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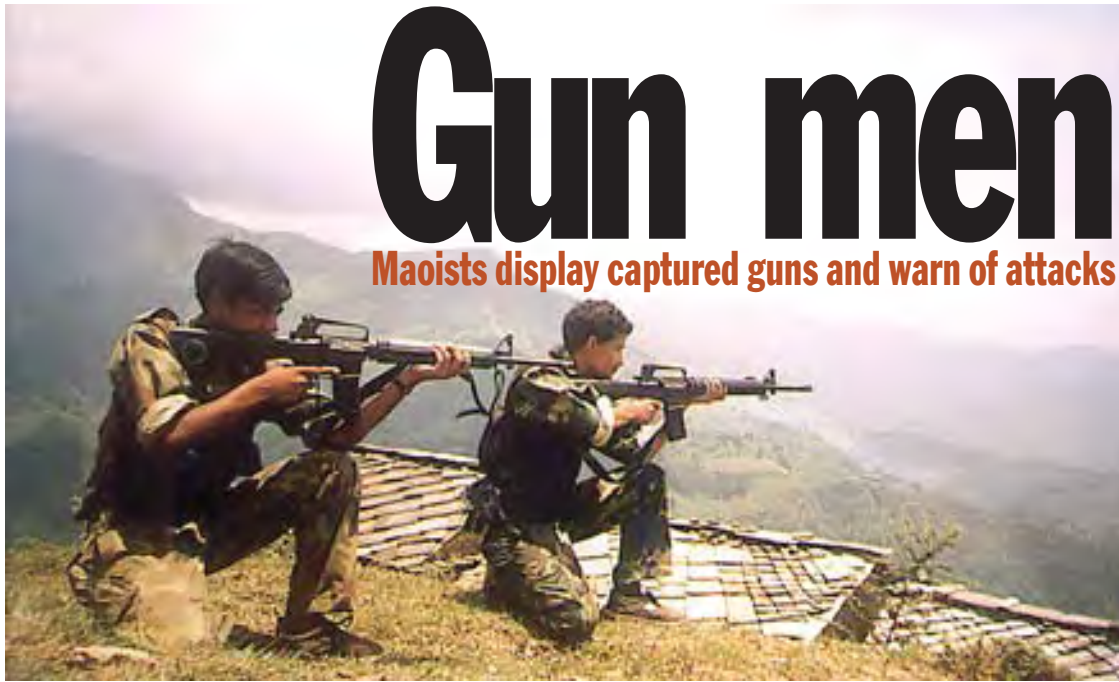
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Gun men

Maoists display captured guns and warn of attacks



SHARAD KC in ACHHAM

A Maoist leader let off a short burst from a captured M-16 and had just started on his speech at a school compound in Achham's Binayak village on 21 July when there was the sound of an approaching helicopter.

The leaders ran for cover, and so did the hundreds of people assembled at the school. From high above, the army's Indian-built Lancer attack helicopter let off a burst of machinegun fire. The farmers remember all too well a chopper attack on a similar meeting at the exact same spot on 12 April when six villagers were killed.

A Maoist aimed at the helicopter with his machinegun, but it was out of range. It hovered for a while longer, then flew away. As the meeting resumed, politburo member of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), Janardan Sharma (alias Prabhakar) spoke into a loudspeaker: "We are in our final preparations to make an attack on the centre...we will capture Kathmandu, and then move on to seize New Delhi and

Washington."

All present applauded and if there was disbelief, no one showed it. Later, some villagers told us, "Even the stones here are Maoist, so how can we defy them?" Guerrillas proudly posed for visiting Nepali and international journalists with guns captured from the army in Dadeldhura: M-16 A2s, SLRs and even a belt-ammo Belgian Minimi. A 20-year-old army defector, Lal Bahadur Magar, carried a satellite phone and was directing his men.

Present at the meeting was the Seti Mahakali Autonomous People's Government chief, Lekh Raj Bhatta, who announced the Maoists were also setting up their own 'unified command' to consolidate their strength.

At the army's Western Division Headquarters in Nepalganj, spokesman Yagya Raj Rajaure admitted that the army was aware of the Maoist meeting in Binayak. He told us: "We knew they were using the villagers as human shields and our helicopter only fired warning shots. We didn't want civilian casualties." ●

PHOTO OP: Maoist pretend to aim their captured M-16s, SLRs, INSAS and Minimi guns for the benefit of visiting journalists at a gathering in Achham's Binayak village, which was addressed by the head of the rebel's Far Western Regional Bureau, Prabhakar (above right)



ALL PICS: SHARAD KC

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Weekly Internet Poll # 147

Q. Is United Nations mediation possible in Nepal?



Total votes: 900

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Q. Do you support the government's lottery system for overseas workers?

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The middle path

The centre must assert itself and build an inclusive identity around Nepal's diversity

The birthplace of Lord Buddha is a sensitive issue here. Even learned Nepalis take offence when a writer is careless enough to refer to the Enlightened One as an 'Indian'. A similar sensitivity, however, is seldom shown towards the people who reside in the vicinity of present-day Lumbini.

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



Kapilbastu may lie within Nepal, but those who live there are not 'Nepalis' because they wear dhotis, speak Awadhi, and insist on observing local customs that are different from mainstream practices.

In the traditional definition of *Nepali pan*, no blurring of boundaries between cultural and political identities is allowed. The line between 'us' and 'them' is cast in stone. 'We' stands for people-like-us. The Panchayat slogan of 'One People, One Language, One Religion, and One System under the King' is still the mainstay of Nepali nationalism.

By and large, the framers of the 1991 constitution lifted the Panchayat definition of Nepali nationalism lock, stock, and barrel. The Nepali Congress and UML deserve credit for introducing democracy, but they must also share some of the blame for consciously and consistently refusing to recognise the inherent diversity of Nepali society. It took a totalitarian ideology to challenge the prevailing model of authoritarian nationalism. The risk that the medicine may turn out to be even more dangerous than the disease is very real.

It is astonishing that a totalitarian Maoist ideology appropriated the agenda of ethnic and tribal rights and monopolised it for so long. However, there are early signs of impending implosion.

Two militant ethnic groups, the Kirat Workers' Party (KWP) and the Madhesi National Front (MNF), announced on Monday that they have severed ties with the Maoists. It is very unlikely that a decision of this magnitude and danger was taken without contemplating its

consequences. Like with most revolutionary groups, the Maoists brook no dissent and punishment is termination.

If this is not a ploy by Comrade Prachanda to keep his critics guessing, then his outfit has difficult days ahead. Withdrawal of support by the ethnic groups delegitimises the Maoists because they can't claim to be fighting for the rights of the marginalised (Janjatis) and the externalised (Madhesis) anymore.

Disillusionment of Madhesi Maoists with their predominantly Pahari central command had been festering. In private, Maoist cadres of Madhesi stock complain bitterly of their internal struggle to be accepted by party leaders. Publicly, Jaikrishna Goit's revolt is the first sign of rumblings in the rank and file of the Maoists.

So, what of the middle? Even though it is badly squeezed at present between the resurgent right and rampaging left, it is in the political middle that the true salvation lies. Ethnic identities that have a legitimate claim on Nepali nationalism must first ensure that their efforts are directed towards making it inclusive and democratic.

The political middle must reframe itself for the new realities of Nepal. The right resurgence is losing steam, left adventurism is doomed to fail. The centre must rise to the occasion and learn to assert itself by accepting the diversity of Nepali society and building an inclusive identity around it.

The moral of the story: the middle path is the only correct course for private life as well as public policy. ●

JUST DO THE SMALL THINGS

When there was a gap of more than a month between two prime ministers in May, the joke in cocktail circuits was that it was difficult to tell the difference between having a government and not having one. Others said it was better not to have a government because at least that way no one could make any major gaffes.

Today, we have a 31-member multi-partisan government led by a prime minister who has served in that post twice before. We are trying not to be cynical about it, hoping that a government representing diverse interest groups should be the best option at a time when representative democracy is in deep freeze.

But it is its own political diversity that has mired this cabinet in contradictions. Coalition partners are working at cross purposes driven by vested interests. The water resources minister is the left-hand man of the RPP president who held that portfolio before. The minister of communication doesn't even bother to hide the fact that he is a palace plant. The prime minister himself is also defence minister. Between them, they have hydropower, telecom and the military, three of the most economically-important sectors in Nepal today.

The UML is inside the coalition, but seems to be a spectator to the status quoists. The UML's legitimacy rests on being able to move the peace process forward with a unilateral ceasefire if need be, yet every time it raises the issue it is spanked on the knuckles. The army is bent on bringing its strength to 120,000 and inducting advanced weaponry, and it is happy with the sympathetic civilians in Singha Darbar.

We aren't expecting any major breakthroughs (like a ceasefire) from this lot. So, it's best they concentrate on one small do-able thing at a time: rushing relief to the far west where people are on the verge of starvation, helping cholera victims in the mid-west, rehabilitating the flood-displaced in the eastern tarai, ensuring that some of the money pledged in the budget actually reaches the schools and health posts in remote areas this year, or nabbing dacoits who are on a rampage in Rautahat.

We could also ask them to publish the much-delayed auditor general's report so the Nepali people know where their money went in the last three years. We could ask them to investigate the cases of the recently disappeared. But we won't, because we know it's not going to happen.



ROBIN SAYAMI

There is a lot of debate about involving the United Nations to mediate in resolving the Maoist insurgency. Although it is widely supported, UN-mediation has inherent limitations.

It is important, first, to abandon the practice of political stigmatisation based on one's analysis. Current comment on this

GUEST COLUMN
Dipta Shah



subject tends to brand skeptics of the UN's proposed role as 'pro-monarchist', and the fallacy of this claim is apparent in its hypocritical posture.

To start with, there is ambiguity over the exact nature of the UN's proposed role in Nepal. Clearly, the time for 'confliction prevention' is over. The remaining alternatives (using the UN's own terminology), are 'peacemaking' and 'peace-building'.

Peacemaking, as distinct from 'peace enforcement', entails the use of 'diplomatic means to persuade parties in conflict to cease hostilities and negotiate a peaceful settlement'. This definition is expanded further to include a principal qualification that the 'United Nations can often play a role if the parties to the dispute agree that it should do so'. In Nepal's case, the required agreement is absent.

There is less disagreement on the UN's participation in peace-building which

Peacemongering

Let's not use the UN's name in vain

according to the UN 'refers to all external efforts to assist countries and regions in their transitions from war to peace'. Nevertheless, peace-building is necessarily preceded by peacemaking, which renders immediate deliberation on the specifics of peace-building, premature.

It is logical to ask why the Deuba government is hesitant to accept the UN's offer for mediation. There could be several reasons:

- Negotiating under the auspices of the UN would grant recognition to the Maoists as a legitimate state actor. This bears the markings of an irreversible precedent that encourages rogue behavior as opposed to democratic process
- The Maoist demand for a UN-mediated settlement is a contradiction that leaves ample room for hearsay. On the one hand, the Maoists openly recruit and arm child soldiers and engage in 'political cleansing'. On the other, they demand mediation from the ultimate enforcer of international norms and regulations. This deliberate inconsistency is a travesty of the UN system itself.

- Despite popular belief, Nepal's conflict with the Maoists is no longer a two-way dispute. The arrest of Maoist leaders operating from Indian territory has highlighted the fact that Nepal's internal problems are not devoid of ramifications for India. Without India's direct participation in negotiations, a sustainable resolution to Nepal's problem is improbable. In the absence of forthcoming Indian acquiescence on UN involvement (overtly or covertly), debate on the issue is largely redundant.

- The consistent Maoist demand for UN mediation is suspicious. Every peace-building initiative undertaken by the UN needs a mandate from the Security Council for the deployment of UN troops. The Maoists could be sticking to this demand knowing fully well that Nepali troops serve on UN peacekeeping missions elsewhere. Undermining the state's military apparatus is an overriding Maoist goal, the call for UN mediation is the most painless means of accomplishing it.

The suggestion that a role for the UN may not be appropriate for Nepal at this time is not an attempt to degrade the genuine goodwill

of Nepal's well-wishers. It is simply to elicit essential awareness of the necessity to appoint a universally perceived, neutral third party in the absence of which the resumption of meaningful dialogue is impossible. Principally, this entails the delegation of an entity whose mandate does not inadvertently favour either side.

It is no secret that successful negotiations are almost always conducted through 'Track-II' channels. The very art of negotiating demands the provision of a clandestine environment which mitigates the risk of public denigration. Unfortunately, the promotion of such an environment has been severely inhibited by irresponsible politicians operating under self-proclaimed mandates.

The biggest shortfall since the advent of democracy in Nepal has been the inability of our leaders to manage public perceptions. In a genuine effort to prevent the further deterioration of public trust, the state should make every effort to carefully evaluate each alternative candidate of mediator.

Staged negotiations in the name of power politics should cease immediately. Simultaneously, the deplorable practice of executing political machinations (using the good name of UN), should also be halted. The only process that should be moving ahead is the process of implementing confidence-building measures in anticipation of candid, meaningful negotiations. ●

LETTERS

**BELOW THE BELT**

I have been an admirer of CK Lal's provocative State of the State columns, but I must say he crossed the line in 'Under-developed' (#206). We all know that the United Nations can sometimes be profligate, but it is a union of all member states, including ours. It is the closest we have ever come to multilateralism and world government. By tarring all UN agencies with the same brush, by passing snide comments about big cars and high salaries he has deeply hurt many international civil servants who are trying to change the world through true internationalism, relief aid and life-saving interventions. I think Lal owes them an apology.

Name withheld

THINKING SMALL

There are some interesting discussion points in Tiwari's column 'Thinking Small' (Strictly Business, #205). First, with a primitive market infrastructure, small businesses in Nepal are literally excluded from the privilege of getting help from financial institutions. The financial institutions are interested in bigger businesses that have substantial equity, or in business owners with a good network of influence. The public knows that some of the financial institutions have provided assistance without people having equity just because they fell within the influential circle. Secondly, during the medieval times (or even today), there was an established socio-economic institution of rich merchants helping poorer farmers with financing. However, the downside of this institution was that poor farmers became kamias or slaves if they were not able to payoff their loans. Since the bigger financial institutions can only cater to the rich and influential, the government should target these traditional merchants and poor villagers with financial provisions, and also some type of penalty mechanism (other than slavery) if the loan cannot be paid off.

D Mahat, Baltimore, USA

HEROJIG

I am a California girl and have been a follower of your cartoonist HeroJig for about a year now. I've never even been to Nepal, so maybe I don't fully 'get' all his comic strips, but they always crack me up and strangely enough make me want to come to Nepal for a visit and maybe even try some momos. His latest strip on the 'girlie men' (#206) was so timely and hysterical. How does he do it? I mean, I live in Los Angeles and he, in Nepal, is more up to date on what's going on than many of us here in Southern California. I've shared this particular strip with my friends and the ruling is: HeroJig ROCKS! More please.

Lora Lehman, Los Angeles, USA

DISGUSTING

Kunda Dixit is disgusting and insane (Under My Hat, 'Our giardia stockpile', #206). But we get sadistic pleasure reading his articles, so don't let him stop. We need a mad man writing in these mad times.

Rashmi, Shobana and Binod, Bangalore

Vacancy Announcement

A bilateral programme implemented in close co-operation with Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation (MFSC) working in the field of Natural Resource Management invites applications from Nepali citizens for the positions of:

LOCAL GOVERNANCE & RURAL INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT ADVISOR

The Rural Institutional Development Advisor is primarily responsible for supporting Institutional Strengthening Component for the development of a Sector-wide Institutional Support Mechanism (SWISM); supporting in the formulation of relevant strategies and design of appropriate institutional frameworks for decentralisation and field implementation and monitoring with focus on good governance, gender and social equity concerns.

(Position: 1)

Specific duties include:

- Act as a focal point for governance, decentralisation, devolution and institutional strengthening, and in this capacity provide relevant technical assistance to staff and units under MFSC in programme design, planning, and implementation (including the development of guidelines and practical approaches);
- Support in the establishment of District Forestry Coordination Committees (DFCCs) under the District Development Committees (DDCs) in five pilot districts. This includes improving the 'DFCC Establishment and Operational Guidelines' with a view to address issues such as equity in access to forest resources, gender and social inclusion in the DFCCs, revenue sharing and distribution;
- Build awareness and knowledge amongst forest sector stakeholder on the policy and legal framework for decentralised forestry sector management, including the need for harmonisation of Local Self Governance Act and the Forest Act;
- Develop linkages between forestry sector and local government structures;
- Promote sector wide approach, gender and social inclusion at all levels of programme planning and development; and
- Contribute to programme's positioning and sector wide strategy development at national and regional level.

Required Skills

Fluency in English language; highly developed skills on strategic analysis; social & inter-personal; policy & programme development knowledge; effective coaching and team building; awareness of gender issues in the delivery of institutional development & organisational strengthening. The job requires travel to the districts supported by the programme.

Required Knowledge

Masters in Forestry/NRM or Public Administration/Political Science/Rural Development; at least 8 years of progressively responsible experience of working with governance, decentralisation and devolution issues in local bodies including a thorough knowledge of the Local Self Governance Act; expertise in the area of organisation development/institutional strengthening is a pre-requisite; relevant experience working with forestry/soil conservation programme/projects will be an advantage.

Regional Programme Manager

The Regional Programme Managers will be primarily responsible for the overall management of programme activities in their respective regions. (Positions: 4)

Specific duties include:

- Programme support to the regional and district level programme activities and its effective management;
- Coordination and networking with partners including line agencies;
- Technical advice and facilitation support to the Programme Office and Central Support Unit Offices;
- Planning, Monitoring and Reporting of programme activities;
- Strategic support in sustainable realisation of the programme's goal of institutional strengthening and capacity building;
- Budgeting and administration of all directly funded Programme activities within the region; and
- Contribution to programme's positioning and strategy development at national and regional level.

Required Skills

Fluency in English language; highly developed skills on strategic analysis; social & inter-personal; policy & programme development knowledge; effective coaching and team building; awareness of gender issues in the delivery of institutional development & organisational strengthening. The job as Programme Manager will, on a regular basis, include travel to the districts supported by the programme.

Required Knowledge

Masters degree in Business Administration/Economics/Forestry/Natural Resource management; over 7 years of relevant experience working with forestry/soil conservation programme/projects in a senior/managerial level portfolio; experience in monitoring and evaluation, gender and equity or institutional development with forestry/and natural resource programme/projects will be an advantage.

Natural Resource Programme Officer

The Natural Resource Programme Officers will be primarily responsible for ensuring smooth functioning and implementation of the programme activities. (Positions: 4)

Specific duties include:

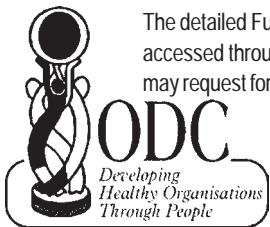
- Technical backstopping and support in building institutional capacity of partner organisation in the districts;
- Implementation, training and extension support to the partners;
- Planning, monitoring and evaluation and timely reporting of programme activities;
- Develop and maintain relevant networks and contacts to facilitate programme activities;
- Integrate gender and social equity and social mobilisation issues in the programme activities;
- Communication, documentation and Information compilation; and
- Build professional insights and vision in local development issues and initiatives.

Required Skills

Fluency in English language; excellent communication and listening skills; effective team player with networking and negotiating abilities; ability to organise; group leadership; ability to work independently & under pressure, intercultural sensitivity and gender awareness & social inclusion.

Required Knowledge

Bachelors in Forestry/NRM or Commerce/Social Sciences with 3 years of relevant experience working with forestry/soil conservation programme/projects in a similar capacity; working experience in I/NGO setting; knowledge and experience in participatory techniques, in capacity strengthening of partner organisations in forestry/and natural resource programme/projects will be an advantage.



The detailed Function Task Description is available for pick up from **Organisation Development Centre (ODC)** from **July 28, 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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Manpower agencies and women's

Misery at home forces Nepali women domestics in the Gulf to endure abuse

JB PUN MAGAR in BHAIRAWA



Increasingly desperate Nepali women are fleeing conflict and hardship at home to work as domestics in the Gulf even though they know about the abuse and exploitation they are likely to face.

There are many levels of mistreatment: daughters pressured to leave homes to earn money, the low status of women in the family and the community, the pimps who dupe them, the border guards who need to be paid off and finally the employers in the Gulf who overwork, beat or rape them.

Three years ago, when Kani Sherpa came home in a casket from Kuwait, her suffering and death was reported widely in the Nepali media. Kani was employed as a domestic in Kuwait. She was raped and beaten almost every day, and when she finally attempted to go to the police, her employer

pushed her off a balcony. The Kuwaiti man was never tried.

Kamala Rai was also working for a family in Kuwait. She suffered multiple rapes from her employer and his friends. She fled the house and was finally sent home, traumatised and sick.

To be sure, not all Nepali women who go to the Gulf to work are abused, and conditions in Hong Kong are better (*see box*). The work is difficult and they are often homesick but they manage to send money home to their families. This is why activists lobbied three years ago to lift a ban on female migrant workers.

But as more and more women go abroad, cases of abuse have become increasingly common. Most women are aware that they may be exploited by middlemen or abused by employers, but their desperation is such that they go anyway.

"I have already spent a lot on

my daughter's passport, visa and citizenship. If I don't send her now, how I will repay my debt?" asks Lal Bahadur Tamang from Sindhupalchok whose daughter Israni was caught near Gorakhpur by volunteers with the anti-trafficking group, Maiti Nepal. This was the second time Israni was stopped on the Indian border, but Lal Bahadur is still determined to send his daughter to Kuwait.

Although it is now legal for Nepali women to work in the Gulf, they face such harassment at immigration in Kathmandu airport that most prefer to fly from India. But travelling overland to New Delhi or Mumbai exposes them to risks of being sold to brothels en route.

Many agents are actually pimps and have no intention of taking the girls to the Gulf, and sell them off in brothels in Mumbai instead. Dipa KC from

Eleven girls from Gorkha who were rescued by Maiti Nepal at the border (*above, left*). Israni and Bimala Tamang (*above right*) Sindhupalchok were turned back at the border twice, but their parents are still determined to send them to Kuwait.

Parbati KC and Agni Thapa are New Delhi-based agents for Nepali girls who want to work as maids in the Gulf.

Pokhara and Barsha Rai from Dharan were recently rescued by an Indian activist group in Mumbai. They had been sold to a brothel owner by their Nepali recruiters, Narayan Shrestha and Gokarna Thapa.

"They think they are going to the Gulf, but most get trafficked in India," says a Nepali police officer at the Sunauli border. The police and Maiti Nepal are working to warn the girls, and send those they suspect are



ALL PICS: JB PUN MAGAR

Shock therapy

Re-electing Bush will give American politics the jolt it needs

An interesting notion is circulating in the United States. I'm not sure where it comes from. In private conversations, I've ventured it myself. Usually I've been called names. Nihilist. Trotskyite. Troublemaker. But

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



now, this idea is coming from

other, much more respectable sources.

It goes like this: in this year's US presidential election, the most desirable outcome for those who believe in long-term, meaningful change is the re-election of George W Bush. That's why I get called the names. Most of my friends are what Americans call "liberals" or "leftists". I'd say, for the most part, they are actually middle class people with a conscience.

Anyway, to such people, whether Americans, Britons or South Asians,

another four years of robber baron economics and piracy as foreign policy is anathema.

I've got a different point of view. I say we need more of the extremism and neo-Imperialism of George Bush. Four years might be too much but that's what we're stuck with, thanks to the American political system. But why, oh why, you might ask, do we need more Bush?

Well, it's simple. American politics needs a jolt. It's quite simply too comfortable, too close to big money, too unwilling to engage with issues of class, race and poverty at home and religious zealotry and corporate malpractice abroad. That includes Republicans and Democrats. It really doesn't matter which party is in the White House. It's been that way ever since Ronald Reagan shifted the political goal posts in his country into ground once occupied only by extremists and reclusive multi-millionaires—the far right.

To bring the goalposts back, the Democrats need to change. They need to abandon big money and the centrism championed by Bill Clinton whose noteworthy achievement in office in the 1990s were to push millions of poor people off welfare in order to balance the national budget. The party needs to return to its roots as representative of the American poor, not its enemy. The party needs to oppose corporate interests, not beg them for campaign funds. The party needs to lead the debate on reform in American, not stifle it.

So who else thinks this way? Who else is wondering whether four more years of the ineptness and arrogance of the current American government might be the way to discredit the current neo-conservative right and its cheerleaders in the media? American's biggest trade union for one, the Service Employees International Union. The leader,

Andrew Stern, told the Washington Post last week that he would be voting for John Kerry in the next election, but hoping for the re-election of George Bush.

Stern is one of many people working for a re-alignment of the left in America. Not all of them are traditional lefties either. Among them is George Soros, the billionaire speculator, and a number of New Technology millionaires from the Silicon Valley. Other union leaders and academics also think this way.

It's not that they're urging people to vote for Mr Bush. It's more that they're genuinely interested in real change on their own side of the political spectrum. And they think that shock therapy—four more years in the political wilderness, four more years that could cause international havoc—might just be the way ahead.

We live, I daresay, in interesting times. ●

power

being duped, home to their families. But parents of the girls are so burdened with debt that many want their daughters to try again.

Maiti stopped some 700 girls at the border this year alone, but many others are getting through. One New Delhi-based agent, Agni Thapa, says he has already taken 200 girls to the Gulf in the past three years. He charges up to Rs 20,000 for each girl's travel documents and another Rs 70,000 in fees for a placement office in the Gulf to find them jobs.

The recruitment and dispatch of Nepali girls is organised by a network of middlemen. Village-based recruiters do the 'marketing' and get a cut for every girl they send to Kathmandu, promising them easy work and huge salaries. Interviews with rescued girls reveal that agents even organise passports for underage girls by paying off officials. The girls are then sent to Gyaltzen Lama and Agni Thapa in New Delhi, who put them on a plane to Kuwait where the girls contact Iswori Rai, Pemba Lama and Rupa Gyawali to find them jobs.

Some women who have worked as domestics abroad return to Nepal and become agents themselves. Usha Neupane from Rupendehi worked in Oman for a few years and is now running a racket promising to take Nepali girls to the Gulf. Most get stuck in India.

Traffickers are getting smarter, and have found ways to get around increased vigilance at the border. Girls travel with their parents so they can't be stopped. "All we want is to ensure they are not cheated. We can't stop girls seeking employment abroad of their own free will," says

Prabha Khanal of Maiti Nepal in Bhairawa.

Shobha, 19, from Rupendehi was so determined to get a job as a domestic in Qatar that she tolerated being raped repeatedly by her agent, Shyam Neupane. She trusted the man because he was from her village and promised to send her to the Gulf. After three weeks, Shobha did fly to Qatar where she washed dishes and cleaned floors. One night her employer, Sahid Sheikh and six of his friends raped her until she became unconscious. She was hospitalised for 15 days and sent back to Nepal. Shahid Sheikh was never charged.

Maya GC spent five years in Oman and Bahrain where she was exploited and sexually abused. But she says the situation in her village is so bad, she wants to go back to Qatar and hopes that she will be lucky enough to find a better employer this time. "I know it may happen again, but look at the situation in our country," she tells us.

Bhagbati returned to Nepal two years ago after being sexually abused by her employer in the Gulf. Unable to go back to her village because of the stigma, she tried to return to the Gulf but was turned back from New Delhi airport for being HIV positive. She is determined to give it another try. "My family's state is bad and if I get a chance, I'll go again," says Bhagbati.

Horror stories of abuse are not stopping Nepali women wanting to find work. Such is the despair that the passport office in Rupendehi is now issuing 1,000 passports a month, a quarter of them for women. ●

Some of the names of women have been changed.

Maid in Nepal

Things are slightly better for Nepali domestics in Hong Kong

MAINA DHITAL



Nepali maids waiting at the Royal Nepali Consulate office in Hong Kong for documents, and being counselled at a Christian charity (below).

Sanu Maya Gung is a cheerful 20-year-old. She left her home village last year to work in Hong Kong as a domestic worker. She was full of excitement and hope, presuming the workload would be light and she could send money home to her family in Nepal.

Sanumaya's spontaneity and cheerfulness became the very traits that made her lose her job. Her mistress accused Sanu Maya of having a relationship with her husband and sacked her. She is now back in Nepal, her dreams shattered.

Nepalis working overseas are not prepared with minimal skills-training and orientation before they leave and often face exploitation, harassment and culture shock. They are often left to fend for themselves and, without proper training, end up getting the least-paying jobs.

Sanu Maya was lucky, she only got fired. Many others are physically abused, or have to endure mistreatment from family members they work for. Labour laws in Hong Kong are stricter than elsewhere, so Nepalis working there have more safeguards than in

countries and about 1,400 of them are Nepalis.

"Despite legal protection, most Nepalis are duped because of the language barrier, lack of experience and ignorance of the lifestyle prevailing here," says Rai. Many unsuspecting Nepali women sign papers given to them by middlemen without agreeing on a salary figure and get cheated.

The government has made training mandatory for Nepalis going abroad to work and since the law went into effect, more than 80 'training centres' have opened in Kathmandu alone. But Nirmal Gurung, president of Nepal Foreign Employment Business Association, says there aren't enough centres to meet the demand and the quality of instruction leaves a lot to be desired.

According to the Foreign Employment Act 2042 and Code of Regulations (amended) 2053, the

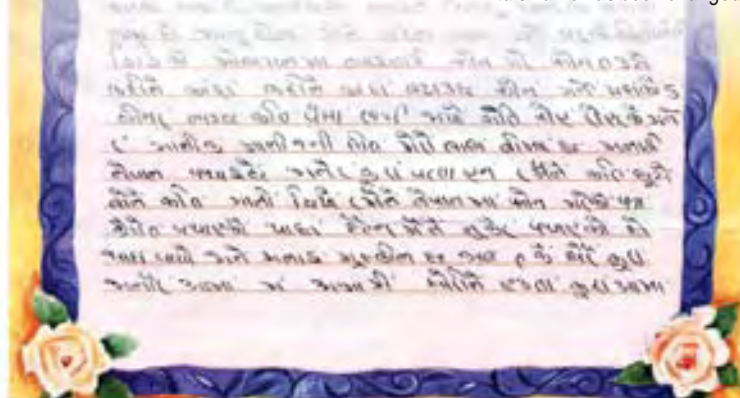
Anita's agony

A few months after Anita from Palpa reached Kuwait to work as a maid, she sent home a tape with her voice and a letter (below). When her family listened to the tape, they started weeping with worry. The neighbours came over to listen and they cried, too. Excerpts from the tape:

"We all believed Raju Rana from our village when he told us we could earn a lot of money here. But to enter India in Sunauli we had to pay Rs 2,000 in bribes. When we got to Delhi, they herded 20 of us like goats and locked us up. They did not give us enough to eat. We started eating banana peels. They used to send us out with men who abused us. If we refused, they warned us we'd never go abroad. Finally, a month later we got to Kuwait. The master doesn't let us go out, or meet anyone. His children often beat us up. What am I to do? I am in deep trouble."

Anita managed to escape the clutches of her employers with the help of a kind-hearted Indian woman and returned home to Nepal, penniless.

Anita's name has been changed.



BOTH PICS: IPS

the Gulf. Still, most women are homesick and unfamiliar with the language and household implements. When there is abuse, the women don't know who to turn to.

After Hong Kong, Israel is emerging as the next big market for Nepali maids. The Labour Department says 77,000 Nepalis went abroad to work so far this year, and 733 of them were women. But the government doesn't keep count of the thousands of other women who travel overland to India and fly out from there. Official figures show 417 of the women landed up in Hong Kong, 112 in Israel, 63 in Korea and 50 in the UAE.

Prem Chandra Rai is president of the Far East Overseas Nepali Association (FEONA) and says women coming to Hong Kong to work should be given language training, orientation and skills training before they leave. This would not only enhance their earnings, but also make it easier for them to cope with alien surroundings.

Nepali women in Hong Kong get the jobs not taken by Filipino, Thai or Indonesian maids because they are regarded as relatively less skilled. Still, a Nepali maid can earn Rs 30,000 a month. Hong Kong has an estimated 250,000 domestic workers from these

syllabus of the pre-departure training course should include social, economic, religious and cultural information of the country they are going to. Language and other related subjects should also be incorporated. Information on type of work the employees have to perform, whether or not it is as per contract, immigration formalities and the process of sending money home also need to be included. Most courses don't address these issues.

Janaki Ballabh Adhikari of the Foreign Employment Promotion Department agrees that there needs to be a specialised curriculum for women workers. "We need to draw up new content on protection against sexual assault, harassment and family planning methods," he says.

The government has fixed a fee of Rs 700 for the mandatory two-day course, but many manpower agencies charge the fee and never give the training, especially to women workers. Manpower companies are actually not allowed to open training centres at all, but this rule is violated. The result is that many Nepali men and women are going abroad, not fully prepared to face the uncertainties of working far away from home. ● (Sancharika Samuha)

Kanchha's life

Hope your next life is better than this one

A few lines in the News in Brief section announces 'Teenager commits suicide'. The casual, commonplace, no-comment death by hanging of a 15-year-old 'domestic aide' known by the name of Kanchha. This is all we learn about this boy. This is the only trace of his passage on earth. His death doesn't seem to shock anybody anymore.

Another headline on a 60-word brief a few weeks ago, 'Compensation for torture', cited the case of a Damak resident who agreed to pay compensation in the form of 17 *dhur* of land worth Rs 150,000, to an eight-year old domestic

worker who was repeatedly beaten and tortured by his owner. Owner, I presume, is the term best describing the master-slave situation prevailing with domestic help in Nepal.

This sort of occurrence is so common. "This is Nepal," you shrug. "What to do, Kathmandu."

An NGO spends great amounts of money and energy trying to kidnap a handful of not-so-grateful or downright resentful girls and boys from Makwanpur previously sold by their parents, then exported to work in a circus in India. They are re-imported with no financial compensation to the buyer and exploiter, they relish the excellent career-prospects a teenage circus performer can expect in Nepal. No doubt, they will end

up in some seedy massage parlour in Thamel, or be recruited by either of the warring sides, or go back to a government school.

When a product is sold, one cannot just grab it back by force. One has to refund the initial payment, plus compensate the years of training in this particular case.

Likewise,

some Christian do-gooders from Britain and the US regularly fly to south Sudan to buy back kids sold on the local slave-markets, \$300 dollars apiece, then return them to their families.

No doubt, some of them are getting sold again every time these bulk-buyers are announced. The market prices for Sudan's child slaves has increased tremendously thanks to them, to the extent that it has become a prosperous concern. Very similar to buying caged birds from Buddhist shrines in order to release them to obtain merits. How many just fly back to their cages? Or like the lines of Nepalis queuing to pay to work abroad.

Lucky Nepal, so docile to the West through its cash-guzzling NGOs that the US State Department forgot to mention it in its 4th annual 'Trafficking in Persons Report' last month. They nailed Bangladesh, Burma, Cuba, Ecuador, Equatorial Guinea, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Venezuela, but India, Nepal and China were omitted.

Nepal is the most African country in Asia. Its palace increased its annual allowance six-fold from Rs 110 million to Rs 620 million this year, which comes to Rs 1,700,000 per day. That is \$22,000 daily—not bad for a country whose poverty ranking is 142 out of 177 and where 82 percent of the people live on less than \$2 a day. Nepal is certainly a long way away from socialism.

Hope your next life is better than this one, Kanchha.

Greenbacks for

Nepalis can soon start collecting their reward for not polluting the earth



NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

Nepal's successful biogas program has given farmers a non-polluting fuel, conserved forests and provided great fertiliser for the fields. Now, it looks like the rest of the world wants to pay us hard cash for not burning firewood to release carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change has set up a Clean Development Fund and the World Bank has put together a Carbon Finance Unit to allow rich countries, which are

pumping more carbon into the atmosphere than is allowed under the Kyoto Protocol, to 'buy' emissions that poor countries prevent by conserving forests or promoting renewable energy. Although the Kyoto treaty has not yet been ratified, these countries are trying to get ahead in the game.

So Nepal can trade the carbon it hasn't emitted into the atmosphere through its biogas program and collect a cool \$5 million! The government and the World Bank last week signed a letter of intent for the deal.

The World Bank's Prototype Carbon Fund has set up a separate Community Development Carbon Fund, which aims to help grassroots development schemes that also offset carbon emissions.

Nepal's biogas program is internationally regarded as a model for successful use of alternative energy for the rural Third World. Each of Nepal's 125,000 functioning digesters prevents five tons of carbon dioxide from being pumped into the atmosphere every year. Nepal has now overtaken China

Teenager commits suicide

KATHMANDU: A 15-year-old boy, who was working as a domestic aide at the residence of Paskar Lal Soghai at Kathmandu Metropolitan City-9, has committed suicide by hanging from the ceiling of his apartment. The boy has been identified as Kanchha. The police are investigating the case. — 100

Man falls to death

KATHMANDU: Beera Bhujel, 40, of Sunsari district, died after he fell into the well owned by Anil Das situated near the Manakamana Boarding School, Koteshore. Bhujel fell when he was working in the well. — 100

Truck hit kills one

KATHMANDU: Jemish Shrestha, 20, died in a road accident at Khumaltar on Wednesday. Shrestha died on the spot when a truck hit his motorbike at around 9:45 pm. Police said pillion rider Diwas Shrestha is undergoing treatment at the Patan Hospital. His condition is said to be critical. — 100



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being green



and India in the number of biogas plants per capita. This 'saved' gas is what rich countries are buying to reach their own emission quotas. The \$5 million is expected to be ploughed back into clean energy that would make Nepal eligible to trade even more carbon.

"We have an initial agreement with the World Bank," confirmed Sundar Bajgain, executive director of the Biogas Support Project, which has played a lead role in installing biogas plants in private houses in 66 districts across the country. The biogas model can be applied to other renewable energy sources such as hydropower and solar power to reap rewards from carbon trading. For instance, if electrical vehicles replace diesel ones, Nepal could sell saved carbon emission amounts to industrialised countries.

"If we could make hoteliers use electric broilers instead of fossil fuels, we could save carbon emissions at the end users level," says Bikash Pandey of Winrock International, which has been pushing the carbon trading concept in Nepal.

The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) also promotes the construction of hydropower plants below 15MW for carbon trading. If the plants are located in remote areas, they qualify for reimbursement under the Community Development Carbon Fund. "When such construction takes place in rural areas, the project needs additional finance, which is a strong qualification for carbon trading," says Ratna Sansar

Shrestha, a carbon trading expert.

But there are some practical hurdles before Nepal can start reaping the bonanza. For example, it would be expensive for a transport entrepreneur to switch from fossil fuel to electricity, as diesel is subsidised and electricity rates in Nepal are among the highest in the world. In rural areas, a solar cell costs money while firewood from the forest is free.

Around 85 percent of the fuel Nepalis consume comes from biomass sources like firewood, animal manure and agricultural residue. The remainder is made up by kerosene, diesel or LPG while not even two percent of the energy used in Nepal is electricity. Even biogas would not have been possible if the 125,000 users had not received foreign-supported subsidies. Each biogas unit costs \$300 to set up, but the government pays one-third of the amount.

"Since the clean technology needed for carbon trading requires investment, the government must consider customs rebates for the import of the equipment," argues Pandey. Experts say the direct cost incurred make renewables appear expensive, but they bring environmental and health benefits.

The other challenge Nepal faces with carbon trading is what is known as 'the baseline'. Since most plants and factories here already use hydropower, we have a poor baseline to shift to clean energy and sell the carbon emission it

prevents. Unlike in India, where most power plants use coal, if the Indian government converts all of them into clean energy, the greenhouse gases thus prevented can be traded for dollars. If India purchased hydropower to replace its thermal plants from Nepal, who would get the rights for carbon trading? That is still debatable, and is one of the issues that the carbon traders haven't yet resolved.

Other options to reduce greenhouse gases are also being proposed. A report prepared by the European Biomass Industry Association and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) claims that switching to farms producing ethanol and other biomass as fuel would create hundreds of thousands of jobs while helping reduce CO₂ emissions. "It could reduce CO₂ by about 1 billion tons each year," the report said. Biomass currently provides only one percent of the power needs of rich countries, but could provide up to 15 percent by 2020. Unlike fossil fuels, burning biomass is considered 'carbon neutral'.

But fossil fuel use is on the rise, even in conservation-minded countries like Japan and Scandinavia. Japan's greenhouse gas emissions increased 2.2 percent in 2002 from the previous year. Norway's carbon dioxide emissions jumped in 2003 and remain far above Oslo's Kyoto Protocol targets. Since the Kyoto Protocol has not yet been ratified, some of these rich countries want to buy emission rights from poorer countries and have created funds under the United Nations' Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) as well as the World Bank's Prototype Carbon Fund.

Nepal and other developing countries will therefore continue to have ready buyers for the greenhouse gases they save through clean energy or providing carbon 'sinks' in the form of forests. Even private companies and factories can, under the CDM, be able to offset excess greenhouse gas emissions by investing in green projects in developing countries. ●



BOTH PICS: SUDARSHAN RANJITKAR

Pokhara's hyacinth-busters

RAMESH POU DYAL in POKHARA

When Crown Prince Paras was in Pokhara cooling off last week, his speedboat got entangled in clumps of water hyacinths floating on Phewa Lake (pictured below).

If it wasn't for that, there probably wouldn't have been the frenzy of water hyacinth eradications that has been undertaken literally on a war-footing in the past week in this tourist town. The lakeside is now crawling with soldiers in blue and green camouflage fatigues gathering the weeds on boats and loading them on dump-trucks on the shore.

Actually, Pokhara's Restaurant and Bar Association had started a clean-up campaign last month and local luminaries had been involved in taking out the hyacinths. The weeds are spreading too fast for stop-gap cleanups like this to work, even with the crown prince pitching in. But it's the thought that counts—the very fact that locals are worried about the health of the lake is a positive sign.

Pokharans are bemused by the nationwide notoriety that their famous weed has now earned thanks to a royal celebrity being briefly involved in its cleaning up. In fact, they don't remember anything happening in Pokhara in recent months that has caught mainstream media attention as much as this prolific weed.



However, no one seems to know much about the water hyacinth, except that it spreads at an astounding rate. Beachfronts in Pokhara that are cleaned up the previous day are suddenly choked with the weed the next morning. Even botanist Suresh Shrestha at the Forest Science Research Institute in Pokhara is stumped: "This is one incredible plant, we haven't studied it enough to know how it spreads so quickly."

Another Pokhara-based biologist, Jayadeb Bista with the Fisheries Research Station on the shores of the Phewa, says there is a kind of beetle that is known to feed voraciously on hyacinth. The beetles have been deployed in the United States to eat hyacinth leaves which causes the plants to lose their buoyancy, after which they sink and die. The search is on for the beetle.

Water hyacinths first made their appearance in the lakes around Pokhara only 15 years ago, and have since choked most of the other smaller lakes as well. Within a year, one plant can spread into a hectare area of lake. The weed seems to thrive on the organic pollutants that flow into the lake from the city's drainage system and from the streams that flow into it.

The hyacinths are also a factor in making the lakes of Pokhara valley shrink faster than they would just through sedimentation. In 1993, Phewa was 523 hectares in area, it is now only 452 hectares. Biologists at the Fisheries Research Centre estimate that water hyacinths now cover up to a quarter of the area of Phewa Lake. ●



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Nepal's agenda is trade

Last year, Nepal signed three prominent trade agreements: World Trade Organisation (WTO), South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) and the Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMST-EC). Prime Minister Sher

COMMENT

Posh Raj Pandey



Bahadur Deuba is in Bangkok to lead the Nepali delegation to the first summit of this regional trade grouping.

All three agreements hope to expand trade, infuse technology and promote investment not for its own sake but for overall economic development in the region. Thus, the issues of trade expansion in any agreement should not be dealt in isolation but to complement each other and in the broader perspectives of development needs.

The Framework Agreement of the BIMST-EC Free Trade area seeks to initiate trade liberalisation through fast and normal tracks after negotiations. Considering the existing composition of Nepal's exports

to the region, such an approach may not increase market access immediately.

A better approach could be sectoral and sub-sectoral initiatives for elimination of tariffs and non-tariff barriers in order to expedite liberalisation process. For example, Nepal can

benefit if an initiative to eliminate tariffs on woolen products is traded off with agriculture machinery/ automobile parts. Thailand would be interested to get tariffs eliminated on agriculture machinery. This approach would be specifically beneficial for

Nepal to gain market access in Burma, where Nepal's export is nil. We should try having such initiatives at a regional level, and if that fails, pursue them bilaterally.

Landlocked Nepal has high transit costs, accounting for 15 percent of total expenses. As members of the regional group, non-contiguous simplification and harmonisation of customs procedures and expanded transit facilities for 'transit in goods' would go a long way in reducing transport cost of intraregional trade.

If a container of the 'goods in transit', once sealed, can move freely without hassles, there will be significant reduction in 'invisible' costs. Furthermore, direct transport costs are reduced if cooperation can be extended to develop transport infrastructure and the shortest route to link member countries, including port facilities.

The agreement states that the depth and scope of liberalisation of trade will go beyond those undertaken by the parties under the General Agreement in Trade in Services (GATS) of WTO. Nepal, being a WTO member through an accession process, has made commitments to more sectors than incumbent members of the region. The language of the agreement implies an unequal baseline among members for

services sector liberalisation.

For example, the baseline for Bangladesh is tourism and telecommunication sectors only, whereas for Nepal there 70 sub-sectors and liberalisation will be beyond these sub-sectors. Nepal should strive make sure the liberalisation process is smooth and applies uniformly to all areas. Nepal can garner support from Bhutan, which is undergoing the WTO accession process and Thailand which has made significant concessions in the services sector under the pressure of key players in WTO.

Information Technology is conspicuous in its absence in the list of the areas identified for cooperation in the Agreement. Experience has shown IT plays a significant role not only in the expansion of trade and investment, but also in lowering the cost of doing business and contributing to economic and social development. Nepal should propose the inclusion of this sector for meaningful cooperation and even offer to host a Regional Centre for Information and Technology.

Nepal's export/import ratio with the BIMST region is lopsided. Nepal exported Rs 55 million worth of good to Thailand and imported Rs 3.3 billion worth in 2001/02. The issue of revenue compensation has already been rejected in previous meetings. We need to re-mould our approach and require compensation for adjusting our displaced industry and workers from the import substituting sector to the export sector. The indicative parameter which could be easily and objectively quantifiable could be revenue foregone.

Any regional cooperation scheme can't be sustained unless it is owned by the common people. People, irrespective of political borders, will own it if they perceive it as fair and just. And it will be fair and just if we compensate the losers in the liberalisation process and establish an in-built mechanism to compensate those who lose out. ●

Posh Raj Pandey is an international trade expert.



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BIZ NEWS

Swiss Day in Charikot

Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) in Nepal is setting an example by holding celebrations for the 713th Swiss National Day not in Kathmandu but in Charikot. SDC has been in Nepal for 50 years and has been involved in development infrastructure, forestry and farm skills development with a lot of its activities centred in Dolakha district. SDC's partners in the district and former members of parliament will attend the celebrations on 1 August. "It will recognise the friendship that development cooperation has created between Nepali and Swiss people as well as the hope that peace will return soon to Nepal," SDC said in a statement.

Student discounts

Not only is studying abroad a financial drain, just applying for overseas colleges costs a small fortune. Fortunately, Everest De Cargo, Licensee of Federal Express Corporation (FedEx) has taken pity and is offering a special discount for each college application sent anywhere in the world, which includes free packaging and pickup of the documents from the student's home, college or hostel.

Big numbers

Since it first opened in April 2001, Kumari Bank has grown dramatically. Over the last year, total deposits have risen to Rs 4.82 billion, a 92 percent increase over the previous year. A whole slew of new features have been launched, including SMS banking, e-payment and Super Savings, plus the new branches at Biratnagar and Birganj. All this has paid off: the bank's operating profits rose by 83 percent, to a healthy Rs 106.4 million.

Qatar for kids

Keeping the kids quiet on those long flights should be easier with Qatar's revamped Ollie Oryx daypacks, which includes a scrapbook, colouring pencils and game sets. The airline's food has also been upgraded in a complimentary school lunch box. Contents include a hot meal, pastry, chips, a chocolate bar and a Gumy bottle. Small passengers on Qatar's A330's also have choices of a range of video games, cartoons and a special children's channel.

Cosmic Rajesh

Fans were in for a treat when a test ride and rally combined an opportunity to encounter both the first Nepal-manufactured motorbike and Nepal's biggest superstar. Cosmic Yingang held a rally on 25 July organised by RabRen International and brand ambassador Rajesh Hamal visited three showrooms. At each showroom, 20 lucky test riders were chosen to go on a rally with him and each received a Rajesh Hamal calendar and a Cosmic Yingang t-shirt.

The luck of the draw

The odds are against the new labour lottery system

Selecting and sending Nepali workers to Qatar, South Korea and other countries has been a lucrative business for the over 300 recruitment firms making up the 'manpower' industry in Nepal.

For a long time, they have enjoyed four benefits: As host countries made economic

Pant's solution—as he is about to impose on Lumbini Overseas this week—is to have agencies select qualified workers through a lottery process under the government's watch. Few doubt Pant's good intentions. But there are two reasons why the business community as a whole must oppose his decision.

First, it's up to the owners and managers of private firms to decide how they want to hire workers without running afoul of basic employment laws. In some cases, the government can provide incentives for firms to expand employment opportunities for minorities and economically disadvantaged Nepalis. But when, instead of making use of the labour court system, it arbitrarily dictates how exactly specific firms should hire workers, then it is intruding into a sphere from where there will be no turning back. Today it is after Lumbini Overseas. Tomorrow politicians with ulterior motives will use this precedent to go after companies in other industries. For private Nepali companies, it's better to protest together now than cry alone tomorrow.

Second,

the problem of enforcement is going to grow bigger and costlier. Presently, there are many workers willing and able to pay more than the government-mandated Rs 96,000 facilitation fees, not only because the value they place on going overseas is higher than that, but also because, unsurprisingly, the government's one-price enforcement mechanism remains weak.

Given this context, the government's new attempt to engage in more enforcement-related work by instituting a lottery sounds naïve and dubious. In the short-term, such a scheme will raise political capital for Pant's party while providing emotional relief to some. But in the longterm, neither the government nor the poor will benefit because, given the money involved, it would be cheaper for firms to buy influence and do their real selections secretly, while putting up with a kangaroo lottery under the government.

Even so, Pant's concerns are valid, although his solution is not. In the days ahead, the task for his ministry is to stick to the goal of increasing the size of the labour market pie for all Nepali labourers, while leaving it to the courts to decide just how fairly portioned each slice is. ●

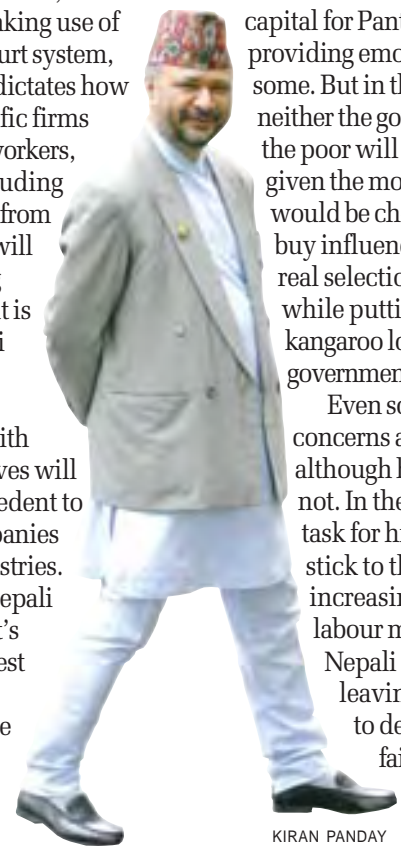
STRICTLY BUSINESS

Ashutosh Tiwari



progress, their demand for Nepali workers in menial jobs has gone up. The worsening political and job-market situation at home has prompted more Nepalis to seek foreign employment, even paying lakhs in facilitation fees and giving manpower agencies the upper hand. Nepali politicians maintained ties with such agencies to get jobs for supporters. And civil servants, seeing the crores of rupees involved, decided long ago that there is more to be gained by being friends with the industry than by policing it. Over the years, all this has turned the manpower industry into a cash-rich, politically-connected and a swaggering extortionist *dada*.

Raghuji Pant, ex-journalist and the new Minister of Labour from the UML, has decided enough is enough. Arguing that agencies demand and receive money way above the government-set price, he says overseas labour opportunities are biased against the poor.



KIRAN PANDAY

“Development could stall”

Nepali Times: In your assessment, does it still make sense to provide development assistance to Nepal while the conflict goes on?

Most definitely. Development cannot wait for conflict resolution. It has a key role to play both to help people survive the conflict and to prepare the way for peace. We will not withdraw as long as the safety and security of development workers can be safeguarded. To do so would increase the suffering of the most vulnerable in rural areas and would, in my view, prolong the conflict.

Provided we remain confident that our support will continue to improve the lives of the poorest, we plan to increase the level of our bilateral effort in the period upto 2006/7 from an estimated £35 million this UK financial year to £47 million by 2006/7.

From my perspective, having effective and well targeted programs is more important than volume. I am pleased to say that DFID in Nepal has an excellent track record of disbursing agreed allocations effectively and in full. This record is all the more creditable given the severe challenges in the country. But we should not be complacent. The challenges facing development continue to grow and unless there is real and immediate progress towards a political resolution of the on-going conflict, there remains a risk that the development process could stall.

There are serious obstacles to service delivery. How does DFID plan to overcome them?

We will not compromise on the safety and security of our field staff. We have developed, together with the other bilateral and multilateral agencies operating in Nepal, a set of Basic Operating Guidelines which set out the ground rules for development programs. These Guidelines, available in both English and Nepali, have been given a wide distribution across Nepal and are very familiar to all the parties to the conflict.

As you know, there have been occasions when DFID, along with other donors, have been forced to temporarily suspend activities in some districts as a result of threats to field staff. We will continue to monitor compliance with the Basic Operating Guidelines very closely. The safety of staff is of paramount concern and we will not hesitate to suspend activities should this be put at risk.

Service delivery in an environment where government is not able to work in parts of the country presents some real challenges. DFID

is responding by adopting flexible and innovative approaches. We are working through government where possible. We also work with NGOs or community based organisations. In many instances we are working directly with communities and “user” committees. DFID, together with other donor partners, is talking to the government about protecting the space for development and being more innovative and flexible in the design and implementation of programs.

The protection of human rights is central to development. We have acknowledged the government's progress with the development of a Human Rights Commitment paper. We continue to urge the full and speedy implementation of that commitment and especially the need for independent monitoring and a substantial strengthening of the Nepal Human Rights Commission. DFID is ready to help.

Does the continuance of British help with military hardware procurement for the Royal Nepali Army mean that a military solution to the conflict is possible?

It is very clear to me that there can be no military solution to the conflict in Nepal. The UK government is committed to helping bring an end to the suffering of the Nepali people brought about by conflict, poverty and discrimination.

The UK government's non-lethal support to the security forces is intended to help government protect internal security. As part of this support, the UK has provided two Short Take Off and Landing (STOL) aircraft. These aircraft are unarmed and are suitable only for conducting aerial surveillance, search and rescue. The gift was made on the understanding that they will not be armed in the future.

The gifting of these aircraft represents only one component of the UK government's support to Nepal through the Global Conflict Prevention Pool (GCPP). Other important GCPP initiatives include programs aimed at community policing, support for the protection of human rights, support for the victims of conflict and a variety of initiatives aimed at promoting an effective negotiating process to bring about an end to the conflict.

Is there any significance to the timing of your visit?

A visit to Nepal has been one of my priorities for 2004 and I am delighted to have made my first visit. I have found it useful to see for myself how the efforts by DFID and others to reduce poverty are being implemented.



The British Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Gareth Thomas, arrived in Kathmandu on Wednesday to look at UK development aid projects. Nepali Times posed some questions to him on the British aid agency DFID's plans to deal with development assistance in a time of conflict.

Despite neglect, this historic site can still inspire awe and wonder

Gorgeous Chobar



ALL PICS: KIRAN PANDAY

NARESH NEWAR

Myths and legends about the birth of Kathmandu Valley speak of the deity Manjushri cutting the hill at Chobar into half with a mighty sword, letting out the water of a primordial lake and opening the fertile vale for habitation.

The scar of Manjushri's sword can still be seen at Chobar. This is where legend meets science: the hill is actually made of limestone and the lake was drained when water seeped through the soft rock and created a gaping cleft. Either way, Chobar has always been regarded as a holy spot, just like Pashupati and Gokarna where there are similar gorges. The elegant Jalbinayak Ganesh shrine is located at the base of the gorge and the devout used to throng here by the thousands.

About 8km south of the Ring

Road, Chobar gorge today shows signs of the malignant intent of modern planners. Thirty years ago, they decided to locate a cement plant near the holy site. The factory-owners were drawn here by the same limestone ore that allowed geology to carve the gorge. Thankfully, the factory was closed down two years ago.

The picturesque Chobar village on top of the adjoining hill could be one of the most desirable residential areas in Kathmandu Valley, but the stench of the river now makes it unbearable in the dry season. Chobar was always a favourite picnic spot and fishing area for Valley residents, but today, it gets few visitors. On Saturdays the occasional student driver practices on the hairpin bends. Otherwise, there isn't much happening.

The holy Bagmati itself is now an unholy mess. The water



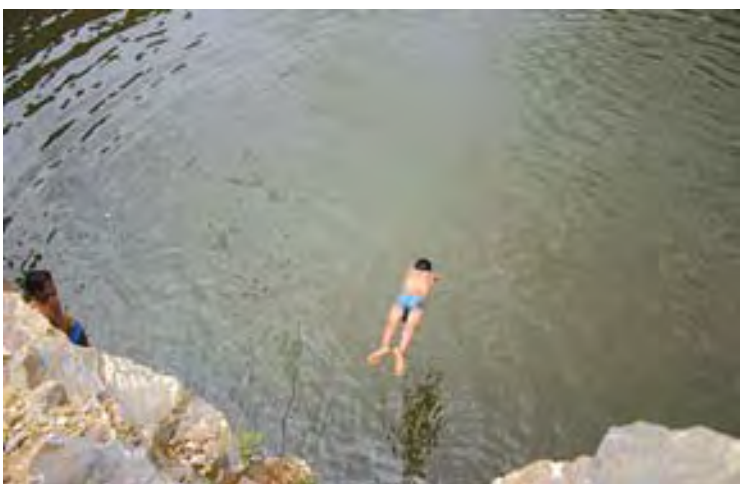
THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY REMAIN THE SAME: Chobar Gorge in 1855 in a watercolour painting by Dr HA Oldfield (left), who was a surgeon at the British Residency in Kathmandu between 1850-1863. A picture of Chobar Gorge taken from the same spot this week (top). Eleven-year-old Binod Majhi jumps off a cliff into the artificial lake created by the cement factory (below left) and the Scottish-built suspension bridge (below right) from which there is a striking view of the gorge (below).

is black, with detergent foam building up on the eddies between boulders, and the smell drives away all but the most zealous pilgrims.

"There was a time when we could see the coins in the water, it used to be so clean. I even used to drink from the river," says the Jalbinayak priest,

Pursattam Tuladhar. He misses the crowds of pilgrims and the only money he gets for upkeep is Rs 500 each year from the Guthi Sansthan. "It is sad," says Tuladhar, shaking his head.

Chobar still figures significantly in all tourist guides. Websites for Nepal travellers still advise tourists not



to miss it, especially since it makes a good day trip from Kathmandu. But many will be disappointed. Things will be even worse when a proposed bridge across the Bagmati to Bhaishpati is built because it is sure to harm the spiritual and aesthetic values of Chobar.

At the moment, there is a pedestrian suspension bridge built by Scottish technicians in 1903 across the river, which provides a rare glimpse of the gorge. At one end of the bridge, two roadside vendors wait for passers-by to buy their food. "This used to be such a busy place," recalls Parsuram Maharjan who, after 20 years as a fruit seller at Chobar, is now thinking of giving it up.

Local villagers say the gorge "has become a place for the dead", as crowds only appear when a cremation takes place. There are two cremation stands, one on each side of the river. After the death rituals, these sites are often left dirty, and the trash flows into the river during the rains and adds to the already polluted waters.

But there is still hope for Chobar. Kathmandu residents come here, and some give exploring Chobar's many limestone caves a shot. However, some amateur speleologists get lost and locals make good money rescuing tourists trapped inside the caves. A rescue can cost

up to Rs 4,000. Young local boys are on standby near the entrance to the caves hoping someone gets stuck inside. "Anybody could get lost, but we are here for them," one boy tells us.

Beyond Chobar on the Pharping road is Taudaha, the lake where the holy serpents of the Valley are said to have retreated after Manjushri let the waters out. The cement factory left a gaping hole where it gouged out limestone ore, and this has turned into a pretty little lake. Local children show off their diving skills, jumping 25m down from the surrounding cliffs. There are some Olympic diving champions in the making here. One of the divers is 11-year-old Binod Majhi who jumps off the highest point and awes the crowd. "It's great fun," he tells us as he wades out. The music video industry has discovered the lake and does its shooting by the crystal clear water.

The scenic and spiritual aura of Chobar still inspires awe and wonder. If the government and tourist entrepreneurs get their act together, there is still time to turn Chobar into a park, preserving the area's historical value and giving Kathmandu another lung.

But with the government's poor track record of actually implementing such ideas, chances are slim that we will rescue this relic of the Bagmati River Civilisation from ruin. ●

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Loyalty to royalty

Maoist central member Bamdeb Chhetri in Kantipur, 25 July

कान्तिपुर

The latest move by the Communist Party of Nepal Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML) has proved how contradictory it is within itself. Once again, it is a partner in a reactionary coalition government. This is very much in line with the opportunist amendments in the world's history of communism, beginning with the times of Marx right up till the era of Mao, to oppose revolutionary movements and help reactionary forces.

Even during the ongoing 'people's war', the UML has been creating hurdles and illusions to support the reactionary state power. The party, which began calling itself Marxist-Leninist after the fall of Russia under the amendments by Khrushchev, is now exposed because the illusions it once spread have shattered.

After the royal palace massacre, the hereditary monarchy ended, and the sun of republicanism rose over Nepal. For the institutionalisation of a republic, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) organised a meeting among all leftist political forces in Siliguri, India where a consensus was reached.

But the UML then backtracked and established itself as a broker for foreigners and feudalism. It also made its loyalty to royalty public. However, there had already been indications of the UML's true intentions in the past, like after the fall of the Sher Bahadur Deuba government almost 10 years ago, when the UML proved it had joined the reactionary forces by joining the government of the former



ROBIN SAYAMI

mandale, Lokendra Bahadur Chand.

It even bowed to Indian expansionism and signed the anti-national Mahakali treaty in an attempt to stick to the state power. During Bam Deb Guatam's tenure as Home Minister, efforts were made to introduce the Terrorist and Destructive Acts Control Act, with the objective of quelling the revolutionary movement.

During the second Deuba innings, the UML played a pro-active role in declaring the state of emergency (a move that clearly targeted the Maoists), fixing bounties on Maoist leaders' heads and deploying the army against us.

Taking all this into account, the real question is: can the UML admit the deeds of its past and oppose the reactionary constitution and state power? Can it actually accept the causes of Marxism and Leninism and take up armed struggle? No way. It cannot do so because the party has already fallen both physically and in principle.

The constitution prepared after the historic people's movement was dubbed a "black constitution" by the then-Nepal Communist Party (Unity Centre), because it had so many irreversible provisions, even more than in the Panchayati constitution. Even then, the UML duped the common people because, although initially it admitted to having reservations about some provisions, it later accepted the constitution as a whole.

When King Gyanendra ousted Sher Bahadur Deuba in 2002 and Lokendra Bahadur Chand was appointed prime minister, the UML was sure it would be given the position of deputy prime minister. The UML's top brass had even donned daura suruwal and waited for the palace calls. It was only after the royal palace dropped the idea of taking UML on board that the kings' take-over became "regression" for the UML. Even after that, it submitted petitions at the royal palace several times to reach the state power.

The king used Article 127 to appoint Deuba as prime minister this time, which means a continuation of regression. And since the UML has joined the Deuba government, it too has become one of the king's pawns. It has forgotten the 18-point agenda it had signed together with the other four parties that are still agitating in the streets.

Finance Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari is from the UML and used to brag that he would slash security and royal palace expenditure. It is he who sought the king's permission to continue the deployment of the army for the next six months and for the addition of two regional army bases. This is not how the problem will be solved. The reactionary forces are using the UML against the Maoists.

Taxing teachers

Kantipur, 26 July

Teachers in Ilam district are being forced to pay 'donations' to the Maoists. Already underpaid by the school administration, the teachers are faced with added woes because of the extortion.

The rebels even have fixed donation rates for teachers at different levels in the local schools. Primary school teachers are required to pay Rs1,632 annually, those teaching in lower middle school have to pay Rs1,968 and high school teachers are forced to pay Rs3,000 each year.

The rebels arrive in the schools for extortion just as the school administration distributes four months' worth of the teachers' salaries. "Since we are notified by the rebels in advance, we have to give them the lump sum they demand annually," said Tara Khatiwada, principal of Jana Kalyan Primary School.

The rebels give the teachers cash receipts for the money they have taken, but some teachers don't take them for fear of authorities accusing them of helping the rebels. "The donations we collect like this have helped us to strengthen our party and sister organisations," one Maoist leader said. But the teachers who have been forced to pay the donations are having a difficult time taking care of their families. "Ever since I've been forced to pay these amounts, I've had to cut down on my children's expenses," says one teacher. There are 380 schools in Ilam district, with around 1,600 teachers.

Changing sides

Nepal, 1 August

नेपाल

Narendra KC of Dailekh district is an army soldier turned Maoist rebel. After two years of service



in the Royal Nepali Army, he defected to the Maoists last month. On 1 June, KC was on regular duty as a sentry with the Shiva Dal battalion in Gulmi district. The 24-year-old soldier went missing from the sentry post and joined the Maoists with his INSAS rifle, five magazines, 275 rounds of bullets and three plastic grenades. In a function nearly two weeks later, KC ceremonially handed over the rifle to Maoist central leader Bamdeb Chhetri who welcomed him into the rebel group. "I will accept whatever role the party gives me," KC said. Lately, there have been sporadic cases of army and police defections, and also of Maoists surrendering to the state. Last year, brigade commander Hom Prakash Shrestha, battalion commander Jay Bahadur Gharti and other senior Maoist leaders surrendered to the army.

Royal silence

NC politician, Prabhunaryan Basnet in Rastriya Bimarsha, 23 July

राष्ट्रिय बिमरशा

King Gyanendra may think he is on the right path, but it is impossible for him not to be aware of Crown Prince Paras' reputation and actions. As a king involved in undertaking microscopic examinations of the misdeeds of politicians, it is hard to believe that he is unaware of his own son's misdeeds. It was because of Paras' past that the king had to declare him crown prince while

the nation was distracted by Dasai holidays two years ago.

When the crown prince runs people over on the streets, aims guns at security personnel and opens fire in public places the question arises: do we have laws against such behaviour? Can the king and the royal family be above the law in a constitutional monarchy? These are questions for the drafters, experts and implementers of the constitution.

Even after the crown prince's latest antics the king hasn't shown public discomfiture. Some media sources have suggested that both the king and his son are worried, but how do we know for sure? If the king is really serious about controlling his wayward son, why did he not take any action in the past when the crown prince committed one serious misdemeanour after another?

The king may be keeping quiet to defend himself, but what about the defenders of constitutional monarchy? Have they deserted the *shastra* and surrendered to sycophancy? The king must make a public pronouncement before this becomes an issue for public debate. He should learn from the Mahabharat and what happened to Dhritarashtra and his son Duryodhana.

If the king and the royalist government keep quiet now, it may be proof that the time has come for this country to start thinking about an alternative to monarchy.

Rebel reporter

Drishhti, 27 July

दृष्टि

Mahesh Adhikari always wanted to be a journalist, but he settled to start off as a paperboy in Pokhara. Two years ago, as he was calling out the headlines of a rebel attack in Accham from the paper he was distributing,



Elephant: Constituent Assembly
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राजधानी Rajdhani, 25 July

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"I am sure that this problem [the Maoist conflict] will end during my term here."

Newly appointed US Ambassador to Nepal, James Francis Moriarty in Janastha, 28 July

he was arrested. In prison, he met a militant who inspired him to become a war correspondent for the Maoist 'regime'. When he was released 14 months later, he headed for Accham and, after receiving Maoist journalism training, he joined Basu Smriti 4th Brigade 12th Battalion as a war correspondent and now reports for *Janadesh* weekly.

The Maoists have trained many young males and females like Adhikari to work as 'war correspondents' in their battalions and brigades. According to Manrishi Dhital, a reporter for *Janadesh*, there are about 50 rebel reporters in the paper from west Nepal. "It is better to work hard in the villages than sitting at a desk in Kathmandu. The job for the reporter becomes challenging and exciting," says Dhital, who adds that the journalists also get the chance to report from the battlefield. After joining the rebels, Dhital says he is able to write freely about the 'people's war'. The Maoists are organising a series of journalism trainings in Jajarkot, Accham, Kaski, Rukum, Syangja and Palpa to produce more war correspondents for each battalion. All of them will report for the pro-Maoist *Janadesh* weekly, which is published from four places in Nepal and abroad.

Dirty medicine

Drishti, 27 July

Pharmaceutical companies in Nepal have a simple marketing strategy: give doctors a cut for every medicine they prescribe. "Our main clients are doctors and the companies spend a huge amount of money for promotion," admits Pradip Man Baidya, president of the Association of Pharmaceutical Producers of Nepal. The practice of pharmaceutical entrepreneurs bribing doctors to promote their products is not new, and Indian companies do a lot more 'investing' in doctors here than Nepalis. The bribes mostly come in the form of gifts like stationary and decorative pieces for the doctor's home and office. The companies even help renovate the doctor's clinics. The companies also help finance up to eight or nine activities, seminars and programs for doctors each month. Such unethical marketing is a matter of great concern at a time when Nepal is flooded with substandard drugs from unknown Indian pharmaceutical companies, most of which are not registered exporters to Nepal. Indian companies dominate 70 percent of the drug market.

Womanpower

Purnajagran, 27 July

In Sikles village of Kaski, a group of Gurung women have formed their own public court to judge cases for fellow villagers. Hardly anyone travels all the way to the courts in Pokhara anymore. The women pose as judges and give their verdict after hearing the statements from both the appellant and defendants. The women have no formal education,

and do not have specific knowledge of the laws of the land. But so far, none of the villagers have been unhappy with their verdicts. The locals continue to approach these self-proclaimed judges, and say they make just decisions for both parties. "The judges are fair and honest. We are very impressed," says Manbahadur Gurung, chairman of Parche VDC. He believes Sikles' women judges will inspire other villages to do the same. The women have set up a mini court at the Reflect Centre, which they also run. Established by a passing tourist six years ago to help the education and health of the Dalit children, the centre is now not only helping Dalit children, but has also helped their parents find justice. In this Gurung-dominated village, Dalit families live as part of the larger community. The centre has a school for Dalit children as well as a small room for the trials.

Forced to rebel

Rajdhani, 23 July

राजधानी

SURKHET—Maoists in Jumla have started a new strategy, called the 'shoe campaign', to forcefully recruit young Jumlis. Last week, about 5,000 boys and girls from five villages were forced to join the campaign, which boasts a catchy, rhyming slogan directing the youth to tie their shoelaces tight and enter the forest. Those who managed to escape the recruiters have been threatened and their houses have been locked up as a warning for them not to return to their villages. "This time, they did not take the young ones just for a marching parade but to recruit them as permanent members," says a young villager from Jumla who fled from his village late at night and walked all the way to Surkhet. Hundreds of villagers from Jumla are fleeing the forced conscription. They migrate to nearby towns, abandoning their houses and land, which are seized by the rebels. They survive on meagre incomes and usually can't afford to send the children to schools. "It is better to run away than risk our lives in the village," says one young Jumli.

The biggest fear for innocent civilians is dying at the hands of security forces after being forcefully recruited by the rebels. The recruiters visit each household and select the young and strong members of the family. If the family objects, they are accused of rebelling against the Maoist party. Many have been beaten and threatened. A large number of men escape without taking their wives, children and old parents with them. Says a Jumli: "I cried all the way when I had to abandon my wife and my children."

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Islamic evangelism and the voices of reason

If you listen carefully, you'll find not all Muslim reformists are radical

The "clash of civilisations" supposedly underway between the West and the Muslim world, which many see

ANALYSIS
Abdou Filali Ansary



as manifested in Iraq and as in Saudi Arabia's growing violence, in fact masks other conflicts—disputes that will probably prove to be far more significant in the longterm. One of these struggles is taking place among Muslims themselves over the shape of reform within their own societies.

The Muslim reformist tradition—the search for an authentic path that links Islam's traditions to the modern world—has deep roots,

stretching back to the middle of the 19th century. Back then, Muslim thinkers contrasted the decline of their own societies with Europe's dynamism, a particularly painful distinction in light of European successes in colonising large parts of the Muslim world and focused on the "decadence" of Muslim societies, their debilitating political and social corruption.

Many early Muslim reformists were clerics or senior bureaucrats who had seen first hand how diminished their societies had become and were members of a tiny minority educated in the written heritage of Islam. Far beyond Koranic recitation, these men aspired to participate in the centuries-long discussions among Muslim scholars about the proper ordering of Muslim life. This training enabled them to compare the debased state of affairs of their time with the norms and aspirations of earlier generations of clerics and thinkers.

Their judgement was clear: Muslims had sunk far below what their religion required them to be, and lagged far behind the accomplishments of their ancestors. For the reformers, normality meant the progressive development of Muslim societies, and they tied this to the interaction of Islamic teaching with relevant, worldly ideas of the time. So these first reformers sought to engage with the ideas that they saw emerging from Europe: rationality, tolerance and ethically determined behaviour.

These early reformers, among them Muhammad Abduh and Jamaledin al-Afghani, did not ignite the mass mobilisation they hoped for and were unable to redress social ills through better implementation of religious prescriptions. But their influence was powerful and lasting, and extended in directions that they could not have anticipated.

The paradox here is that the open-minded reformism they espoused helped stir conservative trends among Islamic thinkers, who seized the reformists' revival of Islamic norms to urge a return to the "purity" of the first Islamic societies. This conservative trend did not follow the reformists' engagement with the modern ideas of the European Enlightenment, arguing instead that these represented a further estrangement from authentic Islamic values.

Thus, the most lasting

effect of the first reformist wave was the establishment of a "salafi" (traditionalist) trend and the eventual emergence of an even more radical fundamentalism. Both conservative traditionalists and radical fundamentalists were drawn to political activism and came to regard the modern state as a means to liberate Muslims from foreign domination and to re-Islamicise society through a revival of Islam's original norms.

Today, we can see the force of this ideology, but it would be a mistake to assume that the spirit of the original Muslim reformists has vanished. Out of the spotlight, countless Muslim scholars and academics have continued to probe the connections between Islamic thought and modern values. Drawing on critical scholarship in history and theology, they have detailed the ways in which Muslims have changed—and continue to change—their traditions, in different times and places.

Thus, a sharp, focused challenge to the assertions of religious orthodoxy has emerged in the work of such important thinkers as Abdolkarim Soroush (Iran), Abdelmajid Charfi (Tunisia), Fazlur Rahman (Pakistan) and Mahmud Muhammad Taha (Sudan). While their work encounters great resistance from traditionalist and fundamentalist circles, these contemporary reformers and the questions they have raised have had a big impact on a rising generation of Muslim intellectuals.

The reformists of the first wave attempted to "reopen the doors of Ijtihad (religious interpretation)" in order to adapt the inherited systems of Islamic thinking to new conditions. Today's reformists are subjecting these traditional frameworks to scrutiny and attempting to separate the core ethical principles of Islam from the various historical adaptations that conservatives have enshrined as sacred.

Of course, listeners must strain to hear the voices of reformists amidst the din of those calling for resistance to the enemy and a return to the pure sources of Islam. However, the seeds of a new wave of "reform" have taken root, and await an early thaw to sprout. ● (Project Syndicate)

Abdou Filali-Ansary is director of the Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations of Aga Khan University of Karachi, Pakistan.

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How organic is organic?

A label saying its healthy is not enough



SANJAY SURI in LONDON

Eating healthy is coming to mean buying organic. Or “bio”, “pure”, “natural”. But what do these words say about the produce they sit on?

“Nothing very much,” says Marco Presutto from Consumers International. “Or worse, they can actually be misleading.”

A study by Consumers International, along with leading consumer groups in eight countries (Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Italy, Norway, Romania, Slovenia and the United States) threw up the following examples:

- **Tuna:** Up to six different logos and wording were found on 25 tins of tuna claiming it was fished without harming dolphins, including ‘dolphin friendly’, ‘dolphin safe’, and ‘certified fishing, drift net free’. There was no verification to back up any of these claims.

- **Eggs:** The 17 samples surveyed came up with six different types of claims, such as ‘free range’ and ‘free running’. These claims were unverified, and were sometimes contradicted by other labelling information.

- **Bio:** This widely used term means different things in different countries and languages. It is mainly used on organic foods, but also on dairy products such as Bio yoghurts, which are not organically

certified.

“The label ‘natural’ is used for just about anything, but there is no standard definition of what it can mean,” Presutto said. The label “pure” is commonly used on orange juice made from concentrate, while the word suggests something straight from an orange. “There is no agreement what ‘fresh’ means,” he said. “To some fresh eggs come straight from a hen. To others they are fresh if they are a week old.”

The consumer organisations that conducted the survey purchased a list of basic foods typical of a family’s weekly shopping basket. “They were then checked and evaluated against national and international regulations,” the report says, adding, ‘Many of the green and ‘eco’ claims were unverified, confusing and/or misleading.’

The International Federation for Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) is working to standardise the quality and labelling of foods marked as organic. “But there is a problem because many governments do not recognise one another’s certifications,” Bernward Geier from the IFOAM head office in Bonn explains. “You have about 60 governments engaged in certification regulations and so there is some confusion.”

But the certification privately offered by IFOAM covers about two-thirds of organic produce traded worldwide, Geier said. About 750 member organisations in over 100 countries are actively involved in pushing for a move

towards standardisation.

The European Union (EU) has its own system of certification, which is relatively unknown as more people use national certification schemes. But with a lot of produce traded across countries, someone in

Norway may not know a Danish label. Large numbers of “copycat labels” are also resulting in people losing faith in organic labelling.

The report includes 12 recommendations to support consumer rights. The primary recommendation is that ‘self-declared claims on food labels should be clear and unambiguous—where they are not, enforcement action should be undertaken to ensure that they are.’ ● (IPS)

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मेट्रो एफ एम ८४.६



अब हामी तपाईंसँग
अफ नजिक

साउन १ गते देखि मेट्रो एफ एम
८४.६ मेघा हर्जमा प्रसारण भई रहेछ।

For a vocal section of Kathmandu intelligentsia, being anti-Indian in beliefs, words and deeds is the very essence of Nepali patriotism. Such a boorishness irritates the Indians and does immense harm to the interests of Nepalis. In New Delhi, where the fate of Nepal's economy, politics and society is often determined, it is becoming increasingly unfashionable to speak for the legitimate claims of a landlocked neighbour.

The hawkish South Block view that Nepal must know its proper place and learn to stay there has suddenly begun to assert itself in the Indian capital. Even the left-liberal literati,

REVIEW
CK Lal

traditionally the strongest champions of Nepali interests in India, keep quiet when the assertive rightists of the RSS variety fling wild allegations about the supposed activities of Pakistani ISI in the Nepal tarai.

This is why the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) has taken a risk by establishing a full-fledged Nepal Centre. But it is a risk that needed to be taken, and the think-tank funded by the redoubtable Ambanis is perhaps the most suitable organisation to examine the whole gamut of Nepal-India relations in order to reorient it towards the future.

The Nepal Centre has a line-up of usual suspects, although the formidable KV Rajan isn't there anymore. Other ex-ambassadors to Nepal like M Rasgotra and AR Deo continue to dominate proceedings at every meet it organises. The Nepal Centre's first offering on Nepal (a trashy monograph on the Maoists by JNU scholar SD Muni) was a blinkered perspective on the

insurgency.

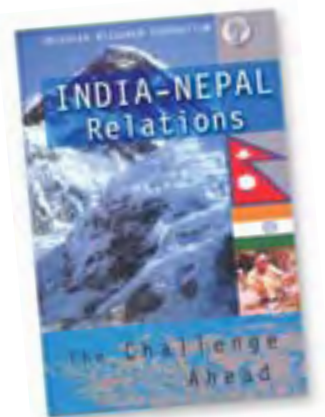
This book is a record of the proceedings of the seminar 'India-Nepal Relations: Perspectives for the future' that ORF organised earlier this year. There are 25 contributors, including weighty worthies Lok Raj Baral and Bekh Bahadur Thapa, our former ambassadors in New Delhi. Nepal is represented by 10 scholars in the collection. Predictably, there is no former Nepali officer of the Indian Gorkhas on the list. No Madhesi makes the grade, unless you consider Arun Choudhary to be a representative of the people of tarai. There is nobody to articulate the concerns of the Nepali people living in the region west of the Karnali River. No wonder then, that this is just another tired collection of worn-out platitudes about the 'age-old ties between two closest neighbours'.

The worthies from the Indian side include equally staid scholars. In the overview chapter at the beginning of the book, ex-foreign secretary Kanwal Sibal accuses Bhek Bahadur Thapa of saying nothing new and then goes on to say nothing new himself. A phalanx of former policy makers like Jagat Mehta, VP Malik, AK Mehta, AN Ram, RR Iyer and Salman Haider then go on to confirm the widely held view in the capital cities of India's neighbours that the babus and brasses of New Delhi begin to see the merits of closer relations among South Asian nations only after they are retired. No wonder the so-called Track Three SAARC diplomacy is completely dominated by the granddaddies of the Indian foreign policy establishment.

The merit of the book perhaps lies in its very predictability. In his concluding observations, M Rasgotra finds Kanak Mani Dixit's idea about the Kathmandu-Patna-Lucknow triangle attractive, but he is unwilling

to explore the idea any further on his own. Lok Raj Baral thinks that Indo-Nepal relations should be contextualised, and we should 'inject trust, understanding, cooperation, coordination and any other elements that could be injected into it ...' Everyone advocating a fenced border between India and Nepal must take note of these suggestions.

The problem with the Nepal-India relationship is that almost all the clichés about it are true. No template of border management in the world fits a reality where citizens of one country are some of the first ones to face bullets whenever there is trouble in another state on the other's border. No cannon of diplomacy can define why even ministers and serving diplomats of one state deem it fit to touch the feet of the head of state of another state. Perhaps a relationship as intimate and passionate as this needs no definition. Yet another book on India-Nepal relations needed to be published precisely because this one is redundant. We wouldn't have known it otherwise. ●

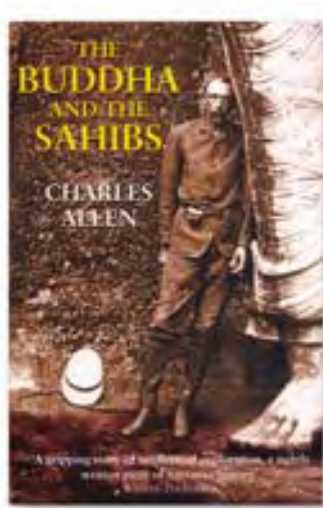


India-Nepal Relations: The Challenge Ahead
Observer Research Foundation, 2004
Rupa and Company, New Delhi
Rs 1,112

BIGBEN



BOOKWORM



The Buddha and the Sahibs
Charles Allen
John Murray Publishers, 2002
Rs 800

In The Buddha and the Sahibs, Charles Allen chronicles the work of the handful of soldiers, administrators and adventures in India during the British rule who were responsible for reintroducing Buddhism to the subcontinent and making it the major influence in the West that it is today.

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

Solid shots

Hit at the target, be in the fairway

Club golfers struggle to keep the ball in the short fairway grass. After just about every round, you hear them pointing out how many times they went in the woods and the number of dropped shots caused by hitting the ball into the water. Why does this happen?

Not surprisingly, it's usually because of a bad swing. Hitting the ball long and straight is one of the keys to scoring lower since it gives the player a tremendous advantage, especially on longer holes. In this regard, the drive is one of the most important shots.

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



It demands reasonably good skills for players to keep the ball in the short grass. This then allows the

next shot to be played more accurately to the green. Occasionally hitting the fairway is just not good enough. Doing it regularly requires not only a reasonable amount of proficiency but also understanding and following some basics.

Why so many wayward drives?

A lot of tee shots head into the forest because golfers try to achieve that extra bit of distance and force the swing and body. Forcing the swing creates tension in the body, and the body then actually becomes a resisting force to swinging freely through the ball. The result is often a loss of balance and balls flying off in all directions.

Golfers also regularly just align themselves wrong, with their feet and shoulders pointing way away from the actual direction where they want the ball to go.

How can these be corrected?

Poor balance really starts from bad posture. If the way you stand while addressing the ball is incorrect, it becomes hard to stay balanced during the swing. Some keys are keeping your spine at a 90 degree angle to the club shaft and keeping your weight on the balls of the feet (closer to your toes, not on your heels). If this angle and balance can be maintained, it will promote straighter drives.



NEPALNEWS.COM

Nepali golfers (from left) Pushpa Rai, Shastika Shrestha, Sinvaram Shrestha, CB Bhandari and Tashi Ghale before leaving Kathmandu on Tuesday to take part in the 6th SAARC Golf Tournament in Lahore this week.

For poor alignment, while practicing, lay a club on the ground parallel to the target line. Then set the feet and shoulders parallel to that lined club. This will ensure you are better aligned. It shouldn't take more than half an hour of such practice for you to get the feel of being properly aligned. Don't be shy to ask a fellow golfer or caddy to stand behind you and check your set up.

How to hit it solid and far.

Tension and stiffness in the body doesn't let the arms and the body swing through the ball. Too tight a grip causes a chain reaction of tension in almost all parts of the body. So it is very important to keep the grip reasonably light and the body supple in order to generate a higher swing speed and to swing through the ball, getting a better release and follow-through.

Our national team of golfers comprising Tashi Ghale, CB Bhandari, Shivaram Shrestha, Pushpa Rai and Shastika Shrestha are in Pakistan representing Nepal at the 6th SAARC golf tournament (pictured before departure at Kathmandu airport on Tuesday). Let us hope they keep themselves balanced and aligned, stay nice and relaxed and perform their best.

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

Olympic doping

Getting drugs out of sport won't be easy, but it is worth trying

THOMAS H MURRAY

When the Olympic Games return to Greece, the results at the drug-testing laboratory may get as much attention as what happens at the stadium. The history of drugs, and drug control, at the Olympics is discouraging—a farrago of ill-informed rules, outright state-sponsored cheating and half-hearted attempts at enforcement.

A new model has recently revived hope for effective drug control by moving testing and enforcement from the direct control of the International Olympic Committee and the national governing bodies to the World Anti-Doping Agency and similar organisations at the national level.

But the renewed hope will be frustrated unless we can respond effectively to the ethical challenge. No amount of interdiction will suffice if we do not explain clearly what, precisely, is wrong with using performance enhancing drugs in sport.

There are three compelling reasons to ban such drugs: assuring all athletes that the competition is fair, preserving the integrity of the athlete and safeguarding what gives sport its meaning and value.

Young Olympians devote their lives to their sport for the opportunity to match themselves against the world's most gifted and dedicated athletes. The difference between gold medalist and also-ran may be measured in fractions of seconds or inches. A tiny advantage can make all the difference. What if that advantage comes from using a performance-enhancing drug?

For athletes who want to compete clean, the threat that they may be beaten by a competitor who is not faster, stronger or more dedicated, but who takes a drug to

gain the edge, is profoundly personal. When drugs are prohibited but some athletes use them anyway, the playing field tilts in favour of the cheater. If we prohibit drugs in the Olympic Games, we owe it to the athletes to detect and punish those who cheat.

Performance enhancing drugs affect the individual athlete's integrity in two ways. First, if drugs are banned, then choosing not to use them is a test of one's character.



Second, the concept of integrity implies moral soundness and freedom from corruption. When an athlete wins by using a performance enhancing drug, what does that mean for the athlete's own understanding of what happened? Am I the world's best? Or was my supposed victory hopelessly tainted by the drug's effects? The meaning of a drug-aided victory is ambiguous and elusive even for the athlete, resulting in corruption, the very opposite of authentic victory.

We expect the winning athlete to combine extraordinary natural talents with exemplary effort, training and technique. These are all forms of human excellence. Some we are born with—or not. Whatever natural abilities we have must be perfected. We achieve this—or not—through a combination of virtues such as

fortitude in the face of relentless training, physical courage as we persevere through pain and cleverness when we outsmart our opponents, along with other factors such as helpful coaching, optimised equipment and sound nutrition.

Natural talents should be respected for what they are: the occasionally awesome luck of the biological draw. Courage, fortitude, competitive savvy and other virtues rightfully command our moral admiration. The other factors—equipment, coaching and nutrition—contribute to an athlete's success but don't evoke the same awe or esteem. When we watch a sprinter set a new Olympic record in the 100m dash, it's not the shoes he or she wears that command our admiration. Nor is it the coaching received or the energy bar consumed just before the event.

What we care about most, what gives that achievement its meaning and value, is the ineffable combination of remarkable natural talents and extraordinary dedication.

Performance enhancing drugs disguise natural abilities and substitute for the dedication and focus that we admire. Performance enhancing drugs cheapen sport, making winners out of also-rans, and depriving virtuous and superior athletes of the victories that should be theirs.

Getting drugs out of sport will not be easy, and success is not assured. But the effort is worthwhile as long as we care enough about fairness, integrity and the meaning and value of sport. ● (Project Syndicate)

Thomas H Murray is president of the Hastings Center.

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



Siddharth-Bi has seen Spiderman II more than 17 times, and can often be seen practicing in the parking lot of Jai Nepal....



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-- Daisaku Ikeda, Japanese peace activist and leader Soka Gakkai Int. (1928 -)

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

#31 (c) 2001 by jigme gaton - read. love. write.

ABOUT TOWN

EVENTS

- ❖ **4th Bagmati River Festival** till 21 August: Compost training at Milanmarga, Teku on 30 July, 8AM onwards. Morning walk along the river, 31 July. Starts at Teku Dobhan
- ❖ **Paella Night** at Dwarika's, 30 July. Rs 699 per person, including dinner and drink. 4479488
- ❖ **Movies** 2PM onwards at the Alliance Francaise: Sens Uniquem, 1 August
- ❖ **Friday Forum** between Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and Kathmandu University School of Management for establishing a business technology centre. 3PM, 30 July at the American Centre. 4415845



MUSIC

- ❖ **Beatles Night** at Moksh music hall, Pulchowk. 31 July, 6.30 PM onwards, entry Rs 200
- ❖ **Deo** at Not Just The Jazz Bar Fridays at Hotel Shangri-la, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Jatra Friday Nites** Live music by The Strings. 4256622
- ❖ **Dabur Vatika Miss Nepal 2004** 7 August. Broadcast live on NTV.

DRINKS

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

FOOD

- ❖ **Summit's Barbecue Dinner** with vegetarian specials. Fridays at 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 Vaijyantha, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Dwarika's Thali** Lunch at The Heritage courtyard. 4479488

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Summer in Shivapuri** Birdwatching and great views at Sivapuri Heights Cottage. steve@escape2nepal.com. 9851051780
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- ❖ **Bardia National Park** with Jungle Base Camp Lodge. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- ❖ **Golf** at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa. 4451212
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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.

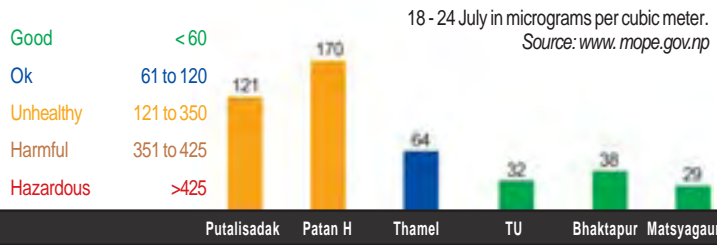
12:15, 3:15, 6:15 Bookings open
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KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

There was little change in Kathmandu's air quality over the past week. Due to the monsoon rains, the air remained fairly clean in the rural and suburban residential areas, while along busy streets such as Putali Sadak, the PM10 (particles small enough to enter the human body) concentrations were slightly higher than national standards. This week Matsyagaun wins the "how low can you go" race, coming in with a neat—and healthy—average of 29 micrograms of PM10 matter per cubic metre.



NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



Now, this is what we weatherpersons call a 'mature' monsoon. Heavy night rain, bright mornings and cloud buildup in the afternoons to keep temperatures down. Kathmandu Valley has recorded slightly above average rainfall for July, and has recouped the deficit precipitation of the earlier drought. This latest satellite picture taken on Thursday at noon shows that the monsoon is spreading westwards with another robust depression in the Bay that should bring sharp showery bursts of rain all weekend and into next week.

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102.4 रेडियो सगरमाथा

Newsbulletin of Radio Sagarmatha "Haal-Chaal"

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RAM HUMAGAIN/NEPALNEWS.COM

HI, BYE: Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and his wife, Arzu, greeting wellwishers at Kathmandu airport before his departure for Bangkok on Thursday. Domestic and international flights were delayed for up to one hour to accommodate his flight.



KIRAN PANDAY

WHEELS: The Disabled Help Fund distributes wheelchairs, artificial legs and other equipment at Bhrikuti Mandap on Tuesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

SKIN DEEP: Eighteen Miss Nepal contestants posing during the selection for the Miss Photogenic title at the International Club in Sanepa on Saturday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

GREEN AMBASSADORS: Chandra Gurung of the World Wide Fund for Nature briefs Miss Nepal contestants on conservation issues Wednesday. This year's Miss Nepal will be a conservation ambassador for the WWF.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

14TH DAY: TU Professor Nanda Kishore Singh on the 14th day of his hunger strike at Ratna Park on Thursday morning.

Yubakar's youth

Yubakar Raj Rajkarnikar was a guitar-strumming 22-year-old when he felt this urge to create something lasting. He got together a group of like-minded friends and started WAVE, Nepal's first English youth magazine. The first issue hit the stands in August 1994, and all 4,000 copies sold out instantly. Yubakar & Co knew they had hit something big.

Ten years later, WAVE is still going strong and has something of a cult following among the young-at-heart. Yubakar himself is now 32, has a two-year-old daughter, Khusi, and has moved on to other ventures. But he still regards WAVE as his baby. "Wave needs fresh, young

people and ideas, which I was getting too old for," recalls Yubakar. "Of course, I needed to grow and do different things as well."

Wave's instant reputation first as a status symbol for youth, and then a reputable infotainment source, has guided the magazine through its various incarnations and publishers. (It is now published by Himalmedia.) There have been song books, posters, countless glossy pictures cut out and posted in teenage bedrooms. Articles over the years range from the Pujari sweepers to Kathmandu's gang wars to Nepal's evolving music scene to Che chic. Football in Norway and Maoists in Rolpa have been

covered, all seen through young eyes for young eyes.

After a brief stint as station manager at Radio Sagarmatha Yubakar is now editor at the *Metro* fortnightly paper. He is also CEO at Advertising Avenues and chairman at Vibes, an event management and social campaign group.

As WAVE celebrates its 10th anniversary this week, Yubakar is spending a lot of time looking back and feeling nostalgic. He may even consider making a comeback as a columnist, but most of all, is considering how his efforts managed to shape Nepal's current youth culture. ●

www.wavemag.com.np



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Ten more things I sort of like about Nepal

Due to a widespread wave of national revulsion created by a previous column listing the ten things I like about Nepal (#205), and due to popular demand to excommunicate me from the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) which I fully endorse, I am left with no other option than to think up ten more things I sort of like about Nepal.

But this time it comes with the caveat that any part of this list may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in

UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit



any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise provided no mention is made of its original author

who, by the way, bears no resemblance to any person living or dead and any such resemblance is purely coincidental. Also, the representation of any real person in this column is done with purely malicious intent and for the purpose of causing embarrassment and offence.

Right, now that we have those legal issues out of the way, we can get down to the part you have all been patiently waiting for by throwing beer cans at the podium. Here is an expanded list of ten more nice things about Nepal in a descending order of niceness:



11. We Nepalis are very serious about preserving our heritage, and one proof of this is the pre-paid airport taxi service which only uses vintage cars manufactured during the reign of Maharaj Juddha Shumshere, or older. Besides being a tourist attraction, the antique Datsuns and Toyopets are fuel efficient because they don't actually have any engines, so they coast downhill till the Ring Road from where the passengers have to help the driver push it to their destination. Fare is calculated on the number of kilometers the tourist pushes the car with an Airport Limo Service surcharge and generous tip to the driver for making such an unforgettable experience possible.

12. It is an age-old tradition in Nepal to atone for our misdemeanours by volunteering to yank out water hyacinths from lakes.

13. The word "no" doesn't exist in our vocabulary, we will take anything even if we don't need it. As long as it is free.

14. Nothing is secret in Nepal. In fact, it is no secret that secret talks are going on in secret at a secret venue which I'll tell you all about some other time.

15. We are a transparent nation, and wash all our dirty underwear in front of foreigners so they know we have nothing to hide.

16. Lotteries are the latest craze in Nepal. Many Nepalis have won lotteries to get American green cards, jobs in Korea and even diamond rings in our instant noodle packs that we sometimes swallow by mistake out of sheer greed.

17. Our leaders set a great example to the rest of us by never flying Royal Nepal Airlines if they can help it, since they want to avail themselves to the 'Fly One...Get One Free' offer from BIMSTEC Airways which is a member of the Star Alliance network.

18. Our sheer ingenuity. We are an adaptable and resourceful people who can find our way around any rule or regulation. Like the woman with the suitcase at the airport this week who was found to have hidden 15,000 Canadian dollars and Japanese yen inside her false bottom (of the suitcase, not the woman).

19. Those of you already fully-apprised of our national past time of nose-grooming can skip this point and go on to number 20. We are a very hygienic people and are always busy keeping our orifices squeaky clean. Like my neighbourhood taxi driver the interior of whose nasal cavity is spotless, although the same can't be said about the interior of his Maruti which in the rainy season has water hyacinths growing out of the dashboard.

20. Since everyone is laughing at us, we have no option but to laugh at ourselves as well.

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