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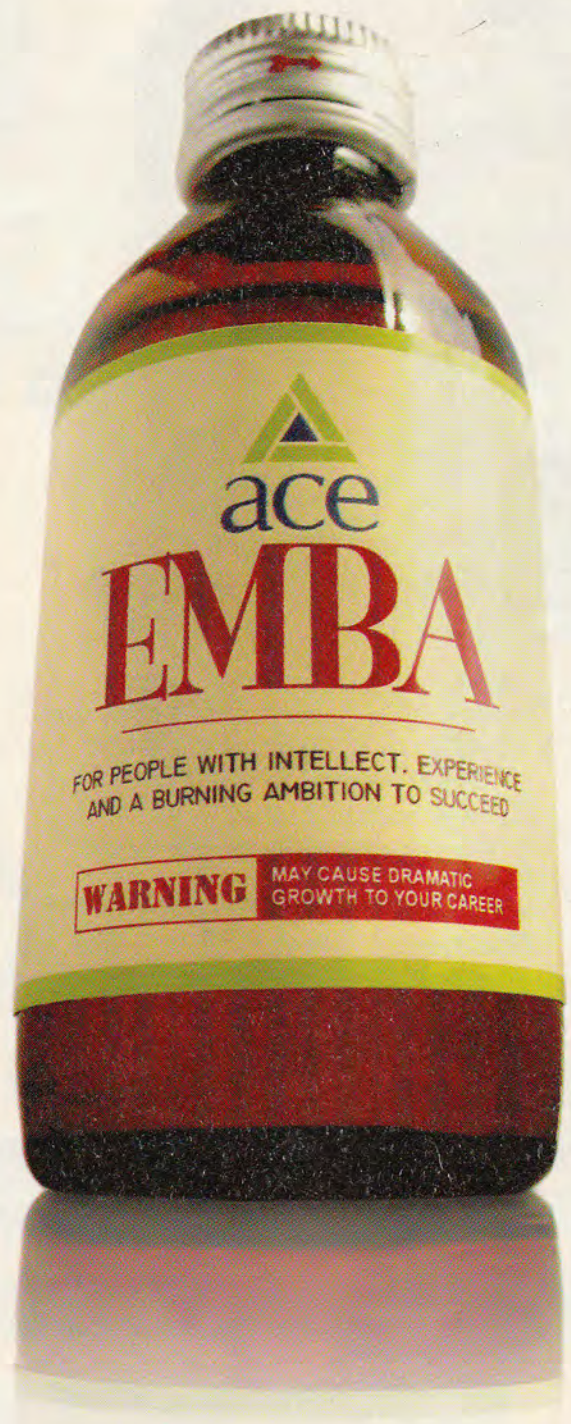


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COVER STORY

Parity at Last? 22

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

Will Gurkhas finally receive equal treatment? Britain has promised a 'wide-ranging review' by October that will make it 'legally and morally irreproachable.'

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WEEKLY
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JANUARY 30, 2005

VOL. I, NO. 41

COVER: RAJ SHRESTHA

REPORTS

Testing Times.....20

BY KOSH RAJ KOIRALA

The Royal Nepal Army has made a name for itself as UN peacekeepers. But its questionable human rights record is now stirring concerns about its long-term participation in the peace missions.

Flavors of India, Made by Nepal.....27

BY PURNA BASNET AND BELA MALIK IN NEW DELHI

Nepalis cook most of the food in the 25 eateries, representing the different states of the Indian union, at Dilli Haat

The Fishermen and the Sea.....30

BY PRADEEP SILWAL IN DEVANIMPATTINUM

The tsunami waves have long gone. But the fishermen are just too afraid to go back to the sea.

BUSINESS

As Oil Prices Boil.....37

BY BIPUL NARAYAN

The government of a rural country like Nepal cannot afford to subsidize petroleum products, which are mainly consumed in urban areas and by the middle and the upper classes.

LIFESTYLE

Happy Campers.....40

BY KUMUD NEPAL

Busy parents and bored students are driving a ne trend—activities camps for kids

Fast-Food Fad.....42

BY BISWAS BARAL

Fast-food is tasty, convenient and definitely "in." But is it healthy?

COLUMNS

Costs and Benefits.....11

BY SUMAN PRADHAN

The Final Push.....32

BY ADITYA ADHIKARI

Raindrops Keep Falling.....40

BY KUNAL LAMA

DEPARTMENTS

LETTERS.....6

WEEK IN PICTURES.....9

PICTURE OF THE WEEK.....10

CAPSULES.....12

MILESTONE.....15

BIZ BUZZ.....15

CITY PAGE.....34

SNAPSHOTS.....44

KHULA MANCH.....48

BOOKS.....49

LAST PAGE.....50

20

27

37

42



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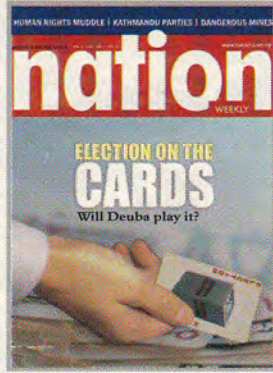
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LETTERS



“It is the responsibility of the security forces, not human rights workers, to ‘come out in the open’”

BRYAN NEWMAN

Flawed argument

AS A FOREIGN VOLUNTEER AT Collective Campaign for Peace, the human rights organization in the spotlight in Kosh Raj Koirala's piece, (“Human Rights Muddle,” Jan. 16), I was extremely disturbed by the condescending and bitter tone with which the reporter portrayed some human rights activists in Kathmandu. The underlying assumption of Koirala's article, that human rights defenders must publicly substantiate threats on their lives, is severely

the gravity of the situation. To assume that in such an environment, that those faced with threats on their lives can or should “come out in the open” and confront their harassers is ridiculous. One can only “come out,” if those in power create a safe enough space for such openness to occur, something that is certainly yet to happen.

Contrary to Koirala's assertions, it is the responsibility of the security forces, not human rights workers, to “come out in the open” and “clear the air of confusion.” They could begin by reviewing their practices of illegal detention and forced disappearances. It is very possible that such an action would build enough confidence in human rights defenders to then come out and “tell their side of the story.”

BRYAN NEWMAN
 KATHMANDU



flawed, if not absurd. Anyone with even a basic knowledge of Nepal's current situation knows the vast impunity under which the security forces operate and also the ineffectiveness of the country's legal system. The recent alarming statements by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the United Nations regarding threats on rights workers are further indicators of

Shame!

I THINK IT'S A SHAME TO DENY someone a position despite his competence (“Lame-duck Argument,” Legal Eye, by Jogendra Ghimire, Jan. 23). To stop Yubaraj Khatiwada from being the governor on grounds that he is not a deputy governor is plain nonsense.

NAME WITHHELD
 VIA EMAIL

Language barrier

I AGREE WITH ADITYA ADHIKARI that Nepalis who become intellectually mature in the west find it difficult to represent Nepal in their writings (“The Limits of Language,” The Essay, Dec. 19).

However, many Nepalis leave Nepal after completing their undergraduate studies and are well acquainted with local and national issues. Though Adhikari's analysis of writers based in the west who seem to have trouble dealing with their native cultures is thought-provoking, one cannot generalize that all writers based in the west whose origins are elsewhere have trouble writing about their native lands. Salman Rushdie and Edward Said have written with remarkable clarity about Anglo-Indian and Palestinian issues, for example. This, however, does not negate the fact that the more you stay away from your native land, the more difficult it gets to understand the native culture.

Regarding translations, there is no doubt that the emotions and ethos inherent in the native language cannot be reflected in a foreign one. This is quite evident when you compare "Muna Madan" in Nepali and English. Besides the problem of translating "direct conversations" and onomatopoeic words is immensely problematic. Nonetheless, translation is important as it gives writings a wider audience. Translators should be aware of their audience and should make their works compatible with the reader's understanding. The translation should be as faithful to the original text as is possible.

It is also essential that writers have a solid grasp of pertinent issues. Most Nepalis who write in English seem to lack an understanding of their culture. Here, they would do well to learn from foreign scholars who spend a long time to understand us. The writings of Mark Turin and Sara Shneiderman on Dolakha's Thami community are a good example of this kind of scholarship.

GANESH KHANIYA
MIN BHAWAN

Tourism talk

NEPAL HAS NOSE-DIVED 17 notches in the list of the world's top tourist destinations, compiled by iExplore.com, a leading international tourist company; thanks to the ongoing conflict ("Risky Business," by John Narayan Parajuli, Jan. 23).

Such statements have become a daily nuisance; they are repetitious and offer a distorted theory. We have consistently

complained about the state of affairs and blamed the internal conflict for the downward spiral in tourism. Although we must admit that the conflict is part of the problem, it is not the entire problem.

As a nation, what is our perception of tourism? It can mean a lot of different things to different people. Tourism started as an enlightening idea, introduced by western mountaineers; an entrepreneurial gesture that brought international attention to this country's radiant beauty. Today it has turned into a dire necessity.

The government needs to have realistic aspirations for tourism and so must the public. The goals set by the tourism sector need to be realistic rather than utopian. Tourism in this country has far too long been portrayed as a cure for all economic ills. The concept of tourism has to involve a sense of realism, awareness and responsibility. Instead of being overtly concerned about our top ten or bottom ten listings, we should be paying more attention to infrastructure development with a long-term objective. The perception that we have become a dollar-hungry scrapheap must be eradicated. Tourism is as much about cultural awareness and insight, as it is about bringing in foreign exchange.

Through advertising campaigns and direct marketing, the ministry of tourism can project its own perception of tourism in its target market. As much as we need to show bank statements, ownership of property, etc., while traveling abroad, the same should be applicable for those coming into this country, albeit to a lesser degree. This kind of control will eventually lead to quality tourism. The government must understand that providing services to the local population has a sustainable future, on the basis of which tourism will flourish. Since we've taken it upon ourselves to live and die by the sword of tourism, we must begin to concentrate on long-term objectives.

The tourism industry is always in a state of flux, and its ups and downs are quite frequent anywhere in the world. For a country of our stature, the blame game is dangerous and it makes us lose focus on what we should be doing instead.

SHIVENDRA THAPA
LALITPUR

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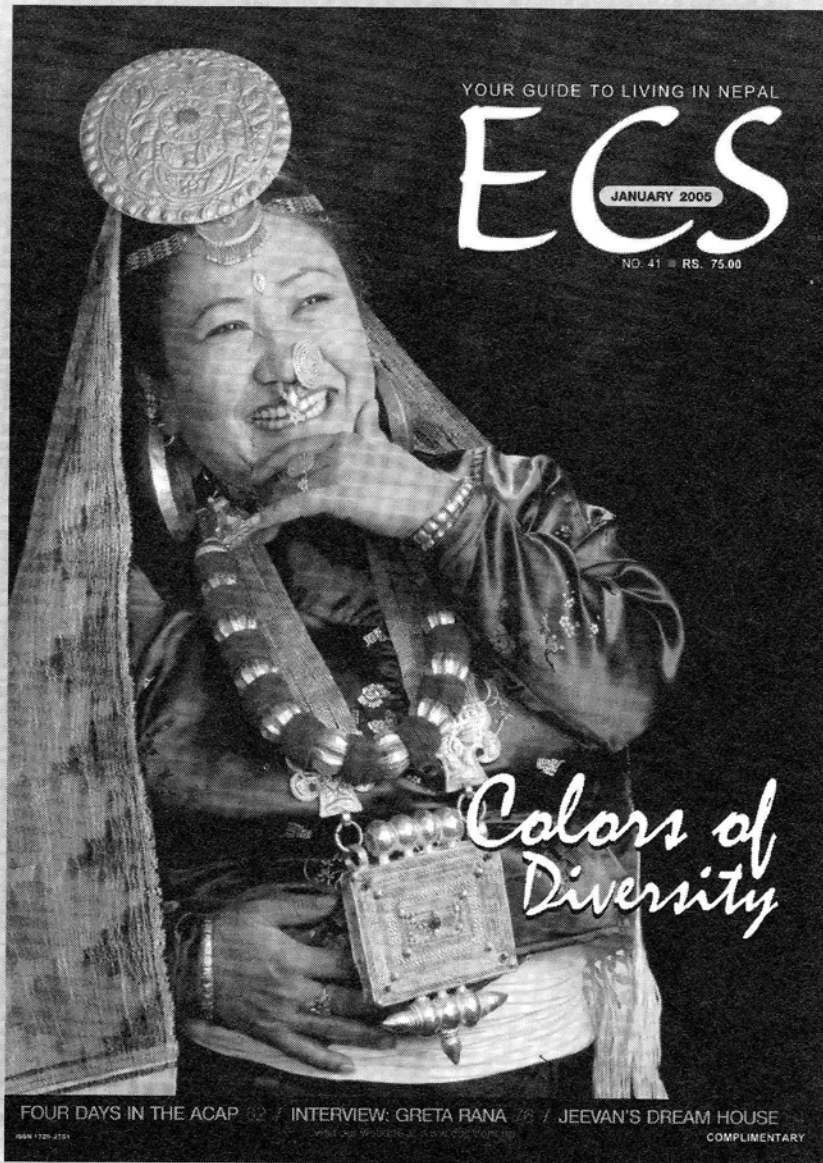
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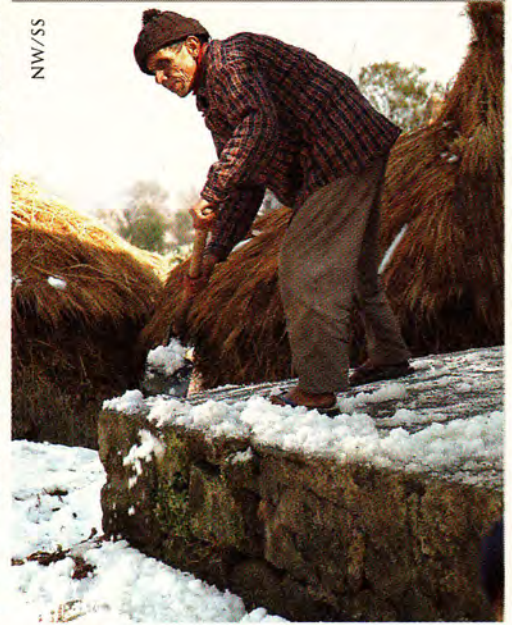
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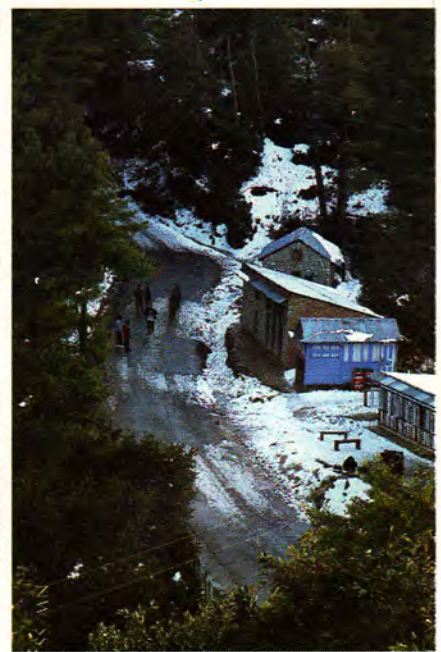
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ONE MAN'S POISON IS ANOTHER'S DRINK:
The first burst of snow in the rims of the Valley brought smile to some, sorrow to others





PICTURE OF THE WEEK

MAN, CHILD AND CHILD: The good old bicycle comes in handy for this shopper at Soaltee Mode in Kathmandu

nation weekly/Sagar Shrestha





Costs and Benefits

The prime minister will deserve the blame if he indeed pushes the nation to an election that no one is prepared for. But the largest share of the blame should go to our Maoist comrades.

BY SUMAN PRADHAN

Let's admit it: The option to revive Parliament is getting nowhere.

With Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba constantly shooting it down, the Supreme Court shying away and the Palace showing no inclination, the 1999 Parliament appears, well, as dissolved as ever. Does this mean that you and me will soon be dodging Maoist bullets and bombs and lining up fearfully to cast our ballots? I don't know. It's almost certain that the government will announce elections, but uncertain whether those elections will be held. Even the government realizes that holding elections in several phases is not as easy as it sounds.

But if Deuba has his way—despite howls of protest from coalition partners, opposition and civil society groups, not to speak of most donors who fear a bloodbath—he will push hard for new parliamentary elections. It's a pity that the motive is not “let's resolve our problems through elections” but rather “no elections mean I get sacked.” Had a statesman been at the helm right now, he would probably have told the Palace: “I tried to meet the mandate given to me, but unfortunately the Maoists are not willing to listen. So rather than call a violent election and ignite a bloodbath, I tender my resignation. I don't want blood on my hands.” But ... sigh.

The prime minister will deserve the blame if he indeed pushes the nation to an election that no one is prepared for. But the largest share of the blame should go to our Maoist comrades. It is they who want a roundtable conference, an interim government and constituent assembly elections. But when the government is prepared to discuss all these issues at the negotiating table, they slam the door shut.

What's more? The rebels have also vowed to disrupt new elections until their demands are met. Under such circumstances, what option other than new elections or resignation does the prime minister have? Practically none. Resigning, as

we know, is not his preferred option. “The next prime minister will face similar problems,” says a senior politician. “What good does it serve other than to give the Palace another opportunity to dabble in politics?” True, but what purpose does a new election serve? Will it answer any of the underlying political and constitutional questions at the heart of this three-way conflict? A new Parliament, in theory, may have enough political will for constitutional reforms. After all, almost all the political parties have accepted the need to address constitutional deficiencies to resolve the conflict. If these parties get a chance to sit down in the Parliament and discuss the various options, then they might agree on major changes to the Constitution. But that is unlikely to satisfy the Maoists because the new Parliament will certainly not make any changes in the preamble—the prime bone of contention.

Then there is the political conflict between the parties and the Palace. A new Parliament could in theory cut down many of the powers the Palace currently exercises. But there is no guarantee the Palace will agree to it either. After all, any amendments will need the Palace's stamp to come into effect. A new election, therefore, could exacerbate the conflict by precipitating confrontation between the three sides. While confrontation is not necessarily bad, the high costs involved in this case—from the initial violence to a protracted confrontation—can make it very bad indeed.

But the strongest argument against new elections is that there is nothing the new Parliament can do which the old one cannot, provided it is revived of course. Unfortunately, that is not happening, and it won't happen until the prime minister and the Palace are made to realize the potential costs of new elections. Please set aside the legalese for once and think of the political benefits of House revival. There is even a precedent for it: The previous royalist governments staffed VDCs and DDCs in 2003-04 with formerly elected and unelected officials even though they had been disbanded more than a year ago after their tenure expired. If it can be done once, it can be done again. ■





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MAZDA DEALER

Kedia International has been awarded the dealership of Swaraj Mazda vehicles in Nepal. Swaraj Mazda is the second vehicle company after Change Pickup of the Changhe Aircraft Industries, China, to have given the dealership to the Kedia group. Swaraj Mazda Vehicles Company, which specializes in manufacturing buses and trucks, is established in India in collaboration with Mazda Motor Corporation, Japan. Swaraj Mazda's plans include introducing other range of vehicles—ambulances, police vans, trippers, dumpers and bottle carriers—in the Nepali market.

TOYOTA MARATHON

Vaidya Organization of Industries and Trading Houses will sponsor the "Toyota Kathmandu Marathon," slated for Feb. 18. This road run is the only marathon in Nepal that has been sanctioned by the Association of International Runners and Road Racers. The marathon will aim at creating awareness about the need for charity medical care.

NCCB OFFER

Nepal Credit and Commercial Bank has introduced a new scheme for its account holders. The customers can now pay their telephone bills directly through the bank. The bank has inked an agreement with Nepal Telecom to that effect. Customers will now be able to pay telephone charges through their individual bank accounts.

NEW WEBSITE

A new site to inform about the government activities was launched on Wednesday, Jan. 19. The site, www.nepalhmg.gov.np, was launched following the government's decision to update the activities of the ministries. The government also aims to foster the concept of e-governance through its new venture. The site includes information about the structure of the government and its three organs—the executive, the judiciary and the legislative. The site contains the details of the government policies, projects, advertisements and holidays. Additional features include separate contact and feedback pages. The government expects the new website to help make its activities more transparent and to provide

people with an easy access to the government policies.

VAT INCREASE

The Finance Ordinance 2061 the government issued on Jan. 12 has increased the Value Added Tax on commodities to 13 percent from 10 percent. The increase in revenues is expected to raise an additional Rs 2.10 billion during the remaining six months of the current fiscal year that ends in mid-July. The government has also decided to increase the total expenditure by Rs.3.5 billion for the ongoing fiscal year. The government has attributed this increase to the growing security expenditure as well as its decision to give 20 percent of basic salary as monthly dearness allowance to 400,000 government employees.

DVD PLAYERS

Hansraj Hulaschand & Co., an authorized dealer of Samsung electronics, has launched a new line

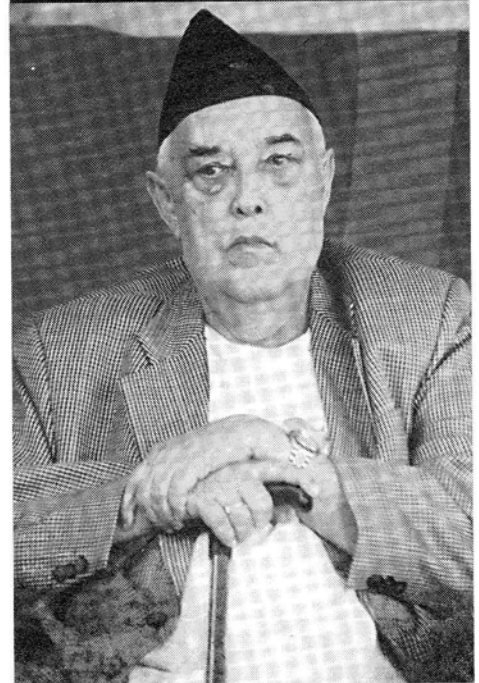


of DVD audio players. The players include different versions like the DJ 750, MAX DJ 550, MAX DJ8 and MM-DS80. Small in sizes, the players cost anywhere between Rs.19,000 and Rs.33,500. New features such as the DivX and Qmp compatibility have also been added. Available at all Samsung outlets, there is a one-year warranty on all new audio systems.

DUTCH FAIR

Nepal participated in 35th edition of the Vakentiebeurs, a six-day tourism fair held in Utrecht in the Netherlands, from Jan. 11 to Jan. 16. Around 7,500 people visited the stall set up by Nepal. An estimated 145,000 visitors had attended the fair. There were 1,600 exhibitors from 106 countries. Nepal Tourism Board led the Nepali delegation. Other representatives from Nepal included Nature Trail Trekking and Expedition, Village Tours and Travels, Explore Nepal and Richa Tours and Travels. Nepal also screened a documentary film on Manang during the fair.

DIED



Former chairman of the Rastriya Sabha and noted freedom fighter in the *saalko andolan*, Beni Bahadur Karki, passed away on Jan. 13. He was 75. Karki died of a heart attack at the Norvic-Escorts Health Care and Research Centre in Thapathali. He had been admitted there due to respiratory problems but was also plagued by diabetes and hypertension.

After the restoration of democracy in 1990, Karki was the chairman of the Rastriya Sabha for two straight four-year terms. Born at Melung in Dolakha, he joined politics in 1948. Karki became the co-general secretary of the Gorkha Parishad in 1950.

In 1960, Karki was elected to the Parliament in the first multi-party general elections. Following the royal takeover in 1961, his party merged with the Nepali Congress. Karki then became a central committee member of the NC.

"He was a man of integrity," says Narahari Acharya, central committee member of the NC. "It was not easy to run the first elected House after almost three decades of party-less rule, but he rose up to the challenge." Karki's powers of persuasion were perhaps his greatest asset, says Acharya.

Karki is survived by two sons and a daughter. ■

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FROM	TO	FLIGHT NTO.	DAYS OF OPERATION	DEP. TIME	ARR. TIME	RUPEE TARIFF ONE WAY	DOLLARTARIFF ONE WAY	REMARKS
KATHMANDU	LUKLA	YA 111	DAILY	0700	0735	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	LUKLA	YA 101	DAILY	0705	0740	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	LUKLA	YA103	DAILY	0710	0745	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	LUKLA	YA 105	DAILY	0715	0750	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	LUKLA	YA107	DAILY	0840	0915	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	LUKLA	YA113	DAILY	0845	0920	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	LUKLA	YA109	DAILY	0850	0925	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	LUKLA	YA 115	DAILY	0855	0930	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	LUKLA	YA117	DAILY	1020	1055	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	LUKLA	YA119	1,2,4,5,6,7	1025	1100	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	TAPLEJUNG	YA 901	3	1025	1135	2695	164	DHC-6/300
	PHAPLU	YA181	1,3,5	1030	1105	1480	85	DHC-6/300
	RUMJATAR	YA 221	2,4,7	1030	1105	1245	61	DHC-6/300
	MANANG	YA 601	6	1030	1130	2995	122	DHC-6/300
	MEGHAULY	YA171	DAILY	1130	1200	1340	79	DHC-6/300
	BHARATPUR	YA 173	DAILY	1200	1225	1160	61	DHC-6/300
	BHARATPUR	YA 175	DAILY	1400	1425	1160	61	DHC-6/300
	SIMARA	YA 201	DAILY	0825	0845	970	55	SAAB 340/B
	SIMARA	YA 141	DAILY	1330	1355	970	55	DHC-6/300
	SIMARA	YA 143	DAILY	1500	1525	970	55	DHC-6/300
KATHMANDU	KATHMANDU	YA 301	DAILY	0700	0800	4800	109	SAAB 340B
	KATHMANDU	YA 302	DAILY	0700	0800	4800	109	SAAB 340B
	BIRATNAGAR	YA 151	DAILY	1000	1040	2585	85	SAAB 340B
	BIRATNAGAR	YA 153	DAILY	1210	1250	2585	85	SAAB 340B
	BIRATNAGAR	YA 155	DAILY	1700	1740	2585	85	SAAB 340B
	POKHARA	YA 131	DAILY	0825	0850	1710	67	SAAB 340B
	POKHARA	YA 137	DAILY	1000	1025	1710	67	SAAB 340B
	POKHARA	YA 135	DAILY	1410	1435	1710	67	SAAB 340B
	BHAIRAHAWA	YA 163	DAILY	1550	1625	2220	79	SAAB 340B
	BHADRAPUR	YA 121	DAILY	1140	1230	2950	109	SAAB 340B
	NEPALGUNJ	YA 177	DAILY	1415	1515	3500	109	SAAB 340B
BIRATNAGAR	KATHMANDU	YA 152	DAILY	1100	1140	2585	85	SAAB 340B
BIRATNAGAR	KATHMANDU	YA 154	DAILY	1310	1350	2585	85	SAAB 340B
BIRATNAGAR	KATHMANDU	YA 156	DAILY	1800	1840	2585	85	SAAB 340B
POKHARA	KATHMANDU	YA 132	DAILY	0910	0935	1710	67	SAAB 340B
POKHARA	KATHMANDU	YA 138	DAILY	1045	1110	1710	67	SAAB 340B
POKHARA	KATHMANDU	YA 136	DAILY	1455	1520	1710	67	SAAB 340B
BHAIRAHAWA	KATHMANDU	YA 164	DAILY	1645	1720	2220	79	SAAB 340B
BHADRAPUR	KATHMANDU	YA 122	DAILY	1250	1340	2950	109	SAAB 340B
NEPALGUNJ	KATHMANDU	YA 178	DAILY	1535	1635	3500	109	SAAB 340B
LUKLA	KATHMANDU	YA 112	DAILY	0750	0825	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	KATHMANDU	YA 102	DAILY	0755	0830	1665	91	DHC-6/300
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	KATHMANDU	YA 116	DAILY	0945	1020	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	KATHMANDU	YA 118	DAILY	1110	1145	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	KATHMANDU	YA 120	1,2,4,5,6,7	1115	1150	1665	91	DHC-6/300
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RUMJATAR	KATHMANDU	YA 222	2,4,7	1120	1155	1245	79	DHC-6/300
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TAPLEJUNG	KATHMANDU	YA 902	3	1150	1300	2695	164	DHC-6/300
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	KATHMANDU	YA 176	DAILY	1440	1505	1160	61	DHC-6/300
SIMARA	KATHMANDU	YA 202	DAILY	0905	0925	970	55	SAAB 340B
	KATHMANDU	YA142	DAILY	1410	1435	970	55	DHC-6/300
	KATHMANDU	YA144	DAILY	1540	1605	970	55	DHC-6/300

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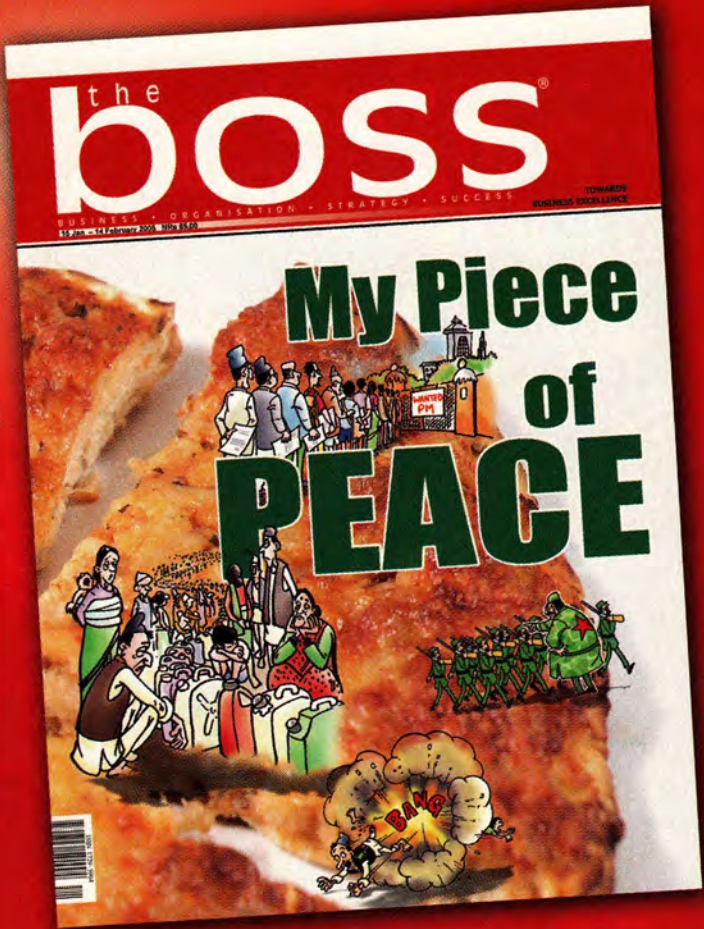
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TESTING TIMES

The Royal Nepal Army has made a name for itself as UN peacekeepers. But its questionable human rights record is now stirring concerns about its long-term participation in the peace missions.

KOSH RAJ KOIRALA

THE ROYAL NEPAL ARMY IS in the headlines again. This time the news is about its capacity to carry out the United Nations Peacekeeping missions judiciously. The underlying argument: How can the Army, with a questionable human rights record in handling conflict at home, administer conflicts elsewhere? The next question: Will the United Nations then reconsider the Army's involvement in its peace missions on grounds of its poor rights records and thus deny the RNA personnel lucrative overseas assignments?

The U.N. Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances had given Nepal government until Jan. 20 to respond to its report, which has documented more disappearances in Nepal than anywhere in the world. The Army is allegedly responsible for 217 disappearances.

"If the annual meeting of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights endorses the report [of the working group] later this year, the United Nations will be bound to follow it," says a senior government official. "That will certainly put a lot of pressure on the U.N. peacekeeping officials to give a second thought to the deployment of the Army in U.N. peacekeeping missions."

Should that happen, the Army would be a big loser. The United Nations and the RNA have worked closely on peacekeeping missions in some of the world's most volatile conflict over the years. Starting in Lebanon in 1958, some 46,000 RNA soldiers have donned the Blue Beret serving in 29 missions in different parts of the world.

Each mission lasts for six months and on average, a peacekeeping soldier receives \$700 to \$800 a month. RNA missions have contributed significantly to the national coffers—more than \$30 million each year since the early 70s.

Presently, there are 12 RNA missions around the world, including in Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia and the Ivory Coast. Nepal is among the top four troop-contributing nations to U.N. peace missions.

RNA officials stoutly defend their human rights record and dismiss suggestions that the United Nations will give it a short shrift. "We have excellent human rights records in the [U.N.] peacekeeping missions," says the Army spokesman, Deepak Gurung. "We want to maintain the same at home as well."



ALL PHOTOS: RNA

The Army, he says, is committed to improving its rights records.

The Army also dismisses suggestions that contributing 3,000 troops from close to 90,000-strong force will harm the counter-insurgency operation at home. The thinking is that peacekeeping missions not only provide the poor RNA soldiers an opportunity to make some money but also a welcome breather from the grueling battle at home. And if they learn innovative ways to police conflicts under qualified foreign commanders, so much the better.

Some government officials warn not to read too much in the U.N. group's report. To them, it is a "customary report" and will have little effect on Army's peace missions. "It is naïve to assume that the report is an end in itself," says the Foreign Ministry spokesman, Durga Prasad Bhattarai, reacting to the U.N. working group's displeasure with the security force's questionable human rights records. "The report is only a preliminary one and the Nepal government will have its say."

While government officials continue to play down the significance of the working group's report, it is a fact that Nepal's fast-deteriorating human rights situation is under U.N. scrutiny. The United Nations High Commis-

sioner for Human Rights Luise Arbour arrives in Kathmandu on Sunday, Jan. 23 for a four-day visit. Arbour is among the highest-ranking U.N. officials to visit Nepal since the insurgency started in 1996. Such visits will no doubt put more pressure on the Army to right its wrongs.

The numbers are telling, if contested. Out of the 217 disappearances in state custody cited by the U.N. working group, the RNA says only 85 were arrested before its deployment in 2001. And the 40 of those arrested were released after investigations, and 16 were handed to the local administration.

Meanwhile, the pressure continues to mount on Nepal to do something about its poor human rights record. Two leading human rights groups—Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International—have put their advocacy campaign on Nepal on a high gear. After an appeal to the Maoist supremo Prachanda to stop abductions and killings of civilians on Jan. 10, Amnesty International last week, on Jan. 20, again drew the world's attention to the growing number of illegal killings in Nepal. "Both the security forces and the Maoists are deliberately executing civilians and unarmed fighters," says Ingrid Massage, the Asia director at

Amnesty International. "What is most chilling is that these killings are go-

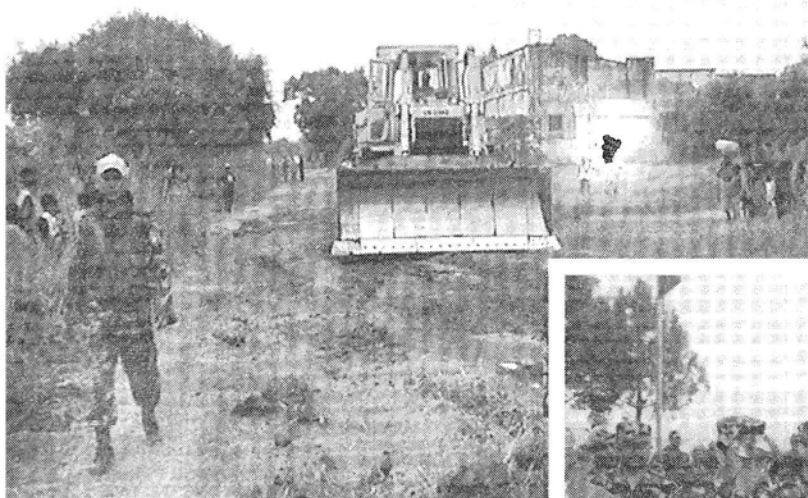
ing completely unpunished, despite numerous promises by the government and Maoist leaders to uphold human rights."

The report, "Nepal: Killing With Impunity," gives details about the unlawful killings by both sides to the conflict since the breakdown of the ceasefire in August 2003. The report documents an increasing sophistication among security forces in hiding these abuses, including by burying bodies and forcing local people to sign false witness statements, as well as a continued reluctance to punish those responsible.

Even those responsible for the most serious and high-profile abuses, such as the illegal execution of 19 unarmed Maoists in Doramba village, Ramechhap in August 2003, have not been brought to justice, Amnesty says.

"These unlawful killings are part of a terrible spectrum of human rights abuses. The Nepali people are living amid daily torture, rape, 'disappearances' and arbitrary arrests," says Massage. "International pressure can make a difference. Last year, it helped produce a drop in reports of 'disappearances' in Nepal. Now it is time the same level of attention is given to unlawful killings and other human rights abuses," says Massage.

The next few months will be crucial for RNA and indeed for Nepal, and the date to watch out for: April 25-29, when the U.N. Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances sits for its 75th session in Geneva. For the second straight year, Nepal will be high on the United Nations' human rights roster. ■





PARITY AT LA



A POPULAR JOKE OUT OF the Falklands War that was fought in 1982 goes like this: How did the Argentine soldiers know that the Gurkhas had come to fight? Answer: In the morning when they woke up, their heads fell off.

Valor on the battlefield is the Gurkha's hallmark, but their perseverance off the battlefield is remarkable. For 14 years, retired Gurkhas have protested unequal pay and pension rules that make them second-class soldiers in the British Army. Their struggle may finally have paid off. The British government has put aside a longstanding policy of revising minor aspects of its policy regarding the Gurkhas; something that retired soldiers, now activists, say was a cynical attempt to avoid major revisions. On Jan. 12, British secretary of state for defence, Geoffrey Hoon, made an announcement in the House of Commons: Britain will conduct a wide-ranging review of the Gurkhas' grievances.

Prem Bahadur Bega joined the British Army in 1984 and was given compulsory retirement in 1999 after 15 years of service. A British colleague who was recruited in the same year as Bega was allowed to serve for seven more years before his retirement. The Briton earned several thousand pounds more in a year than Bega and receives far more in pension—625 pounds a month compared to Bega's 91 pounds. Bega's wife and children were allowed to accompany him for only 18 months out of his 15 years of service: The family of his British counterpart accompanied him throughout his service. "This is gross injustice," says Bega. Many other Gurkha veterans agree.

The Gurkhas want parity with their British colleagues in pay and pension, and also on the prickly issue of promotion. There seems to be a glass ceiling

FAST?

Will Gurkhas finally receive equal treatment? Britain has promised a 'wide-ranging review' by October that will make it 'legally and morally irreproachable.'

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI



COVER STORY



on Nepalis rising to higher ranks. Only three have been promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel, and only one has commanded a Gurkha battalion. Beyond this, the Gurkhas argue, the terms of service should be equal. Only 25 percent of Gurkhas are entitled to married housing, and the length of time that Gurkha families can stay with soldiers and non-commissioned officers is limited. The grievances of pay, pension, promotion and terms of service form the bulk of

the Gurkhas' discrimination case against the British government. For years the British refused to hear their pleas. "The

British government even didn't bother to respond to our petitions," says Gopal Siwakoti, popularly known as Chintan, a lawyer who acts on behalf of the Gurkha Army Ex-Servicemen's Organization, the GAESO.

But after the Royal Courts of Justice in London cleared the way in May 2002 for the Gurkhas to sue the British Ministry of Defence, the British government

found itself on the legal and moral low road. It has now for the first time conceded that fact. On Jan. 12, Defence Secretary Hoon announced that the government would conduct a "wide-ranging review" of the Gurkhas' pay and pensions. Hoon said that he wants to ensure that the Ministry of Defence is beyond reproach both legally and morally. Hoon's concession raises a few obvious questions: Why did the ministry decide to conduct the review now, and will the proposed review end the unequal treatment regime to the satisfaction of all?

"An ultimatum from us," says Krishna Rai, vice president of GAESO, "prompted the MoD to make the new announcement." GAESO, which is fighting court-battles against the ministry over its unequal treatment, sent the ministry a legal notice on Nov. 19 asking it to address all their grievances within a month or face court action. The Gurkhas see Hoon's announcement as a major victory. GAESO's legal advisers say that their case was strong and that they had collected new evidence that would have brought them a victory in court. The ministry must have found the new evidence damaging, say observers, because it responded by asking GAESO

to wait until January for a major announcement regarding Gurkha pay and pensions.

In a written ministerial statement to the House of Commons Hoon said, "As the House will be aware, our policy is to keep the Brigade of Gurkhas' terms and conditions of service under review, to ensure that they are fair and that any difference from the wider Army are reasonable and justifiable."

As happy as Gurkha activists are with the British action, they are also taking the new announcement with a pinch of salt. They have demanded that the British government make all aspects of the announcement public. In reply Lieutenant Colonel G.R. Harnby, chief of staff of British Gurkhas Nepal, says: "It will be a comprehensive review. It will look into all aspects [and be] sensitive to the Nepali dimension."

A British Embassy statement says that the examination of the terms and conditions of service will be all-embracing and look into the present terms of service for Gurkhas. The review is likely to include their career profiles; length of structures within

See
Last Page, 50



NEW BATTLES: GAESO President Padam Bahadur Gurung (left) with lawyer Chintan (middle)

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the Brigade of Gurkhas; pay and pensions; allowances; personal support for soldiers and their families, including pastoral care, education for children, medical provisions and leave arrangements. The Nepali government has already been informed of the review. Hoon told British MPs the review would look at whether differences between the Gurkhas' conditions and those of British soldiers were "absolutely justifiable." But the Gurkhas have warned the Ministry of Defence not to try to justify any disparity. "We want complete equality," says Chintan. "There can be no justification for any kind of discrimination."

Is British policy racial discrimination? Britain says it's not, but an increasing number of Britons including the wife of current Prime Minister Tony Blair, Cherie Booth Blair, argue that it is a clear case of racial discrimination and a human rights violation.

The argument has merit. Nepalis are treated differently than other foreign nationals serving in the British military.

Fijians whom the Ministry of Defence recruits enjoy the same conditions as British troops.

Even the British government's Commission for Racial Equality has supported individual cases filed by some

Gurkhas. In the case of Hari Thapa, a retired lance corporal, the commission said that the ministry's responsibilities under the Race Relations Act of 1976 outweigh the terms of the tripartite agreement (see Box Story, Page 26).





THE TRIPARTITE FACTOR

For more than 50 years, the British government found justification for treating the Gurkhas differently in the Tripartite Agreement (TPA) between Nepal, Britain and India, signed in February 1947.

The agreement is a complex series of documents comprising a memorandum, various annexes and a series of trilateral and bilateral exchanges between the three governments. It was negotiated shortly after Indian independence to redefine the role of Nepali soldiers in the armies of other countries. Under the agreement seven Gurkha regiments continued to serve in the Indian Army; four were transferred to the British Army and became the Brigade of Gurkhas. Crucially for the future of the Gurkhas, pay scales for all Nepali regiments in both the armies were pegged to the Indian army's pay. More than half a century later the Gurkhas are challenging both the

relevance and legality of the agreement.

The arrangement results in a huge disparity between British soldiers and the Gurkhas. As a result, say activists, more than 30,000 men retired from the British Gurkha service with little or no pension and were forced to live in poverty. Gurkhas who do receive pensions receive between one-sixth and one-eighth of what British pensionaries get under the rules of the TPA. The lower the rank, the higher the disparity.

Britain says that any major change to the present system would raise awkward questions between the three governments by breaching the TPA. There are

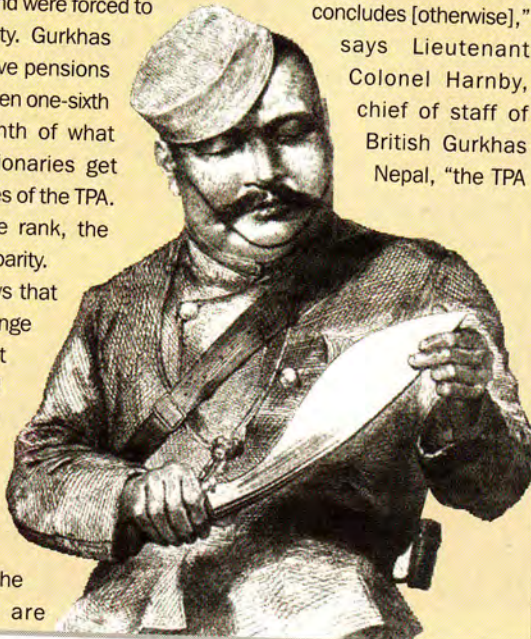
additional implications for bi-lateral relations with Brunei, where 23 percent of the Gurkhas are stationed. Despite announcing a review of the Gurkhas' demands, the British will stick to the status quo as long as possible. "Until such time [as] the review concludes [otherwise],"

says Lieutenant Colonel Harnby, chief of staff of British Gurkhas Nepal, "the TPA

will firmly be in place."

Gurkha activists say that until the discriminatory provisions of the agreement are nullified, they will continue to press their case. The Gurkhas have been pursuing the case under the Human Rights Act 1998 and the European Human Rights Convention. Both ban discrimination on the basis of race, color or nationality. GAESO lawyers say that the London High Court ruled in their favor in February 2003 in a case that hinged on challenging the validity of one of the clauses of the TPA. The court said then that 1947's discriminatory policies couldn't be practised in 2003, the tripartite agreement is dead except for recruitment purposes, according to the GAESO.

The British may eventually have to give up the TPA. The Indian government has said clearly that it wants to see the Gurkhas treated equally. So far Nepal has kept mum. **N**



Thapa, who lives in Wales, filed a racial discrimination case against the Ministry of Defence in an industrial tribunal after he was given an early discharge from the Army five years ago. During his 15 years in military service, he was paid 43,000 pounds less than his British counterparts.

Growing support among British political parties parallels the court support for the Gurkhas. Opposition Liberal Democrat defense spokesman, Paul Keetch, said that the ministry must recognize that it cannot "treat 21st-century soldiers like 19th-century conscripts." Even the British public seems to care about the Gurkhas. A demonstration of

more than 400 retired Gurkhas in Liverpool caught the eye of the press, and the Daily Express ran a campaign supporting the Gurkhas. In a poll of 16,000 people conducted by the newspaper, 99 percent supported the Gurkhas' demand. In October, British Prime Minister Tony Blair agreed to grant conditional citizenship to Gurkhas.

Gurkhas aren't going to be satisfied with conditions any more. They have called for complete equality with the British soldiers. There is another outstanding issue: more than 10,000 veterans and widows who are without any pension or compensation. In one example, in 1969 some 10,000 Gurkhas were made redundant under a retrenchment scheme. Their British counterparts who were also laid off under the scheme were handsomely compensated; Gurkhas were paid 150 pounds and sent home. In 1986, 111 Gurkhas soldiers on training in Hawaii were disciplined and dismissed en masse for mutinous behavior. Gurkhas said they

were sent home without compensation or the right to appeal. When asked if the review would include these two issues, a British official in Nepal says that the review will be forward looking, although he quickly adds that he hopes the reviewers will look into the past and the future before reaching any conclusions.

Some Gurkhas are optimistic that the review will get them equal treatment. "Let's hope the Ministry of Defence will end the discrimination," says retired Lance Corporal D B Bomjon, who receives 71 pounds a month, about Rs.9,000, as pension while his British counterparts receive 475 pounds.

The money is a big issue, and it is perhaps the reason the British have tried to avoid a full review. Full parity could cost the British government more than 2 billion pounds in total. It may finally be worth the cost to shake-off one of the last bits of the colonial hangover. And if complete parity isn't forthcoming, the Gurkhas say they are ready to prove their mettle in the courtroom, just as they have in the battlefields. **N**





FLAVORS OF INDIA, MADE BY NEPAL



The food in the 25 stalls at Dilli Haat representing 25 states in the Indian union are all cooked and served by Nepalis

**BY PURNA BASNET AND
BELA MALIK IN NEW DELHI**

TAKE SOMEONE OUT TO dinner. Come stimulate your appetite in a typical ambience. Savor specialties of different states. The *makki ki roti* and *sarson da saag* of Punjab ... *dal-bati choorma* from Rajasthan ... *srikhand*, *pao-bhaji* and *puran poli* of Maharashtra ... *macher jhol* from

Bengal ... are all available under one roof."

The brochure of the Dilli Haat could have added one more line, "all cooked and served by Nepalis." And it could have added yet another, "momos, chowmein, soup and thukpa available in almost all the state stalls." The waiters give the order to the cooks in Nepali, the cook talks to the helpers in Nepali;

the Assam stall plays Nepali and Assamese music in turns. The ambience of the food stalls in Dilli Haat has a special something about it.

According to the manager of the Haat, Zakir Ali, more than 10 million visitors have entered Dilli Haat for its 25 food stalls and 200 craft stalls since its inauguration in 1994. The 25 food stalls represent each state of the Indian union, and the idea was to promote foods from each region.

There have been Nepalis from the beginning. They set themselves up, and

DIASPORA

then moved on, but in the process the pioneer Nepalis had installed other Nepalis in each stall, now adding up to between 150 and 200 in the 25 stalls. Most of the Nepalis employed in Dilli Haat are from two districts: Jhapa and Pyuthan. The ethnic spectrum is varied and includes Magars, Bahuns, Tharus, Chhetris, Tamangs, Rais and Limbus. Zakir Ali does not know the number of Nepalis working in the stalls: "There are some Nepalis in the stalls of Northeast India since their food is momo and chowmein." The traditional food of the people of the Northeast is not momo and chowmein, anymore than it is the food of the people of Nepal.

Raj Subba, 15, has spent a few months in Delhi. He came with his "dai" from his village in Jhapa to "roam." Now he is a helper in the Manipur food stall. Everyone we spoke to came through a "dai" or a "bhai" or a "kaka" from the village. They in turn brought other young persons along with them.

The journey is not easy even for a veteran. Nepalis are troubled in the train and on the border. The TTE, the traveling ticket examiner, in the train, especially in Bihar, extorts extra money on the allegation that their tickets are invalid. The police on the trains who are meant for passengers' security threaten and loot them. And when they return to Nepal, the Indian security at the border opens their bags, pulls everything down, and takes bribes from them.

Sometimes they lose all their money on the way and don't eat anything for days until they reach their destination. Bhim Singh from Pyuthan says that he could not have made it on his own the first time.

In Delhi, the Nepalis in the food business in Dilli Haat and Chanakya, the other "momo-chowmein" hotspot, live in Pilanji, a slum behind the Sarojini Nagar market. Living in Delhi is not easy. There is a water problem in their locality. Few Nepalis dare to argue with their landlords, since they have no backup. Language poses another problem. The working hours are long, from 8 a.m., when they come in to ready the hundred and more dishes on the menu, to 11 p.m., after the last guest has left. The grind continues seven days a week, barring Holi, the only day on which Dilli



GOOD OLD NEPALI-PAN: Most of the Nepali workers are from Jhapa and Pyuthan

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY PURNA BANSAL

Haat is shut. Walking back alone at night is not advisable. There have been incidents involving local gangs and the Delhi police, both of which harass and loot. There are an estimated 600,000 Nepalis in Delhi but there are no records as to what they do and how they survive.

The wage rate for work in Dilli Haat remains fixed over the years. Cooks get up to Indian Rs.4,000. Helpers make a maximum of Rs.1,000, and waiters Rs.1,500 a month. You begin as a cleaner and slowly move up to being a chef or a cook, but that requires quick learning. There is no insurance, bonus or any other rights. If someone falls ill, the oth-

ers in the community take care of the invalid.

Deepak was removed from service. No one backed him. He had not heard of the Prabhashi Nepali Sangh (Bharat), a mass organization of Nepalis that works especially with waiters and helpers, or any of the mass organizations of other parties in Nepal— Ekta Samaj, Nepali Jan Adhikar Suraksha Samhiti and Nepali Jan Samparg Samhiti—but was keen to contact them. Deepak says it is common for Nepalis to get exploited in Delhi. The owners do not pay for months, and when the worker asks for the payment, the owner slaps a false





charge of theft and it becomes a police case. The owner has the law and influence on his side. The Nepali does not even have a union on his.

Deepak and his friends, Govinda and Krishna, are bitter about life as workers in Delhi. They say that the people in power in Nepal get dollops of dollar as aid money, which is all eaten up. There are no jobs. There is a conflict. They can't return due to that. If there were jobs in Nepal, who would come to Delhi to wash dishes in a restaurant?

The manager, Zakir Ali, says that the stalls were contracted to the state tourist corporations, who then leased the kitchens to private contractors or ran it themselves. Any complaints have to go

to the corporations through the contractors. It was not possible.

The long hours, no paid leave, low pay and the arduous journey make going home difficult. Some of the workers have not met their families for years. Communication is maintained through letters and phone calls. They do not read the papers. New entrants in the labor community bring news from home. There is no time to watch TV. Sometimes this lack of communication creates trouble.

"Dai, what is your name?"

"Tara Thapa"

"Which Thapa?"

He grinned and said that he is a "Rai Thapa." The owner of his stall

(Jharkhand) re-christened him and the new title stuck.

Tara Rai's wife at home left with another man leaving his parents with their two children. He felt bad. He had to leave for Delhi to feed his family and this is what he did.

Nepalis are popular with the managers and owners. Zakir Ali says that as manager he has no complaints: "Nepalis are brave and hardworking." R.K. Chandro Singh, manager of the Manipur food stall, says that all his staff are Nepali. "They are very nice boys. They work well and are smart and quick on their feet. Best of all, they laugh and joke." The boys and he communicate in broken Hindi.

How do Nepalis learn how to cook *chicken xacuti*, *sev puri*, *chicken in taro's nest*, *akhumi*, *anishe*, *maser tenga* and *eromba*? Someone from the state comes for a bit and teaches some basics. For the rest, it is a lot of imagination and experimentation with food that is unfamiliar. Bikram Poudel Sharma, manager of the Goa stall, says, "Goan food is very easy. You just take coconut and mix it with masala. The more the masala ferments, the tastier the food. We use masala that is kept for weeks." Mrs. Mendonza, any comments?

But the customers don't complain. The stalls are thronged by hungry visitors through the day. Dolly Arora, a smart-looking woman in her early 30s, beams, "I like eating here. The service is good, the price reasonable. And I get the extraordinary experience of tasting food from all the states of India." Her favorite food in Dilli Haat? "Momos and chowmein." ■

EVERYBODY'S FAVORITE: Momos, chowmein and thukpa are available in almost all stalls

Alfresco
Nagaland Food Stall

NAAGA SPECIAL THOU
(BYEHAN RIVU, YEHYEHANG RIBU, SHUYEY ANU RABU)

VEGETARIAN
SAG HARTI MULLI SAGLE
SAG HARTI MULLI SAGLE
SAG HARTI MULLI SAGLE
SAG HARTI MULLI SAGLE
SAG HARTI MULLI SAGLE
SAG HARTI MULLI SAGLE

CHICKEN
CHICKEN IN TARE'S NEST
CHICKEN IN BYEHAN RIBU
CHICKEN IN BLACK BEAN SAGLE
CHICKEN WITH BABY CORN
BAMBOO SHOOT
CHILLI
MUSHROOM
FRIED PULL
FRIED HALF
CHICKEN MUNCHUMAN

PORK
BAMBOO SHOOT
CHILLI NAAGA RIBU
AKHUMI (FERMENTED PORK HEAD)
ANISHE
DRY FRIED

MOMOS
VEGETABLE
PORK
CHICKEN
MUTTON

PRAWNS
CHILLI & MINTED PRAWNS FRIED
PRAWNS IN HOT OIL & SAUCE

FUYONG
EGG
ONION
MUSHROOM

SPRING ROLL
EGG

THE FISHERMEN A

The tsunami waves have long gone. But the fishermen are just too afraid to go back to the sea.

BY PRADEEP SILWAL
IN DEVANIMPATTINUM

PEOPLE LIVING IN THE coastal fishing hamlets of Tamil Nadu are gradually picking up the pieces of their splintered lives tossed away by the tsunami waves. Thanks to the combined, if somewhat chaotic early on, relief efforts of the government, NGOs and individuals.

Bulldozers are busy leveling the ground. Disinfectants have been spread on the both sides of the dusty road. Everyday the fishermen get to see hordes of visiting aid workers who take their pictures and listen to their stories. People have started to move back into the places where their mud and thatched houses once stood. Children straddle the overturned boats and pose for photographs even grandmas are eager to oblige the cameramen with their toothless smiles.

Some semblance of a normal life is emerging in the chaos, though the villagers realize it's going to be a long hard struggle. On the morning of Jan. 15, three weeks after the disaster that claimed around 3,000 lives in Tamil Nadu and more than 9,400 all over India, a group of fishermen from Devanimpattinum village in Cuddalore district, some 200 kilometers south of Chennai, faced the sea with their repaired boats. The eternal provider served yet another raw dish on their plates: only two fishes. On a normal day before the tsunamis, the group of four would have netted at least 150 fish in two hours. "I put the net into the sea but I could hardly get much. All I got are these two," says Angammuthu, 33, one of the four fish-

ermen who had ventured out to sea, pointing at a meager catch.

Tsunami waves have deposited tons of sand on the shallow waters, disturbing the marine environment near coastal

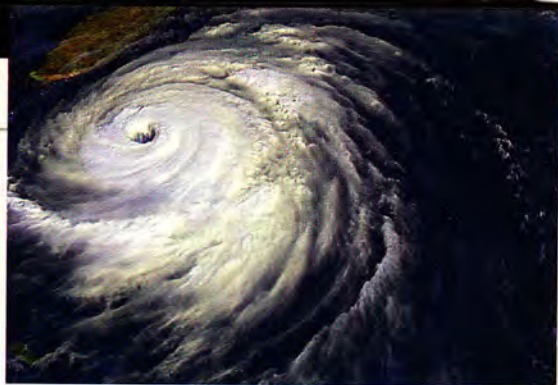
A MEAGER CATCH: That's all these fishermen got

areas. The news of disappearances of the fish has heightened the distress level of the fishermen who have already lost boats and fishing nets. Many of them lost homes and loved ones too. The media speculates that 85 percent of the affected are poor fishermen living near the sea.

Before the tsunamis came, these fishermen would earn on an average Rs.3,000 every month. When a group went out to



ND THE SEA



sea—sometimes for as long as a week—they would make Rs.1,000 from a single excursion. It is a different story now.

On the coast, the tsunamis have left behind tattered fishing nets, and small wooden boats called *vallams* have been crushed to pieces. Boats and damaged fishing nets remain scattered in places that were once fishermen's lawns. Further inland, fiber boats are lying upside down, almost all of them in irreparable condition. The fishermen neither seem to have the will nor the resources to get them back in shape or to take them ashore. The authorities have requisitioned heavy-duty cranes from the Madras Port Trust to lift the boats.

The logistics and the money needed to buy new boats and nets aside, the fishermen are simply too afraid to go to the sea.

"The waves have damaged our boats," says Mailvanan, a fisherman and father of three children. "Some are in useless condition. We need new nets. We are waiting for the government to provide us those things."

"But all of us are waiting. No one wants to be the first to go to sea. Everybody is afraid," adds his friend Devanathan, 40, who has three daughters. Both of these fishermen lost all of their belongings but at least have their families intact.

The Tamil Nadu government provided Rs.4,000 as immediate relief to each of them. The feeling among the displaced fishermen is that "the government will take care of us."

All along these coastal villages, fishermen have started to repair their homes and some have already returned to the patches of land where their thatched mud house once stood. In Sonagappam, Shivaraj, 25, and his wife Kalaiselvi, 22, have just finished putting a corrugated iron sheet roof over their temporary house with the construction materials they received from World Vision India Tsunami Relief Program—which has

PICKING UP THE PIECES: Cranes being used for relief work



helped 500 families in Cuddalore build temporary shelters. Some of the houses have already been handed over to those people by Dean Hirsh, international president of World Vision, during his visit to the affected areas.

"These temporary houses are meant for a year, until these [people] will be able to build their own houses," says Jayanth Vincent of World Vision India. The World Vision India relief team plans to wind up its immediate relief program by Jan. 26. So far it has provided food, clothing, utensils and clean drinking water to 40,000 families in 10 affected sites in four states in India.

"To help the fishermen start their life once again, we are looking at the possibility of starting a micro-finance program to lend money to buy fishing equipment," says Vincent.

These fishermen lost just about everything. But they still have their pride intact and realize that relief efforts won't take them too far in earning their livelihood. One after another, people who came to receive relief packets say that

they are not poor people. "We had color TV, grinder, and fridge. Floods washed everything away."

Says Vathani, a fisherman's wife and mother of three children, "This packet will help our family for 10 more days. But it is the government that must help us out in the long run." The Pondicherry government has announced a fresh package of Rs.432.9 million for the fishermen to purchase boats and fishing nets.

Here in the coastal villages of Tamil Nadu, heavy-duty cranes are busy lifting the boats and what remains of them. The people who rushed in with food and relief materials are slowly beginning to leave. The fishermen realize they will have to fend for themselves; they will not have the liberty to stand on the beach and watch the sea forever. The question that haunts the relief workers the most: If the fishermen are afraid to go to sea, what are they going to eat? ■

(Silvial, with World Vision Nepal, was recently in Tamil Nadu assisting the World Vision India tsunami relief team)

THE FINAL PUSH

The support the Maoists have among the populations in the countryside they operate in is tenuous and liable to erode as their guerilla tactics intensify

BY ADITYA ADHIKARI

THE MAOIST DECLARATION of strategic offensive is supposed to signify a dramatic change in their tactics. Any uprising that uses the tactics of guerilla war—blockades, bandas, ambushes on military convoys—has found sooner or later that these tactics ultimately have only limited success. The state cannot be taken over by guerilla tactics alone. What guerilla warfare has done historically, however, in China for instance, is that it has gained time for the development of conventional forces. The declaration of strategic offensive, in theory at least, signifies a great confidence in the rebel leaders about their capability to fight the security forces on their own terms. Guerilla warfare, by its very nature, is strategically defensive. Strategic offensive means a complete change in the methods of war.

To go beyond guerilla warfare is extremely difficult for any rebel group. The historian Eric Hobsbawm has written: "It is comparatively easy for a widely-backed guerilla movement to eliminate official power from the countryside, except for the strong points actually physically occupied by armed forces. The real problem is to get beyond that point."

So the Maoist declaration of strategic offensive in Nepal is unconvincing. They may have stepped up the intensity of their attacks, but they are still guerilla attacks. The last blockade they enforced was well-heeded because of the fright they instilled in everyone by burning 18



trucks, but that blockade did not reveal any increase in their ability in becoming strategically aggressive.

The other crucial factor necessary for a guerilla army to embark on the offensive is to have gained the support—active or passive—of the local populations among whom, or close to whom, they engage in their activities. Toward this end, textbooks of such warfare always emphasize the need to inspire the "oppressed population" with revolutionary ideals, but inspiring non-military populations to support and condone guerilla operations is especially difficult in countries like Nepal, where there is no foreign power to fight against. It is easier to gain full-fledged support against "foreign imperialists" than it is against a "class enemy" for the simple reason that the former is easier to identify. A ruling class that looks different and speaks a foreign language will arouse more hatred than one who looks and talks the same as everyone else.

Nevertheless, despite the civilian uprisings in Dailekh, the Maoists seem to have had some success in gaining the passive support of populations. This mostly means that villagers in many places are not willing to inform the Army about Maoist activities, and that the "donations" the Maoists ask for are provided somewhat ungrudgingly, almost as a routine activity that needs to be borne with. The key to this support has been to intimidate villagers by demonstrating force, but not to the degree that it would antagonize them. The villagers have to be assured their safety if they don't say or do anything against the Maoists.

The following observations are based on a recent visit to a few villages in Dolakha district, where the rebels tread the fine line between intimidating and but not antagonizing the populations: where a local shopkeeper said that "if the Maoists demand more of us, then the villagers here will revolt against them like the people of Dailekh." Yet, the same shopkeeper also said, "No one here will

reveal anything about Maoist activities to the Army. But there are a few who reveal Army activities to the Maoists."

How, then, have the rebels been able to gain this kind of passive support?

To begin with the simplest reason: The Maoists pay for everything they buy at the local shops and never give the impression of living better than the villagers. They are not averse to visiting villages alone to buy the small day-to-day goods they need. While this helps to humanize the Maoists in the minds of the population, it is also flattering to the villagers that even the powerful rebels are dependent on them in some ways.

In contrast, although soldiers of the Royal Nepal Army too pay for the small things they buy, they come to villages in groups, armed and uniformed, and appear mostly self-sufficient, with little need to buy goods from the village shops. Besides occasionally harassing the villagers for information, they mostly keep to themselves. Their intimidating appearance and their apparent self-sufficiency has earned them the reputation of being high-handed and arrogant.

Maoist methods of identifying and "eliminating" their enemies are seen as cold, efficient and precise; the Army's as belligerent and inaccurate. "The Army visits our village, yells at some people, sometimes beats someone up and then leaves," said a villager. "But when the Maoists are looking for someone who has informed on them, they make sure they have the right person before killing him."

As for convincing villagers of the Maoist cause, the rebels seem to have had little success. The implementation of the most important rule of guerilla warfare as far as gaining the support of villagers goes—to bring land, justice and schools wherever the rebels go—has been severely limited both by Maoist capabilities and the desires of the villagers. This is partially so because this guerilla war, despite what Maoist rhetoric states, is not directed upon "foreign oppressors", and there is not much "lifting of oppression" that can be done without antagonizing people. This is because very few in these rural communities are

actually perceived as oppressors, and the "rich oppressors" of the capital are too far away to arouse hatred.

So no land has been redistributed among the disenfranchised, because the Maoists don't have adequate control over the villages and also because they cannot risk the anger of villagers whose ways of life would be unsettled with any redistribution of property. As for bringing schools and education, the propaganda camps that hundreds of abducted students are forced to attend simply do not qualify as an education.

There have been reports that the rebels are preparing a curriculum that includes military studies, Marxism and Leninism, economics, culture and even something called "socialist aesthetics," but it is clear that they do not have the resources to create and disseminate anything close to a decent education. Most rural populations are aware that a replacement of the government curriculum with a Maoist one can only be a serious blow to whatever achievements that have been made by our educational system in the past half-century.

The problem of bringing justice to the people is the most interesting of all. The only way in which the rebels can be said to have brought justice is by killing or forcing to flee various officials and schoolteachers who supposedly appropriated public funds for private use. Among most of the villagers I met in Dolakha it was an unquestioned truth that those who were "punished" were guilty of the crimes they had been accused of and their punishment was seen to be justified. It was however difficult to ascertain whether the "guilty" officials were considered to be guilty by the villagers before they were punished, or whether the villagers simply accepted



The state cannot be taken over by guerilla tactics

their guilt after the fact. One villager even demonstrated pleasure in describing how the Maoists had publicly humiliated a government official before killing him. His story ended with a gleeful laugh, an indication of the thrill he felt at this extreme act and his awe of the rebels.

This may appear as justice to some, but it is justice of a most primitive nature and cannot have any lasting value.

Many people living in rural areas under direct or indirect Maoist control are willing to accept powers over themselves as long as they feel they are indirectly a part of that power. As long as the Maoists are perceived to be powerful and as long as they punish people who are perceived to be "different" from the rest of the population, there will be those who consider them to be just. This is mostly a case of people equating power with justice.

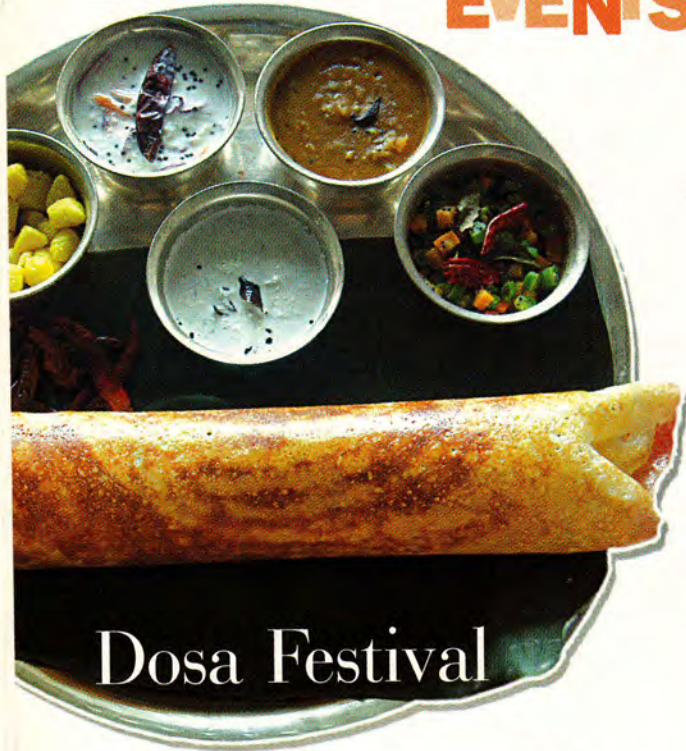
All this is to say that, if the Maoists have been able to gain support in much of the countryside, this support doesn't exactly translate into a whole-hearted backing. There are those, no doubt, who feel awe and admiration toward the Maoists, but this admiration is mostly for their power, not for their ideals. This makes the support the rebels have quite tenuous. Application of more power onto the villagers, by extortion or by other demands made upon them, will make communities withdraw even passive support. An increase in guerilla activities—planting of bombs in public places, the enforcement of blockades—will have the same effect, as these too threaten and inconvenience the general population. On the other hand, as whatever support the rebels have is based mainly on the awe that power inspires, any intimation that people have of a decrease in Maoist power will also lead to a withdrawal in support.

What the consequences of the strategic offensive will be are yet to be seen. But an intensification of the kind of guerilla warfare we have become familiar with will only mean a further alienation of the population on whom the Maoists depend. **N**

There are those who feel awe and admiration toward the Maoists, but this admiration is mostly for their power, not for their ideals.

CITY ThisWeek

EVENTS



Dosa Festival

The Café at the Hyatt Regency presents the Grand Dosa Festival. It's going to be a full meal with a variety of delectable vegetarian and non-vegetarian fillings to suit different taste buds. From an anytime snack of crisp paper-thin wafers to a filling meal with wholesome stuffing served with chutneys and a dollop of butter, the *dosa* is versatile. For non-vegetarians, on offer are *mutton keema varuval dosa*, *chittinadu chicken dosa*, egg and chicken *keema dosa*. For vegetarians there is the *paneer dosa*, the *paper dosa* and more. The café, located at the lower lobby overlooking the poolside, is set amidst a tranquil environment of traditional Newari architecture. It comprises of indoor and outdoor seating offering panoramic views of the Boudhanath Stupa, landscaped gardens and the poolside areas. Be a part of the Grand Dosa Festival. Till Jan. 30. Time: 6:30 p.m. onwards. For further information: 449-1234.

ART EXHIBITION

Zen Painting

The "Buddha Gallery," in partnership with "Gallery 9," presents 50 paintings by Kang Chan-Mo. Among the 50 paintings, 25 will be exhibited at the Buddha Gallery in Thamel and 25 at Gallery 9 in Lazimpat. The Korean artist Chan-Mo uses few colors in his experimental approach. For this exhibition, Chan-Mo has derived inspiration from a recent trek amidst the natural splendor of the Himalaya in the Khumbu region of Everest. The paintings are simple figures that depict his imagination of Buddha, various landscapes and people. Born in 1949, Chan-Mo got his Bachelor's degree in fine art from Joong Ang University. This is his 12th solo exhibition till date. Date: Jan. 20 to Jan 26. For information: 444-1689, 442-8694.



Martini Mania

Hotel Yak and Yeti presents Martini Mania at the Pub. Date: Jan. 21 - Feb. 5. Time: 12 a.m. - 12 p.m. For information: 424-8999.

prawns, smoked salmons, crisp batter-fried ruby rocky mountain crab, white oats fried sea fishes and other delicious seafood cuisine during the seafood festival. An array of wines will also

Seafood Festival

The Sea has always offered a variety of exquisite and diverse range of exotic seafood. The Signature Restaurant at the Rox presents palate-tantalizing fried jumbo



P U B L I S H E D

District Development PROFILE of NEPAL 2004



COVERAGE
Divided mainly on three parts,
the publication covers
i. National ii. Districts iii. Municipalities

1130 Pages

District Section includes-
District Maps /Development Indicators of Each District /VDC data on Population & Infrastructure /District wise database on Topography, Demography, Household Characteristics, Economic Activities, Social Characteristics, Agriculture, Irrigation, Forest, Co-operatives, NGO's, Transportation, Communication, Energy System, Education, Health, Drinking Water, Gender, Children and many more
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Informal Sector Research & Study Center (ISRSC): Kamladi, Kathmandu, Nepal/Ph: 4429324/ Email: informal@ntc.net.np/ Website: <http://www.isrsc.org>

be available alongside the food.
Date: Jan. 12 - Jan. 26. Time: 6
p.m. onwards. For information:
449-1234.

Trip of all Times

For just Rs.5999 for Nepalis
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Jomsom Mountain Resort
provides two nights and three
days accommodations. The
price will also include round-
about airfare from Pokhara to
Jomsom, daily buffet breakfast
and dinner, pickups and drops
from the airport to the resort
and vice versa and a tour of the
Marpha village in Jomsom. For
information: 449-7569.

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more. For information: 201-
2345.

Margarita Night

Dwarika's Hotel presents the
Margarita Night serving
Churasqueria BBQ, Latin
American Delicados and refresh-
ing margaritas. Also enjoy the
Latin beats by Abhaya and the
Steam Injuns. Date: Jan. 28.
Price: Rs.799. Time: 7p.m. on-
wards. Happy hours from 4p.m.
- 7p.m. everyday at Fusion Bar.
For information: 447-9488.

Kickin' Up Dust

Siddhartha Art Gallery features the
Australian Contemporary Indig-

ONGOING

Taste of Thailand

The Rox Restaurant features di-
verse range of popular dishes of
Thailand. The herbs, spices and
market fresh ingredients will make
a difference in your culinary ex-
perience. Thai buffet lunch every
Fridays and Saturdays. Time:
12:30 p.m. - 3 p.m. For infor-
mation: 4491-234.

Seasons Special

Exotic Thai, sizzling tandoori, tra-
ditional Nepali and Italian en-
counter daily for lunch at the
Shambala Garden Café, Hotel
Shangri-la. Price: Rs.450 in-
cluding a bottle of soft drink or
mineral water. For information:
441-2999.

Krishnarpan

The Nepali specialty restaurant
at Dwarika's Hotel offers fine
dining ceremonial cuisine. Four
to 16 course ceremonial

meal. Open for lunch and din-
ner. For information: 4479-
488.

Fusion Night

The Rox Bar welcomes everyone
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western instruments—a treat for
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ers. Every Wednesday. Time: 6

p.m. onwards. For information:
449-1234.

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8p.m. Also BBQ Lunch every
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fer: Drinks, buy one get one free.

Jukebox Experience

The jukebox experience with
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Walkers every Wednesday, Fri-
day and Saturday at Rox Bar. For
information: 449-1234.

enous Cultural Festival, with
exhibition of photographs of
the country's aboriginal habi-
tats and their culture. Date:
Till Jan. 31. For information:
421-8048.

Masquerade Night

Hyatt presents the Masquer-
ade night featuring models
from dreams unlimited, vari-
ous pop stars with DJ's
Rupesh& Raju. Date: Jan. 29.
Price 400 nett, Time 8 p.m on-
wards.

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FOR INFORMATION: 4442220

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A GREAT NEWSPAPER

POLITICS OF OIL

The government of a rural country like Nepal cannot afford to subsidize petroleum products, which are mainly consumed in urban areas and by the middle and the upper classes



BY BIPUL NARAYAN

After tolerating losses amounting to Rs.400 to Rs.600 million every month for more than a year, the government has finally taken the inevitable plunge. It increased prices of petrol and diesel by 11 percent and 17 percent, respectively; LP gas prices by more than 13 percent; and kerosene prices by 29 percent. Prices are now closer to those in India; the higher prices will also allow the Nepal Oil Corporation, the NOC, to recoup its losses amounting to more than Rs.5 billion.

The widespread protests after the price hike have again put the NOC in the eye of the storm. Most people would not mind paying higher prices for petroleum products, if they were convinced that price hikes were solely the result of a rise in international prices. But they are not. They think that the NOC is inefficient and corrupt; and that they are just being made victims of greed in high places. So much was made clear in television interviews of common people right after the price hike.

No government could have continued with such huge losses for long. The amount of money under consideration was just too big—about 1.5 percent of the Gross Domestic Product every year. Moreover, the spending had no economic rationale. The government of a poor and rural country like Nepal cannot afford to subsidize petroleum products, which are mainly consumed in urban areas and by the middle and the up-

per classes. Government money is much more productive if it is spent for building more schools, health posts and roads, which the country so badly needs. Also subsidies create distortions in the market; people no longer look for cheaper alternatives and end up consuming much more of the product than is good for the economy.

The government could have, however, done a lot more to make the distribution of petroleum products more efficient and transparent. This would have not only made petroleum prices lower and created much less resentment when the prices were raised.

For too long, the NOC has been a classic example of a poorly run public enterprise. The corporation is a monopoly; overstaffed; rife with corruption; routinely tinkered with by the government of the day; its bosses hand dole-out to political parties during elections. It is lacking in initiative and dynamism, and proper audits are seldom carried out. All this means the operational costs of the NOC are much higher than they should be. In normal times, the

NOC has survived on government grants or by overcharging customers.

But these are no longer normal times. First, international petroleum prices have reached record levels over the last year. The war in Iraq; political and other instabilities in oil producing countries such as Nigeria, Russia and Venezuela; and high demand from China has fueled the growth in petroleum prices. The prices are likely to stay at their current high levels in the near future. The NOC can no longer overcharge cus-

tomers without inviting their ire. Second, the country is in the midst of an unprecedented political and military conflict. At a time when Maoists are bent on capitalizing people's discontent, the government cannot continue to be insensitive to the concerns of the people.

The good thing is that the government is working to change things. The government has started reforms, which if implemented properly and quickly will go a long way in changing the way petroleum products are sold in Nepal. By the end of 2005, an automatic pricing mechanism built by the Petroleum Price Fixing and Monitoring Committee is expected to be in place.

This will help bring an end to some confusion regarding petroleum prices but will not solve the whole problem. The government also intends to adopt the Petroleum Products Sale and Distribution Ordinance this year to allow private sector participation in oil imports and distribution. This should make the petroleum market more competitive; the NOC will have to either measure up to the increased competition or quit. Moreover, petroleum products will no longer be politically explosive. With some luck, they will be just like any other commodity whose prices go up and down depending on the market situation. And people will seldom have doubts about the prices.

But as all of us know, government intentions are just government intentions. There are many other important things on which the government has failed to deliver. Let's wait and hope that this is not one of them. ■



Raindrops Keep Falling . . .

You can't stop the banda by complaining, so enjoy yourself

BY KUNAL LAMA

What a tawdry start to last week: banda on Monday; westerly winter rains on Tuesday. For those of us fond of excessively extended weekends, it was godsend—for homebodies, bliss. Of course, there are lots of people who rage, rail and rant at the news of yet another banda AND when the first raindrops fall on their heads. It's easy to understand their feeling, especially when it comes to bandas. Usually called at the flimsiest of excuses, it appears that anyone can call a banda for whatever reason suits them. Take this classic case for example:

On January 1, 2005, I woke up to a Thamel that was shut. I thought, perhaps, the shopkeepers, like me, had had a heavy night of "fun"-making and, consequently, had decided to roll up their noisy shutters later in the morning of a brand new year. The truth was different. Thamel had witnessed two "street festivals" on two consecutive days: the first, on December 30th, in honor of the Crown Prince's birthday and the second, on the 31st, on account of New Year's Eve, of course. On the 31st evening, one of the stages set up in the middle of the street apparently played music beyond 10 p.m., the agreed upon time between the police and the local organizers. The story then gets a bit murky: the police asked the organizers to stop the music; the band played on; the police climbed up on the stage to forcibly shut it down, but when the music still played on, they arrested the organizers. When an official from the Thamel Tourism Development Committee (TTDC) went to the Durbar Marg police station to negotiate a release, he was manhandled and also thrown into the clink. To protest this—voilà!—Thamel was shut down on New Year's Day. This was the same committee that had gone around Thamel

last year asking the shops to open up when a local gang lord, protesting inaction from the police against his rival who had attacked him outside Jai Nepal Cinema, had mobilized his goons to shut down Thamel in protest—or else. It was difficult to understand, therefore, the TTDC's chosen form of protest against—if correct—the police's mishandling of the situation. I felt sorry for all the tourists, having flown miles, ambling about, facing a wasted day and ignorant of the closure, probably thinking that the Maoists were involved, on what

was, if I remember correctly, not exactly a cheerful, sunny day. "Namaste, but no thanks," is what I would have said, and then left Nepal.

Bandas have come to symbolize all that is wrong with the free and selfish interpretation of democracy; they underline, at the same time, the near total collapse of law and order in Nepal. Until this situation is addressed and the citizens of the country feel empowered enough to oppose it, expect more of the same.

The best course of action, therefore, is to take advantage of the situation. House cleaning, laundry, lunch with friends, a family card session, catch up with the reading (I always have books that I haven't read lying around for years) and check out DVDs. I love going on long walks around the city, streets finally empty of traffic, noise and dust. I then realize how small Kathmandu really is and wonder why we even get into cars to travel from A to B, getting stuck in almighty traffic snarls, shouting at motorcyclists who suddenly appear out of nowhere and giving the middle finger to motorists who change lanes right in front of the traffic lights, raising our blood pressure to perilous levels unnecessarily. It's also a delight to discover forgotten bahals, lanes, old houses and temples, full of character and charm. One of my favorite pastimes is people watching. Giggling girls and bashful boys seemingly circling each other aimlessly; old

men lounging in the sun, deep in deliberate conversations; curious shoppers flipping over stacks of clothes selling cheap; hungry *pani puri* lovers stuffing their dripping mouths; and little kids intent on a mock match of cricket.

The rain on Tuesday kept me inside the house the whole day. There was no point in going out to get wet, cold and dirty. And the rains were a blessing in many ways. My well suddenly sprung more water: the dusty roofs got a clean-

ing; the plants in the garden looked fresh and greener. Holed up inside with the lights and the expensive gas-fed heater on, I wondered if Nature too was in on the banda conspiracy. And why not? Indian actors malign Nepal: nationwide banda. A senior-but-no-longer-relevant politician isn't allowed to drive up to the airport terminal: Nepal banda. Western Command Maoist leaders are killed: Narayani, Lumbini and Bheri banda. Petroleum product prices are raised: the Monday banda. Winter rains: Valley banda! ■



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Happy Campers

Busy parents and bored students are driving a new trend: activities camps for kids

BY KUMUD NEPAL

What more could students want than a month-long winter break? After hectic schooldays and extra classes to make up for time lost to the usual bandas, students should be craving a lazy month of sleeping long hours and hibernating in a quilt to watch movies or the test series between Australia and Pakistan on Star Sports.

Some students want a lot more, and winter camps for kids are the hot new thing. They allow students to keep themselves busy during the break, and they give busy parents a welcome hiatus too. Camps can be academically oriented: "English Language Courses for Students at Break" read one of the advertisements in the major dailies and other magazines; another promised a "Life Skills Camp." Some camps are more about good fun, offering light games, educational tours or coaching in sports, music or dance.

Sonam Tshering, a 14-year-old from Dhalko, is happy to have learned some new basketball tricks at the Godavari Alumni Association's month-long bas-

ketball camp, which concluded on Jan. 22. It was raining on a chilly morning a week before the end of the camp, but the campers didn't seem bothered by the weather. Dressed in jerseys, thin T-shirts and light trousers, they were all dribbling hard and shooting hoops. "If I just stayed idly at home, I would be wasting my time as well as my talent," says Tshering.

The camp's coach Krishna Maharjan says that the camp helped students to develop both team and individual skills. When they played and trained with other students they didn't know, he says, they learned about cooperation and team spirit. "Some came to have fun," says Maharjan, "others for serious skill development." According to the GAA, it had to reject students because of a higher number of



registrants than expected; it ran the camp in two shifts.

Part of the high demand for these winter camps comes from parents. Parents who have to work need a safe place for their children during long school breaks. Others want to stimulate their children. Rashmila Adhikari didn't want her 12-year-old son, Rajat, watching cricket the whole day, so she sent him to a cricket camp last winter. "I don't even remember the name of the camp," says Rashmila. "I just wanted to get Rajat off his TV addiction." She says Rajat was more than happy to do something that interested him, and she was happy that he was active.

A wide variety of camps have started up to cater to the demand. Sangita Niraula runs Om Boarding, a girls' hostel at Dhobighat. She and her friend Geeta Keshavan organized a two-week-long culture and arts camp this year for 49 campers from various schools. Niraula says the kids liked skating, music and dance the most. She rented the Aroma Sports Center at Sanepa for the activities and for cre-

ative courses like clay modeling. The program also included tours to Fun World, the video game arcade at the Soaltee Crowne Plaza, and the Patan Museum.

Banjara Restaurant and Party Place in Bhatbhateni also organized a camp for children between 10 and 15. "Our primary business is the restaurant," says Narayan Prasad Gautam, the manager of the winter program. They saw the demand for winter camps and decided to join in. The camp set up by Banjara offered to drive away the winter blues with talent shows, music classes, magic sessions, dance training, yoga instruction and educational tours. The tour package included trips to museums, the zoo and Nepal Television. According to Gautam, the campers enjoyed the tour to the TV station's offices at Singha Durbar the most, because they got to see how shows were broadcast to their television screens.

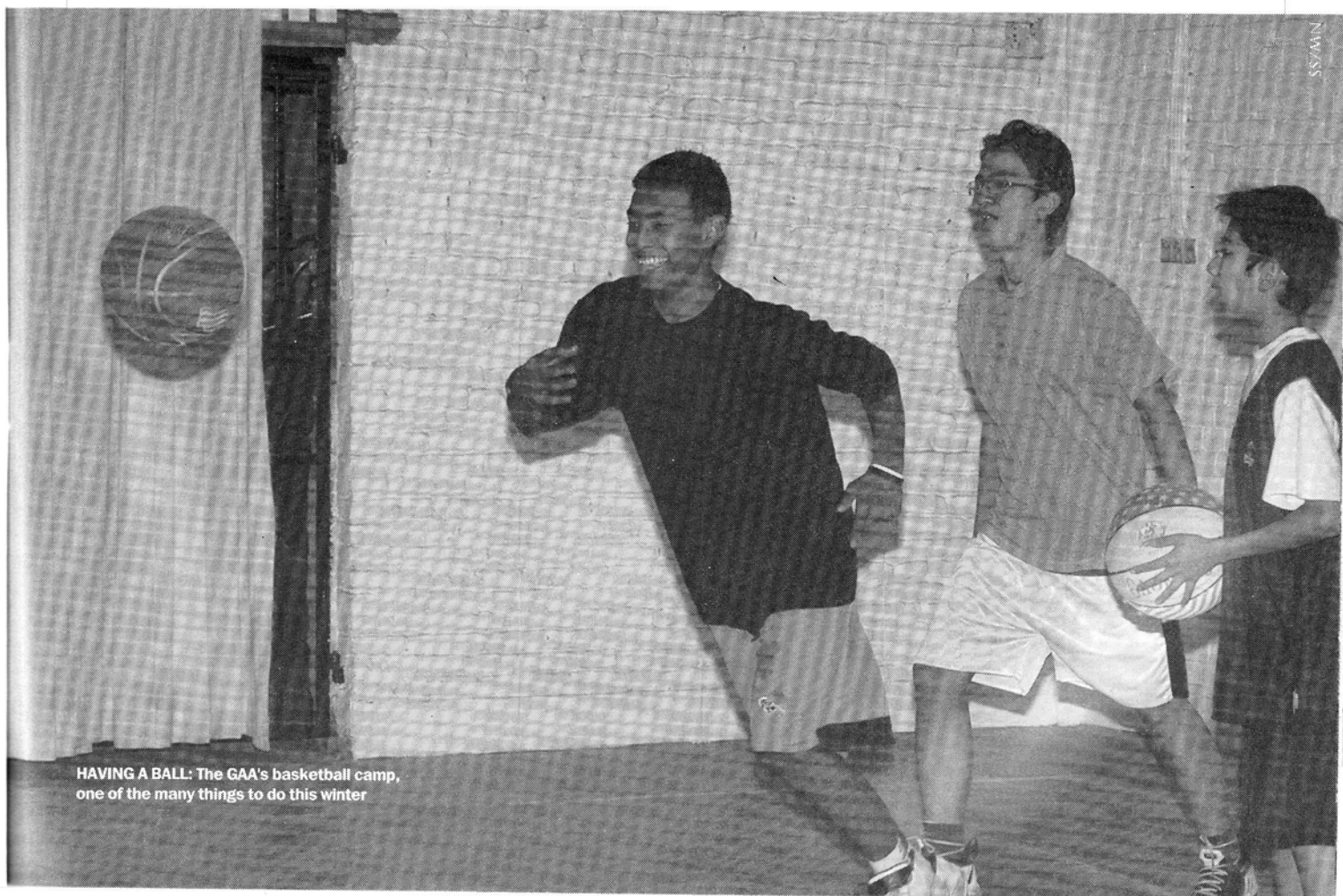
The British Council's winter offerings are educational: It has been hosting winter English language classes for the last eight years. Children between the

ages of 8 and 13 came in large numbers for all eight sessions, council staff say. These courses are intended to strengthen students' English skills.

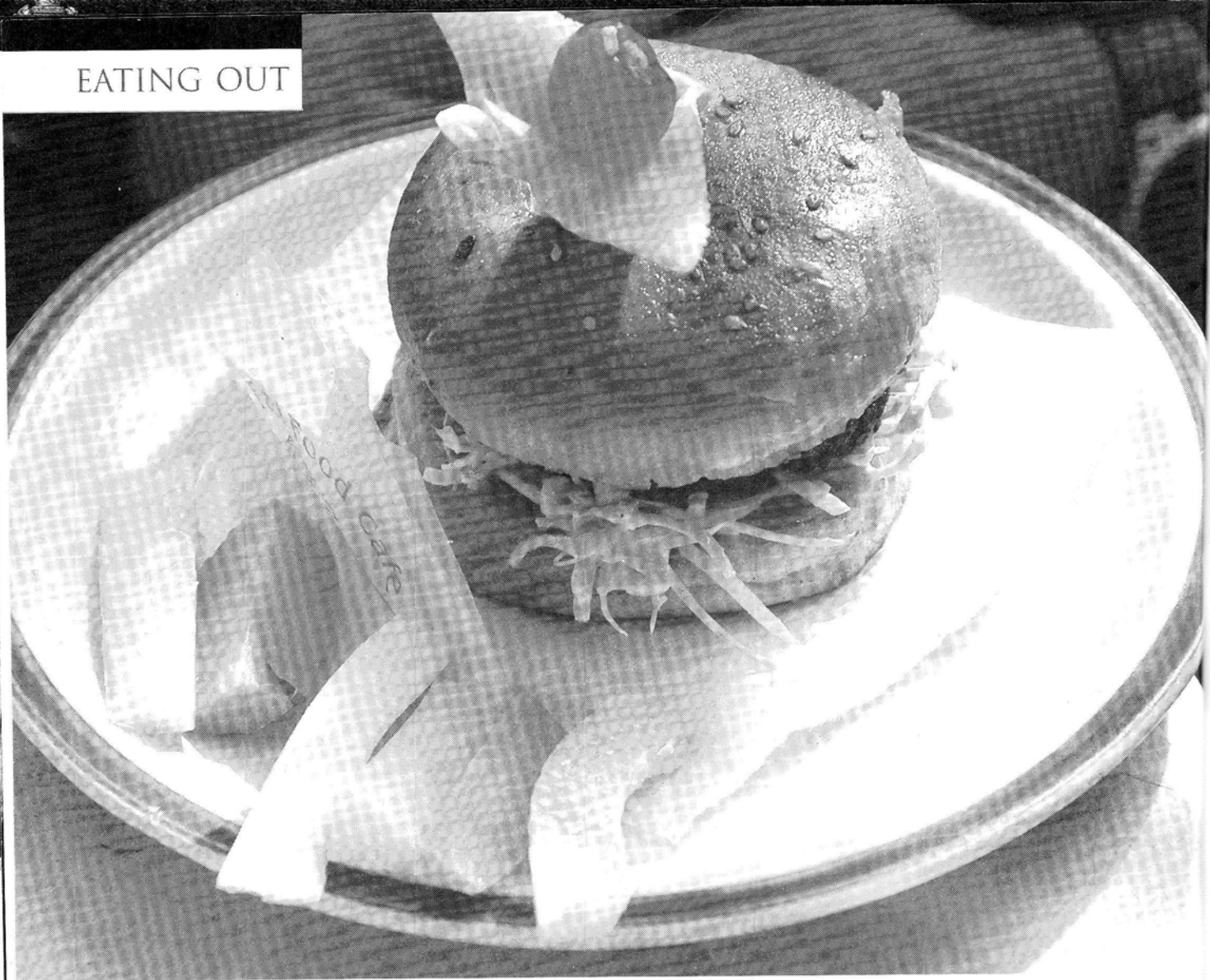
Some camps are very different. Rato Bangala School in Patan took about 40 students from grade nine and from their O-levels program to the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute in Darjeeling. There they learned rock climbing, ran cross-country and tackled obstacle courses. Sunniv Rajbhandari, who participated in the camp in Darjeeling three years ago, says that program came with a high price tag of Rs.14,000. But the money was well spent, he believes.

Costs for the camps vary widely. The GAA basketball camp cost Rs.500; Niraula's was Rs.3,800, both exclusive of transportation. The British Council's winter courses cost Rs.4,300. "Parents are willing to pay if their children are learning new skills," says Banjara's Gautam.

Expect the number and variety of camps to soar even higher next winter. "This trend will only increase," says the GAA's Maharjan, "with the growing demand for such retreats both from the children and their busy parents." ■



HAVING A BALL: The GAA's basketball camp, one of the many things to do this winter



Fast-Food Fad

Fast-food is convenient and definitely “in.” But how healthy is it?

BY BISWAS BARAL

Sailaja Rajbhandari is a fast-food junkie who loves her pizzas and burgers. It was hardly a surprise, then, that we caught her eating out. She said she couldn't imagine doing without fast-food. “When you have little money and less time, fast-food serves you the best,” she says. “Who cares about health when you're starving!”

Rajbhandari is one of a growing number of people who depend on fast and junk food instead of a regular meal during the course of the day. “Office

goers, especially the ones with long shifts, are our main customers,” says Kumar Shrestha, the manager of the Fast Food Café in Tripureshwore. The dishes that sell best at the café are momos, chowmein and pizzas, all fast food.

There is no hard and fast definition of fast-food, says Ashis Sharma of Real Fast Food in Jawalakhel. But he says that everything his restaurant sells is fast food. “I named the shop Fast Food Restaurant to attract customers,” he says. It was a good move, because fast food is universally popular.

Fast-food started in the early 19th century, during the Industrial Revolution. Longer work hours meant shorter lunch breaks. Workers couldn't go home for lunch, and enterprising shops and street vendors started to produce meals for the workers. The variety of food is amazing, but all fast foods share three things: They are quick to prepare, cheap and convenient. The typical fast food item takes anywhere from three to 10 minutes, says Fast Food Café's Shrestha. Most fast foods can be eaten as “finger food” and are typically served in use-and-throw utensils.

It's easy to like fast-food, but too much of a good thing isn't good at all. Most fast-food is prepared from refined wheat flour, *maida*. Refining strips the

flour of most the major nutrients and fibers: The result is that it has little nutritional value.

The grain or kernel of wheat is made-up of three layers: the outer bran, which contains anti-oxidants, B vitamins and fiber; the germ, stocked with B vitamins, proteins, minerals and healthful fats; and the endosperm, the grain's food supply and the largest portion of kernel, containing starchy carbohydrate, proteins and small amounts of vitamins and minerals.

During refining the outer two coats, the bran and the germ, are removed, taking away most of the essential nutrients with them. Due to the missing fiber, the wheat flour lacks coarseness; the consumption of *maida* in large amounts causes constipation and acidity. Most fast-food is fatty too, worsening the health problems and adding to the calorie content. Our bodies can't consume high-calorie foods all at once, so the food is stored as fat.

Eating fast-food habitually turns the problem into a dangerous cycle. Because these foods lack fiber, we tend to overeat before we feel full; fast-foods are aptly called stomach fillers. They often contain a large amounts of salt, dangerous for people with high blood pressure. Failing to eat enough fruits and vegetables drains our bodies of vital vitamins and the trace elements necessary for healthy growth and development.

Long-term consumption of fast-food and the resulting obesity leads to other problems. Cardiovascular disease, diabetes, stomach and intestinal cancer, and



QUICK BITE: Fast-food joints like these are popular

high blood pressure are called the diseases of civilization. In the past 20 years, there has been a six-fold rise in heart diseases in Nepal, according to the Nepal Heart Foundation: Ten percent or more of the population may be afflicted with heart problems. "Modern lifestyles with the lack of exercise, smoking and eating unhygienic foods are the major culprits," says Dr. Arun Sayami, the head of the Department of Cardiology at the Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital.

Not long ago most heart-patients in Nepal were above 50. Now people in their 30s throng the heart centers in the Valley. "A girl of 24 was brought to our hospital the other day after a heart-attack," says Teaching Hospital's Sayami.

Nutritionists recommend three servings of wholegrain food each day for health. Whole-grains are unrefined

grains, the entire seed or the kernel of the plant with all the nutrients intact. Oatmeal, granola, grape-nuts, shredded wheat, amaranth, barley, buckwheat, millet and popcorn are the example of nourishing whole-grain products. Unrefined wheat flour, beans, nuts, seeds, fruits and vegetables should also be in our daily diet.

According to Reshma Dhital, a dietician at the Medicare Hospital in Chabahil, 95 percent of Nepalis don't know about the possible health risks of a bad diet. Those who do know don't seem to care.

"I am not changing my eating habits anytime soon," says Rajbhandari. For her, the pizzas and momos are too much to resist. She says she may think about controlling her appetite when she's in her 40s. "For now, I'll continue to have my fast-foods binges." **N**

HEALTHIER FAST FOOD DINING

- Don't overeat. Decide what to order before you go to the restaurant.
- Eat at restaurants where you can sit down, preferably in a relaxed atmosphere.
- Don't eat the same kind of fast food every day.
- Choose low-fat options like vegetable momos.
- Drink lots of liquid with your meal, but not caffeinated or alcoholic drinks.
- Supplement fast food with other meals containing milk products, fruits, vegetables and whole grains.



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NW/SS

SNAPSHOTS BY DHRITI BHATTA

It Runs in the Family ...

Eleven-year-old **DINESH KAFLE**, broke a record at the recent Hits FM Music Awards when he became the youngest singer ever to win a top prize at the annual event. His 22-minute-duet with Gitadevi, "Runchau Aama," bagged the award for best folk song. Kafle said he was proud of his achievement; his father, Dinesh Kafle, must be proud too. The winning song was from the elder Kafle's latest album "Bhannu Nabhako." The elder Kafle is a prominent folk singer with more than 300 songs to his credit. Like father, like son.

... Part Two

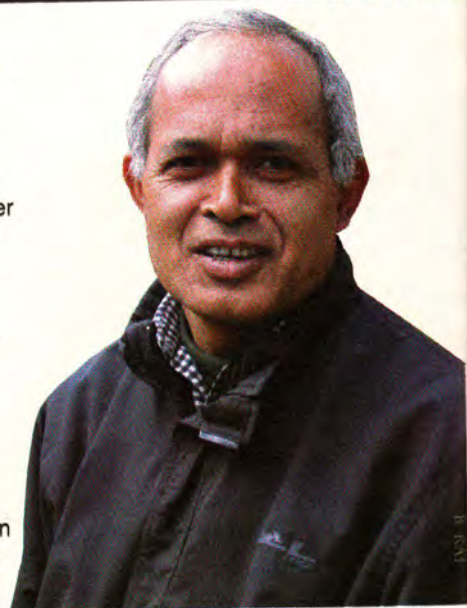
Nearly five years ago, **SAMPADA MALLA**, now 18, wrote a movie review of the acclaimed film "Caravan" for Kantipur's weekly supplement, Kosheli. To her surprise, it was chosen as the best article of the week. Malla has continued to write as a freelancer for both English and Nepali newspapers. The 12th-grader who now works for Cybernepal, an e-zine, recently took another step forward. Her first book, "Anayas Ekdin," a collection of 14 short stories, came out last week. The stories, says Malla, are a reflection of how she sees society. This is another case of a talented youngster following in the footsteps of an illustrious parent: She is the daughter of Ashesh Malla, a pioneer of street theater in Nepal and the author of many books of stories, plays and poems.



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Veteran Winner

NIRPHA DHOJ KHADKA is a 46-year-old senior instructor at Pulchowk Engineering Campus. He's also an amateur photographer who has taken pictures of hundreds of insects and plants from the outskirts of the Valley: Godhavari, Nagarjuna, Budhanilkantha and Chobar. Recently the veteran of 20 years of field trips entered one of his photos in the Amateur Wildlife Photography Competition organized by Wildlife Conservation Nepal. Most of the other entrants were much younger. "At times I felt my participation might have been unfair to the youngsters," says Khadka. He was right: He won the top prize.



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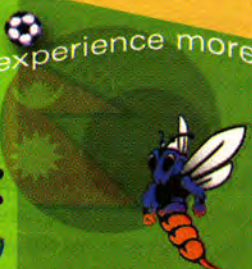
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Of Bars, Booze and Bartenders

Yangdup Lama is a bartender who's passionate about "cocktail etiquette," a term he frequently uses in his conversations and classrooms. He runs a bar and beverages management school, Cocktails & Dreams, in Delhi, which trains aspiring bartenders. He also conducts short-term courses for amateurs who want to do some home bartending and mix

their own drinks. Lama's stint in the hospitality industry started in 1995 as a waiter at the Hyatt Regency in Delhi where he soon found himself behind the Polo Lounge Bar. After four and a half years at the Hyatt, he decided to move on. Besides the school, he now also runs a mobile bartending unit with 25 permanent bartenders. His unit now conducts parties throughout the year and at times as many as six in a day. Last week, Lama was in Kathmandu conducting a workshop "Bars and Beverages," organized by Smirnoff on, what else, bartending. Yashas Vaidya talked to Lama about bars, bartenders and the booze.

Why is it important for people to know their drink?

You want to enjoy your drink. If you drink to get drunk, that's another story. But say you're out to drink with your friends and looking for a good time, you need to know what you are drinking. And you've got to know what you like. Tastes are very individualistic. As in food, people have specific taste profiles in drinks.

Can taste profiles be generalized—for example, what kinds of drinks do South Asians like?

Yes. Much depends on our food habits; the way palate develops over the years. In this part of the world, we prefer full-bodied flavors, much like our traditional foods that have quite a bit of spices. Likewise, in drinks we prefer something that's heavy. A martini is a very old classic cocktail—gin and dry vermouth, a fortified wine. Westerners like it because

it's very delicate in its flavor. Whenever I do a martini here, it's mostly the flavored ones that are preferred more, like say, a coffee martini or a fruit martini.

You need to know your drink, if you want to enjoy it

What are people drinking in Kathmandu? You had the chance to interact with quite a few bartenders during the workshop ...

Here it's mostly straight drinks, not too many cocktails. That's because people don't really know their drinks. They keep it simple—things like the whiskey and soda. But it's also because people don't trust the bartenders, as even the bartenders don't know much about cocktails. They're called bartenders just because they stand behind the bars. I had a couple of nights out in Kathmandu. I went to what was supposed to be the best bar in town. Not only was the experience not good, it was terrible.

What happened?

First I had to wait 20 minutes for the drink. And when the drink was brought, it was served wrong. I had ordered a Black Russian. Now the world over, the Black Russian is served on the rocks. Here it was brought as a shot.

So the bartenders here lack cocktail etiquette...

It's more than that. You can pick a guy off the street and teach him to make 10

cocktails, and he'll do it. But here the bartender doesn't even have a smile on his face. I saw bartenders who didn't want to talk, much less smile. Good bartenders get to know your name, the drink you had last time. What you've got to realize as a bartender is that you're not just selling the drink, you're selling the experience.

Why do you think such a problem exists?

More than the bartenders or managers who provide the services, the customers are responsible. The managers tend to relax when they don't have to work too hard.

What about the bartenders themselves?

I found the bartenders willing to learn. It's just that the management needs to train their employees properly. I run a mobile bartending unit with 25 permanent bartenders. If I have a bartender whose English is not up to the mark, I hire an English tutor to train him. Investing in your employee is not a waste.

Do you think Kathmandu is overrated as a tourist destination?

No. It's not that. People in this part of the world have that warmth. And the smiles are natural too. All we need to do is polish them and present them better. In the end, bartending is all about making the customer happy. For that all you really need is to be a good human being. ■



The Worldly Buddha

In a strange combination of autobiography, history, philosophy and travelogue, Pankaj Mishra explains the continuing relevance of the Buddha's teachings

BY ADITYA ADHIKARI

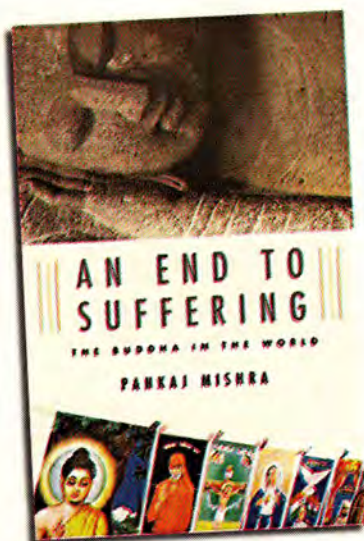
When he graduated from college in 1992, 23-year-old Pankaj Mishra moved to Mashobra, a remote hill station near Simla, with the intention of spending his days preparing to become a writer. Over the next few years he spent reading and dreaming, he conceived the idea of writing a historical novel based on the Buddha's life. But procrastination and the realization that he hadn't adequately understood the life and the message of the Buddha delayed the writing of the book for many years. When Mishra finally decided to write the book, what emerged was not a novel, but something much more ambitious: a sometimes rambling, often exhilarating, combination of autobiography, history, philosophy and travelogue.

Part of the great charm of Mishra's book is the unique way in which he approaches a theme that thousands of writers have tackled over the past thousands of years. Unlike the new age gurus who interpret the Buddha's teaching for a mass public, Mishra did not grow up in a monastery. He is not even Buddhist himself. There is none of the soporific didacticism and cultivated unworldliness that characterize the hundreds of volumes on Buddhism that litter Thamel's bookstores.

In his own way Mishra is very much a man of the world. Early in the book he ruminates on how strange it was, considering his great interest in the modern world, that he should feel an attraction towards the Buddha. "I had little interest in Indian philosophy or spirituality," he writes, "which, if I thought of them at all, seemed to me to belong to India's pointlessly long, sterile and largely unrecorded past. I didn't

see how they could add to the store of knowledge—science and technology—and the spirit of rational enquiry and curiosity that had made the modern world."

So Mishra's mind is well stocked with Marx, Nietzsche, Proust and the ideas of other writers who have shaped the modern world. He has traveled on journalistic assignments to Pakistan and



An End to Suffering: The Buddha in the World

by Pankaj Mishra
Picador, 2004 (Hardcover)
PAGES: 422
PRICE: Rs.792

California, Afghanistan and London. And it is with the "spirit of rational enquiry and curiosity" that Mishra looks at the life, times and teachings of the Buddha.

The historical conditions of North Indian society during Buddha's time are described in some detail. This was a time of massive urbanization. Money became the new measure of value, and merchants

enjoyed unprecedented power. Political power shifted from small tribal city-states to the much larger centralized monarchies. "The end of smaller political units [meant] the growing subjection of human beings to the remote authority of the bureaucratic state."

As North India in the fifth century B.C. became more and more complex, it was inevitable that the rigid morality and social structure of the Vedic Aryans would come to appear as inadequate and obsolete to many.

Mishra describes these changes and explains that the teachings of the Buddha were a response to the widespread uncertainty and anxiety of the time. Interspersed with this historical analysis and philosophical ruminations are reflections on more modern themes: the India where Mishra grew up, the various people he has met and the various places he has traveled to, 9/11 and Islamic fundamentalism. Slowly the reader realizes these observations are meant to demonstrate that the condition of the world now is very similar to the conditions during the time of the Buddha. And this is done to lend force to his final thesis: That the Buddha's teachings are as relevant today as they were during his time.

Mishra's final belief—that a dose of introspection of the Buddhist kind will work as an antidote to the destructive passions for power that dominate history—is not very convincing. But the book is, in its way, a fine guide to the Buddha.

As a work of history too, the book has its merits. "The western idea of history can be so seductive," Mishra writes, "with its promise of adding an extra emotional and spiritual dimension and validation to our limited life; with its ability to brighten the future and the past. To have faith in one's history is to infuse hope into the most inert landscape and a glimmer of possibility into even the most adverse circumstances." Though in some ways a failure, this book is an admirable attempt by an Indian to infuse life into an Indian historical figure and so to brighten the Indian past—a past that the writer thought of a long time ago as "pointless and sterile." ■



And Justice for Gurkhas ...

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST Nepalis in the British Army is nothing less than an ugly scar on the face of British democracy. It's clearly a vestige of Britain's colonial past to regard some of its servicemen as less equal than others. The treatment of Gurkhas, who have been part of British history and Britain's triumphs for 150 years, is a measure of British justice.

Happily, the grand anachronism is finally being righted. British Defence Secretary Geoffrey Hoon has pledged a "wide-ranging review" of the Gurkhas' longstanding grievances against Her Majesty's Government. He wants to see that Britain is "legally and morally irreproachable."

We welcome the announcement. It is a most positive step, though cruelly belated. Hoon, in a written statement, told the House of Commons in London that his government is gearing up for an all-embracing review of Gurkhas' pay and pensions.

Far away in the plains and mountains of Nepal, Hoon's statement has brought some cheer and hope. The review will indeed make life easier for tens of thousands of Gurkhas and their dependents, many of whom are living in penury. In so doing, Britain will have delivered a strong statement—that it is keen to bury the imperial hatchet.

But some issues still remain unclear. Does the Hoon announcement include the 10,000-plus "redundants," the unfortunate group of Gurkhas—on whom the axe of retrenchment fell in the 60s and 80s—who were discharged from duty without adequate compensation? We certainly hope so.

While welcoming the proposed review, we would like to single out GAESO for much-deserved praise. Not many gave the organization of ex-Gurkhas, ably led by Padam Singh Gurung and counseled by Yubaraj Sangraula, a smart young lawyer, much chance when it started out in 1990. GAESO was the first organized effort to shame the British establishment.

A number of successful lawsuits against the British government in the

courts have certainly proved that the Gurkhas have a case. The public interest surrounding the legal battles also showed that the British people are most anxious to see the Gurkhas put on a level-playing field. In a Daily Express poll of 16,000 Britons, 99 percent said they supported the Gurkha cause. More than anytime before, London perhaps feels that the Gurkha issue needs a permanent solution, not piecemeal action. No democracy can go against the opinion of its people, not for long. Hoon rightly talks of "public unease" over the Gurkha issue.

But successive governments in Britain have taken refuge in the Tripartite Agreement signed between Britain, Nepal and India in 1947 to justify the pay and pension disparity. We understand the treaty was a historical imperative, signed after Indian independence to provide a much-needed framework for the continuing recruitment of Gurkhas into the British and the Indian armies. The treaty, insist British officials, binds Britain to peg Gurkha pay to that of the Indian Army so as not to adversely affect the Nepali recruitment into the Indian Army.

That is understandable. What is not is that the 1947 treaty should continue to be the cornerstone of Gurkha recruitment more than 50 years later. New Delhi has already said that the recruitment of Nepalis into the British Army is a bilateral issue between London and Kathmandu. More importantly, New Delhi does not have a two-tier pay system. Britain we hope has taken the cue. Mr. Hoon should follow up on his pledge to compensate the Gurkhas without delay; indeed, they should have been given their dues all along.

Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor

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