

Resebrev Nr 27

26 november– 3 december 2005

BHUTAN & NEPAL

PHUENTSHOLING–THIMPHU–PARO–KATHMANDU–BHAKTAPUR

Fortsättningen på radarparet Staffan Lindbergs och Lars Eklunds månadslånga tjänsteresa för Swedish South Asian Studies Network (SASNET), med besök på universitet och utbildningsinstitutioner i nordöstra delen av Sydasiens. Del 2: Bhutan och Nepal.

Vid detta vårt första besök i Bhutan var vi inbjudna av Centre for Bhutan Studies (CBS), men vi besökte också landets utbildningsdepartement och flera institut knutna till Royal University of Bhutan. Efter en sagolikt vacker flygning till Kathmandu – med utsikt över Himalayas högsta toppar och den tibetanska högplatån – vidtog så ett späckat program med besök till flera fakulteter inom Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu University och fristående institut som är involverade i samarbetsprojekt med svenska universitet och forskare.



SASNET in the Northeast

Report from a contact journey to India, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh, November–December 2005

by Lars Eklund and Staffan Lindberg

In the Spring 2002 we made the first SASNET contact journey to four countries of the South Asian region. The purpose was to network with researchers and institutions, and get to know under which conditions and with what expectations they function.

We followed this up in the Fall 2003 through another journey, this time to visit universities in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Now two years later it was time to make a third tour covering the northeastern part of the subcontinent (India, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh). We travelled for a full month and visited a large number of universities and research institutions in the region, and had fruitful meetings with vice-chancellors, researchers, teachers and students everywhere. The aim of the journey was to spread information about SASNET and higher institutions of learning in Sweden, and at the same time promote research cooperation and student exchange. [Read the detailed itinerary for the tour](#) (as a pdf-file).

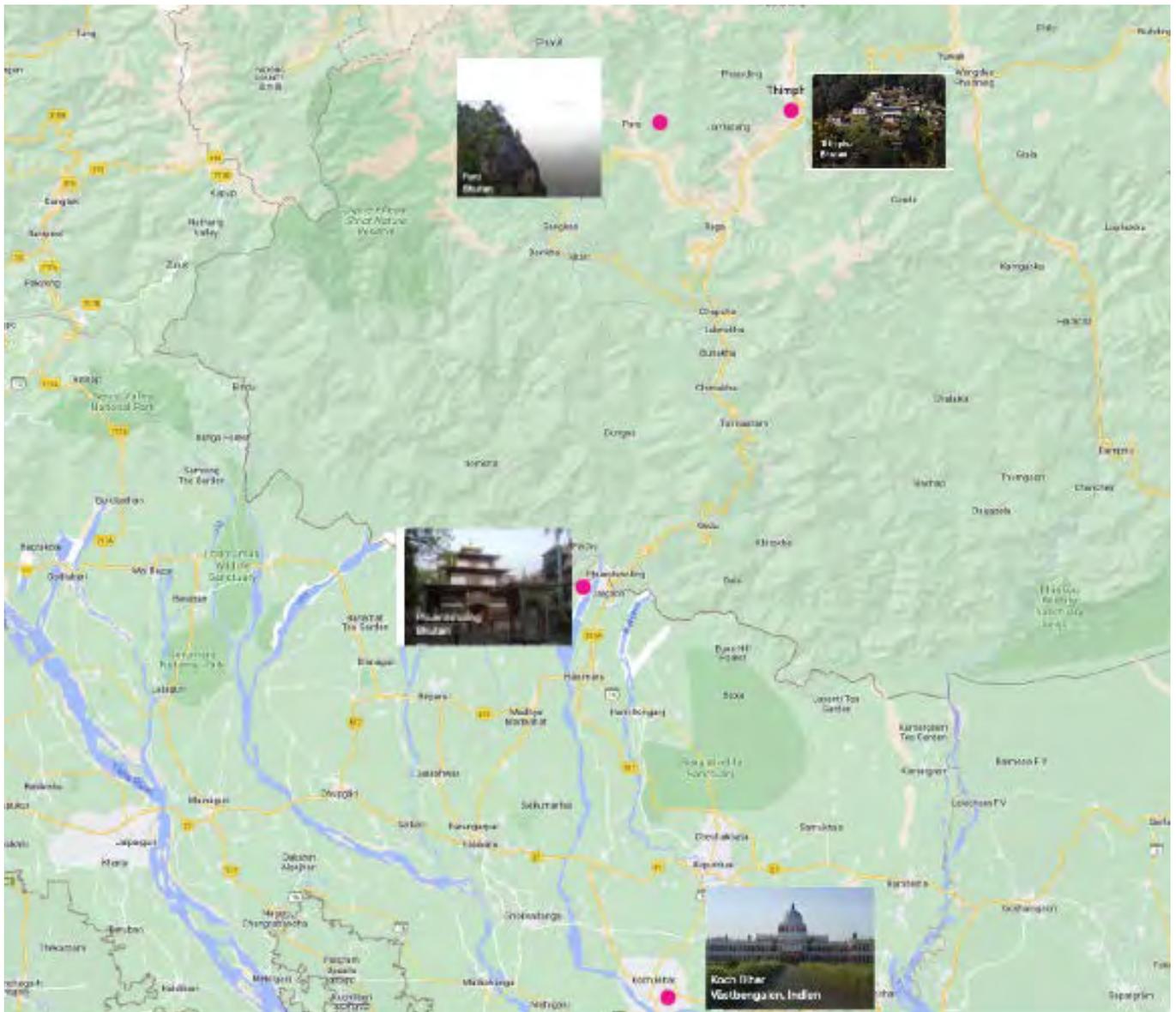


• [Report from the contact journey to Maldives, Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh in February-March 2002](#)

• [Report from the contact journey to Pakistan and Afghanistan in November-December 2003](#)

After returning to Sweden we have compiled the reports from all meetings. Welcome to read our reports.

PART 2: BHUTAN & NEPAL



BHUTAN

Phuentsholing – Thimphu
Sunday 27 November 2005

We woke up Sunday morning at Druk Hotel in Phuentsholing, our first morning in Bhutan.

After checking out from the hotel we were picked up by our guide and driver, Mr. Samdruk, a Bhutanese with a degree in Commerce from Bangalore in India. He works as free-lance guide for foreign tourists and is connected to the Centre for Bhutanese Studies in Thimphu.

We returned over the open border to India and got the necessary exit stamps from the Indian passport office, opening at 9 o'clock, then back through the gate to Phuentsholing, and proceeded to the

Bhutanese Immigration office to get our visas (*photo of the visa officer in charge, see below*).



After watching some Bhutanese teams practising the national sports of Archery (*photo to the right*) and the Bhutanese variety of dart game, Khuru, we left Phuentsholing for a seven hours journey to the capital of Bhutan, Thimphu. It was a fantastic tour along a steep road with hairpin bends all the time, surrounded by mountains and a dramatic nature full of fascinating views. Along the road we had to pass at least three checkpoints, where the car and the passengers were reported.



If there is any place close to heaven, maybe this is. We gradually realise that we are in what the Bhutanese refer to as an actually existing 'Shangri-la', where progress and development is measured, not in pecuniary terms alone, or even literacy and infant mortality as in the Human Development Index, but as a weighted index called Gross National Happiness.

We are passing the water power stations being built by India (producing not only electricity but also good income for the Bhutanese government), roadside eateries and petrol stations all nicely designed in a typical Bhutanese style (*see the petrol station on*



the photo to the right). In the afternoon we reach the plain where Thimphu is located, a town that has grown a lot in recent years. The houses now stretch far up the hillsides, and down along the river Bhutan's first stretch of highway is being constructed.

We were taken to Jambayang Resort, a small hotel beautifully located with a view over the entire city. Here we would stay for two nights.

[Read more about our first impressions from Bhutan](#)





Phuentsholing immigration



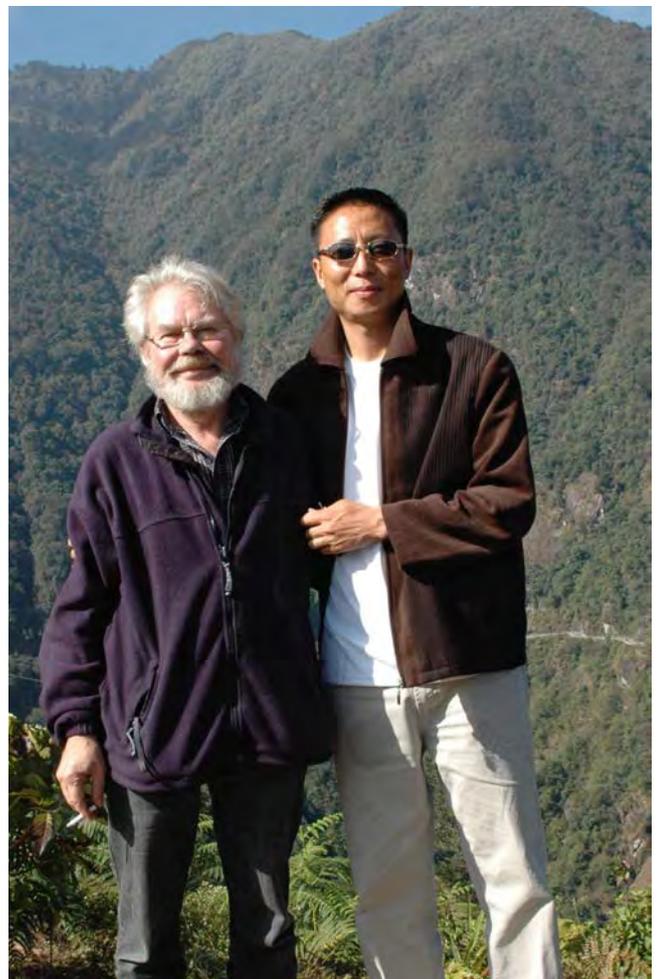
Khuru (dart) – national bhutanese sport





First checkpoint on way to Thimpu

Our guide and driver Samdruk





Thimphu

Meeting at the Royal Service Commission



Thimphu, Monday 28 November

[Visit to the Department of Adult and Higher Education, Ministry of Education](#)

[Visit to Royal Civil Service Commission](#)

[Visit to the Centre for Bhutan Studies](#)

[Visit to Royal University of Bhutan](#)

Thimphu-Paro, Tuesday, 29 November 2005



This day was devoted to seeing the most important sights in Thimphu and the historic town of Paro, 60 km away, from where we were going to fly out of the country the following day. After checking out from our Thimphu hotel we first visited the Folk Heritage Museum in Thimphu, consisting of one big traditional farm house. We were guided by the museum guide [Ms. Karma](#) (photo to the left), who herself hails from a village far away with no road connection. So she knew what she was showing us. It is a self-contained farmstead with a four-storied house, with a compound wall at one side of the house, where horses and other cattle are kept together with the ploughs and other implements used. On the ground floor is room for more cattle, floor 1 is used for storing grains and saddles. On second floor is the kitchen, the combined drawing and sleeping room, and the altar room, where also monks and honoured guests usually stay over night. On the top floor there are no walls, being the place for drying of straw, etc. The most impressive thing about these traditional houses is the woodworks around the windows.

We then proceeded to Paro. The road passed through scenic beauty, with a river at the bottom of the valleys and surrounding high mountains. We learnt that there were trout fishes in the river and

that sport fishing was allowed in some places. As we came closer to Paro the landscape changed, we came out into a plainland, flat enough to accommodate Bhutan's only airport. Paro is a much smaller town than Thimphu, located in the shadow of an old fort, dzong. On a nearby hilltop stands an old watchtower, built by stone. This building with several floors has been converted into the National Museum of Bhutan ([see photo](#)), and that was our first stop.

The museum houses the history of Bhutan from the 15th century onwards, which is closely connected with the spread of Buddhism in the region. From the early 16th century there is a kind of a nation state formation organised by leading abbots of that time, who conquered and ruled the land and the people with hired soldiers and the word of Buddha.

This theocratic state existed up to 1907, when under British 'protection' a royal dynasty was installed in Thimphu. The present ruler is the fourth king of Bhutan. Most probably the British found it hard to negotiate with a religious head of state.



Paro Valley. Red chillies, much eaten in Bhutan, are being dried on the roofs.

Paro-Kathmandu, Wednesday 30 November 2005

After an overnight stay at Kichu Resort in Paro we left in the early morning for the airport. Our Druk Air flight was scheduled for 09.30, and we spent the waiting time inside the beautiful airport terminal building, as most buildings in Paro designed in a typical Bhutanese architecture (photo to the right). The one-hour flight between Paro and Kathmandu is probably one of the most scenic in the World. Sitting on the right side of the plane we had extraordinary views of the Himalayas.

It was clear sunshine as we sailed just over the beautiful mountain range, first green Bhutanese hills with valleys richly inhabited and later with the naked snow covered cliffs of the highest mountains in the world on our right hand side, Kanchenjunga and Mount Everest so close and the Tibetan tablelands behind. Totally amazing sights, this is the wonder that you may experience only once in a lifetime.



Bhutan Ministry of Education

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Submitted by [admin](#) on Wed, 2011-08-10 16:00

Thimphu, 28 November

Visit to Department of Adult and Higher Education, Ministry of Education

Web page: <http://www.education.gov.bt/DAHE/NFED/NFE.htm>



We met Ms. [Nim Dem](#), Director (photo to the left). She is in charge of higher education, that is the university education as well as of adult and informal education.

We first discussed the school system in Bhutan. It is a 12 year system, divided into primary 1-6, lower secondary 7-8, middle secondary 9-10, and higher secondary 11-12. The medium of instruction is English from the first standard. Buddhism, however, is taught in Dzongkha, the national language.



Ambitious educational system

They have a very ambitious system and today almost all children go to school, the ratio between boys and girls being about 55/45. But many children live far away from the schools in rural area and have a very long way to walk to reach. When rains are heavy, they are often late or miss school altogether for many days.

There are 19 private schools which charge a nominal fee and are monitored by the Ministry. School books are given free to all students.

At the higher level about 120 students go abroad annually for undergraduate studies on scholarships from the Bhutanese government. Included in this figure is a group 50 students who are given complete scholarships by India. In other cases some part funding is received from some countries and colleges where the students are studying. We inform about the possibilities for Master and PhD studies in Sweden.

Frustrated young generation

Many in the current youth generation after the age of 20 are frustrated with the career opportunities and are unemployed. It is not that there are no jobs, but their and their parents' expectations have been high and the actual jobs offered do not match these. In this group, there is quite a wide use of drugs. So it represents a serious problem for the Bhutanese government. The schools try to provide career counselling in the higher secondary now. One important aim is to make many students return to agriculture with their new knowledge in order to introduce scientific farming. But most young people want to move to the cities.

For those that have not finished school properly, the Department is setting up classes of continuing education from 2006 onwards. They have asked the private schools do this and hope that they will respond to this challenge.

We inform about the Swedish Folk High School System and Ms. Nim Dem said that it would perhaps be interesting to study that and get some advice about continuing education in Sweden. We promised to host such a visit with contacts, etc.



Visit to Royal Civil Service Commission, Bhutan

Web page:

<http://www.rcsc.gov.bt/>

We met Mr. Bap Kesang, who is the Secretary. The Commission is organising the government administration in the country. He gave a long introduction to modern Bhutan and its development during the past 40 years. It is very important that Bhutan is understood in its proper perspective, he claims.

His Majesty's policies have been enlightened when thinking about the difficult times that Bhutan was facing a generation back. People were illiterate and there were no resources to develop the country. They had to



import everything, skilled people and goods. Bhutan has received a lot of aid for this, both bilateral and multilateral.

Bhutan became member of the United Nations in 1972, and at that time the government stated that there were 1 million people in the country to avoid being treated as a very small country. The official UN figure for the population today is therefore 2.4 million. The real figure is thought to be only 750 000. A Census has just been held and the result is expected soon.

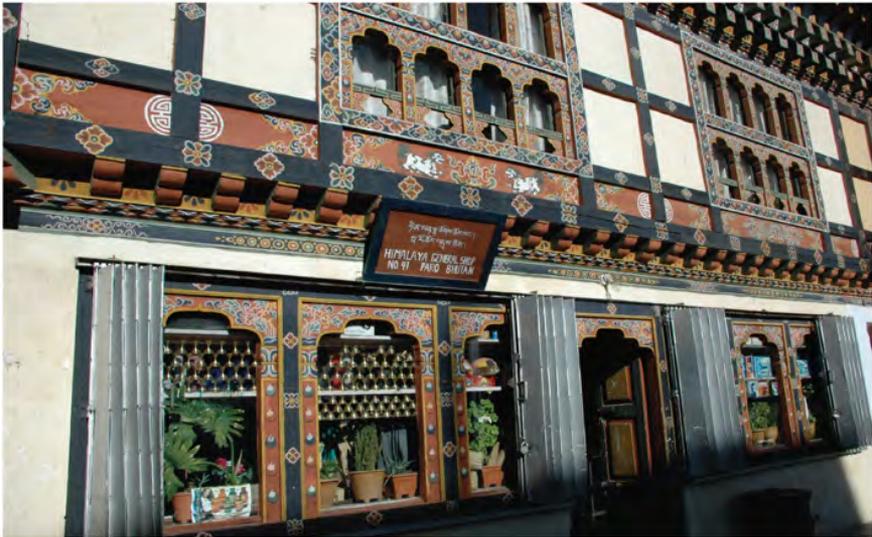
Development has been rapid since then. Now Bhutan adopts modern technology in all spheres and has a great many highly educated citizens, both men and women.

The Bureaucracy is now being reformed from a cadre based to position classification based system. The Royal Institute of Management at the University is in charge of training the new officers. They offer masters programme in financial management, policy and public administration. Continuing education of government servants will also be provided. They are affiliated to the National Institute of Financial Management in India, but are also looking for other foreign collaboration.



Mr Bap Kesang flanked by Prof. Staffan Lindberg and Mr. Lars Eklund, SASNET.

Mr. Bap Kesang has formerly been Bhutan's ambassador in Geneva, which looks after diplomatic relations with Sweden. He has many Swedish friends through the active [Swedish-Bhutan Society](#) (Svensk-Bhutesiska Föreningen), and he also knows of a few Bhutanese people married to Swedes.



Lunch at Karma Ura residence in Thimphu



November 2005 SASNET Visit to Centre for Bhutan Studies (CBS) in Thimphu

Submitted by [admin](#) on Wed, 2011-08-10 16:00

Web page: <http://www.bhutanstudies.org.bt/>

E-mail address: cbs@druknet.bt



Senior researcher Karma Galay, Director Karma Ura, and member of the Council of CBS Dasho Megraj Gurung at the Centre for Bhutan Studies in Langjophakha, Thimphu.

On 28 November 2005, Lars Eklund and Staffan Lindberg visited CBS, the centre that organised our visit to Bhutan through Mr. [Karma Galay](#) (who was senior researcher there).

We were received in Langjophakha, the area in which the Centre is located, by Mr. [Karma Ura](#), who is the Director of the centre since its start in 1999. Present at the meeting was also Mr. [Dorji Penjore](#), researcher in languages (whom Staffan had met in a Delhi conference in February 2005).

This was at moment the only institution which carried out research in Bhutan in a focused way. The Royal University of Bhutan, [see separate report](#), had only recently taken up research in a few areas. The centre is doing studies of government development programmes and provides feedback for their improvement. It undertakes 'inter-disciplinary studies of Bhutan in its social, cultural, and economic aspects focussing largely on contemporary issues.' It also supports basic research by other agents in Bhutan and acts a clearing-house of information on various studies by others. It hosts foreign scholars who do research or come to lecture.

The centre has also started to publish research reports and it publishes the bi-annual Journal of Bhutan Studies. A list of 45 research reports is available with us. They cover issues in economics, government, social structure, culture, Buddhist traditions, historical research on various areas in Bhutan, youth studies, etc. The academic background of the research staff is in public administration, economics, languages, and political and cultural studies. [More information on the publications from CBS.](#)

Index for Gross National Happiness

The term Gross National Happiness (GNH) was coined by Bhutan's King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, when he ascended the throne in 1972. It signalled his commitment to building an economy that would serve Bhutan's unique culture permeated by Buddhist spiritual values.

Today, the concept of GNH resonates with a wide range of initiatives, across the world, to define prosperity in more holistic terms and to measure actual wellbeing rather than consumption. By contrast the conventional concept of Gross National Product (GNP) measures only the sum total of material production and exchange in any country. Thus an international conference on Gross National Happiness, hosted by the Bhutan government in the capital city of Thimphu in 2004, attracted 82 eminent participants from 20 countries. [More information on GNH in an article](#) by Indian journalist Rajni Bakshi, posted on *Alternet/Envirohealth*, 25 January 2005.

A central theme for research at the Centre for Bhutan Studies as instructed by the Government is to work out an index for Gross National Happiness, and make it measurable. The index should have the following dimensions:

- *Living standard*
- *Health*
- *Education*
- *Eco-system vitality and biodiversity*
- *Community vitality and interdependence*
- *Good governance*
- *Cultural resilience and diversity*

- *Time use and balance (margin of leisure time available)*
- *Emotional well-being*

We discussed the good governance issue, and found out that it could be operationalised at the local as well as national level. One aspect is corruption, where the CBS researchers meant that this was sensitive and could not really be dealt with by foreign scholars due to its inherent national ethical character and the sensitivity of the information collected. Otherwise CBS welcomed foreign collaboration in constructing the index. We also agreed that several disciplines would have to be involved.

We then discussed the gender equality issue. With the modernisation started about 40 years ago, women got education also on the higher levels and were free to join the government administration, higher institutions and also work as professionals. There were little in the way of formal obstacles to this and many women now work in these spheres. However, women here as elsewhere face constraints connected to child birth and family obligations. On the other hand, the extended family system allows for a great many relatives who can take care of the children when the parents are working. Even so, career women have fewer if any children. It is also so that the extended family system is declining in urban areas.

Sensitive issues



The centre of power in Bhutan, the dzong in Thimphu housing the offices of the King as well as of the Chief Abbot (Je Khenpo) who is chosen from among the most learned lamas of the country.

CBS is undertaking quite a few economic studies directly for the government. Many of these are however not published due to the sensitive information sometimes dealt with.

Regarding the Lhotshampa refugee problem, relating to the six southern districts of Bhutan, CBS is not involved in any studies about this. There are already so many studies of them by Nepalese scholars, is an argument. Anyway, the ongoing negotiations will allow a proportion of the refugees with legitimate rights to return to Bhutan, others will have to stay on in Nepal or find a place in the rest of the world (that is, those who did commit crimes during the agitation, etc.).

We discussed the issue of cultural pluralism. The population of Bhutan is small, but there are many groups with different languages, cultures and origins in the different regions. On the other hand, the Tibetan Buddhist tradition is very strong. So is there unity in diversity after all? CBS researchers had the view that diversity is an important asset to national strength and creativity and should be strived for.

WTO and the risk of mass tourism

A final point of discussion was about Bhutan joining the World Trade Organisation, WTO. The current government seems bent on joining fairly soon, but the CBS researchers were not so convinced about the merits of joining. The Bhutanese economy is rather self-contained. Exports are mainly based on local advantages, like that of hydroelectric power and cement to India. None of these represent a global good. The only engagement in global good production is tourism. If the country joins the WTO, mass tourism would probably follow, a phenomenon which they argue would undermine the special character of Bhutan within a generation. Perhaps you can ride the tiger for a short while, but what about the day after tomorrow?

We also discussed possible collaboration with Swedish researchers. A PhD candidate from the [Department of Religious Studies](#), Göteborg University worked till 2002 in Bhutan on a project called "*Field studies in the religious life of ordinary Bhutanese in a time of transition*", but currently there are, as far as we know, no Swedes engaged in Bhutan studies. So it would have to be to start from scratch to find interested partners in Sweden. We promised to try, given that they write to us about their interests in this, based on Swedish competence in various fields.

After the formal meeting we were invited to Mr. Karma Ura's house for a delicious lunch with traditional Bhutanese dishes. We also came to see an art project that Karma Ura is presently undertaking. He is a painter as well, and he has just started to work on a big wall painting with religious motives that eventually will be given to a Buddhist monastery.

LARS EKLUND & STAFFAN LINDBERG

Back to SASNET Report from the contact journey to North-East India, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh, November–December 2005

SASNET Visit to Royal University of Bhutan (RUB)

Monday 28 November 2005

Submitted by admin on Wed, 2011-08-10 16:00

RUB web page:

<http://www.rub.edu.bt/>

While planning the visit to Bhutan we had been in touch with Ms. [Phintsho Choeden](#), Research Director at the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB). On behalf of the Vice Chancellor Mr. [Dasho Zangley Dukpa](#) she had expressed an eager interest to meet us. But as we arrived in the country it turned out that both Ms Choeden and the Vice-Chancellor were away from Thimphu, and no programme had been arranged for us to visit RUB.

Ms. [Nim Dem](#), Director of the Dept.

of Adult and Higher Education at the Ministry of Education, whom we met in the morning however kindly made it possible for us to visit RUB in the afternoon, and we went by car to Semtokha, five kilometres away from Thimphu, where the RUB administration building with the Vice Chancellor's office is located.

There we were received by Ms. [Kesang Doma](#), Registrar of the university (*photo to the right*), and had a meeting with her in the Vice Chancellor's office. Ms. Doma informed us about the history of RUB, established as late as in June 2003, and briefly presented the nine educational institutions that are included under the umbrella of RUB.

Three institutions in Thimphu



Students at the Royal Institute of Management (RIM) in Thimphu.

Four of the institutions are located within Thimphu. They are the [Royal Institute of Management \(RIM\)](#), established already in 1986, and located right near to the RUB administration building; the [National Institute of Traditional Medicine \(NITM\)](#) with only a very limited number

of students; the [Royal Institute of Health Sciences \(RIHS\)](#), located close to the Jigme Dorji Wangchuk National Referral Hospital; and the [Institute for Language and Cultural Studies \(ILCS\)](#) in Semtokha.

Outside Thimphu are found the [Royal Bhutan Institute of Technology](#) in Rinchening, Phuntsholing; the two National Institutes of Educations in [Paro](#) and in [Samtse](#); the [College of Natural Resources](#) in Lobeysa (offering diploma programmes in Animal husbandry, Agriculture and Forestry); and finally the [Sherubtse College](#) in Kanglung, Trashigang, an institution that has been a full-fledged degree awarding affiliate college of the University of Delhi since 1983, and has a large proportion of Indian teachers among its faculty.





Students at the Royal Institute of Management (RIM) in Thimphu.

Altogether the nine institutions that form the Royal University of Bhutan has a teaching staff of 337, out of which 79 are non-Bhutanese (mainly in Sherubtse College), and the number of students in October 2005

was 3,553, out of which 125 are participating in post graduate programmes. The largest institutions are Sherubtse College with 1,014 students, the National Institute of Education in Paro with 744 students, the sister institution in Samtse with 483, and the Royal Institute of Technology with 446. The Bhutanese crown prince HRH DASHO JIGME KHEGAR NAMGYEL WANGCHUCK is the Chancellor of the university.

Royal Institute of Management

The Royal Institute of Management has a special status as it has its own charter and is semi-independent of RUB. Besides it offers no undergraduate studies, but only postgraduate. A special feature with most of the institutions is that they till 2003, when RUB was established, were very intimately connected to different ministries, e.g. the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Health.

Ms. Kesang Doma also informed us about the ambition of RUB to increase the number of International collaboration projects, so far very few and none with Sweden. Besides the long-standing connection between Sherubtse College and University of Delhi, there also exists a collaboration between the Royal Institute of Health Sciences and La Trobe University in Australia. The National Institute of Education in Paro is involved in co-operation with the University of New Brunswick in Canada, and the Royal Bhutan Institute of Technology has collaboration with the Indian Institutes of Technology in Kanpur and Kharagpur. Sherubtse College also has some collaboration with Wheaton College in USA. Recently the Vice Chancellor went to Austria, and discussed possible co-operation with the Institute of Applied Sciences in Krems. On the agenda was to initiate tourism research which would result in a tourism degree.

Traditional subjects

Traditional Bhutanese subjects play an important role in the RUB institutions. The National Institute of Traditional Medicine is a unique institution, striving to achieve excellence in the design, development and delivery of the so-called *gSo-ba-Rig-pa* education, to a handful of students every year. The Institute for Language and Cultural Studies focuses on Buddhist Philosophy, Bhutanese History and also Astrology, still considered of utmost importance in Bhutan. The study of social sciences on the other hand is almost non-existent. It is supposed to be on the curriculum at Sherubtse College, but the present and future plans presented for the College for the period 2006-2010 only mentions the launching of new programmes in Business Administration, Dzongkha (the national language), Computer Science, English, Economics, Science and Geography.

Before returning to the Jambayang Resort Hotel, for a comforting traditional Bhutanese stone bath in the evening, we made a quick tour of the Royal Institute of Management, met some students all dressed up in traditional Bhutanese dresses, and saw the impressive auditorium of the institute.





Studenter vid Royal Institute of Management (RIM) i Thimphu, Bhutan.

Bhutan impressions, from a journey to Thimphu



This is tropical green – all kinds of crops can be grown, rice, fruits and vegetables, but only on miniscule plots on terraces of the mountain slopes and for family use. Women inherit all property, including land, so no male land grabbing here! Little is exported – we know of only apples. But the forest is rich and if you can log it and cart it somewhere, it is certainly worth it. But that is a royal prerogative, all forest belong to the state. The real asset in these mountains are the

streams, rivers and waterfalls – the most important source of income to the government and those sharing in state incomes is export of hydro-electric power to India.

Houses have an appearance like in many mountain countries, like Switzerland or Austria, with flatly sloping roofs but there is a distinct Himalayan touch with all the woodwork decorations. There must be a lot of very good carpenters around.

Not all houses are like that. We find rows of shacks belonging to, it is said, those Lhotshampa Nepalese people who are still working and living here.

The king guides the country

With a population of about 7 lakhs this is of course a very small humanity to govern for the Bhutanese King, the fourth in line since the creation of an all-Bhutan kingdom in 1907. He guards the Buddhist tradition of most Bhutanese and he now guides the country into a negotiated modernity that is rather unique in South Asia, not to speak of the rest of the world.

In the early 1990's the king declared a Bhutanese code of conduct, the so-called Driglam namzha ([more information](#)).

While at work, in offices or factories, citizens should wear a



National Museum in Paro

national dress, which we now see on many people around, increasingly so as we approach the capital Thimphu. It is not really a uniform, however, and we see many different patterns and colours of the dress.

Second, all should speak the national language Dzongkha. It was supported by most people and seems well anchored in the Bhutanese ethnos. The Lhotshampa minority though, of Nepalese origin but since generations in Bhutan, objected and mobilised against it with some violence in the end. As a result, about a lakh of these people are now staying in refugee camps on the other side of the border to Nepal.

The king is also the guardian of the Himalayan Buddhism practiced here, but with a 'division of labour' with the Chief Abbot of Lama, who is the spiritual head and with the same status as the king. All inhabitants are not Buddhists, but most are however divided by tribal distinctions and languages. A decisive minority is also Hindu, whether hailing from Nepal or parts of northern India.

New constitution is coming

A new constitution is in the making, allowing for a constitutional democracy and freedom of religion. Negotiations are going on about the return of the refugees in camps in Nepal.

We meet a lorry representing Coca-Cola Bhutan. We see people with modern consumer goods all around but mixing it with a distinct everyday traditional Buddhist culture. Internet came late here as did TV. Both of these modern media were introduced in 1999 and there is now a national channel with

English subtitles. However, satellite TV is also there and the Bhutanese can take the whole world into their drawing rooms.

Tourism is still much limited. It is more or less restricted to an up market exclusive tourist inflow via tour groups, and each tourist must pay about 220 dollars a day, all inclusive.

The state of Bhutan owns all rivers, forests, and mineral resources and the environment is protected by strict rules about logging prescribing that at least 60 per cent of the Bhutan territory should be covered with forest. As we approach the central part of the kingdom, we can see that the higher areas, where pine trees grow, are less fully covered with forests, and we understand that this may be a necessary protective measure. However, nothing like the devastating deforestation that has taken place in other parts of the Himalaya can be seen here.

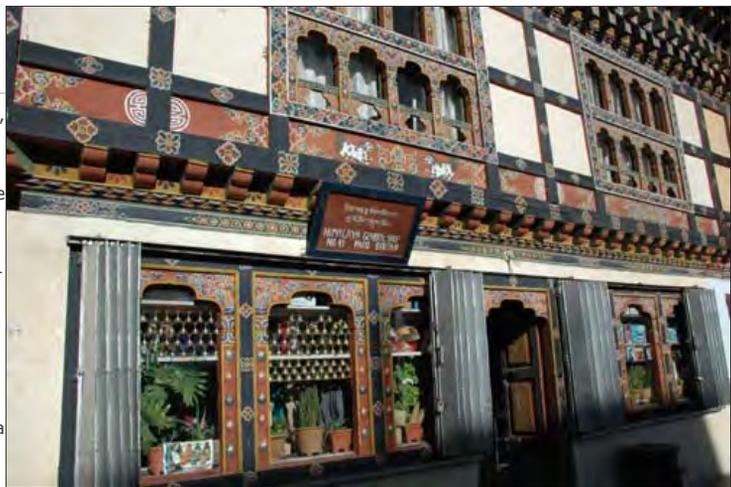
Tobacco is banned, and smugglers from India have a hard time, since the Bhutan police and army is now well equipped to deal with troublemakers after its build up to successfully fight Indian tribal extremist groups hiding within Bhutan borders in the 1990s.

How come such an autonomous approach to national borders, culture and economy has been possible in South Asia on the border to China? Can it be preserved in this era of globalisation?

India and China seem to have held each other at bay in this case, neither allowing the other any interference. Bhutan, has also not had any decisive internal challenge to its system of rule, like that in Sikkim, which simply couldn't handle Nepalese uprisings in the seventies and, therefore, asked for Indian help. Sikkim was immediately annexed by India in 1975, and China couldn't really stop it.

More interestingly

though. Has Bhutan found a formula also for preserving difference in a world of equalising global forces of commerce, culture and politics? It really remains to be seen, but should be worth a close follow up by all those people who value cultural roots and a sound environment.



The centre of power in Bhutan, the dzong in Thimphu housing the offices of the King as well as of the Chief Abbot (Je Khenpo) who is chosen from among the most learned lamas of the country. He enjoys an equal rank with the King.



Turmoil in Nepal

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Submitted by [admin](#) on Wed, 2011-08-10 16:00

Kathmandu 30 November 2005

Nepal – country in political turmoil

If Bhutan presently is characterised by a guided transition to modernity moderated by the stronghold of its royalty and traditions, Nepal, as is well known, is in a political turmoil. The latest earthquake here was in 1934. This time it is not a physical earthquake that seems imminent, but a social one. A country closed to the outside world from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, and then slowly awakening to the surroundings from the early 1950s onwards, now with dramatic intensity.



Demonstration against King Gyanendra in Kathmandu on 2 December 2005. 50 000 people paraded the streets in a manifestation organised by Communist Party of Nepal/United Marxist-Leninist (CPN/UML).

City under 'siege'?

There is now a large number of political refugees in Kathmandu, who have come from rural Nepal. In the 2001 census the city population was given at 1.6 million, but now with the heavy inflow it may be close to 2.5 million, nobody knows for sure.

The Maoists have made large parts of rural Nepal their land, mustering maybe around 1 lakh men and women in arms. They represent the educated youth who knows both the physical and social terrain and they target not just the army but also the village elite and members of political parties. This has created a widespread feeling of insecurity and made many people flee to Kathmandu.

What do they want? The message is a socialist revolution, the aim a communist society! Surround and beleaguer the cities! So what is in store for this country? In September 2005 the Maoists declared a three month unilateral truce, which ended in December, the day after we leave for Bangladesh. Are we just escaping Armageddon? Or is this a belated bourgeois revolution in the making?

Since February 2005 King Gyanendra has taken full control over the government, with the motivation that the political parties cannot govern the country.

Well armoured Kathmandu, the Maoists cannot take it seems. And do they want to do it? This is not just a matter of the strength of the Nepalese army but of the geopolitics of India and the other superpowers including China. And behind the strategy of the Maoists there seem to be another motive. After all, this is not the city of Havana in 1959! This is after all a Hindu Kingdom with a strong Buddhist tradition.



Portraits of the royal couple on display on the walls in every public office in Kathmandu.

Portraits of the royal couple on display on the walls in every public office in Kathmandu.

Mix of Hinduism and Buddhism

The impression of siege is not fuelled by what meets the eye as we enter the city on its crowded streets. This is a historical mix of Hinduism and Buddhism – and tourists – as nowhere else in South Asia. The result is a colourful and imaginative syncretism of ideas, unique to the world.

Here is Hinduism in all its rich variety, with a strong presence of nature in the form of female goddesses and Tantric rituals straddling with Nepalese and Tibetan forms of Buddhism, *Vajrajana*, the diamond road.

Here are intricate relations between male and female and an erotic symbolism. On the surface this is nowadays an urban 'traditional' culture with great liberties in religion and life styles attracting all kinds of visitors and also probably reinforced by the tourist 'eye'.

Set in natural beauty Nepal is perhaps unmatched anywhere else. Kathmandu now has a service culture with everything a tourist can wish for, catering to low budget travellers as well as the high class trekkers starting their adventure in Hyatt Regency five star hotel in the city; restaurants with world variety of foods, temples, monasteries and old architecture of world heritage sites all around.

However, below this glittering appearance is a hierarchical and oppressive caste and tribe society, toughened by the fact that this is today the only nation on earth with Hinduism as state religion and a strong royal family ruling under this ideology. 85 per cent of people are said to be Hindus, with a caste system much the same as in India, with Brahmins at the top and ex-untouchables at the bottom. Like in India there is a growing Dalit movement among the latter. However, there are a great number of tribal groups spread out throughout the country confessing to Buddhism and other types of religion – a total of 90 languages are spoken – and the figure of 85 % Hindus may be grossly misrepresentative. With no colonial past, there is little wonder also that there is no nationalism to speak of in Nepal.

Industry and services more and more important

The total population of Nepal is above 24 million. Still agriculture in the richly irrigated valleys is the mainstay of most people, but 41 % of the national income derives from service and industrial sector today, with tourism at about 3.5% to GDP (but 15% of total foreign exchange earnings). A figure, which most probable is on the decline in the current political situation.



In 1990 there was widespread urban agitation for a democratic political system manifested in Jan Andolan (People's movement) which staged mass demonstrations in Kathmandu. A representative democracy was introduced in 1991 with a parliament of 205 seats. But the political parties, formed much along the same lines as in India, have been unable to form strong and effective governments.

The parliament was dissolved in 1995 and new elections held the same year. The following year the Maoists started their armed uprising, which now seems to culminate with their control of most parts of rural Nepal.

This has, of course made government policies and implementation increasingly difficult, though the insurgents have left most of the economic transactions undisturbed except for tourism. From a high of about 400 000 tourist coming per year, the figure may now be as low as 200 000 (uncertain statistics).

Again, there were fresh elections in 1999, but no effective formation of stable governments. This is the background to the take over of the government by the king himself in February 2005. [More about Nepal on SASNET's special web page.](#)



NEPAL

Kathmandu, Nepal, Wednesday 30 November 2005

Arriving at Tribhuvan Airport in Kathmandu we were warmly welcomed (and graced with the traditional Nepalese scarves) by our local host Dr. [Tek Nath Dhakal](#) and his friend and colleague, Dr. [Govind Prasad Dhakal](#). Dr Tek Nath Dhakal is Campus Chief of the Public Administration Campus of Tribhuvan University, and also a member of [SASNET's South Asian Reference Group](#).

Our accommodation was arranged for at Boudhanath Guest House in the northeastern part of Kathmandu, just in front of the historical Boudhanath stupa (known to Tibetans as Chorten Chempa or the "Great Stupa"), on UNESCO's list of world heritage sites since 1979. It is the focal point for Tantric Buddhism in Nepal. An entire village has been built around the stupa inhabited mainly by Tibetans, many of whom are living in exile since the Chinese took over Tibet in 1959. [More information on the Great Stupa of Boudhanath](#).



SASNET visitors with Dr. Govind Prasad Dhakal and Dr. Tek Nath Dhakal in front of the Boudhanath stupa.

After leaving our luggage we immediately proceeded towards central Kathmandu for our first meeting, with faculty members and students at Dr. Dhakal's Campus of Public Administration. It is one of the totally 61 campuses all over Kathmandu and even in other parts of the country that together form Tribhuvan University.

[Read our first impressions of Nepal – country in political turmoil](#)

[Read report from the Department of Public Administration, Tribhuvan University](#)

From the centrally located Public Administration campus we travelled through the crowded streets of Kathmandu going south, and entered the lush green Kirtipur main campus of Tribhuvan University.

We had an appointment to meet the University Vice Chancellor, but on the way we were informed that he had been called for a meeting at the Ministry of Finance, and our meeting had to be postponed to another day. Instead we headed for the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, located within the Kirtipur campus.

[Report from the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, CNAS, Tribhuvan University](#)



Thursday 1 December 2005

In the morning hours we visited the Social Science Baha, a meeting place for social scientists in Kathmandu. Most of the day was however dedicated to visiting the heritage places in central Kathmandu and the town of Bhaktapur, 14 km east of Kathmandu. This was due to the fact that two Nepalese architects, [Ram Govinda Shrestha](#) and [Rupa Dongol](#), came to Lund University in the autumn 2005 to participate in a postgraduate International training course on Conservation and Management of Historic Buildings. We now had been invited to see the conservation works carried out in the Kathmandu Valley, and not only that. As we happened to be in town just at the time for Rupa Dongol's marriage, we were also invited to participate in the reception party of her wedding ceremony in the evening at Kismis Party Palace in Kathmandu.

[Report from meeting at Social Science Baha](#)

[Report from visits to heritage places in Kathmandu and Bhaktapur](#)

Kathmandu, Friday 2 December 2005

The first programme on this day was to meet Dr. Dinesh Raj Manandhar, Managing Director for the private enterprise Development Network Ltd, and also working with an NGO called Community Development Forum. We were in contact with Dr. Manandhar, as he has collaborated on research regarding solid waste management, with Professor William Hogland, Dept. of Technology, University of Kalmar, since 2003. From there we proceeded to Tribhuvan University's Kirtipur Campus for a meeting with the Vice-Chancellor and a visit to the Research Centre for Applied Science and Technology, RECAST. Our final destination for the day was Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital, to meet people involved in a collaboration project with Göteborg University.



[Report from meeting with the organisation Community Development Forum](#)

[Report from meeting with the Vice-Chancellor, Tribhuvan University](#)

[Report from meeting at RECAST, Research Centre for Applied Science and Technology, Tribhuvan](#)

[Report from meeting at Institute of Medicine, Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital, Kathmandu](#)

Submitted by [admin](#) on Wed, 2011-08-10 16:00

Wednesday 30 November 2005

Visit to Central Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management, Tribhuvan University,

Web page: <http://www.pactu.edu.np/>

The Public Administration Campus is one of the 61 campuses of this very big national university spread out all over the country. The campus is housed in old houses surrounding a courtyard in central Kathmandu.

The Department had organised a big meeting for us with about 50 participants, and we were heartily received by a delegation from the students union before entering the main auditorium.

Most of the participants were teachers and students of the department, some of them with a background in Political Science.

They first informed us about their activities, which is focussed on a masters programme with various types of administration taught (general administration, local, financial and development administration). They admit about 500 students each year for these two year programmes, but the 'output' is only about 50 %, with many dropouts due to part time studies. Many of the students are already working in administrative jobs, and many of them are transferred outside Kathmandu. There are altogether 50 teachers and 18 visiting professors in the Department, catering to about 1 000 students.

Research interests are wide within the field of administration, for example:

- All forms of administrative specialisation
- Labour relations
- Gender development
- Social policy



• Dr. Shree **Krishna Shrestha** (photo to the left), Head of the Department expressed high ambitions for the research in the future, once the current political crisis had been overcome. The multilingual and multiethnic situation in Nepal should offer a rich field for collaboration with foreign institutions interested in the study of cultural transition to modernity. This would also call for interdisciplinary research of various kinds. Other important topics for research, that he thought the department should engage in, was poverty reduction, inclusion of marginal groups and the revitalisation of social movements.

Research programmes and projects

• NGOs in development. A programme in collaboration with the Dept. of Management Studies, Tampere University, Finland, and University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Our host Dr. **Tek Nath Dhakal** (photo to the right) himself wrote his

doctoral dissertation on this issue at the University of Tampere in Finland in 2002 (*The Role of Non-Governmental Organisations in the improvement of Livelihood in Nepal*. *Acta Universitatis Tamperensis* 868). He has also recently edited an anthology on this topic, published in New Delhi. [More information on Dr. Dhakal's personal web page](#).

- Good governance (with Japanese cooperation).
- Conflict resolution. Collaboration on this issue is carried out with the Dept. of Administration and Organization Theory, Bergen University, Norway. A Memorandum of Understanding between the two departments was signed in January 2005, during a visit to Kathmandu by Professor **Ishtiaq Jamil**,



Bergen University.

- Restructuring the Timber Corporation in Nepal.

- Krishna P. Pokharel, Professor of Political Science, is studying the current political situation and publishes articles regularly in Himal, the famous Nepali/English language magazine.

- Mrs. Sabitri Aryal is doing a PhD study of women's micro-finance groups in two villages in the Kathmandu valley. She is registered with the [Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya](#) university in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India.

- Mr. [Thakur N. Dhakal](#), National Programme Manager, Support for Peace & Development Initiatives, UNDP, Kathmandu. Mr. Dhakal plans to conduct research on civil society peacebuilding and write a book on it. He is therefore looking for possibilities of linking this effort with international conferences or journals.



Other persons with whom we interacted at the meeting, and at a dinner reception organised by the Department of Public Administration in the evening at a Kathmandu restaurant:

Associate Professor [Ratna Raj Niroula](#)

Mr. [Ganesh P. Adhikari](#), Lecturer in Sociology

Dr. Chuda Raj Upreti, Professor of Political Science. He is also Chairman of the [Royal Nepal Academy of Science and Technology](#) (RONAST) at Tribhuvan University, and former Chairman of the Tribhuvan University Service Commission.

Prof. [Mahendra Narayan Mishra](#), Center for Development Studies, National College, Kathmandu University

Dr. [Govind Prasad Dhakal](#), Executive Director, Local Development Training Academy, Jawalakhel, Lalitpur, Kathmandu





Submitted by [admin](#) on Wed, 2011-08-10 16:00

Friday 2 December 2005 Web page: <http://www.tribhuvan-university.edu.np/>

SASNET VISIT TO TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Meeting the Vice-Chancellor

Tribhuvan University is the major university in Kathmandu and Nepal, mainly funded by the government. It has a total staff of about 7 000 teachers/researchers and about 6 000 administrative personnel. There are more than 300 colleges affiliated, and it may well be the biggest university in the world.

The rumour goes that in the 1950's the king wanted to keep a very strict control over the

academy in the country, and therefore he only allowed for one university to be set up, namely Tribhuvan University, established 1959, and he guided its activities closely as Chancellor through screening appointments, etc. Later, in 1986, another state funded university was set up, the [Mahendra Sanskrit University](#) in Dang, but apart from this there are no other government funded universities in the entire country. A number of private universities have however been established, among them Kathmandu University.

We had an appointment at 11.30 with the Vice-Chancellor Dr.

[Govind Prasad Sharma](#), Professor of Surgery at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital. Dr. Sharma studied 13 years in the Soviet Union in the 1960s and 1970s and is married to a Russian. During the years he spent in Russia he visited Sweden several times.

He is the first Vice-Chancellor to come from the research staff of the university. All previous VCs have been high government officers.

61 campuses all over the country

The university has 61 campuses spread all over the country. 22 of them are inside Kathmandu. Last year the total number of students at all levels was 132 000. The University has all the faculties from Medicine to the Social Sciences and Humanities. Most teachers/researchers have received their PhD degrees in India or other countries, a great many of the them in previous Soviet Union, Russia and Ukraine. Today the university is very open to foreign collaboration. With the Nordic countries there are established MoUs with the University of Bergen and the Danish University of Agriculture (Forestry), and also a Linneaus-Palme collaboration agreement with Göteborg University, [see below](#).

We also met the Registrar, Prof. [Geeta Bhakta Joshi](#), Professor of Mathematics. He shared the Vice-Chancellor's interest to increase and intensify co-operation with Swedish universities.

RECAST – Research Centre for Applied Science and Technology, Tribhuvan University



Staffan Lindberg, the Registrar Dr. Geeta Bhakta Joshi, Lars Eklund, and the Vice-Chancellor Govind Prasad Sharma



From the Vice-Chancellor's office we proceeded to RECAST, one of four research centres at Tribhuvan University ([read more about the research centres in our report from the CNAS meeting](#)). We had a nice discussion with Dr. Mohan B. Gewali, Professor of Chemistry, and Executive



Director of RECAST (*photo to the left*). The main objectives of RECAST are to:

- *identify, develop, utilise and disseminate indigenous technology*
- *identify exogenous technologies appropriate to Nepal*
- *undertake research on basic and applied sciences*

The centre has a research staff of 30, provides laboratory facilities supervision for graduate and post-graduate students, and organises national and international seminars.

Research activities:

- *Solar driers for Nepalese farmers (within a Sida financed programme, managed by the Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok)*
- *Bio-diesel project on finding a substitute for kerosene by using oil from sajiwan plants (and entrusting the processing with women's groups in Pokhara, which also get a net share of the profit)*
- *Medicinal plants of Nepal in the Terai and Mustang regions, including inventories of local healers (in collaboration with the University of Greifswald, Germany)*
- *Documentation and improvement of traditional technology, like making cooking stoves more energy efficient and less polluting*

There has also been collaboration with Tel Aviv University in 1992 regarding agricultural biotechnology. Today RECAST is involved in collaboration with the University College Northampton, Oxford Brookes University, ITR in Switzerland, and Karlsruhe University in Germany.

Possible areas of collaboration with Swedish universities were identified in the field of biotechnology, solid waste management (already ongoing), and pharmacogenocny.

Meeting at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital, Kathmandu

Institute of Medicine, Tribhuvan University
web page: <http://www.iom.edu.np/index.html>

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) was established in 1972 under Tribhuvan University and had the mandate and the responsibility of training all the categories of health manpower needed in the country. Its main campus is located at Maharajgunj, close to Tribhuvan University (TU) Teaching Hospital, being used for the teaching/learning activities of different programmes run by IOM, and also being a centre for research work.

Late afternoon, we had a short meeting with Prof. K.P. Singh, Dept. of General Surgery, and Asst. Prof. Subarna Mani Acharya, Dept. of Medicine, Unit of Cardiology. We informed them about the opportunities for academic exchange with colleagues in Sweden.



Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital already has a [Linnaeus-Palme Students and Teachers Exchange programme](#) with the [Dept. of Medicine, Sahlgrenska Academy](#), Göteborg University. Coordinator for foreign collaboration on the Nepalese side is Professor T.P. Thapa, Asst. Dean of the Institute of Medicine's Post Graduate Centre in Maharajgunj. Neither Prof. Singh nor Dr. Acharya are directly involved in this collaboration. They promised however to spread information about SASNET to their colleagues in the faculty.

Key person on the Swedish side has been Professor [Göran Bondjers](#), President of the Sahlgrenska Academy. In February 2006 he moved over to the [Nordic School of Public Health](#) in Gteborg, where he is now the Vice Chancellor.

Visit to the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS), Tribhuvan University,

30 november 2005

Web site: www.cnastu.org.np

We headed for the **Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies**, located within the Kirtipur campus, and were welcomed by its Executive Director, Professor **Nirmal Tuladhar**.

CNAS is one of four research centres connected to Tribhuvan University. The other three centres are **CEDA, Centre for Economic Development and Administration**, established in 1969 with

assistance from Ford Foundation; **RECAST, Research Centre for Applied Science and Technology** (which we also visited a few days later, [see our report from RECAST](#)); and **CERID, Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development**.

The Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies was originally conceived as an Institute of Nepal Studies in 1969 was later renamed as Institute of Nepal and Asian Studies. In 1977 it was again renamed into its current name, and became at the same time a pure research centre.

CNAS is engaged in research in humanities and social sciences, within five research fields, namely:

1. *Culture and Heritage Studies, including art, archaeology, history and religion.*
2. *Social Change and Development Studies, including ethnic studies, population dynamics and sociolinguistic studies.*
3. *Himalayan Studies, including studies of environment and geopolitics.*
4. *Nepalese Political Studies, that naturally includes studies on the ongoing political conflict in the country.*
5. *South and East Asian Studies, that is studies on the other six SAARC countries as well as on China and Japan.*

The Centre is the academic contact point within the Tribhuvan University system for affiliation of foreign students and scholars working on Nepalese Studies. The CNAS record shows that since the early 1970's more than 550 foreign undergraduate students, graduates, PhD candidates and postdoctoral scholars have been affiliated to CNAS, including Swedish students and scholars. One of them was **Per Löwdin** from the **Dept. of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology**, Uppsala University, who wrote a doctoral thesis on Nepalese food culture in the early 1980's. He is well known to Professor Nirmal Tuladhar.



International affiliations

In addition to individual affiliations CNAS also has institutional affiliations to a number of foreign institutions, including the research team on "Environment, Society and Culture in the Himalayas" at Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in France; School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, UK; Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Oxford University, UK; Graduate School for International Development and Cooperation, Hiroshima University, Japan; School for International Training, Vermont, USA; and Nityananda Institute, Oregon, USA.

Professor Tuladhar received us in his spacious office with the compulsory photos of the king and the queen on the wall, but also centrally placed a large photo of an Indian guru, Shibpuri Baba from Kerala (*see photo to the right*).

He expressed a keen interest in establishing links also with Sweden, and asked us whether we had come to discuss signing a MoU between Lund University and CNAS.

Presently CNAS has an academic staff of 18 researchers, but five are on leave. One of the latter, [Ramesh Dhungel](#), is currently working in the British Library in London, on Buddhist manuscripts in the Hudson collection, but also lecturing part time at SOAS. Dr. Thungel, who defended his doctoral dissertation on "*History of the Kingdom of Lo/Mustang*" at Columbia University, New York, USA, in 1998, participated in the 7th Himalayan Languages Symposium held at the Uppsala University in September 2001.

Another one of the faculty member is presently in Leiden, and two are in Delhi. Most of the researchers at CNAS are working on issues related to Sociology, Anthropology, History, Linguistics, Culture and Gender.

Their papers are published in the biannual multidisciplinary magazine [Contributions to Nepalese Studies](#) now made easily available on the web through the [Digital Himalaya project](#) (conceived of by Professor Alan Macfarlane and Mark Turin as a strategy for archiving and making available valuable ethnographic materials from the Himalayan region, based jointly at the Department of Social Anthropology at Cambridge University, UK, and the Anthropology Department at Cornell University, USA).

Asia-Link Programme

CNAS is also partner in a European Commission funded Asia-Link Programme called MIDEA, the (Micro)Politics of Democratisation: European-South Asian Exchanges on Governance, Conflict and Civic Action. The MIDEA programme has three other partners besides CNAS. They are the Institute for Global Society Studies in collaboration with Sociology of Development Research Centre, University of Bielefeld, Germany; the Centre for Social Policy Analysis and Research (SPARC), Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka; and the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Oxford University, UK. [More information on the Asia-Link Programme MIDEA.](#)

Since MIDEA was launched in 2004 two International workshops have been organised, the first one on "*Local Democracy in Nepal and South Asia*" was held in Kathmandu in the end of November 2004, and a second workshop on "*Activism and Civil Society in South Asia*" was held in Oxford in the summer 2005. Three more workshops are planned for the coming two years, one of them will again be held in Kathmandu in the autumn 2006.



Social Science Baha

Submitted by [admin](#) on Wed, 2011-08-10 16:00

Visit to Social Science Baha, Kathmandu, Thursday 1 December 2005

Web page: www.himalassociation.org/baha

Mr. [Hari Sharma](#) is the Director of the Social Science Baha, a meeting place for social scientists in Kathmandu and Nepal, located in the residential area of Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur. He is trained in political science, but has the ambition with likeminded persons to bring together the social sciences and make it relevant to Nepalese society today. Mr. Sharma has worked as a principal secretary to the Prime Minister in periods from 1991 but now teaches part time at the [Kathmandu College of Management](#) under the private Kathmandu University.

Baha builds on voluntary efforts. In 1999 they received a grant from Ford Foundation to start a library and a meeting place to this effect. Today they have their own building, a well equipped library and a yearly four-month Immersion Course on contemporary social issues, a kind of state of the art of the social sciences. The intake is 26 from about 75 applicants. The fee is Rs. 10 000 and teachers are paid a low remuneration as they already have regularly jobs elsewhere. A faculty of ten researchers make up the core of these teachers. The word 'Baha' comes from the Newari term for 'Bihar', the traditional monastic centre of learning of Kathmandu Valley. [More information on the 2006 Immersion Course on contemporary social issues.](#)

The course is much sought after not only among students in the social sciences but also in the natural sciences who feel the need to place their work in a social context. The course is divided into modules like research methodology, politics and society, globalisation and society, etc.



Administrative support is provided by [Himal Association](#), the 14-year old non-profit Nepali organisation involved in all aspects of knowledge and information dissemination. Since 1997 it has for example been responsible for the festivals of South Asian documentaries, Film South Asia. [More information on the documentary film festivals.](#)

A small staff handles the library and the administration (*members of the staff on the photo to the left*). During our meeting in the office building in Lalitpur we also met the Programme manager, Mr. [Ajaya N. Mali](#), responsible for the society's web site.

Baha organises guest lectures, seminars and conferences. Foreign scholars on Nepal and the Himalaya region are also invited to

speak when they visit the country.

The conferences have attracted scholars worldwide. So far they have organised three:

- [The Agenda of Transformation: Inclusion in Nepali Democracy \(2003\)](#)
- [Nepal Tarai: Context and Possibilities \(March 2005\)](#)
- [Negotiating ethnicity in Nepal's past and present \(September 2005, in collaboration with CNAS \(Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies\), Tribhuvan University, and University of Bielefeld, Germany\)](#)

Hari Sharma is doing research on social movements, and he and Baha have a vast network with social scientists in South Asia, especially with India, Nepal's other 'self'. In India Social Science Baha is for example, linked with the [Centre for Developing Societies](#) in New Delhi and in Pakistan with the [Sustainable Development Policy Institute](#) in Islamabad.

'Is Nepal then sitting on a 'ticking bomb', we ask.

Hari Sharma's answer is interesting:

"No. This is not so. But the Maoists through their 'violence' have created a strong radical challenge to the Nepalese society, which has to be addressed. The key question today is not how to deal with the Maoists but how to deal with the issues that have come to the fore.

We need a peaceful dialogue, involving also the Maoists, about a politics of engagement instead of a politics of displacement. That is our only chance.

Nepal is also Afghanistan, 'sandwiched' as it is between India and China closely watching what is going on here."

'This is where Baha comes in,' Sharma says.

"Nepal is in a rapid state of transition into capitalism and modernity and belongs to the third generation of democratisation with a strong mobilisation from below. We bring in comparative studies and the global context."

Published by admin on 10/04/2009 09:52:00 AM

Lecture at the Center for Development Studies, National College, Kathmandu University

Web page:

www.nche.edu.np

Prof. Mahendra Narayanan Mishra had invited Staffan for a lecture about his Trichy Panel study. There were about 45 students from the second and third BA course in Development Studies. After the lecture there were many questions about the study.

Some pointed out similarities between the ecology along the Kaveri river in South India and the Nepalese rivers, with canal irrigation close to the river

and rain-fed areas away from the rivers. The process of change seems slower than in South India, though. An interesting feature is that poor peasants are buying land from the rich with money remitted from migrant labourers in the Gulf and India.



Prof. Mahendra Narayanan Mishra

The four year BA course in Development studies have an annual intake of 66 students (about 250 are applying). The annual fee is Rs. 50 000. They have applied to the University to be allowed to run a 2 years masters programme in Development Studies, but so far this has not been granted. This department is very interested in linking up with the Lund Programme of Development Studies, which will start a Masters course in 2006.

We also interacted with Mr. Gopal Datt Bhatta, research officer-cum-lecturer, who is responsible for agricultural studies and watershed development.

At the lecture, we also met Mr. Lok Prasad Bhattarai (photo to the right), who attended the Lund Conference on Modern South Asian Studies in July 2004 (presenting a paper on "Conflict in Nepali Society: A look from the theories of state, modernization and government", more information). He is a sociologists, specialising in agrarian institutions and movements and now works as an officer in the Government Department of Agriculture. He is interested in PhD studies and wants to write about the system of government & bureaucracy in Nepal and the rise of insurgency.



Development Network

Submitted by [admin](#) on Wed, 2011-08-10 16:00

Meeting at Development Network Ltd, Kathmandu, 2 December 2005

The first programme on this day was to meet Dr. [Dinesh Raj Manandhar](#), Managing Director for the private enterprise Development Network Ltd, and also working with an NGO called Community Development Forum (on the photo to the right along with [Staffan Lindberg](#), SASNET). We were already in contact with Dr. Manandhar, as he has collaborated on research regarding solid waste management, with Professor [William Hogland](#), Dept. of Technology, University of Kalmar, since 2003. Along with two other Swedish researchers, Dr [Lennart Mårtensson](#), School of Engineering, Kristianstad University, and Professor [Lennart Mathiasson](#), Dept. of Analytical Chemistry, Lund University, they have been engaged in a major research project on the issue called "Analysis of Pollutants from City Dump/Landfills in Kathmandu Valley, Nepal, with Emphasis on Heavy Metals and Persistent Organics", financed by a grant from Sida, the Swedish Development Cooperation Agency. The objective of the research project was to characterise leachate with respect to heavy metals and persistent organics from dump sites in Nepal and to compare with Swedish conditions.

As a next step an International conference is arranged in Kathmandu 11–13 January 2006. The conference titled "For a better tomorrow: Sustainable Solid Waste Management in Developing Countries" is organised by Kathmandu University in association with Development Network Pvt. Ltd, and co-organized by the [International Foundation for Science](#) (IFS) in Sweden, Kalmar University, the so-called LAQUA group, Kathmandu Metropolitan City and a number of other Nepalese organisations. [More information](#).



Dr. Manandhar, who is a civil engineer, met us at the Development Network's office building in the residential area of New Baneswor. His Development Network colleague Guna Raj Shrestha, a social scientist and Executive Chairperson for Community Development Forum, joined us for a meeting, and so did Dr. [Sanjay N. Khanal](#), Associate Professor and Head of the Dept. of Environmental Science and Engineering, Kathmandu University, Dhulikhel.

The joint effort by a private company, an NGO, and Kathmandu University to tackle the problem of solid waste management in Nepal is no coincidence. Dr. Manandhar explained that it is part of a strategy to develop a private-public cooperation, involving professionals and academicians, and the coming conference will further strengthen this, and one session will be specially devoted to the real problems facing Kathmandu Municipal



Guna Raj Shrestha



Sanjay N. Khanal

Corporation.

Manandhar worked for many years in the government's Water department, but decided in 2001 to form the Development Network, that now has around 20 people in the staff. During the four years the company has existed it has actively worked with water and environmental issues, supported NGO's in capacity building, and collaborated with International organisations and universities, among them the [Water, Engineering and Development Centre \(WEDC\)](#), Loughborough University, UK.

Waste management in the Kathmandu Valley is a major problem. Manandhar described the present problem with 70 % of waste now thrown in the rivers, 300 tonnes a day, with leakage from landfill dumps, etc, but also solutions being tried to improve the situation.

Dr Khanal heads a department at Kathmandu University much involved in research on water and air pollution, but also on occupational health. The University is a public institution with the Prime Minister of Nepal being its Chancellor. It has its main campus in Dhulikhel, 30 km east of Kathmandu, and a total number of 5 000 students (2 000 in Dhulikhel).



The notice board at Development Network, with information on projects carried out.

, 1 December 2005

Web page: <http://www.worldheritagesite.org/sites/kathmanduvalley.html>

Most of the day was dedicated to visiting the heritage places in central Kathmandu (*photo to the right*) and the town of Bhaktapur, 14 km east of Kathmandu.

This was due to an invitation from [Ram Govinda Shrestha](#) and [Rupa Dongol](#), two Nepalese architects who came to Lund University in the autumn 2005 to participate in a postgraduate

International training course on Conservation and Management of Historic Buildings, organised by the [Dept. of Housing Development and Management](#)

and the [Dept. of Architectural Conservation and Restoration](#), Lund University.

The course is financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida, and was run for the second year 2005. Professionals working in Latin America and Asia participated in the first three-weeks period of the training course that was carried out in Sweden 26 September–14 October 2005, and this will be followed by a continuation course in either Latin America or Asia (Cambodia) for two weeks in the spring 2006. For more information on the programme, see <http://www.sasnet.lu.se/hdmlund.html>.

Architects working on restoration projects

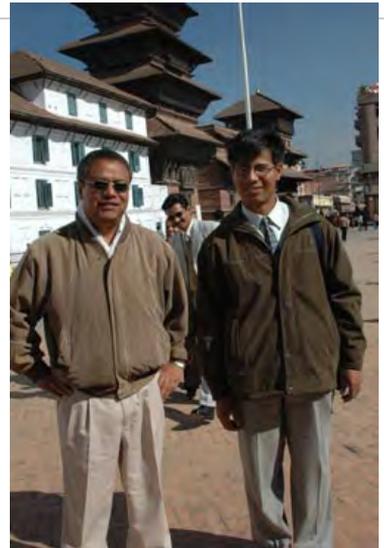
Ms [Rupa Dongol](#) is working in the [Culture, Heritage and Tourism Department](#) at the Kathmandu Metropolitan City Office, and she had arranged a programme for us. Since she was going to marry on the same day, she could however not be with us during the day, but instead we were invited for her grand wedding reception party at the Kismis Party Palace in the evening.



Instead we were given an appointment to meet Mr. [Narendra Raj Shrestha](#), Head of the Culture, Heritage and Tourism Department, located in an old Rana Prime Minister building (one of many) in central Kathmandu (*photo to the left*).

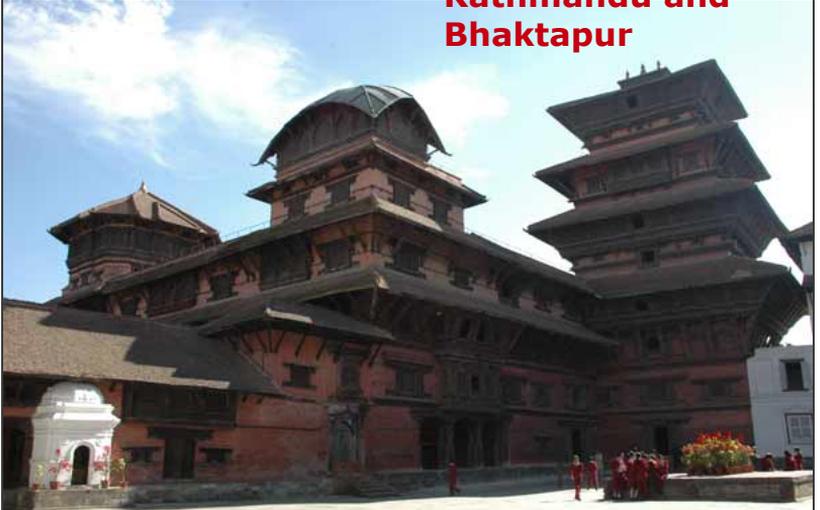
After receiving us in a

typical Nepalese welcoming way, we were given a silk scarf and a traditional cap, Mr. Shrestha and the department's consultant architect [Linda Shakya](#) briefed us about ongoing and planned conservation works carried out in Kathmandu. The department seems to be doing a very efficient job, given the small resources and limited staff available. They showed us blueprints of coming restoration work that includes making new old-style facades to existing buildings near Durbar Square, buildings that today does not fit into the environment.



Narendra Raj Shrestha, Head of the Culture, Heritage and Tourism Department, and Ram Govinda Shrestha, Head of the the building conservation department in the Bhaktapur municipality.

Visits to the heritage places in Kathmandu and Bhaktapur





Mr Narendra Raj Shrestha had got part of his training as an architect in former Soviet Union in the 1980's, and had also been to Sweden some years back, participating in a training course on Urban Land Management, arranged by the Royal Institute of Technology, KTH, in Stockholm. Linda Shakya had graduated in 2004 from the [College of Civil Engineering](#) at Tribhuvan University.

We also had a chat with Chief Executive of Kathmandu Metropolitan City Office (KMC), Mr [Regmi](#) (*photo to the left*), and discussed the main challenges to the development of the city. He pointed out that the unplanned development is the main cause for problems that concerns the KMC. They include insufficient solid waste management, narrow roads (one solution thought of is constructing alternative roads along the river banks) and lack of parking space in the city centre.

Kathmandu Durbar Square

From KMC we went along with Mr Shrestha and Ms Shakya to Kathmandu Durbar Square, and were heartily received by the staff of the Culture, Heritage and Tourism Department, given flower garlands and presents, and taken to the local office. We were treated as most honoured guests of the city of Kathmandu, and were given a professional guided tour around the old royal palace, the Malla dynasty temples and the temple of the Living goddess.

After lunch at a Newari restaurant near Durbar Square in Kathmandu we then proceeded by car to Bhaktapur, accompanied by [Ram Govinda Shrestha](#), who heads the building conservation department in the Bhaktapur municipality.

The entire central part of Bhaktapur is a World Heritage monument, and foreigners (except from SAARC countries and China) have to pay 750 rupees as entrance fee to enter the city. Money that goes directly to finance conservation works.

Bhaktapur is exceptionally beautiful with its wealth of heritage buildings from the 12th to the 18th Century AD. Ram Govinda Shrestha, who got his training as an architect in Saratov in Russia, showed us around and even let us

come inside the Palace of 55 Windows, a building full of fresco paintings that is currently completely renovated and therefore closed to the public. Thus we were able to watch the work of the craftsmen working with sal wood carpentry.



Newari wedding reception party

We returned to Kathmandu before dark, in the middle of the rush hours. Therefore it took more than an hour to reach the city, coming late to the wedding reception party for which we were invited.

It was the first evening of the three days of Newari wedding ceremonies, and only the bride, Rupa Dongol sitting on a dais, was present to receive presents, not the bridegroom.

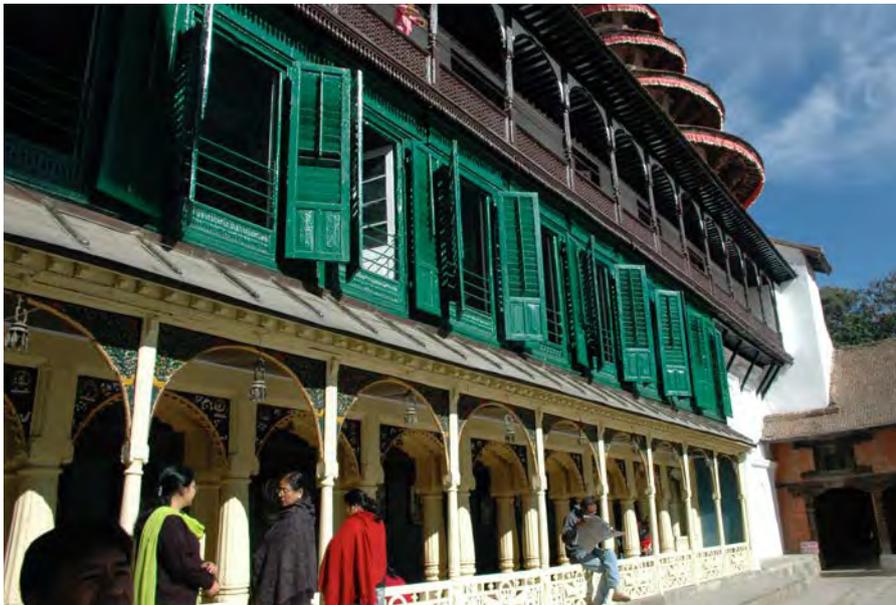


We were amazed to find the festival



hall totally crowded with at least 500 people, mingling around, being served all kinds of Newari food delicacies and drinks by strolling waiters.

Among the guests we also met Ms. [Reshma Shrestha Duwal](#) (*photo to the right*), another architect that participated in the Lund University course on Conservation of Buildings, but in 2004. Ms. Duwal is also working for the Culture, Heritage and Tourism Department.



Kathmandu, Saturday 3 December 2005

Our final day in Kathmandu, with Staffan holding a lecture for students at National College (*photo to the right*). The flight with Biman Bangladesh Airlines to Dhaka, supposed to depart from Kathmandu at 16.55 did not leave until 21.00. We had time to reflect over the fragile political situation in Nepal, and read the newspapers reporting about the biggest street demonstrations in Kathmandu since 1990 carried out the day before. 'Tens of thousands of people rallied against autocratic monarchy and in favour of republican democracy' (Kathmandu Post, 3 December 2005). In the same paper we also learnt that the Maoists had extended their truce by another month, whereas the Royal Nepalese Army declared continued war against them.

[Read report from lecture at National College, Kathmandu](#)

[Read our article, trying to understand the situation in Nepal](#)



LARS EKLUND & STAFFAN LINDBERG

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Staffan Lindberg on 2005 political situation in Nepal

Friday 3 December 2005

One thing is striking about the political situation in the country. There is no panic! All people we met looked at the 'siege of Kathmandu' and the Maoist domination of the countryside with anxiety but were not terrified.. True, the tourists are taxed by the Maoist. For going to Mount Everest a 'toll' of something between 3-500 rupees is charged. Members of the local elite are also taxed. Sometimes Maoists force people to feed them. We heard a story about how they 'kidnapped' teachers and students for a shorter period to teach them about the real situation in Nepal and the need for a new school curriculum. Researchers and officers going for work in the rural areas would take caution, and try to establish contacts with the local insurgents and negotiate a safe way to do their work. Those we met and who had worked in rural areas, said that they had been able to talk their way out by convincing the Maoists about the importance of their work for the rural areas. Few of them had been taxed and they had not felt threatened to their life.

At the same time, there is also the expectation among many intellectuals that the insurgency will have a strong impact on the political development in Nepal by placing the real issues on the agenda ([see report from meeting with Hari Sharma at Social Science Baha](#)).

The most common interpretation among the researchers we met is that the Maoists have used the opportunity of the rapid transition from a feudal to a modern capitalist society and the feeble attempts at democratisation of a political system from the nineteenth century emphasising hierarchy and procedural forms, rather than effective government for development; a characteristic also pertaining to many public institutions including the universities.

The rapid transition to a commercial economy in an era of globalisation is perhaps more felt here than in other parts of South Asia, with the large tourist industry, the many Nepali migrant labourers spread out over South Asia and the massive inflow of global consumer goods. It is an uneven development, creating wealth at one end and widespread poverty and unemployment at the other and thus a strong feeling of relative deprivation among large groups. The Nepali governments that have replaced each other during the last 15 years have hardly been able to effectively counter these growing cleavages in society in order to give some hope to the common man of a better tomorrow.

In their mobilisation of the rural and urban poor, the Maoists 'use' a well established socialist rhetoric from the Chinese revolution: land to the tillers, equal opportunities for all, social justice ... No new pamphlets have to be written on this. Poor people of Nepal have little knowledge of why real existing communism in Soviet Union and elsewhere failed. 'The diagnosis is right, the prescription is wrong!' as someone commented, and the fact is that they have also attracted many educated middle class persons. So far the Maoists have not needed to deliver an alternative development practice and the question is if they really mean business with a communist society at this stage.

The situation is prone to conspiracy theories of the 'secret hand' of the King, the elite, the Indians ... but the fact is that a strong mobilisation has taken place under the banner of what was thought as an outmoded socialist ideology, obviously giving some direction to the aspirations among the rural and urban poor and their intellectual companions. With the recent negotiations in New Delhi between the Maoists and the seven opposition parties, there are now signs that the first priority of the Maoists is to create a stable and working democracy. 'Only bourgeois democracy opens the path to people's democracy' (as expressed by its leader Baburam Bhattarai, quoted by an Indian newspaper) For this to be a peaceful process, they have to be recognised as an important player in future negotiations. It may take time though, most people here seem to think, and be far from a straightforward progression.

Staffan Lindberg



PS: An exclusive interview with Chairman Prachanda, supreme leader of Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), has been published by *Kantipur.com* 8 February 2006. The interview was made by **Prateek Pradhan**, editor of The Kathmandu Post, and **Narayan Wagle**, editor of Kantipur. Prachanda speaks about his party's current situation, insurgency, and the ways ahead to resolve the conflict, and proclaims that the Maoists want an end to bloodshed in Nepal. [Read the article.](#)

Chairman
Prachanda. Photo:
Narayan Wagle

