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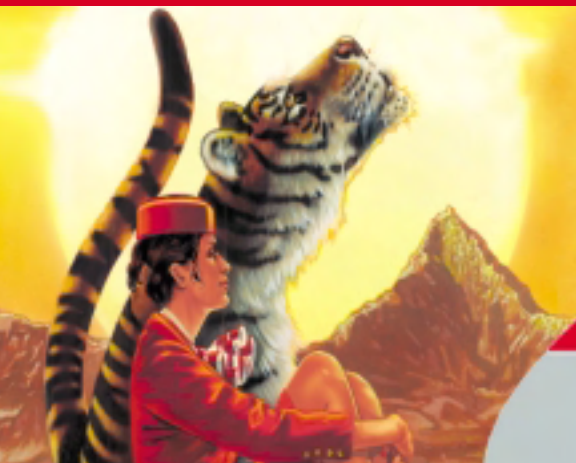
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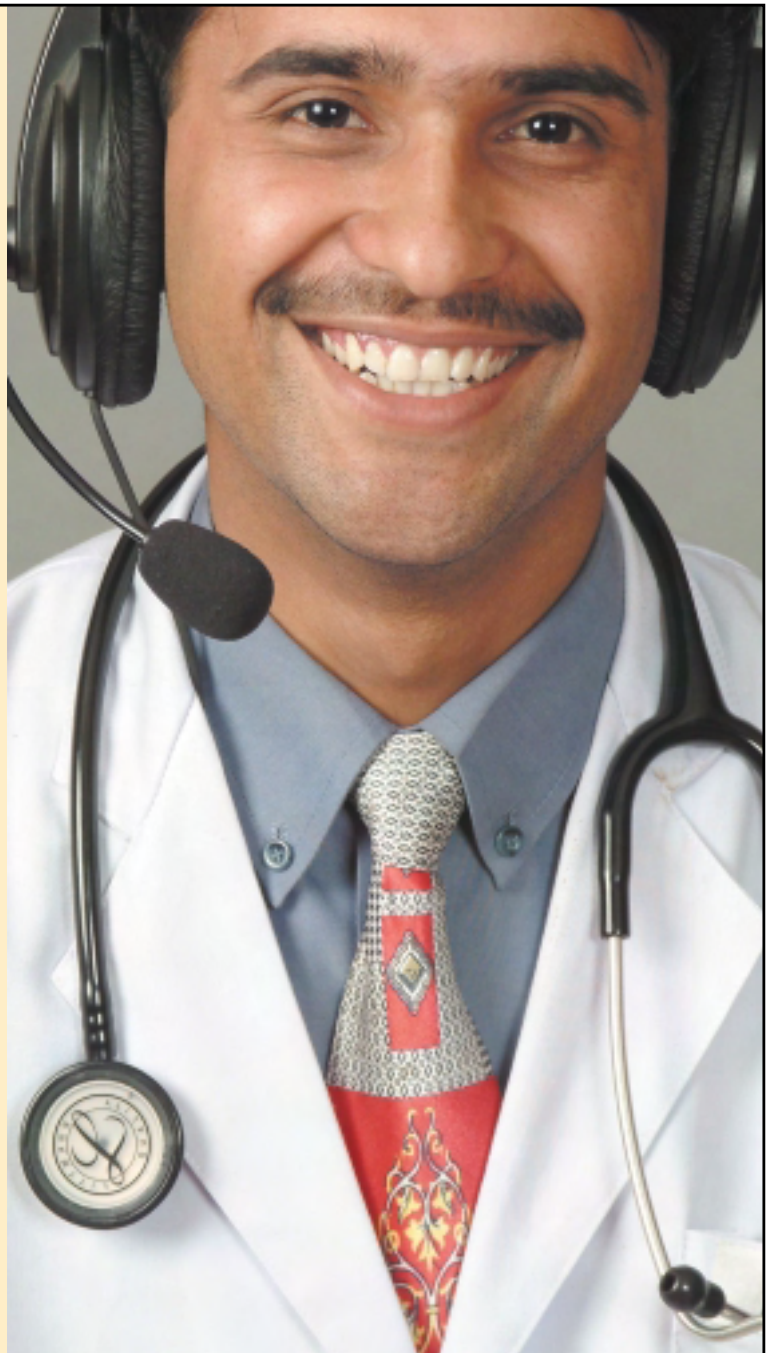
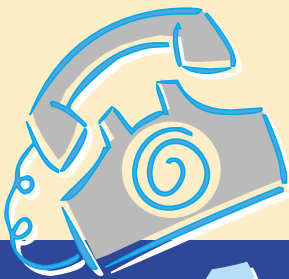


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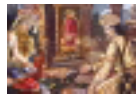
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# Letters



## “ Quotas will discriminate those who are the most deserving, those who rely on merit ”

MAHESHWOR MITTAL

### Divided classes

YOUR COVER STORY LAST WEEK raised a very important issue (“Divided Classes,” by Satish Jung Shahi, November 7). Even by Nepal’s poor standards, education is perhaps the most neglected sector. And the neglect looks all the more appalling, considering the fact that it’s education, if anything, that will bring all Nepalis to the level playing field. I, however, have a problem with the quota system. While providing quotas to backward and geographically disadvantaged communities and women may look fair on paper, it will unnecessarily discriminate against those who are the most deserving—those who rely on their merits—whichever group they may belong to. Quotas for certain groups for a fixed period of time are a good idea, even desirable. But once it becomes a state policy, it’s going to be politically explosive to call for its withdrawal. That anyone should look at quotas as a blank check, regardless of his merit, would be a perfect recipe for trouble. Premier institutions like the Institute of Medicine and the Institute of Engineering are among the last remaining bastions of meritocracy. I for one certainly want them to remain that way.

MAHESHWOR MITTAL  
TEKU

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN EDUCATION is not exactly a great idea. Why should anyone relinquish his/her right for education so as to make room for others of lesser caliber? Isn’t that another form of discrimination? Just as Dr. Shishir Lakhey, I saw friends in India (from the so-called upper classes) who were far

worse off economically than those from the “scheduled classes.” They were virtually shut out from competition in medical colleges because a good 50 percent or so of the seats there were set aside for the backward communities, many of whom in fact had been living in cities for generations and were pretty well off. We are certainly not speaking about mimicking poor Indian politics here, are we? The court has struck down a poor government decision, and that’s good news.

NARESH SHRESTHA  
LAZIMPAT

IN A SOCIETY WHERE ALMOST ALL ILLS stem from social inequality affirmative action is perhaps the only way to prop up the backward section of the society. You’ve got to begin somewhere. It’s so lame to expect a dalit from the Farwest to compete with the Kathmandu-educated elite for a seat at the TU’s Institute of Medicine?

SUBASH  
VIA EMAIL

### US elections

WHILE I AGREE THAT THE U.S. ELECTION results may not be the “best” for Nepal, it doesn’t change anything for Nepal and I don’t think Kerry or Nader would have either (“Bush Bind,” Last Word, November 7). If anything, the election clarified the problems within the Democratic Party and has decisively shown who the American people are and what they want. Voters turned out in numbers that have not been seen since 1968. The major-

ity of Americans believe in George Bush and relate to the Republican agenda. It was a clean win for Bush and a serious wake-up call for the Democratic Party.

As for the Democrats, record number of voters did turn out to vote for them as evidenced by their win in Pennsylvania, for example. Still, they lost. Why? Because they do not have a clear agenda or an unequivocal leader. I can't tell what the party really wants. I can tell you what they don't want, but that doesn't get America anywhere. When I look to the 2008 election, I really don't know who the Democrats will run in the primaries or who will emerge as a leader for the party. They need an agenda that I can sum up in one sentence and they need to find decisive leaders. While I am not a supporter of Bush's agenda and he did not win my vote, in the final analysis, Election 2004 has been good for America.

CAROLYN RODAL  
MAXWELL SCHOOL OF  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND CITIZENSHIP  
SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK

## Request to Onta

PRATYOUSHT ONTA IS ONE OF THE best scholars and social scientists around. I like the issues he raises in many of his articles. His critiques keep the concerned on their toes. In his last article he has raised a valid issue ("Non-interrogating Journalists," November 7). He suggests that journalists should look at themselves in the mirror before reiterating their "watchdog" claim. I would like to ask Onta if he has ever done it himself? A native of Kathmandu with sound family background and a Ph.D. to boot from a foreign university, he is perhaps even more suitable for pioneering the task he has proposed—improving the level of understanding of issues related to social research among the Nepali *patrakars*. It's typical of our academics to criticize others without coming forward with a solution. They take it for granted that they hold a license to criticize everybody. But have they ever looked at themselves in the mirror?

RAJESH DALI  
VIA EMAIL

## Smuggler's hub

YOUR REPORT "SMUGGLERS' Haven" on smuggling at the Nepal-India border may have been revealing to people in Kathmandu, where you sell most of your magazines after all (by John Narayan Parajuli, November 7). To someone like me who has lived not too far from the border for generations, these things are a fact of life. Cross-border smuggling is a huge trade, which is a boon to everybody: It helps the poorly-paid local police and administrators, almost every single monitoring agency in the transboundary trade chain (customs, border patrols, etc.), down to the poor settlers at Mechi Danda Basti. Smuggling in Tarai towns is so commonplace that many of the people involved in it don't even feel that it is criminal or something that will bring them ill repute. Dhulabari, not too far from here, has flourished due to the cross-border trade and people on either side of the border have benefited immensely from it. Tens of thousands of shoppers from neighboring Indian towns/cities of Darjeeling and Siliguri cross over to this side of the Mechi River during the weekends and take with them whatever they can. The rest of the consignment is home-delivered to you (customs-free) in India and you need not worry about your stuffs getting seized by the customs officials. It's hard to imagine that such large volumes of cross-border trade would take place without the local police and administration—both in Nepal and India—having a share in the pie. Of course, the volume of cross-border smuggling in "foreign goods" (as Indians coming over to Nepal fondly call them) may have come down substantially over the years, simply because Indians can now buy Levis, Nike, Jordache and Ray-ban in India. But walk down the long single-lane of Dhulabari on a weekend, and you will see scores of middleclass Indians, who have traveled from across the border, buying themselves jeans and sneakers and Japanese (or is it Chinese?) steers.

SURESH GIRI  
BIRTAMOD, JHAPA

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1 & 4. IN TOWN: Indian satirist Ashok Chakradhar and comic Govind Bahadur Tiwari at "Hasyabahar Kabi Gosti," organized by the Indian Embassy at the Royal Academy Hall

2. NEPALI HOPE: Miss Nepal Payal Shakya before her departure to China for the Miss World contest, slated for December

3. LAURELS: IGP Shyam Bhakta Thapa presents an award

5. LIVING, AN ART: Spiritual leader and founder of "Art Of Living Foundation" Ravi Shankar at the BICC

6. IN THE AIR: The season for winnowing wheat begins



2



# Picture of the Week



**TIME OUT:** A Policeman enjoy a game of cricket at Changu

nation weekly/Sagar Shrestha





# Zero-sum Exercise

The insurgency didn't happen due to the absence of an elected Parliament. It happened despite the elected Parliament.

BY JOGENDRA GHIMIRE

It's been two and a half years since the King dissolved the Pratinidhi Sabha, acting on the recommendation of then Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. There has, however, been a constant drumbeat of noise calling for its reinstatement ever since. In recent weeks, the call has been renewed with added urgency. The proponents of this idea argue that it's the best option available before us to resolve the political stalemate, the insurgency and deep polarization of the political forces.

The arguments offered in favor of the reinstatement can be distilled into three broad categories: constitutional argument, argument for representative democracy and the peace argument. Each category certainly has definite merits. But none justifies reinstatement.

The constitutional argument for reinstatement is twofold. First, the Supreme Court endorsed the dissolution in 2002 because it assumed that elections to the fourth Pratinidhi Sabha would be held on time and that the constitutional requirement of elections within six months from the dissolution of the Parliament would be met. Second, since the elections did not take place within the constitutionally mandated timeframe and since the King exceeded his brief as the constitutional monarch when he assumed executive powers in October 2002, the reinstatement of the dissolved Pratinidhi Sabha is the only prudent course to bring the constitutional process back on track.

The problem with this line of argument too is twofold. First, it takes an excessively legal approach to an inherently political problem. To expect that the current political problems can be solved by strict adherence to every letter of the law of the land is a fallacy. There is no provision in the Constitution, for example, that allows the King to reinstate a dissolved Parliament. When a constitutional argument is made to advocate that the dissolution has been proved to be wrong, what is essentially being asked is a resort to some kind of "residual" powers, irrespective of the way it is phrased. Second, the Parliament was elected in May of 1999 and would have completed its five-year tenure even if it had not been dissolved. To a strict adherent of the letter of the law, the reinstatement of Parliament whose term has already expired should appear a bit problematic.

The argument for representative democracy essentially means that because of the militarization of the Nepali society—a result of the Maoist insurgency and the state's reaction to it—the democratic space at the center has been substantially narrowed, with the armed forces and the insurgents occupying the space, which rightfully belongs to the political parties. Reinstatement of the Parliament, the argument goes, will reinvigorate the center and reignite political activities in the hinterlands.

The expectation that the reinstatement will restore representative democ-

racy in any meaningful manner is unrealistic, at the least. Other than restoring the parliamentarians to their old jobs, the revival of the Pratinidhi Sabha will achieve little. It is unlikely that the restoration will bring changes in the current military strength of the state and the insurgents, nor will the insurgents pack their bags from the villages to make room for the reinstated parliamentarians. In other words, things will remain pretty much the same, with or without the 203 additional salary earners who will drain the treasury. (Speaker Ranabhat and Deputy Speaker Chitralekha Yadav never vacated their positions.) The MPs will be based either in Kathmandu or at their district headquarters.

If expected presence of the people's representatives in the grassroots is the real logic behind the call for reinstatement, one should be asking for reinstatement not of the Parliament but of the local bodies. But, based on the fate of the many local representatives nominated by Surya Bahadur Thapa's government, it is doubtful whether even that will change things much on the ground.

What should not be forgotten is that a comfortable majority of the previous Parliament—not only in terms of the number of MPs but also in terms of the popular vote of the 1999 elections—is represented in the current government.

That leaves us with the peace argument. That it is efficient to have the Parliament reinstated because the political parties can then have legitimate talks with the Maoists and take any major decision required to solve the insurgency. A lot is also being said about the moral superiority that the government formed by the Parliament will enjoy during talks with the Maoists and how the insurgents will have no other option but talk with the government chosen by the Parliament.

This argument, to say the least, is expecting too much from the political parties whose track records say otherwise. The shenanigans of the parliamentary parties have continued unabated even in these difficult times. The intra-party feud within the (reduced) Nepali Congress can be expected to surface as the date for the party's general convention (and the election of new president), which has now been scheduled for early March, draws near. The RPP is busy with its full-scale internecine fights. Already, there are fissures between the UML groups representing the faction in the government and the one outside.

It is naïve to expect that any of these parties will be any more responsible than their 14-year-old track record suggests. More naïve is the expectation that the Maoists will oblige the Parliament, an institution they have worked so hard to discredit.

The insurgency didn't happen due to the absence of an elected Parliament; it happened despite the elected Parliament. It is difficult to conclude that its reinstatement will have much of a dent on the problems at hand. If anything, our problems have their roots beyond the reinstatement. **N**



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**PICTURE PERFECT:** Photographer Ravi Manandhar receives the Gorkha Dakshin Bahu Chautho from King Gyanendra

## Pakistani premier

Shaukat Aziz, the visiting prime minister of Pakistan and chairman of SAARC, said that meaningful regional cooperation in South Asia was possible through institutionalizing development activities and resolving disputes. He said his country opposed any form of interference in the internal affairs of Nepal and was prepared to extend the military assistance that Nepal may require to fight terrorism. The Pakistani premier met King Gyanendra and Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. Aziz is on a South Asian tour as the chairman of SAARC. After his two-day visit, Aziz left for Bhutan, and is scheduled to visit India, Maldives and Sri Lanka.

## Maoist attacks

Gamgadhri, the headquarters of Mugu, is reported to be without communication links since the Maoist attack last Sunday, November 1. The 150-line telephone exchange system along with a dozen government offices and private houses rented out to NGOs were destroyed during the police-Maoist encounter. A former police constable who supplied rations to the security forces was injured in the attack. In a separate incident, Dunai Bazaar in Dolpa was facing a

power blackout after the rebels bombed a local power station. There were also reports of attacks on the district headquarters Humla and Jajarkot.

## Nepalis in Malaysia

As many as 10,000 Nepali workers based in Malaysia may be returning home soon. The Malaysian government had called on all illegal immigrant workers to leave the country before November 15. There are more than 200,000 Nepalis currently in Malaysia—some 10,000 of them are working illegally. Government officials said they didn't have any records of illegal workers in Malaysia. Illegal immigrants leaving the country before the November 15 deadline would not face prosecution, the Malaysian government said.

## Lottery system

The government suspended the lottery system for selecting workers headed for South Korea. The move allowed Lumbini Overseas to send 480 Nepalis already approved by Korean authorities. The Cabinet made the decision when Korean authorities threatened to cancel Nepal's labor quota for this year if the selected workers were not sent before November 5. Earlier, the Supreme Court had ordered the

employment agency to make the selection through lottery. Labor and Transport Minister Raghuj Pant recently visited South Korea in a bid to convince the Korean authorities to accept the lottery system, which he argued would stop employment agencies from demanding high fees from workers seeking employment overseas.

## Death in US

An unidentified group shot and killed a Nepali in the United States, Kantipur reported. Keshab L. Shrestha, 57, identified as a resident of Hetauda, was living in Texas with his family for the past four years. While in Hetauda, Shrestha published and edited a weekly newspaper Kurakani. The Federation of Nepali Journalists in Makawanpur condemned the killing.

## New calendar

Tribhuvan University is set to introduce a new academic calendar for certificate, diploma and masters levels, with effect from the academic year 2005-06. The new calendar would apply to the humanities and social sciences, management, law, education and science streams. The academic year begins from July-August. With the change in academic calendar, the system of summer and winter vacations has been brought to an end, and now there is a long vacation that falls between April and June. There are

no regular classes during this time and the TU will also be conducting examinations at all levels in the same period. The results are due three months after examinations.

## Red corner notice

At the request of the Nepali government, Interpol has issued "red-corner notices" against three more Maoist leaders—Dev Gurung, Dinanath Sharma and Top Bahadur Rayamajhi. Interpol has already issued similar notices against Maoist leaders Pushpa Kamal Dahal, alias Prachanda; Mohan Baidya, alias Kiran; and Baburam Bhattarai. Interpol requires member-countries to apprehend those on the "red-corner" list. Top Bahadur Rayamajhi, Dev Gurung and Baburam Bhattarai were members of the first and second peace talk teams representing the Maoists. The latest move comes at a time when the government has repeatedly asked the Maoists to join peace negotiations.

## Deusi in danger

Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur district administrations have banned traditional *deusi* and *bhailo* after 8 p.m. during the Tihar festival. They have also prohibited sales firecrackers, citing security reasons. Tihar begins this week with Kaag Puja on Wednesday, November 10.

## Nepali hostage

**Y**unus Kawaree, who was taken hostage in Baghdad on Monday, was released on Friday, November 5. Kawaree hails from Debpura, Dhanusha. He worked as a security guard at the offices of the Saudi Arabian Trading and Contracting

Company in the Mansour district of Baghdad. The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Prakash Sharan Mahat had left for the United Arab Emirates on Thursday to negotiate Kawaree's release. The minister was in the U.A.E. when the news of Kawaree's release broke.



### British compensation

In an out-of-court settlement, the British government paid Lal Budha, a 44-year-old ex-Gurkha, 55,000 pounds in a race discrimination case filed against the Ministry of Defense in Britain. Budha, who served in the British



Army for 24 years, was put on light duties after suffering from jaundice and hepatitis and had to get a liver transplant. He was discharged on medical grounds in 2002 but was allowed to stay on leave in Britain after his doctor argued that Nepal lacked the facilities to treat him. Budha had filed a discrimination case claiming that he was paid 38,000 pounds less during his career than what a British soldier in the same post would receive. Budha claimed the pension he received from the British army, of 95 pounds a month—a fifth of that a British soldier would get—was too little for him, his wife and two teenage children.

### Indian concern

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh expressed his concern over the growing nexus between Maoists in Nepal and left-wing extremist groups in India, Kantipur reported. Singh said that the Maoists in Nepal have become a major force and are trying to link up with left-wing extremist groups across the border. Nepali Maoists are said to have forged close ties with out-

lawed groups in India, including the Peoples' War Group. During Prime Minister Debu's visit to India in September, Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Sharan said that Maoist extremists represent a shared security threat to both countries.

### Torture victims

Not a single torture victim has received compensation from the government in the last eight years despite court rulings, said the Centre for Victims of Torture-Nepal. Various courts in the country have ordered the government to compensate those deemed to have been tortured; the amounts for compensation range from Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 100,000. Of the 145 cases registered in various courts in the country last year, seeking compensation for torture, only 55 cases have been decided. Of those the courts have ordered compensation in 19 cases. The Compensation Torture Act 2053 requires the chief district officer to provide compensation to torture victims, as ordered by a court, within 35 days.

### Sexual minorities

The Blue Diamond Society, known commonly as the BDS, which works for the rights of sexual minorities, has won an award instituted by a Bangkok-based gay Internet portal, the Indo-Asian News Service reported. BDS is one of the five recipients of the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Utopia Awards. The three-year-old organization has been chosen for its work to protect the health and rights of sexual minorities. The awarded will be presented to the organization in Bangkok on November 19. The organization has been targeted frequently for harassment by the police.

### Under arrest

Police arrested a senior Maoist leader in Teku, Sadhu Ram Devkota, alias Prasant. Prasant coordinates media and public relations for the Maoists in the Kathmandu Valley. He was arrested a day after two other Maoists activists were arrested in Itumbahal. The name and position of two other suspected Maoists are not known. Prasant has been a central committee member of the CPN-Maoist party since he became the president of the ANNISU-R, the Maoist student organization. Prasant has already been arrested once before this in 1998 but was released later.

### Death in Iraq

Former Indian Gurkha soldier Tikaram Gurung of Morang has been killed in late October in an ambush targeted against U.S. forces in Iraq, kantipuronline.com reported. Gurung had been working as a security guard in a U.S. army camp in Iraq for 14 months. This is the second death of an ex-Gurkha working as a security guard in Iraq.

### News blackout

Maoists in Rukum have restricted journalists from gathering news in five vil-

lages in the district, reports said. They have ordered journalists to seek their permission before reporting from Chubang, Mahad, Ranmamaikot, Pwang and Purtenkada. The Maoists have announced that journalists will not be allowed to leave the district headquarters for the villages without their permission.

### RPP split

The founding chairman of the RPP, Surya Bahadur Thapa, is leaving the party along with senior party leaders Kamal Thapa and Buddhi Man Tamang, though no formal announcements for a split have been made. The split came a week after Thapa had announced intentions to form "a new democratic force." Before deciding to call for the split, Thapa met with senior RPP leaders, the Party President Pashupati Shumsher Rana and former Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand, who had been assigned with the task of negotiating with the Thapa faction for reconciliation; but the differences proved too deep. Thapa and Rana have been at odds ever since pressure from Rana and others within the RPP forced Thapa to step down as prime minister.



ART APPRECIATION: NTB chairman Bhoj Raj Ghimire at a photo exhibition aimed at promoting new destinations in the country



# FM Initiative



The British Broadcasting Corporation's, World Service radio programming is now available here for the first time on FM. The BBC provides international news, analysis and information in English throughout the day on BBC 103 FM for Kathmandu Valley and surrounding areas. Nepali broadcasts on this service come in the form of news, which is broadcast for 30 minutes at 8:45 p.m. and for 15 minutes at 10:45 p.m. The BBC World Service is respected for providing impartial news and on-location reports with objectivity and accuracy. "This is great news," says Michel Lobelle, BBC World Service's business development manager for the Asia-Pacific, "as for the very first time the whole range of BBC World Service output will be available in perfect sound quality on FM to all listeners in the Kathmandu Valley."

The station being used for the broadcast belongs to Radio Nepal and is leased to the BBC. "This is a historic milestone in the long-standing partnership between Radio Nepal and the BBC," says the BBC's Lobelle. The number of BBC's listeners on its traditional short-wave broadcasts has been on the decline, and the broadcasting giant believes that making its programs available on FM is essential in meeting fierce competition from local and national stations. The World Service is broadcasted on FM stations in 139 countries to about 150 million listeners around the world each week, according to the BBC. FM broadcasts, which are easy to tune in and free from static, are expected to increase the BBC's listening audience in Nepal.

## EVEREST BEER'S NEW BRAND AMBASSADOR

Mt. Everest Brewery appointed Reinhold Messner as brand ambassador for Everest Premium Lager Beer. Messner was in Kathmandu for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the ascent of Mount Cho Oyu. The brewery launched its Everest Beer brand last year to commemorate the golden jubilee of the first successful ascent of Everest in 1953. The brewery says it plans to bring out a series of commemorative editions of Everest Beer over the coming years "in honor of the national and international heroes" who have reached the summit of the world's tallest peak. The brewery's involvement with Messner was in accordance with this policy. Messner, an accomplished mountaineer, rose to fame with his mountaineering exploits. He was the first to scale all 14 eight-thousand-meter peaks. Among his other accomplishments: the first solo ascent of Everest, the first ascent of Everest without the use of bottled oxygen and the first solo crossing of Antarctica.

## ADB LOAN FOR NEPAL

The Asian Development Bank has approved a loan of \$20 million for Nepal. This loan is provided with the aim of improving roads to promote sub-regional trade and transport. The project being funded by this loan has a total cost of \$26.7 million; the government will contribute the remaining \$6.7 million. The ADB aims to integrate the country's economy into the South Asian region by improving transport facilities and making trade management more efficient and effective. The project is aimed at improving connection roads from inland clearance depots on the southern border in Birganj and Bhairawa to main highways. These roads have been identified as two of six major sub-regional transports corridors that are choke points. According to the bank, a 12.4-km long stretch from the Birganj inland clearance depot to the Tribhuvan Highway will be upgraded to enable trucks and buses to avoid the congested Birganj and Jitpur market areas on the highway leading to Kathmandu and other parts of the country. The project will also build a new inland clearance depot of about 7.5 hectares at the major gateway of Kakarbita at the eastern border with India.

The ADB believes that Nepal's landlocked and fragmented terrain substantially hampers domestic and foreign commerce. As 90% of Nepal's foreign trade passes through India, Nepali trade goods have among the

highest transportation costs in the region, impeding the country's ability to make its export goods competitive and to expand foreign trade. The project, it is hoped, will go some way to reduce that cost by making transport more effective and efficient. The Ministry of Physical Planning and Works is responsible for the execution of the project, which is due for completion by December 2009.

## NEW AIRLINK TO KATHMANDU

Phuket Air, a private Thai airline, is planning to fly between Bangkok and Kathmandu. The airlines will operate three flights a week on the Bangkok-Kathmandu-Dubai route, starting from the first week of December.

## MCDOWELL'S FESTIVAL OFFER

McDowell's Nepal has a festival offer on its McDowell's Signature whiskey. It is offering a "festival double," a special festive pack with





two bottles of its Signature whiskey. The double pack is available at leading department stores and is available while stocks last.

### TOURIST ARRIVAL FIGURES

The number of tourists arriving in Nepal during October was 12 percent lower than the same period last year. According to figures provided by the Nepal Tourism Board, the number of tourists arriving during the month of October was 33,510, compared to 38,200 for the same month the year before. These figures are only for those tourists who arrived by air. The number of Indian tourists took a sharp plunge compared to figures from last year, decreased by 31 percent from 7,601 last October to 5,628 this year. The number of "third country tourists," those from countries other than India, dropped by 8 percent. While the number of tourists from the China, Japan and the United States has decreased, the month of October saw an increase in the number of tourists arriving from Australia, Germany, France, Spain, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Compared to this time last year, overall tourist figures have increased 15 percent.

### PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION

Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation and its in-flight magazine, Shangri-la, are organizing the Nepal Kaleidoscope Photography Competition 2004. The event is scheduled for December. The theme of the competition, says Shangri-la, is "to illustrate Nepal from the eyes of the photographer." The event will also feature a three-day exhibition. The first prize is Rs. 50,000 along with two return tickets to Bangkok. There will also be a special award for the "most promising photographer," who will receive Rs. 5,000 and an opportunity to hold a solo exhibition at Siddhartha Art Gallery.

### MAGIC MUNCH

Hulas Biscuits and Confectionaries is launching a new brand of biscuits— Magic Munch— in the market. The "sweet and salty" biscuit is available in a 90-gram pack.



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# LEADERSHIP MUDDLE

At 79, Koirala is reluctant to step down as NC president. As the party convention approaches, talk of alternative leadership is getting vociferous but is again likely to go nowhere.

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

**W**HILE NEPALI CONGRESS supremo Girija Prasad Koirala was in Beijing last week with his coterie, NC leaders aspiring to the party presidency geared up efforts back home to replace the septuagenarian. Since party rules limit a president to two terms, Koirala has said little about whether he wants to have another go at the presidency. His stalwarts, however, have spoken openly about amending party statutes to allow him to seek another term. As the party inches towards its March convention and the all-important presidential election, most senior NC members close to Koirala have kept mum about their own intentions. As usual, they are waiting for Koirala to make the first move.

Sushil Koirala, a Girija confidant who had announced his intention to run for

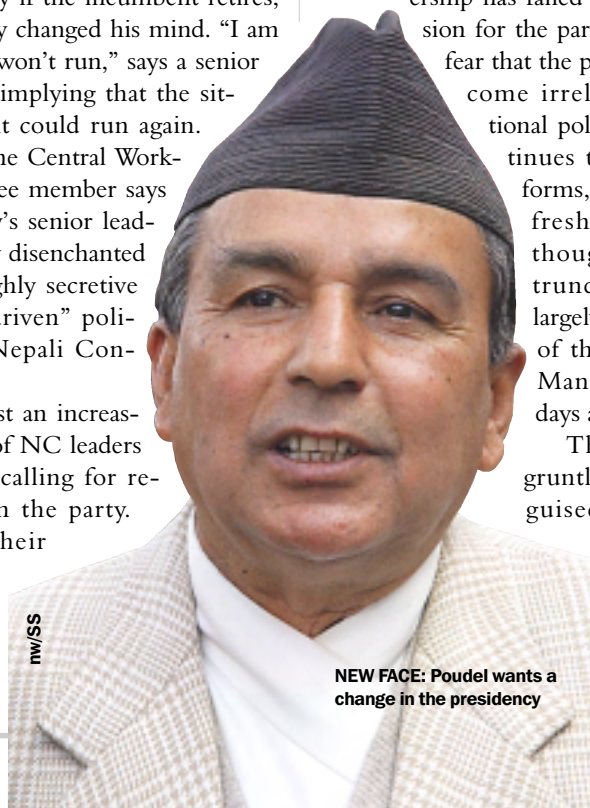
the presidency if the incumbent retires, has apparently changed his mind. “I am sure Sushilji won’t run,” says a senior party leader, implying that the sitting president could run again. More than one Central Working Committee member says that the party’s senior leaders are deeply disenchanted with the “highly secretive and family-driven” politics of the Nepali Congress.

But at least an increasing number of NC leaders are publicly calling for reforms within the party. One of their prime demands: a call to Koirala to hand over the party

leadership to the younger generation.

The call for alternative—and younger—leadership has long resonated within the party. But Koirala has so far been able to keep hold of the reins. Party insiders concede that the current leadership has failed to provide vision for the party. Some even fear that the party could become irrelevant in national politics if it continues to put off reforms, fails to inject fresh blood and thought, and trundles along largely at the whims of the Grand Old Man, whose own days are numbered.

Their disgruntlement is disguised in clever Congress-speak. “The talk inside the party is more about alternative



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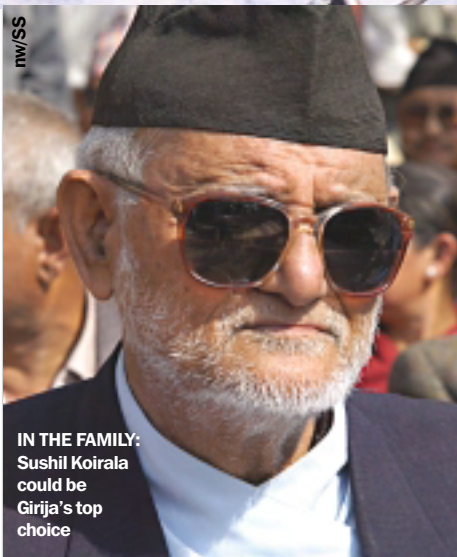
NEW FACE: Poudel wants a change in the presidency





**DO-IT-ALONE:** Shailaja has a standing but lacks a following

nu/ss



**IN THE FAMILY:** Sushil Koirala could be Girija's top choice

leadership, than about new-generation leadership," says central committee member Narahari Acharya. Koirala will once again be asked by his reform-minded colleagues not to personalize the party "as the Gandhi family did in India." Famously, the party refused to buy Koirala's argument that the recent Supreme Court summons against him was an insult to the entire party.

As significant as the move was to party-watchers, challenges to Koirala's leadership in began long ago. The party's 10<sup>th</sup> convention in Pokhara in January 2001 showed that Koirala's control would not go uncontested: Sher Bahadur Deuba emerged as a powerful dissenter. Although Deuba lost to Koirala in the contest for the party presidency, the political symbolism was immense. Their growing rivalry eventually split the party.

The March convention will be another difficult battle for Koirala. At 79, Koirala shows no sign of stepping down; even if he decides not to run for president again he certainly will want to retain an iron grip over the party, and if the presidency has to go to someone else, Koirala will want to be the one to choose his successor.

As of now, the obvious choice seems to be cousin Sushil Koirala, though the rest of the Koirala family circle seems to be pushing Girija to go for one more term, even if that means amending the party rules. There are several other young Turks waiting in the wings: Sashank Koirala, B.P. Koirala's son and a medical doctor, has finally made a grand entry into politics, and Girija's own daughter, Sujata, has shown that she is capable of active backroom maneuvers, although she clearly lacks a popular base. Niece Shailaja Acharya, however, is a leader in her own right with decades of active politics under her belt.

The huge irony of Nepali politics is that the Nepali Congress, which never tires of chest-thumping and referring to itself as the country's only party with a democratic history, severely lacks intra-party democracy. As far as its major decisions at the center go, the party has been reduced to a one-man show. Senior leaders who were once mentored by Koirala himself deeply resent the tendency for dynastic politics that they see in the Koirala family. "With all the claims of a democratic leader and despite having a proud history of working as a pro-democracy fighter," says a Central Working Committee leader, "Girija Prasad

Koirala has shown that none of his democratic claims translate from rhetoric to action. So much for his history." Despite repeated requests to come out in the open with that comment, the central committee member, however, chose to remain anonymous. His sharp criticism makes it clear that many party leaders think they could do better.

As of now, three leaders are all set to go ahead with their candidacies for the party's top job: Shailaja Acharya, Sushil Koirala and Ram Chandra Poudel. Few inside the party take Shailaja or Sushil seriously as reformists, calling their claims for party presidency a stage-managed family drama. "Wait and see, she is going to withdraw her candidacy at some point," says the CWC member who chooses to remain anonymous, "and Girija Prasad Koirala will be the only candidate of stature left in the race."

Many party insiders see Poudel as a strong candidate. A moderate and a reformer, he is seen as a less polarizing force compared to Koirala, and he may have enough influence to bring the NC and the breakaway NC-D together. Once elevated to the post of deputy prime minister, he resigned in July 2001 over his differences with the then Prime Minister Koirala—a principled stand, rare in Nepali politics. "It is ridiculous to say that there is no alternative to Girija Prasad Koirala for the post of party president," Poudel told reporters in Palpa last week.

Senior NC leaders privately say that they are considering offering a platform where all party workers and leaders who oppose Koirala's dynastic politics can demonstrate their resistance. But they are extremely reluctant to offer any specifics; they may be fearful, fickle or both. "We are still discussing various possibilities," says a central committee member. "It's still too early to tell the whole story." Not even Poudel has made it clear what sort of reforms he intends to introduce.

The prime agenda for the convention will be constitutional monarchy, restructuring of the state and constituent assembly, says the central committee's Narhari Acharya. "Anyone offering the vision to lead the party on the back of these pressing issues is likely to win the presidency." And if the history of the Congress is anything to go by, that could easily be the Grand Old Man himself, Girija Prasad Koirala. **N**



# FLYING HIGH

Cosmic Air's first jet aircraft has arrived; another will soon follow. Industry buzz says the jets aren't financially sustainable, but Cosmic isn't worried.

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

**C**OSMIC AIRLINES SURPrised everyone late last month when it introduced the country's first privately operated jet aircraft and flew it on domestic routes. Travelers took note of both the plane and the low promotional fares, but other airlines just seemed perplexed.

Cosmic operated its jet in the Kathmandu-Biratnagar, Kathmandu-Nepalgunj and Kathmandu-Bhairawaha routes. The fares during its launch were priced 30 percent cheaper. The buzz about cheaper flights has taken the travel agencies and ticketing agents by storm, with countless telephone enquiries from would-be travelers. Travel agents say people even from lower-income groups who normally travel by bus have come for enquiries. The travel industry seems excited about the prospects of doing good business with the advent of jets in the domestic sector.

Most people who have frequently traveled by turboprop planes say they find it tempting to switch over to jets. The word jet itself excites many. For





people who haven't traveled abroad, the jet is a novelty many would consider having a go at. But it's the prospect of cheaper fares, should those be possible, that could potentially transform flying in Nepal.

"Cosmic is the first to introduce jets," says Hemanta Aryal, an engineer and a columnist who keeps a close tab on aviation issues. "This is good news. However, it remains to be seen how long they can continue the service."

With excitement about jets in the domestic routes, there is also apprehension being expressed about its sustainability. And people are already asking how far this can go.

Cosmic's rivals question the rationale and the economics, arguing that the jets are too expensive to operate and maintain to be profitable on Nepal's short domestic routes.

Even so, Cosmic's promotional pricing for the routes the jet is currently flying has triggered a price war among private airlines: Cosmic and Yeti Airlines have both slashed their fares during the festival season. More importantly, Yeti has also announced it will acquire jets.

Buddha Air, another leading airline, is also feeling the pinch: It has cut back on the number of flights. The airline used to operate eight flights to Biratnagar daily, but last week Buddha only operated six or seven flights. Buddha Air officials say that they are adopting a "wait and see" approach and that they won't bring down fares. But they have offered double frequent-flyer miles on some routes.

Buddha and other airlines say the fare cuts by Cosmic is just a "promotional gimmick." They point out that the low fares are only available for a limited time period and don't necessarily apply to all seats on the plane. The costs of operating flights now, with very high oil prices, have gone up, not down, they say. "It is not a sustainable fare," says Buddha Air Marketing Manager Rupesh Joshi. "Jets don't make sense for Nepal's domestic sector. It's like driving a Ferrari on Kathmandu's bumpy streets."

There is some question whether jet flights in the domestic sector make sense, but Cosmic may not intend to continue the practice once it begins its regional flights to Dhaka and New Delhi. "This jet is not intended for the domestic sec-

tor," says Aryal, the aviation expert. Many others agree that Cosmic is getting the feel for the aircraft in the domestic sector before becoming a regional airline. "It seems to be just a test ride for the crew," says a pilot.

Cosmic may just be trying to shake up the market, but that may turn out to be blessing in disguise. In the long run, big planes may replace smaller ones, at least in the profitable routes like Biratnagar, Nepalgunj and Pokhara thanks to economies of scale.

Conspiracies and scams in the aviation sectors are not uncommon; neither are conspiracy theories. This is not the first time Nepali private air operators have touted jet aircraft. Shady companies like Air Nepal International and Nepal Transcontinental Freight Freighter Services made deals for jets but never operated them. Observers say that those were just scams to dupe banks and investors. But Yeti Airlines has already announced plans to bring its own jets. That's no scam: It's a clear sign of cutthroat competition coming to Nepal's airline industry, though the competition in the past has driven many airlines out of business.





EXPANSION: Yeti is also planning jet flights



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## JET HISTORY

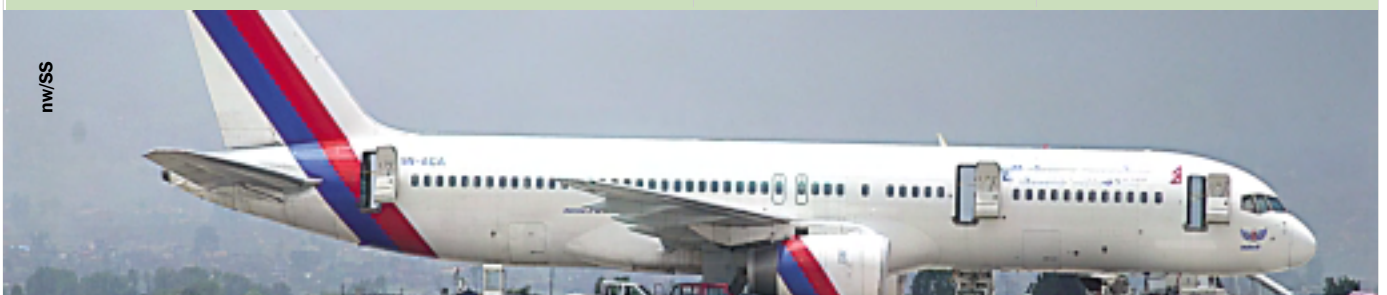
The advent of reliable jet aircraft such as the Boeing 707 and the Douglas DC-8 in the late 1950s started a new era in commercial aviation, the “jet age.” The new planes offered more comfort, higher speeds and less expense

than piston-engine aircraft on long routes. Until the 1960s American airlines used jets only for medium and long distances, such as between New York and Chicago (1,140 kilometers). Jets of that era didn’t have much appeal on shorter routes: high fuel con-

sumption made them profitable only over longer distances.

New technology like fanjet engines changed the scene forever. New jets consume much less fuel; even the maintenance cost is lower. Aircraft manufacturing giants like Boeing and Airbus took lessons from pioneer Caravelle, a French company that built sleek

twin-engine aircraft. Boeing’s 727 and Airbus’ 310 aircraft were designed for medium distances; they have proven phenomenally profitable. But even in the United States and Europe, smaller planes with turboprop engines are often used for short flights: Most flights between New York and Boston (300 kilometers, farther than Kathmandu to Biratnagar) are turboprops, for example. **N**



nw/SS





The closure of Necon Air last year shocked both the financial and aviation sectors. Necon was considered a success story of Nepali entrepreneurship. Few people knew the company had financial problems. With Necon's closure, banks, shareholders, the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal and the Nepal Oil Corporation lost millions of rupees. Necon owes Rs. 20 million to the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal for landing and parking charges and another Rs. 20 million to the Nepal Oil Corporation.

Necon was the first Nepali private airline to operate regional flights, and its decade-long survival had given the im-

pression that the company was here to stay. Aviation experts say that Necon's finances came under strain when the company brought ATR-42 aircraft to replace its aging Avros. ATRs are sophisticated and expensive aircraft; Necon's move came at just the wrong moment, when the volume of tourist arrivals fell precipitously. Observers say that Necon bought the new planes and took up regional routes on a whim, without giving much thought to the economics. It also had plans to establish a jet fleet.

Many blame the regional flights for Necon's bust. Necon operated two flights from Biratnagar to Calcutta and

two flights on the Kathmandu-Patna and Kathmandu-Varanasi routes. Even with aircraft that had much lower operating and maintenance costs than jets, Necon couldn't sustain its regional or domestic flights. The cost of operation became so high that the company was grounded forever. Experts doubt that Cosmic can succeed either. "Only those with deep pockets can afford to operate jets in the domestic sector before they become financially viable, if at all," says Hemanta Aryal.

Retired pilot Man Bahadur Gurung, who was among the first to fly the RNAC's early jets, agrees with Aryal. He and pilots who have experience flying jets



# Private Airlines

**W**ith the implementation of the open sky policy in 1993, Nepali private airlines began operating domestic flights. Initially Necon Air, Everest Airlines and Nepal Airlines ran domestic flights to Pokhara, the cities of Tarai and mountain destinations. Today 13 private airlines are in operation or soon to come on-line. Many have also applied for permission to operate international flights.

The government so far has issued international Air Operation Certificates to five of them. Only Necon has crossed the borders though, and only for a short time before going out of business.

Necon Air, Mountain Air and half a dozen other private airlines squandered billions of rupees borrowed from banks and raised from shareholders. The reason for their doom: They were poorly managed. Airlines require millions of

dollars to purchase or lease aircraft and set up ground operations. Being an international airline means paying thousands of dollars per flight for gate and ground fees and for aviation fuel. Experts say no private

company can afford that unless flights operate at 70 percent of the plane's capacity or higher. Until now, domestic operators in Nepal had not taken the risk of operating jet aircraft. **N**



**GROUNDING:** Necon went bust

doubt that jets are sustainable in a small and mountainous country like Nepal. "It is good to introduce jets," he says, "but one should also keep in mind that they have high operating costs." Senior pilots say that short routes can't take advantage of the benefits jets offer. "Jets are economically rewarding on long routes," says T.P. Gauchan, a senior aeronautical engineer who worked on the RNAC's first B-727 in its early days. "Even difficult terrain can be compensated for by distance." But there are no long routes in Nepal.

Jets perform best when they are at high altitudes and when the distances are long. Higher altitudes allow them to cruise with less air resistance, which saves a lot of fuel. While in India, the United States or China internal flights can take long hours, in Nepal the longest flight is barely 45 minutes. Operators in those countries reap the benefits

from the fuel efficiency of jets. "In Nepal, it's time to descend even before reaching the desired cruising altitude," says Aryal.

The problem is not just short routes. Pilots say domestic airports are ill equipped to handle jets during the rainy season. Even at Tribhuvan International Airport, there could be a space crunch. Airline experts say if more domestic airlines acquire jets, the domestic apron at TIA will soon run out space. Jets also require longer runways. Pilots say there are inherent dangers of overrunning the runway, especially during rainy season and during winter when the visibility is poor.

Others doubt that jets could ever be the mode of mass transit in Nepal, for other reasons too.

Apart from lower operating costs, the turboprop aircraft in use now seat from 15 to 40 passengers. Experts say planes of that

size are well suited to Nepal's needs. Since airlines only operate profitably when planes fly 70 to 100 percent full, larger planes are a risk. And, say the experts, jets may not even be faster than the current generation of planes in use, since they never reach cruising speed on short flights. "By the time passengers are boarded and a jet takes off, a turboprop could be half way to the destination," says Gauchan.

Despite the doom and gloom from other airlines, Cosmic Air isn't the least bit worried. Cosmic managers say the Fokker 100, the aircraft it has chosen, is the jet best suited for small airports and short routes. They also say the Fokker consumes less fuel per passenger mile than the smaller turboprop aircraft, like those operating now in Nepal; they also claim that it is more reliable.

And the heart of Cosmic's argument for sustainability is that domestic sector is growing, given that ground travel is becoming slower and more difficult. Providing an affordable alternative will help expand the domestic aviation market dramatically, particularly if fares can be kept low. Low fares will certainly bring flying within the reach of a whole new group of travelers. Even officials of rival airlines concur with that economics: "Cheaper fares have helped expand the market," says Buddha Air's Joshi. Travelers certainly agree.

"I would rather fly in a jet than travel by bus," says Khagendra Niroula, a computer entrepreneur and frequent traveler from Biratnagar to Kathmandu. "If the fare gets cheaper," he adds. Travelers find the current holiday fares attractive—Rs. 1,990 to Biratnagar in less than an hour. A bus journey from Biratnagar to Kathmandu costs approximately Rs. 500 plus some Rs. 200-300 on snacks and food. The journey may take 15 hours or more with annoying security checks along the way. Many like Niroula would like to switch to flying to avoid the backbreaking overland trip. Cosmic is as enthused about their jet as the passengers are, but there is still uncertainty about the sustainability of jets in domestic sector.

The most important question is whether airlines can afford to keep the fares low enough for long enough to expand the market and still reap profits. For all of Cosmic's optimism, only time will tell. **N**

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# BUSH WINS, THE

The world cannot ignore the US, simply because it is the most powerful nation. The onus now lies on President Bush to bridge the divide he created in his first term.

**BY SUMAN PRADHAN**

**I**T'S OVER. THANKFULLY, MERCIFULLY, over. The nail-biting U.S. elections, which so mesmerized the world, threw up a clear verdict. George W. Bush will remain America's president for four more years.

Angry? Disgusted? Pessimistic? You are not the only one. Half of America is too. But this country, which believes in moving on, is beginning to do just that. All the post-election media coverage has hammered home the need to accept the verdict and move on to four more years of President Bush.

You could almost hear the huge collective sigh of relief all over America as the hotly contested and bitterly partisan election delivered a clear verdict within 24 hours of closing. No one wanted a

repeat of 2000 when Bush won the Electoral College votes—which actually elects the president—without winning the popular vote, and that too on a decision of the Supreme Court. This time, President Bush has the satisfaction of winning not just the popular vote but also the legitimacy that comes with it. It may not be a decisive mandate—because America is still a bitterly divided nation—but Bush now has the clear popular backing.

The story of how Bush won and his Democratic challenger John Kerry lost is going to keep America busy for some time. But for the rest of the world, the question is, how different will a second Bush presidency be? Will he stick with the same unilateralism that so defined his first term and riled the world? Or will he try to reach out, soothing ruffled

feathers through smooth diplomacy? The jury is out.

To begin with, America's foreign policy priorities will remain the same: stabilization of Iraq and Afghanistan, continued war on terrorism, and vigorous efforts to rein in the nuclear ambitions of North Korea and Iran. Consequently, Bush may stick to his first-term approach, reading the election victory as a mandate to continue in the same manner. Indeed that is what he said in his first press conference after winning reelection. "I earned political capital on the campaign, and I now am going to spend it on what I told the people I would spend it on...finding [terrorists] and winning the war on terrorism." Blunt talk, there.

But Bush also realizes that he will need international support in meeting his foreign policy objectives, particularly on Iraq and terrorism issues. At the same press conference, he also said, "We're fighting a continuing war on terror...We'll stay strong and resolute.

Every civilized country also has an interest in the outcome of this war. Whatever our past differences, we have a common enemy. I will continue to reach out to our friends and allies, our partners in NATO and the EU to encourage freedom and democracy as alternative to repression and terror."

The statement does not say much about approach because it can be interpreted either way. Much will be clearer once Bush shakes up his cabinet. The Secretary of State Colin Powell has already made it clear that he wants to quit. And the fate of Donald Rumsfeld, the secretary of defense who most blame for the Iraq quagmire, is unclear. But some commentators here think that Bush is more likely to change

his approach in the second term, now that he is free of the pressures of re-election and pandering to his support base. "Bush aides have signaled that they expect a less ambitious second term, in part because the military is already stretched in Afghanistan and Iraq," wrote *The Washington Post* a day after the president was re-elected.

That probably means the doctrine of pre-emption will be put on hold, much to the world's relief. The motivations are simple. Even Republicans admit that the United States is currently in a quagmire in Iraq. The Middle East is still just as dangerous and volatile, and nuclear tensions with North Korea and Iran have made America less secure than before. These are clear failures of U.S. foreign policy. The United States therefore needs the support and aid of the world more than ever to avoid being stuck in the mud in Iraq and on nuclear proliferation issues. This motivation could prove powerful enough to force a realis-

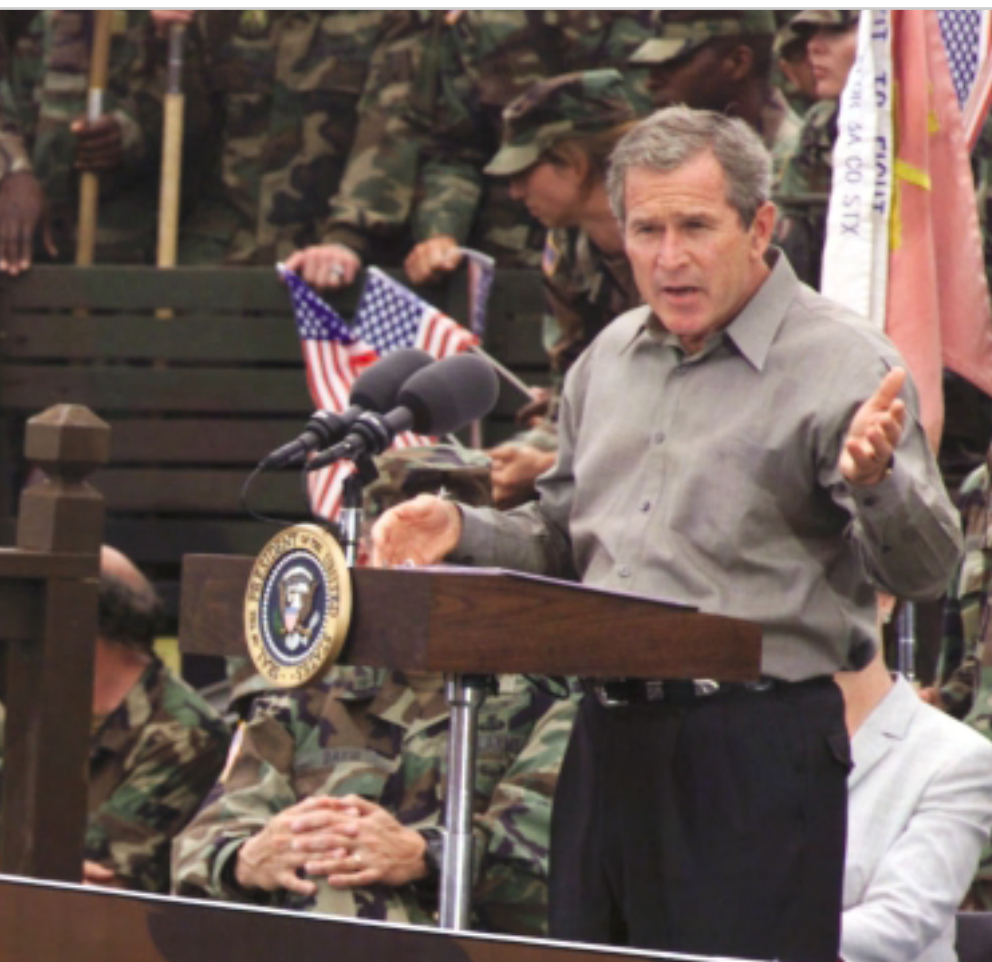
tic re-think in U.S. foreign policy. It could propel Bush to seek more accommodation with the international community, and that, in turn, requires smooth-edged diplomacy, not the "my way or the highway" rhetoric of the first term.

#### US-SOUTH ASIA TIES

The other priority—defeating al-Qaeda and its brand of global terrorism—means that the United States is going to remain involved in Afghanistan and South Asia. On this score, there may be fewer reasons for Bush to change course since the United States and its allies have been generally successful in the war against Islamic terrorism, the failure to capture Osama bin Laden notwithstanding. Bush will continue his close relations with Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf because he needs the latter's help in Afghanistan and against al-Qaeda. But that will not stop the United States from developing closer ties with India, a country which is not only vital for regional stability but also becoming increasingly crucial for America's own economic prosperity. Many large American companies now outsource technology services to India, and this trend will only grow. And the two countries share similar views on terrorism, particularly Islamic terrorism. This only means one thing: The United States will not risk angering India and will generally refrain from being involved in Kashmir. It will also be careful not to increase its involvement in Nepal much beyond current levels. For the United States, Nepal is too marginal a country to risk antagonizing an important regional player.

America's misadventure in Iraq and its war on terrorism necessitate greater U.S. involvement in dealing with the root cause of Islamic terrorism: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But despite making lofty promises in his first term, Bush has remained conspicuously absent from the Middle East peace process, much to the chagrin of his European allies. There are signs that this could now change, not the least due to the illness of Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat—a man the Bush administration detests. And Bush knows that to get more international financial and other assis-

# WORLD WAITS





tance on Iraq and its war on terror, it will need the support of its European and other allies who want a renewed focus on the Middle East peace process. Arafat's departure from the scene is both a risk and an opportunity for U.S. policy in the Middle East. The Europeans are also needed in dealing with Iran's nuclear ambitions. This is

one area where the Bush administration could continue to hold on to its doctrine of pre-emption, but many analysts think it will pass the actual job to Israel.

**INTERDEPENDENT WORLD**

In the end, both America and the world need each other. America can-

not remain isolated in an increasingly interdependent world where a terrorist threat across the seven seas could affect its own borders. And the world cannot ignore America, simply because it is the most powerful nation on earth. But the onus lies on Bush to bridge the divide created by his first term. **N**

# Little Hope

Most Nepali illegal immigrants hang on to the US in the hopes of making enough money to send back home. They fear four years of Republican rule is going to be tough for them

**BY SUMAN PRADHAN**  
IN NEW YORK

**A**run Basnet, a restaurant worker in Manhattan, arrived in New York City in 1998 to attend a seminar. But rather than return home, the 30-year-old stayed back and disappeared in the vastness of America's most vibrant and diverse city. Today, Arun is an illegal "alien," though he is working his way towards the all-important Green Card. The card is a ticket to living and working legally in the United States.

Like the rest of the world, Arun avidly followed the recent U.S. presidential elections. If he could only vote, he says, he would have voted for Democratic Party challenger John Kerry. "The Democrats are good to us immigrants," says Arun. "All recent immigrants want the Democrats to win." Unfortunately for him, Kerry lost. He now faces four more years of a Republican administration determined to stem the flow of illegal immigration to the United States. He fears that four years of Republican rule is going to be very tough for illegal immigrants like him.

Thousands of other illegal immigrants are pondering the same future now. By most accounts, Nepali illegal immigrants living in New York City alone numbers



around 20,000. Most illegal aliens prefer New York because you don't need a car—hence a drivers' license—to live and work in the city. In most other parts of the United States, a car is a must and a driving license is impossible for those without legal status.

Most Nepali immigrants work in low-paying service sector jobs in restaurants and stores in New York City. They hang on to America in the hopes of making enough money to send back home. Along the way, many decide to stay for good and aim to bring their families to the United States. But there is a problem. Though America is a land of immigrants (it's only a question of who, or whose ancestors, arrived when), recent arrivals, especially illegals, face a daunting life.

"It's not easy living illegally in America," says another Nepali immigrant Satish Lama. "You live in cramped and crowded apartments in dangerous neighborhoods, and you

work like a dog just to make a meager living." The only ticket out of this quagmire is a Green Card, which opens the way for better paying jobs and the chance to fly back home without the fear of being impounded on return.

The reason most of these immigrants support the Democrats is because they are seen as being soft on immigration. The Democratic candidate Kerry advocated a plan, which would have provided illegal immigrants a chance to receive a Green Card after five years of arrival, even if they live here illegally. The last Democratic president, Bill Clinton, in fact, signed a law in December 2000, which allowed all illegals who could find employers to apply for work permits and Green Cards within a six-month period. It was a kind of amnesty for people like Arun. "I applied within the stipulated time and now have a work permit. Hopefully I will get my Green Card soon," he says.

Most others are not as lucky. They arrived after the amnesty pe-

riod was over, and as a result face difficult prospects. Many of these Nepalis say that the Republicans are tough on illegal immigrants. Though it would be difficult to smoothly run America's economic gears without the service provided by illegal immigrants, stemming the flow of illegal aliens is a major political issue.

It is a particular concern of the Bush administration that sees illegal immigration from neighboring Mexico as a big problem. Consequently, even before the elections, the president proposed that instead of providing a ticket to a Green Card or citizenship, these aliens be given a work permit for three years. Though that would provide them a means to live and work legally in the United States; all such "guest workers" would have to leave at the end of the three-year period.

The measure, understandably, is unpopular among illegal immigrants. But many Americans see wisdom in it. "The Democratic policy is self-defeating," says an American student. "It gives incentive for people to come and live in the United States illegally in the hopes of getting a Green Card eventually after five years. The Republican policy is more realistic. Right now, hundreds of Mexicans die trying to cross our borders for the lack of an effective policy. At least that will stop once they can get a legal means to enter the United States and work here for three years."

Sounds sensible, but doesn't address the fears of the millions of illegal immigrants who already live and work in America. **N**

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# THE REMEMBERED PAST

We imagine Kathmandu's past as eternally same, almost separate from history. And mythical.

BY ADITYA ADHIKARI

**T**HERE WAS SOME EXCITEMENT in Kathmandu recently when a German-turned-Norwegian, Sugata (adopted Buddhist name), revealed the hundreds of photographs he had taken of the Kathmandu Valley and of the Kaligandaki region in the late 1950s. Most people who grew up in Kathmandu would probably find the images depicting their city the most interesting.

Photographic documentation of the Kathmandu Valley before the 1970s is scarce. So we crave images of our city's past, and there is excitement when images we never knew existed are revealed. And those black and white prints that show clusters of people untouched by foreign influence, in clothes and among buildings of their own making, seem inexplicably mysterious to us. Sugata's pictures—of the Macchendra-nath, of gatherings on the steps of temples at Basantpur, of the performances of Hindu rituals—we are told, are from the 1950s but they seem so much further removed from us in time. They could as well have been from the 1940s. Or the 30s or the 20s. Or even from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Of pictures of Kathmandu public life, excluding those that depict well-known historical events, like the cremation of King Tribhuvan, or of the palaces of the ruling elite, we have no means of knowing precisely what time period such photos belong to.

The lack of photographs from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century does not alone account for our inability to distinguish between different decades. Customs, clothing and architecture changed far slower in Kathmandu than they did in lands with



Jaya Prakash Malla and Taleju Bhawani



Communal life in a baha

the

tremendous changes affecting world history. While it is foolhardy to suggest that no cultural (as opposed to political) changes occurred in the Kathmandu of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, one can

argue that not even a fraction of the change that took place in Europe, China or India took place here.

That Prithvi Narayan Shah did not bring any changes to the cultural life of

Paintings from: Hari Prasad Sharma's "Kathmandu Valley Down the Ages: Glimpses from the Ancient and Medieval Past"



Kathmandu is well known. The urban society of the Kathmandu Newars was so vastly superior to what he had ever seen that he thought it best to leave it as it was.

When foreign influence, primarily British, increased in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, only the ruling elite, eager to grab the clothes, clocks and buildings of the Europeans, were affected. The lives of the subjects continued more or less along traditional lines.

Ours was a culture that until relatively recently believed that truth had been revealed millennia ago, that the best social organization did not stray from the traditional order to better embody the old laws. Look at the principles of our traditional art and architecture: The meaningful works were those that emulated the iconography of the canonical treatises as taught to the artist by his teacher.

So we have carvings of the Buddha that show the same series of gestures—depicting contemplation, blessings or benevolence—time after time. The modern artist seeking to show how he feels, with his conception of art as self-expression, would have been considered a megalomaniac or a madman. Who cares what an individual thinks or feels when there are other more important truths to comprehend? Without tradition, such works were condemned as the work of men who came with their materials to paint a picture on the air (*ākāśē rūpam likheyya* says the *Majjhima-Nikāya*).

No doubt there are variances in the styles of different ages and the conventions used to express them, but stylistic changes in traditional customs and art have occurred at an imperceptible pace—nothing like the rapid changes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century west where even decades are characterized by styles.



Though buildings like Singha Durbar or the whitewashed section of the Hanuman Dhoka Palace existed at that time, in imitation of Versailles and Edwardian England, they differ radically from indigenous styles and look clumsy and incongruous with their surroundings.

And the ugly modernity of our current buildings and streets that sacrifice aesthetics to utility are unable to captivate us as well. We need them, but like the very cameras that captured the images that we so crave, like the idea of progress itself, our current architecture and planning are based on imported principles, which we still fail to understand completely. It is this failure that is partially responsible for the execrable urban mess that Kathmandu is today.

So, with all our new things and ideas, we look with nostalgia—romantic, perhaps, but nonetheless sincere—at the past as a cleaner, simpler time. When we visit exhibitions of photographs like Sugata’s, we seek a momentary transformation to that earlier period. I think it is safe to say there are certain fantasies of Kathmandu’s past that everyone who grew up in this city shares, and we seek expression of these fantasies in any display showing images of the past.

But the camera is a cold eye: It is a good, unsentimental observer, which does not penetrate into what it observes. The black and white prints of an early era excite but do not satisfy our craving.

For satisfaction we look elsewhere. The foremost expressionist of these collective fantasies is the painter Hari Prasad Sharma. At his exhibition “Kathmandu Valley Down the Ages,” held a few years ago, Kathmanduites found expression of their past and everyone was delighted. Appetite whetted by the miniature reproductions of Sharma’s paintings in the newspapers, everyone hurried to the exhibit, and eyes lit up in spontaneous joy at the sight of the paintings. Clearly the joy was in the recognition that someone else had realized some of their own dreams.

The paintings are now available in booklet with the subtitle “Glimpses from the Ancient and Medieval Past.” This is somewhat of a misnomer, as the words

“medieval” and “ancient” are used almost interchangeably. These are words taken from the history of Europe and then applied to our own, and the categorization of Nepali time periods into medieval and ancient are arbitrary. The medieval way of life could very well extend into the 20<sup>th</sup> century: The painting “Communal Life in a Baha” depicts a bustling town square with a *chaitya* at its center. Artisans are busy at work, women are busy carrying water to their houses, and animals wander about. This could have been a scene from Bhaktapur 50 years ago. No doubt the houses are in much better shape in the painting than they have been in recent history, and the clothing clearly speaks of a different time, giving us an impression of an undefined distant past, but the scene is hardly medieval, if we take medieval to mean the years between 500 and 1500 A.D.

On the other hand the painting “Mahabhinishkraman,” depicting Prince Siddhartha looking at his sleeping wife and child before running away, could rightly be said to represent an ancient event, if his palace, with all its win-

dows, walls and doors, wasn’t distinctive of Malla period architecture.

Our past then. Imagination here has fed on the art and architecture of our old city centers and has compressed the scene depicting the *baha* and the event from Buddha’s life into a single era. The classifications of modern historiography may have a place in our minds, but haven’t been able to capture our hearts. We imagine Kathmandu’s past as eternally same, almost separate from history. And mythical. It is hardly surprising that we, a people with so many myths, have an image of the past, easily allowing gods, goddesses and demons to enter into our visions of the old city.

Among Sharma’s paintings we find the last Malla king, Jaya Prakash Malla (really so close to us in history, but so far from us in mind), at a dice game with the goddess Taleju Bhawani. Everyone knows the outcome of this game. This story, which can only be considered myth, is so much more familiar to us than actual events that took place under this king’s reign. And so much closer to our hearts, so much more pleasant to our imaginations. **N**

## The camera is a cold eye: It is a good, unsentimental observer



# CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC

The ceasefire opened a window of hope; the residents of Dolakha converged for the two-day festival in numbers far exceeding the past few years, when fear had kept many at home

BY SARA SHNEIDERMAN AND MARK TURIN IN DOLAKHA

**D**ASHAIN HAS LONG BEEN bittersweet for the Thangmi population of Dolakha's villages. On Vijaya Dashami, instead of receiving *tika* from family and celebrating at home, two Thangmi men must make the trek from the village of Dumkot to Dolakha Bazaar, where they strip down to loincloths and drink the fresh blood of a buffalo calf sacrificed in the Devikot temple courtyard. By drinking the blood, the Thangmi are believed to clear the way for Newar fighters to win the battle against evil in the Khadga Jatra festival, which takes place on the following day. This dramatic ritual has traditionally brought Dolakha's diverse inhabitants together in a quintessentially local celebration that highlights the economic and cultural interdependence of the region's ethnic peoples.

This year, a tangible feeling of relief hung in the air thanks to the Dashain ceasefire called by both the Maoists and the government. Since establishing political and combat operations in Dolakha in 1998, the Maoists have taken control of most valleys in the district, while at the same time the government and security forces maintain a strong presence in the district headquarters of Charikot. Although the area has thankfully not seen a major battle, minor skirmishes occur regularly. Casualties on both sides have been significant, and where village conversations at this time of the year were once focused on the rice harvest and

buffalo sacrifices, now political speculation dominates. The news of a ceasefire opened a window of hope, and Dolakha residents from villages as well as the towns converged for the two-day festival in numbers far exceeding the past few years, when fear had kept many at home.

As we traveled through the villages close to Dolakha Bazaar, we noted a cautious optimism as farmers spoke of their hopes for the future. Despite the insurgency, the past several years have brought concrete improvements in the standard of living for those villagers within a two-day walk from the town. An agricultural road that runs between Dolakha Bazaar and Singati market has become fully operational in the last year, and an impressive number of village homes are now lit by hydro-electricity.

The Dolakha-Singati road was not always a winning proposition. Funded by GTZ and the Norway World Food Programme, construction began in 1998. Local laborers were contracted to build the road through a food for work scheme, but thanks to corruption and mismanagement much of the promised rice was received late or was so infested with weevils that it was only fit for livestock. Worse still, farmers whose property was taken for the new road were never compensated for the land they lost.





For subsistence agriculturalists who squeeze out grain from every square meter just to make enough to feed their families for six months, the loss of land was a major blow.

At the time, villagers organized protests in Charikot demanding payment and threatened to blockade the road when it opened. But now that the road is functional, with several Rolwaling Yatayat buses plying the route every day, attitudes have changed. Few villagers choose to pay the Rs. 10 to ride the bus when they can reach their destination in more or less the same time by foot, but many people with whom we spoke still believe the road to be a positive development. Why? Because in medical emergencies they can move sick or injured people more efficiently to the Gauri Shankar Hospital in Dolakha, now staffed with a well-trained medical team from the Model Hospital in Kathmandu.

The heavy pylons and wiring necessary for electrification were also more easily transported by road. Soon after last

year's Dashain festivities, several VDCs were electrified for the first time from a hydropower station located just west of Charikot. Having installed a meter box and the wiring set-up of their choice, village households can now have lights and power sockets to power radios and sewing machines for a minimum charge of Rs. 80 a month. Some extended families living in close proximity have opted to pool resources and wire several houses off one meter box, so that each household need pay only Rs. 20 or so per month—a manageable charge even for poor families. Villagers commented that electric light at night has led to a noticeable decrease in smoke-related health problems and has likewise increased the amount of time available for students to study and for other productive social activities.

Ironically, even though the road-project staff were some of the Maoists' earliest targets for extortion and physical assault in the area, villagers commented that the road has made Maoist travel and intelligence gathering far more efficient. Almost everyone travels along the wide road now, rather than on the narrow shaded village paths of old, making it far easier to keep tabs on the comings and goings of neighbors. Naturally, the road benefits the security forces as well, who now survey the area from a high ridge near Charikot. For the most part, the security forces patrol the road during the day, while the Maoists move at night. Villagers on their morning rounds or en route to their fields stop by the roadside teashops to check for newly posted Maoist directives.

Intriguingly, there were no such directives against celebrating Dashain. Both the traditional family *tika* and the large-scale festivals in Dolakha Bazaar were allowed to proceed as usual. Ru-

mors flew about Maoist fighters returning home under cover of night to take *tika* and returning to forested camps before daylight. A local source even reported that he had been contacted by the regional Maoist leadership to help send a Dashain bonus to cadres in the field and something special to those in jail.

We had half expected a Maoist ban on Devikot Puja and Khadga Jatra, both because they assign the Thangmi—the poorest and most disenfranchised ethnic group in the area—a demeaning role and because the festivals represent the local assertion of Hindu state hegemony. But there was no such ban in place. For the Thangmi participants who become possessed by deities, the Devikot Puja is in fact a source of divine power. The only other visible display of power during the festival was that of several groups of heavily armed policeman in civilian clothes charging through town in pick-up trucks with their guns trained on festival-goers. Citizens of the bazaar looked the other way, avoiding eye contact.

As the buffalo calf was sacrificed, blood sprayed out far beyond the mouths of the possessed men waiting to drink it. According to the Newar *pujari* of Devikot, the large quantity of blood was an auspicious sign that bodes well for the coming year. At the end of the two-day festival tired, hung-over and relieved villagers walked home up the road, returning for their own *tika* by bulb-light for the very first time. ■

(*Shneiderman is an anthropologist from Cornell University conducting research with the Thangmi ethnic group. Turin is a Visiting Scientist at ICIMOD and the director of the Digital Himalaya Project at the University of Cambridge.*)







CRS Company. Now many local brands and at least a dozen international brands are available, not only in pharmacies but also in department stores and even in places like pan pasals and barbershops. Even so, many customers approach the issue indirectly.

For example, Karmacharya says that people looking for condoms at her shop often start with a request for a common, well-known item such as Disprin, Cetamol, Vicks or Handiplast. Whenever possible, male customers ask the male shop helpers. “Most villagers blush with shame when I have to explain to them how to use contraceptives prescribed by the Family Planning Centers inside the hospitals,” she says. “The workers there usually tell them to ask us to explain!”

One condom buyer who is married and works in a bank told Nation Weekly that buying condoms become easier, with condoms now available near cash counters at department stores. “It’s easy to just pick one up with your other

# CLOSET CONVERSATION

Though experts argue the condom taboo is minimal in urban areas now, it’s still an awkward moment for many buyers who approach the issue indirectly

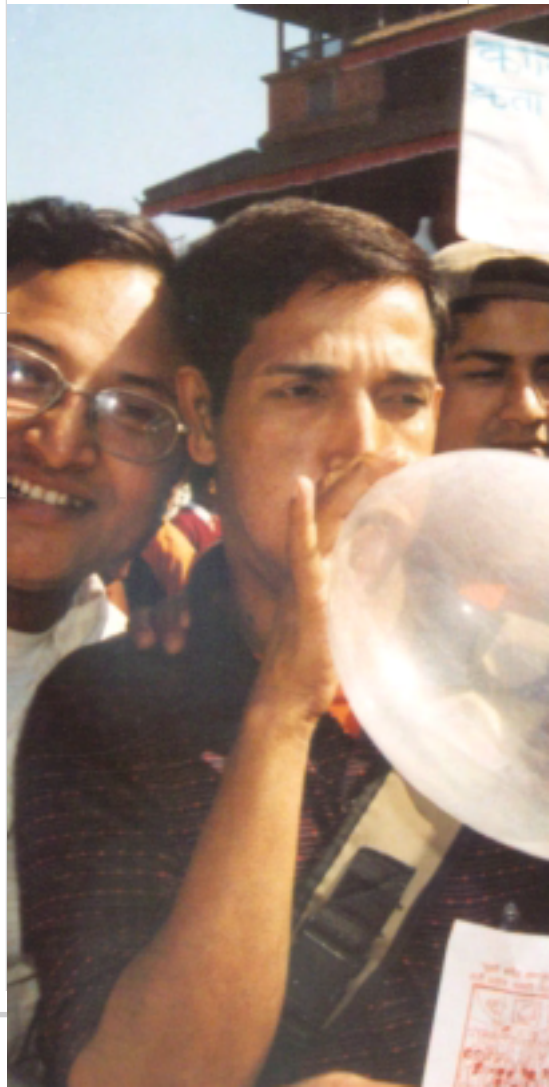
BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

**B**UYING CONDOMS, THE simplest and cheapest birth control method and the best way to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, still embarrasses many Nepalis. Customers aren’t the only ones uncomfortable with condoms: Some pharmacies and medical shop owners aren’t even willing to sell them.

Srilaxmi Karmacharya runs her family’s medical shop, Sikshan Pharma, in front of Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital in Maharajgunj. Her

brother runs another pharmacy right across the street. “No condoms here,” says Karmacharya flatly to disappointed customers. “I still feel really odd to be dealing with issues such as condoms directly,” she says. “I send them over to [my brother’s shop,] Sriram Pharma, instead.”

Though experts argue the condom taboo is minimal in urban areas now, it’s still an awkward moment for many buyers of *dhaal*, almost a generic name for condoms in Nepal after a condom by that brand name was launched first in 1978 by the Nepal





goods, pay for it and leave,” he adds. “In some places, they even wrap it up in newspaper for your convenience if you ask them to.”

A random survey of pharmacists and medical shopkeepers showed that most condom buyers are male and mostly over the age of 40, though young teenagers are also top customers. Celebrations like the 10<sup>th</sup>

Condom Day, marked on

October 30, are promoting public awareness about using condoms to prevent HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancy; slowly there’s an environment where condoms and other sexual issues can be discussed openly.

This year the comedy duo of Madan Krishna Shrestha and Hari Bansha Acharya, popularly known as MA-HA, aired a television serial promoting the use of condoms on all the Nepali television stations at the same time. A three-day *dohari geet* festival was also organized at the capital’s Khulamanch.

“Addressing issues such as HIV/AIDS or STD prevention as well as unwanted pregnancies though information, communication and behavioral change [and]

through events such as Condom Day is the best op-

tion,” says Dr. Ram Prasad Shrestha, director at the National Center for AIDS and STD Control. “We can’t implement laws on condom use, like the law requiring wearing helmets while driving motorcycles, as sex isn’t something [public].”

Despite some social stigma remaining, health officials are happy that information about condoms has gotten out. Condom Day organizers estimate they were able to reach 1,500,000 people in all 75 districts in the country. Condom Day is celebrated in Nepal on the first Saturday after Kojagrat Purnima, the last day of the Dashain festival.

“It is the best time of the year to reach our target groups—migrant males who are home for Dashain and adolescents,” says Pitamber Aryal, director of the Junior/Youth Department at the Nepal Red Cross Society, which has been organizing Condom Day in Nepal since 1995. This year’s celebration included regular seminars, interaction programs, street dramas, rallies and advertising in various publications.

“Condom, the no-no word, is freely talked about among family members and peers in the urban areas,” says Shanker Raj Pandey, managing director of Nepal CRS Company. “But efforts need to be redoubled to address the issue among the rural masses.” As the issue becomes easier to discuss, condom sales have been rising.

According to the AIDS control center, condom sales last year rose to more than 22 million units, almost double the previous year. The growth is attributed to the entrance of the non-profit organization Population Services International, which has aggressively marketed Number 1 condoms. Population Services is a social marketing agency working in about 70 countries worldwide.

Naveen Siddhi Bajracharya, of PSI Nepal says his organization also plans to expand its promotion and marketing to massage parlors, discos, *dohari* restaurants and other places where sexual activities are said to be taking place. As awareness spreads and the taboo fades, buying condoms will cease to embarrass customers, and shops like Karmacharya’s pharmacy will sell them openly. We hope it doesn’t take many more Condom Days to reach that point. **N**



nm/ss





# Reading The Gita

The Gita is not just an interesting; the experience is a cross between reading Stephen Hawking's 'A Brief History of Time' and watching a Hollywood version of Troy

BY SUSHMA JOSHI

**T**he Bhagwad Gita is a book I had avoided diligently. The Sanskrit was intimidating, the topic abstruse (a lecture on a battlefield to move a reluctant warrior), the book in general surrounded by an aura of religiosity which I did not feel I could live up to. The enthusiastic undergraduate students with whom I studied in an American college and who gushed about the Gita further put me off—the Gita, it seemed, was a book of hippies and New Age seekers, and nothing to do with me. This is how I, a child of Hindu parents and a part-time Buddhist, came to know more about the Koran and the Bible, the “Sattipatthana sutta”—“the Great Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness” in Buddhism—and the life of Milarepa, than about one of the most well-known books of my own tradition.

In college, I spent six months reading the texts of Islam, including the Koran, with a Jewish scholar. His commitment to the texts, scholarship and history was extraordinary. Also memorable were impromptu midnight readings of the Song of Solomon from the Bible—who could have known such juicy poems existed within that holy book? A steady flow of Tibetan Buddhist classics has also made its way into our house over the years, brought in by Brahmin cousins who radiated the dedication of neophyte converts. But the texts of the Hindu tradition, for some reason, never made it into my reading list.

A few days ago, I finally picked up a translation of the Gita from Penguin Classics. Admittedly, it was abridged. Perhaps appropriately, it had been translated by a Spanish scholar Juan Mascaro, whose cross-cultural understanding of different religious texts and traditions inform his version. Surprisingly, the Gita is not just an interesting but also an enjoyable read, the experience a cross between reading Stephen Hawking's "A Brief History of Time" and watching a Hollywood version of Troy.

The authors of the Gita are unknown. I say authors because often these older texts had multiple authors, who added text and stories over the centuries and turned the books into massive epics. The Koran, popularly believed to be created through divine authorship, and the Bible, thought to be written by a few select disciples, also show signs of multiple authorship over a period of decades if not centuries.

The Gita appears like an odd tack-on to the huge war of the Mahabharata. Where did this philosophical treatise on spiritual life, transcendence and divinity suddenly find its way into an action-packed drama about two families fighting for land? Inclusion in the Mahabharata, which

has over one hundred thousand couplets and is the longest epic poem in the world, conferred instant immortality, the translator suggests. In other words, appearing in the Mahabharata was the pre-B.C. version of appearing on Oprah.

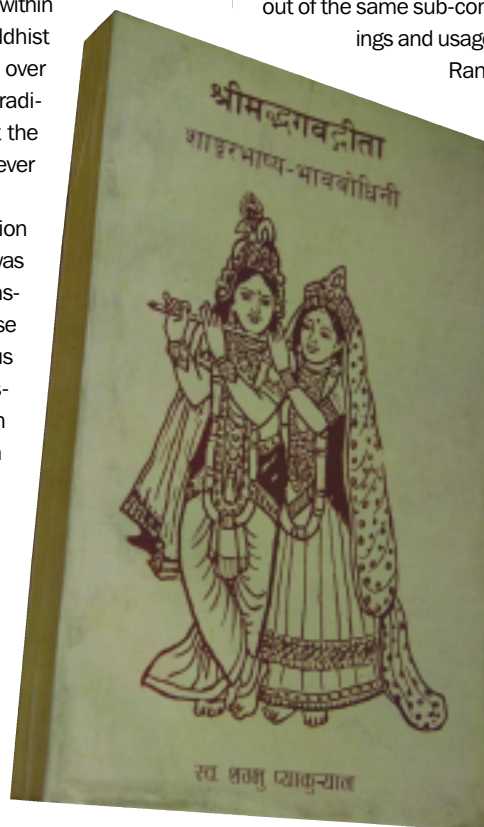
Arjun does not want to slaughter his own family, but Krishna talks him into it. How can this be compatible with the whole idea of the “peaceful” Hindu religion? The paradoxes of this text are multiple, and yes, they do not answer all questions logically. A beautifully written paragraph will be followed by a caste-ist and misogynist observation. But if you look beyond these anachronistic limitations, the Gita is an opportunity to insert a lecture on larger issues. It includes the nature of life and death, the nature of work and duty—the discourse to convince a reluctant warrior into a war is a pretext for these important questions. The Protestants would be happy to learn that the obsession with work (karma) is not just engrained in their culture, but makes a big appearance in this text as well.

The ideas in the Gita, to this average reader, appears remarkably similar to the Buddhist ideas. Hindu and Buddhist philosophies come out of the same sub-continental stream, but they differ in their meanings and usages of similar words and concepts, says Sridhar

Rana, a longtime scholar and practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism. Shridhar Rana, popularly known as “Ratnashree” to his students, started out as a tantric practitioner and is one of the few Tibetan Buddhists who have an extensive knowledge of Hindu philosophies and practices.

What is remarkable about Hindu texts is their close theorizing of time and space, being and consciousness. Modern quantum physicists, cognitive scientists and neurologists spend a lot of time thinking about the same seemingly unanswerable questions. What is the nature of time? Where does space finally end? How can concepts of infinity and eternity be further expanded? Where does consciousness arise from? Many “new” ideas like the chaos theory seem not so far away from the ideas of these unknown authors of 500 B.C. Their breakdown of consciousness and perception rival those of contemporary scientists. It is no wonder that the imprint of older Hindu theories influences the scientific world.

Western philosophers and scientists from Goethe to Schopenhauer, from Jung to Oppenheimer, learnt from and were influenced by ancient Hindu texts. And yes, there is a reason for the fascination. Read these classics. They have more inside them than meets the eye. **N**





*Comfort above the clouds*

*... after sunset,  
waiting for the sunrise ...*



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# CANINE COPS



At the Central Dog Training School the police dogs are on standby and ready for duty, even on Tihar

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

**T**HE SECOND DAY OF TIHAR, November 11 this year, is Kukur Puja, when dogs are garlanded, worshipped and fed delicious dishes. At the Nepal Police Central Dog Training School in Ranibari, everyday is Kukur Puja.

The school's chief, Deputy Superintendent of Police Dandapani Bhattarai, believes dogs have to be treated with love for them to enjoy a healthy and meaningful life. "It's just like raising children. The more time you spend with your dogs, the more you can teach them good manners," says Bhattarai, who is also author of the book "Kukur Hamro Saathi"—"The Dog is our Friend"—and has been training police dogs with the Nepal Police Dog Squad for the last 30 years.

When the Nation Weekly team arrives at the school in Ranibari, a 10-minute walk down a lane beside Sital Niwas in Maharajgunj, huge Alsatians and Labradors bark at us from inside their cages. "It's natural for dogs to be wary of strangers," explains Bhattarai inside his office, showing us his personal collection of press clippings on dogs—his hobby for the last 21 years. His office walls display pictures, certificates and trophies won by the police dogs at various exhibitions.

"If you spend two days with them, they won't bark at you anymore," he says. "Once the dogs accept you, you can observe how helpful they have become in our investigations," he adds. As Bhattarai speaks, the barking dogs become quiet at the command of their handlers. Each cage is marked with its resident's name—Maila, Kanchhi, Blacky, Ritu, Joti, Bronu, Marco, Rox, Jhuma, Asha, Thuli, Nani, Belka, Kalu and Tufan. The dogs' sex, training specialty



and breed are also written on the cages. A team of six policemen has just returned from training a one-year-old Alsatian named Hero with the help of an old-hand Labrador named Lily.

"The dogs usually have two-syllable names, as that makes it easier for the dogs to remember," says Sub-Inspector M. Uprety, as his team showed us some of the skills learned by Hero. The commands followed: Hero *pachi* (march behind)! Hero *rok* (stop)! Hero *baash* (sit)! Hero even salutes back with his forepaws, when his handler salutes. Each time the dog obeys he is praised with a hearty *shyabash* (good job). Finally, the handler tosses a few pieces of meat to Hero, who joyously jumps and runs around the premises.

A total of 91 policemen have been deputed to the Dog Training School. Bhattarai says they have been chosen





tigations, though the legal system still does not allow dog sniffing as evidence.

The Central Dog Training School in Kathmandu is home to 21 police dogs, all of whom undergo basic command training and then specialize in one of the four areas: investigating criminal activities, sniffing out explosives, locating drugs or conducting rescue operations during natural disasters such as earthquakes. Their natural inclination during the basic training sessions determines what specialty they are assigned

Bhattarai. “The vets also suggest how long the dogs should be placed on duty and suggest to us what specific training they should get after they complete their basic training.”

Basic training for these dogs start between the age of six months to a year. Each dog serves for a total of 10 years, as per the belief that one human year equals six “dog years.” By the time the dogs retire at the age of 60 “dog years,” they are given to their handlers or other personnel within the department.

The dogs aren’t paid, but they are well fed. Each dog gets a daily ration of 1,200 grams of meat, 500 grams wheat or rice, 200 grams vegetables, one egg, as well as 1.8 kilograms of firewood to prepare its food.

Despite an urban myth that the dogs are officers, police dogs do not have any rank or hierarchy. The idea could have started as a joke among handlers at the school who wanted to see their subordinates saluting the dogs. “But we do arrange a proper burial with a honorary salute as we do for policemen when they die in the line of duty,” says the DSP.

The school is already preparing for a big bash for the dogs on Kukur Puja. “It will be a special day here,” says a handler. “It’s very interesting, and the media have started coming here in the last couple of years. I hope you won’t miss it.” **N**

from those who love to handle dogs, know a little English and have a clear voice so that the dogs can hear them properly. Each dog has a handler; the dogs only obey commands from that person.

On duty the dogs wear harnesses. “It feels just like when we put on uniforms,” says Bhattarai. “The dogs are more serious in their jobs when wearing the harnesses; they know it is not free time.”

The canine cops are the first to report for duty at an explosion site or when any suspicious object is discovered. Their success rate is high, and they are extremely reliable. They help in inves-

to.

The school was officially established in 1990, though the Nepal Police have had dog squads since 1969. The police are now planning to open branches in all five development regions: So far five dogs have been stationed in Pokhara and in Dharan. But the dogs have been used as far away as Biratnagar, Birgunj, Bharatpur, Butwal, Nepalgunj, Palpa and Charikot. The Royal Nepal Army has now joined the fray. For the last four years, it has its own dog squad.

“We have our own veterinarians, who are part of our team; they are constantly examining our dogs,” says



# Shut Up And Dance

C'mon, get up and dance! And no whinging...

BY KUNAL LAMA

This year, I've had the pleasure to be present at two very well attended open-air concerts. The first one was in March, the opening event for Jazzmandu 2004 at the Le Meridien Gokarna Forest Resort & Spa. The second one took place very recently on Sunday, October 31 at the Dechenling Garden Restaurant. It was Women in Concert: Part II.

The Gokarna event started off on a fabulous, spring-y Saturday afternoon, and went on well into the night, with a fantastic line-up of homegrown and visiting bands performing mainly jazz and some blues numbers. Hordes of music-lovers were spread, literally, all over the grounds of a huge courtyard. The Dechenling affair was held in a crisp autumn evening and featured seven Nepali ladies with a penchant for singing and a flair for performing. Only two out of the seven were professional singers; the rest, well, they just wanted to do it for themselves—and us, presumably! The genre of music performed ranged from jazz to soul to rock & roll to pop ballads. What caught my attention was not how different the concerts were but how similar they were in one conspicuous, undesirable respect: the audience. When one hip-swaying, tush-shaking, foot-stomping song after another was being belted out, the audience sat with the impassive countenance of the recently-discovered *Homo floresiensis*, as though they were listening to a trembling Pope deliver yet another cringingly conservative sermon at St. Peter's Square. Dude, it's a concert. One's supposed to groove to the music; whistle and cheer; pass loud, sexist comments when the beautiful ladies are on stage; boo when the lights snap out. But the audience stayed superglued to their uncomfortable plastic chairs, very few of them bothering to twitch even one of the 600 skeletal muscles that they have been gifted by the Almighty along with a brain (weighing 1,380 grams)

precisely to help manipulate them. And there was an incident, similar in substance, at both the concerts which amused and irritated me no end.

At Gokarna there was one amazing band from the Indian state of Meghalaya, Soulmate, with the beautiful and talented Tipriti Kharbangar as the lead singer. By the time their turn came to perform, by around 8 p.m., some members of the audience were beginning to show some form of life and were even transmuting their appreciation of the music into action. Hallelujah! Bar sales were becoming brisker; the pristine forest air was getting aromatic with smoking herbs; people were getting up to dance. I was among this actively reactive part of the audience, enjoying the evening as I had planned all along when I felt a tap on my shoulder. Looking around, I was confronted with the sight of a large white woman burdened with a backpack the size of a hot-air balloon. I was, apparently, blocking her view. I shrugged her off and focused on Tipriti, who was singing "Ain't no sunshine" with an evangelical purity. Ten minutes later, another tap on the shoulder. The same woman wants me to sit down immediately or clear out. I glared at her and told her with an exaggerated seriousness that one, she was getting on my tits; two, I was going to remain standing and swaying; three, the stage was so far away that I could not possibly be blocking anything that was impossible for her to see; four, her being three times my size, laterally, she was blocking many more people's line of sight than I while she stood arguing with me; and five, 'twas time she bugged off. That shut her up. She barreled off, presumably into the bushes and, hopefully, the oblivion that she so richly deserved.

Before the concert started at Dechenling, I saw a familiar lady beckoning me. When I walked over, it was to request me to ask a bunch of guys to move away somewhere else because, as she pointed out sarcastically, they were not transparent and she could not see the stage

through them. Guess whose side I took? The guys, obviously. Without being too brutal in my refusal, I told her that, perhaps, she would consider moving away from her brazier-warmed position and reestablish herself up nearer the stage, where she could give Abhaya, Rachana, Pooja, Priti, Sapna, Sheri and Vidhea some serious competition. I have a feeling that she is not going to beckon me over ever again!

The women in concert did an awesome job. Even then, towards the end, only ten percent of the crowd was jumping in front of the stage. Ten percent! Shame on you, 90 percent! When the seven sisters were giving their 150 percent doing it for themselves, the least you could have done was to make an ass of yourself by maniacally hooting and dancing all night long. Like I did. **N**





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# TROY

The movie is Hollywood's new take on Homer's great epic, one of the greatest love stories of all time. Hollywood, however, seems more focussed on war than on love.

BY SUSHMA JOSHI

Greek mythology is not something that usually draws a crowd of teenagers at nine a.m. on a Saturday morning. But with a bit of Hollywood thrown in, it may just be possible. Show up at Jai Nepal Hall and watch the crowd that gathers for "Troy," Hollywood's new take on the greatest love story of all time.

Homer might be disappointed, as I was, about certain aspects of the movie—for instance, the casual disposal of Helen and Paris's love affair in the first half of the movie—for what the director considers the real juicy story, the story of Achilles. In keeping with current American preoccupations, war seems to be on Hollywood's mind more than love.

Immortality is the reason why men would prefer to die in war rather than live in peace, says David Benioff's version of the screenplay. Mothers would disagree, and this version gives about two minutes to Mama to make her case. Of course she loses. The profound one-liners about life and death are almost Buddhist in their awareness of the present, but dharma seekers be forewarned: An excess of ego-driven emphasis is put on personal post-mortem fame. All that made Achilles tick was his need to have his name blazing across a cinema hoarding 4,000 years after his death, according to this version at least. This is what fuels Brad Pitt's testosterone-driven Achilles across the landscape in some profound scenes. Brad Pitt is not somebody you would think of as a particularly mythological

character, but he definitely takes this role head on.

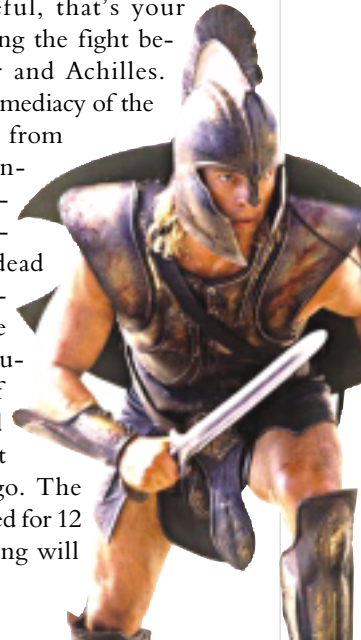
Peter O'Toole gives a moving performance as Priam. As the father who has lost his son, he took my vote for best scene as he negotiated with Achilles to get the body of his dead son, Hector, back for a proper ritual. And while the male actors give stirring and substantial performances, the women are relegated to looking beautiful and crying.

Contrary to Homer's version, a spectacularly insipid actress is cast as the beauty that launched a thousand ships. This Helen bemoans the deaths of men who are dying because of her with the same passion as she may ask for a cup of coffee. Think shampoo ad, and you get the general picture. Orlando Bloom is cast Helen's heartthrob Paris. Bloom looked adorable with his pixie ears in "The Lord of the Rings" and as Johnny Depp's sidekick in "Pirates of the Caribbean," but this viewer thought he wasn't quite as hot as Paris.

The director pays a lot more attention to the thousand ships than he does to the face that launched them, but the thousand ships will not disappoint you, I guarantee. Nor will the spectacular fight scenes that are suspiciously reminiscent of blockbusters fights in "The Matrix" and "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon." Can Hollywood please find some other guy from a place other than Hong Kong to choreograph their fight scenes? That drumbeat in the distance is getting particularly familiar.

The Achilles' heel of this particular version of Homer's epic may be its over-emphasis on war. What balanced out the Iliad and made it epic and immortal was its careful balance between love, desire and the search for power. Take out one of these ingredients and you get a two-week flick that amuses but doesn't quite become an epic itself.

Besides a bit of history, you will also get some down-home Nepali comments to spice up Homer if you see it on a Saturday morning. There were gasps of repugnance as fake blood gushed down the actors' faces, spontaneous clapping following the stabbing of a sleazy Agamemnon by a feisty priestess of Apollo and laughter when a boy shouted out, "Be careful, that's your bhinaju," during the fight between Hector and Achilles. Perhaps the immediacy of the warning came from our own contemporary situation. With almost 10,000 dead after an eight-year war, we are close to the human toll of what occurred in Troy almost 4,000 years ago. The Trojan war lasted for 12 years. How long will ours last? **N**





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# CITY ThisWeek

## EVENTS



## The Sound of Music

“The Sound of Music” never gets old. It is a joyous musical odyssey suitable for the entire family. Based on a true story, “The Sound of Music” was one of the most popular films of the 1960s and also a runaway hit on Broadway. The movie won the academy award for best picture in 1965 and also the best director award for Robert Wise.

Catch the play performed by the students of Triyog High School at the Royal Nepal Academy. Set in the 1930s in

the Austrian Alps the play is about Maria who lives in a convent. Maria wants to be a nun but is outgoing and happiest when out singing. The sisters at the convent try to figure out what to do with Maria. Finally the sisters decide to send Maria as a matron for seven children, who supposedly have sent many governesses away. Will Maria be quit too? Go watch for yourself. Tickets: Rs. 300, Rs. 500 and Rs. 1,000. Date: November 19 and 20. For information: 4470608.

## Srijana Anniversary

## ART EXHIBITIONS

A four-day-long painting workshop was organized by Sirjana College of Fine Arts to mark the third anniversary of the college. Altogether 54 students of the college took part in the workshop and the outcome was 94 pieces of paintings executed in different themes, mediums and styles under the guidance of eminent and senior artists Batsa G. Vaidhya, K.K. Karmacharya, Shankar R.S. Suwal, Shyam Lal Shrestha, Sharada Man Shrestha, Uttam Kharel and Navindra Rajbhandari. The paintings created during the workshop are on display in Sirjana Contemporary Art Gallery, Kamaladi. The exhibition will reopen till the end of the Tihar festival. Time: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.



### Ramailo Saanjh

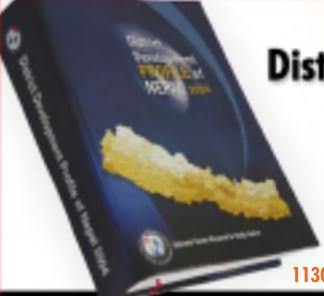
Dwarika's Hotel presents “Ramailo Saanjh,” where Ishwor Gurung with his popular group “Himalayan

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Dwarika's Heritage Courtyard, magnificently lit with *diyos* (oil lamps) and superbly set background with typical Nepali village themes displaying Nepali household items. Ten percent discount for Heritage Plus members. Date: November 17. Time: 7-10 p.m. For information: 4479488.

### Dashain, Deepawali Bonanza



Celebrate the festive season at the Radisson Hotel with 50% discount on food and domestic liquors at the Fun Café. Date: October 15 to November 15. For information: 4411818.

### Salsa Workshop

Partynepal.com presents Salsa Workshop for both beginners and intermediate with Diego at Salsando Studio. Classes starts from November 4-10.



## ONGOING

### All That Jazz

Presenting "Abhaya and the Steam Injuns" and the best of jazz in Nepal at the Fusion Bar, Dwarika's Hotel, 7 p.m. onwards, every Friday. Entry fee: Rs. 555, including BBQ dinner, and a can of beer/soft drinks. For information: 4479488.

### Marwari Specialities

Every Saturday evening at Shambala Garden Café, Shangrila Hotel with a wide selection of vegetarian delicacies. "Rusty Nails" playing blues and rock 'n roll. Every Saturday live at The Jazz Bar. Time: 7 p.m. onwards. For information: 4412999.

Class times: 8-9 a.m., 4-5 p.m., 5-6 p.m., 6-7 p.m. and 7-8 p.m. Class fee: Rs. 1500.

### Photo Session

Photo Concern announces its offer for the festive season. Take along the Photo Concern Free Photo Shoot advertisement cutting available in the daily newspapers and get a free photo shoot during Dashain and Tihar. Valid up to November 30. For information: 4223275.

### Charcoalz

This festive season Yak and Yeti brings to you "Charcoalz" at the poolside. The piping hot grills are guaranteed to drive away your autumn chills with an array of Indian, western and Mongolian barbequed delights to tempt your appetites. Time: 6-10 p.m. For information: 4248999.



### Fusion Night

The Rox Bar welcomes everyone to be a part of the Fusion Night. The rhythmic and harmonic beats of the eastern and the western instruments—a treat for the senses. Enjoy the sarangi played by Bharat Nepali with a well-blended mix of western tunes played by The Cloud Walkers. Every Wednesday. Time: 6 p.m. onwards. For information: 4491234.

### Rock@Belle Momo

Enjoy combo meals at Belle Momo every Fridays 6:30 p.m. onwards as the rock 'n roll band Steel Wheels performs live. For information: 4230890.

### Tickling Taste Buds

Barbeque every Friday Evening. At The Shambala Garden Café. Time: 7 p.m. onwards. For information: 4412999

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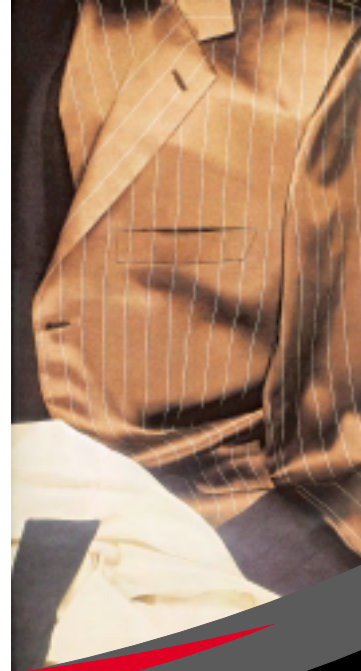
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# COLORFUL SKIES

The colorful night skies of Tihar have been darkened by the government ban on fireworks. Alternatives with more sparkle and less boom could fill the gap.

BY INDRA ADHIKARI

The second festival of Kartik is close upon us. Tihar, the festival of colors and lights, will not glow as brightly this year as it has in the past: Candles, butter lamps and strings of light will be plentiful, but fireworks will be in short supply.

People have already begun to look for firecrackers as the festival draws near, but there are few fireworks in the market. The noisy excitement of firecrackers, a part and parcel of Tihar, has been fading away in Nepal year by year, due to the insurgency. The government ban on the sale of firecrackers has quieted the evenings and darkened the holiday skies.

People feel something is lacking without the firecrackers in their festival celebration.

But still the search for firecrackers does not end. The market in Ason has firecrackers every year. A shopkeeper who does not want to disclose his name says that a large amount of firecrackers are sold secretly. His relative in Siliguri in India brings firecrackers from India while he returns for Tihar. They are sold from Kaag Tihar, the first day the festival, onwards.

He is desperate not only because he is losing money from fireworks sales but also because the lights of the festival nights and colors of the festival skies are losing their charm. "There is no environment for celebrating the festival with humor and enthusiasm," he says.

Local resident Gyanendra Tuladhar sees a big change in the way Tihar is celebrated in Ason. There used to be band music, the constant crackle of fireworks and glowing sparkles everywhere. These



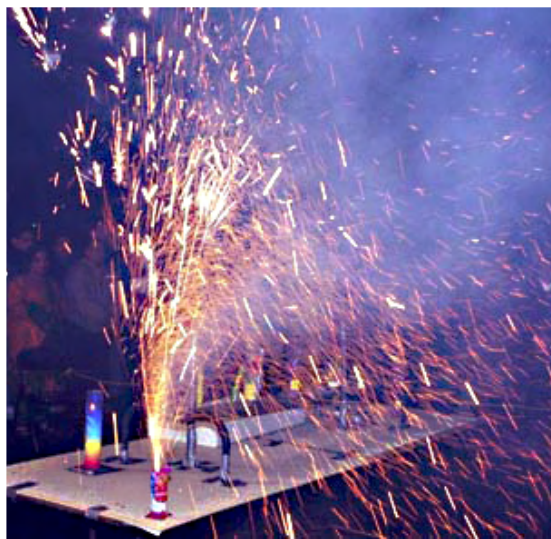




are mostly gone; his Tihar passes quietly with just *tika* and a garland of marigolds. Even *deusi* and *bhailo* teams no longer awaken him in the night, setting off their firecrackers. Most of them just knock on his door.

Without firecrackers, Tihar has become a festival of eating and drinking. The evening lamps lit at the door burn out in a few hours, and the night begins to darken. The shopkeeper remembers the time when the firecrackers set the Tihar night skies alight.

There is no legal import, production or sales of fireworks: The rules have existed since the Panchayat era. Now the rules have been tightened in fear that the Maoists may transport major explosives with firecrackers. When the law was less tightly enforced, large quantities of fireworks used to enter Nepal from India, where production and use of firecrack-



ers to be used during festivals is legal. The major smuggling routes into Nepal are via Birgunj, Bhairahawa and Biratnagar.

Despite the tighter enforcement, some sparklers and pyrotechnics still reach the Nepali market. Even when smuggled fireworks are found and confiscated by the security forces, they are distributed among their relatives, alleges co-chairperson of the FNCCI press committee, Surendra Malakar. "Unless confiscated firecrackers are destroyed," he says, "the illegal trade will continue."

The Kathmandu Valley was the largest market for fireworks. More than Rs. 700,000 worth of firecrackers used to

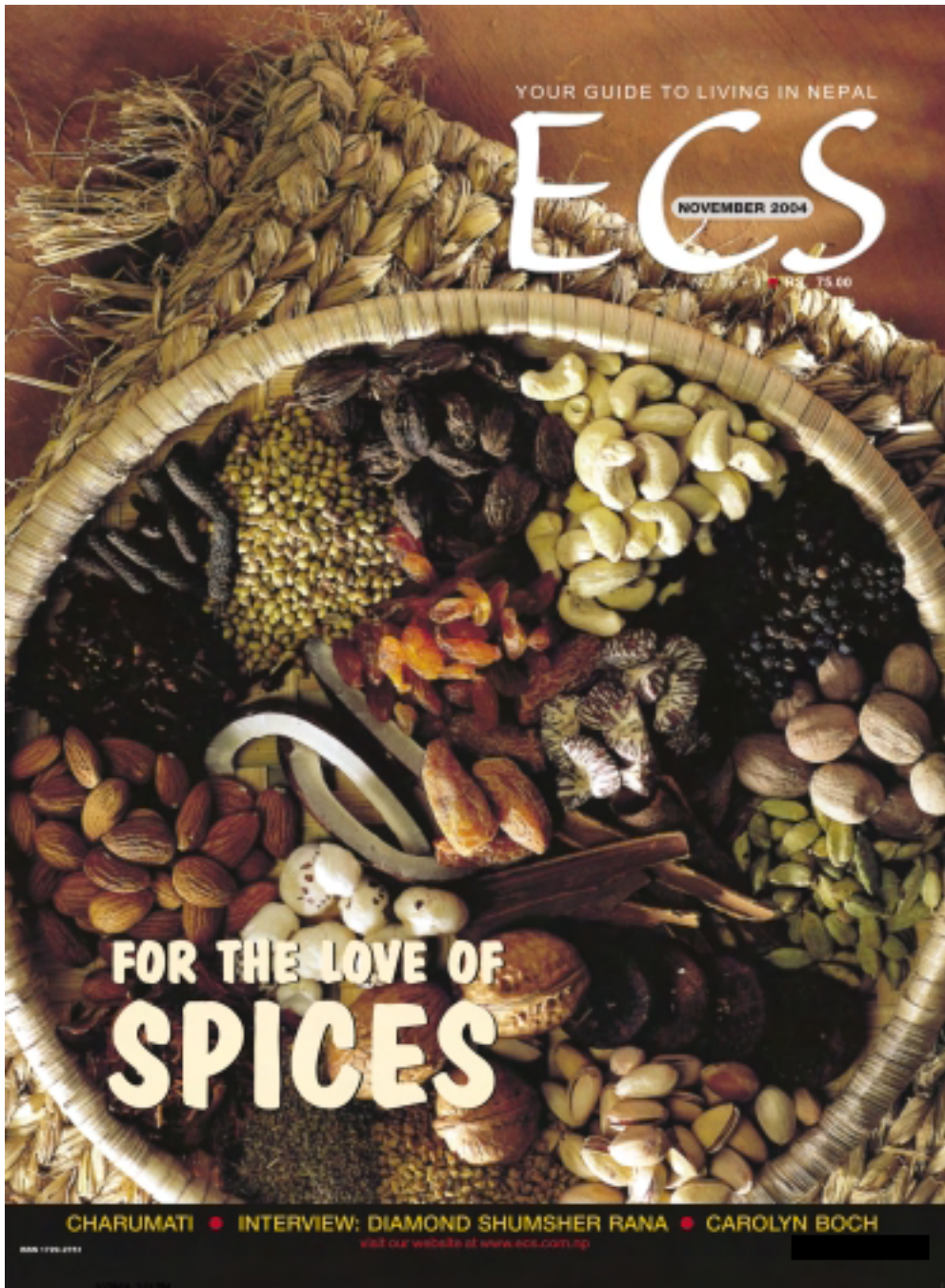
enter the Valley; some still make it in, though there are no figures available. But the fireworks have already begun in a small way, and consumers are looking to buy. Krishna Maharjan, a shopkeeper in Kirtipur bazaar who has been in business for four and a half years, says that since the tighter enforcement of the firecracker ban, adults no longer buy firecrackers for the children and the number of young people looking to buy them has grown. Last year a few shopkeepers in Kirtipur sold small quantities.

"I don't have any plans for firecracker sales this year," says Maharjan.

Tradition says that the illumination of homes with lights of *diyos* and the skies with firecrackers is a request to the heavens for health, wealth, knowledge, peace and prosperity. Firecrackers come in different varieties, from visual delights to deafening booms. But even in India demand has shifted to newer, more colorful but less noisy firecrackers. The colorful twin angles, a new entrant in the cracker market has caught the fancy of many Indians. They would sell well here as well, if allowed. Might they bring back the sparkle to the festival of lights? **N**



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# Super Success

The growing success of the Super Sixes tournament in attracting top corporate houses augurs well for Nepali cricket. Money matters.

BY SUDESH SHRESTHA

When the Soaltee Crowne Plaza launched Super Sixes cricket in 1999 it was not sure if it would really achieve its prime objective—to bring executives out of their boardrooms. After all, all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. Never mind if they couldn't bat, bowl or field: They just had to get out of their offices and head to the field.

Five years on, the Super Sixes can now be called a moderate success. At a time when most sports disciplines are struggling due to resource constraints, the cricket crowd gets bigger each year. More importantly, the number of corporate houses interested in the game is growing.

Looking at the event's progress, the organizers simply can't hold back their smile. The six-a-side event has become a popular annual fixture in the national sports calendar. "What was started at a small scale has turned out to be something of a national event," says Sarad Upadhyay, sales manager at the Soaltee, with a broad smile.

Last month at the Tribhuvan University Ground, while some spectators in

the gallery were chanting slogans, cheering for their teams, others were knocking back cans of beer while lazing in the sun. The Super Sixes is a shorter version of the one-day game, played in five-over innings with each team member, except the wicketkeeper, bowling an over. Super Sixes, however, is more than just cricket.

"It's always exciting to meet people from different walks of life," says Sanjay Verma, first-secretary at the Indian Embassy. "This event provides a perfect platform for that purpose. And winning the event is a bonus," Verma adds.

While Team India was struggling at home against the visiting Australians, the Indian Embassy stamped its authority on the Super Sixes when it won its third successive title, beating Standard Chartered Bank in the final.

Many of the 16 corporate teams that competed this year see an element of camaraderie in this event. This spruces up motivation among their staff and also fosters better relationships with peers and mentors.

"This kind of extracurricular activity once in a while reduces stress levels among staff members," says Bishnu Acharya, head of administration at

Nabil Bank. "It does them a world of good, and that sense of wellbeing reflects on an organization's overall performance."

That's not all. With the event attracting media glare it also serves, to some extent, as a marketplace where corporate houses can get exposure for their company, brand, product or services.

Sports marketing is a new trend in corporate promotional activities, where companies seek to boost public exposure of their brands through their involvement in sporting events. "Sports marketing is an influential tool to boost brand power and build a healthy corporate image," says one official of a leading company. It makes customers familiar with the company; and sponsorship enhances the company's image. He adds, "Such events also provide common ground for CEOs to rub shoulders with each other."

Marketing trends suggest that companies that incorporate elements of sports into their portfolio end up with better visibility. Nepali companies too have come to realize the importance of sports.

"There is a significant surge in interest in corporate circles to get into the event," says Upadhyay, explaining the overwhelming number of calls he received from the country's business houses about the Super Six tournament. "There were over 20 teams interested, but we could only accommodate 15, plus the Soaltee as the host."

The cricket excitement goes beyond just fun in the sun. Experts think the country's sports administrators should capitalize on this surge in corporate interest. "Nepal's corporate world beckons those at the helm of the sports sector to act," says Binay Raj Pandey, former vice president at the Cricket Association of Nepal.

With the cricket association's international partners running away from honoring a contract on cricket development in Nepal, Pandey believes that interest among Nepal's business community could provide a way forward. "With proper planning, we could take this success to a higher level for the benefit of the national league," says Pandey. "The players would be the biggest winners." **N**

From	To	Flight No.	Days of Operation	Dep. Time	Arr. Time	Rupee Tariff One way	Dollar Tariff One way	Remarks
Kathmandu	Lukla	YA 111	Daily	0700	0735	1665	91	DHC-6/300
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	Lukla	YA103	Daily	0710	0745	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA 105	Daily	0715	0750	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA107	Daily	0840	0915	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA113	Daily	0845	0920	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA109	Daily	0850	0925	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA 115	Daily	0855	0930	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA117	Daily	1020	1055	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA119	1,2,4,5,6,7	1025	1100	1665	91	DHC-6/300
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	Phaplu	YA181	1,3,5	1030	1105	1480	85	DHC-6/300
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	Manang	YA 601	6	1030	1130	2995	122	DHC-6/300
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	Bharatpur	YA 173	Daily	1200	1225	1160	61	DHC-6/300
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	Simara	YA 141	Daily	1330	1355	970	55	DHC-6/300
	Simara	YA 143	Daily	1500	1525	970	55	DHC-6/300
Kathmandu	Kathmandu	YA 301	Daily	0700	0800	4800	109	SAAB 340B
	Kathmandu	YA 302	Daily	0705	0805	4800	109	SAAB 340B
	Kathmandu	YA 303	Daily	0820	0920	4800	109	SAAB 340B
	Biratnagar	YA 151	Daily	0945	1025	2585	85	SAAB 340B
	Biratnagar	YA 153	Daily	1430	1510	2585	85	SAAB 340B
	Biratnagar	YA 155	Daily	1640	1720	2585	85	SAAB 340B
	Pokhara	YA 131	Daily	0815	0840	1710	67	SAAB 340B
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	Pokhara	YA 135	Daily	1415	1440	1710	67	SAAB 340B
	Bhairahawa	YA 163	Daily	1555	1630	2220	79	SAAB 340B
	Bhadrapur	YA 121	Daily	1135	1225	2950	109	SAAB 340B
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Biratnagar	Kathmandu	YA 154	Daily	1535	1615	2585	85	SAAB 340B
Biratnagar	Kathmandu	YA 156	Daily	1745	1825	2585	85	SAAB 340B
Pokhara	Kathmandu	YA 132	Daily	0905	0930	1710	67	SAAB 340B
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Pokhara	Kathmandu	YA 136	Daily	1505	1530	1710	67	SAAB 340B
Bhairahawa	Kathmandu	YA 164	Daily	1655	1730	2220	79	SAAB 340B
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	Kathmandu	YA 104	Daily	0800	0835	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 106	Daily	0805	0840	1665	91	DHC-6/300
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	Kathmandu	YA 176	Daily	1440	1505	1160	61	DHC-6/300
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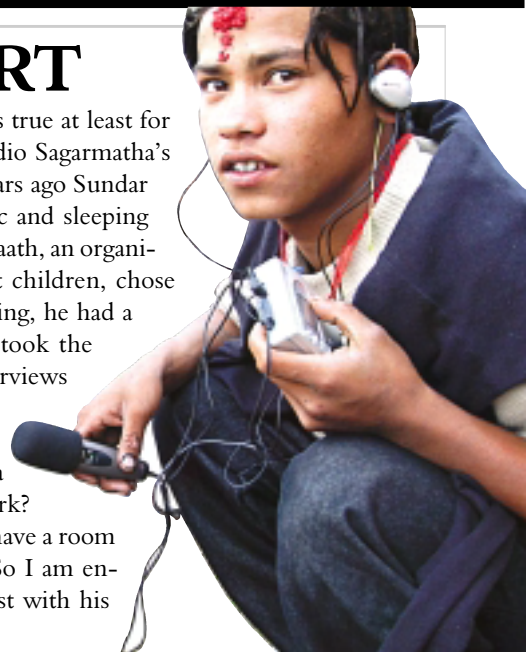
## Snapshots

BY DHRITI BHATTA

### STREET SMART

Where there is a will, there is a way. This is true at least for **SUNDAR BHUJEL**, reporter for the Radio Sagarmatha's weekly program "Saathsaath." Only five years ago Sundar was making a living collecting waste plastic and sleeping on the streets of Gaushala. But when Saathsaath, an organization that works for the welfare of street children, chose him for a 45-day training course on reporting, he had a chance to do something about it. He took the opportunity with both hands. Bhujel interviews other street children like him; he talks to them about their troubles and hardships for the radio program on Radio Sagarmatha 102.4. What does Bhujel think about his work?

"Before, I used to loiter around, but now I have a room to stay in and work to do," says Bhujel. "So I am engaged and happy." We wish him all the best with his work.



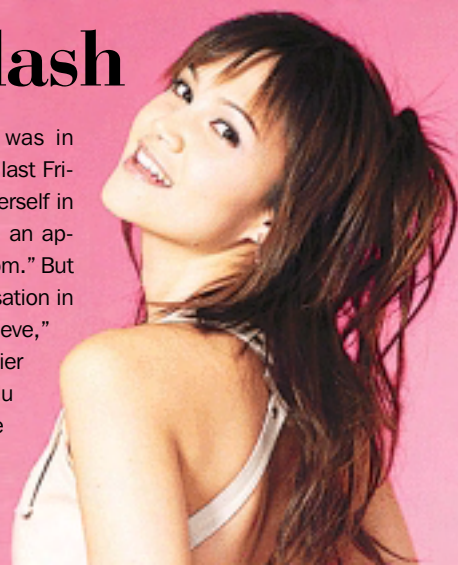
### WOMANPOWER



**GEETA KESARI** is a multi-faceted personality. Kesari is a former director of the Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation, a writer and now the first woman secretary of Royal Nepal Academy. She has published 10 novels and two books of stories; her latest novel, "Niskarsha," was published in late 2060 B.S. She is also the winner of the Rastriya Prativa Puraskar. "Writing was my hobby," says Kesari. "Although I tried to keep my hobby and profession separate, meeting new people and traveling during my days in the RNAC reinforced my hobby." Today her hobby has become her profession. To Kesari, her appointment to the academy is more important than it might be to someone else: "I think I bear more responsibility because I have got to remove doubts that anyone might have about the ability of women."

### Making a splash

Model, actress and singer **TATA YOUNG** was in Kathmandu to perform at the Hyatt Regency last Friday, November 5. Young made a name for herself in this part of the world with a song credit and an appearance in a music video for the movie "Dhoom." But even before that, she was already a pop sensation in Thailand with seven albums. Her latest, "I Believe," is a crossover album in English, released earlier this year. Young's stop here to wow Kathmandu was a part of her world tour, which will include Europe and the United States. With the reception she got, we think she'll be back.





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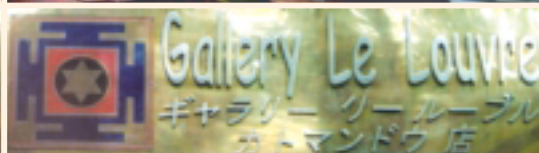
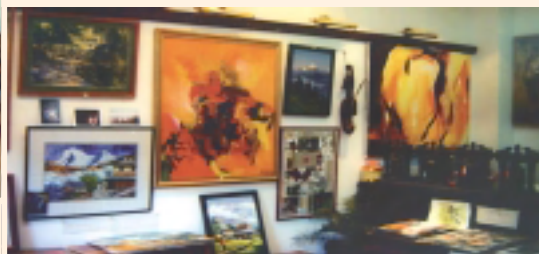
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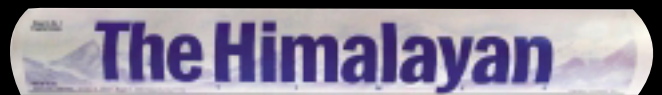


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A GREAT NEWSPAPER

# Chain Reactions

BY KARUNA CHETTRI

**M**itch Albom's "The Five People You Meet in Heaven" has an uncanny resemblance to the Hindu notion of karma. The story begins with the death of 83-year-old Eddie, a grizzled war veteran who works as a maintenance man at an amusement park. He dies while trying to save a little girl from a falling cart. In his final moments he feels two small hands—and then nothing. When he wakes up, he is aware that he is somewhere in heaven. There he encounters five people from each of whom he learns something different about his earthly life. The five include his army captain, his beloved wife and others whom he does not know at the time of his encounter—but whose roles in his life are revealed as significant.

Eddie is a good man whose youthful optimism turns sour when he is wounded in war. His dream to become an engineer is dashed by his leg wound and his father's illness. Consequently, Eddie falls into depression, which his father despises as weakness and laziness. To add to his misfortunes, Eddie's beloved wife dies leaving him alone and heartbroken. At the time of his death, he finds himself reduced to an old, embittered, lonely man who harbors anger and resentment toward his father, his life and his meaningless job.

Each person Eddie encounters in heaven explains one piece of the jigsaw puzzle of his life. Bit by bit, the stories are pieced together with the help of the five people. Eddie's doubts and resentments fade away as he finds his self-worth and also compassion for those who had hurt him.

"The Five People You Meet in Heaven" is deceptively simple in that almost every chapter begins with Eddie's birthday. The book reads like a journal compiled from the events of his birthdays. With each birthday, Eddie is

forced to revisit the events of the day to understand the chain reactions caused by them. Albom, in his narration, informs the reader that heaven is not a "lush Garden of Eden" but rather a place where earthly experiences are explained. Through Eddie, Albom gives the impression that heaven is where life's questions are answered.

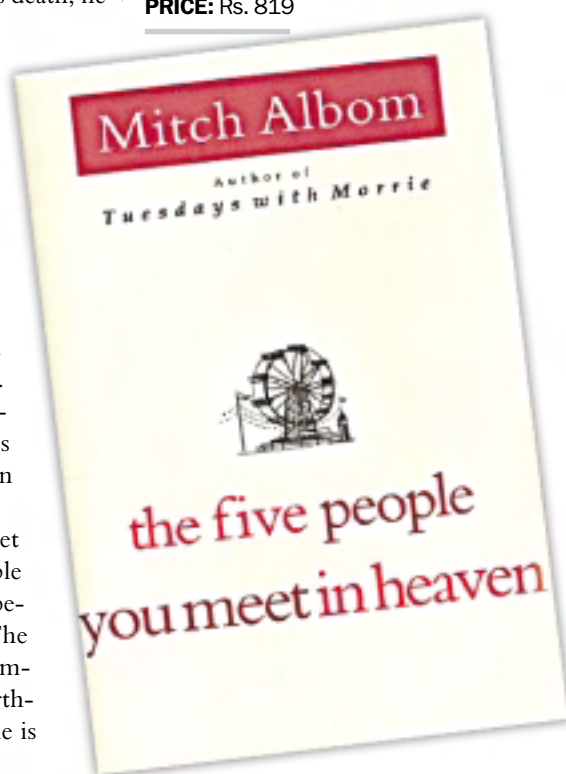
The narration is sensitive and highly imaginative. The theme of the book relies heavily on the old adage, "every action has a reaction"—even happenings, incidents that take place long before one's birth. Albom brings home the true meaning of the inter-connectedness between people, time and action. The more sensitive reader might find that the plot effectively explains consequences, chance happenings and random meetings. "Life begins before birth," Eddie is told by one of the people he meets. In his quest for answers, Eddie finally finds redemption when he resolves his earthly issues. "The Five People You Meet in Heaven" is an easy read with a surprising conclusion. **N**

## The Five People You Meet In Heaven

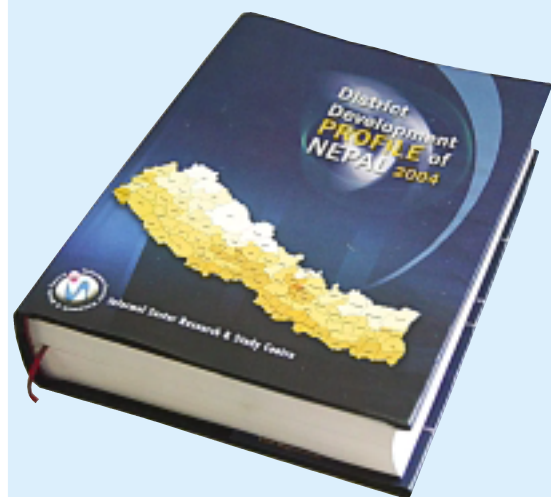
By Mitch Albom

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# Development Profile



## District Development Profile of Nepal 2004

Compiled and edited by Ram Prasad Gautam, Shishir Vaidya, Hari Bhakta Sharma  
Informal Sector Research and Study Center (Hardcover)

PRICE: Rs. 3000

PAGES: 1130

**T**he Informal Research and Study Center is a research institute established with "the objective to help and promote overall development by providing timely and accurate micro and macro development information of least possible [sic] development unit (VDC) of Nepal." It recently published the "District Development Profile of Nepal 2004," a revised edition of the publication, which was first released in 2000. The book starts off with a short country profile. This section contains an introduction and background information such as the National Census on Agriculture 2001-02 and the Second Long Term Health Plan (1999-2017). District profiles comprise the main part of the book; the profiles include detailed data on each of Nepal's districts—maps, demographic and topographic information, economic and social indicators and an "overall composite index." The overall index ranks each district according to "development parameters" such as access to drinking water, telephones per thousand people and the percent of land under irrigation. The book will be a very useful addition to a researcher or writer's reference shelf. Unfortunately the editing of the book is poor: Numerous spelling, usage and grammar errors mar an otherwise competent work. **N**





# Welcome Home

**A**fter four days of captivity in Iraq and ensuing confusion at home in Nepal, Iraqi militants released Inus Kawaree on Thursday, November 5. Just as we were preparing to go to press, Saturday's newspapers greeted us with pictures of his happy family members in Deupura village in Dhanusa. They were overwhelmed with joy that the family's sole breadwinner was safe in the Baghdad office of his employer, the Saudi Arabian Trading and Construction Company. Gulf-based Nepali diplomats said that the 27-year-old coffee boy should be home within a week. Encouraged but wary, his wife Najina, still in a state of shock, insists that she will only believe that her husband is safe when he gets home.

When that happens, it will be a huge relief for the nation, which went into deep mourning after 12 Nepalis were killed in Iraq in August. In our September 5 issue, which followed the grisly killing, we said that the Deuba government had done little to secure the release of the Nepalis. We deplored its reliance on proxy diplomacy through the Arab television channel al-Jazeera and Nepali diplomats based in Pakistan, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Regrettably, it was a leadership bereft of imagination. We still hold that the government and our diplomatic offices in the region fell spectacularly short of their official responsibility. This despite the fact that Iraq had failed to respond to our government's repeated calls for help and that governments much more powerful than ours have been able to do little to save their nationals from violent militants in that war-torn country.

Everything looked different this time. Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Prakash Sharan Mahat rushed to Abu Dhabi when the news of Kawaree's kidnapping became public. It's not certain that his presence in the U.A.E. had any bearing on Kawari's release, though a Filipino and an American who were taken hostage with him still remain in captivity. But we certainly want to give

Mahat his due: He seemed to have learned his lessons after the August debacle. If nothing else, his presence in the Gulf was telling; it showed he cared. There are speculations that Kawaree's fate was determined by the fact that he is a Muslim, but that alone doesn't explain the whole story; Iraqi militants have wantonly killed scores of fellow Muslims in the past.

In welcoming Kawaree's release and giving Mahat a pat on the back, we, however, would like to remind him of a larger responsibility that lies before him. Hundreds of Nepalis are said to be working in Iraq, where 170 foreigners have been kidnapped—and 30 of them killed—since the fall of Saddam last April. Iraq remains an extremely dangerous place, not least because thousands of civilians have become collateral casualties in the combat zone. The city of Fallujah, not far from Baghdad, could see a major battle between the insurgents and U.S. and Iraqi forces in the days ahead.

If it's not possible to stem the flow of Nepali workers to the Gulf, the government should do everything possible to keep them out of Iraq, where they will be at the mercy of militant groups like Ansar al-Sunna who believe that murder in the name of jihad pleases God. In August, Ansar al-Sunna dogmatically declared that it had "conducted Allah's ruling to 12 Nepalis who came from the land seeking assistance from their God Buddha in order to fight Muslims in this land by serving Jews and Christians..." Iraq's conflict is spiraling out of control. No one there is safe from the inferno. The government should be careful that a spark doesn't cost it all the political capital it has gained from Kawaree's release.

Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor



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