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KICKBOXING

One month after becoming prime minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba is still struggling to accommodate the interests of the palace, three party allies and ambitious figures within his own party to craft a cabinet. The UML has been the most democratic about it by voting 8-6 on Thursday to elect Bharat Mohan Adhikari to head its team in government. The UML wants the cabinet be no bigger than 10 percent of parliament, and all parties should get portfolios proportionate to their strength. The RPP and Sadbhavana are not too keen, since it would weaken their clout. Deuba will probably need the weekend to finalise his team.



Weekly Internet Poll #143

Q. Do you support elections for a constituent assembly?



Total votes: 1,141

Weekly Internet Poll # 144. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Is there still a rationale for the anti-king street demonstrations?



KIRAN PANDAY

“The Maoists are a bigger problem than the king”

It hasn't been easy for Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to prove he is not a royal puppet and cobble together an all-party cabinet. He believes a party-palace unity is a prerequisite to peace, and he is committed to holding elections even if there is no understanding with the Maoists.

Excerpts of interview:

How do you analyse the present state of the kingdom?

Things are difficult. We are being terrorised by Maoist violence, there is a lot of misery in the villages, townspeople are victims of Maoist extortion, landmines are going off, even passenger buses are being attacked. All this has had a negative effect on the economy, tourism has been hurt, productivity and economic activity are down, hotels are being auctioned. Yes, there are major challenges for the government.

But there is no government presence in large parts of the country.

I wouldn't go so far as to say that. Things are functioning normally in district headquarters, in many rural areas service delivery continues. Yes, in many areas there are problems due to the Maoist activity, teachers are being abducted and education is disrupted, and development activity has been hit.

continued p6

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Preview on page 17

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Re-education at gunpoint

Sorry, comrades, that is not how it happens

A TALE OF TWO QUAGMIRES

A prime minister is appointed, executive power is handed over with a mandate to restore law and order and hold early elections. But there are questions of legitimacy about the new prime minister and whether he is up to it.

The country is in shambles. Already suffering from decades of neglect, the conflict has ruined the economy and brought the country to its knees. There are no jobs and development has come to a standstill. Rebel groups have destroyed much of the infrastructure. They frequently abduct people, and parts of the country have descended into anarchy as bandits plunder villages.

Roadside bombs, landmines and ambushes along the highways take their toll on the security forces who retaliate with indiscriminate shooting, bombings and helicopter-borne attacks. Both sides torture prisoners in detention, many non-combatants are disappeared.

Sounds like Nepal? Actually we were describing Iraq on the week that the United States handed over power to its designated prime minister, Iyad Allawi, and a governing body of wealthy exiles. Though the Americans have tried to cloak this handover as a deliberate and pre-planned move, President George W Bush is obviously trying to extricate himself from a quagmire with only five months to go for elections.

He has no one to blame but himself and the fossil-fuel driven billionaires who bankroll him. When the mightiest country on earth starts making policy on the basis of the corporate greed of a few rightwing ideologues, it turns the whole earth into a powder keg. What's worse, the invasion and occupation of Iraq was justified on the extrapolated excuse that Saddam and Osama were in cahoots, a view actively promoted by neocon thinktanks and Fox news. The whole world knows that Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz and their war-profiteering cronies were only after crude.

Like in Iraq, Nepal needs to move swiftly towards resolving its own conflict, restoring law and order, re-establishing a representative government that is inclusive of all Nepalis and not just the powerful, then galvanise human and natural resources of the country to finally lift the living standard of a people who have suffered for too long.

The present argument between the palace and the rump anti-regression alliance is over how that should be done. However late, we now have a multiparty interim government in place, it is time for all political forces, underground and in Ratna Park, to look strategically to the future and help put the genie back into the bottle. Unlike Iraq, our governing council is made up mostly of once-elected politicians. They have to be given the chance to return the country from the bullet to the ballot.

In recent times, our Maoist comrades have kept themselves busy with abductions of teachers and students. Citizens have been marched off to the jungles under the shadow of the gun where they have been indoctrinated in 'revolutionary education' and then released in a seeming act of benevolence.

GUEST COLUMN
Khagendra Sangroula



These wholesale abductions are mainly restricted to hapless students and teachers in remote schools. They are taken to unknown destinations and forced to listen to harangues under the barrel of a gun.

Our methods of education in Nepal have evolved over the years. There was a time when teachers, rod in hand, used to impart education on students who were herded like livestock. They were force-fed by rote learning under threat of punishment if they couldn't parrot the words. Such tyrannical education has, even in this country, given way to a more voluntary, creative, instructional style in which children enjoy learning.

The Maoists say they stand for a brand of pure pro-people socialism and a new people's education. But their model of education starts at gunpoint and ends there.

Schooling starts with terror and terminates in terror. It is called people's education, but there is no place in it for the people's wishes, their aspirations and their free choice.

It is as if in the Maoist ideology there is no place for human compassion, knowledge and dignity. It has come down to the wish of the person with the finger on the trigger and the message to the unarmed is: listen to us, or else. In my limited knowledge this couldn't be further removed from Mao's own philosophy of education.

Whenever the media brings me yet another instance of the current Maoist re-education campaign, a chill runs down my spine as I imagine what the terrorised little minds have to go through. How they must have burst into classrooms, and like armed hunters rounded up the

children like game. Where are they taking us, what will they do to us, will they let us go home, will they kill us? The children are like prisoners of war forced to march up and down the hills of Nepal.

It is the same story with the teachers. In this bizarre training of trainers, what can you teach someone at gunpoint? Their mind is not on what you are saying, but on guns, death and explosions. The comrades must be thinking: we're doing a great job instructing the teachers about people's education in our camps. They've all been indoctrinated, and they will henceforth march proudly waving the Maoist flag. Sorry, comrades. It doesn't happen like that.

Can you force someone to love you? Love, respect and trust must be mutual to work. They need the warm soil of reciprocity to sprout. That is the dilemma for the Maoists: how can a party that stands for a utopic democracy force the people to love them with brute force? This barbaric wish will never be fulfilled. Those forced to march with a gun pointed at their temples comply only to save their skins. In their heart of hearts, they will have nothing but contempt for the abductors. They may murmur "Yes sir", but what they really mean is "May you rot in hell".

And the time will come, even in this country, when the Maoists will have to lay down their arms. At that time, I doubt if any of the students and teachers abducted today will give their tormentors the time of day. In fact they may line them up and spit in their faces. ●

Khagendra Sangroula is a noted Nepali writer and columnist. This commentary was translated from his Nepali original, *Apaharan Sikshya ra Prem*.



ROBIN SAYAMI

LETTERS

BETTER KILN

As an environment management specialist, I found Mudita Bajracharya's coverage of the brick kilns in Kathmandu Valley ('Killer kilns', #202) interesting. There is no doubt that brick factories are a major source of

environmental degradation in the valley. And as your report points out, there are many reasons for the pollution, and the new technology and improved kilns are not the solution. I have been continuously monitoring the new technology and found that it is not very efficient in

controlling air pollution. The reduction in particulate emissions is negligible. The more black smoke comes out of kiln chimneys, the more the particulates smaller than 10 microns (PM10) there is. It is possible to reduce PM10 concentrations without spending a lot of money. This was demonstrated in the Trishakti Ita Udyog of Rajendra Maharjan. The rearrangement was done by a German engineer who was successful in reducing PM10 concentrations from more than 1500mg/m3 to less than 400 mg/m3. This method saves fuel by ten percent, and reduces pollution. Rajendra Maharjan is ready to share his experience and the technology if anyone is interested.

Sushil Gajurel, Jawalakhel

FIX IT

Your editorial, ('Fix it', #202) highlights the attractiveness of the constituent assembly to political parties and the rebels. For the political parties, it is a check and balance against the king. For the Maoists, it is a pragmatic solution to an unwinnable war. The odd man out is the king.

The present king and his advisers are in a quagmire because of their short-sighted policies and ill-advised political moves. The king was justified to fire the original Deuba government as per the constitution, but should have let the political parties form a unity government to conduct fair and free elections as they had wished after coming up with a common minimum program with both the palace and

the parties. Had this been done, there would not have been any republican slogans on the streets and no anti-regression rallies. The king's influence and position as supreme commander of the Royal Nepali Army would have never been questioned. His own personal assets and royal expenditure wouldn't have been discussed by the media. And there may even have been peace in the country by now. There is a lesson to be learnt for all here. The king and his advisers should brush up on Machiavelli, if not Chanakya. The king has shown a certain 'youthful exuberance' that has cost the nation dearly. This is the problem with a benevolent dictator/king formula: we never know what their successors are



The lure of legitimacy

Let's get one thing straight: Deuba holds office at the pleasure of the king.

Competence and cleanliness aren't attributes that determine the fate of a government. It is its legitimacy. Lack of legitimacy is the main reason premier Sher Bahadur Deuba took a month to cobble together a functional council of ministers.

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



From the day cave-dwelling humans waved their clubs to show clan members who was boss, the legitimacy of power has remained the central question of politics. It took centuries for chieftaincy to evolve into hereditary monarchy, but once the process was complete, it became nearly impossible to shake it.

People power began as far back as 1215 with the signing of the *Magna Carta* in England. The American Revolution established the principle of the 'rights of man', from then on political legitimacy could only be derived from the consent of the governed. Then the French Revolution in 1789 shook the venerated 'theory of divine rights'.

When the old order of inherited pelf and privileges was challenged by a new class of democratic entrepreneurs, the ensuing chaos gave rise to new Caesars promising to deliver peace and prosperity at the price of liberty. It was conflict between inherited class and caste on the one hand and consent and contract on the other that gave rise to political usurpers like Lenin, Stalin, Mussolini, and Hitler ruled in the name of the people, but without their permission or participation. Mao and Mahendra were rulers of the same tradition, even though the latter held legitimate claims to the sanction of the Hindu religion. Legitimism by mandate is a



product of a post-colonial world order where imperial powers chose their favourites and foisted them upon newly emerging states. This trend continued with the Cold War American mindset "he may be a sonofabitch but he is our sonofabitch" giving rise to a clutch of tin-pot dictators in banana republics around the world.

Post 9/11, we have seen a resurgence of this doctrine but now communism has been replaced by radical Islam as the evil empire. Washington neocons are once more looking for the certainty that only dictatorial strongmen can ensure amidst the political volatility of the abjectly poor.

For regime sponsors looking for peace and stability rather than democracy and justice the selection of Deuba to head a government formed to fight insurgency is politically sexy. He is sufficiently right-of-the-centre to ensure unflinching support to free-market fundamentalism, and yet flexible enough to lure supporters from the left (UML) and the right (RPP) to implement the agenda of the global right.

But it is difficult to run a country with the support of the foreigners, army and the palace combine alone. What really counts is the consent of the governed. When the Rana rulers in 1950 crowned Prince

Gyanendra king, Britain and America quickly supported the move. But within three months, the Ranas have been overthrown by the people. Of course, the new emperors of a newly-independent India played a role, but that is a constant which can't be wished away in this kingdom.

That brings us to Girija Prasad Koirala's sudden trip to rainless and sizzling Delhi. Koirala may or may not hold discussions with the Maoist leadership while there, but his mere presence in India is pregnant with political possibilities.

Debates over the common minimum programme between the aspirants to the cabinet of

royal nominees have no meaning, as premier Deuba has no control over the agenda of his government. The controversy over the Work Performance Regulation is equally pointless: if the king believes in his premier, it is not necessary. If he doesn't, its amendment wouldn't change anything. These are sideshows, and the main drama to decide the fate of democracy in Nepal may be unfolding once again in New Delhi.

Premier Deuba may be juggling with the 51, 41, or 31-point demands of the RPP or UML. But, because he holds office at the pleasure of the king, he has only one agenda: keep his sponsors happy. ●

going to be like.

SN Singh, email

CIRCUS GIRLS

Thank you for calling a spade a spade in your article on the circus girls rescued from India ("Take us home", #202). You are the only paper that explicitly stated that the circus was just a cover for a paedophile ring. There should be no one holier-than-thou in this, everyone is culpable, everyone is to blame. From the parents who sold their girls, the unscrupulous pimps who tempted them with education and jobs, the village elders of the community in Makwanpur where the families come from, the Nepali authorities, human rights organizations and civil society who couldn't be bothered.

We, Nepali citizens, who allow this to happen. And of course, the barbaric circus owners who used the girls and profited from their misery. The Indians have been trying to downplay the circus scandal saying the girls want to stay in the circus and don't want to go back to Nepal. They should be embarrassed, after all they are the perpetrators and the crimes happened in their territory. But, as with the case of the hundreds of thousands of Nepali girls trafficked to the brothels of India, this trade can't be stopped by shifting the blame to the country of origin. The client hardly ever gets the blame in prosecution of prostitution. The Indians owners and customers of this illicit trade have to be punished and this can only happen if the

Indian government and the state governments first admit the exploitation is happening. Simultaneously we also have to look at the push factors that are driving our girls away. Poverty, illiteracy, ignorance and low status of women in our society prompt fathers to give their daughters away rather than be burdened by having to care for them in a male-dominated society. The circus girls are just the tip of this evil iceberg.

Renu Shrestha, email

CORRECTION

In 'Killer kilns' (#202) the kiln owner pictured on page 4 is Mahendra Chitrakar, president of the Central Brick Association and not as erroneously stated.



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A Nepali trapped in America's

Purna Raj Bajracharya was just taking a video on a New York street when he was arrested on suspicion of being a terrorist and had to spend three months in solitary confinement before being deported. The case has highlighted the erosion of civil liberties in post-9/11 United States.

NINA BERNSTEIN in NEW YORK

It took no more than a week for James P Wynne, a veteran FBI investigator, to confirm the harmless truth that only now, more than two years later, he is ready to talk about. The small foreign man he helped arrest for videotaping outside an office building in Queens on 25 October 2001, was no terrorist.

He was a Nepali, who worked odd jobs in flower shops and pizzerias, and he was taping New York street scenes

Purna Raj Bajracharya, 47, who came from Nepal in 1996. His one offence, staying to work on a long-expired tourist visa, was an immigration violation punishable by deportation, not jail. But he wound up spending three months in solitary confinement before he was sent back to Kathmandu in January 2002.

Unable to procure a release that officially required signatures from top antiterrorism officials in Washington,

The New York Times

to take back to his wife and sons in Kathmandu. He had no clue that the tall building that had drifted into his viewfinder happened to include an office of the FBI. Yet by the time Wynne filed his FBI report a few days later, the Nepali man, who spoke almost no English, had been placed in solitary confinement at a federal detention center in Brooklyn just because of his videotaping. He was swallowed up in the government's new post-9/11 maximum security system of secret detention and secret hearings.

Except for the videotape there was no shred of suspicion attached to

Wynne took an uncommon step for an FBI agent: he called the Legal Aid Society for a lawyer to help the jailed man.

Now, for the first time, the FBI agent and the Legal Aid lawyer, Olivia Cassin, have agreed to talk about the case and their unlikely alliance. Within 10 days of the 11 September attacks, the Justice Department instructed immigration judges that all cases designated as 'special interest' were to be handled in separate closed courtrooms, without visitors, family or reporters, and without confirming whether a case was on the docket. The

secrecy left detainees with little access to lawyers. Visa violators would be held indefinitely, until the FBI was sure the person was not involved in terrorism. As a visa violator under suspicion, Bajracharya was among hundreds placed in the special interest category, and his case was wiped from the public record.

Mark Corallo, a spokesman for the Justice Department, said that though he was unfamiliar with the case, the system of secrecy Bajracharya encountered was lawful and necessary. "The idea that someone who has violated our immigration laws may be of interest on a national security level as well is an unfortunate reality, post-9/11," he said.

Cassin of Legal Aid argues that there is no way to know whether other noncitizens are even now being unfairly detained. "By its very nature," she said, "it can happen again without our knowing about it."

By the time Bajracharya was finally returned to Nepal he had spent three months in a 2m by 3m cell kept lighted 24 hours a day. The unit of the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn where he was kept has become notorious for the abuses documented there by the Justice Department's own inspector general, who found a pattern of physical and mental mistreatment of post-9/11 detainees.

Wynne read aloud from phone logs documenting desperate messages from Bajracharya's family in Kathmandu, his efforts to reassure the weeping detainee, and his own dawning recognition that no resolution was in sight. "I told Purna that I would try to help him, that I wouldn't forget about him," Wynne explained. "I felt some, not responsibility, but I felt that there was no one else."

In Kathmandu Bajracharya recalls the fear, humiliation and despair he had experienced in prison. "I had nothing but tears in my eyes," he says. "The only thing I knew, I was innocent, but I didn't know what was happening."

He was stripped naked in the federal jail. "I was manhandled and treated badly," he said, becoming agitated. "I was very, very embarrassed even to look around, because I was naked."

The ordeal began when his videotaping aroused the suspicions of two detectives from the Queens district attorney's office, which has space in the same 12-story building where the FBI occupies three floors. After taking him inside for questioning, they called upstairs to the FBI and Wynne was dispatched to take over the interrogation. With no translator, Bajracharya tried to explain himself to half a dozen law enforcement officers, including two federal agents from the Immigration and Naturalization Service who verified his illegal immigration status. He was then sent to the federal detention center in Brooklyn pending a thorough investigation.

The questions were resolved within days. The Nepali man did not show up in any terrorist databanks, his records, roommates and former employees all vouched for the detainee's honesty. A month after his detention, Wynne wrote his report clearing Bajracharya, he told him through a translator that it would take about a week to get the matter resolved.

Over the weekend, pleading messages arrived from Bajracharya's sons in Kathmandu saying their father was not a terrorist. But the weeks dragged on. The Monday after Thanksgiving, the FBI agent called in Legal Aid. "This guy needed some help, it's as simple as that," Wynne said. But by the time Olivia Cassin spoke with the detainee, through a thick plexiglass barrier and under the eye of a prison video camera, she said, he was weeping all the time.

On 6 December 2001, in a secret hearing room in the prison, Cassin watched Bajracharya carried in by three burly officers of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, shackled so

completely that he could not move. "He's tiny," she said. "His feet didn't even touch the floor."

She said government immigration lawyers agreed that since her client had been cleared by the FBI, he would be permitted a "voluntary departure". She was instructed to buy him an airplane ticket to Kathmandu through a deportation officer. She did, but the first departure date was canceled without explanation. Meanwhile, like other 'high interest' detainees, Purna Bajracharya was still in solitary 23 hours a day. "After a month or two, I started to scream that I was going to die if I didn't talk to anybody," Bajracharya said in Kathmandu.

When Bajracharya was finally taken to the plane on 13 January 2002, he was in shackles and an orange prison jumpsuit. Bajracharya's accounts of mistreatment fit the pattern reported by the inspector general. A spokesman for the United States attorney's office in Brooklyn, Robert Nardoza, said the office recently declined to prosecute abuses detailed in the reports "mainly because all of the witnesses had been deported and were unavailable to be interviewed".

Bajracharya said he would be willing to testify against those who mistreated him if he were asked, though he fears what the government would do to him if he did so. "What happened to me could have been an isolated incident," he said. "I still believe the American government is the best in the world."

Weeks after Bajracharya returned to Nepal, Wynne and Cassin managed to arrange delivery of his possessions by mail, including his camcorder. But when Purna Bajracharya tried to show his wife his video of New York, all that remained on the tape was the pizzeria and the flower shop. ●

Green with greed

There was a time when everyone seemed concerned about over-consumption, pollution, depletion of resources and everything we came to know as 'green'. Even the World Bank, under acute pressure led by brave activists in Nepal, decided to consider the good of the 'world', before the financial returns of the 'bank'.

Green parties were resurgent everywhere. People in developed countries

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



were recycling their rubbish,

driving smaller cars or using public transport. Young people in particular knew about the fate of the earth if we didn't make serious changes in the way we lived. By 'we' of course, I mean people in rich countries. But developing societies too were experiencing growing awareness of environmental issues and demands.

My own feeling at the time was that it had much to do with the end of the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet Union, of the Berlin Wall in Germany and the end of repressive communism removed a shadow

What happened to environmentalism?

from peoples' lives. It was no longer possible that we'd all be annihilated in nuclear crossfire between America and Russia. So we turned our attention to the planet and her dwindling, increasingly more poisoned resources.

Those were heady days.

So what do we find now, more than a decade later? Do we find progressive environmentalism across the political spectrum? A philosophy of making gentle, sustainable use of water, air or mineral wealth? Do we generate electricity from clean, zero emission sources and use sensible transport powered by electricity or fuel cells?

Well, no, we don't. In North America, our vehicle of choice is the offensive and dangerous Sport Utility Vehicle. Public transit has never been more in need of passengers or public money. The streets are littered with fast food rubbish and the drinking water is laden with pesticides and

heavy metals. The food chain is plagued by poison and disease and the air seethes with poison.

Abroad, the picture is little better. China is turning into an environmental nightmare to make the worst American chemical dump look pristine. Indian cities are becoming unliveable. The oceans are running out of fish in part because we dump too much toxic waste, and also because too many people eat too many sea creatures. As for the air, is there any left? Or is it all coal fired

power plant emissions and smoke?

So what happened to the Green movement? What happened to all those young people in the early 1990s who could quote chapter and verse about the dire straits we were in, and what had to be done to turn things around? Why did we let get this way? It's easy to blame conservative politicians for gutting environmental protection measures, which is what has been happening in the United States.

George Bush's government, according to its critics, has been anything but green. But there were the lefties in Bill Clinton's administration, and that nice Mr Blair in Britain and all those Social Democrats in Europe. They haven't done anything to clean up the planet either.

All I can conclude is that being green can't survive the greed that grips us when times are good. The developing world gets dragged along as we rich folk consume and pollute at will. Now things are looking grim again economically, and I fully expect we'll be awash in environmental woe soon enough. It's that simple, it's that shallow. ●



own Abu Ghraib



“I’ll sue the US government”

For someone who was wrongly accused of being a terrorist, who had to go through three months of excruciating mental torture in solitary confinement and who was then deported like a criminal, Purna Raj Bajracharya shows little anger towards his tormentors.

But he adds: “If someone helps me, I’ll sue the US government. If they want me to testify, I’ll testify.” Two years after returning to Nepal, Bajracharya now lives in quiet retirement in his house in Patan with his family. He told us he harbours no ill will towards Americans. “It’s just like in Nepal, there are good people and bad people in America too,” he says.

Bajracharya’s ordeal (see

story, opposite) began just as he was getting ready to head back to Nepal after spending six years in the United States. He had overstayed his visa to work in restaurants and sell flowers. He had saved up \$37,000, which he sent home to take care of schooling for his four boys.

One month after planes hijacked by terrorists struck the World Trade Centre, Bajracharya decided to test his newly-acquired video camera (pictured, above on Thursday at his home in Patan) to shoot street scenes in the borough of Queens. Suddenly, a car pulled up, and two plainclothesmen called him: “Hey, come over here.”

Bajracharya recalls: “I could have run away, but I didn’t. I hadn’t done

anything wrong.” Then three more burly-looking men joined them and asked why he was taking pictures. “I told them, I didn’t know, I was just a tourist,” he says. He was taken into a nearby building and searched, his video cassette was played and they interrogated him for five hours. Finally they drove him to his apartment and searched it too.

It was when they took him to jail, put him in shackles and threw him into a small cell that Bajracharya started getting worried. “*Bekar ma phasiyo*,” Bajracharya recalls telling himself. But he was sure that since this was America, someone would realise the mistake and come to free him. But the solitary confinement lasted three months, the light in his cell couldn’t be turned off. “I thought I was slowly going crazy,” says Bajracharya, now 53. “The only thing that kept me going were memories of home and my family.”

The ordeal had become just a distant memory when the FBI agent who arrested him, James P Wynne, who collaborated with legal aid activist Olivia Cassin, decided to publicise Bajracharya’s story in the aftermath of the scandal over the ill treatment of Iraqi prisoners by US guards at the Abu Ghraib prison. *New York Times* immigration reporter Nina Bernstein got hold of the story and it was carried in the 30 June edition of the paper.

Suddenly, Purna Raj Bajracharya has to relive every moment of those three grueling months all over again. ● (Kunda Dixit)



MIN BAJRACHARYA



12 return, rest disappear

The saga of Nepali circus girls in India is not over even with the return to Nepal of 12 of the 30 girls working in the Great Roman Circus in Karnelganj in Uttar Pradesh this week. The dozoen were handed over by Indian bureaucrats to Nepali officials. But these were not the girls whose parents went to India to rescue. Those have disappeared and are rumoured to be in Orissa.

Hari Pyakhurel of the Banke district administration who took charge of the girls in Gonda told us the Indian authorities refused to hand the girls over to the child rights activists who went to rescue them. They insisted that the girls be released in the presence of Nepali officials and a diplomat from the Nepali embassy in New Delhi.

The girls were angry they were being sent back. “They cursed us all the way from Gonda to Nepalganj,” Pyakhurel told us.

Activists from the Butwal-based Nepal Child Welfare Society and the Indian Bachpan Bachao Andolan, who had spearheaded the rescue of the girls, say they have been left out of the picture. “India is trying to launder its tarnished image, and prove that the girls don’t want to go back to Nepal,” one activist told us. Indeed, it is strange that the girls who had pleaded to be rescued and whose parents had gone to India, are not among those sent back.

Only Sanumaya Lama, Asmita Lama and Nita Lama are among the 12 are girls who wanted to return. The rest: Nisha Lama, Sharmila Lama, Kalpana Lama, Thulidebi Lama, Pramila Galan and Sanimaya Lama (all between 11-14 years) have vanished. Their parents Surya Lama, Bishnumaya Moktan, Janak Lama, Thulimaya Lama are still waiting in Lucknow for word on their disappeared daughters (pictured above). A case has been filed with Indian police.

“They cry all day and all night in the hotel, I try to console them but they are really worried,” says Khem Thapa of the Nepal Child Welfare Society. (Rameswor Bohara in Gonda)

Spy in the sky

Two ex-British Army spy planes were handed over to the Royal Nepali Army’s growing fleet of helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft. The British aid for the Britten Normal Islander AL Mk1 aircraft is derived from the Global Conflict Prevention Fund that debars the Nepal army from using them in any offensive combat.

The aircraft, which has seen action in Northern Ireland with the Royal Ulster Constabulary, is fitted with sensors for surveillance, imaging and night patrols. The short takeoff and landing Islanders can also carry up to 10 personnel each and have an endurance of four hours. “The plane can bring down the cost and difficulty of using night vision helicopters,” said one army source who requested anonymity.



The plane can fulfil surveillance roles with a fuselage mounted turret containing an infra-red thermal imager and a colour daylight camera with telescopic lens for vertical and oblique pictures. The sensor can detect, identify and track individuals and vehicles over long distances in darkness and poor weather conditions. Army pilots have taken part in a week-long training on the Isle of Wight and helped ferry the planes to Kathmandu.

Under the terms of the agreement, the planes cannot be modified for use in combat even though it is equipped with four underwing stations for bombs, cannons and machine guns. Although the plane’s equipment are not lethal, when combined with other aircraft and ground equipment it can increase the targeting capability of the offensive systems already in service with the Royal Nepali Army.

After opposition from peace groups, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw told the House of Commons Defence Committee in February: “The planes are banned from being fitted for weapons or soldiers firing from open doors of the aircraft.”

According to *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, similar restrictions on sales of British military hardware to Indonesia have not been successful. The Global Conflict Prevention Fund is jointly administered by DFID and the Ministry of Defence, the foreign office and the treasury. In internal meetings, DFID is said to have expressed misgivings about the planes being delivered to Nepal.

Junk food epidemic

This is one communicable disease that Nepali parents should pay attention to

When my daughter Deepti was in grade three eight years ago, she came back from school one day and snapped at me: "I am not going to take *roti* and *alu tarkari* for lunch anymore, buy me noodles, or I won't have lunch."

My daughter used to enjoy home cooked food, so I was surprised. She told me with tears in her eyes: "They all tease me and laugh at me because I am eating dirty food, and they are all eating *chau chau* and chips."

Oh, so that was it. I felt bad for her, for myself and for a culture that has turned away from nutritious food to a junk food fad promoted by advertising. Like a lot of mothers, I was tempted to console my daughter and tell her that I would start packing instant noodles into her lunch box from tomorrow. But I took the difficult path. It took a long time to make Deepti understand that it was her friends who were eating junk, that eating wholesome home food was nothing to feel ashamed of.

She agreed to take the rotis, but reluctantly. She still wasn't

completely convinced. A week later, she came running up to me after school, beaming: "The teacher inspected our lunch boxes, and she showed mine to the whole class and said Deepti is the only one eating healthy food, and all of you are eating bad food, and she even told them not to bring *chau chau* to school anymore."

Aside from the fact that in my daughter's young eyes her mother was "cool", this incident tells us something about peer pressure, the power of education and the power of

media to influence our eating and other habits.

Alas, Nepal's epidemic of junk food shows no sign of abating. Hospitals in urban Nepal have started reporting malnourished children from middle- and upper-middle class families who are addicted to a diet of junk food. "Many children are malnourished and get sick, the children are not eating traditional nutritious home food because they are hooked to the instant snacks," says Pushpa Raj Sharma, senior pediatrician at the Teaching Hospital in Maharajganj.

In the UK, there is a move to put a statutory ban on all advertising of fatty, salty, sugary junk food on children's television and over 80 British public health organisations have signed up. Japan already has a lead, and doesn't allow commercial promotion of junk foods in schools with coupons, ads or commercial materials. Snack and soft drink vending machines are not allowed inside schools and students are not allowed to buy and eat food on their way to school and home.

Obesity, malnutrition, cardiovascular diseases and dental caries are referred to as non-communicable diseases, but they are actually communicated through media and through the cultural environment.

As Nepal goes through something of a junk snack boom, it is easy to see why the advertising campaigns work. Gone are the messy preparations of *jaulo*, *bhuteko bhat*, *roti tarkari*, *kheer* or *dahi chiura*. Mothers are happy because it doesn't take time to stuff the children's lunch box in the morning. And when they come home from school, it is noodles and chips or biscuits again. Overworked themselves, mothers are glad because they "didn't have to put in more work".

Of course, completely depriving kids of some of these junk foods may force them to go on clandestine binges. The best way is to lay down some moderate house rules and have an honest heart-to-heart talk like I had with Deepti. It works. ●

Dr Aruna Uprety is a women's health and reproductive rights activist.

DEUBA INTERVIEW from p1

"If Kashmir can have polls so can we."

So what are you going to do about it?

First, I believe, the constitutional monarch and political parties who believe in the constitution have to be on the same side. We can blame a lot of people for the state of the country, but this is a situation created by the Maoists. And the only approach is to forge a common position. If the king and the parties keep quarreling, and the parties keep fighting among themselves, this crisis will only deepen.

You have taken a month to set up a cabinet, why should the people believe you?

It doesn't matter how long it takes as long as the team is strong and can work together for a solution. Despite delays, the government has functioned.

How do you assess the king's role?

I had once said that this is an ambitious king. But after my reinstatement, I have seen that the king is more concerned about strengthening democracy, ensuring Nepal's progress, stopping corruption and bolstering national unity. He wants goods delivered to the people. The king has changed, and I think he

reinstated me because he is convinced that I will not waver from the values of constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy.

Does that make your government answerable to the king or to the people?

I want to take the king into confidence and work with the people. The house is on fire, we can't keep on arguing, we have to start looking for water to put out the flames.

But the king and the parties are drifting further apart. Do you have a mechanism to bring them together?

A consensus. The UML, Sadbhabana and RPP are on board, but Girijababu hasn't agreed. He is annoyed with me, but one day he'll also agree that there is no point in confronting the king. The Maoists are a bigger problem than the king. Nothing happens to those who burn the king's effigy, but if you burn Prachanda's effigy you get killed. So, the real problem is the Maoists, not the king.

Have you seen any change in the character of the Maoists?

Their political ideology is directed by the use of violence, that power comes out of the barrel of the gun. But this ideology is obsolete, and if the king and the parties unite, we can isolate them. We don't want to finish them off, we want to force them to agree to negotiate a final resolution.

But what kind of pressure will work?

Unity between the parties and the king.

But the Maoists are adamant on the constituent assembly issue.

You can't have a pre-condition to talks. We can't make the same mistakes as we did in the previous two rounds of talks. We have to agree on a bottomline before we start negotiating. You can't backtrack once you make your commitments public. The old model of talks aren't going to work.

Any secret back channel talks going on?

No.

Is the army capable of fighting this war?

From what I know, the army has a lot of help from outside. Recently, India and the UK helped with attack aircraft, weapons, vehicles and training. The army is stronger. This war is coming to a climax. The Maoists may be able to launch a few more attacks, but in the end, they will be defeated. After peaking, their strength will wane.

How about human rights violations by the army?

Let me make it clear that the state security machinery can't behave like the terrorists. The security forces may have made mistakes. They are not divine, they lack training, they make mistakes. But that doesn't mean the entire army is guilty. Rights abusers must be brought to justice. They will be tried. Otherwise they will not be able to win the hearts and minds of the people. They are paid to serve the people, they are not paid to kill innocents.

What about India's role?

They are worried. Earlier, even we were not worried and we never imagined the Maoist threat would grow so rapidly to have a network in India too. Even the Indians never thought they would spread so quickly. Now they understand our predicament, and I have noted that they take it very seriously. They have assured us of their continued military support.

But as the army grows stronger, isn't there a danger of militarisation?

There isn't. The army doesn't have political power and they don't want it either.

And elections?

Our priority is peace. We will negotiate with the Maoists, but even if there are no talks we'll conduct elections in many phases if need be. If elections can be held in Kashmir, they can be held here.



KIRAN PANDYA

Flight safety in the monsoon



VIJAY LAMA

Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) records show there have been 56 aircraft accidents in Nepal since 1955, and 31 of the accidents occurred since the deregulation of domestic aviation in 1992 with a loss of 555 lives.

One reason for this is that there has been a huge increase in the number of flights, and the high casualty rate was due to the crashes of the Thai and PIA Airbus 310s within two months of each other in 1992. Those two crashes and a majority of the 31 accidents in the past 12 years happened during the monsoon. All of them were classified as Controlled Flight Into Terrain (CFIT), which means an aircraft flying normally crashes into a mountain in bad weather.

This monsoon was no different, and the pattern was

set with the probable CFIT crash of a Yeti Airlines Twin Otter north of Lamjura Pass on 25 May. Something must be seriously wrong with our aviation safety procedures if so many crashes happened in the years since deregulation, especially if all of them took place during the monsoon due to the same causes. What is the problem that needs to be fixed here?

Following accidents, an investigation panel is formed. It takes ages to complete, its reports are never made public, the files end up stacked in some cabinet in the offices of the Director General Civil Aviation (DGCA). In the skies above Nepal, it is soon back to normal, as if nothing happened. What is the use of investigating if the reports are never publicised and operators never get a chance to learn from past mistakes?

Nepal is notoriously difficult terrain to fly in even at the best of times and with the best navigation aid in the world. In bad weather, at night, with non-existent nav aids and erratic procedures, things become much more uncertain.

Logically, with increasing sophistication of aircraft design and avionics the accident rate due to technical reasons are significantly reduced. But it is the human factor that dominates in Nepal. Human error doesn't always mean pilot error. Looking beyond the cockpit, these have to do with market pressures in which commercial airlines lean on their pilots to operate despite bad weather and with improper load structure. The management also exerts pressure because it is being forced by "higher authorities" to operate a flight despite poor flying conditions.

Nearly all aviation accidents in Nepal since 1992 happened during the monsoon. What can be done to reduce the risk?



There is also pressure from passengers, especially in remote areas. I have even faced inflight situations where passengers try to persuade me to make one more attempt to land even though I have diverted from the destination due to bad weather.

Deregulation has brought competition, which is a healthy thing, but when this competition gets cut-throat, airlines tend to cut corners with safety.

The ultimate responsibility for safety rests with pilots, and there can be several reasons for breakdowns in procedures: from a feeling of infallibility to macho-ness. Lack of training and route experience, fatigue and over-reliance on GPS equipment are other causes.

There is a worrying trend among Nepali pilots these days to make inappropriate

and illegal use of GPS while inside clouds, even in the mountains, to develop individual routes and procedures based on satellite positioning and applying it in bad weather.

Finally, on the ground there is haphazardness of the DGCA to implement and enforce existing rules. Air traffic controllers need upgrading to cope with workload caused by flight frequency. We need better ground equipment for navigation, radar and standby systems for safety.

As domestic air transportation becomes even more important than before, there is an urgent need to remove the causes behind monsoon CFITs events. ●

Cpt Vijay Lama has been flying for 17 years and has logged more than 10,000 hours. He currently heads the domestic operations of Royal Nepal Airlines.



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A high dam on the Kosi

Nepal and India have finally announced plans to start a joint study to build a colossal 300m dam on the Kosi River by setting up monitoring centres in five places along the river in Nepal and Bihar.

Anti-dam activists are opposed to the project, which they say will submerge a large part of eastern Nepal by creating a large lake, and the flood control benefits will mostly go to India. But even sceptics agree that the dam may be a mistake that is needed to correct the mistake made in 1964 with the construction of the Kosi barrage on the Indo-Nepal border east of Biratnagar.

The barrage has trapped sediment coming down Nepal's biggest river so that the Kosi now flows four metres above the surrounding land at the barrage. Any wetter than usual monsoon would drive the river over the levees, devastating villages and towns in Nepal and Bihar. "The dam is needed, but for the wrong reasons," says one Nepali water expert.

Nepali officials are also worried that while India's priority is the high dam at Chattara, Nepal is more interested in a dam upstream in the Sun Kosi river that would allow water to be diverted through a series of tunnels to irrigate 30,000 hectares in eight eastern tarai districts. This scheme would be an inter-basin transfer of water from the Sun Kosi to the Kamala and benefit farmers in both Nepal and India while helping flood control on the main Kosi river.

The trouble is that if the dam at Chattra is built to its full height, it will submerge the site for the Sun

It may be needed just to correct the mistake made 40 years ago to build the Kosi barrage

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA



Kosi dam. What needs to be seen is whether Nepal be able to get Indian help to build the diversion before the Kosi high dam, or will it be forced to comply to Indian interest?

The Kosi has nationalistic connotations in Nepal because of the perception that New Delhi arm-twisted Kathmandu to agree to build the barrage 40 years ago. Once known as the Sorrow of Bihar, the Kosi is a notoriously flood-prone river which is flowing 180km east of where it used to flow 200 years ago. A similar course change today would kill hundreds of thousands of people.

Alarm bells ring in the barrage

when the water flow reaches 40,000 cusecs. Experts now fear a mammoth flood, like the 800,000 cusec discharge in 1968, could sweep away the barrage sending a wall of water across northern India. Even a 500,000 cusec flood like the one in 1987 could threaten the barrage.

It is to prevent such a catastrophe that both countries agreed in 1997 to begin a study on the dam. Last year, India offered to establish joint offices in Nepal but a decision was delayed because of other bilateral problems. Nepali water experts are also wary that India will try to bulldoze the high dam with scant regard for Nepal's own

priority for the Sun Kosi Diversion. Indian officials were reportedly not very enthusiastic about the Sun Kosi diversion during bilateral meetings three years ago.

"The submergence by the high dam will not allow us to make any projects upstream," says water resource expert Ananda B Thapa, who headed the Nepali team during the agreement in 1997. "The Sun Kosi diversion must be built first." The 1997 agreement includes the Nepali proposal for the Sun Kosi Diversion, but officials at the Ministry of Water Resources refused to show us the report saying it was highly confidential and

sensitive. "We don't want to create misunderstandings with India by revealing the content," one official told us.

Another Nepali expert agrees that Nepal would lose if the high dam is built first. "Kosi floods are more urgent to India," he told us. "But Nepali land would be permanently submerged, what do we get for that?"

Officials at the Indian Embassy say that there is no reason for Nepal to be worried because it is a joint team and both projects will be looked at simultaneously. "It has been agreed that the detailed project reports will be prepared concurrently," says First Secretary Javed Ashraf at the Indian Embassy. "We will deal with the issue without a pre-set mind on which project to construct first."

Department of Electricity Development officials confirmed work on the detailed project report will begin soon and will take three years to complete. "We have no cost and time estimates now, we can only say that after detailed report is complete," says Director General Arjun Prasad Shrestha.

Apart from the irrigation and hydropower benefits from the Kosi projects, Nepali officials are also excited about a navigation canal that will join the Kosi waterway to the seaport in Kolkata. Says Shrestha: "The Kosi high dam and the Sun Kosi diversion will benefit both Nepal and India. This is not about doing favours for each other, it is about mutually tapping natural resources that makes economic sense." ●

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BIZ NEWS

Free entry

Nepal announced free visas for SAARC journalists at the national conference on 'Freedom of Press and Media Laws' organised by South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA) Nepal Chapter, which began in Kathmandu on Friday. Over 100 journalists from five South-Asian countries attended the conference where new acts and legal provisions on existing laws, and new forms of the media were discussed. Nepal became the first country in the SAARC region to make this concession.

IT manpower

NIIT Kathmandu Centre introduced a new "industry-endorsed" multiple-track GNIIT program for career aspirants in IT. Designed to bridge the IT manpower demand-supply gap, it has four specialisation tracks: software engineering, systems engineering and networking, information systems management and business process management.

Quality shows

Hyundai has come out a winner in Strategic Vision's 2004 Total Quality Index (TQI) improving its overall brand score by 10 points, with three different models earning the top scores in their category: Elantra, Sonata and Santa Fe. TQI assesses new buyers' responses to buying, owning and driving new vehicles.

Winners

The Close Up Video Music Awards ceremony on 26 June sounded victory for various singers on an entirely novel platform: music videos, which was viewed as secondary to the audio album in the past. Anil Singh won Best Music Video and Album of the Year and newcomer Sabin Rai won Best Music Video featuring a New Artist or a Band.



Malaysia holidays

We're so busy trying to lure tourists back to the kingdom that it's nice to be on the other side. Tourism Malaysia is set to launch its Malaysia Truly Asia destination program in early July. We can look forward to exotic and attractive vacation options including a long weekend, 3-night break, for just \$500 per person, including airfare.

NEW PRODUCTS



PAINT PALETTE: Asian Paints, Nepal's largest paint company and among the top 10 decorative coatings companies in the world, launched its first exclusive Colour World showroom at Teku. With over 127 shades of green, 206 shades of blue, 118 shades of yellow and many others, customers can mix any shade with Automatic Tinting Machines for consistency.

NEW AND IMPROVED: The modified version of Hero Honda CBZ, the CBZ*, was recently launched by Syakar in Nepal. The bestseller bike now has a new look and add-ons like electric start and eye-catching body stickers. The Ambition 135 also has an evolutionary upgrade that makes it not only look more attractive but is also fitted with an AMI carburetor.



Imagine no free market

Look at what happens when market-friendly mechanisms are subverted

Last week, in a letter to editor, a reader offered me a back-handed compliment by saying that my pieces are 'usually

STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari



interesting and thought-provoking, but lately (they have) started becoming a bit repetitious in (my) espousal of the free market being a panacea to everything'.

I am more for market-friendly institutions that promote defined property rights and competition because even when they make mistakes, these institutions are likely to correct errors quicker and in a cheaper manner than bureaucrats with public money. This week let me take up the reader's complaint, look around and report what the real outcomes have been when market-friendly mechanisms are promoted or subverted in Nepal.

Only a few years ago, Indian merchants used to come to Nepal to make overseas calls. Nepal had just installed state-of-the-art technology, while Indians suffered in the hands of a national monopoly. Today, India is throwing open its telecom sector to market competition, many private sector service providers have joined the fray, slashed rates and offered a bundle of services and choices to users. So, Nepalis in border towns today have Indian SIM cards to make calls to Kathmandu! In the capital itself, you are lucky to get a connection on your mobiles.

A happier story is our domestic airline market. Fifteen years ago, state-funded Royal Nepal Airlines was the only carrier that flew to

Pokhara, and it did so irregularly. Today, there are at least 12 flights a day between Kathmandu and Pokhara. Lukla sometimes has 25 flights a day. Surely, this is an improvement.

Or take the case of hydropower. Three generations of Nepalis have grown up chanting



same as being gung-ho about unfettered market freedom with zero role for the government) disposition to do more by providing incentives to others to invest resources too.

Market-friendly institutions do not solve every problem. Diplomacy, national literacy, primary health care, law and order, defence and basic infrastructure-building need openly elected politicians who represent diverse viewpoints to deliberate what to do on behalf of the public. But if the past 50 years of our development history teaches us anything, it's that only when we expect those representatives and civil servants to do everything—from controlling how many shoes a state-run factory can produce to what loans to who can state-funded banks can give out—that we are likely to end up being disappointed again.

Wouldn't it be better to go for a change by instituting market-friendly mechanisms into how we want goods and services provided to us? ●

the mantra of Nepal's infinite hydropower potential. But what good is that resource if we cannot make use of it to live better now? It has taken the Nepali state almost a century to provide electricity to just 23 percent of the population. At that rate, should all the remaining Nepalis wait for more than 300 years to light up their homes?

As our private sector and community-led initiatives of the past 15 years in micro-hydro show, we cannot rely exclusively on the government to provide power. It is time to allow other players to supply more and cheaper electricity faster to more people.

And a mindset that can accept such alternative arrangements can only happen when one assumes a market-friendly (which is not the

The noodle kingdom

Nepali Times: What is it about Nepalis that we excel at selling and consuming instant noodles?

Rabindra Man Shrestha: For any product to be successful, the home market has to be very strong. If you look at the per capita consumption of noodles today, Nepal is much higher than India. We are technologically self-reliant, have trained manpower and lots of experience.

You were the pioneers of the noodle rush, but there is lots of competition now.

Yes, it is a very competitive and dynamic market. This industry has been growing for the last three years, which means rivalry has grown too. There are more than 40 other brands in the market. Our turnover now is between Rs 180-200 million per month. Nepal's present noodle production capacity is twice the consumption so there is enormous pressure to sell.

What is your position in the market?

We are the leaders and we command around 40 percent of the market share. We are at the top if we put all our brands together—Mayos, Ruchi, Hurray, Lekali and Shakalaka Boom. You have to go for the niche market with segments like price and taste among others.

If there is a glut in the market, what is the attraction?

Everyone wants a piece of a fast growing industry because there is still a profit margin and there is a vast export potential.. Everyone is a noodle consumer in Nepal: children, middle class families and those from rural areas, they are all our target

consumers. Noodles are light enough to carry to the hills, is very easy to cook and does not need much energy. If you compare it with any other substitute, noodles are cheaper. For the past five years, the price of noodles has not gone up at all. In fact, it has decreased. Noodles are also convenient and hygienic.

But not very nutritious.

Actually, it is very balanced with carbohydrates and proteins. It can actually serve as a staple diet. In terms of food value, noodles are perfect. Of course, even sugar becomes bitter if you eat too much.

What are the guidelines you follow in advertising gimmicks?

The promises in some advertisements are hard to believe. One wonders how a packet of noodles that costs Rs 10 can contain such large prizes. Some companies have gone overboard. As long as you stick to what you promise in your advertisement, then you are ok. Consumers can't be cheated, and there has to be a code of conduct in this regard.

You mean the government should do it?

The authorities check us regularly and certify us annually. But if you want to make the industry respectable, then it is the producers' responsibility. They should not wait for someone else to impose the rules. Consumers are getting more and more quality conscious, you can't fool them.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Noodles have become a Nepali staple. With so many new brands in the market, competition for consumer loyalty is fierce. Rabindra Man Shrestha, CEO of Himalayan Snax and Noodles talked to Nepali Times about instant success, overproduction and hard sell.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Here comes the rain

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

Kathmandu farmers battle a late monsoon, their vanishing rice gene pool and urban sprawl

Nichhe Bahadur Maharjan looks anxiously at the sky and then at his fields of tender green shoots at Chakupat. As we trudge through the slush, he casually mentions that Patan sewage water is preventing his paddy from drying out. Desperate to water his fields, Nichhe Bahadur simply allows sewage into his fields.

"We've used this whenever the rains are late," says the farmer. "What works for *mula* works for *dhan*." After overcoming initial squeamishness, Nichhe's logic seems sound: there is plenty of free fertiliser in the effluent. Which means he gets nutrient-rich irrigation—for free!

Traditionally 29 June is the date on which rice transplantation should happen. The land is prepared, water diverted to turn it into a muddy pond, the paddy seedlings are ready. While those in the hills and tarai use bulls and buffaloes to plough, *gyapus* in the Valley till every inch of their land by themselves. Seedlings are planted one at a time in a backbreaking process that looks deceptively easy.

Then farmers work from early morning to late in the evening, tending to the shoots until the monsoon begins. Had the monsoon arrived on time, the plants would be more than a foot tall by now and most of the weeds taken out.

Rice is not an easy crop to grow, as most farmers will attest to. It takes more than slipping seedlings into the mud. It needs so much water that

only the monsoon can provide it. But when the rains are two weeks late as they are now, the farmers get worried. Already, frog weddings are taking place, in Nepalganj the women are dancing, dressed as men. The weather gods are not amused.

The *dahi chiura* feast on Tuesday this week was a little forced. It was hot and humid, and the day passed without rain. The Met Office was no help, it talked vaguely about isolated rain in parts of the kingdom. Weak rains will resume this weekend, but the full force of the monsoon is not expected for another week. This is an anxious time for farmers like Nichhe Bahadur. Even the sewage water is not enough to start planting since rice is a very water-intensive crop.

Nepalis are passionate about *Oryza sativa*, as paddy is known in Latin. Bhat is our staple diet without which most Nepalis feel a niggling sense of a meal being incomplete. Given Nepal's topography and altitude variation, the country has one of the widest varieties of rice in the world—some 1,700 traditional types suited to soils and microclimates from the tarai, hill valleys to the mountains. Rice grows in Jhapa at 80 metres above sea level, and it also grows at 2,700m in western Nepal, one of the highest altitudes that the crop is grown anywhere in the world.

With farmers concentrating on increasing harvests, many have switched to high-yield varieties of

rice. Now indigenous rice types are in danger of extinction. Old timers talk of Bayarni, which was so fragrant "that it made you want to start chewing the plant right off the field". The aroma of the Kala Namak from Taulihawa was said to be a gift of the Buddha. Jetho Budho from Pokhara's Phewa lakeside, Dhangadi's Krishna Bhog and Biratnagar's Birenphul are just a few among at least 95 varieties of aromatic rice.

Jumla's Marshi Dhan is the world's highest growing rice. The Valley farmers grew Marchi, Taul, Pokhrel and Puwa. Diverse agro-ecological conditions and socio-cultural traditions of the farming communities made all this possible in the past. Nichhe himself switched from his traditional rice to Taichin years ago. "Taichin is more disease resistant and yields more," he explains.

Besides a late monsoon and new seeds, farmers also have to contend with cheap imported Indian rice. Then there is a possibility that genetically altered rice could come in and contaminate the local gene pool. In Kathmandu Valley itself, it is clear what the real threat is: creeping urbanisation is chewing up the once-emerald terraces of paddy fields and replacing it with concrete and brick.

The late monsoon could just be an angry god throwing a tantrum at our foolishness. ●



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Common Minimum Program

Excerpts of the Common Minimum Program of the UML, Sadhabana, RPP and NC-D announced on 30 June

Our national crisis is becoming more serious and complex, so we need to reach an understanding on a common minimum program and policy. The responsibilities we have on our shoulders include strengthening democracy, solving the problems caused by the Maoist insurgency, establishing the people's sovereignty, activating the constitution, restoring peace and security, providing relief to the people, holding elections to activate the representative organisations and handing over the state power to an elected government. Our common minimum program:

A. Protection of national interest and democracy

1. The country will progress if we protect the achievements of the 1990 Movement so the people are sovereign and exercise power through constitutional provisions
2. Compliance with human rights principles. Cases of serious human rights violations will be probed and victims compensated
3. Elected bodies will be activated and power handed back the people's elected representatives
4. Reforms will be carried out to ensure a clean and committed administration to contain corruption
5. Local bodies will be legally reconstituted
6. National unity, freedom and territorial integrity will be protected, with a national consensus on issues like national security, foreign policy and water resources
7. Foreign policy will be based on the UN Charter and Panchashil. Consensus will be forged to resolve the Bhutani refugee crisis

B. Resolving problems caused by the Maoist insurgency

1. Peace talks with the Maoists will be given top priority by all political parties
2. Rehabilitate families displaced and affected by the conflict
3. Destroyed buildings and infrastructure repaired and restored

C. Emergency relief

1. Relief and support to the displaced families and victims of the Maoist conflict
2. Development programs in Maoist affected areas
3. Priority will be given to activities that foster the people's security
4. Regular flow of food commodities and other basic needs
5. Invest and involve more in human development programs such as education, hygiene and sanitation water supply, health services and rural development
6. Steps taken to gain support of all groups to maintain schools as zones of peace

D. Commitments for political reform

1. Bring the benefits of democracy to the people and for the politics of inclusion
2. Ensure internal democratisation of political parties. The rule of law will be sacrosanct, administrative and electoral reforms will ensure good governance, the civil service the security agencies will not be politicised, impunity will not be tolerated and the CIAA and judicial agencies will be strengthened
4. Ensure free and fair elections, and correct past poll inadequacies by implementing reform reports
5. Activate the Upper House in line with the constitution, and ensure fair representation of women and indigenous groups
6. Local bodies will be transformed into local governments by making them autonomous and self-reliant

E. Economic

1. Poverty alleviation based on social justice, economic growth, just distribution, economic and social policies. Agriculture, hydropower, tourism, human resources, and development of physical infrastructure will be given top priority. Industries, bank and financial business, transportation, communications and management of public enterprises will be encouraged, foreign investment will be attracted on the basis of national interest. While the public sector will be stressed, the private sector will be encouraged.
2. Land reform programs to raise the living standard of farmers. Land will be given to landless farmers. Special attention will be given to farmers, labourers and freed kamaiyas
3. Special program launched to solve the problem of unemployment. Foreign employment will be managed and regulated
4. Concrete steps will be taken for food security and to make clean drinkable water available for the people

F. Social

1. Upliftment of underprivileged groups
2. Involvement of ethnic and indigenous groups and tarai people in every arena of national life
3. Women, disabled and orphans will get special attention, caste discrimination against the dalits will be eliminated and perpetrators will face harsh penalty.
4. Special programs for women's development and equality. Equal rights to property will be implemented. Strong penalty against rape, domestic violence and trafficking
5. Inequities in the labour market will be removed
6. All religious, linguistic and cultural discrimination eliminated
7. Encourage the development of the arts, literature and culture
8. Scholarships for dalit children to encourage them to go to school, national campaign to eradicate illiteracy
9. Education to be made job-oriented and stress on vocational technical education and informal education
10. Accelerate the handover of school management, health posts, postal system and agriculture inputs to local communities with budgetary allocation
11. The citizenship problem of the tarai people will be solved
12. More investment will be made on rural community health service
13. Streamline the judicial process
14. End all negative cultural practices and remnants of traditional prejudice
15. Provision to ensure rights of overseas Nepalis and encourage them to invest skills and capital back home



Recruitment drive

Kantipur, 26 June

कान्तिपुर

MAKWANPUR – At Khayarbari village, nine-year-old Priya Bulanda has been hiding from a group of recruiters who are trying to lure her into joining an Indian circus. They are her Nepali neighbours who have a successful track record in tempting parents to part with their daughters in return for cash and the promise of education and a job. One of the recruiters, Majir Lal Tamang, visits Priya's home every day, and she runs away whenever he comes around. "They insist I join the circus," says Priya. "But I told him I won't go. My friends returned after experiencing so much pain and difficulty." Just recently, she heard about the abuse of circus girls in India and Priya does not want to share their fate.

Local villagers who work as circus recruiters make a lucrative income by supplying young Nepali girls to Indian circuses, a trend that has seen an increase in the past decade. The most notorious recruiter is Kirti Bahadur Banjang. He has supplied nearly 20 girls and made enough money

to build a big house. Sadly, parents are still willing to entrust their daughters' future with these unscrupulous men. Many children from Khayarbari and nearby villages have not returned home because only a small number manage to escape from the circus in Uttar Pradesh last week. Local activists say that the number of children joining the circus dropped after escapees narrated their horrific stories of abuse. But this alone is not likely to keep other children away as poor families are seduced by the idea of their children getting jobs.

Widows' brigade

Kantipur, 27 June

कान्तिपुर

They never imagined that they would one day don combat fatigues, carry guns and parade in a predominantly male battalion, but circumstances made possible what to these women was unimaginable just a year ago. These are widows of Royal Nepal Army (RNA) personnel who have died in encounters with the Maoists. After almost a year of mourning, Nirjala from Jhapa, Goma Shrestha from Dolakha and

Chandri Prasai from Chitwan decided that they had cried enough for husbands killed in action. It was time for action. Today, they do what their late husbands did. They joined the RNA and are full-fledged soldiers. "This had to happen," says Nirjala. "After all, how long can we keep on sobbing in memory of our husbands? There had to be a new beginning." Goma believes she now has a new mission in life. "After becoming a widow, life had ceased to have any meaning to me," she recalls. "But now I have the willpower to serve the country and the people." Chandri remembers when she almost committed suicide after her husband was killed. "At the time, the association of the army personnel's wives injected hope in me to live my own life independently."

The association gave them vocational training in tailoring but after the widows saw female soldiers training, they began to think they could do the same. The RNA could not recruit married females but made an exception for these women with an amendment to the rule. It allowed able widows of soldiers to join the security force, making Nirjala, Goma and Chandri the first three to do so.

After completing their training, they will be deployed in the same kind of risky work as their male counterparts. The three say that they have to fulfil the dream of their late husbands. "To establish peace. We don't want anyone else to suffer the same fate we did," says Goma.

Get back

Samacharpatra, 28 June

समाचारपत्र

LAMJUNG – Local government officers who were forced by the Maoists to leave the villages because they represented the 'old



Can you say that again? You really mean that corrupt people can't be ministers?

स्पेसटाइम दैनिक Spacetime, 27 June

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"The Maoists have totally abandoned their principles."

Mohan Bikram Singh, underground leader of the Nepal Communist Party-United Centre (Masal) in Nepal, 4 July

regime' are now being asked to return. The rebels have ordered the secretary of every VDC to return and resume their work. The district Maoist chief, Budhiram Tamu, warned that action would be taken against them and they would be forced to resign from their posts if they decided not to leave the district headquarters and return. "After we chased them out of the village, it has become more convenient for them in the district headquarters. They are free to do anything and there is no authority to control them," said one Maoist leader. "We want to bring them back so that we can monitor their work more closely." This is not the first time they have been recalled. VDC officers had gone back during the last ceasefire but after the peace talks broke down they were forced out. If they should choose to go back this time around, they will still hold no authority. Everything will need the prior approval and sanction of the rebels. "If we refuse to follow their orders, our lives will be at stake. It's better to resign," one VDC secretary said. During the state of emergency, the Maoists destroyed 56 VDC offices in this district and important documents and papers were burnt. Since then, VDC secretaries have held office in hotels, restaurants and district meeting halls. They have no

privacy and documents can't be stored securely. Villagers face problems processing citizenship papers, registering marriages and procuring necessary documents because officers are difficult to locate. "Most of the time, we never find a secretary and have to walk all the way back to our village," says Milan Gurung from Tandrang Taksar.

Land grab

Rajdhani, 28 June

राजधानी

BARA—Several families along the southern border are accusing India of encroaching on their land on the pretext of fencing their border poles at Jhikaiya VDC. The Indian regional office at Adapur gave the Nepalis 22 days to provide proof of their allegation. But when the Raut community went to measure their land, they were harassed and threatened by Indians for not possessing legal papers. Now India is pressurising them to stop farming, even asking them to leave the area permanently. Sadly, the Nepali authorities are quiet on the matter. "Despite our constant appeals to the district administration office, it has not sent a single police officer to investigate," says local teacher Shivaji Prasad Jaisawar. More than 40 Nepali families are losing their land, he said.

"Who do I turn to now?"

BBC Nepali Service, 28 June



Relatives of people disappeared by the government wept as they narrated their stories at a press meet at the Nepal Bar Association in Kathmandu on Monday. Mothers, sisters and wives have been trying to find out what happened to their dear ones after they were taken away either by the security forces or by the rebels.

"Eight months have passed since my brother went missing," said Parbati Maharjan of Lalitpur. "He took care of the whole family and after his arrest my parents are almost starving to death..." She broke into sobs, unable to finish her sentence. As the tears rolled down her cheeks, other participants started crying too. Even human rights activist Padma Ratna Tuladhar could not hold back his tears.

Indra Kishori Shrestha of Bhaktapur said she knew where her son is but hasn't been allowed to meet him. "They pointed their guns at me and said that they knew what to do with women in the nearby forest," she said, her voice trembling. "Who do I turn to now?" Sita Prasai, a young government employee, was remarkably collected when she recounted how her husband was taken away 10 days ago. But, later when other speakers broke down, she could not control her tears. "Who understands the heart of a woman?" she asked. "Especially when it has to do with her husband." Sita added that she was ready to accept any punishment if her husband was found guilty. "But I must be told of his whereabouts and the

reason for his detention."

Nearly 70 people, mostly women, spoke of their fears for those disappeared. They had just ended their week-long relay hunger strike before publicising their plight through the press. At the meet, three women announced that they would begin a fast-unto-death. "They are all mothers who want to know what has become of their sons who were disappeared after being taken by the state," explained Shanta Bhandari, secretary of the



KUMAR SHRESTHA/NEPALNEWS.COM

Society of the Relatives of Disappeared Persons. "If the government does not listen to us, we will all join the fast-unto-death and die."

Besides those taken by security forces, relatives of those disappeared by the Maoists were also there. On several occasions in the past, they too made their pains public. Several human rights organisations have brought out lists of people disappeared by both sides.

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Made in Asia

Japanese audiences look east

Thousands of Japanese women, mostly in their 30s and 40s, have become ardent fans of a sappy soap opera on television. More than that however, the soap opera they are all watching on the edge of their seats is, incredibly, made not in Japan but in neighbouring South Korea.

This highlights an emerging trend in the lucrative Japanese entertainment industry, which has traditionally relied on domestic or Western productions for business. "It's boom time for South Korean productions," says Haruko Konishi, a producer for So-Net, a new satellite broadcasting company that has invested heavily in South Korean-made productions. The huge success of 'Winter Sonata', a South Korean soap opera, currently playing on NHK-G, a broadband company of the public broadcaster NHK, is a case in point. The television drama was first aired in 2002 on NHK's BS-2 satellite channel, getting good ratings that prompted the company to rerun the love story again in March—to even more success.

"The popularity of South Korean productions underscores a new thrust in Japanese entertainment that has hitherto relied on the West. The trend is here to stay," says Tomohiro Sagawa, analyst at *Nikkei Business* magazine, Japan's leading publication on entrepreneurship. According to Sagawa, the success of Korean television dramas, despite the

fact that they remain concentrated in the broadband market, has helped pave the way for the penetration of Asian cultural productions into Japan. "Up to now, Japanese productions were the storm in Asia, but it is safe to say the opposite is happening now. Asian productions are becoming business opportunities for Japanese companies as they struggle to stay alive," he explains.

So-Net, a satellite company set up two years ago, cannot agree more. Konishi reports that, for instance, the showing of the 18-sequel South Korean drama 'Shinjitsu' (Truth) in July 2003 on its Sky-Perfect TV channel helped triple its 749 subscribers. So-Net is a subsidiary of Sony Communications Corp and has three channels featuring original television series, documentaries and sports programs. "We are cashing in on the boom of Asian productions and moving further to other countries. The risk is worth taking," explains Konishi. ● (IPS)



Brain drain to brain gain

Both the opponents and apologists for brain drain are partly right

HAIDER RIZVI at the UNITED NATIONS

When Shailesh migrated to the United States from Nepal a few years ago, he worried about how he would find enough work to survive. But within a few months he got the job of his choice, something that many among his fellow immigrants would describe as a lottery ticket. He works as an aeronautical engineer for a US company, where his compensation is no less than a dream: after paying taxes, he pockets \$60,000 a year, an amount he would never imagine making in Nepal.

But the 37-year-old, trained in the former Soviet Union in the 1980s, gets rankled when friends question his decision to serve a private business in the US.

"It's my life. I am doing what I got to do," he tells his friends, who believe that a poor country like Nepal needs more of its citizens, like Shailesh, with specialised skills rather than losing them to rich nations like the US, a phenomenon better known as 'brain drain'.

Shailesh's friends accuse him of depriving Nepal of his talent but he argues that since he sends a significant portion of his income home, he actually contributes to the foreign exchange reserves of the nation, which faces an uphill task to address its poverty and a Maoist insurrection.

Recent studies on international migration suggest that both sides—the opponents of and the apologists for brain drain—could be partly right. For instance, a World Bank study released in June 2003 validated the complaints of economically poor nations that rich industrialised countries are stealing their brilliant and brightest ones away.

"International migration does cause brain drain," wrote Richard Adams Jr, who authored the study, *International Migration, Remittances and Brain Drain*. But not all countries that export highly educated workers face the same problems, he added. The study, which focused on 24 labour-exporting nations, concludes that brain drain exists only in countries that have small populations or are located close to an industrially advanced nation. For example, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica—with small populations—and Mexico, which borders the US, lose their best-educated to industrialised countries, say researchers. So do Tunisia and Morocco in North Africa, because they are near Europe.

But the case of China, one of



the largest labour-exporting countries, baffled the researchers. "It has such a large pool of tertiary-educated people that international migration has a relatively small proportional impact on the domestic labour market for the brightest and the best," concludes the report.

The World Bank estimates that between 1981 and 2000, migrant workers (from the 24 countries studied) sent home \$36 billion. But studies that suggest that those remittances strengthen the economies and the living standards of labour-exporting countries do not go unquestioned. Remittances are "mostly used to finance the consumption of basics (such as) staple food, shelter, maintenance and clothing," writes Sam Vaknin in his book, *The Labour Divide: Migration and Brain Drain*. "It is non-productive labour," he argues. "Only a tiny part of the money ends up as investment."

Senior UN officials like Joseph Chamie, who has spent years studying population issues, thinks otherwise. "I have a debate with my economist friends. When this money goes back, it's usually spent on goods and investment," he said. "One thing is eyeglasses, second, education, third, dental and health care, fourth, clothing. Now what happens to this money? You have to go to a place for eyeglasses; it's going to be an investment. I can go on giving you so many examples of human capital."

He suggests one way to address the grievances of the countries facing brain drain is to work out an

arrangement whereby the employers of migrant labourers, not governments, compensate the home countries that provided education and training to their citizens working abroad. But he admits such a program would be "difficult" to implement.

Vaknin suggest the need for multilateral agreements between "brain-draining" and "brain-gaining" countries. Otherwise he warns, resentment "among poorer nations is likely to grow." Some developing nations have already initiated efforts to reverse the trend, just as in countries like Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Ireland successfully repatriated their professionals abroad.

In Africa, where many countries face brain drain, Eritrea recently proposed the introduction of a \$15,000 "bond" to guarantee the return of students it sent abroad for higher and specialised education, a multi-million-dollar annual cost to the nation. Other African nations are trying different methods, such as allowing skilled Africans working abroad to participate in the development of their countries without giving up the better wages and lifestyles of the rich nations they live and work in.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) ran a program from 1993 to 1998 to assist the return of qualified African professionals from abroad. IOM Director General Brunson McKinley says: "It is time for many poor countries to turn their brain drain into brain gain." ● (IPS)

Tarnished Serendib

Child sex tourism ruins Sri Lanka's image

COLOMBO—As tourism begins to overtake traditional sources of employment in Sri Lanka, the lure of easy money has caused many young Sri Lankans, including children, to trade their bodies. "We are taking tough steps to combat this menace," noted Asoka Perera, assistant director of the Sri Lanka Tourist Board.

Luc Ferran, tourism coordinator at ECPAT International told a Colombo workshop on commercial sexual exploitation of children in tourism in Sri Lanka recently that even though child sex tourism accounts for a small percentage of sex tourism, the sheer size of the number of travellers makes it a serious problem. Sex tourism represents 10 percent of the global tourist mark, he said at a 22 June meeting organised by the Bangkok-based End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT) and UNICEF. It brought together hoteliers, travel agents and tour guides and focussed on the tourism industry.

An analysis done by South Asia Partnership (SAP), an NGO with offices across the region, on child sex tourism in Sri Lanka showed that while foreign child tourists preferred boys, local Sri Lankan tourists preferred girls. SAP researcher Ruwanthi Heart Gunaratne said while the laws have been tightened in 1995 and 1998 where child sex offenders face jail terms of up to 20 years, there were few cases, however, brought to the courts due to lack of enforcement. The researcher said the problem was compounded by the fact that parents, especially in the rural areas, were reluctant to admit their children had been abused.

The SAP survey in September 2003 was conducted along with similar surveys in India and Nepal, which unlike Sri Lanka, doesn't have any documented cases of child sex offenders. Sri Lanka's laws are much stronger than in India or Nepal, which is also facing a serious child sex tourism problem. The survey dealt with both local and foreign tourists and was conducted in seven towns where the problem is most acute.

S Kailaselvam, director-general of the Sri Lanka Tourist Board, said poverty is the main cause of child sex tourism since 60 percent of the population live below the poverty line. "Families are poor and have no income. So when they find their children could make easy money from tourists, they allow the children to be friendly with them," he said. According to official estimates, there are nearly 40,000 child prostitutes in the country, of which up to 30,000 boys are used by foreign paedophiles. (IPS)

US neo-cons vs UNFPA

The Bush administration, which cut off its share of financing two years ago to the UN agency handling population control, is seeking to isolate the agency from groups that work with it, United Nations officials and diplomats say.

Pressed by opponents of abortion, the administration withdrew its support from a major international conference on health issues this month and has privately warned other groups, like Unicef, that address health issues that their financing could be jeopardised if they insisted on working with the agency, the UN Population Fund.

The administration also indicated that it hopes to persuade the United Nations' Latin American caucus to back away from a common position on population and development that was adopted in Santiago in March on the grounds that the document's discussion of reproductive rights could be interpreted as promoting abortion.

The actions are part of an administration effort to ensure that international agencies and private groups do not promote abortions overseas. In its first days in office, the Bush administration reintroduced the Reagan-era decree that critics call the 'global gag rule', which denies money to groups that even discuss abortion as an option, except in cases that threaten life or involve rape or incest.

The Population Fund has long been a favourite target of abortion opponents in the US Congress and in religious-based organisations, who contend that it assists in coercive

Neo-conservative opponents of the UN Population Fund contend it helps in coercive abortions around the world

CHRISTOPHER MARQUIS in WASHINGTON



abortions in China. The critics prevented American financing of the fund for most of the last two decades, and they have now set their sights on curbing its operations with other UN agencies.

The administration's position has frustrated some UN officials and family planning advocates, who have complained that advances in education and awareness on reproductive issues are being undermined by the United States, where abortion is legal.

Those critics, most of whom spoke anonymously because the US government is the leading contributor to their agencies, charged

that the administration was pandering to conservative supporters, and said that doing so placed the United States in alliance with tradition-bound Islamic countries and the Holy See.

Last year, the State Department cut financing to Marie Stopes International, a British charity involved in AIDS programs, because it worked with the Population Fund in China.

Supporters of the fund deny that it facilitates coerced abortions in China. They say it has made considerable progress in reducing the number of abortions through family planning programs in conjunction

with the Beijing government.

Two years ago, the administration appeared to agree. A fact-finding mission for the State Department in 2002 recommended the release of \$34 million in American payments.

A report on that trip said that no evidence was found that the Population Fund had "knowingly supported or participated in the management of a program of coercive abortion or involvement sterilisation" in China. But Powell, who had praised the agency's activities, abruptly reversed course, contending in a 21 July 2002 letter to Congress that the fund had

provided computers and vehicles to Chinese government groups that enforced the country's coercive reproduction policy, which taxes parents who have more than one child.

Powell said that the fund was in violation of a 1985 law that prohibits the US from giving money to agencies involved in coerced abortion or sterilisation. President George W Bush withheld the \$34 million in 2002 and another payment last year. He has until July 15 to decide for this year's budget.

Conservative religious groups are keeping the pressure on the administration. A group leading the fight against the fund is the Population Research Institute in Front Royal, Virginia, which calls itself a research and education group that exposes human rights abuses in population control programs.

The institute says that China's population control policy bullies women through the mandatory use of contraception, forced abortions for those younger than 20 and prison for those who do not appear for examinations. By working with the government, the Population Fund is complicit, critics say.

The Population Fund's "support consists of public praise for, and misinformation about, China's coercive family planning policy," the institute says on its website.

Fund supporters counter that they have nothing to do with abortion policy. Through their programs, they give maternity kits and prenatal care to pregnant women. ● (NYT)



Opium glut

A bumper crop in Afghanistan fuels a global addiction

STEFANIA BIANCHI in BRUSSELS

The illicit production of opium in Afghanistan is a "time bomb" waiting to hit Europe, says a new report by the United Nations drugs agency.

Production of opium in Afghanistan is expected to increase this year and will have a significant knock-on effect in Europe, says the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Last year Afghanistan produced 3,600 tonnes of opium (the second highest opium production in the country's history), worth an estimated \$1.2 billion, says the UNODC World Drug Report 2004 released Friday.

Although the global illicit production of opium (from which heroin is made) has remained stable in recent years—around 4,000 to 5,000 tonnes—production has become increasingly concentrated in Afghanistan, which along with Myanmar and Laos produces more than 90 percent of the world's opium. The UNODC highlights the effect the Afghanistan production will have on the drug culture in the rest of the world. "The fate of the world heroin market will largely depend on what happens in that country," the report says. Production in Myanmar and Laos is continuing to decline.

"The real problem we have at the moment is Afghanistan," said Thomas Pietschmann, research officer at UNODC. "With a time lag of about one year, we must expect that the heroin manufactured out of this opium will enter Western Europe."

Opium production in Afghanistan was brought under control in 2001 with the fall of the Taliban, but now the UNODC says it is produced in areas where it did not exist before. In 2002 some 3,400 tonnes of opium was produced in Afghanistan. This increased to 3,600 tonnes the following year.

Although the drug problem, which affects 185 million people worldwide, has increased slightly since the last 2000 report (which recorded a total of 180 million people), the report says that the "spread of drug use may be losing momentum". The number of drug related deaths, mostly due to heroin, fell almost 20 percent between 2000 and 2002 and there are also indications that the injecting of drugs has been stable or decreasing over the last few years in most countries in Western Europe.

There is an exception, however. The report notes that the consumption of cannabis is spreading at "an accelerated pace". New estimates say cannabis is the most widely used drug in the world with close to 150 million people taking it. This is followed by amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS), with some 30 million users of amphetamines, primarily methamphetamine and amphetamine, and eight million on ecstasy. Slightly more than 13 million people use cocaine, while some 15 million people use opiates, namely heroin, morphine, opium and synthetic opiates. In terms of health impact measured by the demand for treatment services, opiates remain the most serious problem in the world, accounting for 67 percent of drug treatment in Asia and 61 percent in Europe. The amount of illicit drugs seized over the past ten years has increased, with ecstasy, depressants and ATS drugs showing the strongest increases, the report says.

The report points to the broader implications of the drug problem, including the spread of HIV/AIDS and other diseases, money laundering, corruption and financing of insurgents and terrorists. The report says little is known about the structure and dynamics of drug markets at national, regional and global levels. "There is a pressing need to fill that knowledge gap in order to develop more synergistic drug control strategies," the report says. "The deficiency of compartmentalised sectorial and geographical approaches must be addressed." ● (IPS)

Not just geisha girls

Japanese women find a new voice through a mystery novel



husbands and financial hardship, touches the hearts of the younger generation. "Many of them consider such issues important and so can relate to her work," he points out. "Writers such as Kirino represent a new trend in fiction that has emerged during the past two decades in Japan where social issues, now, are quite different compared to the past."

The new novels are classified as entertainment writing and publishers predict these Japanese authors will soon be making inroads internationally for their high quality writing in line with the growing reputation of Japanese animation and pop culture. Onodera says such changes can even be observed in serious fiction. The latest winners in February of Japan's most coveted literary awards, the Akutagawa, were two young women, whose novels covered such themes such as body piercing and high school loneliness.

Hiromi Kanehara, 20, co-winner of the Akutagawa prize, wrote recently that she might have come across, in her book, as an airhead, but then said: "I don't give a hoot". Japan's new authors are also similar to the characters they write about. For instance, Kirino's hobbies are skiing, bowling and playing mahjong, a traditional Chinese gambling game popular with ordinary Japanese men and women. "The days when fiction was dominated by uniquely Japanese themes and ethics are over," says book editor Sato. "New trends are emerging with the birth of a new generation of Japanese who want to write on pertinent things and address sexual inequality in the country." ● (IPS)

SUVENDRINI KAKUCHI

The stunning success in Japan, and recently in the United States, of a mystery writer's novel about a husband-killer and psychopath gangsters, has injected new life into the conservative Japanese publishing world that previously only carried works depicting women as loyal housewives devoted to their husbands. The English translation of Natsuo Kirino's *Out*, published last year, was nominated for best novel in the prestigious 2004 Edgar Allen Poe Awards, handed out by the New York-based Mystery Writers of America Organisation.

"Kirino's nomination signifies the emergence of a new literary genre in Japan, a style that is far more universal in story, characterisation and reality," says Kenichi Sato, book editor of the Yomiuri Shimbun daily newspaper. "*Out* features the story and emotions of ordinary housewives who lead lives that are similar to women living in other urban societies." Sato points out that Kirino's style is a far cry from the past where Japanese writers, like Nobel prize winner Yasunari Kawabata and the country's best post-war novelist Yukio Mishima, gained international limelight for writing hauntingly elegant prose depicting the uniqueness of Japanese culture and portraying women as innocent beauties devoted to men.

While Kirino, 53, a former jazz club waitress, might have failed to clinch the prestigious American literary award for mystery writing, experts say her entrance as the first

Japanese writer to be nominated in that field marks a significant development in the domestic literary scene. This year's winner for best novel in the Edgar Allan Poe Awards was leading British writer Ian Rankin for his *Resurrection Men*. Poe was one of the pioneers of detective stories and perfected the psychological thriller. He also produced some of the most influential literary criticism of his time, important theoretical statements on poetry and the short story, and had a worldwide influence on literature. The Poe yearly awards are also for non-fiction and works in television and film.

"Kirino's international popularity has raised the profile of Japanese thrillers in the world. She represents a new genre of writers and writing in Japan," said Kazuki Onodera, a literary agent at the major Kawadeshobo Publishing Company. In a recent press conference, Kirino said she was inspired to write *Out* because of her frustration at the lack of novels in Japan focusing on middle-aged women. "I wanted to read a novel about an ordinary middle-aged housewife but there weren't any," said Kirino. "The only ones I could find were about wives in rather well-off families or housewives fretting about their husbands' infidelities. So I decided to write one myself."

The story is centered around four middle-aged women from poor families who work the gruelling night shift in a factory churning out thousands of boxed lunches. After one of them kills her husband, the women get together to

dispose the body by cutting it into pieces in a bathtub. They later get embroiled with the police and psychopath gangsters.

Out, published by Kodansha Limited, Japan's largest publishing house, won the Mystery Writers of Japan Award in 1998. The first release was 290,000 prints in Japan followed by 20,000 of the English translation in the US last year. It comes as no surprise that Kirino's novel is a bestseller among women who see it as a spicy piece of work in an otherwise dull literary world dominated by conservative male values. In a fan website, fledgling young mystery writer Tomoko Kano writes: "Kirino seduces women readers by her powerful female characters in *Out*."

Her characterisation breaks the stereotypes of women and poses a threat to older men who prefer reading about the fairer sex depicted as elegant objects, a feature of male fantasy," adds Kano. On a recent trip to the US to promote Kirino's book, Akihiro Miyata, head of Kodansha's literary section, told reporters that Japanese authors are now breaking into the international market by not relying "on Japanese sentimentality and orientalism but rather on straightforward entertainment."

Indeed, this was evident in New York bookstores when *Out* was displayed in the mystery section, rather than shelved away in the Japanese author category. Kawadeshobo's Onodera explains Kirino's deft portrayal of ordinary women in Japanese society, as those who have part-time jobs, face abuse from their

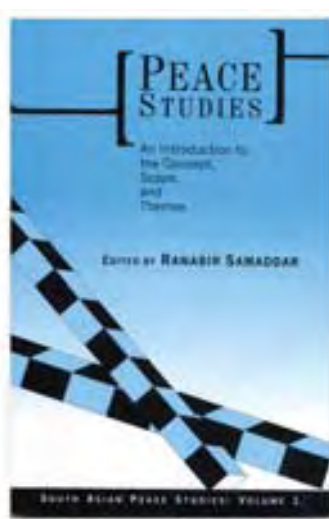


Out
Natsuo Kirino
Kodansha Europe, 2003
\$22.95

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Peace Studies: An Introduction to the Concept, Scope, and Themes

Ranabir Samaddar (ed)

Sage, 2004

Rs 768

In recent years, a significant corpus of scholarly work has emerged that seeks to link peace with issues of justice, dignity, dialogue and reconciliation. Providing a new approach to understanding peace and conflict resolution in a comparative perspective, contributors emphasise the need to take account of the historical, political and civilisational specificities of nations and peoples.

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

Breakthrough

The importance of quality practice

After having learned the game of golf, it is everyone's dream to improve and look for a breakthrough. For instance, beginners would at first want to make some bogeys on a round. Next, after playing for a few months, they start to think of breaking 100, and this ambition to be better never ends.

Some people define a 'breakthrough' as that magical day when they have a fantastic round and shatter their personal best score by several strokes. In reality though, that old score barrier should be consistently broken for it to be called a

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



breakthrough. Obviously, for such long lasting improvement you will need help from somebody who can teach you new techniques and check and correct your swing.

When people want to improve, they start dedicating more time towards practicing. However practice without proper guidance will lead to bad habits. Therefore, it is very important to take lessons to improve the standard of your game. There is a saying: quality supersedes quantity. In golf, this applies equally well. The quality of practice is more significant than the quantity of practice.



Breaking 100

At this level, golf is a social game, often for the sake of starting golf and perhaps for exercise. However, if the standard of play does not improve it soon gets boring. In my opinion, most high handicappers are much too anxious about playing a shot, and overwhelmingly preoccupy their minds with the anticipated outcome of the shot. This creates tension in the grip and body, and not surprisingly, the result is rarely a normal swing.

The idea at this level is to relax before every shot and concentrate on preswing fundamentals like grip, alignment, posture and ball position. Then just hit the ball without worrying too much about the result.

Breaking 90

If you are in the vicinity of breaking 90, you have become a bogey player. You probably advance the ball well enough on those full shots, but might be struggling inside the 70 yards range. These shots, the half wedges, soft pitches and longer putts need honing, even though it isn't as much fun as practicing long drives.

Breaking 80

Here, the yearnings to be a single digit handicapper beckon, and the level of transformation taking place is from being a mere golfer to becoming 'a player'. To consistently break 80, the short game has to be worked on. You should be able to make at least 60 percent of your ups and downs from around the green. The other point to keep in mind is that too many shots are wasted by trying to hit the ball too far. Therefore, it is very important to keep 'the ball in play', which means, keep it away from trouble.

These thoughts are not a magical solution to improving the standard of your golf. They are just some observations I have made over my teaching career. A reasonable amount of practice with proper supervision is the key to improvement at any level. So don't spend too much time on the quantity of practice. Remember the importance of the quality.

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



New Europe rises

EURO 2004 banishes the old powers



will start the ball rolling with a confession: I expected a repeat final of 2000's France vs Italy, and both failed abjectly. The French arrived full of boasts about redeeming their first-round

COMMENT

Rob Hughes

elimination at the 2002 World Cup and left sheepishly, their own media declaring this to be the end of the glorious era when France reigned as world and European champion.

The Italians? Not the real thing, barely a spitting image of the formidable defenders they once were, when Franco Baresi and Paolo Maldini were in their prime, or the great goal thieves that Luigi Riva, Paolo Rossi and Totò Schillaci proved to be.

For all their excuses—and for the failings of the Germans, the Spaniards and the English—the five so-called superpowers among the 52-nation European soccer confederation lacked either the desire, the application or the class to go the distance.

The game goes on, and we still have the Czechs and the Portuguese, who have played undoubtedly the finest soccer of this tournament, as well as weathering two of the most dramatic tests of their nerve.

Those two countries also happen to have two of the most astute coaches at Euro 2004. Luis

Felipe Scolari, the Brazilian who guided his own country to the World Cup two summers ago, is so adept at substitutions that four of his team's six goals have come directly from his intervention. He reads the game like no other, and he cares nothing for reputation or the feelings of the player being replaced. With so much religious talk going on here, so much praying to Our Lady of Fatima, it is not doing the Portuguese much harm that Scolari is such an earthy character, making cold and bold decisions in the heat of the contests.

I like him because he talks common sense, and he talks as if players, and not the work of the coach, are the key. One of the classic moments of this European Championship came when Scolari summoned his captain, Luis Figo, to hand over the armband and leave the field after 75 minutes against England. Figo, the national icon, trudged off like a spoiled child, unable to recognise that the coach was doing the unpopular thing for the good of the team. While Figo hid in the dressing room, Scolari's substitutions again won the contest. His adversary Eriksson did not have the courage to remove his faded celebrity captain, David Beckham.

A very different personality, but wily nevertheless, is the Czech coach, Karel Bruckner. Where Scolari explodes and looks close to imploding on the touchline, at war

with the world, Bruckner has the appearance of an elderly professor. If you watch his team at play, you see a tight order at the back, a liberated and multitalented midfield and an attack in which Milan Baros has emerged as a scorer to eclipse the big—and departed—stars, namely France's Thierry Henry, Italy's Christian Vieri, Spain's Raúl, England's Michael Owen and Germany's—well, nobody from Germany.

There are at least three reasons Baros is succeeding while Henry & Co is out of sight: he has talent, and instinct for the goal. He has an extra edge in fitness because his club, Liverpool, underused him last season.

There is Pavel Nedved, the effervescent and cunning midfield man whose passes slide through defenses like bayonets through sacks. There is Karel Poborsky, now 32 but recapturing his form of almost a decade ago, when he showed the pace and the crossing ability of a true winger. There is Tomas Rosicky, just 23 but almost the brains of the midfield hub. And there is big Jan Koller, not at all the lumbering giant some mistake him to be but a man selfless in making decoy movements to pave the way for Baros.

There are two other teams in contention before we can presume this event will get the final that it deserves: the Portuguese against the Czechs. ●

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STATUTORY DIRECTIVE : SMOKING IS INJURIOUS TO HEALTH

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

HeroJig's Adventures with Tiffen can also be seen at www.extreme-nepal.com

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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Secret Moments** Paintings by Bhairaj Maharjan till 15 July at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, 4218048
- ❖ **Erotic Drawings** by Birendra Pratap Singh till 10 July at Buddha Gallery Zen Café, Thamel. 4441689



EVENTS

- ❖ **Fulbright Forum:** Amanda Snellinger on *Possible Theoretical Trajectories in which to Analyse Student Politics and the Student Movement in Nepal*, 2PM on 4 July at Baggikhana, Yala Maya Kendra.
- ❖ **Film Club:** *Dark Days*, Marc Singer (2000) 5.30 PM on 11 July at Baggikhana, Patan Dhoka. Tickets: Rs 50 Contact: 5542544
- ❖ **Blood donation** organised by Federation of Nepalese Sports Journalists at Dashrath Rangasala, 7.30 AM on 2 July.
- ❖ **Up in Smoke** Party at K2 Bar, Babar Mahal Revisited, 7PM on 2 July. Tickets Rs 399
- ❖ **Summer Drift** Party at the Rox Bar, 7PM on 6 July.
- ❖ **4th Bagmati River Festival** till 21 August
- ❖ **The British Film Festival 2004** *About a Boy* 2 July at Gopi Krishna Cinema, Chabahil.
- ❖ **An Evening with Pankaj Udhas** 6PM on 2 July at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. Tickets Rs 3,000. 2080392

MUSIC

- ❖ **Full Circle** 7PM Fridays at Bakery Café, Jawalakhel. 4434554
- ❖ **Deo** at Not Just The Jazz Bar Fridays at Hotel Shangri-la, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Jatra Friday Nites** Live music by The Strings. 4256622

DRINKS

- ❖ **Red Onion Bar** EURO 2004 and drink specials.
- ❖ **Lychee Martinis** at Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 4491234
- ❖ **EURO 2004 Football Mania** at Hotel Yak Yeti.
- ❖ **EURO 2004** 11ft screen, discounted drinks at Summit Hotel. 5521810

FOOD

- ❖ **Friday Nights** at Subterranea Club Kilroy. 4412821
- ❖ **Vegetarian Creations** at Stupa View Restaurant. 4480262
- ❖ **Splash Spring BBQ** at Radisson Hotel Kathmandu.
- ❖ **Executive Lunch** at Toran Restaurant, Dwarika's. 4479488
- ❖ **The Beer Garden** at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Dwarika's Thali Lunch** at The Heritage courtyard. 4479488

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Summer in Shivapuri** at Shivapuri Heights. 9851051780
- ❖ **Wet & Wild Summer Splash** weekends. Godavari Village Resort.
- ❖ **Pure relaxation** at Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge. 01 4361500
- ❖ **Golf** at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa. 4451212
- ❖ **Weekend Special** at Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha. 4375280
- ❖ **Early Bird discounts** at Shangri-La Hotel & Resort. 4412999
- ❖ **Bird watching escape** at Shivapuri retreat. 4253352



Lakshya is based on the 1999 Indian Army skirmishes with Pakistani intruders in the heights of Kargil in Jammu and Kashmir. Starting with his life as a careless rich boy, the film traces the journey of cadet Karan Shergill (Hrithik Roshan) and the changes in his character, strengths and beliefs. Co-starring Amitabh Bachchan and Preity Zinta, *Lakshya* aims to redefine war films in Bollywood.

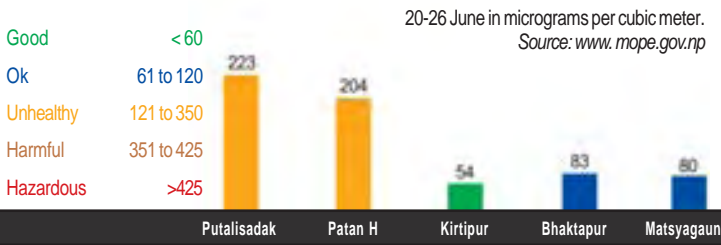
Saturday 19 June Bookings open
Call 4442220 for show timings www.jainepal.com

JAI NEPAL CINEMA



KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

Just when we thought we could sit back and breathe in some good air in parts of the Valley, things have gone back to ok at best with all the monitoring stations recording a leap in PM10 (particles small enough to enter the human body) last week. With monsoon rains delayed, the quality of air in the regularly busy vicinities of Putalisadak and Patan Hospital both shot up well into the 'unhealthy' range. Monitoring stations recorded a slight respite in Matsyagaon, Kirtipur and Bhaktapur where PM10 levels stayed below national ambient air quality standard of 120 micrograms per cubic meter.



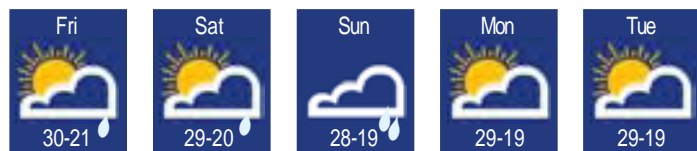
NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



Fingers crossed that the delayed monsoon is rushing up from the ocean again to catch up with its normal schedule. After two dry weeks, it looks like moisture laden winds from the Bay are moving up again. The circulation is still weak, but hopefully it should bring welcome rain over the weekend and into next week. The monsoon had been obstructed by an unseasonal high altitude westerly jet that is now finally shifting northwards. This satellite picture taken on Thursday at noon shows clouds massing up along Nepal's eastern and southern borders.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



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For insertions ring NT Marketing at 5543333-36.



KIRAN PANDAY

ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL: Badri Mandal (Sadhabana), PM Sher Bahadur Deuba, Madhab Nepal (UML) and Pashupati SJB Rana (RPP) say hip-hip-hurray after signing the Common Minimum Program at the BICC on Wednesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

STOWAWAYS: Tara Magar Thapa, 9, and Anita Thapa, 7, gatecrashed the Closeup Video Music Awards at BICC on Saturday and were allowed to stay by Jamim Shah and Prajwol Pradhan of Channel Nepal.



KIRAN PANDAY

AH! ACAPELLA: The Yale Whiffenpoofs delighted the audience at the Yak & Yeti on Tuesday with their renditions of classic jazz and English folk songs.



NEPALNEWS.COM

THAMEL SHUTDOWN: Kathmandu's tourist hub was closed for six hours on Monday in a turf battle between rival gangs.



KIRAN PANDAY

TOUCHY FEELY: Nepali pop hunk Anil Singh sandwiched between Binita Baral (l) and Jaya Nepali (r) at the video shoot of the song *Jivan Hamro* at Chroma Studio 9 on Tuesday.

Do it like Granny

If there is one lesson we could all learn from Ranamati Limbu it is that you're never too old to save the world. This petite 75-year-old from Tapethok village in the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area, along with fellow members of the local Mother's Group, is a vital link in the biodiversity conservation of the wilderness in eastern Nepal.

Her village depends heavily on the forest and in the past, they indiscriminately followed the slash and burn practice to clear the jungles for shifting agriculture. But the Satyalung Mother's Group, which recently won the Abraham Conservation Award from WWF Nepal Program, are changing things. (pic, Ranamati smiles for the cameras during the award ceremony). Since women do most of the household work, including collecting firewood for cooking and grass for livestock, they are ideally placed to effect concrete changes in the sustainable management of forest resources.

Despite being among the poorest communities in the Kangchenjunga area, the Satyalung Mother's Group has been actively involved in conservation activities. The

women not only promote forest conservation and motivate local people to save wildlife but also have a hands on approach: "We planted 500 trees and built a 2m fireline around the area," Ranamati says with pride. A number of poachers even gave themselves up to the group, promising not to kill anymore wildlife in the future.

Ranamati and her group have benefited from WWF Nepal's work in small credit schemes, skills development training and

awareness programs on conservation for villagers.

The Satyalung Mother's Group especially appreciated the child daycare centre. "It allowed us to concentrate on the community as a whole instead of just our own families," says Ranamati with a smile. Another bit of wisdom that could stand us in good stead. ●



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The Annual Most Remarkable Loo in Nepal Awards Night

It's that time of year again for an event that all of you have been eagerly awaiting: The Annual Most Remarkable Loo in Nepal Awards Night. Unpleasant as it

UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit



may seem, it is in the national interest that we

conduct this ceremony with proper decorum, so I crave your indulgence. May I request all of you with gastroenteritis to turn your mobiles off. Our aim is to award everyone in this country an award until there is no one left to award awards to. Your aim will help.

Thank you, Ladies and/or Gentlemen, for attending this important event, it is your interest, passion and your bowel activity that help us guarantee that our bathrooms meet Turd World standards in various olfactory

and visual categories. Before we move on to the nominations, a small housekeeping announcement: the rest rooms here at the Birendra International Convention Centre do not support human life as we know it. But I know that will not deter many of you from venturing out into the Death Zone to get yourselves into the *Guinness Book of World Records* for the longest that a human being has survived without actually breathing. So, good luck.

OK, let's get this over with. Here with me on stage with the nomination envelopes is the Director General of the Lack of Water Supply and Sewerage Board who has kindly consented to announce this year's winners. Over to you, sir.

"First off, let's start with the Most Aromatic Toilet in the Western Development Region. I know you all have

your personal favourites, but unfortunately there can be only one victorious bathroom, and for the tenth consecutive year the winner is Nepalganj Airport. A round of applause, ladies and gentlemen, for a well-deserved win to an aerodrome that has consistently created the greatest stink over the past decade.

That brings us to the Least Bio-degradable Bathroom in the supporting category for which this year's winner is The Mt Everest Base Camp Common Toilet Tent situated on a crevasse on the Khumbu Glacier, which is moving downhill (with everything on it) at one metre per year. In another 3,500 years this facility will be located in the vicinity of Lobuje at which point archaeological excavations will allow scientists to glean details of the diet of prehistoric mountaineers.

The next is the Most Airworthy Toilet

category in which the Aft Starboard Lavatory in the Royal Nepal Airlines 757 Karnali has won uncontested. It wouldn't have been possible for the airline to do this on its own, and the national flag carrier owes a debt of gratitude to an aimless flying public.

And finally, we have this year's winner of the Golden Toilet Seat Trophy for the best overall performer, and the winner is: the Bir Hospital Outdoor Ward Urinal, which is impossible to walk into because one has to wade instead. This is the closest we humans have come to simulating conditions on the Jupiter moon, Ganymede, whose surface is covered with a mixture of liquid ammonia and nitrous oxide. Congratulations to tonight's winners, see you all next year, and we wish each and everyone of you happy toilet training." ●



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