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Spectator sport

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



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Times nepalinfo.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 134

Q. Does the anti-regression agitation by the parties have popular support?

Total votes: 1,558

Weekly Internet Poll # 135. To vote go to: www.nepalinfo.com

Q. Is it ethical for journalists to join the anti-king agitation on the streets?

Divided donors

It's not just Nepalis who are not united

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

A festering rift among Nepal's main donors threatens to become an open split over whether or not next week's Nepal Development Forum (NDF) should go ahead as scheduled.

While multilaterals like the World Bank and ADB are said to favour the present schedule for the meeting, bilaterals led by the Norwegians and Danes have adopted a different position.

In a statement on Wednesday, a group of 11 donors said the meeting could be delayed if the parties meet the king on a common prime ministerial candidate by Friday. "If this were to happen, we would prefer to postpone the NDF pending the formation of the representative government," the

statement said. The donors didn't say whether they would proceed with the meeting if such a move wasn't forthcoming.

Jorg Frieden, director of Swiss Development Cooperation is in favour of postponement: "Given developments in the country in the last few weeks, the delay will also give us an opportunity to prepare in a better way for the meeting."

Norwegian Ambassador Ingrid Ofstad said bilateral donors preferred the postponement if there is a move for a representative government. "But a decision has to be taken at the earliest because our officials will begin to arrive in Kathmandu after the weekend," she added.

The UN was among donors that discussed the conditional postponement of the meet. "The group has put out a statement," said

UN resident representative Matthew Kahane. "We have nothing more to say."

While it looks like the bilaterals are using their aid leverage to get the palace and parties to patch up, multilateral agencies are maintaining a guarded silence. "The meeting is being organised by the government," said World Bank's Rajib Upadhyaya. "Nepal is a shareholder of the bank, therefore we will have to follow the government's decision."

European donors have expressed concern over the derailment of the democratic process and the futility of aid in a conflict situation. Sources said the 11 includes Norway, Denmark, Finland, Canada, Britain, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, France, Canada and the EC.

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The government is determined to go ahead with the meeting. Finance Minister Prakash Chandra Lohani dismissed a donor boycott: "There is no need to politicise this meeting."

With their call for postponement, the parties have put the donors in a spot. More so, because the government is organising the meeting this time. "Technically, it is difficult for the donors to do what we want," admitted former Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat, "but the government will have to face the political issues donors will raise." ●

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Donors as kingmakers

They could broker a truce between the palace and the parties

MAYDAY, MAYDAY

Given the situation the country is in, it is perhaps fitting that the Nepal Development Forum should be held during the week that the country's political crisis is coming to a head. Economic development can only happen through true decentralisation and inclusive democratic governance. It is therefore natural that Nepal's donor consortium wants to use aid as a leverage for a return to democratic norms.

Our two giant neighbours and America have a strategic interest in Nepal, but it is the Europeans and the multilaterals who take the lead in influencing development policy. Before he left, US ambassador Michael Malinowski dared the Europeans to "put their money where their mouth is". They seem to have taken his advice, but not in the way he meant it—some of them want to use the NDF to announce that they will put a moratorium on aid until the king retracts October Fourth and restores democracy.

The political crisis in Kathmandu and the insurgency has brought development to a grinding halt, and there is growing conviction among Nepal's main donors that there is no point pouring in more money until democracy is restored as a prelude to a new peace process. Sensing the donor mood, this week the political parties formally asked the consortium to postpone the NDF, but they seem to have miscalculated because the meeting is going ahead.

At the heart of this debate is the question: which comes first development or peace? It is a chicken-or-egg riddle. The Europeans argue that there can be no development without peace. True, but the only long-term antidote to conflict is development. (An aid moratorium will have the same effect as the trade embargo on Burma—ultimately the Burmese people have suffered while the junta rules merrily on.)

A warning on aid stoppage can only be a stick to prod the king to restore democracy for his own good. Internal displacement, absence of basic services, the withdrawal of government and the erosion in education threaten to reverse all the development gains of the past decades. The need for effective aid is greater than ever before.

The challenge is to find a mechanism to deliver these services in a conflict situation—not just as emergency relief, but also to revive the networks for delivery even if it means working in Maoist areas. The military and the Maoists may have problems with this, but they must be persuaded that the Nepali people have suffered enough. If they can't agree on a peace process, then the least they can do is to allow the people access to education, health and development.

Aid abuse and dependency are partly the reasons we are in the mess we are in, so aid by itself can't be a solution. This means the fundamentals of aid have to change. We need aid that assists the peace process and in the long-term furthers social justice. It is the responsibility of not just Nepalis but also the international community to work towards restoring a representative government committed to resolving the conflict through negotiation.

The latest spectacle in the political drama in Nepal is the donor community apparently asking the agitating parties to name their prime minister. As if they have the

the five party agitation, has lately joined the fray, the RPP is reported to have decided to take to the streets to oust their own prime minister. Both are worried they might lose out ministerial berths in an all-party government.

As the student wings followed their parent parties with anti-monarchy sloganeering, the Maoists expressed their solidarity, so they too could ride the wave of republicanism. Some professional organisations, most of them overtly aligned with the parties, have also joined the stir. While the print media have found it fashionable to toe the 'democratic' line of the parties, some prominent journalists have even invented

manifold achievements of the multiparty regime to argue their partisan agenda. King Gyanendra, himself, while being seen to want to listen to the parties, remains largely unmoved.

The western powers have made multiparty democracy and human rights the basis for their aid to Nepal and tended to favour the parties. India, which wields the biggest influence and has helped militarily in the anti-Maoist campaign, is also publicly committed to support parties, although its intentions are generally viewed with suspicion. As outside pressure increases, the king therefore may have to capitulate.

But public opinion is still with the king, people are sceptical of political parties for having preoccupied themselves with corruption and bringing the country to its knees. Despite democracy the people could do nothing in the past 13 years to prevent the sustained plunder by the parties, other than silently harbouring their discontent. Umpteen phases of 'agitation against regression' have now lasted more than a year, yet the three-decade old Panchayat regime collapsed in less than two months in 1990 when the people spontaneously stormed the streets of Kathmandu.

By his wish to be "heard and not just seen", the king has decided to champion and redefine the role of the monarchy as the much-

GUEST COLUMN

Bihari K Shrestha



wherewithal to have the king nominate that candidate. This is an ominous development.

The tri-polar war of nerves between the king, political parties and the Maoists is deadlocked. While the Nepali Congress (D), awed by the apparent tenacity of



PROSPECT

LETTERS

BIG BROTHERS

Re: Kunda Dixit's 'Big brothers' (#192). I have heard of things being called 'bipolar', but what on earth is 'tripolar'? A magnet, or the world for that matter, has only two poles. A three-way struggle also doesn't make sense. The enemy of any enemy is my friend, goes an Arabic saying. The logic is so simple that it is universally accepted. But here in Nepal, we seem to have a unique three-way stalemate. How can this be? What is stopping from two warring sides from teaming up against the third? The answer, my friends, is probably blowing in the wind.

'Sagar', email

- Janardan Chand's 'Vacancy announcement' (Nepali Pan, #192) is one of the most lucid

articles you have printed in recent times. It lays out clearly and without fuss the next steps to be taken by the king, the parties and the Maoists. All three should read it.

Kiran Lamichhane, Kathmandu

- In these mad times, the *Nepali Times* always comes as a breath of fresh air every Friday. Issue #192 was superb in toto. Kunda Dixit's page one piece ('Big brothers') and the editorial ('Crossroads') were excellent, and so was Under My Hat. A perfect example of balanced, objective, professional (an irreverent) journalism.

Ajay Sharma, email

- Organisers of the current anti-regression agitation should learn how the Filipinos dethroned dictator Ferdinand Marcos in 1986 and got rid of corrupt president Joseph Estrada in 2001. People's Power can peacefully and effectively bring regime change, but only if pro-democracy demonstrators win the support of the police and military as in the Philippines. Please pass this on to the political leaders.

Janu Adhikary, Manila

BANANA MONARCHY

After reading the news and views in your issue #193, some of us have come to the following conclusions. The present insurgency is meaningless and unfair. The political parties

will be back to their old tricks once they restore democracy. For the past 14 years all we have seen is their aggressiveness, ransacking furniture in parliament, bandas. This past month, by burning cars, uprooting fences, are blocking streets with burning tyres they have shown they haven't changed at all. King Gyanendra says he wants to restore stability, why not give him a chance? Only if he fails, you can talk about a republic.

Changing clothes will not change the person wearing them. It is the person who has to change. Let's stop protesting and get to work.

Ashok Bajracharya, Bir Hospital

- Let me congratulate you on your editorial 'A banana monarchy?' (#194) which should be in King Gyanendra's must-read list as he ponders his next move. And you hit the nail on the head with your advice to the parties to 'offer solutions instead of creating more street mayhem'. It is time for the king to swallow his pride and admit he made a mistake on 4 October 2002, and for the parties to stop behaving like idiots.

Govind Shukla, email

- Reading CK Lal's column, 'Goodbye to Year Zero' (#191) and your recent editorial, 'A banana monarchy?' (#193) leaves me with a

feeling that your paper has a myopic view of the political parties and their recent call for republic. I am not quite certain that I would trust any of the political parties or the Maoists if Nepal is to be a republic. This is not to say I am an advocate for the monarchy either. Any person who still holds or perpetuates the view of a Sun King or in our own lingo, Vishnu's avatar in the 21st century is like the eight blind men and the elephant story. We all are human beings and so is the king. He is just as ordinary as us except he was lucky to be born in royalty. Yet, that is not to say that the king does not have a utilitarian value in the Nepali context as a uniting force for an ethnically diverse nation like ours. If republican aspirations of both the political parties and the Maoists are realised, what guarantees we the people have that they will govern well within constitutional and ethical framework of a republican set up? Power corrupts in our political experience. What if we go with a presidential system and end up with the likes of Mugabe, Kim Jong Il, or Mobutu?

Our so-called democrats still cling on to power after ten years of incompetence with no sense of regret. If the grip they possess over their party machinery is an indication of their iron fist style ruling, then I am afraid our flirting with a republican set up is a game

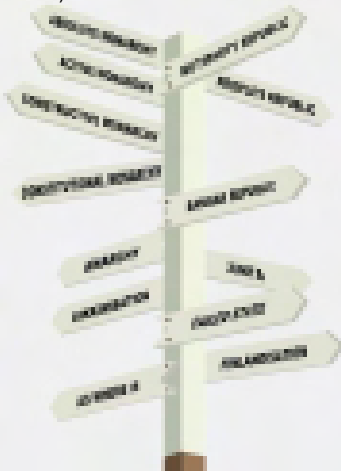
of Russian roulette. These political leaders do not even give dissenters voice within their political parties just imagine what it will be like if they became president! They squandered the peoples' mandate. Are these the people we want as president? So people let's not throw the baby out with the bath water here. Let's think about it.

SN Singh, email

AID BOOK

Re: Sudhindra Sharma and Dipak Gyawali's letter (#192) accusing me of misquoting and reviewing their book *Aid Under Stress* 'without reading it'. Even as the authors declare the Finnish-supported RWSSP to be 'a major success' (p. 223), they must not skirt the issues of the promised full-coverage of Lumbini, post-construction sustainability, reasons for very poor performance in sanitation, and opportunity costs of having expatriates in command on the alibi that the book is not a 'consulting report'. These issues are absolutely central to water and sanitation initiatives in Nepal.

The authors' denial that they are looking at 'development being an encounter between two grand cultures': the 'rational' and 'transparent' western versus the 'hierarchical' and 'corrupt' Nepali is more apparent than real. On p242 they see the project being 'plagued



needed countervailing force against unbridled abuse of authority by politicians. Such a role could be a system of check and balance which is part of a healthy democracy.

By way of apparent penance, political leaders have admitted their "past mistakes". But they have not said how they plan *not* to be corrupt in the future. Specifically, they should tell us how they intend to fight a truly democratic election amidst voters whom they have so far swayed with money and promises. An unconditional handover of power by the king to a coalition of political parties could be much worse, because it would neither listen to the him nor be answerable to a non-existent parliament, let alone to the unorganised masses. Besides, it would be legally problematic since the term of the last parliament has expired, and all parties in the country, not just those represented in it, can now legitimately stake their claim for a place in an all-party government.

This is a stalemate: the parties don't want to work with the king, the people themselves are sick and tired of the tantrums of the rioters. Given the apparent lack of a domestic force (other than the army as the last resort) to break this stalemate, international help is clearly in order.

The donor community, instead of pretending to be kingmakers in these troubled times, should help Nepal broker a truce between these constitutional forces and draw up a common agenda of action so that they can all work together to address the increasingly menacing Maoist problem. ●

Looks like it is curtain time for ambassadors. US envoy Michael E Malinowsky packed his bags and left even before his successor, James F Moriarty, received senate approval.

If there is no major shakeup at South Block after elections, Indian ambassador Shyam Saran will also head home. Then there is Rudiger

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



Wenk, the EU charge d' affaires who was also abruptly recalled after the Geneva showdown between the Indo-American lobby and human rights wallahs backed by the Europeans. Wenk had always been forceful in advocating human rights and mediation.

It looks sirens are wailing in distant capitals about goings-on in Nepal. The insurgency and political crisis have suddenly made Nepal red hot. We are currently mired in the struggle between four Rs: Reform, Rebellion, Revolution, and Regression.

Admittedly, Reformers are in a minority because it entails dialogue and compromise. In the wary culture of the martial race myth, nobody has the patience to hear the other side of the story. Reforms take decades, if not centuries. But amidst such confusion, who has the patience to learn from history and plan the future?

The street Rebellion is spearheaded by students, shouting republican slogans. In *The Rebel*, Albert Camus contrasts a rebellion



The Four Rs

SANJIB RJB

On Buddha Jayanti, don't forget Renunciation

(shared humanity between the antagonists) with a revolution (desired death of the 'enemy') and shows that there is space for reconciliation in rebellions. Unfortunately, neither the rebels nor he who they are rebelling against seem to be in any mood for a compromise.

The rebellion will thus end either in the institutionalisation of regression, or further intensification of the revolution. Mahatma Gandhi said of the British: "First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win." Sadly, the leaders in the streets have failed to exercise the optimistic restraint expected of rebels.

By now, the Revolution has exposed itself for what it is: a descent into extortion, arson, looting, mutilation of dissenters, and wanton killing. You are forced to agree with the proposition that every revolution is in fact a counter-revolution: it concentrates the gains of reform or rebellion in the hands of a few while the rest die fighting a utopia.

Then there is Regression, the illegitimate child of court intrigues and rightwing conspiracies. Despite the loud and clear message of world history that you can't turn the clock back, regression has a fatal attraction. Every reformer, rebel, and revolutionary entertains the thought of regressing to the ways of the

ancien regime to perpetuate their hold on power. The wise ones realise that it is the surefire way of inviting other wannabes, and resist the temptation. Some mend their ways. In Nepal the main regressor needs a firm nudge from his international pals.

Apart from these four Rs, there is a fifth way, one that lifts society to a higher plane of coexistence and harmony—the Buddha's way of Renunciation. This is not withdrawal, it is engagement with society at a higher level. The Enlightened One with his all-seeing eyes can lead us out of the present mess, individually and as a nation. ●

by illiteracy' of Finnish and Nepali 'cultural idiosyncracies' and talk about 'structural dishonesty buttressed by the system as a whole' in Nepal (p161). In fact, the book with its extensive accounts of corruption in a number of fields portrays Nepal as a totally and terribly corrupt country with no hope of foreign aid being properly used at all. This defeatist position is further reinforced by the concluding observation that 'we have to be content with aid with all its contradictions' (p248).

Despite much talk about Cultural Theory in the book (p192), what unfortunately does not come out is that there is a highly rational aspect to the life and culture in Nepal, because of which community forestry became an astounding success in a time almost co-terminus with the contentious Finnish aid under review. Distortions result largely due to donors' failure to direct aid to this segment of Nepal's body politic. Most aid remain defectively structured and donors indifferent, even as the country continues to bleed.

Bihari Krishna Shrestha,
Kathmandu

ANALOGUE

After reading 'Analogue Avas' (#Nepali Society, #193) I was encouraged to know that there are still talents in our society in the age of high-sounding digitised

technology who gives more importance to the root music deeply held in the culture of Nepali psyche. The noblest part of his conviction is that his respect for traditional music is not built on the hatred of digital technology. Digital devices have their own technological advantages over traditional methods of music but isn't it praiseworthy that someone took the road less travelled? It just goes to justify art that defies groupthink and pop culture.

Roshan Sherchan,
Edinburgh

CORRECTION

The caption for the photo accompanying Rabintra Mishra's London Eye column in the hardcopy edition (#193) was inadvertently dropped. It shows the health post at Murma village in Mugu district built by HeNN at the cost of \$8,000. The Network is trying to raise further \$7,000 to get the health post up and running.

LETTERS

Nepali Times welcomes comments from readers about its content. Letters must be signed and may be edited for space. Don't send email attachments and be specific in the subject field to avoid mail being mistaken for spam.
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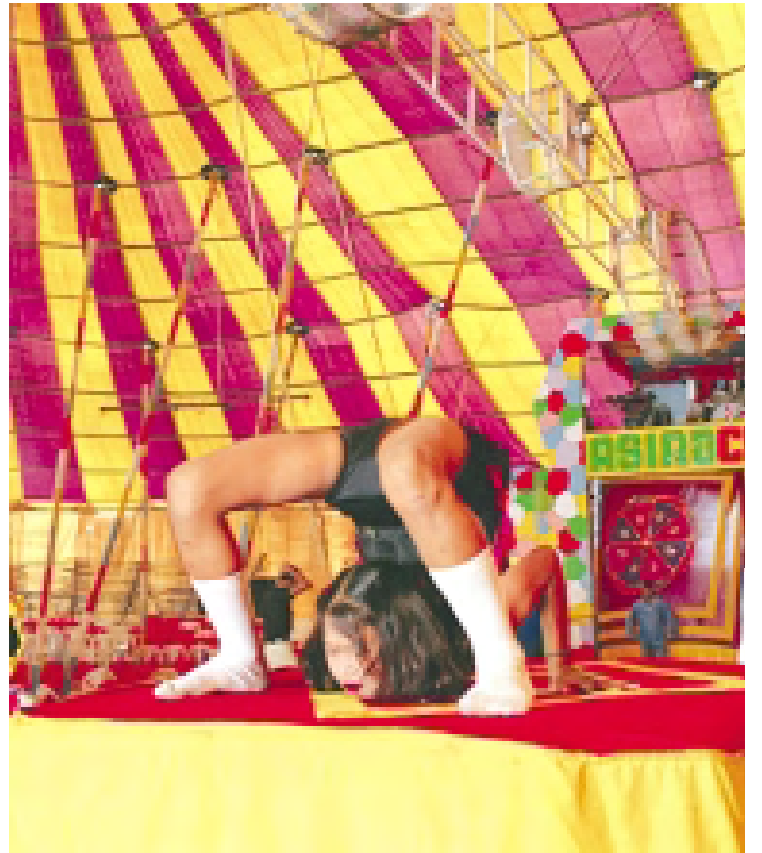




Life is a circus for some



ROBBIE COOPER



ROBBIE COOPER

Parents are selling children to circuses in India where they become the act themselves

MALIKA BROWNE

The rescue of 29 Nepali children working for the Great Indian Circus in Kerala on 17 April has highlighted the work child rights activists are doing to stop the exploitation. But for many other Nepali children, the circus still represents one of the only ways out of extreme poverty. Instead of being taken by parents to see cavorting acrobats, some children are forced to travel to

circuses in India where they are abandoned by their parents or agents to become the acts themselves.

Until January this year, Santosh, who looks wiser than his 12 years, worked as a clown in the Great Bombay Circus, making other children laugh. He had been there since the age of five when his Nepali father sold him to an agent. As the circus travelled to towns all

over India, Santosh lived in a basic tent with male artistes of all ages. His day started at 5AM with training, followed by three shows of three hours every day. Exhausted, he would clamber into bed at midnight. Spending time with his sisters who had joined the company five years before him was forbidden.

Thanks to the Esther Benjamins Trust (EBT), a UK-

based charity that works exclusively for children in Nepal (*see box*), Santosh is now back home. After a medical examination at the trust's refuge in Bhairawa, he was reunited with his parents who are now aware of the dangers present in circuses. As he began his 24-hour journey home by train from Old Delhi Railway Station with EBT volunteers, his eyes lit up when I asked him about plans for the

future. He hoped to start school by the end of the month, and he wants to be a pilot when he grows up.

There are currently over 250 Nepali children working in circuses in India, over 80 percent of them female. Their fair complexion and Mongoloid features make them an exotic lure for Indian audiences, as does their renowned flexibility. The fact that

Death by fat

Cola culture encourages us to eat till we die

A few weeks ago I used this space to ponder the link between economic class and obesity. At the time, I confined my thoughts to the United States, infamously known for its fat citizens. But the WHO now reports that deaths related to obesity are soaring around the world as

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



society becomes more sedentary

and diets more focused on fats, sugars and carbohydrates.

This is not unrelated to the spread of cola culture to all corners of the planet. Once I went deep into the hinterlands of Tamil Nadu in south India. We were doing a story about caste discrimination and our destination was a village at the end of a rutted track where dalits made up most of the local populace. It was hard to imagine, outside of the Himalayas, a more obscure place.

After meeting a number of local people, we were offered cold drinks. I looked around at all the palm trees and pleasantly anticipated a lush infusion of fresh coconut water—that prince of refreshments. But as we sat in the local school, where dalit

children had been banned by local high caste Hindus, in walked a little boy with three warm bottles of Coke. Even there, in the wilds of Tamil Nadu, the allure of cola was irresistible. I asked around and found everyone drank the stuff whenever they could afford it. There were no obese children running around yet, but I hazard a guess that some day there would be. Coke culture has that effect on people.

The WHO report on worldwide

obesity has touched off a war of words with the cola companies and the sugar industry. Sugar spokesmen in the United States say their sweet, heavily subsidised product is not the villain here. They blame the fact that few people get as much exercise as they need to work off all the calories in a couple of cans of Coke—the average daily intake of fizzy drink here. From what I've seen of American soda habits, most people would have to run a

few marathons just to burn off the soda they drink.

An attempt earlier this year by UN health professionals to introduce an international set of recommendations on food to help developing countries with nutrition issues was blocked by the same groups that object to the WHO's sugar warnings. In short, those who make us fat don't want us to know that food has something to do with it. American and some European companies dominate the world food industry. These people want to sell us more and more food, any food, and they don't seem to care what it does to us.

A US government negotiator, speaking on behalf of the food giants, said food was a matter of individual choice and governments shouldn't be in the business of advising people not to dig their graves with their teeth. If you want to drink soda, which has the equivalent of 13 teaspoons of sugar in every bottle, go ahead. Have two bottles. Interestingly, big tobacco companies used to fight international anti-smoking campaigns with the same vigour, but public opinion and lawsuits soon curbed their enthusiasm. Let's do the same with the sugar and fat industries. The health of the world depends on it. ●



Nepali children



MALIKA BROWNE

they are Nepali makes them vulnerable: they are not legally India's problem. Children are sold to circuses for as little as Rs 2,000 and forced to work for Rs 256 per week, if they get paid at all.

Reports of sexual abuse and even rape in circuses are rife. Young girls aged between 14 and 16 may be forced to 'entertain' the circus owner and his sons. There are few safety precautions in the ring, and regular injuries from accidents are left untreated. The nomadic nature of circuses means the children are prevented from going to school, and are instead thrust into the university of life.

Two recent developments in India have contributed to an increase in recruitment of circus children from Nepal. In the early 1990s, the success of the literacy campaign in Kerala, where circus performers were traditionally from, has meant that fewer Keralites are willing to join circuses. And lobbying by animal rights activists in India has made

it illegal for wild animals to be used in shows (although elephants still count as domestic animals), leaving huge gaps in the circuses' repertoire.

I visited two Indian circuses anonymously in January, the *Asiad Circus* in Bhopal and the *Empire Circus* in Bombay. The latter, which bills itself enigmatically as 'An Exploring Exposition of Enthrilli Shows by Indian expertise' (sic) was a sad three-hour marathon of tired acts in which the children's revealing gold-sequined costumes were held together by safety pins. Not a single child smiled during the three hour show I endured. It was payday and the festival of Eid when I visited, so at least the *Empire* played to a full house.

The *Asiad Circus* in Bhopal, in contrast, squeezed out three shows a day to an audience of about thirty farm labourers. Both circuses were run by men with huge curling moustaches who, after initial suspicion, gave me their business cards, which read 'Impresario'.

(from *l-r*) A girl dangles from the mouth of an elephant at the *Asiad Circus* in Bhopal, a child contortionist from Nepal, a young clown prepares for the show.

They both admitted that satellite television and cinema were affecting audience numbers, but both denied that any of the children in their troupe were either Nepali or unaccompanied by parents.

Last year, EBT conducted an undercover six-month survey of 22 circuses around India and appealed to India's 30 main circuses to release the children they had bound to illegal contracts. The result was slight, yet encouraging: in January, three circuses travelled vast distances across India to the capital and handed over a total of nine children to the charity. The raid two weeks ago by child rights groups was more confrontational, the second phase of the campaign to repatriate Nepali children from circuses that refused to cooperate. EBT believes that its role is not only to retrieve the children from the circuses, but also to rehabilitate them within society, preparing them for a return to school or, in the case of the older children, for work.

One of the staff members at the ETB refuge, 17-year-old Maya, smiles broadly as she teaches basket-weaving and other marketable skills for teenage girls. But behind Maya's smile are four years of pain when she worked as a circus performer. During that time she personally witnessed a fellow performer being beaten to death for the 'crime' of fainting from hunger. She feels able to talk about what she has seen, but many others choose to remain silent. ●

All names of children in this article have been changed

A child's trust



CLARE MURRAY

The Esther Benjamins Trust was founded in 1999 by a former army dentist, Philip Holmes, in memory of his late wife Esther Benjamins. It aims to make Indian circuses entirely childfree by 2007. Philip and Esther were married in 1988 and for 10 years enjoyed the "happiest and most loving time" together. Esther commuted weekly from wherever the army sent her husband, to her job as a judge in Holland.

Esther desperately wanted to have children of

her own, but couldn't. Early one January morning in 1999, after a period of depression, Esther cracked under emotional pressure and took her own life at home. Her one-line suicide note read, 'Life without children has become unbearable'.

Philip, then 39, quit his army career, and within a week after Esther's death decided to set up an orphanage in Nepal, a family that would become 'Esther's children'. Philip (shown above with the children at the *Bhairawa shelter*) had never been to Nepal, but he and Esther had been living in Hampshire, then the home of the Brigade of Gurkhas, and had got to know their Nepali neighbours, which is what gave him the idea.

EBT reaches out to a very diverse group of children in Nepal. Street, dalit and disabled children are all on the margins of society. Then there are innocent children who lost their freedom, jailed alongside parents because no one else was prepared to look after them. And now the circus children have been added to its cause. ●

Philip Holmes, founder of the Esther Benjamins Trust, will be giving a talk to the Cultural Studies Group of Nepal at the Shanker Hotel at 9.30AM on 30 April. ebtrust@hotmail.com
www.ebtrust.org.uk

"I'd rather die than go back."

JB PUN MAGAR in BHAIRAWA

For the past seven years, ever since she was nine, Kalpana Lama got up at five every morning for her exercises, prepared for her circus show and performed till midnight. That wasn't all. After the show, her job was also to give her boss, the manager of the Great Indian Circus, an oil massage. She had to polish his shoes, and even help him put on clothes. He beat her if she didn't work properly. The food she got was usually rotten potatoes and worm infested bread. For all this she was paid Rs 16 per month.

One day, Kalpana had to work for 18 hours straight on an empty stomach. She fainted in the ring. As punishment, her boss beat her mercilessly. "I felt like lying on my mother's lap and crying," she recalls, "but I just hugged my friends and wept."

Today, Kalpana is safe at a shelter in Bhairawa with 29 other young Nepalis rescued by Indian and Nepali activists from the Great Indian Circus last month. Twenty of them are from the village of Padampokhari in Makwanpur and were lured away by middlemen. Some of them sold to the circus by their fathers or brothers.

One notorious middleman named Dilip Lama of Makwanpur not only sent his neighbour's daughters to the circus, but even sold two of his own. One of them, Sabina, became mentally unstable from ill-treatment and now lives in the shelter.

Bir Bahadur of Padampokhari says he sold his daughter for Rs 5,000, while Krishna Bahadur got only Rs 1,000 for his. Chandra Nigam of Rautahat sold two of his daughters to the circus recruiter for Rs 3,000, and says his girls have sent home about Rs 16,000 in earnings.

"There isn't a single family in Padampokhari that hasn't got a child in an Indian circus," says Kiran Thapa of the Nepal Child Welfare Society that runs the Bhairawa shelter. "In fact, daughters are treated like a commodity to be bought and sold." Thapa's main challenge is rehabilitation of the children. Nirmala returned to her home in Hetauda, but couldn't bear the stigma and fled. She now works in Thapa's shelter.

Sunita Giri, also from Hetauda, recalls the strict rules in the circus: no speaking in Nepali, no laughing. Performers are never compensated if they are injured, and are sent home.

"Don't even talk to me about circuses," says Kalpana's friend, Sunita. "I'd rather die than go back."

But for now, these children aged between 7 to 20 are in high spirits. They are happy to meet family, speak in Nepali and be free from abuse by their Indian employers. They are eager to return to their villages in Makwanpur.

But what if their families can't take care of them? Khem Thapa says his organisation will take the responsibility. "If their parents abandon them, we will raise and educate them." ●

Names of all the children have been changed.



JB PUN MAGAR

Rescued children are happy to be home

Collateral damage

Nepalis are caught between the barrels of two guns

Forget the sophisticated political analysts in Kathmandu and their convoluted logic. Forget what the government says, or the slogans of the political parties. Listen to what the people have to say. That is what I have been doing this past year, while taking the camera to 35 districts of the country and letting the Nepali people speak.

No one ever asked them what their views were, they were let down by past rulers and the people they elected, and lately they have been cowed with fear of violence. But given the chance, they pour out all their pent up feelings, not caring that they are on camera. Sometimes I have to edit them

NEPALI PAN
Kishore Nepal



so they don't get into trouble from the Maoists or the security forces. From Mechi to Mahakali, from Mugu to Mahottari, it is the same message: "We are caught between two guns, leave us alone and find a way to sort this out peacefully."

Nanda Devi is a social worker from Mahendranagar and speaks of the dismal failure of the army to convince the common people of her region that they are for peace. Citing her own detention by the security forces on suspicion of being a Maoist, political worker Laxmi Pandey from Nawalparasi feels that the army can clean up its image, but it has to try much harder.

In Sarlahi, retired policeman Bhikhari Bhandari was shot and wounded recently. It was not a Maoist bullet that hit him. The security forces admitted, though not directly, that it was a mistake. He expects compensation from the government, but hasn't received any.

By being put at par with the Maoists, the prestige and objectives of the security forces have been seriously undermined. Most victims of violence don't expect anything from the government, all they want is to be heard and to pour out their sorrow.

The Nepali people have never experienced this kind of wrenching violence before. Not even our forefathers ever told us about such terror and conflict. A country where violence was rare till ten years ago, is now in the throes of unimaginable slaughter.



When the 'People's War' started, most Nepalis who may have agreed with the aims of the Maoists disagreed with their method of using violence. As Parmeswar Murarka, a social worker of Lahan, told us: "The government's gun should have protected us from the Maoist gun, but both are now pointed at us."

It takes great courage for rural Nepalis to say these things to a reporter these days. Most others have adopted the survival strategy of avoiding strangers, keeping their eyes downcast and not speaking to anyone except immediate family members.

But this is not always possible. When a teenage son of Bhajan Bohara of Bhageswar village in Achham disappeared from the district headquarter of Mangalsen, every villager was concerned. They gathered in groups and tried to console Bohara. Shilpa Kunwar, a woman activist, said: "Today she is suffering, tomorrow I may need help like her." Bohara's son was never found.

In the tarai, there is less reticence and people are more curious. It was this curiosity that cost a panwala in Siraha, Birendra Kumar Singh, his life. He, along with fellow villagers, were seen inspecting the dead body of a Maoist accidentally blown up by his own bomb. Singh was later abducted and his body found the next day.

The security forces are largely confined to their barracks and admit that some mistakes were made. But there is great resentment about what they perceive as the media and human rights activists' exaggeration of their role. "Here we are defending democracy, and the media thinks we are the enemy, this is crazy," says one officer posted in the midwest.

But Nepalis are a simple people, and their message to the rulers in Kathmandu and the revolutionaries in the jungles is also very simple: "It doesn't matter whose gun is pointed at us, just put an end to this nightmare." ●

Kishore Nepal is the producer of *Mat Abhimat*, a program aired on Nepal Television at 9PM every Tuesday.



MUDITA BAJRACHARYA

Oh, well

As taps go dry, ancient wells are the only source of water

MUDITA BAJRACHARYA

It is the peak dry season, and Kathmandu Valley's water shortage is acute. In many parts of the capital, water hasn't flowed through the mains for months.

The only public water supply systems that still work are the ones built by Malla kings 400 years ago. If it wasn't for the wells and ornate stone spouts in inner city Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur, the Valley's urbanites wouldn't have a drop to drink.

At a time when the government has admitted defeat in ever getting water supply to meet rising demand, and the Melamchi project is stuck because of the insurgency, it looks like Kathmandu's 1.3 million people will have to depend on traditional water systems for the foreseeable future.

Gopal Dangol remembers he was the first person in Patan's old town to get a water mains pipe in his house 25 years ago. There used to be enough water for his whole neighbourhood, and having flowing water in the kitchen was a big convenience. But over the years the supply dwindled. It was reduced to a trickle, and last year, it stopped altogether.

Dangol had no alternative but to join others in illegally attaching a

water pump to suck the water out of the mains. But this year, there is no water at all and the pump is useless. Desperate, Dangol and his neighbours got together to clean up a 200-year-old well in their bahal.

Kathmandu Valley's population is increasing, but supply remains stagnant because of a lack of investment in new storage systems. Furthermore, leakage and wastage in the ageing network of underground pipes mean that the capital's water situation is bound to worsen.

So, it is back to the stone water spouts that have since ancient times met the requirements of the Valley's towns. The spouts are supplied by an intricate underground network of conduits built by the Malla kings, traditionally maintained by the users. These conduits (called *raj kulo*) supplied water to ponds and water spouts in the town squares, which also helped recharge groundwater that fed the wells. There are even traditional well-cleaning festivals like Sithi Nakha (25 May this year) when debris is removed from wells and taps before the monsoon rains recharge the water table.

While the ancient wells had a tradition of maintenance, the modern water pipes were built by

the state with no citizen participation in keep it working. "Governments that built modern water supply systems never recognised the importance of preventive maintenance, which our forefathers did," says water expert, Dipak Gyawali.

Because of a rising population and over-extraction, Kathmandu's water table is falling alarmingly. An estimate by the Japanese group JICA showed the Valley's water table was receding at an average of 40cm a year even back in 1998. The ancient wells are starting to go dry and in some parts of Patan, old ponds have been filled over and turned into parks, thus removing an important element in recharging ground water.

"We are taking out more water from the ground than we are putting in. This is a recipe for disaster," warns Anil Pokhrel of the group Nepal Water for Health.

Kathmandu citizens now have no other option but to start harvesting rain, says Pokhrel. In Patan's Saugal neighbourhood, water from a traditional spout is channeled to a nearby pond which helps recharge groundwater. Also in Patan, the Urban Environment Management Society has been helping rebuild and maintain 60 disused wells. ● *KPK*



D GYAWALI

Business as unusual

Possible militarisation of international aid needs to be taken seriously

The Nepal Development Fund meeting next week is happening at a crucial moment in our history. Neither the state nor the Maoists can gain a great deal from this current conflict.

OPINION
Seira Tamang



Unless there is a massive escalation of military hardware and manpower on both sides, the current stalemate will continue with all the costs of a prolonged war. In this context, to take this year's NDF discussions as business as usual would be a serious mistake.

To pretend that development can happen in such a situation is misguided, misinformed and wishful thinking. Most development agencies have withdrawn to the district headquarters if not Kathmandu. More aid will not ameliorate the situation of those who live beyond the immediate control of the state.

Furthermore, the logic of business as usual will be a political signal for the government to continue its failed strategy. The current government has neither been able to deal effectively with the

Maoists nor the parties. It has earned criticism for increasingly oppressive state mechanisms such as TADA, legitimising excessive state force, narrowing the avenues of democratic fora including freedom of speech and media, and ignoring censure for human rights abuses. Decisions made at the NDF will thus have crucial bearing on the state's future conduct.

NDF funding in a real sense can only happen if eyes are closed to human rights violations, thereby prolonging the war. While the recent decision on UN monitoring is a clear victory, there is a history here of signing international agreements and an equally long history of amnesia. Such achievements need to be vigorously backed by pressures to ensure proper implementation.

Financial commitments now will amount to support for the current counter-insurgency methods of the state. The recent case of the election budget being diverted for military and palace expenditures highlights the ease with which an unaccountable government can distort budgetary allocations. With gaps in the development finances being filled by donors, the possible militarisation of international aid needs to be taken seriously. The

NDF can't be a begging bowl for the RNA.

The way forward is to implement confidence building measures. So far, the government has offered a commitment letter which is meaningless without a memorandum of understanding. This would essentially constitute a human rights accord, the first example of its willingness to address the serious human rights crisis in the country.

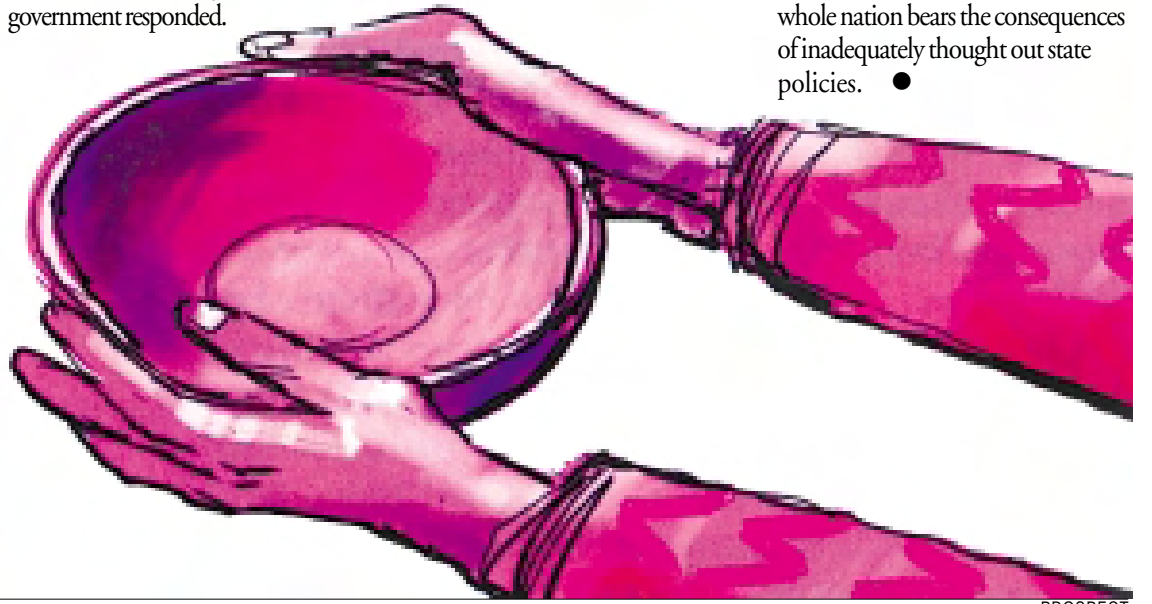
The last two peace talks collapsed under the weight of their own inadequacies and inefficiencies. The Maoists put forward their 24-point agenda at the end of April last year, yet it was 17 August before the government responded.

Talks cannot be held without proper preparation, and informal talks must precede formal ones to minimise the risk of failure. In the absence of other real alternatives, increasing the quality of the peace process as a whole can only be done with third party assistance.

The biggest weakness of both the government and the international community is the absence of plans to help the Maoists move from being a military organisation to a political/civilian entity. Calls for the Maoists to surrender completely have little chance for success given that they have the upper hand militarily.

Calling on the Maoists to lay down their arms is also unrealistic. Experiences in other conflict situations have shown that demands to lay down arms can only work towards the end of a peace process. A well thought-out plan and list of acceptable concessions will help ensure the state is not outmaneuvered by the Maoists in the next round of peace talks.

The social and economic causes of the conflict need to be addressed with serious consideration of modernising the polity. Such plans cannot be done haphazardly or rushed to meet donor deadlines. As shown by the 1990 constitution, the whole nation bears the consequences of inadequately thought out state policies. ●



PROSPECT

"No point"



Interview with
Jorg Frieden,
Swiss Development
Cooperation

What is the Swiss government's assessment of the situation in Nepal?

We believe there should be an unconditional ceasefire, consensus and a political resolution. Nothing can be done in times of conflict and that is the major problem of Nepal. We also believe that the NDF meeting will consider this and give it due importance.

If the conflict is not properly addressed, we cannot talk about future assistance. We can make no commitments under the present complicated circumstances.


But if aid to the government is cut, it would help the Maoists. For us, the Maoists are not the issue. Our issues are Nepal and the Nepali people. If we can't reach the Nepali people, there is no point working here. We have been completely neutral in this conflict.

Is it true that Switzerland and the EU will take a tough stand while dealing with the government in the NDF?


It is true that a concept paper reflecting the concerns and expectations of the countries with similar views is being prepared. They may possibly present their common position on the problems Nepal is facing at present. Many of our projects contributed to poverty alleviation but the violence made field work difficult. Nepali NGOs have not been able to work freely. You can't get to most places without Maoist permission. Pledging more aid will not mean anything.

Some bilateral and multilateral donors don't seem too concerned.

The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank do not have many employees in Jajarkot and Ramechhap. I do not question their intentions: they believe the living standard of the majority can be raised by working with the Finance Ministry, the National Planning Commission, and by providing budgetary support. True, a stronger central economy will prevent major disaster, but if the conflict and political crisis are not solved, sweet-sounding macro-economic policies will not make a big impact on the people.



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A little give and take

The donors and government agree on aid, but disagree on how it should be disbursed

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

This year's Nepal Development Forum meeting of donors has understandably been dominated by the worsening insurgency and the political deadlock in the capital.

The government and donors both agree that, more than ever, development needs to reach communities worst-hit by the conflict. They just disagree on how.

The government is squeezed between donors who want to get basic services to the conflict zones and the army which is wary of medicine, food and other material getting into the hands of the rebels. The army would be happy to disburse aid under its security umbrella, but the donors don't trust the army because of its human rights violations.

"We have seen Maoists ransacking government healthposts for medicines and stealing dynamite from road projects, it's just too risky to let projects go in by themselves," a senior Royal Nepali Army officer told us.

In the NDF pre-consultation meetings earlier this month, the government and donors discussed whether they should wait till the dust settles on the insurgency and the street agitation before re-launching the development drive. They quickly agreed that delivery of services should not be halted.

But when it came to the mechanism for project activities to begin, the government was bound by security concerns. To be sure, the government had decided in 2001 to take development into core Maoist areas. It increased spending on development in the 2003-04 budget by 30 percent and



allocations for road construction alone shot up by 215 percent.

In a paper, the National Planning Commission (NPC) even proposed an Immediate Relief Fund as a new mechanism to take development projects directly to villages in conflict zones. "It will be outside the DDC and budgetary loop," the NPC report said. "It will finance projects demanded by VDC, user groups and villagers."

Theoretically, the government seems ready to allow development work even if it means by-passing its own local agencies so that the rebels don't obstruct work. But it wants

constant updates on donor activities, and under the concept of 'aid harmonisation' the NPC wants all support to be made through the government's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).

Since the PRSP is something donors have praised, they shouldn't have any problems with it. But a potential hitch could be the NPC's condition that all aid be channeled through government, especially if it has security implications.

Donors are uneasy about the involvement of the army. "The security forces are not in a position to safeguard development projects," says Gert

Mainecke, Danish charge d' affaires in Kathmandu. "Many donors are of the opinion that the security forces don't enjoy the confidence of the people."

The RNA, however, feels security operations and development can, and should, go hand in hand. They point to ongoing highway projects like Katari-Okhaldhunga and Lamjung-Chame as proof that the insurgency hasn't brought development to a halt everywhere. "We can do it, and development projects should be introduced in areas where we have pushed back rebels," said another RNA officer.

Understandably, the army's

concern is not just to keep the Maoists from taking advantage of aid work, but also to use development to win back public support. This was the strategy behind the short-lived Integrated Security and Development Program in Gorkha district three years ago. "We ran health posts, built bridges and even distributed passports and seeds," recalls the army officer. "But later the money finished and it fizzled out." This time, the security agencies want a better-funded project and the government is inclined to support it as a way to win the hearts and minds of locals.

Allowing donors to work directly in Maoist-affected areas would allow the rebels to take credit for development. An NPC insider confided: "The government is worried that the Maoists will take propaganda advantage of development." However, since Nepal's donors foot two-thirds of the development budget, what they say carries weight. Of the Rs 116.1 billion budget for the fiscal year 2004-05, more than Rs 33 billion came from donors.

But, judging a sullen donor mood, the government is also wary of letting the security apparatus have more say in development. "The sooner the army finishes its work and returns to the barracks, the better," a senior official at the cabinet secretariat told us.

It is clear that the government is caught in the middle, and the answer to the urgent need for services in communities worst-affected by conflict will have to be a compromise between the donor position and that of the military. ●

"Aid always has strings attached"



KIRAN PANDAY

Foreign aid was an issue that always kept former Auditor General Bishnu Bahadur KC in the news. An auditor throughout a 36-year career in different government agencies, he talked candidly to *Nepali Times* about foreign assistance, his scorn for development buzzwords and the need for transparency.

Nepali Times: You have been quite vocal about foreign aid.

Bishnu Bahadur KC: There is no denying that we need foreign aid. The problem is our increasing dependency on it. We had to prepare a foreign aid policy so our national agenda is not sidelined. The Auditor General's office recommended the operational guidelines for the policy, which admitted that corruption is rampant. The document is idealistic in its over-emphasis on issues like poverty reduction, good governance and human rights. It failed to reflect ground realities. We need to be clear about our priorities.

Could this be because the policy itself was funded by foreign aid?

Yes, it is an irony that we need foreign aid to figure out how to use foreign aid. Their influence becomes clear once we read through the document. If donor agencies lack policies for areas where we have an edge, then we must approach multinationals.

When in office, you once complained bilateral assistance did not appear on government records.

In the past, we were not privy to even aid agreements. A major chunk of aid is absent from our budget records. This is illegal because without parliamentary sanction, we can neither earn nor spend a single rupee. Those who come here to help must abide by our constitutional rules.

Surely some foreign aid is registered in the budget?

We are usually only informed about the lump sum spent on a project with no other details. Foreign aid that comes as technical assistance is never reflected in the budget. Large amounts of money enter the country and no one evaluates who spent what amount. In the case of multilateral agencies, technical assistance is integrated with loan agreements, making them more or less transparent. But there have been cases when they provided aid purely as technical assistance and accounts got murky.

What proportion of aid is unregistered?

It's difficult to tell. In some cases they have three broad

headings—consultant services, training and seminars and commodity—and an unspecified one. Our analysis showed that more than 90 percent of the money comes under 'unspecified'. After we repeatedly raised this issue, that line came down to 70 percent. Till date there is no guideline for remunerating consultants.

So are we to assume that everyone is hand in glove to fudge accounts?

Aid that is not reflected in the budget means donors are unwilling to share information on money spent with the Auditor General's office, public accounts and the people. I remember a case when the Health Ministry was given money directly through different agencies that was deposited in several banks. When we asked for an explanation from the concerned government agency, it said the donor had all the information. Nepalis have the right to know about money channelled through NGOs and local bodies, not to mention aid received by the central government. This is where the Finance Ministry comes in. When we negotiate foreign assistance, we need to carry the constitution in our pockets to show them our rules. There is no aid without strings attached.

Can foreign aid be streamlined?

First, we must set our priorities right and negotiate with donors. So far all our priorities were formulated from Kathmandu. As a result, we saw technical assistance given to the likes of the Rastriya Banijya Bank and Nepal Bank Limited. Have they improved despite the hefty salaries paid to their consultants? The banks' performances in the last two years show it did not work. I don't blame the donors. We should have analysed our needs better.

Donors may say that it is their money and that they do not have faith in Nepal's Auditor General, and that they would like to get audited by themselves. In that case, we must offer alternatives like a joint or separate audit. Someone should be made accountable.

BIZ NEWS

Disaster waiting to happen

As the fatal accident on 20 April in which the propeller of a Buddha Air Beechcraft hit an employee demonstrated, the apron at Kathmandu's domestic airport is becoming a death trap.

Congestion, lack of rules and haphazard parking means that more disasters are waiting to happen, according to airline officials. "It is like the purano bus park, not an airline terminal," says one Twin Otter captain, shaking his head.



The domestic apron can park 20 aircraft, but poor markings, unclear regulations for towing, movement of ground handling equipment and passenger buses means that pilots have to be extremely vigilant while taxiing and parking. "I would say that we have to be more careful on the ground than in the air," said the pilot.

The last five years have seen a big jump in the number of aircraft using the terminal with new domestic airlines, the proliferation of smaller aircraft like Dorniers and Twin Otters, and increased movement of military aircraft. In addition, the grass area off the apron is also used by numerous helicopter companies for parking.

The terminal has no room for expansion because it is squeezed on one side by the runway and on the other by the VVIP terminal and the army hangars. "There is no space to expand, but the number of planes and flight movements keep growing," admits an official of the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN). Pilots say that is just an excuse, and there could be better ground movement management even with the present space and traffic.

Jet set go!

Private Indian airline Jet Airways has announced the launch of its daily Delhi-Kathmandu flight on 14 May, two days after rival Air Sahara commences flights on 12 May. Besides Indian passengers, Jet hopes to attract Nepali and business traffic to Delhi and nearby states on its Boeing 737s carrying 122 passengers on economy and 20 on business. With a successful routes from Chennai to

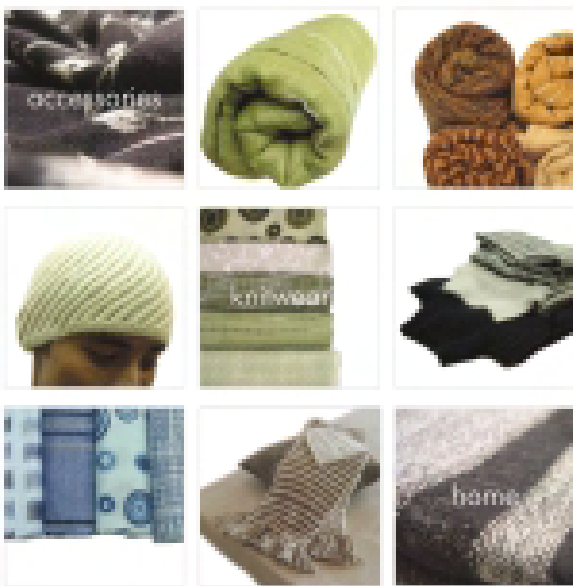


Colombo, Jet Airways had an eye on Nepal for a while. It is also beginning Calcutta-Dhaka flights soon, and Maldives is next on the list. Jet Airways operates over 250 flights daily to 41 destinations across India.

NEW PRODUCTS

MAY DAY: Enriched with Natural Moisturising Factor (NMF) and Vitamin E, May soap has something to suit every skin type. Imported by Nepal marketing Services, a 100gm cake is priced at Rs 25.

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Business of activism

Guess why Valley residents aren't joining the street protests

Working as a volunteer at a US presidential primary election in 2000, I was struck by the influence of marketing consultants. Usually armed with

STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari



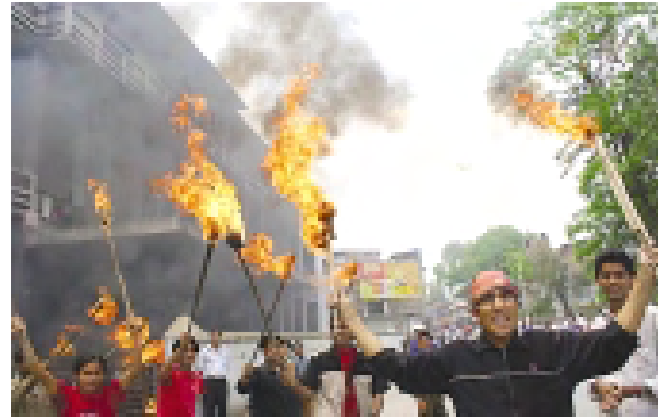
previous private sector experience, they chewed through demographic numbers, devised questions, ran focus group discussions, teased out voters' concerns and then crafted appealing messages aimed at various population segments.

Working parents got one set of messages, ethnic minorities another, while small business owners saw campaign ads that promised lower taxes. This consistently reinforced the central message: whoever you are, vote for the candidate because not only does he understand your particular problems, he can solve them. It was a clear case of business-like thinking shaping the process of electoral outcomes.

This type of thinking features prominently in the current Indian elections. Ever since the election

dates were announced, the major political parties—with laptop-toting, latte-sipping young cadre crunching numbers—started conducting market studies to better understand the voters' concerns and to increase their parties' chances.

Accordingly, they hired ad agencies to prepare and distribute messages aimed at particular voter groups who could decide either to 'change the government at the centre' or to let India shine. The old



KIRAN PANDAY

chaos of preparing for elections, with no clear messages and no defined constituency groups, are over—now voters are treated like consumer groups.

Business-like thinking is not limited to election campaigns. In 2000, the noted Indian anti-slavery activist Vivek Pandit visited Nepal to offer advice on how to make the

then ongoing anti-bonded labour protests effective. By copying Pandit's business-like blueprint to launch *dharnas* that applied strategic pressures on the parliament, the media, civil society and the international community, the Nepali activists were able to reach their goal. In July 2000, the government declared thousands of *kamaiyas* free from years of debt bondage. This certainly wouldn't have happened without Pandit's relentless

challenge to the activists to use business-like thinking.

Being business-like does not mean being cash-grubbing capitalists. It means acknowledging that money, manpower and attention are scarce, and that the kind of thinking applied to solve business problems can be

adapted to effectively address social and political issues.

When asked about why Kathmandu dwellers have not joined the ongoing political rallies, one can argue that party leaders relied more on the old ways: acts of vandalism together with hide-and-seek arrests by the police, not business-like thinking to sell their message credibly. ●



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DRAGAN JACIMOVIC

ANAGHA NEELAKANTAN

It is a climbing season dominated by the 50th anniversary of the first ascents of K2 and Cho Oyu, big names in the Nepal Himalaya, like Polish Piotr Pustelnik, trying the Bonington route on Annapurna's south face to bag his final eight-thousander, and Apa Sherpa's bid for a 14th Everest summit. But it is the Serbian Way expedition on Kabru IV that is raising eyebrows.

At 7,318m, Kabru IV is one of the world's highest unclimbed peaks. When the government opened it to expeditions in 2002, its remoteness, relative anonymity and the confusion about lesser mountains outside Khumbu meant that climbers weren't exactly scrambling to scale it. Some argue that it is higher and that it has been scaled.

But for Dragan Jacimovic, leader of the expedition, Kabru IV is "if not the highest, certainly one of the highest unclimbed peaks in the world". This has sparked off some debate about the height and climbing history of the Kabrus, as well as about methods of verification in the climbing game. (see box below) One thing is virtually certain: the west face, which at 2,800m is 400m higher than the south-west face of Everest, is unclimbed. In Serbia,

which is just starting to rebuild itself after the crippling war in the 90s, the expedition is being seen as an important step in developing a sense of positive national pride.

Kabru IV is at the southeast edge of a chain of mountains called Kabru, 10km south of Kanchenjunga, which includes three or four peaks above 7,000m and a dome in Sikkim. The Serbian Way expedition—four climbers with a base camp manager, a communications expert, a physiotherapist, two Sherpas a cook and a gopher, flew in above Ramche at 4,600m three weeks ago. The team descended to Tseram, 3,800m, and walked back up on foot to set up base camp on a moraine of the Yalun glacier at around 4,600m.

On 22 April acclimatisation underway, Dragan Jacimovic and Milos Ivackovic began the final climb, placing fixed ropes to send up food and equipment for Camp 1 and above. They entered the Kabru IV wall, which they describe as cracked at the opening, bisected by an icy waterfall. The team had marked this first part of the climb as the hardest and most dangerous, and they were right. The often treacherous Himalayan spring weather, which increases the risk of avalanches, is in full force in the Kanchenjunga region too, making

West Face of Kabru IV



Everest gets all the headlines, but next week a Serbian expedition is poised to climb one of the world's highest unclimbed peaks



ANDRE KMET

uncharted territory even more perilous.

On their way up to base camp, the team heard from locals that in the late 1990s a European expedition took one look at the wall and decided against it. Serbian Way believes there is reason for such a reaction. "Our planned starting point (*A on pic*) was a sheet of ice covered mostly by water. When we got there I looked up the waterfall and it was coming down from the sky! These sheets of water were crashing down some 300m. Obviously we could not continue up this. So we crossed 200m to the right of the waterfall (*to B*) and entered the wall from there. Again, this involved a lot of snow and water. In 10 minutes we were drenched and things didn't improve over the next nine hours until we returned to the Yalun glacier," said Jacimovic over email from base camp last weekend, tired but satisfied and very excited.

Jacimovic, who summited Everest in May 2000, is the first and so far the only Serb to have done so. His partner on this first leg of the climb was a Himalayan newbie. Milos Ivackovic, 25, entered the wall first. "I read about Himalayan climbing in books, newspapers, magazines. I devour everything on the net. I *had* expected something hard. But I just climbed the most unsecure wall

I've ever been on. I had to climb agonisingly slowly. The wall would just melt into this sludge of sand and mud wherever I found a foothold. Probably one in four stones I touched was stable enough to support me. I was in the lead and had to be really cautious, to not dislodge stones that could hit and possibly injure Dragan," explained Ivackovic.

Himalayan walls, generally snow and ice, don't often pose this problem. Other walls, such as the infamous El Capitan in Yosemite National Park in the USA, are granite or similarly solid rock, not unduly unstable. Dislodging rock, stone, ice with every step on the wall is every climber's nightmare. The weather isn't helping conditions on this porous wall either. There has been a good deal of new snow almost everyday these past two weeks, sometimes as much as 30cm in a matter of hours.

As we go to press, the team has probably established Camp 1 at about 5,200m, where Jacimovic and Ivackovic placed the fixes last week. If the weather isn't any worse than usual, and the climbers encounter no other serious problems, by this time next week the west face of Kabru IV will likely be scaled. ●

Go to www.serbianway.com for up-to-date reports, pictures and videos from the mountain.

Is Kabru 7,318m or 7,394m? Has it been climbed before? Are there three Kabrus or four? How many have been climbed? How can we be sure?

The truth about Kabru

The answer to this tangle is, not untypically for the climbing world, 'maybe'. Most maps mark Kabru IV at the lower altitude, as does the Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA) list of climbing peaks. The NMA also says that it is unclimbed, as does peakware.com, a generally reliable source of mountain information which says it is 7,394m.

Elizabeth Hawley, doyenne of all climbing information, told Serbian Way that Kabru IV had been climbed by an Indian expedition in 1994. However, there are two confusing

conditions: Hawley's map shows only Kabru I, II and III, and the dome. There are records of European climbs of these three through the 1990s, but the climbing community seems to be in the dark about the Indian ascent of Kabru IV. Peaks have been climbed without permits or publicity in the Nepal Himalaya, for acclimatisation. But Kabru IV is too high and too hard on the Nepal side for acclimatisation.

In the absence of photographic evidence, it is hard to judge. Verifying ascent claims is a tricky

business involving the lay of the land, climbing chronology, statistics, how altitude affects people and more. Serbian Way has posted a request for information with proof on its website as well as on everestnews.com. Maybe when the expedition returns the Indian team can be tracked down and the two can conduct the solemn catechism of landscape and conditions climbers who've been on the same ground greet each other with.

Tashi Jangbu Sherpa of Everest Trekking, the organiser for Serbian

Way, likes to talk about instances where climbers have simply scaled the wrong peak, equipped with inaccurate information, and because the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation's Mountaineering Department and the NMA often give peaks random Sanskritised names at odds with local traditions and linguistic patterns, so the people who live in the areas don't know the map nomenclature of 'that beak-shaped peak on the right of this little one'.

(AN)



DRAGAN JACIMOVIC

(From far l-r) The Serbian Way route up Kabru. Point A was deemed too unsafe to start at.

The team and their gear: Milos Ivackovic (climber), Bojan Branda (climber), Srdjan Paunovic (base camp manager), Dragan Jacimovic (leader), Soni Darijevic (climber and cameraman), Slobodan Sekesan (physiotherapist). Ivackovic in the wall.

Jannu (aka Kumbhakarna) 7,710m in the Kanchenjunga region.

Peak prices

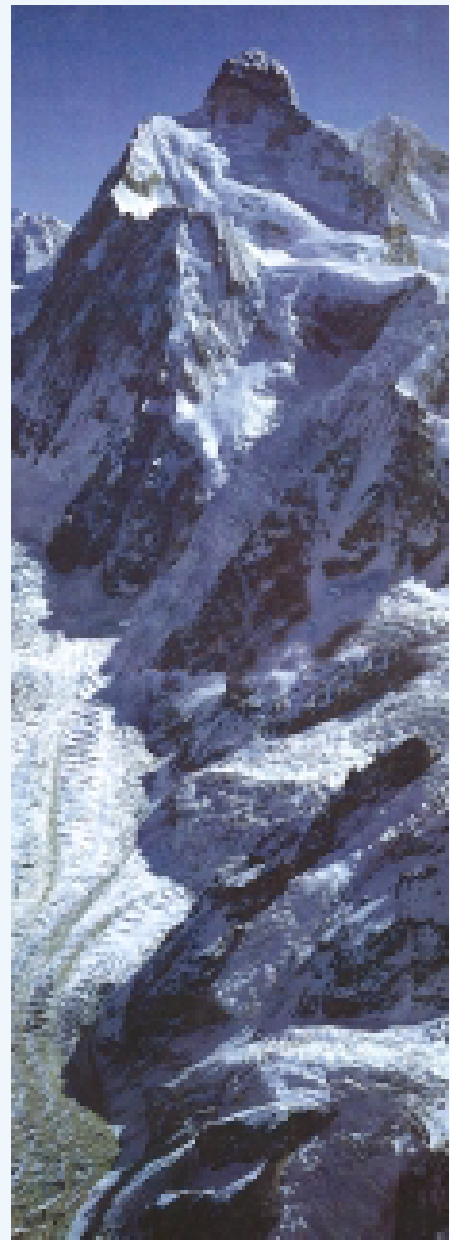
For climbers in general, the Kabru expedition is a wary reminder of the government's recently liberalised policies on open peaks. But though there are now some 326 peaks open, a large number in Khumbu but also many in Manang, the Annapurna and Kanchenjunga regions, and in western Nepal, the fees remain high—\$1,000 for peaks below 6,500m, and increasing by \$500 for every 500 m, going up to \$10,000 for the 8,000m peaks, and \$50,000 for Everest.

Climbing is never a cheap sport, but many say that climbing here is more expensive than it is sometimes worth. The bureaucratic hassles and the burden of a usually disinterested liaison officer add to the expenses. Typically, climbers have considered South America a good alternative—no fees, no permits, plenty of local colour and culture, you just go and climb. Pakistan and China are also looking increasingly attractive.

The Nepali argument is often that Nepal 'has' Everest and seven other 8,000ers. But not everyone wants to climb the monsters, of which at least three can be scaled from the Tibet side for a fraction of the Nepali tariffs.

Nepal's lower peaks are a huge attraction. But China has them too, and they're cheaper. Climbing in Sichuan, where 6,000ers abound in spectacular settings, is free. There are dazzling mountains in Pakistan, five 8,000ers and scores of lower peaks. The attraction here is the reduced peak royalties and permit fees since 2002: from \$0 (for peaks below 6,501m), to only \$6,000 for K2. Nazir Sabir, Pakistani Everest summiter and expedition operator says the rapid return of expedition numbers to pre-9/11 levels is precisely due to this.

Kabru IV is attractive because it is the highest newly opened peak. As for the others, climbers, some jaded by three decades of Himalayan experience, and others exploring new horizons say there are comparable mountains in the rest of the Himalaya and Hindukush. ● (AN)



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'Media can't remain indifferent'

Sharach Chandra Wasti in *Kantipur*, 25 April

कान्तिपुर

The media is nobody's rubber stamp. All journalists, including those belonging to the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) came up with protest programs including a silent rally and the demand for the dismissal of the information minister. The entire press sector has united and has advanced to strengthen press freedom.

Ironically, from within the press we are hearing some voices that the journalists' fight against government atrocities is politics, their street protests for press freedom is against norms of professionalism and that their solidarity in the struggle for democracy is a serious crime. These are the voices that have also been warning us that we may be politicising our cause and thus we might lose our credibility.



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Journalists used to hear similar counseling from panchas during the Panchayat period. They used to shed crocodile tears at every sentence that was written for press freedom and democratic rights. It is the same voice that we are hearing now when there is the government of the same panchas.

It is said that journalists should not be involved in any kind of politics except to cast their votes. If they do, they are supposed to lose their credibility and reliability. These arguments would hold true during normal times. But that does not mean that these ideals should be kept separate from current happenings and circumstances.

What is politics after all? The country itself is a political unit surrounded by geographic boundaries. The state management itself is a mechanism to run the political system under which you get your citizenship. The constitution itself is purely a political document. If you want to remain indifferent to politics, you will have to do without all these. Can you?

On the top of that, believing in democracy means accepting the fundamental concept of the constitution. To be active for democracy and its protection and to work hand in hand with pro-democracy forces is a citizen's constitutional right and duty. That does not translate into going against professional norms.

Some journalists who believe in universal journalistic standards are living in a fallacy. They are just aping certain western norms of journalism suited to their context. These journalists have never been able to think how such principles and standards can be applied to Nepal's ground realities. These are the journalists who, in the name of professionalism, go on practicing journalism that has no objective and goal.

There is a fundamental difference between journalism in Nepal and in the US and UK from where we have been importing these principles and ideals of the press. The genes of their media are different. In Britain, journalism evolved after the country already had a parliamentary system. In America, journalism had an easy environment to establish itself. But in countries like ours, journalism itself played the role in bringing democracy. It is natural for the mother to be caring for her baby. Journalism, therefore, can never remain indifferent when democracy is threatened.

Work in Iraq

Samacharpatra, 23 April

कान्तिपुर

More than 1,000 Nepalis work in Iraq and Afghanistan, but the government has no official records of this. Since the government doesn't issue work permits for these two nations, those who get there do so on their own. In the last few months, Apollo Manpower alone sent around 250 workers to Afghanistan. Most are engaged in construction and household work and are paid upto \$800 including overtime. Those who reach Iraq are employed in rehabilitation work and earn an average of \$500.

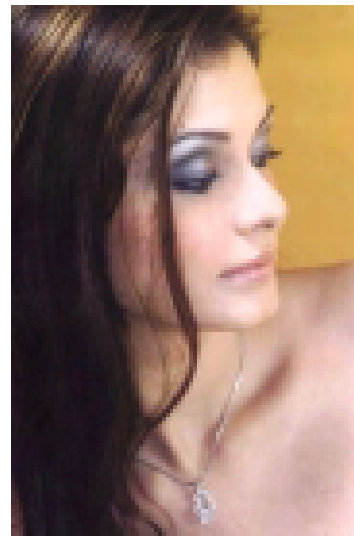
The government is aware of the increasing number of Nepali workers in Iraq and Afghanistan. "We know the numbers are significant," says Pratap Kumar Pathak, director general of the Labour and Employment Promotion Department. "We are working on an agreement with the Iraqi government." If these contracts were done officially, Nepali workers could earn double what they are earning now and also get life insurance packages. But as long as the hiring is clandestine, they get no benefits. At present, the Nepali workers go to Iraq via Kuwait and to Afghanistan via Mumbai.

Darj beauty

Mahendra Lama in *Himal Khabarpatrika* 28 April - 13 May

विद्यालय

Two Nepali girls are grabbing India's attention: Jyoti Brahmin won the Miss India Earth pageant this year while Surabi Rai topped the Indian Forest Service Examination. Jyoti is the granddaughter of Ratanlal 'Maila Bajre' Brahmin, a key leader of the West Bengal communist



movement. The Queen of Hills seems to be churning out a talented lot: Joel Rai is the copy editor of *India Today*, Surendra Rasaili is the deputy director of the Indian Institute Technology, Tanka Subba is the dean of Northeast Hill University and so on.

In the past, the people of Darjeeling contributed to several historical events like India's struggle for independence, the rebellion against the Nepali Rana regime and recently, the Bhutani refugee crisis. Darjeeling also nurtured Olympiads like CS Gurung, Chandan Singh Rawat and BS Chettri. Bollywood artists Ranjit Ghimire, cinematographer Binod Pradhan, Tulsi Ghimire and Ramesh Sharma are from there as are musicians and singers like Louis Banks, Aruna Lama, Gopal Yonjan, Amber Gurung and dance artist like Bhusan Lakhndri. Then there are the great Nepali poets and literateurs like Rupnarayan Sinha, Lain Singh Bangdel and Shiva Kumar Rai.

Rx SOS

Samacharpatra, 25 April

कान्तिपुर

A large number of kalazar patients in the tarai are not getting treatment for their disease because of the shortage of medicine.

Hospitals are running out of sodium antimony gluconate to treat the disease. In 2002, more than 2,000 people were infected with this disease and the number has increased. The Health Ministry has yet to distribute medicine for kalazar in 12 districts where it is reaching epidemic proportions. The ministry is vying for commissions from the medicine import business. Last year more than 18 people died from kalazar and doctors fear there could be more fatalities this year.

About 5.5 million people in Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari, Saptari, Siraha, Udaypur, Dhanusa, Mohattari, Sarlahi, Rautahat, Bara and Parsa districts are in grave danger of contracting this disease. "We have not received anything from the government in over a month. Hundreds of people have been queuing at the hospital," says Mustakim Ansari of the Mohattari Jaleswor Hospital. Meanwhile, the blame game is taking precedence in the ministry with one unit accusing the other: the Epidemiology and Disease Control department says that the Supply Unit is responsible for providing the drugs. "We repeatedly reminded them. If they can't provide the medicine on time, we can't supply to hospitals," says Mahendra Bahadur Bista of the Disease Control department.

Back home

Ram Prasad Dahiya in *Rajdhani*, 25 April

राजधानी

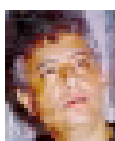
JERUSALEM, ISRAEL—The Israeli government is cracking down on illegal immigrants including Nepalis. There is no accurate figure on how many Nepalis work illegally in Israel, but the government is becoming vigilant. "We have information



Maoist : We're requesting you to accept our cooperation
Tiger : People's War
Goat : People's Movement

पुनर्जागरण *Punarjagan*, 27 April

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



"Our monarch can also learn from the Thai king."

Sashank Koirala, son of late BP Koirala in *Deshantar*, 25 April

on Nepalis living and working here without the right papers," says Danny Simen, a government information officer. The immigration police, set up 18 months ago to look into this matter, has uncovered more than 97,000 illegal foreign workers and the government has already deported most of them back to their respective countries. In the past, the Israeli government accepted foreign workers for jobs in hotels, restaurants and households through overseas manpower agencies. Now Israeli authorities say these agencies are ripping people off.

Breakdown

Kantipur, 25 April

कान्तिपुर

DHANKUTA – In the eight years of civil war, the Maoists have

destroyed physical infrastructure worth more than Rs 550 million rupees in the east. The regional administration office says the rebels targeted mainly government offices, telephone towers and bridges. The amount includes money looted from various banks. Udaypur is worst hit with property worth Rs 177 million destroyed or damaged. Saptari, on the other hand, has suffered the least with losses estimated at Rs 3.8 million. More than Rs 111.2 million worth of property was damaged in Solukhumbu, 21.3 million in Taplejung, 17.3 million in Panchthar and 13.3 million in Ilam. In Morang the sum is at Rs 24.8 million and Rs 4.67 million in Dhankuta. Recent losses in Bhojpur and Ilam were not counted. (Nepalnews.com)

“Talks soon”



Extracts of an interview with Prachanda in Janadesh, 28 April

जनदेश

Why launch a month long program now?

This program is to support the political parties who are actively protesting against regression. We are showing solidarity.

How feasible are your plans of blockading government vehicles inside the Valley and preventing revenue and tax collection?

It will be possible because we successfully blockaded government vehicles both here in the Valley and in several district headquarters. We always urge the public not to pay taxes to a government whose focus is solely on the army.

What about punishing those named in the Mallik Commission?

Those perpetrators were accused of crimes and abusing human rights during the 'People's Movement' of 1990. It's a big political mystery why they were not brought to justice. We constantly protested the agreement of democratic leaders with the palace which involved former panchayat leaders. Now these same panchays are giving party leaders a hard time. We are taking our own initiative to bring justice to those who were victimised and to prevent such crimes from being repeated.

Why are the Maoists and the leaders of the five parties campaigning separately?

Nepal's parliamentary political parties have their own obligations and limitations. We encouraged them to support us in our movement to establish a republic. Now it seems like they are heading in the same direction. Yet it was not feasible to do this in a united manner.

We are constantly in touch with the party leaders. We asked for their suggestions in organising this program and told them that they should call for a republic and, failing that, for constituent assembly elections. Nothing will be solved without a new constitution. It is unrealistic and too late to ask for the reinstatement of parliament.

What are your views on foreign powers trying to unite the parties and the king against the Maoists?

They have vested interests in the country and they are dreaming of keeping the old regime intact. Those who understand the Nepali reality know this will solve nothing.

What happens if the five party leaders set up government and hold elections?

We will protest with all our power. Our party will never accept a government that does not recognise the 'People's War'. We would welcome the framing of a new constitution to open a way for new political developments.

You welcomed the UN's proposal to mediate for peace talks. Is any other international organisation sending mediation feelers your way?

Several, but the palace and certain influential foreign powers are causing obstacles.

Two kings

Former Congress minister Mahesh Acharya in Samaya 22-29 April

समया

King Birendra's face reddened. There was complete silence in the room. An European minister had just asked an indiscrete question and the king was embarrassed. "It seems like Your Majesty has all the free time in the world now that you are a constitutional monarch and there is democracy in the country. So, how do you spend your time? Hunting, swimming?"

The visitor was oblivious of his own insensitivity. King Birendra quickly regained his composure and stayed calm. "Well," he answered, "I keep myself busy sharing my experience and supporting the elected government."

That was King Birendra's character: a monarch who once had absolute power but was comfortable in his constitutional role and calm even when a blunt question was asked by a foreigner. He willingly gave up his powers for the sake of his country, his subjects and for democracy. I don't how much that question hurt him, but one could see clearly that the king took his position as a constitutional monarch very seriously.

Unfortunately, after his death, such honour did not last. King Gyanendra has seriously violated all the limits of the constitution. There are no signs he will remain just a constitutional monarch and return the people's sovereign rights. And this is why the conflict is scaling up.

Today, Nepali people will not accept the king's right to scrutinise errors of a government, amend laws or give punishment. The king is ruling



MIN BAJRACHARYA

arbitrarily, and this is the reason why parties are launching their movement actively to protest his actions. One can never be the people's king when their rights are infringed upon. A real king is someone who will stand by to protect the rights of his subjects.

The 20th century has seen the end of many absolute monarchs and autocrats. The 21st century will see the end of central level governance and the start of power being decentralised and transferred to the people. This is the reality of our time, and such popular demands will never be undermined by any military power or conspiracy.

The king has no choice but to respect the sovereign power of the people through the constitution. And a people's elected government is the only appropriate body that can find a way to end the Maoist violence as well. There is still time to act and end the conflict between the Maoists, the parties, the state and the king. This will only happen if the king restrains his ambitions and respects the popular demand in the way King Birendra did.

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Southern Thailand in flames

MARWAAN MACAN-MARKAR in BANGKOK

An unprecedented scale of violence in Thailand's southern region—which resulted in over 110 people dead on Wednesday—has placed the country's Muslim minority in dire straits. "There is a lot of tension in the area. People are shocked by the attacks. They don't know who is behind it," said Niti Hassan, president of the Council of Muslim Organisations of Thailand in the aftermath of the bloodshed.

Equally troubling, he said, is the site of the heaviest fighting between the assailants identified as young Thai Muslims, and the security forces—the Kru Se mosque in the southern province of Pattani. Over 30 assailants were killed after a standoff with heavily armed security forces at the mosque, which is held in high regard by Muslims for its historic value. "We have learnt that the security forces attacked the mosque," he said of the attempt by the government's troops to force their way into the ancient mosque, where some of the assailants had taken cover.

The violence in Pattani was part of what appeared to be coordinated attacks at dawn on 11 police stations and security checkpoints in three of Thailand's predominantly Muslim provinces, Yala, Songkhla and Pattani. Since the attacks, Thai television stations have been offering the country graphic images of the scale of the bloodshed in the provinces that border Malaysia, including footage of the bodies of the assailants scattered on the ground, blood all over.

"Excessive action by security forces will only help breed new recruits for future attacks."

Estimates of the numbers killed have reached 113, but that is expected to rise. Of that number, 107 have been identified as assailants, while five of the dead were soldiers and two were policemen. The government of Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra appears to be in some discomfort following Wednesday's bloodshed, yet that has not muted its sense of achievement at the success of the security forces in confronting the assailants with minimum casualties. "We are bothered that the people who attacked were Thai people. These militants deliberately planned the attacks in 11 spots that were symbols of government authority and we had to respond," says government spokesman Jakrapob Penkair.

But there were two areas of "progress," he added. "We lost very few in the attacks, but they lost more." As important, he revealed, was the fact that the authorities "were tipped off by people in the neighbourhood" about the impending attacks. "This reflects the faith of the people in the government's efforts in the south." Yet he admitted that while the assailants are "Muslim youth from the area," the "mastermind (behind the attacks) remains unknown".

Analysts say this week's attack has taken the violence that has punctuated the lives of people living in southern Thailand for months to a new level. For Kavi Chongkittavorn, a senior editor and columnist of *The Nation* newspaper, the clashes and the death toll that followed Wednesday is "one of the single biggest incidents in Thai history in the south". He warned that worse could follow: "With this, the conflict in the south will change. We are moving towards a very pivotal period."

In early January this year, unknown assailants stormed an army camp in the south and stole a substantial quantity of arms, including 380 M-16 rifles, seven rocket-propelled grenade launches, two M-60 machine guns and 24 pistols. The attacks have not ceased since then, as school buildings were torched and police posts hit. Lives were not spared either. Soldiers, policemen, Buddhist monks and government officials are among the estimated 70 people who have been killed by unidentified attackers since 4 January.

The government has regularly pointed fingers at various groups, ranging from Thai Muslim separatists to people linked to criminal organisations. Even a Muslim group that has been identified by security officials as spearheading a campaign of terror across South-east Asia has been named. But Muslims not convinced about Bangkok's theories about the involvement of Thai Muslim separatist groups such as the Pattani United Liberation Organisation (PULO).

That stems from the change in PULO and other separatist groups after the government prevailed over these groups in the 1980s. PULO began its struggle in the early 1970s. Thai Muslims, who account for some six million of the country's 63 million population, majority of whom are Buddhists, have long complained that the Thai government has ignored developing the southern region. They have also felt discriminated against in education opportunities, among others.

But what also sets these Muslims apart from the rest of the Thais are their unique history, cultural traditions and language, which is Yawi, a dialect of Malay. Just over a century ago, the five predominantly Muslim provinces belonged to the kingdom of Pattani, which was annexed in 1902 by Siam, as Thailand was then known. "The Muslims will only feel more bitter and more alienated if it is revealed that the way the security forces responded to the attack was excessive," said Kavi, the editor. "It will only help breed new recruits for future attacks." ● (IPS)

Candidates put their faith on the zodiac

Indian astrologers are busy ensuring that the planets are properly aligned for their clients

RAHUL BEDI in NEW DELHI

Astrologers have been honing their stargazing and fortune-telling skills and wrestlers limbering up to help India's politicians decide their fate in the general elections that began last week and will end on 10 May.

The first phase of the election went underway 20 April, covering a 170 million-strong electorate. Some 172 million voters cast their votes on Monday in 137 parliamentary constituencies. The rest of the 333 million voters will cast their ballots in the next two phases of polling on 5 and 10 May, with results expected on 13 May. "The astrologers will manage the heavens and the wrestlers the voters," a senior outgoing member of parliament said. Over the years, both have become a part of India's election scene, he added. Scores of mendicants and yogis or religious men, known for "delivering" electoral successes, are busy "organising" the stars for candidates from all parties trying desperately to win in elections.

coalition said, there is no "celestial" advice he would forego. It just might work, he quipped. Though India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, ridiculed astrologers, succeeding premiers, including his daughter Indira Gandhi and her son Rajiv, have been among their most willing clients. Indira Gandhi popularised soothsayers in political circles, a year after she was voted out of office in 1977 for imposing an emergency when her political survival was threatened. She turned to them for succour and many believe they were responsible for her return to power in 1980.

The Cambridge-educated Rajiv Gandhi, cynically dismissive of astrologers before joining politics, travelled across the country visiting influential 'sadhus' or holy men when he was up for reelection in 1989. One of the 'sadhus' he visited lived in a tree and blessed Gandhi, assuring him of success by placing his feet on his head. Ironically, Gandhi's party was voted out of office a few months later.

But Chandra Shekhar, the 'stopgap' prime minister who served just for three months in 1991, was perhaps India's only modern politician to publicly defend the practice of astrology. But even his army of "star merchants" was unable to predict his downfall after 12 weeks in office. Senior members of parliament and ministers invariably hold 'yagnas' or prayer meetings presided over by priests ranged around a fire, considered holy by Hindus.

Even Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee—whose Hindu nationalist-led 24-party coalition will clash with the main opposition Congress party for control of parliament—attended one such session before filing his nomination papers from the eastern city of Lucknow in mid-April. Political parties also hired wrestlers and

bodybuilders to provide security for candidates, and 'capture' polling booths to enable their patrons to vote with impunity for themselves, and in some cases to intimidate rivals. "Politicians seek out wrestlers for campaigning," locally known wrestler Jagdish Kalliraman said in Delhi. They are promised jobs and given good money, he added.

The "campaigning package" for wrestlers varies according to their popularity with leading grapplers being paid up to \$111 a day for "varied" services. 'Heavies' accompanying prospective candidates assures a pliable audience and, in some rougher constituencies in the eastern states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, it confers status on the campaigner. "Crowd contractors" too do good business during elections, hiring out crowds to political parties by charging between \$2.2 to 3.3 per person per day to attend rallies. ● (IPS)



"The greater the uncertainty, more the need for astrologers as guides into the unknown," said Pankaj Khanna, an astrologer who has ably "steered" senior members of parliament through the complex maze of Indian politics and elections. Senior politicians, he said, have been flocking to him in recent weeks, wanting to determine the exact time of filing their nominations, beginning their campaigns and above all pleasing the "appropriate" gods. Irrespective of their political affiliations, there are few Indian politicians without a string of astrologers, palmists, numerologists or occultists on their payroll, dominating every public and private move.

Whether they believe everything their astrologers tell them is another matter. But as a senior government member of parliament from the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party-led federal

Hearts and minds

Last year, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, George Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, asked Secretary of State Colin Powell why the United States seemed to focus only on its hard power rather than its soft power. Secretary Powell replied that the US had used hard power to win

World War II, but he continued: "What

followed immediately after hard power? Did the US ask for dominion over a single nation in Europe? No. Soft power came in the Marshall Plan... We did the same thing in Japan."

After the war in Iraq ended, I spoke about soft power (a concept I developed) to a conference co-sponsored by the US Army in Washington. One speaker was Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld. According to a press account, "the top military brass listened sympathetically," but when someone asked Rumsfeld for his opinion on soft power, he replied, "I don't know what it means."

One of Rumsfeld's "rules" is that "weakness is provocative." He is correct, up to a point. As Osama bin Laden observed, people like a strong horse. But power, defined as the ability to influence others, comes in many guises, and soft power is not weakness. On the contrary, it is the *failure* to use soft power effectively that weakens America in the struggle against terrorism.

Soft power is the ability to get what one wants by attracting others rather than threatening or paying them. It is based on culture, political ideals and policies. When you persuade others to want what you want, you do not have to spend as much on sticks and carrots

to move them in your direction.

Hard power, which relies on coercion, grows out of military and economic might. It remains crucial in a world populated by threatening states and terrorist organisations. But soft power will become increasingly important in preventing terrorists from recruiting new supporters, and for obtaining the international cooperation necessary for countering terrorism.

The four-week war in Iraq was a dazzling display of America's hard military power that removed a vicious tyrant. But it did not remove America's vulnerability to terrorism. It was also costly in terms of our soft power to attract others. In the aftermath of the war, polls showed a dramatic decline in the popularity of the US even in countries like Britain, Spain and Italy, whose governments supported the war. America's standing plummeted in Islamic countries, whose support is needed to help track the flow of terrorists, tainted money and dangerous weapons. The war on terrorism is not a clash of civilisations—Islam versus the West—but a civil war within Islamic civilisation between extremists who use violence to enforce their vision and a moderate majority who want things like jobs, education, health care and dignity as they pursue their faith. America will not win unless the moderates win.

American soft power will never attract Osama bin Laden and the extremists. Only hard power can deal with them. But soft power will play a crucial role in attracting moderates and denying the extremists new recruits. With the Cold War's end, Americans became more interested in budget

Soft power and the struggle against terrorism



Major Warren Fensom makes friends in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

savings than in investing in soft power. In 2003, a bipartisan advisory group reported that the US was spending only \$150 million on public diplomacy in Muslim countries, an amount it called grossly inadequate.

Indeed, the combined cost for the State Department's public diplomacy programs and all of America's international broadcasting is just over \$1 billion, about the same amount spent by Britain or France. No one would suggest that America spend as much to launch ideas as to launch bombs, but it does seem odd that the US spends 400 times as much on

hard power as on soft power. If the US spent just one percent of the military budget on soft power, it would quadruple its current spending on this key component of the war on terrorism.

If America is to win that war, its leaders are going to have to do better at combining soft and hard power into "smart power". ●

(© Project Syndicate)

Joseph S Nye is Dean of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, and author of *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*.

ADVERTISEMENT

Ascension of the Slovak Republic to the EU

The year 2004 has been an important one for the Slovak Republic. After years of negotiations, the country acceded to NATO in March and on 1 May 2004 to the European Union. This is an important milestone in Slovak and European history.

We have never drawn a dividing line between the two processes, seeing them as complementary. Today, the Slovak Republic is an internationally established country. The purpose of our many years of effort was to build a prosperous and dynamic nation and we have adopted many reforms to this end. Our efforts will not stop with the ascension to the EU and NATO. Our goal is to ensure that within the shortest possible of time after the ascension to the Euro-Atlantic structures, Slovakia will be transformed into not only an equal partner for cooperation within NATO and the EU, but also a capable partner to Asian countries like Nepal.

All the reforms directed at the liberalisation of the market economy, deregulation of competition and taxation policy has been reflected in the inflow of foreign investments into Slovakia. The positive aspects of reform are more and more evident. They are attracted by Slovakia's market in the electronics and automobile industries. Recent investors include Dell, Samsung Electronics, Volkswagen, Citroen, Peugeot and Hyundai, and other partners are Siemens, Orange, Whirlpool, Sony, etc.

More than 120 American companies operate in Slovakia today and the US ranks sixth with a 5.9 percent share in total direct foreign investments amounting to \$340 million.

All these could inspire Nepali entrepreneurs and businessmen. The time to come to Slovakia to invest, create joint ventures, start tourism and other businesses is now.

Ladislav Volko

Ladislav Volko, Ambassador of the Slovak Republic

Slovakia is a small country in the heart of Europe. It is surrounded by the Carpathian Mountains on three sides and by the Danube River to the south. Nature has endowed Slovakia with a varied landscape, hills and massive mountain ranges, tranquil rivers, rugged peaks of the High Tatras and fertile plains of the Danube basin.

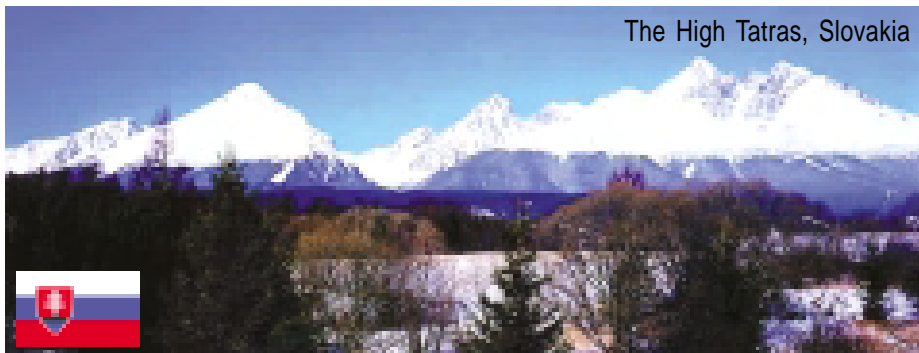
Slovakia and Nepal have a lot in common. Both are landlocked, and are crisscrossed by mountains, valleys and plains. Both have a rich historical and cultural heritage because of their location in the ancient trading routes of their regions. There have been many Slovak expeditions to the Nepal Himalaya.

In 1990, the Slovaks, like the Nepalis, expressed their desire to live in a free, democratic country that guarantees the observance of human rights and aims for a higher living standard and prosperity.

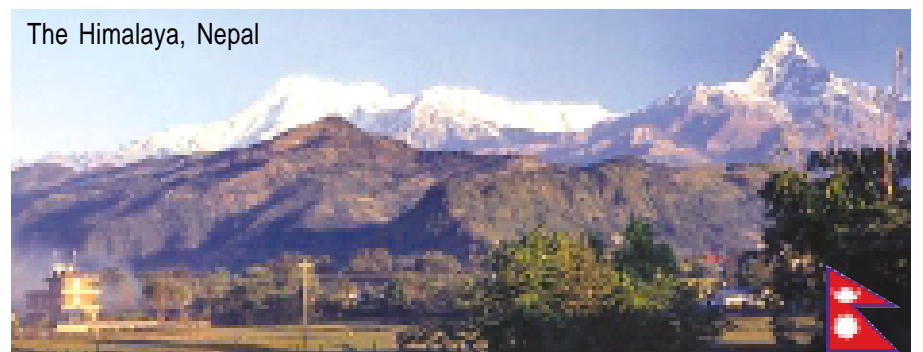
Slovakia's main foreign policy priority, integration into the European Union and NATO, was based on this desire. After political changes and years of negotiation the Slovak Republic had its accession to NATO finalised on 29 March 2004. On the 1 May 2004, the Slovak Republic will enter the European Union.

On this historic moment we offer our hearty congratulations to the government of the Slovak Republic and warm greetings to the people of Slovakia.

Chatur Dhoj Karky
Honorary Consul of Slovakia
Kathmandu



The High Tatras, Slovakia



The Himalaya, Nepal



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The theatre as a mirror of life

A 60-year-old Swiss play bears an uncanny resemblance to present-day Nepal

The Fire Raisers, which opened last Friday at the Naga theatre at the Vajra Hotel, is a must-see for those who care about the human condition in general and the current crisis in Nepal in particular. This play is the perfect antidote for the Kathmandu malaise which one experiences every day, at every reception and dinner party, every jazz bar and golf tournament—in fact every function which reminds one of Nero fiddling while Rome burned.

Billed as a 'tragic comedy', *Fire Raisers* is by Swiss playwright Max

THEATRE
Barbara Adams



Frisch, who is obviously influenced by Berthold Brecht. This is a multidimensional, multilayered thought-provoking, laughter-inducing yet tragic play that depicts the abject

complacency and denial of the middle class moral cop-out, the hair oil magnate, Gottlieb Beidermann, whose mediocre life is forever changed by two arsonists who come to stay.

The superb acting by Studio 7's multinational cast holds the audience spellbound. Salil Kanika is an alternatively cringing and blustering Beidermann, whose fire raiser tormenters are brilliantly played by Shambu Lama and Brian Sokol. As an abused charcoal burner's son, Sokol's performance is extraordinary. His muscular, menacing movements and cunningly primitive persona dominate the stage whenever he is not asleep in the cleverly conceived on-stage attic.

The stage set by Ludmilla Huberman is unobtrusive perfection, as is the innovative direction of Sabine Lehmann. The rousing, live jazz piano and percussion music, provides a perfect audio backdrop for the drama, keeping us focused on the action.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Somehow the play and its sly messages stay embedded in our consciousness long after the last glass of wine at the Vajra's opening night party and during and after the drive home through the still peaceful streets of the capital. The play could be about any 'fire-raiser' situations: the Third Reich, the French Revolution, the Bush administration. But it has an uncanny parallel to Nepal that hits us in the solar plexus. Kathmandu, or "la la land" as my more perceptive friends refer to this city, seems dangerously close to the venue in Frisch's play, dominated as it clearly is by ostriches with their heads in its filthy sand.

Essential to the drama is a sort of Greek chorus of "questioning, merely polite" human fire extinguishers including Sabine and Ludmilla. Early on in the play one hears: "As a means of forgetting the danger that threatens, the citizen rushes cleanly shaved, to his office." And later, as it looks like it is a fire that is too late to be extinguished, we hear the question directed at the audience: "What would you have done, and when?"

The back of the program sums up this Studio 7 production: "At a time when bombs are going off and people suffer, the theatre as a mirror of life, has the duty to reflect the situation. It must take a stand and set in motion a process of critical thought. But, at the same time, theatre should also be entertaining, as any thought is more easily grasped with liberating laughter." ●

Studio 7 presents *The Fire Raisers* by Max Frisch at the Naga Theatre, Hotel Vajra
30 April, 1 May, 2 May, 7 May, 8 May, 9 May
Show time: 7:15 pm
Reservations: 4271545, vajra@mos.com.np

BIGBEN



Then one day, cows decided to join the strike...



Gurkhas invade Italy

After several years of training new recruits, Lal Singh Gurung's company finally sees action during World War II. His company is sent to Iraq, then into Italy to fight the Germans retreating from North Africa. Gurung recounts his experience with flamethrowers and other weapons in the battle for Attesa. Dev Bahadur Thapa translates this and other testimonies of Gurkha soldiers every week for *Nepali Times* from *Lahure ka Katha* published by Himal Books.



On new year's day 1943, I was ordered to select 19 recruits and then proceed to war. My unit was stationed at Kirkuk in Iraq and there we were taught to operate mortars and stenguns. It was a two-week course that I completed in seven days.

I was then posted with D company. Our unit arrived at Syria, a tiny state that lies southeast of Turkey and north of Iraq, then moved to Lebanon and Jerusalem. In the months of June and July 1943, news reached us that the Germans had abandoned North Africa and crossed over to Italy. So we boarded a ship and, nine days later, arrived at Trento in Italy. We had to take a basic three-month course to learn Italian. We marched on, expecting to encounter the enemy by mid-September. In military terms, this is called 'advance to contact': you keep marching till you come face to face with the enemy.

The Germans started bombing us when we reached a hill called Attesa. There were three of us specially promoted sergeants in the unit, and we headed the contingent. I was in the middle, Sergeant Dhan

Bahadur was on my left and Sergeant Jawan Singh on my right. Because of my position, I was a few steps behind my sergeant comrades and remained unscathed when they were hit by initial enemy fire. Despite our age, Sergeant Dhan Bahadur used to address me as his 'mama'. He collapsed, moaning, "Uncle, oh uncle." I rushed to him, and told him not to worry and gave him an injection as we usually did in those days. He asked for water that I helped him drink. A few seconds later, he died.

On the third day we reached the village of Attesa and attacked. However, as we didn't cover the whole village, there were escape routes for the fleeing Germans. We had the advantage as the Germans were hiding in foxholes and mainly using tanks to fire back. The tanks had a limited range, and as we estimated their range accurately, we managed to stay out of their line of fire. Even so, another British regiment suffered heavy losses—only 10 soldiers out of a 100 survived.

We were then ordered to withdraw to our former position, even though this meant leaving what we had

already captured. The artillery could then shell the enemy position.

At the time, I was a sergeant major and Hone, our company commander, had been killed in the attack.

We set up defence in a place called Seno, where we attacked the enemy with flamethrowers and many Germans were burnt to death. Those who did not die fled, and the morale of the enemy troops was greatly reduced. Word spread that the British had a new, unknown weapon. Flamethrowers are so devastating that they can kill everyone inside a bunker at once. Up to 15 soldiers died inside a single bunker.

Our onward march continued and we reached Orsogna in the middle part of Italy. The Germans had established a position across the river and on a hill higher than ours. We could see everything they were doing through our binoculars. The British forces had made several efforts yet could not capture Cassina. The high command decided to send the 8th Indian division there. Our battalion was assigned to attack Cassina.

Lowering your score

Improve your handicap and lower your score

The satisfaction received from whacking a golf ball a long way is amazing. It is understandable then that most golfers spend so much time practicing being able to hit the ball longer, rather than working on very short shots like pitches, chips and putts.

In fact golfers go way beyond just practicing hard. They look for and buy expensive clubs created with the latest technology to achieve this goal.

However, golf is about scoring and practicing the short game will, without a doubt, result in better scores on every round played. After completing your round, how often have you looked back and felt silly for

TEE BREAK Deepak Acharya



having chipped and 3 putted from so close?

Yes, a 300 yard drive certainly feels good, but it counts for exactly

the same as a 3 foot putt.

Here are few tips for putting, chipping and pitching

Putting:

There isn't really a set style of putting. There are different ways of gripping, standing before the ball and so on. You don't need to follow a text book if you feel comfortable with the way you are putting and the ball is falling into the hole. Here is some general advice I give for putting:

- Eyes should be right above the ball
- Grip pressure should be very light and wrist action should be kept to a minimum
- Swing the putter through the ball
- Always swing the putter on straight line to the target
- Keep the lower body very still throughout the putt.
- If you cannot stop yourself watching the ball after you hit it, peek along the line, but don't lift your head until the ball is well on its way

Chipping:

- Aim at the target with the club face
- Feet may be placed a little bit open (aiming slightly to the left of the target)
- Place the ball almost on the back foot (right foot)
- Take a short back swing and accelerate into the follow through
- Turn your hips towards the target on the follow through
- Feel like the shot is a long putting stroke

Pitching:

- Aim at the target with the club face
- The ball position is a little left of center in your stance (towards the left foot)
- Push the backswing straight about 2 feet and hinge the wrists slightly
- Turn your hips both on the backswing and downswing
- Keep the wrists hinged during the down swing
- Into the follow through, feel that the hands, and not the club face, are leading during the downswing

Practice your short game more, and consider keeping the above tips in mind. You can be certain you will improve your overall score.

Extra tips:

It is not only good shot making that is important to lower your score. If you make a good choice in the selection of shot, it will pay. For instance, get your putter out even when you are off the green!

The putt from off the green is an under-utilised shot by mid- and high-handicapped amateurs. There are times when a putt is a better choice than a chip or pitch, even if you think of yourself as a good chipper. When you have a tight lie around the green (the ball is on short grass and the ground is hard), using a putter is often a better option than trying to chip or pitch it to the hole. From a tight lie, one can easily miss-hit a chip shot. This is not negative thinking, it is just reality and a part and parcel of playing percentage golf.

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

“Nepalis can't run”

Sure we can, and dribble a football too

In a world where a nation's esteem and feel good factor is judged by its prowess in the sports field, Nepal does look like the sick man of Asia. Where does it put us in the global feel good barometer when the national football team can only manage a stalemate draw with the lowly

LONDON EYE Joti Giri



Bhutan at the recent SAF Games in Rawalpindi? What next, losing to Afghanistan? The significance of sport in realpolitik and in people's lives is fundamental, the recent Indo-Pak cricket test series and US Secretary of State Colin Powell's comment about the series clearly illustrated this bond. At a time of conflict, anarchy and sheer desperation, sports and all its distractions can be a great leveller and a necessity.

How long can we use poor training or lack of training infrastructure as the excuse? Sports, especially football, should lead the future for Nepal. Why hasn't the special FIFA development fund made any impact or progress? Why haven't the martial characteristics of Nepalis been translated from the battlefield to the sports field? Is it because we have forgotten the art of competing, or is it because the Nepalis can't run?

Can this discrepancy be explained by a vintage newsreel type footage of a Gurkha recruitment camp circa post-World War I somewhere in the east? In the black and white footage, young hopefuls are put through their paces to be picked for export to Somme or Imphal. Nepal's finest export, to this day is still its sons. The scene in the camp, reminiscent of a cattle auction, shows young shirtless wannabes with numbers painted on their chests and backs running through a drill. The

commentator, in his quaint colonial English, an accent which would be so out of place in today's London and its estuary and urban English, wryly explains that the young natives cannot inherently run in a straight line.

Is this why Nepalis can't compete in football since it requires more running than cricket? Why has cricket with only about 20 years history become the team game in Nepal? Cricket was one of the legacies left by the colonialist in South Asia but Nepal was never part of the British Raj, so cricket never took root until recently. Cricket is a new legacy, a game the new colonialist left in modern Nepal. With the wholesale adoption of cricket and Nepal going into hysterics over the minor league successes of our U-19 cricketers, is this the final proof of total domination of Nepali culture, economy and politics by our southern cousins?

Is satellite TV the new battleground and frontier in the spread of a new regional hegemony? Cricket in India is a game which transcends religion and politics, a game that shaped



the nation's identity. Nepal too is in need of such a game, a game where it can stamp its own unique and separate identity. Kathmandu-based media (who normally peddle cricket), nation builders and ANFA should take note and promote football. It is the world's game, the beautiful game and above all the people's

game. Sports is tribal and always linked to identity.

Football is fast, furious, intense, sublime, expressive and sometimes brutal and tragic (ohh, Maradona you are a genius). Nepalis, too, have that la dolce vita, Latin passion and style. Football is the most watched and most played game in the world. Nepal should be part of this global phenomenon. Another season in the different leagues of Europe is nearing close. They are staffed by players from Argentina to Zambia. When will a Nepali player grace these leagues making one Nepali Londoner proud? Until then, the dreams of Shyam Thapa scoring a hat trick for Mohun Bagan will keep getting sweeter. ●



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

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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Still Life/ Street Life** Photographs by Wayne Amtzis till 3 May, poetry reading 5PM on 2 May at Siddhartha Art Gallery. 4218048
- ❖ **Healing Elements** Acrylic paintings by Chungpo Tsering with Reiki carpets by Rupert Smith, Indigo Gallery from 1 May onwards
- ❖ **Diary of Portraits III** and jewellery by Carolyn Boch from 1-15 May at Gallery Moksh, inside Club Hardic, Lalitpur. 2113339
- ❖ **Festival:** Buddha Jayanti, 4 April



EVENTS

- ❖ **Dutch Queens Day** Buy or sell at the Summit Garden, 1-5PM on 30 April. 5521810/ 5524694
- ❖ **The Fire Raisers** by Studio 7 at Hotel Vajra's Naga Theatre. 30 April and 1-3, 7-9 May, 7:15 PM. Rs 700, student discounts. 4410798
- ❖ **Macbeth** by Rato Bangala School, 7-9 May at the Russian Cultural Centre. 5522614
- ❖ **Sinners in Heaven Summer Blast** 8PM onwards 30 April at Hotel Yak and Yeti. Tickets: Rs 1,499.
- ❖ **Lincoln School Rock and Roll 2004** 7PM onwards on 1 May at Hotel Shanker. Rs 800

FOOD

- ❖ **2061 Peace BBQ** at Dwarika's poolside. 30 April, Rs 699 per person.
- ❖ **Friday Nights** at Subterranea Club Kilroy. 4412821
- ❖ **Organic Market** Saturdays, 10AM-2PM at Baber Mahal Revisited
- ❖ **Vegetarian Creations** at Stupa View Restaurant, 4480262
- ❖ **Executive Lunch** at Toran Restaurant, Dwarika's. 4479488
- ❖ **The Beer Garden** at Vijayantha, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Traditional Newari Thali** at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel.

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NEPALI WEATHER by MAUSAM BEED

APRIL 29-04-2004 02:00 GMT

The pre-monsoon showers have started earlier than usual with this moisture infusion on a westerly front. Kathmandu Valley so far has had 120mm of rain in April, more than double the average for the month. All this is welcome news to maize farmers reeling under a winter drought. The northwesterly winds have also chased out the haze and send the temperature plummeting this week. This satellite picture on Thursday morning shows more low pressure cells over north India that may head our way into the weekend. The clash of the cold, moist air with the warm air rising from the plains will trigger thunderstorms over the mountains.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
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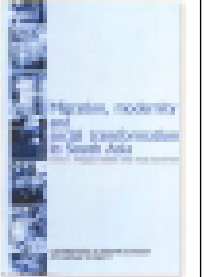
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BOOKWORM

Migration, modernity and social transformation in South Asia

Filippo Osella, Katy Gardner (eds)
Sage Publications, 2004
Rs 1,272

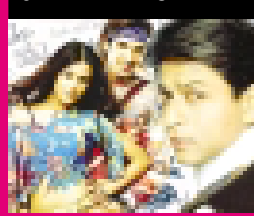
This volume discusses migration within rural areas and between villages, towns and cities. Based on detailed ethnographic studies from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, it focuses on actual practices, juxtaposing internal with international migration. Contributors highlight projects of transformation, ambiguity and relations of power underscored by the global political economy.



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

Popular choreographer Farah Khan turns director with her ambitious debut project *Main Hoon Na* starring Shah Rukh Khan, Suniel Shetty, Sushmita Sen, Zayed Khan and Amrita Rao. Anu Malik composes music in the RD Burman mode and Javed Akhtar pens the lyrics. Farah follows the current Bollywood trend of an Indo-Pak theme repackaged as a mission film. Throw in humour, romance, action and plenty of song and dance and *Main Hoon Na* makes for a masala mix worth the ticket price.

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Main Hoon Na

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A devil of a party

To sin is all too human but perfectly divine if it has anything to do with the return of Sinners in Heaven, the best dinner and dance party in the Valley. Hosted at the Atrium in Hotel Yak & Yeti, Sinners in Heaven Summer Blast on 30 April will feature DJ Ashish of New Delhi's Djinns who aims to please with an array of techno, trance, electronic, rock and all the top of the pop sounds. As a tongue-in-cheek nod to the fine line separating heaven from hell, party people can pose against the decorative Pearly Gates of Heaven as they knock back unlimited tipple with St Peter and the Grim Reaper for company.

Sinners in Heaven Summer Blast

Hotel Yak & Yeti.
30 April.
Rs 1,499 per person for dinner, drink and hours of dancing.



KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

91.2
What you burn is what you breathe.

Last week saw an improvement in Kathmandu's air quality, as pollution levels dropped all over the Valley. Even in perpetually polluted Putali Sadak, the weekly average of PM10 particles dropped to 245.57 PM10 - down by 32 from the week before. Even so, the daily average did cross into the "very unhealthy" range on Monday with 353 PM10. The afternoon showers later in the week probably had something to do with the drastic reduction.

18 - 24 April in micrograms per cubic meter.
Source: www.mope.gov.np

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

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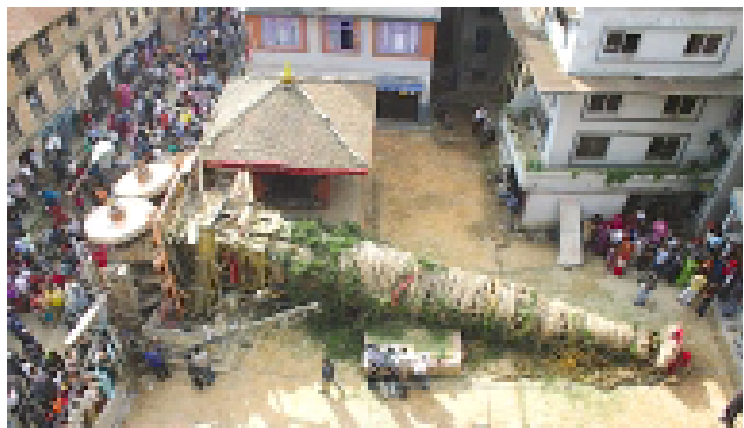
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HAPPENINGS



KIRAN PANDAY

TIMBER!: The Rato Matsyendranath chariot lies on its side on Monday morning in Sundhara, Patan after it toppled over on Sunday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

LIFE GOES ON: Pedestrians walk past slogan-shouting protesters being loaded on a lorry by riot police at New Road on Tuesday.



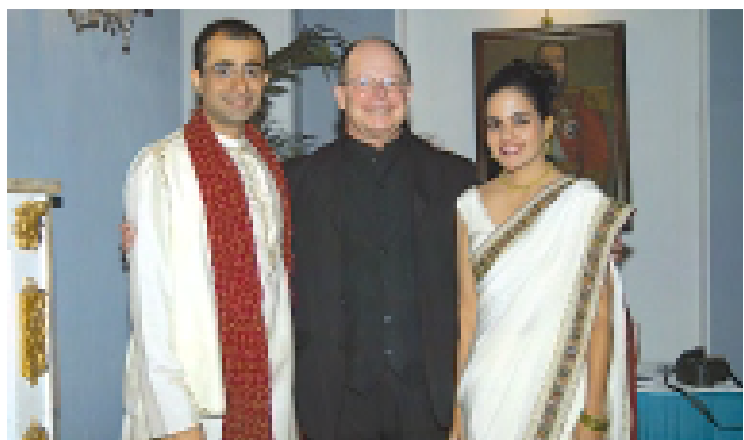
MIN BAJRACHARYA

CAMOUFLAGE: Newly appointed director of public relations of the RNA, Brig Gen Rajendra Thapa takes the microphone at a press conference on Tuesday. At right is the head of the army's Human Rights Cell, Brig Gen BA Kumar Sharma.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

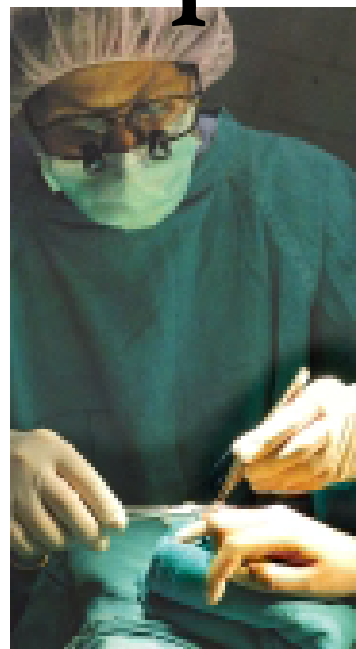
BYE: Outgoing first secretary of the Indian Embassy, Nagma Mallick, chats with industrialist Rajendra Khetan as her successor, Jawed Ashraf (r) and Farid Mallick (middle) look on.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

SAARC WEDDING: Shantanu Nagpal, an investment banker from India, and Aruni John, a media trainer from Sri Lanka, were married Saturday at the Yak & Yeti Naachghar. Fr Joe Thaler (middle) solemnised the wedding.

In Daddy's footsteps



MIN BAJRACHARYA

When Swiss geologist Toni Hagen first brought his three-year-old daughter, Katrin, to Nepal in 1952, he took her to Muktinath. Katrin doesn't remember much of that trip, although there are photographs of her being carried in a doko on porter back up the Kali Gandaki.

Now a 55-year-old surgeon specialising in operations of the hand, Katrin keeps coming back to Nepal every year to help Nepali patients in the Bir Hospital's Burn Unit.

After Toni Hagen died last year, Katrin came back to scatter her father's ashes over the Khumbu Glacier from a helicopter. In an

interview outside the operation theatre at Bir Hospital, she tells us: "I am just carrying on my father's work of helping Nepal."

Toni Hagen traversed Nepal on foot mapping its geology and carrying out feasibility surveys for hydropower and highways for the United Nations and the Swiss government. Hagen had traveled more in Nepal than any other Nepali or foreigner, and his experiences are documented in his pictorial classic, *Nepal*.

As she grew up, Katrin accompanied her father on many of his trips, and her favourite spot in Nepal is the Buri Gandaki valley below Himalchuli in Gorkha district.

But more and more, the trips to Nepal became work rather than just holiday. She makes it a point to spend at least two weeks in a year at Bir Hospital and the HRDC in Banepa. Although her work makes it possible for many Nepali patients to use their limbs again, she says many of them would never have been handicapped if better primary care was available.

Katrin is working to put together specialised surgical equipment for hospitals in Nepal through the Rotary Club. Says Katrin: "My father would be very happy to see me continuing to help Nepal, a country that he devoted his life to." ● (Min Bajracharya)

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We'll be right back after these messages

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UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit



ex-August House, Semi-

underground Comrades, Boycotting Politicians, Madam Chair, Illustrated Members of the Panel, Ladies and Generals:

Thank you for inviting me to deliver this Key Note Speech to the Nepal Development Forum. As someone who doesn't need any introduction, allow me in

my allotted time to dive right into the deep end if you will excuse the pun. But before that, a short commercial break. Don't go away. This Key Note is brought to you by:

General Morons

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As you all must be painfully aware: we are a critical junction in our nation's history. If we make a right turn we are in the fire, and if we take a left we are in the frying pan. Some would be disheartened by this state of affairs, because, after all, it means that either

way we are in deep excrement. But, look at the bright side, how many countries in the world have that choice? At least we have a pick. As a great philosopher once said: "The proof of the pudding is in the eating." And with that, time for another message from our sponsors. This speech has been read and approved by:



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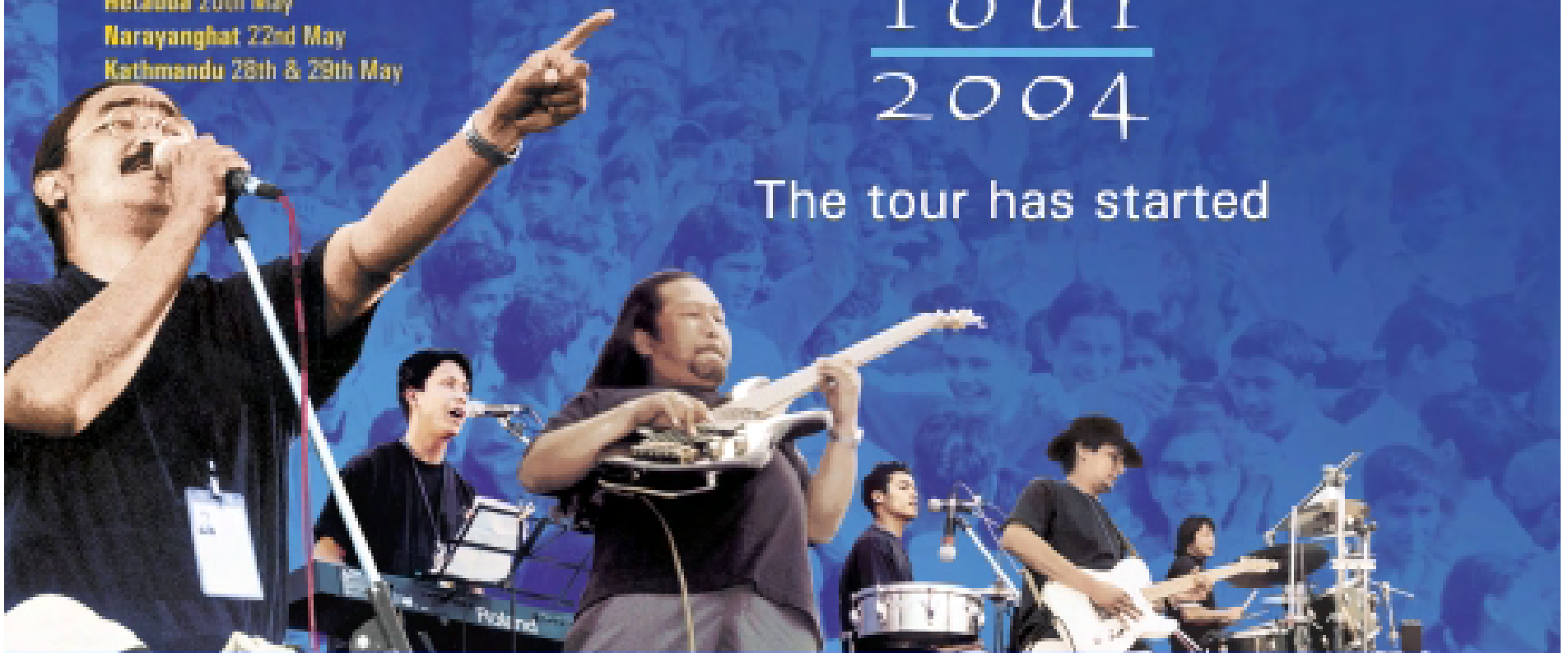
NEVERREADY.

Before I get squeezed out of this page by the forces of Mammon let me say in

Talesipur, Dang 27th April
Dhangadi 29th May
Nepalgunj 1st May
Butwal 3rd May
Bhairahawa 4th May
Pokhara 6th May
Tansen, Palpa 8th May
Birgunj 10th May
Dharan 12th May
Dhulabari, Jhapa 14th May
Damak 16th May
Janakpur 18th May
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Narayanghat 22nd May
Kathmandu 28th & 29th May

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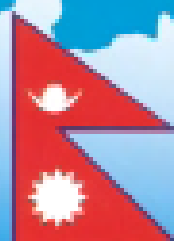
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May 5-6, 2004, Kathmandu

BIKAS BAZAAR EXHIBITION

May 4-6, 2004, Kathmandu



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