Kosi High Dam

Secretariat-level talks began secretively in Kathmandu this week to discuss the proposal to build a flood-control high dam on the Kosi River. A team led by the Indian water resource secretary Jafar Hasan was in Kathmandu for the 1-3 October meeting, but few in Nepal seemed to know about it. Why all the secrecy?

Officially, this meeting is a follow-up to the prime minister’s visit to Delhi in August when India and Nepal agreed to streamline bilateral water consultations. But India seems to want to bring up the issue of the Kosi and the Bagmati High Dam projects. New Delhi is keen to placate fears in Bihar that it is not doing enough to push the mammoth projects which many Bihar see as a solution to their annual flood woes. For the first time, the Indian team included a Bihar official, Radha Singh, the state’s commissioner for water resources, and also Patna-based media.

Why was Ghimire fired?

The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) Director General Nagendra Prasad Ghimire was summarily sacked last week. And that would have been that. But word has come that Ghimire was punished for opposing a government decision granting licences to seven new airlines, one of which wanted to operate a single-engine passenger aircraft.

The Beeb bends over

The BBC backtracked and altered the subject of its South Asia Debate on its World Today programme after the Foreign Ministry sent a sharply worded statement denouncing it. But the emails in the internet debate, parts of which were also broadcast, turned out to be overwhelmingly in Nepal’s favour.

Nepal Times brings a selected transcript of the debate on pg 7. See also State of the State on pg 2.

EXCLUSIVE
C.K. LAL

Force has masculine connotations in societies that struggled against Nature for their survival. Nature had to be subdued and tamed so that Man could be said to have conquered it. In societies that grow in her b favour, Nature was regarded as feminine in both her gentle and fierce avatars. Nature was the complete woman: the mother, the lover, the sister, the daughter, all rolled into one. All life forces emanated from her womb. Even in her eury move there was the cycle of creation, sustenance and destruction. God the Father, the Mother Earth, the Mother Goddess. She made the moon and the earth go round the sun. She made us do what we do, and later enjoy or suffer the consequences.

When the Aryans came face to face with the splendours of the Harappan civilisation in the early part of the second millennium BC they must have been awe-struck by the power of the female deity that bestowed such edon, even on a people so unwilling to go to war. The Aryans established their hegemony by subjugating Harappan cities, and then

establishing their own set of goddesses. Brahmanas called them Shakta-Matris— the 16 mother goddesses.

Perhaps the 16 originated from and of famous patriarchal Aryan chiefs, or from the women that took care of the home and children when the men went to war. The goddesses could have been wired of various saints revered by traditional Hindus who trace their ancestry to them through groves named after famous rulers. It is equally likely that these remarkable women were chieftains in their own right. After all, they have survived millennia of patriarchy and are worshipped to this day at panchrej dances and ritual initiations and marriages.

When they are solemnly recited, the names of these 16 mother goddesses have a hypnotic cadence, a poetry of sound, connecting us to our unknown maternal ancestors: Gaati, Padma, Shachi, Medha, Sabhi, Bhaja, Jaya, Devana, Swastha, Swaha, Mala, Lokamata, Shanti, Puodi, Dheti and Swasti.

Women may have been beaten down by centuries of suppression in our society, but they are still the ones who bestow power upon their men. So, who is empowering whom?

The Aryans became even more important when Vedic Hindus (and later even Buddhists to some extent) fused with animism in the mountainous regions of Kashmir, Himachal, Nepal, Tibet and Assam. A festival emerged celebrating the primal union of the deities (the phallus, standing for male force) with the moon (the vagina), symbolising female force. Linga was the seed, yoni the ground— together they assured fertility, prosperity and peace.

Nav Durga is another latter-day variation on the theme of matrikas. The nine goddesses are worshipped, one on each of the nine nights of Dasain this week. Priests have taken a shortcut and simplified the nine into just three main ones: Mahisharli, Mahalaxmi and Mahasarawali. They are symmetrical to the holy Hindu trinity of Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma—the creator, the keeper and the creator of the universe.

The original tantric saptamatrikas are made up of:

- Brahma, who sits astride a swan, and bears a strikingly similar to Saraswati, the traditional goddess of learning
- Mahisharli in a female Shiva, replete with serpent, mini-drum and trident, and riding a bull
- Barahi is boar-faced, ferocious with a garland of skulls around her neck
- Indrani rides an elephant and looks a little more reassuring, nonwithstanding a whip in one of her hands
- Chamunda is a skeleton, with two teeth protruding like Dracula she looks like someone who can send chill down the spine of sinners
- Kumari is the virgin goddess, her blessings bestowed upon kings the right to rule
- Baijnath stands appearing an airborne eagle that has a snake in its beak and she has one hand raised in a gesture of blessing.

These Seven Mothers are revered as symbols of primal forces that constitute the universe. In addition to them (are you following me here?) there is Mahakali, the great goddess of Dassain herself. Heavenly armed with a lethal-looking trident, a bow, an arrow, an ax, a whip, a snake, and a club (or a rotary blade, in her 10 hands and riding a tiger, Mahakali is the very embodiment of power. She is also worshipped as Durga—the slayer of evil and protector of the good and noble.

Laxmi, but not least, there is Astamatrika, Mother Nature at her bewitching best. It is said that one night she appeared in the dreams of King Pradap Mall and directed him to create an image of her and enshrine her. So there she is at the Mohan Chauk of Hanuman Dhuka—embodying all the forces of creation, sustenance and destruction. Astamatrika is also revered as kali, the seductive destroyer. Other falla ask followers to be perfect like the Father in heaven. All Kali asks for is love: ecstatic love, elevating love, menacing love, punishing love.

For those who worship the female form, the Mother Nature, rather than the Father in heaven, there is creation in passion. Union is the rule of the universe. And that is the Tantric link to Dassain: perfection in union. This universal interlace of creation that is possible only by submission, a submission to the partner and submission to the Supreme Source that leads to salvation. The Astamatrika mother is thus the source of all forces: hell and heaven and everything in between rolled into one. She is the woman who makes it all possible. ☄

NOTICE TO READERS Because of the Dasain Festival there will be no issue of Nepal Times on 11 October. After the holidays, Nepal Times will come out on Fridays every week and not Wednesdays as it does presently. The next issue will be on Friday, 20 October. See you then. — Editor

Nepal’s bird diversity

Mother of all festivals

For a society that has a strong matrilineal heritage and a pantheon of goddesses in heaven, it is surprising how strongly patriarchal practices dominate Nepali society today.

C.K. LAL

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C.K.LAL

A state of paranoia

Self-deception is a technique of self-protecting. When faced with extremely harsh realities, the human mind lapses into a make-believe world in order to preserve its sanity. Our excessive pride in our own nationalism, exalted by last week's outpouring of patriotic fervour over an online debate conducted by the BBC, illustrates this theory of psychology perfectly.

Just look at us, our brothers fight in other people's armies, we sell our assets to brothels abroad, our children don't have enough to eat, we forget aid to pick up our own rubbishes, it needs an ambulance of a nearby country to write a letter to the editor before a mud gets paved in our capital. The dignity of it all should have made us hang our heads in shame. It should have made us question догорь, examine beliefs and behaviour.

Instead, we choose to hang back to our glorious past to mask our present squaller and improve. “No matter what,” we shout from our rooftops, “ours is an independent and sovereign country. We have never been colonized, and our kingdom shall remain independent till kingdom come.” The legend about Nepal being an independent country from prehistoric times that outlandish claim comes from the statement of the Nepali Congress Party’s denouncement of the BHC is a historical fancy of fairy. Nepal is still a nation in the making, as B.P. Koirala had no hesitation accepting.

Till the 1940s Nepal trod ahead with identification papers issued by the Government of British India. Geographically, the Treaty of Nagpur fixed the present boundaries of the Kingdom of Nepal in 1816. It was managed a half when Jung Bahadur Thapa was reawared by the British for mercenary services rendered during the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Politically, the People of Nepal became sovereign only by the enactment of The Constitution of Kingdom of Nepal, 1990.

The subject posed by the BBC on its on site for its South Asia Debate on World Today last week asked how Nepal should respond to a resurgent India. We were so spoooked by what the answer could be that we worked ourselves up into a frenzy of self-righteousness and behaved exactly like paranoid Indians do when they see a map of Kashmir with chucks on the two corner comming. Nepal is not landlocked, it is India-locked. This is a geographical fact, and we had better come to terms with it. India is also a country with which we have a lot in common, but why should an online debate to discuss how this commonality can be pragmatically used for national progress be conducted as an affront to our sovereignty, unless our sovereignty itself is so brittle that we will break at the slightest hint of open debate.

It was interesting to note that in the online discussions the louder peoples’ voices came from Nepal abroad. This is the case with the diaspora of most counties: they tend to be more nationalistic than most of the countries they have left behind. It has something to do with keeping one’s identity when the melting pot threatens to turn all immigrants into aliens. Nepal abroad are no different, especially because they are assumed to be Indians unless they prove otherwise by redacting in the name of Lord Buddha and Mount Everest. You don’t deal with tough questions by stifying debate. The BHC debate was a unique opportunity in a bold new medium to prove the basis of our non-found democracy, show confidence in our own nationalities and maturity and open-mindedness in front of a worldwide multiracial audience. All we did with that obwise statement from the Foreign Ministry was show the world how narrow-minded and insecure we have become. The BBC had adopted a provocative method based on what is known as "null hypothesis" in social science researches. According to this concept, if you can show that a thesis is wrong on all counts, its opposite can automatically also proved to be true. We should have attempted to prove the null hypothesis of BHC wrong by showing that the current trend is towards a break-up of larger nations into smaller ones. Before a meaningful South Asian confederation can even be contemplated, perhaps the Indian Union itself needs to break into at least about 40-50 workable-sized independent nation-states.

We could have used the debate to show that Nepal may be mired in poverty, but the Indian states neighbouring us are in a much worse shape. We could have pointed out that our demoracy may not be ideal, but it is way ahead of the farces enacted by Lako Prasad in Bihar or Madiyan Singh in Uttar Pradesh. We could have said that we have started to tap our huge untapped potential in agriculture, hydropower, tourism and trade in a sustainable manner. Our people are creative enough to preserve and manage our forests with full community participation. All Nepals need is a leadership that will not still this creativity and capacity for hard work. But even that may have started to happen with the evolution of our democratic institutions in the past decade. Many of these points did come out in the online debate, and interestingly, some of the people making these points on our behalf were Indians! But the very content that would have shown Nepal in the best light was drowned out by the display of foolish and knee-jerk nationalism in Kathmandu on the week 22 Nepal pokemones were slaughtered by Nepali Mocion.

When an insecure mind works itself into a rage, then you have bizarre scenes like that of the BHC being burnt in effigy at Bhadraik, or Radio Sagarmatha being forced to chiel out and not broadcast the very debate that was favourable to Nepal. Everyone already knows Nepal is not a developed country, now they also know that we aren’t nos derever either. Our passions have insulted the strength of Nepalism by their paranoia. Doesn’t our fake pride ring a bit hollow when we roar and rant against the radio station of a country where our citizens seek asylum pretending to be Bhutanese refugees? Isn’t the army of which our countrymen serve, and we might add, in the army of the country that we are getting worked up about? Let’s not deceive ourselves, we have a right to the respect of others. They won’t just give it to us because six generations ago our forebears cut up their forebears with khukuris. •

Nepali have to earn the respect of others. They won’t just give it to us because six generations ago our forebears cut up their forebears with khukuris.

So, the commander-in-chief is fummoed. What is the chain of command: king or the prime minister? The clue may actually lie in the third paragraph of the preamble to the Constitution which states that the purpose of the document is to: “...consolidate the Adult Franchise, the Parliamentary System of Government, Constitutional Monarchy and the System of Multi-Party Democracy...” Perhaps in that order of priority. The Head of State is a symbol of national unity, the Head of Government is responsible for safeguarding a “Tand of unity on the basis of Liberty and equality.” But how can the Prime Minister be given such wide-ranging responsibility without commensurate powers? This is the reason for the growing tug-of-war between Narayani Durbur and Singh Durbur. For its part, the Army is aware of its awesome firepower and the generals say privately they don’t want to be pushed into a civil war. The casualty rate is relatively low because the two sides are fighting with crude bombs and antiquated rifles. Given the disarray within the ruling party, the Army has a point when it says the civilians should first resolve their differences before calling for help. But no one has answered one crucial question. Whose side is the Army on?

Goddess Durga is worshipped during Dasain as a slayer of the demon, a symbol of evil that resides in each one of us. The creator has also endowed us with the force to control that evil, with contemplation and an ability to understand our own inner strengths. From all of us here at Nepali Times, we join you in your Dasain prayers for peace and wellbeing in Nepal.

Clauses 118 and 119

Autumn is here, and Nepali passanty is taking a break from back-breaking work. Planting and weeding over, the golden terraces sway with a heavy harvest. The sun is now about to be cleaned, and stocked up for the winter ahead. It is time to celebrate, thank Mother Nature for a good harvest. It is also time to appease the gods with sacrifices.

No one in Nepal we have talked to remembers being less than a mood for Dasain than this year. The sacrifices so far have not been great, they have been human. At least 22 killed in the last week in Macchiche. It does not matter who they were, what uniforms they wore. They were Nepali, and Nepali killed them.

As the high priests of politics bicker in Kathmandu, blood is spilt on the soil of our country. Our fearless civilian leaders can’t get a handle on this conflict, that much is clear. Self-serving, inept, vacillating, mirrored in their internal intrigues, and incapable of grasping the seriousness of the crisis confronting the nation—that about sums up the track record of politicians on whom people have put their trust for the past 10 years. Even those who spout peace are playing politics with it.

Politicians are being killed by Maoists or vice versa. Innocent sons and daughters of Nepali peasants die. And the leaders on both sides! All that matters to them is power. While the Kiling fields of Durnal and Bhatariee were rumbled with the thunder of pipe bombs and guns, politicians in the capital were jockeying shamelessly to ensure a position in the post-Dasain reshuffle. The Army was busy presenting excuses why it did not come to the aid of the police when they were being slaughtered (“we were not formally ratted”, “the bridge was destroyed”). And a bigger battle looms between the two Durbars over the destiny of this land.

One outcome of the blood-soaked week is that the debate is now narrowing down to the key issue of who controls the Royal Nepal Army. The Constitution has (probably deliberately) left it fuzzy. According to Clause 118, ‘His Majesty shall operate and use the Royal Nepal Army on the recommendation of the National Defence Council. “Well and good. The Council is made up of three members—the Prime Minister, the Defence Minister and the Commander-in-Chief. Although Clause 118 clearly establishes civil supremacy—and one would assume that the tax payers who pay for the upkeep of our peacetime guard should have a say in what it does—there are historical reasons for the army and palace to have a fondness for each other.

Clause 118 may make it look like the National Defence Council is all-powerful. But the very next Clause 119 states: ‘His Majesty is the Supreme Commander of the Royal Nepal Army. ’ Then, almost as an afterthought, comes a second sub-clause: ‘His Majesty shall appoint the Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Nepal Army on the recommendation of the Prime Minister.’ You can’t get more ambiguous than that, and it is that vagueness that is coming to haunt us now.

State of the State

STATE OF THE STATE by C.K.LAL

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The Nepal Federation of Nationalities, a group that has been the subject of intellectuals, has always tried to project the janjati movement of this kind. They have the right to define "janjati" and also to define "bahunbadi" and "janjati" as "one of the four classes of Aryas, the brahmans, the bahunbadi, the janjatis", which was defined by Dorji Sherpa in his book, "Janjati Development", as a cultural fossil; and solely used to define domination by the Bahun caste group in different parts of national life. Edith Suren S. K.C. makes the presentation as a statement where the definition of "bahunbadi" is "sociologically inappropriate" and "sensationalised and political". Biju, on the other hand, recognises these meanings provided by Dixit. "janjati", in general, object to the definition of "janjati" offered by the above-mentioned dictionary. Therefore, I would like to use your paper to voice concern over the subject matter of the BBC’s South Asia region. The United Nations is busy trying to solve the border dispute and ethnic problem in the area. Nepal is left behind by the British Empire. The Indian subcontinent still exists as a region of religious and cultural domination. Nepal is a multi-ethnic society. While I agree that there is one matter I often ruminate over. It is that the Bahuns are the most genuine community. The concept of "janjati" has been used to camouflage their leanings towards communist ideology, are attempts to establish a multi-ethnic Nepal. "Bahun" is one of the four classes of Aryas, the brahmans, the bahunbadi, the janjatis and the "poor, rural castes". They are born, they mature to reach the "momentum at a rapid pace. Various philosophers have about the strong interrelation of the three. As you rightly pointed out, "janjati" and "bahunbadi" are not synonymous but since the social status of Rautes and Newars are similar; which janjati group do Bhujels belong? I then read his "My Hat") and think it is a real hoot. The Nepal Federation of Nationalities, a group that has been the subject of intellectuals, has always tried to project the janjati movement of this kind. They have the right to define "janjati" and also to define "bahunbadi" and "janjati" as "one of the four classes of Aryas, the brahmans, the bahunbadi, the janjatis", which was defined by Dorji Sherpa in his book, "Janjati Development", as a cultural fossil; and solely used to define domination by the Bahun caste group in different parts of national life. Edith Suren S. K.C. makes the presentation as a statement where the definition of "bahunbadi" is "sociologically inappropriate" and "sensationalised and political". Biju, on the other hand, recognises these meanings provided by Dixit. "janjati", in general, object to the definition of "janjati" offered by the above-mentioned dictionary. Therefore, I would like to use your paper to voice concern over the subject matter of the BBC’s South Asia region. The United Nations is busy trying to solve the border dispute and ethnic problem in the area. Nepal is left behind by the British Empire. The Indian subcontinent still exists as a region of religious and cultural domination. Nepal is a multi-ethnic society. While I agree that there is one matter I often ruminate over. It is that the Bahuns are the most genuine community. The concept of "janjati" has been used to camouflage their leanings towards communist ideology, are attempts to establish a multi-ethnic Nepal. "Bahun" is one of the four classes of Aryas, the brahmans, the bahunbadi, the janjatis and the "poor, rural castes". They are born, they mature to reach the "momentum at a rapid pace. Various philosophers have about the strong interrelation of the three. As you rightly pointed out, "janjati" and "bahunbadi" are not synonymous but since the social status of Rautes and Newars are similar; which janjati group do Bhujels belong? I then read his "My Hat") and think it is a real hoot.
Are Newars janjati?

The dictionary definition of a “janjati” is a “jungle tribe living on wild fruits and plant roots,” one that is “totally cut off from the development process.”

Janjati of being co-opted by the larger, richer Newars who they fear may hijack issues related to the collective concerns of janjati, the sociologist who teaches at Tribhuvan University told us. Developing their language and its use for official purposes in areas like Kalimandu Valley is high on the Newar agenda, while communities such as the Kirats from the Eastern hills or the jungle tribes are more concerned over the control and restoration of their cultural, linguistic, religious and land ownership rights. He adds that, in the name of building a single national identity, the rules have usurped these rights.

“They economically well-off, and better represented in the administration, the Newars are deprived of their linguistic rights,” says Dr. Chaitanya Subba, Executive Director of the National Committee for Development of Nationalities (NCDN). He added that the NCDN has no doubt that the Newars are a janjati group, if nine distinguishing points listed by the 1996 taskforce were to be applied.

The multi-religious characteristic of Newars is another reason for the confusion over the community’s status. The 1996-taskforce definition requires communities to belong outside the Hindu caste system to claim janjati status. But many Newars are Hindus and follow un-janjati practices such as observing an occupational caste system and “untouchability”. This again could have been caused by centuries of Hindu domination over the Newar cultural space, argue some activists. “Some Newars might have attained high posts and earned much wealth but as a community we have no say in national affairs, we’re a group left out in the cold,” says Mallika K. Sundar, a prominent Newar pro-janjati leader.

HEMLATA RAU

A parliamentary bill on nationalities that proposes to remove Newars from the list of Nepal’s 69-plus nationalities has once again stirred emotions on what makes a janjati and what does not. Some Newars are happy to have “graduated” into the mainstream. Others suspect a sinister design to erase and assimilate a distinct community into a Hindu-dominated amorphous mass.

The Janjati Uthana Pratishthana Bhediya (National Foundation for the Uplift of Janjati Hill) also proposes naming some janjati, for example, changing Bhote which some found was disparaging to a location-specific nomenclature such as Manange. This may not be much different than calling a Bahun that travelled west into Nepal from Kumaon, a Kuma, but there are those who say location-specific names may also be confusing if Bais from Bhispur are to be called Bispure, or the Lambus from Panchchul Panchthale. The list of examples could go on and on, as will the debate once the parliament reconvenes for its looming winter session.

The contradictory definitions of what makes a group a janjati has contributed to the division among the Newars. A 1996 taskforce formed for the formation of the proposed foundation for the uplift of the nationalities, defined janjati as a community having its “own mother tongue and traditional culture but not belonging to the Hindu caste system.”

This team, led by Shanta Bahadur Gurung, described janjati as groups having distinct cultural identities, language, religion, customs and culture, traditional social structures, belonging to distinct geographical areas, groups with written or oral history and “way of thinking, indigenous settlers, groups excluded from the mainstream of state affairs and politics and communities that claim to belong to a janjati group. In other words, the definition confines more than clearly demarcate the boundaries—which is not easy in the first place.

Then there is another definition published in the Gazette in July 1997, which uses the economic status of a community to decide if it qualifies as a janjati. It defines “janjati” as communities having their “original and distinct language and culture” that are “socially backward in comparison to other caste groups”. Although this definition is quite different from that prescribed by the taskforce headed by Gurung, it adopted the janjati list prepared by the earlier team and listed Newar as a hill group along with 61 others. There’s an economic argument for the de-living of Newars. The Nepal Human Development Report 1998 shows that Newars are economically better off than any other Nepali community. But some argue that their economic status goes against the most basic definition, the one in the lexicon that is accepted as standard for Nepali meanings. The Nepali Bihat Unmakdak published by the Royal Nepali Academy. The dictionary definition of a “janjati” is a “jungle tribe living on wild fruits and plant roots,” one that is “totally cut off from the development process.”

Newars with their proud cultural history and economic status were never janjati and will never claim that status,” wrote Pradip Shrestha, a Newar, in the weekly Nepal Jargan. Accepting Shrestha’s view would mean giving up the “special arrangements for education, health and employment” that the Nepali Constitution promises for “economically and socially” disadvantaged janjati.

Advocates of the janjati movement challenge both the dictionary and constitutional terminology, arguing that the definitions could have been different had a janjati been represented in the team that came up with them. “A janjati status is more about a community’s social status than economic,” says sociologist and janjati activist Krishna Bahadur Bhattachar. (See page 3 also)
“This Dasain, don’t drink if you drive.”

The valley traffic police has stepped up breathalyzer tests on Kathmandu’s main arteries, motorcyclists and bikers on Pajeros are all tested.

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY . . . I think that was the darkest day of my life. That was the day I nearly made a mistake I won’t ever repeat again,” says Saurur Gurung, recalling a tragic moment that he said could have changed the lives of two of his friends. Saurur was at the wheel of a Toyota van with nine of his friends out on a midnight drive after a Dasain party. On the road to Bhaktapur, the van skidded and slammed into a pole. One of his friends died on the spot, the other in hospital. Saurur, a former airline manager, spent several months in hospital with a broken leg and head wounds and was lucky to get out of it alive. Saurur does not drink anymore and his message for everyone: “This Dasain, don’t drink if you drive.”

The Nepali festivities of Dasain and Tihar are times when more than half of the vehicle drivers at night will have taken more than the permissible level of alcohol, say the Police. This is the time of year when accident rates soar. More than three quarters of all accidents involving drunk drivers are fatal. “The problem is not that people can’t handle their drink, it’s that they’re driving drunk,” says SPS Kumar Koirala, Head of the Valley Traffic Police. “People just do not get it that drinking impairs driving judgement, especially if you are on a motor-cycle.”

The most high-profile drunken-driving accident this year was the one that allegedly involved Prince Pratap Shah and killed Pravas Gurung. More than 75 people have already died on valley roads since January and half of the accidents were because the drivers were under the influence of alcohol. In 1996, there were 104 fatalities in the Valley and while this figure has gone down steadily despite increased traffic the proportion of accidents blamed on inebriated drivers has gone up.

The valley traffic police has stepped up breathalyzer tests on Kathmandu’s main arteries and even higways on Pajeros are tested. Last week, we came across an all-too-familiar scene at New Road gate when a traffic officer on a motorcycle was arguing with the police in a shunted vehicle in addiction, “Just one peek. Look, I’m fine, I can drive,” by this time the police had confiscated his keys. Those caught driving under the influence are sent to the hospital for a check up, pay a fine of Rs. 200, and a fine amount on calling a relative. “One need not be dead drunk to cause accident,” says NP Koirala. “Impairment results in careless driving and speeding which is the most common errors drivers make.” While the officers are at work asking drivers to breathe into the breathalyzer at New Road gate, up ahead some motorcyclists in their 20s realize that there is a checking going on and zigzag off in another direction.

Deputy Artal of the Valley Police says the checks are to protect the public and the drivers themselves from harm. “Drivers under the influence of alcohol fear getting caught even more then they fear a fatal accident,” he told us. The irony of it all is that the breathalyzer tests are going on under the blinding moon overhead advertising vodka, whisky, and beers. Alcohol commercials were banned on television last year, but doesn’t seem to have dampened the Kathmandu citizen’s view of having what they think is a good time—especially with the festive season around the corner. The proliferation of disco, pubs and dance restaurants haven’t helped matters either. Says assistant sub-inspector Ram Chandu Bisita: “Drivers coming out of pubs and bars are more prone to the dangers of drunk driving than those coming from cultural celebrations.”

For Saurur Gurung, the physical scars have healed, but the mental scars of his accident remain. He has a final word of advice: “I was lucky. Not everyone is.”

NATION

Ganga and Tamuna

Ganga and Jamuna were joined at the head when they were born four months ago at the Eitra Rajai Laxmi Maternity Hospital in Thapathali. Their mother, Surendra Sinh, and father, Bhushan K.C., are from Paarthan, Sandhya had to undergo a caesarean, and the babies weighed only 3 Kg together. They have since grown into two healthy babies and have made steady progress to weigh nearly 10 Kg. Now a group of Nepali doctors led by noted neurosurgeon Dr. Upendra Shrestha have operated on the twins in the art-Singapore General Hospital to try to separate the twins. This is a case similar to the much-publicised one in Bengal in which Siamese twins joined at the abdomen will be separated by surgery, but only one of them will survive. Doctors say there is a chance that both Ganga and Jamuna will survive their operation. This is an extremely complicated case that demands extreme surgical care, and equipment that we don’t have in Nepal,” says Dr. Devkota. “We will be flying out to Singapore with the twins, their parents and his colleague, Dr. G.R. Sharma. The brains of Ganga and Jamuna are joined, and preliminary MRI scans done here showed that it would indeed be possible for an operation to separate them. Dr. Devkota consulted with his former colleague, Dr. Keith Goh, and with help from the Singapore government and Singapore Airlines it is now possible for everyone to fly to Singapore later this month to have the operation performed. But before that, Dr. Devkota and his team will have to come up with a three-dimensional reconstruction of the joined brain, check out the blood vessels in the brain that have to be cut and joined, and perform a computer simulated operation many times before they go for the actual thing. “All this would have not been possible if we did not have access to the most advanced equipment that they have at Singapore General,” Dr. Devkota told us. “But we are not going to take any chances, and a lot will depend on what the scans in Singapore show.”

Joshi hits army

Home Minister Govinda Hari Joshi resigned on 29 September, five days after a Maoist strike in Dolpo and Lamjung left at least 22 policemen dead. But Joshi went down fighting, blaming the military for sabotaging the government’s plans to modernise the police force with semi-automatic weapons and helicopters.

Until new arrangements are made, Deputy Prime Minister Ram Chandra Poudel will look after home affairs in addition to his portfolio as local development.

In a strongly worded pre-departure statement Joshi attacked the Royal Nepal Army for having stood by and watched the massacre of police by rebels. He said he had explained why the troops didn’t come to the aid of the beleaguered police garnison. “The army cannot dodge its responsibility in such situations,” he added. Joshi was slammed in the media of his own party, and the peace-making committee headed by Sher Bahadur Deuba, saying that the former prime minister appeared to be speaking as if he Maoist and not the government had formed his team. Also on 29 September, the Ministry of Defence—headed by the prime minister himself—issued a statement clarifying that the army was an inseparable part of government. The Defence Ministry’s statement was that Joshi’s departure could be associated more with his outbursts against the army than the Campo in Dolpo.

WFP food transport

A Royal Nepalese Airlines 757 with 179 passengers bound for London had to abort takeoff from Kathmandu airport Thursday morning when a large bird became sucked into the right engine, throwing the aircraft out of control. The UN agency says it began planning the shipment of food via Tibet two years ago and that this was the first time a “comprehensive agreement” to transport food aid was possible. The suppliers are to be used for the ongoing food-for-work scheme that is building a road connecting Simikot with Hilsa on the Nepal-Tibet border. Work on a 10-km section is to begin next month.

More birds hit aircraft

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Citizens want clean air

Following a petition by three activist groups seeking annulment of a recent Nepal-India agreement that allows Indian vehicle imports on the basis of self-certification, the Supreme Court has issued a notice to the government and the concerned departments. Pro-Public, Leaders Nepal and Martin Chautari claim the agreement reached during the recent visit of Prime Minister Ghasi Prasad Koirala in late July violates the Nepal Mass Emission Standards 2006 and is also against the citizens fundamental right to breathe clean air. Meanwhile, three groups involved in operating electric vehicles have formed an umbrella organisation called the Electric Vehicle Association of Nepal (EVAAN). The Association brings together the Electric Vehicle Manufacturers’ Association (EVMAN), the Electric Vehicle Owners’ Association (CLEAN) and the Electric Vehicle Battery Chargers Association (NEVCA).
After Duni

“Whatever may be laid down in the Constitution, the army of a democratic country cannot be anything but subordinate to the government.”

The government has to provide answers... (Editorial in Himal Khaharapatika, 2-3 October)

The Maoists succeeded in attacking... (District headquarters of Dolpo. They also succeeded in recruiting their immediate enemy, the police, in leading a bank and burning research books. The prime minister who assumed office six months ago after ousting his predecessor has failed to keep his word to bring Maoist violence under control and maintain peace.

To see one elected government after another fail to address the problems facing the country is a matter of concern, a bad omen for the nation and democracy. It is also a sign that the sovereignity of the people, the constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy are all facing problems. First, the prime minister has to assume responsibility for the current state of affairs. The main question is: why, even after six months in office, has nothing happened on the three issues he had outlined—good governance, corruption control and ending violence and maintaining law and order? It is time the people were provided with a clear answer and the answer must be backed by plausible reasons.

If the prime minister cannot deliver because of his own inability, or even lack of support within the party, he should not hesitate in stepping down. If there are other options, such as those being discussed in public—the role of the Royal Nepal Army, the Royal Palace or lack of laws—those too have to be brought out into the open. Democracy cannot be preserved single-handedly by Girija Prasad Koirala or the Nepal Congress or the UML. People do not believe this anymore.

Of late, members of the cabinet have begun saying (unofficially) that the Royal Palace and the army are not co-operating with the government in its efforts to control Maoist violence. Whatever may be laid down in the Constitution, the army of a democratic country cannot be anything but subordinate to the government.

If the Royal Nepal Army has been disarming the government and is placing hurdles in controlling the bloodshed that is taking place, there can be no greater misfortune for the nation.

It is the prime minister’s responsibility to rein in the army, if the army is disarming the government’s orders, the public has to be told and their help must be sought. But no government can pretend that everything is well and continue to push the nation further toward disastrous... (Only Sinha Dubrak is responsible for the lack of transparency till now. Hence it is Sinha Dubrak himself that should take the lead in changing that.)

Democracy threatened...

Within 48 hours of killing 14 policemen in Dolpo, the Maoists struck again and killed eight policemen in Lamjung. This proves how redundant the government has become. The present prime minister, while getting rid of his predecessor, had declared that he was going to concentrate on law and order. He has since time and again said there is no reason for him to remain in power if he cannot resolve the Maoist problem.

This festive season the people are frightened and scared instead of being joyous and happy. No one knows for sure who is going to be the next target of the Maoists. Not only in the outlying districts, even people in the Valley are scared. Those responsible for ensuring peace are busy looking for scapegoats.

The Maoists are always blamed on the army or the palace. The home minister has tried to place the blame for the present crisis on the army. Some are even trying to blame the palace for this. But the royalty can only survive if Nepal remains a nation and we are sure that the Cambodian example is still fresh in the minds of the palace. Therefore the palace would not dig its own grave.

The role of the army in any democratic nation is limited. The army steps in only if civil governance fails or if a natural calamity occurs. It has a role to play in situations like this, but regardless of how one views it, the Maoist problem cannot be called that. The Maoist problem is a political problem. Therefore a political solution has to be sought. If the army steps in, you will end up with a reign of terror, and that would be no solution. It would also scare away donors and again that is not the type of solution we want.

The prime minister had made noises about activating the National Security Council but that has been sidelined although the opposition is fully prepared to help him. He is in a fix. The cabinet is full of corrupt and inefficient people. He and his men don’t understand the gravity of the situation.

The Maoist insurgency has spread to over 28 districts and there is no sign that this is far from over. How many places can the army... (Secondly, there is no guarantee that the army will succeed. What will be the answer if it fails, what next?)

Democracy in Nepal is under threat. Not only the Maoists... (because of the people in power. We need efficient, clean and hard-working leaders. We need those who govern and... (above petty politics, someone who is humble, soft-spoken and understands the people. There are alternatives to Koirala within the Nepal Congress.)

Does Koirala want to destroy everything?

Not since the 1950 revolution has any district headquarters been captured by rebel forces. The overrunning of Dunai has changed that. Former prime minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai was prepared to talk to the Maoists and was preparing the groundwork when he was removed.

He was doing his best to bring the Maoists to the negotiating table and was succeeding at that. Koirala removed him and became prime minister, declaring that Bhattarai was inefficient, could not control corruption and there was insecurity in the country.

Koirala promised to check corruption, provide good governance and resolve the Maoist problem. The Dunai attack has proved that he has been unsuccessful and it is high time that he left office.

Around 1,000 rebels overran the village, 14 policemen were killed, another dozen or so taken hostage; a bank was looted, government offices destroyed and important documents were burnt. The police, it seems, had prior knowledge of the attack and yet were unsuccessful in holding their ground.

People feel that this is because of the inability of the prime minister to do anything. A committee has been formed to investigate the Dunai attack but everyone is sure nothing substantial is going to emerge out of that. The prime minister is to blame for this incident and there is no reason why he should not quit.

Army to help government...

Saptadevi Bisau, 29 September

Despite all the allegations, accusations and counter-accusations, the army has finally agreed to help the government to counter the Maoists. Immediately after the Maoist strike in Dunai, there were consultations between the prime minister, the home minister and the army and it was agreed that the army would help the government. The government had planned to mobilize the army to block the route leading out of Dunai for seven days, but on 27 September the army said it would not be able to do that now. The prime minister finally realized that he had to speak to His Majesty and in the evening he

he left office.

The army was cut to make the police and the administration dysfunctional. But that was only one side, the release of the army to help had created an entire new set of problems. Questions were asked as to why an army should be maintained if it doesn’t serve any purpose.

The army also has its own grievances. After the re-establishment of democracy, the Maoists had been accused of providing preferential treatment to the police. The army says that it is the inability of the police to uphold the law that ended up with it.

The army also says that the distortion of the army’s role in suppressing the 1990 movement does not help the army. A highly placed army source said that the Maoists have graduated from the very outset to becoming “state-sponsored terrorists,” and that is why the army has to step in. In many democracies the army has been deployed to control such rebellions; democracy will not be endangered if the army steps in, instead it can guard democracy.

The army says that the first time the army is about to step in. The military believes in doing what it is assigned to do, that is why it acts with authority and limits can be clearly spelt out before it becomes active. This could be done within a few days. Sources say that a pacification programme is also being prepared for the Maoist-hit areas and the role of the army may be only an assistance in the development process.

PM seeks army help...

Jana Awam, 29 September

Rather than lay the ground for negotiations, the government is preparing to mobilize the army, this may backfire in the long run.

A former unannounced feels that this will only lead to bloodshed and chaos. People from all walks of life feel that negotiation are the only way out. But the current prime minister is preparing for battle. At its meeting on 25 September the cabinet is preparing to mobilize the army to suppress the rebels. It is estimated that 1,000 rebels attacked Dunai and fought for almost six hours.

After losing the bank, the rebels said they had succeeded in their mission. The bodies were recovered by brothers and sisters and that the battle was only against the government. At Lamjung eight policemen were killed and nine were injured. The body was loot... (the local police station, the ranger post and the bank were destroyed. One reason for the attack on the village was to retaliate against the rape and murder of a Maoist worker.

"From the helicopter I saw a group of 60 or 70 terrorists and informed Kham... (Former Home Minister Govinda Raj Joshi accusing the army of not surrounding the rebels as it had been previously agreed, in Kathmandu, 29 September.)

"Whatever may be laid down in the Constitution, the army of a democratic country cannot be anything but subordinate to the government."... (The government has to provide answers... (Editorial in Himal Khaharapatika, 2-3 October)
Many listeners in Nepal who tuned in to the BBC's World Today re-broadcast from Radio Sagarmatha FM 102.4 were shocked to hear an e-mail letter being read out saying Nepal should be under international security. As word spread, the BBC, which was just facilitating the debate, was blamed for formulating the question wrongly. Said one senior official: 'What if Radio Nepal launched a debate saying the United States and Britain have the same language, culture and religion therefore they should be one country? Actually, there probably wouldn't be an uproar, and Robin Cook would probably not write a still note to Radio Nepal. The point was taken.

The Foreign Ministry's stiff statement on 26 September accused the BBC of 'hurting Nepali sentiments'. The people are proud and have shed their lives for preserving their identity and sovereignty,' a spokesman said with rhetorical flair. 'For us sovereignty and independence are sacrosanct.'

Sensing that it had picked up a red hot potato, the BBC quickly backtracked and changed the subject of the debate (see original web site, left, and the amended one, right). Nepal Times presents below selected excerpts from the debate, which show many comments actually favourable to Nepal's point of view.

"India has nothing to give that Nepal doesn’t have already."

While other parts of the Indian sub-continent have reeled under the rule of various colonial powers, Nepal has relented such powers in the past and should do so in the future. It is better to be a first class citizen of a poor country than a second class citizen of a rich nation. S. Sarker, Canada

The idea of Nepal being better off under India’s umbrella is superficial when there are many Indian states whose economic growth is as bad as Nepal’s if not worse. What Nepal badly needs is dedicated politicians or leaders who can offer concrete plans to India for the betterment of both nations. R. G. Ri, Nepal

From geographical and cultural view points, Nepal and India should have a stronger co-operative relationship in different fields. But this does not mean the invasion of one’s sovereignty by another neighbour. This debate itself is nonsense. M. G. Lee, Canada

"I am sick and tried of those people who only talk about pride, history and culture."

Many of the concerns raised by the two countries are well known to both. Nepal has always been a friendly neighbour and we can handle it if that way. Anyway, Indians can go there freely and trade today as there are no visa requirements or anything else of that sort. S. Sanyal, India

"Debating an Adelaye"

Nepal remains a misunderstood country where change seems to happen too rapidly for outsiders to understand. The Nepali people are proud and have shed their lives for preserving their identity and sovereignty, the spokesman said with rhetorical flair. ‘For us sovereignty and independence are sacrosanct.’ S. B. Datta, Nepal

Five million Indians are already in Nepal legally or illegally working. Nepal has to absorb the poor of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, who have no business opportunities. Furthermore, India despite being huge has never been friendly towards Nepal. It has imposed the ban of India goods on Nepal, and provided minimal economic assistance that is lower than the pre-taliban era. Its surplus has not with Nepal.

S. B. Datta, Nepal

Nepal remains a misunderstood country where change seems to happen too rapidly for outsiders to understand. The Nepali people are proud and have shed their lives for preserving their identity and sovereignty, the spokesman said with rhetorical flair. ‘For us sovereignty and independence are sacrosanct.’ S. B. Datta, Nepal

Nepal will not have to rely heavily on India since we are a landlocked country. Therefore, it is indeed a necessity that we stay in good terms with India. The great rat race in Nepal should be dealt with first, then only can we do something about our economy. S. G. Shrestha, Nepal

Nepal needs to remain an independent nation. India has nothing to give that Nepal doesn’t have already. Chris Callison, USA

Nepal is more or less a similar situation as India. Namely, poverty, illiteracy, poor infrastructure, medically backward. Two poor neighbours joining do not make a rich nation. What can two politically weak, economically poor, corruptly managed countries produce? N. K. Khadka, USA

There are quite a few states in North East India which were merged into India, and a few of them want to be independent again. If merging into India has not benefited these nations/states, I wonder how it will benefit Nepal. M. R. Khatri, UAE

I think Nepal and India should work together like the US and Canada, and find out what works economically for the benefit of both. G. K. Kohsagir, USA

Nepal has always enjoyed good relations with India, and the limited development that Nepal exhibits today is in no small part due to Indian assistance. Imagine the growth that Nepal could attain under the multifaceted Bangabandhu leadership is in India. Although it is unlikely that such a change in political structure would open fast, I believe that there is no doubt that an Indian state of Nepal has a much more future than the nation of Nepal. S. B. Sanyal, India

I agree that not only Nepal but other South Asian countries should come under one roof, like the EU. This will lead to an end of conflict and poverty. Bold decisions by strong leaders are required to achieve this. This can certainly increase security and prosperity in the region. S. R. Nishita, USA

Perhaps Nepal would be better off as part of India—but how would India benefit from such an arrangement? We Indians are trying to tame the smaller Asian nations like Nepal and Sri Lanka requesting our help. The war they need is then itself inducing India and coping up with China. My message to all Nepal solves your own problems. R. C. A. Nair, India

Nepal and Canada seem to have more in common than we thought. Despite the two have a “similar” culture, language and religion to our bigger European neighbours in the south, it is suggested that somehow we will be better off if we are simply democratic countries. Most Lalangians would argue we would only be assimilated and marginalized, and I think most Nepalis would agree. Our sovereignty was established long ago and we should retain and preserve it. P. D. O. Canada

Nepal and India share a lot of things in common but we are quite apart in many issues. The majority of Nepalese people seek a democracy under the sun but do not want the Indian umbrella over their head. D. Kumar, Nepal

Nepal has always been a friendly neighbour and we can handle it if that way. Anyway, Indians can go there freely and trade today as there are no visa requirements or anything else of that sort. S. B. Datta, India

Nepal is a country with its own religion, people and culture. It should try and be more politically at least to move some countries the India and try to stay away from extremist ideology. S. R. Aja, USA

As a sovereign and more or less democratic nation, Nepal has the right to decide its own future. It is not to the benefit of the Nepalis, why not? P. S. Nadia, India

The recent hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane from Katmandu is merely one of the many cases in which India's hostile neighbours have used Nepal's open border with India to undermine India's security. Since many Nepalis already work in India (legally and illegally) and India has a large number of Górka soldiers in its ranks, a confederation between the two countries is a good idea. F. B. India

Without strong ties with India, Nepal cannot prevail on its own. S. R. Dutt, Nepal

First and foremost, I think these countries should resolve their own problems (not to mention the nuclear chaos). Otherwise, Nepal is a beautiful country with mostly honest people there. It's a sovereign state and has the right to remain independent. R. C. A. Nair, USA

This is the 21st Century. All four countries are breaking up into small ones. Every nation is searching for its identity, Nepal has had its identity problems and we are in our own history and age. K. B. Chabba, Nepal

Closer ties to India is not a solution. India has actually been a negative factor in that development. While it is important to import working capital from India, the solution to India’s poverty is only going to come from internal reconstruction. The governments need to change, people’s attitude needs to change, we need a better education and health system and much more. S. D. Thapa, Nepal

It is stupid to say Nepal shares communities with India only. How about a country? Lots of Nepalis share the language and culture of Tibet. Why would these people want to merge with India and not with China? D. Prasannam, Nepal

Nepal is an independent country which will continue to exist in the world. As long as the Nepalese people are alive and have their lives preserved for their identity and sovereignty, our nation will continue to exist. S. B. Sanyal, India

The views expressed in this debate do not necessarily represent the views of the BBC. The BBC is an equal opportunities employer.
New bus/truck terminal for Kathmandu

A parking-loading terminal with a capacity to accommodate 700 trucks and buses is coming up at Tirthan, near the Kailali intersection on the Ring Road. The facility, which will be ready during Dasain, is being built by Kathmandu Parking, a private company which will also operate it and will have a multi-stored parking and terminal complex with ticketing counters, waiting rooms, fuel stations and wash facilities. Nepal Bank Limited is financing the project's first phase, which is expected to cost Rs 150 million.

ATMs at Grindlays

Nepal Grindlays Bank has commissioned five new full-service Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) in Kathmandu and Pokhara. Grindlays Access Cards holders can now make deposits, transfer funds between accounts, request mini-statements and chequebooks and cash withdrawals using the machines. The machines also allow Visa and MasterCards holders to withdraw money from their accounts abroad.

Grindlays, which paid Rs 135.6 million as dividends to shareholders in 1998/99, is also among Nepal's largest corporate taxpayers, having paid Rs 206 million in taxes in 1999/00.

RNAC extends aircraft lease

Royal Nepal Airlines has extended lease agreement with China Southwest Airlines to lease a Boeing 757-200, and signed on 26 September, a day before the existing three-month agreement would have expired.

The company's exports included Rs 37.9 million worth of detergent manufactured by Detergent Manufacturers' Association. The company has also doubled its ancillary industries being promoted by the company. The company has also doubled its toothpaste manufacturing capacity and dedicated two anilox units to produce detergent and to package tea. An interesting point to note is that all the 750 sqp packs bearing the Lever name sold in India are produced by Nepal.

Black & Decker appliances

Universal Trading Corporation has appointed the wholesale distributor of the Black & Decker range of appliances in Nepal. The US-based manufacturer is famous for its electric drill machines, which was invented in 1916 by the company. It markets and produces a range of home appliances, including drills that come in different configurations, shapes and capacity.

Necon’s frequent flyers

Necon has announced a frequent flyer programme called Necon Premier starting 1 October. The programme is open to all passengers between ages 16 and 65. The airline says it is also working on other give-aways for Necon Premium cardholders.

Qatar’s Adventure Club

Qatar Airways has announced an Adventure Club that would allow passengers to make use of special guidance and advice for leisure activities in Nepal from the Club’s London office and will be under added pressure this season because of its new twice a week Kathmandu-India connection.

More insurance companies

The Insurance Board has decided to award operating licences to four insurance companies and forward the applications to the Ministry of Finance for approval, reports said. Two companies—the American Life Insurance Company (ALICO) and Nepal Life Insurance Company (NLCI)—already have ministry approval but have not yet obtained the operating licences issued by the Insurance Committee. ALICO’s entry into the insurance market has been delayed by a lawsuit. NLCI was approved only last week.

Others waiting for ministry approval to join the life insurance business are Lami Life Insurance Company (promoted by the Khetan Group) and Kantipur Life Insurance Company (backed by the Birlas). By law the Insurance Committee recommends companies for ministry approval and it issues companies their operating licenses. Only 1.6 percent of Nepal's population has life insurance and those seeking coverage are expected to cross the half a million mark by 2005. By then, the Insurance Committee expects premium payments to total Rs 1.19 billion.

INTEREST RATE UPDATE

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GDP (Rupee) 175.20 175.20 175.20

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Average rate of 115% t/bill dipped slightly due to heavy bank's selling of government bonds. In coming weeks the average is expected to increase slightly due to heavy festival withdrawals. Expected range for coming weeks 4.0 to 5.00.

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The scapegoats of Dasain

When you see a mountain goat climbing into a three-wheeler for the first and last taxi ride of his life you can tell Dasain is here. At the Nepal Food Corporation outlet in Thapathali, mountain goats from southern Tibet are selling like, well, mountain goats from southern Tibet. At the Ring Road, truck upon trucks crammed with water buffalo have arrived. Goats are being guided out of the godowns, terrified sheep are dragged through the sidewalks. And some smaller Bokas are being hand-carried through the streets—all being prepared for the great massacre next week. It’s enough to turn even hardline carnivores into vegetarians.

But this is Dasain and animal sacrifices are a part of our culture, and the animal-buying spree is gathering steam in Kathmandu. There are four basic types of sacrificial livestocks. Khais (castrated goat) tops the list, followed by Boka (normal goat), Chyangra (Himalayan mountain goat) and sheep. The food corporation picks up its selection of Khais and Bokas from three major tarai markets of Lahan, Janakpur and Nepalgunj. The Chyangra and sheep are from China—an annual gift from the Peoples’ Republic to the Kingdom of Nepal for the festive season. The local suppliers get their animals from all over: North India, tarai, middle hills and the high mountain areas.

There are three major Khais—selling hubs in Kathmandu—Kalanki Khasi Bazar, Tukucha Khasi Bazar and the Nepal Food Corporation godowns in Thapathali. At the moment, it is difficult to tell which are more numerous, the Khais and Bokas on the human thronging to buy them. Since the early human gets the goat, there is a rush to find a healthy and plump animal since late-comers may have to be satisfied with ones that are a little under the weather, or haven’t fully recovered from car-sickness. The Chyangra and sheep sold at the Food Corporation have to take a two-day truck ride from the high plateau.

“The Chinese government has been very generous. We receive 2,000 Chyangra for free every year,” says Murari Prasad Adhikary, Bagmati Zonal Chief of the Food Corporation. On their way to the Valley, many get stuck along the Kodari Highway in Tapani and Barabise. The sheep and Chyangra are corralled in Thapathali and look distinctly homesick; it’s too hot for them here. “Due to health hazard and inability to cope with the weather conditions there was a high mortality rate, and the corporation has backed off from importing sheep,” says Adhikary. Although the animals are free, the Food Corporation makes a packet; it keeps a quarter of the income from sales, minus the transport cost and send the rest (which usually amounts to about Rs 3 million) to the national coffers.

There are still some in Kathmandu who prefer sheep. “It’s not necessary that sheep buyers turn up only during Dasain season. The Kage bheda is a popular sacrificial sheep and the demand remains stable throughout the year,” says Mahendra Thapa at Tukucha Khasi Bazar. “But we only keep a few of them since it’s hard to take care of them.” The price is determined according to the demand of the livestock. The Food Corporation for instance averages its expenditures and the local market price. “Ours is always slightly lower than the local market. This helps maintain a standard price as the private sellers are compelled to fix reasonable rates,” Adhikary says. However, local sellers like Mahesh Shrestha of Kalanki Khasi Bazar believe that their prices are just as reasonable. “We give our buyers the best goats and the best deal while at the Corporation there’s no such guarantee that one can get a healthy goat according to the price you pay,” he says. The main issue is whether the animal you buy is healthy or is suffering from infections. The best way to find out if the animal is healthy is to pick up the animal by its tail—if it lets out a bleat don’t buy it. “The healthiest ones are those that run away when you approach,” says Purna Dongol, a veteran Boka buyer at Kalanki. Boka buyers who have some space for the goats to roam at home buy early to nab the healthy ones. This way the animals also get a few last days of peace and quiet and can munch on some juicy grass before facing the guillotine. But many wait to buy till Phalgun (4 Oct) or even Phruwadi (5 Oct) a day before the actual sacrifices start on Asthami (5 Oct) and Navami (6 Oct).

Many of the animals lay down their lives in front of cars, buses, and motorcycles. Royal Nepal Airlines has a standing order for about 150 goats, the bigger ones are sacrificed in front of the nose wheel of Boeing 757s to appease appropriate gods. This year, there will be added demand from private airlines which have bought new planes. The Food Corporation is selling Khais and Bokas under the same category at Rs 11.3 per kg (Rs 110 last year) and Chyangra at Rs 120 per kg (Rs 101 last year). Khais bazaars at Tukucha and Kalanki have more subtle classifications: The hill pahade bokas (short ear, sharp horns) are sold at Rs 120 per kg while the tarai and Indian madhesi bokas (lean, long ears and legs, curled horns) are sold at Rs 128 per kg. The favourite scapegoat is the black Aloo which sells at Rs 120 per kg and the brown and white ones at Rs 110 per kg. “The black ones are very popular sacrificial goats and therefore their prices are a bit high,” says Thapa. The Kage bheda, also a popular sacrificial animal, has a price range up to Rs 250 per kg. A total of 10,000 Khais and Bokas and 2,000 mountain goats are expected to be sold in this year’s Kathmandu bazaar this Dasain. The Khais and mountain goat counter at the Food Corporation at Thapathali is open 7am-7pm Tel: 246399,228365. The Khais bazaars in Kalanki by the Ring Road and the Tukucha in Pulchabadi operate from dusk till dawn.
there are 850 species of birds found in Nepal, more than the entire continent, and bird watchers from around the world are flocking to them in ever greater numbers.

The terrain rises to nearly 9,000 metres—all within 100 km as the lannerflyer flies. Of the species found in Nepal, about 620 breed and live in Nepal, another 124 breed in the neighbourhood but live in Nepal in significant numbers, and then there are another hundred open migrant species that fly through Nepal in short long-range migrations from Siberia to Africa, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. And it is these migrations that yield some of the most amazing stories of birds in the Himalaya. The playful Himalayan choughs, for instance, have been seen by mountaineers soaring at altitudes of nearly 8,000 metres above the South Col below the summit of Mt Everest. George Shaller in his book, *Stones of Silence*, reports bar-headed geese being seen at an incredible 9,375 metres above the Himalaya. Even that was a fluke, and the flock was lifted by an updraft in the jet-stream, there are plenty of regular sightings by mountaineers of bar-headed geese honking their way past Dhunlagiri at 7,300 metres.

Some of these geese (karyakhurang) are known to take off from spring from the banks of the Rapit River in the Royal Chitwan National Park, head due north and reach their cruising altitude by the time they arrive at the Himalayan wall. They fly on non-stop to the Siberia-bound terns and storks, and the flippity finch larks. It is when you can swing your binoculars to focus quickly and whisper: “rufus-necked laughing thrush” that you know you have arrived into the fascinating world of Himalayan bird watching. But habitat destruction is a worry. Bharat Basnet, the Managing Director of The Explore Nepal Group which runs the Kush Tappu Wildlife Camp, has tried to get local schools into bird watching so that they can work as guides and benefit from bird-watching tourism. “What is more important then a specific species is the habitat. If the habitat is preserved then all the inhabitants will be protected,” Bharat told us.

Even if you are stuck in Kathmandu, there are some fabulous bird-watching areas nearby. If Nepal is a treasure house of biodiversity, then Phulchoki Hill south of Kathmandu is Nepal’s bird and butterfly vade. Deforestation along the margins of this once-protected broadleaved forest, blasting in a nearby marble quarry and raucous picnicakers have spoilt the atmosphere somewhat, but Phulchoki is still alive with birds. The peak soars to 3,000 metres and has...
North American and Alexanderine parakeet are returning.

Nepal's rich bird diversity is also drawing international avian conferences to Kathmandu, like this month's International Galliformes Symposium during which more than 100 bird watchers and scientists from around the world have gathered to devise strategies for conservation of six of the world's 22 pheasant species found in Asia. The symposium plans to identify new areas for conserving pheasant habitats in Nepal, and have set their eyes on the Pilar region near Ghana in the Annapurna region. This area is at 1,400-3,300 metres and was made famous to bird watchers by long-time Pokhara resident, Colonel Jimmy Roberts. An enthusiastic bird watcher and collector, Roberts donated his entire collection of pheasants, falcons, pigeons, and several other smaller species to the Faltari Resort's aviary in Pokhara before he died two years ago. The Pilar region has six species of Himalayan pheasants found in Nepal as well as their lowland cousins, the blue peafowl and the red jungle fowl.

Amit Bahadur Karhi, who was on a pheasant surveying team in Pilar, says the place is full of Himalayan musk, blood pheasants and other common species. “One day we heard the faint calls of the rare crested pheasant,” says Amit, describing the distinctive guggle of this pheasant. The cheer and the swamp frankolin have not yet been included in the endangered list even though they are threatened. Hunting has now been banned in Pilar and the local community is helping to conserve the Himalayan snowcocks, chaker partridges, and the cheer and the koklas pheasants. The Annapurna area is home to half of Nepal's bird species. Another bird watcher's paradise is the Makalu Barun National Park and Conservation Area in the northeast. This rarely visited park reserves a total of 440 different species of birds, of which fourteen are rare eastern breeders.

Loss of forests, wetlands and grasslands are a threat to Nepal's bird diversity. Areas like Phulchoki, Ghodaghodi lake in the western terai and Mai Valley in the east have not yet been declared protected areas. There is a move to declare Phulchoki and Chandragiri ranges nature sanctuaries, but that may take time. In the past 15 years, forests in Nepal's midhills have returned, and with them many of the resident and migratory birds. What worries conservationists is that tara forests are disappearing fast, and this is where most bird species are. When the hardwood forests go,
BROTHER IS WATCHING

From credit card slips to video surveillance cameras, almost everything we do in our daily lives is watched by someone. Privacy on the net is getting harder to maintain.

ANTONY BARNETT IN LONDON

From the moment you wake up tomorrow, every movement you make will be tracked by somebody, somewhere. Walk to your car, turn on your computer at work, visit the local supermarket—all will be noted by cameras or databases deep in the bowels of corporate HQs and within shadowy government agencies.

Already these databases are bulging with intimate details of every facet of our private lives. Your eating habits, hobbies, whether you have children or prefer Hindi songs or hip-hop—your tastes, preferences and passions have all been downloaded. Never in the history of mankind has personal privacy been harder to secure.

Simon Davies, head of watchdog group Privacy International, says: “Government and corporations are desperate to turn the world into villages where everybody knows everything about you. Everything you do ever done will soon be available at the touch of a button.”

Now switch on cable TV: companies are eagerly taking note of your favourite programmes and what time you’re at home. Maybe they’ll offer a personal loan with the bank they’ve just got into bed with.

As you head outdoors, stepping over the junk mail piling up on the doormat, it won’t be long before a CCTV camera’s unblinking eye will capture part of your journey on tape. And if you drive to work it won’t just be the police’s speed cameras that make sure you’re rarely out of sight for long. Filling up with petrol may mean you are being listened to as well as being watched.

BP was forced to admit a couple of years ago that it uses secret microphones to listen to the private conversations of millions of petrol station customers. Hidden bugs in forecourt shops are picking up every word uttered.

If you think arriving at work provides a sanctuary from prying eyes, then think again. Swiping your corporate security card through a barrier on your way to the office tells your boss what time you arrived and what time you leave. The moment you log on to your computer is the point when personal privacy really disappears. Emails, as we should all know by now, are not private or secure. The number of employees being stuffed after the boss has read a flattering email continues to grow. Last summer Kwik Fit sacked two workers who were having an affair after their erotic emails were intercepted by management.

Philip Ryan is a consultant from Peapod, which helps companies spy on workers suspected of wrongdoing. He said: “Everything an employee does while logged on to a work computer can be watched. The emails that are sent, the websites that are visited. It is difficult to keep secrets on the internet.”

Described as ‘dataveillance’, the ability to track people by monitoring the shadow they cast in data is now big business.

What’s more, there are now hundreds of downloaded programmes that secretly snip inside PCs. A programme called SurfMonkey, which is supposed to protect children surfing the Net, but as well as stopping children accessing porn sites it collects information, including users’ phone numbers and email addresses.

Some companies are using ‘track bugs’ that hide computer codes behind images only a pixel in size on your computer screen to gather information about your web surfing habits.

Effectively, this means an invisible dot on your screen is watching every move you make. These dots mine information about who owns the site you are surfing as well as details about your computer. “They are a secret way of gathering information about someone,” said David Banias, a civil liberties expert from the Electronic Privacy Information Centre (EPIC) in Washington.

These bugs work best in conjunction with ‘cookies’—devices that loop on to your hard drive the first time you visit a particular website. They are your own personal calling card and identify you next time you visit the site, but they also record what sites surfers come from and trace what sites they go to and how long they spend online. This detailed profile of a computer user is highly valuable marketing information which can be sold to other on-line advertisers. According to EPIC, 86 out of 100 tested online companies work with cookies.

But it is not just corporations eager to enhance their profits that are keen to survey your personal internet traffic.

Last week in the UK, the Regulation of Investigatory...
**Peking Duck vs Kentucky Chicken**

Catering to local palates, KFC launched spicy chicken burgers and wings which sold so well that McDonald’s was pressured to introduce its own even-more-spicy chicken wings.

Zedong’s regime (1949-1976), in Deng Xiaoping’s era of openness and reforms has China successfully embraced every new and advanced, from mobile-telephone technology to foreign fast-food chain.

KFC opened its first restaurant in Beijing in 12 years ago. Today, there are 300 KFC outlets in near 90 cities across China. A survey of 10,000 people carried out by food chain KFC and McDonald’s, defying cliched perceptions of being conservative and biased towards foreign products.

“At first, going to KFC and McDonald’s was more about ‘pranks than tasting the food,” says Han Guangyuan, a middle-school teacher in Shenzhen. Then people realized because it is convenient, clean and they have learned to enjoy the food.”

After years of imposed isolation during the Mao

**US runs out of patience in Indonesia**

**India-Russia ‘strategic partnership’**

CODERED - Sri Lanka’s UNP is gearing up for elections next month with the two main rivals running neck and neck, amid expectations by some that voters may have to give yet another verdict. Battled by military losses against Tamil Tiger rebels and public anger over rising prices, Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaratunga’s People’s Alliance (PA) is still seen to have a slight edge over the main opposition United National Party (UNP).

A UNP win could create complications because it would then have to work with the country’s real opposition leader, Kumaratunga. The UNP has said it would clip the wings of the president if it wins the poll. But the PA says it cannot be done and the president would remain the all-powerful head of government as provided by the new constitution.

Fears have also been expressed by the international community that polls on 10 October to elect a new 22-member parliament, would be marred by growing violence that is undermining one of the dying world’s oldest democracies.

Most political analysts expect the PA to win the most seats in parliament, but not enough to form a government on its own. “We may be faced with a hung parliament for the first time. Whichever party is able to form a government, will have a fragile coalition that may be forced into elections before its term is over,” said Kiththith Bandaranaike of the Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Both the PA and the UNP, led by former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, are offering to find a political solution to the 17-year-old ethnic war in the north and continue with economic liberalization.

A major contender in the poll is the left-wing People’s Liberation Front, better known by its acronym JVP, which is becoming popular with young voters. Analysts expect a large chunk of the undecided voters, estimated by some to be 40 percent of the total electorate. Despite its involvement in two bloody revolts against the government in the 1980s and 1990s, the JVP is now an influential democratic political force.

**B’desh takes India's place in Sierra Leone**

UNITED NATIONS - Bangladesh has offered 800 troops to replace a large part of the Indian contingent pulled out of the beleaguered UN peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone.

The proposed withdrawal of the Indian troops—numbering over 3,000—created a virtual crisis for the UN. The mission had begun scrambling for new troops to up its peacekeeping mission in the West African nation.

Bangladesh has offered 800 troops with the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). If Secretary-General Kofi Annan accepts the offer, the two additional infantry battalions could bring the total number of Bangladeshi soldiers in Sierra Leone to about 2,600 making it the second largest contingent after Nigeria.

The UN withdrawal was primarily blamed on the growing tension between the UNAMSIL Commander, Major-General Way Jelley of India and his deputy, Brigadier General Mahomed Gabbar of Morocco. But India’s official position is that the withdrawal is a routine rotation of its troops.

Currently, there are 32 countries providing troops to UNAMSIL, (the five largest contributors being Britain, 3,200 troops, India, 3,073, Jordan, 1,803, Bangladesh 776, and Guineas 785). Although Britain has sent in some of its paratroopers to Sierra Leone to rescue its nationals caught in the crossfire, it has refused to send any British soldiers in UNAMSIL. The United States, on the other hand, has kept away from most of the UN peacekeeping missions ever since 18 of its soldiers killed in Somalia in the early 1990s.
THE SPACE ODYSSEUS

The principal baddie in Arthur C Clarke's new sci-fi novel is HAL the magnesium media tycoon who invents WormCams to get the news the instant it happens.

Arthur C. Clarke

Mayfield, now dead, whom he met while living in Florida in the 50s. Asked whether he is gay, Clarke always answers in the same pocoholic pro forma answer: "No, merely cheerful." The answer, presumbably, lies in the "Clarke's"—a vast collection of his manuscripts and private writings, to be published 50 years after his death. Like most brilliant obsessives Clarke was not, one suspects, an easy person to live with. Since growing up on a farm in Minivaddum in some Clarke has become exceedingly famous. He has written more than 80 novels, which have sold 50 million copies. Back in 1945, aged 28, he wrote an essay for Byte's that was about the space race, moon landings, geostationary satellites, spinors and even e-mail itself—seems unfathomable. These days, though, in the context of a generation that has lost interest in space travel, one can't help thinking that the technology he has helped to create has in some way enabled him. "The last thing I wrote was a little squib of 500 words. It isn't even easy to write because I spend so much time dealing with emails. And then he goes off to bed. (The Guardian)

Fire and water: water canons and molotov last week as police battle protesters in Prague. Not all protesters were violent.

WAKING THE BEAST

WASHINGTON, D.C.-President George W. Bush and Al Gore on November 7 will be decided by a handful of votes in a body called the electoral college. The presidency is settled not by a national tally of Ballots cast for president against the “popular vote”—but by a state-by-state contest in which the winner in each state collects all of that state’s electoral votes in the electoral college is equal to its members in the US House of Representatives and the Senate combined. So a state’s representation in the house is based on its population, while each state has two senators. California has the most electoral college votes, with 54. The total number of electoral votes of the electoral college is therefore 270 electoral college votes are required to win the presidency. The effect of the electoral college is brutal, especially for voters in smaller states. This state doesn’t care one bit about who is president in this country. (The Guardian)

OPEC looks beyond markets

CARACAS - The final declaration at the end of the second-ever Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) summit in the oil cartel’s 40-year history, promising full implementation of its 11 member countries “to seek new and effective channels of dialogue between oil producers and consumers, for the purpose of market stability, the transparency and consistency of the world economy.”

But the delegations to the meeting, held in the midst of international pressures against high crude prices, also concentrated on issues outside of oil, including demobilizing unrest and development matters.

The biggest environmental tragedy facing the globe is human poverty. “OPEC looks beyond markets so that it is a really a globalised nations matter.” The document, as known as the Caracas Declaration, expresses OPEC’s worries about the consequences of the Kyoto Protocol, a United Nations convention that establishes guidelines for reducing coal consumption.

The protocol’s principal goal is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, based on 1990 levels, by five percent between 2008 and 2012. This would imply a sharp reduction in the rising demand for petroleum. Oil prices are on the brink of $60 a barrel, up from $8 a barrel in 2001. OPEC’s revenues would cause a drop in demand of 6.5 million barrels a day and a loss of $23 billion in export losses, according to the organisation’s General Secretariat.

The leaders stressed the importance of creating conditions so that oil-dependent economies can diversify their sources of revenue. Concerning development, OPEC said in its declaration signed Thursday that the entire world is in a crisis that could lead to civil war, and calls on the nations of the industrialised North to take part in reforms. The oil cartel also announced that it would continue to efforts to fight illegal oil trading, adding that the OPEC Fund for International Development, which has provided $5.6 billion in resources since its creation in 1976. (WSJ)

WADA wholeheartedly welcomes the decision of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) on the future of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) as of January 2007. WADA has decided to not pursue its on-going investigations into the 2006 Winter Olympic Games in Turin. The Agency has no further mandate to carry out these investigations and will now focus on the next steps in the establishment of the new body, the Independent Commission, which has been established to bring about a new era of clean and fair Olympic sports. WADA will continue to work closely with the IOC and the independent Commission to ensure that the new body is appropriately constituted and funded, and that the new body is fully independent and transparent. WADA will continue to support the independent Commission's work and will provide it with advice and guidance as necessary. (The Guardian)

The Ballt of Prague

PRAUGE - S26, code for September 26—was a date in the diaries of people the world over concerned about what the policies of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) are doing to the world’s poor. Twenty years ago, the fall of the Berlin Wall was a day of celebration for the world. Organisation meeting in Seattle. Protesters then blocked the delegates’ hotels, and stopped the meeting from going ahead, at least for a few hours.

Could they do the same in Prague? Just after 7 am on S26 I stroll round the corner from my modest pension to the Prague Hilton. Dozens of police are there but not a protest sight. I walk through a cordon set up by its usual annual business to a 7.30 am press conference that the S26 organising, the Initiative Against Economic Globalisation, the protest umbrella, had called. Amazingly there are no protesters on the march. A young Norwegian woman explains the tactics. Non-violent marches will start from a city square mid-morning and head for the Prague Hilton, which houses the Bank and the IMF. Other marches will start at different places in the city and all converge on the centre at about 1 pm. The idea, she explains, is to prevent delegates from leaving the hotel.

Walking to the start of the main march, I join a group from the north of England who had arrived overnight to take part. "I was inspired by what happened in Nod House Park last weekend. It showed people can do it." In a grizzly square the protesters assemble. A band is playing, a group is performing street theatre, there's a good humoured, carnival-like atmosphere, and a huge balloon read: “Ban the IMF.” Police keep a discreet distance. Helicopters circle overhead.

"Drop the debt” barriers are prominent. The march begins. Around 5,000 strong at this point. Many are singing and dancing, the world’s photographers are snapping up the action. But the marchers are approaching the long Nusle bridge which leads to centre, the mood becomes sombre. Leading the march are about 200 people, many of them italians who seem, dressed in white boxer suits, with car foam on their arms and gas masks round their necks. At 12.30 am they arrive at the bridge. The police presence is no longer discreet. A line has been drawn. Behind the line are armoured tanks and hundreds of police, shoulder to shoulder in riot gear. Facing them are the white suits and the car face, perfectly symmetrical, seems of the rich and the poor. Just after 1 the police order the marchers to disperse. The order is met. (The Guardian)

Fighting for Belgrade

PODGORICA - The power struggle between incumbent President Slobodan Milosevic and his liberal challenger has dominated the headlines, but the question of who really holds power in the Yugoslav federation is far more complicated that just deciding who occupies the president’s chair. Milosevic’s presidency is largely representative. The power of the current incumbent, Slobodan Milosevic, allows him to control the media, and his control of the media is not just limited to the state-owned media. In addition, Milosevic has used his control of the media to suppress opposition candidates and keep them from running for office. This has led to a lack of democracy in the country, and has allowed Milosevic to remain in power for so long. (The Guardian)
IFAD ready to work in Maoist areas

The International Fund for Agriculture Development has so far spent over $90 million in Nepal, mainly in projects implemented by the government.

IFAD officials recently visited the districts where the beleaguered kanya families have been living to assess the situation. They “saw a similar situation when India abolished press labour in the 1970s. We learnt then that going in fast and creating employment guarantee helps,” says Roy, adding that there is a need to help those in the poor is possible anywhere. He himself worked from India’s northeast where the IFAD is working in insurgency-hit districts. IFAD is a small UN organisation with three major Small Farmer Development and Production: Credit for Rural Women (PCRW).

“The PCRW was a star project in the sub-region because it helped us recognise women as change agents, while the small farmer programme was the first that introduced the concept that poor were bankable,” says Roy.”

IFAD has so far spent over $90 million in Nepal, mainly in projects implemented by the government. Among them is the Hill Leasehold Forest Project, which seeks to help people that

“…we learnt then that going in fast and creating employment guarantee helps.”

follow once it gets a foothold. “We’ve taken it long since small because we found out that we needed deeper understanding of the socio-economic processes there. We hope that poor economies can grow by using resources in sustainable ways to improve the lives of the poor.”

“I want to thank all the members of IFAD for their collaboration. We are working with them to ensure that the poor are provided with the necessary support.”

Not Hindu enough

For long, the shaven-headed western adherents of the Hare Krishna movement have had to content themselves with praying to Pashupati from a distance. They are not allowed within the temple premises on the grounds that one is born a Hindu and conversion to Hinduism is not recognised by the shastras. Now it seems that being born a Hindu is not enough to enter the holiest Hindu shrine in Kathmandu; you have to be born in Nepal or in India. At least that was the reason provided by authorities at Pashupati while denying entry to 11 Hindus from Indonesia last week.

The 11 Indonesians from the predominantly Hindu province of Bali were in Nepal as part of a pilgrimage tour that started from India. “Their documents clearly show that they are born Hindus, and that should have been sufficient to gain them entrance to the shrine of their faith,” said a furious Bishwesh Shrestha, the Nepal tour operator who organised the trip.

Having faced problems earlier at the Pashupati gates with other Indonesians, Shrestha had sought the advice of the World Hindu Federation (WHF). The WHF told him that since the pilgrims were born in India, they shouldn’t have any problem at all. But when the group reached Pashupati in the morning, they were turned back.

Shrestha and his clients returned in the afternoon with a letter addressed to the Mul Bhatta, the chief priest, at Pashupati requesting that the Indonesians be allowed to enter the temple. But the temple authorities not only refused to recognise the WHF’s endorsement but, according to Shrestha, the Mul Bhatta also said that the WHF is a Bombay organisation and not a Nepal one and as such did not recognise its authority to make any recommendation. As for the Indonesians, it was said that they could not be allowed in because they were not born either in Nepal or in India.

The issue is the basis of the official documents they carried. The documents identified them as Hindus, which we thought should be enough to let them into the temple,” said Keshav Prasad Sapkota of the WHF. Indonesia has advisory status in the current executive body of the World Hindu Federation.

Tour operators like Shrestha are expecting 300-400 Indonesian Hindus in the coming three months. But they fear that if the pilgrims are not allowed to enter Pashupati it will certainly put a damper on their religious enthusiasm.

Anti-poverty TV

That the biggest disaster of all doesn’t come from the sky, the sea or the earth, but from poverty.

I spent several days this week, wading through the shallow water along the highways of India’s West Bengal state. That’s right, wading. As viewers of BBC television will know, it’s flood season again in Eastern India and Bangladesh.

That phrase, “flood season,” is something I often use with cynicism when my colleagues at the BBC in London call to ask me about reports of deaths of people dead or thousands displaced in the low-lying regions of South Asia.

“Oh it happens every year,” goes the refrain in a cynical tone. “Too much monsoon rain and you have a flood.” Usually I lose the argument and go forth gathering into the flooded areas to report for my bosses at the BBC, I used to talk about something called “Natural Disaster Television”, a channel given over to storms, fires, floods, earthquakes and calamities in general. Fellow journalists faced such an idea, and made copious offers of seed capital to start up the service. My colleagues in the humanitarian aid business were probably appalled by such merriment at the expense of the suffering masses, and I don’t blame them.

I suppose my cynicism, unfeasible really, came from the limited ways in which one can cover such events for the mainstream media, especially TV news. The dash to the scene of devastation often makes the reporter seem a hero, bearing relief for the hungry, unhealthy and deprived. In reality, all we can ever offer those whose misery we cover is a few minutes of airtime that might help international agencies raise money. Recently, I started to take a holistic view, if you like, of natural disasters and the relationship with poverty.

Perhaps I am stating the obvious, but it seems to me that the biggest disaster of all doesn’t come from the sky, the sea or the earth, but from poverty. And that is an invention of the human race. When an earthquake hits Kobe, Japan, or California, lives and livelihoods are indeed devastated. But revisit the scene a few months down the line, and people are restored to normalcy - often on their own with without much government help, because the community and solidarity to rebuild. Poverty denies people many of those things. A marginal life without savings can end with the simple flooding of a subsistence crop, or the loss of cattle in a big storm. Families become beggars or day labourers, orphaned children enter prostitution. Communities cease to exist. What’s the bigger disaster? Certainly not the one we are covering with our sonorous tones and my face in front of a flooded village. I am accused on occasion, and rightly, of flippancy. But I am deadly serious in proposing “The Poverty Channel”. Change the name if you like, but let it stand. How else can we afford to afford the comfortable of this world with the challenges that surmount us? I’m not suggesting an endless stream of televisual images of malnourished children with bulging bellies, or the hungry walking for handouts in sub-Saharan Africa. We cover acute crises well enough already. Why, do we rarely do is look at the aftermath, ways of preventing the success stories. There are some out there. The Poverty Channel would be given over to a mix of positive and negative. We need to show that some things work if not brilliantly and consistently, then occasionally. Micro-credit, local democracy, simple health and education reforms, ensuring women to play a fuller role, reforming police, curtailing corruption, the list is not endless and bad things to say about each item.

I’m not starry-eyed about the effects of television on bad situations. Too often it comes across as a way of understanding just how good the middle classes of the world have it. But can it be hard to show that people can improve their lives, along with vivid illustrations of their achievements? Can it hurt to show the poor are people, not just statistics, victims and illustrations of political points? Ideas and emails, and seed capital, all welcome.
When the Nepalis contingent arrived back from Sydney on 3 October there was nothing to celebrate. As expected all the five Nepalis crashed out of competition in the first round of their respective events. The Nepali athletes had gone to the world’s best with a month and a half of training. Mekal C. Gurung bettered his timing before leaving for Sydney, Gyan Bahadur (left) had been confident that he would break the existing national record in 5000m (14.34:43). And he did it with a timing of 14.31:15. Ramsi improved her own national record by clocking 31.28 in 50m freestyle. Her previous record was 31.79. To her credit, Ruma came third in her first round heats, finishing ahead of swimmers from Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Iraq. Chitra Bahadur also did better shaving 0.26 seconds of his earlier timing of 27.28. But the performances of sprinter Devi Maya Paneru and shooter Bhagwati K.C.’s performances were below par. National record holder Devi had a poor run in 100m. Her timing of 12.74 sec at Sydney was far better than her 12.73 sec in 10m air rifle. Bhagwati K.C. could score only 486, compared to her personal best of 488. Sydney 2000 will, however, be remembered for the athletes’ performance. It stays in memory for long it will be for the number of Nepali sports officials that went to Sydney. Twenty-one officials accompanied the five players. The top brass of the Nepali Sports Council and the Nepali Olympic Committee were there in full strength. Despite their protestations that the trip was necessary to gain exposure and experience, it was clear that the Olympics was nothing more than a junket for most of the officials. And if proof was needed, the website of the Games provided it. A random screen of www.olympics.com showed two of them figure as assistants in water polo, a sport that is not played in the country. Of those two, Ajay Rana is a media director associated with National Sports Council and Dhruva Thulshima is the vice-chairman of the Nepali Olympic Committe. In the end Sydney 2000 only credited the image Nepali sportsmen had managed to build up with the successful hosting of the 1999 South Asian Federation Games. Beginning with the bickering among members of the Nepali contingent and the shameful attempt to provide the athletes with aittance of a daily allowance according to what the top officials allocated for themselves, Nepali sports is a long way off from the professionalism required for world-class performance. And it is obvious who is to blame—the sports bureaucracy. As for our players, at least they went out and gave their best. ♦

### HOW DID OUR PLAYERS FAIR?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>event</th>
<th>overall performance</th>
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<tr>
<td>Runa Pradhan</td>
<td>50m freestyle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chitra Bahadur Gurung</td>
<td>50m freestyle</td>
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<td>Devi Maya Paneru</td>
<td>100m sprint</td>
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<td>Gyan Bahadur Bohara</td>
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<td>Bhagwati K.C.</td>
<td>10m air rifle</td>
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Prevent muscle vibration, and compression features are built into swimmers’ gear for the same reason. Weightlifters’ costumes in Sydney were coated with slippery Teflon and strengthened with Kevlar; that helps the bar slide over the lap better while giving a point on the chest to rest the barbell on. Compression suits with rounder outer soles and asymmetric shoes for fencers, whose feet and backs need different levels of support. Another shoe improvement is the Z-spike, said to offer better grip than sharp spikes in track events. Within their shoes, many runners and jumpers have opted for a fibre “performance plate” that stabilises the joints in the instep. Cyclists have also been helped by carbon fibre. Bikes used for both the time trials in Sydney and the Tour de France were developed by Pinarello at the Ferrari design works in Maranello, the same workshop that builds the chassis for Formula One racing cars. ♦

### Hi-tech games

Rather than physical condition, advanced materials have been the little-noticed key to many Sydney Games successes. Manufacturers and research laboratories have poured huge amounts of money into the Games to show off their inventions. Take the body suits, which have provided a second skin for competitors as diverse as divers, swimmers and cyclists. Ian Thorpe, swimmer Ian Thorpe and cyclists Ian Ulrich and Lance Armstrong.

Carton clothing has almost completely given way to synthetic textiles in test winds and hydraulic basins. Best known are the scaly surfaces of the new swimsuits, which imitate sharkskin and reduce drag. The athletes’ suits comprise five layers and are designed to cut air drag and retain the optimum amount of body warmth. Throwers wear compression suits to

### OLYMPIC BRIEF

Sydney测试 gets Olympic cup

The Beijing Games of 2008 and New Delhi’s 2010 Commonwealth Games will see the Sydney 2000 Olympic Cup in acknowledgement of their outstanding contribution to the huge success of the Millennium Games which wind up Sunday. Speaking at the international Olympic Committee session, IOC boss Juan Antonio Samaranch praised the organisation, transport and crowds in Sydney and said the locals expected a joyous final day of play had earned them the cup. Samaranch noted the long jump final duel between Australian Jai Taurima and eventual champion Cuban Ivan Pedroso showed a real example of fair play. “Before the cup was jumping, all the people in the stadium were shouting for him,” he said. “For that reason, the IOC is proposing to award the Olympic cup to the people of Sydney.” IOC director general Francesco Carrati said the cup was “an important gesture to compliment the people.” The Olympic cup is given at the end of each year to an individual or a group of people who have made outstanding contributions to the Olympic Movement. ♦

### Games of the dames

Women were banned from the first modern Olympics and were treated as poor relations for decades after, but not in Sydney, which is being ranked as the most feminine Games ever. The growing attention paid to women’s sports and the record number of women attending have made these Olympics the “Games of the Dames.”

Women’s participation still lags markedly on the boards of management of sport, despite one Sydney first. When the Games concluded on Sunday, the Sydney International Olympic Committee’s (IOC) senior vice president, Anita Delfrantz will then be only a heartbeat away from the top job. The front-runner for the IOC’s top job would take over if anything happened to Juan Antonio Samaranch before his successor is elected on 16 July in Monaco. The election of Sweden’s Gunilla Lindberg has meanwhile brought a second woman at last into the 15-member IOC executive board.

It has been a long and difficult battle for women over the years. The Australian hosts have deliberately put the focus on these Games as the centenary of the first participation of women in the Olympics. Australia issued for example a special series of Olympics postage stamps, and only women were portrayed on them. The organising committee has proudly announced that 42 percent of the 11,004 competitors in Sydney were women, a new record. That makes 700 more women than in Atlanta four years ago.

Women still do not have equal rights in many sports: they remain banned from boxing and wrestling, in bilateral relations many sports codes are still taboo for women. Nine of the Olympic teams in Sydney did not have a single woman in them. While women athletes have been adept at baring skin to garner more attention and promote sporting success, not all the firm tummies paraded in Sydney have been voluntarily exposed. Despite the cold, beach volleyballers had to play in bikinis. The dress is part of the rules, and the world federation is run by men, not women. (dpa)
A house for Shiva and Parvati

The wooden images of Shiva and Parvati rest on the window rail, looking out over the passing scene in a manner suggesting interest in all they see.

It is important to remember that Kathmandu is the valley of the gods. If deities no longer descend in disguise to watch festivals, their favourite pastime, they pose as virgins or the masked dancers who represent them on special occasions. I have often seen dancers so agitated by the divinity in command of them, they have had to be held by people on both sides. Indravati Blahutar, the mysterious nine Durbar citi, make themselves appear inhuman, in masks seerined with vermilion, saffron and sacrificial blood. Their gait, the exaggerated way they breathe and talk, their

...they would fight to their death, as great care is taken to keep them apart.

In the artists’ city of Patan, at Daruny young men impersonating the eight mother goddesses, the ashtamahas, are worshipped as real goddesses and lovelily fed. So colourful are these ceremonies that often from the darkness of night, it is no wonder the gods are often tempted to drop by. It seems the great Lord Shiva himself made a habit of coming to see the divine dances held in Kathmandu’s Durbar Square. At first he came alone but it was not long before his consort Parvati pleased to be taken along.

King Rana Bahadur Shah ornamented top floor, the middle of his nine window frames are carved and painted wooden images of Shiva and Parvati in mortal form, a unique representation.

They rest on the window rail, looking out over the passing scene in a manner suggesting interest in all they see. And what wondrous things they look upon. Just across the square from them is the house of the Living Goddess. She can be seen occasionally at her gilded window or being taken in vivid procession. They have witnessed numerous coronations, two divine people in a costelk-bright crowd that fills every inch of space in the square, to watch the newly crowned king walk to pay

Aghaba Aman atteded to the old Malla architecture of the place by the Rana maharajas? Were they amazed by the first automobilers, surprised by the first foreigners and startled by the coming of the hippies?

Not far from their pavilion is a temple on a towering plinth which became a favourite abode of hippies, a smoker’s paradise, a rent free rest house. The hippies went, the huge reaches with

London-Constantinople-Tehran-Delhi-Kathmandu, the more frequent Kathmandu-Goa, the extraordinary Chopati Express, they all went. The tripping, the budget travels, came.

Colourfully dressed women selling Jaipur minor work, old clothes, old saras bards set up shop below Shiva and Parvati. So also curio dealers, and a bicycle hire shop. Shiva and Parvati have watched them all, have posed for endless photograph and stard in many films. What they’ll see next is anyone’s guess. Like all capital cities, Kathmandu changes fast. But the festivals and processions will always be the same.

Women with value offerings, men leading a sacrificial goat or playing old fashioned musical instruments will always come by at dawn and dusk. Sometimes, even in the late of night. Then unfor- tunately, just two people among a worshipful crowd, Shiva and his consort might leave their ornate pavilion and walk the streets of Kathmandu again.

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

Jazz-Jazz by Cadenza at Upstair Restaurant, Lazimpat, Funny Saturday 7:30-10:00 pm.

Rock and blues: Robin ’n’ Looca playing their selection of rock, blues, soul and Nepali numbers every Friday night at The Bamboo Club, Thamel.

Traditional Dhimsa (buffalo dance) in various courtyards and temples across the Kathmandu Valley. These ethnic newa bands are dedicated to the goddess Durga. Emphasising the best time to encounter such bands on the streets.

Live shows: Various bands playing most nights at the Red Onion Bar, Lazimpat, 416071.

Guitar unplugged: Guitar performance by Sushra Lama at the Coffee Shop, Hotel De l’ Annapurna from 7:30 pm to 10:00 pm, 221711.

Classical guitar: Yatir Gurung plays classical favourites at the Chhimbar, Yak & Yeti Hotel, 8 pm onwards, 489899.

Dance: Saturday Night Fever Dance featuring Dalsa, Merengue, Swing, Rock & Roll and much more by Dance Master Andreas at The Piano Lounge Bar, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 8:30 pm onwards, 489899.

ADVERTISEMENTS

PHOTOGRAPHY Celebrating the Millennium. An exhibition of photographs on posters by 15 photographers from around the world. Organised by Himal Media’s Print Protection Group (PPG). 30 Sep-5 Oct, Hotel Yak and Yeti. 10 am-6 pm. Free Entrance.

Platform Nepal Online Art Gallery. Currently displaying black and white photographs of renowned Nepali photographer M.K. Panday. Contact gallery@platformnepal.org

Adventure Sports

Mountain Bike Championship. An International Mountain Bike Championship in three phases. 11 November. Saturday, Registration open all event eve. MTB theory and practice workshops follow after the championship by international cyclists. Surf www.chingpam.com. Contact Peter Stewart, Race Director at Himalayan Mountain Bikes, 427427.

Festival

Dishan is a Nepali festival which starts in earnest from Phalipri (4 October) till Kojagat Purnima (12 October). Marks and other religious ceremonies are followed during this period. It is a time for family members to get together and renew bonds. On 8 October, the main day, elders put on ties (i.e. mix the red vermilion and curd on the foreheads of those younger than them. Jamara (kidding leaves of seven crops) is offered along with blessings, and generally female relatives and their children are given dakwah (cash gifts). It is said the blessings bestowed during Dishan will bring divine strengths.

Dishan is a sort of a festival where people seek a passage out of the Valley and to the outside of there are infine and bus seats. The airplane counters are swamped by hopefuls who regret not coming earlier, while the bus terminal at Gogindig is extremely crowded with people seeking, pleading or shouting their way to a ticket.

With a migrant population of half a million, a majority of whom head out of Kathmandu for the festival, the scramble for seats is only to be expected. And it takes a combination of timing, luck and perseverance to get the required bookings. The reaction of people who reach the counter after a long wait in queues attests to that. Some Kumar Rai had learnt from experience. Last year he had to stand in line from four in the morning to secure a seat in an overnight bus to go home to Kural in east Nepal. That was not something he wanted to go through again, so this time he bought tickets two weeks before the festival began 28 September. “But, look, I was sold a seat at the back of the bus,” he complained.

Getting a ticket should not be a problem like it the past, says Sharat Upeti, president of Nepal Association of Transport Entrepreneurs. “We have added buses to busy destinations. New bus companies have also entered the business and long-distance bus lines have become popular in the last one year, in Disan the business is doubled,” a visibly satisfied Upeti said.

The increased business may bring strides to bus operators, but it is a different story for their passengers. “You never know what may happen. Sometimes seats are sold to more than one person,” said Sunil Subedi from Kathmandu in east Nepal. He also claimed that passengers are in constant danger of accidents during bus journeys during Disan since drivers are not immune to the festive mood and tend to drive under the influence of alcohol.

The story is not very different for air passengers. No danger of dashed pilon, but air seats are just too few. “The number of passengers has increased many times in comparison to seats available,” said Rupesh Shrestha, Marketing Manager of Buddha Air. His airline is operating additional flights during Disan, but all seats were sold out three weeks in advance.

Disan means pressure on airline employees too. “Relatives expect special favours from us around this time, but our staff are supposed to procure tickets when there aren’t any left” reported a frustrated official at the Nepal Air. Royal Nepal Airlines announced a advance bookings for its priority destinations and has also introduced ‘local people’ of Deathy during Disan. But tickets are as scarce as ever. “At 11 AM you are willing to pay the double of normal price the ticket are available, otherwise not,” said a dishearted Tika Rai of Bhirda, who has tried to buy tickets for almost two months before Disan.

Even if she does get a seat in the end that is only half the trouble over, for when she gets off to the capital, an equally tough time awaits her. But this is Disan, and people have learnt to live with these hassles and take it in the spirit of the festival.
Celebrating the porter

SAUL SURECH

Although portering is the only way of moving goods in much of the Nepali mountains, porters generally are not the subject of much attention. Neither is the village shopkeeper or the trekkers, people who carry loads for others might as well be mules or donkeys for the way they are treated. But as the week-long exhibition of photographs entitled “Celebrating the Mountain Porter” shows, it is a profession that deserves respect as well as sympathy from those who employ them.

The 44 pictures on display provide a glimpse of the hardship and the struggle of these heroes and heroines of the trail. The photographs show, traditionally, trekking and mountaineering porters at work and rest, with contributions from well-known mountaineering photographers like Jeff Bane, Tim Macartney-Snape, Chris Bonington, and others like Jeff Hersch, Tim McCartney-Snape, Arthur Pazo and Doug Scott. Two Nepali photographers, Anurak Sen and Min Rai Jacharya, are represented as well.

The exhibition is organised by the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG). It started in Nepal, was inaugurated by Pema Doma Duff, an Anglo-Australian who has been part of mountaineering expeditions in the Himalayas since 1974, was the death of a porter from acute mountain sickness just a short distance from where he was. “We could easily have been saved,” says Dr Duff.

“Trekking is a great experience and great source of cash income for porters. But then we want to encourage trekkers to take good care of their porters. We hope an exhibition like this will help them understand their partnership to their tasks,” he says. The exhibition, which was inaugurated by Pema Doma Duff, the first Nepali woman to summit Everest from the Rare, is on at the link and full Nepal till October. It will then move to Thamel before travelling to Canada and the UK. The entire roster of pictures will later be on permanent display on the IPPG website www.ippg.net.

Vulnerability at high altitudes. In fact, the initiation for Dr Duff, an Anglo-Australian who has been part of mountaineering expeditions in the Himalayas since 1974, was the death of a porter from acute mountain sickness just a short distance from where he was. “We could easily have been saved,” says Dr Duff.

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This week-long exhibition of photographs shows that portering is a profession that deserves respect as well as sympathy from those who employ them.

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Under My Hat
by Kunda Dixit

If you thought the Prime Minister is the most powerful man in Nepal, you'd better think again. The most powerful man in Nepal is not even the Commander-in-Chief. The most powerful man in Nepal is the Thai Ambassador. His Excellency has managed to do something that the rulers of this country tried but could not accomplish for the past four months: get the Mahanagari Road paved for us by Drasini.

This incredible feat has reminded us once more how we have cleverly managed to subcontract Nepal’s entire development process to friendly donor nations. And the awesome thing about it is that it doesn’t cost us a cent! It’s all free. Since we have given others the responsibility of building our schools and hospitals, picking up our garbage and getting us mountain goats, we can now sit back, relax and enjoy the exhilarating entertainment. We need not worry one bit: responsible people who know what they are doing are taking care of us. This frees us up for all kinds of extra-curricular activities that we otherwise would not have time for like spending quality time in the company of our near and dear ones in the festive season, deputizing death, and sucking in the joys of a juicy apricot in our molars.

There is a Sanskrit saying passed down from one generation of Nepalis to the next that goes something like this: “what does this, which roughly translated means “an ambassador is a god-send, put him to work”. But one pleiotropy from a friendly ASEAN country—however committed to Nepal’s property and well-being he may be—cannot have the entire burden of this valley’s upkeep on his shoulders. It would be unfair on the Thais. So, His Majesty’s Government is mulling over a plan to divide up the Kathmandu Valley severally and hand over each area to a different embassy to handle. Any Ambassador who wants to take these up should contact the Ministry of Work and Leisure after Drasini:

- The Nepal Olympic Committee has decided that Nepal has a great future in synchronized swimming, and on return from Sydney has been scouting around if any Kathmandu-based Embassy would be willing to sponsor Nepal’s national synchronized swimming team. The sport would promote discipline, communal, and be a symbolic sport for Nepalis to show that we can support any hustle—even if we are underscored, and have our noses clipped with clothespins.
- The Great Center of Ekantakuna. This gaping cavity, through which you can see Mexico if you look carefully, needs an urgent root canal. The Swiss charge d’affaires has sent a small order (Latin for a message with lots of unprintable words in it) to the Ministry of Waste and Mismangement to get it fixed, or else no secret bank accounts.
- The German embassy is looking into the 150-year-old garbage heap at Kalu Pul. It has a Secret Plan to transform the rubbish from Gyaneshwor to Baneshwor by cover of darkness.
- His Majesty’s Government wants Tribhuvan International Airport to also serve as a bird park and a dog sanctuary. The biodiversity of Nepal’s only international airport needs to be protected so that it can be a model for sustainable development of the country’s ecosystem. Any embassies interested?

Nepal’s national synchronized swimming team

Ambassador vodka

Up where the air is clear

Sunil N.S. Thapa says it is better than working for a living. And what a job he has: floating in a cane gondola at 3,100 m above Kathmandu Valley drifting slowly across the cobalt Himalayan sky and making a dramatic landing on a field as water buffaloes watch lazily. While some pilots like to fly 747’s, others love the thrill of a F-16, what is the glamour of piloting a large object that is technically lighter than air, and is at the mercy of the elements? Isn’t boring?

“No, it’s not monotonous at all,” says Sunil, who is Nepal’s only balloon pilot. “Every flight is different. The view, the wind direction and speed, the scenery, the landing and the enthusiasm of passengers are different each time.”

At 34, Sunil is already General Manager of the Balloon Sunrise Nepal and has clocked about 250 hours flying balloons in Australia and Nepal. Sunil has a taste for flying, he had jumped off planes and parachute for ten years as an officer in the Royal Nepale Army, before taking up ballooning.

“We’re completely dependent on the wind for direction of travel,” explains Sunil as his balloon coasts past Nagarjun forest. “The only control we have is over elevation, and we go up and down to tap different wind direction by turning the burners and vents on and off.” For navigation, Sunil only has a Global Positioning System, a VHF radio for contact with the air traffic controller at Kathmandu and a UHF walkie-talkie to keep in touch with crew and the vehicles on the ground who follow the balloon to anticipate the landing site. Now that the mansions are finished, the wind direction is usually from the west, and not more than 8 knots. Kathmandu Valley is a ballooning paradise with light winds, and spectacular scenery. Says Sunil: “There is almost never any ground wind, which means the landings are really smooth.”

Tomorrow morning at six, when the grass is wet with dew and the eastern sky is just beginning to light up, Sunil will be blowing hot air into the balloon and making it rise above a field on the outskirts of Kathmandu. And when the tower clears him for take off, he’ll soar once more into the wide blue sky with seven passengers who will remember the ride for the rest of their lives.

Grindlays

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