



Growing up in a war



KASHISH DAS SHRESTHA

FOUR YEARS OLDER: Last week, this young Maoist teenager in Budagaun in Rolpa (left) displayed one of the socket bombs in his backpack to a visiting journalist. Four years ago, he was only 14 (NT #124).

TOM FARRELL

Donors divided

As the conflict shows signs of nearing a climax in the coming month, Nepal's major donors are embroiled in a row among themselves and with the government over new aid that could be seen as support for an autocratic regime.

Most bilateral donors have frozen aid since the king's February coup and say they will not add new aid until he restores democracy. They argue the king's move has made it more difficult to find a political solution to the insurgency.

However, multilateral lenders like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank argue that the Nepali people should not be punished for the king's power grab and say they are mandated to continue supporting infrastructure and development projects. The long-simmering row has now broken out in the open.

Meanwhile, the royal regime itself has locked horns with Switzerland and Britain over their new \$5 million project to support democracy and human rights. Under pressure from its intelligence services, the government is threatening to scrap the project which it calls a ploy to channel money to opposition political parties.

Full coverage p4

Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 288

Q. Do you agree with US Ambassador James Moriarty's recent comments about the Maoists?

Total votes: 6,245

Yes	51.2%
No	45.6%
Don't know	3.4%

Weekly Internet Poll # 289. To vote go to: www.nepalimes.com

Q. Is Nepal being left behind by the rise in living standards in the rest of South Asia?

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Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Chief Editor: Kunda Dixit
 Desk Editor: Mary Logan
 Design: Kiran Maharjan Web: Bhusan Shilpakar
 Vicepresident Corporate Affairs: Sneha Sayami
 Advertising: Sambhu Guragain advertising@himalmedia.com
 Subscription: subscription@himalmedia.com
 Hatiban, Godavari Road, Lalitpur
 GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu Tel: 5543333-6, Fax: 5521013
 Printed at Jagadamba Press, Hatiban: 5547018

What intervention?

Fashionable anti-Americanism finally meets reality

The word 'intervention' has lost all meaning in Nepal's current political landscape. The Maoists consider Ambassador Moriarty's recent skepticism of the 12-point agreement as yet another example of an ongoing pattern of American imperial intervention.

The political parties welcome Indian facilitation of democracy on Indian soil as diplomatic

GUEST COLUMN
Pravin Rana



goodwill yet consider those that question the naiveté of this agreement as 'foreigners who don't understand the situation in Nepal'.

Our intelligentsia, mainstream media, some rights groups who are increasingly demonstrating themselves as ideologues of the first order rather than dispassionate analysts, consider ambassadors who express opinions contrary to their own as being out of touch with the 'people'. Yet, they have almost a religious belief in any third-party willing to broker peace.

With so many hegemon around, intervention comes in

many flavours. We look to history and the weight of evidence since 1996 and a complete lack of connectivity between what that the Maoists say and their actions as our compass.

First, one of the core elements of Marxist ideology bears repeating even when volumes have been written on this subject. The end-game is the defeat and control of state army. Altruism isn't the underlying motive nor are the Maoists interested in making a prospective national army more transparent, subordinate to civilian leadership and representative (even as the RNA's recruits and senior officers are becoming ever more diverse and professional).

The Maoist goal rather is to wield the very power of the state in the name of the proletariat, with predictable disastrous results. Such 'people's liberation armies' have more blood on their hands than all of the kings since the earliest civilisations.

Second, the Maoists have shredded the fabric of Nepali society since they took up arms in 1996. Everyone hates feudalism, poverty and oppression and when the Maoists first began their movement, we all scratched our heads and thought that maybe they were justified in bringing to attention the state of affairs in the villages. But their sudden and massive attempts at re-engineering have brought more misery than anyone bargained for.

Despite all their rhetoric against royal and imperial armies and autocracies, theirs has not turned out to be an army of liberation. They do not leave free people in the wake of their battles but even more oppressed, destitute, displaced and terrorised victims. They say they bleed for the Nepali that is faced with the tough demands of working as a servant in the Middle East, while they extort

two months pay from this same cohort on their return from duty. Despite endless double-speak, debate and intellectual inquiry and a respect for logic, so necessary for democracy, are alien concepts in their culture.

Ambassador Moriarty's position offers clarity not seen in the 12-point agreement or in the generally naive department of the parties or intellectual leaders in adding the Maoists to the alliance. Security in the villages, as he further points out, is a critical issue and one barometer of success against this insurgency.

Inability to speak parlour English isn't the problem with the parties. Their demonstrated failings in running parliament, shutting down commerce and educational institutions through bandas, failures to deal effectively with the Maoists, and now an obsessive indulgence in viewing the 237 years of rule as the root cause of everything weigh heavily on their credibility.

No one is asking for a groveling apology—just actions that demonstrate that they can lead and compromise and make the right choices. The choices faced by leaders and statesmen, especially in such times, are always among bad, worse and much worse. Exigencies in such situations favour practical solutions. Utopia is not an option. The choice, though difficult, should be obvious and it entails reconciliation with the current government (and vice versa).

So let us not dismiss the ambassador or his statements with the tired 'imperial Americans', 'Americans are the terrorists', 'Americans support dictators', 'they're in it for the oil' rhetoric. And let us place the word intervention in proper context and reason and recognise genuine diplomatic goodwill when we see it. ●

AS IF THERE IS NO TOMORROW

There may be no military victory to this conflict. But there is certain to be economic defeat.

Revenue is down, the bottom has fallen out of tourism, even remittances are faltering. The Indians are putting the squeeze but raising fuel prices won't be enough to pay them for the backlog. If it wasn't for remittances and the fixed exchange rate with the Indian rupee we wouldn't even have to wait till June for this country to go bankrupt.

Public frustration will rise this summer with inflation in the double digits due to the recent diesel price hike, the combined effects of a disappointing monsoon and an unprecedented five-month drought that has turned Central Nepal into a dust bowl. And then we have power cuts the likes of which Nepalis didn't see even in the worst days of the Panchayat. But Nepal's city-dwellers are an apathetic lot and they'll probably sit tight till the worst is over on or around 6 April—Comrade Prachanda's D-Day.

But even if public anger isn't boiling over yet, the bureaucracy is seething. There is outrage at the arbitrary heavy handedness of royal nominees. Which is why the chief secretary had to appease the civil service with promises of raises and perks. The anger is strongest among those looking after finance and audit as officials have watched aghast at the open plunder of the national exchequer.

According to a cover story in this week's edition of our sister paper, *Himal Khabarpatrika*, a staggering Rs 50 billion has been paid out from state coffers to fund purchases of royal limousines, organising royal weddings, handing stashes of cash to loyal royals and large mysterious payoffs to the Home and Defence Ministries. A detailed list of dates and amounts paid shows billions transferred from budget account heads to Contingency and Miscellaneous and then slipped across.

On the week when victims of the Myaglung fire were sent back empty handed in January 2003 because of "lack of budget" a sum of Rs 130.5 million from a disaster relief budgetline was transferred to another account and then sent to the palace. Rs 70.9 million from the 'Integrated Development' account was moved to Miscellaneous over a period of four days last month. In July 2002, Rs 20 million was transferred with unusual haste from a standard budgetline to a contingency account within four days of the national budget being passed and then used to purchase of two bulletproof Jaguars.

We can perhaps understand the Home Minister making fungible transfers for intelligence-gathering during times of insurgency but other opaque, arbitrary and unaccountable transfers since 2002 of an amount equal to the annual development budget is systematic ransacking of the treasury on a breathtaking scale. An even more damning indictment is that the leadership of the political parties were in key ministries for some of that period.

Had there been a parliament, the Public Accounts Committee would have provided oversight and no one would have dared do this, not even the palace. But without democratic safeguards, and the country in the hands of shadowy powerbrokers, it is plunder as if there was no tomorrow.



Basking in reflected glory

The two chairmen are mirror images of each other

Tipped off by incendiary interviews of Prachanda, the sky is dark again with media parachutists. They think something is afoot but are astonished by the raucous calm of Kathmandu in the nuptial season. Perplexed, they look towards local columnists for explanation.

STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal



Nepal is their stopover between Baghdad and Bangkok. Most have neither time nor patience for the intricacies of Nepali politics. They want to be briefed about the Maoist rebellion in five minutes so that they can grab that flight to Nepalganj to see the 'frontline'.

The problem is that the conflict in Nepal is maddeningly complex even for an insider. It's impossible to simplify the insurgency or monarchist regression to suit

the attention span of a tv journalist.

There is no frontline here. A reporter is as safe or unsafe in Libang as in Lajimpat, an IED can go off with no warning Chipladhunga. All parties to the conflict think they have a higher calling and swear by the same constituency—the people. How do you boil all this down for the Asia Briefs newsbar? So the deadline reporter goes for dath from an exotic dateline: body bags and sound bites of an obligatory my-encounter-with-a-Maoist.

Journalists can get away with gross simplifications but donors and diplomats have to sound a little more profound. They have to pretend that they can make head and tail of this mess. Since the Maoists have been claiming Prachandpath is synthesised Marxism, Leninism, Maoism, and Shining Path, conflict experts evaluate their rhetoric and activities from the prism of these models of left extremism.

Westerners do not fear Marxism anymore. They have seen that it is socialism and not capitalism, that ultimately collapses under the weight of its own contradictions. Marxism is now the fatalism of academia and fetishism of intelligentsia. The elite worldview is that if a classless society is a historical inevitability, then we may wait for eternity.

It is the resurrection of Lenin's ghost in Asia and Africa that spooks the Europeans and Americans. Bolshevik fervency lies buried under the rubble of Berlin Wall. That is why the UML apparatchiks at Balkhu HQ in 2003 took down the wall-mounted portraits of their five avatars (Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao) when western envoys came visiting. Threats of 'or else' was all it took for the UML comrades to desert street protests and join the royal cabinet of Sher Bahadur Deuba.

The mystery of the Great Helmsman has unravelled. He is no more the master strategist he was once believed to be. Without a determined Stalin and disinterested Lloyd Johnson Mao too would have probably gone down in history as a failed warlord. In any case, China has so successfully drowned the memory of the last Chinese Emperor with Deng capitalism that the People's Republic refuses to even use the 'M' word.

Naxalite Charu Majumdar and Shining Pathist Comrade Gonzalo have passed into history of revolutionary have-beens. Unable to pigeonhole Nepal's Maoists into any known model of leftist radicalism, therefore, conflict experts now like to equate them with Pol Pot. No matter how hard Prachanda tries to convince his audience that he wants to be a statesman like Gandhi or Ganeshman, the diplomatic community refuses to accord him any status other than that of Brother Number One.

Perhaps the easiest way to understand a future Maoist republic is to picture it as the mirror image of monarchical democracy. The two chairmen are alike in their moods, methods and machinations. Once we get rid of one, the other will automatically cease to exist. ●

LETTERS

MORIARTY

I think we are giving a bit more emphasis than necessary to Ambassador Moriarty's speech ('Professor Moriarty strikes again', #287). First we should understand his desire for war against terror. For him it is easy to vouch for such a war because for the US war against terror is against some foreigners in Iraq and Afghanistan. Few innocent people (actually several thousands so far) killed here and there doesn't seem to matter to the US. But here a single person killed on the either side is a Nepali and as CK Lal writes, a Nepali will silently weep whenever anyone dies in this meaningless conflict. Second, what Moriarty says does not always have to be true. It is his personal or may be his government's view and we just have to look into the claim of weapons of mass destruction in Iraqi to see how off mark that can be. Third, even if his US views are correct, we don't have to follow that doctrine if it does not suit us. Cuba has been doing pretty well ignoring the Americans. Let's just remember that if we had been able to keep our own house in order then we'd not have to be listening to these lectures from foreign diplomat and then make a such a big deal out of it.

Sagar Sharma, email

● CK Lal's piece on James Moriarty was interesting. It seems that the US doesn't really want a stable Nepal. With the end of the Cold War, a unipolar system has emerged with Washington dictating most world affairs at will. However, China and India are rapidly emerging and will play a pivotal role in world affairs in coming decades. The US fears this change and what better way to foil the Asian giants' growth and prosperity than by trying to destabilise the entire region using Nepal as a platform?

Santosh Pokharel, Maine, USA

● I am not a political activist, but I agree 110 percent with the last statement of Bamdeb Gautam (From the Nepali Press, #287) that the violence or 'terrorism' in Nepal was born, grew and spread like wildfire when the monarch, parties and the international community were standing together. Therefore, going back to the same situation as suggested by the US ambassador 'is the wrong prescription to resolve this crisis'. By now, every genuine peace-loving ordinary citizen of Nepal knows it is not possible to achieve even an initial state of peace or political resolution by isolating the Maoists. In fact, the US should learn from and reflect on the results of its actions in Iraq before proposing any solutions to Nepal's crisis. Nepal needs a negotiated political settlement that enables people to take charge of their destiny, not an autocratic regime and more arms that will spur further bloodshed.

G Gurung, Italy

● I have rarely seen a non-Nepali who has understood Nepal's nuances so deeply as Sam Cowan in his Guest column ('Nepal's two wars', #287). It shows that some foreigners

really care about Nepal while others, like the US ambassador, have their own vested and short-sighted interests at heart.

Ranjan Thapa, email

● Nepal's political parties are like a pack of dogs. Right now they all claim to be working together but if the fate of the nation was back in their hands, they'd turn on each other. To prove my point, they should be challenged to put forth an interim government of their choice to guide the nation to peace. They will show their true colours by fighting amongst themselves, the same in-fighting that let the murderous Maoists go from strength to strength. The shocking part is how they have spun things around to make His Majesty the bad guy, when he's the one man who can and will save this nation.

'Just another Nepali', email

● In 'Professor Moriarty strikes again' (# 287), C K Lal writes: 'The venue was Ganesh Man Singh Adhyan Pratisthan, a pseudo-academic body known for its right wing sympathies...the Ambassadors' address has proven to be a public relation coup staged on a shoe string budget'. This Academy had embarked upon a mission to continue the legacy of Ganesh Man Singh to safeguard democracy and sovereignty of the Nepalis to the best of its resources. Has Mr Lal ever visited the Academy or kept up to date with its performance since its inception in 1995? The Academy may not have similar access to

privileges of the high profile forum of the Nepali Times, which we guess is addressed to the 'non-upper crust' as well. We will let the 'shoe-string' phrase go. Just as the media, we also sometimes provide fora for discussions. The address by Ambassador Moriarty in the venue and media reverberations are quite natural. But by no stretch of



journalistic ethics can Mr Lal label the Academy as rightist on this score. It is an infra dig of an 'advocate' of free media as Mr Lal to pen such irresponsible comments.

The Academy leaves upper crust and hopefully 'non-upper' crust readership of your paper to infer what they may of Mr Lal on his downright demeaning allegations on the Academy. At least we don't make value judgments for mileage.

Nabindra Raj Joshi President, Ganesh Man Singh Academy

KILLING MINISTERS

As always, Kanak Dixit's outburst in his Southasia Beat column ('Why not to kill the minister',

#287) comes with sense and rational arguments. Having watched the movie, I could not even for a moment concur with the idea of how they were trying to draw the analogy to Bhagat Singh by showing what this actor was supposedly forced to draw upon (the violent path) to wipe off society's ill. However, to a majority of young blood this might seem appealing, which I fear most. No doubt this is far off from reality and does not involve creativity. I wonder why people have completely neglected the correct route of eliminating society's ills. Have we really abandoned our belief and conviction to resolve issues with opportune and discredit violence? Isn't it high time we all believe in a system to cure and do away the dream of resorting to violence?

Anjan Pandey, email

TRAVEL ADVISORIES

It's helpfully provocative to have H Marceau's views (Letters, #287) in which he says: 'The embassies don't issue these advisories on a whim but as a last resort'. There is now a website www.nepaltraveladvice.com dedicated to this issue receiving scores of views of quite the opposite persuasion, namely that the western governments are indeed whimsical about how they judge the need for 'negative travel advice'. No views such as M Marceau's have been posted on the website so it is good to see from your newspaper that there is debate on this issue. He is wrong

about not being able to obtain insurance but, sadly, closer to the mark when he speaks of irresponsible tour operators and (mishandling) tourism being a missed opportunity. Our website's central tenet is that, if the British negative travel advice were not whimsical, why then have they now removed that lethal phase advising 'against all but essential travel to Nepal'? Is the situation here suddenly so improved or, more likely, was the case for the 'travel ban' proven to be so insufficient in the first place? The website also concerns itself with how the FCO paints such a paranoid picture of the risks to tourists here and about the possible re-imposition of the negative travel advice for reasons no better than those that proved so unwarranted earlier.

Niraj Shrestha, email

AT RISK

Your silence on the issue of the security of people working in development is regrettable. If a newspaper such as yours does not raise this then who will? Peoples' lives are being put at risk but this could be reduced. From the Nepali people working in development: Help!

Suman Panday, email

UNMASKED

I'd grown so used to the masks. Why has Kunda Dixit reverted back to wearing those outrageous hats again?

Subodh, email

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ROAD TO WAR: The Karnali Highway near Jumla is an example of a World Bank project that has gone ahead despite the conflict.

MIN BAHADUR SHAHI

Where will the money go?

The royal regime has taken strong exception to a new project being launched by Nepal's two major donors, the UK Department for International Development (DfID) and Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), which it says could fund political parties.

The nearly \$5 million Rights, Democracy and Inclusion Fund (RDIF) is designed to support rights groups, NGOs and even government agencies but the government's intelligence services have smelled a rat, saying the money could be channelled to political parties opposed to the royal takeover.

They are now leaning on the Finance Ministry to reject the project outright. The Swiss are said to be firm on not backing down while DfID has held several rounds of discussions with the government to iron things out.

The Finance Ministry says it is unhappy at the way the project was introduced with just one page of guidelines and because its steering committee pointedly excludes government officials.

"DfID is saying it doesn't have the mandate to fund political parties but we need to be assured and we also need to know what is this all about," State Minister for Finance Roop Jyoti told us, "if it is something to help Nepal then the government must have ownership in it especially when there is change in donors' policies."

DfID officials admit there is a problem. "There certainly have been some differences of views on how the fund should be managed," said DfID Nepal chief Mark Mallalieu, "but we will end up making a reasonable understanding with the government."

The project is already being implemented and the two donors are seeking proposals for funding from NGOs activists. They say even government agencies are eligible for the money.

But ministry officials say they are being squeezed between the donors and the intelligence services. One ministry source told us: "They tell us that the project aims to pump in money into the opposition parties and they want to scrap the project."

During his walkabout in Patan last September, King Gyanendra had directly instructed district officials to be vigilant about new overseas funds. "Foreign money is being brought in to do different activities that are against national interests," the king had said, warning, "so we believe you will work extra hard to monitor such activities."

DfID's Mallalieu explains that the new fund is aimed at making multiparty democracy sustainable: "Since the king, parties and the Maoists have been stressing on the return to multiparty democracy, we think the fund could play a positive role toward that end."

In this row, Minister Jyoti seems to be angrier with the Swiss who have been less compromising than with the British. "The way SDC has been issuing statements about the fund is totally unacceptable," said Jyoti. An SDC official declined to comment at the present time. ●

Navin Singh Khadka



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Bilaterals vs multilaterals

Donors in row over continuing development aid to royal regime

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

Most aid is frozen, development projects are grinding to a halt, but Nepal's big donors are preoccupied with something much more earth-shattering: squabbling over whether continued development aid lets the royal regime off the hook.

After King Gyanendra took over on 1 February 2005, most bilateral donors (representing individual countries) suspended new aid and froze other assistance. They also accused multilateral institutions (like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank) of being soft on the royal regime by not stopping aid. Budgetary support from multilateral banks, they said, would ultimately fund security expenses.

Since February First, the World Bank has made commitments on two projects worth \$35 million and is now set to provide \$90 million in grants for higher education and the Poverty Alleviation Fund.

The Asian Development Bank says it made no new commitments in 2005 but approved two loans of \$60 million that were committed earlier. Bank officials say two other projects worth \$40 million have also been signed but they were committed earlier.

"Assistance like this shows that these institutions care least about the present situation in Nepal," said a visibly annoyed chief of a bilateral donor agency, "by continuing its assistance programs it is

endorsing this regime."

The multilaterals have so far ignored the criticism. But now even they are firing back accusing the bilaterals of double standards and hypocrisy. Bilateral donors have committed \$356 million to the government in the last year but they don't want this to be known for political reasons.

"They have asked us to take over some of their projects, but in public they paint us as villains while posing as heroes," one agency official told us privately, "our charter requires us to stick to development, we can't play politics with aid."

A senior Finance Ministry official confirmed that some bilateral donors are asking multilaterals to include them in projects. "They wish to spend their money but they don't want to be seen as helping the government directly," the official confirmed. But the ministry is now involved in a potentially bruising row with the Swiss and the British aid agencies which now want to directly fund political parties in their pro-democracy struggle.

Despite their disagreement, both bilaterals and multilaterals are critical of the palace and want the king to roll back his takeover. The last formal meeting Nepal's donors had was in January 2005. There is no preparation of holding the Nepal Development Forum, the annual meeting of the consortium of donors. State Minister for Finance Roop Jyoti is meeting donors for the first time on 6 March, three months since he was appointed.

"This is becoming a real

problem for the development sector," said a senior diplomat with one of Nepal's biggest bilateral donors.

To be sure, the government did feel an easing of pressure when multilaterals resumed aid in the middle of last year but the regime shot itself in the foot with its controversial guidelines for NGOs. And when the government failed to respond to the unilateral Maoist ceasefire in September and announced municipal elections, relations with bilateral donors soured further. The last straw was the arrest of political leaders last month which was slammed by even a restrained bilateral donor like Japan.

"We have been instructed to closely monitor the situation to decide on our future assistance plan for Nepal," Koji Tomita, First Secretary at the Japanese Embassy, told us.

The government's last line of defence is to invoke aid in the name of the people, and its argument now is that donors should not punish the people by holding back aid. "We have told the donors that if they discontinue their assistance to Nepal, it will be the people who will suffer," says one senior official, "in that sense they would be no different from the Maoists who are using the people for their cause."

Some multilateral officials in Kathmandu agree, "Even if we oppose the political changes, we don't want the people to suffer and that is why we have not stopped our assistance." Said one. ●

Nepal-China deals

Nepal and China will sign two agreements during the special visit of Chinese Deputy Prime Minister Thang Jia starting 16 March, sources say. They are an agreement to provide zero tax on Nepali exports to China and the announcement of new Chinese financial assistance of 20 million Yuan as part of an 80 million Yuan annual assistance package. Thang will also hold talks with King Gyanendra and meet opposition political party leaders. Until recently China described political developments in Nepal as an internal matter but on 24 January, it went further to express concern and urge reconciliation among all political forces. Thang's was to have visited Nepal last month, but the government was said to be unhappy about his plans to meet political leaders.

Expensive strikes

A single day shutdown causes a loss of Rs 870 million to the non-agricultural sector and about Rs 1 billion in total, said speakers at a recent talk program 'Banda and its impact to economy'. Dr Shanker Sharma, vice-chairman of the National Planning Commission said 40 percent of the rural population is affected by bandas and nearly 1.7 million households who depend on daily wages suffer. In addition, there is incalculable loss to the economy from cancellations of tour groups, trekking and climbing expeditions. "Bandas and strikes not only cause a day-to-day loss but also hinder foreign investment in the longer run," he added. Mohan Man Sainju, vice-chairman at the Poverty Alleviation Fund, said that the practice of shutdowns should be replaced by other means of protests. "There is a need to give momentum to the economy and bandas only deteriorate it," Sainju said.

NEW PRODUCTS



COME HOME: Southern Heights, Upper Harisiddhi housing estate opened for bookings on 25 February. Located 4 km southwest of the Ring Road en route to the Royal Botanical Gardens, Godavari, its 41 ready for occupancy homes include marble and parquet floors, spacious balconies, and earthquake-resistant construction. Developed by the Continental group, the estate's services include a convenience store, swimming pool, gym and 24-hour electricity and security back-up.

BANKING ON REMITTANCES: Western Union money transfer services will now be available at 25 banking offices of Nepal Bank Ltd, starting with branches in Kathmandu, Pokhara, Biratnagar and Nepalgunj. "The strategic relationship with NBL will help widen the network in reaching more people," said Anil Kapur, vice-president South Asia of Western Union. Consumers can use the system to pay bills and transfer money around the globe, which should boost the growing flow of remittances into the country.

Growing a human face

Nepali businesses must learn to invest in HR

Most general-interest business books are written by management consultants, who need to produce such tomes to reach out to business executives and to land consulting assignments. Often, the process they follow goes like this. They visit companies, interview senior management, interact with the employees, survey the

STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari



industry landscape, pore over numbers and then eventually come up with some grand-sounding theme that tries to tie up their disparate findings.

The results—whether 'management by walking around' or 'the secrets of Microsoft' or 'reengineering works' or 'turning your front-level staff into mini-leaders'—are often no more than common sense. But they are smartly packaged, perhaps stamped with the logo of a big-name business school press and priced to burn a hole in one's pocket.

Indeed, reading most business books, one gets the sense that one is being taught swimming by those who themselves learnt to splash around by watching instructional videos.

How refreshing then to skim, read and re-read Jack Welch's *Winning*. Welch joined General Electric (GE), one of the world's biggest companies, in 1961, spent his entire career there, rose through the ranks by working in different divisions and retired as the company chairman in 2001. In

between, he says that he made plenty of mistakes, hired, coached and fired thousands of people, got out of struggling industries, exploited new business opportunities, drove costs down and made money for shareholders. This book is filled with answers to questions that audiences around the world asked him when he went on a tour with his first book a few years ago.

Of all the lessons that the book imparts, the one that has stayed with me is the importance of human resources (HR) for any company.

Most top-end Nepali companies do have human resources departments but they are managed only around a flow of paperwork. Employees get their time sheets punched, receive information about leave days and find out about the company picnic through messages from HR. Such paperwork, though necessary, ultimately makes HR look as though it were a mere bureaucratic body there to rubber-stamp managerial decisions.

Besides, since it's seen to be not involved in the core business of selling products and building brands, HR is perceived to be a weak department—not worthy of senior management's attention. These help explain why those who have studied HR management have a hard time getting and keeping jobs at Nepali companies.

But Welch writes that one of his biggest achievements at GE was making that global company's HR department a formidable force in recruitment, training and



retention of talented employees. He elevated HR by giving it resources and by involving himself in interviewing candidates and evaluating employees. One result was that, by the time he left, many of his top-level colleagues also left GE to run other Fortune 100 companies. Looking back, Welch credits his HR department for turning GE from a producer of, say, jet-engine turbines, into a producer of business leaders who could competitively adapt to rapid changes in any industry.

Welch's emphasis on HR is important for us in Nepal because it underscores that, in today's world, products and processes are becoming commodities that anyone can produce and sell. To stay competitive, whether in tourism or hydropower, what seem to matter more and more are adaptability and the innovation that talented employees bring to tasks at hand. That is why, the sooner the top-end Nepali companies see themselves in the business of tapping employees' brains for opportunities and align their HR processes accordingly, the more likely they are to be better prepared for business challenges. ●

Economic alert

It's not just Nepali politics that is in a mess, warns a new report



KIRAN PANDAY

GOING BUST: Aakash Shrestha's camera business, like the country's economy, is in shambles.

MARTY LOGAN

Aakash Shrestha has watched business at his Camera Mart in Thamel plummet about 60 percent in the last nine years. "I didn't sell a camera yesterday and I probably won't sell one today," the young man said early one recent evening. "Maybe tomorrow," he added with a smile and a slight shrug.

Such an attitude might work for a retail businessman but those entrusted with managing Nepal's economy should do more than happily count the \$1 billion sent home by the growing number of citizens working overseas, says a recent report. In fact, if the government doesn't start balancing its books, it could soon be bankrupt, adds the paper by the Institute of Development Studies (IfDS).

After a decade of conflict, the only economic bright light here is the export of labour overseas. The roughly 130 workers who leave the country daily help boost overseas earnings. Remittances now contribute at least 15 percent of the country's GDP.

But look beyond the influx of workers' dollars deep into the country's finances and there are unsettling signs. Even remittances are showing signs of weakening, says IfDS, suggesting that

some families supported by overseas wage-earners have decided to invest their dollars in India, where the political situation is stable. "If the available information is any guide, it will lead to a sharp decline in receipts from remittances," it predicts.

More bad news is that a Rs 4 billion surplus predicted in last July's budget (excluding development spending) will actually be a Rs 3.6 billion deficit, thanks to tariff cuts announced in January's supplemental budget, economic activity since July and based on the accuracy of the Ministry of Finance's past forecasts, adds the report.

'As the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have decided not to release additional resources under the Poverty Reduction Growth Facility, the government (will have) no independent resources at its disposal,' says the IfDS report, and will have no choice but to borrow from the Nepal Rastra Bank.

With inflation soaring, the trade deficit widening and draining reserves of Indian currency, the fear is that the problem could get out of control and ignite social anarchy. "We are not trying to criticise the government," IfDS Executive Director Raghab D Pant told us, "we are just trying to point out the political implications of the current economic situation."

It's not only the government that is ignoring the risks, says Pant, the main opposition political parties hold a belief that once the country's political problems are solved its economic knots will naturally unravel.

State Minister for Finance Roop Jyoti called two press conferences earlier this month to repudiate the findings, dismissing the IfDS report as the product of "political bias". He said revenue in the first sixth

months of the fiscal year grew over last year's figures and public expenditure was within the limits and criteria set by the annual budget.

"These figures indicate that the government will be able to achieve its set goals and ensure economic stability," Jyoti added. An IMF report released in February didn't sound any alarm bells, but did project a revenue shortfall and predicted the government would need to take domestic loans equal to 1 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). The economy would grow 2.5-3.5 percent, it added.

With political stability, better security conditions and structural reforms, "Nepal could see a gradual return to growth rates of 5-5½ percent through 2009/10," added the IMF, "but if the conflict persists and the political impasse stalls reform implementations the fiscal and external position could deteriorate, and international reserves could be lower."

But recent economic figures have been unsettling. The trade deficit grew by more than 24 percent in the first six months of the fiscal year, as imports rose faster than exports. And the NRB reported that in the first seven months, revenue went up just three percent, much below the government target of 15 percent. The central bank also revised its inflation prediction for the year to seven percent from the previous five percent.

Tourism which saw a healthy rebound during the autumn 2005 ceasefire is in deep gloom. Trekking bookings are being cancelled because of the uncertainty and Maoist threats during the peak season.

At Camera Mart, Aakash Shrestha like most other Nepalis is resigned: "I'm waiting, and hoping for peace to come soon—it's been so long." ●

Between two extremisms



Senior advocate Ganesh Raj Shama in Kantipur TV and transcribed by *Jana Satta*, 25 February

At present, one type of extremism in Nepal is providing fertile land for another type. This has resulted into deepening of mistrust. This situation is favourable neither to the people nor to the king. One type of extremism has been inspiring the king to be an active monarch which in turn is indirectly helping the anti-monarchist extremism. The two extremisms have combined to yield the same result: elections have been delayed and there is no reconciliation. Even foreigners have been saying that all forces should get together to solve our problem.

The environment for reconciliation should have been made by both the sides. Both the king and the political parties need to use appropriate language for resolution. If the two sides are really willing to patch up, the last speech of the king on the occasion of democracy day can be a basis for such reconciliation. Of course, if you don't want reconciliation then you can find many faults with the speech.

The king is under pressure to find a way out. For dialogue, the two sides need to focus on activating the constitution. In the past, we used to hear arguments that a conducive environment had to be made for elections or that the House of Representatives had to be restored briefly. But now the issue of the house restoration has simply fizzled out. Now that we only hear declaration of a decisive fight, the situation is becoming more and more complicated.

There are hints that the king realises the need for dialogue. In the last one year, there has been a sea of change in the situation. Even if you need a democracy with the king, the constitution has to be activated. Of course, if you are for democracy without the king then there is really nothing to be said.

Under the present polity, how far can we constrain the king? How much of the illusions about traditional powers of the king can be gradually removed? We have the power to address these issues through parliament. If the king continues to be a hurdle even then, we can have a public discussion. But in absence of the parliament, how would the discussion about the relevance of monarchy achieve any result?

We can go on talking intellectually but that is a luxury. The understanding Nepal's geopolitical realities also shows support for the monarchy. For constituent assembly or referendum, or even the restoration of the House, it is the king who has to be the medium. In a peaceful political course, one may choose to accept the king or reject him. But the king remains the lifeline of the present geopolitical reality.

Whose welfare?

Nepal, 5 March

नेपाल

The UN pays all soldiers in its peacekeeping forces the same rate: \$ 1,350 in monthly salary and \$ 70 for recreational leave during the six months of their service. But riflemen of the RNA take home only \$ 720 every month while officers draw \$1,000 as monthly salary. Most of the lower ranked soldiers do not even know how much is deducted from their salary, with the major chunk of it going to the military welfare fund chaired by the Chief of the Army Staff.

Today 3,027 Nepali soldiers are on UN peacekeeping stints. The fund, aimed at the welfare of serving and retired military personnel and their families, has collected over Rs 1 billion a year from the UN peacekeeping agreement. Official records show that last fiscal year it earned more than \$13 million from the UN. The money that goes to the Military Welfare Fund is disbursed by nine committees. They spend Rs 40 billion on the Birendra Military Higher Secondary School every year and also run the Birendra Military Hospital, Swayambhu Arsenal and an explosives manufacturing plant in Makwanpur. The fund also bears all expenses incurred in sending Nepali troops as UN peacekeepers. In the last four fiscal years, the fund has also provided Rs 10 million annually to the Army Officers' Wives Association, which has disgruntled many former army officers.

In addition, the Tribhuban Army Officers' Club has used the fund to run two petrol pumps and to establish the Basundhara canteen, which provides goods to soldiers at discounted prices. But the financial records of the committees have not been audited



for the last 22 years. The Auditor General's report of 2004 noted that it had repeatedly reminded the RNA to do the auditing but the army replied it was unnecessary because the canteen was not run from the national budget. Ex-general Dipta Prakash Shah says the fund has established residences and clubs for serving officers but has done nothing for retired ones. "There is not even a single guesthouse for army officers who come to Kathmandu on duty tour," he says.

Why foreigners?

Nepal Samacharpatra, 26 February

समाचार

Direct foreign intervention in Nepal is growing. Now it is not just suggesting and advising but they are directing, commanding and in some instances have even started telling us what to do. We Nepalis ourselves play a big role in encouraging such intervention and this has increased after the seven parties started their movement towards restoration of democracy and called on foreigners for help. In response, the regime too has started leaning on its allies. The international community is happy to be a part

of this tug of war and that is the reason why they have been getting away with making statements that are a direct threat to our sovereignty and independence.

This comes more from the US, UK, India and the EU. As well-wishers there is a way to express concern, instead their involvement has reached a level where it is starting to create rifts within society. Word is out that the UK and Switzerland have promised to provide Rs 350 million to Nepal to promote democracy. The amount is going to go to the seven parties movement. It is obvious that the government is going to react by increasing its own repression. It is the people who will suffer. So far the seven parties have said they will continue their movement without help from external sources but if the foreigners are willing to help they will not refuse the offer.

When King Gyanendra was on his walkabout in Lalipur, he mentioned that the movement was 'being fuelled by foreign money'. At that time seven parties criticised the king but it is now proving to be true. So, foreign money is being used to burn tyres and pelt stones and foreign money is also being used to buy



Hear the growling. Seems like something will happen now
Table: Seven parties
Pacard: People's movement

समय Samaya, in 2 March

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ All the ministers do is preach—they don't work ”

- RPP (Nationalist) President Rajeswor Debkota after his audience with King Gyanendra in Pokhara in *Rajdhani*, 2 March

Dangerously dry



Himal, 28 February-13 March

हिमाल

Low rainfall in winter is not unusual in a country with geography like Nepal's. But what seems extraordinary, and cause for serious concern, is the absence of rain for more than four months now. The 2005 drought was the country's worst for nearly 100 years. The last time Kathmandu saw rain was on 22 October and there is still no sign of spring showers. By this time of year, 54 mm of rain should have fallen on average. The drought has also affected India and Bangladesh. The lack of snow in our mountains, especially in the centre and east has affected power generation and irrigation downstream. This is a trend: precipitation has been diminishing every year for the past decade. The same change in weather pattern that has cut rainfall is probably the reason for the growing cold wave in the tarai, which was deeper and more widespread last winter than in many recent years. Most shocking was when the temperature in alpine Jumla was warmer than usually tropical Nepalganj. Drought manifests itself in three phases—dryness, food shortage and famine. At present, Nepal is entering the second phase. Nepal's agriculture is predominantly rainfed, and even where there is irrigation there is no water because streams and springs have dried up. There is a real danger of the water shortage turning into a crisis in coming days and a crucial need to look for alternative water sources. We all know that Nepal is a water-rich country but that will seem meaningless if no rain falls and as we see more and more the effect of climate change and variability.

Capital plan

Jana Aastha, 1 March

आस्था

As the 6 April deadline given by Prachanda for a 'decisive' hit on Kathmandu nears, the army is getting intelligence reports that Maoist forces are amassing in and around the Valley as well as Biratnagar, Pokhara, Hetauda, Butwal and Nepalganj. According to these reports, a Maoist special force directly under the rebel special central commander Barshaman Pun (Ananta) is already in the Valley. Going by past patterns of Maoist attacks and recent battles it is easy to predict what will happen next. Till last year Maoist forces were scattered across the country making sporadic attacks from Ilam to Kailali to prove that they had a nationwide reach. But the Maoists have now withdrawn from the rural heartland and are concentrating their eastern and western forces to the centre of the country. That is why the midwestern districts are quiet and recent skirmishes happened along the highways or in the vicinity of the midwestern districts. The four divisions of the Maoist western command are now concentrated in the Nepal-Butwal-Bhairawa area. The eastern divisions are adding to the special central command in charge of the valley to focus on the entry points to the capital as seen in recent attacks in Thankot, Dadhikot and Kabhre. In recent speeches, Prachanda has also spoken of simultaneous attacks on three big army barracks and even if only one of the attacks is successful it will spread such panic that soldiers will run flee or surrender in subsequent attacks. In case all the attacks are successful, the survivors will regroup and continue attacks. The Maoist strategy seems to be to prepare for their big attacks with the announced blockade of Kathmandu from 14 March and an indefinite nationwide banda from 3 April. The rebels have perfected the strategy through a dozen or so attacks in the past two years on district capitals by pinning down army bases so they don't have to be distracted by attacking police stations, CDO offices and government buildings. Based on these intelligence reports, the Home Ministry has sent circulars to all police and government units in the Valley to be on maximum alert.

teargas and rubber bullets. Foreigners think of this as something to be happy about but this kind of polarisation will not solve Nepal's crisis.

Condition critical

Kantipur, 21 February

कान्तिपुर

KHOTANG—With its doctor absent, the district hospital has been unable to treat people for the past two weeks. Out of the three designated posts, the doctor has left for a workshop in Biratnagar and the hospital does not have a single trained medical professional. There are no doctors in Ainselukhar or Chisapani since the establishment of health centres—instead, health assistants are running these centres. In most of the district's health centres, posts are vacant. The vacant posts include one medical supervisor, one medical assistant, nine health assistants, five staff nurses, two lab technicians, nine auxiliary health workers, five auxiliary nurse/midwife, eight rural health workers and 15 maternal child health worker.

PALPA—He hasn't studied radiography or any other profession and from the government office all he gets is a peon's salary. But since July 2004, peon Karki has been working as the radiographer, dark room assistant and has even been taking x-rays. Karki, who continues to do the cleaning, says he has been interested in radiography for the past seven years. "I used to observe how the sirs used to do it and then they would answer my questions in simple language so that I understood how it is done," he explains.

SALYAN—Ever since the x-ray machine in the district hospital broke down, locals have faced a

problem—they must go to Nepalganj for x-rays. The hospital called in an engineer from Delhi but he was unable to fix it and said it could only be repaired in India. This will cost Rs 80,000, money that the hospital does not have.

Maoist mistakes

Editorial in *Annapurna Post*, 1 March

अन्नपूर्ण पोस्ट

Although the Maoists have time and again reaffirmed their commitment to not harm the general public, their promises have always turned out empty. Last Saturday when they detonated a bomb near the busy Chaurpatan intersection in Pokhara, six locals were wounded. After the incident was criticised by many, the rebels issued an apology. But 24 hours later, a bomb targeted at a security forces vehicle was attacked in Chipledhunga and a dozen civilians were injured. A day labourer died in Dang when a bomb left by the Maoists exploded, a taxi driver in Dulegauda in Tanahu was murdered and nine oil tankers and crew were abducted in Banke. Such events clearly reveal the gulf between the Maoists' words and actions and benefit no one. They will further weaken the rebels' tenuous relationship with the seven-party alliance, a partnership that has given the Maoists, who were long a target of international criticism, a chance to return to mainstream politics. The rebels were praised for their four-month unilateral ceasefire, which gave rise to a slight hope that they might abandon armed struggle for peaceful politics. But now that they have returned to their old path there is reason to doubt their commitment. They must renounce violence at once.



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Closing date for applications is 31st March 2006.

Lean and mean in Thamel

Kathmandu's tourist hub is waiting for a rebound



KIRAN PANDAY

PANKAJ RAYAMAJHI

It is 10.30 PM in Thamel and things are heating up in the most entertaining and possibly the most dangerous, corner of Kathmandu. The latest Bollywood hits blare from dance bars competing with live bands playing rock n roll covers. The music adds to the cacophony of a traffic jam as irate drivers lean hard on horns.

The air smells of exhaust and food from hawkers selling

momos, chiya and bread omelettes. Drug dealers, some from as far away as Africa, peddle their wares: "Hash, you want marijuana, pot?" Transvestites and eunuchs flirt with groups of Nepali men looking for a cheap thrill. Street children try to make eye contact with customers spilling out of restaurants.

Just 50 years ago, this hot spot was the back of beyond. "No one wanted to come here," recalls long-time Thamel resident Rajendra Man Sherchan, "it was

so isolated that people were scared to go out at night and it was very dirty too—we had to roll up our trousers to keep them clean while walking."

The golden years began in 1967 when Karna Shakya took an old Rana palace and turned it into Kathmandu Guest House. With the drop in popularity of Freak Street among tourists on the Hippy Trail because of frequent police raids to curb drugs and lawlessness, news spread by word of mouth of a wholesome place for backpackers.

Those in search of nirvana found that Thamel was closer to the Swayambunath Stupa than Jochhe. Those in search of the next big high were delighted to find cheap cannabis from Nuwakot and Dhading. House owners along the filthy alleys of Bhagwan Bahal, Chakshibari and Paknajol recognised the opportunity and slowly started converting their properties into guest houses, restaurants and pubs.

The 1980s saw a different kind of tourist arriving. RNAC and other major carriers were connecting Kathmandu to the world. New trekking and rafting routes were being opened and the

exchange rate meant that the exotic Shangri-la experience could be a relatively cheap vacation. Thamel was often a tourists' first point of contact with Nepal and by then it had cleaned up enough to serve as a cultural buffer between the East and the West.

For Nepalis quick to identify a good thing coming, land prices were still affordable and rent even cheaper. Single-room travel agencies, trekking and rafting operators popped up to fill the gap between the do-it-yourselfers and the ritzy agents in Darbar Marg. "That was the best time," remembers Sunil Shrestha, who has been a travel agent, restaurateur and today manages a cyber cafe. "Those days it seemed like everyone wanted to come to Thamel. We were, well at least I was, minting money."

It seemed simple enough to let the area grow but unchecked growth can be disastrous. Today, there are almost 500 lodges and guest houses, nearly double that number of restaurants, bars, shops and agencies crammed into the Thamel area. With land now at a premium, there is only one way to grow skywards and buildings are violating seismic

safety standards.

Traffic frequently grinds to a standstill because the narrow alleys were never designed to squeeze a dump truck past a police van on a one-way street. There are potholes that could swallow a whole car. "We contribute to the economy and we pay our taxes so the least the authorities can do is repair the roads and provide better security," says Pemba Ghale who runs a dance restaurant. He, like all business owners in Thamel, also shells out hefty monthly 'protection fees' to the various quarters that demand it.

Dark shadows loom in the neon lights of Thamel. The road into Thamel becomes a meat market every night. The legalisation of prostitution is a hot potato that no one wants to touch and so sex workers put themselves at risk with each encounter. This could well be the biggest breeding ground for AIDS, despite the sight of discarded condoms that litter the narrow side alleys. Long-time Thamel resident, Kiran Adhikary, 31, says, "It was once cool to live here but now it's both embarrassing and scary. I'd get the hell out if I could!"



Pico makes an ass of himself

In a reversal of roles, Pico Iyer goes from hero travel writer to zero commentator

"...one of the most revered travel writers... Born in England, raised in California, educated at Eton, Oxford and Harvard, his essays and other writings have appeared in Condé Nast Traveler, the New Yorker... His books include *Video Night in Kathmandu*, *Falling off the Map*..."

Google Pico Iyer and this is what comes up: an immediate applause for his worldliness, erudition and accomplishments. So it was no surprise

RETORT
Kunal Lama



when I saw his article

Tale of Two Kingdoms in *Time* I thought, at last, someone who can put an intelligent handle on this silly Bhutan vs Nepal thing into proper perspective. I should have paid more attention to the sub-title. Reading it, I got into one of those situations where one feels so insulted, invectives and murderous thoughts flow senselessly.

Iyer has obviously cobbled together one of his periodic essays for *Time*, his former employer of four years, with little respect for history or reality. His puerile attempt at comparing Nepal and Bhutan was irritating; the destruction of his usual clever language bemusing, his commentary clichéd and the conclusions specious.

Let's get one thing straight: Himalayan Kingdoms both might be but that is where the similarity ends. He regurgitated the oft-quoted litany of quirks that is supposed to



confirm Bhutan as the new Shangri-La. All sentient souls this corner of the Indian sub-continent know that Bhutan's Gross National Happiness sags with sadness when 100,000 of its ethnically-cleansed population languishing in the eastern plains of Nepal for the last 15 years are taken into account.

A few boutique hotels and a promise to relinquish the throne in 2008 make not a magic kingdom or a noble king. The Bhutani subjects' attachment to their medieval costumes rapidly wears off in the shopping malls of Delhi, go-go bars of Bangkok and, one might add, Casino Tara of Boudha. And, pray, why drag in religion? The practice of Christianity is now constitutionally allowed in Nepal, but it is a recent import largely spread by unspiritual promises of economic advancement.

Nepal is slowly coming to terms with the implications of democracy, instituted as recently as 1990. The going has not been comfortable or even certain, compounded by the 10-year-long Maoist insurgency. However, Nepal continues to remain a vibrant country full of appealing anomalies. Nepal may have welcomed tourists in the 70s with the easy promise of hashish and hedonism but the natural beauty and the curious charm of its pluralistic peoples have always been the real attractions. Even Bhutani citizens are welcome here but it has always puzzled me why we are not allowed to enter Bhutan freely.

We have never closed our doors on visitors: western governments have with their alarmist travel advisories. Its foreign, defence and economic policies all but governed by India, Bhutan can ill-afford to

sneer at Nepal's present misfortunes with righteous sniggering. My suspicion is that Bhutan's widely-advertised disdain for Nepal is actually a perfectly-pitched but delusional ploy to mask fear and envy. Nepal represents all that Bhutan can't be due to its geographical and international insignificance, its myopic vision that confuses self-preservation with seclusion and the ruling clutch's realisation that its hold on power (royal and political chicanery notwithstanding) is finite.

To quote Iyer '...the first law of modern life is that everything is as impermanent as an image on a screen; the only form of continuity is change'. Deep within, Bhutan knows that it can't stop the clock from ticking and controlling the time it will inevitably tell.

Finally, by coining linguistically-challenged words such as 'Nepalmed' with its non-Nepal connotations, clumsy stabs at promiscuous semantics and scurrilous second-hand comments about Nepal and, especially, Nepali women, Iyer has made an utter ass of himself. By criticising Nepal while romanticising Bhutan, he has merely followed trend, missing a chance to correct it. He once said that the most important challenge in the writing process for him was clarity. Since clarity was clearly lacking in his article, perhaps it is he who should be listening to the King of Bhutan, deposing himself of all literary and analytical responsibilities in 2008. Or, better, sooner. ●

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STATUTORY DIRECTIVE: SMOKING IS INJURIOUS TO HEALTH

Delhi's Little Himalaya

Majnu ka Tila is a speck of Boudha in the teeming Indian capital



DANIEL B HABER
in NEW DELHI

When asked where I am staying in Delhi, my reply "MT", usually draws a blank stare.

Most budget travellers head for Paharganj, the congested area opposite the New Delhi Railway Station. Despite last year's devastating Diwali bombs it still remains popular with backpackers.

But Majnu ka Tila (MT) is a little speck of transplanted Boudha crammed with Tibetans, people from Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim. I had an appointment to interview the Karmapa, and his secretary had booked me a room at the Wongdhen House in MT.

Majnu ka Tila literally means 'Majnu's hill' after the famous lover in Indian mythology. It is a ghetto of narrow lanes near Delhi University crammed with shops, hotels and restaurants run by Tibetan exiles and is a magnet for the Tibetan diaspora making their

way to and from Dharamsala. There are even direct daily overnight buses from here to Dharmasala and Kathmandu.

There are about 25 or so lodges shoehorned into this narrow riverside strip—a former garbage dump on the still green but fetid banks of the Yamuna. Aside from local residents it is a place of transients. This year it has been full of Tibetans some from as far away as Kham making their way to the Dalai Lama's Kalachakra initiations held this year at Amravati in Andhra Pradesh.

In contrast to their more hip (and occasionally hip-hop) brethren, the newly-arrived Khampas swagger about wrapped in their traditional sheepskin chubas. Due to overcrowding, some of these nomads camp out on the rooftop terraces, braving the bone-chilling Delhi fog.

They sit huddled as if they were still somewhere on the Tibetan plateau merrily eating tsampa mixed with salty butter-tea, as crows try to steal the dried

BREAKING NEWS

Notorious international poacher and trader in illegal wildlife items, Tshering Nima, was recently arrested from Majnu ka Tila and a huge cache of 34 freshly-tanned leopard skins and four otter skins were seized. The raid was conducted by a team attached to Special Operations Group (SOG), Rajasthan Police, with the approval of the Delhi crime branch. Nima's accomplices are believed to be hiding in the area. According to sources, the absconding criminals are in possession of more banned wildlife items, including tiger skins. "We had been trailing the accused for the past few months in connection with a poaching case," an official investigating the case said. "The seizure of the skins came as a bonus. We also arrested the driver of the car."

yak meat hanging above them. In front of their hotel posters put up by a Tibet animal rights group plead for a vegetarian Kalachakra.

Aside from hundreds of exiles there are also, not surprisingly, professional beggars, mostly from Bihar. The aggressive beggars flock around Buddhist pilgrims because they are reputed to be compassionate.

Last year at this time, the local branch of the Tibetan Community Welfare Association was collecting donations for tsunami victims. Generally, the association takes care of its own welfare problems, which range from helping the local poor, sick and destitute.

"We also help young people with substance abuse problems," explains Lobsang Dorjee, himself a hip member of the community who attends Delhi University. Lobsang and his brother Palden also help their father run Dolma House guesthouse and a cyber cafe.

Lobsang's father Tobden is from Spiti and was one of the earliest settlers in Majnu ka Tila, having arrived in 1979. He has seen MT rise from being a garbage dump to a prosperous Little Himalaya in Delhi.

For travellers, there is almost everything that one could want: cheap but clean hotels (rooms ranging from IRs175-550), restaurants (which, unlike Dharamsala, have not yet catered to the muesli crowd) with authentic Tibetan dishes, bookstores, cyber cafes, laundry, shops, etc. The only drawback used to be that MT was nearly an hour from Connaught Place.

But thanks to the recent opening of Delhi's Metro travel time has been cut to 15 minutes by train, which costs only IRs10. Stepping into the immaculately clean and shiny Metro, you think you are in Bangkok or Singapore, not India. It was Christmas Eve when I checked out of Wongdhen House, Majnu ka Tila's most popular guesthouse for western dharmaphiles. There was a big twinkling Christmas tree in the lobby, and as I turned in my room key, Dolma the receptionist wished me "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year" and handed me a candy. ●



Shadowy times

Beware the Ides of March, it is eclipse time again

March is the month of eclipses, one solar and one lunar. On 15 March, a penumbral eclipse of the Moon will be partially visible from Nepal between 3:06 AM and 07:58 AM. Look for the maximum eclipse at 05:32.

On 29 March 29, a total eclipse of the Sun will be visible from within a narrow corridor that traverses half the Earth, partially visible in Nepal. The Moon's shadow will trace a very narrow path from Brazil to Mongolia via North Africa, Turkey and Central Asia. This will be a spectacular eclipse, lasting over four minutes and visible within a band up to 190 km wide. From Nepal, a partial eclipse, with the moon blocking ¼ of the Sun, will be seen from 4:58 PM to 6:16 PM local time, with the maximum eclipse visible at 5:38 PM.

From time immemorial, people have interpreted the meaning of eclipses—as indicators of upcoming disasters. In fact, the word eclipse comes from the Greek word for 'abandonment'.

Modern science has given little credence to such legends but eclipses remain deeply studied events. A total solar eclipse gives scientists an opportunity to study the elusive coronal ring, the outer atmosphere of

the Sun, which can only be seen when the moon blots out the solar disc. Many such researchers are trying to solve a burning question: Why does the Sun's surface simmer at about 6,000 Celsius while the outer coronal ring blazes at 2 million C?

Remember—it's dangerous to look directly at the Sun even when it is completely covered during the eclipse. The only safe way to see it is to produce a projected image of the Sun on the wall or a screen using a telescope. At moments like this, it seems especially unfortunate that amateur telescopes and solar filters are not available in Nepal. The government has imposed a 100 percent tariff on importing telescopes! *Ke garne?*

Other highlights in the March sky:

The Sun

The Sun is in the constellation of Aquarius at the start of March, moving into Pisces on the 12th. The Spring Equinox falls on 21 March at 00:11 when the Sun crosses the celestial equator from south to north, making the length of the day equal to the night.

Mercury

Mercury is at inferior conjunction (between Earth and the Sun) on 12 March. We are very unlikely to see this elusive little planet this month.

Venus

Venus is a brilliant "morning Star", visible in the east at dawn each day. It reaches its greatest western elongation from the Sun on 25 March.

Mars

Mars is high in the western sky at dusk and sets in the early hours of the morning. It moves steadily eastward, night-by-night, against the stars of Taurus.

Jupiter

Jupiter, in Libra, rises late in the evening and is at its highest at around 3AM. You'll see it as a very bright, steady star—only Venus, nearly 90 degrees to the left, is brighter.

Saturn

Saturn is high in the eastern sky at dusk. It moves slowly north-west in Cancer, well below and to the left of the "twin" stars of Gemini.

Meteors

Towards the end of the month, we may see a few early meteors from the Virginid shower, which peaks in early April.

A taste of Tibet

Tee Dee, also popularly known as 'Chung town' among the Delhi University crowd, is situated along the Outer Ring Road near Majnu ka Tila Gurudwara, inside Aruna Colony, down the lane to the right, up the stairs—to be precise. If you don't have private transportation the best way to get there is to get on to the Mudrika bus, get off at the Mall Road and take a rickshaw there.

The ambience of the place is unobtrusive. The huge picture of the Dalai Lama as soon as you walk in leaves you with no doubt as to where you are. It is a place where one can have an undisturbed conversation or even a loud discussion to the tune of Hindi/Nepali songs playing in the background. The installation of a colour television ensures that you can also watch 'the match' while you enjoy your meal.

Being within the Tibetan colony, the food served there is well Tibetan food. Tee Dee's serves a variety of food from traditional Tibetan to typical Chinese. A normal meal at chung town would consist of a plate of 'beef chili' and 'tingmo' (traditional Tibetan bread). The cost of this meal would be around IRS 40. For someone wanting more there are a variety of chicken/mutton/lamb items, rice, chowmein and vegetables to choose from, not to mention the soups and salads. Even for a meal that constitutes all the major food groups the total cost would be within IRS 80 to maybe slightly more than IRS 100 depending on how much you can pack away and trust me some people once they start eating here just don't stop.

For the more adventurous, the 'chele fried' is an excellent experiment. Chele fried is to put it very bluntly 'fried tongue'. Taste it and it guarantees that the chances of having tasted such a delight are slim. An exotic dish for vegetarians is the 'shabhakalep', a bit bland but perfect with the chilli chutney. The best way to finish off a meal at Tee Dee's is with their pancakes. It can be ordered with a variety of toppings such as jam, honey, bananas or all of the above. The biggest debate surrounding Tee Dee's is about whether or not it should incorporate a bar. Talking to students from the colleges around the area, there seemed to be a mixed view. Gaurav Anand of Shri Ram College of Commerce says "Ofcourse alcohol should be served" but he adds begrudgingly "though it might make it unsafe for girls but it would be nice to have a drink with dinner". The girls seem to be of the same mindset and would like alcohol but for the fact that a more riotous crowd might frequent it should alcohol be served. Says Jahnavi of Lady Shri Ram College "it would be nice but it would definitely make it more 'shadier'. Thus ended the debate on alcohol at Tee Dee's. ● *Aarti Basnyat*

Tee Dee's is a place for college students on a limited budget but if you are in Delhi and would like a taste of Tibet on the way then it is definitely a cheap and reliable source for it.

Tee Dee Restaurant
H-32, Behind Tibetan School, Aruna Colony
Majnu Ka Tila, Delhi-100 054
Ph-2393414

Bush talks to India about Nepal

US anxiety over Nepal's troubles figure in George W Bush's talks with Indian leaders



RICHARD HALLORAN
in HAWAII

The Bush administration has been cultivating new relations with India after decades in which the country often tilted toward the Soviet Union during the Cold War. US President George W Bush arrived in New Delhi on Wednesday and officials confirmed Nepal has figured in the agenda.

The visit comes amidst heightened American worries that Maoist insurgents in Nepal may be close to capturing state power.

Bush told a joint press conference with Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh in New Delhi on Thursday that he and Singh "agreed" that King Gyanendra should reach out to the political parties to restore democracy.

"On Nepal we agreed that the

Maoists should abandon violence and that the King should reach out to the political parties to restore democratic institutions," Bush said.

Admiral William Fallon of the US Pacific Command flew into Kathmandu earlier this month to meet with King Gyanendra, cabinet ministers, political party leaders and senior military officers. He was the highest-ranking US military officer to visit Nepal in recent times and his message was stark: "I can't help you until you take steps to establish participatory democracy."

The visit of the leader of the US Pacific Command to Nepal took only 24 hours but it spoke volumes about US concern over the fate of that increasingly troubled nation. Over the past year, Nepal has experienced a three-way struggle for power. Maoist insurgents seek to take over the country. The king has sought to consolidate authority in his own hands to fight the insurgents. An alliance of seven parties demands that parliamentary government be restored and has dallied with the Maoists in an attempt to gain political leverage.

US officials say that unless a turnaround is engineered in six to eight months, Nepal will collapse into Maoist hands. Besides bringing more instability to South Asia, that would enhance ties between the Maoists

in Nepal and anti-government insurgents in northern India and possibly provide a new haven for terrorists.

Soon after Fallon's journey to Kathmandu, US ambassador to Nepal James Moriarty delivered an unusually blunt address. He scolded the king and the political parties alike for failing to join hands to fight the 10-year Maoist insurgency in which 13,000 people have been killed. "There is no other practical, workable solution to your constitutional crisis," he said.

"On Nepal we agreed that the Maoists should abandon violence and that the king should reach out to the political parties to restore democratic institutions."

— US President George W Bush at a press conference with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Thursday.

About the same time, a spokesman for US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice abandoned the state department's customary diplomatic stance to criticize the king for failing to "initiate a dialogue with the political parties. His continuing refusal to take these steps is leading Nepal further down the path of violence and disorder."

In response, King Gyanendra issued a Democracy Day statement in an apparent effort to reach out to the politicians opposing him. He called on "all willing political parties to come forth to fully activate, at the earliest, the stalled democratic

process in the greater interest of the nation." This appeal was immediately rejected by leaders of the seven-party alliance.

US officials with access to intelligence say no evidence has yet turned up that the Maoists are supported by China despite having taken their name from Mao Zedong. The Nepali insurgents, however, are reported to get some supplies and ammunition from insurgents in northern India.

Fallon suggested in an interview that, despite Nepal's ordeals, a few bright spots shone through. He found the king, with whom he met for 90 minutes, to be well informed and articulate in arguing that security took top priority. The admiral said Nepal's army, although guilty of sometimes violating human rights, had improved and was helping to hold the country together.

Moriarty, however, berated the quarrelling king and politicians equally, asserting that "so long as there is no coherent strategy in place to roll back the massive gains the Maoists have made over the past decade, the Maoists will rightfully conclude that they are winning".

"There certainly is no way for the parties or the king to successfully ride the Maoist tiger for their own advantage," he added, "one could easily fall off... and tigers get hungry." ●

Richard Halloran is a commentator based in Hawaii and was with the New York Times for 20 years and has covered Asia.

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VOX POP

“We have to sort our own problems, and not leave it to Bush”

If Bush really cares about Nepal he would have visited Nepal and consulted with the Nepali people to really understand the depth of the problem and what the solution should really be. Most of these countries are looking at our country from their own interests.

Bush's visit is a meaningless hope, the US can't find a solutions between Pakistan and India, nor for Nepal. It will only find more ways to manipulate our countries in giving up our freedoms and make us their puppets. For many years we have relied on foreign nations to find solutions for our problems, it's time that Nepali people find solutions to our own problems.

Pravas Singh

During his trip to India, President Bush will definitely mention for the need of democracy in Nepal. He will ask India to take the lead in the same manner the British and French appeased Hitler by handing over Czechoslovakia. Democracy minded Nepalis should wake up and smell the rat. Our future lies in our hands. Get off the streets, participate in elections and choose your representatives.

Fighting for democracy means to earn the trust of the Nepali people not of foreign leaders.

Shree Shrestha

The visit of the US President to New Delhi will speak volumes about US concern over the fate of that increasingly troubled Nepal...but he just can't help us until we take steps to establish participatory democracy.

Pankaj Raj Karmacharya

Response from Nepalnews.com readers.

'Scrambled' golf?

Nepal's pros put some fun back into the game

Are you aware of the Golf 'scramble'? It's a team event where players count only the best shots made by all members (eg, they tee off their second shots from the place where the best drive landed) to compile their score. Although I was familiar with the format, I never played it during my two decades of golfing—until last weekend.

The Royal Nepal Golf Club (RNGC) organised the scramble to give both professionals and amateurs a chance to play together and have fun trying something new. Each team included an amateur with a low, middle and high handicap as well as a professional. I could see that the amateurs really enjoyed the experience of hitting second shots from lies where before they could only dream of

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



playing and of seeing just how well shots can be struck. Humble thanks to the RNGC executive committee for realising the need to develop

golf in Nepal and special thanks to executive committee member Dorjee Sherpa for conceiving of and successfully conducting last weekend's event. Thank you also to the diehard golfers of the corporate world who sponsored teams—without them the event wouldn't have been a success.

I met Dorjee Sherpa a few days before the scramble and found him in high spirits and full of advice: "It's high time that the amateurs appreciate the golf lessons they receive from professionals and started to give something back to help the growth of pro golf in the country."



MIXING BUSINESS WITH PLEASURE: Deepak Thapa Magar, Kundan Rana, Niraj Rana and Arun Chand.

I know that the whole golfing fraternity supports Sherpa's sentiments to support and reinvigorate our professional golf.

For the scramble I was paired up with three seniors—Pradeep Rana, KB Shah and Vinode Rana—representing St Peters Hospital (England). They all enjoyed the format tremendously, as did the other participants I spoke to, most of whom were making their maiden appearances in the scramble. Undoubtedly the team of pro Deepak Thapa Magar and amateurs Niraj Rana, Kundan Rana and Arun Chanda were simply delighted with their victory.

Like other professional golfers in Nepal, I see this event as a boost to the local pro game. Everyone in the golfing community is aware that professionals need more of these 72-hole stroke-play events to improve their standards and an event like the scramble always adds an additional fun element to that serious task. ●

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

Steve and Emi

Two cyclists pedalling around the world arrive in Nepal after surmounting overwhelming odds



DEEPTI GURUNG

DEEPTI GURUNG
in POKHARA

It sounds like something out of a movie. Steve met Emiko 17 years ago in Australia. She was a 23-year-old Japanese and he was a six year older Australian.

They think it was destiny that brought them together and their mutual interest in travel. This week they were in Pokhara, racing ultralights, taking in the scenery and talking to locals. Their eyes still sparkle when they talk to each other as if they'd just met.

Emi and Steve (pictured at Pokhara airport this week) aren't your stereotypical tourists, offspring of rich parents off to see the world. Emi was a daughter of a single mother who had to support two other siblings. They all helped their mother clean, cook and take care of their youngest brother.

Even while young, Emi had a dream of going out to see the world. Steve also grew up in a working class family who loved bicycling. After they met, they pedalled across Australia, then around Emi's home in Osaka. For 11 years since 1989 they cycled 113,000 km around the world enjoying interacting with different peoples and cultures across deserts, cities, rain and snow. They lived frugally and roughed



it, money was always short and they stayed in cheap lodges and even carried a tent. The adventures are innumerable: running away from grizzlies in Africa, encounters with armies of red ants in the Amazon.

After a few years of this, they finally found sponsors from Japanese helmet, bicycle and tyre manufacturers and the going got easier. In 2000, they reached Pakistan in their round the world journey. But Emi was diagnosed with cancer and rushed to Japan where doctors told her she had six months to live because the cancer had spread.

Steve was devastated and got to work trying to make her happy, downloading jokes from the internet to tell her on her hospital bed. After a few months in hospital, they decided to go home, Emi changed her diet turned to yoga, listened to soothing music and moved to the

countryside. Slowly and unbelievably her health improved. A year later she was able to take walks around her home. Her doctor was convinced this was a miracle. By 2004 Steve and Emi were back in Pakistan to start where they had left off in their bicycle journey.

The cancer hasn't gone and Emi needs a check-up every month. But the couple have an added mission to their journey now, they speak on cancer wherever they go. "I don't want to fight with cancer, I want to live with it because it has become a part of me now," Emi says, "I am learning to live with cancer cells, and I know if I am happy they are happy too and won't do me any harm, and my happiest moment is when I am with my husband."

Everywhere Emi has been in the past two years people have urged her not to give up. Steve says: "Everybody has to die one day, so why not live every day to the fullest, do what you like doing and be happy."

Steve and Emi have made a list of the places they'd like to comeback to when their journey is over in three years. And Pokhara has just been added to their list. ●

www.geocities.com/emisteve/

Coz it's there

Wait! It's not April First yet. Bbut get ready anyway for the most daring hoax of 2006: an 85-year-old British woman and her dog will climb Chomolungma alpine style this spring with her Daschund.

Here's more: the route is a straight line from base camp up the west shoulder and directly up the west ridge which has never been hitherto climbed.

Many Woodbridge and her dog, Daisy, are in training now in their backyard doing stretches and going for walks in the village of Greenfield in England. They say they will climb without bottled oxygen without Sherpas, and without camps.



"I'm sure we can make it to the top of Mount Everest. We both go for a walk every day and keep ourselves very fit," Mary said this week just before setting out for Nepal.

The expedition has no sponsors, mainly because it didn't get any. The expedition

website (www.mary-woodbridge.co.uk/) has videos and photos of the rigorous training that Mary and Daisy's training and details on her plans. Mary's website is now filling up with well wishers and also nattering sceptics like this one:

"Mary - your dog will die. His little lungs will give up. You will also die. Soon."

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"Lata ko desh ma gaando tanderi." (In a land of fools, even a man with a bad goatee can be a hero.) - as translated by UNACCOOTS, the United Nation's Association of Cartoonists

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Painting Exhibition** by Ed Bartlett 10 March. 5.30PM. Indigo Gallery
- ❖ **Performance Blowing up The Balls** By Peter Schrader. Siddhartha Art Gallery. 5 March
- ❖ **Waves of Echo** on Rice Paper (Fish Series) by Gajendra Man Shrestha. 2-8 March Park Gallery. Lazimpat. 4419353

EVENTS

- ❖ **Indian Film Festival** from 3 March. Jai Nepal Cinema.
- ❖ **Pre-Cleaning Day** Chobhar Village. 4 March. 8AM. 4333555
- ❖ **Fifth Annual Coca cola Ride Nepal 2006** 12-15 March. Himalayan Enfielders. 4440462
- ❖ **Himalayan healing stones and crystals sales & Work Shop.** Baber Mahal Revisted. 3-5 March. 10AM-5.30PM
- ❖ **Conferences at Godavari Resort** special packages available. 5560675
- ❖ **Great American Films** from 6 March. The American Library Yak and Yeti. 4445577
- ❖ **Possibility of Bird Flu in Nepal** youth forum. 3 March. 3-5PM. Martin Chautari

MUSIC

- ❖ **Manose Singh** bamboo flute player. 6PM. 4 March. Rs. 650. Patan Museum
- ❖ **The Cloud Walkers** at Rox Bar. Hyatt Regency 4
- ❖ **Heartbreakers** live every Friday at Rum Doodle Bar & Restaurant.
- ❖ **Cadenza Collective** live every Wednesday (Jazz) and Saturday (Afro-funk and Latin) 8PM at Upstairs, Lajimpat.
- ❖ **Live Music** at New Orleans Café. 4700311
- ❖ **Best of jazz** JCS trio and Friends. Niek's Place. Tuesday and Saturday. Free entry. 4701324.
- ❖ **Jatra Friday nights**, live music by Siron. 4256622
- ❖ **Unplugged** sessions with Strings, Jatra Saturday nights. 4256622
- ❖ **Live Music** at Juneli Bar, Hotel de l'Annapurna. 4221711
- ❖ **Uncork the Good Times** Fusion bar at Dwarika's presents Ciney and Par-e-jat playing Popular Sounds of 70's. Fridays 7PM onwards. Rs. 750. Dwarika's Hotel. 4479448



DINING

- ❖ **BBQ Ban Bhoj with swimming** at Godavari Vilalge resort. Saturday and Sunday. 5560675
- ❖ **Breakfast** at Singma Restaurant. 8.30 - 11.00AM daily. 5520004
- ❖ **Strawberry time** at Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Stupa View** vegetarian creations, clay oven pizza, tasty desserts, espresso & latte. directly at the Boudha Stupa. 4480262
- ❖ **Maki Nawa Bhutu** for Newari cuisine at Hotel Royal Singi. 4439784
- ❖ **Mexican and Italian** food at Fuzone Café. 5542935
- ❖ **Great Dining** options at Al Fresco, Bukhara, China Garden and Garden Terrace restaurants, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Barbeque** at Le Meridien. Kathmandu. Saturday. 4451212.
- ❖ **The Shangri-La Express** Soups, make your own sandwiches and salads and choice of dessert only for Rs 399. Everyday from 11AM - 3PM. The Shambala Garden
- ❖ **Wonderful Wednesdays** at Fusion, Dwarika's, happy hour 5-9PM.
- ❖ **BBQ Dinner** at Summit Hotel every Friday. 6:30PM - 9:30PM. 5521810
- ❖ **Breakfast With Birds** lunch with butterflies and dinner by the fire place. Farm House Café. 4375279

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Home away from home** Shivapuri Heights Cottage for bookings 9841371927. sohan@escape2nepal.com
- ❖ **Tea House-Inn.** Nepalese Salads with Nepali Thali every Saturday at the terrace garden. Nagarkot. 668-0048, 668-0080 (ext.2111)
- ❖ **Club Himalaya Chiso Chiso Hawama** package from Rs.1700 per person with dinner, breakfast, accommodation and shuttle service. 668-0080, 668-0083
- ❖ **Go Double, Pay Single** special air package to Thailand & ASEAN destinations with Air Nepal & Air Asia until 31 March
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge**, award winning relaxation in Pokhara Reservations 4361500
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- ❖ **Nature Retreat** at Park Village Resorts & Spa, Budhanilkantha 4375280
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Raghav Shastri (Nana Patekar) is a caustic, instinctively witty cabbie who needs 30,000 rupees by the end of the day. Jai Mittal (John Abraham) is an equally witty heir to a resourceful business family who also needs a lot of money—3 billion actually. That too by the end of the day. To get the cash, Jai needs to contest his father's will in court and he needs Raghu's cab to take him there. For his part, Raghu needs every rich sucker he can find as a passenger. The two meet and a predictable cab ride kicks off a roller-coaster journey that leaves you laughing and on the edge of your seat.



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श्री ५ को सरकार
सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय
सूचना विभाग

NEPALI WEATHER by MAUSAM BEED

The change in wind direction this week from southwest to northwest brought fresh cooler air from the Tibetan plateau which cleared the haze, raised maximum temperatures. However, it also brought drier air something we don't really need at a time when we haven't had rain for nearly five months now. The effect can be seen all around us: the Bagmati is a sewer, the rivers are dry so electricity generation is down, ground water table in Kathmandu has plummeted and there are signs of an acute water shortage as even the traditional water spouts go dry. This satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows no signs of rain on the horizon but a low pressure area of Bihar may bring clouds.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

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TRIBHUBAN POUDEL

POKHARA, NOT BAGHDAD: Chipledhunga in Pokhara soon after a Maoist bomb exploded leaving 11 people injured on Tuesday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

FREEDOM CALLS: NC leaders pose after their release from prison on 27 February following one month in detention. Bhim D Pradhan, Dr Shekhar Koirala, Lakshman Ghimire, Nanda Joshi and Tirtha R Dongol.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

WITH ALL HIS MIGHT: A soldier blows the *shankha* during Army Day celebrations at Tundhikel on Sunday.



KIRAN PANDAY

MADE IN NEPAL: Models showcase local fashions at the 7th Handicraft Trade Fair at Soaltee Crowne Plaza on Tuesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

AFTER THE GLORY: Elated students at Padma Kanya Campus in Bagbajar pose for a picture after the results of the Free Student Union elections were announced on Tuesday.



Number one by design

Swapnil Acharya's story is a lesson for those who think the only way to learn the tricks of a trade is to attend a professional school. Until 2000, Swapnil did not even have a computer of his own and the only tool at his disposal as he set out to learn website design was beginner's curiosity.

Initially a friend helped him figure out the basics and then he was on his own. Working his way up by studying the source codes of existing websites and doing research on the internet, Swapnil, who took his A-levels at Kathmandu Academy, started designing his own site, putting extra care into Flash, the technology for animation.

The quality of this 20-year-old's work impressed his friends, who advised him to turn professional.

Swapnil turned to the internet once again, this time to find professional contacts, which in turn got him his first job: building the website of a motor workshop for a friend's father. That was only the beginning. Swapnil is a do-it-yourself guy and has since built websites for foreign companies and organisations: all by working online.

Swapnil's own website www.himmasters.net/nepali, won two awards—for best technical qualities and best overall in Wave Web Winner 2005, the website designing contest of Himalmedia's Wave magazine. Said a beaming Swapnil: "Web designing is an art. It involves creativity."

Already swamped with work, Swapnil has no time to go to university just now. "Maybe later," he says. A man of few words is Swapnil but what a designer! ●

Alok Tumbahangphey

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Complain, complain, complain

It is an age-old custom in this part of the world to have Complaints and Suggestions Boxes located at convenient intervals throughout the kingdom.

We don't know if these boxes are ever opened, or if anyone actually reads the recommendations contained therein, but that is not the point. The point is that the boxes prove that the citizens' right to complain is

still intact despite the royal takeover. As a last resort if nothing else works, they can always vent their frustrations and pour out their angst by making droppings in the box and relieve themselves. So

UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit



what if we don't have ballot boxes, at least we have Complaints Boxes.

However, it has come to our notice that there are some units of His Majestic Government that still haven't installed Suggestion Boxes in their premises. This is intolerable. If this is the state of affairs, how on earth is the ordinary man on the street ever going to lodge a complaint that there isn't a Complaint Box? By unburdening himself in broad daylight right there on the perimeter wall of the Ministry of Hygiene and Insanity to make his/her point?

However, going by the sight of the overstuffed Complaint and Suggestion Box at the airport these days (sign on box: 'Not To Be Used As Spittoon Except During State Of Emergency') it is clear that Nepal is a vibrant democracy where all adults have franchises and an avenue exists for everyone to bring pet peeves to the notice of the highest authoritarian in the land. Since we journalists have access to Complaint Boxes under the Freedom of Information Act we have sampled the outpourings, and here are the highlights:

To Whosoever It May Concern

My flight to Dhaka has been delayed by another four months due to late arrival of aircraft. The airline says it has been rescheduled for the post-monsoon season. I checked in about this time last year and I really feel at home here in the departure hall. I'm not writing to complain it's just that I'm bored stiff. Would it be too much to ask the concerned airline staff please let me know if I can expect a flight during my present incarnation or whether I can reasonably expect to get to Dhaka in my afterlife so I can notify my family and plan accordingly? Thank you for your kind attention.

Yours etc.
Phanindra

You Majesty,

I am writing to apprise you of the fact that your airport security disrespectfully just stopped me from boarding my flight to Biratnagar just now. Don't they know who I am? This is a premeditated attack on the democratic process, and I'm going to declare a nationwide strike tomorrow. We will throw a brick at anything that moves.

Girija Prasad Koirala, 27 August 2004
P.S.: How come I'm not invited to Pokhara?

Hi,

I am writing to complain about the 12-point agreement between the Maoists and the parties. As I told Vijay the other day, I can't allow this to happen. Since all the interviews and letters to the editors I have written in the past month don't seem to be making any impact at all, thought I might as well drop this note while I wait for my plane. Let's hope it creates some ripples.

Jim Moriarty

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ISSN 1814-2613