Mao nostalgia is at its peak. The English National Opera staged Mao in the London Coliseum this summer. In the land of his birth, Mao remains in a monumental and his legacy is marked by a boom in tourist memorabilia.

Here in the mid-hills and forests of Nepal, where Mao’s self-styled proteges are carrying on as if the Long March never ended, a People’s War being waged in the name of the farmer’s son from Hunan has claimed 1,450 lives in the past four years.

On 25 August, three days after Prachanda announced a new “strategic defence” offensive, Maoists hacked to death a primary school teacher in Gorkha—not the first cold-blooded murder of a non-combatant. The same day a group burnt two buses belonging to the Modern Indian School in Kathmandu.

The police say they are now more prepared. Maoist raids, their casualty rates have come down, and they have sometimes even overpowered rebels in daytime encounters. “They seem to be under pressure now,” a high-level police source told us. “They’ve promised fresh attacks but we are better prepared.”

Nepal’s Maoists borrow their military tactics from Mao’s treatises and from practical applications by Peru’s Sendero Luminoso. Shyam Shrestha, editor of left-leaning每日新闻, and a political science professor at Tribhuvan University. “They took the command of the state’s political power and hence regarded as the enemy. Nepali Maoists are fighting a largely civilian police.”

So far, Maoists seem to have an upper hand. Time is on their side, and they strike when they want to and where they want to. Riding a wave of violence, they’ve taken a shortcut from a leftist fringe to the centre of Nepal’s mainstream political discourse in four quick years. “They would not have done as much within such a short time if they had gone through normal political processes,” says Prithbhi Raiti, a right-wing politician at Tribhuvan University. “They took the high-risk, quick-rewards road.”

Successive weak governments, political infighting and poor law and order since 1999 have given the Maoists space and even support, allowing them to grow into a force to be reckoned with. Their violence bred counter-violence from the state, which bolstered Maoist support among peasants caught in the crosfire.

Aside from terror-tactics against “class enemies”, Maoists have also been playing the hearts-and-minds game more effectively than the Police in the “base areas”. They have collectivised farming, set up co-operative banking, given out low-interest loans, banned alcohol and tobacco and emphasised gender equality.

But there are many who believe that this is a cynical application of the Mao dictum that the end justifies the means. “The ‘people’s war’ seems to be an euphemism for extortionist activity and local-level vendetta,” says Dipak Gyawali, a political economist. “In war, you hit targets of strategic significance. How does hacking school teachers and burning school buses further the revolution?”

The Maoists say they have been fighting by the rules of the Geneva Convention, and want the police to do the same. “It’s both sides abiding by the rules there are certain things they cannot do,” says Gopal Swaikot Chintam, a human rights activist. “They cannot murder, torture, take hostages, commit outrages upon personal dignity and execute anyone without proper judicial guarantees. That is why dialogue is urgent, even if only to agree on the rules of engagement.”

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**Times**

Nepal’s Top Newspaper

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**CONGRESS-K, CONGRESS-G**

Editorial page 2
CONGRESS—K OR CONGRESS—G?

There they go again. K.P. Bhattarai and G.P. Koirala are back at it. These two fellows first create a crisis, and then they busy themselves trying to resolve it. It almost looks like they do it on purpose—so they don’t get bored all the time. It would all have been hugely entertaining if only they were not so dangerous for the nation. Chronic squabbling in the ruling party has brought governance to a standstill.

The Maoists, who had a monsoon break in the lean season, seem to be capitalising now on this disarray at the top. The Prime Minister promised MPs of insurgency-affected districts that he would ensure their safe passage back home for the Dasain festival. The Maoists responded with a fresh offensive last week. They chose soft targets to make their presence felt in the capital: setting school buses on fire, lobbing pipe bombs while police wired were having a function, and scaring the Home Minister with another homemade bomb. Elsewhere in the kingdom, they used human shields of women and children to lose police posts, a not-so- glorious technique for a “People’s War”.

It is doubtful whether such acts of arson and mayhem actually further the cause of “revolution”. Even so, the Maoists are not solely to blame for this spurt of recklessness. Prime Minister Koirala, the chiefkeeper of law, and Sher Bahadur Deuba, the man entrusted with the task of talking to the Maoists, are more interested in undermining each other’s influence in their own party than in engaging the rebels. And, as far as they are concerned, the country may as well go to pot.

This ugly grab for power going on at the centre is not the only cause of Nepal’s woes, but it certainly looms large. The Maoists are merely taking advantage of it. The ruling party’s unlimness is exasperating the nation’s crises, including the Maoist one. With a reshuffle in the air, ministers vacilate, senior bureaucrats obfuscate and the general administration of the country has been left to minor officials left to their own devices. It is a wonder that this man-made disaster (and it is made by men) has not yet completely crippled the nation.

But it will if the mess is allowed to prolong. The Nepali Congress chauffeirs have to decide: are they going to go on like this or just get it over with and split the party? Patch up or break up?

There is nothing wrong with political parties splitting, they do it all the time. The UML and the RPP both did it. (Some of them even come back together later.) Leaders of the Nepali Congress like to boast that theirs is a mass-based party. It appears to have become a mess-based one. Were it not the ruling party, none of us would have bothered about its internal affairs. But the collective destiny of 23 million people is hanging in the air while the crises of these two septuagenarians play out their proxy battle.

It is time the infighting is brought to a logical and swift conclusion. The Congress should formalise its split and bifurcate into a Congress G and a Congress K.

ROADS WORST TRAVELLED

Kathmandu has 10 percent of the country’s total road network, but more than half of all the cars in Nepal drive on them. That ratio partly explains the craters that dot the long narrow space between walls in this city. These turn into major lakes in the monsoon that could swallow up a Kursk-class submarine.

“Pothole” is inadequate to describe the craters that are the long suffering cars in Nepal. In the words of the editor: “There are more craters than half of all the cars in Nepal drive on them. That ratio partly explains how the Maoists are more interested in undermining each other’s influence in their own party than in engaging the rebels. And, as far as they are concerned, the country may as well go to pot.”

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The powers that be drive around in their Sports Utility Vehicles, most of them imported duty-free by flouting the privileges conferred upon them by the last hung parliament. Come to think of it, the honourable people’s reps should not be blamed for having chosen all-terrain vehicles. You do need these off- roaders to negotiate Kathmandu’s monstrous surfaces.

On rainy nights, the roads turn into courses on which participants of the Paris-Dakar Race could get some useful practice. Anyway, the phobia is not only of Pajeros, Prados and Pirans, but also of walking into one of these offices. Small wonder then that our national protector is the Lord of Animals. He rides Nandi, a sturdy bull. Lord Pashupatinath had the right idea: a bull is probably the most suitable mode of transport for Kathmandu. Four legs good, four sturdy bull. Lord Pashupatinath had the right idea: a bull is probably the most suitable mode of transport for Kathmandu. Four legs good, four

There is something in our fatalistically known all culture that prevents learning. We believe that whatever is known was already known to our ancestors, therefore there is no need to learn anymore. Panchayat ideologies espoused the “Land and Climate Theory” of a system suited to our soil. They prophesied that the monarchy would fall after becoming constitutional. Actually, it has become stronger. There should be no shame in admitting it or learning from the experiences of constitutional monarchies elsewhere in the world. (“Why should the monarchs of our royalty snuggle at the kings of other countries just because they are egalitarian enough to ride bicycles or raise water buffaloes? So, there is no reason why King Birendra should not try to resolve the controversy swirling around his nephew. The public is convinced that it was Paras who killed Praveen Gurung. Finding a fall-guy, persuading a grieving widow to silence, and subverting the legal system may offer temporary relief. But there is no doubt that the more justice is delayed, the deeper it will dent the credibility of the institution that Para represents. As one deeply concerned reader has so rightly pointed out in a letter to the editor of this newspaper (4), the real issue in the Para episode is not of a person anymore, nor of legal fine print, it is that of justice. For those who still swear by scriptures in matters related to monarchy, here is what Manu has to say in his canons on the Hindu way of life, Manusmriti: “The King should not leave an offender unpunished, whatever may be his relationship with him. Neither father, nor a teacher, a friend, not mother, nor wife, nor a son, nor a priest should go unpunished for the offence committed.”

Rather than leave the fate of royalty in the hands of tyrannical loyalists, it is preferable to have every conscious citizen in this country rise up in defence of the real interests of the king. That is why the monarchy’s role should become a topic of healthy and mature public debate. Thick walls, high fences and black limousines may offer privacy, but real security and genuine devotion can only be found in the company of subjects who don’t have to be forced to be loyal. Perhaps no one knows that better than the king himself. Long live the constitutional monarchy.
A Nepali looks at the Bhutan model.

BLAKY MAI SHERCHAN

The Nepali, Bhutan too is blessed with abundant hydropower resources. But unlike Nepal, which seems to be going nowhere in terms of exploiting its water resource, Bhutan seems to have taken legal much in sight. The Bhutanese government has a 20-year Vision Plan to guide policy formulation in the development of hydropower.

The Master Plan, developed with international consultants, estimates that the four major rivers of Ammochu (Torsa), Wengtong, Bhuthang and Manas have enough potential to generate around 50,000 megawatts of electric power. If all the potential is economically generated, it may writing to 20,000 megawatts of electricity.

Three hydropower projects are under development. The first phase of the Bagachu HPP (60 MW) will be commissioned in 2000. The second stage of the Bagachu HPP (20 MW) will be commissioned in September 2001 and Tal Hipp (102 MW) in the year 2002. Bhutan also has another project, the Punatsangchu Reservoir Scheme (180 MW) is planned to be ready by the end of 2003.

Bhutan receives assistance from a number of international agencies for energy development, but its most stable and important partner has been India. A watershed in the history of cooperation between Bhutan and India was the commissioning, in 1987, of the 36 MW Chukha Hydroelectric Project. Chukha was built under a 99-year lease agreement between India and Bhutan. The Indian government provided a finance package that was 40 percent loan and 60 percent grant.

Later a guaranteed power buy-back provision was also included in the agreement.

This arrangement has proved beneficial to both a power deficit India and a poor Bhutan striving towards self reliant development. Chukha led to the doubling of national revenues between 1985/86 and 1987/88. In 1998/99 the project alone accounted for 35 percent of Bhutan’s revenue generation.

Bhutan was initially paid a paltry Nu 0.50 per unit, but the understanding and increased the tariff to Nu 1.00 in April 1997 and further to Nu 1.50 in July 1999. (Ngelzugg-Nu is Bhutan’s currency and the unit in which electricity is valued in value.)

A striking aspect of Bhutan’s power policy is the very low construction cost per kilowatt. The 1.5 MW Chumey HPP cost only Nu 5.00 (Re. 0.08) per kilowatt. The Bhutang District cost Nu 43.33 million. Tal is being constructed for a reduced estimated budget of Nu 11,300 million, and Bhutan for Nu 1,932 million.

Hence it was expected that the 2000 MW capacity Bhutan is expected to generate by 2005, to be achieved by a total of 20 projects. The most ambitious proposal is the 3,000 MW Karpung HPP.

It is Bhutan’s very success that automatically begs some questions of Nepal. Does Nepal have a viable reason to justify in failing to hydropower development when a much smaller Bhutan has succeeded so well?

Is there any viable justification for the three times higher construction costs of hydro power projects in Nepal? Is it at all probable, that as long as a cheap power is available from Bhutan, India will ever look to Nepal for its hydropower needs?

Bhutan decided to limit hydropower generation only to meet domestic consumption and dispense to the Nepal consumer at tariffs 5 to 7 times higher than in Bhutan! If the answers to the above questions are to be a “No”, it is time that the country’s politicians, planners, bureaucrats and power pundits did some soul-searching to provide an explanation to us.

(Bhima S. Shrestha is a project糊糊 on the Commissioning of Bhutan’s first hydropower project.)

DIDDI IN BLUE

Reading Jasmine Rabhandary’s “Woman to Woman” (#1), I wondered a similar experience and maybe, I would like to correct a quote attributed to her.

“Return of the gods” (#5) is quite informative. But I would like to correct a quote attributed to her.

I read a quote on the Commissioning of Bhutan’s first hydropower project.

(Bhima S. Shrestha is a project糊糊 on the Commissioning of Bhutan’s first hydropower project.)

Bhutan provides a new Nepali model.

Unfortunately, India puts no value on the human rights and any control on irrigation benefits.

While the discounting of the benefits of a number of storage projects makes these schemes less attractive than they are, the larger problem is that developing them is not likely to be beneficial to Nepal in the long run. Bhutan which are being financed entirely by India, will have to look for her share of the costs. But opposition to high dams has grown in recent years and finding the funds to build these mega projects will become increasingly more difficult, if not impossible.

Bhutan has no peaceful view on the sale of hydropower to India. It seems to beketerangan that the country clearly plans to cash on the storage capability of the dam. A dam in the Nepali focus, therefore, from electricity export to charging for irrigation water and flood to the Bhutan model, will face a number of challenges.

It seems logical that India, as their share of the benefits of electricity or water, should be allowed to determine project development for a fair price, of course. If India needs flood relief and water for irrigation; Nepal should be willing to get paid a fair price for electricity. Electricity can remain the inconsequential shared border. If India is allowed to have her say, she should also be willing to pay more than her share to the bit deals the project and be willing to pay a fair price for the benefits accruing from it.

This seems far fetched under the present circumstances with the good and bad conditions, and the price. But, if it is going to be the case in the Nepali focus, therefore, like the only way to go. This could be the Nepali model to be followed by the proclaimed Bhutan one.

(Bhima S. Shrestha is a project糊糊 on the Commissioning of Bhutan’s first hydropower project.)

Letters to the Editor

WALDIE CHANDRASEKHAR

The Nepal, Bhutan too is blessed with abundant hydropower resources. But unlike Nepal, which seems to be going nowhere in terms of exploiting its water resource, Bhutan seems to have taken legal much in sight. The Bhutanese government has a 20-year Vision Plan to guide policy formulation in the development of hydropower.

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(Bhima S. Shrestha is an engineering consultant who recently visited Bhutan as a member of a delegation from Ministry.)
Looking for my brother

Little did we know that only 2-3 km away Kanak was spending his third night out in the open, drinking rain, talking to wild animals to keep them away, and desperately anchoring himself on rocks so that he would not slip off the ledge to the river below.

KUNDA DOIT

From the thrashing indoor of the Ecochull helicopter, Nepal on a monsoon afternoon is a glowing, emerald site. In the blinding splash of drizzle, the white veins of the Budi Gandagi cut through a bright green valley radiating outwards. To the north, veils of rain hide the mysterious velvet depths of the high Himalayas. Here and there, through a tattered in the clouds, you catch tantalising glimpses of the icy rock of Himalchuli’s sky-scraping rapants.

Despite the dull heartbeat and the emptiness inside, I couldn’t help admiring this stunningly beautiful landscape. Padam Chahary, Raaj Gurung and I were on our way last week to the Manang Valley below Manang to look for my missing brother, Kanak. He was on the last leg of his solo Annapurna Circuit trek from Pokhara to Besi Sahar, completing a two-week journey in an amazing 10 days. After crossing Thorung La (5416m) he had made good progress through the Manang Valley, calling home from Dharapani on 19 August, saying he would fly back to Kathmandu from Pokhara on 21 August. Twenty-four hours after he failed to show up, and worried that he had not made any other calls despite phone facilities being available all along the trail, the family started to get worried.

By 2:30 pm on 22 August, Padam, Raju and I were walking across the tarmac at Kathmandu airport towards the Fish Tail Air helicopter. Right then, my mobile rang. It was Anil Shrestha from Himal, who had been coordinating communications with lodges, police stations and APAC offices along the Manang trail for the past two days. News had just come in that Kanak had checked into the Sushma Lodge at Jagat on Sunday morning, 20 August. Right then, we changed plans and decided not to fly to Dharapani, but to land at Jagat and begin searching from there. That’s the decision, taken in the nick of time, was to make the difference between life and death.

After Besishahr, the Manang Valley gets wider and narrower. The steep west side was hardly a dozen metres from the whistling roar. Below us, the white surf of the monsoon swollen river became muffled. Many villages were perched on the mountain sides next to spectacular waterfalls that tumbled down to the deep valley. Padam pointed out Jagat to the pilot a tiny cluster of shingle-roofed houses in front and behind, politely close to the freethinking river. Capt Anil Rawal nudged the helicopter down on a narrow field between the river and the houses, nearly close to a huge boulder.

As the whirl of the departing helicopter receded, we were already searching from the west side was hardly a dozen metres from the whistling roar. Below us, the white surf of the monsoon swollen river became muffled. Many villages were perched on the mountain sides next to spectacular waterfalls that tumbled down to the deep valley. Padam pointed out Jagat to the pilot a tiny cluster of shingle-roofed houses in front and behind, politely close to the freethinking river. Capt Anil Rawal nudged the helicopter down on a narrow field between the river and the houses, nearly close to a huge boulder. Some trekkers would fly back to Kathmandu from Pokhara on 21 August. Twenty-four hours after he failed to show up, and worried that he had not made any other calls despite phone facilities being available all along the trail, the family started to get worried.

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Disadvantage

MIN BAJRACHARYA

It was only after Amrita Bukhara got married did she realise how different life is for males in Nepal. Born into a family with five daughters, she had never experienced the discrimination many Nepali girls face in relation to their brothers. But after marriage at age 15, she suddenly found herself saddled with responsibilities. The routine was unvarying: get up early and cook, wash and clean till late into the night, while the men did basically nothing and waited around expecting to be served.

“I did not get the opportunity to compare,” says the 36-year-old journalist and activist for women’s rights. “After marriage I began to realise how different it was to be born a girl.

There were written rules about how I could talk, walk, behave and perform as daughters.”

Although many of those proprieties are rooted in tradition, it also has to do with the fact that Nepal has about two dozen laws that discriminate against women. Among them is one that bars them from inheriting parental property, unless they remain unmarried till the age of 35. That is more than half the average life span of Nepali women. Also they have to renounce the property, after deducting wedding expenses, if they marry after inheritance.

Women can dispose of inherited property only with the consent of male family members. A Bill that could change some of this has been in parliament for over three years.

A Bill that could change some of this has been in parliament for over three years.

Agreement on the women’s rights bill is far from forthcoming, and by putting it on hold once again Parliament has skirted the issue for now.

The recently concluded parliament session, the bill was sent to the committee which will hopefully make it ready for voting when the House meets again.

One reason for the inaction on the women’s rights bill is the disproportionate male-female ratio in parliament. The House of Representatives has a total of 12 women MPs in a house of 205, while of the National Assembly’s strength of 60, there are only nine women.

“The politicians are afraid. They argue that the bill will change some long-standing traditions,” says Chaitanya Mishra, professor of sociology at Tribhuvan University. “There will be short-term vote losses, yes. But that is no excuse, they have to agree on whether the changes will be good or bad and make a decision.”

Even though the draft bill would allow daughters to inherit parental property, they would be required to renounce the inheritance if they were to subsequently marry. The argument is that this provision would ensure that women, who can also inherit their husband’s property, are not doubly property. The draft also drops some derogatory words and phrases used to refer to actions associated with women. “Ehep,” for instance, has been replaced by “marriage,” and “daughters” has also been added to every reference to their property to husbands upon divorce, while the communist parties say that sons and daughters should be given equal rights regardless of their marital status.

Although they accept that it represents a step forward, women’s rights advocates are not completely satisfied with the draft either. The draft includes stricter punishment for rape, but its definition—sexual penetration—remains unchanged. Neither does it include, say, harassment or even mental rape.

The draft is also silent on many other issues, such as enforcement of women in the army, registration of personal incidents—births, deaths, etc.—which can now be done only under the name of the male head of family and obtaining citizenship on the basis of a mother’s status.

“But something must happen. At this stage we cannot even predict when it is likely to become law,” says lawyer Sapana Pradhan-Malla, who maintains that there is nothing in the draft to enforce women’s rights.

Something is better than nothing, the bill would at least begin a process of enacting laws to enforce women’s rights.

Even after his death, a widow has no legal rights over property if she does not remain loyal to her deceased husband. Hence the law expects her to worship her husband even after his death.

If a woman is divorced and the cause of the separation is herself, neither can she get any alimony or maintenance nor can she claim any property from her husband.

A second marriage by a woman by giving false information is subject to be void whereas a second marriage by a man in similar circumstances is not.

Even for court proceedings, a woman is not considered mature enough to receive any summons, subpoena or court order issued to any member of the family.

If a wife has sexual intercourse with a man other than her husband or if she elopes, she is automatically considered to be divorced but the same does not hold for a husband in similar circumstances.

Women are deprived of the right to inherit the birth of their own child. Right is vested on the father. In his absence, the male head of the family.

(Adapted from Beijing+ 5 Review: Existing Discriminatory Laws in Nepal, May 2000)
Indecisiveness within Nepali Congress

Dhankuta, 27 August

“I don’t want problems within the Nepali Congress to hold up the nation and people’s cause,” said PM Girija Prasad Koirala. But the PM does not seem capable of living up to his words, as he is unable to take a decision.

The indecisiveness of the Nepali Congress leaders has almost paralyzed the administration. The Maoists also seem to be exploiting this situation by increasing their reign of terror in various parts of the country.

There seems to be no dialogue between Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and Prime Minister Koirala. Bhattarai has stopped receiving Koirala’s phone calls and he did not attend the inauguration of the Midiwest Development Region workshop.

After the massacre of Khum Bahadur Khadka and the presentation of demands, the cabinet now feel that the atmosphere for a peace-saving act has been created by Koirala agreeing to 3 of the 5 demands of Bhattarai:
1. postponing of party congress to August 27
2. reshuffling of central working committee
3. calling off the strike

“I have come through the system, through a process and I would like the process to continue to remain in the party. Only through this process can leadership be handed to qualified persons and this process can gain the support of the people. A peaceful process has been found.”

This shows that Koirala is not willing to give up his position. This means that in the present context, the PM will not bow down to the demands of the Bhattarai camp. But his agreeing to the strike’s valid demands gives the hint of win-win situation for both the leaders. And this could possibly end the present stalemate in the party.

Since PM Koirala is open to reshuffling the central working committee and the cabinet, it is speculated that it may take place in the near future. However, it is not expected that new faces will be induced in either the central committee or the cabinet. Sources say that Ram Sham Sarraf, Purna Bahadur Khadka and Bhabha Bahadur Babaray will be added and Tarini Dutt Chauvet, Ram Baran Yadav, and Buddhadev Khadka and Jaya Prakash Anand will be removed.

Sources also say that Nona Koirala and Ila Koirala, who are not acceptable to the K.P.-Deuba camp, might vacate their posts in the central committee while K.P.-Deuba camp will forward the names of Ram Sharan Mahat, Chhaya Devi Prasad, Bima Bhatta and Yog Prasad Upadhyaya.

Well-wishers of Koirala say that he should not attend the UN meeting before the reshuffle of the committee and the cabinet if he is to create an atmosphere for dialogue among the leaders. They warn that leaving without solving these problems could prove fatal not only for the Nepali Congress but also for his prime ministership.

Parliamentary Committee to visit Kalapani soon

The Foreign-Affair and Human Rights Committee of the House of Representatives will visit the disputed Kalapani area in Darchula district within the next two months. Committee chairman Som Prasad Pandey said, “Nepal has been demanding that Indian soldiers be removed from the area that has been under Nepali control but nothing has happened. The visiting team will prepare a report based on the visit. This will later be presented to the parliament.”

The Committee had visited disputed Lipulekh and Taksindo and prepared a report earlier.

Pande also informed that UML General Secretary and leader of the opposition, Madhav Kumar Nepal, who also happens to be a member of the BLT’s Rights Committee, will also visit the disputed area. Speaker Taranath Ranabhat may also join the team, he said. He added that the House Committee will soon discuss the present human rights situation with the chairman and members of Human Rights Commission.

Nepal Bandh before Bandh

Nepal Jagran, 21 August

The Communist Party of Nepal-Marxist-Leninist—along with other nine communist parties have called a Nepal Bandh on 18 September, but members of these parties have now been called to focus attention on the ‘burning issues’ of the nation.

In a statement issued by the communist parties on 25 August, a petition to the Prime Minister will be submitted after which a nation-wide protest rally and awareness campaign of the District Administration Office and Singh Durbar on 6 September will follow. On the eve of the Bandh, on 18 September, they have also called for a nation-wide torch rally in protest.

The parties are also preparing for an interaction with the government and the PM to discuss the consequences of the Prime Minister’s recent India visit.

The parties have taken up various issues including the Citizenship Act, Laxmanpur dam, the Kalapani border, irrigation, and the case of Parasi Shah, among others. The bandh organiser have also included the issue of the salary increment of Members of Parliament, Ministers and the Prime Minister in their list.

Deuba speaks out in a Facebook

Saptapadi Bikashak, 25 August

In a press release, former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has affirmed that he would not pull back from carrying out conversations with the underground Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). The statement comes amidst an atmosphere of uncertainty over whether Deuba is ready to sit down with the commission to initiate talks with Maoists.

The release says “I want to once again remind everyone I am still attempting to negotiate with Maoist leaders and take forward the process even in such circumstances, this conflict does not remain of political interest alone. This problem has been facing the country because of politicians’ ideologies. Therefore, it has become very important to end this existing conflict. I declare that all children of Nepal and killings do not help us achieve our goals. Nation building is the challenge of the day. But without peace, there is no hope of development. Therefore, violence and killings should be put an end to at a halt. Despite all my efforts to move forward, there still exists an environment of distrust. An environment for mutual understanding is necessary to work together. While the BAAC, I would like to assure fellow Nepalis that I am trying my best to begin a dialogue with the Maoist leadership. I want to move ahead with the talks in an environment of trust. I won’t leave any stone unturned in finding a proper solution to end all existing problems. There are numerous hurdles to cross to reach this state and it will indeed take time. Therefore, I look forward to help and assistance from the people of Nepal to understand the seriousness of the present-day situation.”

ADB to withdraw from rural water supply

Dhankuta, 27 August

The Agricultural Development Bank, which has been providing 60 million people with drinking water supplies through its village drinking water and sanitation programme is planning to pull out from the project and begin investing in the construction of small urban water supply projects.

The ADB reached the decision after its diagnostic mission found that the infrastructure development and construction of the 323 projects under the Fourth Water Supply and Sanitation Programme.

Experts said ADB is pulling out of the project after a diagnostic mission done so far to carry out the necessary survey on the feasibility and expansion of the fifth phase of the project.

However, under-secretary at the Physical Development Ministry, Dibash Bahadur Shrestha denies any possibility of the ADB’s withdrawal from the project. He said that it might get postponed for a year. “We have been told that they will proceed with the project despite being postponed for a year.”

Suicidal moves by Maoists

Dhankuta, 27 August

After taking a step back from the fixed table talks with ex-prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, the underground Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) have again made a conciliatory move to resume talks.

News sources say both moves were made by the Maoists after close observation of the way Deuba has been working and to further inflame internal conflicts within the Nepali Congress party.

According to close Maoist sources, the recent nationwide simultaneous violent attacks were also carried out in order to distract anti-Maoist operations in the regions captured by them through an ever-accelerating Congress conflicts.

The Maoists who have been keeping close watch on Deuba have been able to exploit his position to further create confusion and strife among Congress party workers. Despite all this, Deuba is still for talks with the underground party.

The recent press release by the Maoists, praising Deuba’s efforts, is a sign of their nervousness towards the police operations being carried out against them.

The recent nationwide violent assaults also tell of its move to destabilise the police forces working against them. The Maoists have suffered more casualties than the police, whereas it is stated in Maoist military strategy that force is not to be used where there is danger of losing lives.

Maoist source says “Party cadres are insecure. Numerous commanders have been arrested by the police and because of the confusion within the party, cadres are withdrawing their support. Under these circumstances, the increase in violence is very natural and a suicidal move for the party.”

According to sources, there is growing conflict among the Maoists regarding the ongoing events. These suicidal moves are supposedly on orders from party general secretary Sher Bahadur Prachanda who controls the central committee.

There is also a rising conflict between Dr Babu Ram Bhattarai and Prachanda regarding occupied territory. Recently, Comrade Gaurab, a supporter of Babu Ram Bhattarai was expelled from the central committee, expressed scorn for Dr. Bhattarai’s concept of occupied territory. The Bhattarai side has not commented on the issue so far.

The power struggle among the Maoists have been going on for the last three years.

Maoists to form a semi-underground front

Nepal Jagran, 21 August

The recent politburo meeting of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) has decided to form a semi-underground front as a result of the latest dialogue. It is said that the party will initiate talks with other party sources, the necessary policies and ideological criteria to form the new front has already been approved by the politburo and will soon be made public.

Nepal Jagon was informed by party sources that the front will initiate party which have adopted the Maoist ideology. Earlier, the United People’s Front—an open union of the Maoists chaired by Dr Babu Ram Bhattarai—was dissolved during the fourth anniversary of the People’s War in March early this year. He had stated for the need for a new front considering the changing scenario of different political polarisations occurring in the nation.

The sources say the new front will consist of parties or individuals in ethnic and regional talents or those who share similar policies. This is an indication that the party has decided to take assistance with the People’s War. The sources do not say whether the Maoists will make the public the names of the parties and individuals affiliated with the front.

Intellectuals who have been studying the Maoists say the party will help the front overcome administrative problems by placing it in a semi-underground status.

Sources say 11 representatives of ethnicity and region-based fronts, as well as some independent communist intellectuals will be included in the front.

Nationwide retaliation

Jana Shakti, 25 August

Maoist rebels swept the nation with attacks two days after a retaliation call made on 23 August by General Secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) “against the Girija government which sourced the environment for talks and took up civilian killings and brutal attacks.”

It is reported that Comrade Prachanda had agreed to take part in talks and had asked the government to create a minimal environment passed by human rights activities and the public. They say that the government had under- interpreted the openness of the Maoists as its weakness and tried dominating them with a “Slient Kilo Sierra III” police mission which has already killed 15 civilians in last two weeks.

Observers say the move by Maoist rebels, who had already started agreed to talks with the government, is the result of the irresponsible fascist character shown by the Girija government in its traditional blind ways.

They have pointed out that the attack on the police from the army has been a failed attempt. A military source told our correspondent that the recent failure of the specially trained police force is symbolic also of the military’s defeat.

A reliable Maoist source says that although the Girija government did not agree to create an environment for negotiations, even after hearing of the people’s plight, the Maoists are still in their favour. The source says that Girija’s defeats in the war front will force the government to initiate talks.

Observers assure that the Girija government is likely to resort to violent bloodshed and abuse of the national economy. They say if the Girija government uses force, it will lead to its own elimination.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"Kushinjhi and Gunjhabu want to talk, want to come to an understanding, whenever they meet they say let’s meet again and then there is reconciliation. But there is someone who does not want that. Who can that be?"

—Deputy Prime Minister Ram Chandra Paudel speaking at the Nepali Congress Central Executive Committee meeting in Birgunj, 25 August.
HEMLATA RAI

As the Dhangadi sky bursts open, Sarawati Chandhuri picks up her baby boy from the muddy ground and rushes into her hut with its blue plastic covering. She places him on the charpoy inside and grabs a bed spread. She pours out her family’s troubles. “The but that Angan built is waiting for a roof.”

The kisan and his supporter: Hem

The Dhangadi sky bursts open. Sarawati Chandhuri picks up her baby boy from the muddy ground and rushes into her hut with its blue plastic covering. She places him on the charpoy inside and grabs a bed spread. She pours out her family’s troubles. “The but that Angan built is waiting for a roof.”

HEMLATA RAI

Since she left her “owner” two weeks ago, the plastic covered, pioneered hut has been this former kamaiya family’s only protection against the raging monsoon. And when it pours heavily, the only dry place for her family is the bed.

But Sarawati is among the lucky ones. Angani Chandhuri has been living with his family of 11 inside the skeleton of a hut hoping the government will provide him with a flat roof.

Angani is not alone. There are hundreds of other kamaiya families living under the open sky in the far western district of Kailali and Kanchanpur, many of them evicted forcefully from their previous homes by the landlord (landowners).

The 17 July government announcement abolishing the virtual slavery system of kamaiyas came as a surprise to everyone—the campaigning kamaiyas, NGOs and the government bodies—and caught them all totally unprepared. And it is this unprecedented, coupled with a lack of interest in the central government and the rigidity of local government officials, that are slowing down the rehabilitation process. “It will take three or four months more just to begin the rehabilitation,” says Rishi Raj Lumsali, chairman of the Kanchanpur district development committee.

The government has to far completed the first phase of updating statistics on the kamaiyas in Dang, Banke, Bardiya, Kailali and Kanchanpur districts. But there is variance in the figures provided by the government and by the NGOs. Activists doubt the reliability of the new government updates, claiming that the government failed to reach the inner and difficult parts of the districts where kamaiyas are still being held illegally.

“Kamaiyas living near towns are now aware of the government ban. But many others are still ignorant of the ruling. They are still unorganized and do not know how to register themselves with the government,” says Ashok Bajrakir, a social worker from Kanchanpur. But he is equally cautious about the figures touted by trade unions and NGOs: “Many non-kamaiyas are out there to entice themselves for free land the government might distribute to former kamaiyas. And others are being played by political parties.”

Kailali’s land reforms officer, Mohinder Nisar, admits the problem. “Thirty-three wage-earners from a single ward in Tikapur were found to have registered as kamaiyas,” he says. Niraula estimates some 25 to 40 percent of the forms may have been filled by non-kamaiyas.

Activists say the local administration is chary about upsetting the kamaiyas. Although nobody verbally opposes the official ban on bonded labour, the kamaiyas are preparing to fight in March against the new government announcement.

Kailali’s kamaiyas, according to Rishi Raj Lumsali, chairman of the Kanchanpur district development committee, have been forced to register as kamaiyas. “The government teams never reached my family,” says Hiru Devi Chandhuri in Kailali. Hiru Devi belongs to the first batch of kamaiyas who filed a petition against their landlord. On 21 May, 48 kamaiyas decided to begin their movement to free kamaiyas.

The severity of exploitation has been so great that the kamaiyas of Kanchanpur led the way. The kamaiyas have suffered totally unprepared. And it is this freedom certificate to Bahadur Rana.

The level of abuse faced by Kamaiyas

Kanchanpur led the way

The day that Shiv Raj Pant’s kamaiya’s decided to begin their movement may go down in history as beginning of the end of the kamaiya system. But few are aware that the kamaiyas of the adjoining district of Kanchanpur who had already started a silent revolution to end the debt bondage much earlier.

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Free to suffer

Free to suffer
How to kill foreign investment

The Japanese Prime Minister came and went, but we are hard pressed to figure out what was actually achieved. No new Japanese companies say they are willing to set up shop in Nepal. And no wonder, maybe the Japanese had got a whiff of the gauze notification of 7 August: “An Act to amend some Nepali acts.”

With one fell swoop, the government had got rid of the only incentives foreigners investing in Nepal ever had. Gone are sops like tax holidays, now the taxmen will not spare either dividends from invest- ment or earnings from industry, or profits earned through exports. The timing was all wrong, coming as it did even as a new Income Tax draft bill was being discussed. What sense does it make for our own government to tax exports so soon after winning that hard-fought attempt to scrap the four percent special additional duty on Nepali exports to India? Nepal led the way in South Asia providing extra benefits to foreign investors in the early 1990s, a move emulated by other countries in South Asia providing extra benefits to foreign investors in the early 1990s, a move emulated by other countries in South Asia. The Industrial Enterprises Act and Investment and Technology Transfer Act were among the most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most most...
Pokhara’s new museum piece

With all these mountains, why do we need a mountain museum? Sceptics scoffed at the idea. Cyntics thought that an international mountain museum in Nepal, a country where good ideas have more obstacles thrown in their path than bad ideas, was just not believable.

But it was a great plan. Right there in one of the most stupendously scenic places on earth, in the heart of the Himalayas would emerge a museum that would educate and inform people about the genesis of the greatest mountain range in the world, its formation, its human geography and future challenges. The scope was immense. But could a cash-strapped country take on a project of considerable cost, challenge and commitment? Could it be properly managed and adhere to the highest international standards?

It took seven long years, but the museum is now finally taking shape. It is not just a plan, there is now an actual physical, tangible presence. Flying into Pokhara, the museum is impossible to miss from the air: a massive frame of steel, concrete beams and the surrounding mountains. The complex reflects the ethos of the backdrop.

“Of course there’s still a long way to go. The interior has yet to take shape. Models of mountain ranges have to be built on scale, exhibits have to be acquired.”

While requests for exhibits from international alpine clubs have met with positive responses, there is concern that Nepal’s own collection may be deficient. The basket of the first ballooning expedition over Everest lies at the blueprint stage. Although the overall design looks ultra modern, the details have been “indigenised”. Most modern buildings in Nepal suffer seriously on the maintenance and cleanliness fronts. Keeping local behavioural patterns in mind, the toilets and cafeteria are situated outside the main hall, an aspect visiting French and Japanese experts found hard to digest.

“Of course it would have been more convenient to have the cafeteria and toilets inside, but we don’t want the smell of fried momos and unsanitary urinals permeating the exhibition halls,” says Pradhan.

Because Pokhara is a major tourist destination, the museum is expected to get outside visitors, but it is designed primarily to make Nepalis more aware of their mountain environment. Tourist traffic is also highly seasonal, and the locals will keep visitor levels up all year.

The International Mountain Museum in Pokhara is the dream project of former NMA president, late Dawa Norbu Sherpa. When Dawa Norbu died in 1997, work on the museum came to a standstill. The shock of his death and funding shortfalls forced NMA to postpone the museum’s scheduled opening during Visit Nepal Year 1998. It is now targeting 2002, which has also been declared the International Year of Mountains by the United Nations.

“Better late than never,” says NMA president Tashi Jungbu Sherpa. “Of course there’s still a

NATION

30 AUGUST - 5 SEPTEMBER 2000 NEPAL TIMES

Dogaed by delays, the International Mountain Museum in Pokhara is now scheduled for opening in 2002.

RAYATA LIMBU

The NMA premises in Kathmandu. Dawa Norbu had managed to raise money from well-wishing alpine groups around the world over, and largely from Japan, to get the museum off the ground. When complete it will have exhibition halls, an audio-visual hall, a gift shop, an exposition area, parking facilities and outdoor landscaping.

“It will be the biggest of its kind. There’s no example to follow, nothing on this scale,” says Sarosh Pradhan, Museum Project Director. Close in concept would probably be the Bannff Mountain Centre in Canada, a mountaineering museum in Trento, in Italy, the Swiss Museum in Berne and the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute in Darjeeling.

Following a public tender, Nepali museum experts have submitted scripts for the museum. “The script is extremely important. It reflects the spirit of the museum and tells the story of the exhibits,” says Sarosh Pradhan, who does not divulge the quality of the entries so far. Rather than wait for a grand launch, the museum will have a series of soft openings, beginning this autumn with French climber Maurice Herzog opening a book exhibition to commemorate his classic climb of Annapurna I in 1950, the first-ever ascent of an 8,000 m peak.

Minor hiccups and major set backs aside, the museum will be completed by 2002 which has also been declared Destination Nepal Year. “Sometimes you have to wait for the money, the equipment, the support, everything. But this is Nepal—things will take forever,” says an NMA official.

An example of the petty problems that lead to delays include the inability of the museum’s core committee to decide whether the special roof material flown in from Malaysia should be clamped down or screwed in.

It was decided to go for the screws, and the work finally resumed in July. This is the third delay of the museum project cannot afford if it is to open as planned in 2002.

"Better late than never," says NMA president Tashi Jungbu Sherpa. “Of course there’s still a

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Nepal Times is now available on PEPC at major airports, railway stations, book shops.

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hen Bhanubhakta came to Kathmandu from Tanahu, he was taken aback by the elegance of Kathmandu ladies. The bard even penned some verse extolling their beauty, and the fragrant gunakeshari tucked in their hair. Imported fashion is not new to Kathmandu as any old picture of Rana women dressed like their Victorian sisters in billowing black gowns will show. With cable television, the modern Kathmandu woman is also moving in step with global fashion trends.

"Tailor? What is that? Today, they are known as designers and it has become a status symbol to be seen inside some of the more trendy boutiques in the capital’s swanky streets. But it is also the rising demand for high fashion that explains the proliferation of boutiques in Patan and Kathmandu. "There has been a cultural revival in Kathmandu," says Srijana Singh Yonjon a prominent fashion choreographer. "Women these days are becoming more outgoing as well as independent and thus need plenty of outfits to change. Boutiques provide them with moderately priced but effective dresses that suit their personality."

Okay, but is it affordable? We went to find out and the conclusion is that although with the elegant mannequins and smooth interiors they look expensive, Kathmandu’s fashion boutiques are a bargain hunter’s paradise. Free enterprise has something to do with it, prices are low because of the competition. They are generally lower than in Bangkok or Delhi anyway. And Nepali fashion designers with their certificates from design institutes abroad seem as good as the best in the region. The stretch of road from Bagmati bridge to Jawalakhel alone has over a dozen fashion boutiques. Some of them are poor clones. But in most others, the elegant gowns and salwar kameezes are exquisite and affordable.

Chaahat was set up in 1996, and is run by a Rajesh Dhakwa who holds a fashion design degree from Singapore. Chaahat’s clientele ranges from teenagers and aspiring models to Kathmandu expatriates. Don’t be intimidated by the plush look, you’ll find what you want, the way you want it and for the price you want it. But aren’t these things supposed to be expensive? Rajesh shakes his head: “I wanted to change the fashion trend in Kathmandu as well as get to the middle-income level people.”

Right, but what about this wedding outfit here for Rs 38,000? Rajesh says it is one of those custom-made ones, and quickly points to a cozy-looking cotton shirt for Rs 500, and a simple but comfortably-flowing salwar kameez for Rs 1,500. Up the road, Akurshan is a boutique with aspiring talent. Its designers are younger, but as talented. Sangeet Shrestha runs this shop with his sister, and both are very encouraged by the public’s growing desire to dress well. Obviously Kathmandu had a huge pent-up demand for comfortable, functional and elegant clothes that is just now being filled. Still, there is some ways to go. Sangeet says “The current fashion trend is not specific and flows with the season.” Patan may have taken the lead in innovation, but Kathmandu is not far behind. Although the really expensive

Teenaged girls come up to us and demand designs taken straight from Vogue.”

Digital Symphonic Recording

Presents

Ghulam Ali

SAMBANDH

an evening with Ghazal maestro

Welcome track by Sur Sudha
in aid of Bal Bhajan
Venue
Royal Academy Hall
Hotel Raddisson
3 sept. 5.50 sharp
31 aug. 6.00 sharp

Top: velvet beaded evening wear (Rs 2,300)
Centre: printed lycra salwarkameez (Rs 2,500)
Right: netted shirt (Rs 650) with tweed suit
boutiques are located in the proximities of (where else?) Kathmandu’s Champs Elysee: Durbar Marg, these cater more to the visitor and expat market. But the more affordable ones in Bag Bazaar, New Road or Lazimpat have a largely Nepali clientele.

Fashion Den in Lazimpat has been around for nine years and it was tough going at first, says Mamata Tulachan, designer and owner. “Many have come and gone, but this business requires patience,” says Mamata. “It hasn’t always been so easy for me either, but the reason why I am here today and some of my competitors aren’t is because I stuck to it through thick and thin.” Mamata believes in the Nepali touch, and includes hand-painted designs of indigenous Kathmandu figures, ranging from the Kumari to Swayambunath. But do Nepalis wear this ethnic-chic stuff? Mamata says her business proves that they do. “Nepali women these days have become more fashion conscious, and aren’t just satisfied with regular salwar kameez and saris. The evening gown has arrived!” Prices range from as low as Rs 500 to 7,000 depending on whether you want one of the hand painted ones, or the simple but graceful shirts that might just go along with trousers.

Designers Clothline is operated by three young fashion designers Padma Malla, Bina Sheertha and Rakshya Hirachan. The boutique faces Kathmandudhup Bazaar, but Padma is not worried about competition from across the road. “Readymade garments everywhere are the same and people are searching for variety these days. Teenaged girls come up to us and demand designs taken straight from Vogue.” Padma will be putting on a fashion exhibit with the theme “Essence of Women” in the Radisson Hotel in September, and thinks there is certainly a lot of scope for Kathmandu’s designer fashion boutiques are a bargain hunter’s paradise.

Kathmandu’s designer fashion boutiques are a bargain hunter’s paradise.

prices range from Rs 500 and above. The cuts seem to made for the traditional Kathmandu home-maker yearning to be free.

The tourist ghetto of Thamel has its slew of boutiques, but these cater mainly to the tourist market. Most of them sell rough cotton stuff preferred by the trekkies that hang around there. But there are some up-market silk and pashmina shops as well. So what of Kathmandu’s expatriates and other transients? Where do you go? Durbar Marg provides a choice of excellent designs and quality well suited to your taste and (ahem) purse. Yashmine’s is one that has put Nepal on the global fashion map. Run by designer Yashmine Rana, a French fashion designer who did her graduation from the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York. Yashmine has been presenting her creations in the world fashion capitols Paris, New York, Tokyo, Sydney, Berlin, and Zurich since 1984. Yashmine’s collections are original, innovative with simple forms with bold silhouettes. Yashmine does wonders with luxury fabrics and has given the Nepali “dhaka” a contemporary twist.

Nearby is Wheels, run by Shakun Sherchan. True to her personality, Shakun believes in bold statements with natural fibres. The fashion business now has a turnover of more than Rs 10 million a year and provides direct employment to more than 3,000 people and the business is growing exponentially. That’s all fine. But we just have to say this now that Nepali women are free, can the men be far behind?

pepsi
How information and ideas spread on the Net

Memes are the very building blocks of culture. Not every meme is a big idea, but any meme with the right stuff can go global once it hits the Internet.

Memes are, as fashions, political ideas and moral codes. They are copied from one person to the next, planting fundamental beliefs and values that gain more authority with each new host. Memes are the very building blocks of culture. Not every meme is a big idea, but any meme with the right stuff can go global once it hits the internet.

For anyone who has not seen the Hamster Dance (sic), its appeal is difficult to explain. A page of crudely animated hamsters singing the same few notes over and over (and over and over) would not get past the planning stage at most dot.coms. But for Thomas Lowell, a student at Harvard University, it was a mammoth web hit. He found the hamsters on a page that included porn and spam. Religion and ritual are born heroes. Myths, email “spams” and Net-newsgroups, mailing lists and websites. Dancing hamsters and crudely animated worms that combine the simplest components that combine the smallest amount of space. The simplest components combine the smallest amount of space. The smallest amount of space.

Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene*. And you will recognize them from countless urban myths, email “spams” and Net-newsgroups, mailing lists and websites. Dancing hamsters and Mahir do not hold the meme monopoly. It seems that just about any daji idea will do. Cartoon frog in a liquidator? If it has not already been your email infix it will soon be. Internet Cleaning Day? That comes around at least once a year. Pottas-powered web servers! The best Internet memes replicate quickly, gaining authority and achieving mythical status as their familiarity grows. Endorsement by “legitimate” media sources cannot harm either, but is the Net such a fertile breeding ground for memes?

British computer scientist Garry Marshall, author of a paper entitled “The Internet and Memetics” (http: popmc.vub.ac.be/Conf Memefup Marshall.html), believes that the Internet is a “full-blown memetic system” from the encoded network protocols it employs to the ways people use it. Even the processes the Net uses to route information as individual packets are analogous to the passage of memes in the real world. How people communicate over the Net contributes, too, encouraging conversation that packs the most amount of meaning into the smallest amount of space. The best Internet memes share the same characteristics as the best traditional memes. They can just be copied and distributed more quickly. The plethora of urban myths and legends on the Net suggests that memes can be manufactured, just include components that combine elements of truth with a catchy or “cunning” idea.

An email that recently came through my inbox, and it looks like it was sent to everyone who has ever received an email from me: “We’re down,” comes the answer, “and will be up in two-three hours.” Oh, great, don’t they understand we’re talking milliseconds here? The Net is a billion dollar business that sales by then. How can an email service provider be without a phone line. I have to get across by night, so I jump into a taxi and head towards jawalakhel where my ISP is. Reaching Jawalakhel I’m greeted with the sight of the transformer on the street and Lord Sahib Jatra. Finally reach the intersection and get my turn to circle the roundabout—but who is the chariot? And as I look around, lo and behold, there is the Maccchenarrant. Lorry started the meme back into circulation titled Save Sesame Street asks respondents to petition the government against budget cuts to the PBS public TV network in the US. Students at the University of Chicago started the meme back in 1995 when Big Bird and his chums faced real peril in the form of dimmable lightbulbs. While the financial issues were quickly resolved shortly after, the “petition” continues to proliferate at a rate of knots—only the dates get changed. A case where direct action worked far too well. Although many engineered memes are pranks or hoaxes, webmaster John Stoner is trying to spread a meme to encourage people to act more kindly toward each other. His site at www.generosity.org urges you to “do something good for someone, like pay the toll of the car behind you in the tollbooth, or buy a treat for the next person who walks in the door at the bakery”. You are then encouraged to leave a card for your beneficiary stating “This is for you! Now it’s your turn to go do something good for someone else. Do it anonymously. Pass on this card.”

The basic definitions for what a meme is, what they remain fairly constant, but debate rages about whether memes are pranks or hoaxes, simply a part of cultural studies or simply a buzz word to describe something we were all aware of anyway. But by discussing the topic, even to question its validity, you are spreading a meme...
Kumaratunga's gamble for peace

Having failed to win the support she needed to change her country's constitution Sri Lanka's President Chandrika Kumaratunga is now pinning her hopes on the outcome of October's General Election.

Observers muttered darkly about bribery, cash inducements and other forms of political skullduggery but what is real is that the UNP U-turn came after its leader Ranil Wickremasinghe met with a high-ranking official of the LTTE in Singapore. President Kumaratunga remains unshaken. In a television interview after the UNP scuppered her plans she said she would have the new constitution adopted within two months of her People's Alliance party winning the October elections—fighting talk from a President whose government has only had a single-vote majority in parliament the past six years.

There is no doubt the government has lost some of the popularity it had in 1994, when Chandrika Kumaratunga took power ending 17 years of UNP rule, but the president still has her own appeal which she hopes will help ensure the fortunes of the PA. The minority Sri Lanka Muslim Congress has already said it would support the PA and although the Tamil political parties in parliament have yet to decide what role they will play it will be difficult for them to oppose the president after the effort she made on behalf of the Tamil community.

But the Tamil parties remain on uncertain and dangerous path. Those living in the areas in north and east Sri Lanka controlled by the separatists live in the shadow of the gun. The LTTE could force Tamilans not to contest the elections unless they pledge support for the separatist cause or the gunmen could stop people voting altogether or force them to vote in a certain way, almost certainly in favour of the UNP.

Kumaratunga's main strengths are her own personal popularity and the weakness of the UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe, who in recent years has led his party to defeat in seven local government and provincial elections and in his failed bid for the presidency. His position is shaky with his leadership now challenged from within the ranks of his own party.

However the president may not be able to exploit her personal popularity to the full although her poll has improved. Since the LTTE tried to kill her, just three days before the presidential election last December, tight security has virtually confined her to her official residence in the capital and that with rallies and meet-the-people walkabouts ruled out she will have to campaign, via the electronic media, specially TV.

While the spin doctors argue the restrictions on her freedom could win a sympathy vote, the UNP began working on bread-and-butter issues and hopes to capitalise on the rising cost of living and the degradation of the Sri Lankan rupee. It will also target the Kumaratunga administration over corruption and the failure of its economic policies.

Bread and butter perhaps but there is substantial public opinion that accepts the economic costs of the war against the LTTE and having now pushed the LTTE forces back from their positions in Jaffna further military gains were certainly put the President and her government right on top. In the absence of such a success the outcome of the October poll remains for the moment too close to call. ■

Lucien Rajakarunanayake
COLOMBO - Sri Lanka's President Chandrika Kumaratunga is nothing if not determined in the labyrinthine politics of her island homeland. Even a botched attempt on her life, which left her injured and for the moment contained behind a tight security screen, has not quenched her ambition to reach a peace deal with the island’s Tamil community.

Her chosen vehicle has been a new constitution aimed at giving equal rights to the Tamils and seeking a negotiated end to the war with the separatists. Liberation Tamil Tigers (LTTE). But the ride to date has been hugely bumpy and the end of the road is still out of sight. Having failed in recent weeks to secure the two-thirds majority needed in the Sri Lankan Parliament to amend the present constitution, Kumaratunga is now pinning her hopes on the outcome the country’s general election to be held on 10 October.

And her party machine will be looking at the numbers very carefully. Earlier this year Kumaratunga thought she had the constitutional change in the bag. She needed 16 votes from the opposition National Party (UNP) which negotiated with her for nearly five months, agreed, eventually, on a document which it called a historic consensus, only to throw the whole thing back in her face in an abrupt about turn.

...Continued on the following page...
When it comes to our air, our water, and the Earth itself, we all have a responsibility to look not just to ourselves, not just to the politics of the moment, but to future generations.

We need to enforce tough, realistic, achievable standards to reduce smog and soot, and protect our children’s health, and expand the right to know of every area where pollution of any kind threatens public health. We have to protect our forests and our rivers and our land that we hold in common, across borders and across the generations.

In the Environment Decade, we must form partnerships with every industry that will produce fuel-efficient trucks that the critics said could never be made. We have to make the free market the friend of the environment, not its enemy, and invest more in conservation, in renewable energy, and in fast-growing technologies that combat pollution.

More than a decade ago, when I set out to write “Earth in the Balance”, I was worried that it was politically foolish to make so clear a commitment to environmental protection, written down in black and white, for all to see.

But for me, a commitment to the environment has always run deeper than politics. We have to do what’s right for our environment, because it involves all of our lives—from the simple security of knowing that our drinking water is safe, to the most ominous thinning of the ice caps at the top of the Earth. The earth is in the balance.

Save it we can, and save it we must, for this is the great responsibility of our generation. Now let us resolve to finish the job.

(End)

(A Gore is the Vice President of the United States and the presidential candidate of the Democratic Party in the November elections.)
**Who says women are the weaker sex in sport?**

In the past decade, women have made significant strides in breaking down the stereotype that they are weaker than men. However, the debate in the athletic world continues, with some experts arguing that biology doesn’t determine which athlete is superior.

Dowling’s other argument raising eyebrows is her call to reassess the performance of women in competition. She won’t accept that men are better athletes because they can jump higher and run faster. To really compare the sexes, she wants women’s performance relative to men’s adjusted to take into account their smaller size.

"That just doesn’t add up," says Richard Cotton, exercise physiologist and spokesman for ACE, the American Council on Exercise. "You can’t adjust performance to size to determine which athlete is superior. It would be a huge leap to say that Florence Griffith-Joyner, at her peak, was faster than Michael Johnson at his, simply because you divide her size and speed and average out the maths."

"In terms of physiology, men are genetically predisposed to have more strength than women. Venus Williams is a big girl, but she still couldn’t even take on Pettit Svanes, due to genetics," I would venture to say she wouldn’t even make the men’s tour," but Cotton says Dowling is correct in that biology doesn’t prevent women pole vaulting or boxing.

But Cotton also fears a new kind of battle won. Remember, women athletes are still encouraged to feature in the sneers, lace up their trainers and co-operation, and men

**Women still play three sets of tennis while men play five, because the myth that women are too “frail” to play long games persist.**

Women have been excluded from so much in life because of the frailty myth, she writes. "First we believed we were weak. Then we began to suspect that we weren’t but kept getting told that we were. Then we began proving that we weren’t but kept getting told that we weren’t but kept getting told that we weren’t because evolution wires girls to stay indoors because as a culture we don’t like muscular women. Yet I think that stereotype is breaking down."

**Dowling urges women to ignore the sneers, lace up their trainers and then, shock, horror, take it over.** But Cotton warns complacent feminists, is untold damage to women’s identity. To salvage men’s acceptance of women in sports, went into law. (Then 300,000 girls were in team sports. Today there are 3.2 million.)

"In society’s attitudes breaking down about women athletes and television networks smelting profits in women’s games, and Dowling admits these seem like glory days for women athletes. So why isn’t she doing a victory lap? Simply because she doesn’t see the battle won. Remember, women still play three sets of tennis while men play five, because the myth that women are too “frail” to play long games persist. Dowling does applaud the increased participation and acceptance of women in sports, but caution against celebrating. In the year 2000, female athletes are still encouraged to feature in made-up team clones to prove they are feminine. The fashion MTV culture, she contends, tells girls to rein in their athleticism.

She also fears a new kind of male backlash as more women, inspired by Marion Jones and that strip-to-her-bux soccer player Brandi Chastain, buck the “weak girl” stereotype, get onto the field, and then, shock, horror, take it over. But Dowling urges women to ignore the sneers, lace up their trainers and tackle the sexism head on.

"As different beliefs support the frailty myth shatter, one after another, the change will not be trifling. It will alter the way women walk the earth." (The Guardian)
ManU in 'Mandu'

As the English Premier League kicks off, Manchester United fans, like this rickshaw puller in Thamel, are awake past midnight watching their favourite team on cable.

Higher, faster, stronger with dope

Drugs will be simmering beneath the surface at the Sydney Games. The criterion for success these days is not just winning—but being able to win without being found out.

There are several recent examples of banned substances being discovered. In 1998, Linford Christie, Britain’s 100-metre gold medallist at the 1992 Barcelona Games, had tested positive for LSD. He was cleared of any wrongdoing and received his gold medal, but the incident highlights the problem of drug testing in sports.

In 1999, American swimmer Eric Moussambani tested positive for a banned substance after swimming in the 100-metre freestyle event at the Sydney Olympics. He had been given a wildcard entry to the Games, and his performance was widely praised for its spirit and determination.

Similarly, Australian cyclist Anna Meares tested positive for a banned substance in 2008, but was cleared of any wrongdoing and allowed to compete in the Games. Her case was controversial as many believed she should have been disqualified.

These examples highlight the growing problem of drug testing in sports. The pressure to win at all costs is immense, and many athletes are willing to take risks to achieve success.

However, the use of performance-enhancing drugs is not just limited to professional sports. In recent years, there have been reports of school sports teams using banned substances to improve their performance.

The Sydney Games will be no different, and athletes from around the world will be looking over their shoulders to ensure they are not caught by the ever-present drug testing agencies.

As the games begin, it will be interesting to see just how much dope is being used, and whether athletes are able to get away with it.
The Peepul Bot attracts shoeshine boys and hawkers of everything from cigarettes to snacks. Worshippers come at all times to make offerings or pray when there's no one about or to fight their way through the late afternoon and evening crowds. The platform is often used for Newari kheer or feasts, participants suddenly squatting in circles under the tree, oblivious of the crowds passing by. Here people come not only to see but to be seen. Like the dying breed of New Road cowboys who wore natty denim outfits, high-heeled boots, hats or eye shades, transistors and Walkmans, and subconsciously affected John Travolta habits. One of them featured in a BBC television film—banned in Kathmandu—to the music of Saturday Night Fever.

That phase is done. Today’s New Road cowboys, if indeed one can call them such, and a curiously emerging breed of New Road cowgirls, prefer imported tea tins, coloured neck scarves, and discreetly tailored clothes and hairstyles. In the winter it is down jackets or leather.

But mostly, the Peepul Bot is a meeting place for those who come to read the latest newspapers and magazines and discuss the day’s news. There, until recently, a convenient and well patronised bookshop just across the street, which to the dismay of some bookshops, was torn down and replaced by a denim-clad concrete hovel, innocuous of newspapers and magazines. Nothing daunted the hawkers who moved in, so one can buy every popular Nepali, Indian and foreign publication under the peepal tree and find an immediate and informed corset to share or argue your views with.

For years, a café that looks almost like a tree house in the branches of the Peepul Bot, has endeavoured to attract the potential customers below. And perhaps in recognition of all that concentrated reading, there are a fair number of shops selling reading glasses about the small square, and just a reach away is the busy office of Nepal’s largest newspaper group.

Apart from being something of a Mecca to Indian tourists who on occasion can be seen picnicking in the Super Bazaar, New Road is the ceremonial highway to the old Royal Palace and Durbar Square. I have seen the present king, and his father before him, ride to their coronations in splendid horse-drawn carriages, escorted by mounted guards, flag bearers, priests, officials, military bands and troops in olden and modern uniforms, to return leading magnificent processions of elephants. Every year the king passes by in a more simple motorcade to witness the beginning of the Kumari Jatra and receive the blessings of the virgin goddess.

An imposing bronze statue of the Rana prime minister who had the road built, occupies a traffic island to gape down the length of his creation. How modern the street must have appeared to him, almost too wide in its absence of traffic and today’s crowds.

One wishes he could have had a preview of New Road as it is today, with its policeman chasing away parking cars that narrow the street, and its huge tourist coaches that require a traffic lane to themselves. Once they came overlandid from Europe, embazoned with exotic signs and promising enchanting tours. The ghost of one still haunts the car park near the old palace. It was called the Chapati Express. Whatever could have become of a coach with so unlikely a name?  

(Artwork by Durga Thapa. Illustration by Pratiksho Phool.)

Banira Girl is one of the most poised and commanding Nepali poets of today. Her work can be immensely energetic as it sweeps the reader along in a flood of words towards their frothy and eddying conclusions. Lively, sonorous, and rich with cultural allusions, Giri’s erudite poems can be intimidating to the reader unfamiliar with Nepal’s myths and narratives. Yet their reclamation of cultural territory is decidedly modern in concern. She connects with the past in ways that are fresh and unexpected, and she allows the reader to find contemporary meaning in our heritage.

The poem below reveals the intensely private sentiment of devotion. Though this piece can be read metaphorically in a sacred context, I prefer a more literal interpretation; the narrator speaks, to me, of the touch between a man and a woman, meeting in rapture. No authority, no cultural sanction is required, here, to purify their touch. Rather, this touch is rendered sacred by the longing of the one who is found.

For me, this poem recalls, by contrast, Parijat’s classic novel Sirishko Phool, whose intellectual anti-heroine Sakambhari des after being kissed by a soldier and raped. That work—utterly nihilist in outlook—shows the damage done to a woman’s being by the profane and unwanted touch. Giri’s more hopeful poem celebrates the enfolding of individual spirit through the reciprocity of desire.

YOU TOUCHED ME: I’M PURIFIED NOW
You touched me
I’m purified now
To attain such purity—
Is to become the golden-haired Sunakshari maiden bathing in Lake Manakamana’s redolent waters on awakening from twelve years of sleep, is to drop gold coins of experience into the heart’s treasure box, is to make one’s way along gardens of mangoes and chrysanthemums, is to have trust issue drop by drop from a ceremonial bowl plated with hope.

You touched me
I’m purified now
To attain such purity—
Is to be showered light on a dark moon night is to have golden moose spread over the cascades of the Bagmati river. Those golden rays are intended perhaps for filing the maiden’s planter for pouring onto her limbs. I don’t know—

Is the moon purified by such unions? Is the river purified, is the maiden purified?

You touched me
I’m purified now
To attain such purity—
Is to have a woman released from a boulder at the caress of Lord Ram; is to see Ram taste a plum at the caress of Lord Ram; is to have trust issue drop by drop from a ceremonial bowl plated with hope.

(Excerpted with permission from In the Kingdom of the Gods, HyperCollins, 1999)
Mukkudo Directed by Touring Rihat Sherpa

If Dreamworks had produced Mukkudo, we’d have had Tripura Devi and Mahesh, morphing and warping through cosmic voracious, all over the screen. Touring Rihat Sherpa has the advantage of living in Nepal, so he has no need to fake it. Instead, he turns his camera on the world around him. Spirit possession is not unusual in his world.

At the very beginning we are informed that the film is based on an actual occurrence. According to Kesang Tseten, who collaborated with Touring on the story and also wrote the screenplay, the “actual occurrence” was summed up in a brief article in a Kathmandu newspaper some years ago stating that a husband had killed his woman patient. Nothing more.

Starting with that tiny seed, the collaboration generated a tale that explores the universal dyad: Sacred-Profane, at the level of the individual and in the context of contemporary urban Nepal. Mukkudo (Mask of Desire) is charged with a myth-like quality that recalls the classic 1950s film Black Orpheus, where an extraordinary event is made plausible by setting it against the Dionysian background of the Rio Carnival. In Mukkudo, the Machhendranath Jatra is used to establish a similar atmosphere of communal ecstasy.

It is the myth-like quality of Mukkudo, and the universal noble element in Gita the Jhankri’s character, that allowed me to project onto her (whether Touring and Tseten intended it or not) the dilemma of all women torn between society’s constraints and their own human nature.

Gita’s character is not born a shaman. The goddess Tripura possessed her while she was a traumatised unwanted child-widow, unjustly blamed for the suicide of the sickly demented boy she had been married off to. With training, Gita learns to channel the power of the goddess andock in combat with a malevolent spirit that she is exorcising from the body of a suffering woman. She is ferocious and imperious in her holy trance: intimidating, threatening, as she binds and physically thrashes her possessedoll. She has died, and Saraswati seems to be losing her mental stability.

The conflicted Gita, who is both the channel for a goddess and a flesh-and-blood woman, is drawn to the warmth that flows between the couple and magnetised by handsome Dipak’s gentle masculinity. The Sarawati-Dipak-Gita triangle and Sarawati’s ongoing breakdown is the dynamic that drives Mukkudo in its stunning climax.

It’s a great movie. There’s so much in it. Is anybody going to accept Bollywood knock-offs from our Nepali filmmakers anymore?

(Mukkudo is being screened at 5:30 pm, costing $2, at Himalaya Cinema Hall, Kalat Vih. The film is sub-titled in English.)

Mask of Desire

ABOUT TOWN

FILMS

Deewane - Goon (Ka) (520668)

Saitano Ka Honeymoon - Ashok

Hamara Dil ApkePas He - Manakamana (400,000)

SalaiKaHoneymoon- Ashok

Tara jada Chari Sab - Goon (520668)

Deewane - Human(414902)

Dhankar - Jan Nepal (411014), Tara (470625)

THEATRE

Telbarg Mahasangh, Comedy performance by the famous Nepal duo, Madan Krishna Shrestha and Haribansha Acharya at Royal Nepal Academy. Two performances, Nepal Bardhi and Sakli, by Mahasangh followed by other performances by renowned Nepal comedians including Rana Pani Pouati and Kano KC. Tickets 500, 1000, 2000 and 3000. Available at the Royal Nepal Academy.

Doctor Knock, Nepal adaptation of Doctor Knock, a French play by Jules Romains presented at Theatre Platform in the presence of the theatre group Avatar at Royal Nepal Academy, Erodion Road. Call 242 432 for information. Performance starts 9:30 September, Sunday.

MUSIC

Gazal evening with Ghusal Ali at Nepal Chukku, Radisson Hotel, 6:30 p.m. Rs 1000 per person. Inclusive of elaborately Mughlai-Frontier dinner & complimentary CD of his latest recording. Available at Sharmistha Records.

Jazz

Live music by Radhakrishna, Cadence at Upstair Restaurant, Lastment. Every Saturday 7:30-10:00 pm.

FAIR

Book Fair organised by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) at ICIMOD premises in Jawalakhel. 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Fair closes 31 Aug.

EXHIBITION


GET LUCKY

Delicious way to Sydney

Dine at any restaurant at the Stoodle Birthday Inn Crepe Plaza from 15 August-14 September and win a two-way air ticket to Sydney Olympic 2000. Tel: 273999

ADVENTURE SPORTS

Mountain Biking

First-ever Nepal National Championship Mountain Bike race in three phases: 9 September, 1 October, and 11 November. Registration open 18th eve. MTB theory and practice workshop follows the championship by international cyclists. Check www.bikenepal.com or contact Peter Stewart, Race Director at Himalayan Adventures, 623-226.

FESTIVALS

Teen, 1 September, Friday. Women clad in red sans crocheted Pashupati Temple towers by themselves. Unmarried women but on this day in the belief it will help them find a husband of their choice. Married women fast for the well-being of their husbands.

Devotees believe Shiva and Parbati will use their presence to establish a similar atmosphere of communal ecstasy. In In the background of the Rio Carnival. In Nepal, the Machhendranath Jatra is used to establish a similar atmosphere of communal ecstasy.

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

BY JOEL ISAACSON

HIMAL BOOKS

The Nepali fusion band, Maha Yantra performed on 26 August at the Royal Academy Hall on 31 August and 11 November.

The film opens on Gita, surrounded by ritual paraphernalia and offerings, possessed: trembling with the power of the goddess and locked in combat with a malevolent spirit that she is exorcising from the body of a suffering woman. She is ferocious and imperious in her holy trance: intimidating, threatening, as she binds and physically thrashes her possessedoll. She has died, and Saraswati seems to be losing her mental stability.

The conflicted Gita, who is both the channel for a goddess and a flesh-and-blood woman, is drawn to the warmth that flows between the couple and magnetised by handsome Dipak’s gentle masculinity. The Sarawati-Dipak-Gita triangle and Sarawati’s ongoing breakdown is the dynamic that drives Mukkudo in its stunning climax.

It’s a great movie. There’s so much in it. Is anybody going to accept Bollywood knock-offs from our Nepali filmmakers anymore?

(Mukkudo is being screened at 5:30 pm, costing $2, at Himalaya Cinema Hall, Kalat Vih. The film is sub-titled in English.)
Copyright © 2000 Nepal Times

**YOUR WEEK**

**ARIES**

You will enter the week on aetter. But soon you will feel more in control and content on the decisions you have taken. Open up with a trusted friend your inner desires to make changes and reforms.

**TAURUS**

Don’t let go of little things that might look irrelevant. Start actively on opportunities to achieve what you’ve been looking forward to. Romance will surround you this week. Remain expressive and joyful.

**GEMINI**

Open up your inner ideas and intuitive with a close friend or lover one. Communication with fellow professionals at work is easy this week. A promising educational opportunity or new job offer is likely.

**CANCER**

Attachments with friends and family might be a burden this week. Look for ways of detoxifying yourself from desires lingering in you. Find ways to rediscover your lost self.

**LEO**

Make an effort to do something nice for yourself at this time. Brush some of the rules of life, indulge. Try burning out the emotions and passion you’ve been suppressing. Don’t think too much about the future.

**VIRGO**

Work becomes more interesting with some set boundaries. Some may take advantage of your good nature. Let others relate to you spiritually and mentally.

**LIBRA**

You will enter the week on a better. But soon you will feel more in control and content on the decisions you have taken. Open up with a trusted friend your inner desires to make changes and reforms.

**SCORPIO**

Don’t let go of little things that might look irrelevant. Start actively on opportunities to achieve what you’ve been looking forward to. Romance will surround you this week. Remain expressive and joyful.

**SAGITTARIUS**

New efforts to improve your health and wellbeing. The mind-body connection you have is your ultimate strength this week. Your earthy nature will lead others along to make changes and reforms.

**CAPRICORN**

The week starts with vibrant momentum and reach out to people, they are waiting for you. Don’t procrastinate taking decisions, be a little impulsive. Suddenly burst of energy will arise. Take yourself to the edge of all experiences.

**AQUARIUS**

The week starts with vibrant momentum and reach out to people, they are waiting for you. Don’t procrastinate taking decisions, be a little impulsive. Suddenly burst of energy will arise. Take yourself to the edge of all experiences.

**PISCES**

The week starts with vibrant momentum and reach out to people, they are waiting for you. Don’t procrastinate taking decisions, be a little impulsive. Suddenly burst of energy will arise. Take yourself to the edge of all experiences.

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**OFF THE BEATEN TREK**

by **KANAK MANI DIXIT**

Even though the Pokhara-Jomsom trek is the best among the many hill walking routes in Nepal, during the monsoon this too deserves mention. Firstly, here is the place and time for trekkers who turn their nose up when it comes to being with “other trekkers”. Best assured, the monsoon trek leading from Birendra to Jomsom is benefit of all the most intrepid travellers. The peace in the villages is slower, the bhati (zendo) have more time to chat, and there is general renovation and growth all over. Even the black half-man who must be called “Kabu” at Tilicho Dhunga has the time to gamely accompany you on the killer climb all the way to Ulleri (2240m).

The other thing that accompanies you throughout the trek is the sound of water: dripping, patterning, gurgling, roaring, thundering. Nepal at this time of year is rainland. And as long as you know to scurry across a landslide section when the rain is coming down hard, you are okay. Watch the Kali Gandaki as it becomes of slighter girth as you travel upstream. You are now entering Nepal’s most celebrated rainshadow area starting at Thak Khola and to Upper Mustang. The tropical foliage of the southern slopes gives way to alpine, and still further up the stunted growth of dwarf juniper and snow bushes.

There are other small advantages of walking these monsoon paths any other time of the year the trail is littered with mule droppings and the ammoniac stench is overpowering. In the monsoon the dung is washed clean by the rains. Also, being a mule highway, the Kali Gandaki trail is rocky and wide so the lurches can’t get at you if you walk along the centre of the path.

By the time you arrive at Jomsom and meet up with the throng which has been waiting for flights out for a week, and hence have stopped appreciating the scenery, you are truly in desert terrain. The splendidly flushed curtain of Nilgiri is (disconcertingly) to the south—yes, you are still within Nepal but the Himalaya forms the southern horizon.

At Muktinath is the sacred flame in close proximity to a gurgling underground brook that flows by. In this holy land, fire and water mingle. The trip so far is on the whole a low altitude trek, but if you have the energy and the interest you have the option of “taking a hike” upwards from Muktinath to Thorung La, the great watershed separating the Kali Gandaki and Manang Valleys.

**NEPALI WEATHER**

The low pressure circulation over the southern Bay last week that we were expecting to hit the Bangladesh coast took a wrong turn and headed due west across the Deccan Plateau. This did not bring the expected resurgence of heavy showers over the Himalaya, but it affected central India very badly. We are now experiencing only the margins of this huge system. The Tibetan plateau is beginning to see the first effects of the annual southerly migration of the jet stream. This will gradually weaken the monsoon. But look out for heavy localised showers and night drizzles.

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**EXCERPT FROM KANAK MANI DIXIT’S TREK DIARY WRITTEN JUST BEFORE HE SLIPPED AND FELL LAST WEEK (SEE PAGE 3)**

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A for the excitement of the Yoshiro Mori visit— the shortest ever to Nepal by a visiting chieftain—Nepal can now get back to the serious task of nation-building. Nepal is forging full steam ahead on the path of national development, and the Japanese know they shouldn’t take too much of our time.

They know we are a people in a hurry. This is why they promised to keep the visit as short as possible so that 300,000 Kathmandu commuters would be stranded in traffic at Tundikhel for only half a day.

Understandably, Mori-san was concerned that Nepal may be engaged in developing weapons of mass destruction. Unusually reliable sources close to the Prime Minister have told us that the Nepali delegation refused to budge on the weapons issue. “Nepal laid it out in no uncertain terms that as a sovereign nation with lots of territorial integrity we reserved the right to develop any weapon of our choice whenever and wherever we want,” said the Prime Minister.

Yet, the Mori delegation was looking very worried, according to our source. The Japanese said they would feel more secure if Nepal signed the CTBT and refrained from building nuclear weapons as well. Mori said, and here I quote from his press conference: “We humbly request Nepal to ratify the CTBT; it would send a very strong message to India and Pakistan.” We said we’d think about it.

By now the Japanese were in panic, they’d have to go home empty-handed. There was one last point: Tokyo’s request that Kathmandu put in a good word for the Big Five that it get a permanent Security Council seat. But the Nepali side played hardball, we would endorse it only if the Japanese opened their console to Nepali gundruk.

When they told us they would feel more secure if Nepal signed the CTBT and refrained from building nuclear weapons as well, I quoted from our source: “We humbly request Nepal to ratify the CTBT; it would send a very strong message to India and Pakistan.” We said we’d think about it.

Pretty soon they realised that Nepal was stubborn, so they pushed for a Japan-Nepal Mutual Non-Aggression Pact. No doubt, this is a very touchy issue. The Japanese remember all very well how they chased them out of Mandalay 50 years ago with our then weapon of mass destruction, the khukri.

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And on that note, Yoshiro Mori rushed out to the airport to catch his plane back.

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