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KUMAR SHRESTHA

Editorial **p2**
The freedom to be fair

Continued p4

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Support by default

The price of complacency could be dear

The cacophony of near-delirious utterances by leaders of the historically fragile seven party alliance continue to make interesting headlines, thanks to the partisan media, meddling diplomats and self-seeking donors.

GUEST COLUMN
Bihari K Shrestha



While Madhab Nepal wants to hold talks with the Maoists “at any cost” (whatever that means) Girija Koirala would do so publicly. Shailaja Acharya maintains that doing so will be disastrous for the party and the country. But the people themselves will have nothing to do with the parties until they purify themselves: purging corrupt leaders, democratising themselves, ending dynastic rule, and making finances transparent.

To add to these dynamics, the leaders of America and India recently agreed in Washington (presumably at the latter’s urging) that political parties should be restored to power in Nepal. Obviously it is in both their national interests to make that call. For the American president, a blanket prescription of multiparty democracy

everywhere remains the only rationale for justifying the Iraq war. He evidently has little time to go into the agony and frustrations of the Nepali people at the hands of corrupt politicians following the restoration of ‘democracy’ in 1990.

For the Indian prime minister, given his government’s love for Bhutan’s autocracy and the Burmese junta, the prescription is obviously inspired more by expediency than by principle. Since most Nepali politicians hold themselves very much in thrall of India, extracting concessions from them such as on river deals would be so much easier. But what seems to have escaped America’s attention during the visit is that while it is engaged in a global war on terror, our Maoist rebels continue to enjoy safe haven in India.

However misplaced the Singh-Bush statement on Nepal, it carries an ominous ring for us in our quest for genuine democracy. We need a government of the people, by the people, and for the people and not what we had: a government elected by people, but run by the corrupt for themselves and their cronies.

The leaders of the present regime, however, must realise that the peoples’ lack of support for the parties on the streets should not be interpreted as support for it. The people are with the government only by default because they withhold power from the parties in their present state.

If there is a dramatic change

in party leadership at the hands of their Young Turks, the present equation could dramatically change. The government therefore is engaged in a rather precarious war of wits. Only by better delivery of development services will it win the people over, earn admiration and support of friends abroad, and most importantly, strengthen the monarchy as a much-needed countervailing force on behalf of poor and powerless Nepalis.

However, if the recent budget is any guide it seems to be business as usual even in these unusual times. No country has developed without unshackling the creative energies of its people. The process is about building their capacity and entails much more than allocating a little more money for agriculture or prioritising the Karnali Zone.

The Finance Minister swore by the Tenth Plan provisions, most of which are ritualistic, stale and ineffective, and even counterproductive. In contrast, we have living examples of successful community initiatives even when politicians were plundering the nation. This is true people power, and it shows what the people can achieve when they have their destiny in their own hands. It is only by supporting such initiatives that the government can be more pro-people than the ones we had so far.

But all indications are that the present regime is anaesthetised with complacency. The price of this could be very high. ●

THE FREEDOM TO BE FAIR

We have been cursed with having to live in interesting times chronicling the past five years of Nepali life.

What we as a nation have gone through since 2000 we wouldn’t wish on any other. It started with innocent disillusionment with our democratic deficit, the political fecklessness of leaders who frittered away the people’s trust. Violence ravaged the land, strikes and blockades disrupted life, the massacre of an entire royal family by one of its own. There were torture and disappearances, bereavement and displacement, the horrendous slaughters of innocents, unprecedented religious riots, and then a step-by-step return to mandale-ism even as totalitarians rattled the gates. Vignettes are captured in our composite supplement in this issue.

Looking back, what has been extraordinary is the rapid pace of the slide. Such degradation takes decades in other countries—here we went from bad to worse to awful in the span of five years. Society had been ravaged by centuries of marginalisation, exclusion and exploitation, and the violence infected quickly erupting like a puss-filled boil.

The conflict has sent the economy into a tailspin, putting pressure on media finances. Society is so polarised that objectivity is equated with subversion. Some call us pro-royal, others pro-republic. We must be doing something right if they can’t make up their minds.

We freely admit to having a bias: in favour of democracy, civil liberties and press freedom. You don’t fight totalitarian tyranny by curbing those values, and you can’t ensure sustained progress without them. It has been a tumultuous journey and an experience few journalists anywhere have had to endure in this day and age.

In our very first issue of this paper in July 2000, we wrote here: ‘A balance of comment fosters debate and expands the public sphere...a newspaper also needs a set of values to sustain itself. In a society cursed with inequality, some of those values are fairly obvious: to speak for the last, the lost and the least. We will be fair, and we will protect our independence intensely.’

What we didn’t know then was how soon and severely we’d be put to the test.



At the citizens’ rally for democracy and peace at Ratna Park on Monday, some demonstrators chanted slogans that would have been unthinkable until a few years ago. In protests the next day, supporters of Sher Bahadur Deuba used the vilest anti-monarchist language yet heard on Kathmandu’s streets.

Lese majesté, a concept that places the person of the king beyond reproach and

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



makes any attack on him

a punishable act, has ceased to command respect. Could it be that the days of monarchy as we knew it are numbered?

The monarchy lost the mandate of heaven, the central doctrine of Divine Rights Theory, after the Narayanhiti Massacre on 1 June 2001. The alleged killer was declared king and spent his entire reign in a coma. People weeping inconsolably at the gates of the royal palace were in fact mourning for the loss of innocence, an end of the era when the monarch was one of the deities in their pantheon. Many Nepalis ceased paying

customary homage to the king at family altars after that.

The risks of having a manipulative monarchy were proven when Sher Bahadur Deuba dissolved parliament in the dead of night four years ago without even consulting his senior cabinet colleagues. It was a coup by stealth where the avarice of a politically inept premier was exploited. No one believed elections could be held within the specified period and when they weren’t, King Gyanendra sacked a prime minister who was only doing his bidding. His announcement on 4 October 2002 broke the compact King Birendra had made with his people in 1990. With the second instalment of the takeover and Deuba’s second sacking on 1 February, the king became CEO, transforming himself from constitutional monarch to constructive king.

An active monarchy is judged by the results it delivers. But every premier installed by the king since 2002 has bowed out in disgrace as the insurgency escalated, the economy decelerated and Nepali society got increasingly polarised.

Young people started to openly espouse the republican agenda and in campus after campus, students voted against the monarchy in referenda.

February First was the third and final stage of the creeping coup. Six months later, the king continues to hold all state power but his authority is now completely coercive. On an ideological level, a political consensus is emerging that even a constitutional monarchy may be detrimental to healthy democracy. Tulsi Giri, the resurrected political ghost from the Panchayat era, has put the debate most succinctly: it’s either monarchy or democracy, the two can’t go together. The Maoists have been unsuccessfully making the same point for 10 years.

Despite this, some in the international community still call for a “unity of constitutional forces”. US Ambassador James Moriarty this week again urged reconciliation between the king and the political parties even as the royal regime dug in its heels. Former US Senator Thomas Daschle, visiting Nepal on a ‘democratisation’ mission, echoed the point made by his envoy. India’s

junior foreign minister Rao Inderjit Singh reiterated his country’s Twin Pillar Doctrine.

Meanwhile, the king is pursuing his path ignoring all advice and criticism. This is what is provoking people opposed to a return to authoritarianism to resort to unprecedented anti-monarchist rhetoric. It seems the countdown for a final showdown between the palace and the people has begun. If history is any guide, the outcome of such a contest is a foregone conclusion. Sensing the turning tide, radically chic socialites have also joined the republican bandwagon. At public gatherings, advocates of even a ceremonial monarchy are now being seen as too soft.

The monarchy was at its weakest in the aftermath of the royal massacre. But the political mainstream came to its rescue. Now that the king is running the country, that is not likely to happen again. Public evaluation of his performance, rather than faith, will determine the future of the institution of monarchy. With its bleak record since October Fourth, this constructive monarchy needs all the divine blessings it can get. ●

God save the king

The countdown for a showdown over the monarchy has begun

LETTERS

LESSONS

In response to Preeti Koirala ('Letters', #256), I want to make it crystal clear that it is always unacceptable that innocent people are killed and maimed in furtherance of a political, religious or ideological agenda. The UK condemns all terrorist acts without exception. But there is a world of difference between a) an armed insurrection involving thousands of a country's citizens in classic guerrilla terrain, with political and socio-economic demands many of which are shared by the mainstream parties, and b) al Qaeda, which is a world wide extremist network involving a tiny minority, with no coherent negotiable demands or formal structure.

In the case of armed insurrections rejection of dialogue by insisting on labelling the insurgents as 'terrorists' is a recipe for years, maybe decades, of violence and misery. If only Nepal could draw some lessons from the UK where the government, parties and civil society have joined hands to face the terrorists threat- where an unacceptable ideology is combated with ideas, not guns- and where international cooperation is embraced rather than rejected as 'interference' and is discouraged by the pursuit of misguided policies.

Keith Bloomfield, HM Ambassador, British Embassy

DOUBLE STANDARDS

In 'The UN, India and Nepal' (#257), Kunda Dixit writes, 'At the Oval Office on Monday morning, Prime Minister Singh and President George W Bush agreed that "...it's going to be critical for the king of Nepal to restore civil liberties".' Here is a message for world leaders: Gentlemen, Nepal never asked you for your help on democracy. Please wake up and understand that Nepal's problem is with terrorism. The same type of terrorism that killed thousands of people in New York and the same kind of terrorism that killed 50-something in London. Please do not pretend like you care by blending democracy and terrorism because they do not blend. Ask a Nepali if they want democracy or peace, I am sure they would choose the latter and rightfully so because if democracy was indeed the remedy for peace, there would be no attacks in the countries that are more democratic than Nepal.

We need world leaders to focus on terrorist attacks in Nepal like the Chitwan bus bomb first and then we can talk about democracy.

Sushil Bogati, email

Kunda Dixit is disappointing as a political analyst in 'The UN, India and Nepal' and seems unclear about why India's lobbying for a Security Council seat could be a 'window of opportunity' to resolve the Nepal crisis. Has anything that India has said or done after 1950-51 down to this day been a window of opportunity for Nepal? Educated people of Nepal knew that both democracy and constitutional monarchy were in danger in Nepal the day India started saying they are 'the twin pillars' of Nepal's stability. Nepal will still give its vote to India because it has to prove its worth as a friendly state and continue to be exploited for its benevolence.

Kishor Karki, email

DEMAGOGUERY...

Dr Narayan Bahadur Thapa ('The silent majority', #257) has given pragmatic and prudent suggestions to our political parties. Our leaders need to understand that we ordinary Nepalis have had enough of demagoguery. Hence, the political parties need to come up with something concrete to earn their lost popularity. They should focus on resolving the current political impasse rather than indulging in power hunting exercises. Altercations among forces that believe in multiparty democracy and constitutional monarchy should be avoided. An understanding should be reached among them if our politicos believe that they can drive the nation towards a better future. I strongly urge His Majesty's Government to create a convivial atmosphere for reconciliation with the parties on the streets. The government should stop acting on guidelines set by some obsolete minds. An attitude of revenge and appointments of Jagat Gauchans and Badri Mandals as ministers will only benefit our brothers in combat. Expenditures on rehabilitation projects for victims of Maoists atrocities should be preferred to spending on 'welcome gates' and banners. The octogenarians and their contemporaries should play advisory roles taking leave from active politics where they have proved their incompetence. It is high time for the palace and parties to contribute towards



MIN BAJRACHARYA

establishing peace and prosperity. Nepalis want action not mere assurances.

Bikendra Shamsheer Thapa, email

...OR DEMOCRACY?

Whether encouraging young children (Letters, 'Forced March', #257) to take part in various social and political functions is acceptable is a matter of moral as well as health judgement but to claim that human rights and child welfare organisations are opposing child 'marches' is absolutely ridiculous. In our lawless country, everyone is using children for their own vested interests whether they are foreign (or local) religious organisations, political parties, Maoist rebels or human rights organisations, including Amnesty International (see photos on their website). No one has stopped forcing children to take part 'under the scorching sun or in the rain' for all sorts of (useless) reasons but now that King Gyanendra has assumed executive powers, everyone, including national newspapers, is

engaged in the petty business of character assassination.

B Raj Giri, email

As stated by Ashutosh Tiwari ('Starting from scratch', #257) parties should represent the people and vice-versa. Unless and until they do the initial research on people, place, poverty, progress, palace, partiality and their own party policy, survival will only mean standing on a razor's edge.

Anil B, Pulchok

The topic of nationalism, even like that of patriotism, can be misused by those who are not known to have ever worked towards promoting any nationalistic or patriotic cause. Presently, party-bashers from various quarters are growing louder by the day to raise the topic of nationalism to debunk leaders of the seven parties who are trying to bring democracy back on track. Even writers for respectable papers are indulging in kicking up articles demonising the anti-regression leaders and Bihari K Shrestha is one of them ('No sermons, please', #255). Shrestha's thesis is that India has always claimed its pound of flesh. But he may have dwelt on why things are that way. Seeking goodwill and the sympathy of India and other democratic countries by the anti-regression leaders cannot be condemned as an anti-national or unpatriotic act. Would Shrestha take the trouble to furnish tenable, substantial proof of present 'nationalistic' forces as having done anything appreciable and enduring for the people and country? All we hear are the vacuous slogans of 'nationalism'

and denigration of the warriors for democracy. Shrestha and his ilk conveniently forget that the anti-regression movement is supported and participated in by both the younger and older generations who are not accomplices in the incidences of ministerial corruption during the past 12 years. Does Shrestha want to restore his already lost status as a free citizen or does he prefer to remain a serf in what has ceased to be a democracy?

Yadav Khanal, email

ETHNIC GAP

I support Rajendra Pradhan's 'The media's ethnic gap' (#256). I have been living in Siraha for nearly six years and have found the Madhesi to be like everybody else, good and bad. They are really nice, hospitable people but most noteworthy, they are as good a Nepali as you and me.

Roop Pradhan, Lalitpur

CLARIFICATION

'Underfed and underfunded' in #256 gave the erroneous impression the school-feeding program is being "phased out". In fact, the World Food Program's school feeding programs have been running since 1967 and now provide snacks to 500,000 school children in Nepal every day.

There was a translation error in the introduction to Minister of Physical Planning and Works Jagat Gauchan ('New cabinet appointments', From the Nepali Press #257). Gauchan was accused of involvement in the attempted murder of journalist

Padam Thakurathi.

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Just like Afghanistan



RABI TULADHAR

from p1

Picturesque Diktel in eastern Nepal and surrounding villages had till recently escaped the worst of the conflict. But after the fierce Maoist attacks on 19 June and 2 July in which the district administration building was destroyed, the ruins look like a scene straight out of Afghanistan. The police and army barracks are at each end of the town and there is a military base camp in the middle of the bazar. On the

night of 19 June, the people of Diktel found themselves caught in the crossfire as a ferocious firefight raged all night. “There were bullets flying everywhere,” says a mother of two, showing us holes on her wall, “the children were not harmed but imagine the psychological effect on their minds.” Bhuban Acharya has turned his room into a bunker, piling stones on his window but still doesn’t feel secure. The root causes of conflict are

ever more entrenched: social exclusion, official apathy and long-standing neglect of the hinterland. Here in Diktel, the only sign of development is a powerline from Gaighat. But it brings electricity only from 6-8PM. Rebels have halted construction of the British-aided highway from the Arun valley and threatened to ‘eliminate’ anyone who supports the road. In village after village on a three-day walk from Sindhuli, there is no drinking water, disease



“RUKUM OF THE EAST”: Diktel’s district administration building lies in ruins one month after the Maoist attack (left) and people have blocked their windows with stones for protection.

is rife, malnutrition is everywhere, and there are no jobs. The attraction of rebellion is obvious but so is its futility. “If only the soldiers would treat us decently and not be rude...” says one man but he doesn’t complete the sentence. It is clear which way the people would go if only there was a government worth its name and a political alternative to the Maoist gun. Repeatedly humiliated and insulted by an uncaring state that treats them as the enemy, disillusioned with the political parties, fed up of Maoist violence and now losing hope that the king means what he says, Nepalis across Nepal have no one to turn to. The only entity that could change this fear into hope is the political parties. If they would only show their presence in areas where the people are most isolated, their faith in a democratic alternative would be restored. But nowhere do we see the political

parties. Instead, every school, bridge and chautara has a Maoist flag fluttering on bamboo poles. The east is red, and has turned into what the mid-west was five years ago. This week, Ilam’s tea estates have been forced to close and the army is confined to barracks, venturing out occasionally on short patrols. It’s almost as if the rebels and the army are trying to avoid unnecessary confrontation. “This country is turning into Vietnam and no one cares,” says Nayaran Prasad Joshi, a respected elder in Diktel who thinks there are plenty of possibilities for the parties, the king and the Maoists to meet halfway. He adds, “They are just not trying hard enough, and that is why we continue to suffer.” ● Kishore Nepal’s program *Mat Abhimat* airs on Nepal Television every Wednesday at 8PM. Archives can be viewed at: www.nepalpoll.com.np/ntv/mataabhimat/

Kathmandu to Kakarbitta and back

Far eastern economic recovery hinges on the highways being re-opened for business



NARESH NEWAR

NARESH NEWAR
from BAGMATI to MECHI

No Maoist was waving a party flag, no landmines were going off, no militants surfaced to wave assault rifles at travellers. The deserted look of the 600-km stretch of highway from Kathmandu to Kakarbitta is a sign that Maoist fear has taken its toll but highway travel is not as treacherous as it is made out to be. Because of curfews along the way, night buses have stopped services and instead ply only in daytime. Up until the dusty

eastern border town of Kakarbitta recent visitors counted hardly 20 long-range buses. “Rumours and speculations spread unnecessary fear. People from Kathmandu should be told not to believe everything they hear about how dangerous road travel is,” says Hari Lama, a truck driver, as he helps right a bus that went off the road. Many drivers and residents along the highway believe that rumours, rather than actual Maoist attacks, are responsible for the empty highway. “Such fear is natural but does this mean we totally stop using the roads altogether?” asks Lama.

Frustration is highest among transport workers in Kakarbitta. “The impact is really bad on our livelihood,” says Bhadra Lal Puri, a porter at the bus station, who earns less than Rs 50 a day for unloading luggage. Until a few years back he used to make over Rs 300. “When will people realise that the roads are not always dangerous? Why get scared because of a handful of incidents?” Indeed, a 14-hour drive towards the Far East is today an adventure marked more by anticipation than incident. The roads are wide and well-maintained, flanked by greenery on both sides and because there is so little traffic the speedometer hovers at 120 km/h. Families planting paddy and children grazing buffaloes wave at the isolated cars that pass through their villages. The monsoon has not yet destroyed the main roads, Krishna Bhiri has been repaired and even the landslide-ravaged Mugling stretch is now less risky. The only real hassle on the road comes not from the Maoists but from security checkpoints, of which we passed 25 between Kathmandu and Kakarbitta. Bus passengers have to get off with their hand bags and face the same questions over and over again. Security personnel are less strict about checking private cars and one learns quickly not to get too close to a security convoy or military jeep which are the main targets of rebel landmines. Locals say there is no fear of Maoist attacks on the road, except during bandas. Last week on Monday, three jeeps were burnt in Barne in Jhapa but no one was killed in the arson carried out by Maoists against drivers who defied the banda called

in Sunsari and Morang. “Bombing of buses does not happen much these days and even if it did, passengers will not be targeted,” says Maya Rai in Sitapur, two hours from Kakarbitta. Rai has closed down her eatery because of slow business and is now involved in community development work. Fewer vehicles plying the road has crippled local economy. Many restaurants, groceries and lodges along the highway are bolted. “Out here we are already used to tense situations, that prepare us for anything,” explains Rai as she joins around 50 other villagers to plant trees on a swath of denuded forest. But the terrorist bombing of a bus in Chitwan in June and the wide media coverage it got spooked even intrepid travellers. Shop-owners along the highway in Chitwan saw a marked drop in traffic after that incident. But locals have taken it in their stride, says editor of *Chitwan Post*, Bhaskar Aryal. “People are cautious but the incident has perhaps made them more prepared.” For now, the real danger along the East-West Highway is not of a Maoist ambush but accidents caused by speeding. There are numerous carcasses of buses and trucks lying upside down along the side of the highway. In many cases, drivers had fallen asleep behind the wheel. Taxi driver Shanker Gurung nodded off on the Mechi Highway recently and survived a high-speed collision with a roadside tree. He says: “That is the only real danger around here, falling asleep at the wheel.” ●

Yay, Yak and Yeti

The Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation has awarded Hotel Yak and Yeti the number one position among five-star hotels. The honour was handed over by Minister Buddhi Raj Bajracharya on 15 July. Performance of hotels is gauged by the amount of foreign currency earned in a fiscal year. This is the ninth consecutive time that Hotel Yak and Yeti has won this award.

Easy-to-wear styles

Lifestyle Enterprises has launched Bossini apparels in Nepal. With an exclusive showroom in Darbar Marg displaying the latest spring and summer collection, Bossini offers clothes for men, women and children at attractive prices.



School for high flyers

Training organisation Air Hostess Academy (AHA) of India brought a group of students to Kathmandu for international exposure. During the session the students are shown the international airport, operational aspects of the airline industry, check-in area, procedures and more. They are made familiar with the duties of an airhostess and flight steward, which include serving passengers and informing them about emergency exits.

Another ATM in Pokhara

Standard Chartered has installed one more 24 hour ATM at Chipledhunga, Pokhara. The bank now has 11 ATMs in operation within the country—three in Pokhara, six in Kathmandu and two in Lalitpur. In addition to the bank's ATM cardholders, the machines also provide services to Visa, MasterCard, Cirrus and Maestro cardholders.



Flying international

Air Nepal International has started international schedule flights with its B767-300 aircraft from 24 July. The aircraft is configured into two classes with 24 seats in Business Class and 221 in Economy class. The schedule includes flights to Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Dubai and Doha. It also plans to introduce e-ticketing.



NEW PRODUCT

READY TO GO: Galaxy Trading Concern has introduced ready-to-eat snack brands of SM Foods, India, in Nepal. The names of the products are Piknik, Simba Chipniks and Senor Peptio.



Nepalonomics at five

In this anniversary column, the Beed offers five economic mantras

It began with finding an appropriate pseudonym. Today, Artha Beed is five years old and introspection is due.

Most Nepali economists—and there aren't many—identify themselves as 'intellectuals' and continue dishing out old wine in old bottles. Analysis of the Nepali economy is usually

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed



confined to seminar papers. If it is a book, the author's CV is on the back page, and the appendices and references outweigh actual text.

Graph-savvy 'parachute consultants' have always just added more references of their earlier published works and footnotes but contributed no meat to the analysis. The advent of electronic word processing made the Rastra Bank's work easier but its research department has been interested only in delivering the same set of information.

The business community hasn't bothered about the economy because most can influence policy in other ways. Serious people rely on the Economist Intelligence Unit or Control Risks Group for real analysis about the Nepali economy. Even after a decade of insurgency we haven't seen published work on the economic impact of the conflict apart from the cut-and-paste reports.

Here is an example: the lack of proper analysis has made us believe that tourism in Nepal has suffered due to the insurgency, while it is actually supply outstripping demand that has led to the fall. Every tourist who comes to Nepal has three beds to choose from. The absence of self-regulation has killed the industry, not the insurgency. Five-star hotels selling rooms at \$ 15 have forced other hotels to shut down. If they could have agreed to jointly maintain rates, not only would they survive but so would the smaller fellows.

Then there is the Beed's favourite topic: the magical 1.6 exchange rate between the Nepali and Indian rupee. This is a political exchange rate but no economist has come up with a sound justification against it.

Business groups, their umbrella organisations, the corporate houses, none of them have full-time economists. No surprise there is no fresh perspective, no long-term vision, no forecasting. The same 10 people are seen to be commenting on the economy on tv and in the business pages day in and day out, that is when they are not junketeering. Business journalism is not an in-depth look at privatisation or investigative reports on 'No Oil Corporation', it is superficial page fillers.

What is Nepal's foreign debt position likely to be in 2020? What would the long-term impact of new pension decisions to government employees be?

What is the consequence of increased security spending? What happened to the asset report on Royal Nepal Airlines? Writing on economics and business is not easy, it requires rigorous research, reading and poring over documents and statistics to interpret them for readers.

But apart from some hardcore Beed addicts, the Nepali readership is not prone to feedback. I could do with more comments. Please vehemently disagree with me.

So, older and wiser, let's take the opportunity of the fifth anniversary to relearn some mantras:

- Economic growth is directly correlated to economic freedom, which is directly correlated to political freedom.
- Poverty can only be alleviated by creating wealth, as the concept of poverty is all monetary. Only the private sector can create wealth since it is neither the job of the government nor of donors to create money. But the private sector has to behave like a business and not a rent-seeking-arbitrage-institution.
- Open up all sectors for foreign investment and technology transfer; do not hesitate to contract customs or revenue collection to foreign firms.
- Find ways to integrate Bideshi Nepalis to kick start the economy.
- With more than a billion people directly to our north and a billion more to the south we have to hitch our wagons to these two powerful locomotives. ●

www.arthabeed.com

Flying in the rain

VIJAY LAMA

The monsoon has always been a time when passengers, crew and civil aviation officials keep their fingers crossed.

Given Nepal's terrain, cloud cover over the mountains during the rainy season makes it necessary for crew to be particularly careful. It is no surprise that most accidents in Nepal are classified as 'controlled flight into terrain', and most of them happen during the monsoon.

This monsoon was no different. The rains had barely begun when a Dornier 228 carrying nine passengers and three crew had a narrow escape after the aircraft veered off the runway at Lukla on 29 June.

With highway journeys unreliable because of the insurgency and landslides and air fares coming down due to competition, more and more people are opting to fly within Nepal. In addition, there are new operators and for the first time jet aircraft are flying domestic routes.

This monsoon, we have to ask ourselves: are we doing enough to ensure flight safety? Are the pilots given refreshers regarding specific technical issues of monsoon operations and its difficulties? Are ground navigation aids up to international standards? Is the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) doing enough to ensure there is not going to be another mishap this monsoon?

Most aviation accidents do not have just one cause. We have to ask if cash-starved operators are serious about flight safety. Are they exerting pressure on crew to complete flights or cut corners? There are plenty of examples of pilots trying to race the rains to a particular airfield to land before the clouds move in.

What is worrying is the growing number of airlines and their stiff competition which puts air crew under pressure to complete a flight under any circumstances. Delays and cancellations cost money, besides tarnishing the reputation

of the airline.

Pilots should never be forced to fly if their professional judgement tells them otherwise. There is no place here for bravado. When driving rain brings runway visibility below minimum, when mountain passes are covered by clouds, or when there is doubt about en route weather it is no time for heroics. No one is going to applaud a pilot who has a reputation for flying in any kind of weather. But who is checking?

Kathmandu airport is equipped with radar, VOR and NDB beacons but even here, ground navigational aids (navaids) are not up to International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) standards. Given Nepal's notorious monsoon cover, flights often have to make instrument approaches or divert. CAAN should get out of its donor-dependent mode and make its own choices about what is urgently needed to improve flight safety. A donor-funded VOR-DME beacon at Bhatte Danda on Kathmandu's approach has never been operational.

If that is the case with Kathmandu, the less said about other airfields the better. Only nine of Nepal's 40 airports have paved runways and most don't have navaids. In fact, none of the airports meet 21st century standards for equipment and safety. Even if they can't be totally modernised, the airfields need urgent upgrades.

On top of all the aviation safety issues there is the new added concern of flying into insurgency-affected areas and airfields with inadequate security. Helicopters have been fired at and some airfields have closed down due to security reasons. In fact, in an emergency a pilot can't even land at some of these airfields because they are not secure. It's a miracle remote area airfields are still being serviced by airlines.

Then there is the meteorology department, which needs urgent equipment upgrades to improve weather forecasting. To be sure, CAAN has been holding workshops



to make pilots and air traffic controllers aware of monsoon flying issues. Upgraded air traffic control have made a difference in aviation safety but a lot more needs to be done. Our controllers and others need advanced training abroad in state-of-the-art safety procedures.

Traffic volume has risen dramatically after the open-skies policy. It is even more important now to have air traffic controllers who can respond efficiently and with clarity during emergencies.

As airlines bring in new aircrafts, ground equipment has to keep pace with modern cockpits. At the same time, it is the old workhorses like the Twin Otters that face the brunt of bad weather operations with limited equipment, lower altitude flying and to remote airfields with almost no en route ground navaids. ●

Capt Vijay Lama (pictured) has been flying Twin Otters with Royal Nepal Airlines for 17 years.

Park authorities conducting a post-mortem on a rhino killed by poachers last month in Chitwan.



The no-horned Asiatic rhinoceros

Poaching depletes Chitwan’s rhinos and threatens to unravel Nepal’s greatest conservation success story

ROYAL CHITWAN NATIONAL PARK

P GHIMIRE in CHITWAN

On 20 July, a decomposing carcass of a rhino was discovered near Bhalu Tappu in Royal Chitwan National Park. It was just the latest in a slaughter that has seen the decimation of one-fourth of the park’s rhino population in the past five years.

Chitwan is one of the world’s most successful conservation efforts. It has saved the Royal Bengal Tiger from the brink of extinction, restored the Asiatic one-horned rhino to a healthy population and secured the rich bio-diversity of this inner-tarai rainforest. Rhino conservation was so successful that the park has relocated 24 rhinos to Bardiya in the past 10 years. A lot of that success was because the park was guarded by the Royal Nepali Army but with the army’s mobility hampered by an insurgency, poachers have moved in.

In 2000, a census counted 544 rhinos in Chitwan. This year’s count in March reported only 372. The slaughter is intensifying: in the past four months alone poachers killed 10 rhinos for their horns in Chitwan. Most were hunted down within park

boundaries, their carcasses left to rot with gaping holes on their snouts where their horns were hacked off.

Most of the 800 soldiers that used to man the 34 checkpoints in Chitwan have been withdrawn. There are now only 10 army camps, counting the three that were added this year after rhino poaching escalated.

There are now about 100 accused poachers serving sentences in jails in Bharatpur, Birganj and Kathmandu, but that hasn’t stopped the killing. “They are the small fish, new poachers may have replaced those in custody,” says Chief Conservation Officer Shiba Raj Bhatta whose office has counted 94 rhinos killed by poachers and 60 deaths due to natural causes since 2000 (see table).

Ram Prit Yadab, former chief warden of Chitwan, says the situation is much worse today than it was four years ago. Poor security has encouraged poachers to change tactics. Most rhinos poached before November 2002 fell into traps and were speared to death. Today, poachers use guns. Says Bhatta, “Recent rhino deaths have been caused by muskets fired from

close range.”

Among jailed poachers is Bam Bahadur Chepang, accused of killing 19 rhinos between 2001 and 2003. “Killing a rhino takes more than a week— you have to scout for tracks find the rhino, kill it and hand the horn over to your employer,” says Bam Bahadur from his jail cell. “I was paid up to Rs 10,000 for each horn but I don’t know what they did with it.”

Poachers sell the horns to small time traders in Bharatpur, Tandi, Kawasoti and Pokhara. These primary merchants then sell the horns to middlemen in Kathmandu who smuggle them to Tibet and China where rhino horns are regarded as aphrodisiacs and sell for Rs 1.5 million apiece.

Bam Bahadur has identified his middleman as Kedar Giri, who is also in jail in Bharatpur after being caught with a horn. A year ago, officials in Chitwan arrested Pemba Lama and Dorje Sherpa with five rhino horns at Aaptari in Bharatpur. The park authorities could have initiated action against the suspects but the case was inexplicably transferred to Kathmandu and the accused were illegally

released on bail. The National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 2029 BS says anyone killing, injuring, purchasing or selling protected wild animals, including rhinos, or transferring rhino horns can be jailed for 5-15 years and fined Rs 50,000-100,000.

Bhatta is frustrated. “We are helpless, we can’t patrol all parts of the park effectively,” he tells us. But there are plans to install transmitters at army camps and distribute 30 wireless radio sets to game scouts. The park used to spend half its income every year on the development of villages along the buffer zone, an activity that has been praised as a model for

relations between parks and local residents. It was also buying intelligence from villagers about poacher activity but both practices have ground to a halt.

On 19 June, rangers caught Pemba Lama, alias Yakche, said to be the most notorious poacher-traders. He was carrying a rhino horn and Rs 460,000 cash, and confessed to killing 20 rhinos and selling their horns to Tibetan traders. But even Yakche is small fry. Conservationists say that until his bosses are caught, the trade will carry on— unless the army can find a way to revive its anti-poaching role. ●

P Ghimire prepared this article with support from the Centre for Investigative Journalism

Rhinos killed in 2004-05

1	September	17-year-old female rhino, horn missing
29	November	Decomposing carcass found, horn missing
28	December	24-year-old rhino found in buffer zone, horn missing
5	February	19-year-old male electrocuted, horn intact
13	February	29-year-old male found, horn intact, security forces reached site after gunshot was heard
14	March	decomposed body, horn missing
26	March	decomposed body, horn missing
7	April	decomposed body, horn missing
9	April	35-year-old male, horn missing
11	April	27-year-old pregnant female, horn missing
12	April	decomposed body, horn missing
2	May	15-year-old female, security forces heard gunshots, horn intact
3	May	22-year-old female, horn missing
16	June	27-year-old, horn missing
21	June	24-year-old male, horn missing

Year	Natural deaths	Poaching	Total
2000/01	14	5	19
2001/02	9	35	44
2002/03	16	32	48
2003/04	8	16	24

Source: Royal Chitwan National Park



Porters' progress

Nepali porters are the 'most efficient' in the world



Nepalis porters use a *namlo* head strap to support a *doko* containing a load that can be nearly twice their body weight. They also use a T-shaped stick (*tokma*) to support the load while taking rests. Heglund says porters spent only half the energy that European trekkers carrying backpacks used when either carried more than half (60 percent) of their body weight.

For the study, eight porters were selected from a stream of porters regularly going up and down the steep Himalayan mountain route. They were asked to walk a 51 m long flat track at five different speeds, carrying six or seven loads according to their ability. The researchers measured the amount of oxygen they used and how much carbon dioxide they exhaled.

The team wasn't able to say whether the porters are able to reduce the work their muscles do to carry the loads or if they increase their overall efficiency. Heglund points out that professional porters and load carriers around the world carry loads on their heads. Porters in the Andes mountain range of South America and workers in construction sites across India use the method as well.

Despite the porters' efficiency (Heglund saw a 68-year-old porter carry loads heavier than himself) they face several health risks during their arduous treks. International charities such as the UK-based International Porters Protection Group (IPPG) and Tourism Concern conduct campaigns to raise awareness of the problems because many porters take part in tourists' trekking expeditions. The problems include risks of slipping and injuries, frostbite and altitude sickness.

"Unfortunately, while we agree that many porters do perform some pretty amazing feats of strength, there are also porters injured, maimed or losing their lives each year due to the accumulative physical stresses placed upon their bodies," says Elsie James, a Canada-based member of IPPG.

The Nepal chapter of the UK-based Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG), which helps people use appropriate technologies to fight poverty, says its future plans include studies on socio-economic aspects of heavy load transport by porters in the Himalayas.

"So far we have been working on alternate means of transporting goods such as wire bridges to cross rivers," says Anil Subedi, director of ITDG in Nepal. Other means of transporting goods in mountain regions include mules, a local crossbreed between the yak and mountain cattle, sheep and goats. ●

(SciDev.net)

The method Nepali porters use to carry nearly double their own weight—by strapping loads to their head, walking slowly for many hours and taking frequent rests—is most efficient in the world, scientists have concluded after a long study. The porters can carry up to 20 percent of their weight 'for free' using no more energy than if they were carrying nothing.

The researchers, led by Norman Heglund of the Louvain Catholic University, Belgium, calculated the energy efficiency of eight Nepali porters who regularly walk from the capital, Kathmandu, to Lukla. The distance of the weeklong journey is 100 km, with total ascents of 8,000 m and descents of 6,300 m. Heglund says the male and female porters carry heavier loads more efficiently than African women, previously thought to have the most efficient carrying method.

The new findings, published last month in the journal *Science*, show that Nepali porters carry loads that are, on average, one-third heavier than the heaviest loads that African women carry using the same amount of energy.



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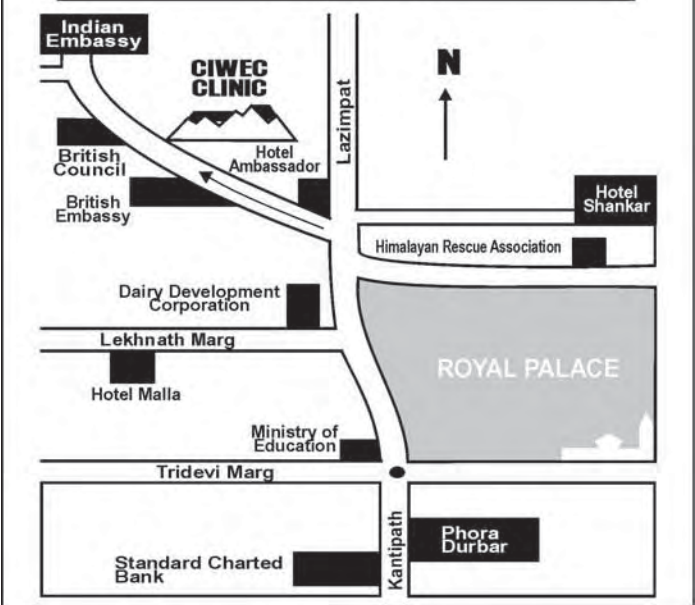
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SAGUN S LAWOTI

Bhutani refugees reject resettlement
Only one way home

SAGUN S LAWOTI
in JHAPA

Fourteen years after makeshift huts were first put up here to house tens of thousands of Bhutani refugees streaming into Nepal, the Beldangi camp has turned into a small city of 53,000 people.

Many of the young boys and girls were born here and know about their homeland only from school books and family lore. Yet, ask them about the latest international plan to resettle them in third countries or to assimilate them in Nepal and they leave you in no doubt about what they want—they want to go home.

The children learn Dzongkha, Bhutani geography and history in school and when they say “king” they still mean King Jigme Singye Wangchuk. Maya Gurung has been hearing stories since she was a child about the motherland she has never seen. Still, she says she wants to go back to Bhutan and become a nurse. Eighteen-year-old Purnima Karki longs to

return to Bhutan and find a job for herself and six younger brothers and sisters who were born in the camp. Maitraj Subba wants to return to Bhutan even though he has heard of the regime’s atrocities in torturing and evicting his grandfather, Santaraj Subba.

In an effort to end the deadlock on repatriation, western governments, led by Canada and the United States, have proposed that once Bhutan takes back a portion of the refugees the rest could be resettled in Nepal or in western countries. But in recent interviews in Beldangi it was hard to find even one person who would choose resettlement.

“This camp has been our home in the past years, we are grateful that Nepal provided us with shelter,” says Bholanath Uprety, a refugee leader in Beldangi, “but it is Bhutan where our heart belongs, there is no alternative to sending us back.”

Uprety says the Bhutani regime has lobbied hard to get

refugees like him resettled in other countries and take back only a handful, and he blames the international community for caving into Bhutani pressure. Deb Raj Pradhan, secretary at Beldangi II, agrees: “We want to be resettled in Bhutan, that is the only option we wish for. We will not consider third country resettlement or integration in Nepal.”

Pradhan and Uprety also think India can play a key role since they were transported through Indian territory in hired Indian trucks after eviction from Bhutan 14 years ago. “When India stops refugees at its border, can one deny India’s involvement?” asks Pradhan, adding, “India holds the key to the resolution of the Bhutan crisis.”

For the moment, however, there are other pressing issues like food, shelter and schooling. The budget for clothes was slashed three years ago, donors are now cutting back supplies of basic amenities such as kerosene, foodstuff, bamboo and health care. The huts are in dire need of repair and the roofs leak. ●



ASHOK R SHAKYA

Bhutan-Nepal border

Bhutan and Nepal don’t share a contiguous border but the gates of Beldangi feel like a frontier.

Inside Beldangi, you are in Bhutan. Outside the camp gates, it is Nepal with all its problems. Jhapa locals outside the gates say life has never been the same after the camps were set up in 1992.

While the local economy has benefited, there has been a rise in crime and prostitution, says ex-mayor of Damak, Ram Thapa. Refugees also stream out of the camps every day and edge out locals as a source of cheap labour.

“Refugee activity has hampered the overall development process of the municipality,” says Thapa. “The pressure on the forest has increased, and there is less fodder for us.”

Looking back 5 years

A glimpse of Nepal's recent history from selected content of the past five years of *Nepali Times*. Archives in pdf and html formats available on the new Nepali Times premium website, eSpecial.

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This is a composite supplement of selected content from issues #1-257

Spectator sport▶

#194, MAY 2004

As bystanders watched from the sidewalk, anti-king demonstrators set fire to a government vehicle at Bagh Bazar on Sunday (right) while the media magnified the image. The anti-'regression' protests have dragged on for a month and in that period, dozens of government vehicles were set on fire and street railings were uprooted to be used as barricades. Government spokesman Kamal Thapa says the arsonists are Maoists who infiltrated the movement. The political parties deny this. The protests appear to be having some effect: King Gyanendra began meetings with political figures but the parties have refused to meet the king until the ban on protests is lifted.



MIN BAJRACHARYA #194, MAY 2004

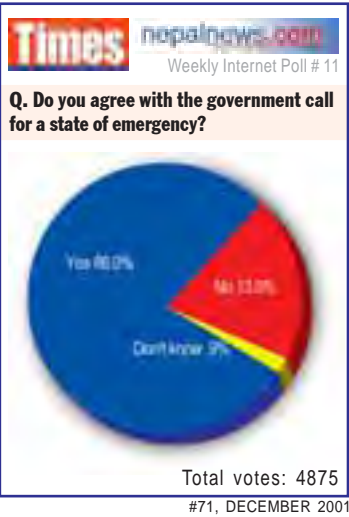
Classless society

#20, DECEMBER 2000

Schools across the country are preparing to close down 8-14 December in response to threats from an extreme student group allied to the Maoists. The All Nepal National Free Students' Union (Revolutionary) says it (among other things) doesn't like Nepal's national anthem that extols the monarchy and it wants India to return occupied Nepali territory. And these demands should have been met by Thursday!



A letter signed by Devendra Parajuli, president of the student body, 'requests' all schools to show solidarity with their struggle by shutting down. He told a press conference this week that schools not voluntarily closing would face action and he warned the police not to intervene. Most private schools have announced they will close, not voluntarily but out of fear of repercussions.



Can't fail this time

A ceasefire is the beginning of the peace process, not the end

ANALYSIS by KUNDA DIXIT

#130, FEBRUARY 2003

Once there was the political will, everything else fell into place. Even so, there was finger-biting tension on that rainy Wednesday morning this week when it was touch-and-go till the last minute, as ministerial mediator, Narayan Singh Pun, shuttled back and forth between the Maoist leadership and the cabinet room until the ceasefire agreement was done.

The question many are asking is: Why did King Gyanendra and the Maoists decide to patch up now?

The Maoists were beginning to feel the pressure from a cadre base that grew too rapidly and was

getting out of control. A newly-beefed-up army could drag out the war. And they were also feeling the squeeze from New Delhi, which was getting anxious about a possible spillover, as well as Americans running around its backyard. Then, there was a real danger of being slotted into America's terror list.

King Gyanendra, on the other hand, needed a peace dividend to bolster his own legitimacy and that of a government he appointed four months ago after sacking an elected prime minister. The king had staked everything on his October Fourth move and needed to pull this rabbit out of the hat.

Whatever the behind-the-scenes tradeoffs, the announcement on Wednesday

inspired hope among war-weary Nepalis that this may finally be the beginning of the end of a seven-year conflict that has cost more than 8,000 lives and ruined the nation.

"This is a major breakthrough, but there is a big challenge ahead now to make the ceasefire stick and carry on the negotiations," one senior government official told us Thursday. He said the negotiations had been tortuous. "Till the last moment, we knew it could have gone either way." The government conceded to lifting the terrorist label, an international warrant and the bounty for the heads of senior Maoist leaders—all in return for the immediate ceasefire call.

Lt Col Pun told us Thursday

morning, "I am very optimistic that we will see lasting peace." The ex-Royal Nepal Army helicopter pilot-turned-aviation-entrepreneur-turned-politician is suddenly in the limelight as the main architect of the negotiations. He has been credited with making initial contacts with the top Maoist leadership two months ago and mediating between them and the palace. The government has named him chief coordinator in coming negotiations.

The UML has the most to lose if the Maoists emerge as a mainstream party and it will likely emerge from Janakpur more radicalised. Party leaders were caught flat-footed and tried to put on a brave face.

It is clear that however dramatic the initial announcement on Wednesday, the real work has just started. The road ahead is rocky. But this process cannot be allowed to fail because if it does, the alternative is unthinkable. ●

Why the children?

NARESH NEWAR in BARA

#121 DECEMBER 2002

Bhakta Bahadur Regmi can't bear to look at his two children and their grievous burn injuries sustained during a firebomb attack on their bus by suspected Maoists on 4 October at Lakhanti Bridge, 70 km from Simara.

"At least they are alive," is all Bhakta Bahadur can say. But he is heartbroken as he remembers his wife, Anju, who died trying to save their children as the bus caught fire. They were the last ones among the 55 passengers to escape after the Maoists threw petrol bombs at the speeding bus. The two others who died in the attack that preceded the three-day Maoist banda were the bus conductor and an



employee of Music Nepal.

We ask four-year-old Rabina who hurt her. "Maobadis," she says simply. Rabina looks at her burnt fingers and touches her stomach which is covered in burn tissue. Her six year old brother Rabin has burns all over his face, a gash on his head and a deep cut on his leg. The two haven't yet been told that their mother is dead.

Anju Regmi was seven months pregnant when she was rushed to Malangwa Hospital, where her baby was stillborn. She died three days later of trauma and burns.

It has been over a month now. But for the residents of Simara who visit the Regmis, the scars on the children is a picture of our wounded nation. Even strangers look moist-eyed at Rabin and Rabina and they ask: "Why the children?" ●

(Editor's note: Due to generous support from Nepali Times readers, a fund of Rs 227,874 was collected for Rabin and Rabina who are receiving free burn treatment at the Sushma Koirala Memorial Hospital. Rabina is now enrolled in Bright Horizons School, where Rabin will join her next year.)



1951, 1960, 1972, 1980, 1990, 2001

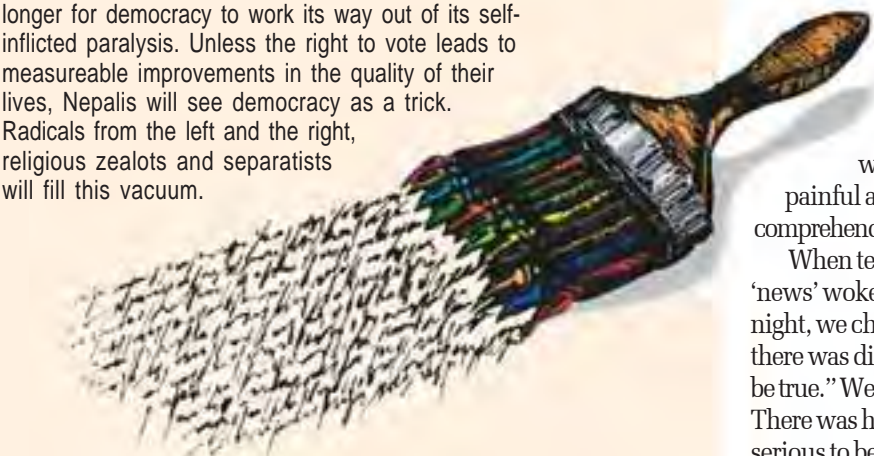
#30, FEBRUARY 2001

As with geology, political pressures welling up within Nepal tend to be released in a 10-year cycle of social seismicity. Nepal's 'geo-politics' since 1951 has followed this rule. Four years after India got independence, the Ranas finally decided that their time was up. It took 10 years of tinkering with this and that before the winds of change also wafted up the Himalaya and we had our first-ever democratic elections. The Nepali Congress swept the polls but King Mahendra and BP Koirala realised that Nepal was not big enough for both of them. In 1961, democracy was shelved, parliament dismantled and elected leaders put in jail.

Our homegrown 'suited-to-the-soil' Panchayat ideology was sustained by a grand design for development. We were starting from zero, so everything we built (highways, hydropower, hospitals) were huge achievements. A little over 10 years later, King Mahendra died. It then took 10 more years, despite King Birendra's efforts, to revamp education, for the pressures to build up sufficiently for students to rise up to demand democracy. The crisis was defused by the 1980 referendum in which Panchayat-with-reforms won 55-45. It was business-as-usual for another 10 years but by this time so much pressure had built up that the lid very nearly came off. The 1990 Jana Andolan was the Nepali equivalent of the winds of democracy that swept across eastern Europe, Thailand, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The king became a constitutional monarch, he agreed to dismantle the Panchayat superstructure, a new constitution institutionalised political parties and multiparty elections were held.

The euphoria of democracy did not last long. From very early on, it was apparent that freedom fighters who went straight from their jail cells to take oaths of office were going to let the people down. But we told ourselves: democratic transitions are by definition messy, just give them some time. Now, time has run out, our transition has lasted too long and it is messier than is permissible for a country with our capability.

Today, 10 years after the renewal of democracy, the stench of political decay hangs heavy in the air. As in *Animal Farm*, it is getting more and more difficult to recognise our erstwhile revolutionaries and freedom fighters. When we look at their faces we don't see anymore the selfless sacrifice, incarceration and exile that many went through. All we see are the grinning, greedy countenances of leaders we trusted who have let us down—not once, not twice, but over and over again. The euphoria has now been replaced by disillusionment and apathy. Millions of impoverished Nepalis are unlikely to wait much longer for democracy to work its way out of its self-inflicted paralysis. Unless the right to vote leads to measureable improvements in the quality of their lives, Nepalis will see democracy as a trick. Radicals from the left and the right, religious zealots and separatists will fill this vacuum.



Today, 50 years after our first taste of democracy and 10 years after restoring it, the moral of the story is: Democracy doesn't come with an indefinite guarantee. It needs to be safeguarded by careful and vigilant application.

HARIYO BAN NEPAL KO DHAN

#233, FEBRUARY 2005

The sudden epidemic of tree-felling along Kathmandu's streets is drastic, misguided and not consonant with the needs of the population. In an increasingly congested valley, foliage provides both utility and aesthetics. It gives us fresh air that allows us to breathe freely.

Trees reach down to the grassroots and hold the soil together, they reach up to the sun and use their chlorophyll corpuscles to convert that energy into food useful to itself and to other animals. The sun and the trees, together with the supportive action of water, soil and air, make possible photosynthesis, the driving mechanism of life on earth. The action of cutting down trees that have lined our streets seems to have been hasty.

True, Kathmandu's poplars and eucalyptus are imports and they do not have the strength of indigenous varieties. But the fact is that they have provided cover and beauty for a long time now. They have become our own, like so many other exotic species that dot the landscape. It is said that these imports are vulnerable to strong winds due to loose root structures but our analysis shows that the maligned arbours have not been guilty of destruction to the extent that they have to be done away with. All in all, the trees should not have been axed. Because the damage has been done, can we ask the concerned authority to promptly correct the move and bring back greenery?



STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



A tribute to history

After royal deaths, getting on with the life of the nation

#46, JUNE 2001

Friday night, faith died. Belief succumbed to the cruelty of history. Impregnable walls could not stop the flight of an age towards eternity. The king is dead, may his soul rest in peace. Long live the king, the symbol of Nepali unity and cultural identity. It is with this mixture of grief and hope that we are coming to terms with a tragedy too painful and complex to comprehend.

When telephone calls with the 'news' woke us in the dead of night, we checked the time. First there was disbelief, "This cannot be true." We checked the date. There was horror, "This is far too serious to be a prank." And then the shock sunk in, numbing us. That numbness still persists. And with grief there is now fear for the future. The question on everybody's mind, that nobody dares speak is, "What now?"

The unpredictability of the future is frightening. King Birendra was a link with the past. He offered a reassuring continuity with the hoary traditions of an age when the king was not just the provider and protector of his subjects but the very incarnation of Lord Vishnu. He carried the duality of a God-king and a constitutional monarch with nary a trace of contradiction visible in his demeanour.

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The most lasting tribute we can pay to our departed monarch is to devote ourselves to building a just Nepali society. We can and we must do so to atone for the sins of having been a part of a decadent society. The march of history does not allow long periods of grief.

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#46, JUNE 2001 PRADEEP SHRESTHA

Six hours in hell

On 1 September, both the riots and the lack of security response were deliberate

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA
#213, SEPTEMBER 2004

Security agencies had information that Maoist rebels planned to infiltrate the mob on 1 September in Kathmandu. Members of a Maoist student wing had met at a hostel in Chabahil on the night of 31 August as news broke that 12 Nepalis had been killed and street

protests had already started. Intelligence agencies had information that they were planning to ride the protests to sow chaos and terror in the capital. If they knew, why didn't they do anything? Why did the police, which used to be out in such force to quell anti-'regression' riots three months ago, remain mute spectators? Why did the army stand aside and let the mosques, offices and

small businesses burn? The man who has answers to those questions is Home Minister Purna Bahadur Khadka. But he says he can't comment because a government commission is investigating the security lapse. "I can't say anything now. It would hinder the commission's work. But we will get to the bottom of this," he promised. When, and if, the commission finds the real answers, it is doubtful security lapses will be blamed. The commission's terms of reference is to find out who was behind the vandalism, recommend punishment, assess damage and recommend compensation. In the past week, Khadka has admitted there was "lack of coordination" between the government and security agencies. Senior sources told us on condition of anonymity

that the police flatly refused government orders to quell the riots. Sources told us Khadka rushed to the prime minister's residence at Baluwatar because the security agencies were not responding to his calls. Even the prime minister found it difficult to get through on the phone and it was only after he reached Commander-in-Chief Pyar Jung Thapa and the police brass that there was some action. By then it was too late. In most parts of the city, the police, army and fire services ventured out only after the curfew went into effect. Deputy Inspector General of Police, Ashok Shrestha, acknowledges there may have been delays. He said, "The investigation will point out the mistakes so they are not repeated in future but it is not about sacking anyone."



ANATOMY OF ANARCHY: 10.30 AM The mob arrives at Siddhi Bhawan. 11AM Owner of the building, Nirmal Ratna Tuladhar, pleads with rioters not to harm his property. 11.30 AM Rioters set a safe from Qatar Airways on fire. 12AM Nirmal Tuladhar's family and friends rush to the basement with buckets of water to douse the flames at Mani Tara shopping centre. 12AM The fire rages but no police or fire service is in sight. 2PM By the time the Ninjas arrive it is too late. 2.30 PM The airport fire service arrives after curfew is declared. The next day, 2 September, a soldier guards the charred hulk of the Siddhi Bhawan building during the curfew.



ALL PICS: MIN BAJRACHARYA #213, SEPTEMBER 2004

LETTERS

#168, NOVEMBER 2003

IDS
Naresh Newar's 'Keep kids out of it' (#167) identifies a critical problem that Save the Children US, BASE, NNSWA, NRCS, SAFE and TWUC are addressing. In August, we began a community-based psychosocial intervention for children who have been affected by the conflict called Sanjivani, or 'New Life'. Adapted from programs designed by The Center for Trauma Psychology, Sanjivani is a five-week, 15 session intervention for groups of 8-20 children. While this program may not work for children who have been severely affected by trauma, it has shown excellent results for children who have been generally affected. Using artwork, drama, music and games, children explore different emotions and issues. The program helps children feel secure, improve their self-esteem, explore their feelings and teaches them coping strategies. Local community members, not professional psychologists, are trained to be facilitators during a 10-day program. This is highly practical, since there are only a few trained psychologists in Nepal. But perhaps more importantly, it involves the community in the healing of its children. As your article pointed out, 'emotional support from the community is what is missing in many parts of the country.'

Anjalee Thakali Shakya and Tory Clawson, Kathmandu

ARMY
I disagree with P Rana's letter (#167) about how the Royal Nepali Army is being

portrayed in your paper. Rana says the RNA is not 'a Latin American military that slaughtered tens of thousands of its own people'. Maybe. But it could be following in their footsteps. Most armies are not created to kill their own people, usually they are supposed to defend the country in case of war. But with the appearance of an insurgent group, things take a wrong turn. Sometimes, there is still a possibility to halt things before it is too late. Rana points at some of those signals. Comparisons are difficult, as your editorial ('Stop it', #167) acknowledges: there are too many factors in a conflict and many cannot be interpolated from one place to another. In my own country, Colombia, the conflict is supposed to be about drugs. False. Or, only half true. The origins of Colombia's violence are rooted in the peasants' fight for land and social justice. Drugs, but fundamentally, the revenues brought by their illegal trade to the rich countries, 'only' fuel the conflict. If it is not drugs then abductions, ransom money, any cash will do. Every day, more parallels spring to my eyes between Nepal and Colombia. Sadly, more than I would like. Most of them are signals that the road is going down the abyss. Nepal can choose to follow or take a detour before it is too late. Learning from other's errors may help, but certainly closing our eyes to them does not.

Karin Eichelkraut, Dhobighat

LUKLA
Re: Daniel Lak's 'Lak in Lukla' (#166). The reason there is no curfew in Namche is because the national park headquarters has a well-prepared 150-strong presence under

a major. Maoists dare not attack the base because of the absence of an escape route. It is the curfew in Lukla that helps filter any would-be Maoist from reaching Namche. If, as Lak seems to suggest, the APF is pulled out from Lukla, the airport and the entire Khumbu region would be vulnerable. Also, Lak says porters frequent the poll house looking for work. Actually sirdars hire porters at about 10-11AM after the clients arrive in the morning.

Mingmar Sherpa, by email

NRN
Anyone who is willing to invest in Nepal and can think of a way to make money legally in the country should be given that chance. Dual citizenship should be granted to members of any country who wish to live and work in Nepal, provided they are not criminals. Nepal needs more people who actually want to live there and be productive—why make it hard for those people? It's not like people are going to come to our country to take advantage of the excellent health care or our generous welfare system!

Anek Belbase, USA

PORTERS
Thank you Ben Ayers for your articles on porter welfare ('Carrying Nepal on their backs', 'Porters in distress', #165). We have just returned from a 10-day trek in the Everest region and were horrified at the size and weight of some porters' load. At Dole campsite, I tried to find the leaders of one particular expedition to protest at the weight of the load (52 kg) that

one porter was carrying. Unsuccessful, I spoke to one of the 'clients', who made no comment and seemed totally indifferent to what I was saying. We later saw at least four other groups run by the same trekking company, with at least one of their porters, and yaks also, grossly overloaded. The latter were panting heavily and obviously in distress. With this volume of tents, cooking equipment and other common baggage going up and down the trail, surely there could be a case made for more permanent sites to be set and maintained during the main trekking seasons. Centralised depots could be positioned at several points along the main routes and porters employed to run these as well as carry the less weighty loads of trekkers. At the entrance to Sagarmatha National Park perhaps larger reminders about porter welfare could be more prominently displayed alongside other environmental advice. Trekking clients should be made more aware of the situation. I am sure that the vast majority would be willing to pay the extra rupees necessary to hire more porters in order to spread their loads more humanely. Personally, I was unable to raise the 'pack' of one porter off the ground—one can only imagine the longterm effects on a person's back, neck, legs and general health from carrying these heavy loads. One last thing, trekkers: get to know your porters and tip them personally—they make your holiday happen.

Helen Palmer, The British School



1951, 1960, 1972, 1980, 1990, 2001

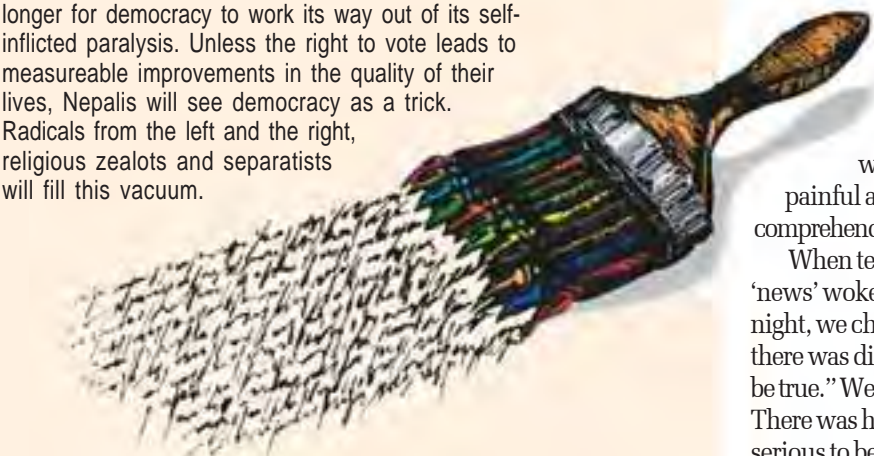
#30, FEBRUARY 2001

As with geology, political pressures welling up within Nepal tend to be released in a 10-year cycle of social seismicity. Nepal's 'geo-politics' since 1951 has followed this rule. Four years after India got independence, the Ranas finally decided that their time was up. It took 10 years of tinkering with this and that before the winds of change also wafted up the Himalaya and we had our first-ever democratic elections. The Nepali Congress swept the polls but King Mahendra and BP Koirala realised that Nepal was not big enough for both of them. In 1961, democracy was shelved, parliament dismantled and elected leaders put in jail.

Our homegrown 'suited-to-the-soil' Panchayat ideology was sustained by a grand design for development. We were starting from zero, so everything we built (highways, hydropower, hospitals) were huge achievements. A little over 10 years later, King Mahendra died. It then took 10 more years, despite King Birendra's efforts, to revamp education, for the pressures to build up sufficiently for students to rise up to demand democracy. The crisis was defused by the 1980 referendum in which Panchayat-with-reforms won 55-45. It was business-as-usual for another 10 years but by this time so much pressure had built up that the lid very nearly came off. The 1990 Jana Andolan was the Nepali equivalent of the winds of democracy that swept across eastern Europe, Thailand, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The king became a constitutional monarch, he agreed to dismantle the Panchayat superstructure, a new constitution institutionalised political parties and multiparty elections were held.

The euphoria of democracy did not last long. From very early on, it was apparent that freedom fighters who went straight from their jail cells to take oaths of office were going to let the people down. But we told ourselves: democratic transitions are by definition messy, just give them some time. Now, time has run out, our transition has lasted too long and it is messier than is permissible for a country with our capability.

Today, 10 years after the renewal of democracy, the stench of political decay hangs heavy in the air. As in *Animal Farm*, it is getting more and more difficult to recognise our erstwhile revolutionaries and freedom fighters. When we look at their faces we don't see anymore the selfless sacrifice, incarceration and exile that many went through. All we see are the grinning, greedy countenances of leaders we trusted who have let us down—not once, not twice, but over and over again. The euphoria has now been replaced by disillusionment and apathy. Millions of impoverished Nepalis are unlikely to wait much longer for democracy to work its way out of its self-inflicted paralysis. Unless the right to vote leads to measureable improvements in the quality of their lives, Nepalis will see democracy as a trick. Radicals from the left and the right, religious zealots and separatists will fill this vacuum.



Today, 50 years after our first taste of democracy and 10 years after restoring it, the moral of the story is: Democracy doesn't come with an indefinite guarantee. It needs to be safeguarded by careful and vigilant application.

HARIYO BAN NEPAL KO DHAN

#233, FEBRUARY 2005

The sudden epidemic of tree-felling along Kathmandu's streets is drastic, misguided and not consonant with the needs of the population. In an increasingly congested valley, foliage provides both utility and aesthetics. It gives us fresh air that allows us to breathe freely.

Trees reach down to the grassroots and hold the soil together, they reach up to the sun and use their chlorophyll corpuscles to convert that energy into food useful to itself and to other animals. The sun and the trees, together with the supportive action of water, soil and air, make possible photosynthesis, the driving mechanism of life on earth. The action of cutting down trees that have lined our streets seems to have been hasty.

True, Kathmandu's poplars and eucalyptus are imports and they do not have the strength of indigenous varieties. But the fact is that they have provided cover and beauty for a long time now. They have become our own, like so many other exotic species that dot the landscape. It is said that these imports are vulnerable to strong winds due to loose root structures but our analysis shows that the maligned arbours have not been guilty of destruction to the extent that they have to be done away with. All in all, the trees should not have been axed. Because the damage has been done, can we ask the concerned authority to promptly correct the move and bring back greenery?



STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



A tribute to history

After royal deaths, getting on with the life of the nation

#46, JUNE 2001

Friday night, faith died. Belief succumbed to the cruelty of history. Impregnable walls could not stop the flight of an age towards eternity. The king is dead, may his soul rest in peace. Long live the king, the symbol of Nepali unity and cultural identity. It is with this mixture of grief and hope that we are coming to terms with a tragedy too painful and complex to comprehend.

When telephone calls with the 'news' woke us in the dead of night, we checked the time. First there was disbelief, "This cannot be true." We checked the date. There was horror, "This is far too serious to be a prank." And then the shock sunk in, numbing us. That numbness still persists. And with grief there is now fear for the future. The question on everybody's mind, that nobody dares speak is, "What now?"

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mind and spirit but with few physical amenities. Development was the dream of Nepalis in those days and the young, western-educated monarch promised us all that and much more.

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#46, JUNE 2001 PRADEEP SHRESTHA

Say it ain't so, Manmohan

The peace pipeline through Pakistan hits a snag

Manmohan Singh emerged from his meeting with George W Bush in the Oval Office on 23 July with some devastatingly equivocal words. Asked by reporters about the discussions on the proposed Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, the prime minister replied, "...there are many risks, because considering all the uncertainties of the situation there in Iran, I don't know if any international consortium of bankers would probably underwrite this".

Innocuous sounding words from a soft-spoken man, but they are harbingers of terrible tidings for a project supposed to energise the Indian economy, help usher peace between India and Pakistan and thereby benefit all Southasia.

SOUTHASIA BEAT
Kanak Mani Dixit

Iran has the second-largest reserves of natural gas in the world. India's galloping economy needs to shift from coal and petroleum to natural gas in order to attain and exceed the magical annual 8 percent GDP growth rate. The cheapest way to transfer gas from Iran's South Pars reserves is via a pipeline through Pakistan and on to Rajasthan, Gujarat and Delhi. In Islamabad, Gen Pervez Musharraf was enthusiastic and willing to provide guarantees of the pipeline's flow and mollify Indian worries of a tap turn-off during bad times.

What was unthinkable just a couple of years ago seemed suddenly possible. Southasia's arch-enemies were willing to collaborate for higher economic purpose. Indeed, the backward and forward linkages of the gas pipeline would lock India and Pakistan in a tight embrace. It could be the mother of all confidence building measures, and the political economy of our region would be transformed.

But something seems to have gone awry in Washington. There



had always been the fear that the United States, with its deep animosity towards Iran, would act against the Iranian gas pipeline. The expectation was that the State Department would make Gen Musharraf buckle, but here you have India going into appeasement mode.

What lollipops were offered to the amenable scholar sardar? It was already clear in March, when US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice addressed a press conference in New Delhi, that she wasn't hot on Persian gas whatever its merits. At that time, Pakistani and Indian ministers had said together they would not be deterred by American aversion to everything Iranian.

After attacking and destabilising Iraq, Prez Bush is now on the lookout for other countries to restore democracy in. It is a terrible thing for a paradigm-shifting project in Southasia to be affected by the likes and dislikes of a president in another hemisphere, harbouring his own animosities and licking his own imagined wounds. But this president is powerful, insensitive and uncaring, and it was obviously too much to expect sensitivity to peace, economic progress and poverty-reduction in India and Southasia.

There had been an eerie silence from the hawks in Islamabad and New Delhi as the gas pipeline proposal gathered steam through last year. Harbouring deep distrust of any kind of rapprochement,

they were nevertheless taken aback by fast-moving developments and the emerging possibilities. As long as the project proceeded at a rapid pace defined by the forceful Mani Shankar Aiyar, India's Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, the hawks kept quiet. They feared being left behind by history.

Now, the hawks can be expected to crawl out of the woodwork with a chorus of I-told-you-so's. New Delhi's raptors are going to say that it was not nice to have ever considered trusting Islamabad on something as strategically critical as a pipeline supporting all industry. What if Islamabad turned off the tap? The hawks there will say it was foolish to have done anything to help the Indian economy anyway, and in particular to have disengaged this issue from the matter of Kashmir.

India can, of course, import gas from elsewhere, including via a pipeline from the Daulatabad gas fields of Turkmenistan or the off-shore fields of Burma's Arakan, or as liquefied gas via tankers from the Gulf. But the Iranian deal had seemed the most proximate and cost-effective. But besides economic reasons, there was the overwhelming need to use it to buttress peace between India and Pakistan.

Suddenly, there is a hiccup on the road to the peace pipeline. India, the Southasian superpower, seems to have blinked in the face of the world's superpower. One would have expected India to be made of sterner stuff. ●

US nukes gas deal

PRAFUL BIDWAI in NEW DELHI

India, one of the world's big gas guzzlers, is caught between securing future petroleum supplies and opting for nuclear power.

In recent years New Delhi has been gravitating towards oil and gas with frenzied attempts to tie up supplies from far and wide. Last year, it moved to sign a deal for a 2,600 km natural gas pipeline from Iran through Pakistan. The \$ 7.4 billion project would have ensured energy into the future and peace between India and Pakistan. (See main story)

Yet after Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Washington 10 days ago, there has been a shift from gas to nuclear. This is strange considering that nuclear power accounts for under three percent of India's electricity.

Singh also signed a nuclear cooperation agreement with President George W Bush under which the US has agreed to sell nuclear materials and technology to India, and pledged to relax export restrictions and other controls in the global non-proliferation order. India will, in return, identify and distinguish civilian and military nuclear facilities from each other and place the civilian ones 'voluntarily' under IAEA safeguards, while toughening export controls.

If it does go through, the Bush-Singh deal will open avenues for imports of civilian nuclear materials into India, which is running out of uranium as its old mines get depleted and new mining projects face popular opposition.

In an interview in Washington, Singh raised doubts about the viability and bankability of the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline project—widely seen as the prime minister's effort to placate Washington. The US has repeatedly opposed the pipeline deal, warning that it will have to impose sanctions on any project that helps Iran, a member of Bush's 'Axis of Evil'.

Politically and strategically, the Indo-US nuclear deal fits with current geopolitics. By contrast, the oil pipeline would have helped South-South economic cooperation and political solidarity. It could also be a breakthrough in India's relations with Pakistan and Iran.

Pakistan would have made \$ 500 million a year as transit fees from the pipeline. There was even a proposal to extend it to China and to develop yet another conduit from Central Asia via Afghanistan and Pakistan.

If India yields to US pressure on the Iran pipeline, it is likely to be stuck with the wrong paradigm and will court energy insecurity. If it follows its South-South instincts, India will improve relations with its neighbours and spread prosperity in the region. (IPS)



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“FM stations aren’t allowed to broadcast news even in the most democratic countries”

Government Spokesman and Communication Minister
Tanka Dhakal in *Nispakshya*, 19 July

निष्पक्ष

The government has done a couple of important things in the last five months. It has been moving ahead with the objective of liberating Nepali society from terrorist activities and establishing peace in the country. We have also made the administration more efficient. The RCCC has been formed and actions taken have been made public. The people have begun to receive government services and facilities. After the historic royal move of February First, the country is moving in a positive direction. The government is doing its best to fulfil the desire of His Majesty.

Local elections will be held soon because His Majesty has clearly stated it in his speech. The election commission is an independent body and the government is ready to extend any cooperation the commission would need. Polls would be free and fair, everybody should be assured about that. The political parties need

to move ahead according to the people's sentiments. In democracy, people are centre stage. Since election is the best medium for the people to express their opinions, politics will lag behind if they remain detached from the elections. If they believe in democracy and wish to see the beginning of a democratic process, they will have to take part in the elections. They have no alternative.

If talks about an alliance between the seven political parties and the Maoists is just to scare the government, the idea will not work. It must be remembered that the same political parties declared the Maoists as 'terrorists' when they were in power. Interpol too has issued a red corner notice against the Maoists. I do not believe that the parties will move ahead with such a group. If they do, it will be very unfortunate for them.

We have been conducting studies on ways to make the communication sector effective. The FNJ has alleged that the government is making amendments in the broadcasting law. I am the communication minister and I am saying that the issue is still under discussion. It has not been finalised.



One needs to be clear about the fact that FM radios never had the permission to broadcast news. FM stations aren't allowed to broadcast news even in the most democratic countries. Even in neighbouring India, the government doesn't allow FM stations to air news. So it is wrong to ask us to allow news on FM here.

Fake federation

UML leader Pradeep Nepal in
Dishanirdesh, 24 July

Democracy and the press nurture each other. That is the experience of our country. We don't have to look at other countries' histories to know that autocracy takes the press downhill while democracy ushers in development. If we count the date since the first publication of *Gorkhapatra*, journalism in Nepal is a century old. But 90 of those 100 years remained under autocracy and the press stagnated.

Journalism in Nepal spent the first 45 years appeasing the Rana regime and the remaining years of the same duration in the service of Shah kings. It was the 10 years of democracy that fostered the growth of broadsheet dailies, community radio stations and television channels. It was the same democracy that raised the sense of duty and responsibility of media persons, and free journalists are now being singled out for pressure.

A Nationalist Journalists



Federation has been set up led by P Kharel, who was the communication coordinator for the king during his Jakarta, Boao and Doha visits. Understandably, this federation will serve as the royal mouthpiece. The king is trying to set up a barrier between monarchists and democrats. Through his yes men he has given everybody a choice—the king or democracy. As if the two can't coexist. But few had guessed that the king would even try to divide civil society into democratic and monarchist camps. The king has proved the thoughts of even such a minority right.

Since the Federation of Nepali Journalists and those affiliated with it raised their voices for peace, democracy, press freedom and human rights, the king went ahead to set up his own federation with sycophants who would help him hide the present conditions in the country. Except for the capital, the rest of the country is reeling under violence and conflict. The Nepali press is now facing a challenge. This new fake federation of journalists will be churning out propaganda. All journalists need to remain vigilant against these efforts to subvert press freedom.

Widening gap

Editorial in *Nepal*, 31 July

नेपाल

The king's decision to expand his ministerial cabinet has mocked civil society, democrats, political parties and the international community. With six months of his direct rule almost over, there were hopes that he would fulfil his commitment to restore democracy and the multiparty system that he had declared at international fora. This seems even more remote. The cabinet expansion took place on the same day that UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's special adviser Lakhdar Brahimi met the king. Less than a few hours after Brahimi suggested to the king that he allow the return of the constitutional process and restore the multiparty system, the Royal Palace Press Secretariat released a statement announcing the expansion of the cabinet. This only proves that the palace either does not recognise the credibility of Brahimi or does not respect his position. At a time when unity and harmony is supposed to reign, the cabinet expansion has only created more obstacles. Even some royalists expressed their dissatisfaction over the expansion. Despite political demonstrations on the street against the king's rule, there is also a consensus among leaders to work towards a dialogue with the king. But now all possibilities for such a positive move remain remote. This has, on the other hand, only helped pave the way for the Maoists and seven political parties to unite and protest against the king. Many new faces inside the new cabinet are controversial. They include politicians who were ousted from parties, staunch royalists and criminals. Cabinet berths are only a reward for those who support every move of the king and those who have no genuine political ambition. The royalists claim that February First was initiated to end corruption and criminality the people suffered during the 12 years of multiparty governance but what message is the king trying to give by including in the cabinet people with records of criminal involvement and

corruption? This decision can jeopardise the regime.

Son-in-law

Desantar, 24 July

देशान्तर साप्ताहिक

The government has been endangering Nepal Telecom's business by backing the king's son-in-law Raj Bahadur Singh to launch his mobile service company Spice Nepal. The future of Telecom's prepaid and Code-Division Multiple Access services are uncertain. It is clear that by restricting its services the government is doing everything to destabilise Nepal Telecom just to benefit said son-in-law's company when he launches his service. Due to government negligence and vested interests, Nepal Telecom has already suffered a loss of Rs 110 million. But even after Spice Nepal is launched, the question of Nepal Telecom's uncertainty remains.

Whose side?

Prakash, 25 July

प्रकाश

Until four years ago, the security forces did not have a camp in Arughat, a market town sandwiched between Gorkha and Dhading. At the time, the Maoists used to walk about openly and constantly intimidated the local people by extorting them and asking for free meals and lodging. But when the security forces arrived, the Maoists took refuge in secure places and started



MIN BAJRACHARYA



समय Samaya, 28 July

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“Without a resolution of the crisis and a quick return by the palace to constitutional norms, there will be growing civil unrest and discontent in Nepal with the institution of monarchy.”

Former US Senator Thomas Daschle at a press conference in Kathmandu on 27 July.

harassing them. Last month, Maoist militants killed two army soldiers in cold blood while they were shopping for groceries. Four other soldiers who were nearby returned to their barracks instead of chasing the assassins. After a while, they came back to the market area with more soldiers and started to mistreat and harass local residents. The soldiers kicked and beat up everyone in their way, even the elderly and children. The army accused the civilians of doing nothing to prevent the assassination of their soldiers by the militants and of not capturing the killers. So the question is, who is responsible for security and protection: unarmed civilians or the armed forces? Not only did they physically manhandle the locals, the young soldiers closed the market for a month and cut off electricity for three days. Now the local residents feel relieved due to the arrival of a team from the

National Human Rights Commission but they also fear that in its absence, the army might resume its harassment. The commission has to pay careful attention to these incidents.

Coronation

Jana Aastha, 27 July



Palace officials and the royal regime want to put a stamp of permanence on February First by beginning preparations for King Gyanendra's coronation. The date hasn't been fixed yet but four of the five development regions have already held traditional felicitation ceremonies after the king ascended to the throne. Cronies of the royal regime hope the coronation will give the king legitimacy and will allow them to hold their own heads high as well. Mandales who had been sidelined after 1990 have got a new lease on life. After all, since

October 2002, the palace needs to approve all senior appointments in the army and civil service, the palace can increase its allowance by itself. The palace had wanted to hold the coronation during the UML-Deuba Congress government, but that wasn't possible because of friction with the prime minister. The situation is much more amenable now. If the parties insist on talking with the Maoists, the palace could declare them anti-national and ban them after the coronation. The palace does feel the international isolation. After 1 February the king has been to Jakarta, Boao and Doha but there have been no other invitations forthcoming. The palace seems bent on using Nepal's vote for India's Security Council seat in exchange for recognition of the February First move and also to use the king's visit to the United Nations in September to meet US President George W Bush.

Education vs education

Himal Khabarpatrika, 16-30 July



After February First, the Ministry of Education's Janak Educational Materials Centre has started including pictures of the king, queen, crown prince and crown princess on the first page of all textbooks. The cost of putting these additional pages in the tens of millions of textbooks has not been publicly debated, nor has the relevance of having the portraits in textbooks. Even parliamentary parties haven't made an issue out of it. However, the Maoists have taken notice and have launched a campaign in some tarai districts to go to schools and tear out the pages containing the royal portraits in front of school children. They have also ordered teachers not to use books with the royal portraits saying they are symbols of feudalism and a personality cult. Paradoxically, the Maoists' own people's education curriculum doesn't seem that different from authoritarian monarchists. The rebels' Regional Peoples' Education Division' for Rukum

and Rolpa has issued its curriculum for Grades 1-3 in which students will be asked not to recognise the king and queen of Nepal, but the portraits of Marx, Mao and Prachanda.

The Social Studies curriculum for Grade 1 says: 'Students should be able to recognise the flags of the communist party, the people's council and fraternal people's organisations, to recite the full names of the party and people's government and remember the names, place and date of births and deaths of Marx, Lenin, Mao and the date and place of birth of Prachanda.' In Grade Three, teachers are asked to make sure that students know the life story of Prachanda.

The head of the Maoist Regional People's Education Division, Comrade Tufan Singh, says: "We are proud that the students will be learning about the proletarian class struggle and its leadership and martyrs." He says the new curriculum will be required in schools all over the country.



Ex-Maoists

Drishti, 27 July



Sirjana, a Maoist guerrilla fighter who had sustained severe injuries while fighting government security forces in Jarayotar of Sindhuli, was arrested while undergoing medical treatment at Miteri Hospital in Kathmandu. Following her release from jail during the second government-Maoist talks in 2001, Sirjana came in contact with her party and went on to become a 'regional platoon commissar'. These days, however, she works as a security guard in a company called Group 4 during the daytime and sells slippers and shoes on Kathmandu's busy streets and pavements in the evening.

Mandab Raj Karki, once a regional bureau member of the Maoist party, is presently learning Japanese at a language institute in Kathmandu. He started his political career with the Masal party and subsequently went underground at the start of the people's insurgency. Popular inside the party as a capable and promising young activist, Karki led an internal revolt in 2001 and even went on to set up a parallel outfit with the name CPN-Maoist Communist Centre.

Maoist leader Mumaram Khanal was arrested in March 2001 and then released from army custody during the second peace talks held the same year. Active inside the party since the year 1986, Khanal was elected as a central member at the second national conference in 2000. He emerged recently after a long silence to say he had left the Maoist party and is currently working as a freelance writer.

Raj Bikram Rai, former Bhojpur district secretary of the Maoist party, has left the outfit and gone abroad. Yadab Bista, a former member of the Okhaldhunga district committee, was arrested at Tribhuban International Airport while trying to board a plane. He is now said to be in the central jail. But his family members have complained there was no reason for him to be arrested as he had already left the party and that he is a victim of personal vengeance.

The number of those who have left or defected from the Maoist party is in the hundreds, if not thousands. Rajesh Thapa, a former central member of the student wing of the party is now confused about his future and doesn't know what to do after having quit. Others are relatively more fortunate. Former Maoist leader Pushkar Gautam, in addition to working with an NGO, writes about the Maoists in different magazines and is widely read.

Due to various kinds of accusations levelled against them by the Maoists and security forces, many who have defected from the party prefer to keep their surrender a secret, fearing reprisals. One such former Maoist district leader says, "The decision to surrender comes from one's soul. We didn't surrender ourselves in front of the radio or tv but it is true that we have left the Maoists."

Maoist leaders and activists from the ranks of the district or central leadership, who have first hand experience of leading battles from the front, are seen leaving or severing ties with the Maoists in three ways. First, by waging an ideological rebellion. Second, creating scandals inside the party like financial misappropriation, sexual harassment or exploitation. And third, by letting themselves be arrested by security forces and later surrendering to them.

According to sources, even though those leaving the party might have been compelled to leave or stripped of party membership after being involved in some kind of scandal, they often say that they had rebelled within the party. And those who did in fact leave after revolting are not only dismissed as liars by the Maoists—who say that nothing of the sort happened—but the party makes an entirely different accusation against them.

Mandab Karki, who claims to have split with the Maoists because of ideological differences, says, "No matter what they say in public, in reality they cannot tolerate multiparty society and ideological contention." Party defectors sometimes get into criminal activities, others engage in minor jobs to survive, and some former party members are still ideologically Maoists even though they are not active.



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Researching *kuire* researchers

Studying Nepal is a labour of love for UK academics

There are three ways to describe Pratyoush Onta. By training he is an historian. Ten years ago, for his PhD dissertation on Nepali nationalism, he examined how Bhanubhakta was anointed a Nepali language icon by Darjeeling-based activists in the 1930s, by using the then available printing presses, literary magazines and newspapers to disseminate nationalist ideologies.

That work set Onta off on the path to become a media specialist. In the last five

years, together with Martin Chautari

colleagues, he has produced 11 books on the state of Nepal's media, including a history of Radio Nepal. When I asked why he studies media, Onta replied that he wants "to help lay social science foundations in what is still a little studied discipline".

Onta's other identity is that of a questioning public intellectual who is interested in how knowledge is created and shared, and what that process means to us as Nepalis. He has hosted programs on radio, written newspaper columns, moderated discussions at Chautari and given public lectures inside and outside of Nepal.

It is Onta's third identity that is on display in this 210-page book, which he conceived as a visiting scholar at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London in 2002. Explaining that Nepal has long been studied by British academics as a geographical curiosity, as a potential trading partner, as home of 'martial bodies', and, in modern times, as a

recipient of development aid, Onta aims to understand the typology of recent and contemporary British social science scholarship on Nepal in a who-studies-what-where-why-and-how manner.

His methodology was to email 20-odd questions to a sample of 19 UK-educated non-Nepali academics, comprising of recent PhDs, active scholars and retired professors whose disciplines range from anthropology to sociology to literature to history and languages. The book is a compilation of their detailed answers.

And the picture those answers paint is depressing. Nepal studies—like Nepal itself on the global stage—is on the margin of even South Asian Studies. It is a discipline with no institutional money, no disciplinary recognition, no formal academic home, no flagship journals and with hardly any influence on other scholars and mainstream theories. The British press hardly cites these scholars' work in its reports about Nepal, and the functionaries of Her Majesty's Government and of development agencies rarely draw on their expertise when designing Nepal-specific interventions.

While those scholars who obtained jobs when British universities were expanding in the 1970s consider themselves lucky, others say that they do not see prospects for university-based jobs improving any time soon. As David Gellner puts it, "studying Nepal has always been a vocation, never a direct path to a job." Indeed, what sustains the field appears to be the energy of its geographically scattered yet academically close-knit members, who cobble together occasional 'high quality' seminars or bulletins, with Michael Hutt at SOAS serving as an

informal dean.

But if, as per the Marxist scholar David Seddon, 'the investment is greater and the potential returns are smaller' in Nepal studies, what pushed these scholars into it? Some were nudged in Nepal's direction by advisers in graduate school. To others, Nepal offered a classic anthropology experience to study 'non-literate and pre-industrial' ethnic groups such as the Tharus, Tamangs or Gurungs. And for younger researchers, the year between high school and college spent working or travelling in the hills turned them into lifelong Nepalophiles.

However they entered the field, their level of engagement with Nepali scholars' work appears split along generational lines. Recent PhDs tend to be fluent in one or more of Nepal's languages and familiar with research papers coming out of Nepal. As the standards of social science research rise here, it's safe to say that we are seeing the last days of *kuire* academics parachuting in to shooehorn locally collected interview files into ready-made theoretical templates. Indeed, as Rhoderick Chalmers and Mark Turin imply, it's become increasingly important to study what native scholars are publishing and to engage as equals in critical dialogues with them.

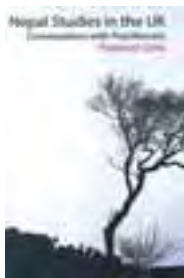
All interviewees agree that in peaceful times, a 'high per capita cultural diversity' made Nepal an attractive, safe and easy place to conduct field work. In post-conflict Nepal some day, some of them hope to obtain funds to do research on conflict management, forced migration, war trauma, coping with violence and healing and psychotherapy. Most are concerned that Nepal has become risky as a site, giving them no choice but to send students to

other countries for fieldwork.

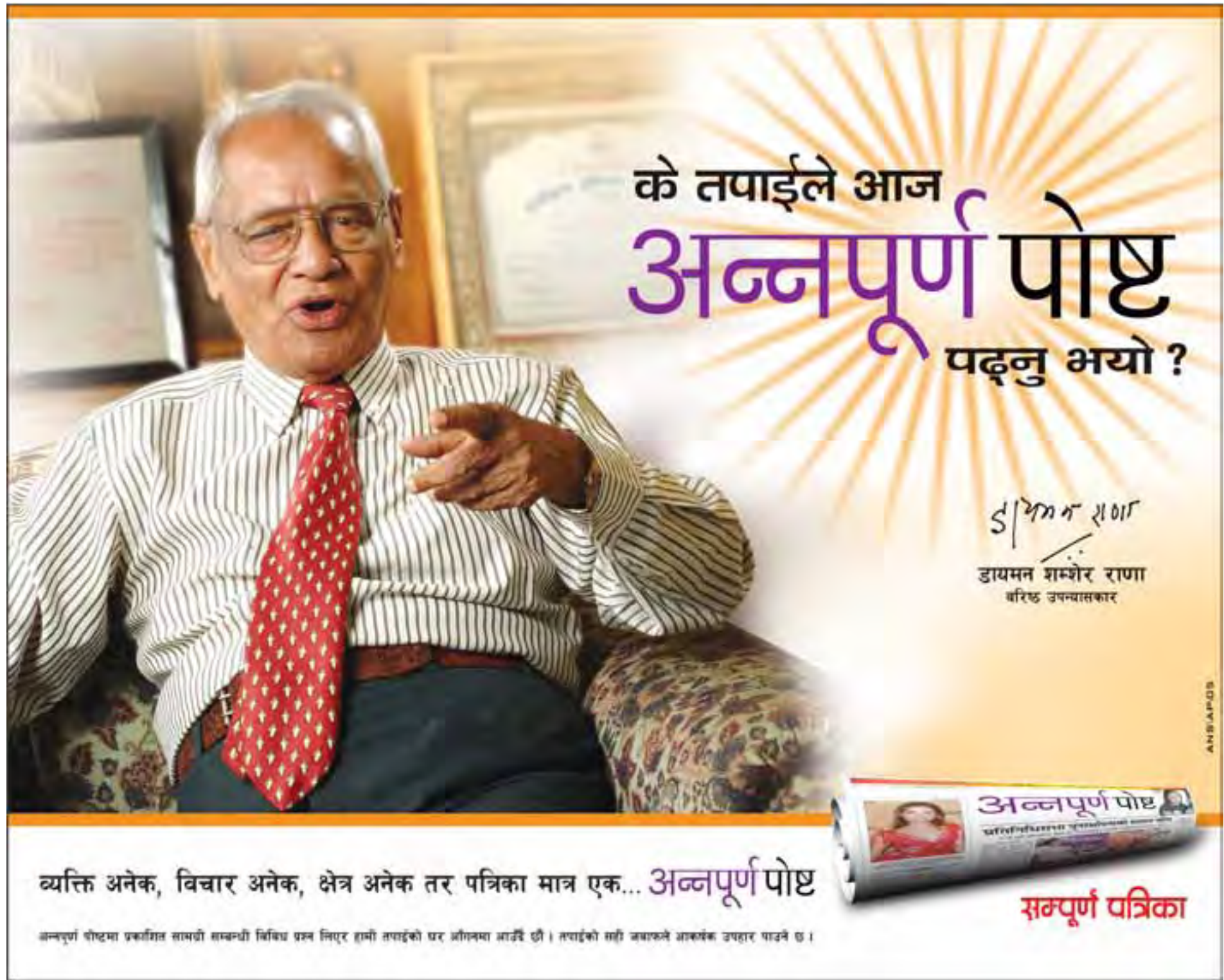
This book provides a window to understand some of the personalities and institutions that are shaping research on Nepal in British academia today. It also gives a sense of the relative diversity of Nepal-related work that those with interdisciplinary and even non-academic career paths are exploring today. Researchers will find the bibliographies that accompany the interviews handy references.

My only quibble is that since the book adopts a checklist approach to asking questions, it does not give us controversies and disagreements that surround various theories and interpretations. Even after reading all the interviews, the image of Nepal Studies as an academic field is that it is still in its cataloguing phase—not yet intellectually bubbling over with ideas and insights that would attract the most ambitious graduate students.

As such, the book is not likely to be of interest to laypersons. But to those interested in the minutiae of scholarly life, Onta has provided a usefully detailed scenario of how knowledge about Nepal continues to be mapped, produced and shared in the UK—almost 200 years after William Kirkpatrick first published his Nepal report in 1811. ●



Nepal Studies in the UK: Conversations with Practitioners by Pratyoush Onta and Martin Chautari, 2004 Rs 300



के तपाईंले आज
अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट
पढ्नु भयो ?

५/१०/०५
डायमन शम्शेर राणा
वरिष्ठ उपन्यासकार

व्यक्ति अनेक, विचार अनेक, क्षेत्र अनेक तर पत्रिका मात्र एक... **अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट**

अन्नपूर्ण पोष्टमा प्रकाशित सामग्री सम्बन्धी विभिन्न प्रश्न निपुर् हामी तपाईंको घर आँगनमा आउँछौं छौं । तपाईंको साथी जसफले आकर्षक उपहार पाउने छ ।

सम्पूर्ण पत्रिका

अन्नपूर्ण पोष्टमा प्रकाशित सामग्री सम्बन्धी विभिन्न प्रश्न निपुर् हामी तपाईंको घर आँगनमा आउँछौं छौं । तपाईंको साथी जसफले आकर्षक उपहार पाउने छ ।

Four-ball

Golf for these brothers is a family game

What's a four-ball? you might ask. The answer is pretty straightforward: four people playing golf together. But four brothers in a four-ball?

Believe it or not, we have such a group here in Kathmandu whose members play together now and then. I can assure you it's not at all common to find a four-ball comprising of brothers.

Three brothers of this family religiously visit the course almost every day. Yeshe Tsering (60), Lobsang Tenzing (58) and Lobsang Tashi (52) not only golf together, they go out in the evenings as a group as well.

What's humbling is to see their genuine respect for one another, the way they inspire each other and how they are bound together.

In Nepal, joint families are common but it is not often that we see them sharing interests and circles of friends. This group of brothers sure look like an encouraging exception to the social rule of discord that is so prevalent nowadays.

Eldest brother Tenzin Choegyal (62) who is not in the photo below, is known to be a workaholic. He plays just occasionally and sometimes joins his kin on Saturdays to complete this dream four-ball. When I caught up with them recently, Tenzin was once again away on a business trip. I cornered the 'younger' threesome over a cup of tea after their daily round and gleaned some reflections of their golfing experience.

Introduced to this sport about five years back by their cousin, Lobsang Tenzing reflects wryly, "I originally thought golf was a boring sport. I never imagined I would catch on to it until that day in the millennium year when my cousin brought me over to Gokarna Golf Club. Once I was here I actually first fell in love with the natural surroundings; so clean and green that I felt at one with nature. I started hitting the ball and as soon as I could get it airborne, I was hooked to the sport as well."



BAND OF BROTHERS (l-r): Lobsang Tashi, Yeshe Tsering and Lobsang Tenzing.

Lobsang was a runner-up in the recently held Gokarna Open Golf Championship and has dropped his handicap to 21. After a smile and a pause Lobsang adds, "I know that I can't be a champ after having started this game so late, however I am so pleased to get some exercise daily."

Says Yeshe, "I know I have added 10 more healthy years to my life after having started this sport. I play nine holes five days of a week and 18 holes two days. These early morning nine holes rejuvenate me and help me stay in high spirits at work." Yeshe plays off a 19 handicap and has won senior titles a couple of times. He is very particular about being punctual with everything he does.

The best golfer and the youngest of the brothers, Lobsang Tashi, plays off an 11 handicap and aims to be in single digits by the end of this year. Very rarely does he miss winning a prize in any tournament that he competes in. He recalls, "When I just started golf, I lost about 10 kg in two months and Yeshe dai suggested I see a doctor. After being tested, the doc handed me a clean chit when he realised I wasn't sick but just getting fitter! I used to play twice each day—morning and afternoon."

When I asked these brothers how they were so intact as a unit, Yeshe replied, "Principally, we respect seniors. We hold a great deal of value for seniority in our family. We've been together and very close for many years now. It's not only just us brothers, our cousins are also close to us and we are all good friends, and it feels great."

Their wives reacted the same way, very positively. They are delighted that their husbands play golf and no longer waste valuable time playing cards and Mahjong late into the night. ●

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Golf Director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu. prodeepak@hotmail.com



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Getting a kick out of it

August has kickboxing, karate and hapkido championships

AARTI BASNYAT

Glamourised by the likes of Michelle Yeoh and Jackie Chan, youngsters all want to learn karate. There is a special magic in being able to say 'haii-yaaa' and exhibit a picture perfect flying kick. Those childhood dreams can now come true—all you have to do is join a karate class.

It is hard to explain Nepal's fascination with the martial arts, but it has something to do with the four karate associations—Nepal Karate, Nepal Wa Do Kai Karate, Shotokan Karate and Nepal Goju-Ryu Karate-do that have been promoting the sport.

In 2004, the Nepal Renbukai Karate Association (NRKA) was established to bring together all karate clubs and dojos in Nepal. As Rajendra Chettri, general secretary, says, "Our mission is to establish them within the Sports Council to make sure that players play by international rules."

Aiming to start work as soon as possible, NRKA has scheduled a tournament for 10-11 August as part of the Birthday Cup celebrations. Called the First

Friendship Karate and Kickboxing Tournament it will highlight karate, kickboxing and hapkido.

Kickboxing, in Nepal, became popular as a sport in 1985. Many players since then have chosen to learn both kickboxing and karate. Hapkido, on the other hand, is a South Korean martial arts technique that came to Nepal in 1998, initially practiced only in the club circuit. NRKA's tournament will be the first to host a hapkido event in Nepal.

Though karate as a sport has been quite popular in Nepal, lack of tournaments and sponsorship in the two decades have hindered its development. Says Prabhajan Singh, president of Renbukai, "The biggest hurdle is the bad reputation karate as a sport has earned, thanks to corrupt officials who asked for sponsorship but never conducted tournaments."

Vice-president of Renbukai, Anil Neupane, adds, "We need to provide players with better earning opportunities and if possible, an alternative profession." But not everyone agrees: some think side jobs will

distract players. Kickboxing gold medallist of the 10th Asian Games, Narendra Maharjan, 24, is not worried about money. "Right now, my problem is training. As long as I get good regular training from my gurus, I am not bothered about money," he says, adding, "maybe later."

Maharjan is keen to showcase his hapkido talents as he adds, "The only complaint I have is that the government should recognise sportsmen. After all, we come from all corners of Nepal to play and it would be nice to receive credit for our hard work."

Mamita Shrestha, 28, has been into karate for 10 years and has won a pile of medals. "Yes, players face money problems," she says, "some don't even have money to pay for transportation, and it is only after they take part in international tournaments that they receive recognition and get hooked on karate."

Shrestha, one of the first few Nepali women to learn karate adds, "There weren't many women then so we got special attention and opportunities. I earned my black belt within a year." ●

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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Brief Encounters** Photos by Holly Holzer at Siddhartha Art Gallery, until 30 July, proceeds go to KVPT. 4218048
- ❖ **Human Dust** Paintings by various Nepali artists at Gallery Nine, until 4 August. 4428694
- ❖ **Our Limbu Culture and Peace** Paintings by Limbu children at NAFA, Naxal. Opening on 30 July, 2PM, until 5 August. 5209349
- ❖ **Perceptions of Time** Paintings by Sunila Bajracharya at Lajimpat Gallery Café, until 16 August. 4428549
- ❖ **Art walk** Traditional artworks at Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999

EVENTS

- ❖ **Feel the Drizzle** Monsoon mela at Hotel Yak and Yeti on 30 July, 10AM-8PM, free entrance. 9851043268
- ❖ **Hip Hop 101** at Gurukul, Old Baneswor on 31 July, 3PM. 4466956
- ❖ **Charlie and the Chocolate Factory** Play presented by Rato Bangla School on 6-7 August, 11AM, 2.30 PM, 5.30 PM at St Xavier's School. 5522614
- ❖ **Introduction Tibetan Buddhism** Talk by Ivy van Eer, 6-7 August from 10AM to 4PM at HBMC, Thamel. 4414843
- ❖ **Teej Festival** at Radisson Hotel, on 12-13 August, 9AM-7PM.
- ❖ **Intercultural Exchange Program** Every Wednesday at Goethe Zentrum, Thapathali, 4.15 PM. 4250871
- ❖ **Tai Chi** Demonstration at Swayambhu. 4256618
- ❖ **Fun in the Sun** at Club Sundhara, Hotel Shangri-la. 4412999
- ❖ **Art Workshop** for kids at Buddha Gallery. 4441689
- ❖ **Rugby Practice** Saturdays. 4435939, citygymktm@hotmail.com
- ❖ **Sanibar Mela** Saturdays at Bakery Café, Dharara, 2PM and Chuchepati, Boudha, 3PM.

MUSIC

- ❖ **Paleti Number Sat** Aavaas sings songs of Manjul and Srawan on 29 July, 6PM at R-sala, Manbhawan, Rs 500. 5552839
- ❖ **WAVE Tour 05** on 6 August at Public High School, Dharan, 2PM-6PM, Rs 100.



- ❖ **Classical Music Concert** Tuesdays at Hotel Vajra, 6PM. 4271545
- ❖ **JCS Trio** Saturdays, 8PM at 1905, Kantipath, free entrance.
- ❖ **The Duo** Live at the Jazz Bar, Hotel Shangri-la, Lajimpat.
- ❖ **The Good Time Blues Band** at Rum Doodle, 7PM. 4701208
- ❖ **Ladies Nights** Wednesdays at Jatra, Thamel. 4256622
- ❖ **Fusion** Mondays at Jalan Jalan Restaurant, 7PM. 4410438
- ❖ **Jazz** at Upstairs, Lajimpat, Wednesdays and Saturdays, 7.45 PM.

FOOD

- ❖ **Monsoon Madness Special** at K-too! 4700043
- ❖ **Kilroy's Annual Wine Festival** at Kilroy's of Kathmandu. 4250440
- ❖ **Summer Special Cocktails** this July at Rum Doodle. 4443208
- ❖ **Saturday BBQ** for Rs 888 at Le Meridien, Gokarna. 4451212
- ❖ **Culinary Fare** of Game Food at Hyatt Regency, Boudha. 4491234
- ❖ **The Chimney Restaurant** Signature dishes at Hotel Yak and Yeti.
- ❖ **Mango Masti** Tropical treats at Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Daily Delite** Lunch at Hotel Shangri-La, Lajimpat. 4412999
- ❖ **Crosskitchen** Cuisine at Lajimpat. 9851083806
- ❖ **Boire and Manger** at Vineyard, Baber Mahal Revisited.
- ❖ **Bawarchi** The Restro Bar for Nawabi cuisine at Lajimpat. 4436673
- ❖ **BBQ Lunch** at Le Meridien, Gokarna Forest Golf Resort. 4445550
- ❖ **Barbeque lunch** Saturdays at Club Himalaya, Nagarkot. 6680080
- ❖ **Special Combo** Burmese and Thai Menu at 1905, Kantipath.
- ❖ **Momo Revolution** Saturdays at the Tea House Inn. 6680048
- ❖ **Krishnarpan** Nepali restaurant at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Delicacies** Pastas and snacks at Roadhouse Café. 5521755
- ❖ **Earth Watch Restaurant** at Park Village, dine with nature. 4375280
- ❖ **Café Bahal** Newari cuisine at Kathmandu Guest House. 4700632
- ❖ **The Tharu Kitchen** at Jungle Base Camp. Junglebasecamp@yahoo.com

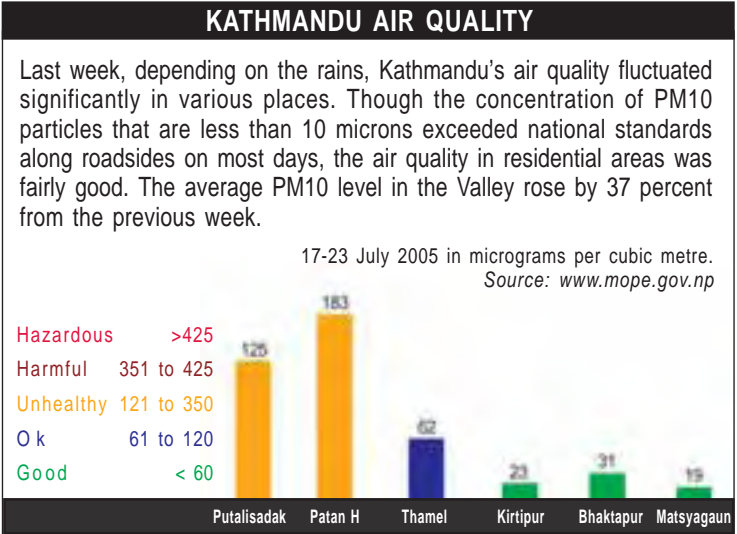
GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Spa** seasonal rates valid till 21 October at Le Meridien. 4451212
- ❖ **Go Karting** at Tiger Karts, special monsoon offer. 4361500
- ❖ **Overnight Stay** at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675, 5560775
- ❖ **Malaysia Dream Holidays** Introductory offers for first four flights of Air Nepal International to Kuala Lumpur. 2012345
- ❖ **Star Cruises** Available in Nepal. 2012345, starcruises_marco@polo.com.np
- ❖ **Get one free night** at Shangri-la Village, Pokhara. 4435742
- ❖ **Shivapuri Heights Cottage** Best time to be in Shivapuri. steve@escape2nepal.com
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‘Viruddh’ is the story of a person (John Abraham) who accidentally witnesses a criminal act and in an attempt to intervene loses his life. It is also about an ordinary 60-plus couple, Vidyadhar Patwardhan (Amitabh Bachchan) and Sumitra (Sharmila Tagore), who are forced to search for faith in human values and society after the death of their only son. They are faced with the most testing time of their lives.

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NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED

The monsoon is slackening off when it should be hitting us hard this time in July. This month is going to be the third month with deficient rainfall, with Kathmandu Valley recording half the normal precipitation quota for July. This satellite picture of South Asia taken on Thursday morning shows an over-active monsoon from the Arabian Sea but a weak arm from the Bay of Bengal. The low pressure system that would bring us moisture from the southeast has drifted southward allowing incursion of drier Tibetan air. However, a breakaway faction of clouds from the Bay will succeed in bringing temporary showers like those seen in the Valley last week. But not quite enough.

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KIRAN PANDAY

MOCKERY: Members of the Upper House and House of Representatives participating in another mock-parliament session at BICC on Tuesday where they debated the Maoist proposal for negotiations.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

OFF TO JAIL: Sher Bahadur Deuba being mobbed by the media after the RCCC sentenced him to two years in jail on corruption charges. Rishi Dhamala is seen delivering a karate chop on Deuba's bodyguard.



KUMAR SHRESTHA/NEPALNEWS.COM

WOMEN POWER: Student supporters of the NC-D confront police outside Padma Kanya campus on Wednesday while demanding the release of Sher Bahadur Deuba and Prakash Man Singh.



KIRAN PANDAY

DASHING OFF: Former US Senator Thomas Daschle addressing a press conference organised by the National Democratic Institute in which he was strongly critical of the king's February First move and his new ministerial lineup.



KIRAN PANDAY

TEN STARS: The Nepali Tara program announced its Top 10 in Bhaktapur on Monday after which the finalists performed live.

Tuki-free country

Babu Raja Shrestha does not give up easily. Nearly a decade ago, when he started his solar tuki (lamp) project, everybody told him to drop the idea. It was not feasible they said, especially in the rural communities where he wanted to replace kerosene lamps with solar tukis.

"I was positive this idea would work," says Shrestha, who installed his first Solar Home System in Pulimarang VDC of Tanahu. Today, Babu and his Centre for Renewable Energy project have been able to reach 80,000 households in 72 districts. He says, "There is more demand now as people realise this is cheaper than kerosene."

Babu is now steering a 'light for all' campaign to completely eradicate the use of kerosene-based tuki. Nearly 2.4 million of the country's population still do not have electricity at home; they burn about Rs 8.1 million worth of kerosene every day just to light their lamps. "We have to discourage the use of kerosene tukis in our country," says Babu, who adds that he won't rest until all non-electrified homes have solar lamps.

Babu graduated as an aeronautical engineer from Russia and worked in Germany. He returned to Nepal from Japan in 1989 when the controversy of the Arun hydropower project was at its peak. Babu has applied his engineering skills to a range of

environmental protection initiatives. Besides bringing solar electricity to thousands of homes in villages, he also helped design a three-wheeled electric-powered vehicle for use on Kathmandu's streets as part of an initiative to combat pollution caused by gas-powered vehicles.

Babu's involvement in solid waste management began in

1998 when he was asked to rescue the city of Biratnagar from a mismanaged waste disposal plan. His initiative has encouraged citizens' participation in waste clean up and reduction efforts. For his remarkable achievement in waste management, Babu was awarded an Ashoka Fellowship to continue his work towards promoting a clean environment. ●
Naresh Newar



MIN BAJRACHARYA

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Earning miles on Air Thrombosis

Ever since prehistoric man sat at his cave entrance gnawing at a mastodon bone and looking up to the sky at birds swooping and frolicking high above the Rift Valley he has wondered: can man ever do the same, can he one day also swoop and frolic like the birds? As it turned out, the answer was in the affirmative.

Recent great strides in civil aviation have meant that very soon there will be multi-storey aircrafts the size and shape of Soaltee Hotel equipped with casinos and jacuzzis where man can realise his dream to swoop and frolic with co-passengers while flying from Point A to Point B.

I don't know about you, but I can't wait for the Airbus A380 to come into service. The plane is so spacious that manufacturers are offering an on-board gym, in-flight astro turfed jogging track along the aisles, and an outdoor soccer field on each wing. And that is just on a two-storey plane. Wait till they roll out the 10-storey condominium megajumbo with its own high-speed lift, penthouse suite, escalators and basement parking.

It's not just size that matters, it's also endurance. They are now making ultra long-distance airliners that can keep flying round and round the world without landing anywhere. Airline operators know that they lose money every minute that a plane is on the ground, that is why they will love this plane because it never needs to touch down. This week Air Thrombosis and Fly By Night Airlines announced large orders for these new jets which they will use to carry that special breed of airline passenger like me who doesn't really care where he is going as long as he is earning air miles.

There is one small problem, and that is the

fidgety passenger who may get bored, drink too much and become unruly. The trick is to keep him occupied so operators on long haul flights are planning special post-graduate courses in marine biology and an option to pursue in-flight doctorates. And if that doesn't work, flight attendants are provided cattle prods to zap rowdy passengers in cattle class. Since these flights are so long, the plane also comes with a fully-equipped flying hospital with diagnostic clinic to treat passengers who grow old enroute.

The other trend in aviation is no-frill airlines which have democratised domestic air travel in Nepal despite regression. It is an unstoppable trend, and the wave of the future. The trick is for budget airlines to go for high volume and slim profit margins by dispensing with most cabin services like food, drinks, in-flight entertainment, seats, tray tables, overhead lockers and lavatories.

I recently took a flight from Kathmandu to Delhi on Rock Bottom Airlines (Mission Statement: 'If you pay peanuts, you are a monkey') and I must say, I didn't miss any of the amenities that I have come to take for granted on normal airlines, like barf bags and life vests. The plane takes off on full power and climbs to cruising altitude after which the captain switches off the engines and glides to his destination to reduce cabin noise and save fuel.

The planes have no seats because hungry passengers ate all the foam padding, so even in economy passengers can relax on 180 degree slumberettes on the cabin floor. Other cost-cutting measures include eliminating the cabin crew and co-pilot, harnessing passengers with chutes and dropping them at designated waypoints to save on airport landing charges, and providing oxygen masks on a first-come-first-serve basis.

But I don't mind all this as long as they credit my air miles. ●



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