Girja and Atal

Despite Indian PM Atal Behari Vajpayee’s keen interest in the regular tone-tale to review progress on reforms promised by Manmohan Singh in Paris earlier this year, despite delays in enacting laws there were no signs of approval all around, said a government source. The donor discussion of the same meeting is slightly different. We were told that reforms seemed to have happened as expected at the Finance Ministry and Planning Commission. They were also concerned about the worsening law and order situation.

Svend-return

Foreign Minister Chakra Prasad Babaula’s visit to Sweden was the first official visit of the two countries since Nepal’s restoration of democracy in 1990. Nepal does not figure in the Swedish Country Programme yet, though some NGOs supported by Swedish aid are active in the country. Officials say Babaula’s visit was a politically important event that could lead to some development support in future.

INVESTMENT UNFRIENDLY

If the Maoists’ intention is to scare away foreign investors from Nepal, they needn’t bother. The government is doing the job for them.

BINOBDHATTARAI

Foreign investment in Nepal is falling, there have been no new ventures since Colgate and as if things weren’t bad enough, existing investors, fed up with new taxes, deteriorating security and chronic labor problems, want out. Just look at events in the last few weeks:

- Union Carbide India, the first major manufacturing joint venture in Nepal, decides to pull out.
- American firms involved with the Bhote Kosi power project put off new investment.
- Carlsberg caps its investment level, and threatens to withdraw from Nepal.

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) loses interest in its Nepal office.

Even a re-considering its involvement in the mammoth Kamalika hydroelectric project.

Kodak Nepal is still stuck.

All this points to a lack of seriousness on the part of successive governments to attract foreign investors. Incentives are given and then pulled away, new taxes appear out of nowhere, goals posts are moved all the time; there is new xenophobia in the air; corruption is flourishing; and threats and extortion have become commonplace. It would almost seem that government is doing everything in its power to dissuade foreign investors.

Says Prabhakar Rana of the Small Group: “Investors come here only if they can make slightly more money than what they would in their own countries, they don’t come here for the love of the mountains.” Seither is in partnership with two American companies, Dallas-based Power Energy and Chicago’s Harris Engineering Company, to build the $98.3 million Bhote Kosi hydroelectric plant. Recently the government said it would re-negotiate the power purchase agreement (PPA) with foreign investors.

Having spent more than $1 million in lawyer fees alone, Rana is confident that Bhote Kosi has a watertight PPA, mainly because tinkering with it would put hefty penalties on the government. The government has no option but to accept the agreement as is.

Editorial

Artha Beed

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The real surprise is that despite the government making it as difficult as possible for foreign investors to bring their business to Nepal, there are still some who set up shop here. Let’s be frank, Nepal’s investment climate was never good. We had neither the physical, nor the legal infrastructure that would make an international businessman look twice at us. Especially if the alternative options were Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Indonesia or Bangladesh. After all, as Prithvi Ram Pasha argues, they won’t just come to Nepal because they love the mountains.

All investment is about risk, in a foreign country there are more unknown variables: will the government play fair, is there rule of law, will one government respect the previous government’s agreements (or bribe), will they be labour headaches, are there any hidden taxes, how about extortion, corruption and harassment? Unfortunately, Nepal seemed in all these regards for major investors to be enticed with incentives to come our way, and stay.

We agree on a power-buyback tariff and change it after the power plant is in operation. We promise refunds on delay of these imports of raw materials for industries, and don’t pay. Our narrow-minded, revenue-driven economic policy makes us work against competitive. And ironically, it is the legitimate multinationals who want to be transparent that we harass the most.

There are a lot of parallels between Nepal today and West Bengal in the 1980s. The commonality came to power: the major industrial powerhouse, commercial hub and financial centre Patna Calculutta was gripped and collapsed as the unions went on a rampage, and the state government started attacking the blood-sucking capitalist exploiter. Indian and foreign investors hurriedly left, setting up shop in Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Maharasthra, which welcomed them with open arms. To this day, grisy Calculutta has not recovered.

The best thing that happened to foreign investment in Nepal was the 1990 visit of Indian Prime Minister I.K. Gujral. Gujral, and the implementation of his Gujral Doctrine that opened up the Indian market for Nepali manufacturing with landmarks concessions. Gujral reasoned that a prosperous Nepal would create fewer headaches for India than a poverty-stricken Nepal. But we didn’t do our homework, and many of the Gujral concessions have been wasted. And we didn’t try very hard to attract investors willing to export consumer goods from Nepal to other SAARC countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan.

We have this fatalistic aegean syndrome that rules all facets of our life. We leave it up to Patna Calculutta. We never grab destiny by the lapels, and take the tough decisions today that will shape our tomorrow. So the chances to create jobs are squandered, openings for increasing export are wasted and the country slides deeper into debt.

There is one area where all is not yet lost. We must forge a multipurpose national strategy on foreign investment, offer handsome incentives that better the world, and retain our legitimate investors. Then maybe, just maybe, it will get somewhere.

TV, or not TV

Nepal Television (NTV) is getting ready to go satellite. This means the signals will now reach everywhere from Mahahansagar to Pashupatinagar, and beyond. This was long overdue, since the technology has been available for decades and it only became cheaper recently because data compression has freed up satellite transponders. But the real issue here is this: are the present programmes worth transmitting nationwide?

One of the tragedies of the broadcast media in Nepal is that its potential for genuine communication, public education and wholesome entertainment has been largely squandered. On TV (except for the likes of Sambal Pradhyapti) the fare is mediocrity, entertainment is substandard and official propaganda masquerades as news. But NTV has one great advantage: it broadcasts in the Nepali language. Time and again, we have seen that if Nepalis have access to well-produced, entertaining materials, they’ll flick off the cable and turn to NTV. And yet, we seem wholly incapable of producing such quality programmes.

It is thinking of going into higher orbit, NTV has no other option than to pay attention to content. This is especially important since its signals will soon be putting for viewer attention of the ‘empty’ generation with all the other channels. The least we can do is produce less irksome ourselves. NTV must upgrade content. It may have satellite access, but the audience has a more powerful weapon—the remote control.
HEBDHAMBA

Sujana, 36-year-old daughter of Nareta Girija Prasad Koirala, is about to become a prominent figure in Nepali political scene. Her marriage to Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal, scheduled for today, is a significant event in Nepali politics. While the marriage itself is a private affair, it serves as a symbol of continuity in the Koirala family's political legacy.

Sujana has been described as beautiful and charming, qualities that are likely to make her a popular figure in political circles. Her marriage to Nepal is expected to strengthen the Koirala family's influence in Nepali politics.

The wedding ceremony is expected to attract a large number of guests, including high-ranking officials and dignitaries. The celebration is likely to be grand, reflecting the importance of the event.

Sujana's marriage to Nepal is seen as a positive development for the country, as it is expected to bring stability and continuity to Nepali politics. The Koirala family has a long history of political involvement, and Sujana's marriage is likely to further cement their influence.

The wedding ceremony is expected to be a significant event, drawing attention from around the world. It is a testament to the power of love and the importance of family in Nepali politics.
Locals want concrete action to close this month Himal Cement was forced to close for five days. Now people of Chobhar want it to shut down for good so they can breathe easy.

HEMILATA RAJ

Kumanari is a beautiful village nestled in an amphitheatre of paddy fields where Kisan Kumari Mahajan came here as a new bride 30 years ago. The family foodly produced enough green vegetables and fruit to feed the family, and they sold the surplus in the nearby market. Then came the cement factory, and life for Kisan Kumari and her neighbours changed drastically. Grey cement dust covered the fertile fields and fields and farmed and formed rock-hard surfaces. The air was thick with coal dust, smoke, and limestone powder. When her village was downwind from the factory, it was unbearable. Many villages developed chronic cough. Havens for Chobhar’s famous cauliflower, radish and spinach don’t sell anymore because they are tainted.

"We saw it all happen, and although we suspected the cement factory, we didn’t know how to begin to stop it," says Kisan Kumari. "Now everyone here blames the factory, and we are getting organised.

Unlike other settlements around Kathmandu, Valley, Kisan Kumari’s village has seen very few outsiders moving in. No marks for guessing why. The neighbourhood did not attract any buyers even when Kathmandu’s real estate hit the roof. Today land here sells for just Rs 250,000 a sq. foot. Over the ridge towards Kirtipur town, it is three times more. The most badly-affected villages are in ward numbers 13, 14 and 15 of Kirtipur and wards 5, 6 and 7 of Sillu.

Local residents say they began opposing the cement factory from the day it opened in 1979, but the protests were ignored by the rulers of the day. In the years after democracy, the protests continued, but for wider success. Last month, their organisation took a dramatic turn when members at the Environment Protection Action Committee, a local group formed three years ago, gathered support from 100 cement factories.

Police moved in and arrested about 30 agitators and the factory remained closed for five days. Finally the management reached an agreement with the protesters. The factory management agreed to immediately install filters to reduce dust emissions from the stack, and prepare a long-term environmental impact assessment, and build a retaining wall to protect the Bhalu Ghat area of Sillu from dust.

The protests are now getting a lot of support from environmental groups in the city, which is also affected by dust and pollution. Experts say that up to 80 percent of the Valley-wide dust and, to a lesser extent, the waste generated by the cement factory would be reduced if production were cut to four kilns.

And the factory’s proximity to the holy Chobhar Gorge and the Chobhar Ganesh Temple makes its presence even more galling. Most urban planners and environmentalists and novel villagers want the factory closed down immediately. Senior Geologist at the Department of Mines and Geology Krishna Shrestha gives yet another reason: ‘The factory has already used up much of the limestone in the area. Combination of mining and cement production can lead to land degradation and environmental damage.’

The order of the government keeps Himil Cement running for its daily production of 150 tonnes, but that amounts to only 43,800 tonnes a year, even if the factory runs for 365 days. This is less than 3 percent of the country’s annual demand of 1.4 million tonnes.

Nepal’s domestic production meets only 40 percent of demand. Maintenance work has been attempted to make up for the shortfall, most notably involving India’s Birla Cement to establish a cement factory in Sankhuwasabha two years ago, and also permitting another Nepal-India joint venture in Asan in the Terai in 1997. But Birla is fighting for tax concessions and the government has given the company final notice to set up its factory or lose its licence.

Back in Chobhar, protests continue with the same fervour. The villagers say the factory is poisoning them and they are ready to sacagew on the issue of their children’s health.

THE END

HERALD TIMES

Canada in the global village

Thousands of orders for stamps were being submitted, with the same picture of a 40-something, intense South Asian man.
Manager Shaker Raj Aryal refused to talk to us. “Though the factory employs many leads to environmental and health problems, it has caused severe anxiety and a long-term nature,” says Suman Shrestha, a locals.

“During winter, the visibility becomes so poor that driving becomes difficult, leading to many road accidents.”

Health hazard

Himal Cement Company has a production capacity of 360 tonnes a day, but it is working only at one-third capacity at present. It has two stacks that are more than 30m in height, but since the construction project is located in a gully behind Chobhar Gorge, the dust and smoke is trapped in a secondary inversion layer and "overflows" into the valley depending on prevailing winds.

The factory consumes about 20 tonnes of coal and emits about 2.5 tonnes of ash, dust and smoke from the stacks daily. Another 10 tonnes of dust is blown out every day from the limestone quarry above the factory. Although bag filters and water scrubbers were brought in 1993, they are lying in the factory premises and were never installed, according to a former employee.

Dust particles in the air are harmful to people, and depending on the size they affect both the upper respiratory tract and cause infections, or go deep into the lungs and lead to asthma and lung disorders—especially if inhaled over extended periods. Every year, Himal Cement emits 6,000 tonnes of larger dust particles which settle in the villages and upper-class residential areas of Kathmandu and Godawari from the factory. Another 800 tonnes of particles, below 10 microns in size, are higher and are trapped in the inversion layer in winter and settle over the valley. An additional 615 tonnes of sulphur dioxide are also emitted.

HK court acquits Nepali

A Nepali who spent three months in custody for immigration fraud was freed last week after the court dropped the case for lack of evidence.

A Hong Kong newspaper reported that the case of Namoram Rai, 37, was the latest in a series of immigration department incidents in which alleged offenders have spent time behind bars before walking free from court. Last year, a 16-year-old American resident spent three months in detention for possession of a forged passport which turned out to be authentic. Rai found himself in a similar position, according to his legal counsel.

Rai was arrested in March earlier this year for using a false travel document—his Nepali passport—on May 27 1998. He also faced two other counts of making false representations to an immigration officer, in May 1995 and December 1998, when he maintained he was Namoram Rai, the name on the passport. Prosecutors identified him as Dambar Kumar Limbu in his charge sheet.

Rai was granted bail on June pending his trial. A prosecutor for the Immigration Department said officials still considered Namoram Rai to be Dambbar Kumar Limbu and they would investigate the matter further. Rai’s lawyer, however, said immigration officials did not conduct any scientific tests on Rai’s passport, which could easily have proved his identity. She handed the court letters from the Nepali consulate in Hong Kong and from immigration officials in Nepal which she said verified the passport’s authenticity.

Body count

The last insurgency that began in February 1996 has so far claimed 1438 lives, reported the Home Ministry last week. The Ministry said that among those killed, 979 suspected rebels, 249 civilians killed by the rebels and 20 police officers.

Government figures showed that it had released 138 people arrested on different charges related to the insurgency while another 320-400 could still be in prison. It also stated that Maoists had so far abducted 361 men, women and children of whom 24 had been killed.

Polluted city

Guests of the country’s three sub-metropolitan cities, Birgunj, Bishahar and Pokhara, is the most polluted? The answer is Birgunj, says a study conducted by the group Leaders Nepal.

The research findings, based on the air quality in June, concluded that Alakha Road Chowk, a commercial and residential hub in Birgunj, reported the highest values for total suspended particles (TSP), while even the industrial area of Pokhara had a lower TSP count. Likewise, the count of particulate matter less than 10 microns (PM10) was highest at Birgunj’s Godharia Chowk and the Birgunj bus park reported the highest values for sulphur dioxide.

Landslides still active

The rainy season is almost over but engineers at the Department of Roads believe landslides could still surprise commuters heading home for Dashain. The experts warn that pressure of traffic on the Pokhara highway, the main road linking Kathmandu to link rest of the country, could trigger more landslides.

A massive landslide at Krishnabhir in mid-August blocked the highway for several days and it has still not stopped sliding. Now the vibrations caused by the increased traffic could trigger more slides along slopes already weakened by the heavy rains of the past season.

Torch protests banned

Just days before the group of nine left-wing groups, supported by the Muktilok, were getting ready to carry out a torch procession, a day before the band called by them, the government announced it was barring all such processions. Carrying flaming torches in procession is a perceived mode of protest, especially among the left parties. The government reasoned that since such processions are generally held in crowded urban areas, they pose a potential fire hazard.

Urdu fortuitously

Nepal now has a national Urdu newspaper. The Urdu newspaper ‘Mayer-e-jahan’—published weekly as ‘Mayer-e-jahan’—was launched last week by Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of CPN (UML) and leader of the opposition in parliament.

Speaking at the launch Nazir Miya of the Muslim Ekhtiar Sangathan said that the newspaper will serve as a voice of the Urdu-speaking community in Nepal, which has been neglected. Among the speakers was Jamshed Ikhitar, counsellor at the Pakistan Embassy.

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PARKING AVAILABLE
Holiday Nepal
Prakash Vishwakarma, 17 September

According to a 1953 government order, government employees enjoyed a 5-day holiday in Dasain, 2 days in Thaur, one hour in Ratri Navami, after 2 pm on Indra Jatra and half a day for Bholaa Jatra.

The 1999 gazette shows the following list of holidays:
1. Saturdays 52
2. Dashain 10
3. Chhath 5
4. Diwali 5
5. Rememberence days 4
6. King's Birthday 1
7. Anniversaries 7
8. Women only 3
9. Festivals 12
10. King's state visits 1
11. Kathmandu Jatra 4
12. Kathmandu only 52

Besides these, off-days are also announced during the visit of some foreign dignitaries, or when a very important person dies. Meanwhile, with the advent of democracy, a new kind of off-day has emerged in the form of bank holidays. In the year BS 2504, bank holidays accounted for 10 holidays, and in BS 2008, it took 6 days. Taken together, this means a total of 186 off-days, or 5 months off per year. Surprisingly, for employees outside the Kathmandu Valley, Sunday is still a working day. It seems they do not deserve to have Sundays off. Only God knows the reasoning behind this, or does He?

October holiday list

The reasons provided for declaring Sunday a holiday in the valley were many—it would cut down pollution, consumption of electricity would go down, there would be smaller telephone bills, whatever. But has this happened? No one knows for sure.

Some SARC countries do enjoy holidays on Saturdays and Sundays, but they do not get holidays on Janai Daha, Jaya Daha, and what have you.
The months of January and March have no days off. Japan has a total of 14 official holidays, America 10, China 16, Europe nations an average of 10 days, India 17, Bhutan 16, Pakistan 11 days, etc. In Nepal, the Dashain holiday itself is 10 days, and make it 15 for the fourth. Maybe they need it.

Employees can take another 90 days or 3 months off, for festivals, home leave, mourning leave, sick leave, maternity leave (for women), etc. For education, a leave of 3 years is granted, and that can be extended by another 2.

All this means that the people in Kathmandu Valley have to work for only 4 months a year, while the people in other parts of the country have to work for 7 months. Moreover, the productivity, growth and development of Nepal is touching the sky.

Oil, Nepal in student politics

Nepalensus, 15 September

The announcement of the Nepal National Free Students Union (ANNUESU) is now being decided by the UML. The leadership of Madav Kumar Nepal, who has decided that Rajendra Rijal will now be the president of the ANNUESU. Rijal was earlier the general secretary of the student body.

A battle royal had ensued between Nepal and Oil in nominating their respective favourites for the presidency of the ANNUESU. Rijal was supported by Nepal, while Oil courted the ANNUESU branch office. As a result of the absence of Oil who in the US, the UML leadership was influenced by Nepal to nominate Rijal for the president’s post.

It is expected that the students will crown a leader over the matter. They will not tolerate the high command intervening directly in their affairs. Moreover, Dhakal is now too much efficient and popular than Rijal in the student wing. Dhakal’s supporters easily outnumber those of Rijal, and there is a person who has a solid grip over the students, may prove detrimental to the party. The ANNUESU members, therefore, will be the one to decide the matter.

The US presidency situation will be decided on the vote of the student members. Dhakal’s right to maintain the policy will only be determined by the student members. After the decision is taken, the general secretary of the ANNUESU, both Nepal and Oil will be off the country, and Rijal and Dhakal will be the new president and the general secretary respectively.

Political solution for Maoist uprising

Chhatrapati, 17 September

Stating that the present government cannot solve the Maoist problem, Nepali students are demanding that the government prove its capacity where they presented their opinions and solutions to the problem.

UML leader Jala Nath Koirala said that at present there is an underground war being carried on by the Maoist rebels, where each side ends up killing innocents. He said that the Dhaka Commission is inefficient and just a facade. In the last 10 years, poverty, exploitation and suppression of people have increased, and this is why the rebels are now so powerful, said the leader. He further stated that his party does not believe in support the way in which the rebels are operating. The problem is a political one, and has to be handled carefully, and a political solution is the only way out. If a political and peaceful solution is the aim, then his party would be more than willing to support the initiative.

Nepal Workers’ and Students’ Party Chief Narayan Man Bijukchhe said that the problem cannot be solved in the present way. This is a political problem, and only a political solution shall be beneficial to the nation. Solving this problem is a test for the Congress, and they will be successful if they handle the care carefully, and with conviction. At present, it seems that both the concerned parties are only interested in killing people, and Blakhe.

Marxist-Leninist leader C.P. Mainali said that the present crisis is a war of power struggle inside the Congress, and force inside and outside the country are taking advantage of this situation. He warned that unless the government is not prepping the ground for dialogue and negotiations.

Padma Rana Thalakhs said that when Sher Bahadur Deuba was the prime minister, positive steps were taken to find a solution, but the present government is not doing anything.

Bihkhu Ram Shawra of the Rashtriya Jan Morcha said that if the government had taken the right steps earlier, a solution would have been in sight. This is a political problem and branding the rebels as ‘terrorists’ will not solve it.

Amik Sherchan of the Samyukta Jan Morcha Nepal also said that this is a political problem, and can only be solved if handled carefully, and a dialogue is held, instead of just engaging people. MP Paul Thapa of the Rashtriya Jummautha said that the people are now caught between the rebels and the government. The MP said that while rebels have their own targets, the government is in trouble all day and night as Maoists are shooting down.

Revolving door MPs

Nepalensus, 15 September

After the special election courts reviewed the election result of Rajendra Prakash Lahari informer MP Dr Prakasha Chandra Lobhawat. It now seems that a trend has set in, whereby a number of candidates who have been officially declared victors want to lose their seats.

Foreign Minister Chandra Bahadur may be the next one to vacate his post. Bashahal had won by a margin of 25 votes, and his closest rival Yuvraj Bhattarai had filed a case, seeking a recount.

The controversy in the counting process. After a lot of legal acrobatics, the court has finally ruled, and Bhattarai won by 25 votes, as against Bhattarai’s 55,665 votes. As a result of this victory, the constituency is back in the contest.

Similarly, recounting is also going to take place in Ramchaur-4. The losing candidate Deepak Bhorat of the IPP had filed for the same, and it is expected that the court will rule in his favor. Durdan Chandrakot of the Nepali Congress, will stand up the loser. Chandrakot had earlier won by a mar of 52 votes.

Khadga Bahadur disappears

Dhutanka, 17 September

The courts recently freed Khadga Bahadur Bhatti, the main accused in the Prithvi Bahadur accident case. This has come as a boon to the police. In the first instance, the ancer and investigation against the Kathmandu UML’s chief in this case, will now be deducted towards the government. Second, it eases matter for Bhatti in his other cases.

We have to remember that right after the trial, Bhatti was released on bail. He was later arrested again by the police. Bhatti was being framed as the fall guy. Bhatti is now a free man.

As usual, there will be all the concern parties to push up this case. Neither proof, nor witness, or any other form of evidence has come up in the case. The police do not know how the incident took place, who the driver was, or even circumstances leading to the death of the singer. This helps the concerned parties to raise the question that since there are no clues or evidence, they cannot implicate Parsa Shah in the case. Meanwhile, Parsa’s father- in-law has publicly stated that Parsa Shah is not the right man being blamed by the courts. Bhatti has shifted residence, and his whereabouts remain unknown. Even his wife must be a happy man these days. He needed money for his wife’s pregnancy and for police bond. He seems to have got enough of that.

This seems to be the end of the Prithvi Bhatti story.

All the PM’s kith

Ghumne Re Bahadur, 13 September

Among the many accusations against the prime minister, one is of nepotism. Never before, other than in the Bamsi regime, have so many members of one family ever exercised control over so many important posts. Under Grista Prasad Koirala’s leadership, members of his clan have moved into many prominent positions, and are creating their personal political fiefdoms. Moreover, friends, assistants and personal domestic help, have been given important areas to run as they see fit.

The children of B.P. Koirala, too, are in important positions, but the general public holds no grudge against them. But against the Prime Minister’s kith, the public muses no such feelings, and it is a matter of time before they vent their anger and frustration.

A partial list of the members of the PM’s clan is given below along with the positions they hold:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relation</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position Held</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cousin</td>
<td>Neupane</td>
<td>MP, General Secretary, NPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nephew</td>
<td>Bibek</td>
<td>Central Working Committee (CWC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother-in-law</td>
<td>Dhakal</td>
<td>Chair, Women’s Wing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Chitra</td>
<td>CWC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Bibek</td>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
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<td>Nephew</td>
<td>Bibek</td>
<td>Home Minister</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brother-in-law</td>
<td>Bibek</td>
<td>Minister</td>
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<td>Brother</td>
<td>Bibek</td>
<td>Parliament Speaker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nephew</td>
<td>Bibek</td>
<td>Minister</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Member</td>
<td>Mehar</td>
<td>Minister</td>
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This time we brought only for athletes. We didn’t want to strain the national exchequer.
Money, money everywhere

RAJENDRA DAMAL, ACHUT
ARKHAM AND KIRAN NEPAI.

Nepal may be a country facing a severe resource crunch, but it is also not hampered by lack of opportunities to invest accumu-
lated wealth. That sounds like a contradiction but the fact is Nepal is presently awash in cash. The dozen commercial
banks hold more than Rs 100 billion in cash in hand waiting to be
invested. There are also 56 or so finance companies, cooperative
and trading firms sitting on at estimated Rs 45 billion. Add to that the 5 percent or so of their savings that Nepalis tend
to keep at home, and one comes up with a colossal Rs 95 billion sitting un-
productively. Thus, of course, doesn’t take into account the investments in gold which cannot be estimated.

The availability of so much money has had a direct impact on the country’s capital market, taking on a shape not seen earlier.
Giving rates of interest and fixed deposits have been raised to the lowest levels ever—lower even than the inflation rate. But that has not stopped banks and companies from raising fresh capital from new issues and accounts, and many have begun investing in foreign bonds.

Indications of surplus capital were already evident two years ago when Tara Cais Global Investment had floated an issue of bonds worth Rs 100 million, and the public over subscribed the issue, with applications for shares worth Rs 260 million within a week.

There was a repeat of the same phenomenon last month, although on a smaller scale, when the share worth Rs 120
raised by Radison Hotel was oversubscribed within the month.

Unlike the much sought-
after bank shares which distrib-
ute dividends regularly, hotel
shares generally do not attract investors. A chartered account-
ant told us that he has subscribed to Radison Hotel shares, even though he was fully aware that his investment would not yield dividends anymore in the near future. It can only be the lack of investment opportunity that is forcing investors to “gamble” with their money.

Since an economic revival can’t be forecast for the near future, other potential investors seem to be in the wait-and-see mood. This attitude has lowered the demand for loans, leading to an unnatural accumulation of money. Consequently, potential investors have turned to treasury bills as an alternate option, creating a distinct kind of market in that sector.

The excess liquidity is also reflected in the fact plummeting interest rates on bank deposits. Till four years ago the banks paid 12 percent interest on fixed deposits, now they pay less than 7 percent. The interest paid on saving accounts has slipped even lower—to 5 percent. Given the government’s average inflation rate of 5 percent, most of bank deposits is decreasing by the day. Unable to invest elsewhere, Nepal Bank Limited and First Bank Limited, and the state-owned Saptahini Bank have turned to money market transactions, buying government bonds and treasury bills, which earn them 5 percent interest, just enough to cover their own interest payments.

No one seems capable of explaining where all the money has come from. There have been no studies, but our own investigation pointed out three main reasons:

1. Remittances from Nepalis working outside the country (over Rs 70 billion annually),

2. Increasing barter trade with Tibet. Nepal Sariya Bank has raised the ceiling for barter trade with Tibet to Rs 6 billion, but nobody keeps records of the actual trade volume. An economic analyst claims that unrecorded barter trade could be 10 times more than the recorded volume, and says that once the two proposed passes are opened for trading, 10 times more barter trade could occur from India.

3. The favourable monsoon in the last few years. bumper crops have contributed to increasing exports and the consequent increase in cash in the market.

Moreover, the large volume of foreign aid entering Nepal through non-governmental channels is another source of the excess liquidity in the banking sector. But, managing the cash that is outside the banks will pose yet more challenges. Gold and cash with individuals and border brokers is much more difficult to account for.

Income sources may be varied, but the main reason for the pile-up of cash in the economy is the lack of investment opportunities compared to the funds available. According to Nepali Times #8.

Who says Nepal is a poor country? We are awash in cash. There is more Rs 90 billion lying idle, and it threatens to play havoc with the economy.

Nepal Development Corporation is also responsible for the excess cash floating around. The Corporation could have played a major role in ensuring some of the available liquidity to potential investors and promoters and also encouraged them to seek new areas for investment.

The government has so far failed to find a way to manage the ever-increasing liquidity in the Nepali economy. According to Dr Sanzari Sharma, member of the National Planning Commission, the establishment of an investment bank to cash in on the available liquidity is being considered. But the Nepal Sariya Bank that should have been the lead agency in addressing the issue remained crippled by the cold war between the finance minister and the governor (although that should change with the appointment of a new governor).

The real danger now is that excess liquidity may lead Nepal to an economic crisis. Lack of investment opportunities is discouraging savings and increasing consumption which in turn results in a deficit in savings. That is a dangerous trend for a country that already is one of the world’s worst savers. The government also could also lead to fund outflows. Indian banks just across the border offer 8 percent interest. In a situation where the Nepali rupee has been steadily depreciating against the dollar, individual savings could be siphoned off to foreign countries.

The effect of excess liquidity is already visible in the real estate market. Another caution is that the unnatural value added to the overvalued share market may have to be crashed anytime. That would indeed be disastrous.

The New Ideas Among Investors: Dambar Prasad Dhungel, Securities Board

“Different factors indicate that the capital market is filled with cash. Commercial banks have increased their savings interest rates. Treasury bills and government bonds too have done the same. Investment is increasing drastically in public issues.

“First of all banks need to evaluate projects for their viability and net issue loans on individual preference. Second, the tourism trade industry is only looking for loans and not thinking about going public. Third, the companies which pledge their stocks and shares should do so immediately. Big projects should be drawn in and bonds and debentures issued which will help increase demand for bigger investments and even encourage savings.

There’s nowhere new ideas among investors: Dambar Prasad Dhungel, Securities Board

“Lack of vision in government, inflexibility of banks and failure of investors to identify new avenues for investment are the causes for excess liquidity. Reliable data is not available, I would say the market has more than Rs 10 billion that could be invested.

“The people have learnt to save. Remittance is another force behind the excess liquidity. The difference in rates offered by Afghan players and the banks has narrowed down from 4 to 6 percent from previous 12-15 percent, which has also encouraged the accumulation of cash. A large portion of it is still held by the nouveau riche who were able to acquire excessive wealth due to political instability.

“Nepal now has accessible funds and technology to support new industries. Government should encourage long- term investments and act to discourage ‘fancy businesses’ entering the country from across the Indian border. Legal loopholes should be plugged.

It’s the nouveau riche who have the money: Rajendra Khetan, industrialist

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“Nepal now has accessible funds and technology to support new industries. Government should encourage long-term investments and act to discourage ‘fancy businesses’ entering the country from across the Indian border. Legal loopholes should be plugged.
Bad news about SAD

The Special Additional Duty on India imposed on Nepali exports earlier in the year and which it agreed to revoke during the Nepal-Prime Minister’s recent visit is not just still around, but India has also come up with a new list of Nepali exports that will become eligible for the tax.

Finance Minister Mahesh Acharya has promised to take up the matter with his Indian counterpart within 15 days. Business sources, however, are convinced that it will be a miracle if Nepal succeeds in getting the tax removed before India’s budget presentation next year.

Sugar supply sound

Fears that the price of sugar may go up during the festival season have been discounted by the Ministry of Supplies which announced that it had enough stock to last the two months till the new crushing season begins in September. In public corposition was 103,000 bags (100 kg each) on 11 September, and the private sector had another 153,000 bags.

Last year Nepal produced 120,000 tonnes of sugar while demand was for 120,000 tonnes. Despite production being higher than demand, records show that the country imported 45,000 tonnes of sugar.

Summit’s 20th

Summit Hotel, the first Dutch joint venture in Nepal, is 20 years old.

The hotel’s unique blend of two- and four-star services is a favourite place of sojourn for up-market group trekkers and mountaineers, and is a landmark at its location on Kupandole height. The 80-20 venture of Dutch and Nepali investors was set up in 1980 by the then Honorary Consulate of the Netherlands Dr. Dolf Noordijk with the help of Nepali tourism entrepreneurs like the late Pralipil Prasai. The hotel also has other Dutch share-holders.

Our ultimate aim is not the biggest or the largest hotel but to maintain our quality and service throughout,’ said Willem Gunter, a shareholder, talking journalists at a press conferen.

The Summit Hotel also manages the Poten Museum Café at Patan Durbar Square.

Highland flask

Highland Distillery Pvt Ltd has introduced a new time-flavoured Mirrow Vodka, which it says brings to the Nepali market a unique taste and quality that is unmatched by other liquor. The company has timed the introduction of the new liquor with the festival season and says the launch has resulted from the growing popularity of similar liquors in the American and European markets.

Mirrow Vodka comes in an ocean-blue colour and has a smooth, tart-tasting lemon-flavoured taste. Though targeted to the mahar, the company also expects it to be liked by the ‘tiki and beer drinkers, people who are confident, successful and the go-getters’.

Grindleys gets bigger

Nepal Grindleys Bank Limited has opened its 11th branch in Bhairawa, which its management said was part of its commitment to take international standard banking across the nation. The Bank, established in 1967, is a publicly listed company whose major shareholders are held by the Standard Chartered Grindleys Bank and the Nepal Bank Limited.

NECON anniversary

Nepal’s oldest privately run airline—also reputed to be the most successful one—completed eight years of operation last week, and unveiled new plans to expand its fleet both in the turbo-prop and jet engine category. The company is the only private airline with flights to Indian cities and has plans to begin daily flights to New Delhi, thrice weekly flights to Lucknow and four times a week to Calcutta.

Bhaktapur visitor fee doubled

Come 1 January 2001 and Western tourists visiting Bhaktapur will have to shell out an entrance fee that is 14 times more than what South Asian tourists have to pay. A recent decision by the municipality plans to raise the fee from the present $5 to $10 for Westerners and from Rs 30 to Rs 60 for SAARC nationals. Explaining its decision, the municipality said the hike is designed to take into account the appreciation of the US dollar vis-à-vis the Nepali rupee. Last year Bhaktapur raised Rs 41.13 million in tourism fees.

Gulf Air awards

Gulf Air recently announced the winners of its annual awards for tourism agencies for their continued support to the airline.

The newly appointed country manager of the airlines, Ismail Hakiki, handed over the gold, silver and consolation awards to various agencies. The most significant award going to Sierra Travels, sisters to Himalayan Land Travels, Merrow Travels and Rainbow Travels. Likewise, Legend Cargo got the gold, and Speedway Cargo, Everest d'cargo and Hima-

laya Cargo were awarded the silver in the cargo sector. Gulf air is very happy to have been received mostly by our Nepali clients. We are encouraged to add more flights and this season we are adding one more flight,’ Hakiki said while addressing the gathering of various travel agents and captains of the airline. "Gulf Air is very much interested to carry out further initiatives in promoting its market in Nepal.” The ceremony also marked the 50th anniversary of Gulf Air.

ECONOMIC SENSE

Bye-bye CII

The free-run news item on the closure of the old office of the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) was overshadowed last week by the thrilling news coming out of the Public Accounts Committee debate. However, let us not underestimate the significance of the CII pullout. The doors for investments in this country are shoreline, and if there was any final proof needed it was this. The timing of this announcement was also significant, coming as it did a week before a trade fair organised by the India Trade Promotion Organisation (ITPO). If it was a signal from Indian business to Nepali business, it was loud and clear.

The CII is an organised forum of the captains of Indian industry and has been instrumental in bringing about economic cooperation between the two countries. It was the Joint Task Force of the CII and the Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) that worked to formulate persuasive suggestions for both the governments, many of which have found their way in the historic trade and transit treaty of 1997. It is in this context that the CII decision to pull out of Nepal leaves many questions unanswered: some relating to the Nepalese government’s own policies, others concerning the transparency, and even the Nepali private sector.

CII activities in India started picking up after the wave of reforms in the early 1990s. It was felt that the Federation of Chamber of Commerce of India (FICCI) was not the right vehicle to take up issues with the government relating to larger industries and business houses. CII has been actively supporting the Indian government on issues ranging from fiscal policy to the Nepal office. The CII’s economic liberalisation gathering pace in the 1990s, it constantly expanded its activities by opening offices in other countries with significant business interest to India.

Nepal’s relations with India has never been pure private, it has always been intertwined by politics. Despite its assurances to Prime Minister Koirala it has not removed countering decisions from India has yet to do so. For its part, Nepal has not yet acted on Indian pleas to curb illicit border trade. That is why CII’s presence here was so crucial. It wasn’t just symbolic; there were actual benefits in having the lobbying power to foster legitimate trade. Smuggling only benefits smugglers, free trade benefits everyone.

Now the initial euphoria brought about by the formation of the Nepal India Chamber of Commerce (NICCI) and the 1997 signing of the Trade and Transit treaty, after which the CII set up shop in Nepal, have all but evaporated. Closure of the CII support here is going to hurt the credibility of Nepal’s investment climate, the sanctity of various business-related furn in Nepal, and we are going to lose its mediating and lobbying role. It also time for hard questions: did CII really think that Nepal was not a problem country, or did it just have problems with us? Counterpart? Is the FNCCI more fit for NICCI in its current governance and bureaucracy? Fully aware of the implications of saying goodbye to CII.

Grindleys Gazette

INTEREST RATE UPDATE

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GDP is excessively high and it is expected that the average rate of 6% this year will come under severe pressure due to aggressive bidding for government services. Maturity of the beggins in the secondary market will also add a positive pressure on the rates. Expected range for coming months is 6.5 to 6.75.

FOREIGN CURRENCY - Interest rates

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CIF: (IPRC members on Sunday agreed to raise all applicable FOB by 50 billion on all deliveries and export subsidy for export bills.

INTERNATIONAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES FOR NEPALI TIMES

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*The annual subscription rate for NEPALI TIMES is $125.00*
Fasten your seat belts

Nepal’s domestic airlines are lining up for take-off with a whole new array of aircraft, new routes and more frequency.

A NEPAL TIMES SURVEY

Nepal’s airline industry is taking another big leap forward in October as domestic airlines prepare to expand their fleets, giving Nepali passengers a new range of choices. However, the big question is whether the airlines will live up to their potential.

Nepal’s domestic sector was deregulated eight years ago. Since then, the number of airlines operating in Nepal has increased from three to seven, and the number of aircraft has doubled. However, the industry has yet to achieve its full potential.

French-made ATR 42s are the most common aircraft in Nepal, followed by the Saab 340, which is operated by Buddha Air. Other airlines operating in Nepal include Buddha Air, Yeti Airways, Aeropac, Air Nepal, and Nepal Airlines.

Yeti Airways, founded in 1986, is the oldest and largest airline in Nepal. It operates a fleet of Saab 340s and ATR 42s, and serves 17 domestic and 12 international destinations.

Buddha Air, founded in 1990, operates a fleet of ATR 42s and 72s, and serves 16 domestic and 11 international destinations.

Aeropac, founded in 1991, operates a fleet of Fokker 50s, and serves 12 domestic destinations.

Air Nepal, founded in 1993, operates a fleet of Fokker 50s and Fokker 70s, and serves 15 domestic destinations.

Nepal Airlines, founded in 1993, operates a fleet of Boeing 747s, Airbus A330s, and Airbus A340s, and serves 17 domestic and 20 international destinations.

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Suddeniy something large and dark stepped out ahead of him

Famous Tyrolean mountaineer Reinhold Messner has chased summits all his life. Few people knew that he also chased yetis in the Himalaya. Read all about it in his new book.

Saw Wollaston

R

Reinhold Messner is the first yetis somewhere in Tibet. It was 1986, and he had gone for a walk on his own and got a bit lost. A walk for Reinhold Messner is not what most people mean by a walk. On this one he was trying to follow a route taken by Sherpas centuries ago in their flight from the birds of Doge in Lhasa. That’s a walk of about 1,200 miles. It was dark; he was climbing a steeply densely vegetated slope. Suddenly something large and dark stepped out ahead of him. He watched it scuttling along in the moonlight. It looked more than seven feet tall and immensely strong, but agile too. Covered in black fur, with long legs and long, powerful arms, it made angry hissing noises, and for a second he saw its eyes and teeth before it ran off into the trees. After his encounter with the strange beast, Messner became obsessed. He spent a large part of the following 12 years chasing yetis around the Himalaya—something that single-minded determination that he has solved the yeti mystery.

We met in the high downstream surrounds of the European parliament building in Brussels. Messner is now an MEP, albeit a slightly reluctant one. His office is down a long, dark corridor. He is not a numbered politician. He looks out of place and a little unhappily among all the bureaucrats. There are no books on the shelves and the view from the window is over another pane of the large building. “I am not building up a political career. I will not run again. The Greens came to me. They came three times. The first two I said no.”

Messner’s eyes have that wild look possessed only by people who do mad things. He has a strange calm and board of strength. His red hair. He looks strong, but agile, actually. Very much exactly like a yeti, though a bit shorter. And he probably does not talk to people or deduct women but I didn’t dare ask. “Before 1986 I wrote in my books the yeti’s R. But then when I have seen this big animal, which I could not see exactly when it was, I understood that it was exactly matching with the legend.”

Messner says “bushka” is not not as an explosive, just a way of describing the situation. “There are no easy answers.”

Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, India, Mongolia, Tibet. That’s the story—travelling to get to the bottom of a mystery that has been around since the days of Alexander the Great, heard of them when they went on to conquer the Indian valley in 320 BC. Now he thinks he has solved the mystery, and has written a book about it.

The German-speaking Tyrolean Austrian is probably the greatest mountaineer alive. He was the first man to climb all 14 of the 8,000m mountains, a feat impressive in itself, but more so because he did it without oxygen. In 1986, when yetis were last seen in Everest, still exist on armls of Sherpas and equipment, Messner went up on his own. His single-minded passion for climbing has survived the loss of one of his brothers and all but three of his toes. And it is with
Mt Everest

Karmicar why do you do it? He has tried to answer the question in his book, Mountainvertising. Selfless. Love. He says: “I want to do something in my life. Not just live in the world for 80 years. Each day I live I must make something of it. Each hour is important.” If Karmicar succeeds, his achievement will add to the legendary list of Everest firsts.

HOW MUCH $$$ DO WE EARN?

Nepali earned barely Rs 500,000 from climbing royalties in 1979, 20 years later it earned nearly Rs 100 million. Total money spent by expeditions in Nepal also went up from Rs 11 million to Rs 382 million during the same period.

But with the exception of a few regions like the Annapurna Conservation Area in west Nepal and the Khumbu in the east, revenue is rarely channelized back to the villages. “Tourism revenue should be shared with the area for which it is charged,” With half the royalty the government collects for the Khumbu mountains, the area would need no outside help for clearing the garbage and the price could become a piece of Austria or Switzerland,” argued social scientist and former tourism minister, Harka Gurung, at a recent conference.

Danish climber and tourism entrepreneur Nizar Sabir agrees: “Nepal versus the Sherpas.”

Compared to the spring when there were nearly 20 expeditions jostling for space at the Everest Base Camp, this season there are only five teams: Karmicar’s Slovenian, four South Korean groups making attempts on Lhotse and Everest. So things will be quieter. Other Slovenian teams will be attempting Annapurna III and Pathivara. Three joint Slovenian/Nepali teams will attempt Doflu, Dorok, Joringang and Kanchchhuli.

Another Korean team will attempt 6098m Cho-Dyu, and a student’s Alpine team will test their skills on Dhaulagiri (8167m). So far, Nepal’s Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation has issued permits to 34 teams from 15 countries to climb 20 different peaks this autumn. Four teams, including an all-women’s expedition from Sweden, have been permitted to climb Baruntse. These teams will each attempt Ama Dablam and Lhotse, two teams each have been permitted to climb Cho-Dyu, Dhaulagiri, Makalu, Doflu, Dorok, Joringang and Kanchchhuli.

Messner’s eyes have that wild look possessed only by people who do mad things. He has a mane and beard of straggry, rusty red hair. He still looks strong, but agile, actually quite elegant, just a bit shorter.

Messner, agree that the yeti is just a bear. But what about all those famous footprints of large, two-legged creatures in the snow? Messner tells me with his hands how a bear might walk on all fours, but with its back feet going into the prints of the front feet to make bigger prints, which would appear to be of a two-legged animal.

It is not just the yeti myth that Messner has the answer to. Messner knows that George Mallory did not reach the summit of Everest—because of where his body was found and the shoes he was wearing. “The second step with these shoes is impossible, he could not have done it.”

Most of the people in their shoes, they say probably he was up, because this is all much better. If you say he was impossible he was at the summit nobody is interested.”

Messner may have the same problem with the yeti book. He has done a few lectures but has not had the success he hoped for. “A lot of people said, ‘I am not coming for a bear. I would have much more success if I had been in the Himalayas’—if I’d claimed that it is some big human-like creature, this would be the answer.” (The Guardian)
For Indian nerds and geeks, it is not “Yankee, go home”, but "Yankees here we come!"

It was a huge event: the US embassy showed no signs of being overwhelmed by the Indian tech experts who were there, seeking work in the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Last year, Indians occupied half of the 315,000 H-1B spots issued by the US government to qualified professionals worldwide. This year, the quota of 195,000 spots is expected to be increased to 200,000, with half of these likely to go to Indian professionals.

Even as IT employers in the United States lobby hard to get legislation passed to allow a hike in the H-1B quota, India’s Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was expected to do the same during his recent visit to the United States.

Besides pressing for a substantial hike in H-1B visas, Vajpayee was also seeking a elimination of social security charges now paid by Indian workers in the US.

We are pressing for easing of H-1B visa and locational constraints on those who qualify, Dewang Mehta, president of India’s National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM).

However, the growing number of Indian IT professionals to the US and other nations has also led to worries that the country may again be losing its best talent to the industrialized countries.

The government is not happy with this at a time when India aims to become an “IT superpower”, says Information Technology Minister Pramod Mahajan. The “India Information Technology Task Force” set up by Mahajan’s ministry has identified manpower shortages as one of the major hurdles in this goal.

According to Mahajan, while the government has been accommodating so far in allowing IT professionals to seek lucrative jobs abroad, it cannot let the exodus continue. But it may be too late, says Guttan Bhat who helped set up the government’s Advanced Centre for Information Systems. "Nothing was done to make it attractive stay back," Bhat said.

But says Indian IT professionals are successful in the West not so much because of their expertise, but because they are simply good engineers. "Put an immigrant Indian on foreign soil and he will be a brilliant, hardworking and useful employee," he pointed out.

Indian IT experts also become successful entrepreneurs abroad because they "suddenly find themselves in a refreshingly different environment in which they are free of unfair and unreasonable government regulations and a corrupt system", he added.

The only check on the outflow of Indian IT experts is being provided by the lack of transnational corporations, which are setting up shop in big Indian cities.

The two southern cities of Hyderabad and Bangalore have become major global IT hubs.

Microsoft chief Bill Gates, visiting India last week, said he opened a Microsoft development centre in Hyderabad because he saw great potential in India.

"India is now second only to the US in the number of self-empowered professionals and I think that’s great in terms of pure talent available here," Gates said.

According to Ramesh Manohar, director general of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), which controls more than 40 premier research institutions in the country, "India has the potential to become the remote processing centre for the world." However, industry observers expect the number of IT professionals leaving the country to grow as more industrialised nations seek Indian expertise in the field.

Deputy chief minister Mohsin Haji, who is in charge of the state IT department, said, "We have been inspired by the success stories of Indians who floated their own IT ventures in the United States. His hero in Saber Bhanu, the man who started the popular internet service "Hornbill" on borrowed money, before selling it to Microsoft for a reported $400 million."

India worried about exodus of experts

Gerhard Schneider’s scheme of 20,000 work permits for foreign IT experts. But Indian professionals, familiar with the English language and put off by stories of racism in Germany and Japan, prefer to work, and perhaps eventually settle, in the United States. "The US is still the land of opportunity," said Ramesh Galani, an electronic engineering graduate from the premier Indian Institute of Technology (IIT). Galani, who had found a job in the United States, but failed in his last attempt to get there on a student visa, said, "Things look different now and I would still try any hard at being an entrepreneur once there."

Tuvalu.com.tv

Tina Clark who is chief of the island’s population of 10,000, could be reshuffled in New Zealand if the islands became uninhabitable.

The island is understandable tiny, but joining the UN and sitting at the Commonwealth’s table could raise its profile. It is a problem in common with many other small countries, which have neither the resources nor the people to make enough impact on the world scene. For such states weaker Commonwealth countries such as Australia and Britain found a Commonwealth Small Office in New York where nine countries share facilities. Tuvalu is expected to join it.

Tuvalu is the former Eelcat in the British colony of the Gilberts and Ellice Islands. (The Gilberts are now the government of Kiribati.) Educators is free and compulsory for seven years—up to 7 and 12. It has all primary schools with 2,500 pupils and 70 teachers and two secondary schools with 350 pupils and 30 teachers.

Everyone is sure dot.com is going to be the salvation of poor small states. James Morris, executive director of the University of Southern California’s Electronic Technology Center, says: "What people have got used to saying, hearing and saying is dot.com. For more, dot.com means a Web address. With all due respect to the people of Tuvalu, I’m not sure it’s an idea that’s going to take off."
Iraq's water was deliberately hit by bombers

A decade after the Gulf War, Iraq is still fighting a deadly legacy of water contamination, disease, pollution and withered crops. Its water supply system was deliberately targeted by the multinational coalition.

The discovery of Iraq's vital water infrastructure was no ordinary surprise: the network of pipes, docks, water treatment plants and storage tanks that are crucial to the country's survival. The city of Basra, for example, relies on the Tigris River for its water supply, and any disruption to the river could have catastrophic consequences. The same is true for other cities and towns in Iraq, where water is the lifeblood of the population. The deliberate targeting of the water supply system was part of the multinational coalition's strategy to undermine Iraq's ability to sustain itself. The coalition's forces used precision-guided missiles and bombs to target water treatment plants, storage tanks, and distribution networks, causing widespread damage and disruption.

The attack on the water supply system had far-reaching consequences. It not only disrupted water supply but also contaminated the water with chemicals and toxins, making it unsafe for consumption. The water supply system was also damaged, leading to the spread of disease and illness among the population. The water crisis had a profound impact on the economy, as businesses and industries were forced to shut down due to the lack of water. The water crisis also had a significant impact on the environment, as contaminated water and sewage spread to nearby areas, causing further damage.

The deliberate targeting of the water supply system was a violation of international law and a clear example of the use of scorched earth tactics to achieve military objectives. It was a deliberate and calculated decision by the multinational coalition to target Iraq's water supply system, and it had far-reaching consequences for the people of Iraq. The water crisis had a profound impact on the country's economy, society, and environment, and it remains a legacy of the Gulf War that continues to affect Iraq today.
human headed for extinction

LONDON - The human race is set to vanish from the earth much sooner than it would naturally as a result of its destruction of the planet and use of fossil fuels, a leading investigator into the history of extinction predicts: Professor Boulter, professor of paleontology at the University of East London, said the meeting of the British Association in London, that with climate change and events such as the comet or asteroid strike which killed the dinosaurs 65 million years ago, mankind as a group could have expected to live for hundreds of millions of years before fading from the evolutionary scene.

But the rate at which mankind has made other major extinctions on this planet since the end of the last ice age, argues Prof. Boulter, amounts to a catastrophic event in its own right. “Humans are adding to the pace of the present mass extinction which will involve all large mammals and many other groups. We will be one of the extinguished species. The good news is that life on the planet will recover and peace will return to the evolutionary scene.”

Prof. Boulter and his group have produced a mathematical model of how the number of living organisms emerges, peaks and become extinct. Typically, groups of animals die out in such a species-based extinction, then slowly decline into extinction, this fits in with the records of fossils. But the recent rate of mass extinctions is in the same league as those of the dinosaurs, latest, and in fact it is now thought that the extinction of a few species of large mammals is more extensive than the mass extinction which occurred 65 million years ago.

The two key periods in human extinction's contribution to the extinction of the mammal species were the hunting activities in the “roar of the 1960s” and its recent use of fossil fuels. Asked whether mankind’s unique ability to influence its density could be turned to serve itself, Prof Boulter said: “Look at the world. People’s anger over the high price of fossil fuels. Cutting back on fossil fuels is the one thing humans really must do to stop extinction happening, but they won’t do it, will they?”

The real reason oil prices went up

There are factors other than OPEC which decide oil prices, such as the high consumption habits of people in affluent countries.

While oil prices hovering above $35 a barrel, the highest in a decade, raising a mini-crisis in the West, world attention has focused once again on the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). But is OPEC responsible for the price hike? Oil does not only play its traditional role in those guilt-tripping Western nations, run by the United States, which have shown little or no desire to adopt effective energy-saving measures.

Despite all the protests, world petroleum prices, when adjusted for inflation, are actually lower today than they were during the 1973-74 oil crisis. “Cheap oil has disillusioned the US from adopting effective energy conservation measures that would change guilt-guzzling habits of Americans,” says Saudi Arabian oil minister Ali Naimi.

Indeed, when angry civilian protests in Britain blacked out petroleum deliveries across the country to protest high oil prices at the beginning of September, one of the first results was a big increase in the number of people using public transport such as underground rail.

It is now, almost, the beginning of the 18th OPEC, producing about a third of the global oil production and responsible for fixing the price of oil. It is ultimately the nimble oil price against the balance of demand and supply and the size of oil stocks worldwide, determine the price, which varies from day to day.

What OPEC does is to raise or lower in its aggregate output every quarter in the light of world demand. Thus this price-influencing potential sometimes in decision achieves the desired results, at other times not. OPEC’s cartel aimed is to see the price of oil range between $22 and $28 per barrel. But its decisions are often taken with other factors in mind. The results can be disastrous.

Golden chance for a political capital

Here come hydrogen cars

MUNICH - At this year’s World Fair in Hanover, BMW has been chauffeur-driving VIPs around its exhibits in BMW fuel cells. Even prestigious names like the Munich-based firm expects to launch the first solar-powered production models in two years’ time. At the very latest, however, if the first batch of prototypes only the majority of motorists will have to be convinced it represents a serious alternative to the internal combustion engine.

While the electric cars can be charged with electricity, the hydrogen-driven car should be spared the fate of its electrically-powered predecessor, which was handicapped by high prices and limited range. When the initial electric cars were quite nicely, the electric cars quickly returned whatever they had come to the stables of their manufacturers. Either that, or they simply burned out, like BMW’s electric taxicab.

By contrast, hydrogen-driven technology has reached a high level of sophistication and thus has a very high potential for the future of the auto industry. What it does require, however, is a little push, from politicians, just to get ticking over.”

Europe on information autobahn

The European IT Forum in Monaco says Europe will outmatch the US in Internet users. Patrick McGovern, chairman of the International Data Group (IDG), said he is going to make more users in the US who use the Internet uses this side of the Atlantic than Stasiecki. They also predict that Europe and the re-commerce-to-e-commerce turnover in Europe is going to go from $3 billion this year to $5 billion in 2001, Internet sales between companies and businesses is going to soar. The EU is far SK's share of the market, some 80 percent, with direct sales to consumers/business to business, IDC predicts for the first year the 10 percent below the level of last year.

In stocks of discusters, used for domestic heating oil and diesel fuel, were 112 million barrels—about a fifth lower than last year. More significantly, the inventories in the six north-eastern states of America collectively known as New England, which experienced heavy oil shortages last winter, were 60 percent below last year’s level. In the words of Stephen Smith, oil market director of Goldman Sachs brokerage house, “We see the situation continuing uncertain for a range of new drillers to produce gas, and it seems likely there will be a further rise in the price.

Rambos vs West Side Boys

Rambos vs. West Side Boys: With both the glittering tradition of the American cowboy and a Sicilian Levantine held captive by a rebel group, the small board of 200 or so British paramedics in Sierra Leone have turned their talents to medicine at the heart of the civil war.

This week, the UN mission in Sierra Leone view the British paramedics from both sides is a group of people who have been driven out of the country by the war, and now they are working to provide medical care to the wounded, the sick and the dying. The UN peacekeepers have been accused of mistreating and even kidnapping civilians, and recently the UN peacekeepers have been accused of mistreating and even kidnapping civilians.

And a Sierra Leonean case, “Rambos”. Unlike the Boko Haram, the 13,000 UN peacekeepers have had standing agreements with any sort of Rambos-like operations or attitudes. Their mission is to serve as peacekeepers, to maintain a neutral attitude to all sides in the civil war. That helps explain the UN’s passive attitude when rebels of Father Jammoh’s Revolutionary United Front (RUF) captured 500 peacekeepers several months ago. Getting those peacekeepers released went relatively peacefully. By contrast, the British paramedics were a group of paramedics during the 9 September attack and lost one of their own in addition to suffering several wounded.

The UN peacekeepers try to work with all the rebel groups in an area. Recently, for instance, RUF rebels returned savagely army trucks that had been stolen from UN troops. The trucks were used to load badly needed fuel to desperate civilians. But, a UN general said he welcomed the RUF gesture as a sign of their commitment to the peace process.

In the UN’s Freedom headquarters, almost no one agrees on how to proceed in Sierra Leone and what to do about the rebels. Indeed, the situation is one of great concern, and it has been reported that senior UN officials, along with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, the UN’s commander of forces, was a group of African diplomats, and the main contenders for the UN peacekeeping mission.
Yet another bandh

DUSK AT BAG

The approach to the 31 September bandh called by the coalition of nine major left parties to demand implementation of the agreement on sharing power was relatively calm as the administration and police took necessary measures to ensure public life was not affected.

The bandh calls for the complete closure of all transport, educational institutions, factories and markets so protest the government's failure to address a host of issues, including immediate implementation of a two-year-old agreement between the government and the community groups.

A day's closure of business can cause business losses of Rs 30 million in Kathmandu alone. Only nickshaws benefit.

A day's closure of business can cause business losses of Rs 30 million in Kathmandu alone. Only nickshaws benefit.

The measure is prepared to make extra offers to provide security to people and check criminal activities.

But perhaps the most dramatic move was the banning of torch procession. These processions are a regular feature of political process and usually take place on the evening preceding the bandh day. The Home Ministry has announced the outlawing of torch processions as they might lead to unforeseen incidents and cause loss of life and property.

The left coalition is, however, determined to stick to its original plan and carry out a torch procession on 30 September.

Their confidence is based on the underground Marxist and the main opposition in the House of Representatives CPN-UML, openly declared support for the bandh call.

Meanwhile, the hands has come under criticism from the business community. With Dashain just around the corner, it is boom time and closing shops for even a day is likely to lead to huge losses. A study carried out by a Kathmandu-based independent research institution about three years ago calculated that a day's closure of business can cause business losses of about Rs 50 million in Kathmandu alone.

The business community believe damages will be more extensive this time given that sales double during Dashain. A meeting of business men, transport entrepreneurs, representatives of consumer organizations and the police that was called by the Khotimana district administration agreed to disallow the call to close businesses.

The meeting decided that businesses would run as usual so as not to interfere with the festive mood that people are gradually getting into.

A pretty bold step that considering such defiance by the business community has never been demonstrated before. Even if the resolve comes to naught, it signals a general apathy towards these shutdowns. But until political parties can come up with more imaginative methods of protest, Nepalis have no choice but to live with the endless cycle of bandhs.

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For people on the MDve
Mountain bike champs

Robert race through the finishing line at Holmehead (above) and Sarawat Bin Boegly on the victory stand.

for future championships. Logos could also be a problem, as indicated by 72 junior riders who got lost in the rice fields and steep roads.

"We were lost in the race; there was a strong wind coming from the north and the rice fields were swaying," said one of the young riders.

The 10-hour-long race was organized by the Malaysian Cycling Association and was attended by over 100 riders from various countries. The race started from Sungai Petani and ended in Kuah, Langkawi.

"It was a tough race, but we enjoyed it," said a rider from Thailand. "The wind was strong and the rice fields were swaying, but we had a lot of fun.

Rich athletes, poor athletes

A recent report has highlighted the stark contrast between the rich and poor athletes in Malaysia. According to the report, while some athletes are living in luxury and attending exclusive events, many others are struggling to make ends meet.

The report highlights the disparity in funding and resources available to different athletes. While some are sponsored by large corporations and receive regular training, others are forced to rely on their own resources and struggle to compete.

The report calls for greater support and funding for the athletes who are not as fortunate as their wealthy counterparts. It also calls for greater awareness and support for the challenges faced by these athletes.

The report is a reminder of the importance of supporting and investing in our athletes, regardless of their financial circumstances. By doing so, we can ensure that all athletes have the opportunity to realize their full potential and compete at the highest level.
The Kali of the South

On Tuesdays and Saturdays just before the festival of Basain, the temple courtyard is ankle-deep in the blood of sacrificed goats, chickens and ducks.

A bewitching drive away from Kathmandu through the gorges cut by the Marsyangdi River leads to the dense forest where the small lake called Taal pond is situated. The temple sits serenely on a hilltop, its gilded copper and wooden shingles gleaming with reflected sunlight. As we approach, the air is filled with the sweet fragrance of flowers and incense, and the sound of prayers and mantras fills the atmosphere.

As we enter the courtyard, we are struck by the sheer size of the temple. The main deity is a large image of Kali, sitting in her three-headed form, each head representing a different aspect of the goddess: the protective, the destructive, and the creative. She is surrounded by her attendants, including her son Ganesha, her husband Siva, and her daughter Saraswati. The temple is filled with the sound of bells and chants, and the air is thick with the aroma of flowers and incense.

As we walk around the temple, we notice the small pools of blood that have formed around the feet of the deity. It is believed that the blood is used to purify the deity and to honor her power. We are told that the blood is collected in small cups and offered to the goddess as a sign of devotion.

The temple is a place of pilgrimage for both Hindus and Buddhists. Visitors come from all over the country to offer prayers and to seek the blessings of the goddess. The temple is also a popular spot for weddings and other ceremonies.

As we leave the temple, we are struck by the beauty and the power of the goddess. Kali is a complex deity, and her image varies greatly depending on the region and the tradition. But in all her forms, she is a symbol of power and transformation, of the ability to both create and destroy.
Introducing the Thami

SAUL NURBER

Anyone who has gone through Nepal’s J. Millot’s Tahal-History of the Himalaya will remember the dancing torrents—‘tserirs’—which are a vital aspect of the rainfed uplands. These torrents are the Thami, a people who have been living a life of their own, despite a rich culture that has been lost to ancient myths and legends. Their presence in the Himalayan region is well documented. Photographs on display such as “Tserirs: Life of the Thami” will help the Thami gain confidence in their originality and self identity, the Thami people to the outside world, they are coming out on strong about their identity. “But of course, it needs time for them to be able to confidently come out from their past economic and societal situations,” says Shreedharan. “In the moment the Thami people have realised their presence and role in the community and society because of some exposure towards the outside world, they are coming out strongly about their identity. The exhibition shows a new chapter in their lives, and there is also a new chapter in the community’s life. The Thami have never been a people who have been hidden away in their own little world, they have always been active participants in the community.”

Nepali Weather

This year’s monsoon still has some surprises up its sleeve. A large moisture cell with towering cumulonimbus towering up to 40,000 feet crossed central Nepal over the weekend, bringing thunderstorms and heavy rain. The satellite picture shows another low pressure circulation on its holds with a large cloud band that has already moved inland from the Bay of Bengal. Depending on how much south-westward push it picks up, this trough could be in Nepal by Wednesday and linger till the end of the week. There is still some hope that the jet stream may bring us a steady flow of monsoon days that will keep the temperature down. Rain will be expected in the Khotang, Bhojpur, Sothakot, and Surkhet districts.

THE SHANGRILA BAKERY IS ONE OF THOSE PLACES IN LIFE WHERE YOU CAN HAVE YOUR CAKE AND EAT IT TOO......

AND YOUR BREDDY AND YOUR CHOCOLATE AND YOUR MASHY AND YOUR FRENCH BREAD AND YOU AND YOU AND YOU ALL CREATED BY MASTER BAKERS FOR THE GOURMET IN YOU. FRESH. DELICIOUS. WONDERFUL.
INVESTMENT UNFRIENDLY

More on p.1. On top of that, labor problems have got politicized, there is an anti-Indian sentiment among Nepali staff, and Masons have targeted Indian joint ventures like Cargill and Sunny Tobacco.

The message to potential investors is clear—keep out, these guys don’t know what they want. And sure enough, a British government manufacturer that wanted to come to Nepal to set up a joint venture—summoningly got spooked and went elsewhere. After government and bureaucracy levels, there is a subtle lot of concern about the message that is going to potential investors and the damage that is doing to the country.

Finance Secretary Bishal Pradhan Botel admits there is a problem. “There is a need to review the labor law which is muddled and complex, especially the exit policy,” he told us. “We’re working on improving our competitiveness by pushing the greater sector reform we promised during the elections in Paris.” This package includes making new laws governing banking and financial sector reforms and amending the Company Act to incorporate rules for public disclosure. Some of these laws would have already been passed if the House had completed its full session.

There are backlogs everywhere: taking the separate income tax, which is 25 percent. Added to it is an uncertain tax like a mandatory 10 percent bonus on profit and a 15 percent housing fund. “Why should someone come to Nepal if I have to pay 40 percent corporate income tax?” one potential investor asked us. “And the end result is profit-making enterprises end up paying more and more tax which takes the benefits out of their margins.” This year’s budget added another 15 percent tax on exports, hitting profitability further.

Other than the free-trade agreement with India, there is very little reason for investors to come to Nepal. The domestic market is small, and Nepal often competes against other locations in north India. Unskilled labor is cheap but it is also much less productive. Land prices for factories are high. Says one investor: “It’s a myth that labor is cheap in Nepal. When you take into account productivity, housing, it is less attractive than India.”

Nepal is now competing with other Indian states which in turn are competing among themselves for a more business-friendly environment.

The last straw is corruption. This huge red flag that investors notice in Nepal just doesn’t make doing business a viable proposition. “I wouldn’t say all businessmen are dean either, but official corruption is something else,” says Pradeep Shrestha, chairman of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI). “Discouraging authority allows officials to siphon businesses.”

The attraction that Indian investors had to move to Nepal was the duty differential on raw material imports which made it attractive for companies to produce in Nepal and sell in India. That too is changing with Indian tariffs coming down with every new budget. Another distinct advantage Nepal had over Indian states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh was industrial policy. No more, in 1998/99 Nepal industry lost 96,000 worker days to strikes and another 14,000 to lockouts.

Trade unions are an accepted part of industr,y in India, but labor unions in Nepal are aligned to parties and their allegiance is to their political patrons and not to workers they represent. And often enterprise-level unions don’t accept or abide by central-level decisions. Even if everything else was fine, Nepal’s labor productivity suffers because of the large number of holidays. Paid government holidays in Kathmandu Valley alone number 132 days—almost five months—in a year. This does not include holidays on the days when the king reached and left on state visits, special leave for women and the monks, nor does it mention the hands. What is clearly needed, as Secretary Botel says, is a fully committed effort to look at all laws—maybe even a look back at some recent revisions in the Foreign Investment and Technology Transfer Act and the Company Act which tax too both dividends and interest—and the overall political environment. But at the end of the day, if the Musings’ intention is to say foreign investors from Nepal, they needn’t bother finding their factories anymore. The government is doing the job for them.
Under My Hat
by Kumki Dhan

Ever since democracy brought adults-only franchise to Nepal ten years ago, a major gain has been the right of every citizen to declare a banjha. However, except for the youngster, the majority of us have been too squabbed about using this great avenue to express our desire to take a day off. Why, we still have split-sport politicians in our country who think we should not have national shutdowns. How can freedom ever be safeguarded if we don’t rigorously exercise our fundamental human right to stay home and play joshe and register our protest of the Indian occupation of Kalapani? Look at our neighbour Bangladesh, the halal superpower of South Asia. They didn’t get there by pussy-footing with democracy; they had a systematic plan to enter the Guinness Book of World Records as the country with the highest per capita national strikes in the world. And, sure enough, they achieved it in April. Bangladesh political parties shut down the entire country cumulatively for 18 days. Democrats in Delhi have hurled hooligans into barracks and acrimoniously aspiring to perfect their strike techniques and endurance skills. Not satisfied with 24-hour shutdowns, they now even have four-day banjhas in Delhi. With such kind of a head start, is it Nepal ever going to catch up?

One thing we shouldn’t do is give up hope. We shouldn’t say, the Banjhas are so far ahead, we can never overtake them. That is having a negative and fatalistic attitude. Our slogan should be, "Yes, the Nepali can. And the Nepali will." We must strive while all our states in the five suns are hot. We will march, or even override, the rest of the world by declaring national strikes whenever and wherever we please. Starting tomorrow, the success of a banjha hinges on people voluntarily keeping off the streets. But we must persuade them by insisting the guardians of our democracy in the art of sheltering the windscreens of a spending car from 25 yards. And who exempted ridiculous and airless? How can we defend freedom if we allow planes to fly around with impunity? Are we serious about bringing this country to a halt or not? When we say we want to jam all dohada, we mean it, and that includes anything running on high beams.

I don’t know what you have planned for Thursday, but I have lined up a busy Joshe and beer schedule designed to put pressure on the government to immediately implement my 15-point demand that includes:

1. Immediate withdrawal of all Indian troops from occupied Kalapani
2. Ending all corruption by Friday
3. Giving the nephew of my wife’s friend’s maternal uncle a job in the Food Corporation
4. Declaring a two-week banjha during Dashain.

Grindlays

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