EXCLUSIVE
Cabinet makers
OK, breathe easy. The impending reshuffle has been pushed to next week pending a meeting of the Nepali Congress party’s central working committee on Sunday. Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala is waiting for a list of ministerial candidates from the ceremonial dissident, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai. Koirala is said to want to make the changes right away since he does not want those who get the sack to have a say. Thir. Kisunji’s priority: to force Koirala to agree to using the 1995 Congress membership list in next year’s party election, which they hope will favour Kisunji’s protégé, Sher Bahadur Deuba. Only then will the two side down and shorten ministerial candidates. Our forecast: no changes before midweek next week.

Monkeys
If you have been thinking birds delayed your flight at Kathmandu, you could be wrong. Our investigation shows Kathmandu airport, besides being a bird sanctuary is also a haven for monkeys, cows and even commuters taking shortcuts across the runway. Birds just came to eat earthworms on the runway, and Dasain leftovers all over the city.

Notice
Starting this week, Nepali Times will be published every Friday. This change was necessitated by readers’ demand for weekend reading.

We wish you all a Happy Tihar.

-Editor

BINO BHATTARAI

On 1 November the independent Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) will auction off a business licence to set up the country’s first private cell-phone network that could finally bring consumers cheaper and more efficient mobile services. Six companies are pre-qualified for the final round of bidding; among them are joint ventures with one Turkish, one Singaporean, and four Indian partners.

The Khetan Group is teaming up with India’s Modi Telstra (MTL) and is also backing Turkey’s Bumeli Telekom. Nepal Venture P Ltd (backed by the promoters of the Nepal Industrial and Commercial Banki) is going along with India’s United Telecom, Videocon Sanchar Nigam Limited and Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited.

Four Nepali business houses (JCTC, the Jyoti Group, the Golchha Group, and Continental Trading) are behind India’s Bharati Telecom. The Mercantile Group is working with India’s BPL Broadband Technologies (BPL) to launch its service.

The auction is straightforward—there is no competition for government and no backroom negotiations. This also means consumers don’t pay for political corruption and commissions on equipment suppliers, all of which are usually passed on to consumers and contribute to unimaginable high tariffs and other inefficiencies.

All eyes are on the NTA auction. How properly it is handled will be seen as a pointer to future privatisation schemes of the entire telecommunication sector. Licensing of mobile telephone service using the GSM-900 technology is part of the government’s efforts to privatise and deregulate service sectors.

The government-run Nepal Telecommunication Corporation (NTC) still owns all bilateral loans for rural telephony. Earlier this month it received a Belgian government loan for a village phone network for an initiative similar to the upcoming NTA auction. Such bilateral deals are the least transparent, and, say development experts, provide wide opportunities for graft and come tied with equipment purchase and consultation contract guarantees. In the case of the Belgian loan Alcatel Bell would be the most likely supplier. Interestingly, the Prime Minister visited the Alcatel headquarters in Antwerp on his way to the UN millennium summit last month.

It took the NTA nine months to get the financial bidding stage. But despite prolonged delays—which even led some multilateral lenders to threaten to put potential projects on the back-burner—participating businesses have few complaints. “The road from here is more important, we don’t know how long the playing field is going to be,” said one.

The message of the mobile licensing experience is that despite endemic corruption, Nepal can make fair and transparent decisions when there is a straightforward law and professionals with integrity—not politicians—are in charge of decision-making. “Generally, the government has been cooperative,” says Bipul Rai Pandey, NTA Chairman. His job has not been easy because the autonomous body’s transparent methods have forced greedy politicians to situate on the sidelines.

Pandey told us there were times when interference and pressures to bend rules got so intense that he nearly resigned. “I’ve told myself that as long as I’m here I will go only by the telecom policy and law,” he said. “I may still have the draft of my resignation letter somewhere with me.”

NTA’s transparency is in sharp contrast to what goes on at its parent ministry. A classic example is of FM radio licensing in which the ministry has made numerous ad hoc decisions and emerged unscathed—even aligned by agencies like parliament’s Public spending watchdog.

The Ministry of Information and Communication has had occasional bouts of honesty, but even these are suspect, such as its recent advertisement seeking proposals from companies wanting to launch terrestrial television. The notice appeared in the government’s English daily on 1-3 October and gave interested parties just 35 days to submit applications accompanied with detailed project studies, including network, construction, financing and programming policy and plans. With two weeks off for Dasain, this was suspiciously short notice for such a large and complicated bidding. One source told us: “How could you expect anyone to prepare a proposal for a $50-60 million project within two weeks?” When we last checked with the ministry on Monday, there hadn’t been a single application.

An NTA notice seeking proposals for a rural telecom network in east Nepal that appeared in the papers the other day was in sharp contrast to the Ministry’s advertisement. The NTA posted the entire tender document on its website, with a clear explanation of how the licensing process works: the plan is to award the contract to the company seeking the lowest subsidies.

The brightening part of the current bidding process is that even after the results of the 1 November auction are announced, the winner will still have to deal with the Ministry. “We’ll have to go there for frequency allocations and other support,” says one businessman.
After Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala evidently played political brinkmanship with His Majesty at Nagarjun just before Dasain, the Royal Nepal Army seems to have finally been persuaded to lend a hand in countering the Maoist insurgency. Koirala sacrificed his Home Minister, Home Secretary and Chief of Police—evidently a small price to pay to have the army partially deployed at 16 district headquarters.

The reluctant generals and lay folk of whatever ideological bent need to understand that the democratically elected government of the day has the right to decide what to do with the army. If we are a democracy, this position is non-negotiable. The army brass was out of line when it let it be known that the soldiers could be deployed only on the basis of an all-party consensus, a clear attempt at political meddling and a challenge to the authority and legitimacy of a duly constituted democratic government.

As is clear from the limited mobilisation of army personnel on the ground, the release of semi-automatic weapons to the police as promised, and from the statements of Defence Minister Mahesh Acharya, the military seems to have come around. The issue of who the army should be answerable to is now a matter of public debate thanks to vibrant media coverage of the issue before Dasain.

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STATE OF THE STATE, by CK Lal

Comrade Nepal peddles to work

Petrol had only two uses in my village: as fuel for a Chinese lighter, or as balm for aching muscles after a hard day’s work.

What a relief it was to see pictures of opposition leader Madhav Kumar Nepal cycling out from Singh Durbar. For the people of his constituency in Kavre district, bicycles, together with rickshaws and e-cars, are the main modes of transport. But I was dismayed to discover that it was just a propoect pump. Comrade Nepal will not be bicycling to work every day. A day later the UML Secretary General was being chauffeured to work in a black limousine.

Every time petrol prices go up, symbolism takes over the streets of Kathmandu. There are rallies with empty jeep tyres, traffic is held up, food is banned, and posters are handed over, the prime minister and his cabinet colleagues are burnt in effigy with much fanfare for the benefit of press photographers. Consumer activists issue angry statements. And then things get back to normal throughout the kingdom. People have come to take fuel price hikes as a fait accompli. And protests are a diversion to be tolerated as a diversion from the dull routine of everyday life. Three wheelchair drivers past seeking to raise the people, but few bother even to listen.

Why don’t Nepalis care too much about fuel prices? A facile answer is: fuelaholic. That vulgar sense of apathy that afflicts us all. Prices are beyond our control, so we accept them. Decades under dictatorship has further ingrained this fuelaholism in the Nepali psyche. The sense of hope that you can effect a change is missing.

But the sense of resignation of a sullen population is not the real reason for this lack of interest. More important are the sources of energy used in Nepal.

Total energy consumption in the country was about 252 million GJ in 1995/96. Nearly 90 percent of it came from biomass sources such as fuelwood (80 percent), animal dung (6 percent)—another reason to keep worshiping our cows and buffaloes—and agricultural residue (4 percent). Only about one percent of it was electricity, notwithstanding the all-powerful hydropower hype. The rest, namely about 9 percent of total energy consumption, was met by fossil fuels.

The price of fossil fuel affects us all in one way or another. The newspaper on which you are reading these words was transported laboriously up from Birganj in smoke-belching diesel trucks. But the impact of a hike in diesel (or even kerosene) prices on a subsistence farmer in Rumjung is marginal. Despite the claim that kerosene is a poor man’s fuel and needs state subsidy, the fact remains that it is only the urban-dwellers and a section of rural elite who rely on fossil fuels for their daily needs. For the rest, kerosene is something you need to fuel your tuki in the hills or dhoi in the tarai and it’s if not available, or too expensive, you blow it out and go to bed early. No big deal.

When Rajiv Gandhi imposed an undeclared economic blockade on Nepal in 1989, he had expected us to go down on our knees and say ‘we’re sorry, please send us our kerosene. Well, guess what, Nepalis held out for more than a year. The reason was that most Nepal’s didn’t use fossil fuels. For the urban users, the government flew in kerosene from Dhalai in Royal Nepal Airlines jets converted into tankers. As for petrol, it had only two uses in my village in those days—either you needed it for your Chinese lighter, or to apply upon your body when your muscles ached from a hard day’s work in the fields.

The Nepal elite which depends on petroleum products is a small and pampered group and does not make a hue and cry over fuel price hikes for two reasons the cost of fuel constitutes only a small portion of their total household expense, the rich are also aware that a government (or any government of a Third World country) can do little about fuel price hikes. It’s people like me in the middle class who are hurt most. The 7 percent rise in bus fare and the increase in kerosene prices hits us badly. The poor may manage with their three-line quota of subsidised kerosene—if they can afford to buy even that much. My peers in the middle class will probably brand me a traitor for saying this, but petrol over the fuel price hike should be held outside the OPEC headquarters in Vienna, not in Kathmandu. The Maiist-Leninists should call an Austria-wide band, burn the effigy of Hugo Chavez, the Venezuelan OPEC-Ramo. He has more to do with the rise of kerosene prices than Girija Prasad Koirala.

The government certainly needs to do much more than it is presently doing to keep a check on spiralling prices. The opposition can help by not antagonising the economy to a halt by planning bands. As it is, prices are on the rise. Protests simply end up adding scars to the inflamed. Cool it comrades, and make riding bicycles to work an enduring habit. It’s good for the environment, and even better for the economy.
The continuing poverty and marginal status of Ayacucho when compared to Peru as a whole in 1961 was significant. The leader of the 6,000-strong Senderista army was Abimael Guzman Reynoso, who went by the nom de guerre “Comrade Gonzalo.” He built up the movement systematically after he joined the faculty of Ayacucho’s university of San Cristobal de Huamanga in 1962. The Senderistas deepened their understanding of the ideological underpinnings of revolution through intense study groups and expanded contacts with the peasants of Ayacucho. The story of the growth and expansion of Maoism in Nepal has a parallel with the Senderistas. It is not a coincidence that when in November 1993 Comrade Gonzalo was finally captured and paraded before the media inside what looked like a lion’s cage in Lima, half the way across the world in Kathmandu the streets were full of graffiti that read: “Free Gonzalo.”

Borrowing from the Senderistas, Nepali Maoists also evolved their own self-sufficient, self-central west region. The districts of Rukum, Rolpa, Jajarkot and Salyan were bypassed by the mainstream of national development despite foreign-aided development projects. Access to the outside world has been a problem in this roadless region, and entrenched feudalism meant that even if the Maoists have been decile, they really had nothing to lose. Like the Senderistas, our own indigenous Maoists have dedicated a significant amount of time and effort to study the agricultural population and winning their confidence willingly or by coercion. Indeed, the rise of the Senderista Luminose and the Nepali Maoists reveal astounding similarities:

- Strong, dominant leadership.
- In Peru by an individual, and in Nepal by a secretive body of die-hard intellectual revolutionaries.
- The leaders and their immediate followers all came from an academic milieu. In Nepal’s case, from universities.
- Both used a remote province rather than a national capital as incubators for revolution.
- Both movements chose a setting in which a rigid, orthogonal ideology could be developed and incubated for more than a decade.
- With an explicit commitment to assist the local population, both movements aimed for social transformations with a high proportion of female cadre.
- Both Ayacucho and central Nepal saw the idea of developing central government expenditure, except for education.
- Defective or non-existent central government, rampant corruption, and ineffective development had made peasants in both countries worse off.
- A continuous rhetoric of reform by a newly democratic government that was not accompanied by action to uplift the quality of life of the local population.

The rise of the Maoists in Nepal is even more impressive than that of the Senderistas. Its growth in the recent half a dozen years has happened despite, and in a sense because of, Kathmandu’s efforts to control them. Today, six districts are effectively under Maoist control, in another 15 districts the Maoists have more influence than the government. They have captured police weapons, and like the Senderistas they have also exploded devices from road-building projects and quarries. The number of sympathisers, followers and armed cadres is expanding rapidly despite official propaganda of voluntary surrender by Maoists. The resources available to the Maoists has taken a quantum leap after recent feats from banks and army in “tax collection” forced out of the business sector.

Whatever the underlying causes of social discontent in the various insurgency affected regions of Nepal and Peru, there had in the past been no anti-government opposition in these areas. This clearly indicates that this insurgency is not a spontaneous uprising by an outraged constituency protesting its dislocated social and economic development and new government, but rather the result of a rural populism which could easily be convinced that armed struggle was the only way. The weak and unstable character of the political parties makes the Maoists cadres almost completely isolated inside the rural areas. This means that they have no other ending point besides the doors of the peasants and the police force that, despite its manpower, is only capable of being a pretender of the real power.

The development in the Maoist organization has only just begun. In the past ten years or so, they have been able to control over one third of the bodies of the armed forces.

Comrade Gonzalo was finally caught by the Peruvian security forces, but Ayacucho still simmers menacingly.

After the Dunai fiasco, there has been a vigorous national debate about deployment of the armed forces in anti-Maoist duty. The government appears to have taken a decision to commit the Royal Nepal Army to secure 16 district headquarters by using small detachments of troops. Sound military wisdom dictates that force, when used, must clinch the issue. The piecemeal use of the army seldom achieves results, it only gives the insurgents an excellent opportunity to gauge the overall strength and weaknesses of their ultimate adversary. Any over-reaction by the army other than to counter an attack due to sheer frustration will give the Maoists the publicity they are seeking to discredit the army’s image. As incidents mount, they will have a tangible impact on the morale and discipline of the troops. The sophisticated social-political organisation of both the Senderistas and the Nepali Maoists has provided opportunities for broad peasant participation, and for the bourgeoisie and to ensure that it is continued to be effective, the government’s campaign to control the insurgency must be multi-dimensional. Max G

Mannaring in his book Uncomfortable Wars maintains that legitimacy is the most important single dimension in a war against subversion.

The thrust of a revolutionary movement relies on addressing political, social and economic grievances. This is the essential nature of the threat from an insurgency, and it is here that a response must begin. Any effort that fails to understand this and responds only militarily is most likely to fail. 

(Yuan Jung Thapa, recently retired as a colonel from the Royal Nepal Army, has a Masters degree from the US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.)

On the path of the Shining Path
Ten years ago, Peru went through a Maoist insurgency eerily similar to what is happening in Nepal today. What can we then learn from the Sendero Luminoso?

PKS (yer London)

LETTERS

PARANOIA?

C.K Lal is of ‘State of paranoia’ (#142) seems to say three things: that we should hang in shame for our socialills, that we were wrong to show socialism in the web and that we weren’t clever enough to use the BBC debate effectively. Needless to say, all three are wrong.

First, no country hangs itself for its social problems, the country works toward solving them. Second, we were right in the web right, because such responses are needed to counter increasing Indian propaganda. No matter where one looks, Nepal is taken into all being Nepali. Finally, these responses have been effective as evidenced by Mr Lal’s retraction and apology.

Even more political was Mr Lal’s misunderstanding of the answers given by Nepal around the globe. The answers were quite simple—why Nepal will not be better off under the Indian umbrella, because many states under the Indian umbrella are still far worse than Nepal, that the country will survive because it has survived for so many centuries, and that it should, because we take pride in our country’s existence.

Sumeer Shrestha Khandu

C.K Lal deserves thanks for ‘State of paranoia’ (#12), he stands alone in the media hystagia to question the government on the part of the government to a debate that (however the question may have been formulated in the end turned out to be of utmost benefit to Nepal and its people.

J Gurung Pokhara

A quick doing the rounds of krazy Kathmandu. If a half-drunk bully gets hold of your wife’s hands at a party, do you:

1. Use the null hypothesis duality
2. Piss the bully down
3. Blame your measly salary and your lousy house
4. Call for a general debate

ck (@kahinda) (#12), has a fifth and more natural choice: “firmly push the bully away and ask questions later!” Mr Lal, please advise!

Bibhuti Man Singh, Kathmandu

On the deliberately provocative debate on whether Nepal should come under an Indian security umbrella (#12). Surely, with an awesomely Hindu government now in India, and Nepal being the only Hindu kingdom in the world this union should be the other way around. In other words, shouldn’t India secede and join Nepal?

LET’S CHAT

Thanks for ‘Let’s have a chat’ by Gaurya Upadhyaya (#11). It seems we have overlooked the ‘pre-historic’ days of internet charts.

Nepalsearch.com chat was the pioneer web-based chat site, but a lot of us were chatting away on the internet long before that on IRC (Internet Relay Chat).

The ‘chatroom’ of IRC was a popular internet haven for a lot of Nepali college students studying in the US, the Philippines, Australia, and Canada. It was a virtual place to meet fellow Nepalis, share news from Nepal, and just do plain guff-guff. IRC has now lost its popularity, but it was still very technically superior to some text-based chat web sites.

In ‘Let’s have a chat’ you say that ecomepal.com is a teen site since it’s chit-chat is popular among young people. But it is more than just a teen site—it has Nepal’s largest search engine, travel info for tourists, people search, etc. It was also the first site to introduce Java chat.

Kewal (ecomepal.com chatter)
“Airport closed, monkeys on

The real problem is with the dogs, monkeys, and cows that roam the runway at Nepal’s only international airport. And the humans who can’t seem to do anything about them.

HEMLATA RAJ

- 11 October. A delayed early morning Royal Nepal Airlines flight from New Delhi is one minute from touchdown. Air traffic control sends out a warning: “Caution, cow on the runway. Request your intention.” The pilot is livid. “What am I supposed to do? Get out of it!”
- 17 October. A Royal Bhutan flight to Pari is at the end of the runway, waiting for takeoff clearance. “Stand-by for takeoff,” says the tower. “Four dogs on runway three.”
- 17 October. A week after its flight to Lhasa hit a bird on takeoff, China Southwest Airlines’ flight 407 is on approach. Tower comes on: “Airport closed, monkeys on the runway;” CSA 407 holds for 10 minutes before the monkeys are chased back to Phuapokh. What is surprising about these three incidents this week is that not only have pilots stopped being surprised at the diversity of fauna that Kathmandu airport seems capable of throwing up—but that they were happening when the entire tourism industry was going bananas about bird danger.

It now emerges that the near-accident on 29 September that triggered the whole bird strike scare had nothing to do with birds at all. The Royal Nepal Airlines flight RA 409 to Hong Kong had just started its takeoff run when the right engine failed with a big bang. The pilots brought the plane to a halt on the runway. The engine was a write-off, the plane was grounded for 10 days and the airline suffered colossal losses. Engineers were intrigued by the fact that there were no tell-tale signs of a bird strike: no blood, no feathers, hair or talons embedded in the fan blades. In fact, the inside of the engine nacelle had been ripped open, the titanium alloy fan blades warped and what looked like rivet punctures. Insurance inspectors are now looking for objects being ingested into engines, and for not coping with the expansion of domestic airline traffic.

The equipment is state-of-the-art. All-glass cockpits, fly-by-wire airplanes, 50km radius control, the state-of-the-art of the airport’s 19th century: perimeter fences with large gaping holes, shortcuts for humans across the Kathmandu, uniformed guards with airguns, and a management record that reflects the country’s sorry state. An airport that is valued by its rulers more as a smugglers’ den, a conduit for contraband than as the mainstay of the economy because it is the only country point for tourists, indicates wrong priorities right at the top. One disillusioned tourism entrepreneur told us: “You can’t make a quick buck chasing dogs off the apron. So how do you expect the airport to get its act together, they have a completely different perspective.”

One morning last week, the airport’s two jeeps were busy deploying staff to sweep up earthworms that were erupting out of the ground and slithering along the side of the runways. This is one of those years that earthworms all over Central Valley in Nepal have gone crazy—and are emerging from the soil by the ton. On the hills of the Valley this year, they came down the slopes escaping a high water table caused by the prolonged monsoon. Dried by fresh milk to the Kathmandu market. This would have allowed family dairies far beyond as south of the Bagmati River in Makawanpur to benefit from higher income. But the economic status would have opened up possibilities for development activities, and perhaps made extreme political ideologies less palatable. Because of mismanaged development efforts and lack of a clear understanding of this development model using a new transport system, the achiever has nearly ground to a halt. Here was one effort that could have paved the way giving farmers access to market and dramatically improve their lives.

The idea was to help farmers: the project was to provide farmers with improved seeds, training, and other development activities, but in the end we are trying out “participatory approach” in “sustainable human development” with experts from within the country and abroad. We have used just about every development model to bring changes in the Nepal of Ikudol. But all it did was kill off the little self-help was there any economic development at all—and the farmers’-owned and Kathmanda-centric dependency took care of that. One effective effort to break the “mill“’s grind” in Ikudol was a cargo ropeway to bring

Milk and Maoists

There are many Nepals. The Nepal of Kathmandu Valley, the Nepal of the district headquarters, and the Nepal of areas like Ikudol.

These rugged mountains south of Kathmandu Valley are so far, and yet so near. From the ridge, you can see the city of Kathmandu to the north, to the south are areas so remote they could be in Jumla. This area has always by-passed by development. Forty years ago, there was hope that the Tika Bharayah highway to Hetauda would change things, but Nepal’s first experiment with democracy was dismayed in 1960, and with it this incredibly quick shortcut from the capital to the Tara was abandoned. The Mahalbatti Lekhi here shows a unique economic descent as one travels from North to South. It’s called the “milk gradient”—people closer to Kathmandu can sell milk at the nearest roadhead, and they live a visibly better life. Those who can’t walk to Bhate Danda—are in a few hours before the milk goes bad have to boil the milk down to khasa, which fetches less money than fresh milk. But even khasa goes bad in a week, so beyond the khasa area is the green region. Gow is an even lower-return commodity, and it is more energy and time-intensive. So the small farmers are poorer still. The effect of all this is here for us to see the farmers get poorer and poorer, and hills get more and more deserted as you travel south.

What lies beyond the gow, you may ask. Well, that’s where the Maoists are. They thrive in remote areas that are dirt poor because of government apathy, and hopelessness. So it is this tri-junction of Kathmandu, southern Laliopur and Makawanpur where you feel so far away from Kathmandu you could be in Timbuktu. This is the face of the real Nepal that is yet to awaken. Except there have nothing to sell because they don’t even grow enough to feed their families. Despite some health care support provided by missionaries over the years, infant mortality rates are double the national average, illiteracy is three times higher.

Four years ago, villagers here used to talk about Maoists like they talked about wild animals that come at night. They had heard of them, but no one seemed to have actually seen one. There were stories about how old a village headman was beheaded, or how a landowner was hoodwinked. Now, owners of rice farms from the agriculture bank were burned to free villagers from debt. Local government officials were helpless, the few police in remote posts wore burned looks, Stories about Maoists had a Robin Hood quality, the staff of legend. Meanwhile development experts worked on their work and reported progress to their headquarters as they have done for the past 40 years. Everyone here knows about who actually benefited from all the aid. There is no sign of the poorest farmers becoming any more self-sufficient or having improved their lives even slightly. Gradually, the areas “affected by Maoists” grow beyond the gow region to the khasa region and even to the milk region. Last year, Maoists attacked a police station in Bhate Danda—the nearest area of Maoist activity to the capital. Villagers liked the slogans and took the path of violently liberating themselves because no one else ever offered them any hope. There are many Nepals. The Nepal of Kathmandu Valley, the Nepal of the district headquarters, and the Nepal of areas like Ikudol. The development mauls’ “extensive” activities in the 1970s, tried “trickle down” and “peoples participation” in the 1980s, and now we are trying out “participatory approach” in “sustainable human development” with experts from within the country and abroad. We have used just about every development model to bring changes in the Nepal of Ikudol. But all it did was kill off the little self-help was there any economic development at all—and the farmers’-owned and Kathmandau-centric dependency took care of that. One effective effort to break the “mill“’s grind” in Ikudol was a cargo ropeway to bring
the runway…”

the sun, they die en masse, rotting and decaying along village trails. The airport also has a worm problem, and the raptors have a feeding frenzy.

A dozen sweepers and some houndogs will not solve the problem. And the long-term bird menace from the city needs a national campaign.

“The airport’s bird problem is an extension of the city’s otherwise mismanaged environment,” says Explore Nepal’s Bharat Busnet, who has been spearheading environmental activism in Kathmandu starting with diesel fumes. By coincidence, two of the birds on last week involved Laura Air, the Austrian charter airline. Busnet is the representative for. “Kathmandu is like an open garbage disposal site that is sure to attract the birds,” he tells journalists on a conference and walking tour of the airport this week, showing the danger posed by birds of prey screeching above the runway just as the airport’s traffic peak was getting underway.

But ironically, while the airport’s efforts to scare away the kites seemed to be working somewhat, it was the dogs and monkeys that started causing havoc.

Environmentalism blame dumping of garbage on the Bagmati River on the northern side of the runway. It is true that this is so, and a serious pollution threat for groundwater through leaching, but activists have been going it on about this issue for months. The three birds at this month started at the southern end of the airport, or on the runway itself.

Eager to see doing something, the government, after a meeting held at the Local Development Ministry on 13 October, banned dumping of food waste and animal carcasses and prohibited animal slaughter at Joypati, Gorhut and Maujhi Village Development Committees.

Kathmandu airport (left) showing urban congestion and numbers working where following picture was taken.

3. Kites take flight as an aeroplane in for a landing over the northern end of the runway adjoining a settlement at Kathmandu. Children play and settle among the runway approach lights.

2. No Trepassing’ gate does not seem to deter dogs who can’t resist the site and easily slip by through the gap.

4. Another gate leading to Kathmandu which was padlocked unceremoniously last week when the humanitate four met at the height.

5. Water buffalo foamy in blueing, in the dawn while a bird glides on the edge of the runway runway above.

Guns and peace

After Dasain, it is back to square one on the Maoist front.

Peacekeeper Sher Bahadur Deuba, whose term in the peacekeeping committee expired on 15 October, dramatically revealed that he had had a meeting with a Maoist, but did not say where, when or with whom. Maoist General Secretary Panchaudhuni confirmed the meeting, and reiterated his demand to make public the whereabouts of Dhesh Shumsh, a central Maoist leader and others, free them, and “state terrorism”, and create an environment for the talks.

But political parties except the ruling Nepal Congress agree that the insurgency should be resolved through dialogue. The main opposition Communist Party of Nepal (UML) has even volunteered to moderate, while a faction in the ruling party advocates a two-proposed approach—beef up the police and rope in the army, but keep the door open for talks.

A series of “all-party” meetings held in the aftermath of the Maoist attack on Danep in late September had lasted hours. Having failed to get the army to help in Danep, the government managed to trigger a national debate and storm troopers in 16 district headquarters.

The army went grindingly, barely concealing its unhappiness.

Many of these dissent now have strategic defense plans prepared by a “security committee” convened by the chief district officers (CDOs). The head of the local army unit is invited member of the committee. But confusion is rife. “It is not clear if the army will go into the jungles and/or parade alongside police,” a government source told us. The operational modality and the chain of command remain unclear.

“This is a case of the tail wagging the dog,” one army officer told us. “The rules of engagement are unclear, and it could be a very messy situation if the army is attacked.” It appears that the army is going along, getting the government to pay for deployment, while not promising anything. Meanwhile the army has still not handed over all semi-automatic rifles that the government has paid to deliver to a paramilitary police force.

Caught between the Maoists, opposition parties and opponents within his own ruling party, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala has been lurching from one crisis to another. He is now thinking of transferring peacekeeping responsibilities from Deuba to the Human Rights Commission. He also added an extra head in the National Defence Council, Mahesh Acharya, by giving him the defense ministry portfolio in addition to his duties as finance minister. The NDC is made up of the prime minister, defense minister and army chief and can recommend decisions like army deployment to the king who is the supreme commander of the armed forces.

The army is learnt to have a list of demands in return for the partial deployment in the 16 districts. These reportedly include an unwillingness to acknowledge the CDO’s command, and getting the government to restrict media reporting on Maoist activities.

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Insurgency stats

Nepal’s five-year-old Maoist insurgency has left 1,465 dead till Monday, according to statistics released by the police. The dead include 981 “insurgents”, 232 policemen and 252 civilians.

According to the police, the Maoists have so far rustled Rs 352.5 million, attacked and damaged 21 projects undertaken with foreign aid, 172 government and quasi-government offices, and 21 telecommunication centres. The Maoists have also set fire to 94 police posts. The police claim to have captured over 1,500 muzzle-loaders, 52 telescopic rifles, 146 home-made pistols and 472 kgs of, gelatine in addition to other types of explosives and fuses. The report also said that the police had released 4,150 suspected rebels after investigations and pressed charges against 1,643.

Nepals help Nepal

A Belarus-based Nepali businessman has donated $2,000 to a charity set up by UK-based Nepal that supports small projects in Nepal. Upendra Mahato, Honorary Consul of Belarus to Nepal, and leading businessman in the former Soviet Republic, says he donated because he was impressed by the campaign initiated by HELP NEPAL Network (HeN), whose goal is to raise money from individual Nepalis abroad for small, doable projects in Nepal.

Mahato has also agreed to work as Chief Co-ordinator of the group’s campaigns—now underway in 10 countries—in the former Soviet republics. HeNl chairman Rabindra Mishra, who is based in London, says that Nepal has relied too much on foreign aid and it is time that Nepal around the world do as much as they can for Nepal.

A money donated by Mahato is to be used to complete the registration of HELP NEPAL Network as a charity. Last year HeNl provided £700 for the construction of a library at Sarwan High School in Dhanu. Dolpo. Using the seed grant the locals added a floor to the school building for a science laboratory. (For details see the URL www.helpnepal.co.uk).

Forum against tourism in Nepal

A Nepal-based group, National Environmental Solidarity Forum (NesoF), says it has begun a campaign to discourage tourists from visiting Nepal. The group says its aim is to strangle an income source which it claims is used by government to pay for atrocities (against the Maoists). The German-based group—which believes the Maoist insurgency is a necessity—is coordinated by one Janak Sharma and claims to have a commit- tee of 400 backing the campaign. Two Nepalis, two Germans, one Iranian, one Turk and one Peruvian.

(http://www.humanrights.nf/nepal).

Nepal-India water meet

India has told Nepal builders that it will delay its response to the inundation caused by Nepal in an Indian embankment along the border upstream of the Laxmanpur barrage near Nepalgunj. This was agreed upon at a meeting of water resource secretaries of the two countries who met in Kathmandu 13 October.

It was also decided to have an Indian team of experts conduct studies for a medium-sized hydro-project that both countries have been talking about for some time now. The water resource secretaries also set the end of 2011 as deadline for the preparation of the Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the Pancheshwori Multipurpose Project, which has remained on paper after ratification of the Mahakali Treaty in 1996.

Also on the agenda was the Sapta Kosi High Dam, wherein both sides agreed to speed up work to prepare DPRs for the dam project and the Kosi-Katmandu Multipurpose Project by year end 2001. The two countries also agreed to form a joint flood forecasting committee that would have a plan before the next monsoon floods. A press release issued at the end of the meeting said India was considering an increase in power exchange between the two countries from the existing 50MW to 150MW.

New Chief of Police

Pradip Giri, Sumsher Rana has taken over as the country’s new police chief. He was formally handed over the insignia of office on 13 October by outgoing Inspector General of Police Achyut Krishna Kharel. Kharel had gone on an extended two-month leave on 3 October—five months before he was due to retire—in the aftermath of the Maoist massacre of 14 policemen in Dolpo late last month.

New IG P Rana (53) has outlined plans to modernize and bring the police force, improve work habits, control corruption and end favouritism. He has also promised to ensure that the police do not violate human rights and there is “better co-ordination” between the work of the army and the police.
Oil in troubled waters

RNAC to lease Lauda Air plane

Sapahati, 13 October

A day before Dasain, the cabinet decided to lease a plane from Lauda Air. It was not a unanimous decision, but one that came because of pressure from the minister for civil aviation. In the process, many rules and regulations were broken or completely ignored.

The aircraft in question is 12 years old. The government is paying an advance of USD 1 million to Lauda Air without any bank guarantee. RNAC wants to lease the aircraft for a period of one month. The cabinet decided on the day of the cabinet decision, but since the paperwork could not be completed, it is expected to pay when the bank opens for business after the holidays.

As matters stand, the rules, regulations and directives have not been followed, or have been broken. According to regulations RNAC should not lease any plane that is more than five years old, should not pay any advance without a bank guarantee, and a tender should always be called for while leasing a plane. None of these directives were followed in the present case.

The acquisition of a plane without calling for tenders, without a bank guarantee and one that is more than five years old, shows that the minister for civil aviation Minister is not working for the benefit of RNA or the country. The only beneficiary in the present deal seems to be the company which has been given an amount of commission that will be making a matter of conjecture.

CIAA voices

Kantipur News, 14 October

Since the advent of democracy, a total of 60 cases have been filed by the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) with the courts. Out of these, verdicts on 30 have already been passed, and the CIAA has not been successful in any one of these cases.

Twenty cases were easily dismissed and in the remaining 10 cases, accessed after the CIAA member, the small fry caught while the big fish got away. This means that the government in this case has the ultimate power and it was actually given a clean chit by the courts.

Foreign agriculture minister Padma Sundar Laosal had three cases filed against him, and the total amount involved was Rs 33 million. The case against him stated that there were irregularities in the purchase of fertiliser from India and Laosal was responsible. Nothing happened to him, the courts proved him innocent and set him free.

The CIAA acts only after a notice, a news or petition has been filed before it. Then it studies the case, and if convinced that corruption has indeed taken place, it files a case in the courts. The person filing the petition does not have to reveal himself and can state that he is either concerned citizen, the wronged person or one who just does not want his identity to be known. But the courts do not give importance to the findings of the CIAA, as it sees the identity of the petitioner. Since the petitioner is not identified, the accused simply escape without a trace.

In the 1997 gold case which was filed against the then director general of taxation, Lok Man Singh Karthi, the courts bided the case in no more than nine hearings as the case became untenable and was dismissed. The return of gold worth Rs 7.5 million, forgy and outright abuse of power were the charges, but nothing came of it.

Another interesting case was that of contaminated milk powder. The then chairmen of the Dairy Development Corporation (DDC), Devendra Jha, was the accused. It was stated that in the purchase of 453 tonnes of milk from Dairy Foods, India, DDC had committed irregularities to the tune of almost Rs 47 million. DDC could not even get 100 tonnes of powder milk that the Indian company had earlier promised to supply.

Before the deal was signed, two officers were sent to India to find and report on the actual status of Dairy Foods. They reported that the company had not been in production for the previous five months, the factory and its premises were in antiseptic condition, no records of production and standards were available, and the company had only 120 tonnes in stock. Despite being aware of this, Bi still gave a company commission to supply milk powder.

In yet another case, that of the adoption of 2000 cases from Spain, a Spanish couple, files were hidden, new files created, accusations and counter accusa-

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"It is very clear it (mobilising the troops) will take the nation towards more dangerous clashes, towards more bloodshed and violence."

—Leader of the Opposition, Mahendra Kumar Nepali, in a statement issued on 15 October, published in Budhanilkantha weekly, 18 September.
We wanna go to America

Hundreds of Nepali women are waiting to join their husbands in the United States. The humiliation of visa procedures has made many of them give up hopes of a normal married life.

DURGA POKHAREL

Don't even wish it on my enemies to marry Nepali men who come from America," says a Kathmandu woman who got married recently, but couldn't get a US visa to join her husband despite repeated trials. Intelligent, smart and skilled, she married a Nepali who came from the USA seeking a bridge over a few years. A few days after the wedding, the man went back to America, and the woman feels lost and is suffering separation anxiety.

The story of many women who marry Nepali men staying in the United States is the same: a few questions are asked because an eligible bachelor living in America is a temptation for many parents who want their daughters married off. Parents forego the ritual of checking the man's antecedents, and brides accept the offer blindly in the hope of making it to the land of opportunity. I personally know 14 married Nepali men living together in the same place in America, and all of their wives are still in Nepal. Many of these women want to take their husbands along, but because the American Embassy denied them a visa they have not been together since their wedding day. For some the wait has lasted ten years.

Samjana is one of them. A few years ago, her husband had gone to America on a programme and had returned after it was over. Since he had a multiple entry visa, he went back again. Since then, she has been trying to join her husband with help from an American businessman who is trying to get the couple green cards. But after three visits to the American embassy, she still hasn't got her visa. The first time she took her husband's letter and details of his bank holdings there. She felt that the embassy people sounded positive, although they asked her to come back with her bank balance and property statements. With help from her father-in-law, Samjana returned to the embassy armed with everything that the embassy had asked for. This time the visa officer said her husband's letter was old and that she must get a new one. She went to the embassy, and naked: "You will not return. We won't give you a visa."

Samjana is a postgraduate student at the Padamkanya Campus as well as coordinator of the Amnesty International chapter of the college. She doesn't want to go to America and lose herself there. She only wants to stay in America for a while, look around, understand the country and return. But the embassy denied her a visa three times after making her run around for paperwork. Feeling humiliated, she says:

"It is not good to humiliate Nepalis in such a manner. I don't want to go to America now. Why go to a place where there are people like this?"

She Chinmaya teaches at Tribhuvan University. Three years ago her husband, who has a post-graduate degree and is pursuing further studies, went to America. He has sent her the papers necessary for Buna to join him, but she doesn't even want to go to the embassy because she knows women like her have been denied a visa. Fearing humiliation, she doesn't even bother to try. She says all she wants to do is stay there for six months or so, to see what it's like, and return to her Tribhuvan University job. The daughter of a renowned Nepali professor, Buna says: "We are not pleading for mercy, I only want to join my husband and see what it's like with him."

Sushila Gyalwai's husband has been in America for the last one and a half years. Here, she runs her husband's printing press. She too was denied a visa because she and her husband and see what this place America is all about. Her husband has promised to send her the necessary papers. Although afraid that her press work may be affected if it is not being rejected that has kept her from even filling out the visa forms. Says Sushila: "We can have fun here."

Only three women out of the 14 who have consented to their names being published, but the story of the rest is pretty similar. Some husbands went there as students, some now have green cards and some are in the process of getting it. Most of them can take care of their families. When their spouses are denied a visa, it is a huge embarrassment for the husbands. What will the in-laws and relatives think? What trauma must a newly-wed couple bear when they cannot live together after getting married, and how is a wife to bear the nagging suspicion of society that her husband has abandoned her?

The American Embassy may have its own criteria for granting a visa, but they seem to treat all applications with suspicion. Could it be that the wrong people are getting visas, and the right ones are not because of this tendency to treat everybody as guilty until proven innocent? There are examples of Nepali living illegally in America who work at slaughter houses, shining cattle and pigs, and who come here and take Nepali women back as their brides. These men boast that even if they are working illegally and sharing one room. One Nepali woman who couldn't live with her husband in a cramped shared room ran off with a man who lived alone. There are many Nepali women who find themselves in a similar situation after reaching America and so escape with Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, or elderly Americans.

Nepalis should be warned about men who live illegally in America and come here to get married, living about their work and their lives. Parents ought to thoroughly check the antecedents of these men before giving their daughters in marriage to them. Women must be cautious and not just blinded with the dream of going abroad. For the American Embassy visa section, a piece of advice: a few cases of visa abuse does not mean that everyone who wants to go to America will never come back. Countless well-intentioned Nepalis have now been humiliated, permanently turned off, and their lives ruined.
Diezel, kerosene dearer

Following the increase in petrol and diesel prices in India, Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) has revised the prices of petroleum products on 14 October. The price hike was steeper to kerosene (100%) from Rs13 to Rs26 per litre, while diesel grew by roughly 20 percent, from Rs23 to Rs27.5. The price of petrol rose 17.5 percent from Rs40 to Rs47.5 per litre and the price of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) increased 19 percent per cylinder—from Rs465 to Rs560. The government has made arrangements to subsidise kerosene for the poor—mainly for lighting in the villages—by keeping the price of a ratiated 3 litres at Rs15.50. This kerosene is be distributed through the local administration offices. Diesel continues to be subsidised.

The price rise was imminent following increasing global oil prices, which remain high despite an increase in production by oil producing countries and efforts of large industrialised countries to augment market supply by using their reserve stocks. The international price of oil soared over $135 per barrel by the end of July. NOC said keeping prices at old levels could result in losses of up to Rs3.5 billion. Under the new price regime, NOC’s losses per litre of diesel and ratiated kerosene are Rs4.5 and Rs5.75 respectively. Likewise the loss per LPG cylinder is Rs100, down from Rs187.

Strokes mar economic performance

The Central Bank has cited the July-August work disruption in financial institutions as reason for low revenue collection and decline in government spending. Revenue collection declined by 24.1 percent to Rs1846.17 billion compared to the 9.3 percent increase recorded in the first month of the last fiscal year. Likewise, government spending, which should have increased significantly because of the early approval of the budget, went down by 7.5 percent to Rs16.64 billion. Last year, the expenditure increased by about 30 percent. Both regular and development spending have recorded a decline of 38 and 66 percent respectively. The bank also reported a robust foreign exchange reserve, which increased by 23 percent to Rs95 billion, 86 percent of it in convertible currency. The monthly reports of the central bank serve as a barometer of the economic health of the country. Of late, however, the reports have been appearing after considerable delay—the one issued on 3 October was two months late.

Bertolli in Nepal

Bertolli, the global market leader in olive oil sales, has begun organised marketing and distribution in Nepal. Last week the company appointed Nepal Overseas Marketing Company—which represents some well known brands such as Gillette, Johnson & Johnson and Procter & Gamble—as sole agent for selling and distributing Bertolli oils.

The Italian company, established 135 years ago, makes three types of olive oils: Classico, Extra Virgin and Extra Light. The company plans to first market Classico in 100ml, 250 ml, 500ml and 1 litre packs, and then move on to the “extra”.

Brazilian aircraft for Yeti

The first of two Brazilian aircraft ordered by Yeti Airlines has arrived to join its fleet of 4 Twin Otters, according to a company press release. The 30-seater EMB 120 aircraft will be used to expand Yeti’s services to major airports along the trunk routes—Bhairahawa, Nepalgunj and Bharatpur. The EMB 120 will also be operated on the mountain flights.

The EMBS are manufactured by Embraer Aircraft Corporation, the world’s fourth largest maker of aircrafts. Yeti says the EMB 120s are among the most reliable aircraft now in commercial operation.

Radisson shares

The Orient Hotel Ltd., managed by the Radisson group, is allotting shares to the general public. The hotel had initially offered 1.25 million shares (value Rs100 each) and later increased the offer to 1.5 million. There were 95,000 applicants for 9.8 million shares of which 32,000 applicants are to receive about 1.4 million shares. The remainder is to be distributed among employees.

Belgian aid for NIC

Belgium will provide financial assistance of Rs456.5 million (Euros 8,496,977) for the purchase and installation of 150,000 telephone lines under the Sixth Telecommunications Project to be executed by the Nepal Telecommunications Corporation, the Finance Ministry said. The interest free loan is repayable over 30 years with a 10 year grace period. Finance Secretary Dr. Bimal Koirala and Belgian Ambassador Guy Trouverson signed the loan agreement on 4 October.

Fourth Singapore Airlines Flight

Singapore Airlines began operating its fourth flight linking Kathmandu and Singapore on 2 October. The airline will now fly non-stop between Kathmandu and the island Republic on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The airline began operating flights to Nepal 13 years ago connects 70 cities in 39 countries from Singapore’s Changi Airport.
Conservation sans frontiers

After the successful Annapurna Area Conservation Project, it is now the turn of the Kangchenzonga region to be the next ecotourism model.

National Parks and Wildlife Conservation and WWF Nepal in 1994 and included socio-economicists, wildlife experts, botanists, and conservation biologists like Lhalu Nuru Sherpa. In July 1997, 1650 sq km of Tanglungtse district was declared the Kangchenzonga Conservation Area Project (KCAP). KCAP is largely modeled after the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) north of Pokhara. ACAP is widely regarded as a ecotourism model, although there has been some criticism lately that there has been relied too much on low-budget brokers. Some tourism experts say KCAP should price itself more up-market and ensure multipliers in the local economy. Initially, the project ran into some opposition: locals here thought that the area would be turned into a national park, thereby restricting their access to forest resources. But once they understood that the conservation concept here was different, and that they had a stake in it, the project took off. So much so that the conservation area had to be extended from the initial 1,650 sq km to its present spread of 2,035 sq km at the request of villagers living on the periphery of the original boundary. 

Talking about the early days, Director of Programmes (Sustainable Development) WWF Nepal, Ghana Shyam Gurung says: "In the beginning it was difficult, because political parties and individuals had a vested interest in the project. People feared it would be turned into a national park, but now that the actual goals have been defined the project and many of its programs have been hugely successful."

The other unique aspect of KCAP is its transnational dimension. The government is supporting National Peace Park envisages a joint conservation effort by China, India and Nepal. The Indian side contiguous to the KCAP area falls within the Kangchenzonga National Park (1,704 sq km) in Sikkim, and except for some land that stands unprotected on the Chinese side in Tibet, the massive Kangchenzonga Nature Reserve (33,185 sq km) falls on the northern side, stretching all the way from the northern slopes of Mt Everest. India has agreed to the proposal and China has shown its willingness to extend the present nature reserve boundary (it is borders Makalu Baran) to the KCAP border. The KCAP area is a unique blend of biodiversity and indigenous culture that the government, international organisations and locals did not recognize.

The western extreme of Nepal is harsh mountain terrain of stark beauty and rugged villages. It is characterised by high alpine forests of Himalayan larch, temperate rain forests filled with rhododendron and mallow bushes, and a wide variety of wildlife. The world’s third highest mountain Kangchenzonga towers at 8586m. But Kangchenzonga is more like a mountain range than a peak, but this is more than made up for by its western-most spur: the striking monolithic granite presence of Jamsi. Also called Kumbhakarna Himal in the lower hills, Jamu dominates the Tamer Valley with its looming presence. Nearly 14 percent of the project area is covered with coniferous and temperate rain forests, 1.5 percent is farmed, and 65 percent of it is a rocky, and icy expanse. The Himalayan larch (Larix griffithiana), a threatened coniferous tree, grows in the upper regions, while a little lower the forests turn fiery red in spring with 34 of the 30 species of rhododendron trees blooming among dense patches of the mallow. Deer disperse magaia (a type of bamboo), if there ever was a rhododendron theme park, then Milie Danda is it—ten days’ walk southwest of Tanglungtse. The elusive snow leopard rules the upper regions, preying on the Himalayan ungulates—blue sheep, goral, and musk deer. The endangered red panda, endemic to the eastern Himalaya, lives off the tender malmals shoots that abound in the cloud forests. Impayan pheasants, red-tailed blue magpies, hawks, eagles and other species are abundant, along with various orchids and numerous species of butterflies.

The Conservation area is also tremendously rich in culture. Limbu, Rai, Gurung, and Olanchung Sherpas live together in a unique cultural amalgamation that marks Nepal’s northeastern frontier. The KCAP area covers four VDCs—Tapekthu, Lalep, Olanchungpati, and Yampush and contains 35 widely scattered villages. The villages are connected by trails which the project is upgrading with the help of ‘Mother Groups’ who have been given a sum of Rs 25,000, and the interest earned is used for scholarships to girls or bringing drinking water supply to the villages. Locals were earlier at the mercy of moneylenders who charged an exorbitant 60 percent as interest, but the Mother Group now lends to the needy at 12 percent, reducing dependency on loan sharks.

“The project has been a boon to us. It has brought hope to our people,” says Br Prakash Rai, a resident of Yampush. Local support too has been crucial. In all four VDCs locals contributed 10% of all VDC money and set up nurseries for saplings to reforest the barren hills shown clear by years of deforestation and slash-and-burn farming. KCAP may not yet have the facilities and services of its more famous counterpart in the Annapurnas, but this remote part of eastern Nepal has the potential to catch up. In 1998, when the area was opened to foreigners, only 87 tourists visited, there were 600 the next year. But although there is better access now the numbers are stagnant; last year saw only 750 visitors. KCAP is tougher and more remote than ACAP, and some adventure-loving trekkers who seek something beyond the trekking routes offer, said a Czech trekker we met along the Kangchenzonga trekking trail.

From tourism is still low, KCAP is promoting cash crops like cardamom, which fetches up to Rs 300 g, “Last year was very good, we made up to Rs 400 per g,” says one cardamom farmer. The medicinal herb chirulo (Sideritis angustifolia) is raising interest these days. Earlier, chirulo was used as a local medicine and the shrubs were fed to cattle. But having realised the herb fetches as much as Rs 500 per g, many are taking it. Another income generation avenue is through the Nepali paper industry, made from the bark of the Alnus nepalensis (Alnus hung.) Torkofer trees are ploughed back and directly distributed among the villagers. The government has shown its support and a bill has already been gazetted for the project area to directly receive revenue generated through fees paid by trekkers entering the area. Some activities, however, have a tendency to hurt the local economy rather than enrich it.

“When private airlines from Kathmandu are given permission to charter flights to the Kangchenzonga base camp our porters do not get a work,” says Nuru Budha Sherpa, a resident of Lalep. The Nepal Tourism Board and WWF Nepal are drawing up a “tourism plan” for KCAP. But it may be a good idea to go there before it is implemented, and the whole world discovers Nepal’s unspoilt eastern paradise."
Dog's best friend?

When one social carnivore reneges on the contract and neglects the other, it is the end of a beautiful relationship and the beginning of a problem.

Nepal now boasts more than 40, and that totals 5,000 individual dogs with blue blood.

No one quite seems to know who, but it appears that the St Bernard is the hot favourite. This Alpine animal, bred and developed by Bernese monks in the French Alps and famed for rescuing snowbound mountain travellers, is being imported into Nepal from the Central Asian republic of Uzbekistan via Delhi. Each pup costs Rs 35,000. “We are expecting more St Bernard pups. The demand for this breed is increasing in Kathmandu despite its high price,” says Suresh Shah, owner of Mount Everest Kennel Club (MEKC) in Baneshwor. “The popularity of a breed depends on the hype that surrounds it, but there is also a growing interest and awareness about dog keeping.”

Shah sold eight St Bernard pups in the previous month alone. None of them, he said, were being used to rescue trekkers stuck in blizzards in the high Himalaya with miniature beauty cups in their collars.

The valley has also seen a growing number of kennel clubs, some nascent animal rights activism, and isolated community efforts at managing mongrels. There are around 15 kennel clubs and close to 50 specialist vets in Kathmandu. The Mt Everest Kennel Club alone has 13,000 dogs registered under it, and there are more who avail of their services but are not registered.

Apart from the growing popularity of the St Bernard, the Tibetan Mastiff (Bhode Kuruk), remains the dog of choice, followed by the German Shepherd, Labrador, Japanese Spitz, and smaller breeds like the Tibetan Spaniel, Tibetan Terrier and Lhasa Apso. The Himalayan Kennel Club at Mallighar sells up to 50 pups a month of various breeds. The increasing popularity also has to do with the recent initiative by the Kathmandu Municipalities and various kennel clubs, of which the MEKC remains on the forefront, to carry out registration of pet dogs, keep records, provide medical examination on house calls, and also sell a wide variety of breeds.

That is how the canine upper crust lives, but for the rest of the dog proletariat, life on the streets is a grind. They have frequent bruising fights with neighbourhood toughs, they have to keep a look out for speeding trucks and motorcycles, sadistic-minded dog-hating humans who like to beat them with sticks, Kukur Tiwar notwithstanding, and battle all manner of afflictions like scabies, worms and distemper.

Animal lovers are trying some conscience rasping. Jan Suller, the British artist who has lived and painted in Nepal for 30 years, is one concerned animal lover. She has taken strays off the mean streets and given them a home in her home. Some of the dogs she adopted earlier died in road accidents. Now, she’s got four ex-strays that she keeps safely inside a closed compound. “I just happened to meet all of them at different times on the street, I brought home those that looked friendly and gave them good treatment. Now they give me good company,” Jan told us. She takes time off to talk to her dogs in Nepali when it gets lonely in the studio. Apart from the dogs, Jan has adopted two cats which live in harmony with the dogs.

Many, many others are not so lucky. On the streets, mongrels befell street children, consume the trash piles together, sleep on the streets, follow them about and sometimes receive good care from the vagabond lunch bunch. “We cannot feed them but it’s good to have them around,” says a 10-year-old child who lives on the sidewalks of Thamel. He strokes his group’s mascot, Tiger, and says he is most worried about the municipality’s dog squad which goes on periodic extermination sprees.

It is a knee-jerk response and goes into high gear when complaints from the public gets out of hand or when there is a rabies scare. The municipality’s dog-kilfers operate by night and leave poisoned food about for the strays to eat. Then, in a pre-dawn swoop, the dead dogs are taken to the green belt along the Ring Road on the city rim and buried before the neighbour-hood awakes. “What can we do? People are astute. They burn a dog house on the streets but when it gets poisoned they are angry and ask us why we poisoned a pet. We are thus forced to carry out our operations in the dark,” a municipal worker told us from atop a garbage collection truck.
**Top Dogs**

**Name:** Labrador  
**Origin:** Great Britain  
**Source for import:** India  
**Life expectancy:** 12-14 years  
**Height range:** 20-22 in  
**Price:** Rs 12,000  
**Characteristics:** Can adapt well, needs daily exercise, loves water, calm, intelligent and friendly. Useful for: Companionship, gun dog, field trials, assistance dog.

**Name:** St Bernard  
**Origin:** Switzerland  
**Source for import:** Uzbekistan  
**Life expectancy:** 11 years  
**Height range:** 24-28 in  
**Price:** Rs 35,000  
**Characteristics:** Impressive muscular giant, lazy, gentle but unsuitable for most forms of indoor living. Useful for: Companionship.

**Name:** Tibetan Mastiff (Usho-Akaru)  
**Origin:** Karakorum Range  
**Source:** Northern Nepal and Tibetan plateau  
**Life expectancy:** 12-14 years  
**Height range:** 24-28 in  
**Price:** Rs 4-8000  
**Characteristics:** Adapts well, outdoor, doesn't like hot and humid conditions, cannot be trained easily. Useful for: Companionship, excellent guard dog.

**Name:** Nepali Mongrel (Shimja Akaru)  
**Origin:** Local  
**Source:** Neighbourhoods  
**Life expectancy:** 12-13 years (high mortality rate due to neglect)  
**Height range:** 22-26 in  
**Price:** Free distribution  
**Characteristics:** Hardy, can't trace its family tree, ghetto dweller, guards its alley, high breeding rates, extremely loyal and friendly, no airs, but shows racist tendencies. Useful for: Neighbourhood watch, scavenging.

**Name:** German Shepherd (Abtatsan)  
**Origin:** Germany  
**Source for import:** India  
**Life expectancy:** 12-13 years  
**Height range:** 22-26 in  
**Price:** Rs 10-12,000  
**Characteristics:** Intelligent, adapts well, requires daily exercise. Useful for: Companionship, security, assistance.

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The newest hazard for dogs is the runway at Kathmandu airport, where the airport authorities have complained about dogs wandering around the airport. In the past, the airport has been known for its runways, which are usually closed off due to the problems caused by dogs wandering on them. However, due to the new regulations, the runway is now open to public and the dogs have been attracted to the airport.

Community efforts at managing the dog population have been thwarted by the lack of facilities. In Tansen, the Mungk and volunteers of the local Shanti Vara Club work with the help of the strays' local benefactors, who help feed the dogs and make sure they are vaccinated for rabies, treated for skin disorders or given a temporary contraceptive shot. MUNCR has not been able to carry out permanent sterilizations due to the lack of post-operative care facilities.

Any dog on the streets of Kathmandu is called a Maojya Abaru (mongrel) regardless of its breed. What people don’t realise is that most of the mongrels on the streets and foraging in the rubbish heaps may have some blue blood—-we have sometimes observed scratching by second-generation Labrador, Tibetan mastiff even German shepherds. Some even argue that the Maojya itself is now a unique breed in itself. A breed apart, as if were. There are superstitions linked to dogs. Nepalis believe that the cry of a bitch during the mating season is a bad omen and that they are possessed by a witch.

Residents also complain of having to put up with the rag tag crew of barking and yelping dogs throughout the night. Some experts in Nepal have undergone nervous breakdowns because of sustained lack of sleep caused by all-night barking.

Shah blames the selfishness of locals who mistreat dogs. “First of all, where do these dogs come from? People themselves let them loose on the streets—either after the dog gets sick, or if it happens to be a female or bears frequent litter. The owner could have sterilized the animal, or not kept it at all,” he says. “The problem of stray dogs is due to the ignorance of dog owners. Pet dogs should be tagged and those on the streets should be taken care of. Poisoning won’t help. The owners who have the habit of letting their dogs out on the street have to be educated first.” Janayam Singh, 70, founder of the first kennel club in Nepal—the Nepal Kennel Club—-lives with two Tibetan Mastiffs and two German Shepherds for company. “There are people who ill-treat their dogs, leave them to a servant’s care, chain them, lock them in a kennel the whole day… those people should not even think of keeping a pet. It is criminal to keep a dog if you can’t spend time with it,” he says. Instead of complaining about dogs in the neighbourhood creating a nuisance and just feeling sorry at the sight of a sick or wounded animal, it would help to complement efforts at managing the dog population by controlling their numbers and keeping them healthy. And let us begin on 20 October by making a National Animal Protection Resolution to give dogs decent lives in their present incarnations. After all, isn’t that what animals are for?
MOBILE AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

Sticking fingers in our ears and speaking into a whipstitch. Hearing voices inside your head? Don’t be alarmed. You’ll probably be hearing the mobile phone that allows you to take calls by sticking your finger in your ear. Prototypes have worked well and soon the days of the mobile phone test on a train or bus will be gone. Instead, commuters will get dismayed as people jam their fingers forcibly into their ears and shout into their phones.

The phone, dubbed Whisper by the Japanese firm that invented it, is worn like a watch. It consists of a receiver that converts audio signals into vibrations. The caller’s voice travels through the hand, into the fingers and out into the ear canal. You talk back via a microphone in the phone’s whistle.

There is no keypad. Incoming calls are signaled by a light, so you know when you are being called by tapping your thumb and index finger together. To dial and use other functions you tap your fingers, in stereo. It’s a new world, but one that sounds similar to those in use on many mobiles.

Masakatsu Fukumoto, a senior researcher engineer at Tokyo-based NTT DoCoMo, has the idea for this phone behind him. At a conference on wearable computers in 1997, though demonstrations have worked well, Fukumoto believes most people are reluctant to “wear” computers and the phone may be ahead of its time. (The Observer)

Here comes the broadband wireless internet! Using an aerial, a lightning conductor, a floopy disk and a miniature transceiver link bigger than a credit card, a pair of tights are hoping to bear the world’s big telecommunication companies and launch the first broadband wireless internet service in the UK. James Stovin and Julian Pinson of Comptecon represent a growing group of people who believe that the internet should be owned by us and as free as the air we breathe.

They say the Net is too valuable a thing to be owned by small groups of organizations: the big telecommunication companies. According to the “network and regulation network is too slow, they say, expensive and the cause of what is now being called the “digital divide”.

The scheme will be piloted later this month in Shoeburyness, near London. It involves the creation of a “data cloud”—a wireless internet network distributed through the radio spectrum. The technology is already commercially available and, as long as the network is used for non-commercial basis, no licences will be needed, say the pair. Steven says: “We have already established three sites for antennas or nodes—which are omnidirectional send and receive stations. People have in the wireless world in their laptops they are able to be able with our network.

These first three nodes, adds Stevens, are enough to generate a data cloud. The right cards for laptops are realised 802.11 and wireless Ethernet and are available from companies like Lucent Technologies for as little as $25.

Of course, the pair cannot build a network on their own. So last month they invited others to participate in its building and design. These include chief executive of a leading UK internet service provider (ISP) and several high technology companies. Another node is being developed in north London, and Medium Range is building its own at London Bridge.

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FREE AS AIR

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MOBILE YOU COON

GADGETS, GIZMOS, AND TOYS GALORE

J

apan’s electronic industry grows once a year to show off its wares. Last week at CEATEC 2000, 100 manufacturers from the entertainment and communications

branches displayed their latest products and gave the public a taste of what is to come. If the current trend is anything to go by, it is bound to be more futuristic, more colorful and more fun than all that has gone before.

This is true of most all of products aimed at younger consumers. Sharp’s Zaurus concept, for example, is targeting children, adolescents and students. The Zaurus aims to transform a palmtop into a mobile brain,” giving users access to educational programmes and games while on the move. Mobile phones are smaller, brighter and more practical. It is now possible to send encoded music from one mobile to another, as Sony demonstrates with its new 991

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Arms race in full swing

As arms sales continue to surge, countries in the region are stepping up their military expenditures. In particular, Pakistan and India, which have a long history of conflict, are increasing their defense budgets.

Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), a govern- ment think tank, has noted the rapid increase in military spending in the region. Pakistan has the highest defense expenditure among all South Asian countries, followed by India. Both countries have been increasing their defense budgets in recent years, driven by tensions with their neighbors over territorial disputes.

India, for instance, has been on a spending spree, with the Indian Air Force acquiring new fighter jets and the navy expanding its fleet of submarines. Pakistan has also been increasing its defense spending, with the army acquiring new tanks and missiles.

The arms race has raised concerns about regional stability and the risk of escalation. There is a need for dialogue and cooperation to address the underlying causes of tensions and prevent further militarization of the region.
Palestinians reacted to poverty

JERUSALEM - Growing poverty in Palestinian areas is feeding the violence, politicians and academics say. Disputes over freedom of travel, land and water have exacerbated economic decline.

Palestinians claimed yesterday that there would be no threat of a return to fighting if the economic situation could be tackled. The number of Palestinians below the poverty line is not even candidates - they had to be approached."

Palestinians today reject both the peace process, which has failed to end the Israeli occupation, and the occupation itself. In 1987 when the original Intifada (uprising) erupted there was no peace process. The Intifada was a revolt against the regime that imposed upon it and expanded territories in 1967. Protests challenged Israeli control of every aspect of Palestinian life, exploitation of Palestinian labor and rapid expansion of Jewish settlements on Palestinian land. Palestinians felt they had no option but violence. The Intifada ended when the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat signed the First Oslo Accord in September 1993. But Palestinians are worse off, economically and politically, than before Israel. Arabs remain in occupations of 60 percent of Gaza, 80 percent of the West Bank and all of Palestinian East Jerusalem.

Palestine has been in occupation for more than 50 years, with no hope for a peaceful resolution in sight. The situation is desperate, with high levels of poverty and unemployment, particularly among young people. The Palestinian Authority has been criticized for its lack of democratic reforms and for its failure to address the root causes of the conflict, such as the illegal Israeli settlement expansion in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

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NATION

20 - 26 OCTOBER 2000 NEPAL TIMES
15

Insanely dangerous man

Davo Karnicar skies down Everest and into history books.

Triumphing over extreme cold, treacherous ice and rock, and in a mad, Slovenian Davo Karnicar (pronounced ‘kar-nar-ee’) on 7 October, became the first person to ski non-stop down Mount Everest. The 38-year-old Karnicar emerged exhausted but exhilarated in his base camp after five hours of skiing which is a world record for the fastest-ever descent of Everest.

At one stage he had to speed over stretches of ice that collapsed and broke underneath him and could have sent him tumbling into the deep crevasses that dot the mountain. “I feel only absolute happiness and absolute fatigue,” he said after his successful run landed him in the record books and notched another in a series of bizarre firsts for explorers of Everest that already includes launching a paraglider from the 8,950-metre summit. The descent by the father of three had been seen by many as insanely dangerous. The Darwin Awards website, which documents and applauds foolhardy deaths, called the descent “madness”. However, the only body to make news on 7 October was that of an unknown mountaineer which Karnicar zipped past as he descended, one of an estimated 120 cadavers thought to litter the slopes. For Karnicar it was a reminder of the potential peril of his sport, but he did not stop him. “This mountain is always full of surprises, seeing a dead man out there was a really shocking experience,” he said.

Thanks to strategically placed cameras on the mountain and one attached to his safety helmet, hundreds of thousands of people in more than 70 countries witnessed his descent on the internet. At one stage Karnicar prompted deep concern after he failed to radio in to his support team just before he negotiated a notorious outcrop called the Hillary Step. But it was just the extreme weather hampering the operation of his radio batteries.

In fact conditions were so severe that he was abandoned plans to rest on the summit before attempting to descend. Instead, suffering from fatigue, as soon as he reached the top he put on his skis and flung himself back down the mountain. Karnicar has already skied down Monte Bianco, the Matterhorn, the Eiger and Ama Dablam, but Everest was the last great challenge. “My next goal is to ski down Mt Elbrus in the Caucasus,” Karnicar told us Tuesday on return to Kathmandu. “Once I get sponsors, I want to ski all seven summits within a year.”

Fascinating is that Billy has already cost Karnicar two fingers in 1996 when a failed attempt saw him get trounced as a fierce storm lashed the peak. Karnicar comes from an illustrious skiing family in Slovenia and took part in his first Himalayan skiing expedition in 1989. He says: “I have captured my dream, I’m very happy. Extreme skiing, is my sport, my thinking and life itself.” Now, the Slovenian wants to open a ski school in the Khumbu. “I want Nepali children to enjoy the joys of skiing just as we did. Who knows there may be a great hidden talent in Nepal.”

The unbearable sweetness of being

The assumption that all village life is poverty, and candy is welcome relief for the downtrodden, is it not akin to the whole attitude behind foreign aid?

walking through a village in the Kali Gandaki gorge, and the crystal clear voices of the children brought joy to my heart. At first. You see, as I still struggle with Nepal, I assumed the toots were coming from the sweet foreigner in their midst. My spirits soared like the Himalayan heights around me. There was a spring in my step.

Then around the corner, dreadful reality intervened. A group of German tourists—trekkers—I deduced from the pastel Gore-Tex space suits they wore—were standing surrounded by children. The kids chanted the same mantra that had so buoyed my tired feet, with a slight edge of hysteria. My fellow foreigners from the continent of Europe were distributing the “miltha”, along with car window stickers saying “Shuttle Airport” and a host of other trinkets. Trade goods, they used to call them. I’m surprised they weren’t carrying beads and mirrors to exchange for gold and animal feathers, loving the red ones. I felt my goaty face turn red with anger as the tourists took turns taking pictures of themselves in a sea of frontalized children. I willed myself to be calm, then adopted what I hope is not too rollicking a role of a social worker. “Just that what you think you’re doing,” I asked, “handing out sweets to children who have no access to dental care? Do you think these people are poor, deserving savages who crave your goblets of civilization?”

My continental co-trekkers were as astounded at our outburst from what was clearly a madness, and one with an American accent to boot. They were well in Europe that fanaticism and the New World go together well. So they wisely ignored me, put away their trade goods and shuffled off down the trail —leaving me surrounded by glaring young children, all aware that my sanctimonious words had cost them a mouthful of mithai. Oops. But that set me to thinking, as I best face facts. This assumption by foreign visitors that all village life is poverty and even a few persons are a welcome relief for the down trodden young, is it not akin to the whole attitude behind foreign aid?

By DANIEL LAK

with setting

...for forty years after it crashed on Dampa Pass below Mt Dhaulagiri, the wreckage of a Pilatus Porter aircraft has been examined by a search expedition, reviving hopes that this legendary aircraft that holds the record for the highest-ever landing by a fixed wing plane may fly again one day. The 22-member expedition consisting of Pilatus Porter enthusiasts and mountaineers from Austria, Germany and Switzerland took six days to reach the crash site at 5,200 m from August earlier this month.

“We have tried to bring down everything that can still be used in rebuilding the plane,” expedition leader for the Caminada, holding a yellow-painted section of the fuselage bearing the word ‘Pilatus’. “The yellow plane which is known as ‘Yeli’ has been hit by severalsl avalanches over the years and was blown off by high winds to lie about 100 m from the place where it smashed into a hidden rock while landing on the snowy pass on 5 May, 1960. By sad coincidence, one of the pilots on that last flight, Eml Wick, (featured in Nepal Times at 5 Aug. last month in Zurich as just the expedition was getting underway.

“It is a pity that Emi didn’t live to see us rescue his plane. We have brought down the plane’s soul and we will build a new ‘Yeli’ around it.” Caminada told us before leaving for Switzerland last week. Pilatus Porter enthusiasts have set up the Porter Vintage Association to raise money to bring back other parts of the plane and build an exact replica in time to fly at the Swiss Expo 2002. For the moment, the wreckage lies in Dampa Pass adorned with colourful prayer flags.

‘Yeli’, with its call sign HB-FAN, was the first prototype of the Porter ever built, and the Pilatus factory near Rigi in Switzerland in 1959. The plane was an immediate hit, much-praised for its excellent handling and short take-off and landing capabilities that made it ideal for mountain flying. ‘Yeli’ flew extensively in Nepal, and was ferrying supplies from Pokhara to Dhaulagiri for a Swiss expedition on the mountain when it crashed.

The Porter Vintage Association hopes to fly the new ‘Yeli’ back to Nepal when it is rebuilt, but will need special permission to overfly the route as the original as the plane originally flew through Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. The rest of the wreckage may be lodged at the Mountaineering Museum that is going to be opened in Pokhara in 2002.

Expeditions locate crash below Dhaulagiri

by DANIEL LAK (a journalist specialising on South Asia based in Kathmandu.)
The captains of Nepal's sport have never learnt to play straight.

Alok Tumbahangpeye

The petty battles that sport managers fight in public has always made better copy than the performance of athletes and players. Not long after the much-criticised Sydney Games, by the international community, the All Nepal Football Association (ANFA), the body that manages the country's football scene, is mired in a controversy that seems likely to drag on for years.

It started two years ago, when the National Sports Commission (NSC) decided to draft charter and circulated it among various sporting associations asking them to be adopted by the government. For its part, the ANFA was also asked to submit its constitution within six months. But the association missed the deadline last five years (although, with the Association, under the presidency of former national football captain, Gunesh Thapa, has not complied so far).

After that came a series of months back when Geeta Rana, head of the Women's Football Committee and a nominated member of the ANFA, filed a case with the Lalitpur Appellate Court, arguing that the proposed election to the national executive of ANFA was illegal since it was against the NSC directives. The Court then ordered ANFA and NSC to amend their acts and set up the election process.

This in effect meant another ANFA executive committee meeting. Thapa himself said that he had to form the ad hoc committee as Gunesh Thapa's term had expired. Thapa then filed a petition with the Appellate Court asking that Rana's appointment be voided.

The reasons for the fight over control of the country's football body is not clear. Not only will the winner determine who gets to go on junior but will also control the squabbles between uncoordinated bodies. In any case, Thapa's advancement to the country's sporting sector, but this time the battle may have gone a bit too far with two parallel bodies claiming legitimacy. Whatever the outcome of this mess, it is evident that the members of Nepal sport may go on for years playing stay-aways. And football management certainly needs a major overhaul because this is one sport that Nepal are truly keen on.

Genetically modified athletes

One way to pass drug tests in the next Olympics would be to genetically-engineer athletes with made-to-order muscles.

Gavin Evans in London

They say no one remembers who came fourth. Well, no one except the British that is — for the eloquence of one athlete who came fourth, maybe not even by that. And that's the truth. Lewis had a most remarkable title run time of 21.11 seconds on a flinty course like Sydney would not have been brought the runner with seven seconds of a century medal. It would have been a whole minute short of gold. Surprising it may have been but Brown, not previously a top-20 marathon man had no doubt about the cause — the absence of drugs.

"It was probably the first marathon I've done on a level playing field," he said. "Now with the new test I feel I can be more competitive.

"I am now working towards being for cyphon (epo), a drug used by endurance athletes because it boosts the oxygen content of the blood. It is widely believed to be behind the sub-2:07 run times routinely scored in the world's leading marathons. It was taken as an article of faith in running circles that some of the world's top athletes — with Spanish and Portuguese men most commonly cited — were EPO cheats. The evidence from Sydney suggests that new urine and blood tests, even though unable to test for long-term abuse, were sufficient to scare off the Europeans.

It was bad not to notice that several favourites were running at least one second under 2:07. One runner forgot the Chinese. Desperate to shore up their credentials for the 2008 Olympics, they effectively traded running and swimming golds for bronze points in London 27 hopefuls who failed internal EPO blood tests. This meant there would be no repeat of the super human times secured earlier in the decade by Chinese distance runners.

Instead it was that of Evgeny (the Ukrainian, A. Elsikho's Doutru Tulsu sprinted the last 600 meters to set two in the women's 10,000m just as she did in 1992. She was aided in her task by Britain's Paula Radcliffe; who led from the front, allowing Tulsu to break the Olympic record of 3:11:30. The record was barely two seconds.

In the past Radcliffe, who runs with a red ribbon as part of her campaign for more effective blood testing, has said that several top athletes among whom she records were using EPO. For her time she seemed more trusting. "We now have both blood and we're doing better. Improving the test is very important to me," she said, adding that the procedure should be an annual event. The successes came in the 10,000m. However, I don't know if results are still best.

International athletes can cope with sluggish times in distance running, events the Americans tend to ignore. Rather Nordic would be a menace, "Oh, you're running for 100 kilometers," the 43-year-old Radcliffe's coach, Craig Amy, said in early March. She had decided not to contest the 10,000m. Not until after three years of delays, Athens has fallen so far behind in Olympic preparations that serious questions are being raised within the International Olympic Committee (IOC) about whether the 2004 games should be moved. The biggest concern has been over construction. Athens claims 70 percent of the games venues are in place—but they claimed that three years ago. Completing the other 30 percent, including the Olympic village, remains a problem. In Sydney, there has already been talk behind the scenes of who might stage the games should Athens not be able to. "There is no plan B," said Francois Carrard, the director general of the IOC. "The IOC is absolutely committed to seeing an excellent games in Athens.

Lewis demonstrated her skill with shot and javelin to win gold in the Olympic Games. The reason why the young woman who has been called "the fastest woman in the world" should have been drug-tested, but what was not clear.

It is likely that Carr Les is probably the only one of the 250 sprinters from this was who could not have been clean — decided to boycott the athletics part of the Games. The stinging blows for the son of American shot-putter T.J. Hunter — he was last in 1995 for steroids — and a bunch of East European disquise the most routine chase of HGH in its comparison, insulin growth factor (IGF-1). Without the introduction of blood tests for these drugs, the only way of catching a cheat is the randomized hunt, as happened to Senego Zenov, the Uzbekistan coach, who tried to sneak 15 pills of HGH into Sydney. Anyone more sensitive can cheat with impunity. It therefore came as no great surprise to find sprint times keeping pace with those of past Olympics and world championships.

The exception was the men's 200m where the performance of star sprinters Michael Johnson and Maurice Green assured a slow time. To the future. The International Olympic Committee's strong talking medical doctor Dr. Christoph Schumacher, asked whether HGH tests would be in place for Athens, was admirably frank in his reply: "I hope so, but my fear is that it will not be taken seriously." He wants on to add that within a few years there may be new headlines — "Like gone there — keeping the gains ahead of the catchers. It is that genetic engineering can be put to use in not only increasing performance, producing higher output of natural hormones for instance, and perhaps even through building specific muscles. See you in Athens. (London Times)

Men throw better than women

It did not look that way when British athlete Denise Lewis demonstrated her skill with shot and javelin to win gold in the Olympic Games. The reason why the young woman who has been called "the fastest woman in the world" should have been drug-tested, but what was not clear.

There is a narrow base to the experiment at the US national institute of child health and human development, given such an inflammatory conclusion. Twenty-five human volunteers and 17 capuchin monkeys threw balls or stones into buckets three or six metres away. The results, reported in New Scientist magazine, found men 52 percent more accurate than rats. Female monkeys, however, were no less accurate than male monkeys. The researches' aim was to explore human evolution but they finding aside to the debate on whether gender differences are innate or learned. Some will argue that boys get taught and peer pressured into throwing skills. But Rachael Heyhoe Flint, former captain of the England women's cricket team, thought the difference was natural. "If you went into a playground with eight- or nine-year-old children, half boys and half girls, the boys just naturally know how to throw," she said. "There is a physical coordination that the majority of males have over the majority of females. It is very peculiar." (The Guardian)
Arriving monument to a glorious past

Long before he died in 1992, Dwarka Das Shrestha spoke to Desmond Doig who wrote this profile of a resort that has over the years become a tourist attraction in its own right.

You remember being terrified to see people squeezing, peering, holding windows of their cabins, to make modern ones. They were chiselling away centuries of priceless art. So gave them new wood in exchange for the old and they were very happy. That’s how the whole thing happened. You know, people were so unhindering, they were selling their old windows—the country’s heritage—for as little as thirty rupees each. My mother brought me two from the historic city of Biratnagar. He said there were many more. No one wanted them. They were being burnt as fire wood and on funeral pyres. I wept.

That was in 1955. With no clear idea then of what he was doing, they did, with DOG began collecting the abandoned doors and windows of old houses. Slowly a passion developed. I spread my search all over the valley and as my collection grew, so did the idea of building a building monument. It was a dream. If I could influence the youth of my country, I could save the ruined our culture—the dead body of my mother. First there was the land planted with fruit trees, nothing small, but enough for DD, his wife and growing family. Tentatively, he eroded a chalet-style lodge that seemed forgetful of his dream and his treasures. “It was a mistake,” he’d go, DD says, then slowly, so that the swayrul momentum of Kathmandu hardly took notice, DD began building his dream house with the help of few architects. It was not yet done, when in 1980, it won for DOG the prestigious PATA Heritage and Conservation Award.

The hotel with its new wing, added since this piece was written in 1985, since Dwarka Shrestha’s death, the hotel is run by his wife and daughter.

Death Poem 4

Death comes to me in the dark of the night and plays a flute beneath the flowering plant. Touching this weeping life with warm hands and cool caresses death offers the brightness of the sun’s dazzling rays in the dark of the night.

The next poem has an equally private tone:

Death Poem 35

Like a finger jabbing at water death writes the name of life

Cold or hot for the duration of the touch After the touch has ended neither mark of the finger remains nor the ease or pain of the finger’s jab

Like a finger jabbing at water death writes the name of life

Manjul did, at first, attract the ire of his comrades by moving towards such “bourgeois” expressions. The poet, though, was clearly seeking a more subjective language than the one allowed by Nepal’s Marxist-Leninist aesthetics. Mrityu Kabita can be read, in fact, as a wittily lit funeral pyre for Manjul’s own early work as a party propagandist. In some works following Mrityu Kabita, Manjul has returned to social issues—but as an individual speaking directly to the people, without party controls. With more and more of Nepal’s communist writers taking the path to this same crossroads, Manjul has become an emblematic figure of Nepal’s progressive writings, relaunched a language which irreconcilably splits personal and political, and private and public terms of expression.
The early bird gets the plane

Ph.........................................email..........................................................
Name.................................................................
To send in your entries, please fill in the details below and fax to 977-1-521013, or email to crossing@ crossing.com. Enthusiasts can drop in at Kathmandu Pvt Ltd, Palace Dhaka, Lalitpur.

The airport authorities have been trying to relocate the Koteshwor township for the past 25 years. But like a lot of other plants, no one seems to have the political will or the energy to take the final step. “We were paid compensation to leave our land here 12 years ago,” says Rahul Riddhi, a local resident doing her wash at the family well as a jet takes off overhead. “But they didn’t do anything to actually move us out, so we are still here.”

Meanwhile, tourism authorities and the airlines have given the airport an ultimatum: “Get the animals out, or we will get out.” With the bush being passed at a slow pace, the ad hoc short-termism and the lack of action to address long-term problems of urban congestion, it is evident that this story will be with us for many years to come.

Kathmandu residents who couldn’t be bothered to clean up their own backyards are unlikely to suddenly become upright and clean citizens in the national interest to protect the tourism industry.
**HAPPENINGS**

**ART REVIEW**

By WAYNE AMTZIS

**Good Finnish, in Nepal**

An exhibition of contemporary art from Finland and a performance of Nepali classical music and dance at Baber Mahal Revisited.

From 14th to 30th October, the work of three women artists from Finland: printmakers, Marjo Yi-Antola and Marita Mikkonen and sculptress Umpa Ninivaara, will be exhibited at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. The opening of the exhibition on the full moon of October was followed by a performance of Nepali classical music and dance in the open court of Baber Mahal Revisited. The performance, arranged by Infinity International, attempted to recall that of court musicians and dancers of the Rana period.

The high whitewashed walls of Mul Chowk provided the perfect backdrop, with only the anachronism of microphones and the hurried pace of the presentation to remind one of place and time. It was with Suresh Mrá’s performance of Radha, however, that the power of illusion took hold as the stately male dancer took on varied female moods and emotions with his exquisite hand gestures and intensity of embodiment of Radha’s desire, frustration and anger with her lover. Krishna. Homnath Upadhaya’s group also provided accomplished performances with the modulated, emphatic and sure voice of Gurudev Kansushree echoing in the courtyard and the clear pitched flute of Sushik Bishwakarma rising above. At the Siddhartha Gallery, three Finnish artists complemented and play off each other while Marita draws her figures with the ease of a child and the sureness of an illustrator of children’s books. Marjo asks that we take on the inner disposition of the women and men she depicts; Marita’s animals possess an assurance of form and yet an disarming presence. Both use the print media to advantage, Marjo scratching the surface of her prints or washing out the eyes of her studies or duppings a face with light. Though the torsos are amiboic or at ease, something is not revealed, or what is revealed is that there is an inwardsness we cannot get at.

With Marita’s series Raven, each print replicates the other: the same dark bird poised above an ink scratched nest presents a variety of moods dependent on the colouring or lack of colour in the print. When we finally notice the aluminium casts designed by Umpa Ninivaara, hanging from the ceiling on a far wall, we are pleasantly surprised. Her pods, her larvae, heavy, yet cool to the touch, reflecting the available light of the gallery, seem lifelike yet resistant to life—or is it death they are resistant to? One almost expects their ribbed encrusted forms to morph into an exquisite creature of light or that the occupant that has emerged from the open faced sleeping bag is lurking in the room.

With anticipation one moves to the second floor of the gallery to encounter more of Umpa Ninivaara’s work. The disappointment one has in finding that these three metal castings are all we have to appreciate is short lived. A full range of prints by Marjo Yi-Antola and Marita Mikkonen deepen our understanding of their work. Marita offers us her menagerie of animals, Marjo her portraits. Only now sticks and roots seem to draw the dreaming woman back to the earth. And the animals want in their own way to be encountered, to be seen as they are.
Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

A s Dasain goes, this year’s festive season had a somewhat somnolent quality. Many of us barged 18 hours of sleep a day, waking up only to graze at an unbroken mountain goat, belching frequently in a loud and carefree manner, chewing the cud by re-eating juice moments of aforementioned ex-goat picked out from between molars, plucking prams in the mouth, pocketing marrowl writings, turning over, and going back to sleep. I know what you’re muttering, you’re musing how is all this different from a non-Dasain day in the Ministry of Labour’s Department of Slot and Letting? Good question. In fact, one expert who has closely nuanced the eclairred rhythms of an average adult male in this country points out that our sleeping patterns are essentially the same. Dasain or no Dasain. As citizens of a landlocked Himalayan kingdom that has never ever in its entire history been colonised by aliens from the Planet Hoth, we have all had a nice long vacation and now, fully rest, we can once more plunge headfirst into the task of nation-building and send protest notes to all foreign radio stations, television quiz shows and religious organisations wearingkhali shorts which slugs to east aspirations on our extra-territorial mega-sovereignty, that Nepal takes a dat view of such doha. The content responses are commiserate with the status, respect and, yes, even fear that Nepal commands in the international community. First to wave the white flag was the BBC. The British broadcasting consortium sent His Majesty’s Government a letter of capitulation calling for a cease-fire of hostilities, unilateral withdrawal of all its forces from within a 10,000 km radius of Malekpur Gad, and the payment of an annual reparations of an amount equaling, but not exceeding, 25 percent of the UK’s gross domestic product.

The next to get down on his knees and beg for mercy was Amritade Buchan. The answer to a question in KIBC last week in which Nepal’s August Lower House was called the Rantra Punclayat amounted to contempt of parliament because it advocated a return to autocracy. Mr Buchan has now promised to travel to Nepal at his earliest opportunity in the coming decades to conduct a training seminar for our politicians to refine their skills in becoming corruptees even more rapidly than they are becoming corruptees now.

And the third request for pardon came from the RSS which clarified that the external boundaries of India as depicted on a map in its official mouth organ was neither correct, nor authentic. The map’s intention was to show that it is actually India that is under Nepal’s umbrella and the entire subcontinent is a part of Nepal’s Great Hindu Empire.

With these major victories and another national holiday around the corner, we can all go back to belching frequently in a loud and carefree manner.

Between Dasain and Tihar

With the astounding success of his film, Caravan, you’d have expected Eric Valli to have at least a chip on his shoulder. But when we met Eric during his brief visit to Kathmandu last week there was no sign of it. Still the same intensely romantic artist and adventurer we met on his first visit to Nepal in the 1970s when he fell in love with the country and stayed on. He is slated about the 11-week box office run of Caravan in Kathmandu and the acclaim that the film received here. “That is my biggest reward, that Nepal liked the film,” he says. “Nepal taught me about true courage, dignity, tolerance.”

As a Nepal-France entry, Caravan was nominated for best foreign language film at the Oscars, but lost out to Pedro Almodovar’s All About My Mother. However, the film was voted best film at Barfelt Jury’s Choice at Locarno, and for Best Music in Toronto. It is the second most successful film at the box office in France this year (where it was renamed Himalaya), and the number one film in Switzerland. For those who missed seeing this epic story of a yak salt caravan, the film will be screened at the first Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival in the first week of December.

Eric grew up as a cabinet-maker in France, and was never formally trained in anything. “No one taught me to be a photographer, a director or a cameraman. Basically I am a story-teller,” he says. “And I have found that a feature film is the best way to recreate reality.”

His latest work with Debra Kehler is the photo-essay of the Rana Tharu on the September cover of National Geographic magazine. A book version called Jungle Princess which will be released in April 2001, Eric first shot to fame with his dramatic story of the Gurung honey-hunters of the Annapurnas which was printed in National Geographic. Eric has other projects up his sleeve, but he is secretive about them. Even so, you can be sure that like the Rana Tharu, the salt caravans of Dolpo, or the honey-hunters they will be about societies and traditional ways of life that are in fragile transition as they are overwhelmed by the mainstream. Eric Valli has always given us one last glimpse before they disappear.