

LETTERS

TIBET

Despite self-styled Tibet freedom fighter Jeff Greenwald's assertion (#151) that Ethical Traveler has called off the tourism boycott, I notice that he is giving interviews to all and sundry saying it is still on. In Ethical Traveler's own website, it doesn't appear that the boycott has been withheld. Ethical Traveler should clarify this issue and Greenwald should stop contradicting himself in his media appearances.

Tshering Lama, Seattle

□ Jeff Greenwald has specifically "withdrawn" his boycott of tourism in Nepal in a letter to you (#151), but he is still giving interviews to the San Francisco Chronicle (29 June) advocating the boycott. As has been explained by other contributors to your paper, sanctions would make life worse in Nepal for Tibetans. Your readers have also pointed out the severe costs to the Nepali economy will hurt the ordinary people (Nepalis and Tibetans alike) who depend on tourism. Greenwald has accepted these, so why does he keep giving more interviews calling for a boycott?

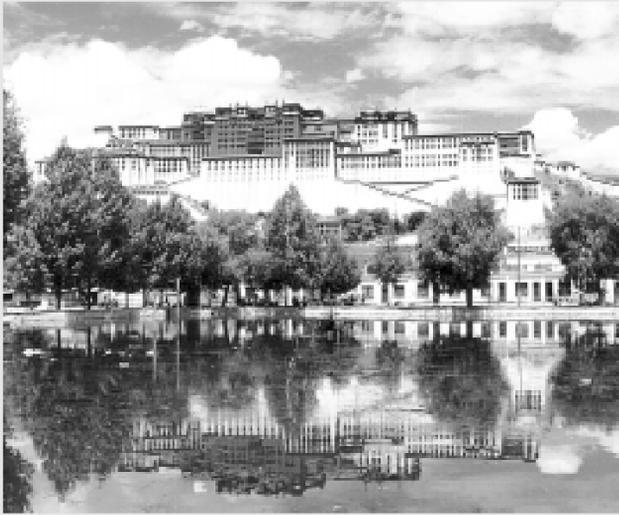
Janet Simmons, email

□ I agree that a tourism boycott of Nepal may hurt ordinary Nepalis more than sending the needed message to Nepali policy makers concerning their attitude towards Tibetan refugees ('Tibet, Tibet', #150). However, it may be simplistic to look at the problem merely as the case of the refolement of 18 Tibetans.

As someone who has been monitoring Nepali and Tibetan issues I know we need to take a broader perspective and see what the solution is. On the whole, Nepal has been good to the Tibetan refugees, providing over 20,000 of my brethren with home and space when they needed it the most. Even today several thousand Tibetans continue to live and prosper in different parts of Nepal, many even contributing significantly to the country's economy. Nepal has been expecting Tibetans to follow the laws of the land and that is something that Tibetans understand and appreciate.

There are two aspects to Nepal's attitude towards Tibetans. First is the treatment of Tibetans escaping from Tibet along the Nepal border. While several thousand Tibetans have enjoyed Nepali humanitarian assistance and have been able to live in freedom in Nepal as well as in other parts of the world, there have been cases when escaping Tibetans have undergone problems, including physical abuse, monetary coercion and deportation. Thus, the recent refolement of the 18 Tibetans was part of what some feared might become a trend.

Second is Nepal's attitude towards Tibetans legally residing in the country. The problem arose several years back when a section of Nepali



bureaucrats started clamping down on lawful activities of the Tibetans in Nepal. What hurt the Tibetans the most was when the Nepali authorities did not permit them to even observe traditional and customary festivals like the birthday of the Dalai Lama or the Tibetan National Day. In fact, such bans have been sources of concern for a large section of Nepal's Buddhist population who are ethnic Tibetans. The Tibetan psyche was hurt when representatives of the Dalai Lama in Kathmandu were even detained without any provocation in the past when Chinese leaders visited Nepal.

Tibetans have always been aware of the pressure on Nepal as a result of being sandwiched between two Asian giants. They are not asking Nepal to either perform or permit political activities, which will place the country's security and stability at risk. Although Nepal is not a party to the UN convention relating to the status of refugees, it has been providing a safe haven to Tibetans, and this should be continued.

I do not subscribe to the theory that the international outcry "will spark new tensions between the Nepali and Tibetan communities". The tension has already been there for so long. It is only that the Tibetans have been understanding of Nepal's situation that they have not been making a big case so far. The writers only need to talk to ordinary Tibetans in Nepal privately and informally to see how they feel about the situation.

The recent international outcry is not solely on account of the deportation of 18 Tibetans but symbolises the concern of well-wishers of the Tibetan people at the negative aspect of Nepal's treatment of Tibetan refugees as a whole. This is the time for introspection to see if part of the blame is not with the Nepali official attitude towards Tibetans. Tibetans are victims in the current development and should not be blamed for seeking external support.

As a country having historical and traditional links with Tibet, Nepal can contribute significantly in enabling Tibetans to reside lawfully and in freedom in Nepal. Already there are signs of Tibet-China detente with envoys of the Dalai Lama visiting China. As and when there is a solution to the Tibetan issue, Tibetans on the other side of the border will remain forever grateful to the assistance rendered by Nepal and its people.

Bhuchung K Tsering, Virginia, USA

□ The lack of protests in Nepal against the deportation of the 18 Tibetan refugees is appalling. There have been protests in the west, but what about protests from our own leaders and the general public? All the actors in our Nepali stage have profited from refugee status at one time or the other. Imagine what would have happened if the Indian authorities had bundled up King Tribhuban, and had sent him back in 1950. If the Nepali Congress and the leftist leaders had been handed over to the Panchayat regime from their sanctuary in India? If the Nepali Maoist leaders in India gathered together and turned over to Kathmandu? Or even if all the Nepalis working in India or abroad as economic refugees were sent back? The country is going through difficult times now. But the utter lack of humanity exhibited by our leaders in throwing out the refugees shows a lack of moral fabric. Perhaps it is this lack of basic morality that is at the root of what is wrong with this country's rulers

Kabindra Pradhan, Pulchowk

□ I was shocked to read that Ethical Traveler has announced a tourism boycott of Nepal. This is totally unacceptable and it will make a huge negative impact to Nepal. Nepal's main source of income and employment is the tourism industry, and a proposed boycott will hurt a lot of people. Nepal has been giving refuge to Tibetans and Bhutanis even though most Nepalis live below the poverty line.

A boycott will never solve the problem. Why doesn't Ethical Traveler take action against China—the ultimate guilty party here? Is it because China is a powerful country?

Buddhi Pant, Coventry, UK

Mark Turin and Sara Shneiderman reply:

As the authors of the initial article 'Tibet, Tibet' (#150), we thank Greenwald and Cancellaro for their feedback (#151). Their letter raises several valid points. Here we respond to some of their comments, as well as to those of Bhuchung Tsering (see letter, above). We are delighted that Ethical Traveler and the Tibet Justice Center have decided to 'withhold action on the proposed boycott'. Their alternative tourist advisories are more appropriate and in line with the grassroots situation in Nepal.

However, some concerns remain. While Greenwald and Cancellaro suggest that the decision to withhold the boycott was reached 'after consulting

with several other human rights and Tibetan rights groups', we are eager to know whether human rights organisations in Nepal were among those consulted. The authors' acknowledge the broader human rights problem endemic to rural Nepal, but their closing demand smacks of a pious moral certainty that is disrespectful of Nepali citizens' ongoing efforts to reform their own polity from within: 'We hope that, should further actions become necessary, all Nepalis will support whatever actions Ethical Traveler and the human rights community suggests'. Moreover, if Ethical Traveler genuinely want Nepalis to support their reformulated recommendations they should disseminate their viewpoint in the Nepali language press.

Likewise, Bhuchung Tsering's analysis of the situation is nuanced, but he would also do well to recognise that there is no single 'Tibetan' opinion of the world over. He suggests that we should discuss this issue with ordinary Tibetans on the street, as if we had not yet done so. In fact, it was precisely such conversations with Tibetan residents of Kathmandu that shaped the opinions expressed in our original article. While there is a natural diversity of opinion among the 20,000+ Tibetan population in Nepal, several Tibetans of various social backgrounds found the international Tibet support community's proposed boycott to be out of step with their own feelings.

Here we must correct Tsering's misunderstanding. We were not suggesting that a general 'international outcry' would 'spark new tensions between the Nepali and Tibetan communities'. A hurtful economic boycott specifically targeted at Nepal's tourist trade, however, would surely do so. As our initial article made clear, we believe that a protest about the Tibetan issue in particular and the Nepali human rights situation in general is

absolutely necessary. The question is what strategy will yield the most positive results for all involved parties.

To conclude, we concur with CK Lal ('Imperious Power, #151) that the Ethical Traveler approach represents a troubling hypocrisy among American action groups on both the left and right. While Nepal is singled out for special condemnation for trespassing international law, the link to the United States on Ethical Traveler's Resources web page refers to the nation as 'the world's first modern democracy'. In light of the horrors of the Guantanamo Bay detention centre, the ongoing atrocities against civilians in Iraq and the inability of the United States government to sign international treaties, it is extraordinary that Ethical Traveler remains silent. Why no clickable email petition to the White House? Does Ethical Traveler recommend a tourism boycott to the United States, or expect 'all' Americans to support its recommendations? More careful consideration of such questions might benefit travellers and citizens of all countries.

Mark Turin and Sara Shneiderman, Kathmandu

ADS

The front page of last week's *Nepali Times* had 36 percent of its space taken by the newspaper and 64 percent by advertisements. At your current rate of depreciation, readers can expect the complete disappearance of news stories by some time in mid-2004. Why don't you just charge all of us a bit more for an issue and clean up the look of your otherwise excellent newspaper?

Mark Zimmerman, Patan

□ (*Nepali Times* maintains a strict policy of always keeping its ad to content ratio below 1:3, as per international norms. Discerning readers will notice that the number of pages

fluctuates in proportion to the volume of ads – Ed.)

SURESH OJHA

What I read about Suresh Ojha (Nepali society, #151) made me very proud of him and his work. When I see his forward-looking and positive attitude towards the country it revives my hope. Thank you *Nepali Times* for introducing us to a rare kind of Nepali.

K Acharya, email



CORRECTION

In 'A big hole in our budget' (#151) the cap on internal borrowing by the Nepal Rastra Bank Act should actually refer to the overdraft with the NRB and it should have been five percent of revenue of the preceding year, and not five percent of the budget as erroneously stated. The article also missed two details: the IMF's approximately \$70 million contribution for the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility covers three years, and the World Bank's budget support is through a Structural Adjustment Credit for the government's Poverty Reduction Strategy - Ed.



**Salutations to
His Majesty King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev
on the auspicious occasion of his
57th Birthday.**

May his guidance always take us in the right direction.


Surya Nepal Pvt. Ltd.