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EXCLUSIVE

MP's Report Card

First Division

Tek Bahadur Chokhyal, NC
Chief Whip seemed born for the job.
Raghu Pant, UML
Got media gag bill scrapped.
Chitra Lekha Yadav, NC
Dy Speaker had charm and strength.

Second Division

Narayan Man Bijukchhe, NPWP
A fellow-traveller of the *juche* ideology.
Pradip Nepal, UML
Write less, prepare more for House.
P.L. Singh, NC
Get well soon.

Third Division

Sushila Nepal, UML
Don't punch male colleagues.
Khum Bahadur Khadka, NC
Look before you leap.
Taranath Rana Bhat, NC
'Property makes women promiscuous'.

GOOD HOUSE KEEPING



Banks essential

Striking bank employees returned to work last week, but the government has not given up on its plan to declare them essential services.

It is likely that the government will bring out a notice to that effect in the Gazette. Finance Ministry sources said a committee is looking into union demands. The committee will study the financial position of the institutions and recommend employee allowances. And by that time striking may be illegal.

IMF review

An International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission here to review reforms being undertaken by the government has returned "satisfied" with the progress made so far. This could translate into a low-interest, three-year loan early next year for the implementation of the poverty reduction strategy, now being prepared.

Another mission will arrive in November to negotiate and finalise the loan under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility—which will replace the Fund's Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility.

Nepal can draw up to \$100 million dollars from the IMF, its borrowing quota which is generally extended to offset foreign exchange crunches.

MPs couldn't finish their homework, but for the first time the Nepali parliament showed multi-partisan maturity in passing laws that matter.

SHIVA GAUNLE

If the Nepali Congress hadn't indulged in one its periodic attacks of self-flagellation this month, the 18th session of Parliament might have gone down in the history books as the most productive application of democracy in Nepal so far.

But, as it turned out, the government felt so shaky after the power struggle between the Bhattarai and Koirala factions that it didn't want to risk continuing the session.

Another two weeks, and all the important pending bills could have been passed. A handful of conscientious MPs had tried putting national interest above narrow party concerns, although the fact that this was not always possible was illustrated by the fracas that broke out when members physically assaulted each other in the aftermath of the resignation of State Minister of Forests, Aftab Alam.

You could say that wrangling and dissent are a part of democracy, but look at what was achieved:

- The Kamaiyas were freed.
- The Human Rights Commission was set up, because the MPs demanded it.
- The budget was passed before the fiscal year for the first time.
- The controversial Citizenship Bill was passed.

There are, of course, questions about all of the above. The Kamaiyas are free, but they have been evicted by landlords and many are camping in the rain outside Dhangadi. The budget was passed on time, but the bureaucratic machinery is doing the traditional thing of waiting for the rains to stop before disbursing any of it. The Human Rights Commission hasn't got much to show for itself nor does it have enough money to do what all expect out of it.

Even the Citizenship Bill didn't go smoothly. The Valley suffered a bandh on 6 August, the UML chickened out despite earlier support, and there are strong questions about whether the safeguards can work at the local level.

Koirala came to power with a three-point agenda: corruption control, law and order (read: Maoists), and governance. An important part of corruption control was the muscular Anti-Corruption Bill which would have shifted the burden of proof to the accused. In effect, officials would be presumed guilty of corruption until they could prove their own innocence. Such a severe law is needed because rarely is there actual proof of graft.

Curiously, the draft of the Anti-Corruption Bill exempts the Prime Minister from investigation. The Bill, however, does give more teeth to the Commission for the Investigation of

Abuse of Authority (CIAA) and the Special Police can investigate petty day-to-day graft in the machinery of government.

The watered-down Political Parties Bill was passed by the Lower House, but will have to wait for the next session before it reaches the Upper House. The Bill has provisions that will force the audit of party accounts and make public names of those who make donations of more than Rs 25,000. But the MPs rejected state funding and also a clause that would have enabled the Election Commission to force them to abide by its codes.

Other bills that have gone back into the freezer are:

- The Judicial Administration Bill which will allow a different Bench to hear appeals on rulings by the Supreme Court.
- The Education Bill which would streamline rules about private schools, and enforce a tax on them to support government schools.
- The Kamaiya Freedom Bill which would make provisions for the rehabilitation of free Kamaiyas.

What never came were perhaps the most important bills that would have addressed reforms in the banking sector and also given the central bank more supervisory powers.

One of the most positive trends for

the future is that the Parliament's committees are functioning as they should. The Public Accounts Committee, under MPs Subhas Nemwang, N.P. Sawad, Hridayesh Tripathi and others, blocked the Army's questionable RJ100 deal, asked pointed questions about alleged misappropriation of Rs 50 million in the Mahakali Irrigation Scheme.

The State Affairs Committee, under Homnath Dahal, Pradeep Gyawali and others, have issued a powerful report on long-overdue civil administration reform. It was this committee that also approved the citizenship bill through consensus. Som Prasad Pandey, Romi Gauchan and Lila Mani Pokhrel of the Foreign Relations and Human Rights Committee

were at the forefront of raising the Laxmanpur Barrage issue before the Prime Minister's visit to India. They did go overboard by calling for a demolition of the barrage, though.

What the functioning of the committees in this session showed was that they can rise above party lines and tackle issues of vital national importance head on. If this trend continues, future sessions of the House could finally start showing that democracy can deliver development. But for that to happen MPs must avoid the temptation for populist grandstanding over petty partisan issues. ♦

YES, PRIME MINISTER
Editorial
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Nepali Times
NEPAL'S TOP NEWSPAPER



News that matters to people who matter



YES, PRIME MINISTER

The House had to be adjourned for a day in the furore that followed the Prime Minister's remark that the parliament was a den of smugglers, or words to that effect. "Name them, prosecute them," chanted opposition lawmakers rather disingenuously. They needn't have worried, Koirala seems to have been alluding to alleged crooks within his own party.

That admission took some time in coming. Rajendra Kharel, an NC lawmaker said to be a Bhattarai loyalist, had once raised this issue most eloquently, "All our leaders know who the shady people in our party are. But why do they keep nominating them election after election? Why do they have to be made ministers in every cabinet formation or reshuffle?" Good point. Unfortunately the Prime Minister decided not to be too specific. He did not name names. But then, why did he stir a hornet's nest, or shall we say, a smuggler's den? One reason could be that he was trying to get back at some of his erstwhile cronies who were trying to oust him. In that case, why didn't he spill the beans? Do we hear skeletons rattling in Koirala's own inner circle?

Meanwhile, with the cabinet grant of a hefty raise in the allowances for our hard-working MPs, they will now be earning about Rs 32,000 a month. Not bad, but depending on the parties they belong to, MPs may not be allowed to take it all home—some of them will have to pay "party tax".

But the really big question in everyone's mind is this: will it control corruption? We now know from the civil service salary hike that this is quite unlikely. Raising salaries just made some of them more greedy. Besides, if the MPs are indeed busy with extracurricular smuggling as Koirala alleges, 32 grand is small change. Yes, Prime Minister. Now what, Prime Minister?

KATHMANDU NEEDS A BYPASS

During the two-year Indian blockade of 1989-90, kerosene was flown in on airliners from Dhaka, and there were shortages of everything in Kathmandu. But a strange thing happened: the Nepali economy did not go into total collapse. What saved Nepal was its very underdevelopment. The country did not grind to a halt because it was not moving in the first place. People outside Kathmandu lived on as they always had, since most items of their daily necessity did not come from India.

For the past two weeks, there has been another near-blockade of Kathmandu. This time it was the natural obstruction of the Prithvi Highway by a massive landslide. Kathmandu and Nepal are much more dependent on the outside world today than 10 years ago, and road transport is the mainstay of the economy.

Floods, landslides or even earthquakes, cannot be predicted with any degree of accuracy. But only fools would not be prepared for them.

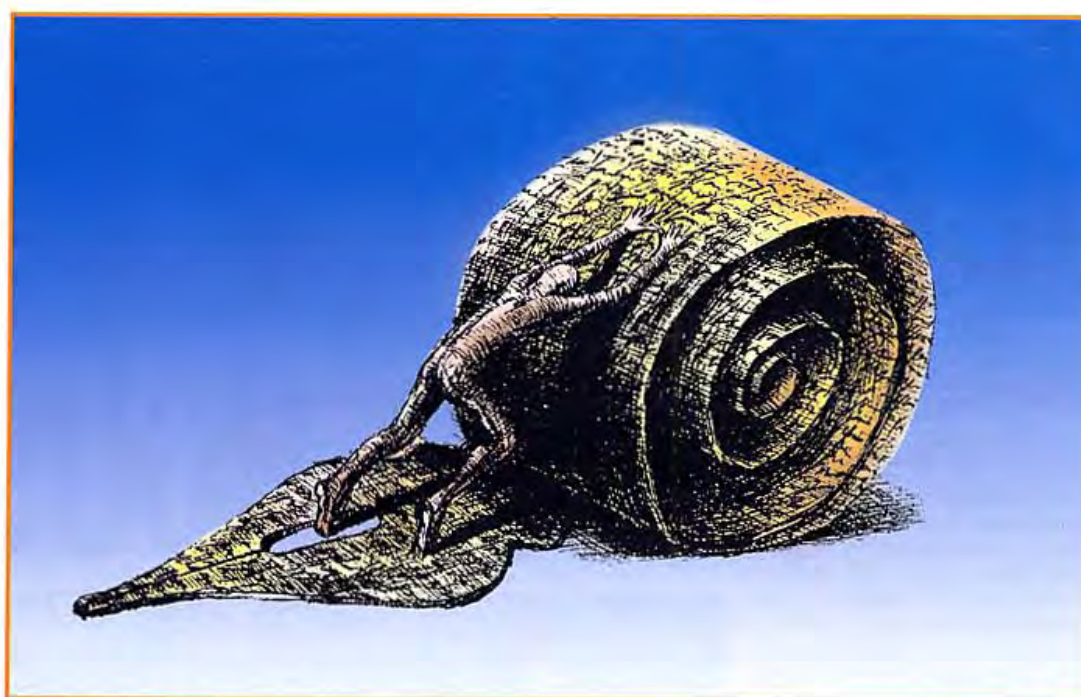
Nepal is on a major seismic zone, the mountains are young and exposed to heavy monsoon erosion. We know this, so it should not be a surprise to us when earthquakes happen or when landslides occur. What we have to ask ourselves is this: what are we doing to prepare ourselves for future calamities that will surely come? Disaster-preparedness means having mechanisms in place for immediate relief, a strategy for alternative means of communication, fall-back options for relief and rescue. If a relatively small event like Krishnabhir could cut off the capital for so long, what will happen during a really big multiple crisis?

Hand-in-hand must be a citizens' response so that the traditional hoarding and gouging does not get out of hand. We must learn to readjust our consumption pattern, use less of everything that there is less of, not travel unnecessarily, be frugal with food, and try to be more self-sufficient than usual. This year, we have been lucky that the road blockage is beyond Naubise, so the Tribhuvan Highway has been able to keep a tenuous link to the plains and the rest of the Nepal. At the level of the government, a rapid rescue force to be mobilised during such emergencies is long overdue. The normal maintenance mechanism for highways cannot cope with slides like the one at Krishnabhir, and it is certain that even bigger landslides will occur in future. And we argue in a report (page 4) that alternative access routes that have been on cold storage, some for 40 years, need to be revived. In this day and age, it is foolish to take a 200-km detour to the west when you actually need to go east.

When a coronary artery is blocked, a person gets a heart attack. To prevent future attacks, surgeons perform bypass operations on patients. Kathmandu badly needs a highway bypass.

Nepali Times is published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd
Mailing address: GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu Nepal
Editor: Kunda Dixit editors@nepalitimes.com
Marketing, circulation and subscriptions: (01) 543333-7 Fax: (01) 521013
marketing@nepalitimes.com www.nepalitimes.com
Printed at Jagadamba Press (01) 521393

International news in Nepali Times is provided through arrangements with The Guardian, Observer, dpa, IPS, The Asian Age, Dawn, SAPU, Die Welt, Sud Deutsche Zeitung and Gemini News.



STATE OF THE STATE

by C.K.LAL

The party is over



Many of you will remember the Panchayat-era textbook that had the chapter "Reasons for the failure of the party system in Nepal". The mess in the political

parties these days makes one wonder if there was some truth in the "reasons" manufactured by Panchayat ideologues.

The Nepali Congress was at the forefront of the struggle against the "Partyless Panchayat Democracy". Voters gave it an absolute majority in the parliament elected after the new Constitution came into force. But the party literally threw it away when, in 1993, the prime minister was forced by his fellow MPs into going for a mid-term poll when they defied the party whip and abstained from a crucial vote in the House. The Nepali Congress exhibited its well-known knack for extracting defeat from the jaws of victory.

And it never did learn any lessons. All erring lawmakers were nominated again. The party's whip in the new parliament was even given to the very person who had led those into defying it in the earlier one. The issue within the Nepali Congress has never been one of institutionalisation, but of massaging the egos of sulking stalwarts. The fault-line in the Nepali Congress is so deep that it actually behaves like two parties. K.P. Bhattarai and G.P. Koirala have to hold regular summits to bring the party back from the brink of a formal split.

The Communist Party of Nepal (UML), the main opposition in the parliament, is in no better shape. Showing more discipline, their factional leaders do not squabble in public, but they can't help taking a dig at each other in public through their respective mouthpieces.

Maybe the reason for the relatively muted wrangling within the UML is that the party has already split once after 1990, with the ML breaking away last year. Even though the ML faction failed to get a single seat in the parliament, it

The Nepali Congress has all along exhibited its well-known knack for extracting defeat from the jaws of victory.

controls powerful local government units, including the Kathmandu Metropolitan Council.

The less said about other sundry leftist political parties the better. They are the private turfs of their leaders. For example, Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party (NWPP) is little more than a front for the political ambitions of Bhaktapur strongman Narayan Man Bijukchhe, better known by his *nom de guerre*, Comrade Rohit.

Then there are the parties chiselled out of the Panchayat mould, and they seem reluctant to part with what they see as their historical glory. Leaders who spent lifetimes practising partyless politics, when all they had to worry about was not losing palace patronage, just don't have the killer instinct to thrive in the cut-throat world of Nepali democracy.

It's too early to be judgemental, but they seem to be learning all the wrong lessons from the Congress and the Left. And one lesson they have learnt well is how to form factions and split the party. Groupism inside the Rastriya Prajatantra Party and the Nepal Sadbhavana Party tend to get even more destructive than in the Nepali Congress or the UML.

One has to wonder: is this a national trait? Can't Nepalis ever work together? Looking at the affairs of political parties in Nepal, it's hard to believe that they are comprised of the very same people who struggled so

hard and for so long for democracy. Many of them went straight from jail to be sworn in as ministers. Just look at them now.

It's still not too late to institutionalise political parties. Even the unrecognisably diluted "Political Parties Bill" passed by the Lower House of the parliament before it adjourned last week offers some scope for change. However, the first step must be to free parties from the stranglehold of ambitious leaders who consider contesting organisational elections an insult to their long years of sacrifice. Pious intentions are not enough, parties now need rules to govern their behaviour through institutional reform.

After India gained freedom, Mahatma Gandhi suggested that the Indian National Congress be disbanded. Perhaps he did not want its proud legacy of the independence struggle to be wasted. Maybe it's time for Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (UML) to think in really radical terms as well. After all, politicians from the two parties do seem to get along better with each other than with rivals within their own parties. And they did work well together during the interim government when the memory of struggle was fresh.

But public memory is notoriously short. And if anything can stop a King Mahendra from emerging again, it can only be institutionally resilient and ideologically

unambiguous political parties. If the present mess gets messier, if those who fought for democracy continue to squander it, then another generation of Nepalis may once again be forced to memorise textbooks with chapters like "Reasons for the failure of the party system in Nepal". ♦



If he had followed in his forefathers' footsteps Hari Sharma would probably be chanting *mantras* for the British Gurkhas somewhere in the UK. Deciding not to was probably a smart move for Hari, who, as Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, is today one of the most powerful people in Nepal. Together with Puranjan Acharya, Political Secretary, and Gokarna Poudel, Personal Secretary, he forms the team that Girija Prasad Koirala relies on to run the country from day to day. The fact that they are all men, and all Bahun may also be important, and reflects this country's governance structure.

Hari and Gokarna are first cousins, although their attachment to Koirala's office came about in different ways and at different times. They are both from Gulmi district, Hari from what he calls a "100 percent Gurkha" village of Juhang, and Gokarna from Bhurtung village. Puranjan is from Madhumara, in Koirala's home district of Morang.

Hari was brought up and raised in Hong Kong, where his father was the battalion *parohit* for the British Gurkhas. "I'm the one who did not carry out what had become a family tradition of joining the army," he says. A brilliant student, Hari ranked fourth nationwide in the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination of 1978. A chance encounter with noted Indian scholar Bhabani Sengupta in a Kathmandu street in 1984 was to have a profound impact on his life. "I had read his articles in Indian magazines and I introduced myself to him," he says.



Sengupta later became Hari's mentor

Puranjan Acharya as they worked together on several projects at the Centre for Policy Research (CPR), the New Delhi think-tank.



All the prime minister's men

Nepali Times brings you the behind-the-scenes people that run Girija Prasad Koirala's office.

It was while he was at CPR that Chakra Prasad Bastola, now foreign minister, and Jaya Prakash Prasad Gupta, the present communication minister and then the PM's press adviser, suggested that he come home to assist Koirala who had just begun his first stint as prime minister. Hari was only 26 years old when he joined the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in 1991.

"I helped set up his first real office, providing him all secretarial assistance needed," says Hari. When Koirala was voted out of office in the November 1994 elections, Hari went for further studies to the US as a Fulbright fellow.

Hari's official tasks now include just about everything from overseeing the PMO and briefing the PM on any issue that comes his way. He also works out the cabinet agenda together with the chief secretary, and serves as a channel through which government secretaries can communicate with the country's chief executive. Needless to say, Hari is also the Prime Minister's eye and ears on foreign affairs, which happens to be his subject of interest.

Gokarna landed his job with Koirala when he was just finishing college, courtesy cousin Hari and Gupta. He was in the mid-20s when he joined the

PMO nine years ago and has been with Koirala ever since. Congress insiders call Gokarna a Khum Bahadur Khadka protégé but such labels don't bother him. "Others can say whatever they want," he says, adding that his one and only guru is Koirala.

The prime minister is at work early at his official Baluwater residence, out of bed by four o'clock. After a couple of glasses of tea, he begins his workday meeting politicians from outside the Valley at about seven. His official programme is fixed at least a day in advance, and the evenings are kept aside for meeting government secretaries, ministers and opposition leaders. All appointments are handled by Gokarna, who also updates Koirala on the law and order situation.

Puranjan was working as a programme officer with Plan International in east Nepal before joining Koirala in 1995 (when the UML was in power), and has been with him both in and out of government. He has a powerful mentor in Nona Koirala, Koirala's sister-in-law who is said to wield much influence in both party and government. But he hastens to add, "I've also been inspired by B.P. Koirala and the Prime Minister himself."

Puranjan serves as the Prime Minister's link with the party, and the opposition, and advises him on development policy and economic affairs. His task also involves scanning questions raised in parliament and outside and preparing answers after consulting concerned officials and ministers. All party, parliament and development related issues pass through his desk.

Puranjan spends many evenings discussing politics and policy with key ministers and academics at Baluwater. His favourite readings include *At the Centre of Whiteness* by J.M. Lee, G.W. Jones and June Burnham, a treatise on advising the Prime Minister and the cabinet.

"Many people come to this office with issues that the state mechanism should have addressed as a



Gokarna Poudel

natural process," he says. "My lesson working here is that unless the delivery of state



Hari Sharma

services take place on their own, it will be difficult for the people to internalise democracy."

Being close to the source of power has its benefits, especially in a society that worships anyone with authority. Hari has a rank equivalent to a minister of state and the other two are of the same level as government secretaries. But the trio have clout almost similar to what the royal palace secretaries used to have during the Panchayat era. All three, therefore, also have their own share of followers and hangers-on—people seeking favours for jobs, promotions, transfers, etc.

"Many political leaders still believe the PMO is a place where you can get everything done. Here we get *fariads* (petitions) on every thing from buffalo thefts to job applications and all sorts of development projects," says Hari. "We are satellites and can only glow in

the light reflected by the leader. I prefer to call myself a conveyor belt to the prime minister."

Besides his private office assistants and the official support he gets from the Cabinet Secretariat, Koirala also has what can be called an informal, *kane-kburi* (whisper) network of advisers who are not accountable to anyone. These include members of his family and some ministers who consider themselves close to the prime minister.

Both Puranjan (40) and Gokarna (33) don't hide the fact that they have political ambitions. That their jobs allow them to observe at close range the conduct of state affairs and the management of a party that has often been paralysed by internal dissent is a bonus.

"Anyone in politics has ambitions, I am now rehearsing," says Gokarna. "One important lesson I have learnt working here is how to respond to a public that has varied demands."

Coming from a district that perhaps has more leaders per capita than others, Puranjan knows the road ahead will be tough: "Tomorrow's politics will be tougher, more competitive. Yes, this experience can help."

Hari's interest in politics is only academic. Every time Koirala relinquishes office, he heads back to his den at the Centre of Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS) and his pet pursuits: analysis of discourse on democracy and dissent, and teaching.

"I have my own small world," says Hari. And that is made up of his family, a personal library with more than 5,000 books and journals and a classical music collection of over 500 tapes and CDs.

Hari doesn't hang around Baluwater more than he has to. Puranjan and Gokarna, however, shadow Koirala from dawn to dusk. On some evenings they sit down with the Prime Minister—when he settles with a cigarette and a glass (not cup) of tea to discuss another eventful day in the life of the prime minister. ♦

LETTERS

LONG LIVE THE KING

C.K. Lal (State of the State, #5) need not have shed crocodile tears for the institution of monarchy. Nothing is immortal: the universe, empires, kingdoms and republics come and go. When history calls the sunset, the Nepal kingdom too may fade. But till such a time, it is a little premature to project the Nepali monarchy as a house of cards ready to be swept away by one motivated media blitz.

The real sense of *deja vu* this time is not the death of another person in a traffic accident in which Paras, nephew to the king, was allegedly involved in, but how the Nepali monarch's detractors will exploit almost anything to discredit and smear the king. Like the time when a mass rumour was spread that Pampha Devi stashed away in a Swiss Bank \$16 billion from the country's coffers, that the mastermind behind the Rajiv

Gandhi killing was our queen. The motivated media is not interested in Praveen's death, not even Paras. What they really want is to taunt and embarrass the king.

Nothing makes for a pathetic read than a republican hack patronising our royal family to take on a "role model" from cycling Swedes, buffalo raising Thais and "cheap entertainment" Buckingham Palace. We want our monarchy to stay Nepali, especially when we have seen what the "Indian role model" has done to our media and netajis. Outside Mr Lal's circle, monarchy does enjoy plenty of "genuine popularity" and it has always exhibited "passionate interests in the welfare and progress of their country".

Our self-inflated media intellectuals strike a gaudy pose behind black Ray Bans while they denigrate the royalty for "hiding behind dark glasses". Both the king and queen have no dark glasses in

the photo you have used. Is Mr Lal conditioned to see clarity through his tinted glasses? Hypocrisy becomes cheap laughter when it crosses a certain limit. Long live the king!

Jaya Buxthakoti
Kathmandu

An overwhelming majority of Nepalis are appalled by the recklessness of punks like Paras Shah. Hiding behind the shadow of the royal family, they probably think they are immune to the justice system. Paras should be prosecuted and taken out of circulation before he kills someone else. He should be prevented from fleeing the country, every embassy should be notified.

Jagan Man
Kathmandu



In this whole sordid episode, one fact keeps getting sidelined: what price is human life? A musician is killed by a hit-and-run driver. There is overwhelming evidence a member of the royal family is involved. The wife of the musician comes out saying she does not want to pursue the matter and her priority is her children's education. So where does justice and the rule of law come into all this? Going by Nepal's existing laws, a driver who hits and kills a cow on the street can be jailed for 14 years. But if a human being is killed, it seems, you can go scot free.

T.S. Basnyat
Pokhara

ONLINE TIMES

What a joy to read real news on your online edition. To keep in some small way in touch with Nepal and the Nepali people who

were so generous and kind to us when we travelled there long ago. Your determined, and spirit-filled people are under some duress at this time. You remain in our most fervent prayers

J. Baker
Canada

Finally we have a newspaper with an eye of its own. The different approach you guys have adopted is something that has to be admired. Hope you will be bolder and challenge issues that are only covered superficially elsewhere. An essence of good reporting is asking "why" to the answer of "what". Keep it up.

Abk S.
Kathmandu

I started reading the online issues of Nepali Times at the behest of a friend. We read with interest the article on Nepal-India relations by Rajendra Dahal (#4). I

must commend him for his writing style, an unstilted language and substance.

Many stories I read in newspapers are, unfortunately, tasteless and superficial. I hope Nepali Times will invest in bright, upcoming journalists and begin an exemplary tradition.

I also hope that you will venture out of Kathmandu valley and include stories on less accessible places. We really need a new, fresh perspective.

Mohan Chand
Syracuse, USA

Here in the United States, reading Nepali Times on my computer is a treat. Kunda Dixit's columns are superb, and I hope to read more of his intelligent humour.

Royce Eaves
Baton Rouge, USA

All roads lead to Kathmandu

But, as the landslide blockage showed, the capital is dangerously dependent on just one road in and out.

A NEPALI TIMES INVESTIGATION

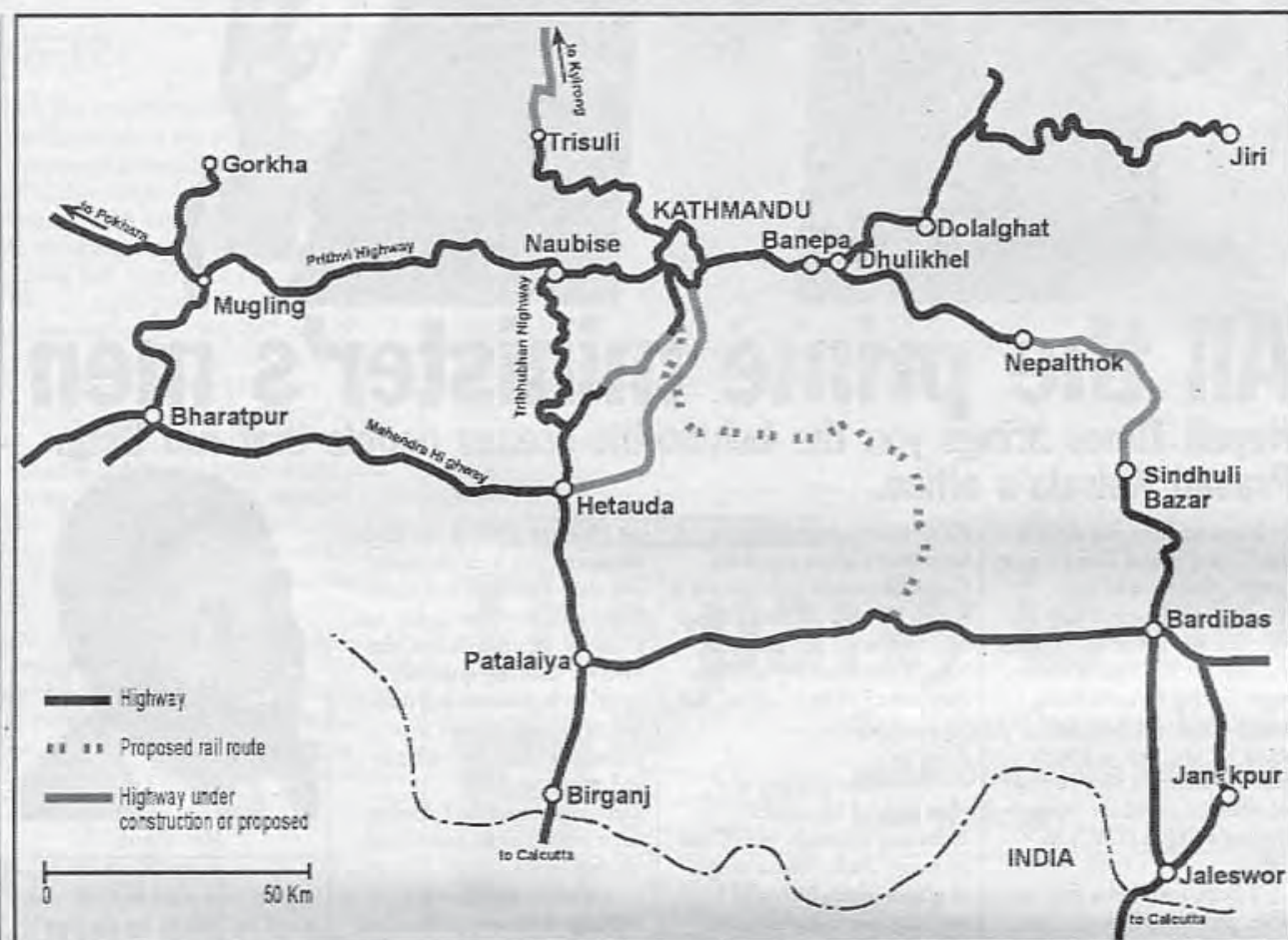
When Kathmandu was cut off from most of the country for nearly two weeks due to a massive landslide at Krishnabhir on the Prithvi Highway, reaction in the capital swung between two extremes. One group was apathetic: landslide, what landslide? The other group started panic-buying.

Government officials, including the Works Secretary, tried to assure everyone that the road would open in "one or two days" instead of telling the public that this was a huge slope failure that would take weeks to cut through.

Keeping the supply-lines to Kathmandu open is not an easy task, especially during the monsoons when the young mountains crumble and slip after every downpour. There is nothing new about the fury of nature during a Himalayan monsoon; what is, is that the population has increased and there is more travel. And because there is better communication, we hear about them more.

The pros and cons of various kinds of road access to Kathmandu from the south has been debated ever since the Rana days. It was only in 1956 that the arduously built Tribhuvan Highway was completed, and a road link to the tarai and India was finally established.

For the first decade or so, the precarious, serpentine highway was chronically blocked by landslides. But after four decades, the slopes along the Tribhuvan Highway have stabilised and these days it



remains passable during the monsoons too.

Ironically, it is this Tribhuvan Highway, long shunned because of its narrow width, sharp turns and steep climbs and descents, that comes to Kathmandu's rescue every time the Prithvi Highway is shut down. Most of the traffic from Kathmandu took this single-lane road and the authorities even enforced a one-way system to prevent traffic

jams. Even with this alternative, the highway leading out of Kathmandu at Thankot is a chokepoint for most traffic in and out of Kathmandu, and that includes vital supplies such as food and fuel, as well as passenger traffic. Block that 10-metre strip of asphalt and you have Kathmandu by the jugular.

The Japanese are studying a Thankot Bypass to connect Naubise on the Prithvi Highway to the Balaju Bus Park through

the Bhimdhunga gap (behind Sitapaila). One disabled truck on the Thankot uphill earlier this year closed the route in and out of the Valley for two days. The Thankot Bypass would prevent such closures and also reduce the distance to Naubise.

However, as the need is immediate, as the Krishnabhir blockage showed, the government needs to give serious thought to improving the Tribhuvan Highway as a reliable

alternative to the overloaded Prithvi Highway. Says one road engineer: "That means more than taking care of the riding surface. Hazard assessment of the road corridor should be done on a regular basis and coping mechanism set up in place."

Things are going to change after the Sindhuli Highway is completed in another two years. After five decades of talking about it, Kathmandu will at last

have an alternative access to the plains. Officially renamed the B.P. Koirala Highway, the Sindhuli road had been put on a 30-year hold by the Panchayat government. Work resumed after the restoration of democracy, with grant assistance from the Government of Japan, which forced Nepal to accept a single-lane road. Given Kathmandu's vulnerability to being cut off, it may also be a good idea to broaden the B.P. Koirala Highway into a double-lane link to Bardibas in the plains, which a road engineer says, may still be possible.

Other alternative roads to the south include the 40-year-old Tika Bhairab road, heading due south from the Valley to Hetauda. This was also a B.P. Koirala project, and was abandoned after his government was overthrown by King Mahendra in 1961.

The alignment still exists, and can easily be upgraded to highway status. The road, now officially called Kanti Highway, has now become the pet project of the Patan mayor, Buddhi Raj Bajracharya, who is said to want to open the access so Patan can benefit from the taxes it can impose.

The government has allocated Rs 10 million for the road in this year's budget, but that won't even build 2 km. In 1998, the government had invited BOOT participation, but there were no takers. The South Koreans had helped in the detailed survey and design of this highway, perhaps with a view to getting the construction

Home they brought her peacekeeper dead

The Nepali army and police benefit from UN peacekeeping roles around the world, but things can turn nasty when there is no peace to keep

SALIL SUBEDI

On the hot and humid morning of 10 August, a group of Nepali soldiers with the United Nations Transitional Authority in East Timor (UNTAET) was ordered to move into the Beko area. This had been a trouble spot where some 30 anti-Independence militants were reported to be hiding, and the Nepalis had been trying to flush them out with the help of the Fijians.

The search lasted the whole day, but no militants were found. But suddenly, another team of Nepalis travelling in a convoy to relieve their compatriots was ambushed at 5:20 in the evening. The 14 Nepali UN peacekeepers in the convoy returned fire. Rifleman Devi Ram Jaisi and Dilliraman Kafle were hit. Devi Ram was shot on the chest and died in a UN helicopter while being evacuated, and Dilliraman is recovering from his wounds at a Dili hospital.

Devi Ram's body was brought home to Kathmandu last week and handed over to his family who were flown in by helicopter to Kathmandu from their home in Dailekh district. Among those who came to Kathmandu were Devi Ram's 22-year-old wife, Krishna Devi, who is still recovering from the birth of their son only two weeks earlier. The Jaisis have another two-year-old son.

The UN announced a compensatory payment of \$50,000 (c.



Rs 3.5 million), while the Royal Nepal Army is going to provide a further Rs 400,000 to the bereaved family. Devi Ram's wife will also get a life-long pension and the two boys' education will be taken care of till they are 16.

The fatality in the Kewal Jung Company of the Royal Nepal Army in East Timor was a tragic reminder that although Nepal has benefitted immensely from sending its troops to take part in UN peacekeeping forces around the world, things can turn nasty when the role of the UN is not properly defined or there is no peace to keep.

At present, the Army has more than 810 soldiers serving in Lebanon, East Timor, Sierra Leone, Congo, Eritrea, Kosovo and Cyprus. The biggest contingent, consisting of 631 men, is in Lebanon, and East Timor has the second biggest Nepali deployment with 164 soldiers. "Nepali peacekeepers have earned a reputation for being extremely disciplined, and also for being tough under fire in Lebanon," says a retired army general.

Besides soldiers, Nepali policemen are also under the UN flag in various conflict situations. There are 137 Nepal Police personnel in Bosnia, Iraq, Rwanda and Sierra Leone, while East Timor also

contract from possible grant-assistance financing, but the project was scrapped because of the East Asian economic crisis.

Another shortcut to the plains would be to build a 27-km stretch of highway to connect Pharping with Kulekhani. This would open access to the south along the old foot-trail that goes via Bhimpedi.

For the future, there are some grandiose plans:

► A road tunnel connecting Thakor with Bhainse and a dedicated highway thereafter till Hetauda was dreamt up by a Norwegian team. The Japanese were also interested before they took up the Sindhuli Highway. In 1999, a private party showed interest in taking it up as a BOT Project, but the proposal is now languishing in the files of the Ministry of Physical Planning and Construction.

► The ambitious Bagmati Rail scheme, proposed by former chief engineer of the Department of Road, Birendra Keshari Pokhrel, and civil engineer Shankar Nath Rimal, is to connect the valley with the tarai by a rail line along the course of Bagmati river. The

Northward bound

When the Amiko Highway to Tibet was built in the late sixties, the Indian media went wild speculating over the possibility of Chinese tanks rumbling into Kathmandu (and then onto India) at short notice. The then prime minister Kirti Nidhi Bista's retort to that was that communism does not travel by road. Apparently, neither do daily necessities, as Nepalis realised to their chagrin when the road to the north proved to be useless during the "economic blockade" imposed by India in 1989-90.

The reality is that Amiko Highway is prone to landslides and difficult to keep open all year round. Add to that the difficulty in traversing long distances to reach any town of economic significance or a sea port in China, and you have a highway that is turning out to be a white elephant in terms of maintenance. The cost of rehabilitating the badly damaged Amiko Highway is so high that a Swiss grant has been obtained to implement it.

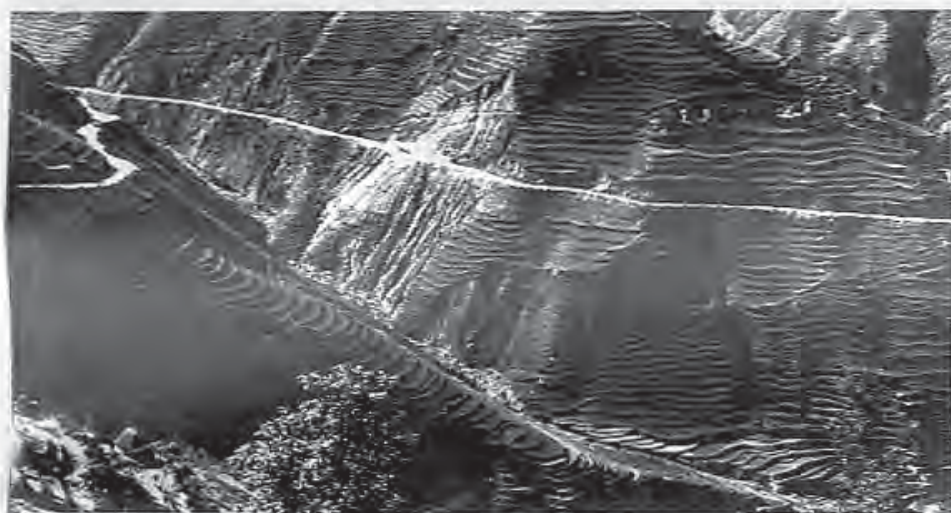
A second route recently proposed by the Chinese government envisages extending the existing road to Dhunche upto Kyirong. Nepali traders believe that this road will be more economical than the Amiko Highway since the vertical distance to Tibet will be drastically reduced. And once you reach the high plateau, it is easy going.

proposal needs much more serious attention than it has got so far. A mass-transit system would be less polluting and more economical, but one reason it has been ignored could be the paranoia in Kathmandu about being swamped by Indians.

► The Hetauda-Kathmandu

Ropeway, which is rotting away, can be refurbished and used efficiently to transport goods.

Or, even a replacement of this ancient system by a more modern substitute could be considered. If there is one project that could be effectively privatised it is this one. ♦



SLIPPERY SLOPE: The Tribhuvan Highway clings precariously to a mountainside scarred by landslides near Nambir.

has a contingent of nearly 50 Nepali Police.

Peacekeeping for the UN affords both soldiers and policemen wonderful opportunities to earn substantial incomes in a short time. There is therefore stiff competition to be included as peacekeepers and although both institutions claim that their selection process is fair, complaints about being overlooked is common.

At present, the daily allowance for Police peacekeepers range from \$70-136 depending on the nature of assignments, area deployed in and rank. Police personnel have to take care of their accommodation from this allowance, whereas soldiers live in their own barracks.

Police peacekeepers contribute up to 19 percent of their allowance for a welfare fund which is used for emergency relief back home in Nepal. The Nepal Police says it has constructed six schools with money from the welfare fund.

The Royal Nepal Army is very secretive about its remuneration, and official figures are difficult to get hold of. However, according to an army officer who formerly served in Lebanon, commissioned officers get something to the tune of \$1,000. Out of that around 30 percent is deducted for the army's welfare fund, which provides for the army hospital and the army school.

More than 35,000 Nepali troops have served in various UN peacekeeping operations in the past 43 years. Thirty-six of them have died in the line of duty and 46 have been injured. Army sources say the benefit for Nepal is exposure of soldiers to international conflict situations, but for the individuals concerned there is no doubt that it is the income that is most important. ♦



Krishna Devi and sons await the arrival of Devi Ram's body (left).

NEPALIS IN U.N. PEACEKEEPING FORCES WORLDWIDE

Royal Nepal Army	Nepal Police	
Lebanon: 631	Yugoslavia	
East Timor: 164	(Bosnia- Herzegovina):	18
Sierra Leone: 6	East Timor:	47
Congo: 9	Kosovo:	54
Eritrea: 1	Sierra Leone:	5
Croatia: 1	Iraq:	10
Kosovo: 1	Rwanda:	2
Cyprus: 1	The Netherlands	
	(War Crimes Tribunal):	1
Total: 814	Total:	137

Toothless party bill

Barely hours before the parliament's budget session was to end on 18 August, the ruling Nepali Congress Party rammed a watered-down version of a bill that originally sought to make political parties more transparent and accountable.

The opposition was against the bill not because it had been made toothless but because it allowed a party president to nominate up to 50 percent of the party's executive body. According to the original draft a party chief would be allowed to nominate only 25 percent of the ex-com members, but that did not go well with the ruling Nepali Congress. The opposition had gone against the 50 percent clause arguing that it was against the spirit of the constitution. The government's position was that the nomination issue was an internal affair of the parties and there was no harm in keeping that flexibility because it did not prohibit parties from electing every member to the executive.

The bill had already been weakened considerably by the ruling party and the opposition working together to delete two important provisions from the original draft. One related to the funding of political parties from the central coffers-at the rate of one rupee per vote to parties securing at least three percent of the total votes-which MPs rejected outright. Another important clause that was thrown out, is one that would have required political parties and politicians to abide by codes issued by the Election Commission from time to time. The original draft gave the Commission authority to even cancel the registration of parties that regularly violated the codes.

One of the few provisions of the bill that remain and can contribute toward making parties more transparent is the requirement to make public their audit reports, including names of contributors that give more than Rs 25,000 to the party.

RNAC's ATR deal questioned

It has become routine that any decision by the Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation (RNAC) ends up for scrutiny by the Parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

The latest to come up before the PAC involves the purchase of two French-made ATR72-500 aircraft. Last week, the Committee ordered RNAC to furnish all relevant studies and papers on the aircraft purchase for assessment.

The airline was preparing to pay the \$ 400,000 "commitment fee" when the PAC stepped in and ordered it to stop the purchase until the inquiry was over.

The national flag-carrier had resolved to go for the aircraft on 11 August at \$16.5 million a piece. Defending the decision, RNAC Executive Director Hari Bhakta Shrestha said, it was based on earlier reports and recent re-evaluation and route-profitability studies.

Shrestha told the committee that the company had short-listed four aircraft for possible selection, and these were again assessed for their viability on short hops to India. The ATRs were found to have compare more favourably than its nearest competitor, the Canadian Dash-8 series, he said.

More cars in Nepal

The number of motor vehicles in Nepal has increased by almost four times in the past 10 years, according to the Department of Transport Management.

In mid-April the number of motor vehicles had reached 263,500 nationwide. Of these, Bagmati Zone alone registered 148,500, of which 73 percent were private vehicles. Likewise, the number of motorcycles registered in the country has grown by more than 400 percent over the 10 years, and most of the increase has taken place in the Kathmandu Valley. Of the 147,100 in the country, 94,200 have Bagmati number plates.

According to the Department, over 100,000 vehicles ply on the streets of Kathmandu every day. Half of these are motorcycles. The narrow roads in the Valley and the large number of vehicles account for the slow speed of the traffic, leading to delays and higher vehicle operation costs. A study by the Department of Roads says that the average speed of vehicles on major Kathmandu streets is about 20 kilometres per hour.

Kathmandu Valley has 13,232 km of roads of which only 4073 km is black-topped. Experts say this is the reason behind the dust and haze that envelope the city during the dry months.



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The Rs 20 million FM licence

Ravibar, 20 August

The FM licence given to Kantipur FM to operate a 1000 MHz radio station by Information and Communication Minister Jaya Prakash Gupta is said to have carried a price tag of Rs 20 million. The deal was clinched by Minister Gupta in New Delhi, where he was on the pretext of a personal visit.

Kantipur FM will now be operating an FM radio together with Times of India's Times FM in east Nepal. The transmitter will be installed at Bhedetar of Dhankuta district. Times FM is the same radio station that Sushma Swaraj, the former [Indian] Information and Broadcasting Minister, blamed for causing cultural distortion and banned from operating in India. But Nepal's Information and Communication Minister Gupta, greedy for Rs 20 million, has given the Times FM a licence to assault Nepali culture. Several Nepali FM companies, including Sagarmatha FM, have been waiting for the past 4-5 years for a licence to increase their broadcast capacity. But what is surprising is that a company like Times FM, which has been banned in both India and Bangladesh, has been given a licence to operate in Nepal.

Information minister's love for Kantipur

Deshtantar, 13 August

A single-handed decision by the Information and Communication Minister has allowed Kantipur to establish a 1000-watt FM station at Bhedetar, Dhankuta. According to sources, the minister granted the licence on the basis of a week-old application, and it took him just five minutes to decide it on 10 August.

There are 21 other applicants seeking FM licences. The applications submitted by different NGO, DDCs and VDCs have been pending for no reason since 1998. In all, 12 FM stations have been licensed since the government came up with a Communication Policy. Of these, the licence of Birat FM has been cancelled while the other 11 are operational. In Kathmandu Valley, other than Radio Nepal the only FM broadcasting at 1000 watts is Kantipur FM. Other stations say they have not been given permission to increase their transmitter capacity. According to Radio Sagarmatha, its application to upgrade its transmitter from 100W to 500W has been pending for over a year and a half. Likewise, the minister has not renewed its licence that was submitted last month.

The sudden decision by the Communication Minister has led to the repeat of an earlier effort by the Times of India group to seek a licence and which had been rejected

by Minister Radha Krishna Mainali. After BJP minister Sushma Swaraj cancelled the TOI's permission saying that it was spreading western culture, the company moved on to Bangladesh. It has come to Nepal after it was unable to get permission there either. It was planning to set up a station in Biratnagar.

TOI to run FM

Chhulphul, 13 August

Against the interests of the Nepalis, Information Minister Jaya Prakash Gupta has allowed the Times of India to get into FM broadcasting through Kantipur FM. According to highly placed sources, on 10 August the minister decided to licence Kantipur to run a powerful station. Reliable sources say that the Times of India group will broadcast its programmes using this infrastructure.

When Radha Krishna Mainali was communication minister, the TOI group had wanted to broadcast its programmes through Radio Nepal. However, the request was rejected because the government deemed that it would be against the interests of Nepal and Nepalis. The present minister who is said to favour both Kantipur and TOI has fulfilled the wishes of the two organisations at one go. Before the permission was granted, Minister Gupta, who was on a private visit to India, is said to have visited the TOI offices, according to sources.

The important thing is that Minister Gupta has not licensed any of the 21 radios



that NGOs, DDCs, VDCs and others have wanted to operate. The promoters have made arrangements for all the infrastructure needed for the stations but have time and again been forced to return from the ministry without a licence.

It took minister Gupta just five minutes to decide on Kantipur's application submitted only about a week ago.

Why do MPs always break the law?

Rup Rekha, 14 August



How can the nation progress if those that make the laws, direct the government and monitor performance are themselves buried in the quicksand of irregularities? Such questions come to the mind of anyone who reads the recent report by the Auditor General.

According to the report, MPs have together been pocketing an amount equal to Rs 14,90,000 as Dasai allowance every year. Past reports too have been pointing this out. The law on salaries and allowances of MPs does not mention Dasai allowances. But, every year, as Dasai approaches, they take the allowance like other public employees do. What is interesting is that even the Public Affairs Committee is trying to hide the fact. It has said that in order to be able to enjoy the facility, the allowance has to be mentioned in the law itself. But after all the MPs themselves are the lawmakers.

The Parliament has also given the Speaker and Chairman (of the Upper House) authority to disburse economic assistance. The Speaker and Chairman together distributed Rs 141,000 to their constituents. The private secretary of the Deputy Speaker was given Rs 4000 and another 10 unnamed persons were given Rs 11,000 each. Further, a total of 72 MPs pocketed the salary of their private secretaries themselves or received the money on their behalf this year.

Indian diplomats transferred

Jana Aastha, 16 August

Two employees of the Indian Embassy in Nepal have been transferred. Those getting the transfer orders are Deputy Chief of Mission Ashok Kanth and Counsellor P.K. Kapoor. Kanth has been instructed to move on to Hongkong, where he will be India's Commercial Consul General. Kanth is well known in Nepal as someone who worked to sour Nepal-India relations and to make Nepal weaker vis-à-vis India.

Embassy sources say that Kanth was also instrumental in preparing the so-called RAW report that had named Nepali politicians and journalists as being ISI agents. Because of his faulty advice, the new ambassador, Deb Mukharji, has also been mired in controversy. Mukharji had issued a statement

denying inundation due to the Laxmanpur Barrage days before Koirala's visit, although it was later accepted by the Indian

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

P.K. Kapoor has been transferred to Cambodia where he will be the Indian Ambassador.

'We almost crashed into Everest'

Jana Aastha, 16 August

"I was certain it was straight from the air to the grave for me." This was from a pilot who flew tourists to Everest on the mountain flight commenting on a narrow escape that day. Planes belonging to Necon, Buddha Air and Mountain Air were all headed to Everest with tourists. There were heavy clouds outside and visibility was poor, and there was only one place in the sky from where Everest could be seen.

Necon's ATR had found that spot and was circling at about 25,000 feet, when an aircraft belonging to Buddha Air shot past just feet away from where it was flying. There were five other aircraft vying to get to the opening in the cloud from where Everest was visible. Even though they knew that there was the possibility of a mid-air collision they were competing. Then Necon climbed down by about 500 feet and tried to save itself. As soon as it had informed Air Traffic Control, another aircraft appeared at about 24,500 feet. Necon then climbed down another 500 feet. Then the Buddha Air aircraft which was commanded by an Indian pilot followed suit at high speed, even without informing others of the descent. On one side there was the mountain, on the other side thick clouds. Necon Air's captain D.R. Niraula repudiated the Indian pilot and made his way out of the danger zone.

Oil Corporation scandal

Saanghu, 14 August

The Public Accounts Committee is investigating the Nepal Oil Corporation's "Oil Storage Project" that started in 1994 with the aim of building storage facilities for petroleum products nationwide but which has not been completed even till now. The project was planned after India's economic sanctions in 1989 caused a shortage of petroleum products. A sum of

Rs 200 million had been granted by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for the project, and the contract was provided to an Indian construction company by the name of Bridge and Roof.

One of the contract terms was that the project had to start by June 1994 and be complete by December 1996. But the company couldn't complete the work and the deadline was extended with permission from the ADB for the first time till March 1997. When Bridge and Roof couldn't complete the work even within the extended term, the ADB formed an investigation committee to find out why the work wasn't completed. After a site visit, the committee discovered that none of the construction work was satisfactory and recommended termination of the loan.

Although the ADB had tried to opt out of the agreement it hasn't been successful and neither has the work ended till now. The project cost (initially started with Rs 22 million) has now reached Rs 56 million. The Bridge and Roof company has demanded a compensation of Rs 20 million.

Work that was supposed to have been completed within a year and half has already extended for six years, causing losses to the nation. The Nepali agent for Bridge and Roof is said to be NEPICON. Among the various ADB-funded projects this is the only one that has taken such a long time to finish.

Please explain, IGP!

Saanghu, 14 August

An official source has confirmed that Inspector General of Police Achyut Krishna Kharel has embezzled millions of rupees within a year. According to the source, IGP Kharel and his counterparts are involved in every scandal from clothing the Nepal Police to feeding them. It has been observed goods worth more than Rs 100 million have been bought without even calling for tenders. Even though there was enough time, Rs 110 million was spent on bullet-proof jackets without calling for tenders while Rs 3.77 million was spent on body shields and Rs 1.29 million on other equipment. These figures are stated in the Public Accounts Committee's report.

It is also stated that there has been embezzlement of funds while hiring helicopters for flights to Maoist-affected areas. The PAC report states, "Helicopter flight rates were fixed arbitrarily instead of calling for tenders." Not only have the helicopter companies been paid whatever amount they have asked but they have also been paid in dollars. A 5-seat helicopter has been paid \$ 800 an hour, a 9-seater \$ 1045 and 21-seaters have been given \$ 1750. The report states, "It is not necessary that these flights be paid in dollars because they are Nepali companies." The report further adds that no record has been kept of how many hours of charter flights were undertaken.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"I am a worker dedicated to the PM. If he decides not to trust me and appoints Ram Sharan, I will resign from the central committee. Then I don't know to whom I'll go. Sher Bahadur, Surya Bahadur... I'm nobody's slave."

—Former minister Arjun Narasingh K.C. reacting to Prime Minister Koirala's possibility of appointing Ram Sharan Mahat to the ministry of water resources. Gatibidhi, 19 August.



Pratispradha, 16 August

Two Days Ago, Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow

"To know all international language is the bets yet English is enough."

Our Social Studies, pg 8, Grade X, text book

PERRY THAPA

Recent questions from actual SLC Compulsory English exams

- "Apply for the post of an accountant to the Personal Manager." (Jesus' box of straw in the stable would love to receive a letter.)
- "Travel Broadens Mind" (And Exercise Lengthens Body?)
- "Write a few Paragraphs" using these clues: "Rhinos 2 tonnes weight 40 KM Speed per hour, good sense of Smell (but clearly no sense of Capitalisation)."

To be fair to the examiners, these are all questions from the past. Perhaps the standard has improved. Browsing through this year's exam, however, uncovered these doozers. From Science: "In which type of rock do gem stones found?" (They do found in igneous rock.) "What is the advantage of being the wall of ventricle thicker than that of auricle?" (Being the wall thicker of ventricle is for pushing further the blood.)

From Compulsory Mathematics, a challenging word problem: "A (some invisible ink here?) can do a piece of work in 24 days. He alone worked it for 6 days and the remaining work by joining with B (A's a welder, right?). If the whole work was completed in 18 days, in how many days can B complete the work?" (2 B answered later.)

Instructions in the Compulsory English paper are clear as gaud: "Write an essay on anyone (but not everyone) of the following topics." "Write a readable (what other kind is there?) story on the basis of the given outlines".

So how are students prepared to deal with the eccentricities of the SLC examination paper? Quite well, actually. Students are coached in deciphering typos, employing a new lexicon of English, writing tautological definitions, being unintelligibly verbose, making egregious grammatical errors, contradicting themselves, and in perpetuating stereotypical views for two years before the exam if they only read their textbooks carefully.

Typographical errors (for which there is no excuse since any decent software will highlight in red or green on the screen) are myriad. I've included just some of my students' favourites: a complete anthology would require dozens of volumes. From *Health, Population and Environment Education for Secondary School* (Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 1999): "Eagle and hawk eat snakes." (p 220) On p 177 "It [AIDS] is a fetal disease." The Grade X book of the same series claims on p 118 that we should "complete the dose as prescribed" and on p 119 that "tight dress or pencil hill boot may effect on posture".

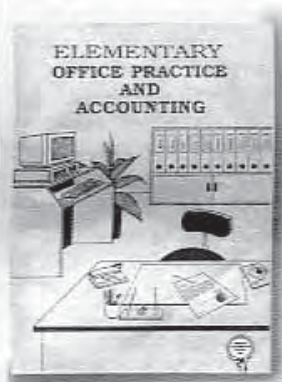
To draw from other texts, note from *Elementary Office Practice and Accounting* (Ekta Books and Stationers, 1995 (revised!)): "To know all interna-

Too many young minds are being brainwashed with rubbish. Too many hours are being spent memorising gibberish. Too many hands are slavishly penning utter nonsense. Even discerning students are forced to parrot nonsense if they want to succeed.

tional language is the bets yet English is enough" (p 8) and from *Our Social Studies Grade X* (Ekta Books 2000) "Malanchi project has been under construction, at the completion of which it is hoped that there won't be shortage of water at last in the Kathmandu valley." (p 43).

Okay, so there are a few typos. That's not much of a problem; communication is rarely seriously impaired and a lot of (much needed) levity is introduced.

SLC students also get exposed to a brand new vocabulary.



TRAITS OR QUALITIES OF ASSISTANTS

(d) **Attractive dresses:** Another trait of assistants is attractive dresses. Attractive and fit dresses show a person's impression and explain about his or her outlook and personality. Attractive dresses do not mean expensive. Cheap dresses also look attractive if they are clean, tailored fit to body, easy to work and matched to season, weather, climate and culture. Light clothes in summer and warm in winter but easy and loose to move should be served. Dresses should also be fit to the nature of work. Tight dresses are undesirable if the nature of job is somewhat like lifting things. Uneasy and unusual dresses should be avoided.

(e) **Make-up:** Make-up is personal decoration by using cosmetics and style of fashion. Make-up is a type of ornament of ladies. But gents also can serve make-up to look attractive. Make-up adds something to personal beautiness. Serving cream, face powder, lip-stick, eyelash and tika is ladies' make up. While using make-up materials, one should be careful enough to serve lightly otherwise that may look hopeless-ugly.

With textbooks like these it is a wonder that Nepali students get anywhere at all.

Sprinter English Workbook Grade 9 (Bhundi Puran Prakashan, undated) has "aweful" and "pits" as synonyms for "bad" (p 73). It's too pits the book doesn't explain how to use these words. Equally tickling are the idioms it introduces on p 86: "I hear that Kiran is in hot soup (as distinct from cold soup?) for cheating on the examination" and "the post office is only a kilometer from my house as the bees fly." (Birds and bees—they're all the same thing).

Our Social Studies Class IX extols Bhrikuti because she helped Nepal develop a "friendly and matrimonial relationship" with Tibet. The book includes other great stuff: "He was distrusted by his first marriage" (p 372) and "Because of her fatiguesless efforts,

her health gradually declined" (p 386). *Elementary Office Practice and Accounting* writes "Tacness: Tacness is such a personal trait which means for solving problems in any condition using mental power, tricks, idea, knowledge, and experience." (p 11) William Safire would have a field day.

I've got nothing against extending my vocabulary, but I do like to be intelligible. The SLC text provides great practice in articulating hopelessly entangled definitions. *Health Population and Environment Education for Secondary School Grade 9*, for example, states: "A healthy environment is necessary to make a healthy place for human beings, animals, and all other living-beings. In this connection, it is necessary to know about environmental health that contributes to keeping environmental components such as land, water, air etc. clean and fresh. It helps to keep the environment healthy. If the environment is healthy, it helps us directly or indirectly to be healthy." (p 215) Basically, the

one place to another, dig solid and work with machineries. It also includes those who use their hands and feet in order to make something happen. At the same time, those who read, write, speak or use their brain are also called workers. They also put their labour into something to get a result." (p 80) Got it? No yawning. You need to regurgitate all this on the test and you'll still only get 1 mark out of 2. The more I think about it, they more I'm convinced textbook writers get paid by the word.

Another interesting quirk of the SLC texts is their creation of a novel syntax. Gone by the wayside are articles. Commas are like weeds, flourishing in the wrong places. Agreement between subject and verb is ignored and pronouns rarely have an antecedent. Capitalisation is based on whims inscrutable to us ordinary mortals; proper and common nouns have reached new heights of classification.

An example or two will show you what I mean. Lovely article

"Physical Exercise is now part of education" (p 32).

If students aren't confused enough by the grammar, writers make sure they include plenty of bewildering contradictions too. What sense can you make of these examples? On p 205 of *Health Population and Environment Education for Secondary School Grade 9* gender equity is explained: "Gender equity is to have notion of equality towards both sexes by acquainting with equal existence between a male and female and to treat and behave in equal manner. The nation and society can not be developed until there is discrimination between male and female." So, do we need to discriminate or not?

Our *Environment Health and Population Class X* (Ekta) has a similarly confusing statement about the "rol" of parents: "The parents are by nature emotional towards their children. Such kind of tendency can be seen easily in human and also in birds and animals. It is not a new thing but a natural process and a natural law. It is self energetic and strange nature of man in the human race" (p 22). Is parenting unique to humans or shared by other animals?

How do students decide? As almost all of the flaws above are language-based, we might postulate that the Nepali versions of the same texts are better written. What cannot be excused, however, is outright misinformation, and, unfortunately, the texts are filled with the very myths and superstitions that they try to dispel. A diabetic friend of mine, for example, was most miffed to read this description of her disease in *Our Social Studies Class IX*: "Let's think of diabetic patients. Neither they can eat normal food nor can they have a sound sleep.... The situation is even worse when they have to take an insulin injection before every meal. They are lean and thin, too weak to work, and live a sort of cursed life." (p 30) A healthy woman who injects herself with insulin every morning, my friend enjoys her life, as do millions of other diabetics.

The teenagers in my class were equally outraged by *Health, Population and Environment Education for Secondary School Grade 9's* description of their emotional state and I was puzzled by the denial of feelings to anyone under ten: "Emotions like anger, fear, jealousy, curiosity, grief, joy, affection are developed in adolescence. Due to the development of curiosity we want to take part in all sorts of activities. If someone hinders in our activities we become angry. If we are diverted in this stage we may fall in deteriorated activities." (p 141) Oh?

Any couple who chooses not to have children or for whatever reason does not have children will

be horrified to read the following: "Sterile people are hated by society. Such couples should always be dominated by the couples or persons who have child or children" (p 49) True, the writers meant that we should not ostracise the childless couple, but that is not the message delivered.

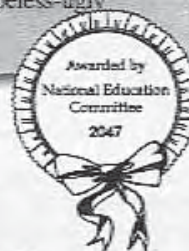
If you've ever had a sip of beer, beware. You are doomed, according to *Our Social Studies Class X*: "Alcohol does not kill a person instantaneously but in a slow process. Slowly the liver of the user will stop working and in a couple of years the person dies. The user of alcohol alone is not effected.... Financially, the person will become bankrupt, there won't be any peace in the family and people living in the surroundings will feel insecure if there is a drunkard in the neighbourhood." (p 132) Talk about scare tactics!

A final example to emphasise the extent of the problem is one my students of four years ago still quote on occasion: for them, only the language is firmly ingrained, but how tragic if the idea, too, had penetrated. The *Elementary Office Practice and Accounting* text states: "Make-up is a type of ornament of ladies. But gents also can serve make-up to look attractive. Make-up adds something to personal beautiness.... While using make-up materials, one should be careful enough to serve lightly otherwise that may look hopeless-ugly" (p 10).

Although I've only used examples from the texts I teach, I didn't have to look hard. I must admit, too, that the books cited are all in English and all were published privately for English-medium schools (although, by all accounts, the content of the Nepali texts produced by the government is no better). Still, all these books have the seal of approval from the officious-sounding Curriculum Development Centre of His Majesty's Government. This means they are recommended for use by thousands of Nepali students all over the country.

It is generally known that no textbook goes through an editor. In fact, one of the biggest publishers of textbooks in Nepal confided to an acquaintance that he was not even aware that books are edited before being published.

Too many young minds are being brainwashed with rubbish. Too many hours are being spent memorising gibberish. Too many hands are slavishly penning utter nonsense. Even discerning students are forced to parrot nonsense if they want to succeed. The *Sprinter English Workbook* writes "He turned a new leaf after his accident" (p.86). Even without the "over", it is obvious that textbook writers, too, need to "turn a new leaf" if education in this country is to experience a much-needed revolution. ♦



BIZ NEWS

Indian trade fair

An Indian trade exhibition is being held in Kathmandu to showcase Indian manufactures on 19-24 September. The India Trade Exhibition-2000 will exhibit a wide range of products agro-products and implements, automobiles and accessories, high-end electronics, engineering tools and machinery, home improvement gadgets and equipment, garments, footwear and handicrafts.

The Exhibition is supported by the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu, the Nepal-India Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

Himalayan Bank ATMs



Himalayan Bank Ltd—the first Nepali bank to introduce automatic cash dispensing machines—has introduced an upgraded version of its Cashlink, the Automatic Teller Machines now operational at all of its four Kathmandu Valley branches.

The service is available at the bank's branches in Patan, Thamel, New Road and Maharajung. The ATMs will allow consumers to withdraw and deposit cash, balance inquiry, obtaining statements and

making cheque requisitions.

The withdrawal limit per account per day is Rs 30,000. The machines also allow deposits of both cheques and cash—30 notes per envelope—of up to Rs 4 million per account.

Customers holding Premium Savings Accounts at the bank are not charged anything extra for the ATM cards. Others can acquire ATM cards upon paying a one-time fee of Rs 100.

Everest Bank reports Rs 41.2 m profit

Everest Bank has netted a profit of Rs 41.2 million after tax in the past fiscal year. Deposits at the bank, a joint venture with India's Punjab National Bank, grew by 56.8 percent to Rs 3.05 billion and lending grew by 66.3 percent reaching Rs 2.27 billion, the bank said.

The Bank's directors have recommended issuing bonus shares, two for every 10, to its shareholders. It has also decided to offer existing shareholders holding 10 shares five shares each at Rs 100 each under a scheme to issue new stock to existing equity participants.

Grindlay's opens 10th branch

Nepal Grindlays Bank opened its tenth branch in Hetauda last week saying that it had decided to come to the industrial town not just to make money but also to provide world class banking services outside Kathmandu.

Grindlays began banking operations in Nepal in 1985.

Nepal Bank sacks top executive

The Board of Directors of Nepal Bank Limited has sacked Deputy General Manager Sher Bahadur Thapa while also disqualifying him from any job with the bank in future.

On 11 August the directors decided to sack Thapa who has been charged of having approved more loans than for which he had authority.

Plant quarantine tax

After the infamous Special Additional Duty (SAD) was lifted Nepali businessmen have been confronted with yet another hassle at the Nepal-India border. The Mechhi Chamber of Commerce and Industry says Indian customs officials have begun charging Nepali agro-product exports a new plant quarantine tax since 12 July.

Customs officials there reportedly charge Rs 6-7,000 per truck on cardamom, ginger, brooms and other agro-product exports to India. The Chamber has asked the Prime Minister's office to take up the issue with India.

HAN team in China

A team of Nepali hotel owners and managers are in China on a 12-day promotional tour timed to coincide with the Foreign Minister Chakra Prasad Bastola's official visit.

A cultural programme and a food festival are planned for Shanghai. HAN and China Hotel Association are also signing an agreement for cooperation for promoting tourism. Nepal was listed as one of the limited tourist destinations for its nationals by China last month.

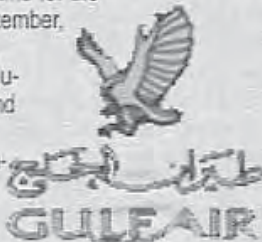
Singapore Airlines, Gulf Air add flights

Singapore Airlines and Gulf Air are to increase flights to Nepal in time for the autumn tourist season. Under the new schedule, effective 11 September, Gulf Air will fly the Abudhabi-Kathmandu-Abudhabi-Kathmandu-Bahrain, Bahrain-

SINGAPORE AIRLINES



Abudhabi,
Kathmandu-
Bahrain and
Bahrain-
Kathmandu-



Abudhabi routes on Monday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Gulf will also operate three extra weekly flights on the Abudhabi-Kathmandu-Abudhabi, Bahrain-Kathmandu-Bahrain, and Abudhabi-Kathmandu-Bahrain routes on Sunday, Monday and Wednesday.

Gulf presently has three flights out of Kathmandu each week. Similarly, Singapore Airlines is adding one more flight to its thrice-weekly routine from 2 October. The Singapore-Kathmandu-Singapore flights will operate on Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

Striking while the iron is hot



The Nepali economy is now strong enough not to be buffeted by monsoon landslides. But strikes by corporation employees, now, that is something else altogether. Strikers and the government have worked out a two-month truce, but it seems that we are entering a chronic condition that will flare up every now and then.

The government knows that it cannot concede to the demands of the employees of parastatal corporations on salary hikes. It just doesn't have the money and is telling corporations: go ahead and given them a raise if you can raise the money yourself. Which is unlikely, and as the unions representing the employees are politically aligned to various political parties, the battle royal has begun.

Public sector companies in Nepal have been run like an answer to the country's unemployment problem. Every new government minister has added hundreds if not thousands of new employees to their workforces. These are cushy jobs: they entail signing in in the morning, moonshining all day and appearing once a month to collect the pay check.

Successive governments have bestowed sycophants and cronies with slots in public sector enterprises. Today, parastatals have become parasites, bloated beyond recognition. They are mismanaged, most run up huge losses, and the public has ended up paying for them. The

Politicians hired them, politicians can't fire them, and politicians are using them to get back at other politicians

employees themselves feel that the jobs they got through patronage is their birthright.

If there is any entity that has become really powerful after the restoration of democracy in Nepal, it is the "fraternal organisation"—the generic term for politicised unions which are actually fronts for various parties. The leaders of unions and employee organisations are more interested in ensuring their leadership position rather than helping management and looking after the welfare of co-workers.

The government is trapped, and it has only itself to blame. Government shouldn't be in business, and if it is it's in the wrong business. The government cigarette company has five times more employees than a private cigarette company of similar size, but its revenue is less than half.

So where is it going to get the money to pay its employees more? You can either have fewer employees or a higher salaries; you can't have both. Look at the arithmetic. At last count, there were more than 50,000 corporation employees. A 1,000-rupee raise would cost the state an extra Rs 600 million a year. This is nearly a third of the profits the government earned from these enterprises last year.

The solution is clear: the government needs to get out of business and just be an efficient regulator by providing a legal

labour framework and leave it to the private sector to handle workers' demands.

But even that is going to be tough. Nepal's labour laws provide the perfect incentive for unions to agitate. Management cannot sack them and is forced to negotiate. The laws ensure a radical socialistic platform where employment is actually equated with the fundamental right to work. So even if there are a bunch of politically motivated employees creating trouble for the management, destroying organisational property and contributing to losses, they cannot be fired.

In case labour goes for litigation, it seldom loses. This is the kind of politicised labour that frightens away foreign investors, and there are joint venture partners in Nepal who have thrown their hands up and are willing to sell their stake because they cannot control their workforces.

From the management perspective does it make sense to talk to union leaders who are actually acting out directives from political masters? What an irony: politicians got them hired, politicians can't get them fired, and politicians are using them to get back at other politicians. No prizes for guessing who loses: You.

Readers can post their views and discuss issues at arthabeed@yahoo.com

Grindlays Gazette

INTEREST RATE UPDATE

NEPALI RUPEE	CURRENT%	PREVIOUS%
Call Money Avg.	5.00	5.25
81 Days T/bill	5.17	5.17
91 Days T/bill	5.38	5.38
365 Days T/bill	6.18	6.16
Repo rate	5.88	5.88

Due to strike in Nepal Rastra Bank, banks were unable to bid for 91 days T/bills. Market liquidity is expected to remain excessive for this week. Expected range for next week of 91 day T/bill average 5.25 to 5.50 percent range.

FOREIGN CURRENCY

	USD	EUR	GBP	JPY	CHF
LENDING	9.50	6.25	6.00	1.38	5.00
LIBOR (1M)	6.62	4.55	6.08	0.30	3.12

The economic evidence of the recent weeks is still pointing to a moderation in U.S. growth with no discernible signs of an inflation pickup. This led the market to believe that the Fed will keep rates on hold. Despite unprecedented opposition from the government, the Bank of Japan Policy Board raised the overnight rate target to 0.25 percent from virtually zero last Friday.

BANK RATES(LENDING)	Mkt	Hi/Lo	Mkt	Avg
S/A NPR		6.0/3.5		5.32
F/D 1 YR		7.5/6.0		6.81
OVERDRAFT		15.5/12.5		13.54
TERM LOAN		14.5/13.0		13.49
IMPORT LN		13.0/10.5		11.52
EXPORT LN		13.0/10.0		10.96
MISC LOAN		17.5/13.5		15.13

CURRENCY UPDATE

AG/USD	CURRENT *	WK/AGO	%CHG
OIL(Barrel)	30.95	29.99	+ 3.20
GOLD(Ounce)	275.85	272.50	+ 1.21
GOLD (NPR)	7095.0 (Haltmark per 10 gms in Nepal)		
EUR	0.9016	0.9059	- 0.47
GBP	1.5010	1.5090	- 0.13
JPY	108.68	108.73	- 0.05
CHF	1.7240	1.7079	+ 0.94
AUD	0.5793	0.5854	+ 1.05
INR	45.73	45.55	+ 0.40

*Currency bid prices at 12.30 p.m. on 14/8 - Source Reuters

Oil: Oil prices have been buoyant since last week due to reports of skimpy U.S. crude inventories and a watch over tight Saudi Arabia crude supplies.

Currencies: The Yen rallied after Japan's central bank decided to raise interest rates for the first time in a decade, but its gain proved fleeting as the move sparked concerns about Japan's recovery. The other currencies remained down against the dollar after the unexpectedly strong U.S. productivity data kept the market optimistic about the US economy. The Euro shrugged off a hawkish European Central Bank's August monthly report, citing the currency's weakness as one of several inflationary risks. The report indicated that the central bank might increase interest rates.

INDIAN RUPEE OUTLOOK:

The Indian rupee ended firmer on Monday at 45.73/74 per dollar. It had recovered from its lifetime low of 46.08 on Friday after central bank officials said RBI was considering moves to speed up remittances by corporates and exporters. So far, the RBI has sought to strangle money market liquidity and push up interest rates in a bid to support its currency.

INTERNATIONAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES FOR NEPALI TIMES

	6 months	1 year
SAARC countries	US\$25	US\$48
Other countries	US\$40	US\$75

marketing@nepalitimes.com

Kathmandu's health-savvy young urban professionals work up a sweat, and the fitness business responds to new demand.

Clubbing it in Kathmandu

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

Not long ago Kathmandu-layers led such physically active lives that they didn't need to work out. They bicycled or walked to work; food was not loaded with unnecessary carbohydrates; beer consumption was negligible. There are many parts of Nepal that are still like that, but Kathmandu has moved into the sedentary, stressful and less-than-healthy lifestyle more familiar to the fast-paced cities in East Asia. No wonder then that health clubs have sprouted all over the Valley, catering not just to the rich, famous and over-weight, but increasingly also to the middle-class Nepali professional.

The fitness fad of the Kathmandu yuppie represents a growing health consciousness. Quite a change for Kathmandu's youthful middle class for whom an evening stroll down New Road was enough exercise till some years ago. Increasingly, they are to be found at squash courts, on treadmills, or in swimming pools and jacuzzis.

"Here we help our clients become and stay physically, socially, spiritually, and mentally healthy", says Dr T.M. Amatya, owner of Hardic Fitness Centre in Patan, who specialised in exercise medicine from the All-India Institute of Medicine Sciences in New Delhi. However, Dr Amatya is sceptical about how other fitness centres are run in Kathmandu,

and believes there may be some compromising on quality. "The business of health care has slow returns, but here people are not willing to wait for profits," he says.

Like in any other business, there are fly-by-nights who are in it for the quick buck. And it is fairly easy to spot them, from the kind of investments they have made in gym equipment, whether they pay attention to details like cleanliness and hygiene. One easy way to check out a genuine gym is to take a peep into the loo-if it looks like one at a government office, find some other place.

There is also a line separating functional health care centres in the puritan form and leisure clubs-although many erroneously seem to want to be both. A gymnasium (with cardio facilities), a decent swimming pool, a jacuzzi and sauna are must-haves for a proper fitness centre. There are also those who define themselves as leisure clubs and have tennis and squash courts, snooker and pool tables, a lounge and also a bar or two for rehydration therapy with a selection of draft beers.

As in other Asian cities local five-star hotels are trying to woo the membership of local residents besides hotel guests to their fitness centres. The Clark Hatch Fitness Centre in the Radisson is the newest, with a gymnasium, a swimming pool, gender segregated jacuzzi and sauna.

The Clark Hatch is a well-known health service chain and the biggest in the Asia Pacific region, although the one at the Radisson may not have the same space as similar centres elsewhere. Sanjeev Soreng of Clark Hatch, explains the fine art of fitness management: "There is a lack of professionalism in most of the so-called health clubs in Kathmandu. People are least bothered about results. They go to the gym for months and still remain and look the same. But here we are result oriented and have specific programmes designed for members according to their health status."

This sort of individual attention does seem to yield results as Jai Shah discovered after only five months: "I've already lost 12 kg. The centre is very well maintained, very clean, and very professional."

If the five star establishments are too upscale and beyond the reach of the motorcycle crowd, there are the more moderately priced ones for them, such as Hotel Shahanshah International, Kundalini, International Club, The Club Bhatbhateni, Hardic Fitness Centre and Verge Inn

Leisure Club. Not all of these are fitness centres in the true sense, and lean more towards weekend leisure for family.

Leisure club memberships are also held as a mark of social status and they provide the opportunity to mix business with exercise. Club Bhatbhateni is one such place where members feel at ease among peers and go about swimming, lifting weights, playing tennis, squash, or just socialising with the rest of the members. This is one place where membership seems to be limited due to its overwhelming popularity among Kathmandu's urban professionals. Kapil Tamot, a regular at The Club says, "Health is an important part of my life, but it's more to do with the environment and the atmosphere of this place that makes me come here."

Then there is the third type of club that caters to the local fitness market and also has rooms for guests and tourists. Hotel Shahanshah International and Verge Inn Leisure Club fit in this category. "We are more than a health club," says Verge Inn's Subodh Pradhan, "We are a leisure club where members can come and not just exercise or play sports, they can come and relax."

Hotel Shahanshah has two indoor tennis courts, one heated indoor swimming pool and an outdoor one, a bowling alley, squash courts and all the rest of the usual infrastructure. Shahanshah is fast gaining popularity among Kathmandu expatriates as well as Nepalis,

which manager Kiti Sarkar attributes to a need for a place to relax and work out.

"Going out every day is a problem nowadays and a club is a place where you come and relax and no one will say anything. The culture is here and people have started taking this concept seriously," she says.

The Valley's upmarket expats tend to frequent the fitness centres in the other five-star hotels like the Soaltee, Yak and Yeti, or the Annapurna. Unless they are members of the exclusive American Club at

Phora Durbar, or the International Club in Sanepa, that is. Dr Amatya says, "Nepalis don't become health conscious until they get bed-ridden."

He may be right, but things are certainly changing with all this fitness craze. One could even say that it is a trend. However, with about 400 members each, the total number of club goers and fitness club regulars in Kathmandu is still a very small proportion of the city's population. For it to grow, perhaps, the membership fees need to be more affordable and the quality of the facilities upgraded.



KHAGENDRA MANSREY



SAIL SUBEDI



SAIL SUBEDI

Annual membership fees in some of the clubs and fitness centres in Kathmandu (in Rs.)

Name	Location	Phone	Single	Couple	Family	Corporate
Banu's Total Fitness	Kamal Pokhari	434024	18,000	28,000	38,000	
Clark Hatch Fitness Centre	Hotel Radisson	411818	40,000	61,200	96,900	81,600 (3 max)
The Club	Bhatbhateni	416430	26,000	37,000	45,000	75,000 (5 max)
Eshani Club	Kalimati-Kalanki	274890	9,500	12,500	18,000	
Hardic Fitness Centre	Pulchowk	522068	16,500	26,000	30,000	
Kundalini	Maharajgunj	413638	22,000	28,000	32,000	
Hotel Shahanshah International	Dhapasi	353411	25,000	33,000	42,000	2,65,000 (10 max)
Verge Inn Leisure Club	Tahachal	271768	10,000	16,000	20,000	45,000 (5 max)



UNDERFED NATION

Nearly half of all Nepalis need to put on more weight, and perhaps 0.05 percent need to lose some of it.

Going by the proliferation of fitness parlours in Kathmandu, it would be hard to tell that Nepal has a serious problem with underweight people, not overweight ones. But then, we don't need to remind ourselves that Kathmandu is not Nepal.

The most direct indicator of a nation's poverty is the proportion of its population that is underweight. For Nepali adults, it is nearly half. And for children under five, the most vulnerable section of the population, it is an astounding 63 percent.

What these figures mean is that more than six in every ten children in Nepal don't get enough to eat. According to UNICEF's State of the World's Children Report 2000, 47 percent of all Nepali children under five are "moderately or severely"

underweight and 16 percent are "severely" underweight.

It gets easier to see how serious this situation is by comparing Nepal's nutrition figures to other countries. For example, the proportion of children who are undernourished in Thailand is less than 20 percent, whereas countries like Singapore, Japan or New Zealand don't even keep statistics any more for underweight children. (They have data for overweight people because that has a different set of health implications.)

The only consolation, if it can be called that, is that Nepal's undernourishment figures are not as bad as some neighbouring South Asian countries (India has 74 of its under-fives moderately or

severely undernourished). But the percentage of Nepali infants with low birthweight is one of the highest in the world—a figure that points to widespread and serious undernourishment of mothers.

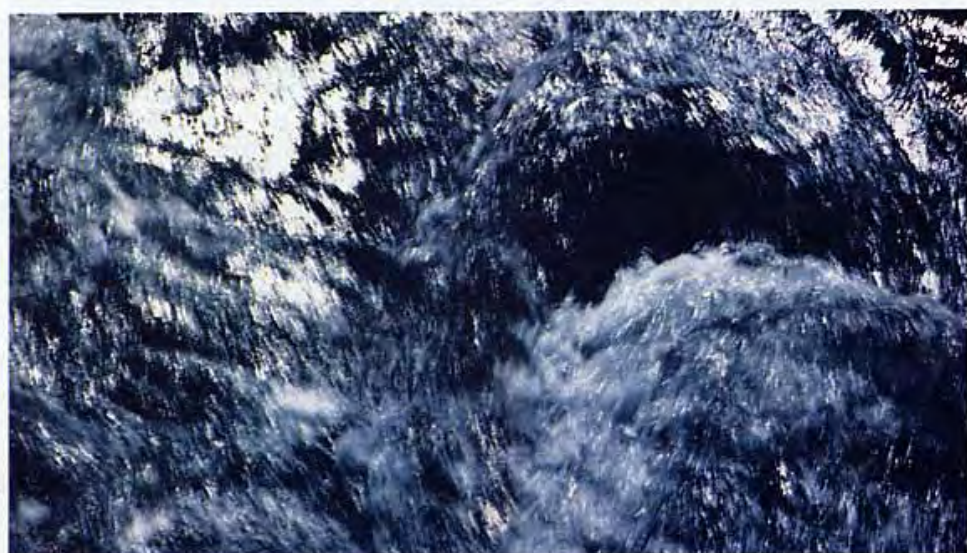
Malnutrition is easy to measure. And you do it with a tape and weighing machine to find out how much deviation from a reference healthy population there is for stunting (height) and wasting (weight). In Nepal's case, 11 percent of all children are moderately or severely stunted. But an astonishingly high 48 percent of children under five are seriously stunted. Stunting and wasting have serious impact the physical and intellectual development of children that carries into adulthood.

Of course, these are not just statistics. Chronically underfed children are more prone to infections and disease. Undernourishment combined with diarrhoeal dehydration is a deadly combination that buttress each other with serious implications on the survival of Nepali children. ♦



Mountains and water

The new Indian ambassador to Nepal is an avid photographer and loves mountains. Good move, De



Above: Rhododendron in cloud forest below Kangchendzonga in Sikkim.

Clockwise from left: Stream in Sangla Valley, Himachal Pradesh; Shivling Peak (also called the Gangotri Matterhorn) in the Garwhal Himalaya; Waterfall in Harki Doon, Garhwal; Villagers at a meadow in Chialik above the Mahakali river with Nepal's Api Himal in the background; Tibetan pony rider; Seralung Monastery near Manasarovar in Tibet.

Thirty-five years after joining the foreign service, India's new ambassador to Nepal has finally been posted to the country where he has wanted to serve all along. In fact, recalls Deb Mukharji, he even wanted to start taking Nepali lessons back then, but he got sent to Berne instead.

Switzerland is where Mukharji could really begin to enjoy his twin passions of photography and mountains. In fact, throughout his career Mukharji has seamlessly blended his diplomatic chores

with hiking in the mountains and taking pictures. And his portfolio shows the range of his travels: stampeding elephants in the Chad, a soulful autumn mood at the edge of a forest in Alaska, stark desert images from Nevada, dark monsoon clouds hanging over the Arakan Hills in Bangladesh, the wide and wild expanse of the Tibetan plateau under a big sky.

His pictures, however, keep coming back to two dominant themes, mountains and flowing water. In many cases, the two are intertwined. The young Mukharji first got bitten by the mountain bug when he went to India's Garhwal mountains bordering western Nepal with his college mates. "I just fell in love with mountains, it is hard to explain exactly how or why," says Mukharji, looking out of the window at the stately trees of the Embassy grounds. "It is the beauty, the serenity and the smell of mountains...yes, the smell. You feel it after you cross a certain altitude, a tingle in the air."

Mukharji has always liked the physical effort needed to get close to the mountains. He says: "What you realise while hiking is how little you really need to be truly happy...a boiled potato when you are hungry, cool spring water when you are thirsty."

The main difference between the Himalaya and the Alps, Mukharji found, was that the Himalaya is not just higher, but it also has more "depth"—more than 200 km wide in places. This means you need to walk for weeks to get to the base of the highest mountains. These distances are now shrinking as roads are built to pilgrimage sites, and in the span of a few decades many parts of the Himalaya have lost their depth. "It's just not the same thing when the road gets there. Everybody is turning up," he says. But not keen to be seen as anti-progress, he adds quickly that roads also transform villages like remote areas of Himachal Pradesh in India

which have prospered because a new highway provided access to markets for its delicious apples and potatoes.

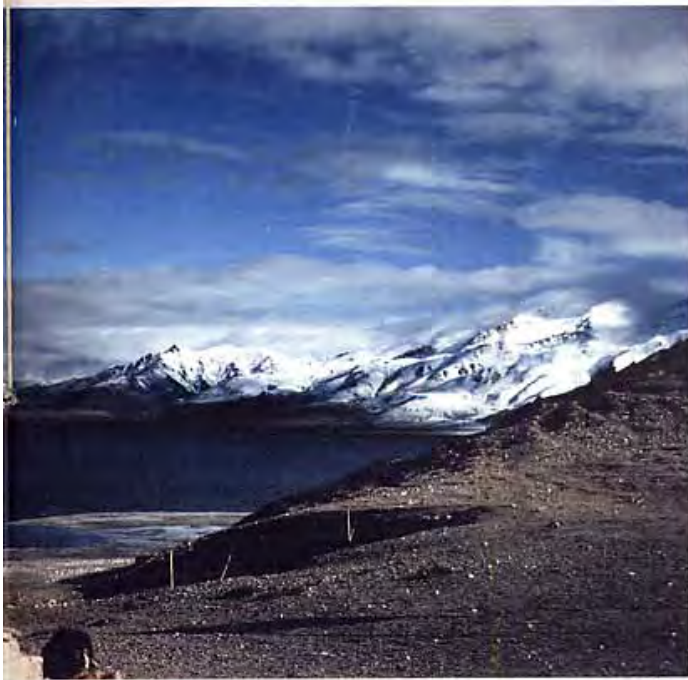
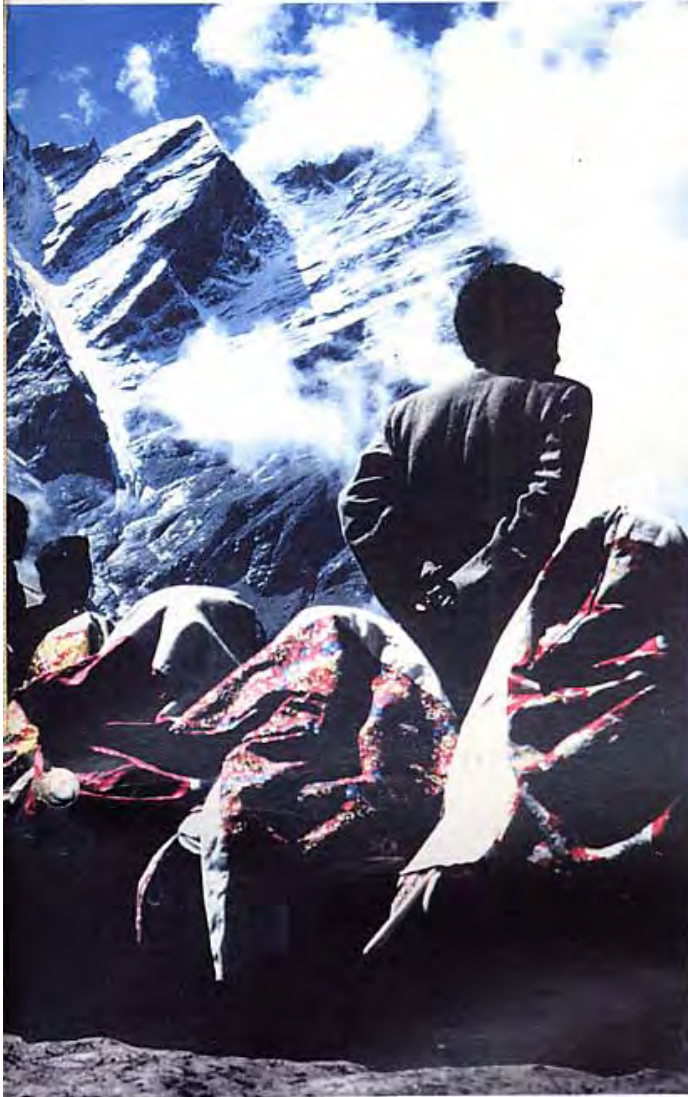
Mukharji got a box camera when he was nine and had his first Voigtlander as a teenager with which he started taking black and white pictures. He then graduated to Canons and stuck with the brand ever since his Canon FT fell into the sea in Ireland, was retrieved by a couple of good Samaritans, and was good as new when it was fixed in a shop in Calcutta for Rs 200. He is now using a 15-year-old Canon A1. He doesn't think much of digital photography which he says can be manipulated: "There isn't much left for a photographer to do, you become a technician."

In Nepal, he would like to get back to doing more black and white photography, which he thinks is much more hard work, but also creative.

Mukharji says he finds Kathmandu and Nepal a photographer's dream come true. "The quality of the light in Kathmandu is just fabulous, it is emerald in the monsoon, liquid gold in the autumn, the people, architecture and the mountains. Hopefully I can get a lot of photography done, but the job doesn't really give you enough time," he says.

If there is one thing that Mukharji likes to photograph more than mountains, it is flowing water. "By changing the shutter speeds, you can create beautiful images. What you see in the photograph of a fast-flowing stream is not what you see in real life—there is a lot of room here for imagination and creativity."

If he likes water so much, we ask if he is looking forward to discussing contentious water issues with Nepali government officials. Deb Mukharji throws back his head and laughs: "I didn't mean that kind of water." ♦



Green Moments



Probably the best beer in the world





SIMON WALDMAN

Imagine my surprise the other day when something came through the post that wasn't a bill, an irrelevant press release or

Softly, softly on Internet marketing

the announcement of the nine millionth internet conference this year.

It was a cutting from Fast Company magazine of an article by Seth Godin called "Unleashing the Idea Virus", a serialisation of his book of the same name. Godin is something of a minor deity among the internet marketing community. He is a Stanford graduate who set up his own direct marketing company, Yoyodyne, which was bought by Yahoo! in late 1998. He then worked for Yahoo! helping their marketing effort, and, in May 1999, released his first book: Permission Marketing: Turning Strangers into Friends, and Friends into

Customers.

This argued that most advertising is about interrupting people. They watch TV, so you put an ad in the middle of the programme. They open their post so you send them a direct mailshot. They walk down the street, so you chuck a poster at them. Wherever they run, there is no escape.

Permission marketing is less about shouting at people, and more about starting a conversation with them. It is about gradually getting people's permission to speak to them, and from then on having a much closer and more commercially useful relationship.

The internet, and in

particular email, is the perfect medium for this. As proof of how it works, if you go to his site (www.permission.com) and send in your email address, he will send you the first four chapters of the book. The start of a beautiful relationship.

As with many business books like this, there is plenty of stating the obvious (and Godin leans heavily on previous work by his co-author Don Pepper), but in a world where each week sees yet another dot.com tumble after spending millions on posters, press, TV, bus-sides and sandwich bags, it is a pleasantly subtle and intelligent read. The new book deals much more with the stage before this-

All advertising is about interrupting people, but in the Internet age it is about infecting people with the idea virus.

how do you get to ask for people's permission? The basic theory is that great ideas are contagious, like a virus, and as a marketer your real challenge is in getting people to spread that virus for you-a group he calls "sneezers".

The search engine Google is a great example of this. It came late to the market and did not spend a fortune on marketing-immediately breaking two of the venture capitalists' golden rules of internet success. However, word came out of Silicon Valley that it was really rather special, early adopters took to it, and it is now not only the coolest search engine to use, but has also been taken up by Yahoo!, thereby making it the most popular.

Godin proves his theory by the way he has promoted his book. As is standard practice it is serialised first (this time in Fast Company), which allows for plenty of word-of-mouth (or postal) transmission. Then it gets really smart. You can download a copy of the book for free from his website (www.ideaavirus.com). You can even download a copy for your Palm organiser and beam it to friends (well, in theory, as I've crashed two people's Palm Vs trying it). As a result, the word has spread apparently effortlessly, without the usual clumsy efforts of advertising, marketing and PR folk.

A month before the book has even been published it is among the top 1,500 best-sellers at Amazon.com-a remarkable

achievement given that it is a business book costing \$40, and that anyone can download the lot for free.

There is nothing new in the idea of "sneezers". Levi's for example has spent much of the past 15 years getting early adopters to wear its products by throwing the coolest of parties and sponsoring various style mags and bands (see the Levi-clad UK garage outfit the Dreem Team on the cover of Dazed & Confused as current evidence).

And Godin is not the first person to promote a book like this. A similar strategy was used by the authors of the Cluetrain manifesto (www.cluetrain.com), another shot across the bows of traditional business practice that spread globally.

But the virus idea is truly wonderful only on one crucial condition-it has to be done well. Done badly, like a real virus, the effects are at best invisible, and at worst disastrous. And this is why, as much as I rather like Godin's work, it does somewhat fill me with dread. Not that anything he says is particularly wrong, but you can sense copies of the book appearing all over town and thousands of hamfisted interactive advertising wizards going idea virus mad and unleashing an epidemic of outright mediocrity on an undeserving public.

So download a copy of the book today, but if you simply do everything it says, then you've missed the point of what it's all about. (The Guardian)



2.5 million people will visit Nepal* this year

UN to bridge digital divide

New York - The United Nations, in an attempt to bridge the digital divide between rich and poor nations, has decided to set up an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Task Force.

"It is crucial that the Task Force be set up as soon as possible. There are so many fingers in the IT (Information Technology) pie, if the UN wants to regain its leadership, it must act now," says Percy Mangoela, Chairman of the Ad-hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics.

Mangoela believes this may be possible as the task force would work independently of the UN above the turf wars that sometimes arise within the UN bodies. Although no firm date has been set for the formation of the Task Force, it seems probable it will be in place early next year.

"The purpose of the mechanism will be to recommend the terms of reference, mandate and composition of the Task Force and also recommendations for the Trust Fund. What is likely to be a three- or four-person group of high-level advisers, will probably comprise members of the

private and public sectors, of foundations and civil society. There are already names in mind and discussions taking place," says Mangoela.

The UN produced its first-ever Ministerial Declaration on advancing development by fostering "digital opportunity" last month. The document sets out ICT policy and strategy, concluding, "partnerships, involving national governments, bilateral and multilateral development actors, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders should play a key role".

Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General, is enthusiastic. He said last week: "If we succeed in this task, we will ensure that poor countries can join the knowledge-based global economy-by giving their people a powerful tool with which to make their voices heard and to combat ignorance and disease."

At present, an estimated 294 million people have access to the Internet and e-commerce is expected to reach \$7 trillion by 2004. However, only half of the world's population has access to a telephone line and only five percent are connected to the Internet. (IPS)

Mori mends South Asia ties

Japan needs trade, South Asia needs aid. But anti-nuclear sanctions get in the way.

SUVENDRINI KAKUCHI

TOKYO - Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori's trip to South Asia this week is a diplomatic overture aimed at rekindling ties that have lagged behind since India's and Pakistan's nuclear tests in 1998.

Mori is arriving in Nepal for a 12-hour stopover on 25 August after a whistle-stop tour of Bangladesh, Pakistan and India.

The first official trip to South Asia by a Japanese leader in a decade, Mori's visit seeks to

appear to be looking for other ways to give assistance without appearing to openly flout its policy on economic aid and the sanctions it imposed. The same official said Mori will be proposing additional funds for ongoing projects such as the construction of power plants, roads and subways. The new funds will be offered if the two countries show a positive attitude toward nuclear non-proliferation, by, for instance, promising to adhere to a

sanctions have not achieved their purpose.

"Officials now acknowledge that while sanctions have hurt the local economies, the policy has not helped to bring the CTBT closer to India and Pakistan," said Kyoko Inoue, an economist at the Tokyo-based Institute of Developing Economies.

As a result, Japan is ready to move ahead with its assistance programme. Yet mindful of the strongly pacifist public in Japan,

extension to the first phase of the projects, started with Japanese aid in 1996. Officials here insist new funds will be tied to India's commitments to sign CTBT.

India's booming information technology market is another reason that contributed to the changing of Japan's official attitude—Japanese businessmen have aired their concerns about not wanting to be left out of this growing market. Mori is expected to outline bilateral

India's lunar plan

NEW DELHI - India took its first step into space in 1963 by launching a 9-kg rocket from a science research facility at Thumba, a fishing hamlet in southern India. It has now set its sights on the moon.

"The Indian space agency has already completed preliminary studies and will be able to send a mission to the moon within five years of getting the green signal."

Vasundara Raje Scindia, Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office told parliament last week. The Bangalore-based Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) says it has both the human expertise and technological competence to send a probe to the moon by 2005.

Dr P.S. Goel, Director of the ISRO Satellite Centre in Bangalore says, "The Indian lunar mission will provide us with the excellent opportunity of exploring space. So far we have received an overwhelming response."

Government clearance remains key—the project is expected to cost IRs 3.5 billion, and there are many areas competing for such money. The urge to probe the moon is considered a natural expression of scientific maturity and technological excellence.

These sentiments are a far cry from the vision of the founders of modern Indian science. More than three decades back, Vikram A. Sarabhai, the architect of the Indian space programme, declared, "We don't have the fantasy of competing with the economically advanced nations in the exploration of the moon or planets or manned flights. But we are convinced that if we are to play a meaningful role nationally and in the community of nations, we must be second to none in the application of advanced technologies to the real problem of man and society which we find in our country."

ISRO says it has the option of sending either a fly-by mission or an orbiter. For now, building a spacecraft for soft landing on the lunar surface to collect, process and transmit data back, is ruled out as a complicated and costly exercise. (Gemin)

Ecstasy in Asia

BANGKOK - While regional anti-narcotics agencies still see heroin and methamphetamines as the prime mass drug menaces to Asian societies, ecstasy's growing popularity, particularly among the young and affluent, has raised growing concerns.

"A few years ago we found that ecstasy seemed to be mostly consumed by Western tourists, but more recently it has gained popularity among Thai youths, especially those who go to discotheques," said Chatchai Suththikom, Director of Thailand's Narcotics Law Enforcement Bureau.

In Thailand one ecstasy pill costs up to \$30 compared with an average \$2.50 for a tab of methamphetamine. In 1998, Thai authorities reported 99 ecstasy-related cases, with seizures of 4,520 tablets. The figure rose to 175 cases and 21,989 tablets last year.

"First we had to take steps against heroin abuse, then methamphetamines and now ecstasy has come into the picture," said Sorasit Sangprasert, Secretary General of Thailand's Office of the Narcotics Control Board.

"The same syndicates which smuggle heroin from Thailand to European countries are importing ecstasy on the way back for the Thai market," said Chatchai. There is a growing cross-border trade in smuggled ecstasy between Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, and there are concerns that as the drug's popularity surges there may be attempts to manufacture it locally to reduce prices.

Worried by the drug's rising popularity among Chinese-Malaysian youths, Malaysia's biggest ethnic Chinese political party has declared a nationwide "war" on ecstasy.

Ecstasy has been a major concern in Singapore since Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) officers raided 11 nightspots last year and arrested 220 people. They also uncovered and smashed plans to set up an underground laboratory to produce ecstasy pills on a large scale. In Hong Kong, the growth of the rave culture has gone hand in hand with a rise in ecstasy abuse alongside the other new club drug, ketamine, or "K", or "Special K", as it is known. (aps)

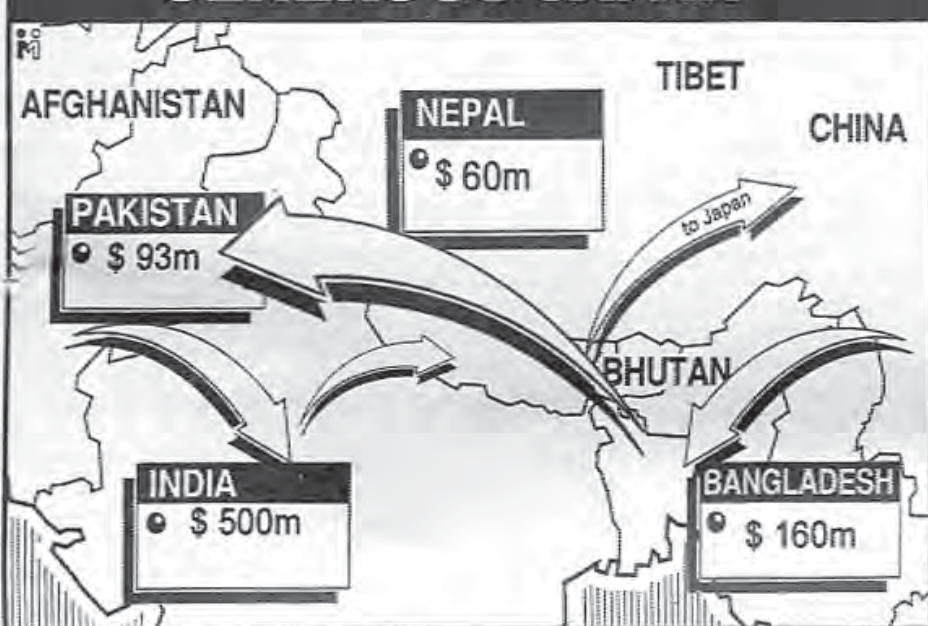
Japan middle class falters

TOKYO - The decline of the middle class has resulted in a continental divide among Japan's haves and have-nots. As the lucky few continue to live it up, the majority, who have fallen on hard times, are winning at the wide differences between the way they live. The rich are getting richer through stock investments, entrepreneurial success or higher compensation packages, and they are spending their wealth on products and services that cater to their class. Meanwhile, the middle class is experiencing a lifestyle downgrade because of restructuring, pay cuts, and less bonuses. So these people, who form the majority, are making do with much less or much cheaper.

Not surprisingly, a recent survey by the Prime Minister's Office revealed that one in three Japanese believe they are worse off now than they were a year ago. The survey also showed that more than half are unhappy with their current income or assets.

But what may be more worrisome is a prevailing pessimism among many Japanese. According to the survey, only one in 10 Japanese believe their financial circumstances will improve in the future. (PS)

GENEREROUS JAPAN



reinforce Tokyo's commitment to the region's economic development and its security and stability, says Japan's foreign ministry. Apart from being the major aid donor to South Asian countries, Japan is also the only donor nation that makes financial contributions to support the activities of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

Following traditional diplomacy, foreign ministry officials said Mori will propose a resumption of some aid to India and Pakistan if they promise not to conduct new nuclear tests. "The freeze on new aid will remain," said an official. Japan had imposed sanctions on both India and Pakistan after they conducted tit-for-tat nuclear tests in May 1998.

But amid views that its economic sanctions have not pushed the two countries enough to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), Tokyo

monitors on nuclear testing or to work towards building a consensus in their respective countries to sign the CTBT, he said.

After the 1998 nuclear tests, Japan froze new grants and yen loans other than for humanitarian purposes to Pakistan and India. In 1998, Japan gave \$115 million in loans to India and \$3.5 million dollars in grants. To Pakistan, it gave \$5.6 million in loans and \$27 million in grants. Tokyo gave no new loans in 1999.

Tokyo's official development assistance (ODA) charter prevents the disbursement of official aid to nations pursuing the development of nuclear weapons. In response to public outcry, Tokyo harshly criticised the nuclear tests and has since joined other countries in pressing New Delhi and Islamabad to join the CTBT. While Mori will continue to press Pakistan and India during his visit, his discussion of new loans in both countries illustrates the domestic opinion that Japan's

Tokyo's moves will be made slowly. News reports here said Tokyo is considering resuming large-scale economic aid to India—but this was denied stiffly by the foreign ministry. The report by the English-language daily *Japan Times* explained that in fact, there is growing pressure from within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party to completely lift economic sanctions against India.

Taro Nakayama, former foreign minister and chairman of LDP foreign policy research council, argues that sanctions have severely damaged ties with India and that Japan's anti-nuclear stance has been acknowledged by New Delhi.

To get around the ODA charter, analysts expect Mori to propose new low-interest yen loans of up to \$700 million to help finance a subway project in New Delhi and a power project in the south-eastern province of Andhra Pradesh.

These loans will be an



To give or not to give: Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori

cooperation in this sphere during his stop in Bangalore, the heart of India's IT industry.

Hisaya Oda, an analyst on Pakistani affairs, says Mori's visit to Islamabad has been dampened by its economic and security woes, so that India appears to be a much more attractive market.

"Pakistan is badly in need of Japanese aid for its economic development, which Japan is well aware of," said Oda. He contends that a resumption of full-scale aid will not be pledged during the visit but "there will be a pledge to review resumption".

In comparison to India and Pakistan, Mori's stopover in Nepal is expected to produce clear pledges of Japan's support for their economic development. In Bangladesh, Mori announced pledges of \$160 million for the country's development.

Development experts however are disappointed that Mori will not bring concrete proposals on debt relief. Professor Kazuo Sumi of Niigata University says debt servicing is a detriment to poverty alleviation in South Asian countries. Thus, he says, Mori's visit should be marked with programmes for relief, either through grants or outright write-offs for countries such as Bangladesh.

"I really don't know why Mori is going unless there is some concern for poor people in those countries," Sumi explained. (IPS)

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Thai greens fight on

BANGKOK - Thailand's environmental movement has made great strides the past 10 years but corruption in government and business must be tackled to protect what is left, former prime minister Anand Panyarachun said last week.

Anand, who also chaired the team that drafted the country's new constitution three years ago, was speaking at a fund raiser for the Seub Nakhasathien Foundation, named after Thailand's foremost environmentalists who killed himself 10 years ago. Several fellow environmental campaigners who knew Seub said he killed himself because of the despair he felt fighting illegal loggers who had protectors high up in the government. Soraida Salwala, founder of the Friends of the Asian Elephant, said the public and organisations have increased their influence but the fight goes on. "We shouldn't have lost such a good man, that taught us a big lesson." (A4)

The new Iranian Revolution via satellite

GENEVE ABDO IN TEHRAN

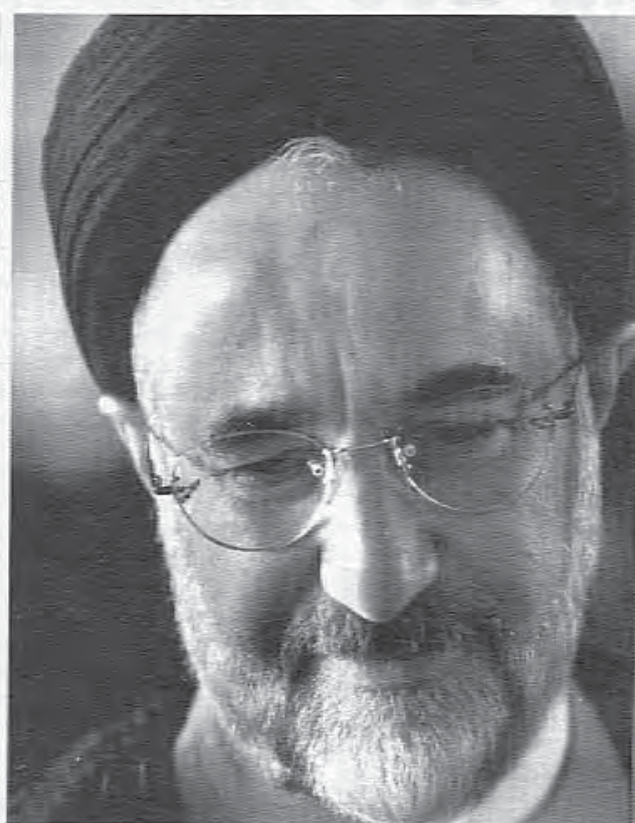
Every night Ahmad sinks into his armchair and drifts back to 1978. He listens to the songs of Googoosh, Iran's banned and most venerable pop star. He watches old films and remembers a time when romantic love was a public affair. For the next few hours he weeps, out of longing for the time before the Islamic Revolution.

He goes to bed already looking forward to his return from work the next day, when he can escape to the past again. "I am not part of this life any more. I'm much happier now," says Ahmad, who is too afraid to give his real name.

Thousands of Iranians are now retreating to the past by tuning in to National Iranian Television, a station broadcasting old music and entertainment by satellite from north Hollywood, California, not far from the area known as "Tehrangeles" because of its large community of expatriate Iranians.

The Iranian authorities have always feared an American invasion, but this one—reaching an estimated 300 new homes a day—is an onslaught that exceeds all expectations. From dawn to nightfall satellite installers race round Tehran erecting illegal dishes for \$ 500 or so a time—only foreigners and those with a state permit are allowed dishes.

Devoted fans of NITV call relatives in Europe and the US and urge them to make donations to Zia Atabi, the brains behind NITV. He has warned on air that lack of funds may soon force him to close down the station. "People call me and offer to sell their houses. One woman wanted to sell her apartment in Norway and give me the money to keep the programme running," Atabi, a well-known Iranian singer, said. "Some even offer to sell a taxi



Revolutionary Iran has been vigilant about an American invasion, but it cannot defend itself against this one from the sky that brings television programming.

or a car. We receive donations of 50 dollars and it makes me so sad. Sometimes I can't control myself on the air. I'm trying my best. I am trying to make Iranians happy and to let them taste freedom."

The offers of cars and flats may be examples of what Iranians call *tarof*—an exaggerated gesture of politeness not intended to be carried out. But the thrill among the illicit satellite dish providers is definitely real. "I have so much business I sleep only a few hours a day," one said. Atabi said he had intended to start the programmes later in the day.

"But we did a test for 30 hours and the people in Iran did not let us sleep. It was so popular, it was

crazy." So he brought the broadcast forward, including a mixture of old and new programmes and talk-show hosts and newscasters who had been familiar figures in Iran under the Shah. The enthusiasm for NITV stems from 20 years of entertainment deprivation in Iran. Most of the programmes on IRIB, the state-run television system, feature clerics giving sermons, orators reciting from the Koran, or newscasters spouting the latest government line.

Until Atabi broke through the sealed airwaves four months ago, Iranians tended to rely on bootleg videos for comic relief. Although the songs of Googoosh, a pre-

revolutionary pop diva, could be heard in some Tehran restaurants, no one was prepared for the sensation that is NITV.

Atabi recently visited Europe, where the company is planning to set up offices to cater to the enormous demand. NITV reaches not only Iranians in Iran, but the vast diaspora which occurred at the time of the Revolution, estimated to number about 4.5 million worldwide.

Since the Revolution Iranians have lived cross-cultural lives. Many own homes abroad but return to Iran in the summer to visit relatives. It is not uncommon for the elite to own apartments in London, Paris, New York or Washington. To these jet-setters NITV is a link not only with the past but with other Iranians scattered around the globe.

It is unclear whether the authorities in Iran, who are certainly aware of NITV, plan to confiscate the dishes and cut Iranians' connection to each other. In recent weeks prominent conservatives, including former President Hashemi Rafsanjani, have declared that satellite dishes should be legalised.

But those who own them live in fear; many refused to be interviewed for fear they would be punished. Modern technology makes it difficult for clerical rule to be enforced, however. Iranians who can afford it have had hidden satellite dishes on their rooftops for years.

Unless the authorities conduct house-to-house searches, there is little way of getting rid of the dishes. In addition, two new radio stations run by Iranians in the US are broadcasting to Iran on short wave frequencies. "We are able to return to the past through modern technology," Ahmad said. "And there is little anyone can do to stop it." ♦ (The Observer)

Nuclear ocean floor

FRANKFURT - Since 1961, when the Soviet submarine K-19 was disabled as a result of a leak in its cooling system, a series of accidents and reactor failures have plagued nuclear submarines. In the K-19 incident, by risking their lives, the crew narrowly avoided a reactor meltdown. Although 14 Soviet sailors eventually died from the effects of radiation exposure, the accident was first made public only in 1992.

Greenpeace has recorded 23 incidents involving the Soviet Russian and US navies' nuclear submarines between 1950 and 1996. As a result of the accidents, 51 nuclear warheads have been lost to the sea. The *Kursk*, an Oscar-II class submarine, was launched in 1994. Oscar IIs are fitted with extremely powerful reactors. The two on board the *Kursk* have a capacity of 190 megawatts each, it said.

The International Institute for Strategic Studies revealed that submarines of this type can carry up to 24 missiles and torpedoes. The missiles can be fitted with either conventional or nuclear warheads. The Russian fleet operates seven Oscar II vessels in the Arctic seas and four in the Pacific. The wrecks of six nuclear submarines still lie on the sea bed—two American and four Soviet. One of the craft was sunk by the Russians themselves in the Kara Sea after repairs proved unfeasible and the cost of towing the vessel back to port too high.

Norway fears the rusting wrecks may eventually develop cracks, allowing radioactivity to seep out into the surrounding sea. As the Barents Sea is one of Norway's most valuable fishing grounds, any radioactivity could very quickly affect the food chain.

On 7 April 1989, the Russian submarine *Komsomolets* sank off the Norwegian coast after catching fire. The submarine's two nuclear warheads, each containing five kilos of plutonium, still lie on the ocean floor. Several years ago the warheads were sealed off by divers. However, this will offer protection for only 30 to 40 years. Norwegian sources claim the plutonium is already leaking from the sunken reactor and contaminating the surrounding marine environment. (Frankfurter Rundschau)

Mobiles on planes by next year

LONDON - Aeroplanes used to be the last refuge from the trill of mobile phones, but now telephone firms are taking handsets to new heights. Revolutionary new British satellite technology means passengers will be able to use their mobiles at 35,000 feet next year. CabinCall, developed by BAE Systems, replaces the current wired-in seat phones which airlines use in first class and business class.

One BA pilot said: "Who wants to watch a movie with some jerk shouting down a mobile phone in the next seat? And what happens if your phone goes off while you are asleep? Who will answer it? I predict trouble."

But Julia Brookes, editor of *Business Traveller* magazine, insists passengers will welcome the new service. "Mobiles are essential these days," she said. "With increasing globalisation of business, a lot of people are paid a lot of money to be available 24 hours a day—even in the air." (The Observer)



Vacancy

Rato Bangala School announces two vacancies for classroom teachers in the Primary grades. Applicants must have fluency in English, an ability to relate to children and a willingness to learn. Interested candidates are requested to visit the School to pick up application forms.

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The Cold War never stopped

MUNICH - It seems like a return to the bad old days. When the Russian submarine *Kursk* sank to the bottom of the Barents Sea, the United States Navy was close at hand, observing this set of Russian sea manoeuvres with as much suspicion as it does all others. Even 10 years after the Cold War officially drew to a close, the Russians and the Americans are still keeping a sharp eye on each other in the silent depths of the world's oceans.

The significance of submarines to military strategy has in fact increased. The Russians consider them to be the least vulnerable component of their strategic nuclear potential, according to disarmament expert, Harald Mueller, of the Peace Research Institute-Frankfurt (PRIF). The other two pillars of Russia's nuclear deterrent, intercontinental missiles and weapons under the control of the air force, would be far easier for an enemy to destroy.

This situation is particularly true since Russia realised that the money was no longer there to keep its mobile missile-launchers on the move. General Anatoly Kvashnin, chief of Russia's General Staff, also uses this argument to support his belief that, against the will of Russian Defence Minister Igor Sergeev, the role played by submarines should be strengthened. Mueller fears that the accident in the Barents Sea has—“regrettably”—weakened the reasonable position taken by Kvashnin.

The strategic use of submarines carrying ballistic missiles plays an important role in larger power games—they are part of a credible nuclear deterrent. They make the possibility of a nuclear second strike much more realistic in the event of other

weapons systems being knocked out. Experts reckon, however, that Russia has no more than two nuclear submarines of this class in service at any one time.

Strategic submarines are still, however, something akin to the queens of the military's underwater arsenal. They top potential enemies' lists of concerns and they are their owners' top priority when it comes to funds and attention. Attack submarines which are capable of hunting and destroying them are their main danger when the situation turns serious. The *Kursk* belongs to a special class. It is armed with cruise missiles which enable it to attack aircraft carriers and thus protect its own underwater fleet.

Although Russian naval power has decreased since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has been little comparable drop in the attention paid to it by the US. The US navy attempts to follow the movements of Russian submarines wherever and whenever possible—but also as a means of training personnel in the use of sonar and other technical equipment.

"This is a skill you can't just pick up overnight," said Chris Hellman, an analyst for the Centre for Defence Information in Washington, in answer to questions from the *Los Angeles Times*. In any case, the navy is certainly also very interested in knowing the position of Russian submarines at all times—just in case.

The Russians' reluctance to ask the West for help, even in the direst of emergencies, is another reminder of the Cold War. Harald Mueller does not think it is a genuine case of secrets which must be kept hidden but rather a remnant of the "old culture of maintaining total secrecy." For the crew of the *Kursk*, this turned out to be a fatally flawed policy. (Sueddeutsche Zeitung)



BINOD BHATTACHARAI

Last week, the Ministry of Information and Communications (MOIC) went through a pile of pending FM radio applications and pulled out the one submitted by the Kantipur group, and granted it permission to set up the country's most powerful FM transmitter.

Kantipur was chosen out of 21 applications with the ministry for FM stations all over the country. The country's premier private media house (it publishes The Kathmandu Post and Kantipur, among others) is planning a mammoth 10-kilowatt transmitter at Bhedetar (the first high ridge on the Dharan-Sanku road), which will be ten times more powerful than the FM transmitter in Kathmandu run by the state-owned Radio Nepal.

With that kind of power, the Bhedetar transmitter will bring the Nepali-speaking areas of India-Sikkim and northern West Bengal, Bihar, and even parts of Uttar Pradesh within range. In Nepal itself, the signals will reach a broad swathe of the tarai and hills from Ilam right up to Birgunj.

By awarding the licence to Kantipur, the ministry overrode applications for smaller community FM stations from non-government organisations, local communities and village development committees. The

pending applications are from Pokhara (8), Birgunj (1), Biratnagar (4), Kathmandu (5), and others from Dang, Bardia, Sankuwasabha and Kanchanpur. According to sources at the Ministry of Information and Communications, Minister Jaya Prakash Prasad Gupta ordered that all pending applications be brought up for scrutiny and approved just the one for licensing.

Minister Gupta, however, justifies his decision saying that the Kantipur licence was granted in accordance with the 'FM master plan'. "There are 11-12 other stations which will be licensed after they make the necessary papers available."

The MOIC decision seems to copy similar deregulation of the FM band in India, but there the annual fees for metros like Bombay and Delhi run in the range of Rs 50-100 million (NRs 80-160 million). The government makes money, the private companies cash in on the huge advertising market, and everyone is happy.

The high fees in India is what has motivated Times FM, a wing of the Times of India group of newspapers, to want to set up a powerful FM transmitter in the mountains of Nepal overlooking the north Indian plains. Its earlier proposal which MOIC says did not exist was supposedly rejected by Marxist-

Leninist minister Radha Krishna Mainali, saying it was against the national interest.

Newspapers have reported that Times FM is going to piggy-back on Kantipur. Managing Director of Kantipur Publications, Kailash Sirohiya, however, expressed surprise when asked about the Times of India connection. "I came to know about it only through different news sources," he said. "It is basically Kantipur FM and it will be only Kantipur FM."

There is also a growing feeling that the MOIC's decision is arbitrary, non-transparent and does not follow the National Communication Policy, which stipulates support for community broadcasting.

"We don't care which organisation was licensed and which was not but what we all have to question is the process through which the ministry has issued licences," says Raghu Mainali, who coordinates the Community Radio Support Centre at the Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists (NEFEJ) that runs Kathmandu's Radio Sagarmatha.

He adds: "Because the radio frequency spectrum is a national resource, agencies like the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament should look into the licensing process to see if it has been fair and according to established rules. Licence fees are a

flat Rs 500,000 annually—whether it be a 10-kilowatt or a 1-kilowatt station, and neither is there any distinction made between commercial stations and community-run ones. Asks Mainali: "Is it logical to charge a station broadcasting with 10 times more power the same licence fee?"

In most countries, radio frequencies are regarded as public property and commercial broadcasting licences are usually auctioned to the highest bidder. But in the case of the MOIC, most licences have so far been granted by ministers on their way out. This has led many to suspect that Gupta's hurry this time too may have been motivated by the unstable politics of the past two weeks.

Still others, like Bharat Koirala (see Viewpoint, alongside) who see decentralised community radio as a key component for development communication, question the licensing of industrial-scale broadcasting to private entities. In fact, the National Communication Policy lays down the guiding principles of radio licensing in favour of small local stations.

The Kantipur licence has also generated extra interest since it is allowed news broadcasts. Private and community stations so far have been restricted from airing news, but they have all found ingenious ways of circumventing this by calling news and current affairs

something safe, like "Diary", "Headlines" or "Today's Talk".

Sources at the MOIC say that although Kantipur is allowed to broadcast 'news', it comes with the proviso that only information gathered from government sources or from government-owned organisations is to be regarded as 'news'. Kantipur's Sirohiya, while not explicit about this stipulation, asked, "How can news originate only from official sources? I believe the licence requires us to function as stipulated by the broadcasting law."

This is the first FM licence granted by a Nepali Congress government after being elected to power in May 1999. All previous 12 permissions were given between May 1997 and May 1999 by minority or coalition governments. The first batch of commercial FM stations, including Kantipur and Image FM, were licensed in

1997 after a no-confidence motion to oust Surya Bahadur Thapa, the then prime minister, had been registered. (Minister Gupta was in charge of the same ministry in that government.) At that time, out of a ministry 'merit' shortlist of four applications for licensing (which consisted of Kantipur, Music Nepal, Hits FM, Image Channel) only Kantipur and Image Channel were licensed.

Two years ago, the state-owned Radio Nepal wanted to set up a similar high-power FM station in the western hill town of Dadaeldhura. But the plan was replaced by another one to set up a string of FM stations in urban areas across Nepal run along the lines as FM 100 in Kathmandu. That plan now stands scrapped after a ministry study recommended that individual stations were more desirable than a mega-network. And so on. ♦

Radios licensed up to November 1999

Licencee/station	Power (Watt)	Licensed on
Radio Nepal	1000	2052/10/28
Radio Sagarmatha	100(20)	2054/02/05
Kantipur FM P.Ltd.	500	2054/11/06
Image Channel P.Ltd.	500	2054/11/06
Kathmandu Municipality	100	2054/11/25
Hits FM P.Ltd.	500	2055/05/08
Himalayan Broadcasting Co.	500	2055/05/08
Birat FM P.Ltd.	500	2055/05/17
Madan Pokhara VDC	100	2055/09/18
Lumbini JSC Co-op	200	2055/09/20
Manakamana FM	250	2056/07/15
Koshi FM P. Ltd.	500	2056/08/01

(Source: MOIC)

100 watt is 0.1 K.W. 500

— Birat FM has now been cancelled and Kantipur (Bhedetar) was down 1000

VIEWPOINT

Nepal must be more radio active

Community FM holds the promise for decentralised information necessary for grassroots development in Nepal.

Back in 1992, when democracy was young, several Nepali organisations got together to apply for a licence to operate a private radio station. Although there was nothing in the new constitution banning private stations, we were sure the application would be rejected.

The Communication Policy Task Force headed by Narahari Acharya had just come out with its recommendations, and one of the key elements in the document was the provision to allow private broadcasting on the FM Band. But it was the bureaucracy that was the main hurdle, and their argument was that even India hadn't yet allowed private broadcasters, so how could we?

To our surprise, not only did the government decide to adopt the recommendations of the Task Force, it also drafted a National Communication Bill with a provision for private FM broadcasting. The bill passed through parliament without a hitch. It was at that point that the bureaucracy started dragging its feet. It took five years for Nepal's (and South Asia's) first community FM station, Radio Sagarmatha, to receive its licence and that too with much difficulty.

Grassroots FM stations can make information accessible through low-power transmitters in the 20- to 100-watt range for small communities and 500 watts for commercial stations in cities and large valleys like Kathmandu, Pokhara or Surkhet. Radio Nepal uses a 1,000-watt transmitter for its FM station in Kathmandu but this is because the rules

don't seem to apply to a government station. Radio Sagarmatha had to wait one full year for its licence because the government wanted Radio Nepal to be the first to start an FM station in Nepal.

I remember discussing the importance of FM radio stations with Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala in 1992 at a Baluwatar tea party in the presence of UNESCO's Carlos Arnaldo. The Prime Minister's reservation in allowing private broadcasting was that the air waves could be used to hurt the sentiments of our powerful neighbours and jeopardise relations. Arnaldo assured the prime minister that many countries had community stations and they had become a key component of development. There was a glimmer of interest in the Prime Minister's face. He looked at me and said, "Let's go ahead then." The present Minister for Information and Communication, Jaya Prakash Gupta, was then the Prime Minister's Press Adviser and was present at the meeting.

The announcement last week of a licence for the Kantipur group to start a powerful FM station at Bhedetar in Dharan district, therefore, appears a bit lopsided and not in the spirit of the government's Communication Policy. What we need are not more large commercial stations, but a network of small community stations. This is evident from the experiences of some Asian countries where people are generally fed up with commercial stations and are asking for more serious debates on issues that affect

their lives. In The Philippines, where there are hundreds of private radio stations, there is now an effort to convert many of the commercial stations into public service stations. A similar effort is underway in Indonesia after democracy. Public debates on political, social and economic issues are now possible and radio stations have become more vibrant and popular despite the continued growth in TV channels.

Nepal still leads countries of South Asia in public broadcasting. Our experience has generated a lot of interest among media professionals in neighbouring countries. But, unless the licensing process is speeded up and more community stations are established soon, it will lose this lead. Granting licences to powerful, well-endowed commercial houses tends to discourage those communities that have taken steps to establish local radio stations. When news that Kantipur had received a licence was announced, the promoters of an FM station in Fikkal in Ilam district called us to ask what would happen to their initiative. We had to assure them that theirs was a public station for a small community, and as it was not driven merely by a profit motive, but by genuine concern for the needs of the audience, it would not affect their own effort.

Nepal already has some good models of public broadcasting. Radio Sagarmatha has established itself as a professional, relevant and independent public station with a large listenership in Kathmandu Valley. In Madan Pokhara in Palpa district, a small station with local volunteers broadcasts seven hours a day to most of the VDCs in the district. Its popular-

ity is growing. In Manigram of Rupandehi district, Lumbini FM broadcasts six hours a day to towns like Butwal and Bhairawa and to many surrounding villages. Both are public stations developed on the Sagarmatha model and their programmes provide information and education to many rural areas. Presently, the Community Radio Centre in Kathmandu is working closely with a number of communities from Bajhang to Ilam keen on starting FM radio stations.

Any community that wants to establish a radio station must carry out technical and economic feasibility studies before making a formal application for a licence. There are now 23 applications pending at the Ministry of Information and Communication. Among the existing stations the ownership patterns are also different. While the Madan Pokhara station is owned by the local VDC, the one in Manigram is owned by a cooperative which put up the money for the whole project.

Nepal's pioneering work with community radio can only go ahead if the liberal licensing process that is in place is implemented. This calls for political will. After all, FM stations are still the most cost-effective broadcasting units. Low-cost FM receivers are more readily available now, and can even be manufactured locally.

Then, there are new possibilities for connecting them into a network with the Internet. Given Nepal's rugged topography, its low literacy and widespread poverty, such a decentralised network would be the best way to use communications for development. ♦

(Bharat Koirala is the General Secretary of Nepal Press Institute.)

by BHARAT KOIRALA



"Sports Council is run like in Panchayat days"



CHHITZ ARUN SHRESTHA

If there was one person who stood out during the opening of the South Asia Federation Games last year, it was Rukma Shumsher Rana. As he welcomed the delegates in his capacity as chief organiser, his easy grace and polished manners impressed many.

It was perhaps a reward for a job well done that Rana was appointed Nepal's

ambassador to Sri Lanka after the Games. But he declined the honour, preferring instead to work for the development of sports in the country.

He presently heads two sporting bodies, the Nepal Olympic Committee (NOC) and the Nepal Amateur Athletics Federation (NAAF). He is also the vice-chairman of the National Sports Council (the chairman is an ex-officio position held by the minister in charge of sports).

Equally well known as a businessman (he is Executive Director of Dabur Nepal), Rana's association with the world of Nepali sports dates only to the early 90s when he was appointed member-secretary of NSC, a position he held for three consecutive terms.

Earlier he had served as Nepali Congress member in the National Assembly. Son of Congress stalwart, late Subarna Shumsher Rana, deputy prime minister in B.P. Koirala's short-lived Congress government of 1959-60, he freely admits that his appointment to NSC is political.

Problems with Nepali sports

Lack of commitment on behalf of sports administrators. It is true that Nepal is not a major sporting power in

the world and our athletes are below par compared to world standards. But at the same time we sports administrators have also failed. There has never been any attempt made by us to upgrade the sporting scenario. Secondly, sports has been given secondary importance by the government.

National Sports Council

It is still run in the same way as in the Panchayat days. In the last 10 years, all sectors have gone through changes except NSC. There is no other institution in Nepal where one person has both financial and administrative control. Everything is in the hands of one person—the member-secretary.

NSC must be run like an institution. There should be a clear division of power. In Panchayat times, the member-secretary wielded a lot of power and was ably supported by the government. But things are different now. Though, the member-secretary holds all the executive power within NSC, there is little support from the government.

Also, there are two systems at work in sports. The ministry has developed its own way of working, whereas NSC

has continued with its Panchayat style. NSC should be working in tandem with the ministry. But that hasn't happened so far.

Nepal's performance at Sydney

We don't stand a chance. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't send our athletes to the Olympics. The exposure they get is enormous.

Bid for Asian Athletics Championships

We've taken this bidding process seriously. Actually, we've bid for three championships. These are the Asian Athletics Championship, the Asian Marathon and the Asian Cross-Country. But we are keen to host the Athletics Championship as it is the biggest among the three. Not only will it be the first ever Asian-level tourney organised in Nepal but it would also give a big boost to Nepali athletics.

The athletics scenario

Optimistic. Some good athletes are coming up. In the past, our athletes have done well, especially in long distances. I've great hopes for Gyan Bahadur Bohara, who is a tremendous runner. There is a 13-year-old girl from

Chitwan who shows promise in sprint events.

Planning Nepali sports

The time has come to think about a long-term plan. It is a must if we want to move ahead. Also, the focus should be on key sports in which we can be successful. But that doesn't mean neglecting other games. But priority should be given to those that can bring us results. I think we can achieve greater success in taekwondo, karate and boxing.

There are 44 sporting associations affiliated to NSC. Only half of them are active. It doesn't make any sense to support all the associations. They must be ranked according to performance. Only those that can produce results should be given financial assistance.

Becoming NSC member-secretary again.

Unless and until there is government support forthcoming, it won't make any sense. ♦

Interviewed by MUKUL HUMAGAIN



Vajra (literally-flash of lightning), is an artists' condominium, a transit home for many, providing a base during months of hibernation and creative inspiration. Its isolation, graphic splendour and peaceful ambience, make an ideal retreat from the clock of pressure.

Ketaki Sheth
Inside Outside.

I stayed a week at the Vajra, by which time I had become so fond of it that I stayed another.

John Collee
The London Observer.

Vajra, a serene assembly of brick buildings, grassy courtyards, ivycovered walls and Hindu statuary is a calm oasis over looking, chaotic Kathmandu.

Time



in Kathmandu, the Vajra

Swayambhu, Dallu Bijyaswori, PO Box 1084, Kathmandu
Phone: 977 1 271545, 272719 Fax: 977 1 271695 E-mail: vajra@mos.com.np

Mountain bike championship

In two weeks, an 11-km track inside the Nagarjun reserve will be the scene of Nepal's first Mountain Bike Championship series. The championship is being organised by Peter Stewart, the man who brought the country's first-ever rickshaw race in 1996.

The mountain bike event will be divided into three races in five categories and will showcase the best mountainbiking from Nepal and

be followed by the "trail raiders" of the open event to complete the 33.6 km course in three laps of the 11-km loop that runs through the Nagarjun forest.

"The loop will remain the same in all the three races till November as it would help athletes correct their timing, improve their skills and gain confidence," says Stewart. "It generates positive feelings towards this action packed sport."



abroad. "Kathmandu is at a critical point, young people are not doing much. Sports like this would really help mould them and keep them occupied with something good," says Stewart, the race director.

The Himalayan Mountain Bike Race Series-2000 will invite high school students, juniors (under 16), seniors (over 40), women and open to compete. The open event will see trail raiders comprising of all age groups.

The one-day race will be held on three days: 9 September, 1 October and 11 November. During that period, the participants will be adding points according to timing and position in each event. The one who gets the highest points will bag the grand award: a two-way Qatar Airways ticket and an entry into the European MTB Championships this year. The inter-school competition winners will get a running trophy, which points to the a national MTB championship in future.

The first stage will kick off with the junior and students group (10.4 km) followed by the women's group (13.7 km) at 11 in the morning. The seniors will start about an hour later and will

The course is based on standards set by the Union of Cycling International (UCI) and follows the suggested format. Says Stewart, "The race will provide good spectator viewing. There will be enough time to move around the course to watch events like the Open Category which will pass spectators on 10 occasions."

The event will be aired by IMG and TWI, the leading international TV sports coverage companies, for distribution to various TV networks worldwide.

An added attraction will be Barrie Clarke and Caroline Alexander, World Cup and UK National MTB Champions, who will compete in the open race on the last day of the championship. They will later conduct a four-day training camp for Nepali riders at Borderlands, a resort near the Nepal-Tibet border on the Kodari road. The final awards ceremony is to be held at Hotel Radisson in Kathmandu. ♦

To register, contact the Himalayan Mountain Bike offices in Thamel or through their website www.bikingnepal.com

The gorge of the flaming sword

Geologists may have various reasons to believe Kathmandu Valley was once a lake, but they would not be able to match the story of Manjushri

In the high wall of the Kathmandu Valley, at a place called Chobar, is the gorge of legend. For here, when gods walked the earth and miracles were commonplace, the Mongolian saint Manjushri cut the mountainside with his flaming sword to drain a lake that filled the valley. His two wives, who he sat atop nearby summits, watched the awesome feat, matched only perhaps by

the dividing of the waters of the Red Sea by Moses. Manjushri's motive was to reach and worship a lotus of incomparable beauty that floated upon the lake. Perhaps he also realised the rich potential of the valley that would result, for legend has him leaving his followers behind to found a city called Manjupatan.

That would be the end of the fable except that, like all fables it varies at every telling and is still

in the process of being spun. So it was not Manjushri but Krishna who made the gorge by striking at the mountain with a thunderbolt. The thunderbolt assumed the shape of Ganesh, and is there below the gorge today, enshrined in a golden-roofed temple, a strangely shapeless deity, and yet distinctly a Ganesh without a trunk. Fable comes forward immediately to explain, that before the temple was built, an innocent farmer while harvesting his corn, sliced off the trunk of the sleeping Ganesh.

There was a time not long ago when it was easier to fantasise about the gorge. It was Kathmandu's favourite picnic spot. Stood under tall old trees above the river that thundered through the narrow fault, there was the whole Kathmandu valley spread out below one, a bowl of emerald or gold or tawny green according to the season, and beyond the misted city with its gilded spires and pagoda roofs, the high steps of mountain ridges reaching to the snows. A wondrous sight one never tired of seeing. On the Kathmandu side of the hill were the loveliest rocks that may have been fashioned by a Japanese craftsman. Indeed the entire area, with its trees and shrubs gnarled and shaped by the winds that buffet the gorge, could have been designed by a Japanese master gardener. One spread one's picnic among the rocks

and having fed, lay back to watch the changing light transform the valley and the towering snow summits with fleeting designs and colours: a temple roof vying briefly with a snow pyramid, the river Bagmati running silver though a purple landscape while the snows turned to gold.

Now a cement factory below the gorge is greedily eating the hill of fable. The beautiful rocks have been chewed to gravel. Many of the lovely trees have gone and often a pall of smoke or dust or both hangs over the area. One does not picnic anymore, but there is still the fantastic gorge to explore, narrow as a knife cut and as deep as the thrust of a powerful blade. Carved into its rocky walls, which themselves are masterpieces of natural sculpture, are numerous caves which legend has leading to a temple on top of the hill, to the city of Kirtipur, to the great Buddhist stupa of Swayambhunath which grew where the lotus settled, and to Tibet. I once happened upon a Nepali Brahmin sitting beside a cave, which he assured me was full of treasure. He had seen it himself, piled about a pool deep inside the hill. He was prepared to share his discovery with me but observed that it was getting dark and he had no torch or tapers to light the way. But if I came during the day he would gladly conduct me inside.

Everyone knew him. I had only to ask for Bhagwan. Somehow, the lure of treasure and the sight of a sacred pool, lost its appeal in the fetid smell of bats that belched from the dark cave with a regularity, that suggested an air conditioning plant somewhere deep down inside.

A geologist friend explained that the Kathmandu valley was indeed once a lake: he used all the arguments of rock formations, types of soil, glacial traces and erosion that he emphasised with jargon to make impressive sense. The levels of its surface had been traced and the long process of its draining away recorded. He agreed that there were places more apparently vulnerable than Chobar, where centuries of erosion could have breached the valley wall, but obviously Chobar was at fault. We laughed at the pun. But far more acceptable to generations of the superstitious and devout, are the stories of divine intervention, and what fol-

lowed. When the waters of the lake receded, there were thousands of angry serpents left high and dry, the king and queen of the Nagas among them. They sought refuge in a small lake called Taudaha that formed below the Chobar gorge, and some believe they are still there. More fascinating is the story that Karkot Nag, the serpent king who had been entrusted with the care of the priceless treasure which the demon Densur had stolen from Indra, the Lord of Heaven, hid it in Taudaha Lake. So powerful was the legend that the first Rana prime minister, Jung Bahadur, is said to have had the lake repeatedly dragged in search of this heavenly wealth, but not even a sign of the snakes was found.

Now there's the cement factory belching pollution and one wonders how, in a thousand or more years time, it will be absorbed into legend. ♦

(Excerpted with permission from In the Kingdom of the Gods, HarperCollins, 1999)



The view last week looking south from Chobar: a Bagmati swollen with monsoon rain roars past the Ganesh Temple and the cement factory beyond it.



CHARCOAL ON ROCK

The grainy dark strokes are what drew 21-year-old Rohan Chitrakar to charcoal. In the sandy blackness of ash and the smeared smoke of lost trees he can easily lose himself. It is a late monsoon afternoon in Kathmandu with dreary drizzle outside, and Rohan's drawings are up on display. Somehow the brooding charcoals dry the air.

Rohan is an avid rock climber, and this seems to explain the muscular strokes of his work: presenting pain, angst and frustration. "Climbing presents me with a very personal challenge, especially because I also have an acute fear of heights. But it forces me to confront my emotions and fears. But to a much larger extent, I keep pondering about the greater questions dealing with our social and environmental behaviour as human beings. Has modern development led to a better life for all?" asks Rohan. And that pretty much sums up everything he has to say as an artist.

These eternal questions are what he ponders with his medium. The texture of the rocks are carved out in dynamic and dramatic human gestures, dance forms frozen in time and yet mysteriously fluid. Some are restless, some struggle, others hang on the edge of cliffs, some loiter about in drowsy stupor, others writhe in agony.



SALIL SUBEDI

"We were intended to be nature's creation. We're gifted with a special capacity to create and discover. But we have drifted so far from the natural world that there is a sense of loss."

The paintings symbolise question marks about why, what and where we live and climb. Rohan is a pessimist: "Often, I come with negative conclusions about our progress, our climb. Maybe it's just me, maybe I have not had adequate experience...but my consciousness tells me that we are all blundering down the wrong path." The sky, the air and the divine terrestrial souls of the mountains have found their way into Rohan's haunting work—nature, struggle and vivid doubt seem to propel him along. "We were intended to be nature's creation. We're gifted with a special capacity to create and discover. But we have drifted so far from the natural world that there is a sense of loss."

Rohan knows where it hurts when he climbs. He knows how the muscle is stretched to the limit, he knows the tiredness of clinging fingers. "Why do I climb? Or to rephrase the question why do we climb? What are we reaching for? I look at climbing as a metaphor for life and for our entire existence," he says.

Rohan hopes to keep one foot in Nepal when he goes to the United States soon as a student. His travels have dispelled any concept of any single, pure culture. It is evident Rohan is searching for meaning. We hope he finds it.

Rohan's drawings were exhibited at the Siddhartha Art Gallery last week. ♦

ABOUT TOWN

FILMS

♦ Foreign

Blood in Blood Out - Kathmandu Mini Vision (226169, ext 512)

♦ Nepali

Sorha Barse Jowan - Bishwo Jyoti (221837), Ganga, Prithvi Hall, Hira Ratna Mallee - Goon (Kha) (520668), Krishna (470090), Ranjana (221191), Nava Durga

♦ Hindi

Har Dil Jo Pyar Karega - Manakamana (225284)

♦ Sungharsh

Ashok Khunkhaar Darinde - Pushpanjali Deewane - Gopi, Goon (Ka) (520668), Kumari (414932)

Tera Jadoo Chal Gaya - Padma Dhadkan - Jai Nepal (411014), Shivadarshan, Tara (476092)

GET LUCKY!

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MUSIC

♦ Sacred music and dance of Nepal
Mandala Lalit Nasakhala, a newly created association of young Tamarakars of Patan and one of the 10 musical ensembles who participate in the Buddhist festival of Malaya or Neku Jatra, have teamed up with Dance Mandala, another cultural group established in 1996, to present an overview of the Newar sacred music or Naumal Baja and dance called Chacha Pyakham. A programme of some 13 songs and dances will be presented. Venue: Alliance Francaise. Date: Friday, 25 August. Time: 6:00 pm. Tickets: Rs. 100

♦ Ghulam Ali live

Ghulam Ali will be performing at Hotel Radisson on 31 August and at the Royal Academy Hall on 3 September at 5:30 pm. Both Nepali and Urdu gazals will be sung. Organised by Digital Symphony. Tickets available at venue. Concert Coordinator: Jivan Shrestha. Tel: 243649

♦ Jazz

Live jazz by Cadenza at Upstairs Restaurant, Lazimpat. Every Saturday 7:30-10:00 pm.

♦ Classical fusion

Maha Yatra presents a classical music fusion concert at the Russian Cultural Centre, Kamalpokhari. Date: 26 August. Time: 6:30 pm. Tickets: Rs 500 & Rs 300. Available at East Meets West, Thamel. Tel: 256411

FESTIVALS

♦ Bhimsen Jatra, 24 August

On this day the image of the Newar god of business and prosperity, Bhimsen, is brought out of his temple at Patan Durbar Square and carried around the city on a palanquin. Businessmen from Patan, Kathmandu, and Bhaktapur accompany the palanquin, carrying burning incense and torches in their hands. A musical band lead the procession with special ceremonial music. Procession starts around 8 pm from Durbar Square and ends there after a tour of Patan.

♦ Gokarna Aunsi or Father's Day, 29 August

Gokarna Aunsi is the day when fathers are given special care and attention and provided with ritual food, sweetmeats, and other gifts by their children. The streets come alive with scenes of married daughters bearing gifts for their fathers. Those without fathers visit the temple Gokarneswar Mahadev, some distance east of Boudha, and offer prayers and gifts to Brahmins there. It is a sacred shrine of Lord Shiva, renowned for his singularly close communion with the souls of dead.

The day is also celebrated as Motiram Jayanti, or the Birth Anniversary of Motiram. Motiram Bhatta is credited with popularising the works of Bharu Bhakta Acharya, considered the first poet of the Nepali language, among Nepalis. Patan make it a point to participate in the festival at least once in their lifetime. Entry to Patan city: Rs 200 for foreigners and Rs 25 for SAARC nationals. Free map of Patan and access to eight historical sites provided.

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com

Garbage in , compost out ↑

SALIL SUBEDI

Even as the issue of Kathmandu's garbage threatened to swamp the space for public debate over the past weeks, a small organisation in Kupondole has been going about quietly getting rid of the waste, and producing something useful out of it—organic compost, recycled paper, and public awareness.

Started in 1992 by a group of enthusiastic housewives from Kupondole, the Women Environment Preservation Committee (WEPCO) began working with 50 houses. Now they cover more than 1600 houses in the area. For a monthly fee of Rs 30, every morning, WEPCO collectors visit houses in Kupondole, Chakapat, Bakhundole, Sanepa and Ghusinghal with their *dokos* and tri-cycles. Unlike with other collection systems in the Valley, where everything is put together for the collectors to dump in the municipality container or neighbourhood heap, WEPCO members are expected to separate the biodegradables for the compost.

However, as Maila, a worker at WEPCO's compost production site puts it, people don't always take the trouble to separate the plastic from the food waste. And then there are those who still throw rubbish from their rooftops and litter outside their own gates even with WEPCO active for the past eight years.

"Some people even scold us for not collecting the refuse in time. But then we have only seven collectors and we've not been able to pay them so well. Funds are low. All of us are basically volunteering,"

says Sudha Poudel, Vice-President of WEPCO.

But these are the minor irritants and she does not want to dwell on them. She would rather talk about the appreciation they received when they went from door to door eight years ago asking people for their cooperation.

WEPCO's compost plant was set up with support from the Danish aid organisation, Danida, but it is now self-sustainable. Currently a kilo of the organic compost sells at Rs 8. "Because we also want to generate the habit of

using organic compost among people we are promoting it at low rates," says Poudel. The compost sells fast. "Not only has it helped support us but we've been able to set an example that small community efforts can lead to great results."

Apart from compost production, WEPCO also produces paper recycled from the rubbish heap. Using machines granted by a Japanese NGO, their small factory produces office materials, postcards and paper toys of export quality. The organisation has also begun

sharing its expertise with others. In Lalitpur's wards 2 and 10, WEPCO has trained women's groups in implementing similar programmes.

WEPCO motto is '3R'—Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. "It is no secret and anybody can follow it," says Poudel proudly. "In fact, the municipalities would do well to learn from our example to make use of solid waste. There wouldn't have been a garbage disposal problem if the authorities had started working at small-scale community level." ♦



HAPPENINGS



Writers and artists march in Kathmandu on 14 August to mourn the death of musician Praveen Gurung and demand that Paras Shah be brought to justice.



Models wearing haute couture made of newspapers and trash at Vision '00, a fund-raising environment awareness night organised by Jagaran Samuha on 15 August.



Lars Braaten (left) at the opening of United Bookstore at Thamel on 17 August. Writer Dubby Bhagat of Everest Hotel reaches out for a copy of Nepali Times.



The East

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OFF THE BEATEN TREK

by PADAM GHALEY

Beyond Langtang

You race the descending darkness. The presence of the mountains doesn't leave you, it leaves a mark on your soul forever.

Taking the path less trodden sometimes means coming to the point where the average tourist stops, and venturing beyond. Langtang's L-shaped valley is just 40 km due north of Kathmandu, but it is so wild that it may as well be 4,000 km away.

Most trekkers get up to Langtang Village or Kyangjin Gumpa and, struck by the views all around, stop. Not that it is

not a beautiful place to take a break: the views are out of this world, the shingle-roofed wooden houses are almost Alpine in looks. But after a day or two, you itch to move on to see what is around the bend in the valley beyond the airstrip. You also want to get away from the blue seracs of the Lirung Glacier that loom menacingly above Langtang village. Not a very safe spot to locate, you

think, but the locals probably know better.

As you swing past Kyangjin and Langshisha Kharka, you start getting an indication of what a high-altitude Himalayan hike is all about: 360 degrees of mountain views so spectacular that they seem to have been chiselled in heaven by the Gods. The fluted summit ridge of Gang Chenpo is one such exquisite piece of ice sculpture.

It exudes its various moods throughout the day—from the moment it is silhouetted against the dawn sky, past noon as the sun glints off the ice melting on its flanks, in the afternoon when the clouds veil the ridge on a backdrop of pure blue and finally the grand finale: the crimson giving way to pastel pink as the sun sets and the shadows of Naya Kanga steal up its side. Up here in Langshisha

valley, the spectacle does not end with the close of day. There are other heavenly bodies, the moon and stars, that rise soon after. By lunar light, the peaks guarding Langtang Glacier come out like ghosts of our rinpoche ancestors and they stand like silent sentinels in a skyful of stars. The silence is total, especially if it is one of those windless pre-monsoon nights. The only interruption comes from the Langtang Glacier grinding its teeth in its sleep, or an avalanche thundering down from the snowfields of Pemthang Karpo-Ri. The booming sound reverberates, and when it dies down it only accentuates the silence. A meteor pierces noiselessly across the sky, heading north towards Tibet.

In the early morning at Morimoto Peak Base Camp, you realise how far up you have come by how disfigured Gang Chenpo looks from this angle. We are now in the rainshadow and the half-hearted clouds that

do venture up here just leave a few drizzles. But this is enough to make the moraines bloom with flowers. Chukor pheasants are the only birds around, a flock of them pecking on the wild berries and clucking contentedly.

Above this point, the glacier gets more dangerous and is used by mountaineering schools for training in crevasse rescue, rock climbing and ice work. Climbing up one of the eastern spurs of Morimoto Peak, the brooding presence of the vast South Face of Xixa Pangma rears up in Tibet from behind Hagen's Col. This awesome wall of rock has a magnetic presence, it seems to look down on all the smaller summits around to show them who's boss. As you hurry down towards camp, racing the descending darkness, the presence of the mountains doesn't leave you. It leaves a mark on your soul forever. ♦



The fluted ridge of Gang Chenpo (top, centre) as seen from the Upper Langtang Valley. Monsoon clouds swirl up the slopes of Naya Kanga.

YOUR WEEK

by KARUNA NAYA



ARIES 21 March-19 April
Activities involving education and publishing are on the good side. Love and romance are to be accepted with measure. Relationships with family will improve. Be expressive.



TAURUS 20 April-20 May
Frivolity will increase. Work and other commitments require quite a lot of attention as well. Good time to get over doldrums and lift energy levels. Share love and compassion with young ones.



GEMINI 21 May-21 June
Get down to business and concentrate on a particular project. Issues concerning household or family is likely to let you down. Be contemplative, but don't let it get you down.



CANCER 22 June-22 July
Attitude will remain cheerful throughout the week. A fresh wave of energy in love life may be experienced. Heightened creativity, or children coming up. Don't overspend, but don't be stingy either.



LEO 23 July-22 August
Improve relationships with friends. Try sorting out miscommunication at work. Attention is required in the area of finances. Beware of self underestimation, try to look at yourself in perspective.



VIRGO 23 August-22 Sept
Changes are gradually happening in your life in terms of career. Claim your personal identity and keep firm decisions. Good projects are coming your way, but manage time better.



LIBRA 23 Sept-23 Oct
Not a good time to start something new. But the end of week will bring about romantic excitement. Give attention to health matters. Don't ignore problematic symptoms.



SCORPIO 24 Oct-21 Nov
Energies towards career and life goals continue through this week. Your intuition is good. Good time to begin money-making projects but be careful about overspending.



SAGITTARIUS 22 Nov-21 Dec
Various events will continue to favor writing and discourse. Take steps towards newer grounds in relationship. Work will be more intense this week. Keep track of daily activities so you can take stock later.



CAPRICORN 22 Dec-19 Jan
Be more organised at work. Overcome lethargy and improve the style of work. Meanwhile take care of health matters. Don't ignore minor symptoms, get some exercise it will boost your spirits.



AQUARIUS 20 Jan-18 Feb
Take firm decisions regarding education and future plans. Time to recollect your self. Intimate moments and happiness will have to be shared. Avoid stress, good antidote is taking long hikes.



PISCES 19 Feb-20 March
Clear out the empty moments in your life, fill them with joy. Impulse concerning the arts and spiritualism is likely to rearise. Allow your creative energy to flow as it will. Work will be intense.

NEPALI WEATHER



This is one of those rare occasions when almost the entire subcontinent is under heavy cloud cover. Quite unusual for the tail-end of the monsoon. The troughs of the past week were delayed and dissipated by some northwesterlies sneaking in from the Tibetan Plateau. But a large low-pressure buildup in the Bay of Bengal off central India is creating a counter-clockwise circulation that could reach Bangladesh by the beginning of next week. For Kathmandu, sunny spells and light rain till then.

KATHMANDU

Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
29-18	29-18	30-19	30-19	30-19	29-18	29-18

Digital Symphonic Recording

Presents

Ghulam Ali
SAMBANDH

an evening with
Ghazal maestro

Welcome track by Sur Sudha
in aid of Bal Bhojan

Venue

Royal Academy Hall 3 sept. 5.30 sharp
Hotel Raddisson 31 aug. 6.00 sharp

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Funny Side Up

by Kunda Dixit

A couple of gender-sensitised readers have written in pointing out that the cow we used as a model in this space last week is actually not a cow at all, but a bull. We immediately launched a thorough investigation, threatening Nepal's greatest livestock photographer with dire consequences, and have come to the painful conclusion that, yes, the cow in question is indeed an ox. A bull he is.

official acknowledgement to make it as easy as possible for foreign joint ventures. The first signs of change are already visible. The airport arrival now has the Red Channel (something to declare), Green Channel (nothing to declare) and the Back Channel (pre-paid smugglers with prior arrangement).

Royal Nepal Airlines used to serve Teacher's whiskey in its Shangrila Class. Now, moving with the times, there will be the fine single-malt Old Smuggler on offer. There are plans to have three classes: Economy Class, Chyangra Class and the premium Smuggler Class near the cockpit. A special cargo hold has been set aside for contraband so that traders don't have to flush gold bars

Smuggler's Shangrila

RED CHANNEL

"Don't Even Think About It"



GREEN CHANNEL

"Green Channel Is Not a Green Light"



BACK CHANNEL

"Shh... No One Is Looking. Go Go Go!"



In fact some of you may have recognised him as none other than the Resident Alpha Male of Chabahil Circle. And we owe a debt of gratitude to the observant readers who seem to know their oxen. (Always wondered about that one, why not oxes, or why not: "Where do I put these boxen?")

Nepalis are grateful to the Prime Minister that at last "smuggler" is not a bad word anymore, and the bandicoots of contraband will now get the recognition they deserve. This great national pastime and a lynchpin of our economy is finally coming out of the closet. At parties across Kathmandu last week, well-known smugglers were finally not shy to introduce themselves:

- "Oh, have you met? He smuggles ball bearings."
- "Pleasure, I'm sure, we smuggle motherboards."
- "Hello. Cell Phones."
- "Hi, pleased to meet you, our family has been in money laundering, but we will soon be moving Russian uranium."

At last smuggling is getting multi-sectoral

down the toilet for later collection anymore.

The yellow arrival card for Nepalis will soon be amended.

Occupation (tick box):

- ☐ Student
- ☐ Housewife
- ☐ Pilgrim
- ☒ Smuggler
- ☐ Other

Nepal should resist becoming a member of the World Trade Organisation. The biggest enemy of smuggling is global free trade. The soon-to-be-set-up Ministry of Smuggling and Human Resources is expected to accord due priority to this sector by announcing a one-window arrangement and an incentive package that includes working visas and a five-year tax holiday for non-Nepali smugglers who want to set up shop here. Only by opening up smuggling to international competition will Nepal as a nation benefit in these challenging times. Otherwise we may be forever stuck to taking bulls across the border. ♦

NEPALI SOCIETY

Bhairab dai



At 73, activist-journalist Bhairab Risal has the energy that leaves today's young reporters panting far behind. When not doing his twice-weekly live talk-show on Radio Sagarmatha, he may be recording another of his weekly interview programmes with senior citizens. When he takes time off from his radio programmes, you can be sure Bhairab dai is hiking in the hills of Humla or walking knee-deep in a paddy field in Kapilvastu. Last week he spent his 73rd birthday in Chitwan.

Born in Thithali, Bhaktapur, in 1927 Bhairab dai studied literature and economics in Sanskrit, and worked for the national news agency, RSS,

from 1963 to 1985. A year later, he was jailed for criticising the sacrosanct Panchayat slogan for Nepal to reach "Asian standards". In jail, Bhairab kept a diary which was later published as the *Sadhu lai Suli* (Skewered Saint). A free man, he contested parliamentary elections on a Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party ticket in 1991 and lost by just 1300 votes.

Bhairab then turned into an environmental activist with a passion he had reserved for politics. Bhairab toured Nepal, spreading the word about sustainable development and is one of few Nepalis who has set foot in all the country's 75 districts.

"I think it is my company of young enthusiastic journalists that re-energises me all the time," says Bhairab dai. "I feel younger every day."

Bhairab's Radio Sagarmatha interviews have been published *"Utile Bajeko Palama"* (In Grandad's Time) and he is working on *Logne-Swasni ra Kehi Mitra Haruka Chitih* (Letters between a Husband and Wife and Some friends). Bhairab dai and wife Sushila are also among a handful of Nepalis who have donated their bodies to a medical college to be used for both organ transplants and dissection. "When I heard that Nepali medical schools import corpses from India, I wanted to set an example," he says.

Other Bhairab projects: a scholarship scheme for married women students with a Rs 24,000 trust fund, and raising Rs 200 from every friend and well-wisher to help students of a primary school in his village to buy school uniforms.

Happy Birthday, Bhairab dai. ♦



Grindlays



In US\$	Dal-Lentil 1 kg	Bhat-Rice 1 kg	Petrol 1 Litre	Diesel 1 Litre	Kerosene 1 Litre	Electricity 1 Unit	\$ Rate
Bangladesh	0.74	0.37	0.40	0.22	0.37	0.04	53.85
Bhutan	0.65	0.31	0.56	0.33	0.18	0.02	44.46
India	0.65	0.37	0.58	0.29	0.14	0.05	45.81
Maldives	0.25	0.28	0.40	0.30	0.42	0.21	11.82
Pakistan	0.44	0.46	0.55	0.24	0.13	0.04	54.42
Sri Lanka	0.77	0.38	0.64	0.25	0.20	0.03	78.42
Nepal	0.66	0.39	0.55	0.33	0.18	0.08	72.55

All prices are in US dollars, collected from informal sources, and are only indicative.



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