

Norge - Nepal foreningen



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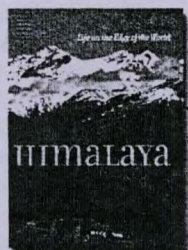
MEDLEMSKONTINGENT:

Enkeltmedlem	kr 125,-
Familie	kr 175,-
Organisasjon	kr 300,-

Postgirokonto: 0530 32 17098

Books Received

2000 March 13/3 HIMAL



Himalaya: Life on the Edge of the World

by David Zurick and P.P. Karan
The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and
London, 1999
pp xiv+355 • ISBN 0 8018 6168 3 • price not given

With the help of geological records, scientific reports, official documents dating back over a century, field research and travel, the authors explore the environmental and cultural changes in the Himalayan region. The book provides: a comprehensive natural history of the region from the birth of the Himalaya to the variety of landforms, habitats, and climates seen today; a study of the mountain people, tracing human history in the Himalaya back more than a thousand years; and an in-depth analysis of the relationship between nature and society in the Himalaya and the pressing problems of environmental degradation, explosive population growth, spiralling poverty, and globalisation confronting the region and its people.



HAMRO PATRIKA & VAR AVIS
ORGAN FOR NORGE-NEPAL~FORENINGEN

Nr. 3, juni 2000

God sommer!

Neste medlemsmøte blir i september 2000

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Hamro Patrika er Norge-Nepal foreningens avis som utkommer 4-5 ganger årlig. Forespørsler angående avisen eller foreningen kan rettes til styremedlemmene.

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Anuradha Gurung, Kirsten I. Greiner og Kristine Alsvik.

Foreningens e-post adresse: norge_nepal@hotmail.com

Referat fra Norge-Nepal foreningsmøtet den 28.mars 2000

Lysbildeforedrag ved Øyvind Amundsgård, "Trekking i Everest".
Servering av "Daal-Bhat".

Ca. 40 personer var møtt frem til foreningens årlige festmøtet med servering av "Daal-Bhat". Øyvind Amundsgård viste flotte lysbilder fra trekkingturer til Kala Patthar og Gokyo i Everest-regionen.

Nytt styremedlem

Kristine Alsvik: Studerer sosialantropologi hovedfag ved Universitet i Oslo. Har bodd i Nepal ifbm. feltarbeid. Jobber med hovedoppgave: "Aama Toli" blant Gurungene. Vært medlem av foreningen siden januar 2000. Ble valgt inn i styret i mars 2000 som erstatning for Øystein Berg (som er i Kina).

Nepali folkemusikk i Førde Internasjonale Folkemusikfestival

Fire nepalesiske ungdommer fra Himali Sanskriti Pariwar, Pokhara, deltar for første gang i Førde Internasjonale Folkemusikfestival, 6.-9. juli 2000. Ungdommene heter: Keshab Gurung (23), Dilip Gayak (19), Kalpana Gurung (19) og Eema Gurung (18). I samarbeid mellom Hem B. Gurung, rådgiver ved Kongelig Norsk Ambassade i KTM, og Hilde Bjørkun, direktør av Førde Internasjonal Folkemusikfestival, har utøvere fra Nepal fått anledning til å delta på denne musikkfestivalen.

Gjennom deltagelsen i prosjektet "Talent 2000", ønsker Førde Internasjonale Folkemusikfestival å skape internasjonal forståelse gjennom kulturutveksling og at unge musikere fra ulike verdensdeler får anledning til å utfolde seg i utlandet. "Talent 2000" har deltagere fra Nepal, Madagaskar, Palestina og Norge. Prosjektet er støttet av NORAD.

Har du fine Nepal-bilder til Norge-Nepal foreningens kalender 2001?

Styret ønsker å trykke en kalender for Norge-Nepal foreningen år 2001 og er i ferd med å avklare trykkekostnader og andre praktiske spørsmål. Kalenderen skal selges på foreningens møter og andre steder der vi er representert. Størrelsen blir A4 delt i to, d.v.s. A5-format som når den "slås opp" blir A4-størrelse; bilde i A5 og månedskalender i A5. Bildene til kalenderen ønsker vi å låne fra foreningens medlemmer og styremedlemmer. Har du bilder du mener kan egne seg til formålet? Vi ønsker bilder av god kvalitet med enkle/talende/gode motiver og komposisjoner. I løpet av sommeren eller tidlig på høsten bør vi ha en fin samling bilder å velge blant. Styret velger ut de bildene som tas med i kalenderen. Merk bildene med navn og adresse, og send dem til Kirsten Greiner, Landingsveien 102, 0767 Oslo. Alle bilder returneres.

Kirsten I. Greiner

17. mai markert i Kathmandu

Av Kirsten I. Greiner, basert på brev fra Kalendra Bikram Shahi.

Også i år markerte Nepal Norway Friendship and Cultural Association den norske nasjonaldagen i Kathmandu. Nyvalgt styreformann i foreningen, Kalendra Bikram Shahi, var initiativtager til feiringen som inkluderte middag, dans og taler. Partileder Madhav Kumar Nepal, R. Koirala, Leif Sauvik fra den norske ambassaden og Ole Orset, rektor ved Den norske skolen, var blant æresgjestene. I sin tale sa M.K. Nepal at Nepal er et av Norges prioriterte land i bistandssammenheng. "Siden etableringen av diplomatisk forbindelse i 1973, har Norge bidratt voldsomt til Nepals utvikling, spesielt i vannkraftsektoren som snart også omfatter Khimti-anlegget". Leif Sauvik pekte på at den norske ambassaden ble etablert for å ta vare på det bilaterale samarbeidet mellom Nepal og Norge. Han nevnte også at i tillegg til bistandens hovedområder, som energi, utdanning og vanntilførsel, er man i ferd med å oppmuntre norsk næringsliv til å investere i Nepal. Ole Orset kastet lys over relasjonene mellom Norge og Nepal.

Nepal Norway Friendship and Cultural Association's nåværende styreformann, Kalendra Bikram Shah, har tidligere vært viseformann i foreningen. Han var også grunnlegger og styreformann da foreningen ble etablert i 1984.



NYTT FRA NEPAL

Regjeringen kritiseres av sine egne

The Kathmandu Post 3.juni 2000, *The Independent* 22-28.mars, 5-11., 12-18 og 19-25.april, 26.april-2.mai, 10-16. og 24-29.mai, 7-13. og 14-21.juni 2000.

Fritt oversatt og bearbeidet av Kirsten I. Greiner.

Statsminister Girija Prasad Koirala (Nepali Congress; NC) møter motstand i egne rekker, hovedsakelig fra de tidligere statsministrene Krishna Prasad Bhattarai og Sher Bahadur Deuba (begge NC). Som tidligere pekes det på forfall i lov og orden, spesielt i de maoist-påvirkede områdene der det stadig er angrep på politi og sivile. Interne stridigheter i NC kom i sterkere grad til overflaten i mai og juni. Flere personer innen partiet søker nå å svarte Koirala for selv å få ledende posisjoner. Koirala overtok statsministerposten fra Bhattarai i slutten av mars måned. Skiftet kom etter en avstemning i parlamenetet, der Koirala fikk 69 av NC's 113 mulige stemmer. Sher Bahadur Deuba fikk 43.

I april foretok Koirala visse endringer i regjeringen. Flere departementer ble slått sammen og antallet dermed redusert til 21. I Bhattarai's regjering sa elleve ministre opp jobbene sine rett før Koirala overtok som statsminister. Koirala har nå belønnet ti av dem med fortsatt plass i kabinettet. Kabinettets størrelse er imidlertid uforandret. Enkelte departementer er fremdeles underlagt statsministeren. Dermed finnes en mulighet for utnevnelse av flere nye ministre i framtiden.

Innenriksminister Govinda Raj Joshi møter hard kritikk fra sine egne idet parlamentskollegaene har startet en underskriftskampanje for å fjerne ham. "Vi har gitt statsminister Koirala en tidsfrist for å sparke minister Joshi", sier et NC-medlem. Kritikken begrunnes med ineffektivitet og korrupsjon. De siste ti årene har Joshi sittet i hver eneste regjering der NC har deltatt. Han omtales ofte som en outsider, men har Koirala's fulle tillit. Flere partikollegaer ser med mistenksomhet på Joshi's lange og trygge karriere i politikken. Parlamentsmedlem Ramjanam Chaudhary sa i et avisintervju i juni: "Han (Joshi) tror han er den klokkeste i hele verden og han har til og med begynt å tro at han har arvet innerriksministeriet".

En av de største utfordringene for Koirala-regjeringen er å håndtere maoist-problemet og opprette ro og orden i landet. Oppgaven ble først og fremst gitt til den erfarne Joshi som ikke har klart å bedre situasjonen. Riktignok har han foreslått å kjøpe inn mer våpen og ammunisjon til sikkerhetsstyrkene, noe han både roses og kritiseres for, men foreløpig ligger ingen planer for å løse maoist-problemet på bordet. Koirala-regjeringen synes å ønske en tøffere linje overfor maoistene. Royal Nepal Army skal utstasjoneres i seks av de verst rammede distriktene. Koirala har også luftet ideen om en væpnet sikkerhetsstyrke bestående av 15.000 personer med bakgrunn fra militæret og politiet. Samtidig åpner han nå for å samtale med maoistene.

Den første som offentlig talte varmt for forhandlinger med maoistene var minister for vannressurser, Khum Bahadur Khadka (NC), da han for to år siden og senere i midten av mai i år, sa at problemet må løses gjennom samtaler. Mange ble overrasket over uttalelsen og antar at Khadka nå ønsker å forberede seg til kampen om både partipresidentvervet og statsministerstolen. Khadka og hans NC-støttespillere arbeidet for Deuba's kandidatur til statsministerposten i mars i år. Khadka's posisjon er helt i tråd med det syn Robin Cook (British Secretary of State for Commonwealth and Foreign Affairs) la for dagen da han besøkte Nepal i april. Cook sa at "maoistproblemet bør håndteres gjennom dialog" og pekte på at dialog hadde ført fram i forhold til IRA.

På den britiske ambassaden foresto Cook åpningen av et nytt kontor for handel mellom Nepal og Storbritannia. Han la også ned grunnsteinen til British Council's nye bygning som står ferdig til høsten, samt annonserte økning i antallet stipender til unge nepalesere som ønsker å studere i Storbritannia.

Utnevnelsen av Nain Bahadur Khatri til styreformann i Menneskerettighetskommisjonen, har løsnet tungebåndet også på Koirala's gamle erkerival og tidligere statsminister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai. Han, og mange NC-medlemmer med ham, kritiserer utnevnelsen. Khatri var Chief Justice i panchayat-tiden og avsa dødsdommer over flere NC-aktivister. I tillegg har Khatri nylig uttalt at panchayat-systemet var bedre enn dagens flerpartisystem og at hans lojalitet går i retning av det førstnevnte. Koirala taklet situasjonen lite strategisk da han i ettertid forsøkte å legge skylden for utnevnelsen på partileder Madhav Nepal.

Maoistene på offensiven; 25 drept i Jajarkot

Nepali Times 15.juni 2000, *The Kathmandu Post* 11.juni 2000, *Nepalnews.com* 15.juni 2000.

Fritt oversatt og bearbeidet av Kirsten I. Greiner.

Til tross for at politikerne nå åpner for samtaler med maoistene, synes maoistene å trappe opp sine aktiviteter. 7. juni i år gikk 1600 maoister til angrep på Panchkati-politiposten i Jajarkot-distriktet. I løpet av de nesten fire dagene kampene varte, ble tolv politimenn og syv

landsbyboere, inkludert fem barn under ti år, drept. Elleve politimenn var blant de mange sårede. Seks maoister mistet livet. Politi stasjonert ved en post i nærheten forsøkte å komme til unnsetning, men returnerte da de utløste en landmine som såret tre av dem.

En uke senere drepte en gruppe på femti maoistene tre politimenn, og såret tre andre, da de stormet en politipost (Junbesi) i Solukhumbu nordøst for Kathmandu. Samme natt angrep et trettitalls maoister et lagerområde i Simra. Der overmannet de vaktene og satte fyr på to lagerbygninger. Verdier for 10-15 millioner rupies gikk tapt i flammehavet. "Folkets krig" har så langt kostet over 1300 menneskeliv.

Budsjettet for 2000/2001 presentert

*The Kathmandu Post 3.juni 2000, The Independent 7-13.juni 2000.
Fritt oversatt og bearbeidet av Kirsten I. Greiner.*

Reaksjonene lar ikke vente på seg etter at regjeringen tidlig i juni la fram budsjettet for skatteåret 2000/2001. Politikere, næringslivsledere, økonomer og selv den vanlige nepaleser tviler på om de budsjetterte planer og programmer kan iverksettes effektivt. Nepal Chamber of Commerce (NCC) mener ressursene avsatt til utviklingsformål er for store og stiller spørsmål ved om de faktisk vil bli brukt til slike tiltak. NCC mener en økning i denne budsjettposten på 44,5% er urealistisk når kun 33 milliarder rupies av estimerte 41 milliarder ble brukt til utviklingsformål forrige skatteår. Planen om å formulere 20-års planer for industrien blir imidlertid godt mottatt.

Tidligere finansminister Bharat Mohan Adhikari (CPN -UML) mener budsjettet legger for liten vekt på jordbrukssektoren som basis for utvikling, og peker på at nesten 80% av Nepals bønder sliter med gjeld. Fra Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) uttrykkes misnøye med innføring av moms på jordbruksvarer, blant annet på mel som brukes av den jevne befolkningen. FNCCI frykter prishopp på konsumvarer som følge av momsforslaget. Handelen med Tibet unngår heller ikke omlegging i budsjettet. Det planlegges pålegg om at alle handelstransaksjoner mellom Tibet og Nepal skal foregå gjennom banker, noe Nepal Trans-Himalayan Trade Association hevder vil påvirke handelen svært negativt.

Hotell Association Nepal (HAN) er ikke fornøyd med budsjettet i forhold til turistsektoren som genererte en stor andel av statens inntekter forrige skatteår. HAN etterlyser konkrete programmer for videreutvikling av turismen i Nepal. Likeledes uttrykker Nepal Carpet Exports' Association (NCEA) misnøye med fravær av ordninger for å fremme teppeeksporten. En planlagt skatt på eksporten forventes å øke byrdene til en allerede vanskeligstilte eksportnæring.

Royal Nepal Airlines søker fly

*The Independent 19-25.april, 3-9. og 17-23.mai, 14-21.juni 2000.
Fritt oversatt og bearbeidet av Kirsten I. Greiner.*

Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation (RNAC) har ennå ikke fått i land en avtale om leasing av en maskin beregnet på langdistanseflygningene. Flere ganger har selskapet annonsert at det er oppnådd enighet om leasing av en Boeing 767, først med britiske Babcock and Brown,

deretter med det noe dyrere australske Ansett. Babcock and Brown's tilbud står ikke ved lag lenger fordi RNAC brukte for lang tid på å bestemme seg. Muligens kan RNAC kreve erstatning fra Babcock and Brown fordi sistnevnte trakk seg fra avtalen. Enkelte kritiske røster mistenkte Sujata Koirala, statsminister Koirala's datter, for å ha en finger med i spillet. Hun har visstnok gode kontakter til Ansett. Ansett og RNAC var enige om en leie på 3400-4100 US \$ per time (*oppgitte summer varierer*) for en Boeing 767, men RNAC forsøkte å få prisen ned og avtalen ble kansellert. I tillegg sier Royal Brunei Airlines at det er umulig å sørge for vedlikeholdet av flyet, slik de først var enige om.

Spørsmålet blir nå hvorfor man i det hele tatt skal lease et fly for å betjene ruter som gir selskapet store tap. Samtidig går RNAC trange kår i møte med bare to Boeing 757 tilgjengelige og oppsatte flygninger både til Europa i vest og Japan i øst. Disse to flyene, kjøpt sent på 80-tallet, har holdt RNAC flytende. RNAC har fullt eierskap over det ene flyet, mens det andre vil være nedbetalt i september 2000.

Denne vinteren og våren har antall turister til Nepal vært lavere enn tidligere år. Grunnen er at Indian Airlines (IA) innstilte alle sine flygninger til Nepal etter kapringen av et IA-fly i desember 1999. Med minnet konkurranse kunne RNAC satt opp flere egne flygninger, men tilgang til kun to maskiner forhindret selskapet fra å dra fordel av situasjonen. Den tredje maskinen i flyparken leide RNAC av China South West. RNAC hadde forlenget leielavtalen 19. mars, en uke før kontrakten gikk ut. Forlengelsen var ikke i tråd med instruksjoner fra den nyutnevnte ministeren for turisme og luftfart, Tarini Dutt Chataut, som to dager tidligere hadde bedt RNAC om ikke å fornye avtalen. Resultatet ble at ministeren avskjediget RNAC's Executive Chairman Bharat Bahadur Karki og droppet leasingen fra China South West.

Utenriksministeren på India-visitt: Indian Airlines gjenopptar flygninger til Nepal

*The Independent 3-9. og 17-23.mai 2000, The Kathmandu Post 3.juni 2000.
Fritt oversatt og bearbeidet av Kirsten I. Greiner.*

Utenriksminister Chakra Prasad Bastola's visitt til India i mai, er den første kontakt på høyt politisk nivå mellom India og Nepal siden Indias utenriksminister besøkte Nepal i september 1999. I mellomtiden kjølnet forholdet mellom landene på grunn av kapringen av et Indian Airlines-fly 24. desember 1999. India la skylden på Nepal og sikkerhetsrutinene på Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA) i Kathmandu. IA stanset dermed alle sine 14 ukentlige flygninger til Nepal. En person ble drept og de andre passasjerene holdt som gisler i den drøye uken kapringen varte.

Nepal har opplevd nedgang i antall turister generelt, og indiske besøkende spesielt, denne vinteren. Tapene regnes til rundt 2,5 millioner rupies. Etter samtaler i India informerte Bastola at begge land hadde besluttet å gjenoppta flygningene fra 1. juni 2000. Midt på dagen 1. juni landet IC-813 fra New Delhi med 159 personer om bord på TIA. Indiske tjenestemenn sier de nå er fornøyd med sikkerheten på flyplassen.

Under sitt India-besøk diskuterte Bastola også ulike aspekter ved forholdet mellom India og Nepal, blant annet Mahakali-avtalen og vanskelighetene med å iverksette den dersom ikke uenigheten om Kalapani løses. Indias minister for vannressurser har sagt seg villig til å besøke Nepal for å samtale om delingen av vannressurser mellom de to landene. Det er også oppnådd enighet om å starte nye samtaler om Handels- og tariff avtalen fra 1950.

Politikernes rikdommer offentliggjort

The Independent 12-18. og 19-25.april og 24-29.mai 2000.
Fritt oversatt og bearbeidet av Kirsten I. Greiner.

Denne våren og forsommeren presenterte statsministeren, andre i kabinettet og politikere fra opposisjonspartiene United Marxist Leninists (UML) og Marxist Leninist (ML) oversikter over sine private eiendeler. Mange stiller seg uforstående til politikernes skriftlige offentliggjøring av hva de er i besittelse av. Få er imidlertid overrasket over at nåværende og tidligere ministre fra alle partier har enorme verdier. Alle synes de å eie mer enn den jevne nepaleser noensinne kan drømme om. Flere politikere som tidligere hadde beskjedne jobber med gjennomsnittslønn, har i dag store landeiendommer, hus, biler, gull og penger. Ingen har foreløpig presentert en forklaring på hvordan de har tilegnet seg rikdommen. Det foreligger heller ingen sammenligning av politikernes eiendeler før og etter ministertiden.

UML har gått hardt ut mot korrupsjon hele våren. Venstresiden har organisert demonstrasjoner, streiker og massemøter som del av en anti-korrupsjonskampanje som delvis slår tilbake på dem selv. Like etter at UML offentliggjorde en av flere lister over de mest korrupte personene i landet, var det UML-lederne selv som sto for hogg. Borgermesteren for Kathmandu by, Keshav Sthapit (tidligere UML-tilhenger), hevder at Pradeep Nepal (UML) som offentliggjorde den første listen, krevde 1 million rupies for å stryke borgermesterens navn fra listen. Sthapit anklager også UML's topp-leder Madhav Kumar Nepal for å på uærlig vis ha tilegnet seg 30 millioner rupies for å redde UML-regjeringen i 1995. Noen aviser har allerede hevdet at flertallet av UML's øverste politikere, samt de i mellomskiktet, er korrupte. Det er overraskende at UML har valgt ut til listen kun navn på personer de anser som politiske fiender - for eksempel de politikere som bidro til splittingen av partiet. UML sier at hvis de oppdager korrupte UML-politikere, vil disse håndteres internt.

Safa-tempoer forbys

The Kathmandu Post 3.juni 2000, *Nepali Times* 15.juni 2000, *The Independent* 7-13.juni 2000.
Fritt oversatt og bearbeidet av Kirsten I. Greiner.

En lite hyggelig overraskelse ventet minister for miljø og befolkning, Shiva Raj Joshi, da han nylig returnerte fra et besøk i Sverige. Etter å ha sett elektriske kjøretøyer på europeiske flyplasser, var han åpen for å innføre lignende ordninger på Tribhuvan International Airport i Kathmandu. Innen han ankom hovedstaden i begynnelsen av juni, hadde imidlertid departementet for transport besluttet å stanse registrering av alle tre-hjulinger i Kathmandu - et forbud som rammer selv de elektrisk drevne tre-hjuleringene kalt Safa-tempoer ("rene tempoer"). Mange nepalesere og en rekke utenlandske organisasjoner kritiserer regjeringens beslutning. Beslutningen sies å være en forberedelse til introduksjon av 600 bensindrevne minibusser som bringes til landet de neste månedene. På grensen mellom Tibet og Nepal står allerede åtti kinesiske minibusser i kø og venter på innreisetilatelse til Nepal.

Totalt 150.000 kjøretøyer er registrert i Kathmandu-dalen. Safa-tempoene overtok for dieseldrevne forurensende Vikram-tempoer da disse ble forbudt i Kathmandu. Forbudet har allerede bedret luftkvaliteten i Kathmandu, selv om ulike målinger gir noe forskjellig resultat. Ved hjelp av investeringer på over 450 millioner rupies fra privat sektor og utenlandske bistandsorganisasjoner, kjører 600 Safa-tempoer i dag rundt på veiene i hovedstaden. I tillegg planlegger mange i det private næringsliv å øke antallet Safa-tempoer, samt å

etablere flere ladestasjoner i dalen. Millioner av rupier er allerede investert i disse prosjektene.

Fem nepalesiske selskaper produserer elektriske kjøretøyer. Industrien sysselsetter 1000 personer og har stor omsetning. "Forbudet mot elektriske kjøretøyer kom som en overraskelse", sa lederen i Nepal Electric Vehicle Industry (NEVI) på en pressekonferanse. "Departementets beslutning var et komplott for å skyve Safa-tempoene ut av markedet." NEVI arbeider for å fjerne mange av de forurensende gamle kjøretøyene og motorsykler med totaktsmotorer.

NEVI og deler av næringslivet krever at regjeringen revurderer forbudet mot å registrere de elektriske kjøretøyene. Danske myndigheter, som har sørget for 300 millioner rupies til fremming av elektriske kjøretøyer i Nepal, har anbefalt det samme. Om ikke beslutningen omgjøres, kan det koste Nepal de dansk-finansierte "larger environmental programmes", noe Danmarks utsending Lars Hormann gjorde klart på en pressekonferanse i Kathmandu. "Jeg mistenker urent spill bak denne beslutningen", sier han. Danmark har støttet nepalesiske myndigheter i gjennomføringen av ulike miljøforbedringstiltak, inkludert Safa-tempoer, avfallshåndtering og forbedring av luftkvalitet. I forbindelse med forbudet mot diesel-drevne Vikram-tempoer i 1999, bidro Danmark med 25 millioner rupies til introduksjon av 48 Safa-tempoer. Lars Hormann påpeker også at Nepal ikke har vært i stand til å utnytte til fulle den bistanden Danmark yter Nepal (25 millioner US \$ årlig). Kun 80% av bistanden er benyttet. I tillegg viser danskene til at en rekke ubesatte stillinger i ministeriet for befolkning og miljø, samt hyppig politisk motivert utskiftning og overføring av personale, har forsinket en rekke bistandsprosjekter.

Agent-rapport lekket ut

The Kathmandu Post 9.juni 2000, *The Independent* 14-21.juni 2000.
Fritt oversatt og bearbeidet av Kirsten I. Greiner.

Det slo ned som en bombe i Nepal da det velrenommerte indiske nyhetsmagasinet India Today siterte fra en hemmelig rapport i begynnelsen av juni. Rapporten, angivelig utarbeidet av den indiske etterretningstjenesten, navngir flere hundre personer som sies å være agenter med forbindelser til Pakistans anti-indiske aktiviteter. "Nepal Game Plan", rapportens tittel, ble også publisert på India Today's websider. Blant navnene listet i rapporten er en rekke prominente nepalesere, bl.a. noen av statsminister Koirala's nærmeste medarbeidere og rådgivere, ministre, parlamentsmedlemmer, flere framtrepende offentlige tjenestemenn og en rekke næringsdrivende. Det politiske miljøet i Nepal avviser rapporten som fullstendig falsk. Uansett sannhetsgehalten i India Today's artikkel, har saken skapt stor furore og truer med å forsure forholdet mellom India og Nepal.

Juksing på avgangseksamener

The Independent 26.apri -2.mai 2000.
Fritt oversatt og bearbeidet av Kirsten I. Greiner.

Flere uheldige episoder under årets avgangseksamener indikerer svært dårlige forhold i den nepalesiske skolen. Mer enn 200.000 elever tok avgangseksamen i år, men bare to

tredjedeler forventes å bestå den. Mange elever er desperate etter å komme gjennom nåløyet, noe som ga seg utslag i utbredt juksing. Kopiering av besvarelser var ikke uvanlig. I mange områder var lærerne med på notene, blant annet i Jaleshwore og andre deler av Terai, der lærerne ga elevene de rette svarene. Elevene forlot også skolebenken under eksamener og kommuniserte seg imellom via utallige oppfinnsomme innretninger.

Årets eksamener har resultert i sekkevis med inndratte jukselapper og kopierte besvarelser. Også lærere som nektet å delta i juksingen har fått gjennomgå. I Mahottarai-distriktet ble ærlige lærere stengt inne og trakassert av studentene som også fikk støtte fra styreformannen i "Village Development Committee". Styreformannen krevde endog lærerne overført til andre distrikter fordi de "ikke tar hensyn til elevenes framtid". Myndighetenes reaksjon er å underkjenne eksamener ved en del skoler, noe som rammer de ærlige og flinke elevene. Flertallet av de offentlige skolene i Nepal sliter med dårlig økonomi, knapphet på lærebøker og skolemateriell og få og underkvalifiserte lærere.

Nylig bygd avløpskanal sikrer Tsho-Rolpa

(The Kathmandu Post, 10.06.2000, oversatt av Anuradha Gurung)

Av Surendra Phuyal

Lamabagar, Dolakha, 08.06.2000 – To års kontinuerlig arbeid med å bygge avløpskanal fra Tsho-Rolpa har midlertidig avverget risikoen for flom fra brevannet. I dag åpnet ingeniører og geologer kanalporten som reduserer faren for flom i ett av Nepals verst rammede Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) områder. Tsho-Rolpa GLOF Risk Reduction Project har et budsjett på 200 million rupies. Prosjektet er et samarbeidsprosjekt mellom Nederland og Nepal. Prosjektleder Adarsa Pokharel uttalte følgende: "Til å begynne med er vannføringen fra den vertikale kanalporten på ca. 6000 liter vann per sekund. Kanalen er ca. 3 meter dyp og 700 meter lang. Allerede etter to ukers vannføring vil brevann-nivået synke med tre meter. Dette vil gi en merkant reduksjon av GLOF fare". Prosjektets andre fase omfatter regelmessig kontroll av vann-nivået, samt overvåking av isblokker som danner en naturlig demning i brevannet. Dette skal ferdigstilles i 2002.

Tsho-Rolpa ligger 4480 m.o.h. i Rolwaling-dalen, der omtrent 100 millioner kubikkmeter vann er demmet opp bak en løs morene. En eventuelt GLOF i Tsho-Rolpa vil kunne true 10.000 menneskeliv, buskap, dyrket mark, broer, Khimti-kraftverket og annen infrastruktur opptil 100 km nedstrøms. Overvann fra Tsho-Rolpa renner til Rolwaling-elven som videre munner ut i Tamakoshi-elven - en av syv elver til Sapta Koshi. Tidligere hadde et samarbeidsprosjekt mellom Nepal og Verdensbanken etablert 19 automatiske flomvarslingssirener i 17 landsbyer langs Rolwaling og Bhotekoshi.

GLOF faren er ikke helt avverget. For å minske risikoen må det også bygges en 20 meter dyp kanal, noe som er dyrt og risikabelt arbeid i ett så utilnærmelig terreng. "Med sin dårlige økonomi vil ikke Nepal alene greie å dekke byggekostnadene", sier Pokharel.

Kontrakten var tildelt Butwal Power Company som igjen valgte Himal Hydro som sin underentreprenør.

Nødhjelp forsinket til flomrammede

(Kathmandu Post, tirsdag 13.juni, 2000, oversatt av Kristine Alsvik)

Banke, 12.juni - Distribusjonen av mat og annen støtte til de flomrammede menneskene i Bajhang distriktet er blitt forsinket. Flommen som tok med seg flere landsbyer, har ført til at mange mennesker har blitt hjemløse. I tillegg har de den siste tiden hatt store problemer med å skaffe seg mat. Leder for District Development Committee (DDC), Man Prasad Khatri, fortalte Kathmandu Post over telefonen at "De flomrammede menneskene lider av sult. Det finnes ikke nødvendig hjelpeapparat i området, men DDC har bestemt at det skal gis 7 kilo ris til hver flomrammede person".

The Natural Calamity Relief Committee har også bestemt seg for å distribuere hjelp, men denne hjelpen er blitt forsinket. Videre er det bestemt at det skal gis Rs100 000 fra Alcohol Control Fund som skal brukes til opprettholdelse av veiene. Representanter fra ulike politiske parti og administrasjonspersonale har også besøkt området, og det er bestemt at Natural Calamity Relief Fund vil bidra med hjelp først etter at disse representantene har presentert sine rapporter. Assisterende distriktsjef for Bajhang, Upendra Dhaka, forteller Kathmandu Post at man regner med at hjelpen vil nå de trengende innen tirsdag. Han forteller også at det har vært vanskelig og fått brakt telt til Bajhang som skulle sendes fra Røde Kors hovedkontor. I mellomtiden har CPN (UML) krevd at det må igangsettes umiddelbar hjelp til de flomrammede, og at det må skaffes husrom til de som er blitt hjemløse.

En god begynnelse

(The National Newsmagazine, 2.juni – 8.juni, 2000, oversatt av Kristine Alsvik)

Av Akshay Sharma

Mens nepalesere slår rekorder i fjellene, har en gruppe av sveitsere, østerrikere og tyskere gått den vanlige turistruta fra Lukla til Gyoko og samlet søppel som de vil ta med seg tilbake til sitt eget hjemland. De sier at en sjokkerende mengde av søppel har samlet seg i området. Miljøets svekkede tilstand i Everest-regionen er et stigende problem. Et av regionens største problem er hva den skal gjøre med alt søppelet som samler seg. Tiltakene som så langt har blitt satt igang, har ikke vært tilstrekkelige.

Organisert av Arbeitskries Trekking- and Expedition (ATE) sammen med Explorer Nepal har gruppen samlet inn 40 bager med søppel under denne 5. årlige opprenskningen. Gruppene oppholdt seg i Khumbu regionen og gikk fra Lukla til Gokyo og rundt Gokyo fjelltoppene. Christopher Sachsenmaler, en av deltakerne, forteller at han synes Nepal er et veldig vakkert land. Han sier at han var sjokkert over alt søppelet de fant, og at Lukla og Namche bør få et godt system for avfallstømming.

ATE er en assosiasjon av tolv tyske reisebyråer som spesialiserer seg på fjellturer og ekspedisjoner, og som er opptatt av at turene deres skal følge de generelle reglene for økologisk turisme. Opprenskningskampanjen ble igangsatt av ATE medlemmer, som selv betalte for turen. Etter turen har gruppen appellert til alle berørte autoriteter og grupper som vil kjempe mot forurensningen i området. "Lokale anstrengelser er nødvendig for å kunne bekjempe forurensningsproblemet" sier Bharat Basnet, leder for Explorer Nepal. Han sier videre at han var sjokkert da han leste rapporten om

problemene i området. Gruppas anstrengelser er en symbolsk handling for å få ryddet Everest-regionen og for å skape lokal bevissthet. Plastikk, bokser, glass og batterier som ble samlet inn er lagt ut til utstilling i Bhojan Griha.

Etter kampanjen leverte ATE en rapport til HMG og alle andre relaterte organisasjoner. Thomas Prinzler, en journalist fra Tyskland og medlem av gruppen, sier at regjeringen burde øke arbeidskraften som patruljerer parkene og at overtredelser burde straffes. Gruppens rapport sier videre at informasjon om miljøvennlig fjellgåing burde gjøres tilgjengelig sammen med tillatelser og nasjonalparkavgifter. Så langt blir denne informasjonen bare gitt til de som tar initiativet til å besøke Sagarmatha Pollution Control Center (SPCC) i Lukla og Namche. For å få folk til å bli flinkere til å samle inn søppel burde det igangsettes et finansielt attraktivt depositum-system. I dag er det SPCC som tar seg av det materialet som blir samlet inn av turister og fjellklatrere. Sistnevnte må betale en viss sum penger i depositum som returneres først når de viser at de har tatt med seg søppelet tilbake.

OLD HAT

GIRIJA PRASAD Koirala is back in the saddle at Singha Darbar. This is his fourth stint in the hot seat that have seen ten turns and six occupants since democracy was restored a decade ago. But it had better not be business as usual this time around, since Koirala has taken charge after ousting the person he himself had installed about a year ago.

Back then, it was hailed as a master stroke. Koirala's Nepali Congress was heading a coalition with the Nepal Communist Party (UML) when he called for mid-term elections "to rid the country of political instability". The Nepali Congress, while a divided house, was still in one piece even as its main rivals—both the NCP (UML) as well as the conservative Rastriya Prajatantra Party—had split formally. To check dissent and control rebel candidates within his party, Koirala announced that if his party gained an absolute majority, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai would be the next prime minister.

It is unclear whether it was the ceaseless campaigning and direct leadership of Koirala that worked, or the magic of Bhattarai's name, but the Congress managed a comfortable majority. Koirala, as head of the victorious party, kept to his pre-election promise and had Bhattarai installed as the prime minister. It was a decision that he was to regret from day one, as Bhattarai went on to form a cabinet that was a queer mix of his old cronies and suspected wheeler-dealers.



The Bhattarai government was guided by the principle that those who do nothing can do no wrong. It would have worked, if it were not for some feats of his faithfulness. Yog Prasad Upadhyay, the prime minister's Man Friday, stirred a hornet's nest as education minister by his whimsical decision to grant tenure to thousands of temporary school teachers even as the result of a competitive examination for those very posts was pending. Bal Bahadur KC, another Bhattarai favourite, gained notoriety when a local daily had him scaling a compound wall in the capital.

Things worsened as Bhattarai's age and ineptitude started to show. His offhand remarks after the hijacking of the Indian Airlines flight IC 814 was considered hasty and inappropriate, for he seemed to be accepting blame even before an investigation was complete. Though he backtracked later, his interview to a foreign news agency rattled the palace when he aired apprehensions

about a risk to Nepali democracy from the king. The resignation of finance minister Mahesh Acharya over the appointment of the Governor of the Nepal Rastra Bank, the central depository, also seemed to indicate Bhattarai's uncaring attitude.

Bhattarai's increasing recklessness was matched by Koirala's growing restlessness. Koirala believed he had promises to keep to those who had given his party a majority, while Bhattarai thought that his being and continuing in the chair was in itself an unparalleled achievement. Things came to a head after Koirala made a tour of the hinterland and concluded that the Maoist insurgency was getting out of hand, and that Bhattarai was doing nothing to curb it.

Once Koirala decided to oust Bhattarai, the latter's formal exit became only a question of timing. Under the threat of a no-confidence motion from MPs of his own party, Bhattarai bid an emotional farewell from the podium of the House and resigned. As a parting shot, he fired several salvos at Koirala, and pointedly expressed the wish that a "yuba peedi" (younger generation) would take over the reins of government after him.

In retrospect, Bhattarai's source of power was not numbers, but the respect that he commanded due to his absolute integrity. While he remains untainted even now, the same cannot be said about the coterie that surrounded him. For the capital's intellectual elite, however, his repeated breach of decorum stuck at the craw. His light-hearted comments about petty corruption, the bloated national army and his own indispensability, finally saw him lose this mainstay of his support once he started to ridicule its very value system. The elite could not indulge any more the ineptitude of an old man and forgive the incompetence of this historic figure.

Koirala is more feared than respected. Reputed to be a man of action rather than contemplation, he inspires either fierce loyalty or intense hatred, the latter especially from the mainstream left. Should Koirala fail to deliver on the variety of challenges facing the country,

he himself has shown the way the party should deal with him by engineering the Bhattarai ouster. History can no longer bail him out, and nobody knows that better than Koirala. His announcement that 60 years of his active political life was at stake is an acceptance of reality rather than bravery.

The priorities set for his government by Koirala appear to be well thought out politically. Controlling the Maoist insurgency, restoring faith in the administration, and checking rampant corruption are some of the immediate worries. The insurgency, however, is foremost in everyone's mind. Poor Nepalis—rebel, peasant and police jawan—are dying to the gun and bomb like never before, and the resolution of this problem will probably make or break the new prime minister.

Even beyond the Maoist problem, however, Koirala faces complex issues where quick and visible results are difficult to deliver. Restoring normalcy to strained Indo-Nepal relations, pulling the SAARC process back on track by prevailing upon New Delhi to come back to the postponed Kathmandu Summit, and courting belligerent aid donors, are some of the other critical issues that will test Koirala's diplomatic mettle.

Unfortunately, other than a few exceptions such as the re-installed Finance Minister Mahesh Acharya, Koirala's team of tainted faces of the past does not inspire much confidence. Cooperation of the civil service is suspect because its top echelons consist of the very people Koirala had expelled during his first term as prime minister and who owe their present positions to a court directive invalidating that decision. To complicate matters further, Koirala will have to contend with both the left and its traditional animus against him, and ambitious parliamentary party colleagues expecting their pound of flesh for aiding and abetting the ouster of Bhattarai.

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala is said to be resolute, and he will need that quality in good measure to meet the challenges that he himself has set. Time is certainly not on the side of the septuagenarian. The first few months in office will determine whether this will be a grand finale or a curtain of disgrace for the evergreen Young Turk of the Nepali Congress. Now that he has taken charge, there is no looking back. It is either perform or perish. ▲

C.K. Lal

ARMED PEACE

IT IS sometimes said that peace depends on the ratio of coercive power held by the government compared to those who might be tempted to challenge it in a civil war. Secure peace is always armed, with its use strictly regulated by law and overseen by a strong 'civil society'.

A Maoist insurgency has been raging in about one-third of the country's administrative districts for over five years now. Nearly 1500 Nepali lives have already been lost. The necessity of using effectively the coercive power of the state, in addition to negotiations and other constructive engagements, is being acutely felt. Normal 'policing'—some of it indiscriminate—has not succeeded in controlling organised assaults by a motivated and armed group adopting the techniques of guerrilla warfare, and that too in a rugged terrain amidst a population plagued by acute poverty.

In the hill regions affected by insurgency, fear reigns supreme. Caught between a rock and a hard place—demanding Maoists and vindictive policemen—the people have started to lose faith in the government administration, which has been effectively confined to the district headquarters in more than one place. In certain pockets, there are what can only be called Maoist administrations in place. Clearly, the Nepali Congress government needs to resort to something drastic, and quite quickly too, if it is to retain credibility and live up to the promises it made to the larger populace in the general elections of a year ago.

The coercive power at the command of the Kathmandu government is of two types: the Nepal Police, the force which has 'handled' the Maoists for the past five years; and the Royal Nepal Army, which has remained firmly in the barracks till now. Nepal has nothing in between in the form of a paramilitary force.

During the Rana oligarchy which lasted till 1950, it was the army that oversaw law and order, with civil administrative officials routinely holding military position. The Nepal Police was raised only after the Ranas were overthrown, with leaders who had faced the fire of the soldiers during the first struggle for democracy committed to separating law-and-order and national security functions.

A relatively younger force, much closer to the people and made to sway under the whims of the political leadership, the Nepal Police has the image of a poor cousin of the elitist army. In comparison to the soldiers, Nepali policemen are poorly paid, ill-equipped, inadequately armed, and consequently, less motivated. To make things worse, at the latest instance, the police was thoroughly politicised during the coalition government of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (Chand) and the Communist Party of Nepal (UML), when its feisty home minister Bam Dev Gautam went about dismantling the command hierarchy established over the years. No thanks to Mr. Gautam, among others, the Nepal Police has turned into a force that does the politician's bidding—hardly the ideal organisation to respond to the complexities of a Maoist 'people's war'.

The Royal Nepal Army, on the other hand, commands fearful respect in Nepali society, partly because it is associated with the name of the king (note the 'Royal' in the name, not given to the police), and partly because it has not yet had to prove its worth in a possibly messy internal security assignment. Still essentially commanded by the Chhetri elite of Nepal, the army has not had to fight an external war since 1858 (with Tibet, and a losing proposition at that), and uses its time protecting the king and the national parks, conducting ceremonial displays, and building the occasional highway. Nevertheless, in the minds of the people, the army remains the weapon of last resort if national society really begins to fall apart as a result of a wildfire insurgency that the political class of Kathmandu cannot contain.

Deploying the army is not a routine government decision, however. According to the 1990 Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, which in so many areas reflects points of compromise between the royal palace, the conservative classes and the democratic forces, the army can only be bought onto the streets by the king upon the recommendations of the National Security Council. The Council, which has never been activated over the decade of democracy, consists of three members—the prime minister, the defence minister and the commander-in-chief. With Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala himself holding the defence portfolio, the effective strength of the council is two, and judging by their public utterances, both Koirala

and the C-in-C Prajwalla SJB Rana appear to be in favour of deploying the army to control the Maoists.

A third option has now been suggested by a commission set up by the previous government (of Krishna Prasad Bhattarai) to explore the possibility of establishing an armed police unit. Chaired by Khem Raj Regmi, a former home secretary, this commission has come up with the idea of a paramilitary unit at the direct disposal of the government, said to be modelled on India's CRPF. Tentatively named the Armed Security Force, initially the group would be composed of the existing riot police and the commando unit of the Nepal Police, and an equal number of trained personnel from the army.

There may be questions about costs, composition and line of command, but eventually such a force may have to come into existence, especially if the police cannot be brought back to professional stature. The state does need a specialised unit to face the challenges of increasingly sophisticated insurgents who are not engaged in merely a political movement, but have actually declared 'people's war', and are acting according to its violent precepts. The government does need to have something to fall back upon when a situation is neither just a civilian law and order problem, nor an outright attack by an external enemy.

Even while the Regmi Commission's report was doing the rounds, Prime Minister Koirala set alarm bells ringing by wanting to 'activate' the National Security Council. The Kathmandu intelligentsia fears, perhaps with sound reasoning in the context of the less-than-respectful postures of the army brass towards the popularly elected government, that Koirala's action will let the military cat out of the bag. The army, itching to play a role, may be reluctant to return to the barracks once brought out, and it would also definitely claim a bigger share of the national revenue—it is well known that the generals and their paraphernalia come dearer than the inspector generals. But the counter to this argument is that the Maoist insurgency has spread as fast as it has, precisely because the underground leadership knows that the army is not within the direct control of the government. In such a context, it needs to

be said that any action by Prime Minister Koirala to take the final step of wresting the army from the ambiguous grasp of the royal palace and under fuller command of the elected government, can only lead to a further strengthening of Nepali democracy. If the politicians try to 'politicise' the army like they did the police, the army brass as well as media and the academia, as also the palace, should fight it.

While the debates on setting up of the paramilitary force and/or galvanising the NSC take their course, perhaps the government can try out a solution which would even render these two proposals defunct for the moment. The best course for now appears to be for Prime Minister Koirala to take firm steps to mobilise the army, but to keep it confined to a supportive role in the insurgency-affected regions. This would allow the police to face the heat with the confidence of a fall-back option, while at the same time saving the government from the embarrassment of having to make obvious use of the army to fight its own people. (For the moment, with the government still unsure of its authority, the suggestion of the RNA providing support to the police has the colonels coming back to the home minister with their calculators and asking for 'x' amount of rupees before the jawans come out.) Such an approach will necessitate the establishment of a civilian command to coordinate the efforts of the army and the police in the field, and in this context the (one more) idea of appointing regional governors does deserve serious attention.

Fighting battles is an unpleasant but essential task if the Kathmandu government is to re-establish authority and restore peace in all of the hinterland. No amount of political correctness amongst Kathmandu's intelligentsia—rarely known to do its homework—can cover this fact of public affairs in present-day Nepal. And if and when the government really comes up with the will to go to 'war' with the insurgents, rather than stay in holding pattern, the role of media and the larger civil society will be that much more crucial, to ensure that the innocent and deprived peasantry of Nepal are not caught in the crossfire. There is terror in the hills, and no credit is due for the violent ideology of the Maoist leadership nor the heavy-handed police action of the government in the years just past.

- C. K. Lal

At Kathmandu airport a diplomat passes a bag to a transit passenger ...

■ by Farzand AHMED

AT THE BEST OF TIMES THE Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA) in Kathmandu is a madhouse. Last October, a mentally deranged visitor thought it was his natural habitat. He ambled into the airport, strolled casually through what feigned to be security, meandered his way through the tarmac and finally lodged himself comfortably in the cockpit of a parked Thai Airways aircraft. "We have the best security arrangements at TIA," says Nepal's Home Minister Purna Bahadur Khadka.

At noon a day before Christmas, a car with a slightly grand number plate, 42-CD-14, drew up before the airport. Two gentlemen, one with an undistinguished cabin baggage, strolled into the departure lounge, walked officiously past the passengers awaiting the departure of a delayed Indian Airlines flight to Delhi and went briskly up the stairs to the VIP lounge. Anxiously awaiting them was a "transit" passenger who had arrived by PK 806 some three hours earlier. The three exchanged meaningful glances and the bag changed hands. A few minutes later a satisfied Arshad Chima, first secretary in the Pakistan Embassy, was ne-

gotiating his way back to work through Kathmandu's bazaar traffic.

The "transit" passenger spent the next two hours anxiously eyeing the trickle of passengers crossing the unmanned metal detectors to await the boarding call for IC 814 to Delhi. Like the others, S.A. Qazi too collected his boarding pass and strolled into the departure area, where he was joined by the transit passenger and three others. The contents of the bag were discreetly distributed. When the flight was finally announced, all five entered the aircraft.

There were 178 passengers on board the flight to Delhi; only 177 submitted their embarkation cards. "Yes, there was a transit passenger from the PIA flight who may have been counted as an extra crew. Also, there's nothing unusual in diplomats frequenting the departure area. Beyond that I can't say anything," said a harried TIA General Manager Medini Prasad Sharma.

The identity of the transit passenger still remains a mystery. He may have been Ahmad Sheikh, Qazi's co-passenger in the executive class, or S.A. Sayyed or Z.I. Mistri. There is a presumption that the group may have included Gajendra Man Tamrakar, a Nepali businessman—some say smuggler—and

small-time TV comedian.

Chima's name had been linked to the 20-kg RDX haul in 1998 which was meant for India. And he is not the first Pakistani diplomat accused of running a local office for the ISI. In 1994 Gul Rehman, the political secretary, and Imtiaz, the third secretary, in the Pakistani Embassy, were found to patronise Hotel Karnali, a well-known ISI base.

Kathmandu airport is chaotic during check-in, there's no transit lounge or proper security. But Assistant Civil Aviation Minister Narain Singh Pun argues, "We have the best facilities. Yet there can be some human error." Whatever be the case, all officials on duty at the time IC 814 took off have been suspended. There were 250 people at work on the second shift at the airport that day. Some months ago their colleagues had been suspended for escorting gold smugglers to an aircraft.

A six-member commission has been set up to investigate the lapses at the TIA. The inquiry team is headed by former police chief Hem Bahadur Singh. Despite

these impressive credentials, Singh's appointment has left the Nepal Government with egg on its face. Soon after his retirement, he had rented out his house to Mirza Dilshad Beg, the slain minister linked to Dawood Ibrahim and the ISI. Singh, however, denies any complicity with the underworld, "When I rented out my house in 1990 to Beg, then an MP, I didn't know his background. When I found out that Babloo Srivastava was living there I got the house vacated." Srivastava, another Dawood associate, is of course in an Indian jail now.

The Nepal Government had initially asked three retired judges to head the inquiry panel. All of them refused. Singh was the fourth choice. To some this is evidence of the fact that important people in Nepal may not want the unravelling of the nexus between influential locals and their ISI partners. Like IC 814, the inquiry could be a flight into darkness. ■

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Små-rupies blir mynter

Nepalnews.com 15.juni 2000.

Fritt oversatt og bearbejdet av Kirsten I. Greiner.

Nepal Rashtira Bank har besluttet å stoppe trykningen av rupies-sedlene med minst verdi. Disse sedlene er dyre å trykke i forhold til verdien og varer bare et halvt års tid. Sedler med verdi opp til 5 rupies skal nå erstattes av mynter som har en levetid på minst ti år.

Ny avis i Nepal

Nepali Times 15.juni 2000.

Fritt oversatt og bearbejdet av Kirsten I. Greiner.

Himalmedia står bak den nye engelskspråklige avisen Nepali Times som utkommer i Nepal hver onsdag fra 19.juli 2000. Avisen er også tilgjengelig på internett. Nyheter, ekspertkommentarer og dyptpløyende bakgrunnsartikler om Nepals politikk, næringsliv, samfunnsforhold og turisme settes i høysetet. Bak den nye avisen står Himalmedia som allerede utgir det samfunnskritiske magasinet Himal i nepalesisk og engelsk versjon.

Our IA flight from Calcutta to Kathmandu was due to leave early morning. The dawn was soft, a gentle humid air wafting across the city. At the airport, the check-in queue was no longer than usual. Equally routine, the flight was delayed, allowing time to investigate the limited scenery of Dum Dum airport. The departure time shifted to 11:00 a.m. and then to noon, and then on to some indeterminate hour. It was a pleasant surprise, therefore, when the flight was called circa 13:00. We slid smoothly past the security guards and, being somewhat experienced travellers, managed to find a seat on the first bus out to the Airbus 320.

We made our way across the tarmac to an airplane, but the flight crew was clearly surprised to see us. There was none of the usual pre-departure bustle, and mechanics and staff eyed the bus suspiciously. Our doors remained closed. Then the Airbus commander deigned to come down and shout through the glass, "We're not going to Kathmandu!" A five-minute Hindi-English-Bengali debate ensued between the captain, the bus driver and an increasingly irate group of self-confident been-there-done-that Indian businessmen passengers. Nepalis and some Americans, who made up the rest of the bus, watched the drama unfold.

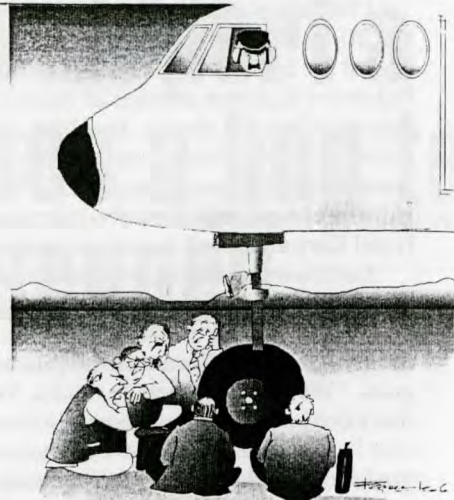
No amount of discussion would make a plane which was not ready to fly, fly. So we headed back to the terminal, where the airline officials asked us back inside, but the bus driver perked up with some unexpected counsel: "I suggest you stay put. If we go back in, who knows when you will come out again. Stay in the bus." So we stayed seated and watched the debate escalate between the airline staff and the businessmen.

At about this time, a stream of passengers was loading onto buses for an IA flight out to Dhaka. A large number of our Kathmandu-bound businessmen picked up their Samsonite briefcases and joined that stream. The Dhaka-bound Airbus 310 was parked nearby, and we began to understand what this was about. Our businessmen walked away from the line of other passengers at the stairs and sat down at the front wheel of the A310, much as would village elders around the community banyan. Their Samsonite briefcases made a nice ring around the seated circle. Things were getting interesting.

Our bus was super-heated in the mid-afternoon sun, so the guards let us out. We wandered over to the group

Only the peanut sellers were missing

(Welcoming Indian Airlines back to Kathmandu)



around the landing gear, watching and sipping the drinks we'd brought along. My son and wife found shade under the fuselage. The only thing missing was the peanut sellers. Our flight would go when it went, no point in allowing the blood pressure to rise with the ambient temperature.

By now, there were about 40 businessmen seated on the tarmac. They would allow the Dhaka plane to depart only when another plane had been found for the Kathmandu passengers. This was leverage. I had never seen a plane, or its wheel, gheraoed before. But this is Calcutta, where there is the tradition to direct action. Perhaps things would move!

The Dhaka plane was ready to go, doors closed and ramp pulled away. With a whirl its engines turned briefly, and then shut down. The captain opened the cockpit window and stretched his neck out and studied the terrain below. No movement from the businessmen, who looked up defiantly. The doors of the Dhaka plane were reopened. Stalemate.

Suddenly, a parallel development. An aircraft had apparently been found to go to Kathmandu. Those of us not engaged in tarmac dharna jumped back on the bus and rumbled out to the fresh airplane, not the one we'd been taken to before. Up the ramp, into the seats. Watching from the window, we could see the captain of the Dhaka plane waving plaintively at the assembly underneath. His gestures were clear—*you've got your plane, now will you let us fly to Dhaka!* The knot of businessmen stood up from their position around the front wheel and swaggered across the tarmac, heroes who had bested the largest airlines of the Subcontinent. The flight to Kathmandu was uneventful. ▲

- Marcus Moench

Ke Garne - What to do?

By Sushma Amatya

The Independent April 26-May 2, 2000, VOL. X NO. 7

Ke garne?, is the catchword of the average and also not so average Nepalis. One gets to hear this word at least once, each and every day. This phrase means, 'what to do?', that signifies complacency and helplessness - not very dissimilar from the three vultures in *The Jungle Book* asking each other, "what do we do now?" and the other replying with the same phrase. We civilised, gentle people use the Ke Garne phrase when nothing happens, when things go wrong and when they refuse to go right; and get sympathetic replies from others with the same phrase.

Everybody uses this word - the politicians, businessmen, government servants, housewives, students and so on. We seem to hang on to this word like a favorite mantra that seems to act like a balm on our psyches. Ke Garne is often followed by Yestai Chhai, meaning - this is how things are; our version of 'life is like that'.

This may be a very indigenous, collective way of placating our nerves but it also provides a fertile ground for the bacteria that breeds complacency many times over with each passing day. Come to think of it, with each of us saying Ke Garne, once every day and what with the never ending addition of the young ones learning to utter the pop word and making it a part of their lives - we could very well become a nation of Ke Garnees. The call for today should be Garne, that is ACT, act now. We must not reduce to a bunch of Ke Garnees.

It is however heartening to note that quite a few people are awake and are not touched by the stupor of Ke Garne. Instead of repeating the much hackneyed phrase when the road of their locality becomes a mess after being dug up many times over and remains so for a long time; many residents of the Kumaripati area took to the streets and protested. This action is of course taken notice and something positive should come out of it - instead of Ke Garne whispered under breath. Not that Ke Garne would do anything even if it were shouted over a mike!

Have we not suffered from the ostrich like attitude long enough? This attitude that makes people think that their neighbour's problems are theirs alone. If we were to realise that problems of pollution, corruption, inflation, insecurity and many other problems are collective problems that affect each and every one of us sooner or later; and if we were to learn to work to advocate, implement the corrective actions together - things would move much faster. That would be giving the nagging creature called complacency a kick where it hurts, so it would not be back again to reduce us to non acting whiners. So, let's get on with our act, now!

A country that sells itself, poorly

Nepal's travel-traders seem to know how to run every sector of tourism into the ground.

by Kanak Mani Dixit

The two biggest problems of Nepali tourism are over-supply and under-cutting. The market is saturated with 'vendors', and each tries to under-price the other—among lodges, hotels, airlines, travel agencies, trekking agencies, rafting agencies, wildlife safaris, and even porters and *riksa*-pullers. A five-star hotel in downtown Kathmandu will provide bed and breakfast for as little as 20 dollars, and nowhere in the world but in the Thamel tourist quarter can you have clean sheets and attached-bath for as low as two dollars a night.

In whichever sector, Nepal's tourism has always started at the high end, but then the 'service providers' proliferate and the asking price plummets. The country becomes a tourist heaven and tourism hell—enough to begin asking whether the industry is here to serve Nepal or vice versa.

The oversupply of 'capacity' itself is not a problem (and it does represent a more 'democratic' sharing of the pie). The issue is a terrible failure to market the country so as to fill all those extra beds. There are by today more than 300 trekking agencies in Nepal, vying for about 100,000 trekkers annually, many of whom actually prefer to walk un-organised. The hotels in Kathmandu are running at 36 percent occupancy—it has been years since the top hotels got top dollars. There was a time when high-end trekking used to go with ease for USD 150 a day, but the average now is about 20-25 dollars. White-water rafting, even till five years ago, was at USD 40 a day, but today the asking price is less than half of that.

It is true, as Edmund Hillary once told this writer, that even the "impecunious" have a right to travel, but the interest of the host country, Nepal, is to, first, maximise income from tourism, and, two, maximise spread of that income. The way things are today, Nepal seems to be focused exclusively on pandering to the impecunious, as a result of which there is precious little to share around. Last month, some European millionaires were revelling in the Everest region of Khumbu for USD 40 a day. When snow blocked their progress, they casually chartered a helicopter for USD 2000 an hour and toured the Everest Base Camp area, and then returned

to rejoin their trek group.

No one can deny that Nepal's tourism has a lot going for it—a small country of South Asia blessed with great variety in culture, antiquity and geography. The Himalayan mountains are a permanent asset and the quality of service in Nepali tourism—warm and natural—is by all accounts one of the best in Asia. When occasionally a policy goes right, the response is immediate—as with the surge in domestic civil aviation when it was deregulated in 1991-1992.

But when you speak of international aviation, that is where the problem begins. The government-run flag carrier Royal Nepal, despite having competent management, has been bled by the politicians and bureaucrats over the last decade, to such an extent that its fleet today is half the size of 12 years ago. The airline is in the doldrums, its international 'network' stretching laughably from Osaka to London, supported by two narrow-bodied Boeing 757s. The glut in supply in every sector of tourism would be taken care of if Royal Nepal were to be allowed to fly as a real airline, but travel operators have waited two decades for this to happen.

Besides Royal Nepal's incapacity, the other major lack is in marketing the country. Over the years, Nepal has essentially 'sold' itself, but today's traveller has discovered so many more 'exotic' places in the Orient—and not just Bhutan, Ladakh, Tibet and Mongolia. Nepal now needs marketing, which is why a couple of years ago the government hived off its Department of Tourism and created an autonomous Nepal Tourism Board. With two percent of the total turnover of the private industry dropping into its coffers, NTB was to be a dynamic agency 'selling' Nepal. Suffice it to say that it has not quite worked out that way, and Nepal's marketing is actually done gratis by firms like the large-format IMAX presentation *Everest*, which led to a surge of arrivals to the Himalaya over the 1998-1999 seasons and is spilling over into 2000.

When it comes to holistic promotion, the NTB and private sector as a whole do precious little other than to hope for such promotional bonanzas like *Everest* to land on their laps. (The travel-traders do, of course, market their own busi-

nesses.) They lack commitment and creativity, as seen in the inability to adjust to Kathmandu Valley's changing cultural landscape. The holistic ambience of medieval urbanism has vanished over the last 15 years, sacrificed to pollution and cement-concrete, but the travel agencies are still trying to sell the Newar inner-cities as they did in 1980. The need now is to introduce 'micro-tourism', focusing on individual temples, monastic courtyards (*bahals*) and palaces, where Kathmandu's old-world charm can still be found.

Indeed, private industry has exhibited a remarkable capacity to squeeze tourism income out of each sector without evident concern for long-term sustainability. Thus, the industry kept quiet over the 1970s when the Valley lost much of its free-standing statuary to idol-theft; over the 1980s when the streetscape crumbled to the concrete onslaught; and over the 1990s when air and water pollution devastated Kathmandu's environment. All of these downturns affected tourism before anything else.

There are many ways in which Nepali tourism can innovate, but it requires creative savvy. Like the Himalaya, Lumbini as the birthplace of the Sakyamuni has an eternal potential to attract pilgrims and tourists. However, the East Asian tourists in particular seem to be staying away, perhaps because they realise the potential of Nepal's tourism mandarins to convert the place from a spiritual haven to a crass Disneyland.

Kathmandu's Thamel has evolved from a budget-traveller's refuge into a destination in its own right—probably the most cosmopolitan place in all South Asia, where Western 'cafe culture' can be enjoyed at middle-class prices. The place is a magnet not just for Western tourists, but also for English-speaking, travel-oriented, high-spending city elites from Dhaka, Karachi, Bombay or Bangalore, who would come to Thamel if they were told about it.

Like Lumbini or Thamel, so with casinos. Largely limited to the Punjabi weekenders from New Delhi, the four casinos of Kathmandu have not been able to entice the other great gamblers of Asia, the Chinese who populate the east and the southeast. Trekking, the home-grown industry, has yet to 'upgrade' itself from a backpackers' delight to high-value tourism injecting better income into the villages.

True, there are some matters which are beyond the control of Nepal's tourism operators and government. For example, tourism is an industry that is extremely sensitive to bad news on the telly, and it does not help that Nepal is right in the middle of the volatile northern half

of South Asia, a region described aptly by William Jefferson Clinton as "the most dangerous place in the world". Nepal's travel trade is therefore at the mercy of little wars and potential big wars, bomb blasts, nuclear tests and sectarian killings. Even if they happen hundreds of miles away, before you can say 'Chomolongma', the fax machine will be spewing a slew of cancellations.

The extended nature of the IC-814 hijack drama in December, the fact that the flight originated in Kathmandu, and that the Indian government chose to punitively and summarily cancel all Indian Airlines flights to Nepal, has affected tourism grievously. The summer tourist season in Nepal has been mostly filled by Indian tourists, many of them honeymooners, but the first quarter of 2000 saw a drop of 38 percent over the previous year of Indian tourists arriving by air.

The summer tourism season is by now a certified disaster, and so the need now to salvage at least the autumn season, which for Nepal is the peak. And therein lies the whispered prayer of all Nepali tour operators—that the violent Maoist insurgency of the past five years will once again spare tourism. But this year the prayer may not be answered. The long-dreaded US State Department 'travel advisory' went out on 21 April, stating that "the level of civil unrest and terrorist violence throughout Nepal has escalated in recent weeks and is expected to remain at heightened levels". It continues, "In a break from past practices, in three recent incidents, Maoist insurgents have targeted tourists or tourist facilities in different parts of Nepal... Although no injuries have been associated with these confrontations, the targeting of tourist groups and facilities indicates a heightened level of risk for travellers in Nepal."

Tourism will be devastated, and all the attendant impact visited upon Nepali society, if the underground Maoist leadership fails to understand that, even at its most inefficient, the industry does help the economy and the population. There is a lot of room for the government, the NTB and the private sector to improve their performance, but they will have no space to perform if the threat of violence, tragically, keeps tourists from the one-time and would-be Shangri-La that is Nepal.

HIMAL

2000 May 13/5

The impact of Indian Airlines' hijack and flight suspensions on air-tourist arrivals in Nepal, data for the first quarter of 1999 and 2000 (courtesy Immigration Office TIA and Nepal Tourism Board).

TOTAL TOURISTS		
1999	2000	% change
94,353	83,561	-11.4%
(% change for same period in 1999 over 1998 was +5.4%)		

THIRD COUNTRY TOURISTS		
1999	2000	% change
68,238	67,376	-1.3%
(% change for same period in 1999 over 1998 was +6.8%)		

INDIAN TOURISTS		
1999	2000	% change
26,115	16,185	-38%
(% change for same period in 1999 over 1998 was +1.7%)		

Floating over Kathmandu

On 9N-AFV,
there is nothing
between you and
the Valley below
and the Himalaya
upfront.

HIMAL 13/5 May 2000

by Rupa Joshi

Silence... That is what hits you. Silence almost eerie as you hang from a hot-air balloon 5000 feet above the slightly misty landscape. Underneath, a Kathmandu Valley that is slowly waking up to a spring morning. Suddenly there is a roar from the propane gas burners and the VHF radio that communicates with the control tower crackles. But then it is back to floating quietude and calm.

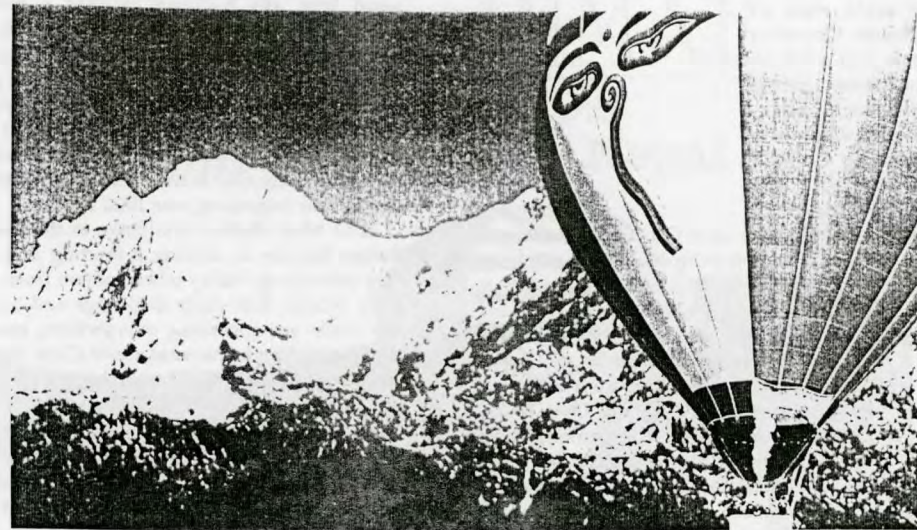
Equally amazing as the silence is the stillness. Anyone with the 'wind-on-your-face' idea of a balloon ride will be taken by surprise at how calm it is. Because the balloon goes with the air flow, you do not feel movement. In fact, other than when the balloon is rising or descending, it almost seems as if the balloon is stationary. We seem to be stuck in one place, like an eagle frozen in mid-flight, no flapping of wings, no gliding in circles, no obvious movement at all. An unobtrusive eye in the sky.

And then the view. Unparalleled. So much to observe, and in so relaxed a manner. It actually takes some time to get used to the 360 degrees 'spherical' view of the Valley and surroundings. There is the Himalayan panorama

to the north, the ancient city-centre and the modern sprawl of Kathmandu below, and hills that fold and unfold themselves into the horizon. There is something for everyone to see from up there—the mountain addict, the naturalist, the environmentalist, the sociologist, the geologist, the poet, the artist...

It is early in the morning in late March. The air is crisp and clear, just as mornings a day after the rains are supposed to be. As we arrived at the lift-off site at Gatthaghar, just east of Tribhuvan International Airport, the eastern sky was already glowing orange. Sprawled on the dew-laden field was the canopy of our craft, call-sign 9N-AFV. It is owned by Balloon Sunrise, Nepal's and South Asia's only commercial balloon operator, which pioneered this extraordinary early-morning floating tour over Kathmandu Valley.

As the passengers sipped on coffee, pilot Chris Shorten, an Australian from Alice Springs in the centre of the Outback, was trying to make contact with the air-traffic controller at TIA in order to prepare for lift-off. Meanwhile, his co-pilot Sunil N. S. Thapa, a Kathmandu *raithane*



Balloon
Sunrise eyes
Ganesh
Himal.

(local), was directing the ground crew to fan hot air from the gas burners into the 'sleeping' beauty. Slowly, the balloon with the signature Buddha-eyes unfolded, expanded and stood upright eight-storeys' tall, plump and ready to take flight.

The queen-size cane basket with standing-room space for nine-seven passengers and two crew—and with propane gas cylinders attached to the sides, is not a confidence-building sight at first. No rudders, no handles, no steering wheel. The only navigational aids on board are a tiny Global Positioning System meter, a VHF radio for contact with the tower, and a UHF radio to keep in touch with the ground crew and catch-up vehicles.

The only means to control this craft are the burners and vents, which allow vertical ascent and descent. Doubts nibble at the corner of the mind about the wisdom of suspending oneself half way to the heavens in this open basket. But all doubts vanish with the receding ground. Says co-pilot Thapa. "Passengers worry as they get into the basket, but all apprehension wears off the moment we head for the skies!" Lifting off is memorable mainly because it is so imperceptible. The sights below gradually begin to shrink, accompanied by a simultaneous enlarging of the landscape.

As the 7-o'clock sun whitens the sky, the balloon levels at 9000 ft. The neat-rowed potato patches and the irrigated wheat fields below us have nearly blended themselves into general green expanse. The smoke coming from the numerous brick kilns billow westwards—as polluting as they are to the residents on the ground, they help the pilots monitor the wind direction.

"We're completely at the mercy of the winds for the direction we take," says Thapa. "The only control we have is on the elevation, and the rotation of the balloon. We have to constantly adapt our flight path to the direction of the air flow at each level." Shooting a burst of propane into the canopy, Capt. Shorten adds that flying in Kathmandu is a breeze as far as the wind is concerned. "There are very light winds, and virtually no ground winds, which makes for very smooth landings."

Himals across Nepal

For the passengers, the view is absolutely astounding. All across the northern horizon is the Himalayan range resplendent in the fresh powdering of yesterday's snow. They loom large and regal,

above the navy blue hills. The Himal east of Phurbi Ghyachu can just be seen outlined against the white morning sunlight. The nose-up Chhoba Bhamare, the twin embrace of the Gauri Shanker, and Cho Oyu, Melungste and Everest with its signature plume of snow. It is the mountains directly to the north of the Valley, the reclining Langtang, the pyramidal Gangchempo, and the towering hump of Tibet's Shishapangma, that put their best face forward to the slanting sun. Over to the northwest, there is the conglomeration of the Ganesh Himal peaks, majestic Himalchuli and Manaslu a little further on, and across the Marsyangdi the crescent of the Annapurna Himal, wearing the 'topi' of the windswept massif of Annapurna II.

"The mountains never seem the same," says Thapa, as he democratically rotates the balloon to grant an unrestricted northern view to passengers who are facing south. "Every season, they have a different shading, sometimes dark and daring, and at other times dazzling with snow. From one harvest season to the next, the valley below metamorphoses from green to yellow to golden."

As we glide silently along, thousands of feet over the airport, we can make out the large number of aircraft queuing up by the side of the runway for the 'mountain flight'. As the planes take off one by one, the voices of the air traffic controller can be heard over the VHF, warning them to avoid the balloon at 9000 ft. Which they thankfully do. Royal Nepal's large white Boeing then takes off for Delhi, starting on the runway below us, but ending up high above in the sky by the time it leaves the Valley via Chandragiri Pass.

Increasing air traffic in the valley's skies, is one of the challenges that this sightseeing balloon faces. An average of 16 flights leave in a rush for the mountain flight towards Everest in the mornings, and then there is the other rush of STOL aircraft flying to Lukla and other mountain airstrips.

The small planes all circle and mostly fly east, while we silently skim westward, over the shoulder-to-shoulder houses and temples of Kathmandu city. The clusters are only broken here and there by algaed ponds, some open

grounds (too few), and dark meandering streams. With permission to descend a thousand feet, the balloon catches a swifter wind layer and we are soon heading towards the distinctive Swayambhu stupa, with the Nagarjun hill sprawling behind it like a great green dragon. We come close enough for Swayambhu's all-seeing Buddha eyes to take in the balloon's own unblinking eyes. All too soon, the encounter is over and we are past the stupa, and beginning our final descent.

The other distinct challenge to the pilot of Ballon Sunrise is making a landing in a rapidly urbanising Valley where power lines, concrete pylons, half-made buildings and boundary walls are sprouting everywhere, even in the remote *kaanth* (the rural areas). Capt. Shorten cautions, "Folks, we'll now have to keep a watch for power lines, and please don't hesitate to tell us if you see something we've not." He and co-pilot Thapa lean over the side of the basket to look out for power lines and other obstacles. The passengers enthusiastically join in the lookout.

The balloonists have to be equally careful about landing on farmlands and crops. If forced to land on fields, the company reimburses the farmers for the crop damaged. The crew says that, in this the fourth season of their operation in Kathmandu Valley, they have always had safe landings, with no untoward incident other than the slightly bumpy landing when they were blown over the hills into windy Panuati, one valley over to the east.

As the ground draws nearer, the sounds of the city pierce through the silence, firstly as a muffled roar of the Ring Road traffic, then by the barking dogs of the villages below, warning of the great looming orange bulb over their heads. Lower still, and the barks are overtaken by the chatter of the youngsters who have abandoned a nearby government school to swarm over the terraces following the balloon in its westward glide. There is also a sudden stream of maroon amongst the youngsters—these are pupils from the monasteries which dot this area behind Swayambhu.

The company jeeps have followed the balloon as far as the roads will allow, and thereafter the crew gives chase on foot and finally is able to grab the guy wire dropped by the pilots. The balloon is guided into a postage stamp patch of green next to a graveyard of old vehicles on one side and a small pond on the other. The touchdown is the gentlest ever, and after the passengers alight, the air is released and the balloon is slowly laid on its side. Its day's work done. ▲

EYE ON THE HIMAL

An Awesome Flight with Balloon Sunrise Nepal



PRE-DAWN PREPARATION

Balloons usually fly within two or three hours of sunrise, when the winds are calm and conditions most stable. Balloonists try to be on the ground no later than four hours after sunrise. The timing of the year makes much less difference than the time of day. As you are receiving your wake-up call, the pilots, along with the retrieve crew are already making preparations for the morning's flight. Equipment is thoroughly checked and each crew member receives their assignment for the day. The retrieve vehicles roll out of the garage and the day begins. Having arrived at the launch site, the pilots perform last-minutes appraisals of the weather conditions. If you arrive a bit early, you will see them release 'pibals' (short for "pilot balloons") into the atmosphere. These small balloons give important clues about the directions of the wind and velocities - as do movement of nearby trees and flags. The balloon is unloaded, unpacked, and stretched out. First the burner is attached to the basket and then the basket is attached to the balloon. The inflation of the balloon is accomplished by motorized fans. Once the balloon is filled with

air, the burners are ignited to heat the air inside. As the air heat, the balloon starts to rise until it pulls the basket upright. The anticipation grows...

THE FLIGHT OVER KATHMANDU VALLEY

You're up! You realize instinctively that you are enjoying a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The views are spectacular and breathtaking. The silence is broken only by the blast of the burner or by the enthralled fellow passengers. You are ushered along the corridors of wheat, paddy fields, and between the hills and mountains of one of the most beautiful valleys on earth. You'll notice people stopping their cars and taking photographs of the spectacle. By this time, the sun is high above the horizon and the surroundings shimmer in the morning light. If condition allows the balloon to rise high enough it is possible to see Mt. Everest! The pilot will keep on firing the burner for ascent and letting the air cool for descent. Different layers of air can be moving in

NEPAL
TRAVELLER

different directions. You will go up and down a couple of times, while the pilot determines the direction of the balloon which drifts depending on the air currents at different altitudes. Since balloons don't have any means to control their lateral movement, they go wherever the wind takes them. Part of the adventure of ballooning is not knowing your final destination prior to departure. During the flight, the pilot will select a landing site which is free of obstacles, large enough for a safe landing and deflation of the balloon, and not too far from the road. Luckily, there is several such spots around Kathmandu Valley.

THE RETRIVE CREW

The crew helps the pilot rig the equipment, holds open the envelope while it fills with cold air, and applies weight to the outside of the basket as needed before launch. Then they follow the balloon on the ground after the landing, help the pilot pack everything up and bring it home again. Much of the crews' workload consists of carrying heavy equipment from the truck to and from the launch and landing spots. It is indeed hard work! It is also extremely rewarding and lots of fun! There is

NEPAL

TRAVELLER



always the chance that if there is room in the basket, the pilot will say "jump in". The greatest fun, aside from meeting the passengers from different countries and sharing in their wonder and delight, is the task of holding onto the ropeline as the balloon becomes inflated enough to "stand up"! This action drags the crew members sliding across the ground (without the weight resistance on the rope, the balloon would pop up too quickly, instead of easing itself upright). The CGC (Chief Ground Crew) uses radio with which to coordinate retrieve operations. The pilot talks to the CGC about the direction of flight, roads and intended landing sites. The CGC notifies the pilot of any ground hazards, changing weather conditions on the surface, hidden livestock (which can be frightened by the noise of the burner) and owner for permission to land. Long after the sumptuous breakfast has been downed, the crew is still working -

refuelling the propane tanks, cleaning the vehicle interiors and making sure everything is ready for the following morning.

BY SUNEIL N.S. THAPA

Gurkhas to Go

The cream of Himalayan manhood still leaves the mountains to fight in foreign lands, for foreign flags

A CURIOUS SPECTACLE IS TAKING place near the rapids of the Kaligandaki River in the western foothills of the Himalayas. Roughly 150 men between the ages of 17 and 22 have stripped to their underpants and are lining up for a

physical fitness test. It's the first round of a grueling elimination that will end three months later when 230 of the thousands of aspirants are chosen for the world's most successful and perhaps most feared mercenary force—the Gurkhas. Across the mountains of eastern and western Nepal, the annual re-

cruiting season for Britain's 3,700-man Brigade of Gurkhas is in full swing.

On the Indian side of the Himalayas, at a military training depot close to Simla, another spectacle is taking place in the thin autumn sunshine: a passing-out parade. After nine months of training, 120 young Nepalese have shed their status as "boys" and graduated as *jawans*, full-fledged soldiers of India's 40,000-man Gurkha force. The Indians recruit year-round, taking 2,000 Gurkhas annually—nearly 10 times more than the British. For both armies, the ritual is the same. Each soldier swears allegiance to a foreign flag and a foreign government, promising to obey his foreign officers and fight their enemies. But there is one exception—a Gurkha soldier cannot take up arms if the enemy is Hindu, a caveat Nepal's government imposed in 1947 when Britain and a newly independent India carved up the imperial Indian army's 10 Gurkha regiments. The terms of the settlement, known as the Tripartite Agreement, have recently become a focus of dissension and bitterness among some British Gurkha veterans, who demand equal treatment with British soldiers. The agreement ties their pensions and salaries to Indian levels.

Alongside the Kaligandaki River, in the village of Beni, any notion of discrimination seems far removed from the minds of the "boys" wanting to join the British army. Durga Bahadur Pun, 19, has walked two days from his mountain village to the test site. It is his third try. "We all want to join the British army because we will earn a lot of money and go to other parts of the world," he says. "We have no work here."

This is one of 500 selections taking place this season in Nepal. The date and location is advertised by *gallahwallahs*, or recruiting agents, each of whom covers five or six mountain villages. The British army has 67 *gallahwallahs*, all retired soldiers, whose job is to search the countryside for likely troops. They don't go to the plains or the towns because men in such areas generally aren't considered tough enough. Each *gallahwallah* is allocated a fixed number to recruit, usually no more than 80. These go on to the next stage, known as the hill selection, in which the tests—physical and mental—are more thorough and the elimination more ruthless. Of some 6,000 boys who attend the hill se-



lection, only 789 make it to the final week-long examination at the British Gurkha recruiting center in Pokhara in west Nepal. Of that number, 230 will join the army while 100 others will be chosen for a select unit in the Singapore police. Elsewhere in Asia, one of Britain's two battalions of Gurkhas is stationed permanently in Brunei at the request of the Sultan. The unit rotates with the one in Britain every three years.

Most of Beni has come out to watch the *gallah* selection. The women giggle when the boys fail; they look on in awe when others pass. The easy part is when aspirants puff their chests out a few centimeters. Half are knocked out at the next test—25 sit-ups in one minute lying head down on a 35° sloping board. This is followed by 12 pull-ups on a bar with the support stand kicked away. When entrants pass this stage, the "cattle market" begins. The *gallahwallah* inspects the men like prize animals: their mouths are opened, their breathing checked, their teeth examined, their chests tapped, their muscles poked. Are they flat-footed, can they stand straight, can they use both eyes? Are they co-ordinated, can they read, are they deaf, do they have any diseases, are they calm?

As a precaution, the *gallahwallah* and his helpers pack up their equipment in case they need to make a quick getaway: candidates who fail have been known to throw stones. Pun misses out again. He suspects it may be because of his slight squint. He is on the verge of tears; others are angry. Those who passed are beaming, only dimly aware of the greater hurdles ahead—more grueling than for other recruits to the British army. The tests include a 1.6-km run in less than 9 minutes; a 4-km mountain race carrying 35 kg of stones in a *doko*, or rattan backpack, up 400-m slopes

within 35 minutes; intelligence tests, mathematics quizzes, essay-writing exercises, X-rays and still more physical exams.

After years of fighting at the margins of empire, the Gurkhas have become a central part of the 113,500-member British army. They help fill gaps caused by a shortfall of domestic soldiers that currently totals 6,000 a year. Recruiting is now open to citizens from Commonwealth countries, leaving the British army with the curious prospect that it could look more imperial in the 21st century than it did in the 20th. Gurkha units are also an integral part of India's 1-million-strong army and are stationed along all of its borders.

A certain aura surrounds the Gurkhas, owing to their reputation for bravery and to the *kukri*—a small machete they carry that can slice off a human head in one blow. Their motto—"It is better to die than to live a coward"—also helps. Says India's vice-chief of army staff, Lieut. General Chandrashekar, an honorary colonel of the 4th Gurkha regiment: "They are excellent soldiers, physically fit, fearless, relaxed, hard working and with a natural aptitude for field craft."

Gurkhas have fought in almost every conflict involving Britain or India over the past 150 years: Afghanistan, Mesopotamia, Persia, Palestine, Tibet, China, Egypt, North Africa, Malaya, Burma, Borneo, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Falkland Islands, Iraq. Their peace-keeping role within and outside the United Nations has taken them to Vietnam, Congo, Rwanda and Lebanon. This year they have served in Kosovo, Kargil and East Timor. An Indian Gurkha battalion is also on standby to join the new U.N. force in Sierra Leone.

Lately, though, some Gurkhas have been asking whether their service is adequately appreciated. The death in June of Sergeant Balam Rai of the British Gurkha Engineers while clearing unexploded bombs in Kosovo focused attention on a disparity in pay and pensions between British soldiers and their Gurkha counterparts. Rai's widow received a lump sum of \$31,000 and a pension of \$1,500 a year, falling to \$1,300 after five years—her husband's remaining period of service. The widow of a British soldier of the same rank would have received a lump sum of \$90,000, a further \$16,000 six months later and an annual pension of \$25,000 until she died.

A British media campaign, backed by ac-

tress Joanna Lumley, whose father was a Gurkha officer, has forced the government to review compensation. When British Gurkhas

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“We all want to join the British army because we will earn a lot of money and see other parts of the world.”

DURGA BHADUR PUN

quit Hong Kong and relocated to Britain in 1997, they were given “allowances” to bring their take-home pay on a level with British soldiers of similar rank. This was the first tangible recognition of equality. But pension levels remained fixed. “We give them a very shabby deal in retirement,” Lumley told the British press. “It’s all very well saying, ‘Oh, you can live very cheaply in Nepal.’ But we all know what that means—they walk for seven days to get to a hospital.”

Last week, British Prime Minister Tony Blair announced that payments to the widows and families of Gurkha soldiers killed in action would match those of their British counterparts and be backdated to May to cover Balam Rai. The pension issue, however, remains unresolved.

At Subathu depot, a Gurkha headquarters and site of the passing-out parade, the officers’ mess is filled with trophies. The skin of a tiger shot by King George V on his 1911 visit to India and another bagged in 1938 by John Masters, a Gurkha officer, hang on the wall. These days Gurkha officers are more likely to spend off-duty hours playing hunt the yeti on their laptops. Not worthy of their reputation? Try telling that to a Gurkha. —*With reporting by Dhruva Adhikary/Katmandu and Michael Brunton/London* ■

By MICHAEL FATHERS BENI

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Storstilt satsing på barn i Nepal

195 millioner norske bistandskroner til grunnutdanning

Fra og med i år støtter NORAD etorstilt utdanningsprogram i Nepal. De neste fem årene skal til sammen 195 millioner norske bistandskroner brukes til grunnutdanning i et av verdens fattigste land.

FAKTA:

Norsk bilateral bistand til Nepal tre siste år:
1996: 72,3 mill. kr
1997: 54,3 mill. kr
1998: 59,9 mill. kr

6/99 • bistandsaktuelt

Etter lange forhandlinger med myndighetene i Nepal er den første norske satsingen i landet endelig på plass. Det skjer tre år etter at Stortinget utpekte Nepal til et prioritert samarbeidsland, og to år etter at det ble åpnet en norsk ambassade i hovedstaden Katmandu.

I samarbeid med nepalske myndigheter skal EU, Danmark, Finland, Verdensbanken og Norge være med på å videreføre et nasjonalt program for grunnutdanning i Nepal. Programmet, som til sammen vil koste rundt 800 millioner kroner (hvorav Norge betaler nærmere en fjerdedel) skal bidra til et bedre grunnskoletilbud i Nepals 75 distrikter, med jenter, lavkastebarn og funksjonshemmede som spesielle målgrupper.

Testcase. Giverne deltar i en felles finansiering av programmet, såkalt «basket funding», som i korthet går ut på at giverne setter sine bidrag inn på en felles konto som forvaltes av Nepals finansdepartement. Det er første gang Norge deltar i denne formen for finansiering. Nepal blir dermed «testcase» for et giversamarbeid som norske bistandsmyndigheter lenge har gått i bresjen for.

Men et slikt samarbeid er ikke uproblematisk.

– Giverne har hatt forskjellige måter å jobbe på, og ulikt fokus. Det er opplagt vanskelig å skape en lik

forståelse av hvordan innsatsen skal håndteres, sier rådgiver Marit Vedeld i NORAD, som har arbeidet med å trekke opp linjene for det norske samarbeidet med Nepal.

Korrupt. Nepal er kjent som et korrupt og nepotistisk samfunn, med til dels ekstrem sentralstyring. Landet har få tradisjoner for lokalt selvstyre, og politiske motsetninger mellom sentral- og distriktsnivå, svak infrastruktur og svake offentlige institusjoner er problemer som kan innvirke på programmet. En ny lov skal sikre en større grad av lokalt selvstyre, men det er et langt stykke fram til loven kan settes ut i praksis.

– Den største utfordringen blir dermed å sikre at lokalbefolkningen får innflytelse over innholdet i grunnskolen, understreker Vedeld.

Programmet vil følge et konsept der aktører i lokalsamfunnet (deriblant lærere og foreldre) og på distriktsnivå skal få utvidet makt til selv å bestemme bruken av pengene, mens selve pengestrømmen vil bli styrt ovenfra og nedover. Et viktig punkt er at lokalbefolkningen hele tiden skal bli informert om hvor mye penger som er tildelt deres distrikt, og hvordan de blir brukt.

Tester åpenhet. – Det blir spennende å se om myndighetene i Nepal vil være interessert i å delegere makt og innflytelse til lokalsamfunnene. Programmet blir dermed også en testcase på vilje til åpenhet og innsyn, sier Vedeld. I tillegg blir programmet gjenstand for et følgeforskningsprosjekt, som Kirke- utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet skal gjennomføre.

– Det skal sikre at vi uansett får god læring av dette programmet, sier Vedeld. • BIBIANA DAHLE PIENE

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Over the 'mountain of the moon'

The Kathmandu-Kulekhani connection

by Kamal Tuladhar

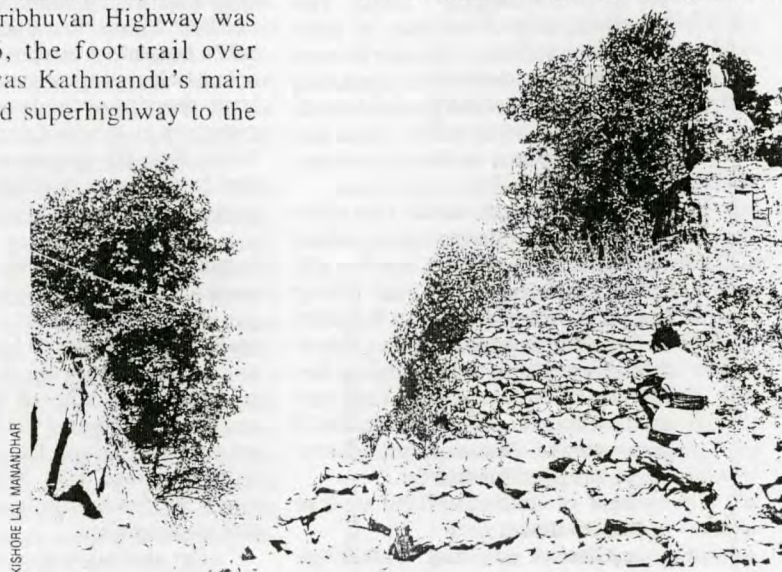
Shangri-La

My father used to be a Tibet trader, journeying by mule caravan between Kathmandu and Lhasa where we had an ancestral business house. In the 1930s, when he entered the family trade, the only way in and out of Kathmandu was on foot. You climbed over the valley rim at Chandragiri Pass ("mountain of the moon") and trekked south via Chitlang and Kulekhani to Bhimphedi. And from there, by lorry and train to Kalimpong in northeast India, the staging point for caravans into Tibet across the Himalaya.

Until the Tribhuvan Highway was built in 1956, the foot trail over Chandragiri was Kathmandu's main supply line and superhighway to the

outside world. Long columns of porters would trudge up and down the slopes carrying textiles, factory goods, machinery... even motor cars. The new road bypassed Chandragiri altogether, giving the imposing mound a wide berth. Trucks took over the role of coolies, and the trail passed into the annals of Nepalese travel lore.

I would have followed in my father's footsteps to our family business in Lhasa, hadn't it been for historical events that brought an end to the traditional trade. But being a keen



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Chandragiri Pass

history buff that I am, I thought that I should at least walk over part of the old trade route - if not all the way.

And so it was that one fine morning last month, a friend and I set off for the ancient track over Chandragiri Pass to Kulekhani. We took the bus to Thankot from where we would begin walking. The ridge (2,280 m high) can be seen from any rooftop in Kathmandu. It's the low saddle between the two large humps you see to the southwest. The trail begins behind the police checkpoint. Houses and shrines line the wide, stone-paved path, evidence of the busy commerce that once passed through here. We walked on, the way becoming narrower as we ascended gradually. Suddenly, we were throwing our heads back to look up at the sheer face of Chandragiri. Picture a group of 40 porters carrying a Mercedes Benz on their shoulders over that precipice! The clatter of stones tumbling down from the quarry above to the right brought us out of our reverie.

"How far is it to the top?" we asked a villager who emerged out of the foliage with a basket on his back piled high with dead branches for firewood. "Oh, about an hour." He gave the impression it was going to be like a stroll through the park. Fortified with confidence, we attacked the almost vertical height. We were surprised at how alive the old trail still was. Groups of laughing school students scrambled past us down the hill, probably on a weekend trip to Kathmandu. There were families with children visiting relatives in the city. Apparently, people in the villages on the other side found walking over Chandragiri quicker and more



Farm houses on the trail-side

preferable to the serpentine detour of a bus journey on the highway.

We kept climbing - and climbing and climbing. The man with the basket of firewood had said about an hour, but it was already two hours, and we were still here and the summit was still there. We plopped down to rest on the steps that somebody had cut into the hillside where it was very steep. After a short breather, we were again clawing up the slope, and half an hour later we finally dragged ourselves onto the ridge. Looking around to see how high we had come up, we were rewarded with a view that was truly mesmerizing.

To the north stretched the expanse of the Kathmandu Valley, with the peaks of Ganesh Himal, Langtang, Dorje Lhakpa and Phurbi Chyachu watching over it. And to the south, the long Chitlang Valley extended into the distance. We could see the village of Chitlang, a tight cluster of houses, and the path leading to it laid out like a yellow ribbon along the valley floor. There's a tea shop on top of Chandragiri Pass (the highest eatery in Kathmandu!) where weary mountain climbers can recharge their batteries. There are a number of stupas also,

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common markers on mountain passes.

Turning our backs on the Kathmandu Valley, we descended over a rocky path and proceeded towards Chitlang, an ancient Newar settlement with a history going back to Lichhavi times. Relics of its past glory as a trade route are everywhere. The way is lined with stone water spouts and *chibha* stupas ornamented with statues of Bhimsen, the patron god of merchants. A grand travellers' resthouse with beautiful wood carvings stands as the village's pride edifice. We sauntered down Chitlang's main street passing mostly empty tea shops. It was nearing 4 pm. Should we stop and spend the night here? "There is time enough to get to Markhu," a kindly-looking shopkeeper lounging outside his store advised us. "You will find lodges there, and in the morning you can visit Kulekhani dam."

We decided to race the sinking sun. There weren't any more mountains to be climbed, and we should be able to make it before dark. So we started marching. After Tupikhel village, the trail drops and climbs through pine and oak forests, crossing babbling brooks and passing thundering waterfalls, before emerging at the top of a gorge. Coming around a bend, we saw what looked like fluffs of silvery clouds floating way down below. It took some time to register - it was Kulekhani lake! We had arrived! We hurried downhill to Markhu, a small village and bus stop on the edge of the water. Darkness was closing in, and we found ourselves a lodge. Feasting on boiled rice and fish as a reward for the day's exertions, we retired to our bunks upstairs and crashed.

The waters of Kulekhani shone in

the morning light. We could see small boats and fishing nets here and there (mostly silver carp, we heard). The lake, named Indrasarovar, was completed in the mid-1980s as a reservoir for the Kulekhani hydro-electric project by damming the Kulekhani river. Its water is carried through a 6-km long tunnel to power the turbines located at Dhorsing. The dam is about a two-hour walk from Markhu over a dirt road which skirts the many-tentacled lake. An abandoned ropeway strings high above the water. In days gone by, wool portered in from Tibet rode on it from Kathmandu up to Dhorsing and then by lorry and rail to factories in India.

From Kulekhani village, which now lies under water, the trade route goes to Chisapani. (In the old days, there used to be an immigration office here where you had to show your travel papers.) Then on to Bhimphedi, Hetauda, Amlekhgunj and the Indian border. But we decided to postpone that part till a future date, and chose to turn east making a circuit to Pharping, and then catching a bus back to Kathmandu.

We were again climbing up and down endless ridges, passing Tamang settlements and ocher-colored Brahmin and Chhetri farm houses perched on steep terraces. After about five hours of intensive legwork, we limped into Pharping around 5:30 pm. The last bus had just left, and we hitched a ride on a passing truck. We bounced back to Kathmandu - thinking of the wayfarers of yore and the porters who used to transport motor cars on their shoulders - feeling enriched by our dip into history.

At last, Himalayan cinema

reviewed by Kanak Mani Dixit

HIMAL 13/3 March 2000

CARAVAN

A film by Eric Valli
Cinemascope, 104 min

IN THESE days of cinematic Himalayan hype it is natural to be sceptical about yet another celluloid offering on the 'exotic' Shangri Laesque communities and landscapes of the Tibetan plateau and surrounding areas. It is therefore a pleasant surprise to find in Eric Valli's *Caravan* a movie with a story, simply and powerfully told.

Eric Valli is a photographer-adventurer now turned cinematographer who before this has ventured into deep (sometimes officially forbidden) Himalayan valleys to come away with little photographic fables, such as on the "honey hunters" of the Gurung heartland of central Nepal. This time around, Valli has teamed up with Galatee Films of Paris to produce a feature film on the salt traders of the Tibetan rimland of Dolpo, in northwest Nepal.

The obvious reason for the film's success is the director's attention to the story-line, on which the locale and customs of Upper Dolpo then become natural appendages. In most of the Himalayan films made for Western audiences, such as the wide-screen Imax presentation *Everest*, or even Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Little Buddha*, it has tended to be the other way around.

Thinley is a tradition-bound village chieftain past his prime, who has led yak caravans over the dan-



gerous high passes that lead down to the *rongba* (lowlander) country of midhill Nepal, continuing a centuries-old tradition of exchanging salt for grain. His son, Lhakpa, who was expected to take over the reins of village leadership, dies in an accident. As far as most of the villagers are concerned, Lhakpa's friend, the proud and handsome Karma, is the natural choice to lead the next caravan to the south, although Thinley has his misgivings.

In Karma, we have the impatient modern-day non-believer. He rounds up the village youth and starts the caravan journey south before the village seer's auspicious hour. This does not go well with the equally proud Thinley, who opts out and forms his own group which will follow the oracle, and the dictates of age-old belief, even though neither he nor his lead yak Nygimpo are any longer their youthful selves. The story of *Caravan* is founded on the tension that swirls around Thinley and Karma, as the two lead

their followers and families separately on the perilous trans-Himalayan journey.

After a slightly awkward beginning, the film settles down to a comfortable pace with creditable performances by the non-professional actors assembled by Valli. All but three characters in the film are Dolpopa proper, including Thinley Lhondup who plays the old man and Karma Wangel in the role of his boy-grandson.

Caravan was filmed entirely 'on location' between September 1997 and July 1998, taking all of nine months in Dolpo's challenging terrain. The absence of elaborate studio sets enhances the film's authentic feel, although the shooting of some of the scenes must have been difficult indeed.

Among the many outstanding episodes, and obviously a high point for Himalayan cinema, is where darkness slowly overtakes Thinley's caravan on a high pass in the middle of a heavy snow-blizzard. This section is followed by the morning-after brightness at the *la-toh* (pyramid of stone offerings at a pass), where Thinley finally departs with his soul.

While resisting the temptation of providing an ethnographic documentary evidence, *Caravan* is nevertheless successful in presenting the natural rhythms of the Dolpopas' life-cycle through the fictional script. The various episodes are full of understatement, which requires some alertness on the part of the viewer. This is evident, for example, in the low-key acting by the 'heroine' of the film, the Dharamsala-based Lhakpa Tsamchoe. The complexity of Thinley's character, a loud-mouth egotist and yet a man with the wisdom of the old and un-

doubted strength of character, is captured well. Neither the few moments of humour in the film, nor the longer episodes showing high drama or pathos, is overdone.

The authenticity of *Caravan* is enhanced by scenes such as the one where a bag of salt is lifted from the padded back of a yak in a gathering snowstorm—the brightness of the rug underneath is suddenly seen in contrast to the grey sprinkling of snow on the yak's back. The "sky-burial" of Lhakpa's mortal remains is shot tastefully, with the lammergeier and griffon vultures dipping below the frame as they set about their business. The insides of window-less Dolpo houses, nighttime within yak-hair tents, and the interiors of monasteries are effectively filmed without intrusive artificial lighting. The craggy yet desert-like vistas of upper Dolpo, high passes looking across to the Himalayan ramparts, and the dark figures of yaks against snowfields, are images that one would of course expect in a film shot on the Tibetan plateau. And yet, these shots sustain, rather than detract from the story line of *Caravan*.

The script, written with the assistance of Olivier Dazat, has been sensitively prepared ("He saw the storm in the blue sky and I saw nothing," laments a wiser Karma after Thinley's death.). And again, the film seems to achieve a fair degree of ethnological authenticity despite the obvious compromises of fictional film production. The music, a mix of traditional Tibetan vocals with Western accompaniment (including the Bulgarian Symphony Orchestra) also fits in with the, unfolding story.

Caravan is effective Himalayan cinema, and comes off better than the

Joining the Oscar caravan

IS IT great news for Nepali cinema or is it Nepal's tourism industry that shall gain? An Oscar nomination for best foreign-language film for *Caravan*, and maybe the award itself when it is announced on 26 March, might indeed be just reward for a challenging film, but can it truly, as the Oscar nomination does, be called "Nepal's first Academy Award nomination"?

Not really. Of course, almost all the actors in the film are Nepali, the credits call it a "co-production of National Studio, Nepal" and mentions well-known Nepali cinema man, Neer Shah, as one among the six associate producers (as well as the names of some Nepali technical hands), but still it is an out and out foreign production headed by French director, Eric Valli. For those yet wanting to prove the Nepaliness of the movie, you could say that it was the Kathmanduphile Desmond Doig who gave Valli his first break.

Such nitpicking aside, the fact that *Caravan* has been running since 10 October 1999 in Kathmandu to a packed house of expats, tourists and locals, must mean that Nepali cinegoers have it in them to appreciate good cinema, however spoilt they have been by Hindi films and their poor Nepali imitations. By setting a standard for compelling cinema, Valli's film should be able to inspire Kollywood's filmmakers to get out of the rut of parodically copying Bollywood.

only other film this reviewer has seen in this genre, which is the somewhat surreal, *The Horse Thief* of 1986, based in Tibet, and directed by the Chinese Tian Zhuang-zhuang. Through its more nuanced presentation, Valli's film is bound to enchant viewers worldwide, but it will also generate better understanding of the harsh livelihoods in the hidden valleys of the Himalayan rimland.

It is ironic that the very week that *Caravan* premiered in Kathmandu, Unicef and the government began an advertising blitz in their ongoing campaign to fight goitre and cretinism with iodised salt in the kingdom. Powdered salt, imported from the coast of Gujarat rather than the salt pans of Tibet, are seen as the best medium to spread iodine throughout the population. Indeed, the subsidised spread of iodised Indian

salt for the sake of Nepali public health is one of several reasons that the salt caravans of Dolpo themselves are a dying tradition. And its eventual disappearance is what seems to have impelled Eric Valli to document this unique kind of trans-Himalayan trade.

Director Valli has said that the life of the Dolpopa does not have to be romanticised, and so he does not pander to the overseas viewer by hyping the romance of high plateau. "This film is a sort of a western, a Tibetan western," says Valli. He adds, "This saga of power, pride and glory might have taken place, just as well, in the seas of Japan, in the Normandy plains, or deep in Texas." Fortunately for us of the Himalaya, it takes place in Dolpo.

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