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The mother of all floods

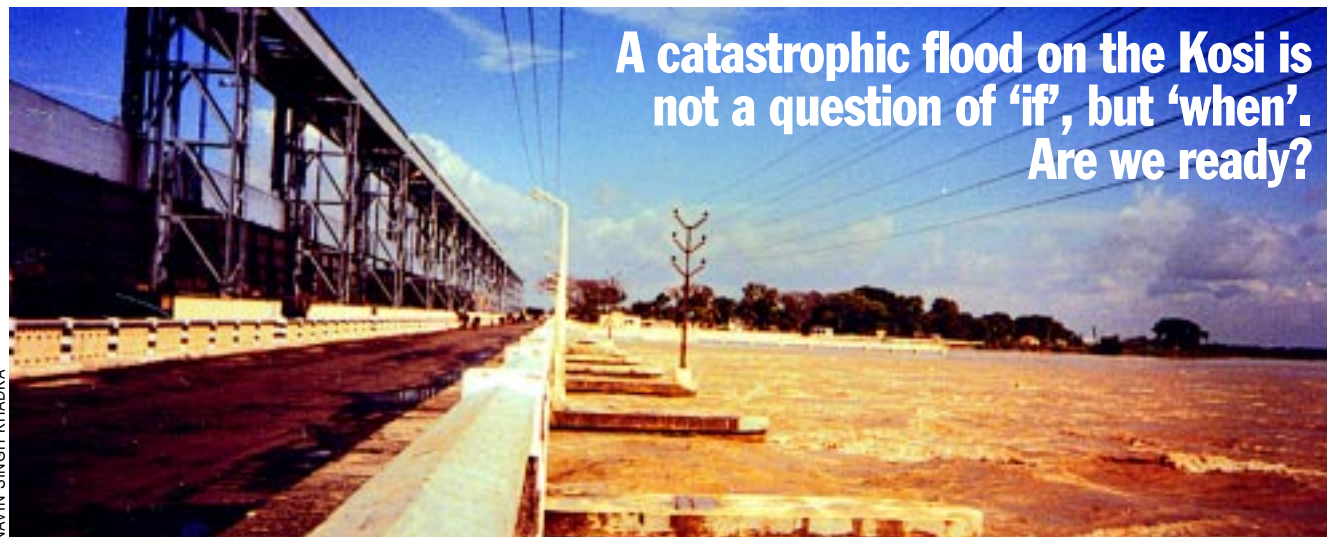
NAVIN SINGH KHADKA
at the KOSI BARRAGE

This is Nepal's biggest river, it carries the most water and the highest sediment load. It used to be called the 'Sorrow of Bihar' because the Kosi often changed course, bringing misery to millions of people downstream in India.

In 1964, India built the Kosi Barrage (see pic) near the border to control the floods and to provide irrigation to farms in both countries. But standing atop of one of the towers looking out at this sea-like expanse of water, it is clear the Kosi is a river that is about to go places.

The gray-brown river surges out of the mountains of eastern Nepal to join the Ganga in India, depositing some 120 million cubic metres of silt along the basin every year—twice as much as the Nile and five times more than the Sutlej. The river is now flowing several metres above the surrounding land, and only slender embankments in Nepal and Bihar keep the mighty river in check.

Near the barrage the Kosi turns into a



NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

A catastrophic flood on the Kosi is not a question of 'if', but 'when'. Are we ready?

delta, with islands and vegetation sprouting from long sand bars. Below us, the flood gates are raised to their maximum height to let the monsoon waters through, but there is only 30cm between the steel gates and accumulated sediment.

This week, the water flow is 200,000 cubic metres per second (cusec). Alarm bells rang last month when the flow

reached 400,000 cusecs and the flood waters nearly topped the barrage. Sedimentation has raised the river bed by three metres, and even during a normal monsoon the barrage is in danger.

Experts now fear a mammoth flood, like the 800,000 cusec discharge in 1968, that could sweep away the barrage itself, unleashing devastating floods in Nepal and India. Because the river bed

has been raised by sediment, even a 500,000 cusec flood, similar to the one that came down in 1987, could threaten the barrage. Since then the sediment has choked the river even more.

Upstream from the barrage in Nepal, there are two 12km and 32km embankments on either side of the Kosi that channel the river towards the sluice gates. Over the years, the rising waters has

scoured these earth embankments. There is also water seepage through the levees into the fields and villages on the other side.

The Kosi has migrated 150km westwards since 1730, and now flows along a channel it made in the 1954 flood. (See map, p5) At the point where the river flows out of the mountains in Chatara, the Kosi is riding higher and experts fear it could easily flow back to its original course. This would take it past the heavily-populated farms on the eastern outskirts of Biratnagar and down across the Bihar and West Bengal plains. Such a flood would be of such proportions that everything else in the history of the Kosi would pale in comparison.

"Various studies on the Kosi have shown this to be a very real possibility, and it would cause an unimaginable human catastrophe. We would all be caught napping," says Nepali water resources expert, AB Thapa.

continued → p4-5

Not ceasing fire

The government and Maoists are now not just exchanging letters, they are also exchanging fire again. There has been a dramatic spurt in clashes since Prachanda agreed to resume talks last week. But while they reiterate their commitment to talks, they have also been ambushing army vehicles and killing police with sniper fire. In the most-serious incident so far, three soldiers were killed in a landmine blast in Panchthar on Tuesday. The human rights group INSEC says 46 people have been killed since the ceasefire announcement six months ago when both sides were supposed to be following the code of conduct. The breakdown of the figures show the Maoists killed 26 people, while the security forces took 20 lives. Within this period, INSEC says the security forces detained 48, while the Maoists abducted 32.

Editorial p2
Hair trigger truce

MIN BAURACHARYA

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Q. Do you support the budget item for grants to parties for election expenditure?

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Q. Should the political parties join the government's negotiating efforts with the Maoists?

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HAIR TRIGGER TRUCE

Every day that the peace talks are delayed, the people pay a price. This condition of no-war-no-peace is costing us in opportunity lost, in development and reconstruction delayed, in an economy that continues to be paralysed by the uncertainty, and in tourism that will not fully rebound. This is probably what purgatory feels like: the region between heaven and hell.

The situation will not get back to normal even if the third round of peace talks begin by next week. But at least there will be psychological relief that the two parties are still engaged, and the negotiation process is on track. The ground reality has worsened in the week after Prachanda's statement agreeing to resume talks. Every day, there are reports of security forces units being ambushed. Last week, two unarmed soldiers in civvies, returning to guard duty at a telecom tower in Sindhuli, were tortured and killed on the day Prachanda offered the olive branch. A policeman inspecting flood damage in Nawalparasi was killed the next day. On Tuesday, an army vehicle was blown up by a land mine in Panchthar and four soldiers were killed. This doesn't look like a ceasefire anymore, it looks more like Iraq.

An earlier report of a grenade attack on a police post in Ramechhap turned out to be lightning strike that set off booby traps on the base perimeter. The fact that the entire national press got the story wrong was only proof that the truce is on a hair-trigger.

The first six months of the ceasefire were tense, but there hadn't been as serious violations of the code of conduct. Could the Maoists be sending a message to the government and the army that they will enforce the 5km deal unless the talks are taken more seriously? Keeping the helicopters flying into Chhauni military hospital every day is a way of reminding the government what could happen if they don't. Such raids would also improve the Maoists' bargaining position on the third round.

A mysterious flurry of statements and press conferences by a suddenly-active group of Maoists in Rasuwa, Nuwakot and Sindhupalchok against American-funded NGOs and USAID could also be a part of a strategy of symbolically warning off superpower intervention. Interestingly, the more the Maoists lash out against "American imperialism" the more it exposes their inconsistency in suddenly going silent on what they earlier used to call "Indian expansionsism".

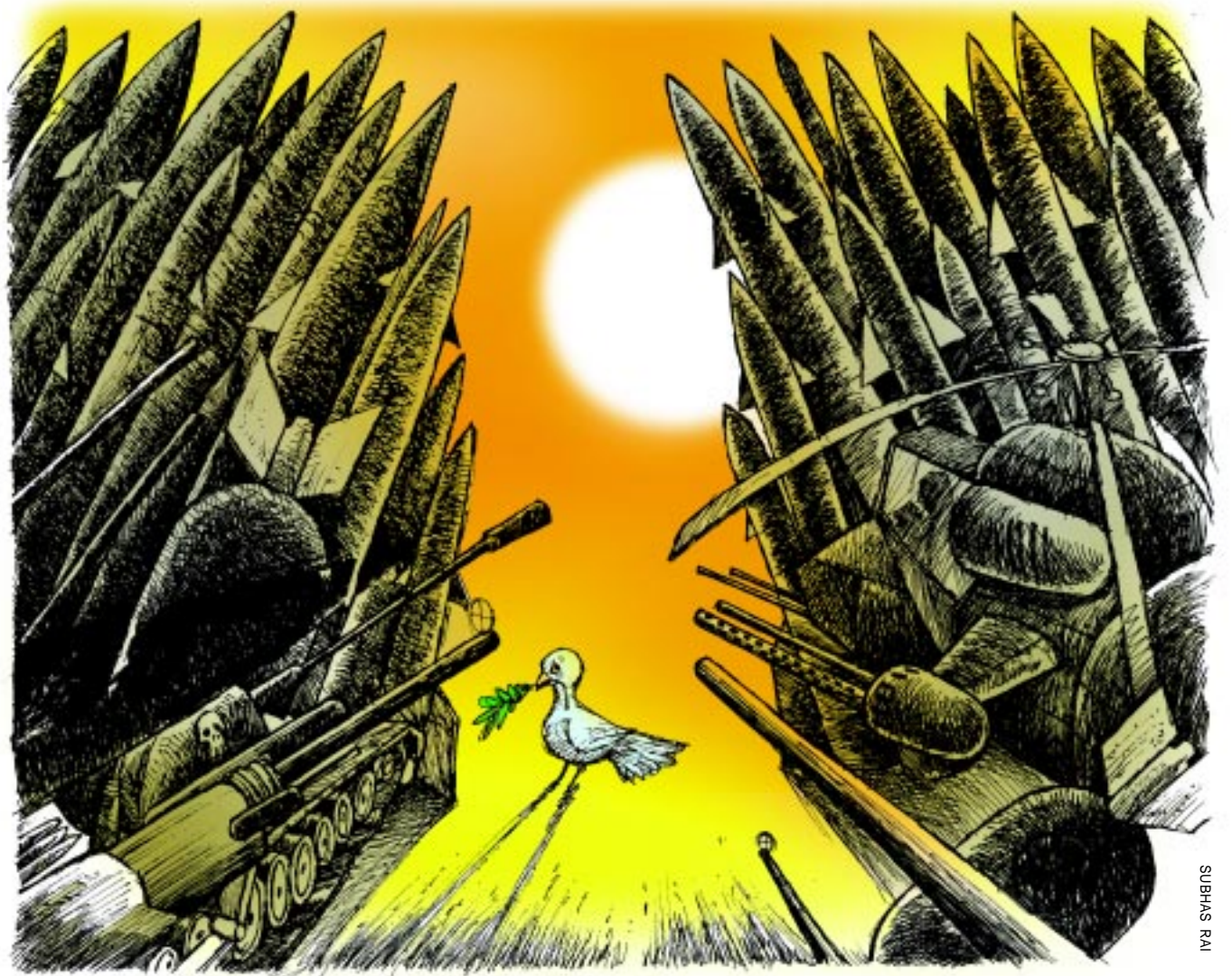
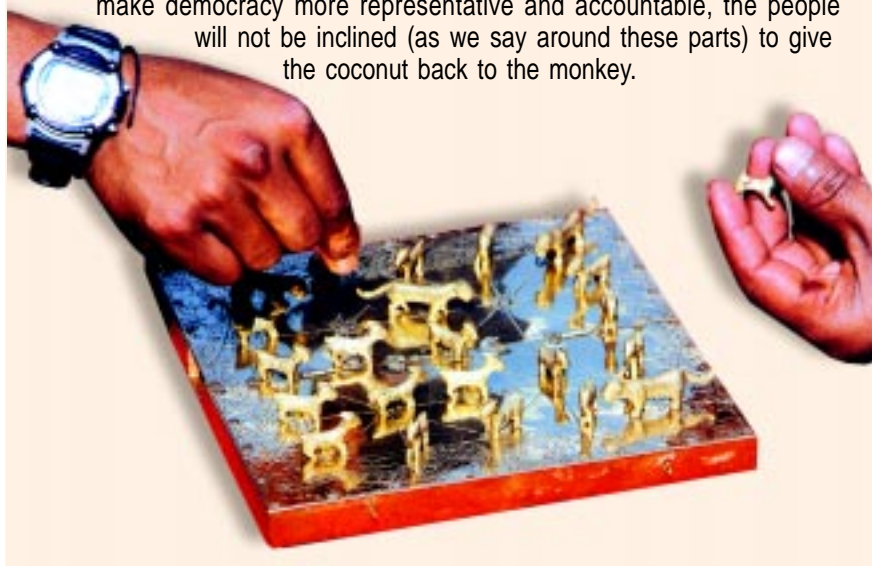
A more sinister explanation for the present escalation in incidents is that there are groups within the movement who do not agree with the talks, feel that an open-ended negotiation process will weaken the militia, and therefore they are carrying out their own offensives. The leadership may be forced to allow impatient cadre this autonomy to carry out hit-and-run raids to avoid a more serious rupture. As it is, Maoist extortion, threats, abductions have continued unabated. And having looted most of the food and money from villagers, they are now taking away pressure cookers from households in the districts.

Whatever the explanation, the incidents raise serious questions about the peace process. Something must have been lost in the translation, but the Defence Ministry expressing mere "sadness" at recent killings of soldiers shows the government wants to talk at any cost. The prime minister is in a quandary: his emotional appeal this week to the parties to bury differences and join the talks has been roundly rejected by the agitators. He is also getting no cooperation from a palace clique that backs his party rival.

The fact that the parties will not even listen to Thapa's logic that constitutional forces should stick together at this time of crisis points to a serious lack of trust and communication. The king isn't doing much to rebuild this trust. And, as for Girija Prasad Koirala, it is now becoming an end-game to try to checkmate the king before the CIAA pins him down on a serious corruption charge.

Hence the decision by the political parties not to be a part of the peace process. The strategy: 'We'll put a spanner in the works, unless'. This maybe Koirala's personal insurance policy, but it doesn't help the country at all. It is also counterproductive for the parties, since it disregards strong public support for an all-party approach to talks. The parties have justified their decision saying that a peace process in the absence of democracy makes no sense, but this argument is getting more and more frayed.

After all, there was a parliament and what passed for democracy in the past seven years. But not only were successive governments incapable of resolving the insurgency, but they actually made things worse with their near-sighted, narrow-minded ineptitude. Unless the parties can demonstrate that they have turned a new leaf, that they now have a bold new plan to make democracy more representative and accountable, the people will not be inclined (as we say around these parts) to give the coconut back to the monkey.



SUBHAS RAI

STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



The dogs of war

Cry, "Havoc!" and let slip the dogs of war.

— Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* III.i.270

Kathmandu is all agog with talks about talks again. The Maoists want the agitating parties to be included, and the government expects the parties to abandon their protests and join its team on the negotiating table.

The parties want to talk to the Maoists and continue agitating against the October Fourth royal move simultaneously. Forget about the agenda, the two teams do not even seem to be too clear about what they want to achieve or who the stakeholders should be. In this confusion, if Comrade Prachanda expects the impending round of talks to resolve longstanding political issues, he is clearly being over optimistic.

The facilitating team is more pragmatic. Daman Nath Dhungana and Padma Ratna Tuladhar want better confidence-building measures in place. But Kathmandu high society is so enthused about the mere possibility of talks that it hasn't stopped to consider the issues that are at stake.

The Maoists haven't budged an inch from their original position: round table, interim government and elections for the constituent assembly. But the king's government has no legitimacy to discuss these substantive issues, and lacks moral authority to implement any agreement with the rebels.

Facilitators insist that the decision to limit the movement of security forces within 5km of the barracks was indeed taken, but the new team of the king's negotiators don't want to honour commitments made by predecessors. There is no guarantee this will not happen again unless a government with a popular base is at the helm in Singha Darbar.

Only a democratic government can make commitments on behalf of the people, and the institution to give legitimacy to any political settlement is a parliament, the proper legislative arm of the state. When framers of the

present constitution met to deliberate the political crisis, they unanimously decided to urge the reinstatement of the *Pratinidhi Sabha*. The alternative is further chaos in the formation of the government and a prolonged war.

The ground reality in the hinterland isn't conducive for talks either. The security forces continue to be on high alert wherever they are, facing daily sniper attacks and ambushes. Armed Maoists walk around fairly openly in the country's governmentless vacuum. Their extortion campaigns continue unhindered. The government and the insurgents are talking peace, but they are competing to prepare for war. For now, the ceasefire holds, but it is a perilous peace.

Perhaps it was to clear the air of uncertainty that UN Secretary General Kofi Anan last week made this statement: "The secretary general remains at the disposal of Nepal to assist the achievement of a negotiated peaceful solution." But even such an innocuous statement of goodwill has raised the hackles of the Indian establishment. Indian media reports that New Delhi is miffed at "extra-regional powers" offering "help of conflict resolution experts to facilitate the negotiations". The UN is a 'power'?

Unnamed "Indian officials"—often a euphemism for the official view—obliquely sympathised with the issues raised by the Maoists. Media reports quoted the official pointing out: "If the talks between Kathmandu and the Maoists get stalled, it is not because the two sides lack conflict resolution skills or do not know how to negotiate. The negotiations will succeed or fail depending on whether a meeting ground is reached on substantive issues being raised by the Maoists."

If that's not direct enough to reveal New Delhi's real intentions, here is the punchline: "And how can anyone be neutral between a state which is trying to maintain law and order and those

taking up arms against it?" Indeed, neutrality in such cases isn't possible, but which side are you on, "unnamed officials"?

At the other end of the spectrum, an article published in the webzine FrontPageMagazine.com (<http://frontpagemag.com/Articles/ReadArticle.asp?ID=9090>) last week leaves no room for ambiguity. A certain conservative academic, Steven C Baker suggests: "The United States should work closely with India to ensure that the Maoist insurgency is extinguished. A 'peace process' between the current government and the Maoist rebels should be discouraged."

Shades of McCarthyism cloud the piece in which Baker doesn't let his ignorance of world affairs get in the way of passing sweeping conclusions from Langley about the ground reality in Libang.

When this ezine piece first came to our notice, we decided to laugh it off—after all, every country has its share of paranoids. But Baker's theory of the fear of the peace movement has to be taken seriously when the American Information Centre in Kathmandu provides reproduction rights to local newspapers.

We may be smoking peace pipes inside the country again, but the drums of war are still booming outside. Comrade Prachanda must ensure progress in the next round of talks. Political parties must remain relentless in their pursuit of democratic rights. The king must make up his mind: a country can't be half-democratic. And civil society must stop chanting the mantra of peace at any cost. If that were possible, there would be no wars in the world. Some values—like freedom and democracy—are too important to be compromised for an unjust peace. In any case, we may not be interested in war, but as it often happens, the dogs of war are very interested in us. ♦

LETTERS

DIRTY DIESEL

Re: Ken Pumford's response ('Letters', #156) to my article ('Breathing is harmful to health', #155). Promoters of diesel have long argued that because diesel is more fuel efficient than petrol it produces less carbon dioxide and is therefore more climate friendly. This claim may not be true. A study by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency says that although diesel cars use 20 to 25 percent less fuel than petrol, they emit 15 percent more carbon dioxide (CO₂) per litre of fuel than petrol. As a result the overall effect of CO₂ emission is negligible. In another study, Mark Z Jacobson from Stanford University has used computer simulations to prove that although diesel cars obtain better mileage and emit less CO₂ than similar gasoline cars, they can emit 25 to 400 times more mass of particulate black carbon and associated organic matter ("soot") per km. The warming due to soot may more than offset the cooling due to reduced carbon dioxide emissions. It's not just global climate but also local pollution caused by diesel exhaust that is raising concerns, even in Europe. In the past few years in Paris, home of Peugeot, the world's leading manufacturer of diesel engines, levels of nitrogen oxides and ozone (which mainly result from diesel engines) have gone up to dangerous levels several times forcing authorities to send out pollution alerts and restrict vehicle movement. Similarly, according to a WHO report, 6 percent of all deaths in Austria, France and Switzerland are due to PM10 (again mainly caused by diesel engines).

Manufacturers in Europe may be developing "clean" diesel engines but it will be years before these technologies and the corresponding ultra-low sulphur fuel come to Nepal. We do not have to ban all diesel vehicles but at least admit that they are dirty and keep them at a safe distance from sensitive areas such as Kathmandu.

Bhusan Tuladhar,
Clean Energy Nepal

BAHUN BAD?

CK Lal is my favourite columnist. His is the first thing I turn to on your internet editions. I admire his analysis and understanding. But it is when CK Lal writes on Hinduism or on his pet subject of 'Bahunbad' that it gets disgusting. I don't understand why he is going out of his way to champion himself as one of the crusaders against Bahuns. Does it help to make Nepal a secular country in the near future? What does he gain by making a mockery of Hinduism? Are Bahuns ahead of other so-called down-trodden ones to espouse communalism in Nepal?

Certainly not, and I challenge Lal on this issue. My Muslim friends and American colleagues are so dedicated to propound the cause of their faiths, and it hurts when Hinduism can't be similarly defended. Lal should use his wit and wisdom in more constructive writings than running down his own faith. If he has one.

Madhuban Paudel
Honolulu, Hawaii

- Thank you, CK Lal for being such a brave champion to the cause of secularism. It is when those around us are losing their heads that your clear, sharp arguments for rationality and tolerance ring true. And thank you, *Nepali Times* for giving writers like Lal a voice.

Dinesh Sharma, *New Delhi*

- I am a Bahun, although I call myself Brahmin. Pardon my sophistication for sticking to the original Sanskrit here, CK Lal. My whole family was Brahmin and I am a pure Brahmin. My *mamagharis* Brahmin, *Sanima* and *Phupu* are Brahmin. One phupu did marry a Newar and that was more than 28 years ago. But that probably won't tell you the degree of our conservatism clearly. I, myself, recently got married to an American (a whitey, Swiss-German Mennonite guy from the Midwest). And guess what? My family is fine with it. So you might be asking me, hey wait a minute, where is your bahun *naak* (pride), right? Well yeah, that's what I am wondering. I am not sure what exactly you were you trying to say in your article ('Kingdom of the bahuns', #153). We Brahmins, even though revered highly by Vedas etc, never really tried to rule this poor country of our. We were not the ones to suck the blood of poor Nepal for 105 years. On the contrary, we tried to earn a decent livelihood by studying hard, getting a job and going places. So why are you envious of that? I would rather have you write about the class of people who rely on their might and money to get places. Not us. Not one person in my family has the 'pride' you are referring to. In fact, all I have learnt while growing up is: work hard, be honest and god will be good to you. In fact, I have personally seen some insane injustices happen to my family that made us feel pretty helpless and powerless because we were Brahmins. Or maybe because we were just ordinary Nepal. If you were a Bahun, Lal, you would know that it is no big deal. Most of us don't have the feeling of supremacy that you are hallucinating about. And about secular faith, let me give you an example: I lived in a Buddhist town most of my life and even though raised Hindu, I consider myself Hindu-Buddhist, just out of respect to my surrounding roots. We are not as orthodox as you make us out to be.

D Adhikari, *Michigan, USA*

Contrary to Artha Beed's 'Building bridges' (#153) I was under the impression that most Sino-Indian trade routed through Nepal was of the illegal variety. Also, re-routing Middle East trade that used to go through Shanghai and Hong Kong through Sikkim doesn't make sense to me. But it would decrease the smuggling of Chinese goods to India via Nepal. But this is to be expected with economic liberalisation and falling trade barriers. A conduit country anywhere is bound to lose its primacy. As for Nepal playing India and China against each other. I believe only King Mahendra was successful to some extent in doing it and that too he used to throttle democracy. Times have changed. It is in Nepals best interest to have strong political and economic ties with both countries. Our esteemed politicians fall over each other to be servile to the powers that be. Nepal is a remittance economy now, no more an agricultural economy. And does the Beed seriously think Nepal is in a position to comply with the WTO regime? Won't it kill whatever little industry we have left?

Rabin Koirala, *email*

BLACK OUT

I'm from Dharan and we have had blackouts from early yesterday morning and the whole day today. It is 7:30 in the evening now and the lights have just come back on. The next person who tells me Nepal has the highest hydropower potential in the world, I'll hit him. How long can we live this way? It made me even angrier to read Navin Singh Khadka's '\$50million' (#155). No wonder the little electricity we have is the most expensive in the world, because politicians and contractors are in cahoots and they steal millions of dollars from us, the consumers. Why can't the CIAA intervene and put these thugs behind bars? Anyway, thanks to *Nepali Times* for that expose, at least someone is trying to make things better by blowing the whistle.

Rohit Rai, *Dharan*

CRY, EDUCATION

How nice I felt when I closed down the schools and colleges in the name of education. I felt better after I burned the chair of the vice chancellor of the university. I inhaled the fumes of the burning library and pumped myself with the perfect education. I saw the books burning. I recognised some of those books. I had studied some of those books in my IA and BA. I used to take great initiative to arrange a grand program on Teachers' Day. We had our teachers seated in a decorated chair and we put *tika* on their foreheads. We also managed to collect some money and give them some gifts. I used to be the best in giving speeches on those occasions, stating how we must respect the teachers because they were our *gurus*. I considered myself an ideal student because I was never interested in education. I was interested only in a certificate. To tell you the truth, teachers meant nothing to me.

Well, the past is past. Now I am a professor. I have a 'Dr' in front of my name and a long line of abbreviations at the end of my name. Now I am a recognised person. Students say that I don't prepare for class. Who cares! I am an 'honourable man'. I think these regular students are stupid. They seem to have nothing to do in life. I just have to speak for 40 minutes. Education is not that easily available. If the students want

education, let them come to my tuition centre.

Augustine Thomas SJ,
Kathmandu

MBA's

Re: 'Underselling MBA's' ('Business Sense', by Ashutosh Tiwari, #156). The booklet, *Profiles of Students*, which Tiwari received was a profile of the graduating students and not their resume. These are two distinct tools to communicate information and, accordingly, they have different objectives: the content and techniques of presentation. The profile is meant to "introduce" students to a wide range of target audiences and would contain concise, general information. In contrast, had it been a resume, it would have been more customised and specific to suit the information needs of the prospective employer, we believe Tiwari would find most of the information he wanted to acquire when he went through the profile.

The phone numbers and addresses provided in the profile are not to help the prospective employers make hiring decisions, but to help them establish contacts with the concerned students to acquire further information if they wish—based on the information provided in the profile. Mention of the project titles is intended to highlight the area of study of the student and not to provide a synopsis of the findings of the projects. Further information about the projects can be had from the concerned students, if permitted by the related organisations in which the studies were conducted. As an academic institution, Kathmandu University School of Management (KUSOM) emphasises theories and principles related to different fields of management and their application in a dynamic changing environment with a more holistic approach aimed at helping students succeed in such an environment. We appreciate Tiwari's suggestion of 'resume workshops' which would help students write better resumes but our primary emphasis is to ensure

that students are worth what they put into their beautifully-produced resumes.

Bhushan Pradhan,
Lecturer, KUSOM

TALKS

You deserve appreciation for your illuminating editorial comments on the ongoing peace process between the government and the Maoists ('Pen pals' #156). The Maoist problem will not be resolved in the near future, as the three players (the palace, the Maoists and the agitating political parties) are committed to defeating one another at the cost of national independence. We were never a slave country, but we were (and are) always plagued by political instability, conspiracy, poverty and corruption. Does it not show that our rulers have completely failed us? Do we really need a political master to teach us good governance? And is sovereignty the price we have to pay for it?

Bigyan Niva, *Bishalnagar*

CORRECTION

- The calculations for an education voucher system in parts of Alok Bohara's opinion piece ('Ahead of its time', #156) went awry during editing. Parts of the second-last paragraph should read as follows:

"With a 10 percentage estimated increase in upcoming election counts of 15 million voters, an education trust fund of Rs 300 million (at the proposed Rs 20 per voter) can be created to fund 8,333 poor students for one year of undergraduate education at the rate of Rs 3,000 per student per month in a non-profit private school or any other public schools of their choice. Using these vouchers, 1,666 students in each region can stimulate healthy competition among public and private institutions."



Thinking the unthinkable



A marooned village on the Kosi River in Bihar in 1994..

➔ from p1

Just 15km upstream, the Sunkosi, Tamur and Arun join to form the mighty Sapta Kosi that cuts a deep gash in the mountains before disgoring into the plains. Others share Thapa's concern for Chatara as the possible trouble spot. If the Kosi's tributaries in eastern Nepal all peak at the same time during an above-normal late monsoon cloudburst when the soil is already saturated, the river could easily change course at Chatara.

None of the experts we talked to could accurately estimate the casualty figures if the Kosi

changed course, by-passing the barrage altogether. The estimates ranged from 1-10 million people affected in Nepal and India with tens of thousands of deaths, and longterm destruction to crops and livelihood. "Anything could happen," says Ajaya Dixit of the Nepal Water Conservation Foundation. "This is a very unpredictable river."

The Indian government's reaction to the annual floods in Bihar has been to repeat its commitment to build a mammoth 269m high dam at Barachhetra, the Kosi's gorge 15km upstream from Chatara. The dam has been proposed since 1947 and the only

reason it hasn't been built is because of cost, and the lack of priority for Bihar within India. But things seem to be moving. There was an initial understanding with Nepal in 1992 to study the site. And news in mid-June that this year's floods were threatening the barrage came coincidentally on the same day as a report that a joint Nepal-India team was setting up a feasibility study on the Kosi High Dam.

The Nepali side has never objected to the Kosi High Dam, but only wants that its future project—to transfer Sun Kosi storage water to the tarai through tunnels—not be affected by the

dam. The joint study is expected to look at both projects in conjunction. The three-year \$10 million study would look at the feasibility of what could be the largest hydroelectric and irrigation project in the region costing anywhere up to \$3 billion. "It all depends on that study if we will really build the dam," says Surendra Mahananda Bajracharya of the Department of Electricity Development.

Indian officialdom is all out to push the idea of the Kosi High Dam, presenting it as a project not just to protect the barrage but also as a longterm flood control and energy solution for Nepal

and northern India. "The high dam will actually prove to be beneficial for Nepal," officials of the Bihar Department of Irrigation stationed at the Kosi Barrage told us this week. There are indications that India now wants to prioritise Kosi, since the other joint projects on Pancheswor and Mahakali have turned out to be political hot potatoes in Nepal.

Indians engineers argue that the Kosi High Dam would check downstream flow of silt which means the river bed will stop rising, thus prolonging the life of the barrage. There would be flood control benefits, water released in the dry season would help irrigation and generate 4,000 megawatt of power that Nepal could sell to India. Another bonus is the possibility of a regulated Kosi providing Nepali goods access to the sea through river navigation, Indian officials say.

Some Nepali experts, however, caution that the plans are too grandiose and will not solve the problem of sedimentation. "Because of the Kosi's huge sediment load, the dam will silt up just like the barrage has silted up," says water expert Santa Bahadur Pun. Bihar sees the high dam as a panacea for all its ills, but it could turn out to be a white elephant.

Bajracharya at the Department of Electricity Development disagrees, arguing that the sedimentation problem can be mitigated. "We cannot

compare the Kosi Barrage and the Kosi High Dam because they are based on different technologies. The barrage cannot clear accumulated sediment, while there are now new technologies to flush sediment from dam reservoirs."

For India, the Kosi High Dam project could be a component of its super-ambitious \$2 trillion project to interlink 37 Indian rivers for flood control and irrigation. According to recent reports in the Indian press, the Kosi will be linked by canal to the Ghagara, and similar links will be made between the Gandaki, Karnali and Mahakali river systems after they flow out of Nepal. The waters of the Gandaki for instance, will be channelled to the Ganga so that waters from flood prone areas reach drought-hit places.

The Nepal government has not been officially notified about the river linking project and what role, if any, Nepal may be asked to play. But it is clear that since at least six of the 37 rivers originate in Nepal, there will have to be some kind of reliance on storage dams in the Himalaya.

However, there is disagreement within India about the interlinking project—between states and between the BJP government and environmental activists. (See: 'Conjoined rivers', #156). By the time the feasibility study for the Kosi High Dam is complete in 2007, and if construction starts, it will take at least till 2012 before it is finished.

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK

Nothing but the truth



The beleaguered Blair government in Britain has resorted to a time-honoured technique to blur the outrage over the David Kelly affair. The row over BBC reporter Andrew Gilligan and his stories about "sexing-up" an Iraq arms dossier has been referred to a judicial inquiry headed by Lord Hutton of the Law Lords. And, crucially, it's summertime. Brits are bored with politics and media infighting. They're heading for the beach. When they come back, unfortunately, this episode will be distant history. Kaput. But it shouldn't be. Much about the situation remains deeply troubling.

For Blair. For Britain and, of course, for the BBC, my alma mater.

Journalism is often a tightrope. Especially reporting, which is largely a matter of fossicking through the claims, counterclaims, blatant attempts to manipulate and other clumps of filth in our in-trays. Occasionally something gleams pure gold but even then, it's best to be suspicious. As I found out in March of 1993 as a somewhat damp-behind-the-ears South Asia correspondent in Pakistan, finding the glittery lump in the dirt can be a risky business.

By March of that year, it was clear that we were in for a wild ride in the Islamic Republic. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's battles with President Ghulam Ishaq Khan made the Gilligan spat look like a love-in. So I tuned in to Khan's Pakistan Day speech on 23 March with some interest. I don't remember the exact wording but in impeccable Urdu, the bureaucrat-president seemed to be dissing his prime minister. At the time my Urdu was—ahem—poor. So I made a few calls to what I admit were interested parties. All gave me the line. Yes, Khan was preparing to dump Sharif.

I reported that, much in the manner that Andrew Gilligan told BBC audiences that the Blair government had deliberately "sexed-up" the Iraq arms report. Khan was livid with me, apparently. Not that I was wrong, but he'd deliberately said what he said on a national holiday. No newspapers on the following day. No nasty questions in the press about improprieties. And you can guess what happened. Like Andrew Gilligan, I became the story. 'Who was the BBC's source' screamed one Urdu



paper. 'BBC schemes against Sharif' said another.

In the end, I was proven right. And I didn't need a senior judge to exonerate me. But I still remember with a shudder of fear how it felt to be out on that limb on that day. Unable to take back my broadcast analysis of Khan's speech. Praying to gods I don't believe in that I was right.

I don't say Andrew Gilligan went too far out on any limb. He is one of the Beeb's more tenacious hacks, with a long record of breaking troublesome, and true, revelations about the people in power. No, I believe that the villain of the piece is Tony Blair's government, no matter what Lord Hutton's findings about the behaviour of Gilligan and the BBC. It has to be asked: have we lost sight of the main point here? Blair and his team, in dogged support of Washington, told self-evident lies to justify the invasion of a country that was no direct threat to Britain or the United States.

Of course they "sexed-up" the dossiers, speeches and justifications for war. They had to. There were no smoking germs, no missiles, no mobile

Blair and his team told self-evident lies to justify the invasion of a country that was no direct threat to Britain or the United States.

labs making anthrax, no Ebola, TB or Sarin gas. Nothing. The Saddamites had destroyed it all. Or hidden it. Whatever.

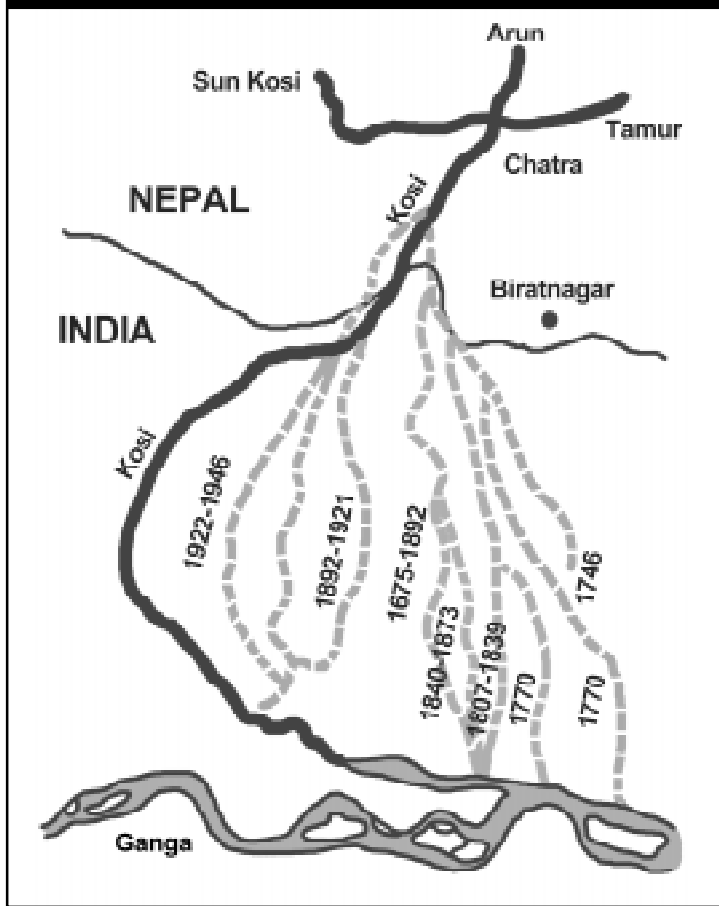
Lies of historic proportion—Goebbelsian in their audacity and scope—spewed forth from the likes of Powell, Blair, Straw and, of course, Bush. Each was supposed to be decent, conviction politicians, a cut above the rest. No more, no longer. They used information they knew to be false to wreak unholy havoc in a country already on its knees because of a decade of sanctions, a country that, yes, had an evil government, but deserved better than the slapdash invasion and occupation that it has suffered.

Of course none of this is within Lord Hutton's remit. Tony Blair has been careful to specify, respectfully of course, that Milord will confine himself to the case of the late David Kelly, his words to Andrew Gilligan and how the Ministry of Defence handled the aftermath. No chance of proving whether or not what Kelly is alleged to have told Gilligan was true. That's water under the bridge. Or so Blair thinks. So he hopes.

What I hope as a journalist—not as a citizen or a political animal, but as a member of a profession too often scape-goated by politicians—is that Tony Blair and colleagues suffer the sanction of democracy for their perfidy, their cynicism, their lying. I hope they continue to see their stock plunge in the market of British public opinion.

And I pray that history marks them down as the Great Liars, along with Bush and Co in Washington. Long after Andrew Gilligan is forgotten, and David Kelly's family is done with righteous grief. ♦

The Kosi's changing channels in the past 250 years.



The question is will the Kosi Barrage have been washed off by then? Or worse, will the Kosi have changed course at Chatara in the next 15 years? Both would be disasters with huge human costs and an economic and political fallout. But the disasters could also sway public opinion in Nepal and India in support of a long-term solution to Kosi floods, like a high dam.

AB Thapa is in favour of launching the Sun Kosi storage and diversion project at Kurule, north of Chatara before the high dam. "One benefit would be to help us control the Kosi from jumping toward Biratnagar," says Thapa, formerly of the Water and Energy Commission. The Ministry of Water Resources would prefer to wait for the feasibility study, since a future Kosi reservoir would submerge the Sun Kosi diversion if it is built earlier.

Given the experience of Panchswor, it is clear that much

more water has to flow down the Kosi before the debate about the high-dam is resolved and the necessary political will garnered. The debate over the Kosi is nothing new, it was a question that bedevilled even British engineers who were entrusted with trying to tame the 'Sorrow of Bihar' in the 19th century.

"British engineers were divided about dams and embankments for flood control," says Ajaya Dixit. "Today, looking at the sedimentation problems at the Kosi Barrage we have to admit that they were talking sense."

Whatever the case, the threats of a Kosi breach at Chatara or a flood bypass of the barrage are clear and present dangers. It could happen 10 years from now, or it could happen next week. But it will happen. And when it does it will make this year's floods and landslides look like a picnic. ♦

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Swept away

Monsoon landslides and floods have destroyed an important bridge over the Marsyangdi River near Mugling, cutting off a major north-south and east-west highway artery. A makeshift bridge will take another week to put into place, according to officials in the Roads Department. The Department of Roads has no stock of Bailey bridges. "What we had has been depleted," admits MG Maleku, director general of the department. "We should've stockpiled for emergencies." With monsoon emergencies a given, these prefabricated steel panel bridges should have been ready to move, but officials blame everyone but themselves. "There was a fund crunch as usual," another senior official told us. "We did notify the ministry on time, but they told us the money was unavailable." Maleku says the government has learnt its lesson and will now stockpile Bailey bridges in five regions across the kingdom. Check back next year in this same space.

Not submerged: India

The Indian government has once again refuted Nepali media reports that some of its barrages and embankments near the border have inundated Nepali villages. "Such reports are misleading and not only create misunderstanding between our two friendly countries but vitiate the atmosphere in which inundation problems can be successfully tackled through co-operative efforts," the Indian Embassy said in a press statement on Wednesday. It also referred to media reports of a dam-like structure supposedly being built on the Nepali side of Laxmanpur barrage near Nepalganj. A barrage was being built, the embassy admitted, but on the Indian side. The barrage is not operational, and when in use it will save low-lying villages on the Indian side of the border from being flooded. The statement also stated that no dam is being constructed at Koilabas. An old reservoir straddles the India-Nepal border at Koilabas, with a gated escape on the Indian side. This escape was damaged some time ago, and due to heavy rains the discharge of water threatened to flood the Indian side. Temporary measures have been taken and there is no threat to Nepal. On the much talked about Mahalisagar, the Indian government has said it has given detailed clarifications and agreed to a joint site visit to find mutually acceptable measures to meet Nepali concerns.

No reprieve

Kathmandu Valley may not be delisted from the endangered sites on the World Heritage List, says Unesco regional advisor, Richard A

Engelhardt, who was in the Valley this week. "Its status has been put in a special category that asks for the Nepal government and people to seek active international support," says Engelhardt. Unesco is preparing an assessment report on Nepal and will soon have an 'action plan' to control activities endangering the zones.

One of their main concerns is the growth of shopping malls, modern buildings and hotels that are rapidly replacing the traditional houses and buildings that surround the monuments. Uncontrolled urban development is the main factor endangering our world heritage sites. The blame lies partially with past governments that failed in their conservation responsibilities. "But there is still hope," concluded Engelhardt, "if people in the Valley are educated and encouraged to promote traditional Nepali architecture." He acknowledged that the country lacks technical manpower.

Lumbini, another World Heritage Site, could possibly lose its status too. "This is not Unesco's view but my own," says the regional adviser, who expressed unhappiness with the reconstruction of Maya Devi Temple, an important part of Lumbini. "The temple does not spiritually validate the place and does more damage." Unesco wants to revive the master plan by renowned Japanese architect, Kenzo Tange in 1978.

Landslide toll now 181

Last week's massive floods and landslides have killed at least 181 people, according to the Nepal Red Cross Society. This year's monsoon rains between 30 July and 2 August were the highest recorded in the past three decades. It affected nearly 8,000 families from 45 districts, destroying about 1,000 houses. The number of displaced families has reached 1,300. More rainfall is expected next week.

Visa required

First the UK and now the US has tightened their airport security requirements for transit passengers. The US has suspended its Transit Without Visa program (TWOV) and the International-to-International transit program (ITI) which will affect Nepalis travelling through the US to third countries. TWOV has been in force since 1952 for international passengers who were permitted to go through the United States to another foreign country without a visa to stop and change planes. Air passengers using the US for transit purposes will now need a visa. US intelligence believes that terrorists groups have been planning to exploit these transit programs to gain access to the country and its airspace without going through the consular screening process. For us Nepalis it just means even more visa queues.



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ORG - MARG

MEDIA SURVEY DATA AT 6 MONTHLY INTERVALS

ACNielsen (ORG - MARG) Nepal is happy to announce that after being encouraged by the major corporate houses in the country; it is planning to launch syndicated media survey database on a regular basis, covering all media vehicles viz. TV, Radio, Dailies (Newspapers) and Magazines at 6 monthly intervals. The survey will be conducted among randomly sampled households covering entire nation by region, pop strata and demographic socio-economic segments. While media penetration (cable, FM, press subscription) will be obtained at household level; more detailed data will be obtained from random adult individuals (15 - 50 years age). Such individual level data will include relative shares in terms of channel and program viewership / listenership (regular vs. most often) and press brand readership (read regularly). This database will be directly marketed to all Corporate houses, Donor organisations, INGOs and Advertising agencies by ACNielsen's own executives and associate consultants. ACNielsen would earnestly look forward to financial support in form of service subscription, from the existing and potential clientele for successful launch and regular continuance of this media database venture in the country.

NOTICE OF PUBLIC INTEREST
It has come to the notice of ACNielsen (ORG - MARG) Nepal that certain people, in order to fulfil their own interests and also having little or no knowledge of research / survey technicalities, have been spreading misleading information about this international agency. We request all establishments and individuals to ignore such futile attempts. We assure all, about our services standards and quality commitments that has helped us to establish ourselves across the globe.



A yam between two stones (and a huge boulder)

What is behind the Maoists' anti-American rhetoric?

context of India's sometimes overt, and mostly covert role, in determining Nepal's political course in the past half-a-century, it would not be difficult to discern a link.

Independent India under Nehru always appeared keen in public for the establishment of a democratic polity in Nepal. However, Nehru felt no qualms about securing the most crucial 1950 treaty with the crisis-ridden Ranas that would have longterm implications for Nepal. The Ranas probably would not have come under much pressure from India to give up power had China not moved into Tibet in October 1950.

India was worried that the Chinese were expanding southward when political instability in Nepal was growing due to the anti-Rana campaign. Convinced that political upheaval in Nepal at such a time would jeopardise India's own security, New Delhi decided to act. It was against this background that Nehru envisaged the famous power sharing 'Delhi Compromise' for Nepal, which would incorporate the Ranas, the opposition parties led by the Nepali Congress and the king.

But surprisingly, as BP Koirala stated, none of the three parties were properly consulted nor were they allowed to sit and discuss the matter. US academic Leo Rose writes in his classic work, *Nepal: The Strategy for Survival*, that the decisive battles in

[the power] struggle had "not been fought in the hills of Nepal but in the halls of New Delhi".

It is a tragedy for Nepal that Rose's description of Nepal's predicament in the early 1950s has continued to remain largely true even today. Fifty years ago, Nepal had no policy of its own as Indian influence was all-pervasive on every aspect of the state. It was only after King Mahendra's accession to the throne that Nepal attempted to distance itself from India. When he took over the reigns of power after dismissing and arresting the democratically elected Koirala ministry in December 1960, Nehru said "it was a complete reversal of the democratic process".

However, within six months of the dismissal of the Koirala government, India had signed four aid agreements with Nepal and after the 1962 Sino-India war, when Nepal is said to have followed a carefully neutral line, Delhi ordered all anti-Panchayat Nepali exiles in India to cease their activities.

Despite India's public pronouncements in favour of democracy in Nepal, in essence, it has been least bothered about it and more concerned about extracting favourable agreements and treaties from Nepal. The 1965 'secret' arms supply agreement with Nepal was the result of the same policy. If Nepal had agreed to

India's draft proposal forwarded to Kathmandu in the height of the Indo-Nepal crisis in 1989-90, it is possible that India could have remained silent on the issue of the restoration of democracy in Nepal.

However, King Birendra is said to have thought it appropriate to "give in" to the demands of pro-democracy campaigners in the country rather than "give away" sovereignty to India. India's role has remained pivotal, but despite that anti-regime, Nepali exiles in India hardly received substantial help from the Indian state. They have been used more as an option to keep Kathmandu under a constant sense of fear, and gain its subservience on issues related to India's national interest.

No wonder, then, that despite the world's knowledge of the Maoist leaders' presence in India, Delhi insists that it has no idea about their whereabouts. After Prachanda's Siliguri audience to all the top communist leaders of Nepal, CK Lal wrote in this paper "since our southern pals claim to know everything that happens inside the smallest *madarasa* in the tarai, it is highly unlikely that they have not been aware of the honoured guests in their strategic Chicken Neck".

That sounds like a perfectly reasonable argument. But the question is, why should Delhi acknowledge that it is aware about their activities in India? It had become a must for Delhi

to put pressure on the Maoists after 11 September. It did, and the Maoists acknowledged later that they had come to talks because of the pressure from the US, the UK and India. But the post 9/11 heat on South Asia has virtually evaporated and India can again be master of its own will in the region.

That means they can let Nepal know loud and clear that they are not happy about the growing US involvement in the country, which they have long considered as an exclusive sphere of Indian influence. And to convey that message, what could be a better medium than the roaring rebels, the nightmare of the Nepali state?

But those Nepalis who draw irrational pleasure in India-bashing should understand that Wilsonian idealism is a far cry in international politics. It is all about the advancement of national interest and if Nepal had the ability to manipulate regional geopolitics we would probably do the same.

Thus, instead of blaming others, let us blame those Nepalis who, from the 1950s to the present, have allowed themselves to be used by India in the hope of fulfilling their political ambitions in Nepal. ♦

Mishra is a journalist with the BBC World Service in London, currently researching India's influence in Nepal's domestic politics.



In January, India's former ambassador to Nepal, KV Rajan argued that New Delhi was not "comfortable" about the growing US-UK influence in Nepal (<http://www.observerindia.com>). He also predicted "substantial dilution" of Indian influence in the country in the coming years. If a senior Indian diplomat, who continues to advise the South Block on Nepali affairs, predicts such a scenario, it should be taken as a genuine concern of the Indian state.

Last month the Maoists were reportedly back in Delhi, and this added a fresh dimension to the uncertainty over the continuation of

peace talks with the government that echoed KV Rajan's exact concern. They demanded that the government should annul the Memorandum of Understanding on terrorism signed with the US government and "expel US security advisers currently in Nepal".

Interestingly, the Maoists did not mention India's current help to the Royal Nepali Army, but argued that the US presence in Nepal is part of its wider policy to encircle China by "keeping an eye on India". On the surface, the two statements don't appear to have any connection. However, if viewed in the wider

Green revolution

A cleaner and greener Kathmandu, one tree at a time.

SOPHIA PANDE

For all the talk of a concrete jungle and the fact that public parks are rare, Kathmandu Valley has a surprising amount of greenery. In fact, comparing period pictures from the 1960s of central Kathmandu to today, shows a lot more trees growing in between houses and office blocks. On the Valley rim, the protected forests of Nagarjun and Shivapuri and the community forests on the hills south of Bhaktapur are much more verdant.

But in inner-city Kathmandu, the roots of Kathmandu's green revolution are being laid by groups like Save the Environment Foundation (SEF) and the Environment Division of the Kathmandu Metropolitan City. They are busy planting trees along roads, traffic islands and vacant lots. SEF has been working since 1994 to set up green belts around the Ring Road and along the city's main thoroughfares. The effort is gaining momentum, especially with private firms chipping in to maintain the greens. Many flowering traffic islands and young trees are prominently donated and maintained by companies like Carlsberg and Toyota who realise that such publicity works to everyone's benefit.

To be sure, Kathmandu is still far from being a green city. SEF's Chanda Rana knows this better than most. "Unfortunately, planting trees in areas like New Road is



completely unfeasible because of the amount of urban congestion already present," she told us.

Just outside New Road, on the ever-shrinking Tundikhel, there used to be two 80-year-old ginkgo trees shaped like giant bonsai. Every *Gai Jatra* its branches would accommodate scores of locals who climbed it for a better view of the parades. Unfortunately, both fell prey to road expansion and only one survived the translocation to Godavari. Other trees like the beautiful pipal near the Nepal Rastra Bank in Baluwatar was simply axed down. For what it's worth, the roads are wider now and we have more overhead pedestrian crossings.

The good news is that SEF recently planted 400 ginkgos right around Tundikhel because the trees are good air purifiers and their

strong roots gives them the best chance of survival on the sidewalks. The rare trees date back to the Jurassic era and may not have survived had it not been for Buddhist monks in China and Japan who lovingly preserved them. Ginkgos are also incredibly resilient, even surviving the atomic bomb blast in Hiroshima.

Rare old trees can still be found in pockets of Kathmandu. Tree lovers can behold awe-inspiring specimens inside the British and Indian Embassy premises where the forest is so thick, a family of foxes has made it its home. Trees have continued to flourish on the grounds of the Narayanhiti Palace, Singha Darbar, Baber Mahal, the prime minister's quarters at Baluwatar, Neer Bhawan, Kiran Bhawan and the enclaves of other foreign embassies. The gardens of Keshar Mahal, currently undergoing

renovations ('Renaissance of romance', #152) also houses some veteran trees.

It takes vision to plant trees because they are an investment that takes time to mature. The best part about taking the initiative to make our Valley greener is that individual effort makes a big difference. On hot summer days most people find welcome relief under the shade of the magnificent jacaranda trees that line Darbar Marg (see pic). They were planted by the Late Princess Jayanti Rajya Lakshmi Devi Shah to beautify the road leading to the palace on the occasion of visit Nepal Year 1998. Today, the trees have grown and spread, giving the boulevard a leafy look that is a poignant symbol of her foresight and dedication.

Small things also count, like individual efforts to grow a few ginkgos in school premises, restaurants and private gardens. A consortium of private companies located around Tinkune could take the initiative to adopt the unsightly triangle and turn it into a beautiful park. Or, people could support private-public partnerships by supporting efforts of organisations like SEF. ♦

Contacts: SEF - 4375858
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Save the trees!

The Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT) and other conservation groups this week renewed a 10-year-old campaign to save the trees lining the Arniko Highway near Bhaktapur. The trees are being uprooted this week by the municipality citing safety reasons, but KVPT says they should be trimmed and not cut.

Activists are now moving to court and getting a stay order to halt the ongoing destruction of trees along the highway. Some 150 of the trees between Bhaktapur and Thimi have already been uprooted, and the trust says that at this rate most of the remaining trees to Sanga Bhanjyang will be gone by the end of the monsoon.

"We are telling them, Kathmandu is becoming a concrete jungle, let's keep these trees, cut the dangerous ones and trim the rest," said the KVPT.

In 1993, KVPT started a similar campaign when the Roads Department awarded a Rs 10,000 contract to remove 7,000 trees between the Ring Road to Sanga. That campaign was successfully halted after only 400 trees had been destroyed.

The poplars lining the Arniko Highway outside Bhaktapur are so stately that their shadows can even be seen in this picture taken from 270km up in space by space shuttle astronauts at noon in February 1987 (see pic).

The Roads Department says storms caused several fatalities in Kathmandu Valley this year from trees falling on vehicles, and add that the trees will pose a danger to the trolley bus lines when the service starts in September. The authorities used the safety argument to go on a logging spree recently to destroy 50 majestic eucalyptus along the Chabahil Road. "No reasons were ever made public (and with no public resistance), and Kathmandu was deprived of one of its unique ecological landmarks next to one of its important historical sites at Chabahil," says KVPT.

The trees along Arniko Highway were planted in the early 1970s and are an example of environment engineering, giving shade and visual comfort to an increasing number of people who use this road both on wheels as on foot. KVPT admits that the poplars may not have been the best choice but they should be trimmed, not uprooted.



BIZ NEWS

In the black

What is bad news for long-distance bus operators has been good news for private airlines. They have cashed in on the one-week blockage of Prithvi Highway to Pokhara and Tribhuban Rajpath to Hetauda after landslides. Almost all airlines have doubled, if not tripled, their flights. Simara tops the domestic destinations with nearly 20 flights on some days this week. The rise in traffic has come with a corresponding increase in allegations that airlines are gouging passengers to pay double normal rates.

Airline operators admit their tickets cost double the original price, but say this is because they are doing charter operations. Many are charging one-way passengers a roundtrip fare even if they are guaranteed 100 percent occupancy on the return flight. "We are trying our every best to check this," says Birendra Basnet of Buddha Air. They have alerted their clients through the media. "It is very difficult to detect which travel agents and individuals are engaged in black marketing airline tickets, but the situation is difficult to control because desperate passengers pay the higher rates." Officials at the Civil Aviation Authority Nepal say they are aware of the problem. "We have alerted our stations to be watchful about this," CAAN's Mohan Adhikary told us.

Arrivals up

This is supposed to be the monsoon lean season, but tourist arrivals are up compared to last year. Amidst signs of further political instability, there are some signs of revival in the battered tourism industry. There has been a 30 percent spurt in tourist arrivals by air in July compared to the same month last year. Close to 18,000 visited the country last month. Indian nationals, that normally comprise one-third of the total arrivals, were up by 41 percent while visitors from other countries increased by 22 percent, including those from prime markets like the US, Japan, France, Australia and Holland. Arrivals from Spain, Italy, New Zealand, Norway, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Israel and Sweden too have gone up. The only decline was registered from Britain and Germany, that fell to six and 11 percent respectively. "The growth puts Nepal back on the recovery track," says Nepal Tourism Board's Marketing Manager Aditya Baral. The tourism nosedive started after the hijacking of IC814 in 1999 (a year in which Nepal saw a record 500,000 tourists) and has never recovered.

On the money

A new premium savings account has been launched by Nepal Industrial & Commercial (NIC) Bank. It offers prime depositors an attractive interest rate and other features designed to provide additional benefits including customised life insurance cover. At five percent per annum, NIC says its Life Savings Account has one of the highest rates in the market. A minimum balance of Rs 50,000 is required.

Better insured

Life insurance just got a little more cost effective and convenient with the 'One year Renewable Group Term Assurance Plan (RGTP)' introduced by Insurance Corporation (LIC) Nepal, which offers pure term insurance cover. It begins on completion of 18 years and ends at the age of 55, and covers both accidental and natural deaths. Under this plan, the head of the group is issued a Master Policy. The premium is payable once a year.

ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

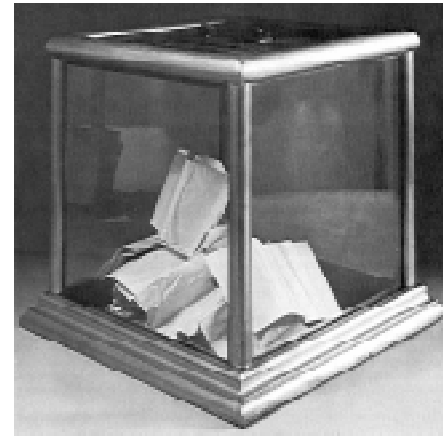
Ballot boxing



After another round of business elections, we must ask if we are choosing the right kind of leaders.

Although government elections are still distant, the Nepali business community had their fair share last week as they placed their votes for the country's apex business body. After equating democracy with voting and elections, both professional bodies and all secondary associations too revolve around much discussed elections—be it of the Institute of Chartered Accountants for Nepal (for which there is a writ petition on election rigging pending at court) or the Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI). In the ensuing hullabaloo, what we really need to ponder is whether we are taking this whole business of democracy and voting to a point where we're stifling rather than nurturing our economic institutions.

Corporate culture has embraced the policy of elections with open arms, going so far as to electing directors from public shareholders. The Beed wonders what sticky situations we would run into if, instead of a proper evaluation system, peers or other employees just went ahead and elected the CEO or a department head. Leadership theory, studies and citations tell us that the best leaders



are not the ones that are elected.

It is all about demonstrating your success and replicating it. You cannot have someone lead if they haven't proved their mettle. It is important for a leader, in business parlance, to have "eaten his own poop". It is just as important for the CEO of business associations to successfully plan and execute business models.

Rather than having election manifestos in the vein of mainstream politics, there should be a 'laundry list' of things to clean up and goals to achieve that must be tackled head on. Further, the general body of members like shareholders, should have the right through their elected people to take the CEO to task if the performance is substandard.

The Beed has talked ad

nauseum about business people doing politics and vice versa. The emphasis this time is more on leaving the new leadership to act as catalyst, changing the way associations function and probably even the way leaders are chosen. In the case of FNCCI, there have been many discussions for an overhaul in the way the body functions but there has been little concrete action taken.

A good business leader leads by devolving power and putting in proper systems that work. Those who do become leaders have an opportunity to prove a point. If they are any good, they will prove their mettle by revolutionising their organisations. Failing that, in two years we'll be subjected to another round of ballot boxing, not to mention the possibility of splinter groups formed by those ignored during the last tenure. The point is, we should look upon these elections as collective business opportunities. The Beed is convinced that we can dig the flailing economy out with good people at the top. And the only way to do that is to use the vote wisely. ♦

Readers can post their comments or suggestions to arthabeed@yahoo.com

Powerful rupee hurts Indian exports

RANJIT DEVRAJ in NEW DELHI

India's exporters are worried by a phenomenon not seen in decades, the steady appreciation of the rupee over the dollar and foreign exchange reserves hovering above the \$80 billion dollar mark.

Particularly concerned at the unstinting rise of the rupee against the dollar in the first quarter of the fiscal year that began in April 2003 and continued into July are software exporters, who now earn \$10 billion worth of foreign exchange annually. The bulk of this is made by such majors as Wipro Technologies, Infosys Technologies and Telecommunications Consultants India Ltd (TCIL).

Wipro's chief finance officer Suresh Senapathy told IPS that the rupee's appreciation against the dollar represented a new challenge to his company, which earned \$195 million in the first quarter of the fiscal year. A hefty 77 percent of that came from software exports. "Proactive hedging helped us maintain exchange rates in the first quarter, but effective management (of the appreciating rupee) for long will be a difficult challenge," Senapathy said.

Company officials at the rival Infosys Technologies, which earns 75 percent of its revenue from North America, said they expected a loss of more than \$20 million from their profit margins this fiscal year as a result of the rising rupee. Both Infosys and Wipro are now shifting their business to Japan and Europe to compensate dollar losses through gains made by earnings from the steadier euro and the yen.

Other exporters who earn a combined

Huge dollar reserves and a strong rupee worry Indian information technology investors.

average of \$40 billion annually are now looking to the euro, yen and the British pound as well as to increased export volumes to make up for the losses. They see comfort in the fact that the currencies of India's competitors, such as China, Malaysia and Thailand, have either not appreciated or not appreciated as much as the rupee.

Said Ramesh Khanna, owner of a major apparel export firm based in the national capital: "We are still competitive but cannot hold out much longer if this trend continues and there are countries in the region like Taiwan and Philippines whose currencies have actually depreciated."

A recent survey conducted by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) covering 100 importers, exporters and financial institutions showed that most of them believed that the lower value of the dollar against the rupee had eroded their competitiveness in the international market.

FICCI made the assessment that the rupee was likely to continue on its upward trend, although this has been challenged by other experts. Saumitra Chaudhury, economic adviser to the prestigious Investment Information and Credit Rating Agency (ICRA), said in an interview that what is happening is determined not only by trade but by steady foreign direct investment (FDI) flows which he described

as "transient".

"This type of capital flow invariably levels off as asset prices rise—and that is when profit opportunities begin to diminish and investors start moving their capital out," Chaudhury said.

Some of the flows were the result of the fact that interest rates in India continue to be between 3 and 5 percent points higher than in the United States and other advanced countries. This encourages wealthy expatriates, foreign investors and even hedge funds to take advantage of the situation, exposing the economy to more footloose capital and highlighting challenges that other developing countries have faced in liberalising their economies.

India maintains high bank interest rates for political reasons—mainly because it does not want to hurt pensioners and people who have in the past been encouraged to put their savings into the provident fund and government-subsidised and tax-exempt bonds and saving instruments.

On 17 July, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) moved to fix a limit on the interest rates that foreign depositors would get on repatriable deposits. According to Chaudhury, what was happening was the inevitable result of India opening up its markets to foreign investment—and the phenomenon cannot be stopped unless the country reverts to its socialist, protectionist past.



It was neither practical nor desirable for the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to interfere in the process by buying up dollars to shore up the exchange rate as it did when the rupee sank to the psychological benchmark of Rs 46 to the dollar two weeks ago, he added.

Officially, the government seems ready to give up this interference. A study released late June by the Ministry of Commerce admitted that the RBI was "finding it difficult to keep the rupee from appreciating despite heavy buying of dollars."

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has, however, commended India's management of its foreign exchange reserves and said they were comparable to the best global practices. In a document titled 'Guidelines for Foreign Exchange Reserve Management' released earlier this year, the IMF said the Indian government was "maintaining a capacity to intervene in the markets to support the exchange rate

regime or to contain excessive volatility in the foreign exchange market".

"India intervenes in the market to even out lumpy demand or supply in thin markets to prevent destabilising speculation while facilitating foreign exchange transactions at market rates for all permissible purposes," the document said.

For the first time this year, India, because of its strong foreign exchange position, turned from being a borrower from the IMF to a lender. It contributed \$291 million to the multilateral institution in two tranches in May and June. "Selection of India as member of the Financial Transaction Plan for the first time by the IMF sends strong signals regarding the country's strength and resilience of its external sector to the international community," the RBI said in a note following the transfers that seemed to be aimed at India's despondent exporters. ♦ (IPS)

Twenty-four years after seeing it for the first time, an anthropologist goes back to the 12-year chariot festival of Bungadya to find out what has changed, and how much has stayed the same.

Pilgrims' progress



NARENDRA SHRESTHA

BRUCE OWENS

The 12-year festival of Bungadya that has just concluded is a festival that both Hindu and Buddhist Newars insist everyone should attend at least once in their lifetime. It is the large-scale version of the largest of Kathmandu Valley's innumerable annual festivals, and the god it honours is known by many names, Rato Matsyendranath and Karunamaya among them. This enormous chariot festival is inextricably woven into the lives of the Valley residents, and serves as a marker to reflect on what has changed not only in the festival itself, but also in the lives of those who have celebrated the tradition for more than a 1000 years. This year's *jatra* was different from the one I saw two decades ago when I first started studying them as an anthropologist, but at many moments it was almost eerily identical. Some of the changes were predictable results of abandoned tradition, but others were products of vital cultural innovation and revival.

Several of the changes due to cultural attrition are those that very few would notice, for they are apparent only early in the morning and late in the evening. Daily devotional activities at the chariot begin at around 3:30 in the morning, and build to a climax with the morning *nitya puja* around daybreak, when hundreds of people come, hoping to glimpse the god's face in the mirror in which Bungadya's reflection has been ritually bathed. Twenty years ago the pre-dawn was first filled with the sounds of the singers of the *Namsangiti* hymns, and then of various *bhajans* playing chime-like cymbals, horns and large double-ended drums. Musical groups would arrive in procession from various parts of the town, their drumming and clanging cymbals becoming louder as they reached the *rath*. After the *nitya puja* climax, and people had rushed forward to be sprinkled with the *prasad* of Bungadya's bathing water, the *tuta bhajans* would, one by one, take their place first in front of Bungadya's chariot, and then in front of the smaller chariot of Chakwadya, to sing hymns praising Bungadya in the various manifestations in which he is recognised.

Quieter, shorter

This wonderful cacophony of morning praise can still be heard, though it is now quieter and shorter than it was two decades ago. The *Namsangiti* singers are still in force, though few newcomers are among them, and there are fewer instrumental groups than before. Those who remain to sing and play every morning cite the increasing demands of office work, tighter schedules and declining interest as reasons for these changes, but this is difficult to ascertain, as it is hard to talk to those who now are absent, or who might have otherwise been inspired to join in the morning rites of wakening.

If the morning brings a chorus of sound to the chariots, the evening brings a festival of lights, and there was certainly no shortage of *batti* burners at the *rath* this year. Twenty years ago, however, among the many lamps burning around the chariot, one could often detect the form of a supine worshipper or two, swathed in cloth, and shielded with daubs of cow dung, topped with clay saucers of oil, burning with lighted wicks. This year's *jatra* saw only one *mhe matta chyakemha*, from Thimi, fulfilling a vow at Jawalakhel, accompanied by members of his family, who refilled the *salicas* with oil so that he might burn 360 over the course of the night.

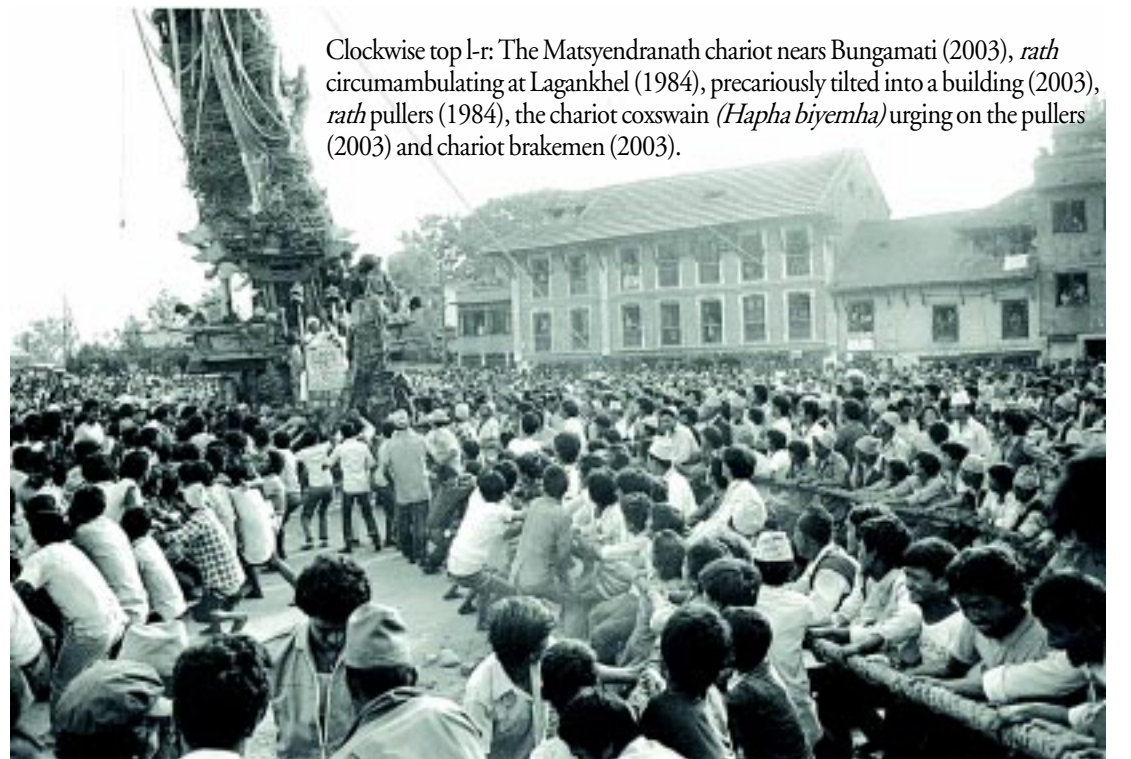
Far more visible, though paradoxically a bit less clear, are changes in the way the *rath* is pulled. There used to be a more general consensus about where the *rath* should stop along its route, and it is generally agreed that the *rath* pullers used to be more respectful of the decisions made by the *gurujuya paltan* as to when to call it quits for the day. But the contrast between then and now is not as clear as I had first thought. I recall being surprised to see the pullers ignore the *gurujuya paltan's* ceremonial conclusion of the day's pulling during the last 12-year festival, and chalked it up to Nepalis being newly empowered by the *jana andolan*. However, elders recalled other *jatras* of earlier times in which the same thing

had happened. This having been said, those who are most closely responsible for the welfare of the chariot agree that those who are pulling it now are less disciplined (and less skilled) than in the past. One of the Yangwals who lashes the *rath* together and often risks his life at the top of the rath in order to coordinate those pulling below told me that, these days, (with several clear exceptions) no one could say how far or late the *rath* would be pulled on any given day.

Given the rambunctiousness of today's *rath* pullers, the paving of the *jatra* route is a mixed blessing. The smooth hard tarmac makes it easier for the often-unruly pullers to pull the *rath* too quickly. The speed and direction of the chariot are controlled by brakemen, or *gakhus*, who walk backwards, immediately in front of the seven-foot high wheels, armed only with large chocks of wood attached to sapling handles, which they shove under the wheels at critical moments to redirect or stop the chariot. The nicely paved road and lively pullers make it necessary for them to do this far more often than in the past, placing them at greater risk, and lurching the vulnerable chariot more than it should.

Julus or jatra?

The *jatra* has always presented numerous occasions for conflict, whether it be in determining who will lead the chariot pullers with cries of *hoste*, struggling over the coconuts that are dropped from the chariot spire, or determining where it will stop for the night. The threat of these conflicts has become more ominous, however. Police armed with rifles rather than *latthis* now join the *panjus* as constant attendants ensconced on Bungadya's chariot, and events are heavily patrolled by police in riot gear and held earlier in the evening, so that the crowds are less emboldened by libation and darkness. Perhaps the line between *julus* and *jatra* threatens to become too thin.



Clockwise top l-r: The Matsyendranath chariot nears Bungamati (2003), *rath* circumambulating at Lagankhel (1984), precariously tilted into a building (2003), *rath* pullers (1984), the chariot coxswain (*Hapha biyemha*) urging on the pullers (2003) and chariot brakemen (2003).



BRUCE OWENS

Customs that had been forgotten or ignored have also been recently revived. Twenty years ago, steel cables concealed within the *rath's* tower added strength at the cost of inauspiciousness. In honour of a tradition that had been flouted for two decades, these unholy innovations have now been eliminated. In another instance, I was surprised one morning, nearly two decades ago, to find that the chariot had been pulled from its place of construction by the *phuku* in Pulchowk to Svorakutti Patti just below, before the normally scheduled pulling that afternoon. The people of Pulchowk had restored an earlier custom, which had been abandoned until the reconstruction of the *patti* that year.

Other new traditions have been invented. Women are now a conspicuous presence among the drummers and cymbal players who help urge the chariot pullers along: an exclusively male domain until a few years ago. People who live in the ever-taller and more numerous houses that line the *jatra* route now pour water on the chariot pullers as they go by—something that the chariot pullers seem to appreciate and even encourage, but that many others more closely tied to the *jatra* consider to be an unfortunate innovation. Though many complain of disbanded *guthis* and miss the feasts that they used to provide during the *jatra*, the relatively new phenomenon of so-called *Ihaapam* (or fair share) *bhways*, is partially filling the gap. The first-ever Kumari puja *Ihaapam bhway* was celebrated in Bungamati this year and over 600 people attended, their Rs 100 price of admission to be devoted to constructing a house for the village Kumari.

Some involved in the festival this year doubt that there will ever be another 12-year *jatra*, and for others, even the fate of the *jatra* of next year hangs in the balance. For others still, the question of whether or not there will be *jatras* in the future is preposterous, for it is impossible for them to imagine a year without one. Those who fear for its survival most often express frustration over being inadequately compensated for the considerable time and labour that they must devote to the *jatra*. Ritual obligations such as these were previously directly tied to rights to the fruits of land set aside for the purpose of perpetuating religious observances. But with the centralisation of the administration of major *guthi* holdings, the increasing privatisation of *guthi* lands and the increasing dependence upon wage and salary earnings, the costs of devoting one's labour and time to god's work (*dyahya jyaa*) are becoming ever higher, and the compensation given is, for many, not keeping pace.

One could view these complaints as signs of decline in religious devotion, but to do so would fail to acknowledge the forces that shape life in the Kathmandu Valley today, among them greater involvement in a global economy in a place where the costs of living have skyrocketed and the means of paying them are increasingly in cash.

Conventional wisdom has it that this festival has been going on for around 1,400 years, and historical evidence confirms that it is at least 11 centuries old. The crowds at this year's *jatra* were larger than any could remember, and their joy was undeniable. But the survival of Bungadya's *jatra* depends on more than the enthusiasm of devotees. It will also require that the government that now controls the assets that fund this festival help keep the privilege and burden of doing this work feasible for all concerned. ♦

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Joint Commission International

The lunchbox and the bomb



Reiko Watanabe's lunchbox was found by school authorities under a fallen mud wall, 500m from the hypocentre. Her body was never recovered.

Each anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki reminds us that memory is not morally neutral. It leans towards good or evil, and four main perspectives powerfully shape every historical account: the benefactor or his beneficiary, and the malefactor or his victim.

To be the beneficiary of an action is less glorious than to be the benefactor, because it hints at powerlessness and dependence. But to be the victim of a crime is obviously more respectable than being a criminal. And while no one wants to be a victim, many people nowadays want to have been a victim: they aspire to victim status.

Victimhood confers a right to

complain, protest and demand. It is in your best interest to retain the role of the victim, rather than receive reparation. Instead of a one-time satisfaction, you retain a permanent privilege. What is true about individuals is even truer of groups. If it can be convincingly shown that a group has been the victim of a past injustice, the group in question obtains a bottomless line of moral credit. The greater the crime in the past, the more compelling the rights in the present—which are gained merely through membership in the wronged group.

Of course, we now recognise more clearly than ever that history has always been written by the

victors, which gave rise in recent decades to frequent demands that the history of the victims and the defeated be written, at least next to that of the victors. This is an entirely legitimate demand, because it invites us to become familiar with a previously ignored past. However, speaking in the name of victims doesn't bring additional ethical merit.

Indeed, no moral benefit can be derived from evoking the past if we fail to realise our group's shortcomings or errors. But doing so is problematic. For example, in 1995 the Smithsonian Institution in Washington sought to take a fresh look at the Enola Gay, the plane that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. John Dower, an American historian and specialist of modern Japan, studied the issue at length. He demonstrated how history can be presented and valued in totally different ways: from an American or Japanese point of view, even though no one is making up facts or falsifying sources. Selection and combination of data is enough.

For the Americans, there was "a heroic or triumphant account in which atomic bombs represent the final blow against an aggressive, fanatic and savage enemy." From the Japanese perspective, there was an "account of victimization," in which "atomic bombs have become the symbol of a specific type of suffering—rather similar to the Holocaust for the Jews." At the

Hiroshima museum itself, the victim role has been exploited in ways that similarly distort memory. Neither the Japanese government's responsibility for initiating and continuing the war nor the inhuman treatment that prisoners of war or the subject civilian populations suffered under Japanese rule are adequately acknowledged.

Everyone chooses the point of view that fits him best. Whether we identify with the heroes or the victims, with the pilots of the plane that put an end to WWII or with the passive population subjected to the hell of atomic annihilation, we are always rooting with the "innocents" and the "good guys". At the Smithsonian, the Enola Gay was to play a central role in an exhibition meant to depict the Hiroshima bombing in all its complexity. However, due to the pressure of various US patriotic groups, the exhibition was cancelled, because it was seen as an offence against memory. By failing to depict the Americans in the role of heroic benefactors, it suggested that they were responsible for a massacre that could not be totally justified.

What would an account about evil be like if the author refused to identify himself with either the hero or the victim? Dower's research into the different ways Americans and Japanese remember Hiroshima provides us with a good example. He could identify with both groups:

Victimhood confers a right to complain, protest and demand.



"Little Boy", the atom bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima on 6 August 1948.

he belongs to one and his work has made him intimately familiar with the other. The title he gave to his version of the facts, after trying out "Hiroshima as a victimisation" (the Japanese point of view) and "Hiroshima as a triumph" (the American point of view), was "Hiroshima as a tragedy".

Tragedy: the word signifies not only suffering and distress, but the impossibility of redemption. Whatever path is chosen, in a tragedy tears and death inevitably follow. The cause of the Allied forces was undoubtedly superior to that of the Nazis or the Japanese, and the war against them was just and necessary. However, even "just" was provoked tragedies that cannot be dismissed lightly under the pretence that it was the enemy that suffered them.

The 12-year-old child's lunchbox blasted at Hiroshima, preserved by chance, with its rice and peas charred by the atomic explosion, weighs as much on our conscience as the Enola Gay. Indeed, it was the display of the box among the artifacts that the Hiroshima museum lent to the American institution that made the exhibition unacceptable to the former "heroes". Only if one musters the courage to envision the bomber and the lunchbox at the same time is it possible to comprehend the tragic vision of history that Hiroshima—like other episodes that have seared our modern conscience—most clearly represents. ♦ (© Project Syndicate)

Tzvetan Todorov is the author of *Hope and Memory*.

Off road?

Thailand's 'road map' for Burma is unclear.

LARRY JAGAN in BANGKOK

Thailand is pushing ahead with its initiative to bring democratic change to Burma by pursuing discussions on a road map to national reconciliation and democracy, but where this political journey leads to remains unclear. This week, Thai Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai (left) discussed his ideas for this road map with his Burmese counterpart Win Aung (right) in Bangkok. Win Aung said he would take the Thai ideas back to Rangoon for further discussion.

Since Thai officials met with Burma's deputy prime minister Khin Maung Win, who visited Bangkok as a special envoy for Gen Than Shwe recently, Surakiart has been canvassing vigorously for support from countries in Asia and Europe that have expressed interest in helping Burma implement democratic reform. Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra has said that Thailand was taking the initiative because the crisis in Burma was more than Rangoon could handle, and that it would be easier for it to deal with friendly neighbours than for the matter to be brought before the UN Security Council.

"We are doing what we are doing now because we are concerned about Burma. We are not pressuring Burma or interfering with its internal affairs," he said. "Since we are Burma's close neighbour, we should initiate something that leads to the international community's acceptance of developments in Burma."

Under its vision for this road map, Thailand wants the Burmese regime to



propose a series of concrete and practical steps towards democratisation. As part of this process, the Thai government would then host a meeting of interested parties that would be tasked with fleshing out the Burmese road map. But where this will lead—if it leads anywhere—remains unclear. To date, the Thai idea of this road map, floated in the wake of the detention of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, seems rather vague. "It's really only a concept that still needs to be fleshed-out," said a senior Thai foreign ministry source.

"It's a working idea that has to be refined before it gets seriously unveiled," added a senior Thai diplomat. European leaders who discussed with Surakiart at various bilateral meetings during the Asia-Europe Meeting in Bali last week all seemed to have been given varying versions of it. "It's not really a road map as such," a senior European official at the Bali meeting said in an interview, "but ten or twelve proposed steps which would help the Burmese military government to move towards full democracy within the next few years."

For all of the talk about the Thai road map however, many foreign governments



Pro-democracy supporters call for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi.

and the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN), of which Burma is a member, believe that the first step on any road map must be the release of Suu Kyi. For more than two months now, she has been held under what the government calls protective custody after a violent attack on her and her supporters in northern Burma. That attack has been blamed on pro-Rangoon elements.

"ASEAN and the Thai government have called for Aung San Suu Kyi's immediate release and we would like to see steps taken that would move towards her release," said Surakiart in Bali last month. "The recent release of more than ninety-one political prisoners is a good signal and if these steps can be spelt out as part of the road map as to how and when she would be released that would be very helpful."

But UN special envoy Razali Ismail—who helped broker the original talks between Suu Kyi and the generals—has also been very clear: there can be no dialogue process when one of the key partners is under detention. Privately, ASEAN leaders have made it clear to Rangoon that they expected Suu Kyi to have already been released by

now. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has warned the generals that if nothing happens soon, ASEAN will have to consider expelling Burma—although this would only be done as a last resort.

At the ASEAN meeting of foreign ministers in Phnom Penh in mid-June, Burma was asked to give them a firm date for Suu Kyi's release. This was reiterated by Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda last week during Win Aung's visit to Jakarta. Burma continues to ask its Asian allies to be patient. "We need some breathing space," Win Aung told his Indonesian hosts. But international pressure may be having an impact on Burma's generals. Last week, the military authorities allowed the International Red Cross in Rangoon to visit Suu Kyi in the guesthouse in which she is being detained.

Thai officials say they see the road map as having a course of steps—after the release of Aung San Suu Kyi—which would lead to Burma becoming a fully-fledged democracy before 2006 when Rangoon takes over the chairmanship of

ASEAN. The other steps would include Thailand hosting an international forum, which in the words of the Thai foreign minister would "brainstorm" with representatives of the Burmese military government on economic liberalisation, increasing political freedom, drawing up a constitution and then holding elections within the next two years or so. In truth, there is very little new in this framework that Razali has not already been discussing in detail with the three main players in Burma: the military, the democratic opposition and the ethnic minorities.

But what is new is the Thai proposal to host an international forum on Burma. "This would be a senior officials meeting rather than a ministerial one," said the Thai foreign ministry spokesman, Sihesak Phuangketkeow. Originally, it was to include representatives of ASEAN, China, Japan and Europe. The United States did not seem to be on the original invitation list.

But in the course of the last week or so, ministry officials have realised that the guest list has become too long and the thinking now appears to be an initial meeting which would include Thailand, China and India with representatives of the Burmese military junta. Thaksin has said that neighbouring countries need to agree first on political change in Burma. "As Burma's neighbours have the greatest interest in seeing the country become democratic and thereby ensure regional stability and security," added a senior Thai diplomat, "it would make sense for them to be the main participants in the road map forum." ♦ (IPS)

Break down

Discipline in the White House is sliding.



the *Financial Times* last Friday, the newly perceived weakness of National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and her staff, is making it very difficult for the secretary to gain traction there. Instead, Powell is relying increasingly on his friends in Congress to both press his positions and to keep the Pentagon on its heels.

Indeed, the overriding impression is one

of a diffusion of power that the president might find difficult to recover when official Washington reconvenes in September for what is shaping up as a very difficult autumn. Congress has scheduled a battery of hearings on whether, how, and why the administration exaggerated the threat to the country allegedly posed by Iraq in the run-up to the war, and how and why it so

completely failed to anticipate and plan for the post-war debacle.

Unless the military has captured Saddam Hussein and resistance to the US occupation has been substantially reduced by then, those hearings could spell major trouble for the administration. Bush's handlers appear to have sensed that he has lost authority over the few weeks, despite last week's killings of Saddam's two sons, a development that appears to have at least temporarily halted a steep slide in Bush's popular support. Adding to the growing sense of a vacuum at the White House has been Rice's sharply diminishing public stature as a competent arbiter of policy. Her case was probably not helped by Bush's effusive—if irrelevant—endorsement of her as "an honest, fabulous person" at his press conference.

Her initial attempts to blame the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) for the president's reference to the African yellowcake have clearly backfired, and her tardy admission that she had not read key intelligence documents on Iraq has exposed to the broader public her lack of expertise and authority. That shortfall has been evident for a long time but became particularly pronounced last year when Cheney assailed United Nations' weapons inspectors just as Powell had persuaded Bush to request new inspections.

Her public exposure as a lightweight, combined with Bush's babble, has set back the hopes of those who thought Powell might regain more control over policy. The result is the spectacle of an uncoordinated scramble for power, with Cheney and the Pentagon—backed by Congressional right-wingers—still pushing their agenda, at the same time that Powell and key Democrats and moderate Republicans try to push back, with Bush, Rice and the White House somewhere out in right field.

The jockeying was clear all week long. While Powell and the senators all but pleaded for a new UN Security Council resolution that would permit more countries to contribute troops and financial assistance to Iraq, Wolfowitz rejected any arrangement that would diminish US control over the occupation. In a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon—a favourite of the hawks—Bush declined to criticise Israel's construction of a security fence in the Occupied Territories as he had done just the week before. And while Sharon was toasted at the White House, the powerful Republican Majority Leader in the House of Representatives, Tom DeLay, assured his right-wing hosts in Jerusalem of his reservations about the roadmap and that he "can't imagine in the very near future that a Palestinian state could ever happen". ♦ (IPS)

WASHINGTON—If foreign leaders and diplomats appear increasingly confused about where US foreign policy is being made, they are not alone. From Qalqiya on the West Bank to Karbala in Iraq to North Korea, contending forces within both the administration of President George W. Bush and his Republican Party are duking it out for control, and the White House seems more and more unable to impose discipline.

While the neo-conservatives and right-wing hawks in the offices of Vice President Dick Cheney and Pentagon chief Donald Rumsfeld, who led the drive to war in Iraq, have been put on the defensive as the costs in blood and treasure of the post-war occupation mount, they have by no means retreated from the battle. And while Secretary of State Colin Powell has worked quietly to extend his power, particularly over the Israeli-Palestinian roadmap and dialogue with Pyongyang, right-wing elements in Congress appear determined to thwart him, even if the Pentagon's voice on the two issues has been somewhat diminished.

To succeed, Powell needs a strong ally within the White House, and, as noted by

Future downturn

DHAKA—The implications of the Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA) that is being phased out in 2005 is worrying Bangladeshi businessmen and economists. The MFA controls the international trade in garments and provides developing countries with preferential access to leading markets such as North America and the European Union, which together import 92 percent of Bangladesh's total garments output.

From 2005 Bangladesh will find itself at a disadvantage in the international garments market. Duty-free access to US markets for 72 developing countries in the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa, he said, will render Bangladeshi garment exports uncompetitive.

In June, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) warned that up to a million workers, most of them women, could lose their jobs when tariff-free access ends. The best preparation, according to some experts, is to establish spinning and weaving mills in Bangladesh to produce fabric and yarn. In the last decade, the improvement in Bangladesh's economy was driven primarily by the garments sector, which brought in \$6 billion in export earnings in 2001-2002. It employs 1.9 million people and generates almost \$2 billion dollars worth of economic activity in secondary areas such as banking and transport. (IPS)

To the poll

NEW DELHI—India, the world's biggest democracy, is not due to hold general elections until next year, but its two main political parties are already in election mode. In recent months, they have been planning strategies, projecting personalities, championing causes and wooing allies from among smaller regional parties. As with the two general elections in 1998 and 1999, this one too will feature a clash between the personalities of elderly statesman and prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and the Italian-born Sonia Gandhi, leader of the Congress Party.

Gandhi's foreign origins and halting Hindi are seen by many Congress Party members as a liability. It triggered off a split in the party before the last general elections. But the splinter National Congress Party (NCP), which later agreed to partner with the Congress Party in running Maharashtra, is now in a mood for compromise. But regional parties seem uncomfortable with the BJP's fundamentalist agenda—and this may affect the ruling party's political fortunes. It is also faced with a serious threat from Hindu fundamentalist groups that helped it to come to power who now want to see it make good on a promise to build a temple at the exact site where the Babri Masjid once stood. (IPS)

Muzzling NGOs

CANBERRA—The Australian government wants legislation that would allow charities to be stripped of tax concessions if they are "too involved" in advocating changes to government policies, a proposal that non-profit groups say reveals a draconian move to quell dissent. Under the draft Charities Bill, a "disqualifying purpose" that would prevent a charity from gaining tax concessions would include any of "advocating a political party or cause", "supporting a candidate for political office" or "attempting to change the law or government policy". A charity would be excluded if advocacy were deemed to be either the sole purpose or "more than ancillary or incidental to the other purposes of the entity concerned". In a bid to defuse the growing controversy, Australian Treasurer Peter Costello blamed media misrepresentation. Under the current system, the approximately 40,000 non-profit groups in Australia can be, but not all are, exempt from income tax, the goods and services tax as well as enabling donations from individuals to be claimed as a personal tax deduction. (IPS)



Save the Children
UK

INVITATION FOR LETTER OF INTEREST

Save the Children UK (SC-UK) is an international non-government organization that works for a world that respects and values each child, that listens to them and learns from them, and in which all children have hope and opportunity.

Save the children UK has been working in Nepal since 1975. Since 1995 the main focus of our work has been in localized and increasingly child focused community development work and our current competence derives from this, more recent, history. In recent years, SC UK in Nepal felt the need to reorient its programs towards enabling children and the societies they live in to identify and secure the opportunities for their development based on their rights. The concept mobilises the people of the community to study a situation, decide what they want to do, both as individuals and as a community, and implement the project themselves. Since 1997 we have been developing work and strategies in the fields of primary/basic education, HIV/AIDS, children's participation and social violence against girls. A specific intention here was to work out how we might achieve a broad (national) impact with our work despite what we were coming to see as the dual failure of policy and community-based approaches in Nepal. The four strategic objectives chosen for 2000 – 2004 are:

1. Improve access to quality primary and basic education, primarily for those excluded because of caste, gender, disability, rapid urbanisation or geographical isolation.
2. Demonstrate - to communities, NGOs, donors and the government - that important spaces can become safe for girls.
3. Reduce the potential impact of the emerging threat of HIV/AIDS on children's lives in Nepal.
4. Work with government and civil society institutions - including children's organizations - to ensure the effective implementation of, and to extend the scope of, key provisions within the Nepal Children's Act.

Given the timeframe of the strategy, SC-UK will be evaluating all projects between now and March 2004 so as to assess the effect/impacts, lessons learnt and to develop program further. Therefore, SC-UK invites individuals to show their interest to evaluate the various programs. Those showing interest in any field need to meet the following criteria:

- Having extensive experience in any of the following fields:
 - HIV/AIDS, gender (girls issues), Education and Child Participation.
- A sound understanding of the socio-economic and policy analysis in regard to field of interest - education, HIV & gender dynamics in Nepal and/or the South Asian context.
- Demonstrated experience in conducting reviews/assessment and evaluation using a variety of techniques (including participatory tools).
- Having strong English report writing skills and familiar with word processing applications.
- Inter-personal/facilitation skills in view of the need to work with an evaluation team and conduct meetings/interviews with a variety of stakeholders.
- Understanding of Nepali language and culture is desirable.

If you are interested, please send your resume with letter of interest specifying your field of experience and competence along with sample writing before 31st august 2003 to:

Save the Children UK
Jawalakhel
GPO Box No 992, Kathmandu, Nepal
email: mail@sc-uk.org.np

SC(UK) promotes and practices equal opportunities.

Palace, parties and peace



Narhari Acharya in Sanghu, 4 August

साँघु

To resolve the crisis in this war torn country, King Gyanendra made his royal proclamation on October Fourth that dissolved the House of Representatives and sacked Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. But the events that followed must have made him realise the problems have not been solved in the way he thought possible. This is evident in the dismissal of Chand government and the appointment of Surya Bahadur Thapa.

Till date we have had two rounds of peace talks. Six informal meetings were held before the third round of talks was confirmed. The only means of communication between the two negotiating parties are letters, the contents of which hold nothing specific. For the most part, we are ignorant about what was really discussed during those informal talks. The exchange of Maoist and government missives back and forth proves the informal talks were just an act—the people have yet to hear, let alone see anything of importance emerge.

Although political parties are not part of the negotiations, they have a clear agenda. They have already started holding talks with the Maoists: their agenda is very clear and they coordinate well with the rebels. On the other hand, the government lacks vision. In a letter to the government, the Maoists asked them about their objectives and vision. They may not be on the streets, but they have succeeded in staying involved, and clear on their terms and conditions.

Although the talks in 2000 ended in failure, at least everyone's cards were on the table. The Maoists had put forward a 31-point list to Deuba's team, with three main demands: a republic, an interim government and a new constitution. The government said it would negotiate on everything but the rebel's demand for a republic. The talks held then stood on firm ground and laid the foundation for concrete negotiations. At present it is near impossible to say what the future holds. We all recognise that the talks are in jeopardy. The political parties must initiate formal and legal talks with the Maoists if we are to salvage anything.

It is of utmost importance for the political parties to intervene. The responsibility must not lie solely with the present unconstitutional government. The Maoists must not lose faith or their patience. They must be transparent with their demands to the people. We must seek a political resolution that involves the political parties.

Allied

Dambar Krishna Shrestha in Himal Khabarpatrika, 1-17 August

हिमाल

After the Maoist leaders suddenly went underground last month, their organisational expansion into the east of the country became clear. In the presence of Maoist chief Prachanda and leader Baburam Bhattarai, the Limbuwan Liberation Front and Kirat Workers' Party reorganised the Kirat National Front during the two communal parties' first unity convention held between 16-18 July. Reports say both Prachanda and Bhattarai rode horses to reach Yangnamma in Panchthar district.

Fifty-nine-year-old Bhaktaraj Kandangwa (*pic below*), a member of the Maoist Revolutionary People's Council and chief of the people's government of Tehrathum, was elected the new chairman of the Kirat National Front (KNF). A past merger between the Limbuwan Study Forum and Khumbuwan Liberation Front brought the KNF into being.



That Maoist-mediated unity did not last. Khumbuwan Front's Gopal Khambu disassociated himself from the new party, and subsequently the Maoists. His splinter group called themselves the Kirat Workers' Party.

On 23 July, the reorganised Kirat National Front declared its comeback and made public its 29-member new committee in Dharan, which did not include Gopal Khambu. Insiders say he has been made a politburo member of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). Khambu is also part of the revolutionary people's council formed under Baburam Bhattarai.

Kandangwa stressed reunification was necessary to fight discrimination. Referring to the demands for regional self-governance by the Kirats of the east, he added that even the Maoists have accepted this fact. He also believes that his party and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) need each other at present.

The Maoists have tried to expand their presence in the east by bringing the two parties that are demanding the separate sovereign states of Khumbuwan and Limbuwan under its umbrella. They, in turn, are trying to use the Maoist banner to achieve their goals. "Our demand is not related to class, it is about community," says Kandangwa. "If they betray us, we won't hesitate to take up arms against them." How long the Maoist rebels, who believe in class struggle, go along with these community-centric organisations, remains to be seen.

Merger

Rajdhani, 5 August

राजधानी

The subject of merging the Armed Police Force (APF) with the Royal Nepali Army has led to friction between the Defence and Home Ministries—both want exclusive control. The dispute arose after the National Security Council (NSC) decided to assimilate the paramilitary force, formed some four years ago, into the army proper.

On Monday, APF chief Sahabir Thapa expressed his disagreement on the subject to Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa. He argued that maintaining a paramilitary force is an acceptable international practice that doesn't need to be dissolved. Thapa also told the prime minister that the APF has already established a separate identity for itself by fighting the Maoists. "If this is followed through, it could have a negative effect on the security situation and demoralise security personnel too," he said. That same day Home Secretary Tika Dutta Niraula also met with the prime minister and stated his dissatisfaction over the decision of the NSC, adding it would be an undemocratic move. Three months ago, while the Chand government was still in power, the security council had decided to make this recommendation to the king. The prime minister chairs the security council.

"We feel it is a wise decision to merge the armed police force into the army," says Defence Ministry spokesperson Bhupendra Poudel. "And we

have not heard any disagreement from the Home Ministry." The Defence Ministry had notified the Home Ministry about a month ago. They, however, have not responded. Prime Minister Thapa said he is studying the matter seriously.

More bombs

Nepal Samacharpatra, 7 August

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

Security in entry points to the Valley have been intensified after information that Maoists have smuggled explosives into the country through the Nepal-India border. They had reportedly used some young men from Belauri and Gaddachowki, bordering to Kanchanpur, to carry GI pipes and explosives on their bicycles. Twenty quintals of explosives were stored for two days inside the house of a Nepali Congress worker in Pipladi VDC. The pipes and explosives were on their way to Dadeldhura. Security officials say that the Maoists have used GI pipes and explosives to make socket bombs. These have supplied in large quantities to Dadeldhura, Accham, Bajhang and Bajura districts.

According to sources, three Maoist activists, including a female, were seen unloading a heavy sack from a bus at Salli Bazar. They then trekked along the Bheri River through the night. In related news, about 150 armed Maoists were seen training in Dulalthai jungle of Bidyapur VDC in Surkhet. The Maoist militia has blocked the route and villagers are unable to travel. There is reportedly a severe food shortage in the village.



Newspaper headline: Property and lives lost in floods. People: Help! Help! Surya Bahadur Thapa: Please be patient, let the talks begin first...

देशान्तरसाप्ताहिक Deshantar, 3 August

No quick-fix

Himalaya SJB Rana in Drishti, 29 July

दृष्टि



The nature of the letters exchanged between His Majesty's government and the Maoist rebels is frightening. Their directness at laying blame can be interpreted both positively and negatively. Bhattarai's letter shows that the main grievance of the Maoists is against the government's attempt to win the hearts of the people through health camps. Meanwhile, the government is less than thrilled with the Maoists' continued 'donation' drives. The code of conduct has been violated by both sides and these issues have been raised before the negotiation teams in the absence of a monitoring mechanism. Even after six rounds of informal talks, these matters have not been resolved.

Negotiation is all about give and take—each party picks a weakness of the opponent and tries to build their strength on it. This is why the Maoists honed in on the much-contested point of limiting the army to 5km of their barracks. By pressuring the government on this point, the Maoists are making it apparent that they want a serious and decisive dialogue.

The focus now should be on the political agenda put forward by the Maoists and the government. However, the crux lies in whether the present government has the power to make decisions and execute them. If the king participates in the talks as the Maoists demand, he will be stepping outside his constitutional boundaries. This will be unacceptable to the Maoists themselves, and the other political parties too.

The present government is ready for an interim government like the Maoists demand, but they are not likely to let the rebels lead it. The other Maoist demand for proportional representation of all sections in the new government structure is acceptable, but a constituent assembly might draw controversy because the agitating political parties believe amendments to the present constitution will suffice. The government, however, may suggest a referendum.

But the rebels have made some impractical demands that they need to abandon. They must lay down their arms if they wish to enter mainstream politics. Then comes the issue of guerrillas—the peace talks must decide how the rebel army can be assimilated into national life in a way acceptable to everyone.

Including the political parties is crucial. They are still divided between reinstating the parliament and an interim government. Some constitutional experts say the present prime minister can reinstate the parliament since it was dissolved on the recommendation of a former prime minister. The king could also initiate a revival by executing Article 127. A referendum can make a decision on the remaining issues. At the end of the day, one thing is certain: there are no quick-fix solutions.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

Let them [the Maoists] come to the parliament. We'll have a roundtable conference there.

- Girija Prasad Koirala, President of the Nepali Congress. Nepal Samacharpatra, 7 August

Back at Sundarijal >41

"I am happy, I thank all the gods..."



BP Koirala gets a visit in solitary confinement at Sundarijal Jail. His wife Sushila is permitted to see him for half-an-hour. At first BP thinks the government is trying to score propaganda points by allowing her visit, but he decides to see her. They talk about family matters, and about BP's desire for an open trial.



Thursday, 14 April 1977

Sundarijal

It is now becoming clear why the other day Ass Anchaladish came to inquire whom from my family members I wanted to consult in connection with the engagement of lawyers for my case. Today's paper, ie dated yesterday (*Gorkhapatra* and *Rising Nepal*) have published a condemnatory statement contradicting the news that had appeared apparently in some important Indian newspapers (the news concerned the reported judgement of capital punishment that has been given to me after a closed door and secret trial) I have been told the case is in court, ie the trial is on, but I have not been given any formal notice nor have been produced before any court. The news published in the Indian press may well be correct in that the judgement has already been given and it would be communicated to me at any time. The whole govt is a big fraud—my trial and the case being pending in a court of law is a big lie. If they asked Sushila to meet me it will be really with a view of gaining a propaganda score against the Indian press. How can a govt run wholly on the basis of lies and fraud, and that is why I feel that the govt is most unreliable and can collapse at the least prod—otherwise if the govt were stable and sure of itself it wouldn't resort to chicanery and fraudulence. The purpose of keeping me in such isolation and darkness is clear—it will facilitate them to make any kind of propaganda that they choose as far as I am concerned—any lies, any fraud. GM is definitely wrong to think that keeping us so isolated is indicative of the king's indecision on the question of compromise or even talk with us—the indecision being that he is being pulled in opposite directions by the softliners and hardliners among his powerful advisers. He wants to keep us in prison and if he succeeded he would even like us to die in prison. The propaganda in the foreign press is coming in his way—that is why this big fraud is being perpetrated. There is no other explanation.

The king has made a pedestrian statement on the occasion of New Years' Day. He has tried to catalogue the achievements—and what a pitious catalogue it is—and mind you the achievements of 5 years are listed in the catalogue. He has beaten his own drum about how he has rallied the international status of the country by heading the delegation of the non-aligned conference in Colombo. It is a very superficial statement, and I was very unhappy going through it, all the time being conscious that the king, ie the head of the state and of the govt, was making that kind of statement. He was ill-advised to enumerate his achievements. It is most puerile, very unfortunate.

Did a lot of laundry and had a good bath—I had performed the similar task 12 days ago. I have been really very weak + didn't have strength to wash clothes which piled up awfully soiled + and since I feel feverish too I didn't feel like bathing. I of course massaged my body, not formally massaged, only lightly rubbed mustard oil on my body and wiped it off with a rough towel. Thrice in course of the last 12 days—therefore I am feeling awfully dirty. All this took me the whole morning and during the day I feel too tired to do any work—hence no reading and writing today. In the evening it becomes suddenly cold, there was some rain and the wind was very strong—almost stormy weather. The construction of the house, the structure, the tin roof, and the high walls surrounding it making the compound some kind of a basin—all combined to produce a peculiar—eerie—humming and at times whining sound when there is a strong wind. The structure starts cracking like a ship in a storm sea, ready to fly apart at every buffet of the wind. My room leaks in a few places and at the attic, disturbed birds flutter and the mice scamper, dropping pieces of stone masonry, bricks and even droppings into my room through the chinks in the ceiling. I am amazed at my unperturbability because I used to be extremely afraid of ghosts and such unnatural manifestations...If I were to believe in spiritual and unnatural ghostly manifestations I would have readily believed that this house is infested with ghosts—all kinds of sounds and noises, voices like those of human beings, groans, heavy treading on the floor, whispers, gasps, sound

of somebody bathing in the bathroom with full tap on, pouring of water, laundering, beating of washing clothes with wooden sticks, taps on the door, sounds as if some heavy things have fallen on the floor. You seem to hear the voice of your own and sometimes you own name being called distinctly.

Friday, 15 April 1977

Sundarijal

Today's *Gorkhapatra* has an editorial criticising the statement of JP. JP's statement I haven't seen. I didn't get the *Rising Nepal* today, which too must have written a similar editorial on JP's statement. It appears JP has given a critical statement on the present system which he has perhaps compared with a colonial type of system—and perhaps made some mention of the monarchy and its reactionary role. It is all gratifying in the sense that the design of the king of Nepal to kill us slowly in prison under a veil of secrecy and darkness is not succeeding—he can kill us, there is no doubt about that, but now it will have to be done with the knowledge of the world. This is a part of the victory gained. I had fervently hoped that a dialogue with the king would start after a few months of our arrival, and that the process of democratization on which alone lasting unity and national cohesion can be achieved, would commence. Instead of that, the king is behaving as if by our return the restraint that our stay in India had over him as been removed—and that he is indeed...

It is very unimaginative of him—not like his father who had a better sense of politics + and a shrewd assessment of the realities of a situation. He would have grasped the opportunity which our return to Nepal has provided to the king with both hands.

The govt is in a quandary about us. If they bring us before a court, they don't know what defence we would like or what character the case would assume in the course of the trial, and moreover the trial has to be a public trial, a secret trial will carry no conviction anywhere. And if it is an open trial, our case will be a cause celebre and will do tremendous propaganda for our cause. If they decide not to bring us before a court of trial they will be the laughing stock of the world, having already announced to the world that we are on trial and that legal processes have started. I am very happy with this development—the total discomfiture of the little men in this dictatorship. I know now that the prospect of a compromise between the king and ourselves has receded and consequently I am in for very hard times in prison. But that is a personal concern...but so far as our cause of democracy is concerned, our suffering will have tremendous and everlasting impact. This is gratifying. The game of the king to kill us in silence has not succeeded. This is satisfying.

Yesterday there was an added show of military force in this camp. The rifles were pointed towards the building horizontally from the four guard towers—and I could see from my room that there was feverish activity going on in the tower. The soldiers and the COs instructing them were in full battle dress. They were guarding us as individuals ie now they have employed an army for that purpose, then thinking that it was not enough they have to prop up a demonstration of that capacity to kill me, if need be or if such orders were received, at the drop of a hat. Maybe such a demonstration is instead to cow me down and demoralise me. If it is so, what foolish idiots! And if it was really for training purposes, they should have realised that to point a rifle at a prisoner in his cell is tantamount to inflicting mental torture of the most brutal type.

In the afternoon, at about 4:30 the Ass Anchaladish came and said that he had brought Sushila with him in the car for an interview with me. Indeed she did come. My 1st impulse was to see her because the govt should then be able to say that they have permitted my wife to see me. [cont. 10.4.77] and the publicity given to my detention in isolation in the foreign press in some measure could be refuted. The propaganda in the Indian press about my trial in secret and the judgement given to me could also be met. That is why I was in the beginning reluctant to see her. Then I thought that perhaps I may be able to assess the situation outside by her, or at least know if she is all right, so ultimately I decided to see her. In such a situation I became too excited and didn't do what I had been planning for so many days to do—then after she was gone I regretted deeply the loss of this opportunity. She appeared to be in good health. Chetana and Manisha, Sriharsha, Ruchira and...couples are all here. Sushila received the message from Rosa at Varanasi to proceed to Kathmandu. Ass Anchaladish had gone there to convey this message to her. She arrived only this morning and hence had no time to meet any of our friends here. She told me that Shailaja is normally treated and she receives regular visitors. I could gather that Kishunji is also in prison. She only said [in Nepali] "*Kishunji harulai ta uta bheta diye ko chha kuni kina diye ko ho*". I am greatly relieved on the score of Shailaja and I take this information as a positive point of the interview. She told me that

Prakash is assisting Girija, Nanu is suffering from her old trouble for which she has gone to Delhi to consult a specialist. Manish was seriously ill with lung complications consequent upon an attack of measles. GP and Nona are all right, Sriharsha is trying to get a job in...travel agency and at the same time trying for a scholarship for research abroad. Ruchira is with him for some many months in Kathmandu and is likely to return to B'bay with her parents. She has to take her MA exams this spring. I don't think she can manage it. [Mama?] is a little disheartened that he was wasting his time with BSc if he was to join some medical college and...to support Sushila that for his admission to medical college in India. Rajnarayan who is now health minister in Delhi, should be approached. I, however, think that Dandawate should be contacted for scholarship for Sriharsha. Chetana has spoiled one paper, she will return to B'bay in June when her school reopens. All others are all right. Kalpana's one eye is irreparably damaged. Perhaps the second eye can be saved. JP and others, and all my friends, have sent affection and regards to me. JP is in a hospital in B'bay but on the whole the family affairs are what they need to be. A burden is lifted from my mind. From her demeanour I could gather that everything is all right outside even politically. Now about the specific purpose for which she has been called to interview me—consultation in connection with the appointment of lawyers to defend my case. I told her that I have demanded an open trial, and that I intend to debunk the whole case and expose the govt for which I need the assistance of competent foreign lawyers also because the Nepali lawyers can be brow beaten. For Nepali lawyers, these names...Ganesh Raj, Bhandari, Kusum. I also told Sushila that I have been demanding 4 things from the govt, ie more interviews, correspondence, books and newspapers. Ass Anchaladish said that the matter has reached the palace from where final orders will emanate. He further said that he himself has done it. Sushila gave me the impression of confidence...she seemed to "rise to the occasion" is the expression. She turned to the Ass Anchaladish to say, "Why, the trial should be an open trial otherwise it will not be considered a fair trial...or your demands are very legitimate and hoped they would be met, Anchaladishji, books are most important for our intellectual, particularly when he is kept in isolation...visits for children over here, they would like to meet their father..."

I repeatedly told her that the way I am living, kept in cynical disregard of Human Rights, has a powerful champion these days in the President of the USA. I don't think she got the hint. She is a very clever girl in some ways. [see 27.3]

[contd from 15.4] I just finished my afternoon tea. I had prepared tea very elaborately and served it to myself on a small tray with a plate of biscuits and cheese, and felt both satisfied and ludicrous. Said to myself that I needed just one person—an intimate one—to share this tea with me—that I could be a good housekeeper and place my partner in the housekeeping—when suddenly I heard knocking at the door. I had closed my bedroom door and was having tea in the bedroom itself. I thought I misheard, because such sounds are heard here off and on. But the next time the knocking was persistent—then I called come in and in comes the Major of the camp to say that the Ass Anchaladish had come to see me. I said—please ask him to come. He was just outside the door. He came in and said that Sushilaji had come to see me. With great difficulty I maintained my usual demeanour and kept quiet for a few seconds and then I said—where are we [to] meet? He said—outside on the veranda. I said—please bring her in I am coming. He goes out to fetch Sushila and I comb my hair and wrap myself with a khasto and come out of the room. Three chairs had been placed on the veranda and Anchaladish and Major had gone out to bring Sushila. When she appeared at the fore end of the veranda I walked up to her, held her hand, patted her cheeks and asked her to sit down. "How are you Sushila?" When our interview was over, I think it last a little over half and hour—when she got up to go I again held her in an embrace, patted her cheeks and said to take good care of your health and tell everybody that I remember them. At the steps of the veranda she stopped, asked if I had planted those flowing creepers. I said—no, they were already there when we arrived. Then I pointed her a plant with big red flowers growing near the compound wall and asked her to pluck them and take them with her. She said, "I like that flower in the creeper—which are fragrant. Can I pluck some of them?" This she said addressing the Camp Commander, and of course he said it is a wild growth you can take as many of them as you choose. She plucked [them] and this time, lifting her sad eyes to me, said goodbye. The small gates opened for them and closed. From a distance Nona was standing, and during the short moment when the gates opened and closed, we both saw each other and waved. From the chink between the gate and the wall I saw Sushila join her and after sometime they left in a white car—Anchaladish car most probably.

I am happy. I thank all the gods. I remember mother. I am...and relaxed.

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Imaging Everest** photographic exhibition from the Royal Geographical Society, London, in association with The British Council, at the Patan Museum till 16 August.
- ❖ **Monsoon Moods** Paintings by Uttam Nepali, Shashi Shah, Batsa Gopal Vaidya, Shashikala Tiwari, Kiran Manandhar, Ragini Upadhyay-Grela at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. 4411122
- ❖ **Sizzle and Shine Summer Show** paintings, prints and photographs by well known local and international artists from noon to 7PM, Tuesday through Sunday at Gallery 9, Lazimpat. 4436944
- ❖ **Nepali Watercolour Paintings in Retrospect 1850-2003** features old masters and contemporary artists. Till 16 August at Nepal Art Council Gallery, Babar Mahal, Kathmandu.

EVENTS

- ❖ **Yoga Workshop** with Carolyn at The Retreat, Palanchowk, 15-17 or 20 August. 5551455 Website: www.carolynboch.com
- ❖ **Ghulam Ali live** 7PM on 14 August at the Regal Ballroom, Hotel Yak & Yeti. Tickets, inclusive of dinner and drinks: Rs 2,499 single, Rs 3,999 couple.
- ❖ **The Good, the Bad and the Googly** by Entre Nous from Mumbai on 9 August at Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Kathmandu.
- ❖ **South Indian Percussion** by Pandit "Vikku" Vinayakram on the Ghatam (Earthen pot) to celebrate Indian Independence Day. 5.30 PM on 15 August, BICC. For passes email: eipi@mos.com.np. Collect from Indian Embassy Gate 11 August onwards. Lecture-demonstration from 10-12 noon 16 August, Hotel Yak & Yeti. Open to all.
- ❖ **Pipalboat Playback Theatre** share your stories on 17,18 August. Inside Saipal Academy, New Baneshwor. 4437746
- ❖ **Late night movies** from 8.30 PM. Buy one coffee, get another free. Himalayan Java, Thamel. 4422519 Elle Salon at Shangri-la Hotel host professional French hairstylist Michael Blin. 14-17 August. 4486146

MUSIC

- ❖ **Deepak Bajracharya live** on 9 August at Moksh, Jhamsikhel. Happy hour: 5.30-7.30 PM, except Sundays. 5528703
- ❖ **Vayu live** every Friday night, 'Friends of Jatra' jam sessions every Wednesday night. Jatra, Thamel. 4256622
- ❖ **Full Circle** acoustic jam every Friday at New Orleans Café, Thamel. 4427311
- ❖ **Cadenza Jazz Vocal Encounters** 8PM on 8 August at The Jazz Bar. Entry: Rs 300 (includes welcome drink) at Shangri-la Hotel, Lazimpat. 4412999

DRINKS

- ❖ **Uncorked wine festival** at Yak & Yeti, Darbar Marg. 4248999
- ❖ **Fusion** for over 100 cocktails. Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Liquor Buffet** 7-9PM at the Splash Bar & Grill. Rs 550 per person. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu. 4411818
- ❖ **Kilroy's Monsoon Wine Festival** 14 different wines at Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Thamel. 4250440

FOOD

- ❖ **Biryani and Kebab Festival** from 12-27 August at The Café, **Mango Festival** till 15 August at The Lounge, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Chef's Special** far east to the west for Rs 499, South Indian specialities at lunch for Rs 199, BBQ on Friday night at Rs 399. Shambala Garden, Shangri-la Hotel, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Café Mitra** New menu, spicy Chinese food every Saturday. Thamel. 4259015
- ❖ **Chimney Refreshed** Fine continental cuisine at The Chimney Restaurant, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Executive lunch meals** at Bhanchha Ghar Restaurant and Bar, Kamaladi. 4225172
- ❖ **Belle Momo** for more 15 varieties of momos at Darbar Marg. 4230890
- ❖ **Espresso Bar** newly renovated at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4419612
- ❖ **Roadhouse Café** now in Patan, opposite St Mary's School. 5521755
- ❖ **Monsoon Madness** 25 percent off everything, 35 percent off pizzas till mid-September at Rum Doodle, Thamel. 4443208
- ❖ **Malaysian Singapore food** at Singma, Jawlakhel. 552004
- ❖ **Full Moon Celebration** on 12 August at Stupa View & Terrace, Boudha Stupa. 4480262

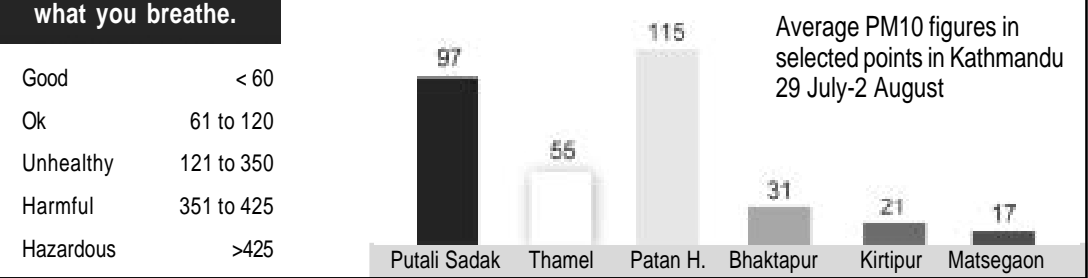
GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Shivapuri Heights Cottage** 30 minutes from Kathmandu, at the edge of the Shivapuri Reserve. Email: info@escape2nepal.com Website: www.escape2nepal.com
- ❖ **Escape to Jomsom** this summer. Rs 3,999 per person at Jomsom Mountain Resort. 4496110
- ❖ **TGIF overnight package** at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Shivapuri Cottage** a natural environment, luxurious rooms at Shivapuri Dadagaon. Email: cbbasnyat@hotmail.com 4354331
- ❖ **Monsoon Retreat** special deals in Bardia for expats. Jungle Base Camp. 061-532112 Email: junglebasecamp@yahoo.com

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY



Last week's results of air quality monitoring at six stations in Kathmandu showed that the PM10 (particulate matter that is smaller than 10 microns or small enough to enter the human body) concentrations had dipped further. In Putali Sadak, one of the most polluted sites in Kathmandu, the PM10 level went down by 22 percent compared to the previous week and the week's average level at Putali Sadak went below the 100 micrograms per cubic meter mark for the first time this year. Average monthly PM10 levels also hit their lowest mark in July, a figure that was one third less than in January.



NEPALI WEATHER



by NGAMINDRA DAHAL
After two weeks of above-normal rainfall, the monsoon is taking a respite again. This satellite image taken on Thursday morning shows most of the Indian plains and Himalayan mid hills in a cloud-free zone. There are still remnants of the last monsoon pulse over western Nepal, but otherwise the weather has allowed rescue workers to clear up the devastation of the past week. Hot and humid days in Kathmandu Valley with light to moderate rain for afternoons and nights. By early next week another monsoon trough, currently over the Bay, should be upon us with more wet days.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
31-21	31-22	30-21	30-20	29-20

BOOKWORM



Shodh Taslima Nasrin (Translated by Rani Ray)
Srishti, 2003
Rs 312

Unlike her other novels, Taslima Nasrin seeks to revolutionise the concept of love and marriage in the elite tradition-bound societies. She effects this through a transformation of roles assigned to women as lover, mother and daughter-in-law. In this, as much as her other non-fictional works, Nasrin's personal experience breathes life into the narrative.

Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus John Gray
Harper Collins, 1993
Rs 400

With a decade behind it, John Gray's book is being heralded as a modern classic. It has helped men and women realise the schism in their communication styles and how they can bridge the gap without conflict and resentment. Firmly in the self-help genre, Gray is confident we all can become better interpersonal communicators—with a little help from him.



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Published on July 28, 2003 - The Himalayan Times, Rising Nepal Kathmandu Post
Published on August 1, 2003 - Nepali Times

Koi Mil Gaya is being touted as the desi version of ET meets X-Files. Rakesh Roshan's mega production aims at changing our comprehension of this genre in Indian cinema. The movie, starring his son Hrithik Roshan, Preity Zinta and Rekha, uses the expertise of international production teams who worked on Independence Day and Godzilla. As always, we'll have to suspend our disbelief (a spaceship that responds to the sound of "Aum") but at least we can look forward to a new experience and perhaps the slickest Bollywood sci-fi thriller ever made.



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Wah Ustad!

*"Gajalu ti thulathula aankha
Teera bane basyo yo dilaima..."*

The mellifluous baritone of Ghulam Ali singing King Mahendra's classic tender ballad of love can be heard in the narrow lanes of Asan, in the hills of Gorkha, even in certain suburbs on foreign shores—in fact wherever Nepalis have set down roots. The slight Urdu accent doesn't detract from what many associate with Home. This song, among others, earned added popularity after being compiled into the Nepali album *Narayan Gopal, Ghulam Ali ra Mat* two years ago.

That is how Ghulam Ali came to be better known in Nepal, but it is actually for his *ghazals* like *"Hungama hai kyon barpa"* and *"Chupke chupke raat din"* that he is world famous. The Pakistani artist is a true performer—not in the sense of pop bands that entertain with their antics and vocals—but in his ability to connect with his audience. He experiments with music and words, often scouring his vast library of Urdu poetry for the right lyrics to set to music, which he composes himself.

Mirza Ghalib, Aamir Khusro and contemporary poet-lyricists like Ahmed Faraz, Qateel Shifai and Farhat Shahzad have all been blessed by his touch. In the album *Visal* he collaborated with India's famous Gulzar and with singer Asha Bhosale on *Miraz-E-Ghazal*. Now his son

and disciple, Nazir Abbas Ali is following in his father's footsteps. Although he accompanies his father occasionally, everyone knows the main event is always Ghulam Ali.

Born in 1940 into a musical family—his father was a vocalist and sarangi

player—at a Sialkot village in Pakistan, Ghulam Ali studied his craft with his parent, as well as the legendary Ustad Bade Gulam Ali Khan, Bade Mubarak Ali Khan and Barkat Ali Khan. His career began in the 1960s on Lahore radio, after which he cut many albums. In the more than 40 years that the maestro has honed his art, his style has evolved, revealing a rich patina brought about by a lot of *riyaz*, training and a thorough base in the classics. He fuses the complexity of classical music with a perfect understanding of the *ghazal*. Over the years he has widened his range to encompass *nazm* and *thumaris* with equal elegance.

While the brilliance of many *ghazal* singers has waxed and waned, Gulam Ali continues to command respect and a new fan following with each successive generation. A truly South Asian artist, the ustad transcends national borders and technological innovations. His music has survived the long evolution from vinyl to MP3, and his live performances still resound with appreciative calls of *"wah Ustad!"* Ghulam Ali's concerts in India, Nepal, the US and the UK are as well attended as they are in Pakistan, where he is regarded a true *ghazal* maestro in a country where they are a dime a dozen. His voice mesmerises even the normally boisterous and intimidating Nepali audience who fall into silent awe when he sings. And at this Saturday's live performance, when the ustad begins the opening strains of *"Gajalu ti"*, it's going to feel a bit like a homecoming. ♦

Ghulam Ali will be performing live in Kathmandu on 14 August.

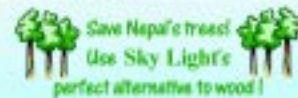


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When you call listen carefully as the Captain gives you the final clue. Use the clue to find his hiding place on the map. Put your answer on the Form in part 6 of the map. Submit the complete map accompanied by 6 Real Seals (Caps). Put all these together in an envelope and drop it in the Real Spot Box placed at major outlets or send it to Dabur Nepal Pvt. Ltd., TNT Building, Teenkune, P.O. Box. 14375, KTM.

Multiple entries are accepted. Correct entries will go through a lucky draw. The Winner will bag the first prize of an African Safari for 3 family members and 20 runners-up will win trips to Sauraha for couples.

Hint:
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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Guy Jatra

It is an indication of the tremendous gender balance in our society that next week we celebrate Guy Jatra, and a week after that we mark Tij. The latter is a festival in which members of the female species from all walks of wife re-dedicate themselves to their profession by undertaking 24-hour relay hunger strikes at cardinal points in the city to wish their present or future husbands health, wealth and happiness.

Those who, for technical reasons, don't wish their current spouses to have any of the above, will have no other alternative but to move on to the seventh phase of their agitation which, they hasten to warn, is going to be decisive, and could turn violent. Anyway, it's the thought that counts.

Some of the more passionate women I know say they will not even swallow their saliva during this period as they pray intensely for their husbands to be inducted into the next government line-up. Good luck.

Among our upcoming festivals, my own personal favourite is Guy Jatra. It is a very funny festival and a time for us guys to forget our cares and worries, let our hair down, and cast doubts about the gender, if any, of the Rt Hon Prime Minister and members of his and/or her cabinet. Why exactly this particular festival ended up getting the sex of our rulers mixed up has a long and glorious history which I will tell you about some other time.

Suffice it to say for now that Guy Jatra is the time when us macho menfolk of this kingdom get a temporary license to make complete asses of ourselves by behaving as we always do in everyday life. Here is a short questionnaire to ascertain whether you have what it takes to be a Full-blown Nepali Alfa Male. (Warning: readers who are currently eating are warned in the interest of public safety to stop doing so and have barfbags handy.)

Q: As a just-about-average Nepali male, what do you when you are by yourself, and certain that no one is looking:

- Put your hand in your pocket and vigorously attend to a subterranean itch.
- Attend to aforementioned itch even if someone is looking, after all it's an emergency.
- Go to a nearby mirror and squeeze blackheads from your nose cone.
- Sharpen the non-flammable end of a matchstick and use it as NASA would the robotic arm of the Mars Explorer to reach hitherto unexplored and remote caverns in your mouth cavity containing fossil remains of last year's Dasain goat, and dispatch the specimen for further olfactory inspection and disposal.
- An essential feature of human existence is breathing, and for this it is of paramount importance that we keep our pulmonary tubes clear. The user manual that comes with every male Nepali lays down strict procedures to periodically clean our carburettor filters. Most models have an automatic self-clearing device which at regular intervals dislodges obstructions with a sharp intake of air through the nostril which propels said glob from the nasal cavity into the oral cavity whence it can be either defenestrated with a smart 'pthoo' through the window into the street below, or ingested into the alimentary canal as a protein-rich nutrient. Either way, it is a disgusting habit that all Nepalis proudly call our own.
- Who said press freedom in Nepal had been curtailed? This column proves we can get away with writing any rubbish. Right, then. If you ticked all of the above, congratulations. You are the proud recipient of this year's Guy Jatra Mr Revolting Nepal Contest.

NEPALI SOCIETY



Brush and ink



KIRAN PANDEY

There is something determinedly Keatsian about Shashi Kala Tiwari, the eminent poet and artist. She is forever in search of beauty and harmony. "I never paint anything gloomy, there is enough sadness in this world," she says with a playful smile in her voice. Her paintings burst with colours and strong brush strokes to create an abstract glow of nature's radiance.

In her art, flowers symbolise the beauty and benevolence of the human spirit. This appreciation came at a price. She recounts an incident that took place on a freezing winter morning a few years ago when she slipped and fractured her leg on the way to Bungamati. As she lay there, helpless and in pain, no one came to her aid. Even the pilgrims on

their way to Kary Binayak ignored her. Shocked by their indifference, Shashi blamed the city's corrosive influence. ("The eye of the city is poisonous..." she wrote in her poem *The Aborigines and the Jungle*.) After more than an hour, an old farmer helped her up and half carried her to a taxi so she could get some medical attention. Although Shashi was traumatised by the whole event, she says that stranger's kindness restored her faith in people. She never met him again.

The other man who influenced Shashi was her father: he always encouraged her to pursue art. Today, the 53-year-old is regarded as one of Nepal's best painters. She has held several solo international exhibitions in Japan, Korea, India, Germany,

Bangladesh, South Korea and the UK. The Nepal Association of Arts has twice named her the best national artist (1981, 1984) and she recently received the prestigious Gorkha Dakshin Bahu.

As a struggling artist, Shashi often sold her poems for Rs 30 each to pay for art supplies. Of course, things are different now: "I don't write for money anymore, but for art and literature," she says. Her favourites include *Shradhanjali* (a tribute to the Late King Birendra and the royal family), *Bichalit Bartaman* (dedicated to the victims of Kalikot incident) and *Timi Afno Pachi Koon Dhuni* (on the crisis in the country). Shashi cannot imagine what she would do if she wasn't an artist. "Painting and poetry keep me alive," she says. ♦ (Naresh Newar)

NEPALI Times

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