



EXCLUSIVE

404,000,000

Update on the official tally in rupees for cash and valuables looted by Maoists so far from banks and rural savings schemes. Independent analysts say this could soar to billions if all forced "donations" from businesses and individuals are added. Official death toll for the past six years till this week: 298 ordinary folk (considered class enemies by Maoists), 365 policemen and 1,054 rebels or suspected rebels.

Indo-Nepal trade

Business lobbies from Nepal and India met in New Delhi last week and averted a major crisis in bilateral trade. India accuses Nepali companies of misusing provisions in the 1996 preferential trade treaty to export non-Nepali goods. Indifference by Nepali officials over these Indian concerns had taken India to the point of threatening to scrap the treaty which comes up for automatic renewal later this year. The FNCCI and India's CII carried out a review and concluded that trade has benefitted both countries. The recommendations are to be handed in to the two governments by August just before the deadline for either side to can notify the other of any major changes it wants to make. The treaty comes up for renewal in December.

(More on Page 8)

IT'S THE ECONOMY, STUPID

BINOD BHATTARAI

Nepal's economy has never been in such a sorry state. Revenue collection is down, expenditures have soared, Maoists have targeted major tax-paying industries like alcohol, and the turmoil of the past three weeks has demolished tourism.

Even before the royal massacre, businessmen were sounding the alarm bells: the crippling three-day strike called by the UML and political instability had paralysed government. Maoist threats and extortion drives had gone into high gear. Government had come to a standstill. Then the Naryanhiti mass murder closed everything down for three weeks, gave Nepal worldwide negative publicity, and the shock and uncertainty of the tragedy affected businesses and offices.

Now, the Maoists are capitalising on the public's disbelief of the official version of the tragedy to mount an anti-Gyanendra campaign, and sow confusion. They have heightened protests in the capital and accelerated their campaign in the industrial heartland of six tarai districts, including Morang and Chitwan.

A women's organisation affiliated with the Maoists has declared Chitwan "dry" since 15 June. Retailers have pulled beer and alcohol off the shelves, and the

campaign is spreading to other districts. Maoists have put up pamphlets calling for making three zones of Gandaki, Narayani and Dhaulagiri "dry" by mid-July and wholesalers even in Kathmandu are hesitating to renew retailing licenses. "This is turning scary," confessed one industrialist in Kathmandu with business in the tarai. "Business runs on future hope, if this is the present mindset there is no future."

Liquor manufacturers and breweries have already seen a 30 percent drop in sales. Soft drink and mineral water manufacturers have received Maoist threats, some of them ordered to slash prices. One brewery in Chitwan even shut down as a precautionary measure for a couple of days. The National Beverages and Tobacco Association says the government could lose up to Rs 12 billion in revenue alone. 50,000 retailers nationwide will lose business. Indirectly, sugarcane farmers across the tarai will be hit.

And with the government already into deep red, this would further hit spending in vital development programmes. For the government it has become a Catch-22, to win the hearts and minds of the people it needs to spend more on basic services, but there is less and less money coming in.

"It has become useless to gripe about industrial security anymore, only a targeted

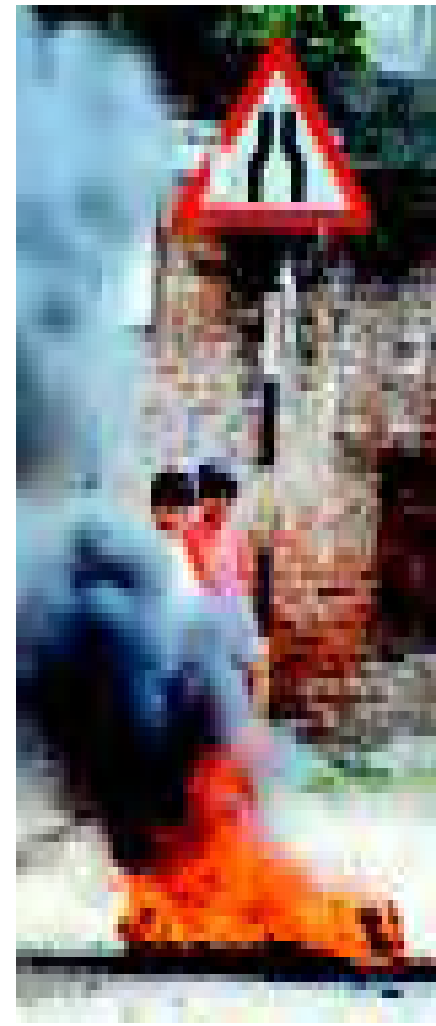
The Maoists are out to sabotage the economy. Our politicians better forget about politics for now, and rescue the economy first.

.....

second-phase of sweeping reforms and actions can bail us out from where we are," says a frustrated manager of a company with factories in the tarai. The Maoists are now targeting industry through the labour unions. Last month "revolutionary" labour unions submitted a 13-point list of demands including a 50 percent salary hike, stopping contract labour hire and evicting foreign (read Indian) employees.

The Maoist strategy appears to be three-pronged: reducing government revenue, disrupting the marketing chain, and cashing in on public support for curbing alcohol. Says Rajendra Khetan of the Khetan Group: "It is becoming urgent to recognise the Maoists as a force and get them to talks. Left to itself I won't be surprised to see the economy reach the point of no return."

See p. 8



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"Economic ruin now will mean political ruin..."

How is the economy doing?
The macro-indicators are not bad. We are expecting a six percent growth in Gross Domestic Product. Export also remains good but the trend of the past few months is not very encouraging—we are having problems with some major exports. Foreign exchange reserves are comfortable, but the fiscal front is a problem, especially because of the turmoil and instability. The business climate has not been favourable mainly because of bandhs, strikes and disruptions in the business climate. Revenues have gone down seriously following the three days of bandhs and two weeks of mourning.

Nothing seems to be working

in the country and with the Maoist problem, even the macro-indicators may change...

The economy has been hurt in the past few months because of the Maoist problem and the irresponsible tactics of even mainstream political parties. The economy has been the main casualty. Normal business has been obstructed, shops and factories have been forced to shut down. Daily wage workers have been forced out of work. The atmosphere of insecurity created by the Maoists in some districts has also taken its toll. They mainly influence remote districts where economic activities are not well established anyway.

But they have been threatening and even forcing factories to shut down in districts where most industry is located?

They are trying to hit the government in areas where it is very vulnerable in the tarai—Chitwan, Bara, Parsa, Morang, Sunsari, Jhapa and Kapilvastu. These are districts where Nepal's economic and industrial activities are concentrated. In Chitwan they seem to be trying to make breweries stop production and they're also trying to stop the flow of various beverages. They are even creating problems for products like Coca-Cola. All that is bad, it affects revenue. Naturally the economy is affected. But we're committed to providing full security. No effort will be spared in ensuring total security for our economic life.

Why cannot there be a minimum political understanding between the opposition and government, and even between factions within the Nepali Congress for the sake of the economy?

That is what we are trying to do. Our main discussion platform with other political parties is 'let us agree on a common national agenda'.

See p. 6

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TIME TO TAKE OFF OUR MASKS

Of the intrigue and back-stabbing that has always characterised Nepali politics, it is still true what they used to say 150 years ago: you will learn more if your eyes are closed, you won't see much by opening them.

In this netherworld of conspiracy, nothing is as it appears. If nothing is happening something is up. If something is happening, it's probably not. Since we believe our destiny is written in our stars, the only people we truly believe are astrologers. We don't even believe in ourselves. Our nation's future then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy of doom.

The rule of survival in this Machiavellian kingdom is to keep your eyes wide shut. The Panchayat years taught us to walk around with masks, and some of us never really took them off. Is that why, even when the truth is staring at us in the face, we look away? At this moment of great turmoil and tragedy in our country's history, we keep masquerading. The ruling party, the opposition, the elite, the underground left, the palace, the security forces—all milling around in this masquerade ball while a long-suffering people look on from outside the fence.

A crisis of this magnitude in most societies works as shock therapy and brings out the best in people. With us, it has shown us at our worst. When we should be rallying around to keep the country united, we scurry off to hide in our individual little burrows. When parties which believe in democracy and parliament should be standing up for their beliefs, they all lie low, afraid to speak out lest they be noticed. Factions within political parties have daggers drawn instead of patching up their petty tiffs. Our revolutionary republicans who wear Mao masks have, with retroactive hypocrisy, discovered that they were monarchists all along.

Orphaned by the annihilation of their patrons, the ultras of the left and right who are united by their do-or-die hostility to parliamentary democracy now want to give our fragile constitutional processes a fatal knock. Of course, given the utter lack of accountability of our elected leaders, half their battle is already won. But one really has to wonder: if they are the true nationalists they claim to be how will this short-sighted and opportunistic assault on the monarchy help them?

Our little boat is taking water fast, people on it are beginning to panic, and the comrades are bent on rocking it. When the boat finally sinks, don't they know it will take them down with it? Our democratic institutions survived this crisis intact, and everything happened according to the laws of the land—that is the bottle-half-full way of looking at it. The half-empty version is that these same institutions are all hollow: our elected leaders have squandered most of their moral authority, military and police morale is low, and even the once-monolithic monarchy which was a symbol of national unity is a shaky shadow of its former self.

This week's parliament session was the first sign in a month that there still is a government in this country. Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala's 14-point programme presented in parliament on Monday offers a way out of our present political impasse. Koirala has also offered to step down, and we hope that is not another bluff. Since the UML's Madhav Nepal has welcomed the 14-point plan, all we need now is for the Nepali Congress and the UML to be serious about it.

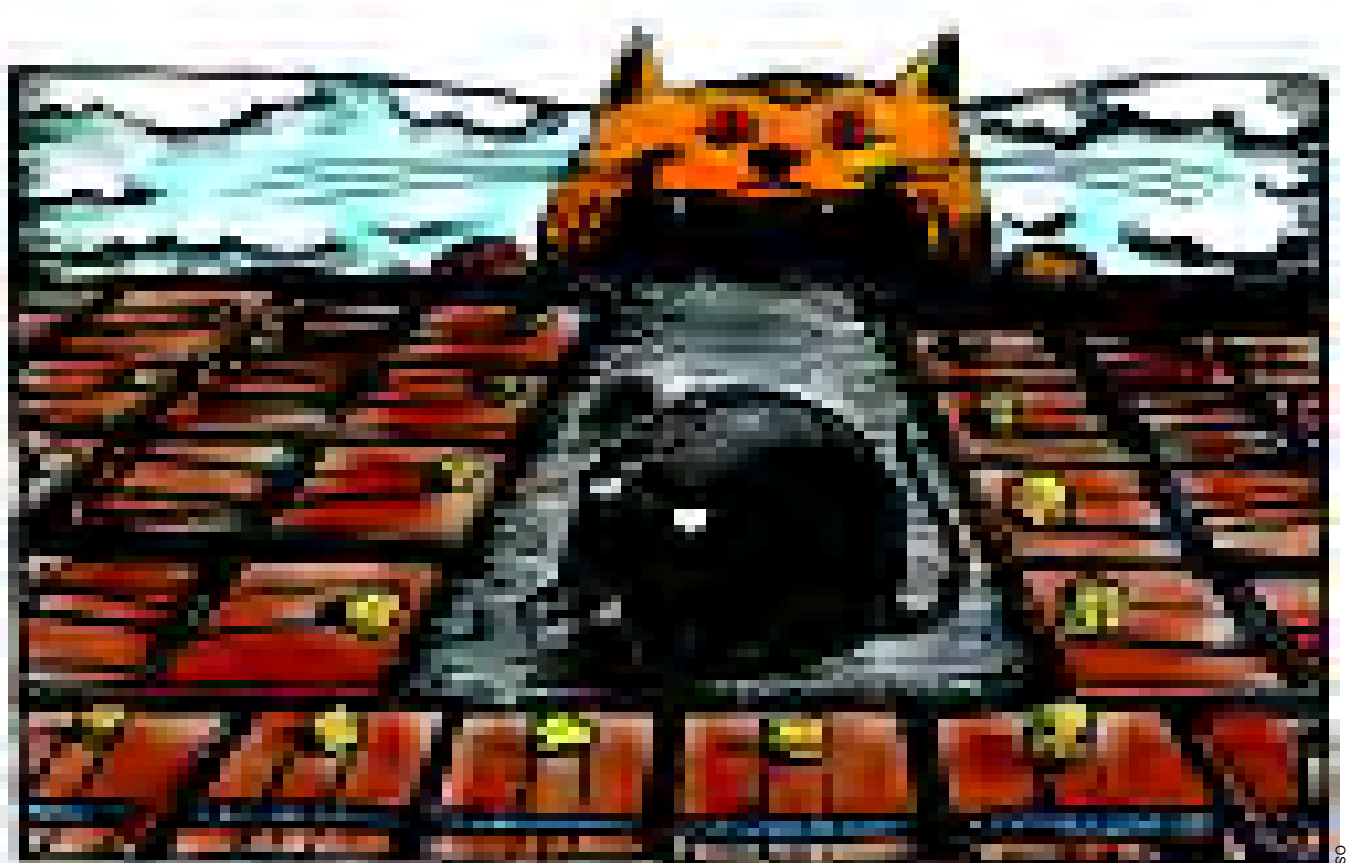
Our country is not fated to doom, it can be saved. Our destiny is not shaped by the stars but by actions we take together today.

THE GATES FOUNDATION

Dear Mr Bajracharya

We are writing to you as mayor of our fair city of Patan to ask what on earth you are doing at the Bagmati Bridge taking two months to dig three enormous holes. The labourers there tell us you are building a "Welcome to Patan" gate. Stop this megalomania at once. If there is one thing we don't need more of in Nepal, it is gates. This nation has a fixation on gates. There is a welcome gate at the airport that is neither functional, nor tasteful and it is in total disharmony with the surroundings. Maoists are busy erecting martyr gates all over their territory. Mr Mayor, if you were really concerned about the welfare of your voters you should plough the money you are wasting on that gate to give us street lights that work, Ashoka Stupas that are not blotted by concrete high rises, garbage that is collected, and pot hole-free streets. Save the erections for later.

Yours truly,
 Patan Residents



STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL

An unquiet peace



More than the Public Security Regulation, it is the terror of unfreedom in the Nepali hinterland that should engage those in their safe perches in Kathmandu.

SERA, Sindhupalchok—This is a picture postcard hamlet. Its lone tourist lodge is straight out of trekking brochures that promise instant nirvana. The tiny rooms with low-ceiling tin roofs are shaded by banana leaves, and are immaculately clean. The bed has wrought iron legs and is fitted with a comfortable mattress. Between the bare floor, naked ceiling, and freshly whitewashed stone walls the clean and colourful cotton sheets appear like an artwork spread for display. A tiny window offers the view of rice paddies and the mountains of the Jugal Himal to the north.

There is a compact toilet into which they have managed to fit a mini washbasin, a functional commode, and a mixer shower with running hot water from the solar collectors on the roof. In a place like this, when evening falls there is nothing but the music of the river, the piercing call of strange birds and the sigh of monsoon rains on the leaves. There is no electricity, and the phone is blissfully out of order.

After the rains, the night sky is so clear you can walk around in the starlight. I sit down at the chautari on the riverbank and try to identify some new stars in the sky. I choose a few particularly bright ones towards the north above Lantang National Park and name them after the souls of the dead. The most luminous one could be King Birendra. Not even immortality is entirely free of time and space.

Then there are the white stars on the red sky of the Maoist flag. Just after the regicide, Maoists claimed that they had an "undeclared working relationship" with King Birendra. High in the sky to the north, King Birendra is silent. Were you talking to the Maoists as Dr Babu Ram Bhattarai and Comrade Prachanda claim? How could you sympathise—let alone have a working relationship—with an ideology

that has brought the country to the very brink? I ask for forgiveness for my irreverent question, my momentary lapse of faith. King Birendra smiles.

The Sera lodge itself is an example of the havoc that the Maoists have wrought on Nepal's tourism trade. They may not be targeting tourists, but their very presence is scaring trekkers away and depriving rural Nepal of one of its sole sources of income and employment. We were the first guests here in last six months. Tourism is an image-conscious business where perceptions matter more than reality. Even though not one tourist has been harmed in six years of insurgency in the country, just the reports of the spread of Maoism is enough to create a scare. One terse public statement of Comrade Prachanda causes a flurry of travel advisories by western embassies in Kathmandu, and cancellations of reservations.

The struggle for survival of the lodge at Sera is filled with poignancy because it is a non-commercial resort and one of several across Nepal that doesn't repatriate profits to Kathmandu or abroad. It is a sustainable philanthropic enterprise that ploughs tourism earnings directly into running a local school and a health centre. But because there hasn't been a single tourist for the past six months, the school has been closed and the health centre is barely running.

Asked why tourists don't come anymore to Sera, the lodge attendant gives a fearful "I know but I dare not tell you" shrug that says it all. The shopkeeper in Talamarang is more forthcoming, even though elliptical in his answers. Hiding behind an impersonal pronoun 'they' for the Maoists, he tells me: "They haven't caused any problem for us. Why do you (meaning people of Kathmandu) say

that this area is in 'their' control?" I ask him who are "they"? He starts dusting his wares with a meaningful silence.

On our way we stop for tea at Melamchi Bazaar. Connected by regular bus service to Kathmandu, Melamchi has the look of a wild west town. Shacks with tin roofs, roadside drains overflowing with filth, street corners reeking of urine, iron bars dumped haphazardly in front of matchbox structures struggling to keep straight, and black plastic bags fluttering like flags on bushes along river bank. The cinema theatre had a poster of Nepali movie, but it was blaring an Indi-pop number to draw customers.

A vegetable vendor looked familiar. He turned out to be from my village. Pointing towards a slogan painted on a shop-front along the road, I asked him, "Who did that?" He answered me with the finality of ending the conversation there and then: "Them."

Its terror out here—naked and palpable. The dread is no more of the vagaries of nature (floods or famine), atrocities of the administration (these days, policemen themselves wear hunted looks) or the fear of an uncertain future. It is the most basic of all fears: fear of life. It has become so pronounced that the object of dread is a collective pronoun, a malevolent word full of dread and foreboding.

It is in the context of this harsh reality that the recently implemented Public Security Regulations need to be seen. There are laws to check the tyranny of the government, but how else do you deal with those who have so terrorised the masses that no one even dare take their name?

The idle intelligentsia of Kathmandu is leading the chorus of protest against the regulation. For them, there is nothing wrong with kangaroo courts of insurgents dispensing Taliban-like quick justice. But administrative actions under the due process of law is tantamount to "resurrection of ghost of Panchayat". George Orwell was right, there are some ideas so absurd that only an intellectual could believe them.

Democracy needs practitioners capable of faith without illusions, not fanatics in search of purity of intent, form and content in every government regulation. As long as the rule of law with right to reject the lawmakers through the ballot box exists, freedom is not in danger. It is the terror of unfreedom in the unquiet hills and plains of Nepal that should engage the empty minds in their safe perches in Kathmandu. ♦



Melamchi Bazar

USHA TIMBARI



The leadership mirage



Addressing the 20th session of the House of Representatives, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala put forward his 14-point plan for national consensus. He added, for good measure, that he was willing to make any sacrifice (including resigning from his post) in order to carry the plan forward. Madhav Kumar Nepal, leader of the main opposition UML, told the House he agreed with many of the 14 items on Koirala's checklist and would like to discuss them. But before that, would the prime minister mind resigning?

The winter session before this was a dark blot on Nepal's parliamentary democracy. The opposition's demand for the prime minister's resignation on charges of corruption and Koirala's stubborn refusal to do so brought the House to a standstill, and the opposition bands brought the country to a grinding halt. What this campaign for the prime minister's resignation ended up doing was eclipse the economic, development and political crises that had been piling up.

The UML could neither explain how throwing out Koirala would solve any of these problems, nor offer alternatives. Similarly, the Nepali Congress could not show an increasingly disillusioned public why it should remain in power if it could not keep the three promises it had made: addressing the Maoist insurgency, curbing corruption and improving governance. The country's future was being held ransom by these two myopic political parties.

At a time of deep national crisis like now, political parties must emerge from their slumber to give a sense of vision and hope, otherwise the public disenchantment will only grow and push us towards anarchy.

Crisis of representation

The present political crisis in Nepal has many facets: economic, social, political, religious, ethnic, linguistic, regional disparities and judicial independence. Koirala has tried to address some of these problems in his 14-point plan which includes citizenship, land reform and women's property rights. But he does not even begin to look at the Maoist insurgency and the psychological impact this has had on the public. The last 12 years have seen new aspirations to address discrimination against dalits, women, janjatis, and bonded labour. Tied to this is the question of their inadequate representation in the national legislature. The increasing cost of electioneering has meant that only a certain class of people from the mainstream are being represented. The status quo on economic inequities and social justice is therefore perpetuated.

The present parliament now faces another challenge: the constitutional monarchy. The massacre of almost the entire royal family has raised the question about whether the monarchy should now be handled by the palace itself, or be brought under the transparent purview of the peoples' representatives as in other

The 20th session of parliament is a time of crisis and opportunity. Which path will our lawmakers choose?

modern constitutional monarchies. Should decisions on the royal succession still rest with the palace, or should appropriate laws be made by parliament on the succession question?

Maoist "Peoples' War"

Large parts of the country are now under the influence of the Maoists. The group has seriously over-extended itself, and its leadership now finds the movement slipping from its grip. This is the result of the Maoists' own immature and adventurous pursuit of armed struggle. By relying on violence, the Maoists are inviting counter-violence from the state. Ultimately this can only push the country towards a bi-polar balance of power between itself and a militarised palace. In this either-or struggle, parliamentary parties in the centre will be forced to choose between the two extremes and will no longer have a future as the country drifts towards civil war.

The current session of parliament must once and for all come up with a precise perspective on the Maoist "peoples' war". First, are the Maoists a political force or not? Second, if they are a political force, parliament has to work to bring them to the table and entice them to join the political mainstream, or try to finish them militarily. Third, if the Maoists want to negotiate, how is parliament going to even begin to solve the Maoists' myriad demands?

Many government development projects have been affected by the insurgency, trade has been affected, businesses have been closed because of threats and extortion. The education of more than a million Nepali children has been affected by Maoist action against schools. In this sense, the Maoists can be seen to be the single most important problem facing the country today. No political force in the country can regard the Maoists as an issue over which to score political points, or consider allying with the Maoists to hit out at rivals. However, if that is the only way our parliamentary parties know how to behave then they will have to reckon with the whirlwind that will hit them. The coming polarisation between extreme left and right will annihilate them. It will be the path to national ruin.

National consensus

After the restoration of democracy, there should have been a national consensus over the process of economic and social transformation. There should have been progress on making elections freer and fairer, implementing land reform and delivering social justice. But there was no consensus on these vital matters. The self-interest of political parties, their ideological drift, meant that consensus stood no chance. Politics that centred on petty personal interest meant that political parties did not institutionalise themselves. Internally, the parties failed to foster a democratic culture, there was a crisis of discipline and values. This has pushed citizens, political parties and even the country towards uncertainty, causing chasms to open up between the people and political parties, between the political parties and the constitutional monarchy.

Even now, after having brought this upon themselves, political parties continue to be plagued by internal strife and have no time to devote to the country's vital and urgent problems. The result: most Nepalis equating democracy with economic collapse, lawlessness and social anarchy. Unless the political forces come to an understanding on the lowest common denominator that is necessary to address some of these issues, the country is not going to find a way out of this mess.

Leadership crisis

Much of this is a result of a crisis of leadership. Governance has become a mirage. Leaders have shown political, organisational, managerial and ethical bankruptcy. It because of this failure of leadership that consensus, political goodwill and trust could not grow and the country is facing this crisis. Even the Maoist insurgency and the recent royal massacre can be viewed as a by-product of this moral dilemma.

We now have a new king. The Maoist strategy has been to give the constitutional monarch a hard time and keep up the pressure on the political leadership. Meanwhile, the time has come for the two main parliamentary parties to evaluate their own leadership and hand over the reins to a new generation of fresh leaders. Only this can point the country once more in the right direction, and allow it to move forward. Let us see if the 20th session of parliament will give us any signs of this new maturity. ♦

Hari Roka is an independent leftist analyst.

LETTERS

THE REAL CONSPIRACY

Dr Upendra Devkota's theory that "There is a conspiracy in this country to turn our youth into drug addicts. Even the royal family is not safe" (#48) is right on. In fact, the elite and the emerging middle class sector is precisely the target group. The motive? Profit and power. The young elite not only have the money, they are the role models for the aspiring affluent. Three-quarters of the young people in Kathmandu (the leaders of the next generation), seeking treatment in drug recovery centers are from the upper/middle class. Check out the moody colour advertisement in a Kathmandu English daily on 22 June that read "Mind-altering substances. Now sold legally." It shows a glorious chest-high photo of a young boy with hair flowing looking upward as if he is having a spiritual experience. And what is the advertisement selling? Shoes. What is the connection? The message to the unconscious is: if you want to be "high", if you want to run with the "big" boys...buy our shoes. Dr Devkota's comment are not psychological hysterics.

M. Krajniak, Psychotherapist
Kathmandu

I am appalled that the palace did

not have a full time doctor on duty as well as an ambulance with life support equipment. Princess Sruti was still alive when she arrived at the hospital. Had they had more better equipment, perhaps she and other wounded could have stabilised until they were got to hospital. In all the talk of Dipendra using drugs, no one has mentioned that alcohol is probably the drug that causes more people to commit violent acts than any other. Marijuana and hashish would have caused him to be mellow and relaxed, unless the "black tar substance" was something other than that, such as black tar heroin.

The same issue of Nepali Times also talks about the Maoists' use of "children". In a country where the majority of wealthy and not-so-wealthy people use children as servants, where it is relatively tolerated to have children working, then what is the fuss about children in war? Until the society sees that having children used in any capacity, whether as servants, farm workers, prostitutes or warriors, is wrong, this practice will continue.

Maggie Namjoo
Vermont, USA

HARI ROKA
Hari Roka's "Nepal's tripod of stability" (#47) was illuminating and contains a

thorough and in-depth analysis of the present political situation in Nepal. All leaders of political parties who command a political base in Nepal, should read this article and see just how precarious our survival as an independent democratic country is. Nothing is more important than to save our country and be able to call ourselves citizens of Nepal. We must put our house in order. Any egoistic, extreme partisan-based politics, and pseudo-nationalist moves by any major political force will destroy the very existence of our country and ought to be dealt with firmly.

Kumar Regmi
Toronto, Canada

CK LAL

CK Lal in "Regal to royal" (#48) provokes debate by making the point about tradition and the need to change it. Indeed, we should discard what Tagore called "dead habit", but tradition is one part of that fascinating, ever-evolving, all embracing entity we call culture. It is also a part of a nation's symbology, it's pschye. It will evolve at its own pace. It will be shaped by its own genius, this tradition, this culture and yes, this value system. We can indeed demand its demise, but will it listen?

Once basic tools were worshipped during Karma puja, today some have computers anointed. Once traditional clothes were worn to observe religious ceremonies, today business clothes are acceptable. A new generation has forgotten how a particular aspect of faith was born, but in their jeans they observe a variant of that original belief. You publish Desmond Doig's labour of a search for Nepali salvation in "Saving Faith", the whole point surely is that someone, somewhere will remember or discover and while not believing, learn.

Dubby Bhagat
Kathmandu

CHAKARI?

I have been reading all the news reports on websites on the brutal royal massacre in Nepal. Yours is the only paper confidently reporting and presenting Dipendra as the killer. No other Nepali newspaper could point it out so directly, simply because there is no evidence to do that. You may not like to listen conspiracy theories, but how you could so easily conclude that Dipendra alone could carry out so many killings? I don't understand how you could support the probe report without a single question. Why was there no post-mortem? We

understand your situation: you must be able to show your *chakari* to the new king Gyanendra and his killer son Paras. Your paper has lost the credibility it had gained with me over the past months.

GP Bhattarai,
Kohn, Germany

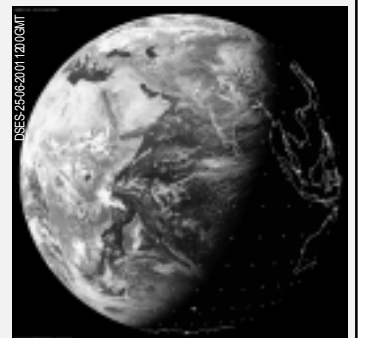
Thank you at Nepali Times for being one of the few beacons of truth from Nepal during this whole sad, sorry episode. You alone have shown you have the courage to stand up and criticise officials for keeping information from the people, while steadfastly maintaining your effort to confirm and reconfirm the truth however unbelievable and unpalatable it may be. My question though is this: is anyone there listening to you?

Rita Rai
London

KRYPTONITE

Thank god Nepali Times has run out of its sturdy staples, the major dampener of enthusiasm and breaker of finger nails every Friday morning. Thank you for replacing the kryptonite staples with ones that are more easily removable, and also relocating the subscriber's label.

R Chitrakar
Baghbazar



CORRECTION

• Due to a layout error, Nepali Weather (#48), contained an earlier forecast and was not the satellite picture or forecast for the week 22-28 June.

• In the interview with Dr Devkota, the end of the sentence on p.1 starting "He was extremely pale..." should end "was being Ambu-bagged." The end of the p.1 sentence "But she was in poor shape..." should read "a pneumothorax".

• We also regret the mistakes in the numbers for carryover pages in two

Can't hide drug abuse anymore

The royal tragedy of 1 June has spotlighted the growing drug abuse problem among Nepali youth.



ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

The fact is that drugs are now a fact of life among all social classes in Nepal's towns. From labourers right up to the Kathmandu elite, drug abuse has by all accounts grown into crisis proportions.

Nepalis have always been blasé about drugs: it is culturally accepted to smoke hashish and opiates are consumed within the family environment during festivals such as Teej or Tihar. And if Shiva himself indulged in marijuana, it is no surprise that

the royalty found reason to do the same. In recent years, numerous surveys have reported a rapid spread of injectable drug use among the lower strata of society as well.

Frustration among jobless youth and boredom among the upper classes who don't need jobs have fed the epidemic. If marijuana was a part of our culture, Nepali addicts have now graduated to modern designer drugs and abuse of prescription pharmaceutical products. Narcotics, stimulants, depressants, hallucinogens,

cannabis, organic solvents, they are all freely available on the streets. "We can solve the problem but there is a lack of political will," complains a highly placed source within the Narcotics Drug Law Control Enforcement Unit.

Marijuana and alcohol were never hard to get, and the hippie era in the 1970s brought in other drugs such as opium, heroin, and the infamous Lysergic Acid Diethyl amide (LSD), an extremely powerful hallucinogen that could cause permanent brain damage. The 1980s saw a rise in heroin addiction, and the 1990's led to more morphine based drugs such as cough syrups (Phencidyl was a huge brand name), depressants such as Valium, Xanax and Nitrozapam normally prescribed by doctors for anxiety, tension, insomnia, and stress. Those who couldn't afford expensive drugs, simply injected the easily-available

analgesic, Tidigesic.

Today, with the globalised drug market reaching Nepal, the upper class also has access to pushers who bring in crack, speed and even ecstasy. There are no reliable figures, but the number of hard drug users in Nepal's urban centres is now said to have passed 50,000. Because many of them are injecting the drugs and sharing needles, this has become one of the main factors in the spread of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis B. Several surveys have shown that many of the sex workers in Kathmandu also inject drugs, and one estimate put the number of sex workers with HIV at 18 percent. "Most women drug users sell sex to earn money to meet their drug needs," explains Sunita Singh Malla, of the Richmond Fellowship Nepal.

One often-ignored factor is that alcohol is also a drug. And the use of alcohol in

combination with drugs increases the potential for both overdose, death and addiction and if another drug like alcohol or barbiturate is used with heroin the effects are much greater than one would expect. "Drugs are not the problem. They are the result of a problem, and it is the height of folly to think that the problem will go away by ignoring it," says Mike Krajniak, a psychotherapist at the Youth Vision Drug Abuse Recovery Centre in Maharajgunj. "The problem has to do with relationships, which are dictated by culture. Therefore, we need to take a good honest look at how we are treating each other."

Studies among hard core drug users show that in a majority of cases marijuana gets young people started on the path to addiction. Once there is an addict in the family, there is an effort to keep it under wraps. This is especially true in families with higher incomes because of

the fear of losing face. Among lower class families, on the other hand, studies have shown entire communities taking part in trafficking and subsequent abuse of drugs. Families often lack the information or the knowledge necessary to address the issue, says Rajendra Shrestha of Freedom Centre, a drug rehabilitation centre started in 1983. He says: "Families however educated they may be lack the skill to tackle problems related to drug abuse and that is where counselling comes in. Sadly there are only a handful of rehabilitation centres in Kathmandu." Freedom Centre currently has 24 addicts on rehabilitation: most of them from middle or lower income families. Not more than 100-150 drug users are at the handful of treatment centres in the valley. Given the scale of the crisis, this is woefully inadequate. ♦

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



Health is a human right

A friend who advises a big multilateral organisation on public health puts it succinctly. "Health is a human right. A society that recognises that is advanced. One that doesn't is backward." My friend insists that South Asian countries could lift themselves out of poverty by recognising his simple formula for success. India could be Singapore, and Nepal, New Zealand if only citizens had the right to be healthy. People would take care of the rest, no need for vast injections of foreign capital and expert expats clogging the roads and buying up all the organic veggies.

Of course, getting to perfect public health wouldn't be easy. It would mean clean drinking water for every last slum dweller and street kid. It would require social reform on a grand scale, sweeping away patriarchal nonsense that leaves women and girls undervalued, undernourished and overworked. Medicines and medical treatment would have to be available on demand, not just in cities but in the most remote and mountainous corners of this region. Doctors would have to provide high quality care to all, not just those who can pay, and patients would have to be educated and aware of their own role in avoiding disease and recovering from illness.

In short, my friend, himself a doctor who for many years practised what he preaches, is a



DOTS in Nepal

revolutionary. He wants societies remodelled on the notion that everyone has the unfettered right to free and high quality health care, backed up with education. He's a pacifist of long standing and his religious beliefs rule out any form of militarism or coercive behaviour. His revolution involves consent and hard work, not guns or peasant armies. His storm troopers would be public health workers and teachers infiltrating every last nook and cranny, administering enlightenment and responsibility in equal doses. He is of course somewhat of an extremist, but think of all the people who found Nelson Mandela, Gandhi and BP Koirala dangerously militant in their "extreme" approach to freedom. What if my friend, or someone like him, could lead a peoples' movement that demanded good health as a fundamental right. And it would not be a movement that tried to shake a cruel elite into dispensing this medicine, it would be a mass mobilisation of people prepared to work for their own salvation and good health. At least that's what he says. "No point in expecting bad governments to change and start doing the right thing," he insists,

"No point in expecting bad governments to change and start doing the right thing, they don't care and they never will. We need to do it ourselves."

"That's what made people ill in the first place. They don't care and they never will. We need to do it ourselves."

What a wonderful thought, no riots, no confrontations with police, no marches on palaces or parliaments, just vast legions of people asserting their right to health by building dispensaries, setting up schools and getting on with it. My friend tells me that good things like DOTS programmes for TB and mass vaccinations against polio only work as grassroots efforts, supported by the people and run by them. Look to western Nepal and the way that communities are carrying out AIDS awareness, bucking local trends, spending hardly any money and shunning the bureaucratic, Pajero-loving culture of the expat-government nexus in the capital. There's a natural ally (yes, that's right, an ally!) just across the southern border and I don't mean the babus of Delhi or the sensation-starved Star News crews. I'm talking about India's drug companies, Ranbaxy, Dr Reddy's, Cipro and others, who are snatching AIDS treatments from the grasping hands of Big Pharma, the western drugs multinationals, and making them available cheaply to needy locals.

There were loud cheers when South Africa's government won a court battle to allow public distribution of cheap, technically illegal anti-AIDS drugs for the 25 percent of its adult population who are HIV-positive. My friend has no ambitions to be Mandela or Gandhi, but he's on to something. A public health revolution, based firmly on principles of *ahimsa*, could just be the Next Big Thing. Repeat after me "health is a human right, health is a human right....." ♦

How were children affected?



MIN. BAJRACHARYA

Seven-year-old Sumin was saddened by close shots of the dead royals—he said they looked like frightening dolls.

Children probably coped better than adults in the aftermath of the royal tragedy.

gruesome details of the probe panel report, and watched assault rifles being displayed. Many, like Dippu, were deeply disturbed. Older children suffered anxiety attacks, worried about the fate of the country and their families. But because Nepali family units are closely knit, there are support mechanisms for such situations, even if professional counselling services are grossly inadequate.

Kedar Rayamajhi, a clinical psychologist who regularly counsels victims of domestic violence, believes that letting a child see a death, or even a funeral or a dead body for that matter, could have long-term implications. "Seeing death, a young child might develop a pessimistic outlook on life and living," Rayamajhi told us. He also cautioned that disturbed children who do not receive counselling in time may sometimes develop suicidal tendencies.

But other child psychologists say children's power of resilience is underestimated, and that glimpses of deaths can actually be a lesson in mortality if parents and teachers discuss it properly with children. Dr Dhruba Man Shrestha is a senior psychiatric consultant at the Patan Mental Hospital, and says most children are unlikely to be traumatised by news of the royal massacre. "Television viewers were

spared the gruesome details of the shootout, they did not witness scenes of bloodshed and the horror of people being gunned down. There is little chance children will be disturbed," he said.

But his experience with older people is significant—all older patients he has counselled after the royal massacre complain of depression and mental stress. Dr Shrestha is not surprised by this seeming contradiction: the perspective children have on death is too limited for an incident like this to disturb them. "Reacting to the death of public personalities is a purely adult phenomenon," he says. And in this case adults were particularly shocked because the royal palace incident broke taboos about filial piety and respect for elders. For many, one defence mechanism has been taking refuge in conspiracy theories.

Rajja Kiljunen, a clinical psychologist and programme director with United Mission to Nepal's Mental Health Programme agrees that adults were more affected by the news of the massacre than children. "Children will feel sad because the adults are shocked and confused. They will suspect something wrong and sad has happened because their daily routine has been disrupted and adults are disoriented," she told us. However, Kiljunen says children should have watched the funeral and other coverage with parental presence.

Both Rayamajhi and Kiljunen agree on one point: discussing conspiracy theories in front of children might scare the older children and trigger behavioural abnormalities. Children listening to endless rumours and conversation among adults about the massacre may also develop a cynical and distrustful nature in adulthood. Most school principals we spoke with said that when schools reopened two weeks after the massacre, children were repeating in school rumours they had heard at home. Children were encouraged to keep journals of their feelings, and older children took part in class discussions in which they talked about the future of the country.

Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital is the only Nepali institution that runs a child guidance clinic where the services of psychiatrists and psychologists are available. A few institutions like Richmond's Fellowship Nepal and Sahara Counselling also provide counselling services to children.

Whether or not mental health professionals agree that children have been disturbed by the last few weeks is moot. Parents we spoke with find cause for concern in their children's reactions, and worry about the lack of counselling facilities available. One distraught parent told us: "I have noticed my son being moody, and staring into space. We have tried to draw him out to talk about the royal killings, but he still finds it too painful." In many schools, some parents said, teachers aren't much help because they repeat bazaar rumours. ♦

HEMLATA RAI

It was a traumatic experience for nine-year-old Dippu to watch the funeral ceremony of the royal family members on television. He was restless, and couldn't sleep properly for days. Only when his father stayed in the room did the child start sleeping normally again

after a week.

Across Nepal, thousands of children have been silently affected by news of the royal tragedy, shocked to see the funeral on television with the late King Birendra's wide-open jaw, the late Queen Aishwarya's vacant stare, and Princess Sruti looking like she was asleep. Then they heard the

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Show cause

That was the Supreme Court's response to writ petitions challenging the constitutionality of the recently promulgated Public Security Regulations 2001. The petitions were filed by the Nepal Janjati Mahasangh, the Kirant Yakthung Chumlung and three advocates who charge that the regulation is against the spirit of the constitution and essence of Public Security Act. They argue that it gives "unlimited" power to administrators and breaches the constitutional rights of anyone expressing their discontent with the authorities. The Regulation empowers local administrators to detain a person in solitary confinement, restrict movement in certain areas and restrict overseas travel, if they are "convinced" that the person will harm the country's sovereignty and integrity, and violate law and order. Deputy Prime Minister Ram Chandra Paudel defended the Regulation saying that it was only a clarification of the Public Security Act and in no way violates the present constitution.

Meanwhile, Paudel was summoned by the parliamentary State Affair Committee on 26 June to discuss the government's recent arrest of the editor and publishers of *Kantipur*. The Committee directed the government to ensure that people's constitutional right of free expression and peaceful gathering are respected. The Public Security Regulation was not discussed during the meeting. The Committee's chairperson Hom Nath Dahal said it is being discussed at the Supreme Court.

Monsoon belly

This monsoon has already proved as fatal as previous ones and not just because of flooding and landslides. More than 75 people have died in an outbreak of gastroenteritis in villages in the far western Bajhang and Doti districts. Hundreds of others, mainly the elderly, women and infants, have also contracted the viral and bacterial infections, which spread mainly due to contaminated water and poor sanitation. Health officials in Kathmandu say Gorkha, Baitadi and Dadeldhura have also been hit hard—over 500 people have already been affected. The Ministry of Health says 55 of Nepal's 75 districts are vulnerable to gastroenteritis epidemics. But it isn't only people in remote areas who can catch the bug. Teku Hospital's Epidemiology and Disease Control Division says the infections are spreading fast in Kathmandu too—the hospital sees 20-25 sufferers everyday.

Make it snappy

They're talking again—for the eleventh time. The Bhutanese government has agreed to hold further ministerial level talks with Nepal in Thimpu at the end of July regarding the repatriation of the approximately 100,000 Bhutanese refugees in eastern Nepal. Foreign Minister Chakra Prasad Bastola requested the meeting to discuss ways to speed up the refugee verification procedure. Minister Bastola will propose appointing different verification teams for individual refugee camps in Jhapa and Morang. The joint verification team (JVT) started work in March this year at Khudunabari in Jhapa. The JVT's planned to start by verifying ten families a day, and gradually increase the number. But the team has not yet delivered—in the three months since they began, it has completed the verification procedure for under 600 families. There are over 15,000 Bhutanese families in camps in Morang and Jhapa, and if the procedure does not pick up speed, it will take more than three years to complete the task.



Bhutanese refugee camp in Jhapa



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from p. 1

The prime minister has said it is immaterial whether he remains in power or not, but there should be a consensus on core issues. Once there is a consensus on broad national issues between political forces that believe in the constitutional process, government can run smoothly. I personally believe, and am calling for a five-year moratorium on strikes and bandhs. It cannot go on, we cannot afford disruptions, because we should be concentrating on national reconstruction. Look around—every country is preoccupied with economic issues. We cannot afford to play power games all the time and talk about politics while sidelining vital national and economic issues. It is time we realise that if we are ruined economically now, we are ruined politically, and there is no future for us. So let us stop activities that obstruct economic life, ensure industrial peace and security, and ensure that factories can run smoothly. Now we have a situation where despite our laws industry is recruiting foreign labour instead of Nepalis. That is happening because of the trouble they see around incited by political forces.

How does the opposition respond to your demands, which seem genuine and minimal?

In principle they agree, when we talk informally. But when it comes to doing, their wishes are not translated into action. Even responsible political parties like the UML, which is the government-in-waiting in a sense, called for a totally irresponsible three-day nationwide strike. It disrupted economic life and set a very bad precedent.

Isn't that cheating themselves and us, the Nepali people?

It is cheating the nation and ourselves. Mixing politics with economics and playing with the future of the economy for petty political interests is harmful. Because once ruined, the economy cannot get back on the rails, at least in the short-term.

How has revenue collection been in this record year of strikes and bandhs?

The target was ambitious all right, but even until a month or so ago I thought that we may come close to the target. But last month's performance was very bad. We are not near the target and the revenue scenario this year may not be very comfortable. Planning for next year with the low base of this year will pose further difficulties, especially when the wage bill has shot up and the security bill is going up. The debt-servicing obligation has also gone up largely due to depreciation of the currency. The obligation for recurrent expenses will be very high next year, and will not leave much resource for capital investment and developmental activities.

How do you plan to keep the deficit narrow?

We have tried to consolidate priority programmes, we are de-emphasising low

priority projects and trying to cut them as much as possible. We are also looking at possible new sources of revenue. Reforms will be key in next year's budget—not adding new programmes, but consolidating existing ones and introducing reforms in critical areas to boost business confidence, better returns on limited investment and minimum administrative expenses. These will be my aims in the next budget.

How has Maoist extortion and violence affected revenue collection and security spending? We hear they are also 'taxing' industry.

That is what I also hear but it is yet to be verified. When security is bad, it is bound to impact every aspect of national life. The economy has also been affected because security is something we have to ensure at all costs.



How can you assure business that things won't go out of hand?

The government will give them full protection, security will be ensured. We have discussed this in government and want to give them our full assurance that we will spare no effort in ensuring that vital economic interests are protected. Industrial security will be provided at

all costs. We will also do everything possible in our power to ensure better investment climate.

How do you do that with an empty purse?

It is difficult, yes. But we will have some reforms in the budget and find ways... we don't want to lose money all the time.

How is it being finance minister when you have low revenue and high payment obligations?

It is tough, naturally. Obviously the deficit will widen. Hopefully we will have the understanding and cooperation of our development partners. We hope they will understand our limitations and be more sympathetic to our cause. If we manage our economy rationally and to the best of our ability, we think there will be total understanding. Deficit always widens in critical situations like this, but if I compare our situation with rest of the subcontinent, there are worse cases than ours. Things are not as bad as they are made out to be by the opposition. It is bad, but manageable—and that needs common sense and cooperation from all parties. Let us keep our expectations low, not be irresponsible, cut down on unnecessary expenses, do away with low-priority investment and ensure strong tax administration and better compliance. With these and improved security I think things can be handled.

What about the new hearts and minds programme, will that be a major thrust of the budget?

There will be appropriate allocation. It will be a major programme in areas where the ISPD (Internal Security and Development Package) is being implemented.

So can we understand that you're going to be tough on the revenue end and also reform the overall budget?

Yes. You will see quite a few reforms in the budget. Consolidation and reforms.

COMMENT

by RUPA JOSHI



Tears and roses

Cameras can lie. Parachute journalists who wield them have a pre-conceived notion of the talking heads they need, and what they want the grief-stricken to say.

I was standing in line in front of the royal palace gates the first day the condolence books were opened. The gates hadn't opened, but the serpentine gender-segregated lines were already getting longer by the minute. There was a herd of journalists right in front of the gate, hunting in packs. TV cameras were panning down the queue, seemingly on the prowl for a grief-stricken face, tears, a good sound bite.

I have seen hungry parachutists before, but they always kept a respectful distance from people in sorrow. But the grief vultures that day displayed no sense of propriety, or respect for mourners. Television and still cameramen (and they were almost all men) zoomed in on any teary-eyed face in the line. Right at the front, underneath the parapet, was a teenage girl with tears rimming her eyes, clutching two roses in her hands. The shock and grief she felt at the macabre murders of our entire royal family had overwhelmed her. She averted her face from the prying cameras, but was just too photogenic. A couple of the cameramen brought their lens right up to her cheeks. They pointed the camera downwards, almost touching her shoulders, for an extreme close up of the roses. The next day, major international dailies carried a picture of the girl with tears and roses.

When I saw pictures of grieving men and women in the papers and on television, part of some faraway tragedy, I used to assume the journalists used zoom lenses to get the shots without intruding on a moment of private grief. Now, I wonder. Even as an alert and aware citizen, I could not do anything as I watched the media exploit the sadness and vulnerability of that girl outside Narayanhiti. The anger and humiliation I felt were swamped by immense helplessness in the face of this national tragedy. I couldn't react or retaliate. She couldn't either. A great sense of loss and melancholy overwhelmed me. The closer I came to the gates, the greater the sense of loss, and the greater the impact of the incomprehensible massacre by the crown prince of his family. When my mother-in-law, after acknowledging the finality of the tragedy by signing the visitor's book, came and hugged me and cried, my own floodgates of grief opened. The tears just flowed. An Indian TV crew rushed over for a sound bite. "Can you tell us how you feel?" the reporter asked, mike outstretched and camera rolling. I wanted to tell him to leave us alone, but I couldn't. All I could do was to shake my head vigorously and say with quivering lips: "I'm sorry, I can't speak."

It seems the camera stayed on for some time on my misery-stricken face, because the next day on the hour every hour I saw my sniffling self on Star News. But that wasn't all. I spotted another



NINI BAIRACHARYA

television journalist who had been talking to a young Nepali girl in jeans across the road and away from the line. He brought the girl to stand amongst us. "We would want you to be in line," he told her in a French-sounding accent. He placed her a couple of people behind me and began to question her as if she were an ordinary mourner waiting to sign the condolence book. After he had got her name, he asked her: "I see you are standing in line, are you a royalist?" Next question: "What do you think about this morning's explanation of the accidental firing of the gun?" After the questions were over, and the reporter had got the sound bite he wanted to hear, the girl moved back across the road and became the bystander she was.

When I watched television that evening, I realised that the man with the strange accent was none other than CNN's Kasra Naji. The footage of the girl he planted in our midst was beamed across the world as an off-the-cuff answer of a mourner waiting to sign the condolence book. Pretending is lying. When the CNN reporter made the girl be what she wasn't, it was lying, it was misrepresentation. When reporters have already made up their minds about the sound bites they want, found a person willing to provide that talking head and then presented it as a "voice from the street", objectivity is flayed, and the message is warped.

I guess this is what happens in any disaster anywhere in the world when parachute reporters from foreign countries swoop in for a piece of juicy action (unfortunately Nepal now can lay claim to the juiciest, most gruesome whodunit in world history), and start speaking with authority without getting a feel of the pulse of the land. Most of what we saw on foreign television (shamefully, our television just played dirges for two weeks) was street scenes from Kathmandu. Anger on the streets. Clean-shaven heads, chanting, "Our king and queen are dearer than our lives!" While the rest of grieving rural Nepal went about their way during

this rice-transplanting season, Kathmandu's unrest seemed to represent the entire country. A majority of these reporters did not venture too far from the palace, let alone from Kathmandu. Before the riots on that Mad Monday, droves of motorcycle-riding youths with shaved heads and angry voices were far too interesting. Kathmandu's shaved angry youth gave the foreign media what they were looking for. They knew the wilder their antics, the more attention they could get from reporters. So they went wild whenever they saw TV cameras. Mild anti-monarch, anti-government chanting would thus reach frenzied heights whenever a TV camera was around. The cameras changed reality by simply being there. To the rest of the world Nepalis must have seemed to run amok. Friends and relatives living outside Kathmandu felt extremely concerned for the safety of their loved ones back home.

Then there was the phenomenon of Hind-pali (Nepali-flavoured Hindi). The very people who were chasing Indian journalists on Darbar Marg on Monday afternoon and chanting anti-Zee News slogans seemed to be elbowing each other to get on-camera to answer questions from Indian journalists in Hind-pali. If one were to go by the sound bites from Indian satellite news channels, from politicians to the angry youth on the streets, we seemed to be a Hindi-speaking nation. When the reporter from Star couldn't get a word out of me, he approached another girl in front and asked if she could say something. When she started answering in Nepali, he said: "No in Hindi or English, please." The girl said she couldn't, and the camera moved on. How easy do these reporters want it? The journalists just showed their disrespect, but the biggest losers were viewers around the world. ♦

Rupa Joshi is a journalism graduate from the University of Southern California, and is now working in Nepal.

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RAMYATA LIMBU

eteorologist Krishna B Manandhar of Nepal's Department of Hydrology and Meteorology relies on experience and instincts honed over more than two decades to read the weather and make forecasts.

But assisting him in his analysis is data from around the world and American and Japanese satellite imagery. "Weather forecasting isn't like astronomy or guesswork. There's a lot of sophisticated technology involved," says Manandhar, who is head of the department's Meteorological Forecasting Division. "Contrary to what people think, we don't just look up at the skies and predict that it is going to be 'fair throughout the kingdom.'" Meteorology has no geographical boundaries, and the technology Manandhar and his colleagues rely on is proof. They use a system called SADIS (Satellite Distribution System), which Nepal has had access to for almost three years. It provides weather reports and forecasts from the World Area Forecast Centre in London. Specifically designed for aviation purposes, it details weather turbulence patterns, icing, jet stream winds, volcano eruptions, temperature, and air pressure up to about 15,200 m. In addition to SADIS, they also rely on AMSS, which is a two-way Automatic Message Switching System based on VSAT (Very Small Aperture Terminal) technology. The system is basically an information network, and allows the department to send out and receive weather reports and forecasts from around the world every

half hour in the day and every hour at night, 365 days a year. Images captured by a geostationary meteorological satellite (at a height 36,000 km) and the American polar orbiting NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) satellite (at 1,300 km) further help in observing weather patterns, trends and phenomena. The final, comprehensive weather charts are drawn manually based on all this information.

"We're not exactly using cutting-edge technology but considering the equipment, the manpower, and resources available, we attain 70-75 percent accuracy in forecasting," says Manandhar. That's not too bad. Meteorological services departments aim for one hundred percent accuracy, but that goal is never reached. Even the most sophisticated equipment and technology assures at best 85-90 percent accuracy. Nepal's meteorological forecasting division provides weather reports and forecasts primarily for flight safety and flight operation purposes and mountaineering expeditions, and morning and night reports for the public. Getting it right. Or not. Spread out before Manandhar are weather maps extending to Mongolia in the north, the coast of China in the east, Israel in the west and Maldives to the south. In the last week of May, he was following the growth of a

cyclone that originated as a low pressure point in the Arabian Ocean, and within a few days turned into a severe cyclone that threatened the Gujarat coastline but later weakened rapidly. A survey of such intense and early pre-monsoon activity in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea enabled forecasters to predict that the monsoon would arrive around 7 June.

Due to its geographic location Nepal is relatively safe from cyclones that can cause devastating damage in coastal countries like Bangladesh where they are an annual feature and, as in the early 70s, can kill over 100,000 people from resultant flooding and building collapse. But Kathmandu Valley does see pretty strong winds—up to 108 kmph—in the local storms that hit us March through May. And the aftermath of a major cyclone, which can generate winds up to 200 kmph in the subcontinent (which even meteorological instruments cannot withstand) can result in unexpected rains and snowfall in the Himalaya, causing damage and loss of life. In 1995 more than 60 trekkers, mostly Japanese, died owing to unexpected rain and snow in November. At the time, weather forecasters had predicted that a cyclone originating in the Bay of Bengal would move in a northeasterly direction towards Assam. Instead, it moved north to Patna, with totally unexpected speed and intensity.

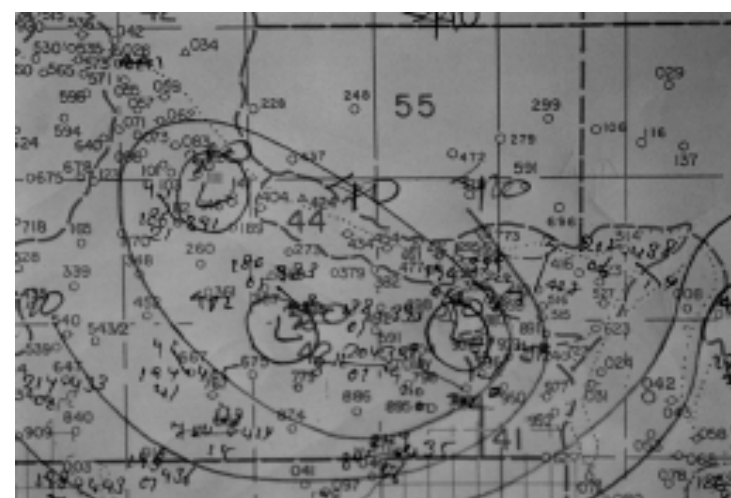


Asynoptic weather station in Kathmandu

"There were cloudless conditions all over Nepal the day before," recalls Manandhar.

Topographically, Nepal is a hard country to read—the high mountains and rugged terrain make it difficult to predict how weather patterns in the area will pan out here, so forecasting is something of an art. Meteorologists here say repeatedly that they need three-dimensional data, including altitude, to make accurate forecasts. So far only surface data is available. Radio sonde equipment—a weather balloon fitted with remote sensing technology that helps forecast thunderstorms and measure temperature, upper atmospheric pressure, wind and humidity up to around 150 km, was used for five years, between 1975-1980, but proved too expensive. The cost of running the equipment would today amount to over Rs 5 million annually. A weather radar would help, but the cost of a Doppler, the most sophisticated kind, is estimated at Rs 150 million, and we'd need trained manpower to operate it. China has three such radars, Thailand has two.

"Cost-wise, it's out of the question, but our accuracy would increase greatly and it would enable us to provide regular weather updates to the public every hour through FM radio," says Manandhar, whose division will soon be providing more detailed local forecasts on their website. The department has applied for assistance from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to update their equipment. In the past experts from Israel, Sweden, the Czech Republic, and the US have helped the department. India could be a potential source of expert assistance—it has 150 years experience in meteorological services, compared to Nepal's 32. Nepal has been negotiating with India for two years to obtain INSAT facilities. INSAT would provide a closer, more detailed image of Nepal and the subcontinent. The present Japanese and American satellite images, which Nepal has been



ALL PHOTOS: NIM BAIKACHARYA

relying on for 20 years and will be phased out within the next couple of years, show the country as a tiny speck, which makes weather reading and forecasting difficult. "It [sharing INSAT facilities with Nepal] would be to India's advantage, too," says Manandhar. "We would be able to forecast floods in Nepal and Bihar." Sky cover

The Meteorological Forecasting Division collects information from 15 synoptic stations, over 300 rain gauge stations, and 43 climatological stations around the country. A synoptic station makes surface weather observations at periodic times (usually at three-hourly and six-hourly intervals specified by the World Meteorological Organisation), of sky cover, the state of the sky, cloud height, atmospheric pressure reduced to sea level, temperature, dew point, wind speed and direction, amount of precipitation, hydrometeors and lithometeors, and special phenomena that prevail at the time of the observation or have been observed since the previous specified observation. The climatological stations gather data that helps in studying the processes of climate formation, the distribution of climates over the globe, analysis of the causes of differences in climate and the application of climatic data to the solution of specific problems. Their focus is more long term than the next weather report and they usually produce charts on the

principal climatic elements of a specific region for a long period, say a few months or years. All the information is put to use in weather forecasting for agricultural and industrial purposes and lately for research in the environmental sector. Some of the data is exchanged globally through New Delhi.

"It is because our visual presentation is so bad that the public feels we don't know our job," say officials. "They tend to rely on the BBC and CNN which have much more attractive forecasts." But that doesn't mean these networks don't slip up at times, despite their sophisticated computer and digital technology and colourful, chatty presentations. "Sometimes they will report Kathmandu's maximum temperature at 35 degrees when it is actually 30 degrees," says Manandhar. "Because they use computers to read weather on a large scale map, Nepal gets lost. Here, we're manually analysing weather patterns on an area-specific map." Weather read closer to home generally makes for more accurate forecasts.

Manandhar reckons we're going to see some interesting weather in times to come. Don't roll your eyes at your septuagenarian friend—it is getting hotter every year—one degree per decade over the last couple of decades, says the Meteorological Forecasting Division. ♦

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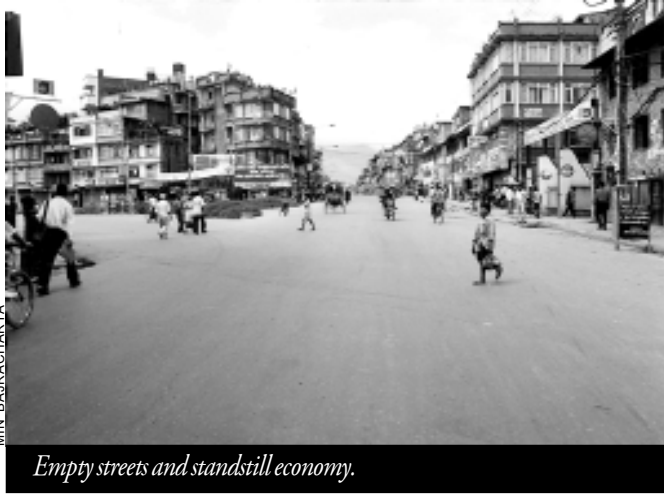



It's the economy

from p. 1 ⇨

It has been a steady downhill for the economy in the past year, with the royal tragedy just the last straw:

- Last June public enterprises, including central bank employees, went on strike
- Hotels shut down in December and March, badly affecting tourism in the two peak seasons
- Leftist parties called a two-day strike to protest the October oil price hikes, which were called off, but the damage was already done
- In December Maoist students attacked schools and a weeklong strike kept 1.5 million children at home
- Another student union burnt buses because they wanted to pay only half fares
- A proposal to phase out old polluting buses resulted in public transport staying off roads for nearly a week
- In end-December the anti-Hritik Roshan riots killed off what was left of the tourism industry
- In February UML joined the protests by disrupting parliament and rampaging on the streets after preventing parliament from working for 57 days. Then it enforced a three-day strike
- In April Maoists killed 70 policemen in one week forcing the government to spend more to meet increasing costs of security



Empty streets and standstill economy.

excessive politicking," finance minister Ram Sharan Mahat told us (see interview). No one would know that better than Mahat, who is now writing next year's spending plan. "Obviously the deficit will widen," Mahat said gloomily. Plugging that would either mean getting grants from donors or borrowing more, to add to the already high debt-servicing obligations.

No one will envy the numbers Mahat has been forced to work with. Over 77 percent of the recurrent expenses budgeted was spent two months ago—mainly on salary and pension payments and security costs, while development spending remained at just 33 percent of what was budgeted. Salaries are expected to overshoot the budgeted Rs21 billion and debt servicing will be over Rs12.7 billion. The government's domestic borrowing is almost as high as was anticipated.

Two months ago only 17 percent of the foreign aid and loans the government hoped to mobilise had come through. Revenue collection stood at about 70 percent of the target, which nose-dived in May-June as a result of strikes and the shutdown

for mourning. The Maoist threats to the alcohol industry and some joint ventures are bound to hurt more. "It has become increasingly difficult to cap the deficit," says Shankar Sharma, a member of the National Planning Commission. "Industries are our main tax payers, and the base remains very small."

Most businessmen and politicians interviewed for this article agreed on a basic checklist for economic revival:

- Address the Maoist advance through a carrot-and-stick approach
- Forge an all-party consensus to prioritise the economy, and control the Maoists
- Launch a drive to spur domestic and foreign investment
- Declare a moratorium on strikes and shutdowns to give tourism and the economy a chance

It has become pointless to assess the accumulated losses in money terms anymore. Investors and businessmen have reached the end of their patience and they were the only ones who openly supported the controversial Public Security Regulations. Says Pradip Kumar Shrestha, FNCCI president: "There is no other way: we need a minimum all-party agreement on the economic agenda. Parliament should be talking economy now, this is now an economic emergency."

The government seems to have belatedly realised that things have got out of hand, but it has been able to do little. "We're cheating ourselves by

Trading places

As the Nepal-India trade treaty comes up for renewal, business on both sides wants it to stay in place—with a few safeguards.

BINOD BHATTARAI

Officials from Nepal and India meet next month to discuss trade—finally. The next three months until end-September are crucial because, by treaty, this is the window for either side to notify the other of its desire to amend the 1996 Trade Treaty which allowed unprecedented access for Nepali exports to India. If either side has something to say, the entire trading regime could change.

India began raising concerns about trade early this year, in the form of a barrage of reports in the Indian press about "dumping" of non-Nepali products. Rather than looking into these "concerns", Nepal postponed every meeting of commerce officials that was planned. Then early this year the government suddenly "promoted" a senior official at the commerce ministry—a Nepal-India trade specialist—and made him a Regional Administrator. The retirement of other government secretaries after that meant the commerce ministry would be playing a new hand.

Nepali business sensed these early warnings and held several rounds of meetings with its Indian counterparts, and early this year agreed on a thorough review of trade before coming to any conclusions. That process is now complete and business sources on both sides say they have found a way to keep the broader trading regime unchanged. "We don't think it would be wise to touch the main treaty," says Prabhakar Rana, who is vice-chairman of the Joint Economic Committee of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FNCCI), two business groups that lobbied jointly for the treaty. "Even CII members and Indian officials are concerned about some products, but we believe we can suggest ways to address them." Rana was in New Delhi last week where



SAIL SUBEDI

both organisations reviewed trade and agreed on some joint recommendations to ensure the main Treaty of Trade can be renewed automatically. The two sides are expected to pass on recommendations to their respective governments by August.

Sources told us tentative agreements have been reached on dealing with fly-by-night companies, which, India charges, re-export semi-finished imports. The CII and the FNCCI are also working on ways to handle borderline products, which India does not think are real manufactures. One possibility is introducing value addition as criterion to qualify for duty-free export to India for products using imported raw materials. This would not apply to products using Nepali or Indian raw material. The two sides have also come to an agreement on ways to monitor "manufacturing", by requiring products to undergo a one-digit change in the four digit harmonised code as proof of process. The CII and the FNCCI are also to recommend ways to define "surge"—still another Indian concern—to ensure that trade lobbies and interest groups do not use treaty provisions to make frivolous complaints or seek protection.

Contrary to reports in the Indian

media both the CII and the FNCCI are convinced that the treaty has benefited both countries. Every year Nepal exports about IRs 3 billion worth of goods to India and imports about IRs 2.7 billion worth of Indian goods. Around 250 Nepali products have been certified for duty-free export, of which about 50 actually sell something. Of these, the exports of only around 10 are significant. FNCCI sources say value addition may sound restrictive but that it is the only way to go, as it addresses Indian concerns but also forces Nepal-based industries to add more value—and ensure that real industrialisation takes place. Unofficially, even today Nepal has in place a provision to check value addition (about 20 percent) on exports when companies file for duty-drawback refunds. That may now become an official requirement of 30 percent. Surprisingly, even today, many of the six "problem products"—vanaspati ghuu, zinc oxide, copper wires, black pipes, acrylic yarn and plastic bags—singled out as not being genuine manufactures pass the value addition test. Both the CII and the FNCCI feel that rather than restrict imports of borderline products immediately, the industries should be given time to add value. ♦



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Karnali's salt caravans

CHHAKKA BAHADUR LAMA
IN HUMLA

Caravan had a lot of yaks. Stumbling yaks, yaks plunging to watery graves down vertiginous cliffs, recalcitrant yaks, charming yaks, unexceptional yaks—so many yaks, in fact, that you'd be forgiven for thinking the only animals involved in real-life caravans were, well, yaks, or the occasional cross-bred dzo. Yaks have traditionally commandeered high altitude roads like the one to Tibet, but caravans to and from the middle hills and the tarai are generally *bhagris*—sheep caravans—because yaks cannot survive at low elevations. And caravans were not ever oddities, the quaint custom of tiny nomadic villages, waiting to be made into an Oscar-nominated film. Yak and sheep caravans were in every corner of Nepal's remote and roadless western Karnali region.

The skilled people of the upper Karnali evolved the caravan as an ingenious response to their surroundings and climate to get salt from Tibet and food supplies from Nepal's middle hills and tarai moving where they were needed. Sheep were the perfect transition animal between Nepal's varied terrain and peoples. And now many sheep caravans in Humla

In Nepal's roadless and remote Karnali, the march of time and "development" have finally killed the salt caravans. A once-proud and self-sufficient people are now dependent on handouts. They want their dignity back.

are being replaced by mules on new Dutch-built horse trails and by trucks on roads—one of the many effects of economic, developmental and geo-political change that are making most caravans redundant. But we are getting ahead of our story.

A perfect Karnali day. The sky filled with flocks of seasonal migratory ducks. People say they head north in the summer to feed on Tibetan salt and head south during the winter to catch Indian Ocean salt. Karnali's caravan herders relate their own migratory patterns with that of the ducks flying along the Karnali watershed, the Ganga and out towards the Indian Ocean, back and forth, year after year. A more colourful version has the ducks flying down from Lake Mansarovar deafened by Tibetan salt and those returning blinded by Indian Ocean salt. That, people in the area will tell you, is why they always fly under a single leader who guides the flock and determines what altitude they should be flying at and what their

bearing should be. This is more than a story for most caravan herders and their families—it brings home the need to obey the logic of natural laws even as they undertake their journeys of peril and profit. It provides inspiration for the long and bitter trip from the tarai to the highlands as they watch the birds honking high above.

The excursion arose, as so many historic trips have, in search for edibles, and more palatable meals. Food was short on the ground (literally) in the remote western regions of the Tibetan plateau, and salt was extremely hard to come by in Nepal's landlocked hills. The dangers of high passes and scary terrain seemed preferable to the malaria that traders would surely be possessed by if they were to bring in salt from the Indo-Gangetic plain. And there were vast open pastures in the Karnali valley for sheep, caravan-ready animals. The logistics of caravans worked out because of the complementary needs and skills of the people from northern and southern Karnali—interestingly, the



CHHAKKA BAHADUR LAMA

names of both these broad groups are considered derogatory now. Natives of northern Karnali, Jadas are said to be people of Mongolian stock who entered Nepal through the high altitude Tibetan deserts and brought with them sheep-trading skills. The people of southern Karnali, Khasas, tell of being from tropical pre-Vedic and Vedic-Aryan stock. They brought their southern agricultural skills and introduced to the region red rice and metal weapons.

Between the northerners and the southerners, and with access to food and salt, the people of Karnali had a pretty good idea for a thriving

business. Tibetan salt in Nepal was valued like gold. A sack of salt could be bartered for 15 sacks of rice here, and vice versa in Tibet. For as long as they can remember, virtually the whole of Karnali engaged in salt trading. The various nomadic Tibetan traders (collectively called Khampas) in western Nepal didn't acquire any permanent land and migrated between the tarai and the hills with families and livestock. Constant interaction with the Hindu Khasas of the southern middle hills, has meant the Tibetans adopted some of their ways, and ally themselves with

people of southern Karnali. Humla and Mugu Khampas forge links with Thakalis and Gurungs, while Dolpo Khampas associate with the Magar. While the Khampas were always on the move, the semi-nomadic sheep caravan herders like the Humla Nyinba and the Sathi Kholya set up villages—every village and settlement in Karnali is where semi-nomads set up permanent homesteads. The herders usually pass through their homes twice a year, on their Tibet-tarai circuit.

Top. 10,11 ⇨

SIC

When trade fades, so does the K

from p. 9 ➔

Canny Kamali traders therefore had extra rice from Achham and salt from Tibet. It seemed as dependable as the sunrise in the east—the land of salt was the north, Tibet, and the land of provisions was the Achham plains. It seemed as if the salt traders would tread this loop forever. The promises all parties involved made, the lengths they went to ensure trust and reliability created an aura around Tibetan salt that is evident even today. The Nyinbus of Humla still keep a wooden box full of old Tibetan salt in the most sacred room of their house dedicated to the family god. Humli Khampa people, who are now settled in Bajura are still reluctant to use the iodised salt distributed in Martadi. They continue to use salt from the Tibetan plateau. As a matter of course, the farmers from the south who barter their red rice and barley and salt traders in Tibet establish ritual friendships with people they deal with, sealed with a vow to Mt Kailash and the holy Manasarovar Lake. This pact on mutual objects of faith ensured there was no treachery or distrust.

The parties make their promise before a heaped plate of rice symbolising Mt Kailash and water in a kalash (a ritual vessel) standing in for Lake Manasarovar. Then *dai chamal achbeta* (yoghurt mixed with rice) is shared by the new ritual partners. Once such a friendship is established, it is believed both their bodies merge into one and the relation is as permanent that of

Shiva and Parvati, lasting as long as there is snow on Kailash and water in Manasarovar. An economic transaction changed into a social one, adding new meaning to an exchange between peoples of two different religions and cultures.

This economics of travel that arose from basic need put down roots like a wayward tree, penetrating every aspect of the lives of trading communities. Many of the resultant practices and phenomena took on a patina of natural, age-old phenomena and it was not until the caravans started slowly coming to a stop in the mid-1970s that they were revealed to be the centre of a vital web.

What forced the change? Geopolitical realities and the inexorable march of "development". The Chinese arrived in the remotest parts of Tibet, India fought a war with China, Nepal got more mobile—the country forged more roads and entered the jet, or at least chopper, age. Malaria was eradicated in the tarai, better health care and nutrition meant Nepal's midhill population increased, and changing patterns of population and consumption resulted in deforestation and eventually community forestry in the middle hills.

In the 1950s, with the Chinese presence in Tibet, the Bhotia, the Drogpa (Tibetan nomads) and the Taklakoti of Tibet, who barely knew what paddy and wheat looked like, started consuming rice and flour produced in China brought to them via the newly constructed highways on

the high plateau. And so the land of salt also became a food supplier. The 1962 Sino-Indian war destroyed the traditional caravan trade between areas in western Nepal and bordering areas of Himachal Pradesh and Kumaon Garhwal in India.

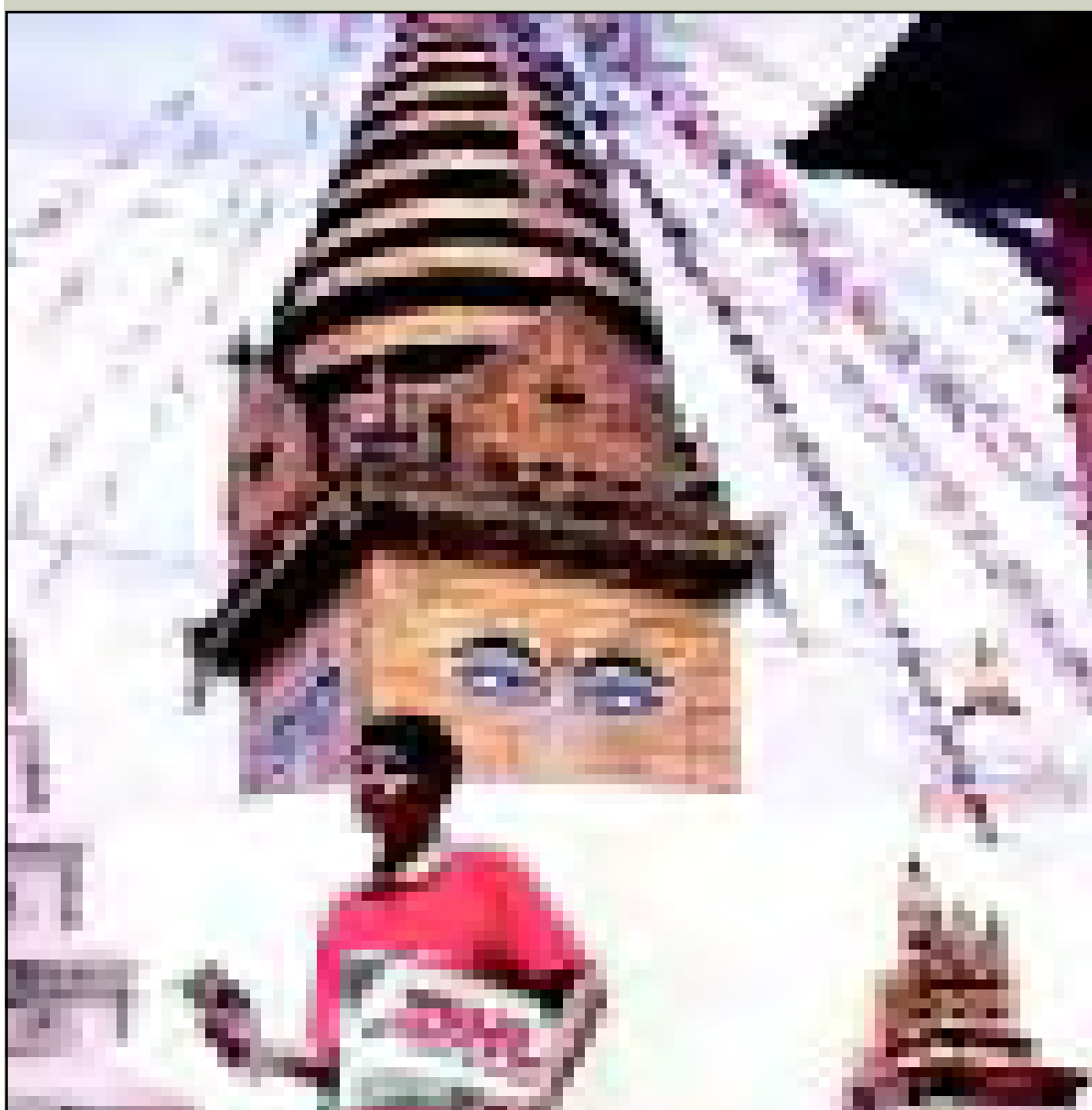
In Nepal, meanwhile, new roads and a malaria-free tarai ensured that iodised Indian salt started making inroads into the condiment market. As the Indian salt trade started from the small *haat bazaars* (multipurpose markets) in the tarai after the eradication of malaria in the 1930s, the trans-Himalayan caravans moved their base to the plains. The Thakalis settled in Butwal, the Khampas of Mugu in Surkhet and the Sauka of Darchula, who started running yak caravans in Mahendranagar.

The Salt Trading Corporation started flying out iodised salt to the furthest reaches of the kingdom in an effort to combat goitre and cretinism. Wherever an airstrip was built, there was now a monetary alternative to the barter economy. The growing middle hill population started stripping forest cover and encroaching on public forest—making the denudation alarming enough for a community forestry programme to be implemented since the 1980s. This meant nomadic shepherds lost their customary rights to grazing grounds. After 1990, there was nothing to replace the traditional guarantee that caravans could use commons to camp or let their animals graze.

Among the first casualties of this rapid change were the *haat bazaars*



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WAVE

Karnali's economy and social fabric



From left: Humla herdsmen cross the border bridge into Tibet with Nepali timber to barter for food and alcohol, mountain goats with salt on their backs arrive in Mugu. The traditional trade routes from Tibet and India into Nepal in the early 1950s.

along the Nepal-Tibet border. They used to be held every alternate year on the Tibetan and Nepali sides. But after the 1950 Nepal-Tibet treaty, this became history. Haat bazaars in the tarai, on the other hand, were flourishing with Indian goods and iodised salt. Migrant western hill people could fill many of their needs more easily at the bazaars in the south than in the north. Initially, the caravans with Indian salt meant alternative business and increased employment. Caravan runners started transporting Indian salt from the tarai up to the middle hills. More haat bazaars were started. The caravans of Karnali, especially those from Humla, played an important role in the establishment of hill towns like Silgadhi in Doti, Sanphe Bagar, Bayal Pata, Kuchchi Binayak in Achham, and Martadi and Kolti in Bajura. The caravans didn't just bring salt, but virtually every necessity. The

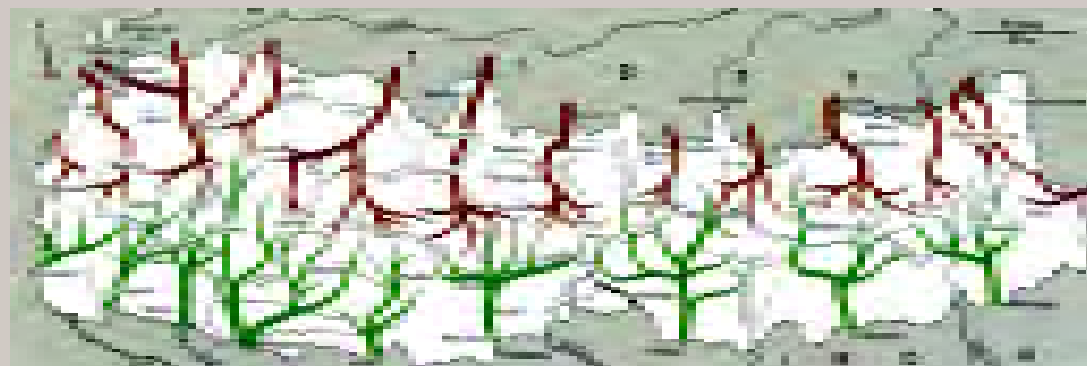
Dadeldhura-Doti highway in the 1980s virtually wiped out the caravans. And when the Kohalpur-Banbasa highway was built, even the tarai haat bazaars dried up. And this was how salt started coming from the south and food from the north—once as unimaginable as a western sunrise.

After the trade stopped, people had to negotiate all over again how they deal with land, livestock, food and each other. The impact has been devastating. Border villages like Chala, Chyaduk, Dojam and Nepka of Humla district and Mugal of Mugu district are among the worst-affected. Tibetan was the language of commerce, so they acted as interpreters for the Thakuri landlords, given responsibility of the weighing procedures by the Rana rulers. They were paid in flour and as their livelihood depended on border transactions, they did not own much land or have any established

agricultural base. When the salt trade ran dry, they had nothing to fall back on.

The caravan highway extended from Tibet to the tarai along the banks of the Karnali, the Seti and the Mahakali rivers. The open pastures were used by the caravans, and the sheep droppings were rich fertiliser. In Humla there was a system of collecting a royalty in exchange for allowing caravans the use of pastures. Now the market has dried up and the Humlalis have registered the pastures as private farms. With the yaks and sheep gone, they will have to find new ways to fertilise the soil. The change in the forestry act and lack of proper governance in recent years has led to a mass selling of sheep. Earlier honoured as a god of wealth, similar to the cow in Hinduism, sheep now fulfil the growing demand for meat, becoming the favourite snack in western Nepal's growing urban areas.

The urgency for border posts is obvious if you live in Humla. The biggest western Tibetan border town of Taklakot, adjoins Humla. When the caravans were still making their trips, Humlalis were self-sufficient as far as food went, and the caravan used to supplement the scarce food supply in Taklakot. The Taklakot elite build up ritual friendships with their counterparts in Humla. When winter was around the corner, Taklakotis entered Nepal as far as Yalbang Chaur in Muchu Village District Committee to stock up on *tito phapar* (bitter



TONI HAGEN'S NEPAL

buckwheat) flour, and *bhuse jau* (barley with a thick bark), which grows in Rodikot in Humla.

Taklakot is now connected by road to other centres of supply, and the market, which also catered to Humla, does not function anymore. Humlalis are now completely dependent on the Taklakot market for food supply and commodities. Because there is no checkpoint or customs post at the border in Hilsa, Humlalis must now travel at their own peril and dogged by considerable harassment to inner Taklakot to buy their basic needs. The price? Deforestation and alcoholism. In Taklakot, Humlalis pay for food with Nepali timber sold for as little as 7 Yuan (Rs 56) per kg. Worse, Humlalis are sometimes forced to barter the wood for *thope*, the local alcohol. (See 'Nepali timber to Tibet', Nepali Times #17)

The tradition of polyandry is also collapsing. The well-to-do Nyinba community, among others, had evolved a unique system of brothers

dividing the caravan work equally amongst themselves and marrying a single wife. Since all the brothers' earnings from different sources went to the wife and relations between all the husbands and the wife were equal, the families prospered. "A wife from a good family, water from a good spring", goes a Nyinba saying. But now, as the sheep stocks are sold for meat, there are few or no pastures, the single wife will be married to many unemployed brothers. Many retired herders are now forced to take on a completely alien tradition: a single household with a sort of large joint family. In their old age some are settling down with individual wives and earning their livelihood running teashops and lodges in Simikot. Nyinba women who used to proudly wear along (traditional golden earrings), now line up in front of the Chief District Officer's office with a coupon that entitles them to 5 kg of rice. And these are people who were earlier among the biggest salt traders of the upper Karnali.

There is corruption and politics

involved in the food coupons, tainting these straight-forward, honest and hard-working folk. One-third of the Himalayan region including Karnali once depended wholly on the caravan economy. Now, there is nothing to replace it. The Karnali is not the only region to be affected by these changes, but it is most desperate here.

The people of the Karnali have been proud and self-sufficient for centuries. They don't want handouts, they want a life of self-sufficiency and dignity. But the march of time, the encroachment of the outside world, and an uncaring faraway capital has forced them to speak out. And now that they are speaking out, the government considers them a nuisance. They are seeking their rights not as bohemian caravan runners romanticised in Oscar-nominated films, but as alert citizens of Nepal. All they want is their dignity back. ♦

Chhakka Bahadur Lama is a former communist MP from Humla.



Iconfess



STEVE BODOW
"The Internet is an excellent instrument for evangelisation and religious dialogue, but it cannot be turned into an online recycle bin for sins in place of face-to-face confessions, a senior Vatican official said Tuesday." - from an IDG News report
Your Eminence:
I. It was with perfect wisdom that

you forbade the taking of communion via Federal Express. In accord with what surely was divine guidance, you similarly banned cell phone administration of last rites. However, I must humbly urge you to reconsider your decision to outlaw the performing of the sacrament of confession through the Internet.
II. Indeed, though we have

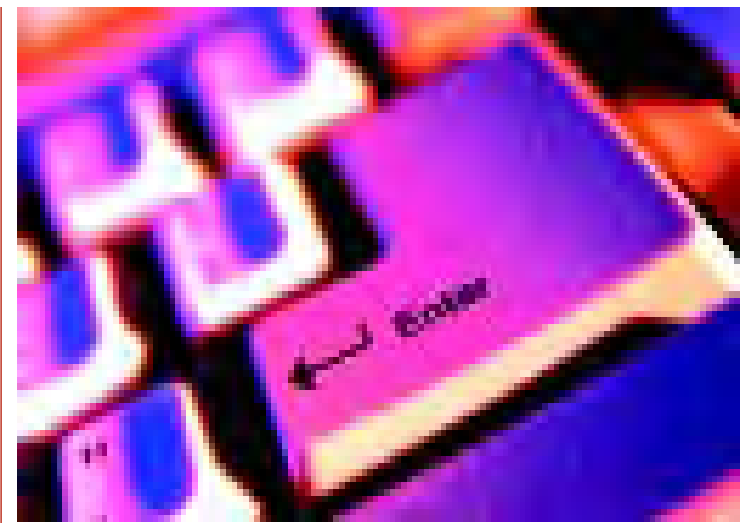
not solicited it, confessional e-mail has been pouring over the Vatican's virtual transom in great waves. This is not necessarily a bad thing. With so much electronic data, Your Grace, we now have a more accurate picture of our flock than ever before. It turns out that our faithful besmirch themselves a great deal more often, in more ways and

with far greater enthusiasm than we had previously had any reason to believe. The demand for absolution is bigger than we even imagined.

III. Admittedly, this situation requires us to bear some new burdens. But this is largely a matter of mere resources. For example: In stark contrast to you, Your Grace, our technical team is in fact deeply fallible. We have found skilled programmers difficult to recruit; apparently they still prefer to be granted options instead of indulgences. Our current techies, meanwhile, just wrote confession-routing software that routinely misdirects venal sins to the mortal department and vice versa. Nor is our current server architecture of exactly Bernini quality. (I am sure this explains why I receive so few of your responses to my e-mails, Excellency.)

The advent of the devilish Blackberry has only made matters more challenging. With some of our more eagerly flagellant believers now requesting forgiveness every 10 minutes, we are often overwhelmed. Of course we are eager to hear immediately about every instance of someone fibbing, cursing or touching themselves. But we simply do not have the bandwidth to respond. Put simply, we need a great deal more VC funding. Vatican City, that is.

IV. Other issues are more ecclesiastical, and we beg your judgment. BCC-ing e-mail feels like a sin of duplicity, but we are not sure. Is the viewing of unclean websites more or less of an offence if one pays the



requested fee? It is also worth pointing out that Hail Marys, Our Fathers and other prayers well-suited to repetitious penances are rendered useless with simple "copy and paste" technology. This is probably best tackled by the fellows in repentance services, but I wanted to bring it to your Righteous attention.

V. We might employ some fast-track tactics to make i-confessions work:

i. Implement a CRM (Catholic Relationship Management) solution: The leading provider seems to be Oracle, if you're not unduly bothered by the heathen Greek connotation, or by doing business with Larry Ellison, who, with all due respect, is an even sharper dresser than is Your Beneficence.

ii. Outsource to India: An increasingly popular option in the e-services business, Your Whiteness. Of course we would try to staff our remote contrition centres with as many converts as possible, but it may be necessary to hire some heretics. Muslims,

who generally "get" the heaven vs. hell concept, should do fine. Hindus may present more of a training challenge.

iii. Explore Alternate Platforms: We suspect e-mail's lack of immediacy may hinder the validity of a confession. But how about instant messaging? NB: We would want to consider very carefully the possibly confusing signal sent by an AOL/Holy See pact. I frankly do not see how they could have taken over Time Warner without at least a little help from down under, and I do not refer to Rupert Murdoch.

VI. Once you have thought this over, please contact me at my Yahoo address or send me something on vellum, either is fine. Finding the right i-confessions formula will be hard, Holy Father, but I believe it is at least worth giving the old college try. ♦

Devotedly,
Fra Benedictus
(Industry Standard)

PRIVATISE EVERYTHING



Protestors outside the WTO meeting in Seattle 1998.

KEN LAIDLAW

Edinburgh—In the WTO's Geneva headquarters talks and negotiations are being held which threaten the public services commitments of governments around the world. The aim of the talks is to radically extend the GATS—General Agreement on Trade and Services—Treaty. The current GATS regime, established in 1994, is already comprehensive. The new regime proposes making it almost impossible for governments to monopolise public services like health, education and water. For many this is not new. IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programmes have for years prodded countries in the South to dismantle public services to allow in foreign-based health care, education and water corporations. On 6-7 July the WTO has invited government representatives, the media and NGOs to discuss the WTO agenda ahead, including GATS. As a public relations exercise it is unlikely to be very successful.

"Services" seems an innocuous item. But in a memo he wrote to the chair of services negotiations in 1999, David Hartridge, WTO director of services, said: "Services is the major part of the agenda, less difficult and less visible politically than agriculture but very much larger in economic importance and potential." Services are among the fastest growing sectors in the global economy. Health, education and water are leaders: the global annual health market is worth some \$3.5 trillion, education \$2 trillion and water \$1 trillion.

Little wonder that multinational service providers want a large chunk of the action, if not all of it. The World Development Movement (WDM), an NGO that campaigns against GATS, notes that after the Bolivian government sold its public water system under World Bank instructions, low income families received higher water bills than food bills. Even collecting rainwater in tanks was illegal without a permit. Hundreds took to the streets of Bolivia's

The WTO's two-day meeting in early July could bring stormy weather.

Cochabamba city last April and eight protestors were killed. They finally won and the government was forced to evict the British company that had acquired Cochabamba's public water system. The water supply was put in local hands. Under the proposed WTO regime it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for the Bolivian government to rescind the privatisation.

In a speech in 1997 David Hartridge said "a GATS Treaty in 1994 would never have been signed but for pressure from American Express and Citicorp." Lobbying by multinationals, the European Services Forum and the powerful US Coalition of Services Industries, has succeeded in setting most of the agenda for GATS negotiations, due to be concluded in 2002. Global investment houses like Merrill-Lynch predict that public education will be globally privatised over the next decade. The CEO of US-based Colombia/HCA Healthcare Corporation, the world's largest for-profit hospital organisation aims to privatise every public hospital in North America. Thames Water, a British firm, operates privatised water treatment plants in Chile and plans to expand into South America and Southeast Asia. National Grid, another British company, delivers electricity in Zambia.

The 1994 GATS identified 160 sectors subject to its rules. They are: business, communications (telecom,

postal and audio-visual), construction and related engineering services, distribution, educational, financial, environmental (water delivery, energy, refuse disposal), health-related and social, tourism and travel related, recreational and sporting, transport (sea, air, rail, road, auxiliary), and others. Also included are culture and social security. GATS negotiations cover nearly everything. All 141 WTO member-states are members of GATS and have assumed specific commitments in individual service sectors. Multinational service providers gain increased access through an Article called the 'necessity test'. Governments would have to demonstrate that their laws and regulations are "not more burdensome than necessary", ie, least trade restrictive. The GATS Dispute Panel will decide what is and is not trade restrictive. It will be final and outside governments' hands. One commentator wrote in the *Guardian* that after GATS, national parliaments and regulatory agencies will be demoted, effectively, to advisory bodies." While protests are growing, Michael Moore, the head of the WTO, says, "The people that stand outside and say they work in the interests of the poorest make me want to vomit." Clare Short, British Secretary for International Development, said recently that those who claim GATS will lead to privatisation are "conspiracy theorists". ♦ (GEMINI)

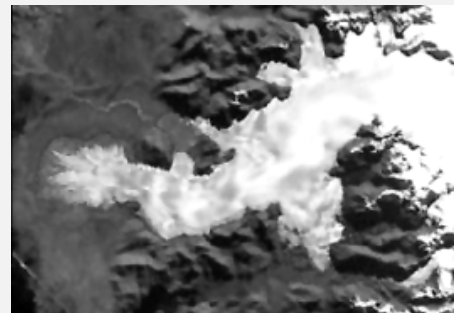
What price Milosevic?

BELGRADE — Goaded in part by economic concerns, Yugoslavia has begun a legal procedure that could lead to the extradition of former president Slobodan Milosevic to the UN war crimes tribunal in The Hague, The Netherlands. The extradition is made possible by a decree passed by the Yugoslav government last week. Milosevic tops the list of those accused of war crimes in Kosovo in 1999. The decree followed weeks of controversy on how the country should cooperate with the Tribunal. Donors to Yugoslavia are to meet in Brussels 29 June and make new investments worth \$1 billion—but leading Western countries threatened not to participate unless the extradition was pushed through. Milosevic's lawyer almost immediately started a procedure of questioning the constitutional validity of the decree. Milosevic's Socialist Party of Serbia says that the country's constitution bans extradition of Yugoslav citizens. But constitutional law expert Pavle Nikolic says, "The Tribunal is an organ of the UN, where Yugoslavia is a full member. The UN's laws are above ours. We have to cooperate with or without our laws, decrees or other documents." Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica is quoted as saying "extradition of war crimes suspects to the Tribunal was a lesser evil than that which could strike us if we did not cooperate with the Tribunal." The Yugoslav Left party, headed by Mirjana Markovic, Milosevic's wife, described the extradition as "giving up the sovereignty of the country for a handful of dollars." A recent poll showed that 48 percent of Serbs support the idea of Milosevic's extradition and that 33 percent oppose it. If extradited, Milosevic will be the only head of state—indicted while in office—to be brought before the court. (IPS)

Shrinking mountain glaciers

Mountain glaciers around the world are receding, a comparison of new satellite data with historical records clearly shows. The majority of glaciers studied by the Global Land Ice Measurement from Space (GLIMS) project have decreased in size. The ongoing research, which compares new satellite data to historical records

and photographs of glaciers on mountains worldwide, could be seen as new evidence that global warming is occurring. The report does not say why glaciers are receding, but does state that mountain



ASTER image of the North Patagonia ice-sheet

glaciers respond much more quickly than polar glaciers to changes in temperature and climate. GLIMS' objectives are to establish a global inventory of land ice, including surface topography, and to measure the changes in the extent of glaciers and often their surface velocities to establish a digital baseline inventory of ice extent for comparison later. GLIMS uses data from an instrument known as the Advanced Spaceborne Thermal Emission and Reflection Radiometer (ASTER) aboard the US TERRA satellite. The number of glaciers in the world is not accurately known, but two large inventories, the World Glacier Monitoring Service and Eurasia at the US National Snow and Ice Data Center, point to about 80,000. GLIMS is also looking at crevasses and small bodies of water on the surface of glaciers to get a better picture of the overall health of a particular glacial region. One of the areas where GLIMS is focusing research is the size and temperature of glacial lakes in the Tibetan Himalaya. This area includes the Khumbu glacier on Mt Everest, which makes up part of the most popular routes climbers use when attempting to reach the world's highest peak. (Environmental News Network)

Flatulence fighting filter

Few people talk about it past adolescence. But 62-year-old American Buck Weimer is different. He actually likes talking about, um, farts. His inspiration was his wife, who suffers from Crohn's disease, a form of inflammatory bowel syndrome. Under-Ease is airtight underwear with a replaceable charcoal filter that removes foul-smelling gases before they escape. The undies are made from a soft, airtight, nylon-type fabric. Elastic is sewn around the waist and both legs. The removable filter, which looks like the shoulder pads in women's clothing, is made of charcoal, which removes odours, sandwiched between two layers of Australian sheep's wool. The trickiest part of developing the undies was finding a filter that wasn't too bulky but could capture the foul-smelling gas and allow the non-smelling gas—hydrogen and oxygen—to pass through. Weimer tweaked a filter used in gas masks worn by coal miners and inserted it into the rump of his undies. The underwear is made for men and women and sells for \$25, two replacement filters cost \$10. The company's motto: "Wear them for the ones you love." Even though a healthy person breaks wind 16 times a day on average, according to UselessKnowledge.com, flatulence is a private matter. Almost every sale of Under-Ease has been on the Internet. (The Guardian)

COMMENT

by PIERRE NORA

The tidal wave of memory

Countries, social, ethnic and family groups have in recent decades undergone a profound change in their relations with the past. This takes many forms: criticism of official histories and recovery of repressed ones, demands for confiscated or suppressed pasts, interest in "roots" and genealogy, commemorative events and new museums, opening archives to the public, and fondness for what English-speakers call "heritage" and the French "patrimoine." With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union, followed by the end of military dictatorships in Latin America and apartheid in South Africa, a global settling of scores with the past is underway.

This upsurge in memory intersects with the "acceleration of history". A key feature of modernity is change rather than continuity, the straightforward linearity of historical time. The way people envisaged their future traditionally determined what needed to be remembered and gave meaning to the present. The future could be envisaged as a form of restoration, progress, or revolution. But because today we cannot anticipate what our descendants will need to know about us to understand themselves, we piously and indiscriminately stockpile anything that might testify to what we are or will become. It is this dissolution of teleology—a history whose end is known—that creates today's "duty to remember," a sense more mechanical and heritage-based than moral, and linked not to "debt" but to "loss". And so we commune with vestiges of the past. To recover the past we reconstruct it, aided by documents and archives, a form of memory once called "history." "Memory" is now so all-inclusive, it stands in for "history".

This outbreak of memory is also due to the emancipatory trend among minority groups—rehabilitating the past reaffirms their identity. Minority memories mainly arise from decolonisation: international decolonisation, which provides societies mired in colonial oppression historical consciousness and the rehabilitation (or fabrication) of memories; domestic decolonisation of sexual, social, religious and provincial minorities for whom reaffirming their memory, their history, is a way of being recognised by a community that refused them that right; and ideological decolonisation, which reunites people with memories confiscated, destroyed or manipulated by totalitarian regimes. This explosion of minority memories enhances the idea of "collective memory". History was the sphere of the collective, used by public authorities and scholars to mould the meaning of a nation. Memory was individual. The idea that memory can be collective, emancipatory turns its meaning inside out.

History-replaced-by-memory is almost a popular protest movement—the revenge of the outcast, the history of those denied history. Hitherto, if history did not have truth, it at least had loyalty. But the last century's sufferings incited demands for a truth more truthful than history, the truth of personal experience, individual memory. The idea that collectivities have



Checkpoint Charlie at the Berlin Wall, now dismantled. Pieces are in nearby museums.

"Memory" is replacing "history". Invoking memory is often a call for justice.

a memory implies a great change in individuals' relations to their communities. Identity has been transformed from an individual and subjective notion into a collective, objective one. Traditionally, identity characterised all that is unique about an individual—so much so that it acquired an essentially administrative sense: our fingerprints, our identity papers. Nowadays, identity implies a group category. Identity created by self-assertion, like memory, becomes a duty. It is at this level of obligation that memory and social identity become almost synonymous.

How is memory now organised? Two patterns are visible. The first consists of a dramatic increase in the uses made of the past. Many reasons exist for today's proliferation of commemorative events, but each shows that the past has ceased to have a single meaning and that a present overlaid with awareness of its history allows for several possible versions of the past. The second deprives historians of their monopoly on interpreting the past. Historians now share their duties with judges, witnesses, the media, legislators. But the problem raised by memory's sanctification comes in recognising when emancipation becomes exclusion. To claim the right to memory is to call for justice, but this proliferation of moral claims can degenerate into a call to murder. ♦ (Project Syndicate)

Pierre Nora is director of studies, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris and a member of the Academie française.

Slippery quarry

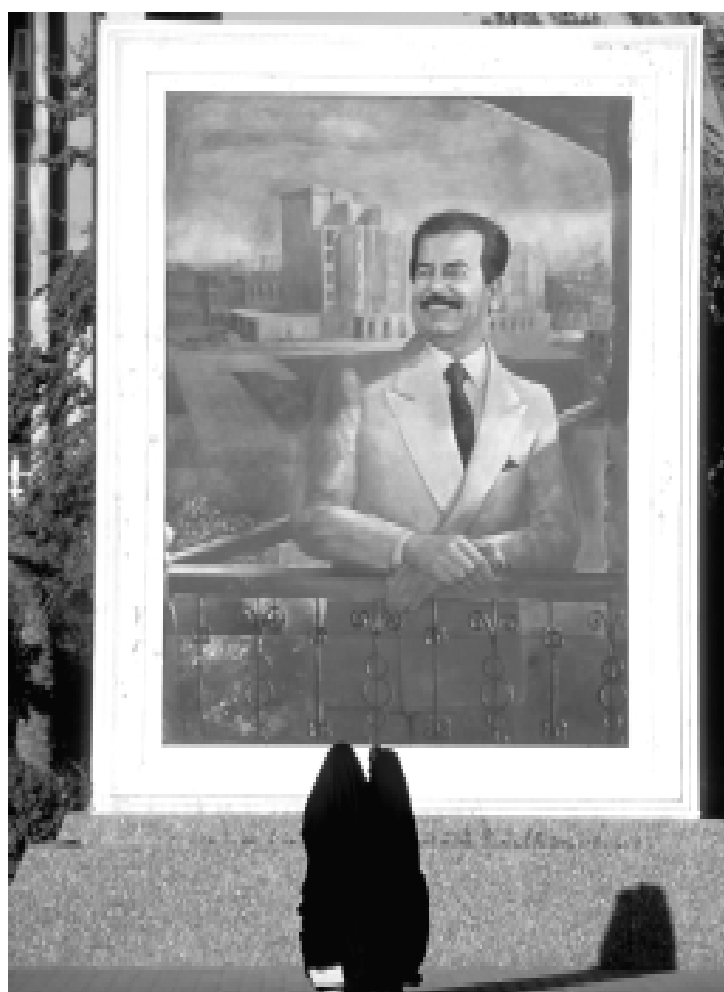
DILIP HIRO

Iraqi president Saddam Hussein is preparing for another showdown with the US and Britain—this time over the United Nations oil-for-food programme. Since 1996, the UN has allowed Iraq to buy food from the foreign exchange earned through the sale of Iraqi oil—money that has to deposit into a UN-administered fund. The UN Security Council committee responsible for maintaining the sanctions on Iraq has to decide by 3 July whether to roll over the oil-for-food programme for another six months. The committee will also consider an Anglo-American draft resolution requiring Iraqi private oil sales to Jordan, Turkey and Syria—something the alliance has turned a blind eye to so far—to be placed under the oil-for-food scheme. But this is Iraq's only major channel for obtaining foreign exchange outside the UN-administered account.

Iraq sells oil at discount prices to the three countries, which pay Baghdad directly. If they were to go by the Anglo-American draft resolution, they would have to pay the market price. Of the 75,000 barrels per day (bpd) of Iraqi petroleum Jordan has been receiving with the agreement of the Sanctions Committee since the end of the Gulf War, half is free. The remainder is \$18 a barrel. Supplies to Turkey are channelled through private intermediary traders. Significantly, they are senior officials of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in the Iraqi region of Kurdistan. This supply of about 65,000 bpd has been sold since 1993 at about \$10-12 per barrel. Baghdad's price cut has enabled KDP officials to make substantial profits which they use to

administer that part of the Kurdistan Autonomous Region (three northern Iraqi provinces) under KDP control, with the assistance of Anglo-American air patrols. The Alliance wants to deprive Hussein of the control of the area, one-fifth of Iraqi territory. Aware of US Congress unwillingness to permit financial aid to the KDP, the Clinton administration overlooked the clear breach of UN sanctions. Iraqi oil started flowing through a newly re-opened Syrian-Iraqi pipeline last January. Baghdad sells it to Damascus at \$15 a barrel. Syria, an oil-exporting country, consumes the Iraqi oil domestically and exports an equivalent amount, 150,000 bpd, at the market price of between \$25 and \$32 a barrel.

Persuading Iraq's neighbours to give up this economic privilege will be hard, so the Anglo-American draft resolution proposes to compensate them. The proposal, bizarrely, is to compensate the three countries from a UN Compensation Fund, part of whose revenue comes from the UN-administered Iraqi oil export account. The initial 30 percent UN cut was reduced to 25 percent last year. The draft resolution proposes raising it back to the original level. But there is more to this than mere compensation. "Under President Clinton and Secretary of State Albright, Washington regarded the suffering of ordinary Iraqis as acceptable collateral damage in their struggle against Saddam Hussein," explains Ian Williams, a British specialist on the Gulf. "Under Colin Powell and President Bush, there is the realisation that the support of Iraq's neighbours is waning because of the suffering of Iraqis, and without their support the US could



CAROLINE PENNINGTON

Syria, Jordan and Turkey are key elements in the proposed addition to the UN's oil-for-food program in Iraq.

not enforce sanctions effectively."

Saddam Hussain will keep trying to loosen the UN stranglehold on Iraq's prime resource, oil. Last December Iraq decreed that buyers of Iraqi petroleum deposit a surcharge of \$0.50 per barrel into an independent Iraqi account. Unwilling to violate UN sanctions, the purchasers, including India,

refused and Saddam backed down. "For Baghdad," says Williams, "the continued existence of the escrow account amounts to an infringement of its sovereignty." ♦ (GEMINI)

London-based journalist Dilip Hiro's latest book is *Neighbours, Not Friends: Iraq and Iran after the Gulf Wars*.

Oil in troubled waters

WASHINGTON - A labour rights group is suing ExxonMobil on charges that it paid and directed government forces who committed atrocities while protecting the oil company's Indonesian facilities. The world's largest oil company denies any wrongdoing. The Washington-based International Labour Rights Fund (ILRF) filed charges on behalf of 11 people from Aceh who allege that they and family members were murdered, tortured, raped, and kidnapped by an Indonesian military unit guarding the company's local operations. ExxonMobil allegedly provided logistical and material support to Indonesian troops operating in the restive territory between 1989 and 1998, when former president Suharto sustained an intense effort against armed separatists there. ExxonMobil suspended its Aceh operations in March citing security concerns, but might return under pressure from Pertamina, Indonesia's state oil corporation. The company has other problems too. Environmentalists and rights activists have urged the EU to suspend financial backing for the Chad-Cameroon oil and gas pipeline, threatening the ExxonMobil-led consortium hoping to build and operate the controversial venture. And US distributors are suing against the company, alleging antitrust violations (in this case price-fixing) and racial discrimination.

The Indonesian suit is the latest under the Alien Tort Claims Act which allows foreign citizens to sue US companies in US courts over acts committed abroad. Since the mid-1990s such cases have dragged on against Unocal, sued by Burmese nationals alleging human rights abuses; Royal Dutch/Shell petroleum, accused of complicity in the 1995 detention and hanging of nine environmentalists in Nigeria; and Texaco, defending charges by indigenous communities from Amazonian Ecuador of violating international environmental laws. (IPS)

Not yet half the sky

BEIJING - As the Chinese communist party prepares for its 16th Congress next year when a new leadership team will be announced, Beijing is looking to address a serious gender imbalance in government. At recent meetings of the party's powerful Organisation Department, officials debated promotion schemes for women. But a high-profile report on women leaders in China warns of the risks in implementing those schemes, because of a tendency to meet minimum required levels for women in leadership positions—and stay there. The report, prepared by the Beijing-based Branch of the Women Mayors of China association, discusses the work of women leaders as the Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors is held this week in Thailand. Chinese women make up 21 percent of the world's women, but in 1990 women cadres made up only 12 percent of the government leaders on prefecture, city and county levels. China boasts 463 women mayors in its 668 established cities, but 90 percent are deputies with little decision-making power. There are only two women in the central leadership line-up. Mao Zedong wanted women "to hold half the sky"—50 years later China has laws safeguarding the rights of women. But no legal clause guarantees women's participation in government and no law-enforcing organ is responsible for enforcing regulations on women's political rights. Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms were a political chance and impediment for women. They created opportunities in developed coastal areas where foreign investment and entrepreneurial incentives thrived, but women in poor hinterlands got little exposure to public affairs and rarely made it to local governments. (IPS)



After the hype, what?

SUVENDRINI KAKUCHI

TOKYO - Full-length posters, a CD featuring his favourite music, an electronic magazine registering a million sign-ups on the day of its launch, and daily TV programmes on the life of Japan's newest idol. The rage is not a movie star or toy, but Japan's prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi, a 60-year-old politician who sports a rock-and-roll hairstyle and was a single father to his two sons until a few years ago. Analysts see this as a sign that Japan's traditionally stodgy politics is entering a new era.

Koizumi, who became prime minister on 26 April, is revolutionising Japanese politics, says Kunihiko Okada of the Matsushita School for Politics and Economy, a private outfit teaching leadership. "His style is more in line with the flashy, hard-hitting west and younger people are lapping it up." Last week, the veteran politician, a member of the conservative Liberal Democratic Party, opened his own e-mail magazine, *Cabinet E-mail Magazine*. In his first message there, Koizumi said, "I am Koizumi, the Lionheart." He described himself as "24-hour public servant," and added that "since becoming the leader, I feel like a caged bird because I have ten bodyguards with me all the time." "The idea behind the magazine is to sell his charming personality. It is a totally new approach," explains Professor Keichi Katsura, who teaches mass media at the Tokyo University of Information Sciences.

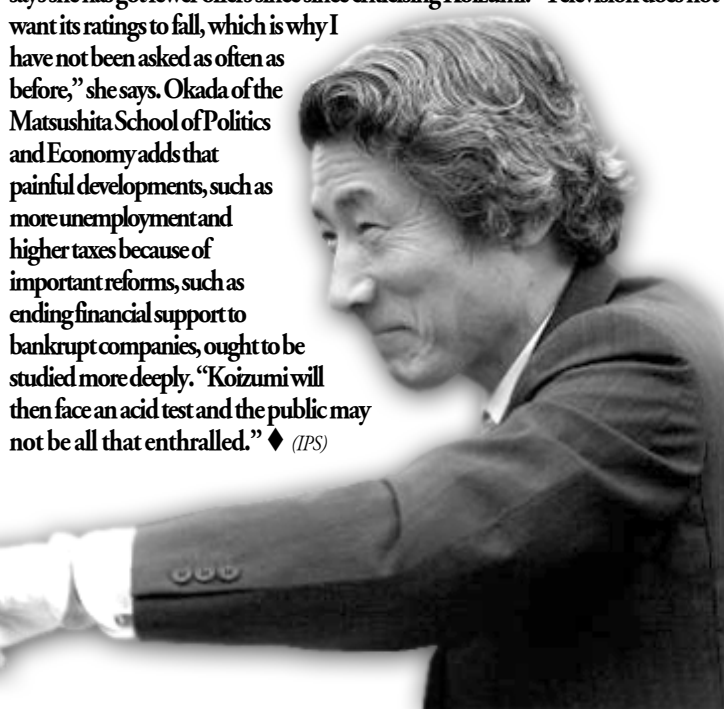
"Koizumi politics" is marked by lively televised debates and personal stories. This approach "is working like magic," says Rieko Ogawa, a political analyst. "Koizumi has appeared when Japan's self-confidence is at its lowest, with no new vision from Japanese politicians," she says. "His timing is perfect." Recent opinion polls revealed an 85 percent approval rating for Koizumi, by far the highest for any post-war Japanese government. Asked why they support him, respondents said Koizumi was "capable of reforming Japan" and was "straight talking". A young woman, interviewed recently on television called him "cool". She said she was touched when the media reported Koizumi had tears in his eyes when he met in May with leprosy patients who won a lawsuit against a Japanese government isolation policy.

There are high, intense expectations of Koizumi. Some supporters even equate Koizumi to a "god". Said Masaru Okayama, who owns a convenience store in central Tokyo: "Koizumi and his cabinet are like gods, because they are working so hard to reform Japan. I know he will not fail us." Okayama particularly endorses Koizumi's decision to steer away from deeply entrenched faction politics that have shaped Japan's politics—and government—for decades.

How will Junichiro Koizumi do?

He thinks this will lead to a more open and fair Japan. Heated questioning of Koizumi during a parliamentary debate by Naoto Kan, spokesperson for the opposition Democratic Party of Japan, resulted in a flurry of annoyed telephone calls. "Don't bully the prime minister," said an angry caller to Kan's office.

At the same time, there is apprehension. "A more personal approach is welcome in politics, but people must look at things rationally," warns Ogawa. She says the current sentiment is dangerous, because people are glossing over key issues in Koizumi's programme—his declared desire to change Japan's Peace Constitution and acknowledge the Self-Defence Forces as a full, legitimate military force. "Such moves are not good for Japan with its past aggression. But with Koizumi's sky-high popularity, people could accept anything and that is very worrying," Ogawa adds. Ogawa, a regular television political commentator, says she has got fewer offers since criticising Koizumi. "Television does not want its ratings to fall, which is why I have not been asked as often as before," she says. Okada of the Matsushita School of Politics and Economy adds that painful developments, such as more unemployment and higher taxes because of important reforms, such as ending financial support to bankrupt companies, ought to be studied more deeply. "Koizumi will then face an acid test and the public may not be all that enthralled." ♦ (IPS)



A media-fuelled row

HAVANA - Military relations between Cuba and China that allegedly extend to arms sales to this Caribbean island nation as well as joint intelligence activity has heightened tension between the two socialist nations and the US. Reports categorically refuted by Havana and Beijing have appeared in the US media since Chinese President Jiang Zemin's visit to Cuba in April. Citing a US intelligence report, the Washington Times reported 12 June that three boats carrying explosives and other weapons had been traced from China to the Cuban port of Mariel in the past few months. The newspaper said China was taking advantage of Cuba's proximity to the United States to carry out electronic espionage to intercept US communications. However, US State Department spokesman Phil Reeker denied that the government had reports confirming the allegations in the *Washington Times*. China, the United States' fourth biggest trading partner, with a bilateral trade flow that stands above \$110 billion, could be subjected to economic sanctions for selling weapons to Cuba. Analysts see China's relationship with Cuba as analogous to that of the US with Taiwan. In April, the Bush administration approved the sale to Taiwan of eight diesel submarines, 12 anti-submarine aircraft, four destroyers and other weapons, along with the corresponding technical training. The row over this compounded the tension triggered by the 1 April spy plane crisis. The geopolitical differences between Beijing and Washington also arise from China's intention to counter, and if possible eliminate, the United States' predominant military presence in southeast Asia, especially in the South China Sea.

Decision-making, Congress style



Girija Prasad Koirala



Krishna Prasad Bhattarai



Sher Bahadur Deuba



Khum Bahadur Khadka

Saptahik Bimarsa, 22 June

राजनीतिक विमर्श

In a meeting to decide who should be nominated to the Upper House, Koirala said that he had given his word to two people, and those present at the meeting could decide about the others. People were surprised and had no clue who these two were. They were Ashok Koirala and Bal Bahadur Rai. After this, Deuba said that he also had two nominees who had to be elected. His nominees were Bal Dev Bohora and Akkal Bahadur Bista. Then Bhattarai got into the act and said that even he had given his word to two people, Maiya Devi Shrestha and Dr Narayan Khadka. He told the meeting that these two people had given their lives to the party and that they were very deserving. Other members then put forward their nominees. Khum Bahadur Khadka fought vigorously for Tirtha Raj Gyawali, some one put forward the name of Ram Jivan Singh. Since there were no lawyers, Radhe Shyam Adhikary and Mukund Regmi were also suggested. Koirala immediately supported the candidature of Adhikary. One member raised objections and said that as far as appointing a lawyer went, Adhikary was acceptable, but that he had until recently publicly stated that the Lauda Air lease was improper and that the prime minister should be held accountable and should resign. The prime minister responded: "Who has not accused me? Even Bhattarai and Deuba have said all they could. So forget about that objection." Deuba was surprised, but replied in a jolly manner: "All I did was

ask for the prime minister's resignation. Bhattarai is the one who left nothing unsaid. I did not say anything much." Dr Ram Sharan Mahata also supported Adhikary—in fact, everyone did. Deuba was asked to choose one of the two names he had proposed. He agreed to Bista. Although he had committed himself to about two dozen people, Sushil Koirala kept quiet during the meeting. He did not support or oppose anyone. Laxman Ghimire put forward the names of Pursottam Basnet, Birendra Dahal, Basu Koirala, Chandra Singh Bhattarai and many others. Ram Chandra Poudel stated that Ram Chandra Pokhrel too was an ideal candidate. Maiya Devi was accepted by all, but Dr Khadka did not get through. In the end Bhattarai proposed that Bista should step down for Khadka. He tried to convince Deuba, who suddenly exploded: "Why are you never just to the far west? Just because you are ineffective in other regions, you try and bully the far west. There is no way I will be party to this. Why are you always unfair to me?" In the end it was agreed that both Koirala's nominees would get through, one each of Bhattarai's and Deuba's, one from the intellectuals, Ram Jivan Singh from the list of political sufferers and Major Deepak Gurung from the list of retired army people.

Although people tried to raise objections about the candidature of Shrestha and Rai, Prime Minister Koirala brushed them aside.

Dipendra and Devyani

Jana Aastha, 20 June

आस्था

While Dipendra was studying in England, he had a classmate called Charles whose father is a Lord and who has a sister, Shelly. This Lord was Dipendra's local guardian when he was in England between 1987 and 1990. Around that time, Devyani also came to England for some sort of course. She came into contact with Shelly, whose father became Devyani's guardian too.

Although Dipendra and Devyani lived in different parts of England, since they both had the same guardian, they first met at the house of Shelley and Charles. Both Dipendra and Devyani were in their early 20's, just out of their teens. At that time, Dipendra was quite a jolly fellow who liked to joke a lot. It is said that it is easy for the young to fall in love very quickly. It is around this time, that Dipendra told Devyani in front of Charles and Shelly that she was fit to be the future queen of Nepal.

The relationship between Dipendra and Devyani began there. Until 1993 or 1994, the palace did not know anything about it. In fact, Devyani's parents were unaware of it for another year. In 1995, Devyani's older sister Urvashi married into a rich business family in India. Just before this wedding, Devyani's parents sent a proposal to the palace, although they had no idea about their daughter's relationship with Dipendra until then. Sources say Their Majesties brushed the proposal aside, saying they were in no hurry to get Dipendra married.

Garima Rana, Supriya Shah and Devyani Rana were the three women short-listed for Dipendra. Although he loved Devyani, and Garima was in the news for her educational achievements, the palace thought Supriya was the ideal match for the crown prince. Shree Rajya Laxmi Rana, Dipendra's maternal grandmother, was given the task of selecting the right girl. Sources say that she once contacted Devyani's mother. Devyani's mother had no idea of her daughter's relationship and mentioned casually to Shree Rajya Laxmi that Devyani had grown up accustomed to extreme comfort and wealth, and that she was the grand daughter of Vijaya Raje Scindia of the house of Gwalior, known for its wealth. She further said that Nepali royalty was relatively very poor and she had to think seriously about whether her daughter could survive if she married into a poor house.

Devyani's mother unwittingly called the House of Shah poor, and this shut the doors on her daughter getting married to Dipendra. The palace thought Devyani was too ambitious. Our sources also say that Devyani has over Rs 50 million in different banks in the city, while Dipendra had to get by on his Rs 2.4 million government allowance. Although the palace ruled out marriage with Devyani, Dipendra could not get her off his mind and there was not a single day he was in the city



that he did not meet her. Apparently, Dipendra's ADCs used to pick Devyani up everyday. They never knocked on the main door of Bijay Bas, but used the side door. They'd drive up to this door and then ring Devyani on her mobile phone. Devyani would come out and go to meet the prince.

Dipendra later told Devyani that his family was against their marriage, and she is said to have told him that she was willing to marry someone else, but Dipendra did not want to hear anything of this sort. While Devyani and Dipendra were madly in love, proposals for Devyani were coming from all over—the House of Jodhpur, the House of Bhagalpur and the House of Jaipur. In fact, the heir to the House of Baroda parked himself at Hotel Yak and Yeti and wanted to meet Devyani. The couple was passing through a very difficult time, and Devyani asked Dipendra to finally make a decision. Sources say that Dipendra went to Bijay Bas with a bottle of poison and told Devyani that if she did not marry him, he would commit suicide. After this incident Devyani's parents apparently told the heir of Baroda that they were very sorry, but their daughter could not marry him.

Dipendra could not imagine life without Devyani. Last year when he was training to be a parajumper, the day of his first jump, he rang Devyani and told her that he would only do it if she made breakfast for him. She did, and met him at the airport with his breakfast. He ate and went for his jump, while Devyani went to the banks of the Manahara river where he was supposed to land. He drove her home and then went home himself. This was only one of many such occasions.

The pair used to buy each other very luxurious presents when they went abroad. The expensive Omega watch Dipendra wore was a gift from Devyani. The camera that he used was also from Devyani. She recently bought him a £1,000 T-shirt in London. Dipendra also gave her a lot of presents.

Since both were madly in love, it was becoming very difficult for them to be apart from each other. The palace could not understand this. No one besides Garima, who is related to Devyani, could understand this and she very politely removed herself from this situation and got married. Supriya also later realised this and slowly moved out of the picture.

The palace never changed its position. Dipendra also stood his ground. Dipendra was blinded by his love for Devyani, this drove him mad and he then committed what we today know as the incident that took place at the royal palace on the night of 1 June.



More Nepali press on p.16

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

The recurring illegal activities inside the royal palace are disgraceful. If it is true that lethal drugs were being trafficked and used inside the palace, it shows that the royal family were least bothered about their citizens.

- Prof. Madhav Prasad Acharya, Criminologist in Budhabar Saptahik, 27 June.



"Why, don't worry it's not a letter bomb! It's that same old book with a new cover." Public Security Regulation

स्वसेवादायक दैनिक Space Time Dainik, 24 June

Poudel on Maoists

Ram Chandra Poudel, deputy prime minister
Himalaya Times, 19 June

हिमालय टाइम्स

It has now become very clear that the Maoists' main intention is the destruction of the present constitution and the multiparty democratic system. They want to propel this country to complete destruction. All their speeches, statements and activities point to this.

The Nepali people must realise that the present political framework—the constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy—have all helped bring political stability and normalcy to Nepal and that any changes in this framework will push the country towards trouble. The understanding between the monarch, the democrats and the leftists does not seem to be appreciated in some quarters. They have started conspiring. If we look at our history books and study incidents such as the proclamation of 26 Chaitra, the 10 Baisakh incident or the Pasupati Bankali incident, we will find that the seeds of today's dissatisfaction were sown then. It would not be wrong to say that we caused these incidents, but intellectuals would be lying to themselves and to the common man if they say that all this has happened because of the inefficiencies in our multiparty democratic system.

The Maoists want to play on the psychology of the common man and to do this they have a two-point agenda:

1. Make every person and institution within the parameters of the constitution feel isolated.
2. Make all these people feel they are in danger.

The Maoists have realised that until you make people feel isolated, you cannot control them. After you have trapped them into feeling helpless, the way is clear for you to make your move. People like the Maoists thrive when there is utter confusion. In the Maoists' 40 demands, nowhere do they say that they want to

abolish the multiparty system, but it is now clear that this is their fundamental objective. Until now they have made the peasants rise up against the land-owning feudal class, but their recent statements show that they were working closely with the palace to destroy the multiparty system. On the one hand the Maoists spread rumours that they are getting ready to attack, on the other, they act deceitfully and selfishly. They say they are ready for a dialogue, but when they reach the negotiating table they are not ready to find a solution. Until yesterday, they thought Nirmal Niwas [King Gyanendra's old residence] was the centre of all nationalist forces, today they have changed their colours and claim that Nirmal Niwas is the centre of American imperialism and Indian opportunists. By making such public statements they are trying to fool the Nepali people. On one hand they praise the Shah dynasty to the sky, and say the incident at the royal palace was a foreign conspiracy, and then they say that a republic has been born. How are people to believe any of this.

They said the Prachanda Path was the road to salvation for the country, then they talked of a South Asian Federation, and now they talk of an interim all-party government that will destroy multiparty democracy in this country. What are we to make of all this? Is this a conspiracy to destroy the country, or something else? We have come face to face with a very serious question. The Maoists hide their true colours. They are like a wolf in sheep's clothing. That much is clear to everyone. When we are passing through such tough times, isn't it necessary to gather all the nationalist forces here and try and help move the country ahead?



element like the Royal Nepal Army! Perhaps we should say that this is not the thinking of a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist party, but of a party that is south-leaning and opportunist. It seems Prachanda is looking to bring about a revolution through a joint effort of the army and Maoist guerillas.

Prachanda says with conviction that the monarchy is dead. But the monarchy in Nepal is very much alive. Constitutionally, Gyanendra is the new king. The government, the army, the constitution and the people are behind him. Why can Prachanda not accept this? The strong relations between the monarchy, multiparty democracy and the people are deeply engraved in the constitution. The constitution has placed the monarch at the centre of national unity. The monarchy can be a unifying factor in an underdeveloped society like ours, economically, politically and culturally disunited. Political parties have so far been unable to fill this void. Despite the Peace Corps, Christian missionaries, and now the Maoists trying to incite people, the monarchy is still the most important unifying factor in the country.

Another reason that Prachanda is issuing so many statements could be that he is trying to draw attention away from the close relations between the Maoists and the palace. And it may be another way of preventing the mobilisation of the army against the Maoists. Prachanda's recent statement claims that for the establishment of a people's republic and the formation of an interim all party government, the Maoists are ready to work with all nationalists, and asks all people to support them in this national endeavour. The statement implies that only people against the monarchy, the constitution and multiparty democracy are nationalists. So by that definition, the UML, the Nepali Congress, Masal, the Ekata Kendra, other leftists, the Sadbhavna party, the Praja Parishad, the palace and the army are not nationalist. Only the Maoists are. Prachanda is therefore prepared to work with the Maoists. This great thinking of a great revolutionary is remarkable.

RPP machinations

Saptahik Bimarsa, 22 June

सप्तहिक बिमर्स

The infighting within the third largest party, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) concerning the forthcoming elections to the Upper House has reached a climax. Earlier the party passed a resolution saying an understanding should be reached with the Sadbhavna party, the ML and the Nepali Congress for the election. The very next day, Surya Bahadur Thapa released a statement saying that instead of working with all these parties, the RPP would from now on work only with the UML. The party finalised its candidates and announced that the candidate from the mid-west would be Khem Raj Pandit. The RPP also decided to help the ML in the far west and the NC in the eastern, central and western regions. The party also decided that at least one RPP candidate would win one of the Upper House seats elected by the Lower House. The day after this



Surya Bahadur Thapa

announcement, Thapa met Madhav Nepal in the parliament secretariat and agreed to support the UML in all five regions. The UML would help the RPP to get Lokendra Bahadur Chand elected by the Lower House. Nepal agreed on the condition that Thapa signed the documents and made the deal public. Thapa agreed—and spoke in favour of the agreement on NTV. Rabindra Nath Sharma, a powerful RPP member, protested. He said the RPP had pledged to work with the Congress and that Thapa did not have the right to sign any agreement independently, against the directives of the party. Another RPP leader, Jog Meher Shrestha filed his nomination for the election to the Upper House in defiance of Thapa's stated plans.

No celebration

Naya Sadak National Weekly, 22 June

नयाँ सडक

King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev's 7 July birthday will not be celebrated this year, said a letter from His Majesty's secretariat to the government. The letter cites the tragic incident in Narayanhiti Darbar on the night of 1 June as the main reason. The cabinet agreed on a notice supporting that move on 21 June.

King's property

Janajagaran National Weekly, 21 June

जनजागरण

The central committee of the CPN (ML) issued a statement asking that a complete list of all the king's movable and immovable property be made public. The release said that a lot of questions were being raised concerning the king, and issuing a list of his properties would put them to rest. The ML makes

many suggestions. It asks that all the king's excess property be nationalised. It suggests that all property belonging to the late King Birendra, King Dipendra, Queen Aishwarya and Prince Nirajan should be nationalised for use in the social sector. Finally, the statement puts forward the idea that Narayanhiti Darbar be turned into a museum and the Tribhuvan Sadan should be maintained as it was found after the incident.

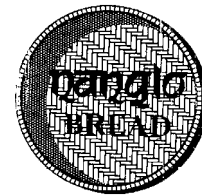
Whassup, Comrade?

Chhalphal National Weekly, 17 June

चलफल

Mahesh Mani Dixit
In his second statement on 11 June, Prachanda said that the royal palace incident is a very serious matter and called for the formation of an interim national government. He said it would be his honour and duty to work with the army and form an interim national government. It seems that suddenly Prachanda likes Gyanendra. King Gyanendra in his very first speech to the nation proclaimed his belief in a constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy. The high command of the army announced that they are fully dedicated to His Majesty and will follow his directions. In such a situation, Prachanda's statement is either laughable or quite stupid. What can we tell a revolutionary Marxist movement that thinks it can work hand in hand with a monarchist

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SAVING FAITH

by DESMOND DOIG

A temple to Ravana's memory



The pilgrims were plagued by spirits infesting the Valley and so various shrines had been built at the spot to give them spiritual courage.

The original shrine was larger, more garishly muralled. A painted face as large as the building. Two staring eyes, a grimacing mouth, coiling serpents and a string of human heads pouring blood. At the base of the mural, and at its exact centre, was a small altar into which was set an earthen pot filled with fine branches and bamboos. The painting, done in shocking red, yellow white and black was discoloured at its centre with the blood of many sacrifices. As I painted it, people passing along a nearby track came to touch their hands or foreheads to the pot. When some men arrived with a buffalo for sacrifice and began their *pujas*, I packed up my material and fled. I remember the shed-like building stood in a riverbed, beside some towering rocks beautifully sculpted by water over the centuries. The main stream flowed close by, and just upriver from the temple was a bridge made of several heavy logs. A quiet place. A lovely valley with forests capping the surrounding mountaintops. But even in the remotest of places, people gather to watch something so unusual as a large, foreign gentleman sitting on a rock painting. The children come first. After a while they start calling shrilly to parents or relatives in nearby farmhouses, particularly if the houses

or people figured in the sketch. 'Quickly, come quickly. He's just done a drawing of auntie Shanti.' And then inevitably follow the words I have yet to distinguish from each other, *'bala'* and *'bama'*. *Bala* means good and *bama*, as might well be imagined, means bad. It is an unnerving experience sitting in a crowd of children chanting words suggestively awful. By the time the elders have arrived to give their expert opinion on the sketch or painting, *balas* and *bamas* fairly come to blows. Which is time to call a halt and ask questions. I was lucky to have the *pujari* of the temple in the crowd. Apart from objecting to the omission of some gore in the top left hand corner, he announced me *bala* and readily answered my questions.

The track that passes the temple and arches across the river, was the old highway between Kathmandu and the plains of India. Along it passed pilgrims and sages, demons and gods. The pilgrims were plagued by spirits infesting the Valley and so various shrines had been built at the spot to give them spiritual courage. Invariably, the rising river water, which in truth was the spirits, washed these shrines away. When, during the time of the Rana prime ministers it was attempted to build a proper road

along the track, an army of spirits, witches and demons thwarted the attempt. The road was abandoned.

But this particular shrine was very old. It commemorated the passing and brief halt of Ravana at the spot as he returned to Sri Lanka from the Himalayas, where he had gone to ask a boon of Shiva. Shiva gave him a pot of mountain water to take with him, with the warning that it must never be placed on the ground. The jubilant Ravana got as far as Tikka Bhairab, to give the spot its name, without mishap, but was suddenly seized with something akin to the Kathmandu belly. Looking frantically about, he saw a cowherd and entreated him to hold the pot most carefully. Finding it much too heavy to hold while Ravana disappeared behind some bushes, the cowherd placed it on a rock and made off with the speed of terror. One can imagine the collective rage on all those many faces when Ravana found his instructions abused. Drawing his mighty sword, he struck at the offending rock with all his might so that it split down the centre and the pot settled in the cleft. Why Ravana then went off in a demonic huff leaving his boon behind, the *pujari* couldn't explain. 'Perhaps he wanted to leave it here,' suggested an elder who thought my sketch was *bala*. 'He knew it would be looked after and worshipped.'

When I returned to Tikka Bhairab to do my sketch, I found a completely new building and mural, and the large, lonely pine that shaded it has quite disappeared. The children collected and the elders came, and a dear old woman told me sorrowfully that a great flood had washed not only the tree and the temple away, but the small bazaar including her house as well. Perhaps the spirits had been enraged for some inexplicable

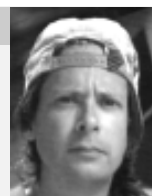
reason. They may not have liked the new mural, for every year the same family of artists from Patan comes to renew the painting, and from a comparison of photographs and my own sketches, their inspiration differs from year to year. This year the demon's face is smaller and he wears a crown, rather than a necklace, of human heads. The old shingle roof has been replaced by corrugated aluminum sheeting, and the whole building has been raised a few more feet above the river level. Half of the stone that Ravana cut is still there. The other has been shattered by the fury of the Water. There remains the pot set in its low altar, but whether it is the same one is doubtful.

How was it that a temple associated with Ravana became dedicated to Bhairab? It seems that when a high-powered party from the Kathmandu valley went to Assam centuries ago to coax the god Machhendranath to take up residence in Nepal, they travelled this way. They were protected by four fierce Bhairabs against a pursuit of angry demons. One of the Bhairabs decided to stay at this lovely and strategic river crossing to guard the escape route. It is his bold likeness that is painted on the wall of the shrine. His silver mask, that adorns the pot of river water, stands on the low sacrificial altar. And it is to him that countless sacrifices are made. Interesting to remember is the fact that Bhairab is the most ferocious manifestation of Shiva, and it was Shiva's pot of water that Ravana left at Tikka Bhairab. For god and demon both, the spot is *bala*. ♦

(Excerpted with permission from *In the Kingdom of the Gods*, Harper Collins, 1994.)

MIAMI VOICE

by DAVE BARRY



Climbing with Jamling

MIAMI — You can imagine my reaction when I found out that Jamling Tenzing Norgay was coming to Miami.

My reaction was: "Who?"

Then I found out that he is the son of Tenzing Norgay, the legendary Sherpa guide who was with Edmund Hillary in 1953 when they became the first people to reach the top of Mount Everest. In 1996, Jamling followed in his father's footsteps as the climbing leader of the team that went to the summit and filmed the IMAX movie, *Everest*. He was coming to Miami to talk about his excellent book on that expedition, *Touching My Father's Soul*.

In other words, a world-class mountain climber—a man who survived one of the deadliest climbs on earth—was coming to my city. Not to brag, but I am something of a climber myself. On several occasions, at risk of personal discomfort, I have bypassed a hotel elevator and ascended to the mezzanine level via the stairs.

So I wanted to climb something with Jamling Tenzing Norgay. Specifically, I wanted to climb the highest mountain in Miami-Dade County. I knew this would not be easy, because there are no mountains in Miami-Dade County. All of South Florida is basically at sea level, which is why every time there's a hurricane, we wind up with ocean-dwelling fish in our family rooms, flopping around and moving their mouths as if to say: What are you doing here, Lung Breath? This is SEA LEVEL!

So I decided that, in lieu of a mountain, Jamling and I would attempt to climb the closest approximation we have: The South Dade Solid Waste Disposal Facility. This is a South Florida landmark, known locally as "Mount Trashmore." It's basically a large mound of garbage covered with dirt.

I proposed this climb to Jamling through his publisher. He agreed to do it, partly because he is a brave man who relishes a challenge, but mainly because he was on a book tour. When you've been on a book tour awhile, you give up and do whatever anybody asks you to do. When I'm on book tour, I allow television makeup people to apply so much mascara to me that I become a dead ringer for Elizabeth Taylor.

And so on a Saturday morning, I met up with Jamling, a quiet and dignified man, and together we attempted to summit Mount Trashmore. I will not ruin the suspense by telling you up front whether we died. Instead, I will give you a dramatic, minute-by-minute account:

9 a.m. We set out.

Almost immediately I consider turning back because it is terrifying. I'm referring here to the South Florida traffic, where the motto is: "GET OUT OF MY WAY! CAN'T YOU SEE I'M ON MY CELL PHONE?!"

9:30 a.m. We

arrive at Mount

Trashmore, where

we meet our guides for the

ascent: communications director Gayle Love and Bill Thome, whose title is "chief of landfills." We discuss the ascent, and agree that if spoken communication becomes difficult on the summit, we will use hand signals. For example waving your hand would indicate "Hi!"

9:38 a.m. Nothing dramatic happens during this particular minute.

9:40 a.m. We start our ascent. It is frankly easier than I expected. This is because we are riding up in a Jeep. I wonder why this technique has not been used to ascend Everest, but do not mention it to Jamling, lest he smack his forehead and say, "NOW you tell me!"

9:43 a.m. We're almost to the top, a place where few humans have ever been, unless you count the several hundred people who drive dump trucks up there daily. We leave the Jeep and walk to the summit, ascending a slope that is pitched at about the same angle as a shuffleboard court. That is the kind of mountaineering studs we are.

9:45 a.m. The summit! We stand 149 feet (45.42 meters) above sea level, just 28,879 feet lower than Mount Everest itself. It does not smell nearly as bad as we expected. I ask Jamling to compare this experience with being atop Everest.

"It's very different," he says.

10 a.m. We begin our descent. On the way down, Chief of Landfills Thome informs us that Mount Trashmore contains—I am not making this up—human body parts and dead whales. I can tell Jamling is impressed.

10:03 a.m. We reach sea level, tired but proud. On the way back to the hotel, we are killed in a car crash.

No, really, we got back fine. It was a successful expedition, and Jamling was a great sport. So buy his book, O.K.? Because it's there. ♦

(This column first appeared in *The Miami Herald*)



ABOUT TOWN

MOVIES

- ❖ **Nepali and Hindi movies** online ticket booking at www.nepalshop.com
 - ❖ **The Cranes Are Flying** 1957 Cannes sensation, Russia, 4 July
 - ❖ **The Living Dead**, Russia, 5 July
 - ❖ **All About my Mother** Almodovar's latest that beat *Caravn* to the Oscar, Spain, 6 July
- All films: Subtitled, Russian Cultural Centre, 6pm, Rs 50
Organised by the Kathmandu Film Archives.

EATING OUT

- ❖ **Breakfast with birds** Lunch with butterflies, dinner with fireflies. Traditional Nepali, Indian and Chinese cuisine. Farm House Café in the Park Village Hotel, Buddhanilkantha. 373835
- ❖ **Kababs, Biryani** At Naachghar, the Theatre Restaurant at Hotel Yak and Yeti. 30 percent off all bottled wines with a meal at Naachghar. Until 30 June. Reservations recommended. 248999
- ❖ **Bubbly Brunch** Free-flowing sparkling wine. For children, face-painting, balloons, sculpture. Rs. 999 for adults, Rs 499 for children under 12. Saturdays at The Fun Cafe 11.30am-2.30pm. Radisson Hotel. 411818
- ❖ **Dwarika's Saturday Escape** Afternoon tea, cocktail, dinner, room, massage and breakfast. Every Saturday until end-September. \$130 per couple. Dwarika's Hotel 479488
- ❖ **LaSoon Restaurant and Vinotheque** Lunch, tea and dinner with European and American food, fine wines. Pulchowk. 535290
- ❖ **Brunch with swimming** Shangri La Kathmandu's award-winning garden. Rs 700 plus tax. 412999
- ❖ **Wet and Wild Summer** Swimming in a cool pool and a buffet lunch. Saturdays at Godavari Village Resort. Adults Rs 600, children Rs 350. Taxes extra. 560675, 560775
- ❖ **Mango Tango** Exotic mangoes desserts Hotel de l' Annapurna. All day, all food and beverage outlets.
- ❖ **Botega Restaurant and Tequila Bar** Authentic Mexican specialties, steaks, salsa and merengue music. Thamel. 266433
- ❖ **Sam's Bar** Cocktails including the classic B-52, Apple Schnapps, Sam's Special, Mexican Tequila and more. Music and free popcorn. Reggae on Saturdays. Thamel, opposite Hotel Mandap. 419836
- ❖ **Naked Chef Restaurant, Nagarkot** Gourmet continental and Indian cuisine. Great views. 262039, 680115
- ❖ **Exotic Nepali Food** Mongolian Restaurant and Bar. Exotic Nepali food like *dhindo* and *gundruk*, good family environment. Putalisadak. 425454



EVENTS

- ❖ **Contemporary Jazz Dance** Classes at the Alliance Française by Meghana Thapa. Thrice weekly, starting 26 June. Alliance Française. 241163, 242832.
- ❖ **Yoga and Breakfast** Six-week course in Hatha Yoga for beginners. Rs 400 per lesson, includes breakfast. Dwarika's Hotel 479488
- ❖ **Stress Free Weekends** Overnight stay at the Hyatt, dinner for two at the Rox Restaurant, use of pool, health club, spa and outdoor jacuzzi, ayurvedic massage for two, weekend brunch, late check out Sunday. Rs 9000 plus tax. Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 491234
- ❖ **Spiny Babler Museum** Readings and presentations of contemporary Nepali literature and art Sundays 5-6pm Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel; Tuesdays 4-5pm Kathmandu Environment Education Project, Thamel; Thursdays 7-8pm Bamboo Club Restaurant, Thamel, Saturdays 5-6pm New Orleans Café, Thamel. spinybabler@mos.com.np. 542810, 546725



EXHIBITION

- ❖ **View on Reality** Solo show by Sunil Sigdel. Organised by the Artists' Society of Nepal and Zero Century Nepal. 29 June-6 July, NAFA art gallery, Naxal. 411729, 430251

MUSIC

- ❖ **Jazz by Cadenza** Upstairs, Lazimpat. Every Saturday 7.30-10pm. Rs 200
- ❖ **Unplugged guitar** Sybaru Lama, The Coffee Shop, Hotel de l'Annapurna. Every evening.

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com

BOOKWORM



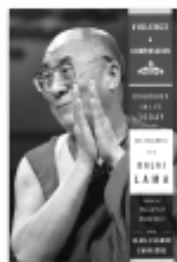
The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain: Popular Pilgrimage and Visionary Landscape in Southeast Tibet Toni Huber
Oxford University Press, New York, 1999
Rs 1,500

This study documents and analyses the representations, ritual practices and, peoples centred around this important Tibetan holy mountain. Huber delineates the relationship between high and popular religion in premodern Tibetan society and explores the social and cultural features of large-scale Tibetan pilgrimages.

Deities of Tibetan Buddhism: The Zürich Paintings of the Icons Worthwhile to See Martin Willson, Martin Brauen, eds, Robert Beer, drawings.
Wisdom Publications, MA, USA, 2000
Rs 18,960



An encyclopaedia of Buddhist icons based on the Rinjung Gyatsa, the Narthang Gyatsa and the Vajravali. Full-colour illustrations of over 500 Tibetan deities reproduced from 19th century hand-painted woodblock prints in the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zürich. Also contains explanation of the meditative visualisations, mantras and symbolism around each figure.



Violence and Compassion: Dialogues on Life Today His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, with Jean-Claude Carrière
Doubleday, New York, 2001
Rs 560

Two formidable thinkers discuss the problems facing the world today, including terrorism, the population explosion, environmental dangers and an escalation in random violence. The Dalai Lama is clear and Carrière, probing.

The Seven Sisters of India: Tribal Worlds between Tibet and Burma Aglaja Stirn, Peter van Ham
Prestel Verlag, Munich, 2000
Rs 2,400



The first comprehensive publication on India's northeastern Seven Sisters states: Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, Assam. The first detailed, balanced portrait of life, rituals, and artefacts here in 50 years. 405 full-colour photographs.

Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath

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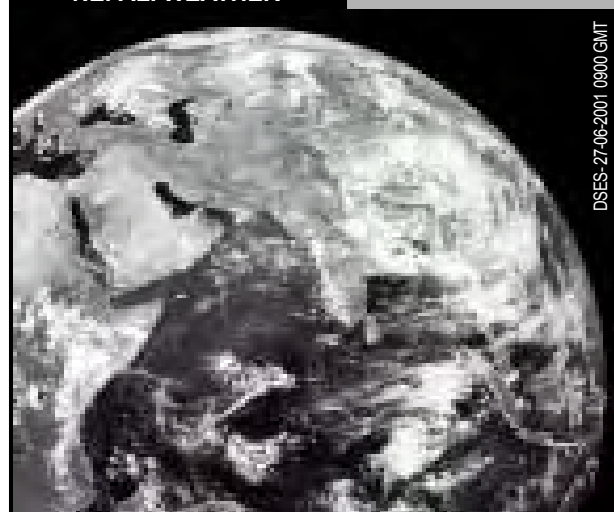
YAK YETI YAK

by MIKU



NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



DSES-27-06-2001 0800 GMT

After starting right on schedule, the monsoon is trying to build up momentum over central Nepal and progressing smoothly westward. By this weekend the easterly monsoon front reaches western Nepal. The inter tropical convergence zone has drifted northward and its effects are being felt in pushing moisture-laden clouds towards us from the Bay of Bengal. Central and eastern Nepal received rainfall normal or above during June. The satellite image here shows cloud masses moving in a three-pronged manner towards Bihar, central Nepal, and Bhutan. Rain in the coming week will be widespread and heavy, especially at night. The minimum temperature will hover in the 20 C range while cloud cover will bring down maximum temperature.

KATHMANDU

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
28-20	27-20	28-20	28-20	28-21

BBC on FM 102.4

Mon-Fri	0615-0645	BBC	World Today
Sat	0615-0645	BBC	Science in Action
Sun	0615-0645	BBC	Agenda
Daily	2045-2115	BBC	नेपाली सेवा
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ART REVIEW

by AJIT BARAL

Korean images



Lyric Scenery, Lee Suk-ju

The contemporary Korean art exhibition *The Dialogue With Nature* touring internationally is now in Nepal. Viewers have been thronging the show that opened on 20 June after delays. Korean paintings come from a traditional background that draws on the precision of Chinese calligraphic paintings. The paintings on show display, through their modern

media, the influence traditional Korean painting. *Lyric Scenery* by Lee Suk-Ju seems, at first glance, as if it is the product of traditional technique, with the most minute detail painted. But it isn't. The artist is helped by printing technology to retain the verisimilitude of traditional paintings. A shirt used to frame the view of a train chugging along and the smoke from the train floating up in the distance is a print, cut out and pasted,



Weed, Kim Jong-Hak

with touches of acrylic applied to make it appear drawn. The same can be said of a painting by Ji Seok-Cheol, *The Story of Nonexistence*.

The paintings of artists like Park Hang-Rul, Kim Young-Chul, Kim Kyong-In are realistic, but hardly hyper-realistic as a critic in the catalogue suggests. Kim Kyong-In naturescapes in muted colors are soothing and bear an uncanny resemblance to the work of Nepali artist Sarita Dangol.

There are other, more abstract paintings including impressive pieces by Kim Jong-Hak and Suk Rai-Hi. Kim Jong-Hak's *Weed* (mixed media) black over unevenly white painted panel, evokes tactile sensory perception. Suk Rai-Hi's *Nature* done predominantly in blue is a pure visual delight. A touch or two of smoke gray and green are applied on blue picture plane, perhaps, to break the monotony of blue monochrome and to create the depth through which you are keep looking into an eternal distance.

The Korean artists have used a myriad of media—colored paper, very textured canvas, acrylic bars, metal granules, panel, etc. But the use of an interesting is not the only thing that makes a work of art interesting. The medium used must be subservient to the theme of a painting. Nepali painters tend to focus too much on medium, but in the case of this show they need to keep in mind that the Korean artists have used their many media as a means of expressing their emotion and driving home their point, rather than as an end in themselves.

The bottom line on the show: The stylistic differences of the artists are clear in the exhibition, and this suggests that care has been taken to give us a show that represents different facets of Korean contemporary art. But the show disappoints by not providing insight into the socio-cultural situation the art was created in. ♦

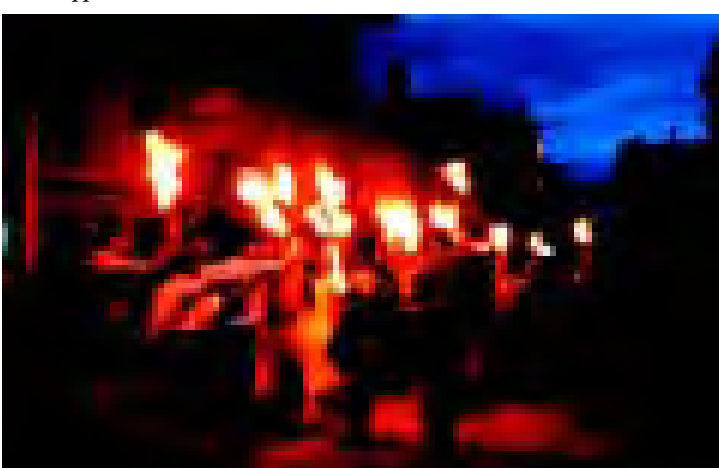
HAPPENINGS



NEPAL SPEAKS: Leader of the main opposition UML Madhav Kumar Nepal speaks at the Press Chautari a day before parliament began on 24 June.



UPPER HOUSE: Elections taking place at the City Hall on 27 June for 16 posts in the Upper House.



TORCH RALLY: A flash demonstration in Dilli Bazar on 26 June by pro-Maoist students in which photojournalist Min Bajracharya was manhandled.

NEPALI SOCIETY

Back to Mangal Man

60-year-old Mangal Mohan Shrestha is proud of the love and care the Nepali royal family have given him. Mangal, whose father and grandfather were both photographers, took his first pictures at the late King Tribhuvan's funeral in 1954 at the age of 13. Five years later, his photographs of the football match between the Mahendra 11 and the BP 11, shot him through the ranks and to the position of royal photographer. In 1962, he was appointed Nayab Subba of the *Prachar Vibhag*.



There are perhaps few photographers who love the royal family as much as Madhav Mangal does. For him, they go beyond just being a professional concern. Mangal has taken pictures of virtually all the religious ceremonies involving members of the royal family, from the late King Mahendra to the late King Birendra, the late King Dipendra and the present King Gyanendra. But what Mangal likes to think back on most is the love the royal family, especially the late kings, showered upon him. Recalling the times he went with both King Mahendra and King Birendra on their trips around the country, Mangal says, "I used to think I really loved the king and the royal family—but I found the king loved me, a commoner much more than I did him."

Mangal has been awarded the Gorkha Dakshin Bahu of the fifth order, and is the only photographer to have received the

Prakhyat Tri Shakti Patta, one of Nepal's highest civilian honours. But he says that happy memories of the times he had with his beloved royal family are worth more than anything else. Recalling the grief he felt when he heard of King Mahendra's death he says, "I loved him more than my own parents, for my parents only gave birth to me, but he gave meaning to my life."

Since he has lived through and documented two generations of kings and palace goings-on, we asked Mangal Man what he thought of the recent events. His reply was one only a person with love, humility and plenty of experience with the rarefied world of royals could give. "Life is a battle between the past, the present and the future, and if a balance is not maintained there will be conflict," says Mangal Man. If only more people could see through the eyes like his. ♦

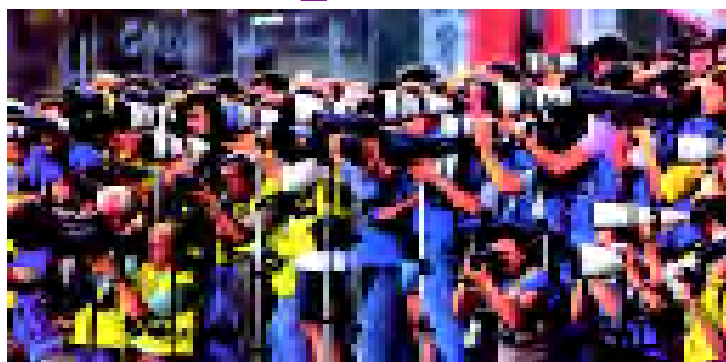
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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

The world's second-oldest profession



It is beginning to worry us in the journalism profession that the press gets bad press. Without beating the bush around it would be fair to assert with cautious optimism that in certain quarters the media has, ummm, a public relations problem; or to put it more politely: people hate our guts.

It is not true that we are self-important mercenaries, holier-than-thou hypocrites, preachy bigots, annoying and morally repugnant nosy parkers, smug and arrogant hacks who hunt in packs. In fact, we are much worse, and if you have any problems with that, well, tough. Our image problem starts with Hollywood movies in which reporters are invariably portrayed as if they are a shoal of pet piranhas—the kind which can nibble off in under six seconds a heavily armed baddie thrown into a swimming pool-sized aquarium by James Bond. What only few people know is that Hollywood uses actual real-life piranhas acting as journalists for those scenes. (Director: "Lights. Camera. OK, fishies, now just be yourselves. Action.")

Blaming the messenger, of course, is not a new phenomenon. Genghis Khan was known for his crackdowns on the freedom of press with his draconian Public Security Regulation which was vehemently opposed by every human rights organisation worth its salt east of Samarkand. Legend has it that whenever an inquisitive newsperson during the regular five o'clock press conference at the Hack & Yeti

asked Gen Genghis a particularly embarrassing question like: "Mr Conqueror, we have learnt from unusually reliable sources that you personally received kickbacks from a Manchurian horse trader for the supply of cavalry chargers. Would you care to elaborate?" Genghis Khan would fudge it: "Yes, it has come to our notice that some of the horses may kick back, but in the heat of battle that is not something completely unknown. Next question." After the press conference, Genghis would gift the muckraking investigative reporter a suckling piglet, and that would be the end of the story.

Journalism has, of course, moved away from such crude and ruthless methods of controlling information. Today, we live in an Age of Information Technology which means that modern newspersons belonging to at least two genders exercise much greater self-confidence, self-esteem and self-censorship. The Ministry of Non-information and Doublespeak has made it abundantly crystal-clear that journalists should not make anything up—except during a national emergency. This rule will henceforth be strictly enforced so that if any domestic or international hack is caught red handed spreading the truth during a national crisis the punishment will be that they will be sent to a school of piranhas for a crash course on journalistic ethics. ♦

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