

/ Peaks Of Power

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M.S. Gill

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I first went to Kathmandu when I was cec many years ago. It was a world congress on mountaineering and tourism, Nepal's main bread-earner. But I spent most of my time with the political

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establishment, the Election Commission of Nepal, and the late King Birendra. I can never forget the hour he spent with me in intense interrogation to learn about the Indian democratic system. It was obvious that he was anxious to carry Nepal on the road to democracy. When I went back recently, I thought of him each time I passed the Narayanhiti palace. This time I was there for a conference on the state of political parties in South Asia, organised by idea, the international democracy institute in Stockholm, of which India is a founder-member. <p> I am a minor mountaineer, trained by Tenzing himself in 1961. My heart lifts at the sight of the snow peaks. We flew from Delhi towards Nanda Devi and then took an eastward turn to Kathmandu. Flying past the Annapurna massif and the other Himalayan giants was a treat. As we dipped over the last ridge and dropped to the city, I noticed the great expansion all over the valley—but also that there was no planned road network. Mud lanes meandered through cultivated fields to four-storey cube buildings. The Bhagmati river running through the middle of the city was obviously also the city drain. How familiar, coming from messy, urban India.



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