



Media bark worse than Maoist bite?

Government officials and the travel trade have reacted angrily to what they say was a "massive exaggeration" of the situation in Nepal during the Maoist Valley blockade last week. They said it distorted the reality and spread false and harmful news about Nepal across the world. "The reporting made it sound like there was a catastrophe here, as if the state was collapsing. This was false and that is what hurt us," government spokesman Mohammad Mohsin said during a press briefing on Thursday. One travel entrepreneur summed it up: "It was a case of the media's bark being worse than the Maoists' bite."



eyebrows. "Girijaji rejected prime ministership under Article 127, but it looks like his followers are trying to convince him to take it," confided Nepal Workers and Peasants' Party President, Narayan Man Bijukchhe. Some of Koirala's colleagues are already rubbing their hands in glee.

"It is now or never for the Deuba government," NC's Narhari Acharya told us. "It will have to make progress on peace. If it doesn't, it will have failed in its mandate."

For optimists, this means that the Deuba government will at least be forced to send feelers to the Maoists. And there were some silver linings this week: the blockade was lifted, the Maoist student wing formed a negotiating committee and the rebels have privately told the industrialists whose businesses they closed to persuade the government to agree to talks in exchange for lifting the closure threat.

Deuba's spokesman Minendra Rijal says the government is still trying to ascertain whether the Maoists are serious about talks.

"We have been cross checking with various sources because we don't want the rebels to use the ceasefire for reconsolidating and regrouping like they did last time," he says. The army is said to be concerned that the Maoists used the blockade as a diversion and will also use a future ceasefire to amass forces in the Valley.

Information Minister Mohammad Mohsin says the government is moving systematically to form a Peace Secretariat that will forge an all-party consensus for talks. "We are trying to figure out exactly what the Maoists have up their sleeves," he told us. As long as he is at it, he may also want to find out what Koirala's plans are. ●

Editorial p2
Shooting the messenger

After the siege

In Kathmandu, politicians still don't get it

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

It looks like they're taking turns to paralyse Kathmandu. Even before the Maoists lifted their blockade on Tuesday, the four-party opposition announced a new phase of anti-king street agitations beginning Friday.

There is despair among those who say a political consensus is a prerequisite to future negotiations with the Maoists.

"If only the constitutional forces were on one side, it would have been much easier to deal with the Maoists," says

one political insider. But whichever party joins a royal appointed government, it seems there will always be a rival trying to prevent it from restoring peace and earning the peace dividend.

So the party in power is too busy trying to prevent itself from being toppled to get down to the main agenda: ceasefire and negotiations. Indeed, the vultures are already circling Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's coalition, saying he hasn't made progress on talks.

"How can the government

do anything when they keep trying to destabilise it?" asks one exasperated UML member of the government.

Meanwhile, Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala seems to have suddenly developed an interest in the prime ministership. Although he has said he will not accept the office under Article 127, it is hard to see how else he could become prime minister.

Even some of his counterparts in the four-party alliance have begun to raise

Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 151

Q. Does the Miss Nepal contest degrade women?

Yes	25.3%
No	71.7%
Don't know	2.0%

Total votes: 1,109

Weekly Internet Poll # 152. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Should the government announce a unilateral ceasefire?

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Ring leaders

The Valley blockade was just a test for bigger things to come

It is difficult to think of a time the Maoists have been the target of as much censure as they have been in the past two weeks. Negative public opinion

and open defiance of the Valley blockade forced them to withdraw it after a week. They have antagonised the very industries they targeted for extortion by forcing them to close down. The murder of journalist Dekendra Thapa has provoked unprecedented fury.

Even for an organisation that is so sure of its revolutionary destination that it is past caring about public opinion, there seems to be uncertainty about what to do next. A high-level meeting presently underway is discussing what the future course of action would be.

The rationale for the Valley blockade was part of the Maoist

goal of fusing a rural 'people's war' with an urban uprising. To put pressure on the government to agree to its demand for constituent assembly, the Maoists had launched a new phase of their 'strategic

offensive' to militarily encircle Kathmandu within a 'Ring Area' and blockade the capital to create economic chaos.

The Maoists have a Central Command under the chairmanship of Prachanda, yet they chose to announce the Valley blockade through their regional organisation. This lends credence to the theory that the blockade was a rehearsal for a bigger future offensive, and they were trying to test the panic-level of the Valley residents, the reaction of the international community and especially India, the role of the global media, and see what tactics should be employed in case of a future military attack in the Valley.

They must be quite pleased with the way the international and Indian media made a big deal out of the blockade, overstating its extent and

impact. India's leaked warning that it would air drop food in case of a prolonged siege was a message to the Maoists to lay off. In Kathmandu itself, they underestimated the public defiance. However, this has helped them calibrate violence in a repeat siege: all it took this time was the threat of violence to keep most buses and trucks off the highway they didn't even have to blow up anything.

The Maoists also want to wage a dynamic war by institutionalising front organisations and their regional political units. Combined with urban guerrilla warfare, this could be a way for the rebels to maximise their strength and minimise the army's superiority in numbers, armour and airborne capacity.

The Maoists have faced major losses in the past four months with the capture of 11 senior leaders in Patna, the elimination of their Special Task Force from the Valley, the split of the Tarai Mukti Morcha and the Kirat Workers Party, and the killing by the army of leaders of the 'Ring Area'. It has to be said, however, that even with its added intelligence the military hasn't been able to inflict as much

GUEST COLUMN
Puskar Gautam



SHOOTING THE MESSENGER

Most of us in the media never had any illusions about the Maoists' democratic credentials. But we were willing to give their political agenda the benefit of doubt because most of their original 40-points for a structural overhaul of Nepali society had merit.

We never agreed with their methods, however, and we have always said so. No end ever justifies such wanton slaughter, especially when the democratic space (however flawed) was available.

The Nepali media has fulfilled its professional obligations by airing the Maoists' political demands and making them a matter of public debate. And it has not shirked from exposing their gross abuses of human rights. This has been largely possible because of the brave and committed journalists in the field who have risked their lives to get the truth out.

Unlike the journalists in the capital who are relatively protected, district reporters are vulnerable to threats, intimidation and pressures from both the Maoists and state security. They have to tread a fine line while reporting human rights violations, and have often done that without sacrificing the truth.

In the past year, the threats to reporters have increased in direct proportion to the intensification of the conflict. There has been a lot of unnecessary harassment of journalists by security forces in the field, and the state has killed more journalists in the past four years than the rebels. Krishna Sen worked for a Maoist mouthpiece and Dekendra Thapa worked for state radio, neither deserved to die.

Even though the Maoist leadership pays lip service to press freedom from time to time, its field-level cadre do not waste time in such niceties. They tolerate reporters only as long as their dispatches are favourable. This is a deliberate two-track policy.

By killing Dekendra Thapa earlier this month the Maoists showed that they don't even bother with politically-correct rhetoric anymore. Their Talibanesque threat to chop off the hands of other journalists who refuse to toe the party line is further proof of a dangerously fanatical streak.

The brutal murders of unarmed village elders, elected grassroot leaders, social workers, teachers, businessmen, anyone who don't agree with the rebels or refuse to pay 'donations' are acts of cowardice. When a movement has to resort to such unconscionable cruelty it means it has lost the power of argument. Using such brutality to impose one's will is not only immoral, it is also an incorrect interpretation of revolutionary dialectics.

The regional Maoist leadership in the midwest is reported to have said that killing Thapa was a 'mistake' and it won't do it again. That falls short of an apology. This contrition also didn't originate from the central leadership as it should have.

While the killing of one of our own has set off understandable anger in the profession, we must add that it focuses our grief and outrage even more at the senseless loss of thousands of other innocent Nepali lives in this conflict.



HEARTS AND MINDS

Nice of you to translate Khim Ghale's 'Royal Nepali Army wins the heart and minds. In Congo' (From the Nepali Press, #210). Nepalis have great capacity to work in troubled areas, and with the troublesome people. The congloese love the Nepali soldiers. Only if the same could be said about back home. Why is it so difficult for the Royal Nepali Army to win the hearts and minds of their own brothers and sisters in Nepal? Why don't they use some of the peacekeeping skills they show in the Congo in Nepal? These are very important questions we need to answer, if we are really serious to manage the conflict. The major cause of any success is 'attitude'. If our army's attitude in foreign soil can be so positive, why can't they be positive in their own soil and communities? I am not blaming the army, just trying to figure out why the army can't do the same thing in Nepal that it is doing in faraway Congo.

Laxmi Bhatta, Singapore

INDIAN HANDSHAKE

Interesting article indeed on increased Indian aid evolution for Nepal by Navin Singh Khaka ('Indian handshake', #209). There are no shenanigans or strings attached to Indian assistance to Nepal as Kathmandu's intelligentsia and media know all too well. However, Nepal would do well if it set about reforming its own national mentality and competing globally with its various excellent

products than just rely on its southern Big Brother. It should be made clear that India will never come with tanks or drop bread over Kathmandu as happened in Sri Lanka some years back. India appreciates Nepal, and Nepal should learn to say thank you for what it has done for Nepal's own good. For instance, look at the sudden rise of young Nepali MBAs in the Indian corporate hierarchy, there is no discrimination whatsoever. But in Nepal? Let's not have hate, that is all. *India-Nepal Bhai Bhai Acha Rahe.*

Bing S Thapa, Mumbai

PEACE NOW

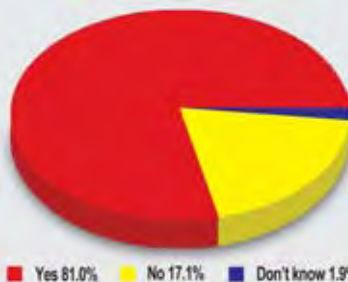
Poverty, deprivation, injustice, inequality, and exclusion lead to rebellion and armed revolt, but a majority of people are against violence and conflict, as the results of two recent questions in your Internet poll have shown. (#209,210). But how do you convert the popular will into actual progress towards peace? There are many lessons from Latin America. One relevant to Nepal may be El Salvador where the conflict was brought to an end through consensus-building and a sincere implementation of the agreement between state and insurgents. The insurgents were coaxed back into the mainstream of national politics and established as a recognised leftist party. Under this settlement, the rebels surrendered their arms and their cadres were integrated into society as farmers, traders, police, and armed forces after necessary

training. For over ten years, the electoral system has worked and the former rebels have emerged as the second largest political party. A parallel in Nepal would be the way our own NCP (ML) used armed struggle in the early 1970s in eastern Nepal, but later realised it wasn't getting them anywhere and came into mainstream politics. Peru, Colombia and Guatemala offer lessons as well in the costs of not finding a solution or protecting a fragile peace. In Nicaragua the insurgents defeated the government and captured state power by force. But the

Q. If the Maoists renounce violence and free, fair elections are announced, which party will you vote for?



Should the Maoists give up violence and join mainstream politics?



LETTERS

Sandinistas squandered their victory and lost national elections. Nonetheless, they continue to remain in the political mainstream without going back underground.

What scenario will be closest to the Nepal situation will depend on how well we plan for peace. One thing is sure: there is no military solution. It is better to realise that now before more lives are lost. The military may suppress a rebellion, but can't eliminate the rebels. The Maoists may even capture state power by force but can't retain it by the same means. If we can't resolve this, we should let the United Nations do it for us. Why the delay?

Bhanu Parajuli, Pokhara

I hope the Maoist leadership is following the Nepali Times Nepalnews.com Internet Poll in the past two issues. Nearly 30 percent of the respondents said they would vote for the Maoist party if it gave up arms and stood for elections, and although there was a sizeable proportion of undecideds, it showed that the political parties are way down in the ratings. Then 81 percent said the Maoists should give up violence and enter mainstream politics. You could say that internet polling does not reflect the ground reality, but the results tally quite well with scientific nationwide polls taken by Himalmedia two years ago. The lesson for the Maoists is quite clear. Most Nepalis agree with their goals, but they almost completely disagree with their methods.

Gunlal Shrestha, Kathmandu

Reading the statistics of the number of people killed (10,000+, #209) was shocking. Most of us know by now who are the culprits: the megalomaniacs of the Maoist movement. They are sucking our country dry even more than some of the corrupt political parties. The top Maoist leaders talk about equality and freedom, but kill anyone who doesn't agree with them or pay them extortion money. What kind of society are they trying to build? The Nepali people are disgusted with the mass murders, they want peace desperately, and are raising their unequivocal voices. Some reputed newspapers and magazines are showing their predilection towards the Maoists. We cannot deny that the security forces have also been responsible for excesses, but they have now realised they need the people's support. The press must stop castigating the security forces without investigating the matters properly. And the politicians have to stop squabbling and work together to rid the country of the menace. Someone said it right, "What you throw comes back ten folds."

And coming back to general public, they can no longer be mere bystanders. They have to understand that the state is trying to save their freedom and they have the most vital part to play in it. Peace without freedom is of no use. Most Nepalis are oblivious to Maoist's sick plan but once they penetrate through its cruel

damage as it could have because of its own structural flaws.

To get over these setbacks, the Maoists needed the blockade as a show of force and to use psychological warfare against the capital. On the military front, they have decided to combine their eastern and battle-hardened western divisions to form a Central Command. The bandas and blockades could just be diversions to ensure greater mobility of their cadres across the mountains. Now, they are busy putting together the training, weapons and logistics to back up this force. What they are still uncertain about is what will happen if they do attack Kathmandu whether it will trigger an international intervention.

The military's strategy now could be to form its own outer ring and a strong inner core to trap the Maoists in their own Ring Area. So far the army has been constrained in fighting a guerrilla war in the mountains, it has been party-successful in the plains and has achieved considerable success in the Valley. If the military puts its mind to it, there is no reason why this plan wouldn't work.

Since the Nepali Congress has now come around to agreeing with the constituent assembly, and the UML despite being in the coalition has given its nod the Maoists only need to put pressure on the palace. ●

Translated from the Nepali original.
puskar21@yahoo.com

Peace by proxy

The only thing going for civil society is its name, it is unmilitary

The Maoists miscalculated. It was apparent from day one of their blockade: the middle-class decided to endure the hardship, the rich ignored it completely, the poor didn't seem unduly worried. Even the sensation-hungry Nepali media

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



played it down. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba was sufficiently unmoved to attend the *Guara* celebrations at Tundikhel.

What was abnormal was how normal everything was. For the spoilt citizens of the capital who used to queue for petrol as soon as landslides blocked the highways, the real story this week was the lack of panic. Try telling that to the parachuting international media.

The fallout of the transportation embargo was so negative that Comrade Prachanda didn't even have the courage to own up, and got his regional honcho to say that the blockade was being withdrawn at the request of 'civil society'. If civil society indeed played a role in making the insurgents realise their mistake, it must be top secret.

In Nepal, civil society has been even less effective than the government in cultivating a culture of peace. To have any role in conflict resolution, civil society needs to have the 4Cs of successful mediation: credibility, competence, consistency, and common sense. Unfortunately, Nepali civil society has generated quite a lot of heat about the necessity of negotiations without throwing any light on how to go about it.

A hodge-podge of retirees, out-of-job politicians, ex-bureaucrats, professionals past their prime, and socialites describe themselves as civil society and hog the limelight by alternating between inflammatory and conciliatory statements towards the insurgents. The fact that many of them share a common Panchayat past makes them

complicit with the regime of oppression, and are therefore severely credibility-challenged.

Had civil society been competent or less-donor driven, we could overlook all that. As

human rights guru Michael Ignatieff writes: international donors have created a climate of 'capacity sucking-out' by inundating poor countries with broad-spectrum experts from well-endowed NGOs who begin by importing duty-free SUVs and live deluxe lives with their First World salaries, and then blame local politicians for all the ills besetting their host country.

Consistency is not one of civil society's strong points. It was the first to fete the insurgents during the truce and began to call them 'terrorists' as soon as the government re-

issued the Red Corner notice. We have lost count of the number of peace activists and conflict resolution experts doing the Colombo-Geneva-Belfast-New York circuit, but it doesn't seem to have resulted in any consistent vision for peace.

The most glaring deficiency has been a lack of common sense. Many in civil society believe that an exit from our Maoist-created mess can be found in the offer of the good offices of the UN secretary general. Politicians know better. Why else would they all be trooping off to New Delhi at the same time: Khum Bhadur Khadka, Shailaja Acharya, Pashupati Shamsheer, Madhab Nepal have all done the trip and Deuba is off himself next week with perhaps King Gyanendra soon after. So, how come the conflict resolution circuit designed for our peace activists by concerned donors only overflies India?

If we ever succeed in establishing peace in this country, it will be in spite of civil society. Since the Maoists have shown themselves to

be even more inept than the government and civil society, prospects of peace look marginally better than before the one week Valley blockade. ●



heart, they will see one mission: to establish a totalitarian regime without mercy and freedom.

Reshivaa Nakarmi,
Kathmandu

SEGE

Re: 'Jugular' (#210). The significance of the Maoist blockade is that at last Kathmanduites are feeling the pain that the rest of the country had to go through for the past eight years, especially in western Nepal. The media also seems to be biased in the reporting because all it is interested in is bombs, bullets and battles. The hardships of the people of western Nepal were often ignored. So Kathmandu now knows what it feels like.

Puspa R Pant, Dadeldhura

ADVISING CAUTION

It was amazing to read the reaction of the travel industry that travel advisories and negative publicity hurts tourism in Nepal. ('Advising caution', #211) So one must ask, what kind of publicity should there be about Nepal? Should it ignore the thousands of Nepalis who have been killed by the RNA, police and Maoists? Should the publicity ignore the armed police and army in the streets of Kathmandu? Should the publicity ignore the bombs? Should the publicity ignore the harassment and 'taxing' of tourist by the Maoists? Ignore the almost daily violent demonstrations, the Amnesty report listing Nepal near the top

in disappearances, and extra-judicial misconduct? Ignore the killed, jailed, and beaten journalists? What are western governments supposed to do? Maybe the Hotel Association of Nepal thinks western governments should lie and tell their citizens all is fair throughout the kingdom? Until the king, parties, and the Maoists hold successful peace talks and begin to solve the internal problems of Nepal without the interference of other nations, the tourist industry, like the rest of the economy in Nepal will continue its slide toward collapse.

D Michael van de Veer,
Hawaii

CK LAL

Finally, CK Lal is not just criticising and criticising everything that he sets his sights upon but also has something constructive to say. In 'None of your business' (#210) he has not only pointed out what is wrong with the generals becoming executives, but also offers them suggestions for investment. The World Bank has decided that the best rate of return on any investment in the developing world is to educate the girl child. If the army spent its welfare money on opening quality schools all over the country it would be doing this nation a much greater favour than by running banks. Especially because such opaque institutions should never be trusted with anyone's money.

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TRIKON/INHP-04

Is oil Nepal's next big

MARK WILLIAMSON
in EDINBURGH

After an age in which Nepal only ever earned a mention in British papers in brief articles detailing the latest Maoist attack, the kingdom has been figuring unexpectedly large on business pages lately.

News from Kathmandu on 11 August that Cairn Energy, a Scottish oil and gas company, had agreed on a contract with the Nepal government allowing it to explore for oil and gas in huge swathes of the south sparked a sudden renewal of interest in a new version of 'Himalayan paradise'. (see 'Cairn strikes it big', #209)

While the government in Kathmandu was rubbing its hands with glee at the apparent endorsement of an oil-importing country's productive potential, Cairn bosses were more circumspect, saying it could take years of scrabbling about before it was known if there was any oil down there.

With hard-nosed investors bidding up Cairn's shares in London on the day it confirmed the successful conclusion of talks, it was clear that optimism was not confined to the Department of Mines and Geology in Kathmandu. The Edinburgh-based company has plenty of people who would be prepared to follow its bosses anywhere.

Helped by a series of massive discoveries in Rajasthan, an unfancied area of western India, Cairn has been lifted from the

A Scottish oil prospecting company is hoping to strike oil in the tarai, but what will it mean for these wetlands in Nepal?



ranks of stock market also-rans into the premier league. Valued at £560million in January, the company is now worth £2billion plus. All four of the finds that powered the transformation were made on land the mighty Shell had not rated and had sold to Cairn for just £4million.

While Mike Watts, the company's wily exploration director, first saw the potential in Rajasthan, Cairn's feats have ensured its chief, Bill Gammell, a star status in business circles to match his glamorous background. The son of a wealthy oil financier, Gammell became friends as a child with the future President George W Bush while their fathers talked

business. He was a classmate of future Prime Minister Tony Blair at an elite Edinburgh school, Fettes College, where he excelled at rugby before going on to play the sport for Scotland.

Now with the company having discovered more than one billion barrels of oil in India he is sitting on a stake in Cairn worth more than £15 million. As the terms of the company's Rajasthan licence gave the Indian authorities the right to 30 percent of any area in which oil is developed, the strikes promise a bonanza for the country's government.

Little wonder that for some the mere mention of Cairn possibly drilling summoned up

images of an adventure in Nepal that could only end happily for all concerned. However, Cairn has been relying so far on little more than educated guesswork in Nepal where the only well ever drilled found nothing, some 36 years ago. A vast area needs to be studied using time-consuming techniques like seismic surveys of the deeps to help turn up leads. It could be years before any wells are sunk.

"We're in the early, early stages of exploration, of transient operations, risk capital," said Watts. When and if drilling starts, Cairn could easily fail to find oil or gas or not strike enough of the stuff to make installing expensive

production infrastructure worthwhile.

Speaking on the third day of the Maoist blockade in Kathmandu last week, after Maoists forced a dozen big companies to closed down, Watts, who has spent years working in countries like Bangladesh, appeared to be relatively unconcerned by the security situation. "We're conscious there are security issues in Nepal like there are in many areas where oil and gas is sought and we will operate with a cautious pragmatic approach."

However, there is a risk exploration activity could be disrupted either directly or indirectly by political violence that Cairn may not have encountered elsewhere. Even if all goes to plan, sceptics surveying the oil provinces of the developing world could find plenty of reasons to wonder precisely who would be the beneficiaries of exploration and production in Nepal.

One British expert who asked not to be named noted Angola and Nigeria as the most grotesque but not the only examples of countries in which the discovery of huge amounts of oil had produced wealth aplenty for the already rich and powerful, corrupt or otherwise, but no end of misery for the poor. (see: 'The resource curse', #209)

Activists say the powerless have been the main victims of huge environmental damage resulting from oil spills and other ills. Following similar experiences across the globe, the World Bank recently made

Dateline Guantanamo

The world is best when America sets an example, not when it hurts itself

Guantanamo Bay, Cuba: If Nepal is the world's only Hindu kingdom, then this place is the world's only communist fast food paradise. Food and the extreme left seldom go together, the hammer and sickle sit uneasily alongside capitalist icons like McDonald's golden arches.

But this remote, arid chunk of Cuba,

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



where the arches loom alongside

KFC's friendly colonel, the Subway sign and Pizza Hut is only communist by proximity. Cuba owns the ground beneath our feet, but the American military walks on it.

Guantanamo Bay was first leased to the United States in 1903, when Cuba was a newly captured colony. So 'lease' is probably a bit too lenient to the American government. 'Given', 'delivered post paid', or 'snatched' might be more to the point. This 85 sq km of real estate on both sides of a magnificent natural harbour remains in US hands to this day, despite Fidel Castro's revolution and years of hostility between Washington and Havana.

In the 1990s, when the going was good, Bill Clinton's government wanted to wind the place down. It was thought too expensive and badly located. Also this little McDonalds-haunted paradise was a magnet for migrants from Haiti, and of course, Cuba.

Tens of thousands of them came here annually and had to be penned up while their cases were processed. Gitmo, as the base here is known in military slang, was losing its lustre as an outpost of freedom.

Then came September 11th 2001, the American-led war against the Taliban and Al Qaeda, and the worldwide campaign to stamp out militant terrorism. As US forces went into action around the world, they rounded up many a Muslim. Some were handed over by their own countries, others nabbed on the field of battle. In all, close to a thousand were detained, perhaps even more, but we were never really given a number.

A lot of that group ended up here in Gitmo. Who could forget the first TV pictures of dismal captured Muslim men being lead across steaming tarmac, confused or defiant, angry or frightened...who could tell? The cameras

were too far away. The first inmates to arrive had to sleep in outdoor cells that were little better than metal boxes. As the population got larger, more permanent prison quarters were built. So were a hospital, guard buildings and other structures.

There were howls of outrage against American military detention



procedures from human rights groups and decent governments around the world. The Americans listened to some and improved their inmate handling. But what they didn't do was treat their 'detained enemy combatants' as they would like their own soldiers to be treated if arrested by a hostile foreign power. This is the basis of self interest, not to mention the rules of war.

Now the process of trying those 'enemies of America' has begun and all I'm seeing so far is a lot of disorganisation, ad-hocism and clumsy behaviour by security forces. Also, at least one inmate has a vigorous and courageous defence attorney who is fighting hard on behalf of his client, even risking his own military career as a lawyer in the navy. This is good, but not good enough.

Sooner or later, I hope America realises that the world is best when it sets an example, and doesn't do things that give rise to anti-Americanism that hurts us all. They could start by putting the men at Gitmo Bay before their own justice system, and not some invention from the Second World War that didn't even work at the time. ●

bonanza?

support for a pipeline linking Chad with Cameroon conditional on measures to guarantee Chad's newfound oil wealth would be used for poverty reduction.

"But initial returns are not encouraging and even though the oil money is flowing, there are no structures in place for distributing it back to the oil producing region," said a development expert.

In the case of Cairn oil industry, sources say Nepal can probably be pleased that it is dealing with a company that has a record of pioneering in countries like India. Bigger players might throw their weight around more.

Following warnings about possible environmental damage resulting from exploration in the Nepal tarai, Cairn has been quick to relinquish rights to explore all designated national park and wildlife areas on its acreage in Nepal, including Royal Bardia Park.

The company says it will explore only in consultation with local communities. However, there is concern among environmentalists about

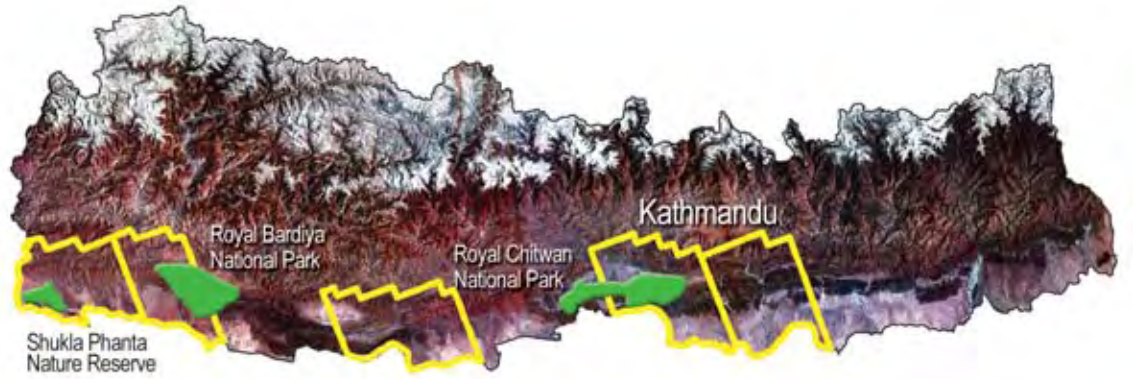
what the exploration will do to the India-Nepal Tarai Arc Landscape project, which aims to protect jungle corridors for tiger and wild elephant migration.

While the terms on which Cairn will look for oil have not been disclosed, there are said to be provisions of jobs and training for 300 to 400 Nepali staff during the initial survey period. "If we ever get into production we'll be doing community issues like we do in parts of India," Watts said. However, with Cairn obliged to prioritise the interests of its shareholders, the country's ministers and officials will have responsibility for ensuring an oil and gas business for which they have scarcely any experience.

Years of complaints about mismanagement by self-interested politicians and bureaucrats will have left few in the country confident that officialdom can meet the challenge. ●

Mark Williamson is a business journalist on *The Herald* in Scotland
mark.williamson@theherald.co.uk

Oil and water don't mix



The Indian environmental website, indianjungles.com has raised concerns about oil exploration along the environmentally sensitive India-Nepal border regions. Indian wildlife author and photographer, Nirmal Ghosh writes:

Cairn's concession map for Nepal, showing the proximity of the tarai national parks in Chitwan, Bardiya, Sukla Phanta and adjacent areas of the Parsa wildlife reserve. The historic Lumbini/Tansen area are also included as well as contiguous concessions in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar which has the Valmiki nature reserve.

Currently, Maoist rebel activity in many of these areas will probably delay progress of these plans. But in the long run, there is no telling how much damage they will do. At the very least, they could render plans to restore and conserve the Tarai Arc wildernesses in Nepal as well as India, a crucial component in north India's river systems—an exercise in futility.

While Cairn is currently the darling of the London stock exchange, having risen three times since January via four Rajasthan finds, they are a smaller 'independent' firm by global standards and will be unable to go it alone for too much longer and may be bought out in the next 2-3 years by a mega-major companies like Shell or BP, which could lead to a vast increase in their ability to influence government and spend even on more exploration.

I've had a chance to observe the effects of drilling in Amazonia, and it's not pretty. There have been some improvements due to heat from the usual green

pressure groups, but in general drilling has dramatically affected habitats. But far more damaging than actual forest clear-cutting (for wells/pipelines) has been the immediate increase in bushmeat hunting and poaching by native workers shipped in from urban areas, the usual effects of better roads etc and a quick drop in water/aquifer quality (and fish catches) due to poisonous effluents and leakages.

In general Cairn does have slightly better green credentials than the mega-majors, but as firms grow, they tend to become less green, for obvious reasons. For now, despite their finds in Rajasthan, Cairn is largely pumping gas and oil from offshore. Most of their onshore fields will take 2-3 years to start pumping, given the lead times, need for new pipelines etc. As for the Bangladesh reserves, perversely, their resentment/suspicion of India has prevented the construction of pipelines to India, has had the effect of protecting their environment including the Sunderbans mangrove delta region.

Business proactive against closures

Industrialists and the business community have been organising rallies and issuing press releases urging Maoist rebels and the government to create an environment that allows them to open businesses.

Their main argument is that politics and the economy shouldn't be mixed up. "It does not work that way," says Binod Bahadur Shrestha, president of the Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI). "The political issues should be solved politically and the economy should be allowed to follow its own course."

The business community has been concerned following the closure of a dozen business houses under Maoist pressure, including some of Nepal's most prestigious firms like Soaltee Crowne Plaza and Surya Nepal. Many FNCCI board members said it was not just about the ones presently forced to close. "Today it is 12 of us, tomorrow it could be all," they argue.

There appears to be an arbitrariness in the Maoist threats. They have told American businesses to stay away, but also forced the closure of the Middle-Marsyangdi hydropower project in Lamjung which is funded with German official development assistance. "A thread running through all these closed companies is that they defied Maoist extortion threats, and that goes for the Marsyangdi contractor as well," explained one business source. The rebels suspended the blockade after a week and the student wing of the Maoists have formed a team to hold talks with the government on education issues. But the trade union arm of the rebels that has pressured the business houses to close down, has not made any move. In fact, their stance has hardened after the arrest of two of their comrades in Kathmandu on Wednesday.

The Maoist-affiliated trade union has been arguing that business houses exploit workers. "The workers are being exploited even during normal times, we are fighting for their liberation," said federation chairman Shalikgram Jamarkatel. But trade unionists affiliated to political parties dismiss these allegations, saying the strike is actually anti-worker. "It takes away their jobs and they can't feed their families," says Binod Shrestha, general secretary of the UML-affiliated trade General Federation of Nepal Trade Union. FNCCI's Shrestha believes dialogue is the only answer. "We have been discussing problems the (Maoist) trade unionists have raised, and we believe it can be resolved through dialogue."

Truly Asia

Tourism Malaysia and Marco Polo Travels have announced a 'dream holiday package' for Nepal residents at a gala event on Friday at the Hyatt Regency. The six-day holiday package, the first of its kind in Nepal, is available for Rs 45,000 per person and covers airfare on Qatar Airways, accommodation and meals. "Given the existing rate of airfare to Kuala Lumpur, the package is not expensive," says Subodh Rana of Marcopolo Travels. Rana is also happy that this is the first national tourism promotion done by any country to tap Nepal's growing outbound market.

Tourism Malaysia also organised a weeklong Malaysian food and cultural promotion in Kathmandu and a similar event will take place at the Fulbari Hotel in Pokhara till 28 August. Mirza Mohammad Taiyab, deputy director of Tourism Malaysia says: "There is a lot of potential for tourist traffic between the two countries."

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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER

Thai



BIKAS RAUNIAR

Namaste or not?

Handshakes are more egalitarian than namastes

Mixing with people from other societies or cultures, one is immediately struck by the differences in social behaviour and practices. For example, why is it that in some cultures people shake hands when they meet, while in others they rub their noses or exchange kisses on cheeks or they keep at arms length and do namaste?

NEPALI PAN
Rajendra Pradhan



Is it something to do with notions of equality and hierarchy, intimacy and distance? When we shake hands, are we not saying that we are equals, as compared

to saluting or namaste-ing? Until as recently as the 1970s, people in rural Holland still used to doff their caps to the upper classes in greeting. They would certainly have been rebuffed had they dared offered their hands to be shaken. Handshakes also symbolise friendship, even among unequals, or signal the end of hostility and forgiving mistakes. The simple, friendly act of shaking hands has multiple meanings both simultaneously and serially, differing according to context.

In the age of economic and cultural globalisation, the handshake has also become globalised. In Nepal, more and more people are now beginning to shake hands, especially on formal occasions, such as prize-givings and after speeches. It is also increasingly common for Nepalis to shake hands as well as doing namaste. Nepalis are now less hierarchical than they were, say 20 years ago. But shaking hands now signifies not just friendship and equality, but also sets one apart from the more traditional ("backward?") compatriots.

The namaste (or namaskar) is a form of salutation also practiced by Indians, Sri Lankans, Thais, Burmese and other groups influenced by 'Indic' cultures. One rational scientific explanation for the evolution of this form of salutation is to avoid spreading germs and dirt. Traditional Nepalis frown upon shaking hands and that other 'dirty' practice of kissing, because it is not hygienic. But as an apprentice anthropologist, I am tempted to explore beyond just the rational to social, cultural and political-economic roots of the namaste.

Given the hierarchical social structures in India and Nepal, the namaste fulfils the need for men and women and people of unequal social status to maintain physical distance. Traditionally, what is important during the namaste procedure is who initiates the greeting, how low one bows while doing it to a priest or elder, for instance, and how long you stay down. People of higher social status only respond to the namaste, and don't do it themselves first.

Let's analyse the much-publicised handshake between the leader of a party once classified as terrorist and the helpless head of government at a nonpolitical function during last year's ceasefire period. It signified a (temporary) cessation of hostilities, equality between the leaders of the two powers, a shift to a new (western? global?) way of interacting with the opposition and a new symbol of conflict resolution. A namaste would have meant status quo and support of the traditional ways of doing things. Besides, who would have offered his namaste first?

In the wider global universe, doing namaste as a form of greeting culturally marks us as Asians. When abroad, if you greet another Nepali or Asian with a namaste you signal an affinity to a vague sense of 'Asian culture and identity' and thus a shared culture and closeness in contrast to people of other cultures.

The greeting you get while boarding most Asian airlines is a namaste. In the hospitality business, what sells is culture packaged with its unique traits and the namaste has come to fulfil this role as well.

The form of greeting or salutation used displays social and cultural meanings, those of closeness or distance, hierarchy or equality and also of being modern or westernised. By switching from one form of salutation to another, one switches the meaning of the interaction and social relations. ●

Rajendra Pradhan is a Kathmandu-based anthropologist.

The legends still live

Twenty-five years later, Kathmandu's Shangri-la Hotel shows that the mystique of Kathmandu is still alive

SRADDHA BASNYAT

Twenty-five years ago, herds of hippies roamed Kathmandu, the valley was an emerald jewel in the lap of the Himalaya, and there was peace and tranquillity all over the land. A couple of Rana palaces converted into upscale lodgings and the first few budget lodgings were just springing up in Thamel.

Nepal was a true shangrila and it needed a hotel for a new breed of clientele: not quite hippie and not quite globe-trotting billionaires. Shyam Bahadur Panday decided to take the gamble.

Panday had earlier decided to break with family tradition and not follow his father's footsteps into the army. Perhaps unwisely at first, he invested all his savings into property in Lazimpat near the big embassies. He got a hotel license and decided to start construction. "I had to finish it in time for my children's careers to take off. I could not have them ready to work before the hotel was ready," recalls Panday whose two sons are now managing the hotel.

Luckily, Panday met a group of multi-talented Himalayan specialists led by the famous renaissance man, Desmond Doig, who shared his vision. Doig was a journalist with the *Calcutta Statesman*, but had become something of a Himalayan specialist, as conversant on Bhutan as he was on Sikkim. But he had a special affinity for Nepal. Perhaps owing to his time as a Gurkha officer, school days in Kurseong among Nepali speaking students, or even as far back as his Nepali nanny, Nepal was always special for Doig.

Panday met Doig one evening at a bar in Thamel and a friendship ensued. Perhaps it was that very night, as Panday shared his dream with his new friend, that Doig envisioned a

hotel garden, later called the Shambala. Inspired, Doig moved to Nepal and even as the foundations of the Shangri-la Hotel were laid, he threw himself into the garden of his dreams—a garden which was not even part of Panday's blueprints.

Then, in 1979, the Shangri-la Hotel, inspired by James Hilton's novel of the same name, opened its doors. "Seeing it first," Hilton wrote, "it might have been a vision fluttering out of that solitary rhythm... It was indeed a strange and half-incredible sight." That is what



Panday wanted his hotel to be, and the Shangri-la became Doig's canvas as well. Here he brought to life the designs, plans and visions he sketched out on the small pad he carried everywhere. Guided in design only by Hilton's imagery and his own deep passion for everything high Himalayan, the hotel would become one of his masterpieces.

Although everyone agreed it was charming, the first year was less than smooth sailing for the Shangri-la. Utpal Sengupta worked for the *Junior Statesman*, a cult youth magazine started by

Doig in Calcutta. Utpal came up to Kathmandu and started to work on promoting the hotel. It is said, in Utpal's books you were either for or against the Shangri-la, and if it was the latter, then Utpal had no time for you.

He and Doig used their contacts to build up the Shangri-la image worldwide. Sengupta even pulled his wife Caroline, who he met at the Shangri-la, and his mother-in-law into helping out at the hotel. Caroline's fine French food and her mother's famed cordon bleu hooked many a visitor. Utpal and Caroline today run *Chez Caroline* at Baber Mahal Revisited.

Doig only lived a few more years to watch the hotel grow. Sengupta was general manager for 20 years through the tourism boom years. Today, as the ambience of Kathmandu is eroded and the conflict affects tourism, the Shangri-la is still an oasis of calm in a frantic city. And in the middle of that oasis is a tranquil garden called the Shambala, where you can almost imagine Desmond Doig sitting on a garden chair, puffing at a pipe, watching the rose-coloured sunset of a Kathmandu monsoon evening, and sketching away on his notepad.

Panday's eldest son Prasadha is now managing director, younger son Pravine is executive director and Daman Pradhan is CEO of the Shangri-la group of hotels and the Shangri-la Holidays travel agency. So what is it about Shangri-la that invokes such total involvement? Dubby Bhagat, Doig's friend and a self-professed chronicler of the hotel's history, says: "Perhaps it's the spirit of the old Raniban forest that it was built near that consumes them, or perhaps it is the kind of Kathmandu that drew us all here. ●"

www.nepalshangrila.com

Desmond Doig (above) and the Shangri-la's Shambala Garden that he designed.



Don't rush into Nepal Angels Don't Stomp On Insurgency

THERE are reports that New Delhi is examining options of air-dropping supplies to Kathmandu, blockaded by Maoist rebels and starved of supplies through its regular surface routes. There is a strong case for India to not take any precipitate action either in defence of the incumbent regime in Kathmandu or against it. By all appearances, what is afoot in Nepal is a fairly vigorous challenge to the monarchy. While the particular ideology and mode of struggle of the Maoists might have only limited appeal, it would appear that their demand to set up a constituent assembly has wide popular support. Nepal's mainstream political parties suffer from nepotism, chaotic organisation, personal agendas and other similar vices that are very familiar to the people of India. It is entirely possible that these parties fail to articulate, effectively and cogently, what the people of the Himalayan kingdom actually want. It is plausible that large sections of Nepalis sympathise with the Maoists, at least as far as their quest to remove the monarchy goes. Not just the system of monarchy but the current monarch himself would appear to be widely held in low esteem by the people of Nepal. In such a situation, it would

ECONOMIC TIMES, NEW DELHI, 24 AUGUST

NARESH NEWAR

Indian officials last week leaked to the New Delhi media that India was considering "bread bombing" Kathmandu if the Maoist blockade got worse.

Back in the old days, such a leak would have resulted in a slew of sponsored editorials in the Indian press enthusiastically endorsing official concern about Nepal and echoing its geo-strategic interest in Nepal. It is an indication of how much things have changed that editorials in the main Indian papers the next day warned the government to stay out of Nepal's internal affairs.

'It is in India's longterm

interests to champion democracy in the neighbourhood without active interference in other countries' internal affairs,' wrote the *Economic Times* on 23 August (see clipping above). Another editorial in its sister publication, *The Times of India* on 24 August echoed this view and even went on to diverge from the official Indian stance on UN mediation by saying the world body should be allowed to 'take an active role' to mediate peace talks in Nepal. (see box)

The *Indian Express*, which is edited by India's foremost geopolitical expert, Shekhar Gupta, makes its stand quite clear: 'As a neighbour that

Buddy, not bully

Indian media has become more mature and objective in coverage of Nepal

could be affected by the fallout, India can only wish Nepal well.'

All this is surprisingly objective by past standards. People in Kathmandu remember the Indian media's simplistic and inaccurate reporting during the IC813 hijacking debacle in December 1999 and the Hrithik Roshan riots that stigmatised Nepal as a hotbed of ISI activity.

Recent reporting about the Kathmandu blockade on Indian television may have been exaggerated, but at least the op-ed pages didn't parrot the official line. Is this a sign of changing times?

"If the editorials are any indication, the Indian media has finally got over its Cold War hangover," says Yubaraj Ghimire, editor of the Kathmandu weekly *Samaya*, who worked in for various Indian media in New Delhi for 20 years. "It also shows that they are willing to recognise international peace efforts in Nepal."

This is a view shared by other India-watchers here, who have noticed that the Indian media's coverage of neighbours has graduated from patronising preachiness to factual and non-ideological reporting. "Indian

journalism has shed its ideological baggage, it has become much more professional," another media analyst told us. "My only complaint is that Nepal is still a blind spot and they have underestimated the seriousness of the insurgency here and its potential for a spillover into India."

Political scientist Dhruva Kumar at Tribhuvan University cautions against overplaying this change. "Since Nehru's time, the Indian media has openly supported the country's foreign policy towards its neighbours. That link still exists. We just see hints of a softening these days," Kumar told us, adding, "this doesn't mean they are totally liberated from South Bloc."

However, coverage of the blockade was one indication of

the shift. Although the reporting was alarmist, at least it woke up the Indian officialdom and the public about the fact that Nepal is in crisis. As the *Economic Times* wrote: 'India must sever links between the insurgents in Nepal and the so-called Maoists of domestic vintage.'

India's business press has also drawn attention to the Maoist closure of companies in Nepal with Indian investment as well as threats against other businesses. "The Indian media is seeing a generation change. It has moved away from grey-celled academia and retired bureaucrats to young and open journalists who aggressively question the conventional wisdom of New Delhi's grand promenade," said another Kathmandu-based India-watcher. ●

Nepal Under Siege

(Editorial in *The Times of India*, 25 August)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

We have long warned that the situation in Nepal is fast spinning out of control. Recent events suggest that in fact things might get worse than we thought. New Delhi repeats that it is 'watching the situation carefully'. But it is becoming increasingly obvious that a more energetic engagement needs to be made by India in this strategic and sensitive backyard. The grapevine has it that India has stepped up supplies of arms and materiel to help the Nepalese forces combat the Maoists. There must have been back-door diplomacy to try to bring the contending parties to the negotiating table. However, so far a solution has remained elusive, with the rebels insisting that a total ceasefire and the calling of a constituent assembly should be the precondition for talks.

The palace would be reluctant—to put it mildly—to liquidate itself. However, some concessions have to

be made by both sides. The point is—which party or parties are best suited to play the honest broker? Considering India's close economic, social and cultural ties with the Himalayan kingdom, New Delhi would seem to be ideally suited for the role. But India has, for far too long, been seen as a big bully, not only by Nepal but by other smaller neighbours as well. Any talks held under the obvious auspices of India would be doomed to failure. So, what are the alternatives? The present situation obviously cannot be permitted to continue. On their part, the Maoists, splintered as they are, have said they would be willing for a UN-monitored process. New Delhi and other friends of Nepal should try and persuade the palace to accede to this request. The donor agencies and NGOs, whose presence in Nepal cannot be wished away, could also play a positive role by endorsing such a move. Insurgency has brought Nepal's tourism-driven economy to a grinding halt. The prospect of India being saddled with another refugee problem is not exactly remote.



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Open secret

Everyone, even the government, knew Nepali workers were going illegally to Iraq



NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

MIN BAJRACHARYA

When news came last week that 13 Nepalis had been kidnapped in Iraq, it was no big surprise for the Ministry and Department of Labour. Officials had known all along that Nepalis have been sneaking into Iraq from Kuwait and Jordan.

"It has been an open secret that thousands of Nepalis are in Iraq," admits Labour Minister Raghujii Panta.

The insurgency, unemployment and poverty back home have made young Nepalis so desperate for jobs that they are willing to take the risk of working in a war zone like Iraq. Government officials admit the push factor is just too strong. "What can we do when the state of the country compels people to go to such places?" one senior

Department of Labour official asked.

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Prakash Sharan Mahat, has appealed for the hostages' release through Al Jazeera television in Doha. But so far there has been no response from the kidnappers who belong to the shadowy Ansar al-Sunnah group. Government officials have also corresponded with their Iraqi counterparts to secure the release of the hostages.

The government has formed a three-member committee to probe how Nepalis end up in Iraq. It is coordinated by Labour Ministry Secretary Narayan Prasad Silawal, but until Thursday the committee had not even started work and does not have a deadline. "They will begin work at the earliest and

they will have to submit the report as soon as possible," Minister Pant told us (*see interview, pg9*). "We will take action against companies that are found responsible by the report."

But according to the hostages in Iraq, who were made to speak in front of tv cameras at gunpoint, the manpower agency that sent them should be held responsible. "We were kept as captives in Jordan first and they did not allow us to return home and forced us to go to Iraq," all 12 hostages shown on the tv footage said. "Moonlight Consultant's Pralhad Giri is responsible for all this. The government must take action against him and the manpower company."

Family members are enraged.

"When it has been proven that the manpower companies sent people to Iraq, which is prohibited, why can't the government arrest the agents?" asked Sudarshan Khadka of Lele, elder brother of Ramesh Khadka who is one of the 13 hostages. Moonlight Consultant has refused to meet family members.

Moonlight told us it sent 17 workers to Jordan, including Ramesh and eight others who are now in Iraq. "We completed all due processes and sent them to Jordan on 3 June," says Moonlight's director, KB Rana. "We had sent them to Morning Star company in Jordan, but another company called Besharath and Partners are said to have taken them to Baghdad to rebuild hospitals."

But Deepak Rijal, a Nepali journalist in Jordan, told the BBC Nepali service on Tuesday that the deal between Moonlight Consultant and the Morning Star company in Amman was in fact to send Nepali workers to Iraq. "Morning Star has confirmed this and so there is no reason for Moonlight to offer false explanations," Rijal says.

An official at the Association of Foreign Employment Agencies in Kathmandu admitted labour companies have been sending people to Iraq, while officially stating that they are going to the Gulf. "If a manpower agency says it is sending workers to countries like Jordan and Kuwait these days, you can be sure they will end up in Iraq," the official told us.

This is not something the government does not know. But none of the series of governments of late have corresponded with any of these countries' manpower agencies or with the Nepalis missions to confirm if Nepali workers are actually wanted there.

One of the agents whose clients are among those taken hostage in Iraq admitted anonymously that more and more manpower companies are working in partnership with Indian agents to send Nepalis to Iraq. "Even now there are at least



An Indian tv crew interviews Ramesh Khadka's family in Lele on Tuesday (left), while his father and sister look on (above)

three Indian agents in town coordinating between the agents here and the employer companies in Iraq," he said. "To know what is going on, all you need to do is flip through the pages of newspapers and see the advertisements seeking Nepali workers for these countries."

An added complication is that many Nepalis are going to India on their way to Iraq and being duped by middlemen. Some 10,000 Nepalis have been stranded in Mumbai because the agents promising to send them to Iraq took their money and simply disappeared. The Association of Foreign Employment Agencies has sent a team to Mumbai to find out the extent of the problem, but as many of them work hand-in-glove with Indian agents, it doesn't look like the swindled Nepalis will ever get their money back.

Officials say the demand is so great and there is such desperation here, it would be better to regulate migration to prevent exploitation of workers and ensure that Nepali middlemen can be held accountable if something goes wrong. Says one official: "The worst aspect of this is that crooked middlemen in India are swindling desperate Nepalis of everything they have." ●

Dreaming of Iraq

"Iraq is not safe, but neither is Nepal."

NARESH NEWAR

Prerem Lama knows the dangers of working for the US government in Iraq but seems completely unfazed. He has been working as a janitor at the US military base in Baghdad this year and is eager to return. Currently, he is home on sick leave with a severe case of jaundice.

"Everyone knows there is a war going on and we are not safe, but it's the same in Nepal, too, isn't it?" says 22-year-old Lama. Lama says he is not too worried about the kidnapping of 13 Nepalis. "I'm a Gurkha. Why should I be afraid?" says Lama with defiantly folded arms, his well-built body dressed in American military shorts. He is proud that by working in Iraq he has managed to pay for his family.

Besides a monthly \$275 salary, Lama says he gets other benefits and facilities

as well. "Even children are well cared for. There is a swimming pool, tennis court and a small DVD theatre. We feel quite secure working inside the military barrack," says Lama.

Lama was sent to Iraq by a Kathmandu-based overseas manpower agency run by a group of young entrepreneurs in their mid-20s. A source from the agency told us that there is growing demand from young Nepalis who also want to go.

The agency is processing more than 700 job applications for Iraq this year. The source also said there are other agencies helping Nepalis find jobs in Iraq as construction labourers, security guards, cooks and technicians. "I will stop recruitment after we have processed the

remaining applications as we don't want to take anymore risk," the owner of the overseas manpower agency told us on condition of anonymity.

"We all want to go to Iraq. The government is more scared than us," says Shyam Jha from Janakpur, who came all the way to Kathmandu to apply for a job in Iraq. Looking at the list of selected candidates, he gets impatient when he does not see his name. "I'm sure it will be here in the next list. I can't return home with nothing," Jha says, sounding desperate.

Nepali manpower agencies have come under severe criticism, and are often accused of tricking and knowingly risking the lives of workers by sending them to Iraq. The agents, however, say they are not the only ones to be blamed. "As long as the job is safe and secure, people don't complain, but when something goes wrong we get all the blame," says KB Rana from Moonlight Consultant.

"Everyone knows the risk and I don't want to just point my finger at the agencies," says Ram Khadga from Jhapa, who is now applying for Iraq after being rejected for a security job in Qatar by Moondrop Agency in Lazimpat. "The money is very good in Iraq, more than double than the pay in the rest of

Gulf region," says Laxman Karki from Biratnagar, who is on his way to Dubai to work as a security guard in a supermarket.

Many like Karki are applying for work visa in Dubai, Qatar, Oman or Kuwait and then apply for jobs in Iraq through local manpower agencies when they get there. Promises of Iraq's high salaries don't just attract poor farmers and labourers—Nepalis with good incomes are tempted too. Karki is a wholesaler and owns a number of shops.

Syamden Tamang, originally from Solukhumbu, has already worked in the US, Japan, Korea, Dubai and India but has now set his sights on Iraq. "In fact we don't care where we get jobs, but Iraq sounds promising," says Tamang, who is applying for work as a car mechanic, adding, "The government is not ignorant and it already knows that people are not tricked into going to Iraq."

According to several manpower agencies, more than 10,000 visas for Iraq were processed in the last three months for Nepalis and most of them are waiting for air tickets to fly to Iraq through Oman and Qatar. ●

(Some names have been changed on request.)

BIZ NEWS

Double digit summit

The Confederation of Nepali Industries (CNI), in association with the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank is organising the CNI Partnership Summit 2004 for 2 and 3 September around a central theme of "Can Nepal achieve double digit growth?" Participants will include dignitaries such as Malaysian former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and Thai Deputy Prime Minister Suchart Jaovisidha.

Noodle wealth

2PM's innovative marketing strategy has turned out to be a jackpot in more ways than one. So far, over 75 lucky winners have had the double thrill of generous cash prizes handed over by 2PM's charismatic brand ambassador, Rajesh Hamal. Under the '2PM jackpot' offer, 70 people have won Rs 10,000, four have won Rs 100,000 and Anish Aryal was handed a stunning Rs 500,000 at a function at Hotel Bluestar.

Good service

Nepali Hyundai fans are in for a treat as Hyundai has upped its level of service and after sales benefits. These now include a three-year warranty and 12 free servicings, plus a buy back guarantee should the customer want to resell their vehicle. These, added to existing service from AVCO, the 24-hour Hyundai Mobile Service for emergency breakdowns and easily available spare parts should make that motor purr.

Celebrating excellence

Hard work paid off for the 16 top students from the 2060 SLC exams at the Tuborg Excellence Awards, held on 9 August. The top three, Bishal Khanal, Prasanna Piya and Shashank Bajimya got Rs 100,000, Rs 30,000 and Rs 20,000 respectively. The others, including Pratistha Gyawali who had the highest grades among the girls, were awarded Rs 10,000 each.

Designer diplomas

On 14 August, close to 50 students received diplomas from the Exterior-Interiors campus in Kathmandu. The international interior design institute has been working for over 18 years with campuses in India, America, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh and is the only organisation in its class to have received ISO 9001:2000 certification for its one-year diploma program.

Power package

National Hydro Power Co. (NHPC) has produced 7.5MW of electricity on the Indrawati river to contribute to the NEA's national grid. The Indrawati-III is located 75km east of Kathmandu at Jyamire, Sindhupalchok. Considered a model hydroelectricity project, NHPC has signed a 25-year power purchase agreement with NEA and will receive Rs 287,900,000.

A business alliance for peace

Nepal's businesses need to stop vacillating and be pro-active for peace

Nepali businessmen, especially the ones masquerading as macroeconomists on tv, know how to lose friends and alienate people. After the October 2002 royal takeover, instead of withholding judgment and waiting to see how things pan out, a number rushed to publish messages praising the king's move, casting him as the ultimate savior. True, that action did make a couple of them ministers for a while, but the collective loss has been greater. The businessmen's actions at that time has continued to cost them the trust of political parties.

Then, in the spring of 2003, some business leaders went overboard according rock-star treatment to the then-aboveground Maoist rebel leaders. Indeed, the business community was rapturous after the Maoists announced that, notwithstanding their own aspirations for a Stalinist economy, they too were "for free market". This showed that the business community, despite its self-proclaimed importance, could boast neither intellectual nor moral consistency.

Any remaining hangover of that euphoria has evaporated in past weeks as Maoist rebels forced the closure of several top businesses and imposed a seven-day-long Kathmandu blockade. Hurt in the process were many small, medium and large Nepali



KIRAN PANDAY

businesses and their customers. The most FNCCI and others could do were half-hearted rallies requesting the Maoists end the blockade. Instead of swinging back and forth like a pendulum and forever blaming politicians, could Nepali business leaders start doing something concrete and credible for peace?

This would need a change of mindset and of tactics. No matter how much they yearn for an orderly autocracy *a la* Singapore, business leaders must learn to see democracy as a friend of longterm economic growth. Most prosperous countries have been democratic for a long time, with a vibrant press and multiple outlets for civil society concerns.

Talking about economic freedom as something distinct from political freedom may be comforting. But as the Maoist blockade has shown, when political freedom remains under assault, economic freedom starts to wither. And economic freedom in the absence of political

freedom, which values competition, ends up setting the stage for corruption, arbitrary political meddling and harmful monopolies. Surely that is not what our business leaders want.

Business leaders say that they want peace. Yet they seem content to let the donors and others pay for peace-building efforts. Isn't it time for them to start putting money where their mouth is? A change of tactics would require that instead of finger-pointing, business leaders come together and take the initiative to create something like Nepali Business Alliance for Peace. Funded and managed by Nepali businesses for collective welfare, they could start by looking at El Salvador and South Africa, where businesses played crucial roles in building peace.

Unless the Nepali business community takes a pro-active stance and does its bit to address the present crisis, its complaints alone will help raise neither sales nor profits. ●

"A ban on going to Iraq is not a deterrent."

Nepali Times: Is the government going to allow Nepalis workers to go to Iraq?

Raghuji Pant: The foreign ministry has prohibited Nepalis from going to Iraq, but thousands of Nepalis are there already. Some have gone through illegal channels via India, while others first leave for Kuwait and Jordan and later enter Iraq. We have set up a probe committee under the coordination of the secretary at the Labour Ministry. Once the report comes out, we will decide what to do.

So you haven't ruled out the option of allowing Nepalis to go to Iraq.

We have not ruled out any option. But that does not mean that we have already decided. Certainly, a ban on going to Iraq doesn't seem to have deterred Nepalis from going there.

What would you like to happen?

We will have to make the entire process scientific. We must make sure that all Nepalis going for foreign employment should fly from the Tribhuban International Airport and that the manpower agencies they go through pay their taxes. There have been many lapses in all these processes. Many Nepalis are being exploited, there are illegal agencies operating here.

Shouldn't you at least prosecute the agency that sent the 13 workers to Iraq?

We can take action only after the probe committee comes out with its findings.

Won't that be too late?

As I said, a committee has been formed to look after all this. We do not know yet which companies are involved in this racket. What also needs to be cleared is whether our people in Iraq were sent directly there by the manpower agencies or if they entered Iraq after they reached other Gulf countries. Therefore, talking about punishing manpower companies at this point of time is premature.

What about Iraq-bound Nepalis stuck in Mumbai?

I am told that there are around 10,000 such people in Mumbai. We hear horror stories about the exploitation and misery they are subject to. That is why we need to reassess the entire issue.

Now that the government has won the Supreme Court case to make manpower companies select workers through a lottery

system, how are you going to enforce it?

We have asked Lumbini Overseas to adopt the lottery system within seven days. If they do so, things will move smoothly. But if they defy us, they will have to face action.

Will this be for South Korea only, or for all countries?

We had to introduce the lottery system for South Korea because there were too many applicants for a few posts. There aren't such big crowds for so few jobs in the case of other places where Nepali workers usually go. If the number of the applicants increases significantly, we will have to introduce the lottery system for other markets also. Our decision on the lottery system came from the recommendation of an official report.

Does this mean you will also be changing the law?

We are amending the Labour Act in which we will also include provisions for the lottery system. We have already amended the draft, which is under discussion.

Manpower agencies claim that bureaucrats in your ministry and the Department of Labour had pocketed hefty commissions from them but after you came in, they could not get work done the way they wanted.

I can take action against such bureaucrats only if there is proof. A minister is not Hitler, he will have to follow rules and regulations.

Have you initiated any investigation on such alleged scams?

What I know is that the ministry and the department are both all out to implement the idea of the lottery system I have introduced. The officials in both the agencies are cooperating fully.

What are the prime markets for Nepali labourers?

Malaysia has emerged as the top market. Then follow Gulf countries like Qatar and Kuwait, among others. The government does not have the exact figures, but there are 450,000 registered workers in these countries and we believed about 1.2 million Nepalis are working in different foreign countries. That in itself is an indication that foreign employment is an area where there are many irregularities. Many Nepalis have suffered because of fraudulence by manpower agencies, they have had to bear exploitation and hardships in foreign countries. This is the country's major source of income now, and that is why we have to streamline it.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

There has been hardly a dull moment for Raghuji Pant since the former journalist became minister for labour and transport two months ago. Hardly had the dust settled from the controversy over the lottery system for overseas workers, then 13 Nepali workers were taken hostage in Iraq. Pant spoke to *Nepali Times* about the crises.

Mustang in the mo



Travel into the Himalayan rain shadow in the rainy season

SOPHIA PANDE

Pink fields of buckwheat blossoms that look like cotton candy, wild mushrooms that grow as big as your head and tastes just like chicken when sauteed, scenery that looks like Marlboro country—all this is Mustang in the monsoon.

Just 15 minutes from Pokhara by plane to Jomsom and then on foot into the Himalayan rain shadow, Mustang is even more enchanting in the monsoon. The flight is not just the most spectacular on earth as the tiny plane flies up the Kali Gandaki between Annapurna and Dhaulagiri. It is also a journey into a whole different world.

You leave the monsoon clouds and the rain behind in Pokhara for an arid landscape of organ pipe mountains, traders on ponies galloping along the river banks and a sky a deep shade of cobalt that brings tears to your eyes. Due to the lack of vegetation, you can see the foundations of the mountains: the crumpled and folded rock strata that gives us a geological record of the genesis of the world's highest range.

The trek to Lo Manthang is four days from Jomsom and four days back via more or less the same route. However, doing it in seven days (three days there, three back and one full day in Lo Manthang) like we did is not recommended, since it means walking for about 10 hours each day.

The normal route starts

from Kagbeni and is mostly flat, but involves wading across streams. If this doesn't appeal, you can hire horses or even pay one of the diminutive but wiry people to carry you across. Undignified though this latter method may be, it makes for wonderful pictures and you will be providing the local people with a little extra income.

The magnificent Kali Gandaki keeps you company for the first two days, past Chele, a beautiful little town nestled right above the river which boasts of glorious views of the Nilgiri and Tilicho peaks. The route can be a little frightening in places since the 'road' is narrow and winds in and out of the rocky, sandy cliffs. The approach to Chele in the soft evening light makes the already rosy rock faces glow with wonderful warm red tones.

The second day, from Chele to Ghemi, is rough. The first half of the day is a very pleasantly stimulating walk, not too gruelling. Stop at a gem of a village called Samar and the Hotel Himali with its hot strong tea. After Samar you need to dismount during the downhill stretches. Ghemi is situated amidst amazing blue and red cliff faces that are typical of the sedimentary rocks of the trans-Himalaya.

The next day we

started with great verve since the goal was to reach Lo Manthang by evening. Not only were we acclimatised and fitter by then, but we had also made friends with the horses, cargo mules, horse-keepers, mule-driver and Min Bahadur, a trekking guide-cook-companion-storyteller and raiser-of-spirits all rolled in one.

Tsarang is the lunch spot with delicious momos filled with fresh green spinach and of course the ubiquitous garlic soup which is also the local remedy for altitude sickness. Like all towns on the trail, Tsarang has its gumpa, which dominates the settlement. Right across from it is a five-storey Tibetan style fortress, made in the quintessential bright earth colours of Mustangi architecture.

Four-and-a-half hours of plodding and you are in Lo Manthang. The pass just before the descent into the city is so notoriously windy that it is called (what else?) 'Windy Pass' and it offers a breathtaking view of the walled capital of Mustang.

Don't make the mistake we did. Stay a few extra days in Lo Manthang to explore the holy sites and imbibe all the ambience of the Tibetan plateau, while still in Nepal! The restored Thubchen Gumpa, and the three storeyed 'god house' or Jampa Lakhang, contain stunning wall paintings dating back to the 10th century. These have been damaged by damp weather, earthquakes and the ravages of time, but the American Himalayan Foundation (AHF), is funding a heroic mission to restore these paintings to their former beauty. No mean feat, since the paintings are all very intricate and were painted with skilled and

fluid hands. But with help from locals, two Italians have undertaken the task of chipping away plaster that covers some of the old paintings, cleaning and finally retouching them with carefully mixed paints to restore the jewel-like reds, blues and greens.

In addition, there is the Tsechen Shedrubling Monastic School that houses monks from their initiation onwards and teaches them the traditional art of being a monk, as well as the Lo Kunfun Traditional Herbs Medicine Clinic, which teaches young children to become fully qualified amchi traditional healers.

Then its time to retrace the route back to Jomsom, and take another look at the magnificent landscapes, the sweeping vistas and the dramatic cloudscapes that you rushed past on the way up. ●



onsoon



MIN BAJRACHARYA

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Murder of a media man

Editorials from Nepali national dailies

Muzzling media

Kantipur, 19 August

कान्तिपुर

By murdering a journalist and threatening to kill 10 others, the Maoists have once again tried to establish themselves as terrorists. This action has also exposed their unreliable nature to the international community. Following the restoration of democracy, one area that saw vibrant growth was the mass media. But by attacking it, the Maoists have dared uproot the achievements of the popular 1990 movement.

Despite being sandwiched between increasing hostility from the Maoists and growing pressure from the government, journalists in districts across the country are doing their best. There may only be a few such dedicated journalists, but it is due to their responsible reporting on the nationwide rebellion that the urge for peace talks has become the national agenda. It is their reports that inform the international community and shape outside cooperation for peace talks.

But now the Maoists are talking about chopping off the hands of those who file these reports under such hostile and difficult circumstances. By making such an announcement, the Maoists have not only shown that they fear the media but also that they are not interested in talks. A force that is afraid of information cannot win national and international trust when it comes to peace as the sole agenda. Their campaign to wipe out the correspondents in the districts means that they would like to keep the information business under their control. This is essentially a totalitarian concept. The rebels have a slogan of accepting multiparty competition and giving shape to the capitalistic system. But quite contradictory to that statement is their strategy to displace journalists and make the media their slave.

Ungrateful

Rajdhani, 19 August

राजधानी

The murder of journalist Dekendra Raj Thapa, who was from a very poor family, has proved that the Maoists don't practice what they preach. This is deplorable. The Maoists have also proved how ungrateful they are. It is the Nepali press that helped their insurgency gain the publicity it has today. The rebels have no communication media of their own to reach the people. It is the Nepali press that has always taken their message to



... छैन, कामेड छैन, तेस्तो कडा गाली छैन ... ! 'अप्राधी, आतंककारी, हत्यामा मात्र भन्या छन् ... ! खै, सम्मान गरेरै त भन्या होलान् नि ... !'
 "No, comrade, it's not so bad. They just say that we are 'criminals, terrorists, murderers'. They must mean it as a compliment."

all quarters of society.

The rebels in India have not received this cooperation from the Indian press. The Indian media has always downplayed incidents related to the rebels. But in Nepal, the press has always been there for the rebels, be it through news reporting or columns. In doing this, the press has antagonised the government and has as a result come under attack time and again. But what does the Nepali press get in return for all the free publicity it has given the rebels? Death to journalists. The rebels must understand that the Nepali press is also for change. But the difference is that the media tries to bring change through peaceful means, whereas the rebels have taken a path of violence and destruction. In continuing the violence, if the rebels believe that they can obliterate opinion from society by killing and kidnapping journalists, they are grossly mistaken.

Boycott

Nepal Samacharpatra, 19 August

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

Just because a reporter does not advocate the Maoist cause and does not write reports the way they want could mean a death penalty for him. That was the fate of Dekendra Raj Thapa, a Dailekh-based reporter for Radio Nepal. And this deplorable act by the Maoists has exposed them like never before. This is not the first time a Nepali journalist has been killed, though. In the nine-year insurgency, so far the rebels have already killed six journalists and nine others have been killed by the state. The rebels have also kidnapped dozens of journalists, and many have still not been released.

When reporters and correspondents are killed or threatened, the entire publication house comes under stress. As a result of the increasing violence journalism has had to face, more and more media practitioners have chosen other professions. This does no good for the professional growth of the media.

If the Maoists continue to antagonise the media, the press will have to boycott all of their appeals, press statements and opinion articles and instead begin a campaign to expose their violent activities. And once that begins to happen, the rebels will have everything to lose.

Be free

Nispaksha, 24 August

निष्पक्ष

Dekendra Raj Thapa is not the first journalist to be brutally killed by the Maoists. Last year, they beheaded journalist Gyanendra Khadga in Sindupalchok. There is confusion over the political goals of the Maoists, who consider killing and abduction to be trivial matters. Journalists who hesitate to call the Maoists terrorists have themselves become victims of terror. The killing of two Nepali journalists implies that the independent press is now threatened by both the state and the Maoists. The rebel leaders know very well that the journalists bear the responsibility of reporting facts without any fear or bias. It is clear that the Maoists are sending a message



that anyone who writes against them faces a similar fate. Following the international outcry against the Maoists for executing journalists, the leaders have expressed commitment not to repeat such incidents again. They say that killing journalists is against their party policy. But there is no guarantee that the Maoists will adhere to them. Not long ago, Baburam Bhattarai had said that it is not Maoist policy to close down industries, but less than six months later he has done just that. The Maoists are not so naïve that they don't understand that this affects ordinary and low income Nepalis more than the industrialists. This makes it clear that military power has overshadowed their political ideology and that their political values and principles are already becoming weak. This has led the Maoists to become more distanced from the Nepali people. The road blockade, educational strike and similar incidents have all targeted the ordinary people, especially those who live on everyday wages.

Sorry again

Sanghu, 23 August

साँघु

Dekendra Thapa is the sixth journalist that the Maoists have killed so far. The state has already killed nine journalists. Neither side has been able to provide proof for the allegations that they used to justify executing the members of the fourth estate. During the emergency, the government arrested and inhumanely treated more than 500 journalists. When Krishna Sen was killed in police custody, all Nepali journalists staged a countrywide protest against the state, an action for which the Maoists expressed their gratitude. Unfortunately, the Maoists themselves followed suit and killed two reporters.

Killing Thapa was a total violation of the Geneva Human Rights convention, and this has already projected a negative image of the Maoists around the world. That the Maoist leaders realise this is apparent from their recent press statement admitting that they should not have killed Thapa, no matter what his crime. The Maoists still have time to correct themselves. But if they keep on admitting their mistakes and saying sorry after each killing and do not stop now, they are bound to lose all faith even from the few who are sympathetic to them.

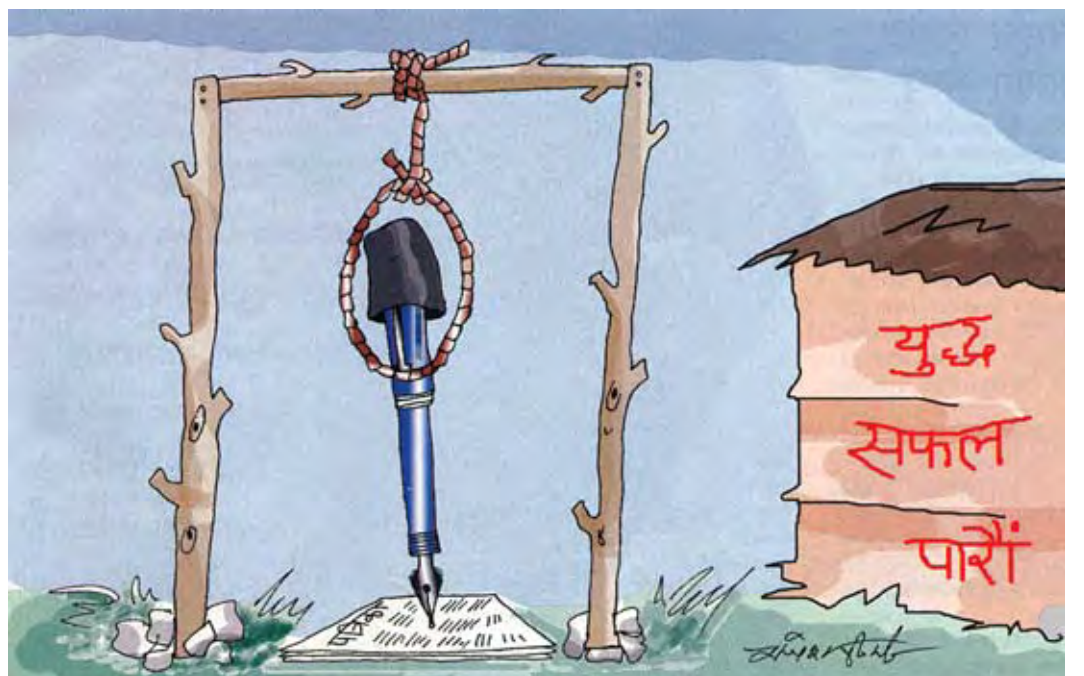
New Maoist strategy

Drishti, 24 August

दृष्टि

The Maoists have indicated that they will further stiffen the embargo they have imposed on the Valley to make the situation more chaotic and unstable. According to our Rukum correspondent, Narayan Shah, the attack in Jumla was carried out within a week after top Maoist leaders including Krishna Bahadur Mahara, Ram Bahadur Thapa (Badal) and Nanda Kishor Pun reached Rukum in order to commence a special new campaign. The just-concluded politburo meeting of the Maoist party has decided to begin a new wave of attacks from next month.

The Maoists have suddenly gone quiet on talks, and have stopped calls for a ceasefire with UN mediation. The Maoist politburo meeting decided to further intensify the strategic offensive phase, and if this was not enough, to start fresh recruiting campaigns across the country. Right now the assumption is that the Maoist leadership is currently engaged in preparing for another major attack. The embargo has been fairly easy to enforce without a big deployment because of the use of terror as a tactic. The blockade could be diversion for centralised military activity in Makwanpur and Sindhuli. It is speculated that the Maoists, who appear dormant in eastern Nepal, could be making plans to attack a district headquarter. They are also planning to increase their militia strength to 60,000, according to sources. This is probably why they aren't really interested in talks at the moment. They are telling their grassroots cadre: "A revolutionary regime can't be obtained through talks, a decisive war is necessary and that it is imminent." They are also waiting to gauge the mindset of the Indians, Europeans, Americans and the UN. The rebels are under extreme pressure to chose between whether to continue fighting or hold peace talks. Our sources say the Maoists have decided to announce their new program within a few days. That should break the mysterious and eerie silence from the Maoists. It is necessary to know where they stand. (Nepalnews.com Translation Service)



Let's make our war successful

नेपाल Nepal, 29 August

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



"I constantly opposed [the Maoist leaders'] idea to advance the movement by individual executions."

Shyam Shrestha, leftist intellectual, in *Desantar* on 22 August.

Rape raids

Nepal, 29 August

नेपाल

An raging wave of rape has gripped Sunsari. In the past six months, more than 16 girls and women have been raped, two were killed after being gang raped. A government probe committee formed recently under Home Ministry has found the incidents are rising due to the negligence of the police and their compliance with the rapists. Some policemen even rape the victims who come to them for help. On 6 August, a 13-year-old girl was brutally raped by Sub-Inspector Sanubabu Rajbangsi of the Debanganj police office. She had been raped the day before by local businessman Narayan Shah and was in police protection. Shah had lured her from her home in Morang, promising to marry her. He took her on a cycle and brought her to Sunsari's Subba Tol. Local villagers found her bleeding, and took her to the police for help. The same night, a drunken Rajbangsi raped her, despite protests from other police staff. When they tried to stop him, he threatened to shoot them. They were forced to stand by and listen to the painful cries of the child in the next room. She is now under the care of an NGO in Biratnagar. The businessman has been arrested, but the policeman disappeared. This was not the first time for Rajbangsi, he had recently tried to rape a female police colleague at gunpoint when he was drunk. No action was taken against him.

plan to recruit nearly 400 female fighters. Before, the Maoists used to include two females in each section of 13 members. Critics have often claimed that the inclusion of females in the Maoist rank and file is to satisfy the sexual desires of their male fighters. But female rebels deny such charges. "Under our revolutionary discipline, the party has always tried to maintain the gender balance," said Maoist activist Bijuli. But she says female guerrillas have problems like marriage, pregnancy and child care which have always hindered their growth. "Our party believes in equal opportunity and participation, but there are practical problems that have not allowed us to reach the leadership level," says Chetana, a member of the Maoist eastern bureau. "But now that the battalion is being created, this will serve as a platform for our growth." The formation of the female battalion appears to be a response to the recruitment of female soldiers into the Royal Nepali Army. But not all the female Maoists have joined the female battalion willingly. Sapana Magar was forced to join the Maoists and recalls: "When they came to my home, my father cursed them and so they took me with them by force. Now they want me to join the battalion." She says girls like her are being forced to join the unit. Comrade Chetana is defensive: "To borrow Mao's words, people are herd of sheep that can be controlled only through power."

Silent parties

Samaya, 26 August

समय

The major political parties are sitting by as dumb spectators despite the Maoist road blockade and closure of industries. While the ruling parties have been of no help in the government's weaknesses, the agitating parties are also just onlookers, delighted that the government is now loaded with more problems. "Although the Maoists are acting irresponsibly by calling on the road blockade, the government is equally to blame," says former deputy prime minister and UML leader, Bam Deb Gautam. Nepali Congress also blames the government for the industry closure. But the parties do not offer solutions. "Our party does not have any official view about this," says NC spokesperson, Arjun Narsingh KC. The closed industries provided revenue of Rs 5 billion per day and employed over 4,000 Nepalis.

Royal visit to India

Janastha, 25 August

आस्था

Even before the prime minister started planning an official visit to India, the palace was already preparing for the king's departure. But sources say the royal visit was postponed as it coincided with Indra Jatra. The king is now going three weeks after Deuba's tour. It has become tradition for Nepal's leaders to visit India and get blessing whenever a new government is formed. Girija Koirala was there last month, Madhab Nepal and Pasupathi Rana have just returned. While the visits were officially for discussing resolution of the Maoist problem, their intentions were to find help to restore their own power in governance as the Maoists still pose a major threat to all parties who form the government.

This is not the first time the king is visiting India since he assumed executive power. But this upcoming royal visit on invitation of Indian president Abdul Kalam is not just another ceremonial meeting, but will centre on Maoist conflict.

India has always taken advantage during Nepal's political crisis. When the people's revolution of 1990 was in full swing, India managed to get support to build the dam in Tanakpur. It also succeeded in ratifying Mahakali Treaty during the hung parliament in 1994.

Female battalion

Dristhi, 24-30 August

दृष्टि

Female cadre will no longer be just showpieces in the Maoist military wing. The rebels have intensified recruitment of women to create a separate female army battalion. In their first selection phase, they have taken 75 females from across Rukum. There are four more selection phases to go and by the end they

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Smooth retreat

The planned withdrawal of US troops has everyone nervous

The United States' planned withdrawal of troops from Asia, which President George Bush announced on 16 August, need not harm peace and stability in the region. But a key condition for a smooth redeployment of US troops is close consultations by America with its allies, something it has not done well so far.

South Korea and Japan need to have their views taken into serious account if this now inevitable withdrawal is to succeed. By contrast, unilaterally announcing the withdrawal—and then unilaterally implementing it—may harm the very purpose that the remaining US troops in Asia are intended to serve: assuring deterrence, stability and nonproliferation in Asia.

The withdrawal plan is causing countless worries. In Japan, there are concerns that it will make the country America's frontline command post in Asia, possibly beyond the scope of its bilateral security treaty with the US. One result is that China feels nervous about the implications of any expansion of the American-Japanese military partnership.

But the impact of America's planned troop withdrawals is felt most keenly in South Korea. In June, the Bush administration revealed its plan to withdraw some 12,500 of the 37,000 US soldiers stationed in South Korea by the end of 2005.

The US Defence Department justifies this as part of the so-called 'Global Posture Review' to provide more flexibility and mobility in deploying troops to more urgently needed places. But the unilateral nature of the announcement and the abrupt timing has incited alarm in South Korea that withdrawal could pose serious risks to the vital role that US forces have performed in deterring another war in Korea.

South Koreans genuinely fear that the plan may weaken deterrence by sending North Korea—which is demanding a US military withdrawal while refusing to abandon its nuclear weapons ambitions—the message that intransigence pays. Indeed, it should not be forgotten that North Korea maintains an army of 1.1 million troops.

Moreover, the manner in which the Bush administration unveiled its withdrawal plan has weakened the US-Korean alliance's credibility. America's unilateral announcement has fuelled rumours that withdrawal must have something to do with the rising tide of anti-Americanism in South Korea, especially with the country's reluctance and delay in dispatching an additional 3,600 of its own soldiers to Iraq.

The Bush administration tries to rebut these charges by saying that the plan will not weaken the deterrence capabilities of American forces, for America's far more powerful air and naval presence in the area will be maintained. Moreover, the US plans to strengthen South Korea's own forces by supplying some \$11 billion worth of high-technology equipment over the next five years.

Militarily, this argument does make sense. Politically and psychologically, however, the method raises questions about the ongoing viability of the US-Korean security alliance, for the alliance now seems adrift, without a common purpose and with little direction from either side.

Yet the Bush administration insists: "The US views South Korea as a strong and steadfast ally. We are committed to South Korea's security and to our alliance and partnership with Seoul." If Washington is serious about this, it should transform this commitment into a long-term and comprehensive alliance that can survive the current estrangement—and continue even after Korean unification—by making a joint declaration with South Korea's government at the highest level.

It is necessary for the US and South Korea to reaffirm their common interests and values in pursuing deterrence, nonproliferation, stability, and democracy on the Korean peninsula and across Asia. It should be possible for responsible officials to work out guiding principles for concrete security cooperation. America must treat South Korea as a full partner with its own voice in making decisions that affect its security interests. As an American ally for 51 years, and as East Asia's third-largest economy, South Korea is entitled to be fully consulted on such decisions.

Despite anti-American sentiments among some South Koreans, a majority of the country's people wants American forces to remain as a stabilising force. Securing a peaceful and nuclear-free Korean peninsula, a place where the interests of China, Japan, Russia and America directly intersect, is one of the most important security goals anywhere on the planet. For this reason, America and South Korea must restore a strategic vision for the future. ● (Project Syndicate)

Ahn Byung-joon is Visiting Professor of International Relations at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, Tokyo and a Member of Korea's National Academy of Sciences.

India's 1.5 Billion

Managing India's future mammoth population needs to start now

India's population is now a little over one billion. It will almost certainly surpass 1.5 billion by mid-century before it stops growing. This actually represents a considerable

COMMENT

Robert Cassen

demographic slowdown: India's population more than tripled during the past sixty years. Moreover, the economy is growing much faster than before. So will India be able to provide a comfortable home for 1.5 billion people?

I recently co-authored a study that concludes, with modest optimism, that while India can manage its population growth, it also faces a number of major difficulties.

the poor. Unless recent trends can be reversed, the growing economic and demographic gulf between India's north and east and its south and west will pose a serious political threat.

The environmental impact of 1.5 billion inhabitants forms the other major challenge. India's past population growth has been accompanied by improving health, education and economic welfare. But the environment has been suffering.

Our study concludes that India can have faster economic and industrial growth, higher rates of energy consumption and a cleaner environment. But this is not what has happened so far. Air, soil and water pollution has been growing, causing hundreds of thousands of deaths every year.

treatment capacity. At the same time, India's growing population will make increasing demands on water supplies—mainly for agriculture, which absorbs over 80 percent of all fresh water India consumes. If the population grows by 50 percent, the country will need to grow 50 percent more food. But there won't be any more water. In fact, there could well be less water than there is now, owing to pollution and climate change. So India will need huge increases in water efficiency.

Here, too, there are examples of improvement. But there is also far too much populist politicking, with promises of free water for farmers. Doing what has to be done to ensure sustainable water supplies—controlling pollution, encouraging conservation, regulating and charging where



True, poverty fell in the 1990's, while literacy rates and school attendance rose. But they did so unevenly. Most of India's big poor states—Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh—suffer from a combination of relatively slow economic growth and rapid demographic growth. Only Rajasthan's economy has kept pace with the rest of the country. The other four hardly benefitted from trade and regulatory liberalisation.

Similarly, states where birth rates fell earlier, such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu, are already enjoying shrinking school-age populations, whereas school-age numbers in Bihar will still be rising until around 2025. But the majority of children in Kerala and Tamil Nadu are already in school, while in Bihar they are not.

These five poor states contain 45 percent of India's population and 56 percent of its poor. In 20 years, they will account for more than half the population and 75 percent of

The key to a clean future is clean technologies. Sometimes these technologies pay for themselves and will be adopted. But Indian producers and transporters will not invest in them if they bear the costs while the public at large receives the benefits. In these cases, the government will have to provide incentives or regulate and tax. Unfortunately, when the main beneficiaries are the poor, corporations are powerful and governments are weak or corrupt, good environmental practices are far from guaranteed.

Nonetheless, there are success stories. Delhi's barely breathable air has become tolerable, following a big move to compressed natural gas in public transport, retirement of old vehicles and higher emissions standards. Delhi's cleaner air hasn't cost much, yet other cities have been slow to follow suit.

The biggest problem is water pollution, with discharges into canals and rivers growing faster than

necessary—is politically tough. Eventually, however, India has no choice: there are already sporadic riots over water shortage, while water tankers move under armed guard in some cities and virulent conflicts arise between communities over water-sharing. But one fears that something more dreadful than the daily misery must occur before India's politicians decide to act. Three national water surveys all conclude that India can have a satisfactory water future. As with the other challenges posed by population growth, the issue is not whether the future can be managed, but whether it will be.

India may or may not be the world's next economic wonder, but it will have to solve its age-old problems, as well as its new ones, if it is going to be a good place to live for the vast majority of its citizens. ● (Project Syndicate)

Robert Cassen is Professor of Economics, London School of Economics, and editor and co-author of 21st Century India: Population, Economy, Human Development and the Environment.



After Arafat

It's a question of what, rather than who, would be needed to replace the ageing leader

Yasser Arafat appears, once again, to have held off challenges to his rule. But his latest victory does not answer the question of what will happen when he finally does leave the political scene.

ANALYSIS
Barry Rubin



When Arafat was seriously ill in 2003, Palestinians were near panic. Ahmad Dudin, former Fatah leader in Hebron, said, "The Palestinian Authority has always been a one-man operation. Arafat never really agreed to share power. That is the problem." Not only does Arafat have no designated successor, but he has crippled the creation of institutions that

could provide for a smooth transition, develop new leaders, mediate disputes among competitors or check the power of a future dictator.

But at some point, Arafat will depart. He is 74 years old and cannot be described as healthy. Arafat's ability to symbolise the Palestinian cause throughout the world has worn thin in recent years, but any successor would be more obscure.

So what will happen on his demise? The best way to address that question is to focus not on who, but on *what*, would replace Arafat. In a certain sense, Arafat is the Palestinian Authority (PA). As a pro-reform Fatah official put it, "This is Arafat's narcissism. We are all suffering

from it. I am afraid the Palestinian people will still be suffering even after his death." Arafat's departure will leave a vacuum that no one will be able to fill. Indeed, Arafat has had several roles and in each his stature has been unique. While nominally the Palestinians have a collective leadership, the reality is that Arafat has overwhelming control. He has been the Palestinian movement's sole leader almost from the day he founded it in 1959. Other contenders, like Abu Jihad and Abu Iyad, were assassinated and Faisal al-Husseini—the only major leader to rise to prominence—died young. Arafat alone has the power to make everyone obey him, even if he often decides not to exercise it.

Some argue that an obvious alternative is democracy. But the more likely outcome is an unstable and ineffective collective leadership, a division of power into fiefdoms or a high degree of anarchy. In a post-Arafat situation, it will be much harder for successors to impose discipline and hierarchy on the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), the PA or Fatah.

Nor will Arafat's departure revive hopes for a political settlement with Israel. True, Arafat's refusal to compromise on such matters as Israel's legitimacy and Palestine's borders has been a critical

reason for the failure to resolve the Israel-Palestinian or Arab-Israeli conflicts. Given Arafat's stature and control, he could have downsized the Palestinians' goals to acceptance of a state in only part of historic Palestine. But he never took the leap and the major issues remain unresolved.

Even if future Palestinian leaders want to resolve the issues that block peace with Israel, doing so will be far more difficult than it would have been for Arafat. Under Arafat's long rule, whole generations of Palestinians have been indoctrinated with the belief that only total victory is acceptable. Indeed, Arafat has constructed the Palestinian movement's dogmatic and uncompromising intellectual and psycho-political style. Arafat's legacy is thus a political culture in which a leader may portray a disastrous tactic, strategy or outcome as a victory and be believed. So no political price is ever paid for continuing wars that cannot be won or making demands that will not be met. The acceptance of violence without limit will be the most devastating feature of Arafat's legacy. Many movements throughout history have used violence, but few have so thoroughly justified and romanticised it.

This problem will not go away when Arafat does. How can someone with less

legitimacy than Arafat escape this justification of violence? Entire groups— Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Fatah's al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades—owe their power to their willingness to kill Israelis, the ultimate measure of political virtue. Any effort by Palestinian security authorities to put down these groups by force would lead to far more violence. Arafat's refusal to take sides ideologically helped create an illusion of Palestinian unity, with everyone dedicated to a single Palestinian struggle. He achieved this consensus by devaluing statehood as an end in itself, building political unity on the myth of an idealised pre-1948 Palestinian society that could be "recreated" on the basis of the "right of return" and Israel's disappearance. These aims are never going to be realised, but they also have never been subordinated to "ending the occupation," so they form the glue of Palestinian nationalism. In today's divisive circumstances, the emergence of a new Palestinian leader will most likely take years. During that interregnum, we should expect deadlock, anarchy or civil war. ● (Project Syndicate)

Barry Rubin is director of the Global Research in International Affairs (GLORIA) Centre, editor of the Middle East Review of International Affairs, and co-author of Yasser Arafat: A Political Biography.

Lending reforms

EMAD MEKAY in WASHINGTON

The Washington-based World Bank, the world's largest public lender for development, says it is replacing its controversial "adjustment lending" with a new set of rules more attuned to poverty reduction in developing countries. These will put more emphasis on what it calls "development policy lending", or DPL.

But watchdog groups say the bank's fundamental approach to the lending, including imposing conditions on borrowing nations to advance policy changes, determining if a nation's macroeconomic framework is "appropriate" and close cooperation with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) remains mostly unchanged.

World Bank Vice-President James W Adams said the new policy would give borrowing nations more say in devising their own economic plans and will have a long-term development focus. "We're moving away from a very prescriptive list of policies that were part of the early adjustment lending—focusing largely on fiscal constraints, trade policy reforms, pricing reforms—to a much broader range of issues," Adams said, adding these include health, education and environment.

The World Bank gives out two types of loans: 'adjustment (now 'development policy') lending,' to influence governments' economic policies and 'investment lending', which

The World Bank has patched its policies, but there may still be holes



finances specific projects.

Recently, structural adjustment has been a controversial aspect of the former because it imposed conditions that forced changes such as cutting spending for health and education, privatising public assets, deregulating the

economy and allowing multinational companies to compete with local firms.

Government policy in many nations across the globe, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, adopted the cutting of programs aimed at the poor as the route to restoring economic

balance, a strategy that prompted uproar from development campaigners and economists. Structural adjustment also came under fire for ignoring individual differences between countries and regions.

In announcing its new approach, the World Bank admitted some shortcomings of the old policy, which it had long denied. "I think, however, the bank got too prescriptive and, in fact, was presenting a one-size-fits-all (approach) to governments," Adams said. "In moving away from that, we are emphasising our desire to see the governments develop policies. This broader approach will form the basis for bank support."

The bulk of policy lending will now come in the form of loans for certain programs for activities already completed, rather than for achievements promised. That means the lender will be able to provide funding based on project performance, even if the measures achieved were not precisely as promised.

Adams says the new approach will also give countries more ownership of their economic development strategies, a long-time demand of borrowing nations and development groups. Unlike the past approach, DPL also refers to the importance of vetting the bank's efforts to ensure that the possible environmental or social effects of its lending are properly reviewed.

But watchdogs say the scheme lacks sincerity and may be an attempt by the bank to transfer responsibility for its policies to borrowing governments.

"This is a huge sham," said Rick Rowden of ActionAid USA. "This is a way of relinquishing responsibility from their own accountability and saying, 'oh, it's all on the borrowing government. Don't hold us accountable.'" ● (IPS)

http://www.childtrafficking.com

Everything you wanted to know and share about trafficking worldwide, now in one comprehensive portal

At a time when war is being waged worldwide against the trafficking of men, women, boys and girls, the global community has often felt the need for more information on the issue of human trafficking, its history, its present, its future and its links with countless other issues that affect people.

REVIEW

Archana Tamang



Numerous studies have been conducted, thousands of conferences and seminars have been held and dozens of proposals to work on the issue of human trafficking are floated each day. Sometimes the magnitude of the events and publications actually seem larger than the issue. Almost everywhere, the need for sharing knowledge, exchanging good practices and information dissemination have been emphasised.

There are several human trafficking information databanks globally and in Nepal efforts have been made to create information pools, housed either by the government or activist NGOs with support from the UN and other agencies.

And then there's www.childtrafficking.com. This website was conceived in Nepal and is the brainchild of a host of Nepali and international anti-trafficking and anti-exploitation activists who dared dream of creating a platform for the public to learn and share information in order to bring about much-needed change against trafficking and rights abuses and violations.

Reinhard Fichtl of Terre Des Hommes, one of the website's editors, calls it "a 'people's website', based on a solid

scientific foundation". www.childtrafficking.com presently has close to 1,000 documents, all related to the trafficking of women and children. This makes it the largest compilation of web links on human trafficking and related issues such as the sexual abuse and exploitation of children, HIV/AIDS prevention and ethical considerations. The website presently hosts more than 200 studies and compilation of national and international laws, instruments, policies and practices.

An interesting aspect of the site is the effort made by the editors to collect first hand accounts of the experiences of ground level activists and workers across the region. "What we want is to allow 'real' activists to share their experiences through this website. Whether their write ups are grammatically and linguistically correct is not important," explains Fichtl, who is also coming up with a related interactive CD-ROM in the near future.

In our race against time, we need information to be available easily, effortlessly and quickly. For some of us Nepalis working against human trafficking in small ways, it is worrying to see the distraction and dilution of the real issues caused by a lack of coordination and effort. Academia, researchers, journalists, practitioners, government agencies, NGOs, the UN and just about anyone else who cares and wants to make a difference will be able to come together on common ground via www.childtrafficking.com. Log on! It's worth every second of your time. ●



THOMAS KELLY

The website contains many pictures and testimonies of trafficked women and children. This one from Nepal (left) is of a young Tamang woman who was rescued from a brothel in Mumbai. "My mother sold me when I was 13 to an agent down the road from our house. He took me to Mumbai. I didn't know what was happening. He told me he was taking me to get a job in a glass factory." In the brothel, she was raped repeatedly until she complied with the wishes of her new madam and became a full-time working prostitute. After being forced to service as many as 50 men a day for the three years she was in sexual servitude, she was sent back to Nepal infected with HIV. She now has full blown AIDS. In spite of her ill health, however, she participates in a border surveillance program, keeping a lookout for traffickers and their victims.

(right) "Former victims of trafficking can recognise those being trafficked," says the director of an organisation dedicated to assisting the victims of trafficking. Receiving assistance from the police, young girls rescued from the brothels are eager to provide surveillance at the border and conduct the interrogations of possible victims. Some of these girls are terminally ill with AIDS. One says, "I know I don't have long (to live), but stopping the traffickers is my revenge—the only one I have."

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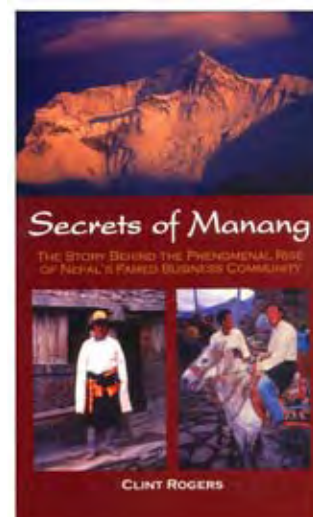
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Secrets of Manang

Clint Rogers
Mandala Publications, 2004
Rs 550

Clint Rogers explores the entrepreneurial Manang community and their rise to economic success. With an in-depth view of their emergence as prominent international traders in the 1960s and later as tourism entrepreneurs in the 1990s, Rogers writes comprehensively and his illustrations provide a compelling picture of the

history, landscape, culture and economy of what is perhaps the most enchanting valley in the Himalayas.

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

Taking aim

Correct alignment is essential for improving your game

Imagine wanting to reach a distant goal and then taking a stance that points you somewhere else. Just like this happens in life, so it does in sports as well, and this is almost always a recipe for inconsistency. To get away repeatedly with such inconsistencies using sheer luck, forget being a good sportsperson—instead, choose a career in pretending to serve the public.

One of the first fundamentals taught in target-oriented sports is the proper adjustment of the body and equipment in relation to the target. I have found that beginners and even average golfers are almost always deficient in this respect.

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



Poor alignment is why you often see amateurs hitting the ball on a straight flight path right into trouble. If club golfers would just align properly, their game can quickly improve.

A major factor that needs to be understood for achieving consistent alignment is that the clubface has to be in line with the target before aligning the body or feet. A common mistake amateurs make is aligning their feet first and then trying to adjust the clubface in the right direction.

An alignment technique that some people use is the image of railroad tracks, with the outside track being the target line and the inside track being the line of the feet. A problem with this method is that since you have to rely on the image in your head, you cannot be sure that it will provide consistent results unless you spend hours of practice honing your visualisation skills.

There are several other methods on how to align properly. One is that while practising on the driving range, you place a club on the ground near your feet parallel to the target line. This helps ingrain a sense of proper alignment and builds confidence in your set up. However this method is just for practising, and cannot be used on the golf course.

Here are some tips on building up a routine that will allow you to consistently and comfortably point yourself in the right direction.



1. While taking aim, always first stand behind the ball on the target line (the line that runs from the ball through the target) and pick a point on the ground no more than six inches in front of the ball.
2. Approach the ball from the side and address it by placing your feet together. From this position, align the clubface towards the line of the point that you've picked in front of the ball. Don't look towards the target while trying to align the clubface—focus on that immediate point only.
3. Once the clubface is correctly positioned, adjust your stance so that the line of your feet is parallel to the target line (90 degrees to the bottom of the clubface). For consistency, line up the clubface to the reference point and then concentrate on the feet. Also make sure your hips and shoulders are parallel to the target line.
4. Finally, without lifting your upper body or turning your shoulders, turn your head and look toward the target. If you lift your head or rotate your body you will alter your mind's perception of where the target lies. Look at the target only to verify your alignment.

You should know that even tour professionals have to work regularly on alignment, since it is one of the keys to consistent shot making. ●

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

The Olympic babel

There is a new event in Athens: the language hurdle

PETER BERLIN in ATHENS

The press conference after the men's doubles table tennis finals spun into chaos more dramatically than the slice shots in the match.

Chinese winners Ma Lin and Chen Qi had modestly downplayed their own contribution, praised partners and coaches and then fallen silent as the translator rendered their words into English. Then came the silver medalists from Hong Kong. As Hong Kong-born Li Ching started, a journalist began shouting. This rapidly turned into a chant taken up by half-a-dozen of his colleagues. After a brief exchange with the translator, Li smiled and started to speak again. This time there were cheers.

The Hong Kong media wanted Li to speak Cantonese. The translator only spoke Mandarin. Li chattered away for five minutes. When he had finished, his partner, Ko Lai Chak gave a monotone two-minute translation into Mandarin. Then the professional translator gave an English version, his sulky manner contrasting with the happy sentiments he was expressing. He took less than a minute. The Greek translator then offered her version: one sentence.

Then a Dane called Finn started speaking in English. That's when a German journalist stood up, saying: "That's enough. Too many languages."

In its babel of languages, the Olympics are Euro 2004 cubed.



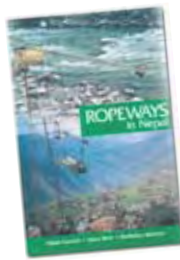
What made the Euros so interesting is that it was the EU at play. And it strongly suggested that the European nations will never be able to talk clearly to each other.

As in Athens, the agreed common press conference language was English. The French, of course, turned up without a translator and were fined. They borrowed a UEFA official who bewildered journalists by translating 'dechets' correctly but unintelligibly, so coach Jacques Santini reportedly said that his team's bad passing was 'leftovers.' He meant a waste. Giovanni Trapatoni said he wasn't going to change his team, but the Italian translator happily reversed his meaning and told the non-Italian speakers he would change his team. The

Portuguese translator whispered shyly until his audience grew impatient. Then he told them that he wasn't going to shout just so that they could hear him.

There are other translation handicaps. At big events, the IOC has installed the full Brussels quota of translators and issued radios which can be tuned to the required language. After the men's cycling road race, an Italian journalist impatiently shouted questions without waiting for the microphone. All that could be heard over the headphones from the French translator was an irritated commentary on the amateurism around him. "I can't hear him. Make him use the microphone. How can I translate if they won't use the microphones." And so on. ● (NYT)

NEW BOOKS IN TOWN



Ropeways in Nepal: Context, Constraints and Co-evolution

Edited by Dipak Gyawali, Ajaya Dixit and Madhukar Upadhyaya, the book consists of policy and planning reviews, case studies of success and failures, and analyses of what an alternative transport future for Nepal might look like. The authors in their chapters argue that *gaun besi* ropeways would provide impetus to rural development by reducing drudgery, making markets accessible and diversifying livelihood opportunities for marginal farmers.

Adaptive Capacity and Livelihood Resilience: Adaptive Strategies for Responding to Floods and Droughts in South Asia.

Edited by Marcus Moench and Ajaya Dixit, the book attempts to understand and disaggregate the factors which enable communities to adapt to floods, droughts and climatic variability by examining the courses of action households actually take during flood and drought events. Case studies of Gujarat and Rajasthan for Droughts; and Nawalparasi, Rautahat and Gorakhpur for Floods have been used to broaden the knowledge base in these contexts. The book is an outcome of a unique collaboration between local grass-root organizations, regional non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and international organizations working across South Asia.



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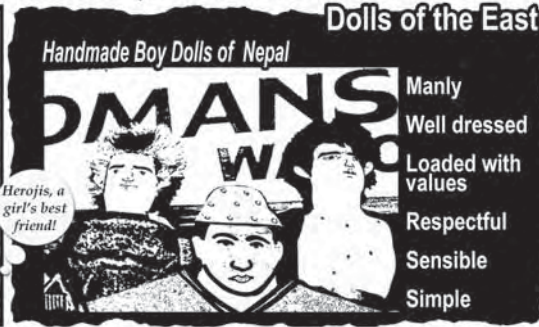
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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Charcoal drawings** by Youdhisthir Maharjan at Indigo Gallery, until 29 August. 4413580, www.asianart.com/indigo
- ❖ **Contemporary Expressions from India** Various artists celebrating India's 58th Independence Day. Until 30 August at the Siddhartha Art Gallery
- ❖ **Gaijatra** on Hitsfm91.2, 31 August. Includes 'Gaiko geet, goruko katha' special, 3-4PM and 10-11PM

EVENTS

- ❖ **Salsa** at the Latin Quarter, Babar Mahal Revisited. Every Friday, 7PM onwards. Special Carlsberg 'buy two, get one free' offer on 27 August.
- ❖ **Friday Forum** with Narayan Shrestha, founder and president of Helping Hands Health Education, at the American Centre, Gyaneshwor. 3PM on 27 August.
- ❖ **Salsa nite** at the Rox, 7:30 PM onwards on 28 August. Rs 300, includes drink
- ❖ **Movies** 2PM onwards at the Alliance Francaise: Les anges de la nuit, 29 August
- ❖ **Discussions at Martin Chautari**: Current politics, 29 August at 3PM
- ❖ **St. Augustine's (Kalimpong)** School Day Celebration @ Hotel Nirvana, Thamel. 5.30 PM on 28 August. Tickets Rs 200 for 1996 batch & later and Rs 400 for everyone else. 9851022090
- ❖ **Surviving in culture** Support the Blue Diamond Society. 31 August, 12 noon to 2PM, starting at Tridevi Marg. Includes candlelight memorial at Hanuman Dhokha for AIDS deaths last year. 4-443350, 4-445147. bluediamondsociety@yahoo.com
- ❖ **Changa Chait 2061** Kite flying at Club Himalaya, Nagarkot. 25 September, 2 and 16 October. Rs 100. 4410432



MUSIC

- ❖ **Reggae Night** with full circle and friends at Moksh on 28 August. 7PM onwards, Rs 250 including Reggae shot
- ❖ **Deo** at Not Just The Jazz Bar Fridays at Hotel Shangri-la, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Jatra Friday Nites** Live music by The Strings. 4256622
- ❖ **Live music** at Moksh. Musician's night with open mic after 9PM Tuesdays and Tri Groove on Fridays. 7PM onwards, free entry.

DRINKS

- ❖ **Island Bar** with DJ Raju, Abhaya and The Cloud Walkers. The Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Free drink deals** at Red Onion Bar, Lazimpat
- ❖ **Monsoon Wine Festival** at Kilroy's, Thamel. Rs 150 per large glass. 4250440/41.
- ❖ **Lychee Martinis** and latest club hits at Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 4491234

FOOD

- ❖ **Malaysian Food Festival** at the Hyatt Regency, until 27 August
- ❖ **Delicious barbecue dinner** Fridays at Summit Hotel. 5521810
- ❖ **Friday Nights** at Subterranea Club Kilroy. 4412821
- ❖ **Farm House Café** Nature with your meals at Park Village Hotel. 4375280
- ❖ **Café Bahal** Newari and continental cuisine under the giant Cinnamon tree at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4700632
- ❖ **Vegetarian Creations** at Stupa View Restaurant. 4480262
- ❖ **Splash Spring BBQ** Wednesday and Friday evenings, 6PM onwards. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu.
- ❖ **Executive Lunch** at Toran Restaurant, Dwarika's. 4479488
- ❖ **Sunny Side Up Weekend BBQ** at Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu. 4273999
- ❖ **The Beer Garden** at Vajjyantha, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Dwarika's Thali Lunch** at the Heritage courtyard. 4479488

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Dhoom reinvents the classic cops and robbers tale and brings it into the 21st century. Kabir (John Abraham) and his gang are a group of slick, mean, fast riding bikers who commit daring robberies and then transform into inconspicuous pizza delivery boys. Jai Dixit (Abhishek Bachchan) plays the honest cop who is brought into catch these speed demons. He ropes in Ali (Uday Chopra) a happy-go-lucky mechanic and prodigious bike rider to help him. And so the chase begins...

NOW SHOWING Bookings open

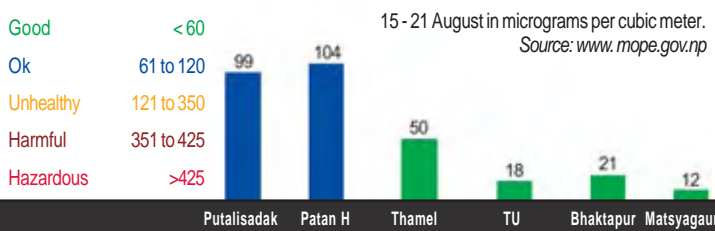
Call 4442220 for show timings www.jainepal.com

JAI NEPAL CINEMA



KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

The unbelievable has occurred—over the last week, Putali Sadak actually maintained average PM10 (particles small enough to enter the human body) levels of less than 100, well below the national standards of 120mg/m³. The rest of the Valley did just as well, with pollution levels dropping in every one of the six monitoring stations. As usual, Matsyagaun proved the healthiest with a crystal clear PM10 concentration of 12.



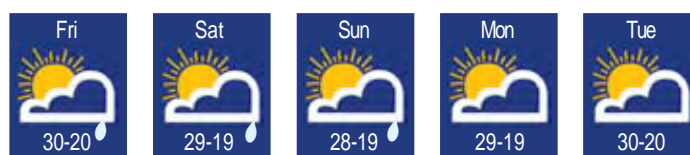
NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



There is a trough over western Nepal that originated from the Arabian Sea that is nearly spent its moisture, and another low pressure area over Bangladesh is heading our way from the Bay as this satellite picture taken on Thursday at noon clearly shows. The monsoon is therefore not yet over and we will have another bout of rain into the weekend. August has been drier than average, with only 170 mm of rain so far, much less than the average 300 mm. Ditto for central and western Nepal. Expect bright sunny mornings, humid afternoons and brief night showers.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



McQuay AIR CONDITIONER



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HOUSE ON RENT: At Panipokhari, opposite the American embassy, behind the petrol pump station. 1 master bedroom w/t attached bath, 3 bedrooms w/t semi-attached bath, drawing room, dining room kitchen, store-room, puja room, watchman room, an outhouse and garage. Total area of compound 7500 sq. ft. For details contact mobile no. 9851024874.

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For insertions ring NT Marketing at 5543333-36.



KIRAN PANDAY

DEUBA DOES THE DEUDA: Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba taking part in the Deuda Dance Festival at BICC on Monday.



KIRAN PANDAY

PEACEFUL DISCUSSIONS: A discussion organised on Wednesday by Civil Solidarity for Peace focused on immediate peace talks at Chamber Bhawan in Jamal and included (from l-r) Mathura Prasad Shrestha, Madhab Nepal and Arjun Narsingh KC.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

TALKING TOURISM: Mirza Mohammad Taiyab, director of Tourism Malaysia (second from right) takes the mic at a press briefing on the company's new tourism package deal with Marcopolo Travels, on Friday at the Hyatt Regency.



KIRAN PANDAY

UNHOLY MESS: Garbage piled up in front of the entrance to Naag Pokharki directly across from the Narayanhiti palace, on Sunday, the final day of the three-day Naag Pokhari festival.



KIRAN PANDAY

HEAR THIS: Members of the Maoist Victims Association bang plates as they call for peace and reiterate their demands at Ratna Park on Sunday.

All-in-one

Rarely does Kathmandu get to see an art exhibition of such range and variety as the 'Contemporary Expressions of India' displayed at the Siddhartha Art Gallery to mark India's Independence Day last week. Art aficionados would have had to travel the length and breadth of that vast nation to see all the work on display, yet here you have them all under one roof.

The exhibition showcases 20 artists from various parts of India, from three generations and using different modes, genres and expressions. "It is a diverse and unique work that reflects the spirit of a multicultural nation celebrating 58 years of its political and cultural independence," explains the gallery's Sangita Thapa, who brought the paintings to Nepal. The artists on display are Pramod Kumar, Buwa Shete, Chintan

Upadhyay, Sheila Makhrijani, Chandra Bhattacharjee, Anand Panchal, Manish Chavda, Santosh More, Hema Upadhyay, Sanjeev Sempimpare, Suryakant Lokhande, Vinita Gupta, Satish Wavare, Sobha Ghare, Jitendra Singh Baoni, Datta Bansode, Anand Mali, Beena Pradhan, Sudarshan Shetty and Rajendra Khapse. All are accomplished painters and have won various awards.

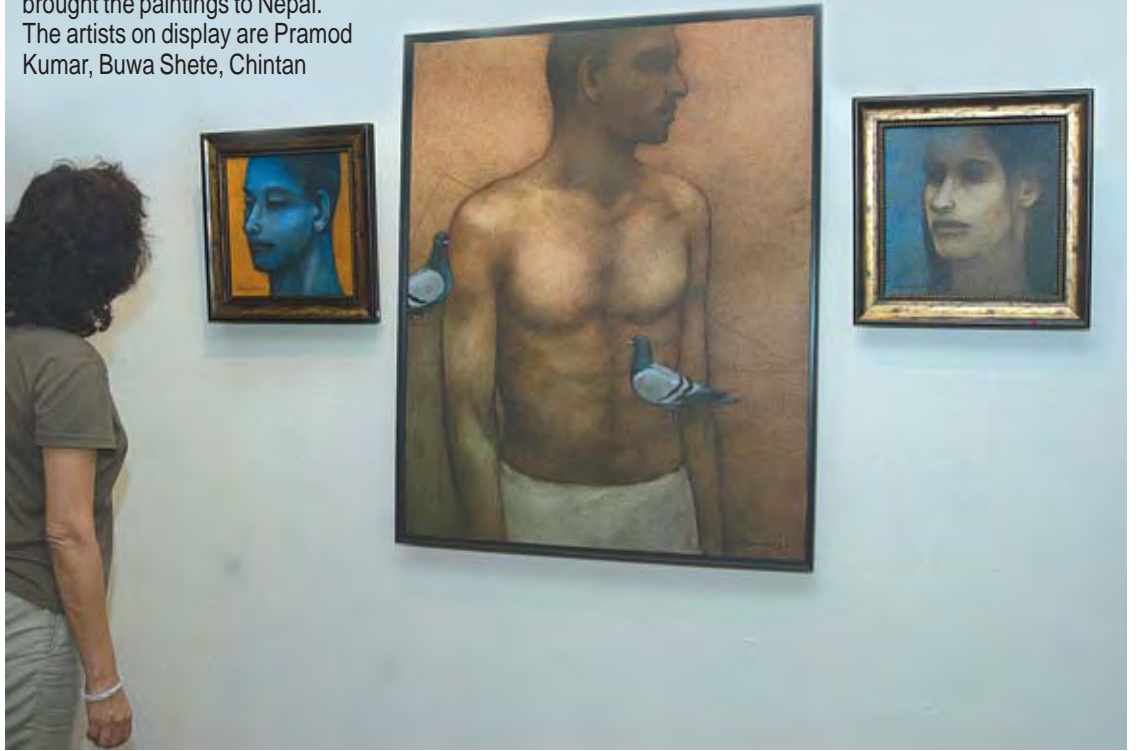
"I want to define the distance between this two visuals, the seen and the unseen. The visible, which is in front of our eyes and the invisible which is on the other side of our eyes," says Vanita Gupta, summing up her own work as well as those of her fellow artists from India. The common thread running through the works is the deep feelings the artists

express about their country.

The materials they have chosen to express themselves in is varied and unique, ranging from Santosh More's symbolic scrolls, concentric circles and dots to Hema Upadhyay's use of photo cut-outs of herself as the visible protagonist in her work. This is a display of a wide range of artists who are individualistic in their expressions and it is a treat to view such a spectrum of artistic talent at one go.

As Vibhuraj Kapoor from Mumbai's Gallery Beyond says: "This is the beginning of a dialogue, the furthering of cultural exchange." ● (Aarti Basnyat)

Contemporary Expressions of India is on at the Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited till 30 August.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Tapas & Margaritas

This is a time not meant for siesta, but to cherish a special moment and say hola to the great Tapas & Margaritas.

"Tapa" is a Spanish word which means (lid) a concept which originated many years ago. When entrepreneurs finished work for the day they would go to the "Tascas" to enjoy a well earned drink which was usually covered by a piece of bread. This tradition often involved cured meats, sausages eaten as snacks to accompany the drinks.

Margarita is a cocktail whose main liquor base is tequila. It is a sour drink which is a mixture of Tequila and Lime.

Date : 3rd, 4th & 5th September
Venue : The Piano Bar & Poolside
Time : 11am - 6 pm
Price : 500/- Nett

Includes a cool splash in the pool along with a pint of Carlsberg.



For further information, please contact Guest Relations at 4248999 extn. 2865.



Alive from Kathmandu

We'd like to welcome our viewers back to this specially exaggerated edition of EmpTV's 25-hour-a-day Breakneck News. Let's now go live to Kathmandu where our parachute correspondent, the one-and-only Khubsurat Dutt, is standing by in the relative safety of the newly-opened J

Bar in Thamel with the very latest.

UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit



Khubsurat, let me ask you first, are you OK? Do you have enough nibbles? Shall we airdrop you some dalmot by DHL?

"Kasto bekuf raichha, Hindi ma po bolchha, hoina bhanya, wrong number kya."

Sorry about that, we will try to track down Khubsurat dead or alive in the Nepal capital in the course of the day. The last we heard, she had a late night at the casino and has gone sightseeing to Bhaktapur with her dad, Pappu, mom, Ammi, hubby, Aniruddha, and sister, Mumtaz, who have all taken the perilous journey to the besieged Nepali capital. Brave people.

As Khubsurat told us yesterday: "When will I get a chance to see Kathmandu with my whole family?" And that sums up the selfless professionalism and remarkable nonchalance of this

intrepid correspondent who has walked into the jaws of death with such unconcern for the safety of herself and her near and dear ones.

As I said, we will be trying to track Khubsurat down later in this news bulletin, that is unless she has switched off her mobile and is swimming at the Hack & Yeti, or shopping at Dalbhat Bhateni.

And now, to give you an idea of just how bad things are in Kathmandu let me read you some news reports from this morning's Nepalese newspapers:

Nepal Goes To India

KATHMANDU—UML General Secretary Madhab Kumar Nepal has joined counterparts from other parties to pay a visit to New Delhi. Speaking to reporters before departure, Nepal said the trip was to take a stock on things and stock up on provisions. "You never know how long the blockade is going to last, so it is best to be prepared," he told scribes at the Triumverate International Airport.

India Comes To Nepal

NEW DELHI—India has warned in no uncertain terms that if the situation in Kathmandu continues to deteriorate it may have to send reinforcements by paratropping more correspondents into the Nepalese capital.

"We won't take no for an answer,"



National Security Adviser JN Dixit told a close-door meeting, and promptly leaked his remarks to the press as soon as it was over.

"The people in Nepal need help, and it is our duty to undertake a fullscale media bombardment so they can carry on with their normal lives."

Girija Not In India

CHANDRANIGHAPUR—NC Supremo Girija Koirala isn't in India, according to sources close to him. This has led to wild speculation that the octogenarian

leader is in the pink of health.

Addressing a press meet in this dacoit-infested town, Koirala said yesterday regression would not be truly over until the king nominated him prime minister. "I will go down fighting, and I'll take the country down with me," he said amidst applause from delighted dacoits and other VIPs in the audience.

Also speaking on the occasion, a leading human rights activist denied there were informal talks going on with the Maoists. "How can there be secret talks when I haven't been asked to facilitate them?" he asked no one in particular.

Army Announces Top Secret Offensive

NEPALGANJ—The Western Division Headquarters today announced a top secret invasion of Maoist strongholds in Binayak in Achham beginning 0700 hours on Friday morning.

"This is a surprise attack, and we hope to catch the rebels completely unawares," the army spokesman told a packed press conference here.

As you can see, ladies and gentlemen, things in Nepal are in a state of flux. I'm told we are trying once more to contact our Star Reporter, Khubsurat in Kathmandu. Khubsurat, can you hear me? Hello...hello

"Sorry, network busy. Please try again next year."

WHO SAID FIRST THAT BLOCKADES COME, BLOCKADES GO ?



Himal Khabarpatrika

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