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KIRAN PANDAY

No looking back

How long can King Gyanendra afford to fight two uprisings?

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

It has been almost a year since the political parties began their agitation to force the king to restore the democratic process.

Twelve months later in the new year, the protests are still going on, the king hasn't budged on demands to restore parliament or set up an all-party government, and

the Maoists are stronger than ever before.

While the king is on a PR blitz in the hinterland, the parties' agitation has taken an ominous new edge as impatient party activists storm barricades surrounding the palace. In the past year their demands have become increasingly more radical, with affiliated student unions

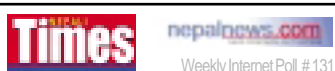
openly questioning the relevance of monarchy. Now, it looks like the party leadership has no choice but to swing towards a republican stance.

"Informal discussions have already begun among the parties," says NC leader Narhari Acharya. "There is no other way out."

continued p6

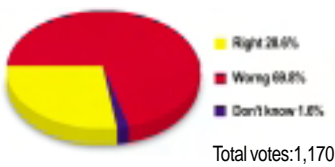
King back

Political parties have planned the mother of all rallies on Friday to coincide with King Gyanendra's return to the capital from his two-week tour of central Nepal. Organisers say it will be even bigger than the one last Thursday and will mark the anniversary of the 1990 People's Movement. The protesters may try to force their way past the barbed wire barricades and march on the palace. After several senior leaders and dozens of protesters were injured by lathis, tear gas and rubber bullets last week, the government has shown some restraint. However, that self-control may vanish in case the parties decide on confrontation.



Weekly Internet Poll # 131

Q. Is it right for the government to reject United Nations mediation?



Weekly Internet Poll # 132. To vote go to: www.nepalnews.com

Q. How likely is an alliance between the political parties and the Maoists?

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Mohan Baidya fallout

Maoists must now re-examine the future course of the revolution

CEASE FIRE IN THE NEW YEAR

Things have gone beyond just hoping for a happy new year. For those who command the destiny of this country, the time has come to act in 2061. They have to seize the initiative and give the Nepali people what they crave the most: peace.

Peace is in everyone's lips—from the war victims thronging to greet King Gyanendra during his walkabouts, the wounded policemen who survived the Beni attack and the villagers in the Maoist heartland whom the state regards as rebel sympathisers. While the tv footage of the royal felicitations may look staged, the spontaneous outpouring of anguish and hope on the faces of those who have turned up to greet their king is not.

The king, the political parties and the Maoists are engaged in a mortal combat for power. They all say they are doing it for the people, but none of them are listening to what the people have to say: "Put a stop to this madness, figure out a way to share power and improve our lives." By now the palace should realise that the tide of public opinion is beginning to turn. It needs to be less obsessed with symbolism, and launch a concrete conflict resolution drive.

One new year gesture next week would be for both sides to declare an unconditional and indefinite ceasefire in the new year. The Maoists' unilateral release on Tuesday of 37 security personnel and officials they captured in Beni to the ICRC was a positive gesture. The government needs to respond, and a ceasefire would not be seen as a weakness. It not just provide much-needed relief to Nepalis, it would also be a forceful confidence-building gesture for further de-escalation, a return to elections and the constitutional process. What could be a more auspicious time for that than Baisakh Ek?

As we watch the last bloody sunset of this ghastly year, it is time to work towards that new dawn.



KIRAN PANDAY

The West Bengal government's arrest of Maoist politburo member Mohan Baidya has baffled the Maoists, and they have reacted in an uncharacteristic and unexpected manner.

CAPITAL LETTER Yubaraj Ghimire



Party supremo Prachanda immediately called it a part of the deal that a greedy India struck with Nepal to divide up natural resources. Then his unrestrained followers

attacked Indian-owned vehicles and businessmen in the west.

The government of West Bengal, led by Chief Minister Buddhadeo Bhattacharya, has the reputation for being ruthlessly anti-Maoist. He was already worried by Nepali rebels inciting Indian Nepalis to self-determination. It is clear that people of Nepali origin will now be under closer scrutiny of the security apparatus there.

But what will be

the impact of the aggressive retaliatory measures taken by the Maoists? India, no doubt, has always remained suspect in Nepali eyes about its wish to exploit Himalayan waters. Not until the Baidya arrest did the Maoists pursue the issue of water resources as a priority. Maoist leaders in India have enjoyed open support from pro-establishment academics like SD Muni, and this has fuelled speculation here that the rebels are enjoying official Indian patronage in some way or other.

Prachanda's hint that Kathmandu and New Delhi have a "deal over water" may not be able to erase that apprehension. After all, politicians from GP Koirala to Madhab Nepal have, whenever it suited them, accused India of supporting the Maoists. Prachanda will get much more credible and positive support from Nepalis on issues of crucial national importance like water if he raises them from inside the country fearlessly, rather than as a tactical reaction to his comrade's arrest.

Similarly, the Maoists also need to react officially to the mindless attacks by their cadre on Indian vehicles and businesses. Is the party out to trigger an Indian blockade like 1988-89? And to what end? Baidya's arrest will undoubtedly be probed

and investigated by the Indian authorities from many angles including 'secessionism', links with Indian militant outfits and on the source of their funds and arms.

In a situation of the Maoists having been declared terrorist by India and other countries, it also becomes incumbent upon New Delhi to share information. Baidya's arrest should be an eye opener for the rebels. They need to pause and ask themselves: Can a 'People's War' be indefinitely led and fought from outside? Can Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai's predicament be different from that of BP Koirala and Ganesh Man Singh's 25 years ago when they realised India did not have a consistent policy towards democracy in Nepal? BP and Ganeshmanji decided to return, what about the comrades?

Unless Prachanda and Baburam can convince the Nepali masses that they are committed to parliamentary democracy and pluralism, Prachanda's statement on water resources and the unjustified attack on Indian vehicles and Indians will further erode Maoist credentials as a political force within Nepal and internationally. A pragmatic and rational attempt at political negotiation will be the best lesson from Baidya's arrest. ●

LETTERS

FACEOFF

Yubaraj Ghimire's column 'Between Bhojpur and Beni' (#189) was inconsiderate, unfortunate, misguided and downright wrong. I was dismayed that someone of his stature would choose to pass judgment so lightly on an issue of such profound gravity which might have implications much more damaging than the two attacks themselves, and that *Nepali Times* would print it without its usual strive for accuracy. While some finger-pointing is perhaps not unnatural in a post-traumatic situation, the allegations that the attack exposed "a rift and lack of cooperation among the security agencies" is simply outrageous and totally prejudiced. Consider the facts:

1. The police in Beni were not left in the lurch to face the attack alone armed only with 303s as Ghimire claims. They had been issued and trained on Army SLRs and this was one of the main factors contributing to the successful defence of the police post till early morning.

2. Ghimire's article

nowhere acknowledges the fact that 18 brave RNA soldiers were inside the police post (as was the normal practice) tasked to protect it. The largest number of RNA casualties was in this group, which fought valiantly throughout the night, alongside the police, mainly manning the key and most exposed rooftop positions of the police post.

3. The night vision helicopter flew in extremely hazardous conditions and had already delivered its first fire when the police post finally fell after it ran out of ammunition. We all cheered every time the reassuring throb of the Mi17 reverberated overhead. It is to the credit of our brave pilots who regularly



KANAK MANI DIXIT

volunteer to fly night missions in our terrain using, nightvision goggles.

4. The article further implies that the rest of the RNA positions, namely the barracks and the DDC were mere spectators to the battle. Wrong again. As other journalists who actually visited Beni and who have seen the captured Maoist video correctly deduced, the main focus of the attack was the army barracks itself. The soldiers of Kali Prasad Bn (Engineers), whose primary task in Beni is to contribute to national development through road construction, and troops of the Gorakh Bahadur Bn fought a 13 hour battle and roundly foiled the Maoists declared aspiration to take and hold Beni for three days and nights.

The soldiers and policemen in Bhojpur and Beni fought and died shoulder to shoulder as one team to bear the burden of the nation's woes and the pointed indifference of various sectors of society, including the self-righteousness media.

Do not desecrate the sacrifice of our

brotherhood with your light academic observations. Do not make a mockery of those who sacrificed their lives. Try and reflect on the likely effect on your communities if we were stopped fighting, and if the Maoists were allowed to succeed.

I do not ask you to compromise your objective neutrality. On the contrary, I challenge you to maintain it. I request you to go back to your journalistic roots, get the facts straight, and sometimes hear our side of the story too. After all, we are fighting, among other things, for your freedom, and trying to preserve democracy in the country.

Officer who fought in Beni, email

● I am quite amazed to see that the government and the pro-royalists proceeded with the felicitations of the king in Pokhara in spite of the carnage in nearby Beni ('Between Bhojpur and Beni', #189). It would have been better to wear white, mourn and reflect. There are many questions that the government and security forces have to answer. The first step in fighting any insurgency is intelligence. If there were about 3-5,000 Maoists gathered around Beni readying for attack, even a simple act of a reconnaissance patrol would have found out where the insurgents were even if there was no intelligence. It seems our military planners/leaders are inept, not adequately trained and lack foresight. Was Beni in flames due to the lack of support of the army to the police as pointed out by Yubaraj Ghimire? Or was the army stretched too thin for having to guard a strategic bridge in northern part of Myagdi district? An even more plausible hypothesis is that the army and the security forces were so busy with the security arrangements for the King's felicitations in nearby Pokhara that they were unable to aid Beni. The attacks in Bhojpur and Beni within two weeks of each other clearly point that our security forces are incapable of dealing with the mounting insurgency due the lack of priorities/directives/planning and/or lack of security man power.

There is a deep reserve of this security and military manpower that is waiting to be tapped. The government and the army have not utilised the 100,000 or so highly qualified and better trained ex-servicemen from the British and the Indian Gorkha Armies. It is high time that the government and RNA swallowed their pride and pressed the bravest and the brightest to promote peace and stability in our motherland before it is too late.

SN Singh, email

● Both the government and the Maoists are equally to blame for the continuing violence and bloodshed in Nepal. The brutal suppression of this week's protest rallies by the political parties against regression shows the state's true face. Citizens should not remain silent spectators to the state's repression. These atrocities are continuing unabated even after commitments and the establishment of the Human Rights Cell in the RNA and the prime minister's office. It is common knowledge that the latter was established to bypass the mandate of the independent National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). If human rights is indeed "a matter of legitimate international concern", the world community should act before the situation further deteriorates. It should pass a resolution for the restoration of democratic rights.

Goodbye to year zero

Just as well this wretched year has ended

In the Bikram Sambat calendar, the years ending with zero are called *Sunya Barsha* and considered inauspicious. Year 2060 was a zero year in more ways than one.

The Maoists tried to make 2060 their Year Zero by blindly bombing everything in sight on the road to the dictatorship of the proletariat. They did succeed, but only in reinforcing a dictatorship of another sort. But they have failed to crush the democratic aspirations of Nepalis. It will be years before Bhojpur and Beni rise from the rubble of the rebel's excesses

STATE OF THE STATE CK Lal



and regain their market town vitality. But neither Mao nor Prachanda are ever going to be installed among Nepal's pantheon of rulers.

The attempt by monarchists to create a democratic void has partially succeeded: the parliament has neither been reconstituted nor restored. But their attempts to give the king a 'constructive' role have also been met with head-on protests. Slogans being raised in the streets of Kathmandu aren't merely pressure tactics, as King Gyanendra interpreted them to be in his *Time* interview, but voices of people fed up with the antics of two royal cabinets in 18 months.

Throughout 2060, King Gyanendra consistently refused to extend even the minimum acknowledgment usually reserved for defeated rivals in politics. Yet, party leaders kept hoping against hope for the right signals from the royal palace. It is too early to say where these street protests will lead, but if the

past record of the present leadership is anything to go by, the future doesn't look too rosy.

Envoys of the Big Three—the US, the UK and India—are the main custodians of the international community's interests in Nepal. This year, Ambassador Michael Malinowski behaved as if he was their sole spokesperson. Charles de Gaulle once said about another US ambassador in Paris: "The American ambassador has judged France by the Frenchmen with whom he used to dine." Nepal's mainstreamers must find out who dines with Ambassador Malinowski.

This week, India's Ministry of External Affairs once again urged "both Constitutional Monarchy as well as the political parties" to "demonstrate flexibility and forge a national consensus to deal with this situation with the urgency it deserves". But it's still an open question whether Indians themselves have fully understood the urgency of the re-establishment of democracy in Nepal.

Meanwhile, after parachuting in for the fifth time, Sir Jeffrey James hasn't made much headway persuading constitutional forces to patch up. Narayanhiti may be across the street from the British Embassy, but there seems to be a huge gap in their perceptions of what a constitutional monarchy should be.



UN Secretary General Kofi Annan stuck his neck out to urge warring sides in Nepal to talk and offered his good services. The palace reportedly refused to even acknowledge Annan's letter of interest, forcing him to make the public offer of good offices.

Unless the 18-point agenda of mainstream parties, which broadly addresses most of the practical issues raised by the Maoists, becomes the main thrust of the UN initiative, there is no

way UN mediation is going to have any impact.

The void on the media scene this year can be judged by the fact that a television personality running a talk-show on the government channel was adjudged the best journalist of the year by a media organisation. It seems we have yet to discover the merits of independent media and investigative journalism in this country. Nepali literature too continued with its grand tradition of formalism by bestowing the title of 'national poet' upon a royal balladeer.

Nepal's economy went into a tailspin in 2060. In private, everyone accepts that creation of employment opportunities through higher investment in public sector should get the topmost priority to wean away Maoist youths from violence, but the Nepal Development Forum is advocating unbridled privatisation without safeguards.

The hallmark of 2060 must be the equanimity of Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa. He has been having a hard time keeping awake. In these times, cultivated a sense of detachment and dozing off at public programs apparently helps.

At the end of a traumatic zero year, hope may have to be sought in Hindu numerology where the number one, as in the binary code of digital language, is a positive force. Here's to a better Nepal in 2061. ●

Likewise, the heinous crimes being committed by the Maoists deserves an equal measure of condemnation. In fact, for their crimes against humanity, the International Criminal Court (ICC) should intervene to arrest those who are resorting to violence in the name of revolution or whatever else.

S Shrestha, Kathmandu

● Puskar Gautam's guest column ('Maoist gameplan', #190) is a brilliant analysis of what the rebel strategy really is. It is also a realistic assessment of the crisis that our country is facing.

Abhishek Bikram Shah, email

● When I read *Nepali Times* online these days I am ashamed to say to friends here that I am a Nepali. There is nothing to be proud of anymore. Of course, I can't blame the country. The problem is our rulers—politicians who have no shame, the same faces of crooks over and over again in parliament and now on the streets leading demonstrations for democracy. Give me a break. The important thing is to change the system, not the people. There is no shortage of committed, honest Nepalis with integrity and commitment to develop the country. And we are stuck with these corrupt people who have pushed our country back into darkness. Most of their sons and daughters are studying abroad, taking their ill-gotten wealth out

of the country, while the sons of honest people are toiling in the Gulf and sending money home! Our future lies with hardworking Nepalis and not with these thieving liars.

**Ram Adhikary
Melbourne, Australia**

DYING


After reading 'Dying for a son' (From the Nepali Press, #189), I was overcome with sadness for Kaushalya Pariyar, a mother of seven—four whom are physically disabled. Yet, she is still trying to 'present' her husband with a son at the cost of risking her own life. The story shows just how far away we are from gender equity, social justice and maternal health in our country.

Jojo Lama, Lazimpat

FUTILE

I completely agree with your editorial 'Futile future' (#190). What do the king and the political leaders think, that they can prolong their power struggle even when the country is burning? Even if one side wins, how do they expect to rescue the country from the Maoist totalitarianism on their own? The only way to deal with the Maoists is for the constitutional forces, and that includes King Gyanendra, to realise that they are all on one side against the outlaws. Let that be our hope and wish in the new year.

Sanjog Thapa, Chhauni




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Down, but not out

Birganj feels the pain

NARESH NEWAR in BIRGANJ

Nepal's business and trade hub of Birganj appears to have come out relatively unscathed from the recent spate of bandas and blockades. But in the villages outside this border town, it is a different story altogether.

The Maoist blockades affected India-Nepal trade, the mainstay of Birganj's economy and frequent bandas have dampened the business climate. But hardy Birganj locals have adapted to the incidents of violence and the murder of Mayor Gopal Giri two months ago.

"In every conflict, there is the first shock and then things become a habit," says business analyst Ramesh Bhattarai.

Like the capital Valley, Birganj has benefitted from the influx of villagers fleeing Maoist threats in the outlying districts. Banks and finance companies especially are doing roaring business. There are now 14 branches of banks and four finance companies in the city. Bhattarai predicts: "Birganj will be the last city to go under."

Trade prospects are still bright, and India recently set up a consulate here. Bangladesh is also starting an information desk office soon to promote cross-border business with Nepal. Once the World Bank-funded container dry port on the outskirts of the town is operational, trade is expected to get a big boost.

Birganj contributes 44 percent of national revenue, and 60 percent of Indo-Nepal trade passes through here. Many of Nepal's industries are



MIN BAJRACHARYA

located along the highway artery between Birganj and Hetauda. The number of large and small industries has reached 400, employing nearly 50,000 Nepalis.

But, as Manoj Upadhyay, editor of the local journal, *Economic World*, says: "All it takes is one road blockade to throw things off." Companies are cutting work shifts from three to one a day, and if Birganj is affected, the rest of the country is affected. Says Upadhyay: "We had

a vision to turn Birganj into a special economic zone but all that is on hold now."

For the first time in eight years, Birganj residents have started to feel the heat. The Maoists made their presence felt with a series of bombings of government buildings. Business is slow and shops close down early after the government imposed a night curfew a fortnight ago.

"It's not the same place anymore.

Seems like no one is safe," says Pradip Gupta, a local shopkeeper. Gupta recalls how the city was hardly affected at all during the past bandas called by the Maoists or other political parties. While the rest of the country came to a standstill during nationwide strikes, here life and business went on as usual.

Maoist extortion has hit an all-time high. The Maoists sent letters to all the industries, small business houses, hotels, department stores and shops for regular donations. "Not a single individual has been spared and everyone is paying," says a local Marwari businessman who did not want to be identified. "If we refuse to pay, the price will be heavy," says a local banker. Mayor Giri was reportedly killed for refusing to pay Rs 500,000 demanded by the rebels. "Since the incident, everyone has cooperated out of fear," says freelance journalist Chandra Kishore.

In the 22 VDCs outside the city, the Maoists operate freely, especially after the police stations were pulled back. Villagers are flocking into Birganj to live like refugees just a few hours away from their homes. Villagers in Parsa district attempted to throw out the Maoists two years ago. They formed a committee of 50 members including all-party politicians, community leaders and local villagers. "There was strong unity and their morale was high, but it didn't last long," says Kishore. The committee collapsed after five days when members were attacked by the Maoists. Rama Kanta Giri, the

leader, was killed.

Ironically, in some villages the presence of the Maoists is the only deterrent against bandits from Bihar. Gangs from lawless northern Bihar regularly cross the border to raid Nepali villages. Since the police post was relocated to the city from Thori, 70km from Birganj, robberies have increased. Locals are helpless against the marauding gangs that come armed with pistols and rifles. "If the government gave them permission to keep arms at home, they would have protection," says Pratap Shrestha who fled from Thori after threats from Indian gangs.

Two years ago, when Pratap was elected chairman of the local buffer zone of Royal Chitwan National Park, he took action against timber poachers from Bhigna Thori village of Bihar. "It was just too much to bear for the villagers after they raped three of our young girls. It was time to teach these criminals a lesson," says Shrestha. He gathered 150 villagers and forest guards and raided the Indian village. The looters were surrounded and the two villages agreed that the looting would stop. Nine months later, it began anew and the Indian dacoits came looking for Shrestha.

Names like Mehfil, Lambu Chaudhary and Shambu Chaudhary make the villagers quake with fear. They lead the notorious Bihari Mehfil Gang which is engaged in smuggling and illegal hashish trade and timber poaching. When the Indian police restrict the gang's activities at election time, they target villages in Nepal for easy money. ●

Perversely, when state authority weakens, the weak suffer. Ask yourself who have been the overwhelming victims of the crumbling Nepali government's offensive against the Maoists, and be damned if you don't answer, "the weak, the innocent, the ordinary". Of the nearly 10,000 dead in the long Maoist war, more than half are probably non-combatants, citizens, people next door.

Similarly in India, when the Kashmiri

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



uprising was raging in the early

90s, Indian security forces tended to go after the softest of targets. Human rights abuses abounded. Whole villages were rounded up and people were never seen again. Women were raped, schoolboys slaughtered. It got better as the decade wore on. The Indian army and paramilitary forces learned the value of intelligence, something that demonstrably isn't happening in Nepal. A distant elite in a cloistered capital is hardly able to penetrate fiery, ideological movements based on rural alienation. So they lash out at those least able to protect themselves, or have their bully boys in uniform do it for them.

Now look at America. And consider the case of Kari Rein. She's a Norwegian-born US resident who lives in the fair state of Oregon. Her husband and her two children are full-fledged US citizens, born on American soil. She holds a green card and

Soft targets

A distant elite in a cloistered capital lashes out at those least able to protect themselves



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has for nearly two decades. Last year, Kari's American dream went sour. She and her family were returning for a vacation abroad when she was stopped by the immigration authorities at Seattle airport.

Her husband and sons didn't see her again for nearly three weeks as the US government held her incommunicado, without charge, under some draconian

provision in the immigration act, bolstered by the current obsession with homeland security. Then a lawyer cracked the government's wall of silence and discovered that Kari was being held as a "dangerous drug offender". Fourteen years earlier, she and her husband had been convicted of growing a few marijuana plants. They'd paid fines, done community service and

avoided drugs ever since.

But now, post 11 September, America is on guard against dangerous foreigners. And Kari Rein is going to be deported. That's right, deported. Various statutes have come together to empower immigration officers to take action against any foreigner with a drug offence in his or her background, regardless of the circumstances. So it's back to the fjords for Kari Rein. Her adopted hometown in Oregon is up in arms and is raising money for her legal defence. The state's best paper is campaigning hard in her favour. She's out of jail but bound by a court order to inform police of her movements.

Reporters say the local police force is embarrassed to have to pay attention to her at all, considering her an exemplary citizen. But a floundering Bush administration in Washington is rounding up and deporting people like Kari simply because they can. They are classic soft targets. There are still thousands of people—mostly, but not all, Muslims—in US jails who were rounded up after 9-11 and not charged with any crimes. They are suspected of immigration act violations and can be held indefinitely pending deportation. Some have drug convictions, like Kari. They're a danger to America and they'll be kicked out.

Soft states are dangerous. To themselves and their citizens. A healthy body politic is less so but it bears watching nonetheless. It's yet another reason to get democracy back in Nepal. ●



No news is good news

Pokhara battens down the hatches

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

There is a full scale counter-insurgency war going on, the headlines are all about bombings, landmines, blockades, bandas, abductions and extortion. Yet the tourists keep coming into Nepal. The flights are full and the trekking trails are bustling. NTB's (Nepal Tourism Board) figures for March show a whopping 60 percent increase in numbers compared to last year.

What is going on? Industry sources cite several reasons: no country in the world is safe anymore and Nepal doesn't yet have the kind of arbitrary terrorism in other countries, tourists have never been harmed in Nepal, there is no fighting in the high mountain valleys and most visitors to Nepal are adventure tourists so news of fighting doesn't necessarily deter them.

Still, the Maoist insurgency has cost the industry dearly. Arrival figures of 230,000 last year were half the peak figures for 1998, and income is even lower because hotels and trekking agents have slashed rates to stay afloat. Despite Maoist assurances that they will not harm tourists, the industry is sensitive to information of strikes or violence. Pokhara was badly hit by the two-week Chitwan and Gandaki blockade in March and the battle for Beni.

There are also worrying signs that assurances guaranteeing safety of trekkers is not always being followed by grassroots militia. Recent incidents:

3 April: Protesters in Kathmandu pelted stones at vehicles carrying tourists arriving after an overland drive from Tibet. Many of these vehicles were driven into the safety of the BICC. "Some tourists were sick with fear," recalls Rabi Poudel, president of Nepal Association of Travel Agents (NATA).

24 March: Maoist rebels forced two French tourists to walk back to Daman on the Tribhuban Rajpath because of the Makwanpur and Dhading blockades. Their van was pushed over a cliff.

21 March: The rebels destroyed the tower in Meghauri, an airfield used exclusively for tourists travelling to the upmarket Tiger Tops resort in the Royal Chitwan National Park.

15 March: Suspected Maoists have been setting off explosions in government buildings in the vicinity of Thamel including the Election Commission and the Sanchaya Kosh Building. Not one has been hurt, but there are loud bangs.

11 March: Maoists vandalised a bus carrying two British tourists to Tiger Tops from Bharatpur Airport. The two were badly shaken and hired a rickshaw back to Narayanghat.

25 February: A socket bomb hit a van carrying a French family driving overland to Kathmandu from India during a banda in Kanchanpur. The tourists were so spooked they cut short their Nepal visit and returned to India through Dhangadi.



Recent news of attacks on Indian vehicles and businesses is worrying the travel industry who fear a slump in Indian arrivals. "Indian tourists were already keeping away because they heard about the blockades," says Sundar Shrestha, former president of Pokhara's HAN chapter.

"There were 60 percent cancellations in the last one week alone."

The average length of stay of tourists in Nepal has also dropped from 14 days to eight. Tour operators say they were convincing their international agents and clients that the Maoist rebels have assured that no harm would befall tourists. But the Maoists have not always kept their word and there are reports of trekkers being forced to pay Maoist tax on the trails. "It looks like the commitment of the Maoist leadership has not reached their cadre," says NATA's Poudel.

Deepak Mahat, President of the Trekking Agents Association of Nepal says: "They must either stop deceiving us or declare the closure of tourism in Nepal." With tension increasing in the central and western region, tourists have headed east to the Everest area, which has reported record numbers.

Several international travel agents have visited the country to take stock of the situation and found no direct evidence of tourists being attacked by rebels, but they told local operators that burnt vehicles along the highway and blockades create psychological terror. Embassy advisories against travelling to Nepal also have a negative impact.

NTB is doing its bit operating airport shuttle buses during the banda this week. Said Tek Bahadur Dangi of NTB. "We are doing what we can, but we can't stop the political forces from organising strikes." ●

Safe and sound

The unexpected release of 37 hostages taken from Beni (seen being bused out of Kathmandu airport, right) by the Maoists has raised questions about the rebels' motives. Some believe it is a bid to improve their battered image at a time when the UN Commission on Human Rights is readying to debate a resolution tabled by Switzerland in Geneva. "Showing that they are abiding by the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners will go down well, especially as the international community has been critical of the army's human rights record," said one Kathmandu-based diplomat.

That the Maoists did not insist on their earlier demand for the release of Matrika Prasad Yadav and Suresh Ale Magar could point to a secret deal with the government who may have asked for a show of goodwill. There is speculation that the two sides may actually be discussing a ceasefire to coincide with the new year. Interestingly, the Maoists contacted the ICRC about their intention to release the hostages. "They called us first and we sent our six-member team to Rolpa for the necessary preparation for the release," Nicolas Bachmann of the ICRC told us.



The Canadian International Development Agency is seeking an experienced Nepali citizen for the directorship of the Canadian Cooperation Office (CCO). Applicants must explain, in less than two pages, how they intend to provide the required services under the current environment.

Applicants should also state the annual consultant fee (minus the compulsory insurance coverage) that they are willing to accept. Women and ethnic minorities candidates are encouraged to apply. The full statement of services is available upon request at cco@cco.org.np. Applications must be received before 16:30 on Monday April 19th at the address below.

Only short listed candidates will be contacted.

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Duties

The Director of the Nepal CCO ensures the provision of professional, financial, technical and administrative advice required for management and ongoing monitoring of CIDA programs and projects in Nepal.

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Graduation from a recognized university with specialization in commerce, business administration, economics, international relations, development studies, or other relevant field.

Language Requirements

English and Nepali Essential

Experience

- Experience in managing and monitoring international development programs/projects, in the field or at the headquarters of an international development organization
- Experience in advising and supporting senior officials from Canada and/or other donor countries
- Experience in policy/program analysis and financial management
- Experience in managing professional and support staff.

Knowledge

- Knowledge of the mandate, policies, programs, objectives and priorities of CIDA.
- Knowledge of contracting regulations and procurement procedures
- Knowledge of financial management practices as they apply to the management of international development programs and projects
- Knowledge of current international issues that have an impact on developing countries.
- Knowledge of South Asia and Nepal.

Abilities

- Ability to analyze, plan and manage all aspects of implementing and monitoring complex projects and programs with several components, and to achieve the desired results.
- Ability to implement results-based management and an accountability frameworks
- Ability to manage budgets and financial systems
- Ability to analyze complex geopolitical issues at the national level, to work as part of a team to develop a strategic vision to development assistance and contribute towards the effectiveness of aid
- Ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing
- Ability to supervise the work of staff and consultants within a multicultural context.
- Ability to create and lead teams to deliver high quality collaborative assignments.
- Ability to manage risk to protect assets, staff and partners working in conflict.

Personal Suitability

- Effective interpersonal relationships and teamwork
- Initiative
- Reliability
- Able to work under pressure
- Ability to make decisions and sound judgement.

* The successful candidate will be required to take out performance Liability insurance

* Phone calls and e-mail enquiries will not be entertained.

Canadian Cooperation Office
P.O. Box 4574
Kathmandu, Nepal
Fax: 977-1-441-0422
E-mail: merina@cco.org.np

Manjushree's headache

If this is what latthis can do, imagine what M-16s are doing

My friend Manjushree Thapa has a headache. A big one. She also has severe back pains. Both of these newly acquired ailments come courtesy of the government.

My friend was participating in a peaceful democracy rally around Ratna Park on Sunday, when all of a sudden she found herself

NEPALI PAN
Seira Tamang



cornered by latthi-wielding riot police. With the rest of the defenseless crowd, she attempted to run away but was hit on the head by a policeman.

Falling to the ground, blood pouring from the gash in her head, she was then subjected to further latthi blows to her body.

She was helped by strangers to enter Bir Hospital, into which police were lobbing teargas shells over the wall. In hospital, she lay with scores of injured awaiting treatment. At the end of the ordeal, she had three stitches on her head and several welts and bruises on her back. Manjushree is another statistic in the lengthening list of those with head injuries, broken bones and rubber bullet wounds in Kathmandu's post-2PM streetscape.

The Ratna Park area in the heart of the capital is now known not just for annoying traffic diversions. Here, the inhabitants of Kathmandu have been shown the nature of the excesses of state violence that they had heard were happening in faraway hills.

Particularly illuminating has been the state strategy of crowd control of unarmed people participating in peaceful democracy rallies, including aiming latthis straight at the skull of anyone within reach, throwing tear gas into hospital grounds, beating people, old and young, male and female, after they have already fallen to the ground, entering hospital premises to thrash the injured and using rubber bullets in ways that



SUNDAR SHRESTHA

maximise injury. That these methods are not necessarily provoked by violence or even hints of potential violence was clear from the experience of many of us in the Ratna Park area this week.

Trapped in a situation of inexcusable Maoist violence and excess, serious economic decline, political stalemate and a lack of democratically functioning arenas, rallies for democracy seem the most positive of options. Participants are not ideologically brainwashed zombies. The political elites' public apologies and remorse may have brought thousands to the capital, but ill-will and distrust in political leaders remain. Yet the sheer numerical turnout and the palpable energy in the crowd testify to the thirst that exists for change, with the only current viable medium to demand for that change being political party-led rallies for democracy.

The ability to congregate as The People, to voice similar concerns and demands, ask for more accountability and say in the government, work together for peace and prosperity in the country, this is the fodder of donor 'good governance' and 'vibrant civil society' visions that so canvas our national development agenda. But these public displays of people power have been seen as a national threat by the state and dealt with accordingly.

In full view of international donors and the national elite, my friend was mercilessly beaten in the capital. That she is an internationally renowned writer and part of the national intelligentsia was irrelevant. Like so many of the injured and killed in the past couple of days, months and years of turmoil, she merged into the mass of the faceless and identity-less in those minutes of state sponsored violence.

In accordance with government statements justifying the force used in these rallies, if she was not my friend, perhaps I would have believed she provoked the police. If I did not know her personally, perhaps I would have believed she was affiliated to a violence-prone political wing. If I was just reading about her as an injury statistic, perhaps I would have believed she was a Maoist infiltrator.

But I know Manjushree Thapa well. If this is the level of violence happening in Kathmandu with only latthis, tear gas and rubber bullets, dare we think of what is going on in the name of the counter-insurgency war in areas populated by those whose identities and personalities remain blurred and in territories in which M16s and not latthis are the choice weapons of state control? ●

King fights on two fronts

from p1

The political leaders insist the semantics is not so important, but it is clear that the palace sees 'constituent assembly' as an euphemism for 'republic' and will not agree easily. The parties may be pushed to ask for a constituent assembly, which has been the Maoist demand all along. This was also the point on which the peace talks between the government and the Maoists collapsed last August.

"Ultimately, we will need a constituent assembly to bring both the king and the parliamentary forces within the constitutional framework," says Daman Nath Dhungana, former speaker and a peace facilitator. "All the factions will unite against the king if he does not agree. It will be the people vs the king."

But the king could still defuse the situation by forming an all-party government acceptable to everyone, or restoring parliament. After reclaiming power, the parties may soften their tough talk, as they gear up towards future elections while trying to arrange a ceasefire.

It is later that a future elected government will face its toughest test in dealing with the Maoist insurgency. In a sense, we will back to 3 October 2002 but with a much more virulent uprising.

The Maoists, for their part, have been using the party-palace clash to their advantage. They are on an offensive spree with attacks on police posts in Janakpur and Ilam this week.



RAJENDRA NATH

Nepalis returning from India trekking for 200 km to their villages in the midwestern hills, here on the Mahendra Highway near Nepalganj.

But things have changed. India is belatedly giving the Maoists a hard time in its territory and Indian concerns will have deepened after the Nepali-style landmine attack in Jharkhand that killed 26 police last Thursday.

For the first time in years the Maoist statements have taken on a strident anti-Indian tone accompanied by attacks on Indian vehicles and businesses in the tarai.

Former minister and peace broker Narayan Singh Pun believes the Maoists' attacks in Bhojpur and Beni actually show that they want to return to the table. "They are forcing the government to take them seriously and restart the peace process, but both sides need to trust each other," he told us.

The government is still talking tough, refusing to accept third-party mediation. "The Beni attack completely wiped out the possibility for peace talks," Home Minister

Kamal Thapa said after the 20 March incident. Analysts say the Maoists are more likely to sue for peace when they feel strong, like they do now, rather than when they are weak.

But there are no indications that there are any back channel initiatives. If anything, the situation on the ground is getting worse. The midwest has been under siege for two weeks now, with serious food shortages in the hill districts. The blockade has forced some Nepalis coming home from India to walk up to 200km to reach their homes. In the far west, the Maoists have been especially active this week rounding up thousands of villagers and taking them on tractor trailers to an unknown destination. Many others have fled across the border to India.

The big question now is how long can, or should, King Gyanendra fight his war on two fronts? ●

Defeat in victory

In Geneva, the spotlight is on Nepal

SUHAS CHAKMA in GENEVA

In the backrooms of the Palais des Nations in Geneva a draft human rights resolution sponsored by Switzerland has raised a storm in a tea cup. The resolution would extend technical cooperation to the government of Nepal under Agenda Item 19 of the ongoing 60th session of the Commission on Human Rights. The European Union, which is using the draft as a stick to prod Kathmandu to resume negotiations with the Maoists, has not yet taken a decision on whether to cosponsor the resolution which, if tabled, will come to the vote on 21 April.

Situations similar to the one prevailing in Nepal are best suited for a resolution under Agenda Item 9 on country situations. Usually, resolutions under Agenda Item 19 are tabled as a compromise after a country has been censured over a considerable period of time under Agenda Item 9.

As expected, Kathmandu sought New Delhi's protection. India has been opposed to any third party involvement in South Asia although it did go along when Colombo decided to invite Norway to facilitate the peace process with the LTTE. Foreign Minister Bhekh Bahadur Thapa met his Indian counterpart Yashwant Sinha on his way to Geneva last month and then went on to Brussels to convince the EU.

On 26 March Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa announced a 25-point commitment paper on human rights.

The question now is who could be credible and effective mediators to the conflict in Nepal. The government has ruled out UN mediation. Domestic interlocutors have no leverage over the parties in conflict

except serving as post boxes. While Kathmandu might have extracted temporary respite from New Delhi's protection, it will have to pay a heavy price.

India's Foreign Secretary Shashank reportedly assured his Nepali counterpart Madhu Raman Acharya on 23 February to take up the Bhutani refugee issue. However, during his meeting with King Jigme S Wangchuk of Bhutan on 26 March 2004, Shashank has reportedly denied any such assurance being given to Nepal.

Colombia, which has been fighting the communist FARC guerrillas, welcomed United Nations monitoring and its sovereignty has not been dented by the UN presence. Nepal, like Sri Lanka, must make an independent decision whether to invite the UN Secretary General to step in. If Nepal, following New Delhi's footsteps, considers the Maoist issue as an internal one and the Bhutani refugee issue as a bilateral one with Bhutan, victory in Geneva would indeed be a defeat.

A failed state has its own negative dynamics and it is in New Delhi's interest to facilitate solutions to both the Maoists crisis and Bhutani refugee issue. Capturing a few Maoists leaders in India is unlikely to resolve the Maoist crisis. The EU, which provides substantial funding for Nepal and Bhutani refugees, must take a firm decision to cosponsor the Swiss resolution if Nepal fails to invite the UN Secretary General before 21 April. ●

Suhas Chakma is the director of the Asian Centre for Human Rights, New Delhi.

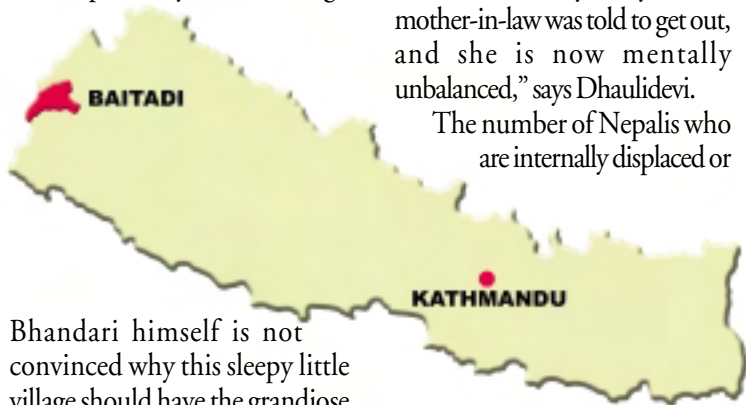
Nothing left to lose

In remote Baitadi, you hear the heartrending stories of Nepal's internally displaced

KISHORE NEPAL in BAITADI

This is about as far as you can get from Kathmandu, and even here, on the kingdom's western border with India, there is an overwhelming dread of violence and fear of the future.

Just 19km away from Jhulaghat in India's Uttaranchal state is Baitadi's newest municipality of Gothalapani. Mayor Ganesh Singh



Bhandari himself is not convinced why this sleepy little village should have the grandiose label of 'municipality'. But it is true that Gothalapani's population has surged after the Maoist attack in the main town of Patan two years ago. It is also now the transit point for many Baitadi villagers fleeing across the border to India in large numbers.

After the Maoists started forcing teachers to attend their meetings in the past two months, most have abandoned their schools and come to Gothalapani for safety. Dhaulidevi Pant, 49, is the wife of a school teacher from Khaligad. The Maoists looted their house and the family has

nothing left.

"We did nothing wrong, my husband is a good man, he has been teaching for 25 years," she says, sobbing. Two boys and two girls, all teenagers, came to their house four months ago and told family members to get out because the 'command' had decided to evict them. "Even my 81-year-old mother-in-law was told to get out, and she is now mentally unbalanced," says Dhaulidevi.

The number of Nepalis who are internally displaced or

forced to migrate to India because of the conflict is, according to one estimate, now about 1.5 million. These heartrending stories must be multiplied many times to gauge the true scale of misery and suffering.

Dal Bahadur Bohora is from Kotkotara village, and has also fled to the relative safety of Gothalapani. His distraught face tells of his anxiety about his teenage daughter who was recently abducted by the Maoists. He does not remember the date. "It was the day before Gaura Parba. Why does it matter when she was taken away, my daughter is lost," he says and



pours out his anger at the Maoists as well as the CDO, army and police who are doing nothing to help.

For Baitadi's CDO Parashuram Aryal, the sheer scale of the dislocation is hard to manage. It is very difficult to help individuals when there are thousands of them. Aryal was CDO in Dunai and has seen first hand the brutality of a Maoist attack. He is trying to help with the meagre resources at his disposal. Aryal knows Dal Bahadur personally and, even so, there is nothing he can do. "I know he is going through hell," he says, "but what can I do? I just don't have any budget even for emergency relief."

Just when you think you have heard the saddest story, there is even a sadder one. Dhan Bahadur Kunwar, a frail man from Kuwakot village, has no words to describe what he went through. He is still speechless with shock and shows us his bruised body. His small tea shop was doing well. The Maoists wanted a donation, but he couldn't afford the sum and resisted. He was beaten and forced to flee his village with his family and what was left of his belongings.

A Baitadi journalist, Laxmi Dutta Pant, says things were going from bad to worse, but in the past month Maoist extortion, eviction and threats has increased many fold. It is not just the rich people

in the villages who are victims. Increasingly, small shopkeepers and subsistence farmers are being targeted.

"By night the Maoists force them to give food and shelter, and by day the army patrols come trying to find out where they are," explains Pant.

Most people we talked to here are reluctant to speak out about their ordeals. The stories of ruthless retribution and punishment they have heard means people keep quiet. Raj Bahadur Chand, a local human

rights activist, says: "People from the villages are extremely frightened, they are also not comfortable with outsiders." But what is surprising is that despite their suffering and the threat of violence, there are still a lot of fearless people who will speak the truth on the record about the atrocities perpetrated by both the security forces and the Maoists. For Nepalis displaced from their homes and villages, it seems there is nothing left to lose. Speaking out is the only thing they can do. ●

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Arabian Nights

This New Year's Eve, usher in the razznatazz of fabled Arabian Nights at Hotel de l' Annapurna. Adding sizzle to the extravaganza will be a sensuous belly dancing show and a lavish spread of quintessential Arabian delicacies concocted by a duo of Master Chefs from Dubai.

Arabian Nights kicks off on the 12th of April with scintillating mysterious rhythms by our DJ Shall. To add to the excitement we feature a sizzling performance by pop queen Nalina Chitrakar.

Date : 12th April, 2004
Time : 7pm onwards
Venue : Pool side lawns
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GOPAL CHITRAKAR

When he first started out, Jagdish Tiwari didn't have his own camera. When he finally bought one, he spent seven years just getting used to it. It was a tough start for one of Nepal's best-known landscape photographers. Now with one published book and another on the way, this freelancer places as great an importance on processing the film as he does on composing a shot.

Before the 60s, film could simply not be developed in Nepal. People sent their reels to London or Hong Kong. Today processing is a different story and an annual Rs 1 billion industry. Local labs sell and distribute Kodak, Fuji, Konica and AGFA products, making life easier for professionals and amateurs. But for laymen it's still hit and miss at some streetside labs.

Picture perfect

Kathmandu's top photographers are fussy about quality

SRADDHA BASNYAT

Like Tiwari, ace photojournalist RK Manandhar gets his pictures done in Photo Concern. "They are Kodak dealers so they have a standard we can rely on," he says. He shows us a horizontal full frame shot of a woman carrying a doko along a dusty trail, weaving through a mustard field. The colour saturation brings out the contrast of yellow and green exquisitely.

Rameshwor Prasad Aryal, president of the Nepal Colour Lab Association, believes Nepali technicians are of international calibre. "So far, Nepal only produces enough technicians for the local market, but we could export this manpower," he says. His Rainbow Photo Labs has been in business for 19 years and has 14 branches. The Nepali technicians use mostly Konica technology and film

products. "As Konica's trading partner, Rainbow delivers world class quality and service at very competitive prices," says Aryal.

Himalmedia's photojournalist Min Bajracharya has been on the beat since 1985 and tried all the top brands before settling on AGFA. "I find a warm richness in the photographs and there's good colour dispersion," he says. Bajracharya

suggests matching the film to the lab—in his case, AGFA to an AGFA processing lab—since the film and processing equipment are calibrated.

To be fair, the blame for a bad picture cannot be placed solely on the lab. Cameras need to be cleaned and maintained. Film kept under glass is corrupted by direct sunlight or may be a duplicate. Photographic paper often isn't stored at the right temperatures.

Professionals like Manandhar take no chances: his fridge is stacked with boxes of photo paper and he divides labour. "I trust the bigger labs to do my processing and have the prints done at manual labs," he told us. If the end result is to be close to flawless, sticklers like Manandhar realise, "It'll never be perfect unless I do everything myself." ●

B/W DIY

Instead of relying on others, Mani Lama (pictured) started Dark Room Creations, a professional black and white lab in Lazimpat where he works with Tanka Rai, a renowned manual processor. "Professionals who know black and white come to us. I give them very good quality work," says Lama. The devil is in the detail, especially since developing black and white film is still a manual process, right from getting the film onto the spool in the darkroom—something Lama makes his students practice repetitively—to choosing the right grade of paper for the negative.

"You can do a lot with black and white," says Lama, whose work with the medium has been lauded at several exhibitions. RK Manandhar agrees. "Black and white is my art too," he says.

Most raw materials for processing film are available in the market allowing professionals like Manandhar to mix their own solutions, removing the risk of an inept technician and getting as close to the photographer's perception as possible. He says: "Working with the grayscale and lighting gives the photograph a more artistic feel and greater tonal quality."

(Sraddha Basnyat)



KIRAN PANDAY

Digital multiply



MIN BAJRACHARYA

With digital technology making things easier, even the most dedicated professionals are making the switch. Going straight from the camera to computer programs like Adobe Photoshop eliminates the entire developing process and has made editing a breeze.

Gopal Chitrakar, photo correspondent with Reuters, began taking pictures 25 years ago. At the time it was vital for any good photographer

to know the darkroom process, which involved an enormous amount of time and effort. Now, with digital technology, he is the master of his own lab and marvels at how fast, economical and easy the process has become. "It's just my photograph and me," says Chitrakar as he opens a computer file and shows us his recent pictures of a Himalayan panorama (see pic top). "This picture was possible only with a software that

allowed me to integrate seven separate images."

Digital print facilities are useful for those of us who prefer to have hardcopies. Unfortunately, most run-of-the-mill labs offer a consumer quality ink jet printer that results in a grainy, raw output, so it definitely helps to know who does it right.

Though they had a good digital mini lab, Photo Concern brought in a Digital Image Processing System (DIPS) to ride the digital wave. The Kodak technology cost Rs 2 million, but the print quality is unparalleled. Though it relies on the same chemical process as a manual lab, it's an entirely digital set up from scanner to LED printer for uniform colour tone. And if they're doing the shoot for you, they'll use their own camera, a Fuji S2 Pro with 12.1 megapixels. DIPS prints from any digital media, including mobile phones. It's possible to retouch, enlarge photos or restore old colour or black and white pictures too. Maximum print size is 20"x30" and a postcard size costs Rs 30 per print.

It is a bit pricier for less work than regular prints, but technology doesn't always come cheap. Studio 7 uses the Konica QD 21 mini lab system for graphic designers, ad agencies and anyone who requires quality digital work, printing a maximum 12"x18" size at 300dpi. But, as technician Niraj Dhungel cautions, if the resolution of the image is low, there are limits to how much it can be improved. Unlike the liquid chemicals many other systems use, QD21 uses tablet chemicals ensuring the photograph can withstand extreme sun exposure, heat and even water. Special

features include value-added prints like calendars, greeting and business cards. Postcard size snaps run at Rs 15 each.

AGFA is expecting the arrival of its AGFA DiLab 2 in a few months. The processing is a regular chemical job, but prints are exposed by laser. It's got a built-in scanner to limit human error and prints 400dpi. You can ask for prints on digital photo paper at a maximum 12"x18" print, but it will most likely come to double the price of regular film prints, estimates Sarada Amatya, director at Colour Link Lab in Thamel.

Chitrakar, who teaches communications at Tribhuban University, sees only one drawback with digital: "It's so easy to manipulate an image. If you are unethical you could destroy someone's life with it." ●

(Sraddha Basnyat)



BIZ NEWS

Welcoming China

An interaction program was held in Kathmandu on 30 March to discuss issues related to Chinese outbound tourists and possible cooperation between China and Nepal for promoting pilgrimage tourism in Kailash-Mansarovar in Tibet. Organised by the Tourism Industry Division and Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, speakers said that Nepal should capitalise on the close proximity of China.

2 million trekkers

Over the last 20 years, nearly two million people have trekked in the Himalayas, so it seemed about time that this popular region finally had a digital destination worthy of its name. Trekhimalayas.com, launched on 2 April in Australia, seeks to give both the first-time traveller and the regular trekker an interactive and regularly updated single source of information into all aspects of the world's highest mountains. Conceived out of a passion for exploring and experiencing the majestic scenery and culture of the Nepali mountains, the site has all the usual what-to-do's as well as constant inputs from fellow travellers. The site was extensively researched prior to its launch and has the official recognition and support of KEEP (Kathmandu Environmental Education Project), and one of the leading airlines flying to Nepal, Qatar Airways.

Spreading their wings

Qatar Airways will soon add another connection in Europe with flights to Zurich, making it more convenient for connecting passengers from Kathmandu. In response to the growing German market, the airways will start its flight to Frankfurt five times and Munich six times a week. It has also increased its frequencies to five times a week to Vienna and is adding its non-stop daily flight to Paris from 1 June.

Star search

Lux, a Nepal Lever product, presents young girls an exciting opportunity to become stars through the Lux Beauty Star 2004 pageant that will cull the brightest and best from Kathmandu, Dharan and Pokhara before a grand finale for the top 20 in May. The girls will be judged on looks, confidence and intelligence. The finalists will be put up at the Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu and have a portfolio shot by leading fashion photographer Madhav Thapa. The winner will be awarded Rs 50,000, two runners-up Rs 25,000 each. The top two will also attend the Lakme India Fashion week.

NEW PRODUCTS

INSTANT SHOT: There's nothing like a little instant memory created by Polaroid cameras, now available in the kingdom through Nepal Overseas Marketing. The dealers have the new 790/DIS Instant Camera with a built-in mercury-free battery priced at a reasonable Rs 4,000, plus Rs 500 for DIS 700 film.



The NGO business

How can business work for development?

BANGKOK – It is always a welcome break to hear good things about Nepal outside the country. NGOs in the region talk about the

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed



success Nepal had in areas like community forestry and FM radio. A few who have spent some time in Nepal see the country as a perfect place for designing and testing new ideas.

Development gurus worldwide are challenged to find the right way ahead. NGOs are generally made up of people who do not want to work for the private sector under free-market rules. However, they are now finding it important to understand the private sector, especially in developing countries where business has to also look at the huge social service market. Therefore, the obvious answer is finding a way to make private business work for development.

The region is witnessing an unprecedented wave of free trade agreements and creation of economic blocs. Like Nepal, many countries have acceded these agreements without really understanding the possible socio-economic impact. Socialist fora have always been against global integration of business and economy,

fearing loss of jobs and opportunities in already poor countries. It is therefore time for NGOs to really accept the path-breaking idea of partnerships. With multilateral and bilateral aid being substituted by trade, the private sector has become a good source of funding for NGOs.

Similarly, the private sector has also felt the need to work closely with communities, both

form the best vehicle for the implementation of their social goals. It is not only the larger multinationals or large NGOs that can get into partnerships but perhaps organisations of all sizes and scales can join hands.

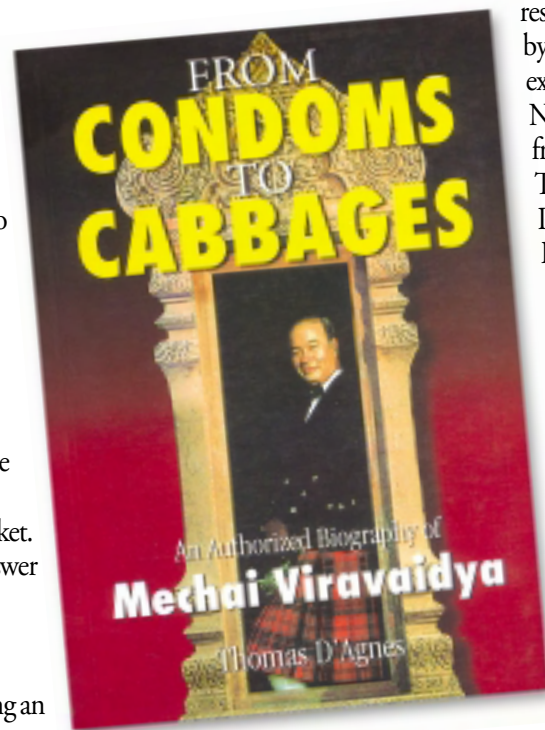
There are also interesting models of NGOs themselves getting into business to plough profits into activities they were set up for.

Cabbages and Condoms resorts chain in Thailand started by Mechai Viravaidya is an example of businesses run by NGOs. Khun Mechai's profits from the company go to fund The Asian Centre for Population and Community Development.

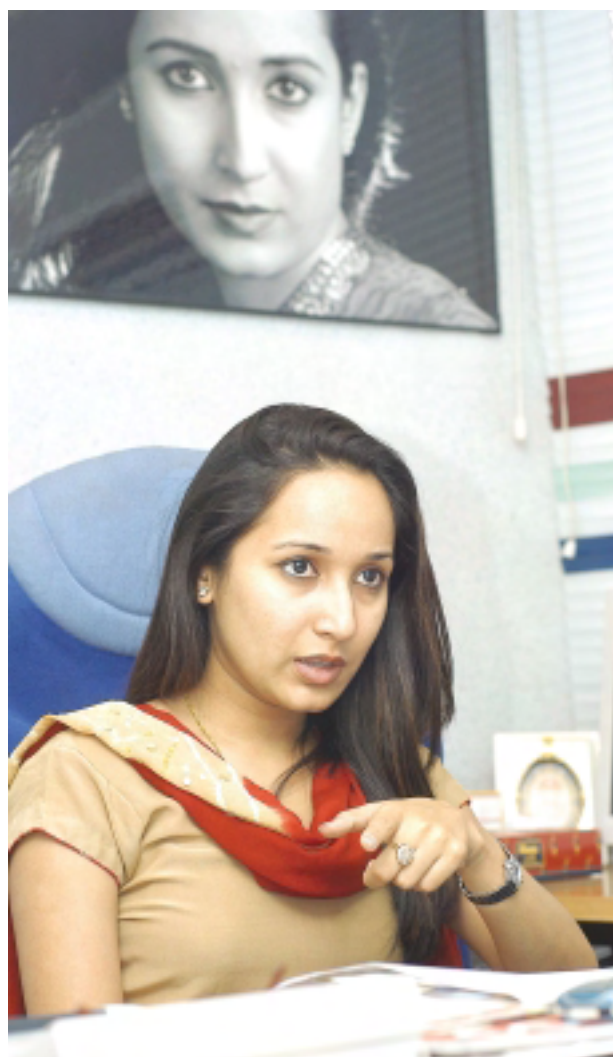
In Nepal, there are lots of examples of the fusion of community service and business: Dhulikhel Hospital, women's co-operatives and handicraft manufacturers. It is time to look for replication and furthering partnerships. That is where the larger Asia-Pacific experience has a lot of relevance for us in Nepal.

However, the danger in Nepal always remains that

we get more engrossed in buzzwords like 'public-private partnership' without clearly understanding why we are doing it. Let's get working partnerships going instead of more workshops and seminars to just talk about it. ●



“No one was interested in photography”



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Srijana Thapa is the 26-year-old director of Photo Concern, one of Nepal's first photo labs. She talks to *Nepali Times* about the photography industry and her family's pioneering role.

Nepali Times: Photo Concern is a family business, how did it get started?

Srijana Thapa: My grandfather DB Thapa was a royal photographer and established the business in 1960. It was in Calcutta that he became interested in photography, but there were no photography services or equipment here then. People used to take colour rolls to Hong Kong to develop. So, he started a small studio downstairs. He started developing colour photographs manually and in the 1970s he got a mini lab. Bringing the machine in was itself a big challenge. It cost Rs 8-9 lakh and no one wanted to help with co-investing. Everyone thought there was no market.

Isn't quality control a real problem?

Quality depends on many factors: the camera, the photographer, people behind the printing machine, the machine itself. Most of our lab technicians have been trained in India and have 12-15 years experience so they are well acquainted with the whole process. We don't compromise on quality. As far as the paper and chemicals are concerned, we use only Kodak. Some labs cut corners and dilute their chemicals.

They call it the 'photo lab syndrome': the Nepali propensity to copy someone else's success.

The photo lab business really picked up 10-12 years ago. Now, it's pretty saturated and stable. We now have 117 Kodak Express Labs in Nepal out of the total 240 labs. The

business is growing daily. Our main outlet processes 50,000 rolls a month and from each roll we give Rs 2 to the Nepal Cancer Relief Society. That comes to Rs 100,000 a month.

Going digital hasn't affected business?

Four years ago we brought in the first professional LED digital lab. It gives a uniform colour tone. We have three of the top digital cameras including Fuji's S2 Pro with 12.1 effective mega pixels. And the cost of processing is less. But professionals will always prefer manual photography. They'll never stop using film.

Who are some of the big name photographers that come to Photo Concern?

Thomas Kelly was here for his exhibition on sadhus. We have also worked with Jill Gocher, a travel photojournalist and Kanak Mani Dixit's black and whites were printed here digitally. Roshan Chitrakar is studying in the US, he came home on an internship and printed his photographs here.

Disposal is a concern isn't it?

The machines put out minimal waste, especially with introduction of digital photography. Test prints create waste paper. We put it through a paper cutter and give it to the municipality. We sell the waste chemicals to people who extract silver from it. We used to do it ourselves but it became a health hazard for the staff. Now, silversmiths have the technology to deal with it safely.

Some can even make me cry

All is not lost: Nepali movies are changing with the times



Siddhanta Ghimirey and Niruta Singh in *Dui Kinara*

KAPIL TAMOT

There are Bollywood-type melodramatic tearjerkers, and there are movies like Tulsi Ghimirey's *Dui Kinara*, which are just so pure in their sentiments that they bring tears to your eyes.

It is a love story in which a young

fisherman falls in love with a Nepali woman raised in America while she's on a visit home. He thinks this is such an impossible relationship that he doesn't let his feelings show. But he is attached to her son, and... I shouldn't give away too much of the plot.

There isn't anything extraordinary about the plot, indeed it is the simplicity of the story and the Nepali touch that is the most moving. Bhupen Chand, Niruta Singh and even child actor Siddhanta Ghimirey provide stellar performances. After a recent premier of the three-hour movie, I went up to Bhupen Chand and congratulated him. Chand didn't want to follow his father into politics and trained to be a pilot. But it is in film that he seems to have found his true calling. Chand must have seen my moist eyes and asked: "Did you cry?" I told him I did, not once but twice.

Tulsi Ghimirey said in a BBC interview

three years ago: "The Nepali audience wants drama with a good social message." It looks like Ghimirey has delivered exactly that with *Dui Kinara*. In the interview the veteran director also said: "We shouldn't give up, and we must compete with Indian films differently not with bigger budgets but with relevance and Nepaliness."

That was a time Ghimirey's *Darpan Chhayana* was drawing unexpected crowds and raked in more than Rs 30 million at the box office. More than half the theatres across the country, including those in the tarai belt, were showing Nepali films. Fifty Nepali movies were being produced every year and they were doing well despite the world's largest film industry being right next door. The logic that Nepali audiences would not respond to Nepali movies was proved a fallacy.

But things started going wrong. As

the security situation deteriorated and the state of emergency was declared in 2001, the cinema industry took a direct hit. Anywhere else, the film industry would have done well in times of crisis. After all, celluloid is a form of escapism. Here, the public was reluctant to go to the movies because of security concerns. But that still doesn't explain full houses in a South Asian documentary film festival last year, and Kathmandu's youth don't seem to be scared to attend concerts, and the discos and dance clubs in Thamel are full till late at night.

Actor Hari Bansha Acharya doesn't believe security concerns are the main reason for the downturn in the cinema industry. He argues that the people who used to go to the movies prior to the state of emergency simply aren't in Nepal anymore, having left for the Gulf or for Malaysia. In order to attract an audience, Acharya thinks Nepali directors and producers need to pay serious attention to quality.

During a talk program last month at the Reporters' Club, actress Jal Shah publicly admitted she felt ashamed being a cinema actress. Is this why educated parents tend to discourage children from joining the film industry? What is the main reason Nepalis don't watch Nepali movies anymore? Who is to blame: the directors, producers, actors, the government, the Film Development Board?

All of the above, says Tulsi Ghimirey. "Times are difficult, the industry is going through a serious crisis. There is nothing negative about it, there are ups and downs in every industry. People do want to watch good movies," he says.

And that is exactly what he seems to have done with *Dui Kinara*, blending a powerful story with good acting and professional production. The success of *Numafung* and the documentary *Bhedako Oon Jasto* must mean that times are changing, and so is public taste. ●



Tulsi Ghimirey and Niruta Singh in *Dui Kinara*.

Muna Madan in New York

When word came that the movie based on Laxmi Prasad Debkota's *Muna Madan* was being screened in New York, many had very low expectations. Some thought the great literary work of the Maha Kabi should not be turned into a motion picture with a low budget, while others felt it shouldn't be turned into movie at all.

Surprisingly, Debkota's epic tragedy of love, separation and death has been turned into one of the best movies ever made in Nepal. The film has not yet been screened in Nepal itself, but is being shown to selected audiences in the United States. One of the most interesting reactions to the film was from the Sherpa community in New York after it was screened here recently.

When comedian Santosh Pant came up with socially insensitive and insulting 'Sherpa Ramayan' in the 1990s, he had ridiculed the community. He made fun of the way they dress (gum boots), the way they speak Nepali (heavy accents) and made fun of their occupations and habits. Among mainstream Nepalis in New York, it was a big hit, of course. But the Sherpas had felt slighted by the negative stereotyping.

When Girija Prasad Koirala had come to New York as prime minister in 2000 and addressed Nepalis at Columbia University, many in the audience quizzed him about dual citizenship. But the Sherpas bombarded him with questions on discrimination within the civil service and recounted vividly the harassment meted out to those not from the mainstream community at the airport in Kathmandu when they returned home. With so much intolerance

how can a Sherpa, Tamang or Gurung feel a sense of belonging to Nepal?

But *Muna Madan* was a departure from the standard portrayals. When a dying Madan, left behind by his friends while returning from Tibet, a Sherpa named Chyangba (although Chyangba is Tamang, in the film he is portrayed as a Sherpa) finds Madan. At first, Madan is scared of this stranger in the jungle and frantically hides his valuables. But when Chyangba offers Madan shelter in his house, the famous song in background ('*Manis thulo dila le huncha, jata le hudaina*'), the theatre broke into applause. Some Nepali New Yorkers had tears streaming down their eyes.

When Madan gets ready to leave after getting better, he offers Chyangba the sack of gold he hid in the jungle. Chyangba answers with those famous lines from Debkota in Nepali that go: "Gold cannot be eaten or grown, instead send blessings for my children from your mother". *Muna Madan* should go some way to heal the insensitive portrayals of Nepali minorities in the past.

For those used to Kollywood, the film is restrained, not melodramatic and there aren't any of the usual embarrassing moments when you feel like cringing. The film is set in a typical Nepali village and there are few flaws (no Nike sneakers in the background) and the actors all deserve an A+. Some Nepali women felt that the way Muna and her mother were portrayed as vulnerable and weak was an insult to womanhood. But even they couldn't stop tears welling up when the movie neared its sad climax. ●

(Kiran Thapa in New York)



Muna and Madan

RAMYATA LIMBU

When Dhurba Basnet ventured into the Nepali hinterland armed with a digital camera in February 2001, little did he know that the footage he captured over a month of travelling through the Maoist heartland of Rolpa, Rukum and Jajarkot would result in a documentary that would bring the Nepali public face to face with the reality of the Maoist 'People's War'.

For the first time, the Nepali public saw images of guerrillas on the move, Maoist gatherings, interviews with widows and orphans, the sad tales of villagers caught between the security forces and the Maoists, hapless government officials at district headquarters. These were viewers who, till then, had only been able to read vague accounts in the newspapers and the government's body count.

Suddenly, they were real people. Nepalis who could be our brothers and sisters fighting and killing each other. "Government officials, lawmakers, politicians, policy makers diplomats, the general Nepali public, everyone wanted to watch the film," recalls Basnet, who was overwhelmed by the response. "I had an idea that I could make a film about the people's war but didn't realise the interest it would generate." Premiered at Film South Asia

2001, a biannual festival of South Asian documentaries in Kathmandu, Basnet's 46-minute *The Killing Terraces* won wide acclaim.

The film has since travelled for screenings across the subcontinent, Europe and in the United States. It has been shown in festivals in Japan and broadcast on Australian and Finnish television. Since 2001, the country's security situation has deteriorated and the Maoist conflict has spread. "Rolpa, Rukum and Jajarkot and large portions of the west are largely controlled by the Maoists, and it is difficult to travel like I did then," says Basnet, who recently returned from Bhojpur and Khotang in the east.

"The security situation in the east is like it was in the midwest three years ago," Basnet says. With filmmaker Mohan Mainali, Basnet visited the destroyed district headquarter of Bhojpur and filmed ordinary people caught between the Maoists and the army.

Mainali's own films *Jogimara ka Jyundaharu* and *Seeking Peace in Karnali* document the added hardships faced by ordinary people in Nepal's remote regions because of the conflict. *Jogimara* is about the families of 18 young men from a village in Dhading who were working at the airfield in Kalikot and were killed in an army raid two years ago when they were



Dhurba Basnet filming the recent street demonstrations in Kathmandu

Real on reel

MIN BAJRACHARYA

Nepali documentaries boldly document the conflict and its impact on the people and the nation

mistaken for Maoists.

Mainali and Basnet are now working on another documentary on the impact the conflict is having on Nepal's education system and longterm development. Both filmmakers have found that documentaries are much more powerful in getting the message across than scores of articles in the print media. "The audio-visual medium is extremely effective, but it has to be done with sensitivity, without propaganda and by letting the people speak on

camera," says Basnet.

Nabin Subba, who made the award-winning film *Numafung* about a Limbu woman and the women in her life, says the country's present situation has brought out many stories that need to be told. "There are a lot of places to explore for the filmmaker, we need more courage to create a third opinion that is different from the Maoists and the security forces," he says, "and film is the medium to do this with, but we need to take risks."

Subba is working on a feature

film on the current conflict due to be released by November. "It is a simple story about a village that is suffering from the repercussions of the eight years of Maoist conflict, the village emptied of its youth, the story told through the eyes of an older generation caught between the Maoists and the security forces."

He realises the risks. Mainali's *Jogimara ka Jyundaharu* was almost banned by the authorities during an official screening at the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival 2002. ●

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Baburam on Baidya's arrest



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Excerpts from Baburam Bhattarai's op-ed piece in *Kantipur*, 7 April

कान्तिपुर

There is no mystery about why Mohan Baidya was captured. It followed the triumph of our 'People's Army' in Bhojpur and Beni. These incidents shattered the state's dream of overcoming our revolution with military power. It has now failed both politically and militarily. So they have taken the last resort of targeting high-level Maoist leaders. Siliguri was an easy and obvious place to begin. Comrade Kiran was their first prey.

That the arrest took place a few days before the agitating political parties began their anti-king movement is further proof that there is an unholy alliance between the reactionary rulers of Nepal and India. The pro-monarchy, parliamentary and revolutionary forces were engaged in a tripartite conflict. But this conflict has turned bilateral: between the pro-monarchists and the republicans. While it is true that the revolutionary forces and parliamentary parties have their own ways of attacking the monarchy, they now have a common target and a common understanding. The people have reason to be encouraged. This situation has completely demoralised the pro-palace faction.

Comrade Kiran was arrested with the active role of Indian rulers. It has bared the nexus between the neo-monarchy of the post-royal palace massacre and the reactionary rulers of India who believe in an indivisible India. In some political and media circles, Comrade Kiran's arrest was interpreted as an unravelling of relations between the Maoists and the Indian ruling class.

Such opinions are baseless, irresponsible and deplorable. Recent developments are indications even for simpletons that it is not we but the monarchy of Nepal that has anti-national links with India. That is why there is no question of reaching an agreement with an anti-democratic and foreign-power brokering monarchy. We would rather bear the responsibility of leading a cruel and decisive fight against it.

We see no reason to be ashamed of Comrade Kiran's arrest. For international proletariats like us, there are friends and foes in every nation. We take it as our right to use the territory of our enemies for to our needs. In line with the demands of our revolution, we can always use the cooperation and protection of our friends elsewhere.

In a foreign land, we run a reasonable risk from the enemy class. Placed between two giant neighbours as we are, we have already expressed our commitment toward the principle of *panchasil* on behalf of tomorrow's people's republic, especially in context of our relations with Nepal's immediate neighbours. Bitter experience has firmed our resolve: we will not be distracted.

However painful the arrest of Comrade Kiran may be at present, it is an indication that the Nepali revolution has risen higher and we must turn this negative incident into a positive force. The outrage and anger that his arrest has aroused among our party cadre as well as the public against domestic and foreign enemies is sure to feed the flames of revolution. As Comrade Mao said: the reactionaries who lift a rock will find that it will crush their own feet. The same will happen here. You can't imprison revolutionary thought, it hasn't worked anywhere.

Girls and grenades

Rajdhani, 2 April

राजधानी

Ten-year-old Rajukala Rawat's hands are small, tender. And they are accustomed to lobbing lethal grenades at security forces in and around Raralihi village in Jumla district. "I have two with me right now," she says, showing us the bag that she carries round the clock. "I was told to attack the enemy with the grenades whenever and wherever I see them." Isn't she the least bit afraid that the explosives may detonate in her hands? "We are not afraid of death," she says confidently.

Rajukala looks no different from any other child: you could easily imagine her frolicking with her friends and being indulged with candies. But this young girl left home for good and went underground with other Maoist rebels who gave her the *nom de guerre* Comrade Samjhana.

Her friend Sirina Budha is 11, and she has two grenades too. "Right now our roles are confined to throwing grenades at security forces," she says, matter-of-factly. "Once we grow up, we will attack the barracks of the Royal Nepali Army." Renamed Comrade Sirjana, she left school at grade three to join the rebels.

There are at least six other girls like Rajukala and Sirina in Raralihi who also act as spies. They scout the village and keep a sharp lookout for security patrols. They also keep tabs of newcomers in the area. The girls carry arms and ammunition for the rebels, sometimes travelling to areas where full-scale battles are raging between the security forces and the rebels.

"When my friends are ready to die, I cannot stay back. My parents encouraged me to fight against injustice and exploitation," says Samjhana. The girls have a ready

explanation about their involvement. They all say they joined the rebels out of their own free will and were not forced. They say they are fighting global imperialism, but don't seem to know what that means. The Maoist leadership has maintained the movement never uses children.

Expensive Everest

Ang Tsering Sherpa
Kantipur, 4 April

कान्तिपुर

The Khumbu region is teeming with trekkers, but this season has seen a drop in mountaineering expeditions on Sagarmatha. The reason is simple: everyone loves a bargain and expeditions find it cheaper to climb from the Tibet side. Nepal charges a team of seven Everest expeditioners \$70,000 as royalty. Individual climbers are



required to pay \$25,000. Even after paying that sum, they need to pay \$2,500 separately for using the route between the Khumbu Icefall and the second camp on Everest. Add to that the expense of guides, porters, logistics and a liaison officer—who must be provided with everything from food to clothes—and the bill soars.

Everest from the China side

costs a flat fee of \$4,500. That covers not only the permit for the expedition but also includes the expense for Chinese liaison officers and the Himalayan beast of burdens, yaks. Little wonder then, that while Tibet has nearly two dozen expedition teams for Everest this season, Nepal has only nine.

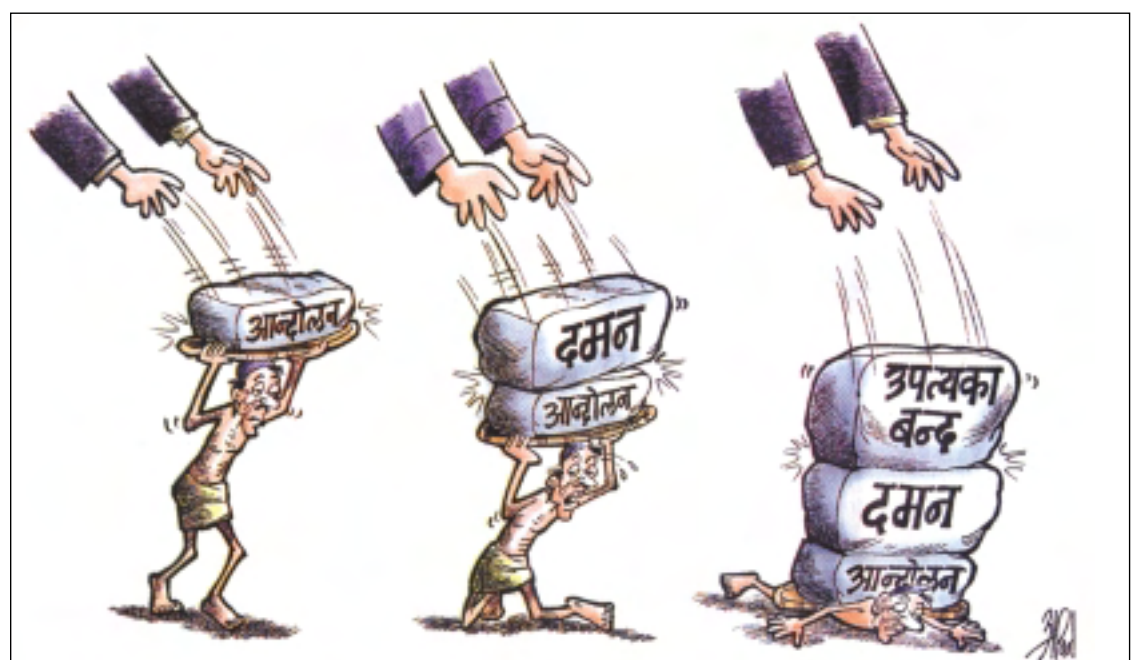
Out of control

Rajdhani, 4 April

राजधानी

Gayatri Adhikari and her friend Gyanu Humagain never imagined they would end up in a hospital after they set out to meet their parents on the afternoon of 3 April, the third day of the anti-regression street demonstration organised by the five parties. The two were caught in a police lathi charge. The blows kept falling despite protestations that they were government employees not involved in the rally. All Gayatri, 48, remembers is walking from Maiti Devi to Putali Sadak. She woke up with a wounded eye at Bir Hospital, surrounded by doctors and her husband. Gyanu was also taken to a hospital by passers by. Bisnu Tamang, another pedestrian, had her nose broken by the police.

Some demonstrators were drinking alcohol while chanting anti-regression slogans, provoking the police by shouting at them and breaking through no-entry street barriers. These instances led the police to attack those in the rallies. Congress leader Jagdish Singh KC himself showed a remarkable lack of restraint by lobbing bricks at the police. But ordinary people in the city, those who have places to go, were caught in the fracas. Shyam Maharjan was obviously in mourning with his white clothes. He was on his way to his mother's funeral on his bike when the demonstrators grabbed his key and



Agitation

Crackdown
Agitation

Valley Banda
Crackdown
Agitation

राजधानी Rajdhani, 8 April

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



"I was quite impressed with the behavior of the Maoist militants towards us,"

Sagarmani Parajuli, Beni's CDO after his release from Maoist captivity in *Rajdhani*, 7 April

A marcher of history



Kantipur, 6 April

कान्तिपुर

Excerpts from an interview with writer, Manjushree Thapa:

● "By the time the demonstration reached Ratna Park after marching through Bagh Bazar, Putali Sadak and Sahid Gate on 4 April, the police had us surrounded. People began to run as soon as the tear gas was fired. The latthi charge began and I was hit on my head. Although I fell down, the police beat me on my back several times. I noticed that the police aimed for the heads of demonstrators. Someone came to help me but even he was nearly beaten. I explained that we did not belong to any political party and we were allowed to go to a hospital."

● "I felt that the present stalemate has to be brought to an end, and this idea deserves support in principle. Moreover, being a litterateur I went to see things for myself. I walked in the rally but I did not chant slogans. It was a peaceful demonstration. Participating in peaceful rallies isn't a crime. I don't believe in the parties completely but the fact remains that they are leading this movement. Among the three forces in the country at present, the parliamentary faction is better than the king and the Maoists that have guns. In these times, we need to support peaceful movement."

● "I don't know if my experience with the movement will help my future work. When I was hit on my head, I realised that this part of my body needs to be saved at any cost. I also discovered how weak and critical people become in such times."

● "I don't want to blame a particular policeman. This is about the government's policy. The unarmed protestors could have simply been chased away. The police attacked them. I did not see the demonstrators pelting stones."

● "The movement is necessary. To make it effective, it needs wider participation. NGOs and civil society still distance themselves from it. While it is true that trust in the parties' leadership has eroded, civil society has benefitted from democracy. Yet they shy away from active, pro-democratic involvement. The people can replace leaders with tarnished images."

● "The royal felicitations look orchestrated, they don't look spontaneous. Perhaps that reality eludes me because I wasn't a part of the pro-king group."

accused him of obstructing the five-party banda. He was already depressed and had little energy to justify his action. Eventually, they let him go.

Meanwhile, many joined in the demonstrations without knowing what it was all about. A group of porters carried flags and shouted slogans—their demand was for the government to reduce the price of salt and oil!

Mothers and widows

Samacharpatra, 4 April

JHAPA – Families bereaved by the insurgency are urging both the state and the Maoists not to feed off revenge and work towards peace. "It's time to come to the table and start the peace talks," was the message that most widows and mothers want spread across the country. "The Maoists should stop their violent politics and the government must avoid thinking that they can control the rebels by force," says one of the victims' parents. "If they go on killing each other, how will we ever have peace?" asks Yamuna Acharya, the widow of prolific writer Deb Kumari Acharya, who was arrested and brutally killed at the Charali army barrack. Her husband was not a Maoist and all he did was to raise his voice against the killings of unarmed civilians. "I don't want others to suffer the way my husband did," adds Yamuna, a student at Kakaribhitta Campus, who saw her husband killed before her eyes. "I obviously want revenge but I try to control it

because it won't benefit anyone."

"People should stop the game of one Nepali killing another Nepali," says Hem Kumari Bhattarai from Budhabare whose two sons were killed by the Maoists. "My sons are no more and our family has been uprooted. I wish I were dead too." The Maoists dragged her son Balbhadra, a staff of National Research Department, out of the Osho Meditation Camp and shot him.

Vicious cycle

Nilambar Acharya in Kantipur, 4 April

कान्तिपुर

What a vicious cycle this is: there can't be elections without normalcy, there can be no normalcy without the king handing over power and the king won't handover power until elections. It is to break this vicious cycle that the parties are agitating. After the king's Pokhara address, I have come to the following conclusions:

1. Elections can't be held under the present circumstances.
2. It can take up to one year to restore things to normal.
3. Voting can't be done in that one year, but preparations for elections can begin.
4. So, the first order of business is to restore things to normal, not to conduct elections.
5. This government isn't capable of returning the situation to normal.
6. To allow the situation to return to normal, all forces must unite.

CDO Parajuli

Annapurna Post, 8 April

अन्नपूर्ण पोस्ट

After the Maoists assault on Beni was over, they called on us to surrender. It was around 9:30 in the morning. I gave myself up after hiding under a bed in the LDO guesthouse. We had to walk the whole day and night carrying heavy loads of grenades from morning to late afternoon along dangerous trails. I was afraid that the grenades would explode if I accidentally bumped into something. DSP Rana Bahadur Gautam, whom I saw only after four days in Tarakhola at Baglung, told me that he had to carry grenades as well. He was in a bad condition, handcuffed and with a bullet wound in his abdomen.

It was a hard trek up and down the steep mountains, through forests and snow-bound passes over 13,000ft. After 13 days, we reached Rolpa's Thawang and it was there we heard the news on the rebels' radio about Kofi Annan's call for peace talks. We were introduced to Pasang, who was exceedingly polite and treated us with respect. The Maoists told us that they would release us through ICRC and treat us as per international human rights norms and the Geneva Convention. We were relieved when the ICRC delegates arrived and told us that we were being released without any conditions and harm from the Maoists. My health has deteriorated and I suffered psychological trauma. But as soon as I am better, I will go back to my post in Myagdi.

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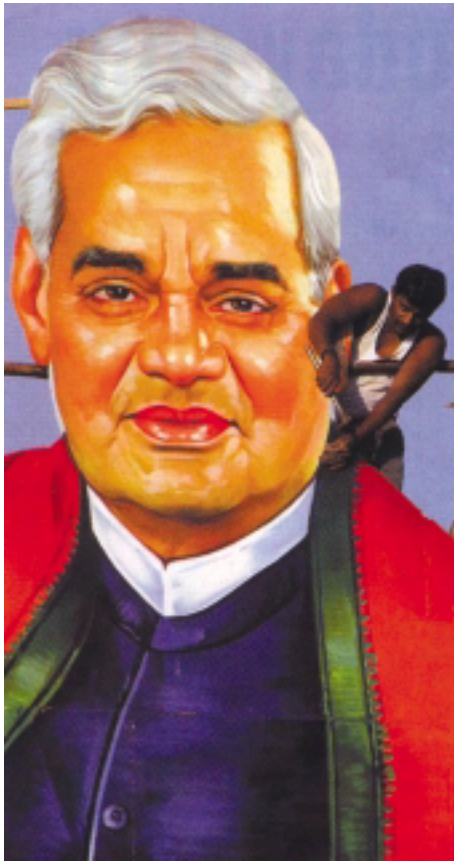
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Sleazy elections

Amid mudslinging, calls for decency in India's poll campaigning

RANJIT DEVRAJ in NEW DELHI

in political advertisements aired in some of India's 83 private television channels. In four-stage parliamentary elections staggered between 20 April and 10 May, the right-wing, pro-Hindu BJP is trying to seek reelection for another five-year term. A series of new state assemblies are also being elected.

For instance, one advertisement tries to get at the right-wing character of Vajpayee's BJP and his ties to groups like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an ultra-nationalist organisation that is often accused of fascism and is known for its military-style drills. On Friday when the apex court banned such advertisements, both Vajpayee's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Gandhi's Congress party welcomed the order. "We have always advocated that the campaign should be based on programs, policies and achievements," said BJP spokesman Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi.

Despite Naqvi's late assertions, BJP's managers have relentlessly steered the campaign in the direction of a personality clash between veteran leader Vajpayee while constantly focusing on Gandhi's Italian birth. But the BJP soon found itself running for cover. Advertisements began to appear showing Vajpayee as a collaborator of the British colonials during India's freedom movement—for which the Congress party can legitimately and almost exclusively take credit.

In fact, it was the BJP-led government that approached the Supreme Court seeking a ban

on mudslinging on private television channels and in some cases by the operators of cable television. On Monday, Vajpayee was compelled to defend himself at a public rally in his constituency of Lucknow in northern Uttar Pradesh state and declare that he had never been an "informer" of the British rulers.

Newspapers have meantime been cautious in describing the advertisements, especially now that the issue is before the high court. The Supreme Court has given the Election Commission until Thursday to frame broad guidelines on what constitutes political mudslinging and has offered to help the statutory body in monitoring the content of private television channels.

Chief Election Commissioner TS Krishna Murthy earlier expressed helplessness in reining in political parties, especially since he is armed solely with an idealistic but toothless 'model code of conduct' that does not carry the force of law. The code is founded on three principles: secular fairness that stops appeals to religion, unfair advantage through the abuse of money and muscle power and personal fairness that avoids personal attacks and invective. But all these principles have been sorely tested in campaigning for the present election.

Earlier, the Supreme Court upheld an entry ban imposed by the local administration of Mangalore city in southern Karnataka on Pravin Togadia, the fiery leader of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad or World Hindu Forum, an affiliate of



The campaign for India's general elections, set to begin later this month, has turned steamy enough for the Supreme Court to warn contesting parties to stay within the limits of decency or risk disqualification. "We want fair play and not slanderous remarks by one party against the other or the leader of party against that of another. This is not democracy," a three-member bench of the Supreme Court led by Chief Justice VN Khare said this week. Hinting sternly at possible disqualification, the court said: "If there is political mudslinging, we will make it an electoral offence."

Monday's was the latest in a series of hearings by the Supreme Court on the issue of 'surrogate advertisements' in which Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and opposition leader Sonia Gandhi were personally targeted

the BJP. "Communal harmony should not be made to suffer and be made dependent upon the will of an individual or a group of individuals, whatever be their religion, be it of the majority or the minority," the court observed in a ruling on 30 March.

The Election Commission is further daunted by the task of having to monitor the content of India's 83 private television channels, which are beamed into homes through some 33,000 cable operators. Audiences are being virtually inundated with content coming in from six national parties and 45 regional ones. Cable operators are already bound by rules making them liable for showing advertisements which "offend morality, decency and religious susceptibility of viewers", but exactly where the line must be drawn has yet to be defined. ● (IPS)

CVICT'S APPEAL TO CIVIC SOCIETY

Centre for Victims of Torture (CVICT), Nepal is extremely concerned with the fake, fabricated, and fictitious news published to offend the centre since a couple of weeks. CVICT published to offend the centre since a couple of weeks. CVICT solicits the attention of all concerned the following verities:

1. Since last 14 years, CVICT has been the only non governmental agency providing service all over the nation to the victims of torture, perpetrated both by the state and the opposition groups.
2. Referring to those officials terminated a few years before on charge of irregularities from CVICT; envious and spiteful people had been trying to defame and denigrate the centre's celebrity earned over many years. Centre claims the allegations are hoax.
3. This centre hereby appeals all those concerned not to rely on the envied allegations made over the sovereignty of centre where the truth is just the otherwise.
4. CVICT further asserts to our service seekers and our well wishers that the centre is operating with equal responsibility and all the official activities are transparent.
5. CVICT draws the attention of civic society to no longer hang on to these falsifications. Moreover, CVICT is prepared to confront those working to demoralize the centre's mission and activities.
6. CVICT further informs its staff to execute their obligations with high morality and requests its service seekers not to be falsified on conjured publications. The centre will continue to extend its ongoing services on a regular basis.

Final assault on polio

A final assault to eradicate polio, an infectious disease that paralyses children, is underway with the goal of halting transmission of the disease by the end of 2004. The Global Polio Eradication Initiative, a massive 16-year effort involving governments, international agencies, humanitarian organisations and the private sector, now has the disease cornered in small regions in Nigeria, India, Pakistan and Egypt. Those countries have committed to complete a series of mass immunisations before the end of this year. Smallpox is the only disease that has been eliminated worldwide. Polio would be the second.

The pursuit of polio eradication has been one of the largest public-health efforts in history, involving 20 million volunteers and costing more than \$3 billion. The number of children paralysed by the disease has fallen dramatically, from more than 350,000 in 1988 to 1,900 in 2003, according to the WHO. The end game for polio has been a long time coming. A cheap, effective oral vaccine (OPV) was developed in 1961 by Albert Sabin. Administered as drops directly into a child's mouth, OPV is ideal for widespread immunisation efforts in the developing world. But no one at that time imagined the enormous logistical challenge of putting those drops into the mouths of 90 percent of the world's children.

And yet the vast majority of the world's children have been immunised. Even in destitute, war-torn Somalia, children have received their vaccinations. Polio is no longer endemic in Somalia, but to prevent importation from elsewhere in Africa another round of vaccinations will begin at the end of March. Community involvement and political will are two key ingredients in the success of the polio eradication effort. The third, not surprisingly, is funding. But despite the program's enormous success and nearness to its final goal, it is once again short of funds. About \$130 million is needed through 2005 to help create a polio-free world.

After that, another \$380 million will be needed to continue some vaccinations, using injectable vaccines rather than the OPV, which in rare cases can produce the disease. Global polio monitoring will also be needed. With luck, by 2008 it might be possible to declare the world polio free. A good deal of credit for the fight against polio ought to go to Rotary International, a worldwide humanitarian organisation of business and professional leaders. Rotary is the second largest donor to the Polio Initiative, contributing more than \$500 million.

And when polio is gone, what disease will be next? Despite the enormous effort involved in vaccinating children, polio is considered one of the easier diseases to eliminate because, among other factors, there are no animal reservoirs for the disease. Malaria, HIV and many others will be more difficult. ● (IPS)



With demand slowly outstripping supply, Asia's energy insecurity is a dilemma for the US



Asia's energy wars?

ANALYSIS by
MIKKAL HERBERG, JOSEPH FERGUSON

Energy is Asia's lifeblood. And there is no greater demonstration of this than this fact: exactly 10 years ago, China became a net oil importer. Now, driven by booming economic growth, China surpassed Japan last year to become the second-largest oil consumer in the world after the US and the fifth largest oil importer. China and India (at number six) have now joined Japan and South Korea (at number two and four, respectively) on the list of the globe's biggest oil importers. The result is a profound and deepening sense of energy insecurity in Asia that will inexorably have significant implications for US interests worldwide.

The US faces intense competition for influence in key energy-exporting areas. China, Japan, South Korea and increasingly India, are frantically boosting economic and diplomatic ties and aggressively buying up stakes in oil and gas fields across the Persian Gulf and Central Asian regions. The Persian Gulf already accounts for two-thirds of Asia's oil imports: over the next decade this dependence is likely to balloon to more than 80 percent.

All these changes will undoubtedly fuel a complex web of diplomatic ties and alliances that are likely to complicate and occasionally

frustrate the US' own energy diplomacy. Oil demands in Asia is expected to rise to 38 million barrels per day (mmbd) from 21 mmbd between 2001 and 2005, while regional oil production is likely to stagnate at around 8 mmbd, according to the US Department of Energy. To put this in perspective, Asia's expected increase in oil imports of 17 mmbd by 2005 will exceed today's oil exports from the entire Opec Persian Gulf region.

More than half of this new import demand will come from China and India alone. Most of these new imports must inevitably come from politically turbulent and unstable regions, and be transported along potentially risky sea-lanes and complex pipeline routes. At the same time, oil demand in the US and Western Europe is expected to grow by more than 30 percent. And because of declining production, oil imports will rise by 18 mmbd in North America and Europe. Although the US will rely far less on the Persian Gulf as a share of its imports than Asia or Europe, it's oil import dependence will continue to rise, giving the US an even larger stake in the security of world oil flows.

The resulting quest for energy security is already awakening

tensions among Asia's major players. A struggle between China and Japan over the route of a Russian oil pipeline is a case in point. After China had spent several years on an agreement with Russia to build a 600,000 barrel-per-day oil pipeline running 2,400km from the Angarsk region in Eastern Siberia to North-eastern China, Japan stepped in the 11th hour to offer \$7.5 billion in financial backing to expand and re-route the pipeline to the Pacific coast, where Japan would have greater access.

A key Pentagon concern is the risk of a growing arms-for-oil trade developing between Asia and the Persian Gulf, particularly in missile exports. Another area of potential long-run concern for the Pentagon is that as a larger share of Asia's oil and gas requirements move by tanker from the Persian Gulf, the major Asian powers are likely to focus on gaining greater control over the Sea Lanes of Communication, or SLOC, in the Indian Ocean and the South and East China Seas. ● (© AWS)

Mikkal Herberg is director of the Asia-Pacific Energy of the Graduate School of International Relations and Pacific Studies at UCSD. Joseph Ferguson is director of Northwest Asia studies at The National Bureau of Asian Research in Seattle.

Knock on wood

The European Union and its member states are not doing enough to combat illegal logging, says the report 'Government Barometer' of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). It reveals that the majority of the 15 EU member states are failing to take action against illegal logging. WWF says illegal logging will become a "very serious internal market issue" when 10 accession countries (Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia) join the bloc in May, bringing 24 million hectares of forests. It points out that half of the EU's wood products come from these countries. Europe's imports of illegally sourced timber are believed to be worth \$1.4 billion a year.

The European Commission, the EU executive, launched the Action Plan for Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) in May last year. The Commission said the plan would help combat illegal logging by "helping to improve law enforcement and governance in wood-producing countries and by working to stop the trade in illegally harvested wood." But the WWF report shows that the 12 EU countries that were rated in the study—Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK—have so far failed to meet the criteria needed to tackle this problem.

The WWF is calling on the European Commission to develop "concrete proposals" to combat illegal logging. It says it will continue to monitor government commitments, attitudes, and actions on illegal logging over the coming months. It will update its report in September, taking into account the record of the new accession countries. (IPS)

Earth unfriendly

The hole in the ozone layer risks looming larger after the world community agreed last week to permit the United States and 10 other northern countries to continue using a pesticide that was supposed to be off-limits from 2005. The meeting was called after nations failed to agree last year on what exemptions should be granted to the northern nations for using the pesticide methyl bromide.

Delegates decided to grant the northern states a one-year exemption, but not to commit to amounts for the following years. They will now be allowed to use an amount equal to more than 50 percent of all the methyl bromide consumed by 34 developed nations in 2001 and nearly three-quarters of that used by developing nations the same year. The push for exemption was led by the United States, whose request accounted for two-thirds of the total.

Methyl bromide is classed as an ozone-depleting substance because it damages the stratospheric layer that protects people, plants and animals from solar radiation, which can produce skin cancer and eye cataracts. Farmers use it to kill pests on strawberries, tomatoes, cut flowers and many other crops. It is also used in meat and vegetable processing.

The ozone debates took place during the first extraordinary meeting of countries that signed on to the 1987 Montreal Protocol. The Protocol added teeth to the 1985 Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer that covers some 100 chemicals, including chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). According to the Protocol, developing nations had to freeze their use of methyl bromide in 2002, and then reduce it by 20 percent by 2005 and 100 percent by 2015. Developed countries previously agreed to cut methyl bromide by 25 percent by 1999 (compared to 1991 levels), 50 percent by 2001, 70 percent by 2003 and 100 percent by 2005. (IPS)

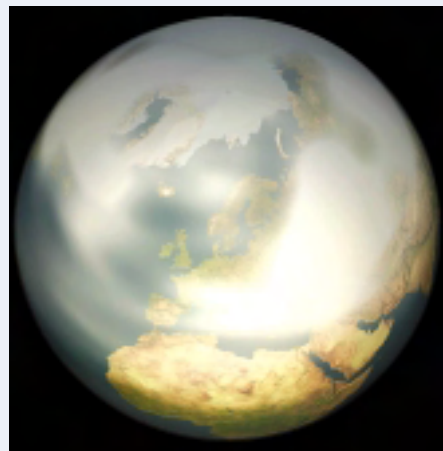


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Kodak EXPRESS
FOR THE BEST

"I did not feel the pain, and kept firing..."



This week we begin the recollections of Lachhuran Gurung, another Gurkha soldier who was awarded a Victoria Cross for his bravery in the Burma front. In this first installment Lachhuran recalls how he was hit by a bomb and rescued. These oral testimonies of retired Gurkhas are extracted from *Lahurey ka Katha* by Dev Bahadur Thapa, published by Himal Books and translated from Nepali exclusively for *Nepali Times* in this space every week.

I cannot say exactly which year I was born. We do not count age in terms of years, we keep track according to one's zodiac. Estimating my age became all the more difficult as I lost my mother early. My eldest sister-in-law told me that I was born in the month of April. We are now in 2000. So, I should be around 83 years old.

I must have enlisted when I was 22-23. From our village, the recruiter took us to Kunaghat where we stayed another 15 days. From there we went to Comilla (in present-day Bangladesh) where we stayed for some time before being taken to upper and then central Burma because war was in the offing.

We arrived in Burma by plane and then had to walk. There were no motor vehicles. In central Burma we joined our regiment. The commanding officer, in consultation with the subedar major, regrouped the force. The newly arrived contingent numbered 35 and the regiment was divided into four companies. I was placed in the fourth regiment and 9th platoon. The enemy force was atop the hill. Our A and B companies were at the bottom and C company was above those two. We had taken our positions surrounding the headquarters.

We had only 90,000

personnel in Burma, nobody knows how many of them were killed. When there is non-stop firing from the enemy side, the soldiers lie down. When the order "Off" is given, we had to get up and rush forward. We could not turn back and run. If we did, our own troops would open fire on the fleeing soldiers. I had taken the position on the hillock above and B company were position below. If shots were fired from a particular position, everyone fired in that direction. In case of the slightest mistake one could be hit by friendly fire. The enemy hid and fired at us, sometimes from trees.

On the 12 May I was seriously wounded by a bomb in Tardu, central Burma. I had no idea where it came from. It hit a tree behind me and when it exploded, shrapnel flew everywhere. I lost the sight in one eye and had a few teeth knocked out. My right hand was hanging to the rest of my arm by a small piece of flesh. I only realised the seriousness of my injuries when the dressing was removed at Comilla. I did not feel any pain immediately after I was hit and kept firing with my left hand. There was a stock of bullets, so I put the butt of the rifle on my shoulder and kept on firing. I assume it was 3 to 5 rounds. Anyway, I fulfilled the oath I had

taken.

Later, I could not walk a single step. I felt dizzy, like I was under the influence of alcohol. At my third attempt I could, with difficulty, raise my head. The firing stopped for a short while. There was no sense in continuing firing as the enemy had stopped shooting. Then I got up from the bunker and jumped towards the sergeant and the corporal who were behind me. They ordered me to go back to headquarters but I did not heed their advice. Orders were issued to collect all the bandages available and my wound was bandaged and a yellow ointment applied to the bullet wound. The wound did not heal with medicine and doctors had to amputate me three times. That is why my hand is shorter. Out of 12 others who were wounded, four died. They were from other units. No one from our unit was killed.

The day I was hurt, for a full day and night I remained there as because we were surrounded by the enemy. Only on the third day was the cordon broken and there was quiet. Those who were fit went to fight. The colonel was with me and said, "You are badly hurt so you better go back," and he put me on a stretcher. Four attendants had been told to carry me. It is not easy to walk up the hill as I had to be carried on stretcher through a difficult route.

They put me inside the aircraft and shut the door. I braced myself for a bumpy ride as the engine started. But the ride was incredibly smooth, I raised my head and looked out of the window only to see the land far below. I was on a plane. It was a tiny plane they used for mail and it accommodated only one person besides the pilot. The helicopters in use these days are far more spacious. I was in a state of delirium. Since I had been hit, I had nothing but water. There was little food. I went without food for three days, like everybody else. We put a lot of water in some rice and had gruel. (To be continued next week)

Stressful aid

Punishing the country with defective structure

Foreign aid to Nepal has grown by leaps and bounds in the last 50 years. Today, it also includes military hardware and software to combat the Maoist insurgency. But despite donor input in money and advice, and the restoration of multiparty democracy, foreign aid has been unable to alter the course of events, and now finds itself in the spotlight.

The research work, *Aid Under Stress* authored by independent Nepali and Finnish scholars of Inter-Disciplinary Analysts group in

BOOK
Bihari K Shrestha



Kathmandu and the Institute of Development Studies, University of Helsinki, takes two examples of Finnish aid in two phases of the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation

Project (RWSSP) and the abortive Bara Forestry Management Plan to find out what went wrong.

The 1996 Bara forestry plan was conceived as "a pilot project to examine the viability of private commercial management" of tarai forests in a joint venture between a Finnish multinational and Nepali business houses, and was inspired by the donor's conviction that "only such a Finnish model could create the necessary discipline in forest exploitation".

But the proposal met with overwhelming opposition from all quarters: the forest-related national and international civil society, local users and forest officials. A Finnida consultant later concluded that the plan did not "adequately address the concern of the local community as stakeholders". It aborted the four-year effort that led to the withdrawal of Finnish aid to forestry altogether.

The RWSSP aimed at "full coverage of Lumbini Zone" at the end of Third Phase by mid-2003, providing water to 500,000 people through 68 gravity schemes and 27 shallow tubewells and sanitation to about 18,000 at the end of Phase Two. It is, however, a familiar story: expatriate domination through special outfits such as Project Support Units (PSU), the donor choosing the Ministry of Local Development (MLD) as partner for Phase II in place of the Department of Water Supply and Sewerage on grounds of "corruption", donor ability to extract endorsement from the chronically aid-dependent government despite DWSS and MLD reservations over the bloated 'technical assistance' cost (46 percent of total Finnish aid for Phase II), etc.

The researchers studied only one gravity scheme and one tubewell to assess project impact and, based on "user involvement", declaring it to be "a major success story". Since the report noted "low caste" people being deprived in one study site, it should have examined the project performance for such basic issues as equity, universal coverage in an area of 2.5 million people and post-construction institutional arrangements for sustainability, including its tardy record in sanitation. The report mentioned national NGOs doing a more frugal job in such projects, but failed to go into why Finnida did not opt for them.

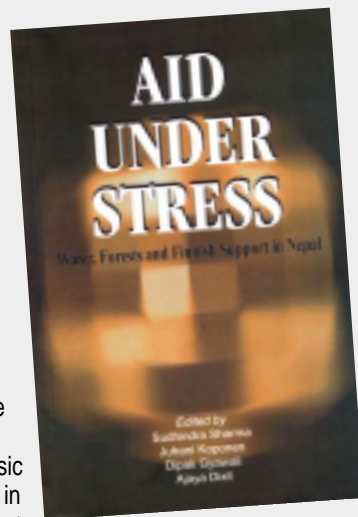
The report has characterised development cooperation as an "encounter between two grand cultures, the transparent and rationalistic Western and the hierarchical, traditionalist and corrupt one represented by the Nepalis". But the statement, besides being misleading, also smacks of ethnic arrogance to the extent that it comes from the Finnish author. Corruption itself grew in Nepal in direct proportion to the growth in foreign aid, even as the donor officials generally behaved like ostriches. The two projects with all their limitations certainly cannot be seen as the product of a rational faculty. While transparency makes people responsive, the RWSSP Phase II design with its contested "technical assistance" costs was far from being so.

In contrast, due to exclusive devolution of authority to the stakeholders, the basic elements of good governance namely, participation, transparency and accountability, have been assured in Nepal's community forestry. The approach achieved a robust comeback of Nepal's forest wealth in less than a decade and a half. It is rationalism at work through and through. Contrary to the claim in the book of it being of Finnish origin, user management of forests itself was legally provided in February 1988 as a result of World Bank using it as a conditionality for Structural Adjustment Loan on the advice of a Nepali professional.

Foreign aid in Nepal suffers from defective structure. It is executed mostly by donors, most of whom lack familiarity with Nepal's extensive development experience. And it is exposed to misuse by corrupt politicians to buy votes in elections. No donor honestly advocates empowerment of stakeholders at the grassroots. So, if the country goes rapidly downhill despite foreign aid, it is only to be expected. ●

Bihari Krishna Shrestha is an anthropologist who once served in the National Planning Commission.

Aid Under Stress
Water, Forests and Finnish support in Nepal
Edited by: Sudhendra Sharma, Juhani Koponen, Dipak Gyawali, Ajaya Dixit
Himal Books



BIGBEN



Bright colours are not recommended in the jungle.

Give way to the ladies

Golf is no longer just for gentlemen in Nepal

'A gentleman's game' is what golf has long been known as, with the word 'gentleman' referring to integrity and the following of written and unwritten rules of etiquette during play.

Though traditionally, as in most sports, it was a men's game, today it is very much a ladies sport too.

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



Millions of women play the sport worldwide, recreationally, as competitive amateurs and on

professional golf tours where the prize money is quite substantial.

A young phenomenon who just turned fourteen is Michelle Wie, who can drive the ball as far as the men do, over 300 yards, and who shot a 64 at the age of 10! She showed her courage and prowess recently by competing with the big boys at the Sony Open, a men's USPGA tour event. She is expected to give women's golf that similar new dimension that Tiger Woods brought to men's golf.

In Nepal, until just a few years ago, we hardly saw any Nepali women playing golf. Most women golfers were wives of expatriates and diplomats. Recently however this has begun to change, with many more females out on the course enjoying the game both on weekdays and weekends, especially amongst the wives of ex-British Gurkha officers.



Eu Hazur Thapa (right) winning a prize at the New Year's Open.

To encourage more ladies to take up the game, Royal Nepal Golf Club offers 50 percent discount for ladies to join the club as temporary members, and Gokarna Forest Golf Resort offers a family membership, where if one person is a golfing member of the club, the spouse automatically becomes a member as well.

Shastika Shrestha, handicap 20, is one of Nepal's top lady golfers, and she is the lady captain of RNGC. Now retired after serving for 24 years at the Gorkhapatra Samstan, Shrestha says, "When I started the game three years ago, I was very shy as there were very few ladies golfers. Frankly, I just wanted my husband to start playing this game because he used to spend so much time playing cards. The time came that I was up to my neck with this, and I would push him and go along to the golf course where I loved the environment. I found an incredible social life, which attracted me to this wonderful sport that I enjoy so much today, and will continue enjoying it as long as I can still swing a golf club."

When asked how to increase the number of Nepali women playing the game, Shrestha said it needs to start from the men. They should encourage their wives to take up the game, and then obviously, when mothers play it becomes a family sport and youngsters take up the game. She said it would not be a bad idea to promote golf by offering free golf lessons and providing easier access to make it more accessible so that its popularity would automatically increase.

Eu Hazur Thapa, the wife of KNS Thapa, a retired general and ardent golfer, says, "My husband has been playing golf for the last 30 years. He tried to motivate me all along but I was only convinced when he was just about to retire in 1996." She regrets not having started earlier, and recalls those boring days when her husband was out enjoying lovely rounds of golf around the globe during his service with the UN. Her early wins in the ladies categories of tournaments in Nepal motivated her to play more. She enjoys the sport and says, "Golf has been both meditation and medication for me." Thapa always had an interest in sports and now enjoys golf, loves the environment and the social life at the golf club. She feels it is possible to produce top women golfers from Nepal with integrated support from all sides.

I'm all with her, so why don't you ladies take a tee break?

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

ZZ

Zinedine Zidane, the world's best player tells Andrew Hussey of his pride in his Algerian heritage, his rage to be the best and reveals why his talent can still be engulfed by flashes of violence



La Castellane, a council estate in the northern suburbs of Marseille, is officially known in French as a *quartier difficile*, a sensitive zone. Most of the population is first- and second-generation immigrants from Algeria, Morocco, sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean. Almost everybody who lives here refuses point-blank to identify themselves as French.

This is the hometown of Zinedine Zidane, the Real Madrid playmaker who, as he approaches his professional peak at the age of 32, is probably the most complete and gifted footballer of his generation.

Aimé Jacquet, the French coach whose victory in the 1998 World Cup was hammered home with two goals from Zidane in the final, claims to have recognised immediately that Zidane was a phenomenon. "His control is precise and discreet. He can make the ball do whatever he wants. But it is his drive that takes him forward. He is 100 per cent football," he told me.

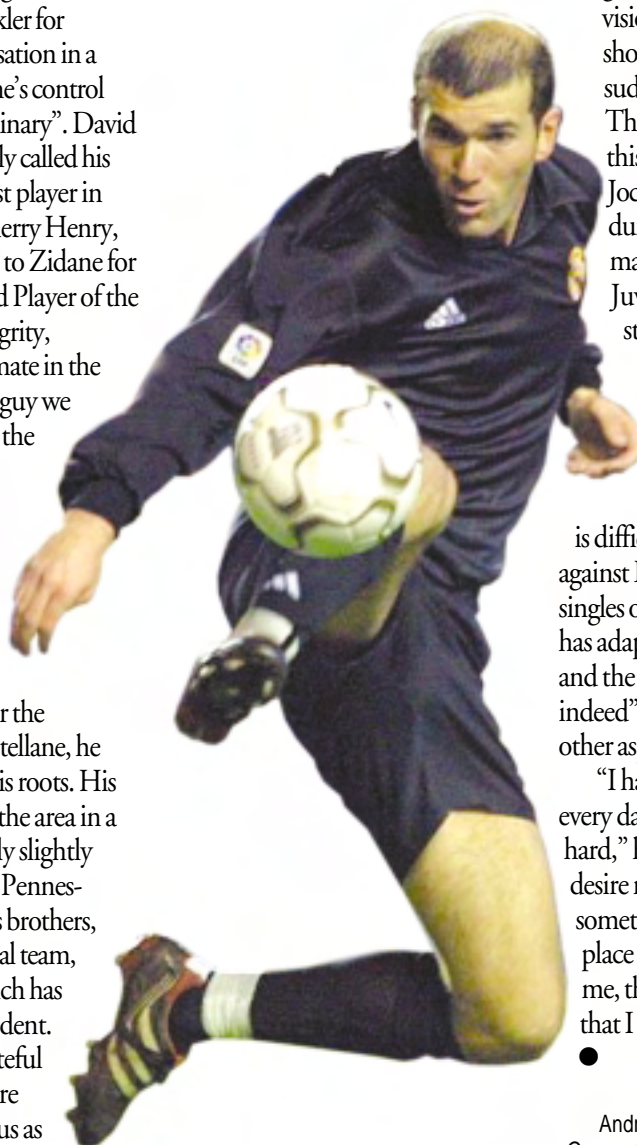
Fellow players, too, admire his consistency and strength. Luis Figo, a notorious stickler for efficiency and organisation in a team, describes Zidane's control and pace as "extraordinary". David Beckham unabashedly called his colleague "the greatest player in the world". Even Thierry Henry, who recently lost out to Zidane for the title of Fifa World Player of the Year, admires his integrity, describing his team-mate in the France squad as "the guy we can always count on, the one who really takes control".

In the past 10 years, Zidane has claimed every top honour that the game has to offer. Most importantly, for the inhabitants of La Castellane, he has never forgotten his roots. His parents still live near the area in a large house in the only slightly posher suburb of Les Pennes-Mirabeau. One of his brothers, Farid, coaches the local team, Nouvelle Vague, which has Zidane as its life president. The kids here are grateful to him, even if they are indifferent to his status as a French national icon.

In the rest of France, Zidane, nicknamed 'Zizou' by the public, is admired for his decency as well as his footballing skills. His public priorities are football, family and friends. His family are Algerian immigrants, so-called *beurs* (French slang for Arabs), and he describes himself as "a non-practising Muslim". "To be recognised by a whole country is incredible," Zidane says. "Before it was hard to talk about certain things, especially, if like me, you came from a difficult area or from an immigrant background. But now it tells you how France has changed and is changing. It's a message to everybody—politicians, the kids I grew up with, ordinary French people—about what can be done."

When I asked him where he felt most at home, he was guarded. "I am first of all from La Castellane and Marseille," he began, hesitantly. "I love Madrid. But I am proud of where I come from and never forget the people I grew up with. Wherever I go, La Castellane is where I want to go back to."

Zidane talks about his father



with respect and admiration. "I'm very inspired by him," he tells me. "It was my father who taught us that an immigrant must work twice as hard as anybody else, that he must never give up." He talks about his own young family with pride. He married Véronique, who is of French-Spanish extraction, in 1992. They now have three boys, each with an Italian name. "They are all good footballers," he says. "I would be happy for them to go into the game. But they must work hard first. That is what I have learnt."

As we chat about Algeria, Marseille, music and family, the atmosphere becomes more relaxed. "I was lucky to come from a difficult area," he says. "It teaches you not just about football but also life. There were lots of kids from different races and poor families. People had to struggle to get through the day. Music was important. Football was the easy part."

One of the theories about Zidane as a player is that he is driven by an inner rage. His football is elegant and masterful, charged with technique and vision. He still erupts into shocking violence that is as sudden as it is inexplicable. The most famous examples of this include head butting Jochen Kintz of Hamburg during a Champions League match when he was at Juventus in 2000 and his stomping on the hapless Faoud Amin of Saudi Arabia during the 1998 World Cup finals.

He is excited about Euro 2004, although he is diffident about the game against England on 13 June. He singles out Beckham for praise ("he has adapted well to the life here and the game: he is very good indeed") but is less interested in other aspects of the English game.

"I have a need to play intensely every day, to fight every match hard," he told me. "And this desire never to stop fighting is something else I learnt in the place where I grew up. And, for me, the most important thing is that I still know who I am."

● (© The Observer)

Andrew Hussey is the author of *The Game of War: The Life and death of Guy Debord*.

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

Easter Bunny Holidays
...in Thamel
...in Washington D.C.

KE GARNE? WHATEVER.
Be a Herojig - watch your wallet.
"Don't take life too seriously - You'll never get out alive."
-- Bugs Bunny, 1967

Next Change: Herojig day dreams of landmines and the National Easter Egg Hunt on the White House lawn.

To see all the Adventures of Herojig - White Man in Nepal, go to www.extreme-nepal.com

(f) 2004 by jigme gaton - permission to laugh, then laminate.

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Mixed Media Exhibition** by Pilaiporn June Pethrith Lisborg till 10 April at Siddhartha Art Gallery. 4218048
- ❖ **Glimpses of Kathmandu City** Paintings by Uma Shanker Shah, until 12 April at Park Gallery, Lazimpat. 4419353
- ❖ **Genius at work** Paintings by senior Nepali artists till 23 April at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. 4428694
- ❖ **Still Life/Street Life** Photographs by Wayne Amtzis 15 April till 3 May, poetry reading 5:30 PM on 15 April at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. 4218048.

EVENTS

- ❖ **New Year Cultural Program** at Chandrodaya Shelter (Kalanki), 12.30 PM on 15 April. 4270466, 981071813
- ❖ **Week of Art, Music and Drama** on Gallery Nine's first anniversary, 9-14 April, in cooperation with Sutra. Details: Sujan Chitrakar, Sutra - 981063993, Kanchan Gurung, Gallery Nine - 4428694
- ❖ **The Power of Nisha** along with DJ Tangree in aid of School Adoption Project. Couples: Rs 4,500. 12 April at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu.

MUSIC

- ❖ **Flautist Manose** accompanied Navaraj Gurung on Tabla live at the Patan Museum at 6PM on 9 April. Tickets: Rs 350. Contact Mangal: 4256411
- ❖ **Not Just the Jazz Bar** presents Chris Masand and The Modern Jazz Live Band. Friday and Saturday night. Shangri-la Hotel, Lazimpat, 4412999
- ❖ **Abhaya & The Steam Injuns** at Dwarika's every Friday from 7PM onwards. 4479488

FOOD

- ❖ **Splash Spring BBQ** 6PM every Wednesday and Friday. Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Executive Lunch** Monday - Friday at Toran Restaurant, Dwarika's. 4479488
- ❖ **Sunny Side Up** Weekend BBQ lunch for Rs 650 per person at the Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu. 4273999
- ❖ **Dinner at Café U** every Friday and Saturday. Opp British School, Patan. 5523263
- ❖ **Roadhouse Cafe** for woodfired pizzas. Opp St Mary's School, Pulchowk. 5521755
- ❖ **Traditional Newari Thali** at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4431632



GETAWAYS

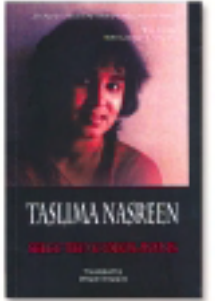
- ❖ **Pure relaxation** at Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge. 01 4361500
- ❖ **Luxury package** for Shivapuri Cottage, Dadagaon. Highland Travel & Tours. 4253352
- ❖ **Golf** in the Valley's last pristine forest at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa. 4451212

BOOKWORM

Selected Columns Taslima Nasreen
Sristhi Publishers, 2004
Rs 400

Taslima Nasreen's simple and unadorned prose, translated from the original Bangla by Debjani Sengupta, places Nasreen firmly in the new wave of South Asian feminist writers. She presents a candid account of her childhood experiences and the years of struggle it has taken to become a spokesperson for all the oppressed and exploited women in her country. A must-read for everyone interested in feminist theory and politics, society and questions of justice and equality.

Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 4227711, mandala@ccsl.com.np



Ajay Devgan, Vivek Oberoi, Lara Dutt, Amrita Rao and Aftab star in the Indra Kumar's romantic comedy about extra-marital affairs. Marriages are supposedly made in heaven but all too often become hell on earth. *Masti* is a story of Meet, Amar and Prem who decide to spice up their lives. Only they intend to do it by having as many affairs as possible in a month and then exchanging notes—all in the name of fun, hence the name of the movie. Smacks of sexism and gender stereotypes? We'll just have to see if *Masti* redeems itself with a twist in the tale.

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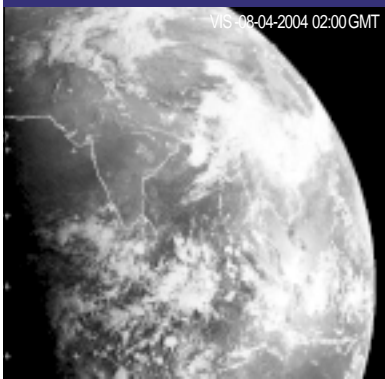
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NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



This satellite image taken on Thursday morning shows us a rare northeasterly front that originated in the East China Sea with one of its tentacles swirling into eastern Nepal. Three fronts, the middle atmospheric westerly jet, upper atmospheric easterly and locally generated updrafts in the mountains, are combining to give us the present weather patterns. The northeasterly will gradually be eased out by the prevalent westerly front to allow pre-monsoon moisture to make inroads from the Bay and the Arabian Sea. Expect calm and clear mornings with afternoon storms in places.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri 28-14	Sat 27-13	Sun 29-12	Mon 30-13	Tue 29-14
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KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

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What you burn is what you breathe.

Kathmandu's air quality data shows that the five agitating political parties and their sister organisations were very successful in shutting down Kathmandu Valley last week. As all vehicles (the main source of air pollution in Kathmandu) were forced off the road, PM10 (particles that are small enough to enter the human body) concentration in the air plummeted by more than 50 percent. Now, if only the protestors could refrain from burning tires, which release large amounts of toxic smoke, they could be thanked for cleaning up the air we breathe. The days before the bandas Kathmandu's air was heavy with pollutants as the PM10 concentration was three to four times higher than national standards (120 micrograms per cubic meter) along busy roads. Putali Sadak's air quality was above the "hazardous" mark on Monday and Tuesday.

Good	<60	343	337	265	200	281	140
Ok	61 to 120						
Unhealthy	121 to 350						
Harmful	351 to 425						
Hazardous	>425						

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बिहान: ६:४५, ७:४५, ८:४५, ९:४५
दिउँसो: २:४५, ४:४५
बेलुका: ५:४५, ६:४५, ८:४५

सम्पूर्ण सामग्री सहित रेडियो सगरमाथा दिनभरिनै तपाईंको सेवामा
(बिहान ५ बजेदेखि राती ११:०० बजेसम्म)

HAPPENINGS



KIRAN PANDAY

FREE: ICRC delegates with 37 prisoners including CDO Sagar Mani Parajuli and DSP Rana Bahadur Gautam (right) at Kathmandu after arrival from Rolpa by helicopter on Tuesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

STREET ANGER: Pro-democracy protesters manhandle a suspected 'Mandale' infiltrator at New Road during Saturday's banda called by the political parties.



KIRAN PANDAY

NO TAXI: Angered that the public was disregarding the three-day banda, two Maoists got off this taxi and blew it up at Bangemudha on Wednesday afternoon.



KIRAN PANDAY

BHOTO DEKHAUNE: The National Forum of Photojournalists launches bright new vests for photojournalists so they can be easily identified during street protests.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

WITH THE TIMES: Girija Koirala and Madhab Nepal share a copy of Nepali Times during a sit-in at Ratna Park on Friday.

Strange customs declaration form

Let's face it, flying has lost its aura of romance and adventure. Gone are the days when, as children, we climbed up the slanted cabin of a Royal Nepal Airlines DC-3 at Simra and the smell of leaky barf bags assailed our nostrils prompting us to throw up even before we took off. The

UNDER MY HAT Kunda Dixit



excitement! The grandeur of air travel in the old days! We can look back with nostalgia and nausea to that lost era of aviation when flying meant stuffing cotton wool into your ear canal and putting your digestive canal into reverse gear.

These days, flights into Kathmandu are so boring that the cabin crew tries to keep passengers from staging an in-flight mutiny by keeping them busy with paperwork. Forms are distributed as soon as the aircraft takes off for Kathmandu so passengers have ample time to fill out His Majesty's Government Strange Customs Declaration Form, the Department of Irritation's Disembarkation Card, and Appendicitis-1 Related to Rule 4 (3), 5 (2) & 6 (5) Visa Form For Entry.

To assist passengers unfamiliar with these entry formalities, we offer below a sneak preview of past question papers so prospective visitors to Nepal have a headstart in their in-flight entry examination. Be warned, only those who pass this test will be allowed to enter Nepal.

Family Name: Given Name:
 Not-given Name: Nom de Guerre:
 Date of Birth (if applicable):
 Nationality at Birth:
 Nationality in Previous Incarnation:
 Permanent Address:
 Semi-permanent address:
 Underground Address:
 Royal Address:
 Occupation (tick one box only):

- Doctor
- Anti-Torture Expert
- Currently unoccupied
- Terrorist
- Engineer
- Part-Time NRN
- Tourist
- Charles Sobhraj

Sex: (tickle only one)
 No, thank you Yes, please

Race:
 Human Inhuman Marathon

Passport No.:
 Fake Passport No.:
 Place of Birth:
 Place of Expiry:

Object of Journey (encircle one):

Official/Semi-official/Trekking/Expedition/Business/Pleasure/Meditation/ Mediation/Convention/Rafting/Deported Asylum Seeker/Extradited Comrade

Next port of call: Mombasa Rangoon Batavia

Passengers can use the Green Channel if they are carrying the following items in the specified quantity:

Passengers having gold or gold ornaments not more than 50gm and silver or silver ornaments not more than 500gm, two sacks of mobile phones, used linen, one camera, one tricycle, four perambulators, one binocular, one telescope, one non-biodegradable barf bag, 50 cigars, 250gm of chewing tobacco, fresh fruits.

Passengers have to use the Red Channel if they have the following items:

More than two sacks of mobile phones, more than 15 tricycles, more than a reasonable number of perambulators, telescopes in excess of one for everyday use, dirty linen, skeletons in the closet, rotten fruits.

Remember: Green Channel is not a Green Light. Walking through the Green Channel with Dutiable Items may lead to confiscation of goods, fine, penalty, prosecution, a medal and an ambassadorship. However, running through the Green Channel is allowed, just don't get caught.

Foreign Currency: Detection of undeclared foreign currency is legally punishable and will result in the confiscation of the said amount, and you will rot in jail unless you pay us a baksheesh equivalent to the confiscated amount. Although, how you are going to do that if you are rotting in jail is beyond us, but we'll figure out a way.

Welcome to Nepal, and enjoy your perambulations.

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Green, and bear it

After interviewing Bhushan Tuladhar, a visitor can't help being infected by this environmentalist's can-do optimism.

"It is a management problem, and if we can get the politics out of it, both are issues that can be solved easily," says Bhushan, who is now working on building grassroots pressure from the Valley's communities for cleaner air and litter-free streets.

After completing his masters in environmental engineering in the US, Bhushan had his pick of international jobs. But he came home to his native Kathmandu, where Mayor Keshab Shapit made him an offer he couldn't refuse: help setting up and heading Kathmandu municipality's environment department. He now has an advisory role as a member of the City Planning Commission, and heads the lobby group, Clean Energy Nepal.

Bhushan's experience in urban environment management and recycling means he is often invited to train experts from other developing countries, like at a recent



MIN BAJRACHARYA

seminar in Sweden. "We have this notion nothing happens in Nepal, but there are a lot of success stories we can share with other developing countries," he says.

Bhushan is convinced Kathmandu's problems have very simple and economic solutions that take very little time and can be

done right at home. Kathmandu's garbage is still predominantly biodegradable organic waste that can be turned into valuable fertiliser. Traditionally, Kathmandu Valley's farmers have always practiced recycling organic waste. "We used to have three basic concepts of recycling already in place: waste has value, it must be recycled and it's up to individuals to do it. We must revive this tradition," says Bhushan showing us the dry, odourless fertiliser that comes out of the compost pile in his home.

It helps that Bhushan is someone who practices what he preaches. He pedals to work in his Taiwanese mountain bike, at his office he has a conference table propped up by used truck tires rescued from the municipal dump and at home he makes his own fertiliser compost on his terrace roof from kitchen scrap. He says: "If I don't do it myself, I have no right telling other people that they should care about the environment." ● (Sraddha Basnyat)

NEPAL
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YEARBOOK 2004

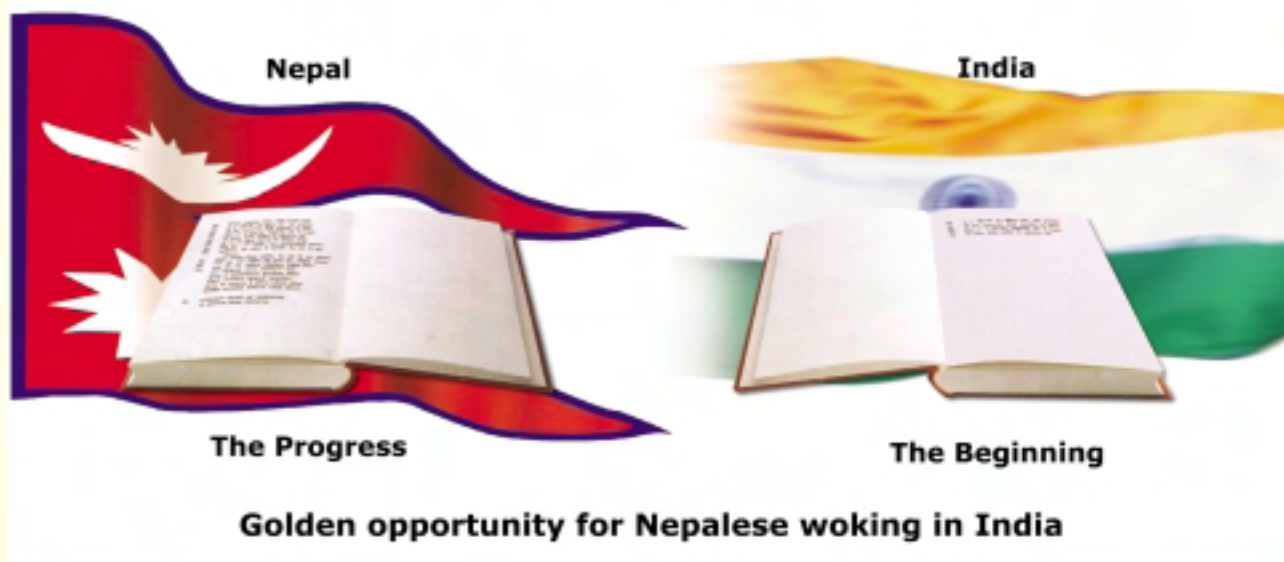
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Strangled Democratic Exercise

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