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Chicken alert

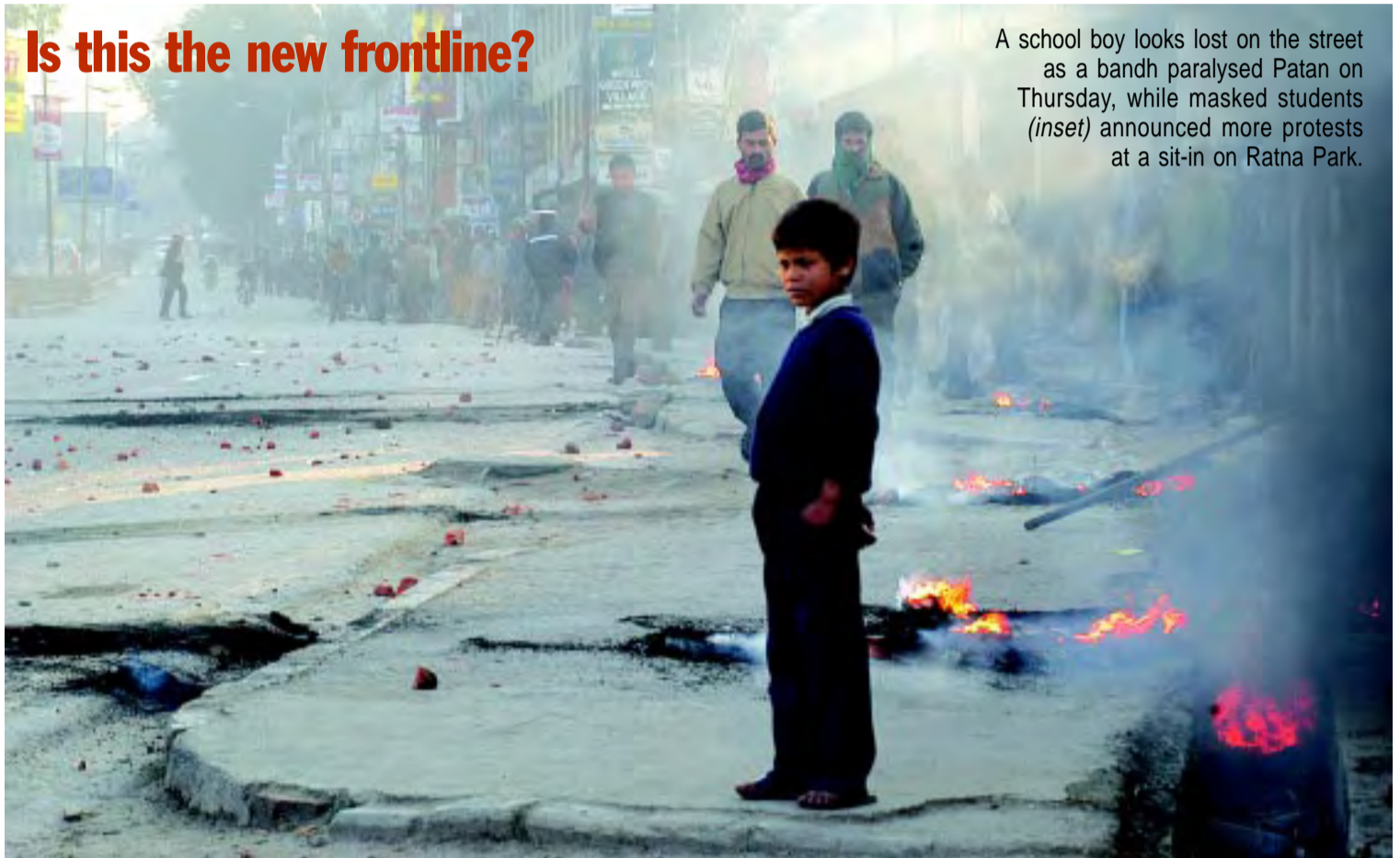
Alerted by WHO this week about bird flu, the government has banned the import of chicken, ducks and other birds and their eggs from outside the country. A chicken task force headed by the Animal Health Service Department will tackle any potential outbreak. A quarantine office at the cargo section of Kathmandu airport will keep a lookout. However, officials told us



Nepal doesn't have the equipment to test doubtful cases. "For now all we can do is stop the import of poultry and eggs," said Deb Raj Adhikary at the department. Local poultry supplies meet most domestic demand, but Nepal imports some chicken, ducks and eggs from Thailand and Germany.

Street battles

Is this the new frontline?



A school boy looks lost on the street as a bandh paralysed Patan on Thursday, while masked students (inset) announced more protests at a sit-in on Ratna Park.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 121

Q. Would you like to see the UML's 9-point roadmap implemented?

Total votes: 1,066

Weekly Internet Poll # 122. To vote go to: www.nepalintimes.com

Q. One year after the ceasefire, how would you describe the country's situation?

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NARESH NEWAR

Political parties and their affiliated student leaders intensified street protests this week, accusing security forces of brutal crackdowns. The government responded by putting army and police under a unified command to meet the escalating protests.

The streets of Kathmandu looked like a war zone with burning tyres and vehicles. On Thursday, the student unions declared a bandh in Lalitpur and Banke districts. Students and teachers, unaware of the bandh, were caught in cars that were stoned in Patan. Dozens of other vehicles were damaged. In Nepalganj, hundreds of bus passengers were stranded at the Indian border.

As pro-republican protests intensified, King Gyanendra himself was conferred the title 'Emperor of

the World's Hindus' by the World Hindu Federation (WHF) last Friday. The federation has chapters in 22 countries and its current president is Nepal's Gen Bharat Keshar Simha. "His Majesty, as a new king, has honoured us by accepting the title from the world's one billion Hindus," Simha told us.

Political parties were angered by an interview in *Time* magazine by King Gyanendra this week. In it, the king reiterated his commitment to democracy and the constitution. But political leaders said the king's comments were "unconstitutional", and took umbrage at his sentence: "The reality is: the people of Nepal want to see their King, they want to hear from him."

A palace insider was puzzled by the criticism: "It is knee-jerk over-reaction," he said. NC president Girija Koirala warned the protests



KIRAN PANDAY

would be intensified. Ex-Indian prime minister Chandra Shekhar's meetings with Koirala and the king this week doesn't seem to have doused the flames. "I can't tell you what was discussed, they can if they want," he said before leaving on Thursday.

Meanwhile, the Royal Nepali

Army has responded to criticism of its human rights record by saying it has punished 25 officers, including a major, for violations. Fifteen got jail sentences, and others were either discharged or demoted. ●

Editorial p2
Into the eighth year

"WHAT'S NEW ?"
NEW MEMBER SERVICE CENTRE NOW IN NEPAL (KATHMANDU)

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The Ungovernment

We can't shrug off corruption within NGOs

GUEST COLUMN
Seira Tamang

Globally, development organisations including international NGOs, have faced periodic charges of the misuse of funds, a lack of transparency and incompetence. But because the need is so great, these allegations have taken a back seat.

Similar dynamics are at play here in Nepal. Because of the scale of the human misery unleashed by the conflict, issues of accountability, corruption and transparency within non-governmental groups are ignored or minimised. The argument is that 'this is not the right time to raise such issues' or 'at least they do some good work'. That rationale is partly valid. After all, the non-government sector is generally more efficient and productive than the government, and has altruism and justice as its mission.

Activists are thought to be above such base instincts as greed found in business and politics. However, both NGOs and their personnel have to play by the rules of the game prevalent in society. Organisational survival is every organisation's goal,

and one that leads to the pressure to secure funds. This is as true for NGOs as it is for corporate businesses. Furthermore, NGO people cannot suddenly rise out and above the social milieu, in what one author on non-governmental corruption wryly describes as 'a sudden moment of transfiguration'.

Informal rules and institutions form the bedrock of civil society. Because such institutions are based on attitudes, culture and social norms, they are instrumental in determining the nature of voluntary civic cooperation in society. NGOs are a component of civil society and can be a channel of corruption if the informal rules of civil society accept corrupt and criminal behaviour. If society tolerates corruption, NGOs cannot always be untouched. While both the World Bank and Transparency International retain the broad definition of corruption as the abuse of public office for private gain, analysts have pointed out its limited utility when applied to non-governmental organisations. NGOs do not have public power charged to them.

However they are entrusted with public and private resources, a result of their self-representation as independent, non-profit seeking organisations working for the betterment of society. Corruption thus has to be redefined as behaviour for personal gain, or for the benefit of another person or organisation on the part of people who claim to represent an independent, not for profit, public benefit organisation.

Accepting that corruption exists in NGOs in Nepal does not mean there aren't principled NGOs committed to useful work. However, the continued acceptance of certain levels of corruption in the NGO sector does not just adversely affect the reputation of all NGOs.

It allows attitudes, cultural and social norms that prevent the emergence of democratic ways of functioning and living. Much research has gone into studying the links between good governance and corruption, but these tend to be restricted to the level of the state. But since NGOs are broadly seen as an alternative to the state, clear analyses of corruption in NGOs need to be undertaken. The fight for democracy, human rights and the fight against corruption rests on accountability, representation, transparency and the commitment to equality by both the state and non-state spheres.

Solutions suggested by analysts of corruption in NGOs include the formation of self-regulating bodies which set standards and sanctions, the improvement of a legal and regulatory environment, and increased professionalism of donors. The last is key in Nepal given the scale of resources and power increasingly accumulated by NGOs and the fact that they are more accountable to donors than to Nepali citizens.

Specific questions of donor competence in regulating the funds given to NGOs, the lack of donor transparency in their funding and recording procedures and the complicity of donors in encouraging corruption in the NGO field by turning a blind eye for the sake of the 'Immediate Cause', or 'The Conflict' need to be raised.

In the face of the lack of legitimacy of the state and political parties, the inability of civil society organisations in Nepal today to hold moral authority and power among the general populace is very telling. The costs of tolerating corruption obviously go beyond the economic. A re-evaluation of the price at which Nepal is receiving more cost-effective and relatively more ethical services is necessary. ●

INTO THE EIGHTH YEAR

How could things have gone so bad so fast? It will be eight years next week that the country began its descent into hell. Nearly 9,000 Nepalis have died violent deaths, hundreds of thousands have been dispossessed, millions forced away from their homes and the country left in tatters. It is possible that if the Maoist insurgency had not been ignited in February 1996, we would still be mired in corrupt, go-nowhere parliamentary politics. And if our elite and politicians are unable to look beyond their narrow self-interests even when a rebellion is at the gates, maybe they never will.

But it is also quite possible that the distortions of a democratic polity would have worked themselves out and elected representatives at the grassroots (perhaps even some of those who bear arms today) would now be at the frontline of the war on want. If there had been a momentum for reform from below, it is quite likely that national politicians would have started to behave themselves.

Democracy has a built-in self-cleansing mechanism, a flexibility that brittle authoritarianism lacks. But we will never know. Instead, there is only the certainty that our country is polarised between a hard right and a ruthless left. It's not much of a choice. No one has asked the Nepali people what they want lately, but most today want neither of the two. In the short-term, they just want an end to the unconscionable violence that has destroyed their lives, and in the longer-term they want a mechanism to ensure a just and lasting peace. If there hadn't been a war and if we still had a parliament, we would still need to address the gross inequities in our society. Given a chance, it is possible that parliament would be debating political reforms through constitutional changes. Pushed from below, our law-makers may have been trying to tear down the exclusionist edifice built by successive Kathmandu elite that allowed only a privileged few to corner power, resources and opportunities. Unless that core crisis is addressed, we will have another violent revolt even if we somehow resolve this one. The political parties on the streets and the Maoists in the jungles are both struggling to attain this power transfer, but in different ways. Their common republican slogan has now become a code phrase for political evolution.

The writing on the wall is clear. The time has come for the entrenched power centres in Kathmandu to hand power back to the people. For the moment, it looks like they don't want to give up without a fight. But in this war for power, there will be no real winners. The cost it will exact on the Maoists and the monarchy will bring both down and destroy the country in the process.



LETTERS

YELLOW JOURNALISM

Yubaraj Ghimire's column 'King's ADC or Singhal's pawn?' (#180) was in very bad taste. I am amazed such writing that came from a presumably top notch journalist like Ghimire and was published in your paper. Firstly, he got his facts wrong. Gen Simha did not ask for the help of Ashok Singhal at the time of the blockade. Gen Simha was ambassador in London when the Indian blockade took place under a Congress government. Furthermore, Gen Simha was not even a member of the WHF

then. Ghimire not only got his facts wrong, but his logic is convoluted. The king of Nepal was declared Hindu Samrat as long ago as 1988 during the World Hindu Conference held in Kathmandu by all four Shankaracharyas and attending Dharma Gurus. How can anybody 'crown' a monarch who is already a king? This was a felicitation. Nobody is denying that the king of Nepal is the king of subjects who belong to different religions. But as he is a Hindu, what is Ghimire's problem if the Hindus of the world want to call him Hindu Samrat and felicitate His Majesty as the reincarnation of Lord Vishnu as mentioned in our holy scriptures? To brand Gen Simha, a nationalist, as a pawn of Singhal, is not only outrageous but also deliberate character assassination that could drag Ghimire to the courts. A person whole-heartedly and selflessly committed to the upliftment of Nepalis is being slandered. Let's show some appreciation for a

person who works in the national interest. And let's hope *Nepali Times* abandons such yellow journalism.

Amar K Simha, Kathmandu

● Yubaraj Ghimire's 'King's ADC or Singhal's pawn?' (#180) was stimulating. Historic geoscience has it that long before Sindhu (Indus), the Kailash rose in the Himalayan mountain belt known also as Bramhavarta where people were taught to live with integrity and in peace. Till date this belt has numerous monasteries and temples that teach internal virtues over external religious behaviour. This is why people come from all over the world to find serenity in the unique culture left behind by the Bramhavarta civilisation.

Chakramehr Vajracharya, Patan

OBITUARY

The opening line of the domestic brief titled 'Tibetan leader dead' (#179) was a total disaster. How can you call the passing of DW Dongtotsang an end of an era in the Tibetan history? It is definitely not the end of an era. The struggle goes on. It is a known

fact that His Holiness the Dalai Lama was escorted by a contingent of Khampa resistance fighters, many of whose bravery is the stuff of legends. This article hurts the sentiments of all those living and the offspring of other heroes of Tibet, many of whom live a life of penury in Nepal and India.

Sonam, email

VISAS

Dewan Rai's article 'Business visas for non-businessmen' (#179) on people bribing government officials to obtain a visa was enlightening. However, it would be a pity if a reaction to the article threw the baby out with the bath water. The problem Rai identifies is not with Nepal's investment laws, but with corrupt officials. These laws are surprisingly fair to small investors. We know dozens of expatriates in Nepal making a genuine attempt to contribute to the development of the country. They obtained their visas on the strengths of their contribution to the country, not by paying bribes. In defence of the Department of Industry, we have found them professional



KIRAN PANDAY

A king can't do wrong

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



Die-hard monarchists are pushing the nation towards republicanism

Political predictions are like weather forecasts. And when a gathering storm on the horizon becomes too big to ignore, you pray for divine intervention.

Strangely enough, it is die-hard monarchists who are preparing the stage for the rise of republicanism. A hike in the palace budget, a tasteless fancy for luxury cars and a continuing penchant for felicitation ceremonies can all be seen as symptomatic of an institution that seems to crave unnecessary controversy.

In a constitutional monarchy, the crown symbolises sovereignty, unity and integrity of the state. The constitution has burdened the monarch with the additional role of guarding the supreme laws of the land. This requires the king to remain non-partisan. Elected

officials are the ones supposed to bear responsibility for every decision taken in the name of the king.

This sovereign immunity for the monarch comes from the maxim that 'the king can do no wrong'. But if the monarch takes up a role in everyday politics and sets off a public debate about whether this role should be 'constructive' or 'active', then he has joined the fray and becomes fair game.

Imagine the public relations

masterstroke of a monarch who refused to accept a move by his loyal royals to increase the palace allowances. After all, Rs 110 million wasn't a paltry sum, and from there to Rs 700 million is a hefty hike. Again, imagine if the king had vetoed another budget request to augment the fleet of palace limos, saying that he couldn't make such lavish purchases at a time when the country is in dire straits.

The decision to import three luxury cars, including a Rolls and a

Jaguar, worth Rs 142 million isn't just bad timing, it is terribly insensitive in the state we are in. At least the infamous Pajero MPs 10 years ago didn't take cash from the state coffers to buy their obscenely expensive cars. Pomp and ceremony are a part of the royal heritage, but someone should tell the palace advisers when such things turn into a public relations disaster.

Then there is the public felicitation ceremony planned for Nepalgunj next Sunday. If the monarchy needs to make friends and influence people such Panchayat-style tamashas won't do the trick.

With all the security bandobast, Nepalgunj will resemble a military garrison. There are 300 welcome arches going up

and a former justice of the Supreme Court is heading the public reception committee. What an irony that the Nepalgunj felicitation to the monarch is being held just as students all over the country concluded public hearings questioning its relevance.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa has been hurling obscenities at all political parties, including his own. His spokesman Kamal Thapa seems to believe in Muckarthyism: the doctrine that if you throw enough mud around it is sure to stick somewhere.

With royalists like these guarding it, the monarchy doesn't need enemies. The king must return to a state where he can do no wrong. ●



MIN BAJRACHARYA

and fair. If indeed your article is correct, I hope Rai gets to dig a little deeper, and finds out who is spoiling the department's good reputation with foreign investors.

Craig Drown, Kathmandu

ROAD FROM HELL

Recently I travelled down the 35km stretch of road along the Trisuli river from Mugling to Narayanghat on my way east. Since this road opened, it has become one of the busiest highways in Nepal, with the majority of traffic for Kathmandu (and also Pokhara) using it in preference over the two older twisting hilly routes through Daman for Kathmandu, and Tansen for Pokhara. During the monsoon last year, I counted 94 landslides in the 25km section south from Mugling. Sadly, little repair has been carried out. What used to be a 30-minute ride can now take over an hour, earning the name 'road from hell' from tourists travelling to Chitwan. What will happen if the few remaining sealed sections of the road are washed away in the next monsoon? The only way into Kathmandu will be via air or the old Hetauda-Daman road. Chitwan National Park will find its already

devastated businesses an extra 10 or 15 hours away from Pokhara or Kathmandu. Aside from tourism, the setback for communities dependent on these routes will be terrible.

Surely it would be cheaper to carry out some urgent maintenance work now, rather than rebuild the whole route after the 2004 monsoon?

Marco Peter, Asha Clinic, Pokhara

FEED THE RICH

I was excited to read J Bradford DeLong's 'The richest get richer' (#180). Nepal, other Asian countries and nations in Africa and South America are getting poorer. Our foreign debt is so high that we are slaves to the developed world. The natural resources of poor countries fall into the hands of rich countries. The oil in the Gulf, Africa's gold and diamonds—all of it is amassed by the Western elite. Nepal's water is now up for grabs. In capitalism's ugly world, nine out of 10 people die of starvation, one from indigestion. Poor countries must not seek foreign investments and goods in their market. They must develop their own independent and strong economy. Ram Sharan Mahat,

Mahesh Acharya and Prakash Chandra Lohani should read DeLong.

Ashok Neupane, Tribhuban University

POST-CAN

This and the week previous, all the media covered CAN Infotech as if it was a millennium extravaganza. It is surprising that this show overshadowed news of the ongoing Maoist insurgency and student's agitation. The most striking fact was the impression and the longterm effect that CAN made on us visitors. Educational institutions and business houses whose sole motive was to distribute brochures occupied most stalls. Most people just threw away the flyers they were handed, something like junk mail that clutters up our email inbox. Somebody should have researched how much money is spent, paper wasted and the effect on the environment.

Indra Kumar Maharjan, email

● Amar Gurung's 'For the people' (#180) was to the point. The modern economy is driven by information and knowledge rather than conventional capital and resources. It is

therefore very important for an underdeveloped country like Nepal to make the maximum use of ICT to leapfrog the process of development and compete in the global economy. And if the people do not come to technology, then technology must be taken to them. However, this is an immensely difficult task for Nepal that has over 93 languages and dialects of which merely eight have any literate tradition. Besides, what little technology we have is urban-centric. Hence, reducing this rural-urban divide is also equally important.

It is quite true that till now the so-called technocrats have decided on the technology and its subsequent benefits for the people, but in a country where nearly 60 percent of the total population is illiterate in their own language or any other, how can we expect them to decide what their needs are vis-à-vis technology's benefits? By taking technology to the people, we are trying to give them the option of having information and knowledge that will eventually bring about a technological culture.

Paribesh Pradhan, NEC

No war, no peace in Sri Lanka



Gateway to Tigerland in northern Sri Lanka.



Remains of an army armoured carrier at Elephant Pass from the 2000 battle.



Tiger war heroes' cemetery in Kilinochchi.

A political power struggle in the south stalls the Tamil peace process.

KUNDA DIXIT in JAFFNA

The dead coconut trees have lost their tops and stand like a forest of poles, a reminder of fierce artillery battles that once raged along this thin sliver of land joining the Jaffna Peninsula to the rest of Sri Lanka.

Not a single house along the highway is intact. A herd of cattle, many with legs blown off, limps past red skull-and-bone signs warning of uncleared landmines. At Elephant Pass, where 2,000 guerrillas and soldiers died in a savage siege four years ago, rusting hulks of armoured personnel carriers and destroyed bunkers litter the ground.

The 20-year Tamil separatist war that claimed 80,000 lives has now been on hold for two years, and the tropical vegetation is reclaiming the ruins of war.

Jaffna Peninsula is under government control, defended by 50,000 troops, and the Tigers have set up their administrative capital in Kilinochchi, 50km to the south. At the edge of Tiger territory, there are all the trappings of an international border. Immigration officials put Tamil Eelam stamps on passports of visiting foreigners, and visitors have to set their watches half an hour ahead of Sri Lankan time.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have used the ceasefire period to create a separate state in the parts of northeastern Sri Lanka that is under their control. A customs service collects a strict tax on all incoming goods, a court system is busy settling

disputes, smartly dressed Tiger police patrol intersections. The Tigers even have an economic wing which runs a chain of fast-food restaurants along the highway which serve spicy dishes with names like 'Landmine'.

"You are here to see us as freedom fighters who are in the process of nation-building," the political leader of the Tigers, S Tamilchelvan tells a group of visiting journalists through an interpreter.

"The peace process is on hold, but we are committed to ceasefire and want to start addressing the rehabilitation and reconstruction needs of our people." Tamilchelvan, a former guerrilla who was wounded in battle and walks with a stick, is the human face of the new Tigers. He led the negotiations with the government, and praises the role of the Norwegians to mediate and monitor the peace process.

But those talks have been stalled since November when President Chandrika Kumaratunga snatched security portfolios from Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe's government, accusing him of giving away too much to the Tigers.

Southern Sri Lanka has enjoyed the benefits of two years of peace—there are no suicide bombings and tourism has rebounded. In government-held Jaffna, the main highway has been reopened, there is 24-hour power and the phones are working again. But one-third of the peninsula has been declared off-limits, displacing thousands of Tamil families. The peninsula's peacetime population of 800,000 is down to 500,000.

In Colombo, senior government official Bradman Weerakoon leads the government's rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts. He downplays the political rift between the prime minister and president, saying both are committed to peace. He is sure a way can be found to let the relief work to go ahead even if the talks are on hold.

"The president is rocking the boat a little, but you don't make it capsize," says Weerakoon. Donors are pressuring the two to work out a compromise, and it looks like the president will agree to the prime minister heading a special security committee to handle the northeast while the president keeps the Defence Ministry.

International donors, led by Japan, have promised \$4.5 billion to rehabilitate Sri Lanka of which \$1.5 billion are supposed to be spent in the north and east. But donors are reluctant to disburse the money unless there is ironclad guarantee that the peace process is on track, and the government opposes handing the funds directly to the Tigers saying this would legitimise them. Tamilchelvan warns that the patience of the Tamils in the north is running out, and says his development coordination office for the northeast is perfectly capable of handling aid funds. "It is urgent to find a mechanism so that money can be funnelled to meet the humanitarian and infrastructure needs of the people, we can't wait for a political resolution in the south," he warns.

For now, it is clear that unless

Develop this

Implicit in development is the notion of superiority.

First there was aid. Foreign aid. It was a simple enough concept. Some countries had a lot. Many had little. So it didn't take a genius to see that a little sharing might be a good thing. After the Second World War in Europe, the United States practically rebuilt the place with aid. Such generosity is a shining example of human nature at its best.

Then came "development". I put the word in inverted commas for a reason. No one really knows what it means, or at least, everyone has their own definition. But what is plain is that with "development", an impulse to help others has become

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



something different entirely. Implicit

in the whole notion of development is the notion of superiority. We—the givers—are more developed than you—the receivers. In short, we are superior. However much one evokes history, geography, geology or misfortune, the relationship in "development" is very much between unequal partners.

You see that all around you in Nepal's cosy little development world. The mismatched pay scales, the obfuscation of

measurable goals through jargon and constant moving of the goal posts, occasionally even the attitudes of people from abroad towards their Nepali colleagues. This last, I trust, is rare on the ground although I'm sure a few tales exist to prove otherwise.

Development seeks to make basic changes in the intrinsic nature of society. Many of these changes are indeed desirable. Who, for example, doesn't believe that women should be equal to men in Nepal? Who wouldn't like to see dalits, janjatis and other disadvantaged groups alongside Bahun Chhetris in all walks of life? Who wouldn't like any and all conflicts resolved by peaceful means? These are laudable goals. But what's becoming ever more questionable is whether foreign development professionals are qualified to pursue them on Nepal's behalf.

First of all, the very inequalities innate in the notion of development make it less likely that those at the receiving end even believe in the mission of the foreigners. If you tell me I'm inferior, I resent it, even if I believe it.

That resentment gets in the way of change. Secondly, the institutionalisation of development—especially here in Nepal—is too far gone. Agencies with mandates to bring change are all based in Kathmandu. Foreign employees participate in career paths that confine them elite economic and social activities and rarely if ever interact with groups they seek to develop. I know that elite's need to "develop" too, if equality and peace are to prevail. But at the moment, our development specialists seem more likely to help perpetuate these problems, not resolve them.

Finally, I don't believe that foreigners—however well intentioned—can bring lasting social or economic change through any means short of conquest and that's certainly—we hope—ruled out these days. Change has to come from the grassroots, from indigenous sources. People have to want it. And if they're to keep it, they have to own it, nurture it and treasure it by themselves. No matter what those of us from Britain, Norway, Canada or America may think. ●



Lessons from Lanka

SAJAG RANA in COLOMBO

There are a lot of parallels between the conflicts in Sri Lanka and Nepal.



Government negotiator GL Peiris and Tamil Tiger representative Anton Balasingham, assisted by a Norwegian mediator, plant a peace tree during start of talks in Thailand last year.



Landmine billboard in Jaffna.

the power struggle between Wickremasinghe and Kumaratunga yields a clear victor, the peace process will be stuck. But donors, activists and civil society are trying their best to ensure that doesn't derail the ceasefire, and are trying to find a way to address urgent humanitarian needs.



One model could be the Asian Development Bank's involvement in demining and rehabilitating the main highway to Jaffna from the south. Civil contractors are working in Tiger territory, but have to give the rebels a cut. Dozens of international charities and INGOs are working with Tiger-run relief organisations on rehabilitation. The government has rebuilt its destroyed telecom towers in the north, and still pays for education and health even in Tiger areas.

ence-building measures need to be in place, people-to-people contacts must be restored, and massive rehabilitation drive launched to rebuilt infrastructure and allow Tamil families to return to their homes.

But for many in Jaffna, all this help is too little, too late. "The rights of our people have been held hostage by politicians in Colombo," explains catholic priest Fr Bernard of the People's Council for Peace and Reconciliation in Jaffna. "They have always used the Tamil question as an issue to capture the southern vote bank."

The longer the stalemate drags on, there is a danger that other festering problems will surface, including the aspirations of Tamil-speaking Muslims in the eastern province. They have been left out of the peace process, but make up one-third of the population in the east. Although they speak Tamil, the Tigers are suspicious of their loyalty and they are not trusted by the Sinhalese either.

In Colombo, Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu of the Centre for Policy Alternatives agrees: "Chandrika has been doing exactly what her father and mother did: use the ethnic divide as an instrument in the political power struggles in the south. The Sinhalese have behaved as a majority with a minority complex."

Geo-politics is also a factor. After a Tiger suicide bomber killed Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 to punish him for unleashing a war against them, New Delhi let Sri Lanka drift. This has allowed international players to step in to try to resolve the conflict. Officials in Colombo say that although they kept the Indians informed, sections of the New Delhi foreign policy establishment were not happy with the involvement of Norway, which they felt was acting as a proxy for the United States.

In November, Chandrika Kumaratunga used her presidential powers to clip the wings of a prime minister from a rival party who she felt was walking away with the political reward for restoring peace. Having successfully sidelined her opponent, she then got her Sri Lanka Freedom Party to sign an alliance pact with the former militant Marxist Janata Vimukti Perumuna (JVP) to increase her numbers in parliament. Many in Colombo say the alliance is an extreme example of political expediency, since it was hitmen from the JVP who in 1987 assassinated Chandrika's husband, the charismatic actor-politician, Vijay Kumaratunga.

Now, India seems to be fully engaged again. Colombo and New Delhi are about to sign a defence pact, and economic ties have expanded dramatically. Having trained Tamil militants in camps in southern India in the 1970s, India now opposes a separate Tamil state in Sri Lanka.

Although it has given up the armed struggle and is the third party in parliament, the JVP is vehemently opposed to the peace process and any talk of a federal solution to the Tamil problem.

Since the ceasefire, Colombo has allowed Indian Oil access to a big oil storage facility in Trincomalee and to run 100 gas stations throughout the island. The defence pact may allow the Indian Navy access to Sri Lankan ports in Jaffna and Trincomalee. Both Colombo and New Delhi are wary of the growing strength of the Sea Tigers, the naval wing of the LTTE and what this would mean to the sea lanes along India's southern coast.

Explains Saravanamuttu: "Power relations in the south need to be clarified for the peace process to move forward. We are in limbo, the Sri Lankan state is in paralysis with dual authority and a power struggle." Once that is sorted out, there must be a federal mechanism to devolve substantial autonomy to the north and east.

In Jaffna, where many suffered bombings and killings by successive waves of the Tiger, Indian and Sri Lankan armies for the past 20 years there is a great longing for peace. But there is also a sense that the more things change in the politics of faraway Colombo, the more they remain the same.

But for now, all that can be done, say peace activists, is to prevent the ceasefire from breaking and maintain the no war, no peace stalemate. Confi-

Asked if the war could re-ignite, the pro-Tiger politician from the Tamil National Alliance, P Sampanthan, says: "It will just mean more misery for the Tamils. Resume conflict, and achieve what?"

D Sithadthan is the leader of PLOTE, one of the smaller former militant Tamil separatist groups that has now given up the armed struggle. He told a group of visiting Nepali journalists here this week: "Sri Lanka is a mess. No one knows what is going to happen. Not even the president and the prime minister."

That statement had a familiar ring. He went on: "Unless the president and the prime minister patch up, there will be no solution to the insurgency." Replace 'president' with 'king' and 'prime minister' with 'political parties, and he could well be talking about Nepal.

One can go too far in drawing parallels between this island nation and landlocked Nepal. Theirs is an ethnic separatist war, while ours is a Maoist insurrection. And despite a stalled peace process their two-year ceasefire has held. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the government have the political commitment to adhere to the agreement. True, conflict between the executive and legislative powers in Colombo and the Norwegian government's withdrawal as mediator, have for the moment, put the brakes on the peace talks.

The recent pact between the president's Sri Lanka Freedom Party and radical left Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) has also cast doubts over the outcome of ongoing efforts. However, even though the momentum seems to have gone down several notches, the peace process is still on.

Are there lessons for Nepal here? Can Sri Lanka's experience with peacemaking be applicable in Nepal's context? Actually, the Nepali Maoists seem to have more in common with the former militant JVP than the LTTE. The Maoists could take a leaf out of the JVP's entry into mainstream politics from the fringes of extremism and terror.

Federalism, a judicious mix of self-rule and shared rule is seen as a solution in Sri Lanka, and the LTTE has agreed to drop its demand for a separate state. In Nepal, the Maoists have also indicated previously that they may consider giving up their agenda for a republican state if elections to a constituent assembly are held.

The stalemate in Sri Lanka is a result of a power struggle between a cohabiting prime minister and president from rival parties. There is similar tussle between the king and political parties and among parties themselves in Nepal. The solution to the crises in both countries is seen as devolution and genuine constitutional reform.

Although the international community has taken an active interest in mediating in the Sri Lankan crisis, the role of the donors is critical in both Nepal and Sri Lanka. There is a familiar rift between the United States and the Europeans in both countries, as well as some tension between New Delhi and Washington, with the Indians wary of US moves in its backyard in both cases.

If there are so many similarities then why has an equally fragile ceasefire not held in Nepal, while in Sri Lanka the country has not gone back to war despite the peace process being on hold?

Warring sides in Sri Lanka have realised the

futility of seeking a military solution. They are responding to the population's overwhelming war weariness, and most politicians have understood the benefits of the peace dividend. There is a great deal of effort and money going into rehabilitation, whereas in Nepal not much happened between January and August last year to restore the peoples' faith in government.

Relief, reconstruction and reform are the main priorities of the day for the government in Colombo as well as the Tigers' political office in Kilinochchi. Donors have promised \$4.5 billion and it will be released as soon as the power struggle in the south is overcome. In Nepal, it has not yet dawned on our movers and shakers that it is essential to build confidence through relief, reconstruction and reforms. And for this we may not even have to wait for a ceasefire.

In Sri Lanka, the debate is centred on the issue of federalism versus decentralisation. We too need to have a certain mechanism in place that can ensure a place for the marginalised if we are to prevent our conflict from taking on an ethnic or separatist hue. The government and political parties must come to a consensus on a longterm devolution strategy.

Maybe Nepal also needs to consider foreign mediation. Our warring sides have failed to resolve the crisis on their own. Foreign mediation does have implications, especially because of New Delhi's opposition to it. The Norwegians were seen to be biased in Sri Lanka's south. Conflict resolution is technical business, it calls for facilitation and monitoring. If we don't have the expertise, we may need to import it from a non-partisan source.

Sajag Rana is with Channel Nepal Television.

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Meeting mountain guerrillas

The latest tourist attraction in Nepal: Maoists!

travel.telegraph

BEN WESTWOOD

As I trekked through breathtaking mountain scenery on a recent visit, our group was approaching the town of Landrung, in the foothills of the Annapurnas, when our guide, Ram, turned to me and whispered: "Maoists with guns."

Ahead of us, a group of men were talking to some local children. They looked no different from the other villagers, except for the antique-looking rifles slung over their shoulders. As we passed them, I thought it prudent to avoid eye contact. After checking in to the hotel, we convened at a table outside, where the Maoists joined us for drinks. Understandably, none of us objected.

A man with a jet-black beard and bright-red scarf, who seemed to fancy himself as a Nepali version of Che Guevara, addressed us energetically in broken English: "We are the Maoist Communist Party of Nepal. We are against capitalism, against America and against the Nepali royal family." (He didn't mention what

they were in favour of.)

Speech over, he turned to Ram and began negotiating payment of our "donations". He then wrote out a receipt for Rs 10,000, which worked out at about £10 each, and warned us to keep the receipt, presumably so that we didn't get charged again. On the back he wrote the address of the organisation's website, then shook everybody's hand before leaving.

It was an unsettling but ultimately harmless experience, and not one I had been expecting when I booked my trip to Nepal last summer. The British Foreign Office has not advised travellers to avoid Nepal, but an insider told me that the government had come within a hair's breadth of doing so. Nevertheless, the travel advice makes for uncomfortable reading, giving warning of "the risk of indiscriminate attacks by terrorists in public places, including tourist sites".

The US government has gone further, advising its citizens against all non-essential travel. Americans

were noticeably thin on the ground in Kathmandu. Andy, 64, from California, was travelling independently on a Buddhist pilgrimage. "The State Department warned us not to come, but I feel safe here," he said. "I've heard about the Maoists hassling trekkers, but they just want money, that's all."

Some 200,000 Nepalis make their living, either directly or indirectly, from tourism. The Maoists seem to be well aware that they would be hurting their cause by biting the hand that feeds so many. And so, far from targeting foreign visitors, the rebels have recently released several statements welcoming them.

On the wall of a restaurant in the Annapurnas were scrawled a couple of messages from the Maoists. One read: "Welcome for foreigner tourist guests, thank you." On an adjacent wall was written: "Yankee go to your home." On the road from Kathmandu to Pokhara, the military presence was all too visible. The traffic crawled at snail's



Maoists are careful not to threaten tourists (top) and the writing on the wall.

pace out of the capital through military checkpoints because all the Nepali passengers—but not the foreign tourists—were required to present documents for inspection.

When we finally escaped the city and drove through the agricultural heartland of Nepal, it appeared a picture of tranquility: lush fields of rice and rape seed, herds of buffalo, women carrying hay and children carrying books to school.

But beneath the surface there is discontent. The Maoists have taken advantage of the social situation, as Ram explained: "The poor people who live in the countryside find it difficult to get jobs. The Maoists say that they will treat all people equally, give them free health and education and get rid of the caste system."

Pokhara, Nepal's second-largest city and an important tourism hub, was surprisingly quiet. Shopkeepers were desperate to entice us into their stores, complaining that they hadn't sold anything all day. The restaurant we chose for dinner was nearly empty and the waiter lamented the lack of tourists before singing the praises of that well-known Nepali speciality: apple crumble and custard.

Before we began our six-day trek in the mountains, Ram explained that we might encounter rebels: "Maybe we'll see Maoists, but it's no problem. I pay and they leave us alone."

Ram's calm manner helped to soothe any nerves. Robert, 30, from Reading, summed up the mood of the group: "If you didn't travel to a place where there's been a terrorist incident at one time or another, you'd hardly go anywhere."

And so we pushed on to our

unscheduled—and unsettling—encounter with the Maoists. Afterwards reactions among the group were varied. Claire, 24, from London, said: "I wasn't happy about it. We're basically funding terrorism and it wasn't as if we had any choice."

Others took the incident in their stride. "I've seen real terrorists in Burma and Cambodia and these didn't look like hard-core revolutionaries to me," said Peter, a 42-year-old former marine who now lives in Hong Kong.

Appearances can be deceptive. Although no tourists have been killed by Maoists, more than 8,000 Nepalis, many of them civilians, have died during the seven-year insurgency. There are regular reports of brutality towards people who refuse to join the Maoist movement and the rebels have been accused of forcibly recruiting children to their cause. The Nepal army, in turn, has been accused of human rights abuses during its crackdown.

The next day we passed several Maoists in full combat outfits. They moved to the side of the path to let us through. "Revolutionaries with manners," said someone.

We didn't cross paths with the Maoists again and our attentions turned instead to the reason why most of us had come to Nepal: the Himalaya.

As always, though, we were at the mercy of the elements. I had to smile at the irony of arriving at Hotel Panoramic Point in Tadapani, only to find it shrouded in mist. But the next morning the sun rose, the clouds parted and the peaks of Annapurna South and Hiunchuli towered above us. ●



DFID Department for International Development

APPOINTMENTS TO DFID'S ADVISORY TEAM IN NEPAL

DFID is a major bilateral development agency in Nepal. Our commitment is to support the Government of Nepal and others to reduce poverty. To do this effectively we require experienced and able professional staff to join our team.

DFID gives priority to support for economic opportunities and essential services to poor and disadvantaged communities, including those currently affected by conflict, and to social justice and governance reforms. We are committed to delivering assistance transparently and with full accountability locally.

The DFID Programme in Nepal is designed and supervised by a team of advisers including specialists in infrastructure, governance, rural livelihoods, social development, economics, statistics, health and conflict studies.

We want to further diversify our team to include Nepalese expertise covering social development (Ref No SD001) and governance (Ref No GOV001) issues.

Applicants should be able to demonstrate they have the expertise in these fields and who have a successful record of achievement working as a professional in a national or international development agency. Applicants must be able to demonstrate strong competencies in relation to working with others; forward thinking; communicating and influencing; and analytical thinking and judgement. Applicants must have a relevant post-graduate degree or equivalent and be fluent in both English and Nepali.

Located in the DFID office in Kathmandu, the positions are based in a fast paced multi-cultural environment that places a high premium on inclusive team working. You will have opportunities to work closely with all levels of Government and non-governmental agencies, and interact with Nepali's from all works of life and from all over the country. The position offers significant opportunities for professional and career growth. Though based in Kathmandu, some in-country and international travel will be required.

There will be an attractive and competitive local salary and benefits package. The successful candidate will be awarded a permanent or a 3 year fixed term contract.

DFID is an Equal Opportunities employer and appoints on merit by open competition. Nepalese citizens - ethnic minorities, disadvantaged groups and women are encouraged to apply. For an application form and more information, including Terms of Reference, please email b-rai@dfid.gov.uk or collect from DFID Main Gate, Jawalakhel, Telephone No (977 1) 5542980, Fax No (977 1) 5542979.

Closing date for applications is 13th February 2004.

Map reading for beginners

CAPITAL LETTER
Yubaraj Ghimire



Roadmaps without a destination make no sense.

Political parties have set a fresh deadline for the king: set aside your political ambition by 12 April or else we will go all out for the abolition of monarchy.

However, this deadline contains a hidden message that the king may not have to reinstate parliament if he appoints someone from The Group as prime minister. After all, the normal five year life of the House of Representatives is going to be beyond the point of resuscitation on 12 April.

Does that then mean the political parties will accept the king only if they get back a bakshish in the form of power? If that is the case, then the parties would only be re-establishing the monarchy in its absolute form. Which in turn would lead to a never ending confrontation between the two.

In order to avoid that, the parties and the king have to accept certain bottom lines:

a. Executive power does not belong to the king, but he deserves utmost respect from

political parties as a guarantee to the continuity of the institution of constitutional monarchy.

b. The parties must have a certain common agenda for the government, including a time-frame for holding elections to parliament.

c. Political parties and any affiliated organisations should exercise a moratorium on any protest demonstration that involves destruction of private and public property and causes loss of productivity until a democratically elected government comes to power within the specified time frame.

The various roadmaps floating around that don't have such clearly-defined bottomlines carry no meaning in resolving the current impasse.

Despite initial hiccups, the process of

dialogue between the king and the political parties should not be abandoned. A break in contacts will cause the political process and the existing power centres to fragment beyond repair, with a dangerous fallout on the unity and

integrity of the country.

The Maoists hold sway over their areas because of the terror they have been able to create and the absence of the government machinery. Theoretically, they would be justified in hoping that

this fragmentation will ultimately benefit them. After all, the comrades have successfully exploited the polarisation between palace and parties to their advantage. The 12 April deadline has, in fact, rekindled the Maoists' hope at these uncertain times in the run-up to the eighth anniversary of their 'People's War'.

The threat by the political parties, however, imperils their own future existence and that of the king. After all, the rebels have neither shown willingness to join the democratic process by surrendering their arms, nor recognised the existing parties' right to exist and carry on their political activities in the

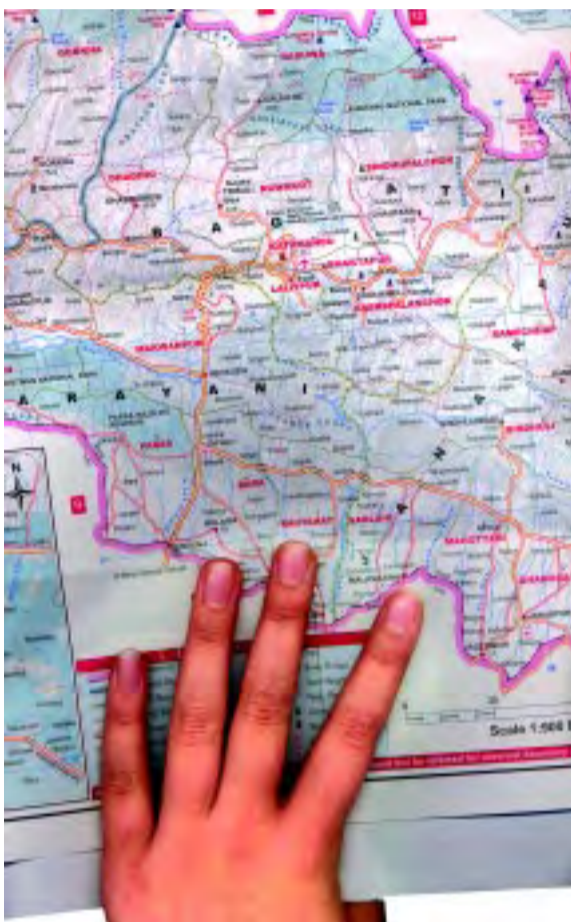
rebels' areas of influence.

The only meaningful step forward is for the king and parties to agree to the above three points of consensus that conform to the spirit of the constitution and will take us all to a restoration of democracy.

The Maoist problem that deserves to be handled with utmost care and urgency after such a consensus is reached. After all, the Maoists are not enjoying an easy time.

Regional politics is not in their favour in the wake of Bhutan's successful operation against Indian separatists followed by the collective pledge at the SAARC summit in Islamabad to root out 'terrorism'.

India is now in a situation where it has to not only act against the Maoists, but also has to be seen to be acting against them. A negotiation process—more sincere in intent and practice than the two previous ones—does not appear unrealistic. But that will not materialise so long as the king and parties are driven by their egos. Both needs to exhibit some pragmatic wisdom to reach a settlement. ●



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Herd mentality

LONDON EYE
Joti Giri



If one Nepali opens a restaurant in London, everyone follows suit.

The National Ocean & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) observation station in a Pacific atoll off Guam detected a large formation of hot air over Kathmandu Valley in mid-October 2003. The scientist's fears were allayed when they found out that it was only the first Non Resident Nepali (NRN) conference.

Hot air, hype or a true attempt at resuscitating Nepal's moribund economy? The jury is still out. The UK Nepali chapter was well represented in the first NRN conference held at the Birendra International Convention Centre, but where are the leaders of UK Nepalis now? Were they

representing the UK Nepali diaspora or themselves? There has been no feedback or information dissemination to share the output and conclusions of the conference. They had their 15 minutes of fame.

Where is the blueprint for the UK Nepali to start contributing towards the 'economic transformation' of Nepal? We don't see any meetings or strategy discussions. There is a fundamental flaw with the NRN objective in the UK. Apathy is deeply entrenched within an unsophisticated community that has scant knowledge or professional base.

Scanning the discerning London eye over the Nepali landscape here,

it is very hard to comprehend who in the community will take up this challenge and lead the charge.

Although UK hosts the oldest Nepali community and consequently the oldest Nepali community association in the West, they are not endowed or affluent.

There are a few SME business owners, some large businesses run by entrepreneurial Nepalis, though of course, there are plenty in the catering trade who call themselves restaurateurs.

Who in their sane mind would invest in Nepal under the current political and economic climate? Not the community or the various British companies who have taken a flight



MIN BAJRACHARYA



THE FULBRIGHT & THE EAST-WEST CENTER 2004 SCHOLARSHIP COMPETITION

The Commission for Educational Exchange between the United States and Nepal announces the 2004 competition for the Fulbright and the East-West Center (EWC) Scholarships. Those selected would begin their US studies beginning August-September 2005. The Fulbright program provides all expenses (including travel) for a master's degree program of up to two years at selected U.S. universities, in any field except medicine, engineering or computer science. The EWC scholarships of the University of Hawaii (UH) are available for master's or doctoral-level study in any field offered at UH and cover all university tuition and fees, a partial monthly stipend, housing, health insurance, book allowance. However, candidates selected for the EWC scholarship will be responsible for partial monthly stipend of \$300 (unless granted the East-West Center Association Alumni Scholarship to cover this portion), transportation to and from Honolulu, and any other costs not provided by the Center. Applicants for either program may be employees in any government or semi-government agency, private business, NGO or INGO.

Application Forms & Deadlines

Application forms and detailed information regarding the competition are available from: the USEF/Nepal office at the American Center in Gyaneshwor (between 2 p.m. - 5 p.m., Monday - Friday); the Ministry of Education; the National Planning Commission; Tribhuvan University Rector's Office; Kathmandu University Rector's Office; Community Information Centers in Bhairahawa (Siddharth Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Kalikasthan), Nepalgunj (Chamber of Commerce, Tribhuvan Chowk), Pokhara (Pokhara Public Library, Mahendrapul), and Biratnagar (Chamber of Industries, Morang, Sahid Marg); and with Campus Chiefs at out of the Valley degree campuses. **Interested persons are encouraged to access and download the application and information from the Commission's website www.fulbrightnepal.org.np since the application form needs to be completed using a computer or a typewriter.** Duplicate, hardcopy, completed applications must reach the Fulbright Commission (USEF/Nepal) no later than 4:00 p.m. Friday, March 19, 2004. Incomplete applications or applications received after this deadline will not be considered.

General Requirements for Entering the Competition

All applicants must:

1. Possess Nepali citizenship.
2. Demonstrate in post-intermediate degrees a minimum aggregate mark of: 56% for students in non-technical fields (humanities and social sciences), and 60% for students in science and technical fields. (The minimum requirements for students under the semester system are: 65% in non-technical fields; 70% in technical fields; or a Cumulative GPA of 3.5/4.0 in either field.)
3. Have a high level of competence in speaking, reading and writing English. (Applicants who pass the first screening will be required to sit for an English test during the application process. The English language test requirement during the selection process may be waived for those who pass the initial screening and have either: a) a valid TOEFL score of 213 or higher; or 2) a score of 125 or higher in the English language test administered by USEF/Nepal in 2003.)
4. Be under 40 years of age for those applying for the master's degree under the Fulbright or EWC program, or be under 45 years of age for those applying for the Ph.D. degree under the EWC program, as of the application filing deadline date (March 19, 2004).
5. (a) Applicants for the master's degree under Fulbright or EWC program: possess either a four years bachelor's degree; or, if the bachelor's degree was of fewer than four years duration, then a master's degree is also required, such that the total number of years of formal education equals at least 16. Students with a three-year bachelor's degree who have completed only the first year of a two-year master's degree program, master's degree students who have cleared all exams but still need to fulfill other university-mandated degree requirements, or students who have two or more bachelor's degree but no master's degree are ineligible to apply.
(b) Applicants for the Ph.D. degree under EWC program: possess a master's degree that is equivalent to the US master's degree; that is, a master's degree that required at least 17 or 18 years of continuous study.
6. Applicants must have at least three years (for men) or one year (for women) of post-bachelor's degree, full-time, professional work experience in an area directly relevant to the applicant's chosen field of study as of the application filing deadline date (March 19, 2004). This experience must be documented by letters (or attested copies) from employer(s) that verify applicant's position(s) and years of employment. Even if you worked at several organizations, you are eligible to apply as long as your work experience at those organizations adds up to the minimum work-duration requirement;
7. Be in excellent health, as evidenced by a letter from a medical doctor; and
8. Be eligible for a non-immigrant J-1 U.S. visa, and not already in possession or in the process of obtaining a U.S. immigrant visa ("green card").

Note: Individuals holding master's degrees equivalent to a U.S. master's degree are ineligible to apply for the Fulbright scholarship competition, but are eligible to apply for the East-West Center competition Ph.D. program; and individuals who have previously resided in the United States for six months or more during the preceding five years are ineligible to apply for either competition.

(Applicants must submit documentary evidence for items No. 1, 2, 5, 6 and 7.)

from the British Nepal Chamber of Commerce's (BNCC) register. The country's status in the global investment rating is poor and everybody today is in a risk averse mode. So will the restaurateurs invest in Nepal? At least this segment of the community has liquidity and the resources. On average their weekly profit and income probably ranges between £5000 - £10,000. As one *sau* put it: "Tandoori Nepali curry houses are minting money."

Surely they could lead the way, but the question arises: what will they invest in beside the obvious land and property market in the Valley? ICT, hydropower or infrastructure development as per the grand vision of the NRN committee is beyond their skillset and capability. By nature these Nepali are not risk takers but followers. On the whole, Nepali businesses in the UK have a 'herd mentality'.

If one opens a restaurant, everyone follows. If one opens a Thamel style market stall in Camden, everyone sets up shop. A Nepali beer business? Others will tap in. They've brought Nepal with them: open a travel agency in Durbar Marg, a carpet factory in Boudha, a pashmina factory in Balaju and you will have five imitators by day end.

Karan Bilimoria of Cobra beer, the London entrepreneur of the year, said, "It's not about invention but creativity. It's all about repackaging the idea in a better way." But Nepali *saus* in London do not push their creativity and entrepreneurial boundaries.

The NRN are not like the NRI. When leaders of India come to London, the resources available are limitless: captains of industry, a vast MBA alumni network, academics, SME entrepreneurs, businessmen and professionals are all on standby. Nepal does not possess such a resource base. It is a fallacy and a joke to compare the Nepali diaspora to the Indian one.

While it's true that the guns must fall silent and the political situation stabilise in Nepal, the Nepali diaspora too must evolve. Get more business savvy before asking what we can do for the country. Till then, NOAA's observation describes it very well—a large bank of rising hot air. ●

BIZ NEWS

SILVER LINING

Morang Auto Works (MAW) marks 25 years of dealing in motorcycles in 2004. Its slogan, "Moving People for 25 Years", reiterates the company's commitments to make quality motorcycles of advanced technology available, provide need based motorcycles for Nepali customers, quality and timely after sales services, easy finance schemes and promotion of motorcycles as sports and pleasure machines. MAW introduced popular motorbikes like Rajdoot, RX 100, YBX 125, Libero and Enticer in its 27 showrooms and servicing centres around the kingdom. Currently MAW is the largest distributor of motorcycles, selling about 6,000 units of bikes per year.



NEW PRODUCTS

MADE ANEW: Mount Everest Whisky has been relaunched in the Nepali market by Shree Distillery. The mixture of Scotch and ENA is extra smooth, with an international flavour that the manufacturer claims is affordable, Rs 343 for 750ml. Shree has redesigned the product to give it a fresh new look and taste.



GOING GLOBAL: Almost every Nepali student aims to 'go abroad for further studies', usually the US. Orbit International Education in Kathmandu, associated with American Universities Scholarships Program (AUSP), promises to help eligible aspirants obtain scholarships of not less than 50 percent, all for a reasonable fee.



REDEFINING CLASS: True to its tradition of being the premier innovative cigarette marketer in Nepal, Surya Nepal launched the newly contoured Sleek 10s pack to live up to its 'International Class' signature. Now Nepal's favourite Surya is available in three pack formats: 20s Hinge Lid, 10s Hinge Lid and now also in a Sleek 10s pack.



NO SLIP-UPS: Subha Shree mustard oil is made from Australian, Canadian and Indian seeds, but manufactured right here in Nepal by Shree industries at their state-of-the-art factory in Nawalparasi. Price: Rs 95 per litre.



The art of business

Nepali firms should promote Nepali arts.

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed



This weekend, a three-day Gandharba festival showcasing the minstrel music of Nepal is being held at Yala Maya Kendra in Patan, an upcoming venue for social and cultural events. It is supported by a few corporations who feel there are longterm benefits in sponsoring events such as these.

While donor money will flow in for development, businesses prefer to look for more direct benefits, like visibility. This is the primary reason why a large number of Nepali products are endorsed by third grade Bollywood stars and sub-standard programs. The institutionalisation of sponsorship is a key issue in promoting the arts in Nepal.

There are surely companies that are putting in money or committing resources to make existing cultural events happen, but is it really in the interest of the Nepali arts? There is hardly any money for reviving traditional Nepali music. Gandharbas or

panche baja remains outside the purview of satellite television or FM stations. While it is natural for companies to look for better mileage, they must share the responsibility for preserving Nepali-pan.

Corporations argue contributions for such events are not tax-deductible, therefore burdening their expense account. While the pure motive of supporting these programs is not saving taxes but promoting Nepali culture, it is also important for the state to encourage corporate spending in this sector. The government must not penalise contributions by recovering taxes on them. Yes, being Nepal, such provisions could be misused and that is why regulatory mechanisms must be put in place

Ashutosh Tiwari, who shares this space with the Beed, remarked a few weeks ago that Nepali art is making the transition from a hobby to a profession. It is important for this to be supported in order to have an environment where the arts flourish with legitimate money from the business world. As gazal and dance restaurants get bumped off for the increasingly popular



AMRIT GURUNG

Nepali dohari eateries, consumer tastes are becoming clear.

The shift is towards more authentic art and music. The challenge is for the corporate world to move in that direction too, as the medium of contact with consumers is getting localised. As corporates spend hundreds of thousands of rupees on advertisements to congratulate themselves on anniversaries, perhaps it is time to divert some of that money to promoting Nepali arts. ●

"...they are economic renegades"

After the government announced sweeping financial reforms nearly two years ago, all eyes have been on Nepal Bank. The new management is a consortium of two foreign agencies, Bank of Scotland Ireland and International Business Technical Consultants Inc (IBTC), and three Nepali private agencies. CEO J Craig McAllister of IBTC talked to Nepali Times about his controversial decision to name prominent defaulters.

Nepali Times: What have your main objectives been?

J Craig McAllister: This is a bank that has extreme difficulties in virtually all areas. Standards were low, it wasn't computerised, the morale of the employees was low and systems and approaches to credit were not modern. We came in to completely renovate the entire bank.

When loans were made from Nepal Bank previously, collateral was the most important area. We prefer to use collateral as a secondary repayment source. The best collateral is the one that is not directly related to the project. We are also building a new service culture. Our objective is to trim expenses, to rationalise all facets of the operation and then present a plan to the government that allows it to recapitalise the institution adequately.

So, how successful do you think you have been?

We are ahead in some, right on target with others and behind in a few areas. In terms of things that have gone better than we had expected, we were able to cut our losses: it was Rs 3.1 billion the year before we came. Now it's down to Rs 282 million—that's about a 92 percent reduction.

What kind of losses were they?

We do not have sufficient revenue being generated to cover the expenses that arise when you roll in the expense for bad debts. Besides that, our trade finance income had fallen off, our employees' expenses and other normal operating expenses are higher than we wanted. We were able to cut around 15 percent from employee and other expenses.

Did the Maoist robberies affect Nepal Bank

at all?

Those are extraordinary losses but we do carry insurance. Only once when one of our branches had a cash deposit more than its ceiling, and the Maoists robbed the bank, we weren't covered fully.

Your bank has a reputation for bad debts...

We were looking somewhere in the order of 38-39 percent of our lending portfolio as bad borrowers but later found out that it was actually a 60-62 percent non-performing portfolio of bad loans. Roughly 80 percent of our bad debts are held by 20 percent of borrowers. Our major debts are held by less than 40 groups or individual borrowers. Those who are adamant not to repay anything, I refer to not as wilful defaulters but economic renegades. Our recoveries in the first year were better, both on the gross and cash basis than we had budgeted for. This year, things are not going quite as well.

Why did you get the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) to haul in defaulters?

In July 2002, we found pending a letter sent by the CIAA around April. In the course of finding out what was going on in the bank during our own validation, it was also appropriate to involve our internal auditors to research the names that were

enquired about by the CIAA. Our conclusion was that the terms and the conditions of the contract in which we put the loans out had been repeatedly violated. We gave them a full report on 24 January 2003 but that was not the banks' effort to make debtors throw up their hands and say, "Enough, we will pay".

What happened?

We don't know. Our actions were misunderstood by a few bad borrowers and others within the community who should have known better. Our response to the CIAA inquiries seemed to have united some people who, in my opinion, are wilful defaulters in various groups. Some pretty important and surprising people joined the protest outside the CIAA, because it seemed like the bank was using police power to recover debts. Those people said we tried to use the CIAA as a debt collecting mechanism. I wouldn't do that for several reasons: first of all, I can collect my own debts because I am a banker and the CIAA is not. Secondly, if they collect the debt, I might not get it back. Banks function best when they do their own work.

So, what percent have you recovered?

Zero.

What next?

We are resorting to legal measures because our efforts in terms of negotiations have not been successful.

How much do the bad loans amount to?

It is Rs 2.5 billion. The borrowers have resorted to their legal rights. We have defended our position and on each level we have been successful.

Have you punished insiders hand in glove with defaulters?

Yes. We did a thorough investigation on loans that were made without central authorisations or board approval. We ended up terminating three employees. A couple of employees were demoted because they made technical mistakes but they were not dishonest. We identified eight bank employees who were implicated in circumstances that involved Rs 52 million. The bank will recover no more than Rs 2 million for that loan.

Have you punished any of the directors involved?

The minutes show that. We are trying to sort out some of those cases. As we did in the case of Fulbari Resort, we will report them to the appropriate authorities.



MIN BAJRACHARYA



NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

A \$75 million World Bank fund for power development is stuck because of a dispute over the appointment of a fund administrator

No money, no power

BIG HEAD: The development of small hydropower projects like this one in Lamjung will be stuck if the deadlock over the Power Development Project is not resolved.

manage a \$35 million component of the project to finance private investors called the Power Development Fund (PDF).

A negotiation committee of the government had selected Nepal Bangladesh Bank (NBB) as the fund administrator through a bidding process, fixing the fee at a little over \$2.5 million. That was when the World Bank was supposed to provide \$70 million assistance for the PDF alone. That assistance was slashed by half to \$35 million because of country non-performance, but the administrator's fee was cut by only 25 percent to \$2 million.

"That decision has kept board members from endorsing the government's decision," a board member told us. "How can we take the responsibility for mistakes made by the government negotiating team?" The majority of the board members are said to be in favour of re-negotiating with all three banks that bid to administer the fund: Himalayan Bank, Nabil Bank and Nepal Bangladesh Bank.

"There is no consensus yet," an official with the Department of Electricity said. "Apart from the fee dispute, there are many

other issues that have to be settled." He did not elaborate, but another board member told us the government had placed the cart before the horse by making decisions before a board had been convened. "We are questioning the transparency of the entire process because we know if we endorse the idea, we will be held responsible."

Water Ministry officials admit the board has full authority to make all decisions. "The board has even been authorised to appoint the fund administrator on the basis of the negotiations the government has done in the past," said one official. PDF rules state that the board has the authority to make the appointment. But without board endorsement, NBB's appointment as administrator is not valid, and without that the World Bank cannot release the money. If the PDF is stuck, the Power Development Project itself grinds to a halt.

The deadlock means other components of the projects, including the \$31 million to strengthen Nepal Electricity Authority and a \$5.5 million allocation for micro-hydro village electrification are also in limbo. There are fears the bank may cancel the assistance that is a combination of a loan and a grant. "The beginning of the project can be extended till 18 months after its approval," the bank's senior external affairs specialist Rajib Upadhyaya told us. "If it doesn't happen by then, the assistance will be cancelled." ●

Eight months ago, the World Bank approved a \$75 million assistance package for the Power Development Project (PDP). The money was promised to Nepal after it pulled out of the Arun III in 1995, and would be used for other hydropower projects.

But a dispute between the government and a board formed to manage the fund has meant that not a single cent of that money has trickled through. Some members of the five-member board have decided not to endorse an earlier decision by the government on the appointment of an administrator to

Golden revolution

Juicy Nepali oranges have found a lucrative market in Bangladesh

TULSI GAUTAM

There is a golden revolution sweeping the central Nepali midhills, bringing income to farmers. The cash crop is orange, and trees in orchards across Syangja, Dhading to Dhankuta are bursting with the fruit. This year saw a bumper harvest, and at present rates of growth Nepal's orange production will double in a few years.

Last year, Nepal produced 80,000 tons of the fruit and this year it is estimated to have crossed the 100,000 ton mark. The area under orange orchards has grown from 5,000 hectares five years ago to 14,000 hectares today. The biggest orange growing areas are in Tanahu, Dhankuta, Syangja, Dhading and Kabhre.

Although Nepali oranges have only been sold domestically, exporters are now

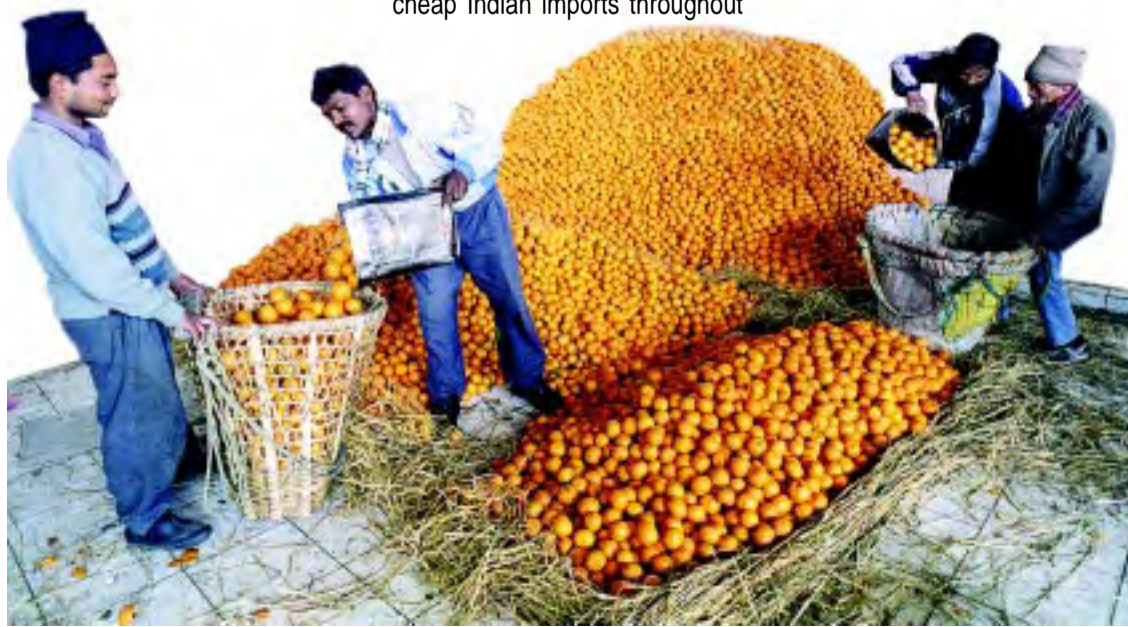
expanding to India and Bangladesh as well. Experts say the reason for the export market opening up is that Nepali oranges ripen earlier than Indian or Bhutani fruits and they are also preferred by customers who like its thinner skin, its juiciness and sweeter taste. Five years ago, the Ministry of Agriculture exported 14.4 tons of oranges to Bangladesh at \$246 per ton, of which farmers got a bonus of \$1 per ton on top of the selling price. Today, private investors are selling directly and last year 5,000 tons were exported to Bangladesh alone.

However, Nepali oranges are more expensive than Bhutani and Indian oranges in Bangladesh because importers there have to pay double the tax for Nepali oranges. In fact, Indian traders are selling Nepali oranges in Bangladesh saying

they are from Bhutan. Exporters say streamlining border procedures for the export route via Phulbari to Bangladesh would increase the market potential.

If the new technology developed in Lumle for cellar storage of oranges is replicated in other districts, it would allow longer storage and the ability for Nepali oranges to compete with cheap Indian imports throughout

the season. The main market for Nepali oranges, however, is still Kathmandu where 36 tons of oranges were brought in daily for the past three months. ●



KIRAN PANDAY



Gaines are us

The songs of the gaines carry the Nepali soul

NARESH NEWAR

It's a long way from his home in Gorkha for 13-year-old Rubin Gandharba. He is in Kathmandu this week with a mission to revive the *gaine* musical tradition, established by his ancestors centuries ago. "People in the capital should know who we are and about our contribution to Nepali culture," says Rubin, who is joining 19 other gaines to participate in the three-day Gandhaba Festival in Patan starting 30 January.

'Gandharba ka Saathiharu', a Kathmandu-based community of journalists and musicians, have come together to promote the music of the gaines, Nepal's travelling minstrels. In the caste system of cable and FM, this sublime music played to the wail of sarangi and beat of the madal falls at the bottom of the pecking order.

Most Nepali folk songs are inspired by the gaines. With them lies the genesis of Nepali folklore, song and music as we know it today. The modern folk genre is commercially successful but its proponents are predominantly Brahmins, Newars, Gurungs and Limbus. While neo-gaines gain nationwide popularity and become wealthy celebrities, the gaines are neglected and on the verge of extinction.

Amrit Gurung, lead singer of Nepathya and Aavaas, a contemporary music composer and singer, went on a talent hunting mission to Kaski, Tanahu, Gorkha, Lamjung and Syangjha districts. Despite the accompanying danger of police harassment, bomb explosions and army-Maoist encounters, the two found 150 gaines and invited 20 to perform at the Gandharba Festival.

"It's sad that real musicians like them are not getting any opportunity at all. Nepali music will not advance by just copying the modern Western style but by modifying our own indigenous music," says Aavaas. Gaines are not just singers wandering around with four-string sarangis, but are communicators and reporters, keepers of the

collective memory of our land. In the days before mass communication, their music was the medium for rural Nepal to learn of and remember battles, brave soldiers, natural disasters, joys and sorrows of everyday life.

The people listened attentively to the gaines and repaid their service with food, clothes and other necessities. Until just before the Maoist war flared up, when people were not as blasé about death as they are now, gaines composed songs about life's end. "But with so many deaths everyday, people are not shocked or even curious anymore," says Aavaas.

Today most Nepalis view gaines as a nuisance—they are shooed away from bus windows, ignored on the city streets or humiliated by packs of young people. Frustrated by their waning popularity in the changing social sphere, alcoholism is on the rise among gaines. "Foreigners have done more for us than Nepalis. They have more respect and value for our music," says Krishna Bahadur Gandharba from Tanahu. He speaks of several gaines who were sponsored to travel abroad to participate in the folk music concerts. Lal Bahadur Gandharba went to Vienna two years ago and was surprised to get such a rousing round of applause from hundreds gathered to see him perform. "It was the happiest moment of my life," he recalls. "We should no longer be ashamed to say that we are gaines and of low caste."

The old generation says it is up to the young to keep tradition alive. "First of all, they should not be ashamed to carry their sarangi and sing anywhere," says Krishna, who has given up trying to motivate children from a 17-member clan to follow his footsteps. Krishna feels the only way to prevent his people's music from becoming extinct is to document the gaines knowledge and skills. ●

Gandharba Festival
30 January - 1 February 2004 at Yala Maya Kendra,
Patan Dhoka Contact: 5522113, 2110200



ALL PICS: AMRIT GURUNG

MISS MINSTREL: A sarangi under construction, and a gaine clan in Tanahu.



No-video nights in Kathmandu

On the odd weekend when the party animal inside rears its head, the call must be answered. Let's start with the premise that Kathmandu is not the liveliest place in the world—well, at least not in terms of glitzy nightlife, but it's not as if they roll up the streets when the sun goes down either. You could stumble upon good times, or you read on and discover the true hotspots in the city. All this on a whirlwind, fun-filled Friday night.

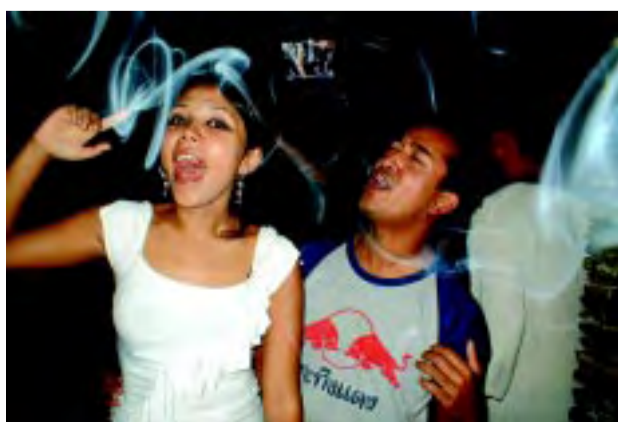
7PM
Perfect for pre-dinner cocktails, dinner and a dessert drink.

Jatra, Thamel: Amazingly peaceful, even in the heart of Thamel, Jatra is fast getting a reputation, a good one. It's not desperately hip or trendy. In fact, it's the sort of place you go with children, parents, colleagues or even on a low-pressure date. The live band makes pleasant music, unlike some other venues where it's like that 1972 rock hit 'Cum on feel the noise'. The outdoor seating is a bit chilly this time of year, but come summer and Jatra is a top pick.

Roadhouse Café, Thamel: This is my personal favourite. If you're lucky enough to snag the table at the right, you may never want to leave this very tastefully designed neo-Nepali interior. The Roadhouse specialities are their woodfired pizzas which are innovative and delicious. Roadhouse's presentation must be commended, it even manages to pretty up an ordinary ice tea.

New Orleans, Thamel: This may be on the pricey side, but New Orleans has great food, well-mixed cocktails and a good live band. New Orleans is one of those places with an amazing ambience, time just flies by. During the winter cold, it does try its best to keep you warm with plenty of wood fires and heaters.

Kilroy's at Boardwalk 1905, Kantipath: For a romantic gourmet meal without the extra cutlery but with candlelight and a pond with white swans, 1905 is the ideal place to start Friday night. With Chef Thomas Kilroy's menu and the new Jack Lives



After a day of breathing
 tyre smoke,
 Mandil Pradhan gets into
 Kathmandu's nightlife

Here's Jack Daniel's bar, this could be that one night spot you won't have to leave, especially if there is a dance party at their sunken garden.

Café Mitra, Thamel: There are people who swear by Kunal Lama's cosmopolitan café. Housed in an old building, the interiors are contemporary, the menu excellent and the cocktails at Mitra Lounge Bar are far from the slap-dash affair available at other bars.

9PM
Dinner's done but it's still too early to go dancing. A few mellow drinks are in order as the night builds up.

The Red Onion Bar, Lazimpat: Just outside Hotel Radisson, Red Onion offers a wide selection of drinks and cocktails from all over the globe. It attracts a slightly upscale crowd from the embassies and NGOs in the area. While admiring the multitude of drinks on display is entertaining, if you enjoy an after-dinner cigar, this is one place where you can savour a fine blend lounging on their fabulously comfortable sofas.

Tantra Bar, Thamel: If cigars won't do for you and a more eastern flavour is what you crave, then Tantra's hookas, imported straight from Bahrain and available in different flavours, could lend you a little exotic east cache. The Axis band plays live on Fridays and Tantra also hosts some of the best DJs in the Valley, making it easily one of the most popular places for the young set.

Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lazimpat: Nevermind where Jack lives, Upstairs is home to Nepal's jazz icons Cadenza. Even with a Rs 200 cover charge on the nights they perform, usually Wednesday and Saturday, the small rooms are always packed to the rafters. Cadenza is also instrumental in bringing about Jazzmandu, the annual jazz festival, this year in March. Surprise guests like Sting jammed with the band last year.

Maya's Cocktail Bar, Thamel: One of the best things about this place is their extended happy hours (4-10PM) and no, they don't charge twice as much and plunk down a free drink. The Mojito is very refreshing and goes down easy with an array of Mexican snacks and little pizzas. The only blot is somewhat slow service, but that is only to be expected from a bar that is always hopping.

Via Via Café, Thamel: A Belgian would recognise the name,

because this café has its HQ there. It's a travellers port of call that attracts a fair share of locals and resident expats. Via Via hosts many dance events with foreign DJs mixing some bumping beats. Oh yes, and they have a very nice cocktail menu.

11PM
Those shoes were made for dancing and the hour before midnight is the perfect time to make your grand entrance at one of Kathmandu's discos or clubs.

Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency: Bar it may call itself, but this is more a swank club: beautiful people sip on expensive drinks or dance to hot new tracks. Till recently, the Rox was the most popular club in the kingdom and on Fridays it still manages to deliver, despite the cover charge, that, to be fair, includes a complimentary drink.

Subterranea – Club Kilroy, Thamel: For those who think Boudha is too far then 'sub' it. A relatively new dance destination, Subterranea's in-house DJ Pritam should have you dancing all night. The club is for members only and they reserve the right of admission to keep the 'undesirables' out. Prices are reasonable and the VIP lounge is plush. You could order a bottle of quality bubbly and rub shoulders with the select crowd—if you can get past the door.

Fire Club, Thamel: On the other end of Sub is Fire Club. It welcomes everyone though the bouncers at the door have a final say. The place is always happening thanks to new music and extremely affordable prices. It helps that Fire is at the centre of Thamel. When you get tired, you can contemplate another drink with an eye on the wall-sized TV projection in a large seating area. However, there is a rougher side to the Fire Club. If a fight breaks out, as is wont to happen, just move aside.

Funky Buddha Bar & Café, Thamel: Definitely not mainstream, at least in terms of music and party styles. Happy



ALL PICS: MANDIL PRADHAN



hour at Funky Buddha starts at 1PM when you can thaw from the winter cold in their sunny garden. Come early evening it's a spot of telly, cocktails and conversation at their indoor lounge before gearing up for the Psy-Club to sample some trance, house, progressive, drum & bass or whatever the DJ wishes to spin. If these terms have you wondering, maybe you need a Funky Buddha party education.

2AM

Sensible people would go home to bed. Sensible people may not even leave home but it's Friday night and you wanted something more exciting than watching Casablanca for the nth time.

Galaxy Club, Everest Hotel: So you have energy enough for another two hours. The only place to go is Galaxy. DJ Ankit is good at keeping your dance groove on. The powerful sound system has the bass pounding through the intimate club. Galaxy is an easy habit to pick up. Soon you'll never be home before dawn.

4AM

All the bars and clubs are closed. There are four things to do: drive to Bir Hospital and chow down on bowl a of instant noodles at the small chiya-pasal, back to Thamel's all night sandwich point for a something-to-go or best of all, do both and then head out towards Nagarkot. An hour later you'll be drinking in pure air, seeing the first blushes of day tint the mountains—a perfect Zen ending to a night of excesses.

Never a dull moment

PartyNepal.com

Whoever said nothing fun happens in Nepal obviously didn't look in the right place: PartyNepal.com.

It all started when three party animals met at a salsa night and discovered that they shared a particular passion...partying! They were part of a rising demand for the latest, 'happening', up-to-date information on where to be seen once the sun sets on the Himalaya.

Mandil Pradhan and Robin Sitoula duly noted the information lapse of a reliable source for parties and events. They decided to create a website to provide free access to news, reviews and information related to Nepal's 'clubbing scene' that, no, does not refer to people bashing each other with effigies or batons, both of which are common on the city streets.

PartyNepal.com is the definitive guide to having a good time in the kingdom. They have the latest club and dance-music charts, bulletin boards and a chatroom, updates on the latest parties and bios on the big DJs. The PartyNepal triumvirate is 25-year-old Sitoula, 20-year-old Pradhan and 26-year-old Bhushan Thapa.

Sitoula is a trained DJ who specialises in electronica. After graduating from Sydney, his penchant for traveling, partying and clubbing took him to party, club and rave meccas like Ibiza, Amsterdam, Milan, New York, Los Angeles, Rio De Janeiro and Goa where he met big names like Fat Boy Slim, Carl Cox and PVD. Sitoula says, "It's my dream to promote more of an electronica scene in Nepal. Hopefully, we can host big name DJs here and be known as a destination for music lovers as well."

Pradhan, a young graphic designer is 'fierce' when it comes to partying. He manages, updates and co-owns the site. "I party hard: I get to do what I



love and I get paid for it," he says. It's tough to beat that. Thapa, marketing director of PartyNepal.com, is a Business Management graduate from Sydney. A whiz at marketing and public relations, he even does event management though his actual background is the more staid area of finance and banking. He looks after the trio's marketing, sponsorship and "makes" clients. "I'm the guy behind the scenes," says Thapa. "My work isn't really work: it's like organising fun."

PartyNepal.com launched Nepal's first online clubbing and partying portal on 14 April 2003, the first day of 2060 BS, at a low-budget event in Thamel where more than 300 people showed up! Four days later, they organised "Tranceport:Kathmandu!", still remembered as one of the best trance events in the Valley. They hosted "Retro Night, A memory of the 60s & 70s", a party intended for the oldies to let loose and boogie. This was followed by PTY LTD, an Australian Electro Funk Band, who performed in Kathmandu as part of their world tour. The "Lounge-A-Rama" event was a live concert that got a phenomenal response from music lovers and the media.

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 नेपालगंज: ०८१-२२३८४८

Primary experience

A Nepali recalls working on Al Gore's campaign four years ago

ASHUTOSH TIWARI

Place: Cambridge, Massachusetts.
Time: December 1999.

A grizzled veteran of US elections is giving a two-hour lecture. A democrat with a 30-year of experience with local, regional and national-level elections, described what it was like working on a campaign.

He reminisced dealing with quirky, even psychotic, sides of

various candidates. He regaled us with stories of brutally-packed, fueled-by-caffeine 20-hour-a-day work schedules. He talked about election strategies, voter mentality, issues around which pollsters frame questions, ways of dealing with the bad news and the media, and about how he had to play the role of a marriage/relationship counsellor to both the candidates and the campaign staff.

He also described the subculture of 'campaign lifers'—election junkies who spend their entire lives floating from one election campaign to another often marrying and divorcing one another. "No other work anywhere teaches you so much about human beings in such a short amount of time as working on an election campaign does," he said.

As a Nepali, I was fascinated. After the lecture, I asked him whether it was possible to work as a short-term volunteer at the Presidential Primary elections in New Hampshire. Who knows, the experience might come handy to work on campaigns in Nepal someday. I gave him a resume, and a few days later, I got a call from Manchester, New Hampshire asking me to come up to the coastal town of Portsmouth to help out with the *Al Gore 2000* campaign.

With a Democrat president in the last year of his final term at the White House then, the election year 2000 got off to a raucous start. Candidates from both the leading parties were vying with one another to win their parties' primaries in New Hampshire. The frontrunners among the Democrats were Vice President Al Gore and Senator Bill Bradley, while Texan Governor George W Bush and Senator John McCain were the Republican frontrunners. Some extracts from the diary:

Day 5: Our messy single-room office adjoins a law firm, which allows us to use its phones, faxes and copiers for free. Five of us are on the floor-collating campaign literature and then stuffing it into thousands of envelopes that will be mailed to all registered Democrats living in villages and towns around Portsmouth. Only they will be choosing one of the Democratic candidates as the winner. The work is important but when you lick thousands of envelopes from morning to evening, the glamour of working on a



CAMPAIGN SLOGAN: Author (right) with Al Gore during the 2000 Democratic primary in New Hampshire.



presidential campaign starts to wear off. Think of George Constanza's girlfriend Susan in *Seinfeld*.

Day 10: The headquarters has sent us a list of ardent supporters. Apparently, the Democratic National Committee buys such lists from pollsters. These supporters have no objection if we plant campaign placards on their snow-covered lawns, and so, off we go to their homes. We also get up early in the morning to go to busy road intersections. Our job is to smile, shout and wave campaign placards to morning commuters, and try to engage some of them in conversation. Supporters honk thrice in glee, Republicans roll down their windows and scowl.

Day 16: We have a list of hundreds of undecided voters. These people can make or break the election. My job today is to call them up one by one, and try to convince them to vote for Gore. I find out that most are lonely elderly people who have long been retired from manufacturing jobs and who just want to talk and talk. Some slam down the phone as soon as they hear the word 'Gore'. Some ask detailed questions about arcane issues, and I have to tell them that I will call them up after I find out the answers, which I never do as there are hundreds more calls to make. After a dinner consisting of limp fries and flat Coke, I start writing pseudonymous letters to various regional newspapers—praising Al Gore. It's the usual 3AM

by the time I go to sleep, only to get up three hours later.

Day 23: Senator Kerry is in town as a surrogate for Gore. My job is to take him from house to house and store to store so that he can 'press some flesh' and do 'retail campaigning'. All these places had been carefully selected and prepared in advance to show to the members of the media who are tagging behind Kerry how enthusiastic the voters are about Gore. I am learning that for a candidate everything he does boils down to how it looks in the media.

Day 27: There's a giant rally this afternoon at a high school auditorium. Rock music is playing, and cheerleaders, in their skimpy outfits, do the rah-rah thing up on the stage. Hundreds of supporters, wearing campaign buttons or holding placards, mill around. The emcee introduces Gore as the "next president of the United States", and the crowd goes wild. Gore gives his stump speech. He's using the occasion to prepare for a television debate later tonight. We watch that debate with 30 other people in a supporter's house. By now, we have all bonded as though we have known one another for years.

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The Islamic democracy deficit

Despite encouraging signs, it is impossible to ignore a "democracy deficit" in the Muslim world, especially the Arab part of it. Only one of every four countries with Muslim majorities has a democratically elected government. Worse yet, the gap between Muslim countries and the rest of the world is widening.

Democracy and freedom expanded over recent decades into Latin America, Africa, Europe, and Asia, but the Muslim world continues to struggle. By the reckoning of

global and competitive world demands.

Alas, instead of progress, what we see is a cycle of inadequate educational opportunity leading to a lack of economic opportunity. Neither freedom nor prosperity can develop in such conditions. Muslims cannot blame the United States for their lack of democracy. Still, America does play a large role on the world stage; and in many parts of the Muslim world, particularly in the Arab world, successive US administrations—Republican and Democratic alike—have not made democratisation a priority.

At various times, the US avoided scrutinising the internal workings of friendly countries in the interest of ensuring a steady flow of oil; containing Soviet, Iraqi and Iranian expansionism; addressing issues related to the Arab-Israeli conflict; resisting communism in East Asia; or securing military bases. By failing to foster gradual democratisation—and yielding to a "democratic exception" in parts of the Muslim world—America missed an opportunity to help these countries adapt to the stresses of a globalising world.

Continuing this policy is not in America's interest. According to the Bush administration's 2002 National Security Strategy, US policy will be more actively engaged in supporting democratic trends globally, with no exception for the Muslim world. This commitment was made with the full knowledge that democracies are imperfect and terribly complicated. Leaders in some Muslim states contrast democratic systems with their more orderly arrangements and point with satisfaction to the seeming stability that alternatives to democracy provide. But stability based on authority alone is illusory and ultimately impossible to sustain. Iran, Romania and Liberia illustrate that rigid authoritarian systems cannot withstand the shocks of social, political or economic change, especially at the pace that characterises today's world.

Any doubt that promoting democracy now receives greater emphasis in US foreign policy was removed by President Bush's speech of last

The gap between Muslim countries and the rest of the world is widening.



November, in which he made clear that the Muslim world's democratic deficit is not tied to religion, but to "failures of political and economic doctrines."

President Bush also made clear that Americans had learned from the past. "Sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe—because, in the long run, stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty. As long as the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place of stagnation, resentment, and violence ready for export."

So the US now actively supports the extension of democracy throughout the Arab and Muslim worlds, not simply for humanitarian reasons, or for theoretical reasons, but from self-interest. History shows that societies where opportunity is safeguarded tend to be societies that are good international

citizens.

Finally, political reform must go hand in hand with economic and educational reform for all the citizens in a society, including the 50 percent who happen to be women. No country can succeed if it denies itself the talents of half of its people. True, democracy can only be built and maintained from within, by a country's people and leaders. Outsiders, however, can and should help. There is a role for governments, international organisations, corporations, universities, and journalists—from the US, but also from Europe and countries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa where democracy has taken root. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a more important task for established democracies than helping other countries join their ranks. ●

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Richard N Haass, formerly Director of Policy Planning in the US State Department, is President of The Council on Foreign Relations.

COMMENT
Richard N Haass



Freedom House, a think-tank devoted

to monitoring democracy worldwide, the number of "free" countries around the world increased by nearly three dozen over the past 20 years. Not one has a Muslim majority.

This phenomenon has been noted within the Muslim world as well. In the summer of 2002, a team of Arab scholars produced the Arab Human Development Report, written on behalf of the UN Development Program and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development. It portrays an Arab world lagging behind other regions in key measures, including individual freedom and women's empowerment, as well as economic and social development.

Disturbing trends, such as a demographic youth "bulge" combined with high youth unemployment rates—reaching almost 40 bulge in some places—highlight potentially explosive social conditions. The Arab world faces serious problems that can only be met by more flexible, democratic political systems.

The second Arab Human Development Report, issued in 2003, underscores the close relationship between the Arab world's educational shortcomings and its lack of democracy. Democracy requires an informed citizenry able to question its government. A well-educated citizenry is also essential if young men and women are to acquire the skills needed to perform the sort of jobs today's

North Korea's right to food

North Korea has been using food as an instrument of political and economic control, says a major new report by Amnesty International (AI). While the country has been unable to produce enough food for all of its citizens since the collapse of the Soviet Union more than 10 years ago, food supplies—from domestic sources and in the form of foreign aid—have been distributed primarily according to citizens' membership in three "classes", apparently based on loyalty to the state. The categories, also said to determine who receives many other benefits in North Korea, such as access to education and residence permits, include "core", "wavering" and "hostile", the last class representing about one-quarter of the country's 23 million people, according to the 42-page document, 'Starved of Rights'.

The study, which is based on the testimonies of refugees, reports by humanitarian agencies that have worked in North Korea and other sources, comes amid an ongoing crisis over the country's alleged nuclear-weapons program and demands by the administration of US President George W Bush that the program be totally and verifiably dismantled. Negotiations to reconcile the two positions have thus far proven inconclusive. Various sources contend that famine killed between half a million and three million North Koreans during the 1990s. Washington has been the biggest single supplier of food aid to North Korea in recent years.

The report noted that about 41 percent of North Korean children under the age of seven suffered severe malnutrition in 2002, and that rations this year were expected to be further reduced in the absence of stepped up food aid. Amnesty argues that the right to food must be considered a basic human right—on par with political and civil rights—under a number of international covenants, and that governments thus have a duty to feed their people. ● (IPS)



Bird Flu raises political stink

A plague of dead chickens is raising a political stink in Thailand, whose government is being pilloried for placing profits over the lives of the country's rural poor. Also exposed is the government's disrespect for transparency. Since the weekend, the administration of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra has been forced to endure the consequence of its economic bias and its lack of regard for an open, democratic culture.

This has come in the form of the death of two boys due to the bird flu, up to 10 people coming under surveillance for possibly having the disease and 13 provinces being declared epidemic zones. At the international level too, Bangkok is paying dearly for what critics say was a "cover up" by authorities to hide the true picture of avian flu in Thai chicken farms in recent weeks. The harshest rebuke was delivered by the European Union (EU), whose statement virtually accused the Thai government of resorting to lies to protect the country's highly lucrative industry of chicken exports. Thailand is Asia's largest exporter of chickens.

Till last Thursday, the Thai government denied that bird flu was rampaging through the country, despite reports from poor rural farmers that their poultry had been dying in the thousands since late last year. The government had been saying that the deaths were due to fowl cholera and that hence, humans were not susceptible. The Thai government's change of tune, however, came with the harsh economic truth it was forced to swallow by the weekend.



Japan and the EU, unimpressed by Bangkok's denial strategy, had slapped a ban on importing Thai chickens. These two economies account for 80 percent of Thailand's chicken export industry, estimated at \$1.25 billion. Thailand shipped close to 540,000 metric tons of chicken meat to its foreign markets last year.

Currently, Thailand is among the nine Asian countries hit by avian influenza, an infectious disease that not only kills domestic poultry like chickens but, since 1997, has jumped species—the H5N1 virus strain—to infect 18 humans in Hong Kong, six of whom died. The other affected countries are Cambodia, Japan, Indonesia, Laos, Pakistan, South Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam. With the bird flu far from contained, an FAO official is also raising the alarm about how this mass death of chickens will affect food security in the country and the region. ● (IPS)

Iraq, the next Afghanistan

COMMENT

Hassan Mneimneh

At the onset of the US-led war in Iraq, two competing views shaped predictions about the outcome. The first contended that overthrowing Saddam Hussein's regime would usher in a democratic era in Iraq that would serve as a model and catalyst for democratic change regionally.

Derided by detractors as a new 'domino theory', this view presented intervention in Iraq as similar to America's role in post-WWII Japan. Against the optimism of that 'Japan scenario', pessimists argued that a 'Somalia scenario' was more likely. They staked their claim on the tribal, sectarian and multiethnic nature of Iraq, which, in the absence of dictatorship, would supposedly incite Iraq's collapse into a 'failed state', with rampant warlordism, ethnic and religious feuds and harboring of terrorist organisations.

But the main question now is whether Iraq will drift along lines somewhere between these two scenarios, increasingly resembling Afghanistan. This 'Afghan scenario' implies a weak state with nominal power over effectively autonomous fiefdoms that are headed by strongmen who are represented in the central government.

Bad as it sounds, this prospect appears to be a 'realistic' compromise between the supposedly utopian vision of a flourishing, unified democracy and the wretchedness of a failed state. Many of the actions and policies of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), as well as higher-level Bush administration decisions, seem to point to a resigned acceptance that early hopes that Iraq would embrace Western-style democracy were misplaced.

Indeed, such hopes were misplaced. Iraq's political culture—and that of most of the Middle East—is incompatible with the basic components of a recognisable Western-style democracy: notions of individual rights and responsibilities are lacking, the concept of a patriarchal state is deeply rooted, and individual cultural identity is rarely tied to the national community.

On the other hand, much circular logic figures in analyses that consider the "traditional" nature of Iraqi society an obstacle to liberal democracy. For these analyses are hardly neutral, but unwittingly enter an ongoing confrontation.

In Iraq, as elsewhere in the Arab and Muslim worlds, a cultural war is being waged between two paradigms: grand narratives that accept and promote a collectivistic understanding (nationalism, socialism, Islamism), versus an implicit paradigm of individualistic



Will it be the Somali or the Afghan scenario?

modernity that is locally rooted yet informed by the global experience. The frontlines of this war are notions of the individual, cultural identity, civil society and the nation-state.

The religious Islamic component in Iraqi social life should not be underestimated. But it also should not be equated with the political Islamism that strives to capitalize on it.

Nationalist and leftist political discourses did leave an imprint on the Iraqi value system, but they are not its sole components. Indeed, the nominal acceptance of grand narratives of 'democracy' and 'human rights' as common bases for political discourse represents a crucial shift in demarcating the cultural battle.

This cultural debate is not limited to the Arab scene. There are also vigorous discussions in the West about the applicability of democratic institutions to the Arab context.

Some have even suggested hastening the outcome predicted by

this faulty view by dividing Iraq into its 'genuine' original components: Sunni, Shi'i and Kurd. In fact, Iraqi society is more complex than this.

The reception and adoption of democracy is not a function of sectarian belonging, but a reflection of the multi-dimensional historical, cultural, religious and political identities of Iraqi individuals. Given the right circumstances, it is eminently possible to mobilize Iraqi society towards a democratic formulation of its state-to-be. The fall of Saddam ushers in the right circumstances.

Indeed, the seeming failure of a recognizable democratic core to emerge in Iraq within the first few months of the collapse of Saddam's dictatorship is due more to idiosyncrasies of the process than to any presumed essential nature of Iraqi society. Upon Saddam's fall, a large 'middle ground' existed in Iraq that was positively disposed towards democratic discourse and practice.

Policy mistakes and reversals eroded this middle ground, opening a path for ideological Islamism and a

reconstituted neo-Ba'athism.

The key mistake was the failure of occupation forces to equip and empower the small group of Iraqi liberal democratic figures to tap into this middle ground. As a result, the space for a liberal democratic outcome receded. But to treat this setback as a failure would be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Iraqi democrats must re-assess and develop a clear public strategy. The CPA, and the world community, must not prejudice the outcome of their efforts by accepting a facile and bogus view of Iraqi society.

Even if such efforts succeed, the road to a full-fledged democratic system in Iraq will still be arduous and expensive. But instead of succumbing to a 'Somalia scenario', dreaming of a 'Japan scenario', or settling for an 'Afghan scenario' Iraq may yet become a 'scenario' for successful intervention in the 21st century. ● (© Project Syndicate)

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Mini-Nukes

New defence or threat?

The US effort to design a new generation of low-power nuclear weapons, approved in the defence budget for 2004, is politically, technically and militarily unjustifiable, say critics. The so-called "mini-nukes" have a potency of less than five kilotons of explosive, a third of that contained in the bomb that the United States dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima in 1945, during the Second World War.

The research, design and economic studies of these mini-bombs were approved by the US Congress as part of the national defence budget for 2004. However, engineering development, production and testing of these explosives are still banned. Experts note that the White House initiative does not violate the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the international agreement to eliminate nuclear weapons, because the text does not prohibit the development of new types of these arms.

The defenders of this weapon—a small nuclear charge carried in the rear of a missile—say that some military targets can only be destroyed with atomic-strength arms. Among the advantages of smaller nuclear charges, say their defenders, is that they cause less "collateral damage" and allow better control and lower maintenance costs. The US Department of Defence is specifically interested in studying the use of small nuclear bombs, known as "earth penetrators", to destroy underground refuges used by potential enemies to store chemical and biological weapons, considered the greatest security threats of the new century. According to a report presented to the US Congress, the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) believes there are more than 1,400 strategic underground targets worldwide.

But critics like Robert K Musil, director of the non-governmental Physicians for Social Responsibility, disagree: "If warfighters believe that a nuclear weapon is 'small' enough to 'contain' collateral damage, they are more likely to fire them, which means an environmental and humanitarian disaster we haven't seen since World War II. That's why we can say that there really is no such thing as a mini-nuke." ● (IPS)

WHO accused



SONNY INBARAJ in ADDIS ABABA

A World Health Organisation official in Ethiopia has dismissed an article in a respected British medical journal that claimed the United Nations agency was undermining the fight against malaria. *The Lancet* accuses the agency of approving cheap drugs that do not work, and blocking the use of a newer—albeit more expensive—treatment to combat the disease. This comes as Ethiopia is experiencing a malaria epidemic. According to a joint report by

government and the UN, 46.2 million Ethiopians are living in malaria-prone areas, out of a population of 70 million. The Ministry of Health estimates that 15 million people are under severe threat of being infected with malaria, the leading cause of death for children under five. About five million cases of the illness are reported in Ethiopia every year. The World Health Organisation's (WHO) "Roll-Back Malaria" campaign has sought to halve the number of malaria cases worldwide by 2010. To date, the agency has approved grants totalling \$700 million for fighting the disease, this through the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

But last week, *The Lancet* alleged that the WHO was supplying African countries with conventional anti-malarial drugs like chloroquine and sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine (SP) despite notable levels of resistance to these medicines. Doctors from the Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF) aid agency who work in the Southern Nations region of Ethiopia and elsewhere also claim to have seen evidence of drug resistance. This has prompted MSF to advocate the use of an alternative treatment to deal with malaria. This treatment, known as artemisinin-based combination therapy (ACT), is produced using an extract derived from a Chinese plant, Artemisia Annua. Olusegun Babaniyi, the WHO's representative in Ethiopia, has hit out at ACT advocates who are criticising the agency. "Why is there so much euphoria about this new drug? It is not a magic bullet. Even with this drug, some deaths are bound to happen," he said. Babaniyi also challenged *The Lancet's* view that chloroquine and SP are becoming increasingly ineffective against malaria. ● (IPS)

Sustainable medicine

Health care reform has become a chronic disease.

ANALYSIS
Daniel Callahan



There is hardly a developed country where health care reform has not become a kind of chronic disease of modern medicine: as soon as some reforms are implemented, a call comes for yet another round. Costs continue to climb, but nothing seems to contain their growth for very long.

Why? Politics surely plays a role. But a more fundamental reason is the nature of modern medicine itself. Most developed countries have a growing number and proportion of elderly. Since health care costs for those over 65 are approximately four times higher than for those under 65, aging societies place massive claims on medical resources.

This is compounded by the constant introduction of new (and usually more expensive) technologies, together with increased demand for high-quality health care. We want more, expect more, and complain more loudly if we don't get it. When we do get it, we quickly raise the bar, wanting still more.

The net result has been an average general system-wide cost increase of 10 percent-15 percent annually in the United States for the past several years—and with no end in sight. European countries are under severe cost pressures as well, undermining their cherished ideal of equitable access.

Unfortunately, greater use of co-payments and deductibles, privatisation of health-care infrastructure, and waiting lists for elective surgery and other non-emergency care are unlikely to work

much better in the future than they have in the past. What is needed is a radical change in how we think about medicine and health care, not simply better ways to reorganise existing systems. We need a "sustainable medicine" that is affordable to national health care systems and provides equitable access in the long term.

The notion of "sustainability" comes from environmentalism, which seeks to protect the earth and its atmosphere in order to sustain indefinitely human life of a good quality. As with environmentalism, sustainable medicine requires reformulating the idea of progress that drives technology costs and fuels public demand. The Western idea of progress, translated to medicine, sets no limits on the improvement of health, defined as the reduction of mortality and the relief of all medical miseries. However much health improves, it will never be sufficient—so further progress is always required.

But unlimited progress cannot be paid for with finite funds. Long-term affordability and equitable access requires a finite vision of medicine and health care, one that does not try to overcome aging, death and disease, but tries to help everyone avoid a premature death and to live decent, even if not perfect, lives.

This implies shifting medical resources sharply towards health promotion and disease prevention. Billions of dollars have been spent on mapping the human genome. Comparable sums must be spent on understanding and changing health behaviours that are most likely to bring about disease. Why is obesity increasing almost everywhere? Why do so many people continue

smoking? Why is it so difficult to persuade contemporary people to exercise?

Sustainable medicine also requires comparing health care expenditure with spending on other socially important goods. In a balanced society, health care may not always be the top priority. At the same time, we often overlook the health benefits of spending money in ways that have nothing to do with the direct delivery of medical care: education and health, for example, are strongly correlated: the higher the former the better the latter.

In any case, sustainable medicine acknowledges that rationing is and always will be a part of any health care system. No system can give everyone everything they need. Our aspirations will always exceed our resources, particularly since medical progress itself raises public expectations. But, to be fair, rationing requires the knowledge and general consent of all who are subject to it.

One place to start is to evaluate the economic impact of new technologies, preferably before they are released to the public. Evidence-based medicine—a popular technique for controlling costs—is ordinarily aimed only at the efficacy of diagnostic or therapeutic procedures. But if drug companies must test new products for their safety and efficacy, why not also for their economic impact on health care? New technologies should not be dropped into health care systems uninvited. Only if a technology does not significantly raise costs, or does so only exceptionally, should governments be willing to pay for it.

Most fundamentally, a finite model of medicine must accept



human aging and death as part of the human life cycle, not some kind of preventable condition. Medicine must shift its focus from length of life to quality of life. A medicine that keeps people alive too long is not a decent and humane medicine. We can live to be 85, but we are likely to do so with chronic conditions that leave us sick and in pain.

This is not an argument against progress: I, for one, am glad that people don't die of small pox at 40 anymore. But aging and death will still win out in the end. Medical progress is like exploring outer space: no matter how far we go, we can go further. With space travel, the economic limitations of unlimited exploration soon became obvious: no more moon walks. Medicine needs an analogous insight.

Slower technological progress may seem a high price to pay for sustainable health care. But our current systems carry an even higher price, threatening justice and social stability. At the same time, only about 40 percent of the rise in health status over the past century is attributable to medical progress, with the rest reflecting improved social and economic conditions. This trend is likely to continue, so that even if technological progress slows, people are almost certain to live longer lives in the future—and in better health—than they do now. That outcome should be acceptable to everyone. ● (© Project Syndicate)

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Closeup

Close-Up Fluoride Gel with Antibacterial Mouthwash

Lemon Mint

Keeps your breath fresh and teeth healthy

'My party'



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Kathmandu Mayor Keshab Sthapit in *Janadharana*, 24 January

My efforts to make roads, parks and sewage facilities can, by no stretch of the imagination, be called destruction. It is not unreasonable for a few houses to be demolished while making roads for hundreds of thousands of people. Development is like carving wood—only the carpenter knows what he is going to make. In the beginning, others think he is only chopping trees. I am trying to give people something crafted from that wood.

It does not matter if I am not mayor for long. I have created a base for my successors. Since I have started public hearings on the works of the Kathmandu Metropolitan City, any mayor will have to face the public. If he does not proceed with the development work, people will stone him at public hearings. So, to save his own life, the mayor will have to work.

Unlike in the beginning, there is no street protest against my works these days. Those who used to oppose my idea are quiet now. I take that as support. Some people do criticise my work but I accept that as a motivation to succeed. Information Minister Kamal Thapa said KMC's activities cover-up for the weaknesses of the government. What could be higher praise?

I now oppose the idea of going to foreign countries to collect money for our development. How long can we beg? We can acquire 1,000 bighas of land for urban development. That way useless land will have increase in value. There will be an abundant water supply, parks, proper sewage, a cricket ground, a temple, a swimming pool and people will aspire to live in these places. For this, I will have to borrow a few million rupees from various banks that I intend to return within two years. Those who will own houses in my town development plan will live in luxury.

What I touch turns into gold. I have the full support of the government, unlike previously, but I know that once this government goes, so will I. I am here only because the government asked me to do something for Kathmandu. Whether the next government will need me or not, is not something I can decide.

If I am allowed to, I will solve the garbage problem in Kathmandu within six months. I am not going to carry the garbage to Okharpauwa. The story of Okharpauwa is over a decade old. Now, we will dispose the garbage of Kathmandu in Kathmandu itself. That way we will be able to deal with the garbage problem more effectively and also produce compost fertiliser. The garbage will be our source of income. The world will know that a person was born in Kathmandu who always dreamt about making his city beautiful.

While it is true that I have left the UML, I have not left politics. Politics is not something that is represented only by the UML or the Nepali Congress. My politics is beginning now. On that basis, I will establish a new party and expand it. Perhaps I will name it 'My Party'—that should make the people feel like it belongs to them.

In India

Nepal Samacharpatra, 27 January

For the first time, the Maoists are reported to have detonated an explosive in Indian territory. They placed a copper pitcher filled with 30kg of gunpowder on a road adjoining the Mahakali River across the western Nepal border. The explosive device was meant for the Nepali security forces that patrol the area but a team from the Indian Special Services Bureau (SSB) discovered the homemade bomb early morning on 26 January. A Nepali security unit and soldiers of the Indian army's ninth Gorkha Rifles reached the site to defuse the bomb. The SSB cordoned off the area, saying they needed to examine the material. Officers with the Indian army believe the rebels planted the bomb four days ago.

Mad goats

Rajdhani, 27 January

KAPILBASTU—There is danger that the infectious disease PPR (*peste des petits ruminants*), also known as goat plague, may get out of control because of an unauthorised supply of diseased goats and sheep from India into this district that are also being sold for meat. The animals are not inspected and experts say that if this continues, Nepal will be unable to control the outbreak of disease.

Worst affected are local agricultural workers who depend on livestock. Although the District Livestock Service Office is actively involved in anti-PPR vaccinations, there has not been much progress in controlling this animal disease. Every year, about 100,000 goats are vaccinated to

keep them immune for three years. Fortunately, humans are immune to PPR.

"PPR-infected animals have to be destroyed but Indian farmers bring these animals illegally into Nepal," says Debendra Sharma, chief of the District Livestock Service Office. The problem started after the police check post was removed, allowing for an unrestricted flow of people through many unmanned or understaffed animal quarantine checkposts. Sources say Nepalis are involved in this cross-border activity, among them, secretaries at the VDCs. "Usually people need authorisation from the VDC and secretaries give them these papers. It's our farmers who bear the loss of their livestock," adds Shah.

Joining Maoists

Annapurna Post, 27 January

Since the Maoists declared a regional autonomous government in Karnali, DDCs are displaying an interest in working with the rebels. DDC chairmen and their deputies say it would be better to involve the Maoists in development activities since there is no other way to function. "They can be involved when it becomes necessary," said Dhan B Adhikari, DDC chairman from Jajarkot. He explained that people can't enter the district without written permission from the rebels. "The situation is not secure enough to even walk around the district headquarters," says Adhikari.

The Maoists have requested the DDCs to work together in the construction of a 'new regime'. "Even if they don't come to me, there may be no harm if the development work is done without any corruption," says

Adhikari. Padmini Shah, DDC chairman from Rolpa, says after the Maoists asked her to join their party as a senior member, she had to leave her village and come to Kathmandu. "I haven't returned for the last two years," says Shah. This time, she is planning to return to her office in the village, hoping that the Maoists will not trouble her if she takes back a development package to benefit the locals.

For now, the ministry has told the DDC authorities to develop their own strategies to start development activities. It also stated that DDC officials should not expect state protection. "Since the officials are political activists, their parties should be the ones to protect them," said Khemraj Nepal of the Local Development Ministry.

Forced out

Nepal Samacharpatra, 27 January

Terror has spread in the borders of Morang since the Indian Special Security Bureau (SSB) instructed its security forces to demolish houses within 100m inside the Nepal-India border. Without informing either the Royal Nepali Army or the police, Indian security forces suddenly entered Nepal and threatened locals to leave their homes within a week or face forceful evictions. Although the SSB says they are removing houses only from the Indian side, reports of vandalised houses are coming in. This follows the incident at Sunsari where Indian security forces forcefully demolished Nepali houses and manhandled the locals. India says its action is necessary to reduce cross border crimes and that at least 50 houses will be removed from the border area in Biratnagar.



Balloon: Our slogans for a republic ends here! Let's now begin campaigning for democracy!
Board: Maoist territory
Banner: No entry for party activities

राजधानी *Rajdhani*, 25 January

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



If the regression is not corrected by March, our movement will be oriented towards a republic.
—Amik Sherchan, chairman of the People's Front Nepal (PFN) in *Samacharpatra*, 26 January

“They should have at least informed the Nepali security forces before taking action on their own,” says Mohammed Muslim Miya, ward chairman of Biratnagar-22.

Freed

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Space Time, 26 January

स्वेसटाइम डैनिक

DOTI – A dalit family was beaten and evicted from their village after refusing to remain as *haliyas*. A *haliya* is a kind of bonded agricultural labourer, usually from a low caste. Despite a movement against this custom, this is the first incident where a family has been brutally treated and thrown out of the village. Narayan Singh Bista, the chief of Durgamadau VDC, and his brother Thagi Bista beat 75-year-old Laxi Kami, her sons and her husband when they refused to work as *haliyas*. Their family has worked under the *haliya* system with the Bistas for generations. Laxi spent her whole life working for the village chief but when she got old and weak, the Bistas asked her son Bhagi to replace his mother. Unlike his mother, Bhagi could not endure the treatment and quit because he felt exploited and was underpaid. “After I left, they threatened and harassed me,” says Bhagi. Last week, during the Maghe Sankranti festival, the Bistas arrived at the Kami’s hut with 10 other people and beat up the whole family.

It is estimated that there are

more than 100,000 landless *haliya* families in the far-west hill districts of Nepal. “Besides being social outcasts, the dalits have always been poor. This is why our community has been forced to work under the *haliya* system,” says dalit leader Kumar Singh Tailor. Dalits makes up 22 percent of the *haliyas* in the country.

Maoist effigies

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Annapurna Post, 28 January

अन्नपूर्ण पोस्ट

It is now the turn of the effigies of Maoist chiefs Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai to burn on the streets of Kathmandu. The Nepal Maoist Victim Association have organised the bonfire for 13 February after they received threats from the rebels to dissolve their organisation. “We got a letter from Prabhakar of the Maoist Kathmandu Valley coordination committee last month,” says chairman Ganesh Chiluwal. “He asked us to stop campaigning against the Maoists and to dissolve our association.” The association chose 13 February because it marks the eighth anniversary of the Maoists’ ‘People’s War’. The rebels have accused the association of spying on the Maoists and being funded by the US Embassy in Kathmandu. Chiluwal said that his organisation is not afraid of the rebels’ threat.

King in Time

Rajesh Dhungana in *Ghatana ra Bichar*, 28 January

गठाना बिचार

Any interview with the king is carefully scrutinised. However, the latest one had a different tone because it was King Gyanendra’s first foreign-media interview. Interestingly, it was given to *Time*, the American newsmagazine known for its in-depth and sometimes flashy coverage of world issues. It looks like the king wants to portray his October Fourth move as legitimate and necessary before the international community. In the course of the interview, he also expressed appreciation for America’s outstanding contributions to Nepal.

The king’s words were carefully chosen and deliberately used. Nevertheless, the interview gives the impression that politically the nation is in the process of retracing its step back to an autocratic regime.

This means the accomplishments of the 1990 Movement, which was brought about by the Nepali people by paying a heavy price, is being stamped out. The ‘appropriate’ words the king used for the interview were so ambiguous that it can deceive people into believing what he says is the truth and nothing but the truth. His rhetoric is impressive. Somewhere in the interview the king said, “My roadmap and agenda is my people and the nation itself.” What does this mean?

And what does he imply by saying, “Gone are the days when kings used to be seen, but not heard. We are in the 21st century now”? Is he is talking about 21st century monarchy and that it should, as anyone would agree, be constitutional? Monarchy should come under the people and an elected parliament. The world that the king is talking about is an era of democracy and freedom.

The king also used a veiled threat: “The reality is that the people of Nepal want to see their king, they want to hear from him”. By saying this he implies his active role will continue.

In short, the interview gave clear indication that the king will carefully review the reaction and response coming from the political parties and also from the international community before taking appropriate



action. What is more ominous is the reflected confidence that he can easily quell the street protests through brute force. Did he give this interview to seek international approval?

The country will therefore definitely move backwards and remain there. Those who advise King Gyanendra should warn him that his course of action could be detrimental to the institution of monarchy in the long run—like burning one’s own house to warm oneself. If the king wants his own way, then it could spell the beginning of the end of monarchy in Nepal. (Nepalnews.com Translation Service)

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STATUTORY DIRECTIVE : CIGARETTE SMOKING IS INJURIOUS TO HEALTH

Back at Sundarjal >53

“The king’s politics has ceased to be relevant”



BP tries to assure Ganesh Man Singh that they have not made a mistake by returning to Nepal. BP’s analysis is that their return at a time when the Janata Party is in power in Delhi proves that they are not guided by India, or dependent on it. “It is my declaration of faith in our future and also of independence from India,” BP writes in these pages from his diary.

21.11.77

Wrote letters to Chetana + Shailaja—small letters more like notes than letters. Feeling better. GM seems to be suffering from a sense of futility—almost of frustration. He doesn’t seem to share my optimism. His analysis of the situation is different from mine, and about this very objective and the purpose of our return to Nepal from India he seems to be more unclear. In his heart of hearts, he feels that the decision to return a second time has been a mistake in view of the change in the political scene in India after the Janata party came into power. He reserves all his wrath for India for not helping in the seven years that we were in exile in India. It had been a total waste, because India—Indira Gandhi—didn’t help us, etc etc. I tell him that the situation is very much in our favour, and that we have to stand on our own legs, that our activities during over 8 years exile have contributed not only to our survival but also the building of our image as an alternative power to the present king’s power—where would we have been if we hadn’t carried on those activities—where are the others now? We are the only force, outside the establishment, which counts. Politics of opposition is considered successful if the opposition remains relevant and is treated with respect. If you are not relevant even if you are in power, you are lost, sooner or later. I feel that the King’s politics is gradually ceasing to be relevant. This is why I have a feeling of optimism even tho I am in prison + don’t know what would be my fate. In a sense, I don’t guide the situation in personal terms. I may even die in prison, but my death will not have been in vain because the acute relevance of our politics. I tell GM that it was a stroke of good luck that India didn’t help us, because the favourable turn of the situation or our relevance would then have been attributed to India’s help. Now we are on our own—a force to be reckoned with in our own right. The fact that I returned to Nepal second time voluntarily (when Janata govt is in power in Delhi) is my declaration of faith in our future and also of independence from India. I therefore don’t agree with GM’s statement that Indira Gandhi made it impossible for us to remain in India. We could have stayed in India in spite of Mrs Gandhi if we had felt that our cause would have benefited thereby—and at heart I had the opportunity to stay away from Nepal this time when our friends are in power in India and I didn’t.

22.11.77

Shailaja told me once, after going through my old diaries that I had always been obsessed with the thought of being old, of my time being over, of death.

9.12.77

Received a parcel of books sent by Chandra Shekhar and others. A Kashmiri shawl of very good quality and a box of dry fruits from Chandra Shekhar. I am touched by this gesture. Do I deserve all this love and regard from friends + relations for whom I haven’t done anything? Against this expression of warmth and love from friends I appear in my own eyes as a old and self-centred person.

12.12.77

Wrote two letters—to Shailaja and Bhimbahadur. What can I write to Shalaja from here—mostly words are inadequate + if sometimes I find words to express my sentiments for her I can’t express them in letters from prison. Businesslike letter is worse than no letter at all. She comes to the gate on my interview day and waits for half an hour there.

Jail doctor (Achyut?) came to see me. I am having dysentery for which I want some medicine, but the doctor himself came. The blood in urine examination has recently shown that I am suffering from diabetes not of a serious nature but still calling for some dietic control. Since a few days past I have given up eating rice, sugar, potato. Today the doctor says that I should give up bread also because in the process of its manufacture some sugar is added to the dough along with the baking powder to raise it. I don’t know what to eat in that case. About a week ago I had an attack of this dizziness was that I felt that I had been pushed down by a force + when I attempted to sit in the chair, I fell on it propelled by a force rather than slowly sat in it. The doctor thinks it may be the due to the blood pressure which must have gone down suddenly as a result of sun bath which I take in the afternoon for half an hour. He has advised me to report to him urgently if there is such an attack of dizziness again. I think the symptom of diabetes is doing to tensions that the long uncertain detention is producing in me. I also pass very highly obscured urine—yellow. This may also be due to tension. I am by all counts + demonstrably under severe tension—QED. But it is very curious that politically + otherwise also I am very optimistic—as a matter of fact I was never as optimistic as today—but still I suffer from some kind of unknown tension (because purely of physical reasons?) Can physical conditions of adverse + unnatural cause tensions when psychologically contradictory condition obtains? Is not tension eventually a psychological manifestation on the physical plane?

POETRY

by WAYNE AMITZIS

Nepal Quartet

1. Exile

A brute gauntlet. A widening moat
Twice-barren fields seeded with stone
nourish those who’ll never leave
What distant castle commands these heights?
What thorny outposts sentence men
To shatter bridges. And legs
Between home and land, exile takes hold
A terrain. A birthright

2. Truce

Unfed. The rutted earth throbs
Stubborn fields insist on yielding thistles
and graves. On a schoolhouse
slate, the numbers add up
Households minus sons and daughters
equals. Goat at the stake
Teacher/ Goat/ Teacher. Each throat,
like the yielding earth, throbs
Then doesn’t

3. Riverstrike

What are your rivers for?
Boulder broken streams stammer to a ha ha alt
Mid fall (Easily forgotten, cliff-battered
corpses tossed into a quarry?)
Secreted blades squeezed into fists
with no cry or scream
Fists slammed into walls and roofs
Kukhri-wielding. Embedded. Waiting
For the downward stampeding rivers’



Cold Cold Call

4. Malaise

A nation reft of sense
to know its distant (distanced) pain,
like the Himal it hides beneath,
a source, a gathering force
that never closes in, but leaves each
less sure
of what the heart can do
and people be

Kathmandu. 10/03


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Juniors in golf are the future

Start 'em young

With such a vision, the Sports Council in the 1970s encouraged individual sports such as Tae Kwon Do. The results of this foresight and investment in the future of individual sports are apparent with today's successes. When I was a young golfer, I had plenty of ambition. However, in those days, there were no proper training facilities or competitions that could improve my game. The support I received was mostly from individuals, because going abroad to play in tournaments or training was unaffordable. While there is no point looking back ruefully, the past is a lesson for the future.

Sports rarely develop on a national level with just the support of that sport's fraternity. This is very much the case with golf that receives little recognition and no support from Nepal's sports authorities. For the development of this or any sport, youth must be supported with organised training programs and opportunities.

It is vital to expose more young people to individual sports and encourage them to be future stars by providing training opportunities and facilities. A few months ago, the Royal Nepal Golf Club brought in a renowned regional golf instructor, Ajay Gupta, to teach youngsters, lay the foundations of the sport and to raise the standard of the game. Similarly, with the

support of Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, I, along with other professionals, have been promoting the sport in schools for children between the ages of 10 and 16. These kinds of programs raise awareness about the sport among both the youth and educational institutions. Talented and interested youngsters are given the chance to try their hand at it and perhaps even flourish.

A future in the sport is quite lucrative. If one has talent and works hard enough, there are a host of opportunities at professional tournaments like the regional Indian PGA tour, the Asian & European PGA tours and the most coveted United States PGA Tour with a total prize money in excess of \$200 million a year! Golfers from any part of the world can participate in any of these tours. You just have to be good

enough to qualify.

Nepali professional golfers playing on the world money tours is not going to happen overnight. It certainly won't be easy for an individual to go it alone. The players need the support of integrated plans from all the golf clubs and sustained commitment. The golf clubs should unite, and through Nepal's Golf governing body, solicit maximum cooperation and help from the Sports Council to promote golf among young Nepalis.

Let us facilitate and encourage educational institutions to participate. Young people should take up this wonderful sport. Nepal can produce champions. ●

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

TEE BREAK

Deepak Acharya



excelling in team sports has been difficult as infrastructure and training resources are limited. We find that individual sports are where Nepalis achieve worldwide recognition and excellence. A person's will and tenacity can provide the drive to succeed alone, as opposed to having to depend on a whole team and all the back up services and resources that a team needs to excel.

Just as we realise the need to start interacting with, and educating our children at very young ages, excelling or building a future in sports is best done early in life.

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गण्डर्भा महोत्सव २०६०
GANDHARBA FESTIVAL
30th Jan - 1st February
Yala Maya Kendra - Patan Dhoka
Phone: 5522113, 2110200

PROGRAMME SCHEDULE

The Gandharba Mahotsav is a three-day festival intended to revive a tradition unique to our country. The goal is to revive interest in Gandharba Sangeet in modern times. 18 Gandharbas from the Dardulo region are participating in the festival, where they will perform various genres of Gandharba Sangeet - "Garha, Ghazala, Nigam, Karkha".

Tickets: (Rs. 25) per show.

Friday 30th January

3:00 PM Opening Function (by invitation). Gandharba presentation of "Mangal" to mark the opening. Gandharba presentation of "Kahaali Lagile Raat" in the ghazala genre - Raj Kumar Gandharba - with remarks on Gandharba living. Amrit Garung reports on "The state of Gaijney Gayan". Kanak Mani Dixit presents programme of the three-day festival.

4:15 PM Talk and Discussion on Gandharbas moderated by Kanak Mani Dixit. Panelists: Ram Saran Darrel, Stephanie Spray, Kustumaker Neupane. Entrance - Open for everyone.

Saturday 31st January

10:00 AM **Gandharba Raag, Nigam, Mantra, Bhakti Garha**
Khim Bahadur Gandharba - Kaski, Krishna Bahadur Gandharba - Tanahu, Ram Bahadur Gandharba - Tanahu, Ganesh Gandharba - Kaski

11:30 am **Mahol / Sanskari / Ritual song - Marriage**
Kali Gandharba - Kaski, Lal Bahadur Gandharba - Gorkha, Khim Bahadur Gandharba - Kaski, Krishna Bahadur Gandharba - Tanahu and group, Ram Bahadur Gandharba - Tanahu

1:00 PM **Garha (Rastriya and Karari) - Sentimental and Patriotic**
Ram Bahadur Gandharba - Tanahu, Lal Bahadur Goyak - Kaski, Tirtha Bahadur Gandharba - Gorkha, Krishna Bahadur Gandharba (Gorkha)

3:00 PM **Ritakar - Samsawal**
Ganesh Gandharba - Tanahu, Krishna Bahadur Gandharba - Gorkha, Kali Gandharba - Kaski, Khim Bahadur - Kaski, Krishna Bahadur Gandharba - Gorkha Lal Bahadur Goyak - Kaski

4:30 PM **Sewa Samadhi - Social Affairs**
Krishna Bahadur Gandharba - Gorkha, Chitra Bahadur Gandharba - Tanahu, Kali Gandharba - Kaski

Gharana - Incidents
Tirtha Bahadur Gandharba - Gorkha, Krishna Bahadur Gandharba - Gorkha, Ganesh Gandharba - Tanahu

Sunday 1st February

10:00 AM **Karkha - Ballad**
Lal Bahadur Gandharba - Gorkha, Krishna Bahadur Gandharba - Tanahu, Krishna Bahadur Gandharba - Gorkha, Ram Bahadur Gandharba - Tanahu

11:00 AM **Karkha - Ballad**
Kali Gandharba - Kaski, Lal Bahadur - Gorkha, Krishna Bahadur Gandharba - Tanahu

12:05 PM **Gharana - Incidents**
Bahadur Gandharba - Kaski, Lal Bahadur Goyak - Kaski, Ganesh Gandharba - Kaski

Yadwaka Geer - Martial Songs
Kali Gandharba - Kaski, Tirtha Gandharba - Gorkha, Ram Bahadur Gandharba - Tanahu, Bal Bahadur Gandharba - Kaski

2:00 PM **Puja Geer - Devotional Songs and Ragas**
Check Bahadur Gandharba - Langtang, Khim Bahadur Gandharba - Kaski, Saakhi
Krishna Bahadur Gandharba - Tanahu, Ram Bahadur Gandharba - Tanahu, Lal Bahadur Goyak - Kaski, Khim Bahadur Gandharba - Kaski, Naryani - Witleian
Dambar Bahadur - Gorkha, Ram Bahadur Gandharba - Tanahu, Kali Gandharba - Kaski, Dale Gandharba - Kaski, Lal Bahadur Goyak - Kaski, Ganesh Gandharba - Kaski, Krishna Gandharba, Dambar Gandharba - Gorkha

4:00 PM **Chalwa Chalti - Popular**
Ram Bahadur Gandharba - Tanahu, Kali Gandharba - Kaski, Tirtha Bahadur Gandharba - Gorkha, Krishna Gandharba - Gorkha, Khim Bahadur and group, Lal Bahadur Gandharba - Gorkha, Anil Gandharba - Tanahu, Ram Bahadur Gandharba - Tanahu, Lal Bahadur Goyak - Kaski, Tiki maya Gandharba - Kaski, Ganesh Gandharba - Kaski

6:30 PM Closing Act - Open to all
Jyawa - Folk
by all participants
Note of Thanks
Arati - Sandhya
Khim Bahadur Gandharba

"Lata ko desh ma gaando banderi." (In a land of fools, a man with a goatee is a hero.)

Tipping - LA vs. KTM

Whaaa... only 20%... What a rip. dude. [grumble] [mutter] [sputter] [muff]

Thank you sir.

No, thank you BL.

KE GARNE? WHATEVER.
Be a Herojig - tip your waiter ... or policeman.

Ghanta khana gayeko budi, jhel ma dubera mari.
-- ancient Nepali proverb (the greedy drown in gravy.)

Next Change: Herojig gets hit with a brick and forgets how to speak nepali, then goes to a cabin restaurant thinking them scenic.

not really (c) 2003 by Jiggy Gatson so if you want to print this elsewhere please send one sack of rice, care of this newspaper.

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **100 Stone Statues of the Buddha** Photographs by Rhee Kun Hoo till 7 February at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. 4428694
- ❖ **Bungadeo Jatra** Paintings by Sharada Chitrakar 1-15 February at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, 4218048
- ❖ **Landscapes, people and places of Ghandruk village** etchings and wood carvings by Caroline Cooe and Elaine Marshall till 10 February at the Lazimpat Gallery Café, Lazimpat. 4428549
- ❖ **Almost Spring** Hand-woven Dhaka exhibition, 11AM-4PM on 8 February at Rita's Garden, Patan Dhoka. 10 percent discount.
- ❖ **Sadhus: The Great Renouncers** Photographs by Thomas Kelly from 13-29 February at Indigo Gallery, Naxal.



EVENTS

- ❖ **Introduction to foot reflexology** by Ilse Scheuboeck 6-7.30 PM on 2 February. Above Everest Bookstore, Babar Mahal Revisited. Call Buddha's Feet, 4425931
- ❖ **Aarohan Theatre Group** presents Henrik Ibsen's *A Dolls House* at Sama natak ghar, Gurukul, Old Baneshwar. Weekends from 31 January till 14 March. Tickets: Rs 25 (for students), Rs 50 and Rs 100. Details 4466956
- ❖ **Gandharba Festival** 30 January - 1 February at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur. 5522113, 2110200
- ❖ **Shukrabar** presents Nookicky (Japan), Dhiren Charan Mishra, Ishwor Joshi and others in concert at Patan Museum. 5PM on 30 January. Tickets: Rs 350. Available at Suwal Music, Jatra, Patan Museum Gift Shop.

DRINK

- ❖ **Cosmic Cocktails** at Mitra Lounge Bar. Above Cafe Mitra, Thamel. 4259015
- ❖ **Kiwi Cocktails and Desserts** at the Piano Lounge, Hotel Yak and Yeti, Kathmandu. 4248999

MUSIC

- ❖ **Abhaya & The Steam Injuns** at Dwarika's every Friday from 7PM onwards. 4479488
- ❖ **Drummer's Circle**, percussion evening, 7PM on 3 February, Entry Rs 150 at Moksh, Club Hardic Pulchowk, 5528703

FOOD

- ❖ **Steaks with specials** Free Irish Coffee with every main course. K-too! Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 4433043
- ❖ **Annapurna Garden Grill** till 31 January at the Coffee Shop, Hotel de l'Annapurna, Durbar Marg.
- ❖ **Raclette and Fondue** Traditional Swiss table cooking at the Chimney 6:30 PM onwards at the Hotel Yak and Yeti, Kathmandu. 4248999

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

HITS
91.2
What you burn is what you breathe.

The unexpected rains last week did the job of cleaning up Kathmandu's foul air. The concentration of PM10 (particles that are small enough to enter the human body) in the air on 18 January along busy roads like Putali Sadak and Patan Hospital were nearly down to the national standard. Otherwise, for the rest of the week things were as bad as normal. Even Tribhuvan University had PM10 levels that crossed the safety threshold in five out of seven days last week.

Good < 60
Ok 61 to 120
Unhealthy 121 to 350
Harmful 351 to 425
Hazardous >425

Average PM10 levels at selected points in Kathmandu 18-24 January in micrograms per cubic meter.
Source: www.mope.gov.np

Patan H	Thamel	TU	Bhaktapur	Matsyagaun	Putalisadak
228	180	115	194	61	242

NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED

VIS-29-01-2004 03:00 GMT

That powerful westerly brought substantial snow and rain for the second time this winter. Parts of the country received as much as 20mm rainfall and almost a meter of snow in the higher reaches. This is the first winter in seven years with normal precipitation. Brief sunny spells will be overtaken by another weaker front moving in from the west. The moisture will bring fog to Kathmandu and tarai towns into next week. Kathmandu's night temperature will plummet to freezing while the days will be warm when the sun shines through the clouds.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri 19-01	Sat 18-0	Sun 18-01	Mon 18-03	Tue 19-02
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BOOKWORM

Conflict, Human Rights & Peace Challenges Before Nepal: Rishikesh Shaha Memorial Lectures 2003 Bipin Adhikari (ed) National Human Rights Commission, 2003 Rs 350

Thirteen contributors, including leading scholars, professionals and experts from a diverse range of national and international fields examine the causes of conflict, the ongoing human rights violations as well as alternatives to violence and ways of initiating peace negotiations. This compilation includes contributions from DB Gurung, Dhruva Kumar and Henning Karcher.



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BEETLE RALLY



The 4th Great Himalayan Volkswagen Beetle Rally will happen on Saturday 28th February 2004. Great prizes to be won, great opportunity to support the production of peace stickers, cleft lip and palate surgery in Nepal, and women's health services in remote areas.

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HAPPENINGS


SUNDAR SHRESTHA

THEIR MAJESTIES: King Gyanendra and Queen Komal at a function organised by the World Hindu Federation on Friday in which the king was conferred the title 'Emperor of the World's Hindus'.



NEPALNEWS.COM

BILATERAL: Officials from Nepal and India at the opening of a meeting to discuss trade issues in Kathmandu on Thursday.



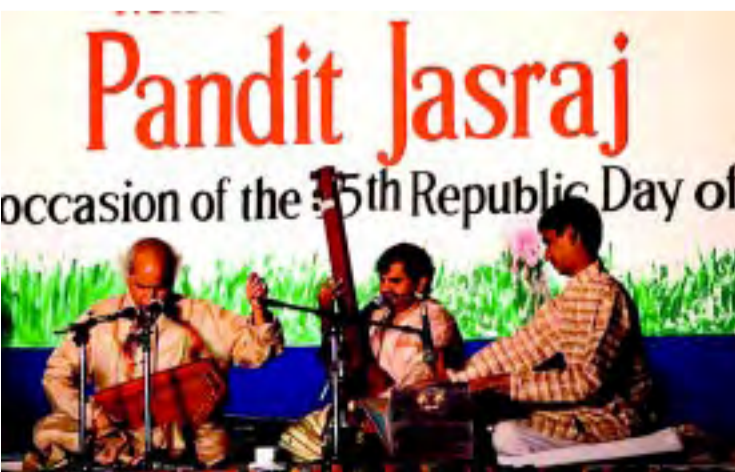
MIN BAJRACHARYA

HAPPY CHILDREN: Kagatigau in Kathmandu used to be famous for child marriages on Sri Panchami, but this year on 26 January teachers and students from Sri Bhawani Primary School organised a dance to celebrate the end of the practice.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

OUCH: Sujata Koirala of the Nepali Congress shows a welt from a police beating she endured during a street protest on Wednesday.



KIRAN PANDYA

FINE TUNING: Famous Indian flutist Pandit Jasraj performing in Kathmandu on Friday 23 January.

NEPALI SOCIETY

Ramesh Badi Nepali is not embarrassed to say he's a Badi, a caste from western Nepal traditionally involved in commercial sex work. "Today, society can no longer point a finger at us and say that we sell our women," says Ramesh who is working in Kailali to discourage young girls from following in their mothers' footsteps.

For the last seven years, Ramesh (*centre, in picture right, with fellow-Badis*) has been able to motivate hundreds of Badi girls to go to school. "Now, Badi men are willing to marry them as well," says the 42-year-old who can remember a time when marrying within his community was out of the question.

Although some families were not involved in commercial sex work, they were still tarred with the same brush. Most Badis adopted the surname Nepali to disassociate themselves from their collective past. Ramesh migrated to India so that he would not have to face harassment from society. He tried to get into Bollywood, but in vain. Then he decided he'd rather return than stay on waiting for a break in filmdom.

Back in Nepalganj, Ramesh worked as a cook. He learnt about social work, and soon he became a social activist with SAFE, an NGO working for the upliftment of the Badi community. Ramesh's job was to educate sex workers within his community about sexually transmitted diseases and HIV. "To begin with, I am a man and then, I had to take them a message that nobody else dared deliver,"

A better Badi



MIN BAJRACHARYA

says Ramesh.

For the first few months, he was not allowed to enter into Badi households. "They abused me and even threatened to kill me, thinking I was there to destroy their traditional profession," says Ramesh. But perseverance and patience paid off. Before long, Ramesh became their friend and confidante.

Today, most of the sex workers have become peer educators, too. They are the first line defence in

educating clients, mostly truck drivers, local men and Indians, about HIV/AIDS and using condoms. Ramesh is happy that the number of commercial sex workers within the community is dwindling.

Despite the hero's welcome that he receives when he visits Badi hamlets in Muda and Tikapur, Ramesh is level headed: "There is still a lot to be done and it's time that the government helped the Badis. We can't do it alone." ●

(Naresh Newar)

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The Return of the King

For those of you out there who watched the first two episodes of the Tolkien trilogy, it has befallen upon this humble servant to provide you eager beaver readers with an executive summary of the third installment: *The Return of the King*. This is to spare you the trouble of having to sit through another three torturous hours (there is an intermission) trying to pronounce the names of its hobbit, elf and swifit protagonists.

UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit



So, without further ado, let us rejoin Gandalf and Pippin as they reach Minas Tirith in Gondor in time to

meet Denethor, father of Boromir and Faramir who have just rendezvoused with Frodo in the company of Aragorn who looks into the planatir with Arwen's assistance to confront Sauron accompanied by an army of ghosts.

Are you still with me? Right, so Aragorn and his comrades reach Erech where he is proclaimed Heir of Isildur. Not to be outdone, Orcs, Trolls, Woses of Druadan Forest and the Lord of the Nazgul confront



Eowyn, finding out in the process that he is actually a she. From hereon the plot thickens as platoons of Gondorians and Rohans arrive at the gates of Mordor on the flaming slopes of Sannath Naur as Frodo confronts Gollum (or is it the other way around?) at the Crack of Doom.

By this time in the movie, Gollum has run out of popcorn and is so hungry that he bites off Frodo's finger and swallows the ring by mistake. Thus ensues an epic struggle to employ laxatives and have the magic ring extirpated from Gollum's alimentary canal. Elrond, Celebron, Galadriel and Arwen all lend a hand, but to no avail. I don't want to give away the ending to those of you who haven't seen the movie yet, so let me just say that after three hours wandering aimlessly in Middle Earth, one would be excused if one didn't care how it ended.

The Return of the King was filmed in New Zealand, but we hear the producers are already working on a sequel to be filmed in Nepal with a fully local cast of characters.



The shooting starts in spring. Here is a sneak preview of the fourth episode: *A Kingdom in Regression*.

Novice hobbits and trolls who left the Shire to pursue higher studies at the Mata Tirth Multiple Campus have been told by Gandalf and Pippin to burn some tyres on the streets to keep warm through a cruel winter. The Steward of Gondor

suggests it may be a much better idea to just climb on top of the nearby social volcano, Mt Crack of Doom, so they can be warm and toasty. But the novice hobbits are trapped in between Gondor and Mordor at Ratna Park. Confused, they turn to the Republican Guards for inspiration against the demonic pressures of the Ring. Only by diverting the attention of Sauron and making him believe in the second coming of the Ringlord can the hobbits hope to convince the army of ghosts to join them against Saruman. The rebellion exacts a heavy toll, Hobbiton is destroyed and Barad-dur is about to be declared an autonomous region. But the ghosts arrive at the nick of time, preventing Gondor from also being transformed into Orodruin. Good sense prevails, international mediators arrive, peace and tranquility finally returns to the Shire. ●

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