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Talking about talking

As assassinations, abductions and ambushes go on as usual



NARENDRA SHRESTHA

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

The four parties in government are talking about it. The four parties on the streets are talking about it. The international community is talking about it. The Maoist are talking about it. Everyone is talking about talking, but no one is actually talking.

In fact, there seems to be fierce competition among various political leaders to prove that they are ahead in the talking game. More than a month and a half after his appointment and two weeks after he put together a government, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has been saying, "I am for talks, but not if they are destined to fail like last time."

The UML needs progress on the peace front if it is to justify joining a royal-appointed government, and is impatient with Deuba's delay. The army says it doesn't want a ceasefire which the Maoists will use to regroup like last year.

The king's man in the cabinet, Information Minister Mohammad Mohsin says cautiously: "We are weighing all options and discussing how to go about it with Nepali and foreign conflict experts."

The Common Minimum Program document that forms the basis for the coalition between the NC-D, UML, RPP and NSP states that the government will exercise 'maximum flexibility' in pursuing talks.

But there is disagreement on what this means. "The government has to stay within the constitution," Mohsin cautioned. Monarchists see the constituent assembly demand as another way of saying 'republic'. But the constituent assembly demand doesn't just split the government and the Maoists, it also divides the NC-D and the UML. Deuba, who shouted slogans for constituent assembly while on the streets, has suddenly gone quiet about the matter.

On Wednesday, UML general secretary Madhab Nepal said, "The government has to be more proactive. Whatever is being done is not enough." UML leaders, including those in the government, have even been proposing a unilateral ceasefire by the government to see how the Maoists respond.

Maoist chief Prachanda issued a statement this week saying there was 'no immediate possibility of talks'. But he left the door open by

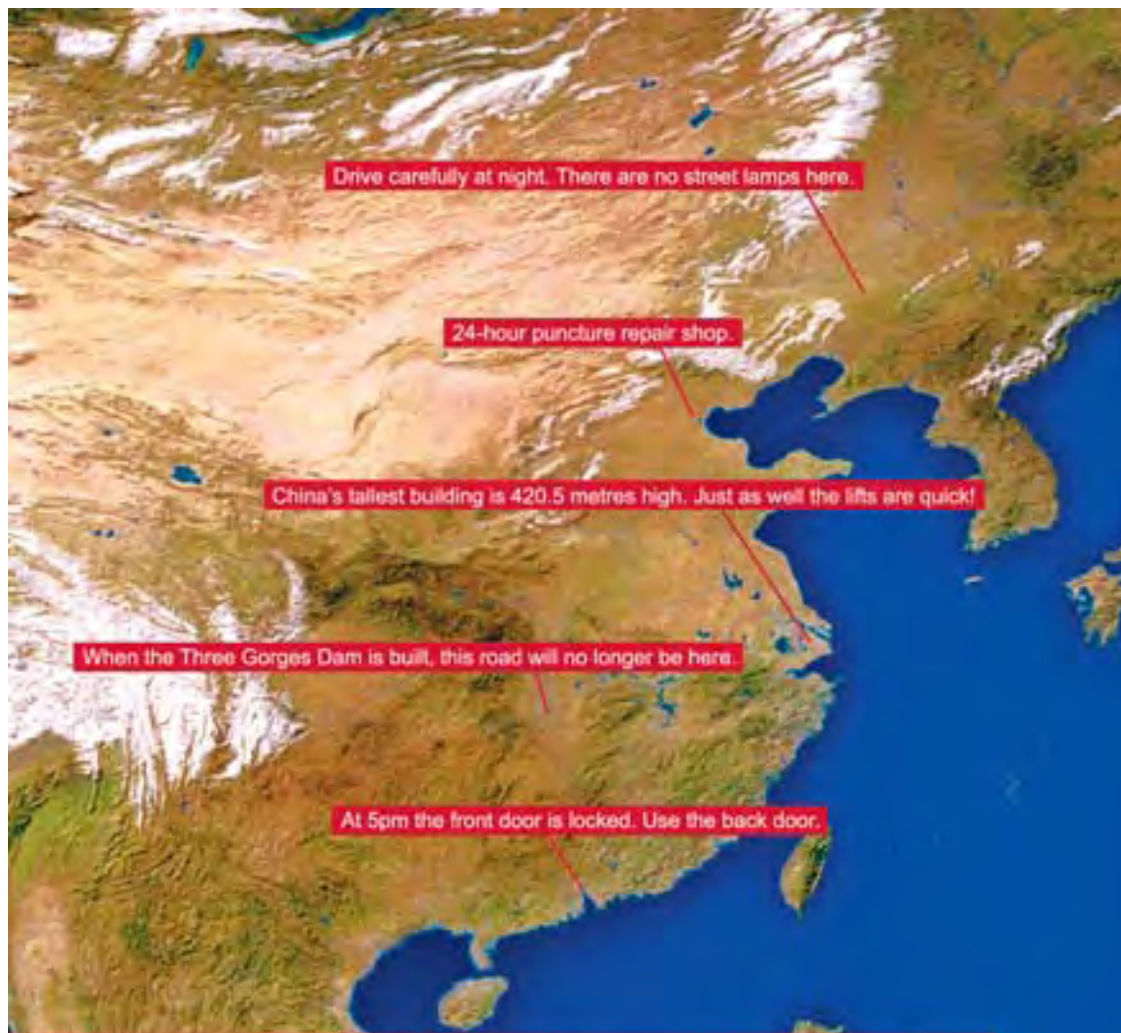
Students from Shri Krishna Secondary School in Chhaimale, 25km south of Kathmandu, after their release by the Maoists. They were force-marched for three days and made to listen to revolutionary speeches.

reiterating his preference for UN mediation, a move that analysts say is designed to ensure the safety of Maoist leaders if they emerge for talks and also to gain international legitimacy for the movement. The Maoists are getting civil society to exert pressure on the government to lift its terrorist tag before talks

and agree to discuss the constituent assembly. The facilitator in last year's negotiations, Padma Ratna Tuladhar, believes the government has made no preparations at all to negotiate. "We see no confidence-building measure, no feelers," he told us.

Nepali Congress President Girija

Prasad Koirala, whose student wing has been washing dirty linen in public all week, claims he has been securing national and international pressure on the Maoists and the king to hold talks. "The king doesn't seem to be the least bit interested," he said on Thursday. "What he has in mind is not clear to me." ●



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LET'S GO BACK

Just to make it easier for us to take the bad news, the United Nations Human Development Report (HDR) released this week upgraded Nepal from its category of 'low human development countries' to 'medium human development countries'.

The cutoff point between the two categories is a Human Development Index of 0.5, and Nepal's HDI climbed to 0.504 from 0.474 four years ago. This promotion carries symbolic value, it doesn't call for any major rejoicing.

We have been comparing this year's figures with those in HDR 2000. There may be a debate about the accuracy of statistics supplied by our government to the UN, but there are indications Nepal was headed in the right direction till 1997. The life expectancy of an average Nepali climbed from 43 thirty years ago to nearly 60. The infant mortality rate went down from 165 for every 1,000 live births in 1975 to 66 in the past 30 years.

Much of this improvement took place after 1990 as grassroots democracy allowed rural Nepalis to force their elected leaders to be accountable. VDC chairmen had to deliver, or else they didn't get re-elected. The villagers' demands were simple: a safe drinking water system which reduced diarrhoeal dehydration—the main killer of Nepali children. The villagers wanted schools and the VDCs built them—the percentage of youth literacy in Nepal shot up from 47 percent to nearly 63 percent in the past fourteen years.

If it hadn't been for the conflict, Nepal's development parameters would have improved at that pace and this year's HDR would have perhaps ranked Nepal ahead of Cambodia and Burma. Alas, some of the figures in this year's HDR are already three years old and it wouldn't be surprising if on literacy, health and other indicators we have regressed. Nepal's primary enrollment, maternal mortality and undernourishment are already at crisis levels.

The UN has boldly taken on the universal values of democracy and cultural liberty in this year's report. Boldly because there are some member governments who have never wanted the UN to be so explicit on issues like pluralism and political freedom.

For us in Nepal, the message has hit home: you have to address inequity, marginalisation and exclusion not just to end conflict but also for future economic progress. You can't have a Gini coefficient of 36.7 and hope to have sustainable growth.

Nepal has to move backward to move forward again. We have to go back to 1997 and start re-doing what we were doing right then.



KASHISH DAS SHRESTHA

UNder-developed

The UN has finally accepted the need to build inclusionary multicultural democracies

From the vantage point of the Sanchaya Kosh building where we are, the UN complex looks like a drive-in motel. Mammoth SUVs, with extra-long radio antennae waving in the air, zoom in and out at lunch hour unless they are rudely interrupted by a bomb scare in an

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



adjacent building. With all their frantic busy-ness, it is a miracle the underworked and overpaid aidocrats in our midst find time to get anything done. It took time off this week to tell us that Nepal has now graduated from a low-development country to a middle-development country. Some consolation.

Ever since it rose from the ashes of World War II, the United

Nations never tried to be an organisation of nations. It was quite happy to be of service to its member states and their heads. Over the years, tyrants, despots and genocidal leaders have graced the General Assembly hall to pontificate while being simultaneously translated into several languages.

But at long last, the UN seems to have realised that nation-states are inherently exclusionary. By emphasising the role of 'building multicultural democracies', this year's Human Development Report 2004 finally admits that there can be no meaningful development without institutionalising inclusive democracy.

However, HDR 2004 frankly admits that it is not easy to build multicultural states. Throughout the 20th century, building cohesive nation-states with homogeneous

identities remained the primary political project of human civilisation. Both Cold War rivals—USSR and USA—presented competing unitary models of state building that didn't have much tolerance for ethnic diversity.

After the Shah restoration in 1950s, Nepal did take faltering steps towards building a state-nation rather than a nation-state by adopting a democratic constitution. But King Mahendra had no patience for the messiness of parliamentary democracy. He envied the 'one language, one system, and one people' pattern of the American Empire and sought to replicate it in Nepal with himself at the centre of the enterprise.

Nation-states have traditionally emerged to oppose empire. In Nepal, the Gorkha Empire announced on 15 December, 1960 that it was going to be a nation-state and not a state of various nations aspiring for inclusive identity. King Mahendra based this Panchayat project on a model of a nation-state loyal to the crown as a unifying symbol. The more he succeeded, the more the state failed. Those who are talking about Nepal becoming a failed state now would do well to ask themselves: which state? Whose state? A large section of Nepal's population never had anything to do with the state in Kathmandu until the 1990s.

Even after the People's Movement, the political elite refused to realise that the politics of cultural exclusion was unsustainable. Attempts at language and religious plurality were repeatedly thwarted by the palace-centric state machinery.

LETTERS

UBER ALLES

I am of the firm opinion that intellect and the hairline have an inverse correlation. In his usual nerdy articles Daniel Lak has apparently succumbed to the gin-tonic blues of summertime. I happen to be German and, sadly, Lak hasn't taken the liberty to read statistics and biz papers ('The Anglo-Saxon disease', #205):

1. Productivity higher than in the US? Compare the ROI of US companies with German companies and consult *The Economist*.
2. 35-hour working weeks? Lak, put the high ball aside and talk to German workers.
3. Companies are profitable? In the second last quarter more than 10,000 companies went bankrupt in good old Deutschland.
4. The top German banks

are under a constant threat of being taken over by big foreign banks. And what's not to like when a hedger makes a cool billion buckaroos by betting against a currency. Here lies the insurance policy of Nepal: nobody can attack its currency because it is only paper.

Hans B Nix, email



BIBI FUNYAL

SISTERHOOD

I was very moved after reading 'Sisters on a long march' by Bibi Funyal (#205) and learning about Sarita and Laxmi who left school out of fear and are forced to carry heavy loads in order to make a living. There are thousands of girls like them all over Nepal, I would like to ask the Maoist leadership to ask themselves what goal is worth this kind of waste and ruin.

Suraj Sharma,
Balaju, Banasthali

SANGROULA

Thank you for translating veteran writer Khagendra Sangroula's brilliant observations ('Re-education at gunpoint', #203). Sangroula has shown us that he is not afraid to call the Maoist abductions of children and school

teachers a big blunder both for the Maoists and also for the country's future. If the revolutionaries want true support from the people, they are not going to get it by marching children off to remote locations, haranguing them about their goals. "Can you force someone to love you?" Sangroula asks. Never. The Maoists should learn from their teacher, Mao Zedong who told his followers never to alienate the people, to take them into confidence, to convince them about the cause. He never told them to kill the people most respected and popular in the village just because the person couldn't afford to pay them Rs 50,000 extortion money. Mao would never have condoned the killing of people who disagreed with his methods, he would try to

convince them about the ultimate political goal of liberation. Like fish, Mao said, revolutionaries swim in a sea of people. I wonder how long it will take the Maoists to realize they have got it wrong. Maybe they should start by reading Sangroula.

Sangita Sharma, email

BON VOYAGE

Captain Vijay Lama is an experienced pilot and he seems to know what he is talking about. But I don't understand what he has against pilots using GPS receivers in the cockpit while negotiating monsoon clouds. Why is this a "worrying trend"? In fact global positioning increases the safety margin in IFR (instrument flying) at airports where there are minimal ground nav aids. GPS has made flying safer in Nepal. It could be made even

The cost has been enormous. A totalitarian ideology like Maoism has appropriated the political agenda of pluralism, and very few of us have the residual moral authority to question the inherent contradiction.

The economic effect of state policies promoting social, political, and cultural exclusion has been no less disastrous: the poorest 10 percent of Nepalis have to make do with only 3.2 percent of national income while the richest 10 percent take away nearly 30 percent of it. The richest 20 percent Nepalis, most of them Kathmandu-based, have half of national income or consumption. Cultural and class distinctions being closely interlinked, it's not surprising that the Maoists claim to champion them even when they indiscriminately kill innocent bystanders with their bombs.



The challenge for the Narayanhiti is to prove that it can address these long standing issues of its own creation through wide ranging reforms in the system of governance. HDR 2004 has shown the way to the future: federalism, multiculturalism, and democracy. It remains to be seen whether the lords of poverty will prevail upon the state to mend its ways or choose to wallow in the opulence of a subservient status quo.

Someday, the UN Complex may even begin to promote cultural liberty in Nepal. When that happens, we shall wave down at you. ●

safer with Enhanced Ground Proximity Warning (EGPW) which gives pilots in the cockpit a three-dimension colour enhanced map of the terrain ahead and warns if the plane is too low. For reducing the danger of CFIT (Controlled Flight Into Terrain) in mountain flying in Nepal during the monsoon, EGPW is a near fail-safe equipment. But at \$50,000 apiece can our domestic airlines afford it?

Name withheld on request, Kathmandu

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To avoid our spam filters from automatically deleting your letter, readers must ensure that they send it only to one address, use text format and avoid attachments. The subject line should be as specific as possible about the issue being addressed. -Ed

SNV/Nepal Vacancy Announcement



SNV/Nepal, a Dutch non-government development organisation, has been working in Nepal since 1980. SNV Nepal focuses on capacitating key institutions at the district, regional and national level with the ability to serve the interests of marginal areas. SNV's sectoral niches are in governance, private sector development and natural resource management.

SNV/Nepal invites qualified Nepali citizens to apply for the post of:

Portfolio Coordinator

The Portfolio Coordinators (2 in number) will be stationed in **Nepalgunj** and **Ilam** with overall responsibility to coordinate the Mid West and East Portfolio activities with partner/clients, lead the positioning and strategy development process within the portfolio and to effectively manage the portfolio team towards desired results.

The specific responsibilities include:

- Capacity strengthening of partner organisations
- Provide advisory support to programme management and its partners
- Coordinate and manage partner/client relations and the SNV team within the Portfolio
- Develop and maintain relevant networks, contacts and strategic alliances
- As member of the SNV Nepal Management Team, contribute to SNV positioning and strategy development at national level.

Required skills: Fluency in spoken and written English, spoken Nepali; highly developed advisory, social & inter-personal skills; strategic thinking & analytical skills; an effective team player with good networking, facilitation & negotiating skills; good organisation skills; ability to inspire and to steer on results; intercultural sensitivity and awareness of gender issues in the delivery of services.

Required Knowledge: A University degree (Masters) or equivalent; at least 7 years of working experience of which at least 2 years in a programme and/or advisory setting in an INGO, private sector or government agency; expertise in the area of Organisation Development/Institutional Strengthening is desirable.

Rural Enterprise Development Advisor

The Rural Enterprise Development Advisor (1 in number) will be stationed in **Kathmandu** (frequent and extended stay in the remote hills and mountains of Nepal) with overall responsibility to support Private Sector Development (PSD) sector partners and clients in micro and small enterprise development, business development services (BDS) and business membership organisations strengthening.

The specific responsibilities include:

- Capacity strengthening of Private Sector Development (PSD) partners and clients
- Provide advisory support to sector partners and clients in micro and small enterprise development
- Contribute to SNV positioning and strategy development in the PSD sector at national and regional level (Mechi hills and Karnali region)
- Develop and maintain networks, contacts and strategic alliances to facilitate PSD sector activities
- Support BDS market development in weaker markets
- Build professional insights and vision in local economic development issues and initiatives.

Required skills: Fluency in spoken and written English, effective social & inter-personal skills, updated knowledge and skills in the field of sub sector market development and BDS for micro and small enterprises development; result oriented team player with a learning attitude; intercultural sensitivity and awareness of gender issues in the delivery of enterprise development and business services in the rural areas of Nepal.

Required Knowledge: Bachelors degree in Business Administration, Management or Rural Development; at least 5 years of working experience of which 2 years in an advisory setting aiming at local capacity building for local economic development; experience working in rural area at the community level is highly desired; experience in institutional development and gender issues in enterprise development is a prerequisite.

The detailed Function Task Description is available for pick up from **Organisation Development Centre (ODC)** from July 21, 2004 onwards or it could be accessed through our website www.odcincorp.com under the category "Recruitment". Candidates unable to pick up the package or access website may request for it through e-mail.



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Applications are to be sent to the above address along with a cover letter with the latest curriculum vitae.

Your daytime contact number, a recent photograph and the names of two referees along with their contact address/telephone numbers are essential for processing your application. Only short listed candidates will be notified. Applications will be accepted till 5:00 PM on Wednesday, August 4, 2004.

Female candidates and candidates from marginalised caste and ethnic groups are encouraged to apply and will be given special consideration.

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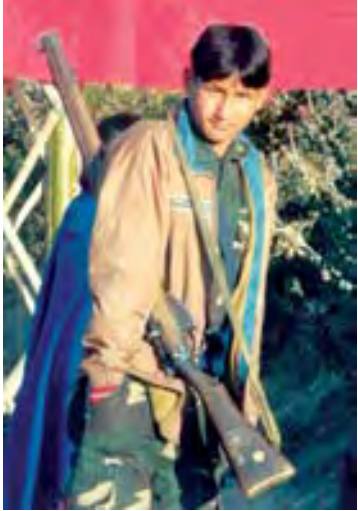
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From the hills to the

In the absence of government, the Maoists spread rapidly across the tarai



RAMESWOR BOHARA in NEPALGANJ

ALL PICE: RAMESWOR BOHARA

Just six km from Nepalganj in the town of Khajura, the Maoists held a three-hour mass meeting on the evening of 18 June. About 300 armed rebels dressed in combat fatigues marched openly down the streets of the town, barely a few minutes drive from the regional army headquarters.

Even if it knew about the show

of force, the army with all its sophisticated weapons and helicopters did not attack them. The rebels then got into their buses and jeeps and casually drove off along the highway to their bases in Bardia.

The Maoists were trying to thumb their noses at the military, which had just conducted an

operation into their heartland in Rukum (see 'Rukum after the sweep', #205). The army said that since their soldiers did not encounter any Maoists, the rebels did not actually have control of the hills. But by parading right under the noses of the army in Nepalganj, the Maoists were trying to prove that they are still very much

around.

"Our people's army is now capable of defeating the royal army," boasted Anaul, the head of the Maoists' Banke-Bardia command, while addressing the crowd in Khajura. There seems to be no shortage of bravado on both sides.

From what could be seen in

Khajura, Maoist morale is high and there is considerable support for charismatic commanders like Nanda Kishore Pun (Pasang) who led the Maoist raid on army bases in Beni in February and on Achham two years ago. There have been some rebels who have opted out and surrendered to the army, but these numbers do not seem to be

Much was rightly made in 1989 of the fall of the Berlin Wall. It was a symbol of the collapse of authoritarian communism almost everywhere. The sight will not soon be forgotten of people converging on the barrier through a great European city and tearing down with their bare hands.

I wonder if the gradual collapse of the Anglo-American Iraq adventure won't be a

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



similar moment for right wing

politics around the world. There's nothing so dramatic, and little that's hopeful, in the daily deluge of bad news from Iraq

But what's happening in London, Washington and other places is the slow self destruct of principles once held dear across the centre-right political spectrum. Iraq is the symptom but it's not the disease. The Butler report in the United Kingdom and the 9-11 panel's findings in America, along with the Senate intelligence committee earlier this month, show how hubris, ignorance and naked partisan politics have led to the deaths of thousands of innocent people. At least a thousand of them are from the invading countries in Iraq, the rest are local. All innocent lives lost are equal, and equally wasted.

For it is surely becoming plain that Tony Blair and George W Bush started a war that didn't need to be fought, a war that wasted lives and that was a waste of lives and radicalized a generation of Muslim youth. Each time we hear that both leaders at very least mislead their people to support their adventurism in Iraq. Each carefully drawn up report about

Iraquagmire

Political desperation at the top in Washington is so thick now that you can smell it



human failure, political wrongdoing, and the deliberate disregard for real threats like terror.

And with their credibility of the war and the wannabe warriors who started it, so too the exoskeleton of their political project,

their worldview. Ostensibly, the two men approach politics differently: Bush from the right and Blair from the centre left.

But they represent a consensus that has become far too influential in global economic policy making, a consensus that

has rarely, if ever, worked.

Their war is their economic record too. Any gains they might argue from freer markets, more private enterprise, unleashed entrepreneurial spirit, will get mopped up by a corrupt war economy where giant players and criminals make the running. Small, creative, risk-taking enterprises can't get a look in past the likes of Haliburton, British Aerospace, Pepsico, and countless consultants with funny acronyms for names—the advisers who advise us to hire their firm to make the changes necessary to...er...enrich their firm.

Take Blair's government in Britain, with two parliamentary majorities in the past five years and immense good will—at first—from the people and the country's allies. What have they done? Tinkered a bit, sold off a few things, got lots of those acronymic companies to cook the books and enrich themselves, and...oh yes...invaded Iraq.

In the US, Mr Bush and his administration are so desperate to rally the voters in an election year, they think of nothing better than to demonise gay people and their desire for stable, public commitment to each other. Gay marriage? A challenge to civilization as we, or even they, know it? I think not.

No, political desperation at the top is so thick in the air now that you can smell it. And if you listen closely, you can hear the mob starting to dismantle something. It may not be a wall between our solitudes, but angry people everywhere just be forging a new world without totally wrecking the old. If only the warmongers will step aside and let them. ●

plains

From *l-r*: A Maoist militiaman at the Khajura mass meeting early this month, The Armed Police Force base camp at Kusum, a huge hole on the Mahendra Highway at Khairi Khola where 22 policemen were killed and (right) chief of the Bardia 'people's government', Bishnuprasad Chaudhary.



as high as the army makes out.

Maoists sources say several battalions in western Nepal have been upgraded to brigades and the best militants are trained and promoted to being 'urban guerrillas', equipped with captured automatic weapons and inducted into a commando task force to launch attacks in the towns and cities.

"The old regime is already nervous because they have seen what we can do, and even the royal army fears us now," says Athak, a central committee member of the western tarai rebel command.

The Maoists have said in numerous statements that their revolution has now entered a 'strategic offensive' stage and that they will now infiltrate the cities and carry out urban guerrilla attacks. This seems to have started, although in a small scale with daily news of bombings, targeted assassinations and abductions of school children and teachers in tarai towns and even Kathmandu Valley.

The movement of security forces has been restricted by devastating landmine attacks along the main highways. Security sources say they have defused numerous landmines laid along the Mahendra highway, and admit there may be more already placed under the road to be detonated when an army convoy passes through. The security forces' response to this has been to scale up fortification of their bases and increase personnel guarding government structures. Even the traffic police post in central Nepalganj now looks like a pillbox.

The Maoist-affiliated 'Tharuwan Autonomous Region' in western Nepal now holds sway over much of Banke, Bardia, Kailali and Kanchanpur. Ramchandran Chaudhary is the chief of the 'Tharuwan People's Government' and says confidently: "The old regime has been dismantled and everything is run by our government."

The indigenous Tharus of Banke have a history of rebellion. Five years ago, a group of young Tharus took up arms against exploitation by zamindars, killing some of them and chasing the others away. They later made common cause with the Maoists and their reach expanded quickly in the fertile plains of the Karnali and Rapti rivers. Already battle-hardened, they took part in an attack on a police base in Lalbojhi near the Nepal-India border, killing 12 policemen and looting rifles. They also participated in the November 2001 attack on

the army base in Ghorahi.

The Maoist force is now taking the war to the east-west highway to attack security convoys. Last month the Maoists killed more than 22 armed police east of Nepalganj in a huge landmine explosion. The crater on the highway is three metres across. Five days later, 14 police personnel were killed during an attack on Chisapani led by Prabat, commander of Mangelsen 1st Battalion A Company.

Since then, Maoist hitmen have entered the town in broad daylight to kill policemen manning checkpoints in Nepalganj's crossroads. In April, the rebels drove into the centre of Nepalganj and killed eight policemen. In May, three Maoists came on bicycles to the district headquarters of Bardia in Gulariya and killed five policemen.

The Maoists have been traveling casually across the Nepal-India border in far west Nepal. Interestingly, they are arrested neither by the Nepali police nor India's much-vaunted Special Service Bureau (SSB), which is deployed at seven entry points in Bardia alone. They are also on guard in more than 12 border areas in Dang, Kailali and Kanchanpur. In June, the rebels smuggled large numbers of camouflage uniforms through Taratal and Kotiaghat of Bardia.

The Maoists openly boast that they use the same route to regularly bring in weapons and explosives and transport them through the tarai jungles into the hills. Some militants get militia training in secret bases in India and others use the same route to take out wounded cadre to India.

In six short years, the western tarai is now a Maoist stronghold.

One reason this has worked so well is the Maoist's community-centred strategy to recruit willing young militants. The tie-up with the Tharuwan Liberation Front, the Madhesi National Liberation Front, Dalit Liberation Front and the All-Nepal Trade Union Federation have also helped in boosting recruitment. ●

Birganj is the prize

The central tarai and Birganj used to be known as the least Maoist-affected area of the country. But since the collapse of the ceasefire last August, there has been a dramatic increase in Maoist control in the region. This is not due to the Maoist's own strengths, but rather the vacuum left by the dissolution of elected local bodies, the pullback of police and the lack of political will to deploy security forces.

The Maoists have now made Birganj their prize. A border town and an affluent trading city, it is not only a safe transit point for Maoists crossing over into India but also an ideal place to extort money from businesses, shops and factories along the Birganj-Simara highway.

The assassination of Birganj's popular mayor Gopal Giri in April was the final proof that the rebels have made the control of Birganj an important priority because this would not only give them access to 'donations' but also controlling Birganj will mean control over what goes in and out of Kathmandu.

In the hinterland, the Maoists have been trying to win over the people by starting a campaign to confiscate zamindars' property and redistribute it to the landless, and by killing dacoits who used to be notorious in the area.

The police are confined to the barracks and hardly venture out. Twelve policemen were killed in a Maoist landmine attack last month near Birganj while they were on their way to investigate the kidnapping of a local businessman. "We are preparing for a decisive and final battle," says Maoist head of the Bara 'peoples' government', Shibachandra Kushbaha.

However, the army in Birganj denies that the Maoists are gaining the upper hand. They admit the Maoists have increased extortion and the use



of terror, but they dismiss claims that they can capture tarai towns. Indeed, senior Maoist commanders as well as leaders in their people's governments have been killed in the past year. Among those killed was the chief of the Maoist Tarai Special Company, Bir Bahadur Khadka (Amar).

But for ordinary people there is no respite. Says Ramswarup Prasad of Pokhariya in Parsa: "We are caught between the guns of the Maoists, the army and the dacoits." ● (Chandra Kishore in Birganj)



Santhagat Bikas Consultancy Kendra (SBCK), an ODC Inc. organisation and an established private consultancy firm, specialising in supporting rural communities to acquire and apply knowledge and support CBOs in improving their service delivery to the communities is now launching its NEW

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Greed, Inc.

How we, too, were nearly duped by Enron

Five years ago, no one would have believed that a highflying corporate giant like Enron could come to such an ignominious end. Watching Enron's ex-CEO Kenneth Lay walking to his trial in handcuffs reminded many in South Asia how close we came to being swindled by this guy.

After having secured a lucrative contract to sell energy from its Dhabol Power Plant to the Maharashtra State Electricity Board, the company, promising hydro bonanzas came north to Nepal. It sought a

NEPALI PAN
Ajaya Dixit



license to survey the 10,800 MW Karnali Chisapani Hydropower Project, build it, and export power to Xian in

China. Nepal's movers and shakers including politicians of the right, the left and the centre, fell for it hook, line and sinker.

A small group of Nepali academics, activists and reporters voiced serious caution about Enron trying to pull a fast one. They argued that the company had not built a single hydropower plant and that giving it a 'hunting license' was risky business. The activists were branded "anti-democratic" and "anti-developmental". Leading from the front then was Sher Bahadur Deuba just into his first stint as prime minister. Even the communists spoke in favour of Enron in parliament.

Fortunately for Nepal, Enron lost interest and a couple of years later became bankrupt and ceased to exist. Will Enron's overseas racketeering be used in the prosecution of Kenneth Lay? Unlikely. The US Attorney General's office, civil society groups and conscious US citizens seem unaware of Enron's shenanigans abroad. Nevertheless, this issue is critical as the US struggles to engage the rest of the world. America's prosperity is more dependent on fossil energy than ever before.

Energy has become the one of the most necessary factors for Americans to be at peace with themselves. Consequently, assured supply is sought from the Persian Gulf region even if it means a violent regime change on the pretext that its tyrants are developing nasty weapons.

Historically, American expansion came in the form of colonisation of lands in the frontier regions of the American Midwest. Egalitarian native Americans did not understand the white man's individualism and motives for profit. They paid a heavy price as America powered its economy by building dams and reservoirs. Only some were compensated, not because of compassion of the state or market but because confrontational social auditors fought to ensure that justice was done.



But these civic pillars of American democracy remained silent while the Enron juggernaut violated American laws and values. This amnesia was a result of the triumphalism that followed the demise of the former Soviet Union, collapse of the Berlin Wall and rise of the dot.com bubble. This period saw privatisation without competition being pushed as the new global ideology. The free market fosters efficiency, creativity and innovation. But without the safeguards of societal regulation, the result can be the kind of swindling epitomised by the Enrons of corporate America.

Enron's crooked intent touched Nepal too. While rural Nepal waited for Kathmandu to be sensitive to its pressing needs, political leaders of all shades vied with each other to please Enron. Foreign profiteers got their attention while Nepalis back in their constituencies did not. The result: a further erosion of trust.

Will Ken Lay go behind bars for his company's fraud? Logic says he should, but that is for the US courts to decide. The company's former chief accountant is already behind bars. Citizen-based groups and social auditors in the US need to reinvent civic confrontation to keep watch on corporate racketeering also globally by building transnational alliances.

The good news is that some American values like freedom, independence, democracy and civil liberties are also cherished elsewhere. ●

Water management analyst Ajaya Dixit edits the journal Water Nepal.

Early warnings

Flood forecasting would save money but who is going to pay for prevention?



STEVE MCCURRY

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

The monsoon has become a predictable annual tragedy.

Yet, every year, hundreds of Nepalis die and tens of thousands are displaced due to floods, especially in the tarai. This year's rainy season is only half over, but already more than 150 people have lost their lives.

Still, there is no monitoring of rainfall in the mountains and midhills to provide early warning that rivers may overflow their banks in the plains. Flood forecasting in Nepal is non-existent. There is little forecasting in India or Bangladesh either. Billions are spent on flood relief and building embankments, but there is no money for prevention and early warning.

In fact, forecasting in Nepal would help downstream countries to analyse data and predict river levels in the Ganga and in the Bangladesh delta where millions are marooned by annual floods. Organisations for regional cooperation exist: ICIMOD, SAARC and both are headquartered in Nepal.

Officials at the Department of Water Induced Disaster Management say that if only there was a timely warning system it could save hundreds of lives and property worth millions of rupees every year, adding, "At present, we help build embankments and other structures to save people in flood-prone areas. But if there was an early forecasting system, we could streamline it."

Of Nepal's four major river systems, the most risky is the Kosi and its tributaries, which could bring devastation next time it changes its course as it has been doing for centuries. Experts fear that the river, with heavy sedimentation, could jump from Chatara washing off thousands of

villages on its path in Nepal and north Bihar.

It is difficult to predict the weather, but it is relatively simple to measure rain once it has fallen and process the information quickly enough for early warning to vulnerable areas. "Monitoring rivers at the upper reaches would certainly increase lead time for forecasting the floods in the plain," says Naba Raj Adhikari, an official at the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology.

But the hurdles are funding, lack of expertise and equipment. There are presently 43 hydrological stations across the country to measure rainfall and the flow of rivers, but data is sent in from these stations only once every 24 hours, if at all. Some of that information is sent on to India for analysis and no one knows what happens to the data there.

"Flood forecasting is just not happening," admits senior hydrologist Kehsab Prasad Sharma at the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology. "We have no technical capability and institutional back up for flood forecasting." Department officials say they need real time data on rainfall, river volume and even a process to calculate snow melt based on temperature readings.

Last year, the department successfully tested a pilot project on the Narayani River by setting up a station to record and send flow data on an hourly basis to Kathmandu with radio transmitters. The test was a success, but Sharma notes, "To improve the system we need more investment and there is no budget."

The main cost involved would be in transmission of data via satellite for central processing.

Nepali officials have now been pushing the idea of regional forecasting which would benefit Nepal and the other countries in the region. But other than occasional meetings over the past two years the work hasn't moved ahead.

Professor Qin Dahe of the China Meteorological Administration and the Cold Arid Regions Environment Research Institute says collecting real time data in catchment areas of the region is vital: "The data can be transmitted to different hydrological centres of the countries in the region through a regional communication system."

Data from China would help forecasting floods in Assam, for instance. Professor Dulal C Goswami of Guwahati University says, "There is immense possibility for regional co-operation with regard to flood management including flood forecasting and warning. All we need to do is start working at it."

ICIMOD and the UN's World Meteorological Organisation have organised two consultations on flood forecasting in the last three years to develop a report on regional flood information system. Under this plan, a pilot project for preparing a regional framework should begin next year and continue until 2008.

Larger countries in the region, like India and China, prefer to do things bilaterally with their neighbours. But floods affect all the countries, and officials say it is narrow-minded to want to do things only one-on-one. Says Sharma: "India and China are interested in doing things bilaterally and it is working for them, but it is the smaller countries like ours who need regional forecasting and don't have our own resources." ●

Do you know your street and house number?

Kathmandu has a new metric system to make it easier to find out where people live

NARESH NEWAR

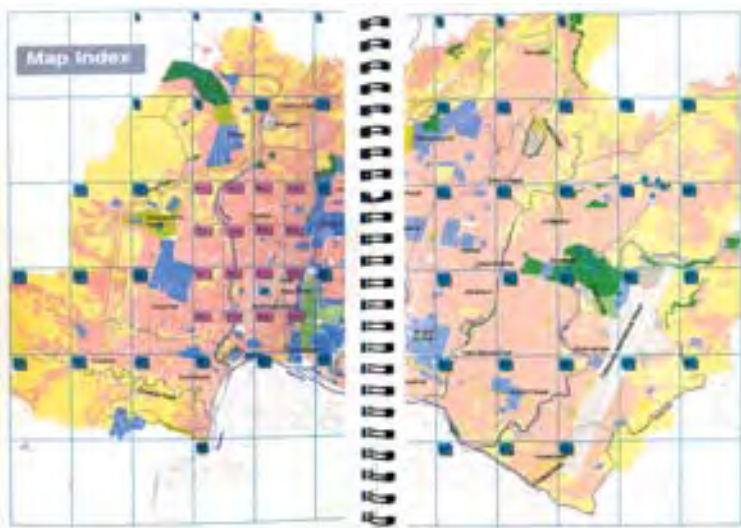
Lost again? Trying to find someone's house in Asan, you're bound to knock on a few wrong doors. Usually, after panicked phone calls, the host ends up coming to the west side of Taleju temple to pick you up.

Or try to find a travel agency in Samakusi. Your directions will be: "Come down near the pipal tree, walk up to the Bhagwati temple past the garbage dump, and ask the pasal ko didi for the house with the green gate, or just give a call."

But good news is around the corner: Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) has launched a new metric addressing system which should reduce the hassle of trying to find your way around Kathmandu. Each house within the municipality area will have a number, based on its metric distance from the street. For example, if the house is 50 metres from the main street, it will have the number 50. Each street will also have a unique name and code.

All the old area names will be replaced by new ones chosen by the locals and approved by the KMC municipal board. KMC has stipulated that the names should have local context and be based on the names of deities, national heroes, martyrs, mountains and rivers.

So far 70,000 out of the 100,000 households in the Kathmandu municipality have already registered for house numbers, a process that only requires applying at KMC and paying Rs 100. The KMC staff will do everything else: measure the distance from the road, prepare the number plate and even nail it on gate or wall for the household. The applicants also get free copies of a Kathmandu street map.



"It has been very convenient, especially for the post office, NEA, Nepal Telecom and the water supply people," says Shyam Mani Gautam from KMC's Information Support Unit. Gautam was part of the team that used Geographic Information System (GIS) to design the Kathmandu street atlas. Converting satellite imagery into a detailed street map of Kathmandu that included schools, temples, monuments and office blocks was not as easy as it sounds. Kathmandu is not in a grid pattern like other planned cities, and because of rapid urbanisation there was also a danger of the atlas becoming quickly outdated.

Regarded as one of the Kathmandu Valley Mapping Program's (KVMP) successful initiatives, the Kathmandu street atlas initially aimed at developing and marketing a tourist map of the Valley. Funded by the European Commission, the four-year project was part of the Rs 400 million KVMP project. Besides producing a wall map, KMC also published the 95-page atlas.

This is probably the best and most detailed map of Kathmandu

ever published, but unfortunately it is already out of print. We barely managed to get a copy. Last year, KMC printed about 10,000 copies, only to be distributed free of cost to offices, visitors and even relatives of KMC staff.

KMC had a chance to reprint more last year, but the project has now ended and there is no more funding. The office has included reprint plans for the next fiscal year, but there is no guaranteeing when or if it will be printed.

Although the staff were against free distribution and had suggested marketing the guidebook through local bookshops, senior officers did not support the idea. "Our people are not used to buying maps, so they are being distributed freely instead," says an officer at the KMC. He adds, "It would definitely have been a best seller if we had marketed it through the bookshops."

Several publishers have shown interest in sponsoring the reprint of the book, even giving full credit and copyright to KMC, but the Mayor's office is still undecided over the proposals. ●

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Health walker

Walking 3,000km, at up to 20km a day, sounds like a gruelling fitness regime, but 39-year-old Londoner Stephen Watkins has more than his own health in mind. His trip, which starts in Ladakh, then passing through Nepal and Darjeeling to finally cool off in Gangtok, Sikkim, is sponsored, and all proceeds go to a remote health post in the village of Murma in Mugu. The health post was set up by the UK chapter of the Help Nepal Network, which Watkins (right) decided to support after reading about it in a London paper. Watkins has been in the region before. Trekking in Ladakh three years ago got him detained by the Indian Army on suspicion of being first an escaped prisoner then a spy, a misconception fuelled by the fact that he couldn't tell them who the England cricket captain was. Despite the hard walk and the challenges he's sure to face, Watkins says, "The fact that I'm helping raise money for charity will be an extra incentive when my legs start to wobble on those steep hills."



The whole trip, starting at the end of July, is expected to take up to five months, with Watkins passing through Kathmandu in September. Updates on 'The Hike' and information on the health post are at www.helpnepal.net

Nepal ranked 140th

Despite the ongoing conflict, Nepal has been able to jump three spots and enter the category of medium development countries from a lower grouping in this year's UNDP Human Development Report (HDR). The annual report has ranked the country 140th with a HDI (Human Development Index) value of 0.504, based on measures of life expectancy, school enrolment, literacy and income.

Nepal ranks 69th among 95 developing countries in the Human Poverty Index. Nepal's HPI has been out at 41.2 percent, which shows the country has been able to decrease poverty by 0.7 percent over the last year. Another favourable factor is GDP per capita calculated in purchasing power parity—up from last year's \$1,310 to \$1,370. The average GDP of South Asian countries this year is \$2,658. In the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) in South Asia, Nepal's GDI value of 0.484 ranked it 116th among 144 countries, up from last year's 0.479 mark.

Still, Nepal didn't fare so well in other HDR criteria: Nepal performs worst in net primary enrolment ratio. The eight years of Maoist insurgency, the report says, may be attributed to deep grievances stemming from the systematic marginalisation and exclusion of certain groups, ethnic groups, castes and women.

"In Nepal, the problems of social exclusion, structural inequality and discrimination have been commonly attributed as the root causes for the current conflict," said UNDP acting resident representative Nicholas Brown during the HDR launch on Monday. In South Asia's HDI, Nepal's position is better than only Pakistan which ranks 142. The Maldives has the best record, ranked 84th with an HDI value of 0.497.

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VAT a great idea

A VAT lottery has improved revenue collection from urban areas



MUDITA BAJRACHARYA

Even though Value Added Tax (VAT) was introduced in Nepal in 1997, it still hasn't caught on. So in an attempt to encourage more people to pay the tax, the government's revenue administrators have successfully tested a one year VAT lottery scheme.

According to the Inland

Revenue Department, VAT contributed 31 percent of the country's total tax revenue in 2002-03 and made up a quarter of the total revenue. But officials say there is huge room for improvement with the carrot and stick approach.

The carrot being dangled in front of consumers right now is a VAT lottery system. Ten counters

have been set up in strategic locations with heavy business transactions in Kathmandu and six others in Pokhara, Biratnagar and Birganj.

Each counter issues coupons for purchase bills equivalent to Rs 1,000 or more, on which VAT has been paid. The number of coupons issued from the 16 counters grew

to nearly 70,000 in the past year.

Still, retailers have found ways to not to pay VAT. One camera shop in New Road keeps two types of bills. For transactions below Rs 10,000, the owner issues an original bill with an invoice number. But for transactions above Rs 10,000, he issues fake bills instead. He justifies this by saying that imported goods are undervalued at customs, and that issuing a real VAT bill for them would mean paying 10 percent of the sales price of the goods to the government. When his purchases are not entered in the purchase invoices at customs, he becomes ineligible for the tax refund, which is collected by deducting the 10 percent VAT he paid on cost price of the purchase from the 10 percent he collected from the sales price of the goods.

Paying VAT is compulsory for businesses with an annual turnover of more than Rs 2 million, which are required to get a VAT registration. In the fiscal year 2001-02 there were 26,000 companies registered and this went up to nearly 30,000 by 2003. Dr Rup Khadka, national adviser at the Danish-aided Revenue Administration Support Project, says it will take time for people to get used to paying. "VAT is a modern concept based on the practice of maintaining the accounts in the purchase book and sales book. This accounting system helps to estimate the tax payers' tax liability," he says.


But bypassing VAT has become

an art form, with vendors using many different ways to cheat. A registered retailer of a clothing store in Bhotahiti gladly explained to us how he under-invoices to evade VAT. He includes the 10 percent VAT in the selling price of the items, but then issues fake bills. If a customer demands an original bill complete with an invoice number, name, date and address, he willingly produces the second bill—but then adds another 10 percent VAT to the already marked up price. The customer and usually the government lose out, but the shopkeeper comes out a winner in either situation.

Although most consumers have heard of VAT they are not familiar with how it works. Many are hoodwinked by shopkeepers who tell them VAT is included in the price of the item they are buying. The revenue office has used celebrities in television commercials to explain the concept, but Khadka says it is actually the lottery scheme that has put people in the habit of asking for the invoice bill.

VAT was introduced to generate more revenue without raising the rate of import duties, income tax and other duties. VAT is levied on the value added to the commodity, no matter how many stages it passes through in the process of production, distribution and retail. This expands the tax base, bringing a larger number of consumers under tax net. ●

(Mudita Bajracharya)



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Present continuous tense

Out-of-the-box thinking for budgetary control

Last year the Beed had given the budget the benefit of the doubt (*'Making the grade'*, #155). However, now thoughts are similar to a column in this space a year before that (*'Who needs a budget?'*, #102). The budget has again become an isolated document taken up each year that harps on and on in the present continuous tense of "will do" or "shall do".

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed



This year, transparency of election funding, the Beed's favourite item last year, has disappeared. Propagating private-public infrastructure partnerships gets lip service, as it did last year and probably will in the years to come. Clearly, making some changes in this yearly budget ritual is essential.

The April Fool's Day announcement of the new Income Tax Act proved that if the government or the donor community wants, major policies can be pushed even outside the framework of the budget. Similarly, as security expenditure takes top priority, budgetary control mechanisms are neglected. How can budgets be meaningful if the state pumps money into parasitic parastatals? In many state-owned enterprises, audits have been pending for years. And when the government is clueless about the country's future, debt servicing obligations and the total multilateral and bilateral contributions for



KIRAN PANDAY

development, how can the budget be a true reflection of the treasury's cash flow?

In fact, why even bother with this annual ritual, when every budget announcement sees a conference hall full of bored bureaucrats and nodding diplomats all listening to what sounds more like an election manifesto than a policy document? Unfortunately, the Nepali media is responsible for encouraging this farce by analysing the pie charts to death. Since private companies don't take the budget seriously, can we expect the government to do so?

The system of budgetary control, like the National Planning Commission (NPC), needs to be revisited. We have economy and business-related ministries dispersed over several portfolios, but then the Finance Ministry also

has solo access to the budget. Money from agreements with donors or from unilateral donor assistance, of course, never adds up in the budget. Dovetailing all that into yet another five-year plan is a nightmare and does not happen.

The time has come to take an out-of-the-box approach. Everyone should help the government get away from this outdated, embarrassing ritual. There should be a document of policy pronouncement that states the broader economic policies along with the plan for the year ahead, and a more serious, technical approach to accounting. There are many ways to make this process more meaningful, but the current system of budgetary control defeats the very definition that books have laid down. ●



"A 360 degree approach"

How does a company differentiate its services from others and stand out in a competitive environment? Branding is not new, but awareness about brand-building is new in Nepal. It is to capitalise on this need that Nabil Bank is organising a BrandInsight 2004 exercise under the Excellence Series of workshops to mark its 20th anniversary.

BrandInsight 2004 is a one-day workshop with Ajay Gupta, the managing partner of Brand Prophet, India (www.brandprophet.com). Gupta is the former executive vice president of Saatchi and Saatchi and an alumnus of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad and the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur. He has over 25 years of experience in building home grown and international brands. Gupta is expected to convert concepts and ideas into practical branding value additions by answering questions regarding issues such as approaching competition, addressing a cluttered market and customer confusion, reviving tired brands and adding premium value to brands. Some two dozen Nepali brand and marketing managers are attending the workshop on Sunday at the Soaltee Crowne Plaza.

Nepali Times caught up to Gupta just before he departed for Kathmandu and interviewed him via email.

Nepali Times: Nepal is considered virgin territory as far as branding is concerned. What do you hope to achieve when you get here?

Ajay Gupta: My main purpose is to share and enhance the paradigm and concept of brand building amongst professionals and businessmen of Nepal.

From what you have seen so far, what prospects do you see for the growth of the Nepali advertising industry?

To take an example from the Indian experience, the stability of the country and economy driven policies will bring the growth. Once a critical mass level and proper direction is achieved, advertising growth will get a kickstart.

Is there a threshold level of a country's economy after which it becomes important for companies to pay attention to branding?

For smaller economies the niche position you create is more important. For example, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia have done very well through tourism and trade promotion. In case of Nepal, tourism, dairy, food sectors have great potential, while tourism needs a revival. Wai-Wai noodles is one of the biggest brands from Nepal in the region.

What is your short answer to those who feel that branding is a waste of time?

I would just quote Drucker: "Business is marketing". Or Brand Prophet: "Marketing is branding"! So, branding is business. If you are not in the business of building brands, you will be out of business soon.

But where does one draw the line between branding hype and essential promotion?

The science of branding is like an iceberg. What you see on top is brand personality, which is where the hype goes. What is below the surface is brand character, which is built through a 360 degree approach and living the brand by culturalising your people.

United Nations Development Programme South and West Asia Sub Regional Resource Facility (Kathmandu SURF)



UNDP is the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. We are on the ground in 166 countries, working with them on their own solutions to global and national development challenges.

Invitation to Apply for the Young Professional Programme (YPP)

The Kathmandu SURF (South and West Asia Sub Regional Resource Facility of UNDP) is expanding into a **Regional Centre** focussing on regional programmes and knowledge management initiatives in support of UNDP's 25 programme countries in the Asia/Pacific region in the areas of

- Poverty Reduction and Pro-poor Policies
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In this context the Regional Centre aims to collect a **pool of qualified young professionals** for possible participation in the Young Professional Programme (YPP). Exceptionally qualified candidates will be offered an **11 months' work and research opportunity** and will be supporting the Regional Centre's Policy Specialists and Knowledge Management Unit, thus gaining experience in developmental research and advisory services as well as be exposed to UNDP's operations and policies.

Eligible applicants must have a **Masters degree in an area relevant to the Centre's main areas of focus** (see above), with more than **1 year of professional experience** after the Masters degree, and must be **below 30 years of age**. They should be conversant with major computer applications (e.g. Microsoft Office), have knowledge of the Asia Pacific region, have commitment and enthusiasm for development work and demonstrate excellent research and analytical skills.

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Interested candidates should submit their applications along with up-to-date CV by 9 August 2004, to:

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UNDP, U.N. House, P.O. Box 107, Kathmandu
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We especially encourage qualified women to apply for these positions.

PRAJAYA SHRESTHA

Only very rich people in Kathmandu surf the net. Wrong. Only tourists visit cyber cafes. Wrong. English is a barrier for Nepalis wishing to go online. Wrong.

Ten years after Kathmandu got its first taste of the internet, there are now 50,000 registered subscribers with the valley's 26 licensed internet service providers (ISPs) with an average of four people using each connection. Add to this the numbers that go online in cyber cafes, and user numbers could be as high as 500,000. Now, with several companies vying to provide cable internet, subscribers can get unlimited internet access through the cable that brings them tv at home (see box). "Now a 24-hour broadband connection is just a click away," says Sudhir Parajuli of Subisu Cablenet, a pioneer web tv provider.

All this should mean prices are going to come crashing down. Or does it? Already, competition among cyber cafes has brought prices down to as low as Rs 15 per hour in some areas. The World Wide Web is now open to anyone for the price of a soft drink, and local demand is now high enough for cyber cafes to mushroom all over the Valley, not just in Thamel, as it used to be. However, with prices that low, cyber cafes say they can't make ends meet.

Over the years, the world of computers for hire has come a long way from the two antique-PCs-on-the-ground-floor-at-home variety. Today's cyber cafes (there is even a Cyber Kitchen in

Jawalakhel) are big, clean, slick and equipped with the latest gadgets and gizmos. PCOs with STD and ISD calling options have also started to plug in a couple of computers and develop cyber

cafes of their own.

Cyber cafes are like cold stores, they don't have to be registered. But because so many close down within a few months of opening due to cheap internet it is hard to say

how many cyber cafes are in operation in the Valley. However, industry insiders estimate there may be as many as 2,000 venues. Most have between 6-15 computers, all networked so they

use a single Internet link, usually a dial-up connection. Because the connection is shared between several users, cyber cafes can afford to slash prices.

However, the flip side is that



Cyber space

Kathmandu throngs to cyber cafes and bridges the digital divide

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Cable net

Bye-bye dial-up. Bye-bye slow surfing. Bye-bye paying two bills to Nepal Telecom and to the ISP.

Here comes cable net: a system that allows you to use your existing tv cable to receive both television as well as internet. How is it different from the dialup system? "The speed says it all," explains Sudhir Parajuli of Subisu Cablenet, which is introducing the system in Kathmandu. "Because of the broadband used by the cable net, the speed is 64kbps, which is double the speed of a dialup system."

Parajuli says his cable internet come out cheaper for frequent internet users. "Under the dialup system, if you use the internet for an hour a day, you end up paying around Rs 2,350 a month including your telephone and internet bills. With the cable net system, you pay Rs 2,515 you get to use it all the time and get a whole lot of television channels as a bonus."

After beginning business as a cable television service in 2001, Subisu applied for a cable internet license which it finally got last year. Space Time Network and Pokhara Cable Service also got licenses, but Subishu has got first off the mark. Subisu already has one fourth of Kathmandu covered with its cable system and in the first week of launch it already had 120 subscribers to its cable internet.

"Most of them are offices," explains Subisu's Amit Thapa. The cable company can also make tv sets work as internet-enabled computer monitors with a remote keyboard. But that will put you back Rs 20,000 or so. "Right now the price seems expensive for our clients," admits Parajuli. "But if you add up present cable and internet costs you actually end up saving money." ●

(Navin Singh Khadka)



MIN BAJRACHARYA

connection speeds are much slower in most cyber cafes we surveyed for this article. As an increasing number of cyber cafes switch over to wireless, dial-up will be a thing of the past. And as cable internet provides faster and cheaper access, it will put pressure on the cyber cafes to offer even more competitive rates.

"Excluding speed, I have no hesitation to saying that through cyber cafes, Nepalis enjoy the cheapest Internet access in comparison to other countries," says Pavan Shakya, of ISPAN (ISP Association of Nepal). This despite Internet bandwidth being significantly more expensive in Nepal, as all ISPs use expensive satellite hookups to international backbones.

Most cyber café owners agree prices for surfing the Internet are too low, but are unable to do much about it. Although the price of the connection is shared between users, there are still the phone bills. Most cyber cafes pay as much as Rs 10,000 per month to Nepal Telecom for a single phone line. While cyber café owners say present rates are as low as they can go, they admit profits would be higher if Nepal Telecom gave them special deals. In an effort to supplement income, many struggling cyber

cafés augment revenue by offering photocopying, printing and telephone services besides drinks and snacks.

"My English is not a problem to use the net because I only check mail and chat with friends," says a 18-year-old college student at Net and Web Station, a cyber café in Jamal at 7:30 in the evening. "I logon for up to half-hour every day and do all my mail, my friends' English is the same level as mine so language is not a problem," she adds in Nepali.

The real push in business for cyber cafes this year came when the American Diversity Visa applications went online. Cyber cafes did roaring business not just with higher online time, but many floated package deals to help people with the applications. The online SLC results last month also brought another surge in visitors trying to get a hardcopy of *Gorkhapatra* with their results. But logging in was difficult because one of the sites providing the results hosted the data on a US server and the system clogged up with traffic.

As Nepal bridges the digital divide, and more and more young people with disposable income start surfing, it is only a matter of time before advertisers discover a brand new medium to reach consumers through. ●

Spam, spammer, spammest

BHUSHAN SHILPAKAR

When, of the six new emails in your inbox, four are advertising everything from home mortgages to cheap Viagra, it seems like ISPs should do more about unsolicited mail (aka spam). But, perhaps surprisingly, there are actually some measures in place to stop the clutter. Considering half of all emails an ISP receives are junk, your inbox could easily be in even worse shape.

Currently, most Nepali ISPs, including Mercantile, Worldlink and Infocom, use an online database called the Realtime Blackhole List (RBL). As mails come through, the sender addresses are checked against the RBL database, which lists known spam mailers and filters out emails from these senders. Unfortunately, this can lead to some legitimate mails (called 'false negatives' in industry jargon) being dumped as well.

There are similar problems with SpamAssassin, the other major spam control method currently in use. This software is meant to automatically identify spam on the basis of some characteristic features of junk mails, such as headers that try to make it seem like a valid email, and style, keywords and disclaimers in the text. The program also uses spam-tracking databases and blacklists of spam senders. Currently, Worldlink uses this program, and Mercantile is likely to start soon.

It is also possible for individual users to install email filters to block junk mail. Often, these are permission-based tools, which only allow emails from addresses included in your address book or on a 'whitelist' to reach your inbox. This can be tricky though, because if you occasionally receive unexpected email that you want to get, blocking every unknown server won't work. A new type of filtering, called challenge/response, or CR, remedies this problem. When an email comes in from an unknown

sender, the CR tool responds with a message asking the sender to perform some action, such as clicking a link. Virtually all spam mailers generally use fake email addresses, and so never respond, and therefore only people sending genuine emails get past the filter.

Instead of just depending on your ISP or filters, there are a few things you can do to prevent and reduce spam. Avoid posting your email address online. Often sites will ask for your address so they can send you updates or to include you in forums, message boards and newsgroups. Spammers use automated systems to search these sources, or sometimes the sites themselves sell lists to someone looking for valid email addresses. Spammers can also get addresses off emails that have been forwarded, which often accumulate hundreds of email addresses.

The smartest thing is to not pass on forwarded messages, and ask your friends not to send them to you either. However, if you feel it is important to pass on the message, you can cut and paste the relevant text and only pass that on, instead of the original mail with all the accumulated addresses. Entering your friend's email addresses in the bcc line (blank carbon copy) will help protect your friends against spam, as their email address will not appear in the message even if they send it to other people.

Binaya Joshi, system administrator at Mercantile, has a final piece of advice: don't respond to spam mail in any way, especially clicking on the 'unsubscribe' link that many spammers try to trick you with. Spam mailing lists often contain inactive or nonexistent email addresses, so by responding, it is like confirming that you have an active account, making it likely you'll get even more spam. ●

Bhushan Shilpakar is the *Nepali Times* web master, and will not post his email address here for fear of spammers.



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Unsafe haven in India



RANJAN RAHI

Top Maoist leaders captured in Patna being transported to their jail cells last month. One of them shows a welt in his arm.

Janadharana, 12 July



Many believe that India is a safe haven for Nepali Maoists, but several rebel leaders in Indian custody may beg to differ. A report prepared by 'Nakul', who claims to be a Maoist 'war correspondent', states that the Maoist leaders arrested in Patna are subjected to torture and treated as if they were local goons.

About a month and a half ago, 11 Nepali Maoist leaders were arrested in Patna. Among those caught in hotels, cyber cafés and telephone booths were Kul Prasad KC, Lokendra Bista, Kumar Dahal, Hit Bahadur Tamang and Anil Sharma. In addition to official party business, several of these Maoists were also in India for health check ups and treatment for high blood pressure, diabetes and ulcers. However, going to India has proved to be a serious health hazard instead.

After their arrest, the Maoists were kept in a local police station for 15 days, and then transferred to jail. According to the report, most of the Maoist leaders have been affected physically in one way or another due to mistreatment and torture. One of the leaders has suffered back injuries, and also has an arm so severely bruised and blistered that he can't move it. Lokendra Bista is having problems urinating, while one of Kumar Dahal's eyes has been seriously damaged. Hit Bahadur Tamang is said to have lost his hearing during severe beatings. Police also crushed Maoist leader Anil Sharma's fingers, reminding him that he used to work for a Maoist publication. A female Maoist who was arrested at the same time is being held at a separate jail, and is also suffering from physical illness.

The report also claims the Maoist leaders are not getting enough food. According to jail regulations, they should be getting the Indian equivalent of Rs 91 for each meal. But due to corruption within the jail administration, they only get about a fifth of that amount—not enough for a decent meal.

The prisoners have registered a case in the Patna civil court demanding that they be treated as political prisoners. According to Sachitananda Prabhat, in-charge of the All India People's Resistance Forum, Jharkhand, the jail administration's treatment of the Nepali Maoists has been inhumane. However Prabhat, himself a prisoner, cautions: "If anyone protests against such treatment, he/she has to suffer from worse torture and is threatened with death." He said an inmate called Sunil Singh was killed under similar circumstances. Prabhat added, "Because they had protested the way they were treated, central members of People War Group Abhindra Kumar and regional leader of the group Ravindra were transferred to Bhagalpur jail."

Prabhat and his organisation launched a movement in the jail to help the Nepali Maoist leaders. The forum's Bihar member, Roshan Kumar Yadav, said that the jail administration's mistreatment of Nepali Maoists is worse than what American soldiers did to the Iraqi prisoners. He added, "I am surprised that international human rights groups are silent over the issue."

Monarchy, manners

Editorial in *Samaya*, 22-29 July

The unimaginable event of 1 June 2001 left a stain on the Nepali people's esteem for their monarchy. Whether this stain is erased or remains will depend on the successors of the late King Birendra. History will remember the heir to the throne, Dipendra, killed his father, mother and most of his clan.

Despite his shady past, Crown Prince Paras as a member of the royal family, has the duty to live up to his new responsibilities. As the king, and as a father, King Gyanendra's responsibility is even greater.

Crown Prince Paras' involvement in last week's shooting incidents at the Everest Hotel and at Nirmal Nibas is a test for the country, people and the king. This nation's reputation is at stake, therefore it is now incumbent upon the king, the government and the Royal Council to draw up a code of conduct for members of the royal family. Instead of insulting the political parties at taxpayer's expense as it is currently doing, the Royal Council should turn its attention to restoring the dignity of the royal family and smoothening the rocky relations between the political parties and the king.

At the beginning of the 21st century, there is a universal trend towards cutting the privileges and special powers of ruling elite all over the world. It is also accepted that there is no alternative to democracy. In a democracy, the military is under the command of an elected government. Militarisation never sits well with democratic values. The constitution's acceptance of the king as supreme commander of the armed forces must also be seen in this light. It is a symbolic title. After all, the days when kings led their armies to battle are long gone.

Even if he wears a military uniform, if the king of Nepal were

unarmed and believed in peace, it would be a positive sign. And if that rule also applied to the heir to the throne, we would perhaps see the last of such ugly incidents.

Given the fallout of the royal massacre, it would perhaps be best for the reputation of the country and the monarchy that these steps are taken. It is also necessary that in the country's present precarious state, the king not be exposed to private stress of this nature.

Terrorising tv

Desantar, 18 July

देशान्तर साप्ताहिक

At a time when insecurity and crime rates are soaring in the Valley, on Friday residents were exposed to another form of terror as police vandalised property worth millions of rupees at the offices of eight cable operators. Claiming that the operators had been evading taxes, the police entered the control rooms armed with guns and proceeded to destroy expensive equipment—without any warning or search warrants.

A team of about 20-25 police raided the offices of eight cable tv networks at about 8PM on Friday, destroying and seizing valuable equipment.

Kathmandu Valley saw a new form of terror, perpetuated by a state force intended to protect citizens against similar vandalism. Superintendent of Police Anand Ranjit led the raid without even informing the related Ministry or obtaining permission from his superiors at the police department. As a responsible officer, Ranjit should know that the police is not legally allowed to take any such action without permission from related offices such as the revenue department, Nepal Telecom or the electricity authority.

There are reasons to believe that Ranjit was motivated by his own disagreement with some of the cable operators, a theory

that is supported by his actions later that night. Ranjit returned all the seized equipment without taking any legal action against the companies for the tax evasion charge he had earlier accused them of.

In a press statement about the issue, the police said their actions were based on a report filed by the Nepal Cable Television Association, but the association denies ever taking such action. Defending themselves against accusations of tax evasion, the cable tv operators are digging out papers and documents to show they've paid their tax and VAT dues.

Several small cable tv operators say that the police were bribed by a big operator to raid them. No specific name is given, but everyone knows who runs the largest cable tv operation in the country. Not long ago, the same cable company convinced SP Ranjit to raid Continental Marketing, the local official distributor for Sony, Setmax and Discovery channels—again without any official warrant.

Explanation

Gururaj Ghimire, former chairman of Nepal Students' Union in *Jana Bhabana*, 19 July

जन बहाना

The unexpected dissolution of my leadership in Nepal Students' Union was the result of a serious conspiracy lead by people in the party who are known to be corrupt and have even been netted by the CIAA. We have always opposed them, and therefore they got back at us through this conspiracy.

We demand an explanation of why our leadership was dissolved at a time when the union was going strong. The move was aimed not only against me, but also against all the members of the NSU. If this isn't autocracy what is it? Of course, the party has the right to dissolve the central committee of the union. But it can do so only with justifiable reasons and grounds. The way the



Get out from under there, it's not a summons from the CIAA, it is someone congratulating you on getting a Gorkha Dakshin Bahu medal.

कान्तिपुर *Kantipur*, 17 July

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"His Royal Highness Prince Paras is concerned about the growth of water hyacinth in Phewa Lake. We are also organising this program as per his wishes," Brigadier General Prakash Bahadur Basnyat, commenting on the prince's desire to participate in the Phewa Lake Cleaning Campaign in *Kantipur*, 22 July. This comes just two weeks after the Nepali weeklies criticised the prince for the incident at a discotheque.

situation was handled and my leadership terminated is against the party's statute. They should have informed us beforehand.

Clearly, the move took place when we refused to be their slaves. We are people who don't want to serve even the gods, so there is no question of us waiting on these corrupt people. I don't know why Girija Prasad Koirala called the dissolution of our central committee a trifling matter, but this is certainly not a small issue.

The high handedness of the party in dissolving our committee will have longterm implications. This is the party that has been carrying on the movement, demanding the reinstatement of the elected House of Representatives. Yet, ironically, it has dissolved an elected body within itself. What message will the move send to the people? The party has lost its moral authority to demand the reinstatement of the House of Representatives.

Because of this move, the congressmen who have been involved in the anti-regression movement will now be discouraged. That is a big loss for the party. Now I will form a front within the party and fight against autocracy.

"Clear cut"

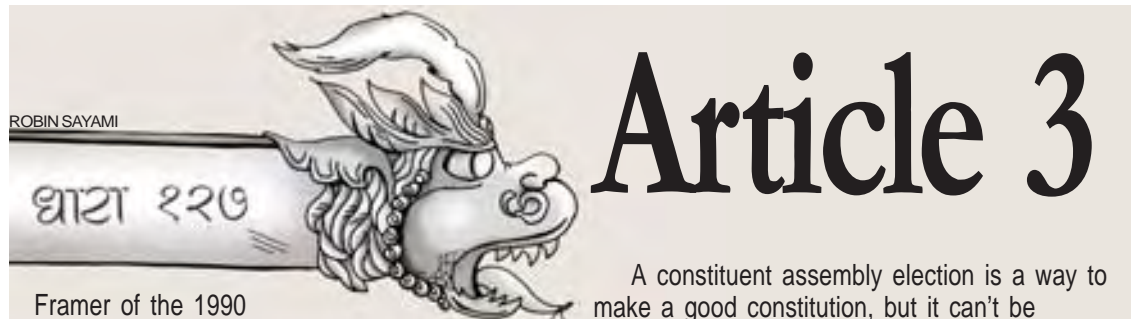
Keshab Singh, newly appointed chairman of Nepal Students' Union in *Jana Bhabana*, 19 July

My appointment as the chairman

of Nepal Students' Union (NSU) is legitimate. Nepali Congress statues have a clear cut provision stating that the party can dissolve the existing central committee of the union and form a new one at any time. There is a provision stating that the party can dissolve the NSU if it sees any problems in how the union is functioning, so in this case the party must have taken action because it became necessary.

The central working committee, led by Gururaj Ghimire, had not been able to hold meetings for quite some time. The differences between Ghimire and the union's general secretary, Gagan Thapa, had intensified to such an extent that they stopped speaking to each other completely and even led separate delegations telling the party that they could not work together. The party could not solve the dispute between them, so it was compelled to dissolve the central committee of the NSU.

I did not become the chairman based on the blessings of NC general secretary Sushil Koirala. If I had his support, I could have assumed the position during the Chitwan general convention. I have been active in the organisation for a long time and I have worked hard to reach this point. I have the mandate of holding the union's general convention within the next seven months and I will do it.



Article 3

Framer of the 1990 constitution, Laxman Prasad Aryal in *Kantipur*, 18 July

The constituent assembly demand is not part of the Maoist agenda. It may be a strategy, but it is not their agenda. The constituent assembly is in fact a demand that pro-democracy activists in Nepal have always put forward. The political parties are therefore wrong to portray this as a Maoist demand. We have to be perfectly clear about this. A constituent assembly is the most democratic form of statute-building there is, so why would the Maoists make it their bottom line? This is the crux of the matter.

The left in Nepal has always struggled for a constituent assembly and they have pushed for it non-violently. So this is not just a Maoist wish. It should be the goal of this nation and its people. The ideological underpinnings of a constituent assembly were laid long ago. Even though we finally had a compromise constitution in 1991, if we had implemented its provisions properly we would not be in this current crisis. Japan has an emperor and it has a constitution that was not crafted by a constituent assembly. Yet they do not have a crisis because the constitution is followed. More important than who made the constitution is how it is implemented.

A constituent assembly election is a way to make a good constitution, but it can't be hurried. If we want a new constitution right away, a constituent assembly election is not the way to go about it. There is no doubt that after October Fourth, the present constitution has been weakened. It has cast aspersions on the king's intentions. The moral of the story is that no matter how good a constitution we may have, future kings can scrap it with the military's help. If the army was not loyal to royal rule, many problems would have been solved. The army should answer to the constitution. Instead, it answers to the king. This is why the king could carry out a direct hit on the constitution. This is why the Maoists claim that this constitution is as good as dead.

The other reason there is discontentment about the present constitution is because we haven't carried out relevant amendments to it. The palace doesn't want the basic values enshrined in the preamble to the constitution discarded. What are these basic values: the institution of monarchy? Parliamentary system? Multi-party system? Obviously, the palace doesn't want these basic values changed even by the people's will.

The people are sovereign: that basic fact is in Article 3 and can't be changed. Unfortunately, the king wants to exercise more power, from appointing prime ministers to ambassadors. If Article 3 had been respected, there wouldn't be this call for a constituent assembly right now.

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All-terrain pollution



European policy makers debate SUVs presence in the cities

JULIO GODOY in PARIS

Vehicles known as 4x4s, originally intended for rough terrain of rural areas, have become a status symbol in Europe's big cities, but are also at the centre of controversy because of high pollution emissions, including carbon dioxide, a leading contributor to the greenhouse effect.

The debate on the probable ban on four-wheel drive sports utility vehicles (SUVs) has only just begun, but is already heating up. London's Mayor Ken Livingstone said in late May that the people who drive these cars in the city are "complete idiots". He added a farmer driving a 4x4 in an area with bad roads was reasonable, "but that

type of car should not circulate in London."

Since 1997, traffic has been cut by nearly 30 percent in Rome's historic centre after the right to drive there was granted only to those who can prove they work in that zone and who pay an annual fee of \$250-400. On 8 June in Paris, the municipal government, which includes the environmental Les Verts (The Greens), announced a majority opinion to limit SUVs in the city, underscoring that these emit four times more carbon dioxide than standard cars.

"The all-terrain vehicles have no place in the cities," and the city government is preparing to ban them, says Denis Baupin, transportation commissioner and leader of the Paris Greens. That move will be part of France's plan for reducing carbon dioxide

emissions in compliance with the Kyoto Protocol. Under the Protocol, by 2010 France must not surpass 144 million tons of emissions of carbon dioxide—equivalent to the country's 1990 emission levels.

The French government's 'Health and Environment' plan includes a supplementary tax of some \$4,200 on new cars that consume a lot of fuel, as 4x4s do, and a subsidy of around \$1,000 for "cleaner" cars.

President Jacques Chirac's conservative UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) protested, said the city council has engaged in a "demagogic manoeuvre". UMP leader on the council, Philippe Goujon, argued "a ban on 4x4s will have no effect on urban pollution."

However, the latest report by the French environment and energy agency found SUVs produce an average of 232gm of carbon dioxide per kilometre driven, while a standard four-door car generates about 146gm per km. The report states that these 4x4s consume nearly 50 percent more fuel than other family cars.

May figures from the French Health and Environmental Security Agency signalled that around 10,000 people die annually in France from illnesses (especially respiratory) caused by air pollution. Studies by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in other European countries produced comparable results.

The WHO calculates that in Austria some 2,400 people die each year from illness related to the carbon dioxide emissions from vehicles. The global environmental watchdog Greenpeace maintains that up to 40,000 people die from such causes each year in Germany.

For two years, German Environment Minister Juergen Trittin has been fighting for a regulation requiring that all diesel-run vehicles have a filter, now basing his argument on the June report from Germany's environmental agency, which states that widespread use of the diesel engine filter would increase German life expectancy by three months. Diesel engines are used in 44 percent of the vehicles in Germany, and 60 percent of those in France. But his initiative runs into opposition from social-democrat Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, who environmentalists refer to as "chancellor of automobiles" for his firm defence of the car industry.

Despite environmental concerns, Land Rover, a world leaders in the 4x4 industry, announced that demand increased by 11 percent in 2003. According to social psychologist Martin Lloyd Elliot, for the new urban upper middle class, driving an SUV provides a feeling of security in the "city jungle" and an all-terrain vehicle represents power, social status and dominance. ● (IPS)

Going green with jealousy

As a confessed car slob, my sole interest in the motor is that when I turn it on, it will go. I am more interested in cup holders and seat warmers than anything motor trendy. One adjective that has never been used to describe a car of mine is "hip".

Then we bought a hybrid. This car has a name—Prius—so unracy, it sounds vaguely like a pill for erectile

dysfunction. But it not only has two cup holders and optional seat warmers, it has a gas engine, an electric

motor and a dashboard screen monitoring miles per gallon. It also has this nifty way of going absolutely dead silent at the stoplight. And, of course, we get close to 60 miles to the gallon.

Now, for the first time, a car of ours has been accused, literally, of being hip. We hybrid owners—a mere 50,000 in a sea of 17 million cars sold last year—are being typecast as granola-crunching, tree-hugging enviro-snobs. Not only did a writer mock us as 'virtuous', another suggested that we were driving with moral superiority, 'the automotive equivalent of corrective shoes'. One professor even declared that driving a hybrid was a way of saying, "I'm more intelligent than the next guy."

I wish I could tell you that we sprung for the Prius because we knew the price of gas was on its way over the \$2 mark, or that we're putting the roughly \$300 a year in saved gas money in our grandchildren's education fund. But the truth is that the road trip had become a guilt trip. In the

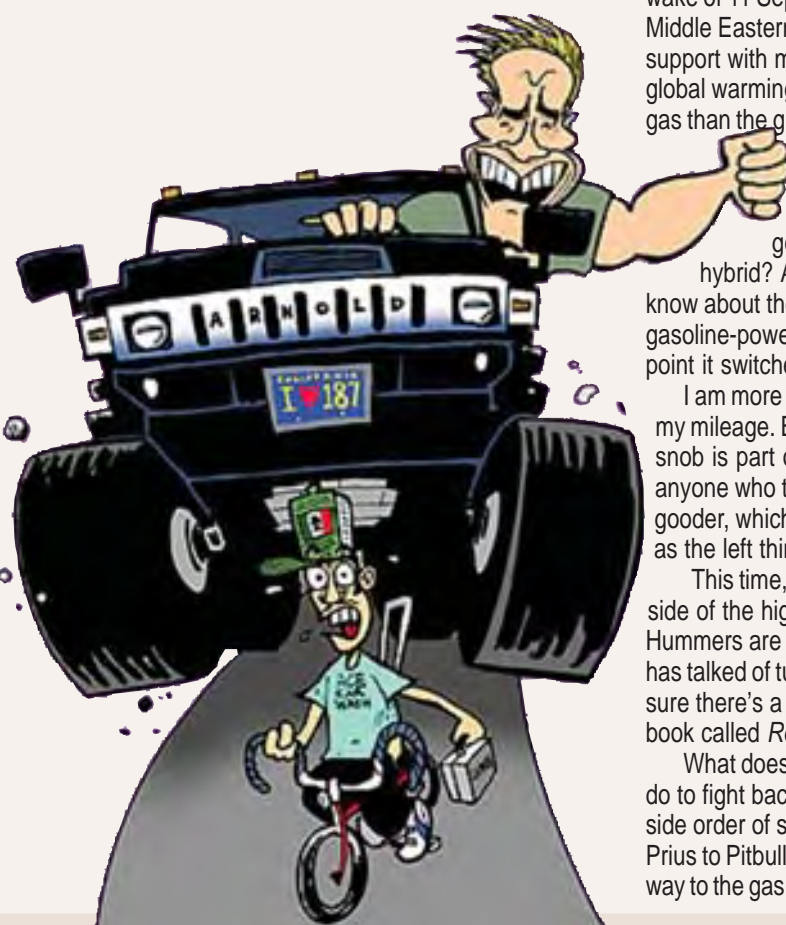
wake of 11 September, I started thinking about America's Middle Eastern 'friends' and the madrasa schools they support with my gas-guzzling dollars. Then there was global warming, the fact of Americans using 10 times more gas than the global norm, and the bright pink Victoria's Secret Hummer parked outside my office.

If the car is to the environment as the cigarette is to the body, if I'm not about to go cold turkey—or cold bike—why not go hybrid? A New Yorker cartoon said all we needed to know about the technology: 'It runs on its conventional gasoline-powered engine until it senses guilt, at which point it switches over to battery power.'

I am more than happy to take a little mockery along with my mileage. But the image makeover from car slob to car snob is part of the weird process these days by which anyone who thinks about doing any good becomes a do-gooder, which is baaaad. Doing the right thing is tagged as the left thing, which is the wrong thing.

This time, the image remakers may be on the wrong side of the highway, since hybrids are wait-listed and Hummers are discounted. Arnold Schwarzenegger himself has talked of turning one of his Hummers green—but I'm sure there's a conventional automaker somewhere with a book called *Real Men Don't Drive Hybrids*.

What does a 'hip', 'virtuous,' 'smarter-than-thou' driver do to fight back? We could have every hybrid sold with a side order of steroids. We could change the name from Prius to Pitbull. Or maybe we can just laugh quietly all the way to the gas pump. ● (International Herald Tribune)



MEANWHILE
Ellen Goodman



Since the breakdown of the trade talks in Cancun, sentiment has increasingly grown in the developing world that no agreement is better than a bad agreement. But what would a good agreement look like?

The British Commonwealth recently posed this question to me and the Initiative for Policy Dialogue, an international network of economists committed

COMMENT
Joseph E Stiglitz



to helping developing countries. Our first message was that the current round of trade negotiations, especially as it has evolved, does not deserve even to be called a Development Round.

Well before the riots at the 1999 World Trade Organisation talks in Seattle, I called for a true "development round" to redress inequities of previous rounds. Advanced countries, with their dominant corporate and financial interests, set negotiations agenda with little concern for developing countries. In the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations, the world's poorest region, sub-Saharan Africa, was actually made worse off.

Our second message was optimistic: if the agenda is reoriented towards development, and if assistance is provided to manage implementation and adjustment costs, developing countries can gain much.

Trade reforms must be sensitive to the effects on developing countries, many of which are net importers of subsidised agricultural commodities. Developing countries also need access for the unskilled labour-intensive services in which they have a comparative advantage. These were off the agenda in earlier trade rounds, as the US pushed for liberalisation of financial services—thus serving its own

comparative advantage. Today, unskilled services remain off the agenda.

Developing countries' gains from capital market liberalisation have been widely noted (although recent studies raise some doubts about these benefits). Nevertheless, the global gains from allowing freer flows of unskilled labour (even temporarily), let alone the benefits to developing countries, far outweigh the benefits from capital market liberalisation.

The trade talks in Cancun raised new subjects—the so-called Singapore issues. But even a cursory look at these items reveals that they primarily reflect the interests of developed countries. Indeed, poor countries' development would arguably have been set back if they had acquiesced in some of the demands.

Consider the issue of government procurement. The single largest area of US government procurement is defence, a sector in which even the European Union has found it difficult to make inroads. Are developing countries really targeting this area in the next few years? Clearly, this issue is not high on *their* agenda.

Competition is another example. Without competition, lowering tariffs may merely be reflected in higher profit margins for a monopoly importer. The most important competition issue for developing countries, however, is reform of dumping duties. The US and EU keep out products from developing countries, alleging that they charge less than the cost of production.

But why would anyone knowingly sell at a loss? This is only rational if the seller can hope to establish a monopoly position and extract large profits in the future. Few developing countries are in a position to establish such monopoly positions, so the dumping charges are bogus.

Making fair trade fair

A true 'development round' takes everyone's interests into consideration



As tariff barriers have come down, the unfair 'fair trade' laws are increasingly being used as America's favoured protectionist tool. Treating foreign and domestic firms the same with respect to competitive practices would stop these abuses. This, too, should be a high priority of a true development round.

The breakdown of the Cancun talks may yet provide an opportunity for deeper reflection. Now that rich

countries no longer need to worry about losing the developing world to Communism, they have an opportunity to redefine the global economic order according to the same principles on which they built successful national economies: fair competition and social justice. Unfortunately, this opportunity was squandered in the Uruguay Round.

The round of trade negotiations begun in Doha in

November 2001 was launched in a different spirit, aspiring to promote trade as a vehicle of partnership between developed and developing countries. Regrettably, in spite of its name, the Development Round has offered far less to developing countries than one would have hoped. ● (Project Syndicate)

Joseph E. Stiglitz, is Professor of Economics at Columbia University and a member of the Commission on the Social Dimensions of Globalisation.

Yes means no for al-Jazeera in Canada

OTTAWA—Canada's broadcast regulator has approved Qatar-based news channel al-Jazeera for the country's digital cable tv market, but with censorship rules that are so stringent it is unlikely to be carried, say television executives. The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) approved al-Jazeera for digital distribution last week, but accepted demands from Jewish groups that the network be censored for anti-Israel and anti-Jewish comment.

The CRTC's conditions "guarantee al-Jazeera would lose money in Canada," says Michael Hennessey, president of the Canadian Cable Television Association, which represents the country's five large cable tv companies and several smaller distributors.

The CRTC said distributors of the al-Jazeera signal in Canada would have to monitor the network for "abusive comment" 24 hours a day, and "alter or curtail" programming deemed to be offensive, although it did not define the term.

Some companies applied to the CRTC for a license to carry the network, but did not offer to censor it. Launched in 1996, al-Jazeera came to prominence in the West with graphic street-level coverage of US military attacks on Afghanistan after Washington launched its "war on terrorism" following the 11 September terrorist attacks on New York and the Pentagon. Recently, it has angered US officials by broadcasting the bloody aftermath of coalition attacks in occupied Iraq.

Digital television reaches just one million Canadian homes, and subscribers decide whether they want stations. Most are likely to refuse al-Jazeera because it broadcasts in Arabic. There are about 500,000 Arabic-speaking people in Canada, according to the last national census.

The network is available uncensored in the neighbouring United States and Israel, but is under increasing pressure in Islamic countries. The government of Qatar, which owns al-Jazeera, says it gets about 400 official complaints each year from Islamic countries saying the network shows bias towards Israel and the United States. ● (IPS)



Organisation Development Centre (ODC), an established private consultancy firm, specialising in organisation development/institutional strengthening, human resource management, general management and behaviour-based training as well as evaluations and design of development programmes

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Poetry and politics

Ode to rain

Pablo Neruda would have been 100 years old this month

On 13 December 1971, the Nobel Prize committee honored Pablo Neruda with its award in literature, citing his 'poetry that with the action of an elemental force brings alive a continent's destiny and dreams'. By then, Neruda had become *the* poet par excellence of Latin America.

It was, as the legendary books of Octavio Paz and Gabriel García Márquez described it, a continent defined by solitude. But in his



turn, will avoid giving any advice on mode or style which might give the new poets even a drop of supposed insight." Nevertheless, his own *oeuvre* displays a clear pedagogy: uniting poetry and history.

Neruda's ideological odyssey took him from apathy to Communism, turning him into the spokesman for the enslaved. From the remoteness of his childhood he heard the echo of the guns of the Great War, his poetry was published in Spain in the 1930s, where he witnessed the Spanish Civil War, saw the rise and demise of Hitler, visited Cuba after 1959, opposed the US invasion of Vietnam and Cambodia and was in Chile when Gen Augusto Pinochet orchestrated a coup, on 11 September 1973, against the elected socialist president Salvador Allende.



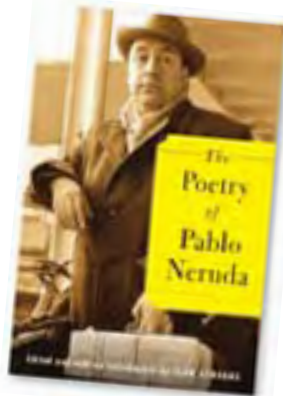
All of which didn't manage to dissipate his naïveté. He was a staunch supporter of Stalin, which prompted him to write some cheap propaganda. He unquestioningly embraced Castro. 'Fidel, Fidel, the people are

grateful/for word in action and deeds that sing,' he wrote. Still, Neruda was—and continues to be—a torchbearer.

If the neoliberalism of the 1980s seemed to turn him into an anachronism, Michael Radford's 1994 film *Il Postino*, based on a novella that included Neruda, by his compatriot Antonio Skármeta, renewed his appeal. The festivities surrounding his centennial in Chile and elsewhere are adding to the enthusiasm. Students everywhere embrace Neruda because he sought fairness and didn't shy away from resistance. The communism he so fervently embraced has lost its gravitas but another larger-than-life conflict has taken hold. How would he have reacted to the current threat to civil liberties in the United States? To the contradictions of the war on terror? His poems offer us an answer, with their indictment of careless corporate globalism and anger at limitations on press freedom.

As death approached, Neruda's humor was sometimes tinged with sarcasm. In 'The Great Urinator', a poem left unpublished, now part of the posthumous *Selected Failings* (1974), he portrayed God's urine falling on factories, cemeteries, gardens and churches, eroding all it touched. Everyone is frightened, but—oops—there are no umbrellas. And 'from on high the great urinator', the poem says (in John Felstiner's rendition), 'was silent and unurinated'.

True to form, he didn't try to tell us what it all meant. Again, he had no wisdom to dispense. Or had he?



Ilan Stavans is a professor of Latin American and Latino culture at Amherst College. Among his latest books is *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2003)

The rain returned.
It didn't come from the sky
or out of the West:
it came straight from my childhood.
Night split open, a peal of thunder
rattled, the racket
swept every lonely corner,
and then
the rain came,
rain returning from my childhood,
first a raging gust,
then a planet's soggy tail.

The rain
goes ticktock, a thousand ticks
a thousand
tocks, a sleigh
or an ample burst
of dark petals
in the night,
suddenly
intense,
riddling the leaves
with needles;
a stormy cloak
drifting down
in silence.

Rain,
sea of the upper air,
fresh,
naked rose,
voice of the sky,
black violin,
sheer beauty:
I have loved you
since childhood
not for your goodness
but your beauty.
I trudged along
in my ruined shoes
while threads
of streaming sky
unraveled over
my head, bringing
a message from on high,
to me and to roots,
humid oxygen,
freedom of the forest.
I know how mischievous you can be,
the hole in the roof
dripping measured drops
on poor peoples'
rooms.

That's when you rip off the mask
of beauty,
when you're as mean as
heavenly armor
or a dagger of transparent
glass.
That's where
I really came to know you.
But I was still yours in love,
in the night,
shutting my eyes tight,
I hoped you would fall
on the world.
I hoped you would sing
for my ears alone,
because my heart cradled
the earth's sprouting,
in my heart metals merge,
wheat springs out of my heart.

-Pablo Neruda



BIGBEN



BOOKWORM

Rana Rule in Nepal
Shaphalya Amatya
Nirala Publications, 2004
Rs 1,112

Based on Amatya's expertise as a historian and his own family's connections with the Ranas, this book focuses on the last phase of the Rana rule, spanning from 1930 to 1951. From the administrations of Prime Ministers Juddha Shamsher, Padma Shamsher and Mohan Shamsher, to the final downfall of the Rana regime, *Rana Rule in Nepal* explores one of the most interesting periods in Nepali history.

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





Expert players, bigger prizes, better equipment means more golf everywhere

As more and more people take up golf, the game is growing so fast it's getting hard to keep track of everything that is happening. More golf courses are being built every day, creating a growing demand for golf equipment, which in turn gives manufacturers incentive

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



to produce new, better equipment. Today we have the pleasure of playing with clubs and balls of a quality that was unimaginable even just a decade ago. As levels of

equipment, proficiency and expectations rise, so do the quality, difficulty and aesthetic beauty of golf courses.

After the arrival of the Tiger Woods phenomenon, the game took on a new dimension. The scoring ability of players, their driving distances, accuracy and mental and physical fitness have reached new heights. Televised professional events get more viewers than ever before, and so sponsors are willing to invest more in prizes. As a result, players improve their competitive skills to win awesome amounts of money. Leading players on the professional tour circuits practice up to nine hours a day, and spend additional time on fitness and mental training. It takes hard work to be a top professional.

Players are getting into the sport younger, and there is a growing hungry, determined group (which includes Sergio Garcia, Charles Howell III, Aaron Bradley and Adam Scott) rubbing shoulders with the big boys and already making waves in the international golf scene. Other even younger players are being groomed as future champions, and are currently preparing in "Golf Universities" in the US and European countries. With growing amounts of prize money in all the coveted golf tours, and the constant appearance of lots of new talent, the popularity of this game is building up to dizzying heights.

Watching golf on television, the game almost looks too easy. The players have smooth effortless swings and the ball seems to fly ever so far and straight. But believe me, when you first start golf, forget about straight shots. Just getting the ball up in the air or even just hitting it will be quite an achievement.

Well, to hit a golf ball, you need golf clubs. Golfers love to know what equipment the world's top players use and how far they can hit the ball. Below is what Tiger Woods carries in his golf bag, and the distances he produces with each club.

WOODS

Driver: Nike Forged Titanium steel shaft to 43½ inches 285
3-wood: Titleist Pro Trajectory, 15 degrees 265

IRONS - Nike Forged, 2-PW, 1 degree upright with a D-4 swing weight and standard-size Tour Velvet grips. The shaft on every club is a True Temper Dynamic Gold X100 steel.

2-iron: 245
3-iron: 230
4-iron: 220
5-iron: 208
6-iron: 190
7-iron: 172
8-iron: 158
9-iron: 142
PW: 128
SW: 106

LW: Titleist Vokey Design, 58 degrees (bent to 56) and 60 degrees. 92

Putter

Scotty Cameron by Titleist, Studio Stainless, Newport 2, standard loft and lie, 35 inches long.

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



STATUTORY DIRECTIVE : SMOKING IS INJURIOUS TO HEALTH



22 days for the 28th Olympics

How many Olympics of the modern era have there been?

Have there been 27 Olympics since the games in Athens in 1906, or 28? Depends what you count. The Olympics scheduled for 1940 and 1944, but which were cancelled because of World War II, still count as the seventh and eighth Games.

Meanwhile, there was one other 'Games' in Athens in 1906 that is not included as one of the 27 'official' Olympics. The Interim of Intercalated Games hoped to resurrect the Olympic ideal after debacles in Paris and St Louis.

Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympics, had hoped that a Games in Paris in 1900 would

coincide perfectly with the World's Fair. But World's Fair organisers took over, de-emphasised the importance of the Olympics and spread the events over five months.

Similarly in 1904, St Louis was hosting a world's fair, took over the hosting over the Games from Chicago and spread Olympic competition over four and half months. Again, the impact of the Games was massively diminished and, of the 84 events generally considered central to the Olympics, only 42 featured athletes from other countries.


As a result of these previous two events, Greece offered to host

an 'interim' Games in 1906. Although Baron de Coubertin was originally against the idea, he agreed that it should go ahead but that it would not be included in the numbered sequence of modern Olympics.

They proved a success and helped carry the Olympic spirit through to the next official Games in Rome in 1908. But it has left confusion for historians of the modern Olympics as to whether to included the medals won - or even to recognise the event at all!

The Olympics Sports Complex is still not completed with only 22 days to go. ●

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Attn: Kate Wray, SANN Program Director
General SANN Research Institute webpage: <http://www.sann-nepal.org>

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

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

#30 (c) 2001 by jigsaw gator - permission to run for any office.

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Visions** Paintings by Prabesh Shrestha. 23-25 July at the Buddha Gallery, Zen Café.
- ❖ **Monsoon Collection 2004** Paintings by various artists at Park Gallery, Lazimpat and Pulchowk, until 24 July. 10AM-6PM, closed Saturdays.

EVENTS

- ❖ **4th Bagmati River Festival** till 21 August
- ❖ **BrandInsight 2004** workshop at Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 25 July.
- ❖ **Kidzmix** Children's talent show organised by ASMAN. 24 July, 4PM onwards at the Hotel Bluestar. Entrance Rs 400.
- ❖ **Movies** 2PM onwards at the Alliance Francaise: L'homme de rio on 25 July & Sens Uniquem on 1 August



MUSIC

- ❖ **Deo** at Not Just The Jazz Bar Fridays at Hotel Shangri-la, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Jatra Friday Nites** Live music by The Strings. 4256622

DRINKS

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

FOOD

- ❖ **Summit's Barbecue Dinner** with vegetarian specials. Summit Hotel. 5521810
- ❖ **Friday Nights** at Subterranea Club Kilroy. 4412821
- ❖ **Vegetarian Creations** at Stupa View Restaurant. 4480262
- ❖ **Splash Spring BBQ** Wednesday and Friday evenings, 6PM onwards. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu.
- ❖ **Executive Lunch** at Toran Restaurant, Dwarika's. 4479488
- ❖ **Sunny Side Up Weekend BBQ** at Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu. 4273999
- ❖ **The Beer Garden** at Vaijayantha, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Dwarika's Thali** Lunch at The Heritage courtyard. 4479488

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Bird watching escape** Shivapuri retreat with meals by Kilroy's. 4253352
- ❖ **Wet & Wild Summer Splash** every weekend at the Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Pure relaxation** at Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge. 4361500
- ❖ **Bardia National Park** with Jungle Base Camp Lodge. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Summer in Shivapuri** at Shivapuri Heights. steve@escape2nepal.com. 9851051780

Spiderman returns, with Peter Parker (Tobey Maguire) as a university student with a secret in *Spiderman 2*. His personal relationships are shaky as his beloved Mary Jane (Kirsten Dunst) is being wooed by other men, his best friend Harry Osborn has a growing hatred of Spiderman and his Aunt May has fallen on hard times. Things get even worse with new villain, Dr Octopus (Alfred Molina), out to get him.

12:15, 3:15, 6:15 Bookings open
Call 4442220 for show timings www.jainepal.com

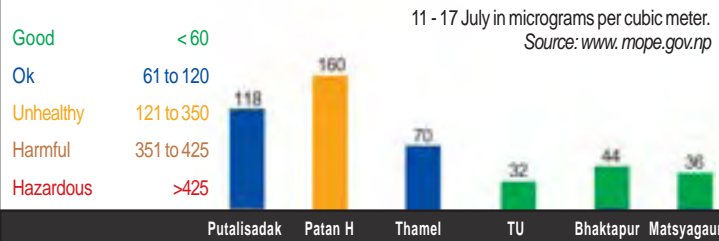
JAI NEPAL CINEMA



23 July

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

Pollution in the Valley went up again last week, in comparison to the surprisingly low PM10 (particles small enough to enter the human body) concentrations of the week before, but most monitoring stations still registered levels that were within national standards. It is becoming obvious that rain is the only real control for Kathmandu's pollution. On dry days like 13, 14 and 15 July, PM10 concentrations immediately shoot up to unhealthy levels. So the next time you're stuck in a downpour, stop complaining about the damp and start taking in some long deep breaths.



NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



Despite the recent resurgence of the monsoon, there is still a high-pressure zone over the Pamir and North India that are stopping its advance. The effect of this has also been felt in western and central Nepal where the drought situation is now severe. Currently, the Bay arm of the monsoon is bringing the eastern half of the country some precipitation. This satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows moisture-laden clouds over central and eastern Nepal, expect moderate and heavy daytime showers through the weekend. There will be a short break before the next pulse arrives on Tuesday.

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MIN BAJRACHARYA

ROBOTICS: The army's bomb-disposal robot vehicle descends into the underground parking of the Sanchaya Kosh building in Pulchok on Tuesday to defuse a suspected bomb.



KIRAN PANDAY

GIVING TILL IT HURTS: Students from the Samata Party's youth and women's wing collect donations from commuters in Kathmandu on Thursday for victims of floods in the central and eastern tarai.



KIRAN PANDAY

ROARING OFF: Top performers in the Martyr's Memorial Football Cup with their prize motorcycles at Dasrath Stadium on Sunday. Three Star Club won the tournament.



KUMAR SHRESTHA/NEPALNEWS.COM

AFTER THE DELUGE: A river on the outskirts of Biratnagar about to burst its banks as rains this week brought down more flood waters.



KIRAN PANDAY

IT IS IT: Students find out about the internet at an Information Technology fair organised by Kantipur City College on Thursday.

Ritu's Nepali connection

Watch any of the Indian music channels on television these days and chances are high that you will see the seductive Hindi hit, 'Sun Zara' being broadcast. But, hang on, isn't that Boudha and Thamel in the background? And isn't that the hirsute hero doing vipassana meditation?

Yes, *Sun Zara* was shot on location in Kathmandu because it was sung by none other than former Miss India, Ritu Singh Vaidya, who married and settled down in Nepal. Even before winning the pageant in 1992, Ritu was already modelling in her student days and was well known for her sense of style.

But music has always been her passion and she missed not singing. So, after a decade in the country, she decided to mix Nepal into her songs. "I always admired my mother's music, but my songs have also been inspired by the beauty of the land and people I have found in Nepal," Ritu says.

Always the optimist, Ritu knew it was never too late to fulfill her passion. While in Nepal, she went through a rigorous classical music training and practice under Gurudev Tamath. She worked with Nepali musicians for six months to compose her songs. Ritu came up with poignant lyrics

to accompany the soulful music of Prakash Gurung, Chris Masand and Harry Anand. *Sun Zara* was released by Times Music in May with all her songs recorded in Kathmandu and the final mixing done in France and India.

Since the release of her album, Ritu has received rave reviews in music columns in Indian newspapers. The music video with its exotic Kathmandu backdrop is regularly shown on MTV and Channel V.

Ritu finds spoken Nepali mellifluous and easy on

the ears and hopes to write and sing her own Nepali songs one day. This may not be too far away, given that Ritu's twin loves are music and Nepal. ●



KIRAN PANDAY

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Our giardia stockpile

There comes a time in every nation's lifecycle when it needs to seriously think about developing weapons of mass destruction so that it is taken more seriously by the international community and the United Nations. Now that Nepal has overtaken Sierra Leone and Liberia in the global quality of life index and, we hear, will soon catch up with Rwanda, such a time has now arrived.

As we clandestinely go about in this top secret, highly classified, and totally lethal project it is important to keep the international media fully apprised about what we plan to do with our spent fuel rods as soon as we

UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit



figure that out ourselves.

Our biological weapon of choice is the highly contagious giardiasis bacteria which has successfully deterred many foreign invasions throughout our nation's history. It is still deterring a tourist invasion. Properly deployed in the endoplasmic reticulum, it can wreak havoc on the enemy's small intestine and make them think twice about entering Nepal's Toilet-Free Zone. But we haven't publicised this top secret micro-organism quite enough, and as a result all kinds of countries are riding roughshod over us. We should be able to tell them: "Don't ride roughshod over us, you big fat bully, otherwise we will paralyse your command and control system with verbal diarrhoea."

What is more worrying is that we are lagging behind in chemical weapons research, but we do have large stockpiles of lethal pesticides stored behind a high school in Amlekhganj and in a godown a stone's throw away from the Royal Nepal Academy of Scientists and Technocrats in Khumaltar. ("Sorry, you're cutting out, say that again. No, sir, we don't want you to throw stones at the stockpiles at the present time, that would be dangerous. All we want you to do is to design an intermediate range ballistic missile launch vehicle and we'll provide the Organophosphate Malathion warhead which will be such a huge deterrent that they won't even think about submerging our border pillars anymore and will promptly sign a Mutual Non-Aggression Pact.")

Many valued readers who are still wide awake will have guessed by now that our role model in this great national endeavour is North Korea, or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as it is



A spy satellite picture of Nepal's chemical weapon stockpile at Khumaltar, with the location of the Royal Nepal Academy of Scientists and Technocrats clearly visible at top, left.

known to its close friends. Ex-mayor Keshab Sthapit went to Pyongyang two years ago to sign a sister city agreement with the North Korean capital and what a lot of benefit we have derived from that healthy sibling rivalry. Impressed by the lack of traffic on Pyongyang's roads, we are proud to say that so far this year we have kept Kathmandu totally traffic-free for 22 days with chukka jams. And we have blown up any milk truck or ambulance that dares defy this order.

A recent KCNA report says a seminar was held in Bhaktapur last week on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the demise of Great Leader Kim Il Sung who "defeated two imperialisms with his bare hands". The function was organised by the Nepal Institute of Juche Studies, which has been conducting top secret research into The Role of Self-reliance, Self-righteousness and Self-deception in International Relations. Speaking at the occasion, the chairman of the Mutual Non-Aggression Pact said: "We will arm ourselves to our teeth even if we have to go hungry." ●

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