

FREE MOUNTAIN FLIGHT
PANORAMA 10-11



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EXCLUSIVE

Mobile licence

The Khetan Group and India's Modi Telestra won the financial bidding for a mobile phone licence on Wednesday. The team offered Rs 24.11 billion for the entire package, which includes licence and renewal fees and a four percent royalty. The one-time licence fee offer was Rs 210 million, and the renewal charge—payable once after 10 years and then every five years for up to 25 years was Rs 20 billion. The four percent royalty payable comes to Rs 3.9 billion. At a 12 percent discount rate, the net present value of the offer made by the top bidder comes to a whopping Rs 9.27 billion, which rival participants at the bidding said was a “stupendous” sum. Now, all we want to know is this: will mobile phones become cheaper next year?

Radisson shares

The Oriental Hotels Limited has allocated over 30,000 shares to applicants collecting what would amount to Rs 150 million. An investigation on the entire public issue reveals many questions that are still unanswered. Financial analysts say the July sale of shares, which was over-subscribed seven times took place without complete financial disclosures. The Security Exchange Board which regulates the stock market, says it has done its best to protect shareholder interest. The issue manager is also confident the issue has benefitted both the hotel and the shareholders.pg 4-5

Congress at arms

Just as you expected, the Nepali Congress infighting is not over. It heated up again with dissident Sher Bahadur Deuba dashing off a stiff statement accusing the Koirala camp of not keeping its word on the vexing party membership issue. All this, and the cabinet reshuffle, is distracting the ruling party's attention from the much more important recent question of resolving the Maoist issue through dialogue.

RAJENDRA DAHAL
They joked, they drank tea and they shared biscuits. Deputy Prime Minister Ram Chandra Poudel was in a relaxed Tihar mood. He quipped that he used to be the leader of a communist student union. Across the sofa, the Maoists' Kathmandu commander, Rabindra Shrestha slapped his knee and laughed out loud, saying: “How strange, I used to be with the Nepal Students' Union (the students' wing of the Nepali Congress)!” The maverick activist and career-mediator, Padma Ratna Tuladhar, who brought the two men together for the first ever face-to-face talks between a government minister and the Maoists, poured more tea and sat back to let the two sides size each other up. The bonhomie helped. After two hours of talks, a beaming Tuladhar dropped Poudel off at the Ministers' residential quarters in Pulchowk in a sleek metallic beige Corolla sedan. “So, they don't look like monsters, do they?” Tuladhar asked Poudel in the car. The Deputy Prime Minister agreed.

A week later, both the government and the Maoists seem to have sensed the overwhelming wish among the Nepali people that this fragile beginning for talks should succeed. After nearly over 1,600 deaths, mayhem, destruction and bad blood, public opinion is against more violence. Even Maoist leader Comrade Prachanda said in his 28 October statement that his movement was responding to the “people's wish” for dialogue. This perhaps is the reason why the positive vibes from last Friday's talks were so palpable, and the politicians made sure it got maximum coverage. In fact, it all seemed too good to be true.

To be sure, the road ahead is bumpy. But peace talks will be more difficult the longer the conflict drags on. As we have seen from mediation processes in Northern Ireland, from the Israel-Palestinian conflict, or Sri Lanka, violence has an in-built mechanism for escalation at its own inexorable momentum. If it goes on long enough there will be enough people who profit and benefit from it, and who will not want it to end. The Maoist insurgency in Nepal has not yet reached that stage, and we are at a point in time when domestic public opinion, the debate over the army's role, the constructive role played by the Royal Palace and international pressure have all converged to prepare the ground for talks. This window of opportunity will not last.

As things stand, there are four basic scenarios of where things can go from here in a good to bad sequence:

PEACE KEEPERS

- Rapid progress in informal talks, both sides negotiate in good faith, government promptly meets Maoist demands, and a ceasefire is agreed upon.
- Maoists come up with demand for safe passage, there is prolonged haggling over agenda for official talks. Partisan interests try to prevent agreement.
- Government and Maoists get dragged into a propaganda war, Congress infighting gets worse, Maoists refuse talks, attacks on police resume.
- All talks deadlocked, government refuses to release detainees, Maoists launch nationwide attacks, paramilitary force is armed, army is deployed fully. Nation heads towards civil war.

Prachanda's latest deadline for the government to meet its pre-conditions, a response to the killing of three rebels in Kalikot district *after* the Poudel-Shrestha meeting, expires today (Friday). And from what we know of these conditions, they are not insurmountable. The government should have no problem acceding to them, and it must understand that if he does not produce results Prachanda will be under internal pressure from the Maoists themselves. At the talks on 27 October when Rabindra Shrestha reiterated the demand that Maoist leader Dinesh Sharma be released, Ram Chandra Poudel is reported to have exclaimed in English: “Done!”

Poudel's goal at the talks was to assess if the Maoists were genuine. Talks could be a Maoist ploy to buy time, impress the domestic public, donors, and the international community that they are reasonable revolutionaries. Poudel appears to have been persuaded that they were genuine. The Maoists, for their part, inquired after the fate of Sher Bahadur Deuba's committee, and asked that the government appoint an official negotiator. It's funny the Maoists should ask that, since the ruling party should have done at without anyone asking. But we all know what the problem is: it is the Nepali Congress' chronic infighting. Koirala and Deuba can't stand each other, and there is factional competition to take credit from future peace talks.

Ram Chandra Poudel seems to be an acceptable compromise, and he will need to be given the space and the mandate by his party to negotiate. Deuba, meanwhile, has been sulking and taking rearguard

action, and we hear even lobbying with foreign embassies to get himself reinstated in the peace committee. In an interview in September (# 9) Deuba told us it didn't really matter who talked to the Maoists, since the credit would go to the party. It is time for him, in the nation's interest, to show the same magnanimity now towards Poudel. Because if the government and the party do not end their bickering soon and sit down to prepare for talks they could end up helping the Maoists re-justify calling off talks and going back to war.

What is intriguing is why the Maoists, who are winning the psychological, military and information battle against the government, agreed to talks at this point. After all, as an ideologically-motivated guerrilla force with a long-term plan for the capture of state power, time is on their side. They don't lose much by talking, they can go back to jungle any moment by saying the government is not serious about meeting their demands. And these are demands we don't really know much about anyway: is Dinesh Sharma just a red herring, or are there more serious hidden demands about constitutional changes? We may finally know, for instance, if the Maoists really want to abolish the monarchy and turn Nepal into a people's republic.

In the end, even the Maoists need to gauge public opinion. Political power may come out of a barrel of a gun, but it

is the people who will keep them there. So far, the gun has taken precedence over hearts and minds. The Maoists may have won many battles, but they haven't yet won the public opinion war. Dunai, for instance, may have been a tactical victory, but it was a strategic turning point. It overturned many givens: it galvanised government resolve to partially deploy the army; the prime minister and king were forced to clarify each others' positions; and the present talks got their impetus.

Whatever may be Prachanda's reason to come to the table, the government has no alternative but to negotiate. The Maoists have shown their flexibility by removing some of their early pre-conditions, successfully throwing the ball in the government's court. The ruling party needs to show similar adaptability. That is why these things are called negotiations: you give as well as take.

The Maoists have not yet declared that the talks are a substitute to the war, nor have they shown signs that they have slowed mobilisation. What the government needs to do is to hold on to the Maoists' expressed desire to come to talks and create the conditions where they will keep talking. Otherwise the blame for failure will be laid squarely on the feckless ruling party, and the inability of its leaders to look beyond the tip of their noses. ♦

SUBHAS RAI

Editorial
page 2

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THE TEN-YEAR ITCH

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 2047 (1990) has been criticised by a vocal minority on all sides of the political spectrum. The right claims it is against Nepali nationhood because the divine powers of the king have been curtailed. The left says its ambiguous provisions are open to manipulation by traditionalists and reactionaries. Extremists ridicule it as a document that compromised the real interests of the people after the *Jana Andolan*.

To be sure, this first decade has been a roller-coaster ride: three parliaments, ten prime ministers, two local elections, improbable coalitions, perennial infighting, break-ups of political parties, and a tendency to polarise. No wonder some call the system of government in Nepal today "constitutional anarchy".

But there have been achievements: the supremacy of the law was proven when the Supreme Court restored the second *Pratinidhi Sabha* in 1995, even though it had been dissolved earlier on the recommendation of the prime minister. Taking advantage of the unfettered freedom of expression and organisation, there has been a transformation in social activism, media and civil society. Given the persisting stranglehold of superstition and fatalism in this country (not necessarily confined to the illiterate), this is no mean feat.

Apart from all that, the 1990 Constitution made a dramatic break from the past—it transferred sovereignty from the crown to the people. The symbol of Nepali nationalism and unity is now the Constitution. So what's so great about that, you may ask. Well, it puts the onus of building our future on our own shoulders. We can no longer blame it on fate, or callous rulers. If our leaders turn out to be crooks, we have the power to vote them out.

There is an opportunity to start anew as we prepare to mark the first ten years of our constitution. Informal talks were held last week between the Deputy Prime Minister Ram Chandra Paudel, and the representative of a group that doesn't believe in the present constitution and has adopted a violent struggle to have it changed. Hopes have been raised that there is now light at the end of this dark tunnel. All right-thinking Nepalis in their heart of hearts are convinced this is the way to go. The sooner the Maoists use the political space afforded by the same constitution they revile to enter the mainstream, the better it will be for them and for the Nepali people. But after living by the bullet, do they have the political will to face the ballot? The Nepali people have such a low opinion of political leaders who have ruled us so far that the Maoists may be pleasantly surprised to win the next election.

Sceptics have already begun to rubbish the informal talks as a Maoist propaganda ploy. But if they are sincere, and we have Padma Ratna Tuladhar's word that they are, perhaps they discovered its usefulness only after the possibility of the army coming under the constitutionally formed government of the day became imminent. Nepalis now have to show they are mature enough to control their destiny. After all, they are in charge.

THE ORIFICE

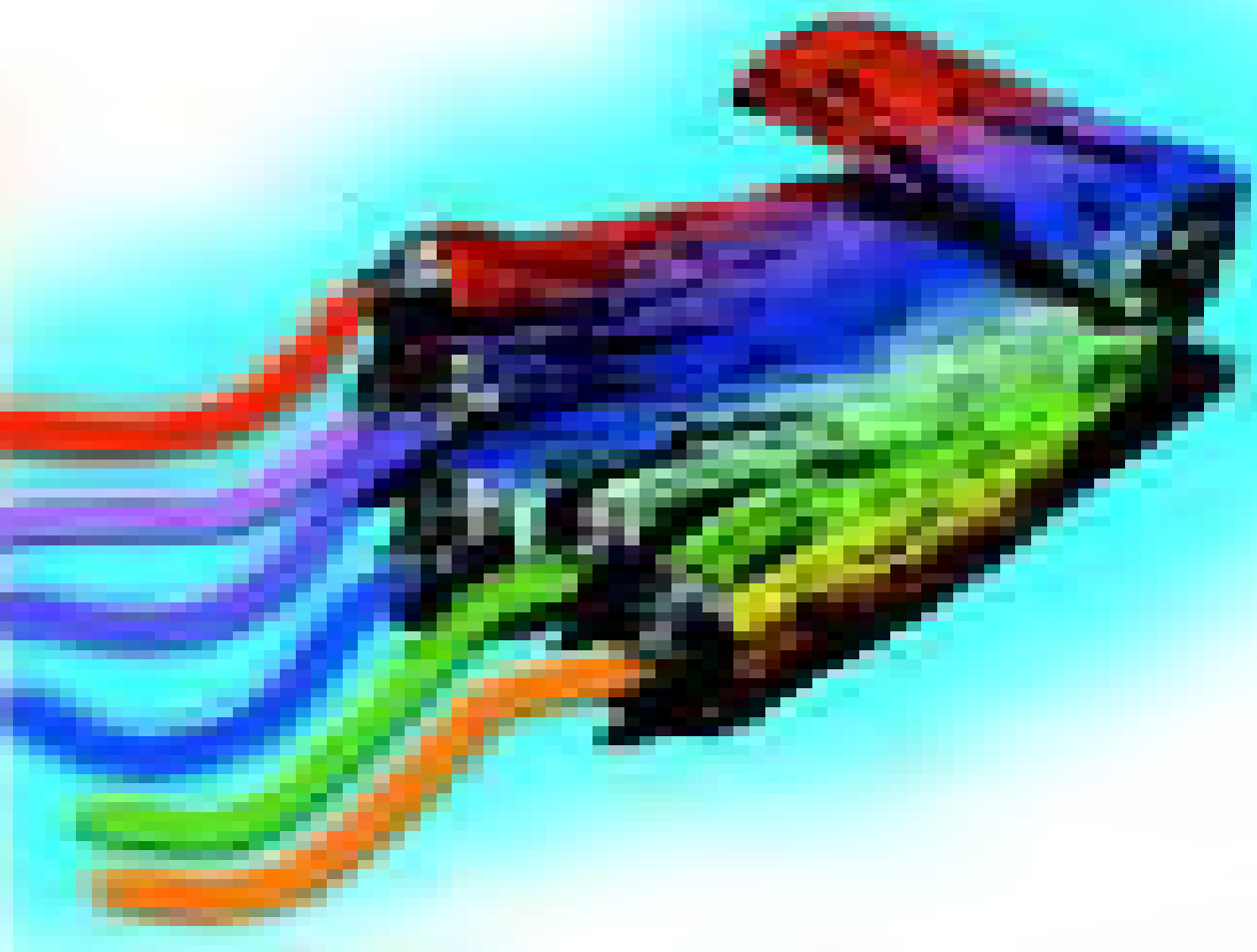


OK, everyone, back to work. The fun and games are over for now. Or, are they? By the looks of it, we are headed for another four-day forced holiday, 16-20 November, to protest the fuel price hike. With a work ethic like that, it is a wonder that this country hasn't completely disappeared off the face of the earth.

Even at the best of times, official office time is nine. You saunter in around ten, nobody even notices because none of the colleague is there to notice; they come in at eleven. Just in time for the first round of tea on the terrace, to reminisce about the Tihar

winnings. Or bitch about local transport: the stinking three-wheelers that run on kitchen gas, the diesel buses that run on kerosene, the Bajaj whose meter gallops faster than a four-wheel taxi, a microbus that is packed like a sardine can, the high-handiness of transport cartels.

An office is where the Nepali civil servant goes to relax, to get away from the tedium of housework. It all becomes a bit suspicious when someone is seen to be actually working these days. Why is he in his office, poring over files? What's in it for him? Why the motivation. is he on the take? The only honest civil servants these days may be the ones out on the terrace having tea. It's better than working for a living.



BOOK REVIEW

by KUNDA DIXIT

Kingdoms in cloud-cuckoo-land

A benign king is preferable to the overhasty adoption of an already corrupted version of democracy, says the author of a new book on Himalayan kingdoms.

When writer Jonathan Gregson was born in India, there were four Himalayan kingdoms: Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal and Sikkim. And from childhood, Gregson had a fascination for these mountains, a fascination nurtured by the Nepali orderlies who talked about home, by summer holidays in Darjeeling looking out at the mountains of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan, and by a boyhood friendship with Prince Jigme Singye Wangchuk at school in Calcutta.

What Gregson has tried to do in *Kingdoms Beyond the Clouds: Journeys in Search of the Himalayan Kings* is pick up vestiges of this allure for all things Himalayan and find a chord that runs through them: the god-kings of the Himalaya. Fifty years later, only two of these kingdoms remain: Nepal and Bhutan. The geopolitical might of the region's two superpowers, India and China, had obliterated Sikkim and Tibet. Gregson, meanwhile, had turned into a travel writer, trotting around the world doing postcard journalism to fill the pages of papers back home.

Kingdoms Beyond the Clouds is a 500-page saga of Gregson's search for constitutional monarchs, sky kings revered as gods by their subjects, and the descendants of others whose kingdoms have disappeared. But tracking down these kings (even his former classmate who by now is King of Bhutan) and then pining them down for interviews, however, seemed as difficult as trying to find the yeti. But here they are: the Dalai Lama, King Birendra of Nepal, King Jigme Singye Wangchuk of Bhutan, 'Prince' Wangchuk, the present 'Chogyal' of Sikkim, and last but not least, the Mustangi Raja Jigme Dorje Balkar Bista.

Inevitably, given Gregson's bad ground as a travel writer, *Kingdoms Beyond the Clouds* belongs to a genre of semi-journalistic travelogues in the half-way world between serious research and a piece in the travel section of the *Sunday Independent*. Although Gregson is not as bad as some of the others, we really can't seem to get away from these patronising parachute essayists who expose their ethnocentrism. For example, how does describing Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and King Birendra as "looking like Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee" because they are both dressed in *durumal*, coat and *tqpi* give us any extra insight into Nepal's constitutional monarchy? But it has to be granted that some of Gregson's shards at King Birendra's secretaries are richly deserved, and his description of their deviousness hits the mark.



The three chapters in *Kingdoms Beyond the Clouds* that deal with Nepal will be rewarding for Nepali readers because of the rare glimpse it gives into the inner workings of the Royal Palace in Kathmandu, and perhaps also into the mind of the monarch himself. (See facing page.)

Gregson is intrigued about how King Birendra, vilified during the Jana Andolan for vacillating on restoring democracy, has now re-earned the respect of the Nepali people. "King Birendra has reinvented himself as the model constitutional monarch," he writes. "What really puzzled me was how to reconcile the benign, ever-smiling monarch I had just met with the loggymen depicted in so many accounts of the 1990 Revolution." He goes on to say that by taking a step back from the political arena, the monarchy is no longer held responsible for Nepal's disorderly transition to democracy. He concludes: "Perhaps for these very reasons, (the monarchy) is better loved, the system of monarchy is so deeply entrenched that it would take a far greater upheaval than the Jana Andolan to turn most Nepalese into republicans."

It is about the Jana Andolan itself that Gregson has some unconventional views. He concludes that the scale of the uprising was exaggerated, it was confined to Kathmandu and that the anti-monarchist turn of the demonstration was not spontaneous but "carefully orchestrated". Then he goes on to say that compared to most other popular revolutions, "the Jana Andolan was a pushover. It was almost too easy a victory." Compared to what, Jonathan, Tiananmen Square? There is really no need to compare Kathmandu 1990 to Rangoon 1988 or Beijing 1989. By Nepali standards, these were unprecedented street demonstrations, with unprecedented and seriously escalating violence. It is to King Birendra's credit that he saw the writing on the wall and began the process of consultations that led to the transitional

government and the new constitution.

The two Jigmes in the book, the Mustangi Raja and the King of Bhutan, seem to wear their crowns with unease. The Mustangi Raja comes across as a simple, likeable man who is comfortable with his status in the "kingdom within a kingdom". Yet, there are rubbings. Mainly from the bulldozers building a new road from the Chinese border to Lo Manthang. He doesn't like the road, but has no power to stop it.

Gregson goes to Bhutan twice in search of the classmate he played tag with and is treated, well, royally. He doesn't therefore probe too deeply into the real reasons for the Bhutanese refugee crisis, and lets King Jigme off the hook when he is told that the Dhotsepa voluntarily left Bhutan attracted by the free food and lodging in the refugee camps in Jhapa. International observers of Bhutan who like to think King Jigme is being pushed by hardliners in his fold, and that the monarch himself is a moderate, will find his statements a revelation. The king repeats the radical Bhutanese position of blaming Nepal for the crisis. What is it about Bhutanese officials that they can only say how well their country is doing by putting Nepal down? Gregson falls into this trap, too, and in his praise for exclusive \$200-a-day tourism, snobbishly trashes Thamel and Nagarkot, glossing over the enormous benefit trekking has been as employment generation and income to the Nepali countryside.

Gregson gives a hint about which side his sentiments lie when in the epilogue, he concludes: "...in certain stages of a country's development, a benign king is preferable to the overhasty adoption of an already corrupted version of democracy." So, now we know: the author is from the "Singapore school". Gregson seems to have done his homework on recent Nepali history, so he should have known that we did try the "guided democracy" model for 30 years, and that didn't work either. Nepal's democratically-elected leaders after 1990 have squandered their own hard-earned freedoms, they have insulted the Nepali people by frittering away the gains. But it is also true that many of the roots of abuse were laid during the Panchayat years. Let's not blame democracy for the misdeeds of venal and self-serving politicians. Unless Gregson is trying to say that democracy is not good for poor countries, and is meant only for rich ones in Europe which have had two centuries of practice. ♦



LETTERS

PRAKASH MAN SINGH
It is a lie that former Kathmandu district president of the Nepali Congress, Prakash Man Singh, did not give memberships to Congress stalwarts as you claim in 'NC readies for party election' (#14). They have not been excluded at any time from active membership. The reason for this controversy about active membership has more to do with the whims and fancies of the party president who dissolved the democratically elected Kathmandu District Committee and 17 other district committees on 12 April. He knew that these 18 committees would not slavishly toe his line at the 10th General Convention.
Ram Prasad Shivakoti
Kathmandu

LABIO-DENTAL
Your "Roman Nepali Phonetic Guidelines for emails and chats" (# 11, p.12) is very confusing and likely to mislead readers even more. You establish 'aa' as in *paani* = 'water', and 'a' as in *pani* = 'also', and then go on to transcribe the Nepali words for 'waterfall' and 'garden' as '*chhahar*' and '*fulbar*'. Secondly, *chiso* = 'cold' should be '*ciso*', and *chhahara* should be '*chaharaa*'. Thirdly, there is no labio-dental [f] in Nepali, and '*fulbar*' should be '*phulbaari*'. Fourthly, the distinctions you make between 'd, dd' and 'dh, ddh' are not phonetically accurate. The same applies to 's, sh, ssh'. These are normally represented as 'd, D (or small 'd' with dot under), dh, DH (or

'dh' with dot under); s, S (or 's' with an acute accent mark) and s (with dot under).
There is a full list of internationally accepted transliteration symbols for the Devanagari vowels and consonants used in publications worldwide. I cannot reproduce them here as the email font does not have the necessary diacritics. You can, however, refer to Asian and Himalayan Journals like *Kailash* or *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* for the Roman transliteration symbols.
Tej R Kansakar
Department of Linguistics
Tribhuvan University

Dipak Gautam is a bit too hasty in congratulating you on your Nepali phonetics ("Thank Ghew", Letters #14). If *ghew* is

pronounced like chew, then we're in trouble because our favourite dollop of bad cholesterol will end up being "ghoo". The correct spelling may have to be *ghiu*.
K Shrestha
Kathmandu

1.6SYNDROME
Artha Beed has a point in his Economic Sense (#13) about Nepal's "1.6 syndrome" vis-à-vis India. I would say that 1.50 would be a good start to getting the ratio down. I'm not an economist, but your columnist seems to have done his homework.
D Sharma
Kathmandu

VISA
I read "We wanna go to America" (#13) with mixed emotions. Saddened by the fact that the Nepali men in

America misled so many Nepali *didis* and *bahinis*. But I also felt that the article was based on a few bad experiences. I understand the main concern, but can you generalise?
Matina
via Internet

After reading "We wanna go to America" on your internet edition (#13) I wished you had tried to balance the story by getting the US Embassy's side. That way some of your visa-pursuing readers would also learn what it is the consular section actually wants out of them before it gives them a visa. Let's hope the situation improves.
Deepak K
Chicago, USA

In "We wanna go to America" Durga Pokhrel has given a true

picture of what is going on out there. But she highlighted only one part. What about Nepalis living good, decent lives in the United States? And what is wrong with working in a slaughterhouse to afford school, and living together to be able to minimise expenses? Can she write another piece about the struggle of Nepalis in America?
Pramesh KC
via Internet

CORRECTION
In Happenings (#14) the picture showing the prime minister arriving at the Millennium Summit and Its Relevance To Nepal symposium was organised by the United Nations Association of Nepal and not as erroneously stated in the caption.



The king rose from his seat and advanced to shake my hand. He was dressed in white, the loose shirting and tight cotton trousers or *surawal* worn by most Nepalese men. On his head was a typical Nepali topi, again mainly with a muted grey-and-pink pattern. His heavy, dark-rimmed spectacles were as in all the official photographs I had seen, but his face was thinner than it had once been and his moustache was trimmed to a shadow of its former, more luxuriant self. I wondered whether the weight loss was connected with the king's recent heart problems.
I was asked to sit on an upright, white upholstered chair, while King Birendra returned to his black leather armchair opposite me. The room was large and rather impersonal, its furnishings dating from the 1960s or '70s when Narayanhiti Palace had been refurbished. A leopard skin half-hidden beneath a glass-topped table and a pair of elephant tusks above the book case were the only hints of oriental exoticism. Otherwise all was plain and functional. The king put his hands together in front of him, forming a bridge with his fingers.
"So what do [sic] want to ask me?" He smiled.
And so began a long and broad-ranging conversation, the main theme of which—whether one liked it or not—was the limitations of what King Birendra can speak out on in his role as constitutional monarch. We touched on many topics: the changing role of monarchy; Nepal's delicate position wedged in between India and China, which the king's ancestor Prithvi Narayan Shah bluntly described as being like "a yam between two boulders"; Birendra's own proposals that Nepal and the Himalayan region generally be declared a 'Zone of Peace'. But every time we seemed to be getting somewhere the trail went cold and we entered an indeterminate region of possibilities and options, with the king proposing any number of alternative ways of looking at the question without coming up with any

'Palace-speak'

"I was left in no doubt that Nepal's ruling monarch has an agile mind with a strongly analytical bent," writes Jonathan Gregson, but because of the palace-speak of the 90s stemming from the king's new role as constitutional monarch, he "is unable—or unwilling—to make an unequivocal statement on just about anything".

clear opinions of his own.
To begin with I found all this rather baffling. The whole conversation had an Alice in Wonderland quality to it. For just as it seemed that the king was on the point of reaching a firm conclusion, he would introduce two other points of view; and, like Alice, I was left wondering which hole the White Rabbit had run down.
On the other hand, I was left in no doubt that Nepal's ruling monarch has an agile mind with a strongly analytical bent—an approach which, like the slightest trace of an American accent, may well go back to the time he spent at Harvard. As he worked his way around a subject his whole body shifted from side to side, as though this would facilitate his acquiring a fresh viewpoint on the matter at hand. The large square glasses which he always wears swivelled like TV monitors that seemed to focus upon some midpoint in the air where he could best conceptualise his latest argument. In his mannerisms he reminded me more of an academic than a power-broker. And yet I was very much aware that for nearly two decades King Birendra had exercised close to absolute power over his twenty million subjects.
I must confess to experiencing real difficulties in following some of the king's arguments. Maybe this is because I am not sufficiently quick-witted to appreciate all the subtle nuances. Or maybe it is because he has adopted a new rhetoric to fit in with his new position as constitutional monarch within a multi-party democracy.
One of the cardinal rules of this 'palace-speak' is the avoidance of any statement that might be construed as an official line on policy, since this could be taken as infringing on the domain of the duly elected government. And given how recently the Palace was effectively running the country, locking up pro-democracy leaders and shutting down opposition newspapers, it is only natural that the current generation of politicians remains highly sensitive to anything that smacks of royal intervention in policy-making. The end result is that King Birendra is unable—or unwilling—to make an unequivocal statement on just about anything. For if he were to do so, he would almost certainly be criticised for acting unconstitutionally.
To give some idea of how palace-speak has evolved during the 1990s, here are some of the king's formal replies to my questions.

- Q. What were your overriding thoughts at the time of your coronation?*
A I have always endeavoured to abide by the aspirations of the people in the best interest and welfare of the nation. Some of my primary concerns during that time were consolidating the sovereign integrity of Nepal and safeguarding the liberty of every Nepali while enhancing their welfare and building the necessary institutions so that all Nepalese could live in justice, peace, security, happiness and freedom.
Q. Shortly thereafter you proposed that Nepal and/or the Himalayan region become a Zone of Peace. Do you think the concept still has validity? Or given the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the region, is it an idea whose time has now come?
A There is a wide consensus on the fact that the need to institutionalise peace is even greater today than ever before. There can, of course, be differences of opinion on how best to go about achieving it.
Q. What do you consider the principal benefits conferred by the monarchical system, as opposed to republican or other forms of government?

A Every nation has to evolve a political system which is best suited to meet its requirements. In Nepal, the monarch has always been guided by popular will and the relationship between the monarchy and the people is traditionally based on mutual trust and confidence in each other.
I could go on, though I doubt one would be any the wiser about what the King of Nepal actually thinks on such weighty matters. His replies, both formal and informal, more closely resemble an elaborate kind of verbal fencing, the main purpose of which is to avoid making any statement that could be judged unconstitutional rather than an attempt at a 'full and frank response'.
That King Birendra does have strongly held views on all these issues is certain. The role of monarchy, the direction of the country, foreign policy issues, the importance of traditional culture—all of these were expounded in extenso during the eighteen years he presided over the Panchayat system of government. Then came Jana Andolan and the country's adoption of multi-party democracy. Since then there has been a resounding silence from the Palace. And although, through persistence and luck, I became the first foreign writer to be granted an audience with the king under the new dispensation, I cannot claim to have penetrated the palace's in-depth defences whose very purpose is to shield from public scrutiny what are the king's real views on matters of public interest.
Such self-imposed restraint applies to all constitutional monarchs. Imagine the public outcry in Britain if Queen Elizabeth II were to make any statement that clearly favoured one political party over another, or even seemed to endorse a policy other than that approved by the elected government of the day. It is almost unthinkable precisely because Britain has had a constitutional monarchy for so long. And although left unwritten, the basic ground-rules of what may or may not be said have been observed punctiliously from one generation to the next.
This is not the case in Nepal, where less than a decade has elapsed since the monarchy stood at the very centre of government. True, the 1991 constitution redefines the king's role with some precision. But there has not been sufficient time for its provisions to become accepted norms, nor for their observance to be taken for granted. And some areas remain rather loosely demarcated. For instance, while I was waiting in Kathmandu to see the king a controversy arose over whether the three royal appointees to the Upper House could vote as they deemed fit, or whether they should always support the elected government. Some members of the majority Nepal Congress Party went so far as to accuse the Palace of acting unconstitutionally because the royal appointees voted against their party.
A residue of suspicion remains between the Palace and the main political parties. Sensitivities are such that even the slightest issue might spark off accusations that the king has exceeded his constitutional role. Which is why the king does not normally talk to the media, and when he does is careful to steer clear of any contentious issues. ♦

(Excerpted from *Kingdoms Beyond the Clouds: Journeys in Search of the Himalayan Kings*, Macmillan, London, 2000, £14.99. Available at Mandala Book Point, Kantipath.)

Buyers beware



Two recent share offers by hotels in Kathmandu showed how desperate Nepalis are to invest. But however enticing, not all public issues of shares are as straightforward as they are made out to be. We advise buyers to beware.

A NEPALI TIMES INVESTIGATION

Two years ago a new Kathmandu hotel issued shares to raise Rs 160 million. By the time the public issue had closed it had requests for Rs 260 million worth of shares. To accommodate the rush, Taragon Regency Hotels Limited retained 20 percent more shareholders than it had initially planned.

The scramble for shares was re-enacted this year when Oriental Hotels Ltd (which owns the Radisson property in Lazimpat) went public three months ago. Oriental wanted to raise Rs 125 million. There was a rush to subscribe and by the end more than 94,000 had requested shares. To accommodate the high demand, Oriental was allowed to retain 20 percent more money than what was initially announced.

But there is a growing group of accounting and financial professionals

who question the method in which the public issue of the Oriental shares was handled—particularly the incomplete financial information that painted a false picture about the true state of the business vis-à-vis its outstanding loans. Sources blame regulators and the company for not providing adequate information to the public buying the shares.

"The financial information in the prospectus is incomplete, even professional accountants find it difficult to assess the investment," a financial analyst told us.

At first it was only Kathmandu's close-knit circle of chartered accountants, financial analysts and stock dealers who became suspicious after many similarities in the share issues of both the Hyatt and Radisson were noticed:

- Both hotels had hired the same financial consultant, an Indian chartered accountant, to prepare the financial analysis in

their prospectus, which was sketchy and incomplete;

- both hotels hired the same issue manager and there was a similar information flow pattern where news of over-subscription of shares found its way to the media within the first week of the issue; and
- eventually both hotels managed to retain more capital than what they wanted to raise.

After Oriental announced its public issue, one alert investor even wrote down his concerns and approached the Securities Exchange Board (SEB) with questions. The unnamed applicant was worried that there was a deliberate attempt to cover up the real face of the business.

The applicant had questioned the valuation of assets, including the Rs 170 million worth of shares allocated to the owners for a property which stands on less than 14 rpanis of land (in comparison, Hyatt's 150

rpanis of land and development at Chabahil was valued at Rs 220 million). In the absence of chartered engineers to value land, valuation has always remained controversial, especially when it has been used as collateral for bank loans.

Other concerns relate to inadequate financial disclosures in the prospectus. "In many countries this would have immediately triggered a thorough investigation before the issue was approved," a chartered accountant told us. "But in Nepal we have this laid-back attitude."

But since public money is involved, the public has a right to full financial disclosure. It has now emerged that even the regulator, the Securities and Exchange Board (SEB) was not satisfied with a notice in the Nepali daily, *Kartipur*, of 19 July, and it promptly asked Oriental to correct the disclosure. The

hotel complied, but got away by taking the unusual step of publishing the corrected version in a newspaper with much lower circulation, *Nepal Samachar*. Potential share buyers who read only *Kartipur* were therefore unaware of the correction.

Ruckmarks, 17 financial companies, and the issue manager, NIDC Capital Markets, seem to have been unconcerned or decided to look the other way rather than question what professional accountants now say were holes in the disclosure and accounting statements made public before the issue. For instance, the prospectus for buyers came with a balance sheet for a year, without the profit and loss schedules. It had a balance sheet for 1998-99 showing a profit of Rs 1.54 million, but without a profit-loss statement for the same year.

We have obtained a copy of the hotel's audited accounts for the same year and the accompanying profit-loss account schedule, showing Rs 1.54 million as profit. But it does not show any allocation made for employee bonus, as required by law. Instead there is also a note that says:

"Since the hotel has come into trial operation only, provisions for bonus and staff housing have not been made."

Potential investors rarely have time to pore through complicated financial documents, and anyway most wouldn't understand them even if they did. That is why they rely and trust the regulators to do their homework in vetting a prospectus. By law and also SEB directives, the issue manager is expected to check the books of the company it is selling. In Nepal, because the general public is even more illiterate about financial statements, the role of regulators becomes so much more important. But in the case of the Oriental issue, neither the regulator nor the issue manager seems to have fulfilled their role. The SEB approved the prospec-

tus, which highlights on its front cover an "operating profit", an accounting terminology that tells little about actual profitability. The issue manager, NIDC Capital Markets, went ahead with the issue. What they should have insisted on was disclosure of "net profitability".

Oriental used a loophole in the Company Act, which does not specify what kind of profit figures should be disclosed. A financial consultant who has studied the Oriental issue told us: "Any hotel can have an operating profit if you don't take provisions for interest and depreciation—the two major costs in the industry. If the hotel had indeed made a profit it should have also paid bonus to employees."

Other players in any public issue are underwriters who are paid a fee for guaranteeing purchase of shares not taken by the public. Oriental advertised that its underwriters had "immeasurable trust" in the hotel's shares. It is unclear who regulates the underwriters because they function under the Nepal Rastra Bank. Going by the trend, underwriters in Nepal rarely have to worry about actually having to buy shares they vouch for. They know all too well that in a country where interest earned on savings has remained lower than the rate of inflation, the public would not waste time studying the project before rushing to line up for the shares.

Commercial banks have the capacity to scrutinise projects but again they have their own secrecy rules. For many banks, public issue of shares of borderline projects to which they have lent money means there is a better chance of payment of instalments on the interest and principal. In fact, the lending terms of many banks in Nepal are so stiff that most borrowers, including five-star hotels, are forced to default. That is when they raise public money through issues, and that is why banks keep mum.

FEEDBACK

Paradise? Lost? by Dubby Bhagat in the Village Voice column in this space last week has provoked a discussion on the quality of change. We reprint some of the feedback below. —Ed.

I read with much interest Dubby Bhagat's thought-provoking story "Paradise? Lost?" about an international development project in Nepal. Bhagat astutely illustrates that sometimes, development—introduced from above and without consultation with local people—can easily have unintended and even disastrous consequences. Cultural sensitivity requires one to stop, to pause, and to listen to the knowledge and needs of people.

But there is a danger in generalising too far too fast, and in romanticising "paradises" rife with poverty, malnutrition and suffering. We must not forget that a fresh well which relieves women from walking hours each day for water, can, especially in less scenic spots, transform their lives and those of their families. Fresh water can restore dignity and joy to life, and help prevent dehydration, diarrhoea and disease.

Development can sometimes harm the very environment it was intended to protect, but that does not mean all development is dangerous. Usually lack of development is far more dangerous to the poor.

Shashi Tharoor

*Director of Communications and Special Projects
Office of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, New York*

Dubby Bhagat's piece, "Paradise? Lost?" is interesting, though I don't agree with it at all. Right from the title down, there is a presupposition that it is somehow obligatory on the part of the rural poor to keep their environments rustic and undeveloped so that the rest of us can have our quaint and picturesque "paradises". It totally ignores the proven fact that the life of "the noble savage" is nasty, brutish and short. This approach polarises society into classes: US, who are presumably smart enough to handle the benefits of basic technology such as piped water and electricity and THEM, who are not. I think this is a very dangerous trap to fall into, particularly when you turn television (a disseminator of information, which is indeed the cornerstone of knowledge) as one of the villains.

The article skirts too close for comfort to the attitude of the upper

classes and the clergy throughout history who understood only too well that knowledge is power and used it to suppress entire populations through questionable means like the Spanish Inquisition. At the time when Goldsmith was lamenting his "Deserted Village" and long before that too, rural folk in Europe were getting disenchanted with their lives of lack and flocking to live in appalling town slums. They were trying to get away from what they perceived as the greater evil of what we romantically call a pastoral life, but which was back-breaking hard work linked to the hideously unsanitary conditions which caused annual epidemics like the Black Death to rage through Europe.

It is important not to romanticise the terrible lives our rural poor lead. The "error" in both your stories was not that of technology, it was of technology being bestowed as a "gift" from a genie (and we all know that every such gift has loads of strings attached!), instead of being understood and evolved by the rural people themselves. For the latter to happen, a sustained educational campaign needs to be undertaken, particularly aimed at women in order to empower them, and here TV can be a primary teaching aid.

The idea can never be to keep people in the Middle Ages while we wax lachrymose about "Paradise Lost", but to bring them forward into the light of the new day dawning so that they can gain the benefits without enduring the stings of the double-bladed sword of technology. If this is not done, it is shame on the US class, because we are perpetuating a repressive stereotype. We deserve no Paradise.

Bunny Suraiya
New Delhi

Dubby Bhagat's cautionary tales about the consequences of unreflective adoption of new systems and ideas provides an interesting counterweight to my views. Change cuts both ways. But believers in the system of democracy take as an item of faith that good drives out bad. Where the people have the right to choose, be it among ideas, goods, parties or political systems, they will, in time, end up choosing well. To believe otherwise reflects a deep pessimism about the human condition.

The catch is "in time". Development and freedom don't come overnight. Many Nepalis expected immediate gratification upon the advent of democracy. Now they are realising that Nepal is only at the beginning of a



long, hard road, and that realisation contributes to the prevailing opinion on the State of the Kingdom.

But that long, hard road will lead in the right direction if the people are educated, informed, and free to choose their leaders and their water pumps.

John Child
Kathmandu

Is it sometimes better to just let things lie, as they are undisturbed while we pause at the implications of what we are about to do?

This is by no means an easy choice. Philosophically, the *Gita* tells us that the more things appear

to change the more constant they are. But in the real world of development economics, the limited choice is really one of catching up with the Jones'. The alternative is continued deprivation. Many would argue that not knowing how the Jones' live is in fact a blessing in disguise. Unfortunately, television denies us this luxury. The rapid shrinkage of global space through the communication revolution has ensured that all of us know what good living is all about. Materialism and demand for more and more has become the order of the day. Change is seen as being synonymous with living like the Jones' and thus, a better life.

A lot of the old and the traditional will become extinct like the chetah and the dodo. Television ensures that globalisation cannot be held back because change is the essence of life and everyone wants a 'better' life. More money, bigger houses, acidity and ulcers.

Do tell us: can we have change if we must but along with continuity. Or are they incompatible?

Amit Dasgupta
Kathmandu



That thinking is reflected on page 24 of the 6th annual report of the Everest Bank Ltd, one of the eight banks in the consortium that put up Rs 770 million (as reported in the prospectus) into Oriental. The Bank reported an income of Rs 6.37 million from the hotel as interest even though the payment had not been made. It added that the interest income was shown because the hotel had given its word in writing that the money would be paid after the share allocations were made.

The present status of the loans remains unclear, and apart from overdue interest payments, the prospectus does not tell how much of the Rs 770 million loans is capitalised interest (which is interest that is merged with the principal and which indicates that a company is not meeting interest payment commitments). Only the auditors of the hotel and its financial consultants may be able

to explain these highly technical accounting questions. But someone will have to ask them on behalf of the investors.

By the end of the week of 25 July, when Oriental Hotels opened the public issue, the press was already reporting breathlessly on how it had been oversubscribed many times over. Only those that were counting the change—in this case the issue manager—could have had that information. Yet, the information found its way to the media despite a written directive from the SEB against that, and the issue manager, NIDC Capital Markets, admits providing the press with tentative estimates of the capital subscribed “in the name of transparency”.

One early news report said 75,000 applicants had requested shares worth Rs 860 million. Word of the over-subscription

soon spread and many who remained undecided joined the bandwagon. By the time the issue closed, there were a total of 95,708 investors ready to invest Rs 942 million in Oriental. The hotel then went back to the regulator seeking permission to retain 100 percent of the over-subscription with a recommendation from the issue manager. The regulator refused total retention, but it did allow Oriental to keep an additional 20 percent.

Now the hotel is richer by Rs 150 million in cash, but an increase in shareholder numbers means that future profits will now have to be distributed to a larger pool of shareholders. The hotel also did not point out in the prospectus that it could exercise the option to retain more money by accommodating more shareholders.

A notice on the new allocations was published in *Nepal Samachar* on 13 October. The notice details the new capital structure and changes made in the composition of the board of directors to take into account the new changes. But all of that happened only after the 94,000 people had applied for the shares.

We asked Damber Dhungel, chairman of SEB, what was going on and he told us that his office had made all efforts to safeguard shareholder interest. He expressed helplessness saying, there’s very little a regulator can do when so many financial institutions, including banks that invest in projects, screen and even underwrite the issues. “We felt the disclosure was inadequate so we

asked it to make more information available,” Dhungel said. “We don’t have adequate intermediate mechanisms to punish anyone for non-compliance with our directives, and so sometimes implementation suffers.”

Clearly, the regulator has problems implementing the law, but that is little consolation to the retail investors among the public who may be surprised how long they may have to wait for their money to start yielding returns. Dhungel also told us that it was his office that had asked the hotel to add footnotes to its balance sheet to clarify its profitability.

We tried to talk to Oriental’s financial consultant about the share issue but he asked us to talk to NIDC Capital Markets. There we were told that the detailed footnotes in the prospectus provided perhaps more information than any issue the company has handled. “Oriental may be the only company that has detailed what made its operating profit,” says Suranda B. Shrestha, manager, merchant banking department, NIDC Capital Markets.

“As far as scrutinising accounts is concerned, we are forced to rely on assessments made by banks and other financial institutions.” We worked on the Oriental issue for about a year, Shrestha says, adding, although everything may not be perfect, no effort has been spared to ensure that both the shareholders and the hotel get the best deal. Some believe at least the latter half of this is true. ♦

PAC gets back to work

The new chief of police, Pradeep Sumsher Rana, has admitted to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) that his organisation had made a “mistake” in an agreement with the Indian Oil Company (IOC) for the exclusive supply of branded lubricants to the police force. The products are sold through a gas station (standing beside the main entrance to the police headquarters and which was constructed by the IOC as part of the agreement) managed by the Police Welfare Fund (PWF), a charity for former policemen.

The PAC had summoned the police chief to answer questions related to the agreement that is valid for 15 years. Members of the PAC subcommittee looking into the deal—MPs Prakash Chandra Lohani (RPP), NP Saud (NC) and Krishna Lal Maharjan (UML)—say that the PWF has already begun implementing the agreement, which gives the IOC the right to accept or reject any amendment. According to them, the IOC, which is both a party to the agreement and the final arbiter in the case of any dispute, may not be amenable to any changes suggested retroactively by the PWF. They also pointed out another faulty clause in the agreement which lays out that the Nepal Police and the PWF would pay for the supplies.

The police has been maintaining that the PWF is an organisation independent of the police. But PAC members differ arguing that its office bearers are ex-officio high-ranking police officials, instead of being elected under a separate constitution as is the case with NGOs.

MPs still after RNAC

The PAC, which is also investigating a recent lease agreement between the Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation (RNAC) and Austria’s Lauda Air, has decided to summon the Minister for Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation to a hearing next week.

Executive Chairman of RNAC Hari Bhakta Shrestha and several high officials of the ministry took to the stand to explain the leasing process done through a quotation and negotiations rather than open bidding. Royal Nepal has agreed to lease a 12-year-old aircraft from the charter airline. The officials told the committee that the council of ministers had approved the decision and that RNAC had already sent \$1 million to Lauda Air to lock the deal. Shrestha added that RNAC had gone for direct negotiations after failing to lease aircraft through open bidding, which has always been controversial. PAC will continue the hearing next week.

Nepali Congress still at it

The truce brokered between the warring sides in the ruling Congress Party has begun to unravel. The two factions are back with what has become their favourite pastime: accusations and counter-accusations. Now it is the election committee formed to hold party polls at the next convention. A dissenting minority in the committee suspect that the membership lists prepared by the party could be faulty and has begun asking that the list be scrutinised by the committee before sending it to the districts. Defeated by majority vote in the committee, which said that that was beyond their authority, two members representing the Bhattarai camp, Bimalendra Nidhi and Gyanendra Bahadur Karki, went to the press.

Adding fuel to the fire came the resignation of Hari Nath Bastola a member of the active membership investigation committee. Bastola accused the committee of not following the decisions of the central working committee (CWC) and the existing rules while preparing the membership list. The list comprises of over 105,000 NC members who will elect delegates to the 10th party Convention to be held in February in Pokhara.

On 1 November four prominent dissidents, Sher Bahadur Deuba, Chiranjivi Wagle, Khum Bahadur Khadka and Bijay Gachhedar, took up the case of Nidhi, Karki and Bastola to castigate the Koirala camp for not abiding by the CWC’s decision, and called on their supporters to rally against the “impending division of the party”.

Chandra and Jivan

Chandra Kumar Rai and Jivan Thapa, two Nepalis serving life-sentences at Bangkwang Central Prison in Thailand, continue to languish in jail denied of the basic facilities allowed to foreigners in Thai prisons. The two were convicted about eight years ago on charges of drug trafficking, for which they have pleaded not guilty (see *Nepali Times* # 9, 13-19 September).

Their request for just treatment and application for royal pardons and transfer to Nepal has fallen on deaf ears in both Nepal and Thailand. “We are denied the right to choose whether we want to work instead we are forced into labour. We are not even given the rations that foreigners are entitled to,” wrote Jivan Thapa in a letter posted to *Nepali Times* with the help of prison volunteers.

We also received copies of handwritten letters the two have sent to people of rank in Nepal. These include Foreign Minister Chakra Prasad Bastola, Permanent Representative of Nepal at the United Nations, Murari Raj Sharma, and the general secretary of the main opposition CPN(UML), Madhav Kumar Nepal (all three applications are dated 5 October 2000). They have also sought help from two Nepali human rights organisations, but they have received no response so far.

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Nation in favour of Maoist proposal

Rabindra Shrestha in *Kantipur*, 19 October

The politburo of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) has called for a dialogue saying that only dialogue can resolve the grave problems faced by the people. Comrade Prachanda had called for a dialogue immediately after the successful attack in Dolpo. As a response, the government tried to build a consensus on how to deal with the "People's War" through a forum convened by the Speaker of the House of Representatives. To keep his corrupt government in power and to suppress the just protest of the people, the prime minister is even prepared to mobilise the army. To some extent this has failed to materialise. All parties (except the Giri-Ja faction) are in favour of dialogue as was made public at the all-party meeting convened by Sher Bahadur Deuba. All parties and people have strongly opposed the stand taken by the PM which shows that the PM has lost the moral authority to continue in power. The government is clearly in a minority. The government which had a policy of excluding and finishing off the Maoists is now isolated. In spite of this, the government, true to its reactionary character, is now preparing for civil war. The government thinks it will be able to solve all domestic and international problems of the country by mobilising the

army and starting a civil war. The fascist group in the Congress was sidelined at the all-party meeting. The government media which is run on the hard earned money of the people and some private papers close to the fascist government have been spreading the rumour that it was only after the government decided to mobilise the army that the Maoists agreed to a dialogue. They said that the Maoists were frightened by the mobilisation of the army, which actually is a very base remark and one that amounts to lying to the people. The truth is that Comrade Prachanda had called for dialogue immediately after the Dolpo incident. That was when the Giri-Ja camp began expounding its "new principle" that the Maoists were scared. That it was the government that was scared and implored for help from the palace and the army is something that cannot be hidden if one wanted to. What is the reason for the Maoists to propose talks? The answer is realisation of their responsibility towards the people. What do the Maoists think about war? Responding to a question of an American reporter, Mao had once stated, "As far as we are concerned, we do not want to fight for a single day, but if circumstances force us, we will fight till the decisive hour."

The CPN (Maoist) has from the beginning advocated peaceful means to resolve the problems of the country and people. Again after the Dolpo incident, Comrade Prachanda, in the belief that logical thinking and rationality would prevail in the government, had proposed talks. To consider this offer as a sign of weakness of the Maoists is nothing new to some sections of the PM's supporters. Whether the country heads into civil war or not will depend on whether the government takes or rejects the advice of such idiots. If to suppress the people's voice the PM uses the army, people with even the least humane and religious sentiments will take notice. If the army is mobilised, the civil war that will follow will result in a thousands repeats of the Khara incident (where the police is said to have torched an entire village). Everyone knows this. But is it justifiable to sacrifice thousands of human lives to save the necks of his corrupt colleagues and his 'conspiracy' (not democracy)? The Maoists have called for dialogue to avoid such severe consequences. Is it justifiable to call this a sign of weakness or fear? The government may see benefits that can accrue from a civil war. They know that maximum kickbacks can be got on weapons purchases. It will also be easier for them to suppress the revolt in the

Congress and to control the opposition by declaring army rule. Even foreign powers may be backing the fascist government to run down the Maoists. But the fact is that dialogue seems to be the best way through which the country's problem can be resolved and a civil war can be averted. In such a situation can a civil war be avoided? Before fighting the fascist powers in his country in 1945, Mao had said, "If all people become united and increase their strength, a civil war can be avoided." For these very reasons, the Maoists have called for the formation of a Comprehensive United Front without any preconditions to fight the fascist government and were getting positive feedback on that call. The government itself is helping to form this front to a great extent. By increasing the price of petroleum products recently, the government has made enemies of the people and the opposition and encouraged them to revolt. By destroying the agreement reached between the government and the nine left parties, the RPP, the UML and the NSP, the government has pushed all these parties toward the front. Some MPs close to the PM have labelled Deuba a Maoist, so people from the Bhattarai-Deuba camp will also be inclined toward the coalition. Chiang Kai-Shek had once said that Mao should be thanked for helping the Chinese villages to develop. Mao had said that Chiang Kai-Shek should actually be thanked for oppressing the communists in the city and driving them to the villages and

indirectly helping to establish base areas in the villages. In the same way, the PM has pushed them closer to such a front. The CPN (Maoist) has said that the present government cannot be trusted. Why is this so? The PM has violated all agreements he has made with all political parties. He has broken agreements reached with the Bhattarai-Deuba camp. He has not been keeping his word. Therefore he has lost the trust of everyone. Another reason is that the government alone cannot resolve the problems faced by the people and the country. For all problems to be solved, the Maoists believe, dialogue must be held with all parties. All political parties have started taking positive steps towards this. Even in such circumstances the government has not taken any steps to build an environment conducive to talks. Even Deuba said that the whereabouts of Dinesh Sharma and other Maoists in custody should be made public, but no action has been taken on this front. While a dialogue between Deuba and Maoists has been taken positively by all people, a certain section of the fascist Congress still thinks it is a conspiracy. This is all because of their lust for power.

(The author, a central committee member of the CPN-Maoist, held talks with Deputy Prime Minister Ram Chandra Poudel on 27 October.)

Profits all the way for NOC

Nepal Samacharpatra, 1 November

The Energy Research Centre of the Institute of Engineering organised a discussion on the implications of the recent changes in fuel prices in which experts warned of severe consequences on the economy. Director of Nepal Lube Oil Ltd, Amrit Nakami presented a 20-year data series on prices of petroleum products in Nepal, arguing that the Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) stood to earn a profit of Rs 520 million a year even if it sold kerosene at Rs 19 per litre (instead of the present rate of Rs 26). Nakami, a former general manager of the NOC, argued that petroleum prices were raised due to NOC's inability to take precautionary measures because international prices were already headed upwards in late February 1999. "The present crisis could have been prevented if the NOC had carefully studied the market and prepared long-term plans for domestic consumers accordingly," he says. Nepal's annual per capita consumption of petroleum products is 35 kg, compared to the US's 3,170 kg, Canada's 2,835 kg, Japan's 2185 kg and India's 82 kg. In Nepal

the sale of petroleum product has been increasing by 12.41 percent each year. But most of Nepal's energy is obtained from traditional sources-88 percent from firewood, nine percent from petroleum products, two percent from coal, and one percent from hydroelectricity. Nakami added that only the mechanisms of a free market could correct the inefficiencies of the NOC, and lead to more realistic prices. At the same meeting, Deputy Director of NOC Rudra Bahadur Khadka clarified that the corporation cannot always fix prices based on the market situation only, adding that the government decision to subsidise five litres of kerosene per family per month would lead to annual losses to the tune of Rs 2.4 billion.

'Koirala's leadership has been tested already'

Budhabar, 25 October

(Excerpts from an interview with Chitranjibi Wagle, Nepali Congress dissident leader.) Q: You contested against Koirala for party leadership at the 9th party convention. How are you preparing for the forthcoming 10th convention? A: I believe that the leadership should be

handed over to the new generation. It was in this belief that I contested for the post of party president at the 9th convention. I believe that Koirala's leadership has already been tested and another five years have passed. Now we are preparing for the village convention. After the village and town conventions, the regional conventions will be held, which will be followed by the district conventions. Only then will the national convention be held. To talk about leadership issues at that time would be ideal. Q: Isn't your demand of handing power to the new generation going to create problems for you in the cabinet reshuffle that is going to take place soon? A: I am not going to be in any difficulty. I don't know if it is going to be a problem for others. In the working committee meeting held last Sunday, an agreement was reached among us. Now the implementation of that agreement is the most important issue. There should not have been such a big hue and cry over the rates of the party workers. This sort of problem never occurs in any other party, only in the Nepali Congress. Q: What is the next issue after this? Earlier the

issue of free and fair elections at the convention had cropped up and you had asked for a separate system.



A: For this an election committee has been formed. The meeting of the working committee discussed this too. A five-member election committee has been formed, with two representatives from our side and two from the opposing side. The 5th person is Mukunda Regmi, who is neutral and is the chief of the party election commission. That the commission will take care of all issues regarding the election has been agreed to at the meeting. But the issue of party members is likely to crop up and the issue of representatives and observers is also important. For this, my friends and I had asked that these be resolved as per the regulations of the party. Representatives and observers will be sent only after a consensus has been reached. After this, the possibility of having fair elections is very high.

Q: You were a candidate for party president earlier. Was there irregularities there? Otherwise why are you raising the question of free and fair elections? A: Everyone learns from history. I don't want to get into how the elections were held earlier. The present central committee has dissolved 16 or 17 district committees. Many of the district committee presidents had voted for me at the 9th convention. All of them have been removed. This shows

that the central committee wants people who would toe their line. This is why we doubt the fairness of this election. The controversy over the party grassroots members has raised further doubts. That is why we have raised the issue of fairness of the elections. The party president has to guarantee that the elections will be fair. We have established multiparty democracy, vital to which are free and fair elections. We have established the system of free and fair elections in the country and this has to be followed in the different parties too. We want a system of free and fair election not only in the Congress but also in all political parties of the country. Q: Why are you holding your convention when murder and loot are taking place in parts of the country? Why don't you take steps to solve the Maoist problem before the convention? A: The responsibility to solve this problem lies with all of us. The ruling party and the opposition are responsible. But the greater responsibility lies with the government in power. Yesterday Bhattarai was in government and the responsibility was ours, today Koirala is in government and the responsibility lies with him.

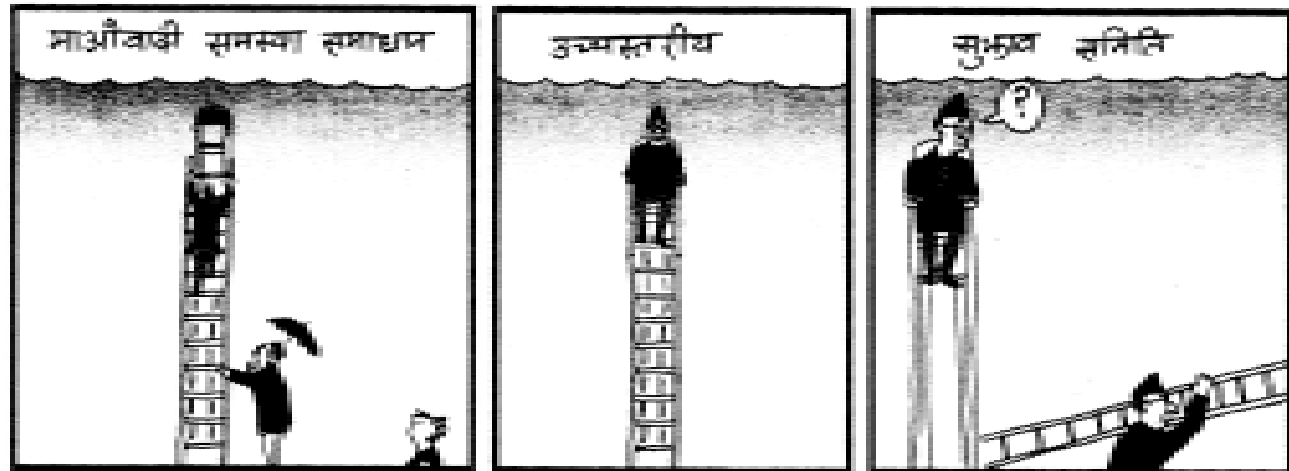
Dinesh Sharma is alive

Ghatana Ra Bichar, 1 November

Dinesh Sharma, the Maoist leader who has been in police custody for some time now, is alive, says a home ministry source. The Maoists have been demanding that the government declare his whereabouts. Another Maoist leader, Matrika Yadav, is in police custody too but the whereabouts of the wife of Dinesh Sharma, Kamala, and others like Milan Nepali, Dandapathi is still not known. It has been assumed that they were killed when Govind Raj Joshi was home minister. The rebels have always demanded that Dinesh Sharma be released. Sharma, who was earlier the chief of the Trade Union Federation, is now a member of the central committee of the CPN (Maoist). People feel that the capture of Sharma and Yadav has not affected the activities of the Maoists in any way. Political analysts have felt that if the release of the two is going to bring the Maoists to the negotiating table and stop the massacres taking place now, then it would make sense to release them immediately.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

When the army had been mobilised to disarm the Khamas (in 1972), the entire area had been declared a military zone, and all security agencies were under the army. The administration also worked with the army. (That is why despite)...reports of army mobilisation in some districts today, we cannot in truth call it mobilisation of the army. -Sachit Sunsher Rana, former Commander in Chief of the Royal Nepal Army, in Jana Astha, 25 October.



Maoist Problem Solving...High-Level...Recommendation Committee
Himal Khabarpatrika, 1-15 November

Tempos on the run



HEMLATA RAI
The government's recent decision to withhold registration of new passenger vehicles for the Kathmandu core city area may have made environmental activists happy, and disturbed operators, manufacturers and advocates of electric vehicles, but it remains to be seen how it will affect the transport situation in the capital.

The decision followed a government taskforce report that the number of motor vehicles plying in the capital has already crossed the bearing capacity of the roads here. According to the report, if all the 248,000 vehicles registered in the valley were to come out on the valley's 740 km of motorable roads, Kathmandu's traffic would come to a standstill. The report recommends that no new passenger vehicles be registered until Kathmandu's traffic management is considerably improved.

"We will soon formulate a policy that will allow only environmentally friendly vehicles to ply in Kathmandu, we also recommend development of a mass transit system," says Director General of the Department of Transport Management, Krishna Murari Sharma, who was also a member of the taskforce.

This is not the first time that "environment-friendly vehicles" and a "mass transit system" have been advocated for Kathmandu. Back in 1996, the National Planning Commission (NPC) had made the same suggestion. The following years saw the government offer import tax cuts and VAT (value added tax) relief to entrepreneurs who wanted to operate non-diesel and non-petrol vehicles. At the same time, rather than follow the NPC recommendation that a mass transit system be developed, the official policy encouraged small vehicles like low-capacity micro-buses and

electric and LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) three-wheelers (tempos).

The number of commuters in Kathmandu has been rising by an estimated 7.2 percent every year, and an unchecked influx of a large number of small capacity vehicles could lead to more traffic headaches. That was one reason why the NPC had suggested the gradual phasing out of six-seater tempos (which, in 1991, made up more than half of the 12,386 daily service trips in the valley) which would drop the traffic volume by 53 percent. Presently, 12-seater electric and LPG tempos and microbuses have replaced most of the six-seaters, but their effect on public transport has not been studied.

The 1996 NPC report stated that efficient transport management was the solution to the city's traffic problems. Its 'origin-destination' survey of total trips made by public transport on various routes

"The government should treat us differently because we are environmentally friendly and we do not depend on fossil fuels that are a drain on the national coffers. Instead the government earns Rs 30 million annually from us," Devi Prasad Limbu.

showed that traffic delay caused by bad management ranged from 21 hours to 299 hours per day. Increasing the efficiency of traffic flow by 33 percent could have accommodated the annual growth of commuters up to 2001 without any significant increase in the 238,063 vehicles registered till that year.

Both the NPC and the taskforce reports stress the need to encourage more 'clean' vehicles, but as the idea is to develop a mass transit system, the battery-operated three-wheelers are not even considered. "We are capable of manufacturing four-wheeled large capacity electric vehicles of 20-22 seat capacity," claims Ashok Pandey, general manager of Nepal Electric Vehicle Industry (NEVI). "But first the government has to come up with a favourable policy."

Under present rules, only manufacturers of electric tempos (popularly known as safa tempos) are provided tax cuts on imported parts. But they say that the government's policy of waiving VAT for electric and LPG tempo imports is hampering the Nepali tempo industry. Presently, there are five electric tempo manufacturers in the country and they produce two tempos per day on an average. But since they depend on VAT payable imported parts like chassis and batteries, they do not have the price advantage over the electric or gas tempos,

which are imported with only 1 percent import tax, but do not pay VAT. The tempo companies have applied for licences to manufacture chassis in the country, but have so far been denied permission on the grounds that the government lacks policies.

Safa tempo entrepreneurs have also shown willingness to reduce their rates once the government agrees to provide subsidies on the purchase of batteries and in electricity tariff. The Clean Initiative Entrepreneurs' Federation of Nepal (CIEFN) recently announced a 10 percent reduction in electric tempo fares on some routes, and has promised reductions on other routes "soon".

"The government should treat us differently because we are environmentally friendly and we do not depend on fossil fuels that are a drain on the national coffers. Instead the government earns Rs 30 million annually from us," says Devi Prasad Limbu, CIEFN president. He said that for a country that is going to see an electricity surplus by the second half of next year, electric vehicles are the only answer to city transport.

All the general public can do is wait and see what kind of policy the government comes up with when the government finally opens new registrations, and, more importantly, if it makes public transport any better. ♦



HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK

Time for sale

There are quite simply too many demands made on our limited time in this cyber-driven, obsessive web-based world we live in. No time for reflection, contemplation, medication, vegetation or an afternoon nap.

Friends from India, Singapore and other beehives of industry and workaholicism often remark on how little I seem to do these days. I tell them that I'm a great believer in observing the pace set by society. And in Nepal, we move, at a pace perhaps, at our own pace—a very sensible one. Take the past month of festivals and holidays and pujas. I had a wonderful time, again as part of an exercise in being in tune with local sensitivities. I learnt this the hard way.

A few years ago I rang a colleague in Kathmandu, grandly announcing that I was arriving the following week with my camera crew and I needed a list of

things done in preparation for my visit. My colleague laughed and said it was impossible. "Nothing is impossible, let's get cracking," was my somewhat tart rejoinder. "But Dasain is next week, then Deepawali, then Bhai Tika and we take about a month off to observe all the festivals. The government does too, so your list of interviewees will all be too busy, having too much fun, to see you." I sputtered in outrage. "But, but, don't they know who we are (we were giants of international television journalism, or so we thought)? They can't just take all that time off. We have identified a time to cover Nepal, and that's it." My



colleague's gentle but unbending insistence that I was doomed to fail if I insisted on my schedule won out in the end. I came later, at Nepal's convenience and had a very nice trip indeed. Productive too.

There are quite simply too many demands made on our

limited time in this cyber-driven, obsessive web-based world we live in. In other parts of the world, people are rich in material goods, technology and the latest of everything, but they have no time. No time for reflection, contemplation, medication, vegetation or an afternoon nap.

What's the point, I ask myself, staring out my office window at the Ganesh Himal. Well, for one thing, to avoid being devoured by all those who have a different outlook on time.

Those without it don't steal it from others; they try to deny the time-rich the opportunity to enjoy their wealth. And they usually succeed. Take the example of Ladakh, an outpost of Jammu and Kashmir in India. Like Mustang, it's a proud enclave of Tibetan Buddhism protected by soaring mountains that only the hardiest of traders and explorers ever passed through. The arid landscape is pockmarked with oases of green around the mighty Indus river where intricate and ancient irrigation canals water the paddy and barley crops. Visit Ladakh in summer and people toil as if they're driven by demons. Come back in winter, and it's a different story.

The cold season in Ladakh is one long party, punctuated with periods of contemplative silence, with plenty of afternoon naps. People do nothing for weeks at a time and they enjoy themselves immensely. Their larders are full, there's *chhang* brewing in the

bowl and the toil of summer is a distant memory. Even now, with Ladakh promoting year-round tourism and cybercafes springing up everywhere, people still relish their long winters of nothing to do but enjoy life's passage. And Biharis do the labouring, Kashmiris run the shops and hotels and the Ladakhis increasingly become spectators in their own land. It's tragic and inevitable. Someone should do something to stop it, but of course no one will. They're all either too busy doing something else, or doing nothing at all. But that's not exactly true. Ladakh is going through yet another bout of anti-outsider violence that does little but make things worse for the very people it's trying to help.

Sad thoughts to end a lovely festival season, but in the end I suppose I'm trying to urge myself to get back to work and start using up some of this time on my hands. If only some dotcom whiz kid somewhere would come up with a way to sell time on a web site.... ♦



New insurance companies

Competition is brewing up for the Rastriya Beema Sansthan and the National Life and General Insurance Company, the two companies that have so far monopolised the life insurance market in Nepal. The Insurance Board has received applications from four organisations seeking permission to set up life insurance companies. These four are besides the American Life Insurance Company (ALICO), which has already been given the go-ahead to open a Nepal branch. (Its entry has, however, been delayed due to a case filed by a group of Nepali lawyers with the Supreme Court arguing that ALICO is not a Nepali company.)

The four new applicants are Nepal Life Insurance Company Ltd, Laxmi Life Insurance Company Ltd, Kantipur Life Insurance Company Ltd and Global Life Insurance Company Ltd. Among them, Nepal Life Insurance has already been approved for licensing.

Nepal's insurance market is growing by about Rs 40-50 million annually, says Laba Raj Sharma, chairman of the Insurance Board. A study conducted by the Board shows that there is room for five more companies to join the life insurance business apart from the two already operating. Nepal has an eligible but uninsured population of about 11.7 million people, of whom less than two percent of the eligible population is insured.

Tourist arrivals down by 12 percent

Overall tourist arrivals by air declined by 12.7 percent in the first nine months of this year compared to the corresponding period in 1999. According to the Nepal Tourism Board, the number of tourists flying into the country till the end of September was 250,957, while it was 287,768 last year. The decrease came about largely due to Indian tourists who stayed away in large numbers in the aftermath of the December 1999 hijacking of an Indian Airlines flight from Kathmandu. But present trends are encouraging. After slumping by 54 percent in January, Indian tourist arrivals increased by almost by almost 38 percentage points in June, when Indian Airlines began flying to Nepal again. The largest number of Indians (14,902) came in June, though this figure was much higher in June 1999. Meanwhile, there has been a steady improvement in the number of tourists from countries other than India, though the figures for September are still about seven percent less than the numbers last year.

Toyoda in Nepal

Shoichiro Toyoda, a confirmed Nepalophile and the honorary chairman of Japan's Toyota Motor Corporation, arrived in Kathmandu Wednesday for a three-day visit during which he is expected to visit some of Nepal's best-known tourism destinations.

Toyoda, who flew into Kathmandu in a private jet, will be visiting Pokhara and Lumbini in addition to stops at Tukuche and Ghandruk on the Annapurna circuit, and a brief stop at Langtang. Toyoda is also scheduled to meet Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala. Toyoda, who had joined the Toyota Motor Company in 1952, became its chairman in 1992. He has been the company's honorary chairman since June 1999. He is also president of the Vehicle Road and Traffic Intelligence Society, Chairman of the Fiscal System Council (of the Finance Ministry) and Chairman of Japan's Economic Council the Economic Planning Agency, among others. Toyoda flew in from Hamburg in his private jet and is flying back to Italy, spending an estimated Rs 8 million during his stopover in Nepal. Toyota's net worth is \$ 45 billion and its research and development budget alone is equivalent to 60 years of Nepal's budget. There are said to be 60 Japanese and Asian business leaders in Kathmandu this week to meet Toyoda while he is here.

Dragon Air resumes flights

Hong Kong's Dragon Air resumed flights to Kathmandu on 29 October eight years after it had stopped flying the route. Initially the airline will fly twice weekly—on Sunday and Thursday—between Hong Kong and Kathmandu. Dragon Air, which flies an Airbus 320 to Nepal, comes just in time to make the best of the peak tourist season.

RNAC to Bangalore

Nepal's flag carrier began flying to Bangalore, an emerging pilgrimage destination for Nepal's headed for a *darshan* of Sai Baba at his two ashrams of Whitefield and Prashanti Nilayam. Royal Nepal Airlines is to fly twice weekly to the south Indian city which is also India's leader in multimedia and information technology. Besides, Bangalore, Royal Nepal has regular flights to New Delhi, Calcutta and Mumbai in India. A roundtrip-ticket for the roughly two-and-a-half hour flight costs Rs 16,800.



Hem Bahadur Malla, 62

Hem Bahadur Malla, the man responsible for single-handedly improving the IQ of millions of Nepali children by managing salt-iodisation and distribution in Nepal died of cardiac arrest at a New Delhi hospital on 28 October. Over the past 20 years, iodisation of salt distributed in Nepal has reduced endemic goitre, cretinism and other disabilities related to the shortage of this micro-nutrient. Malla was president of Salt Trading Corporation

(STC) which supplied salt under the Goitre Prevention Project. It was Malla's single-minded energy that helped make the distribution effective, one reason why iodised salt is available today all over the country. The STC now has six iodisation plants where the iodine content in salt is checked and augmented, where needed, before supplying it to the market and the goitre-prone districts.

Malla, 62, was STC's the first general manager, and later went on to be the CEO and finally the president. In his 24 years at the corporation, Malla also pioneered the establishment of Nepal's first modern factories producing flour and *banaspati ghew* (hydrogenated vegetable oil), and the Gorakhkali rubber tyre factory in Gorkha.



The craft of graft

As the rocket's red glare and the bombs bursting in air rent the night sky this Tihar, Artha Beed's thoughts turned once more to the familiar subject of corruption. Why would firecrackers remind anyone of graft? Good question. In case you didn't know, firecrackers are actually illegal in this country. They are banned; they're contraband. But going by the sound of explosions in Kathmandu this year, you'd have thought there was a civil war going on. Anyone caught smuggling crackers into the Valley has his consignment seized at the Thakot customs post. From there, the stuff finds an underground conduit to the bazzars of Asan almost overnight. Says one trader, when asked who his suppliers are: "You want me to tell you? It's like the dance restaurants, the cops have the monopoly over the firecracker trade."

Corruption stinks more than the garbage heaps that keep building up outside my house. It has become an acceptable way of life, and the more one thinks of it the more difficult it seems to uproot from the system. Crises are created for corruption to thrive. It could be the sugar shortage, or the hoarding of petroleum products. The business-bureaucracy nexus thrives on creating artificial scarcity. The government official

Corruption rules. It determines what flies over our heads and what is driven on our roads.

and the businessmen settle their deals directly, be it the profit of a truck of sugar or a tanker of petrol. Of course, the payment terms are strict, delivery of money in cash on the day the goods are delivered. Tihar gifts have developed as another interesting way of returning favours. Boxes of whisky or a velvet box containing unspecified jewellery have replaced boxes of sweets. Or gift vouchers to sari and jewellery shops. These vouchers can be cashed at the designated shops, all of which show how we are refining the art of corruption. Any day now, car keys will change hands. We have used cultural and religious events to sanitise a transaction which is in essence stealing, and therefore breaks the Fourth Commandment of just about every religion. These new developments have made the ferrying of passengers by white licence plate vehicles on *bhai tika* seems absolutely insignificant.

The fact that gambling is synonymous with Tihar has also provided a perfect platform for ostentatious displays of wealth. People play stakes that are sometimes several times their annual salaries, and at the end of everything they might have just won or lost money that is equivalent to what an average middle-class Nepali would

have to work for a couple of hundred years to earn. Black money lights up Tihar, and the goddess of wealth has never complained.

Corruption rules, be it in determining what flies in the air or what is driven on the roads. Two-stroke motorcycles are trying to make a comeback, pending certain clandestine transactions. Three-wheeler electric and cooking gas vehicles have been banned from inside the Ring Road, and microbuses seem to be making macro-linings to some pockets. Why choke the valley roads with public transport it cannot cope with? The purchase and lease of jets by the national flag carrier has become the national emblem of corruption, and now parliament has decided to take over.

Enough lip service and hollow gestures. We have the institutions to deal with graft, but the position of Chief of the Commission for the Investigation on Abuse of Authority (CIAA) has been lying vacant for the last nine months. Will someone be appointed if enough is paid under the table? Someone has to make a start somewhere. Are you up to it, Suryanarhji?

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

Grindlays Gazette

INTEREST RATE UPDATE

NEPALI RUPEE	CURRENT%	PREVIOUS%
Call Money Avg.	5.25	5.10
84 Days t/bill	5.00	5.10
91 Days t/bill	5.21	5.32
365 Days t/bill	6.18	6.16
Repo rate	5.80	5.80

Market is excessively liquid and it is expected that the average rate of 91 day T/bill will come under severe pressure due to aggressive bidding by government banks. Maturity of T. Bills bought by banks in the secondary market will also put additional pressure on the rate. Expected range for coming weeks 5.0 to 5.25.

FOREIGN CURRENCY : Interest rates

	USD	EUR	GBP	JPY	CHF
LENDING	9.50	6.25	6.00	1.50	5.25
LIBOR (1M)	6.62	4.70	6.07	0.40	3.35

BANK RATES(DEPO/LENDING)	Mkt	Hi/Lo	Mkt	Avg
S/A NPR	6.0/3.5		5.30	
F/D 1 YR	7.5/6.0		6.81	
OVERDRAFT	15.5/12.5		13.54	
TERM LOAN	14.5/13.0		13.49	
IMPORT LN	13.0/10.5		11.52	
EXPORT LN	13.0/10.0		10.96	
MISC LOAN	17.5/13.5		15.13	

Oil : OPEC ministers on Sunday agreed to raise oil supply by 800,000 barrels daily in a bid to tame runaway crude prices and avert a consumer scare over fuel bills.

CURRENCY UPDATE

AG/USD	CURRENT *	WK/AGO	%CHG
OIL(Barrel)	32.70	33.38	- 2.08
GOLD(Ounce)	272.80	276.75	- 1.43
GOLD (NPR *)	7150	7150	+ 0.00
EUR	0.8675	0.9004	- 3.65
GBP	1.4190	1.4619	- 2.93
JPY	106.23	105.85	+ 0.36
CHF	1.7804	1.7240	+ 3.27
AUD	0.5575	0.5763	- 3.26
INR	45.59	45.71	- 0.26

*Currency bid prices at 12.45 p.m. on 11/9 - Source Reuters

Currencies : The US dollar enjoyed broader gains against most of the currencies, climbing to multiyear peaks against sterling, Euro and Swiss France. The Euro fell to its lowest in its 20 month life as sentiments turned increasingly sour over the single currency's prospect amid conflicting comments from ECB officials. The British pound tumbled to seven-year lows from the effect of the Euro's steep decline, along with expectation that U.K. interest rates had topped out. The dollar stabilized against the Yen after falling initially on news that Japan's April-June gross domestic product grew 1.0 pct from previous quarter, slightly exceeding expectations for 0.7 pct growth.

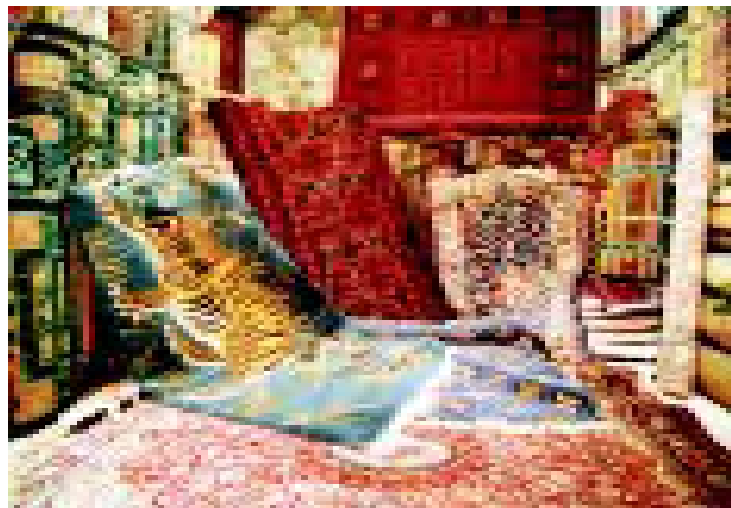
INDIAN RUPEE OUTLOOK : The Indian rupee traded firm last week as market sentiment on rupee is slightly positive following the OPEC decision and bunched dollar inflows. The rupee is now a little over one percent higher than its lifetime low of 40.08 hit on August 11. However, it is 4.7 percent weaker than its January level. Foreign exchange reserves rose by \$ 17 million to \$ 35.619 billion in the week to September after eight successive weeks of declines.

INTERNATIONAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES FOR NEPALI TIMES

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

marketing@nepalitimes.com

Shopping till you are dropping



HEMLATA RAI
It is the last quarter, and the urge to splurge is back. Everyone can share in the mood: visiting tourists looking for souvenirs, expats planning to go home for Christmas, those staying back and locals who are looking for ethnically-chic but functional items for the home. We'll let you in on Kathmandu's best-kept secret: it is a bargain hunter's paradise for exotica. Between Hauz Khas and Banglampu, Kathmandu offers you the best choice for shopping

traditional handicrafts, weaves, jewellery, sculpture, woodwork, music and art. And the prices here will beat both India and Thailand. In fact, Banglampu now has a whole alley full of Nepali shopkeepers selling Made in Nepal cloth *gholas* and lost-wax sculptures for about three times the prices in Kathmandu. Thamel might not give you the real picture of a "typical" Nepali lifestyle, but it does offer you a great deal to whet your craving for shopping. Hand-woven carpets,

pashmina shawls, silver jewellery, bronze and brass work, dolls and puppets, T-shirts and funny football fan hats, traditional musical instruments. You name it, and there is a shop specialising in it. Basantapur and New Road are also definitely worth a raid, although these places are less traditional and more trendy. And if you care to cross the Bagmati Bridge at Thapathali to Patan, Kupondol and Mangal Bazar have loads of tempting goods on display. These shopping tracts are close to the fascinating Durbar Squares in Patan and Kathmandu, and will not mean a big revision of plans for tourists out on a sightseeing trip.

The details and artistic perfection of *thangka* and *pattha* art might appeal to you. A piece can cost you anything from Rs 200 to well over Rs 80,000, depending on quality, artistic excellence, the theme of the painting and who painted them. If you are among the about 10 percent of buyers who go in for works of the masters, you may have to pay much higher prices. Even smaller and less-complicated pieces by world-renowned artists like Uday Charan Shrestha and Prem Man Chitrakar will cost you around Rs 20,000 at the least and well over Rs 100,000 for the grand larger paintings.

Lama *thankas* painted by lamas from the Buddhist monasteries can be good bargains—they are artistically rich but less expensive because they do not carry world-renowned signatures. Works of Buddhist Tantras from Ramechhap, Sindhupalchok and Kavre, for whom *thanka* painting is a traditional occupation rather than an artistic endeavour, are also available for lower prices.

These unknown Tantra painters lost out when expansion of tourism in the capital encouraged them to mass produce paintings, thus forcing them to forego the attention needed to create great paintings and also defying the rituals that go with *thanka* painting. Tradition demands long devotional rituals and prescribes a limit to a day's painting time to less than four hours so that intense concentration on detail is possible. The artists painting *thankas* for purely commercial purpose in the valley's surrounding districts are said to be working for more than 16 hours a day at a stretch.

There is a wide range of silver, bronze and copper statues available to choose from. Metal statues from India are also sold alongside Nepali carvings—the Indian ones look like Nepali carvings at first glance but a closer look will show the difference—Nepali statues have single moulding while the Indians ones are twice moulded. The Nepali sculptures are heavier and are notable for their fine craftsmanship. Price-wise, Nepali statues are costlier than the imported ones. "A Nepali sculptor might have confined himself to his workshop for months at a stretch to make the statue. His devotion and hard work



With Dasain and Tihar over and less than seven weeks to go for Christmas, Kathmandu's trinket bazaars are gearing up again for the next holiday season.

should be paid superior value to commercially manufactured statues," says Sunil Krishna Shrestha of Picasso, a souvenir shop.

Another speciality of Nepali sculptures are their uniqueness—they are moulded from mud devices that are destroyed after each moulding, while the Indian statues are mass produced from multi-use metal moulding devices. Mass manufactured Nepali statues are also available, but after adding the profit margins of 10-15 percent maintained by trading houses and further by retailers, the price of a mass-manufactured statuette and a unique statuette collected directly from a Patan sculptor by a retailer may not differ much. However, the quality and value of that piece of work certainly dies.

Bronze statues are least expensive and a copper statuette of the same weight can cost you twice as much. A simple silver statuette of Buddha is sold at Rs 500 to Rs 600 per tola (a tola is equivalent to 11.664 gram), but others can cost you more depending on the craftsmanship. A complicated one-thousand-arm Avalokeshwara, or a Mahakali or Bhairav statue in the mudra position, with ornaments and instruments in their numerous arms, can cost you Rs 600 to Rs 1000 per tola.

Then there are the Nepali carpets, which are popular with Nepalis travelling abroad as gifts for their foreigner friends and for



personal use for those who have settled there. Chinese, Pakistani, Indian and Afghani carpets are also available and some might be machine made though they look otherwise. Nepali carpets are heavier, thicker, become more lustrous with use and are available in all sizes you fancy. "Nepali hand-knotted carpets are available in the European markets also, but a large variety are available here for lower prices," claims Hari Pandey of New Dragon Carpet Centre. A 60-knot Nepali hand-knotted carpet can cost you about Rs 1,700 per square metre, a 80-knot around Rs 2,400 per square metre and a 100-knot carpet would be approximately Rs 4,800 per square metre.

Some carpet entrepreneurs have recently ventured a contemporary touch to Nepali carpets. Though they still rely on the traditional technique of carpet knotting, their creations are a departure from tradition in colour and design. "Carpet making is like painting. You should dare to experiment with colours and designs to be able to communicate better to your clients," says Pradeep Shahi of Carpet House.

Apart from these top sellers there are paper and metal handi-

crafts, silver jewellery, gams and Tibetan plastic heads, puppets and dolls in Nepali traditional costumes, clayware, hand-knit woollens, furniture and house decorations. If you are going to further extend the traditional Tihar shopping binge, a hand-weave *dhaka* topi for men and a *dhaka* shawl or sari for women are suggested. Recent successes of Nepali fashion designers with *dhaka* cloth have proved that the textile can be tailored into anything from evening gowns to casual wear. There are hand-loomed row and soft silk that cost between Rs 600 to Rs 900 per metre.

Pashminas in three varieties of cotton cashmere (about Rs 1,500 for a 36x81 inch shawl), silk cashmere (Rs 2,300 to Rs 2,500) and pure cashmere (about Rs 3,500) are available. Also available are hand-loomed cashmere shawls which cost more than the machine-loomed, while the famous ring shawls cost something between Rs 8,000 to Rs 12,000.

Then there is music to celebrate your Nepal memories. Meditative Nepali classical music by well-known masters and popular folk songs, made familiar by the humming of porters during a trek, are available in CDs. Nepal is a country of festivals and pujas, and there are CDs available with traditional music to commemorate the festivals. "Its only due to the lack of publicity that Nepali music does not sell internationally. From my experience, one good concert and the lucky musician sells like hot cakes," says Bhaskar Shrestha of Dexto Music Centre.

Window shopping is also fun in Kathmandu. "Salespersons accept your 'no' gracefully with a big friendly smile," says American insurance agent John Marshall Lee, who was doing his rounds. So go around, take a good look and make the best of your shopping trip. ♦

All photo credits: Min Bajracharya



Gandharba



Gandharbas are believed to be the musicians of gods in heaven. Nepal's oldest professional singers are concentrated in the western part of the country. Playing the sarangi and relating historical events in song are their traditional occupation. Seen in the photograph is Bukun Gandharba who completed a sarangi tour of Europe last year and earned international acclaim. Proud of his musical tradition, Bukun sells Nepali instruments like sarangi,

madal and bamboo flutes at Thamel. He also teaches foreigners to play this instrument at his Himalayan Melodies music shop. Bukun is seen playing a sarangi he himself made, in strict accordance with all the traditions involved in sarangi making, which is a rare buy in Kathmandu.

Jewellery boxes



These jewellery boxes might look similar at first glance but vary in cost. The one on the left is a mass-produced Indian product that costs about Rs 150 while the other is a Nepali product, totally hand made, and costs about Rs 500.

Emporium



The government-run Cottage Industries and Handicrafts Emporium at New Road is recommended for poor bargain hunters. Handicrafts from all over the country, from 'Palpali' dhakas to 'Chainpure' karuwas

and 'Bhojpure' khukuris, are available here unlike the privately owned shops that sell only those made around the capital. The emporium also offers a range of wood carvings and brass ware, the favourite buy of Nepalis as gifts for their friends abroad.



MIN BAIRACHARYA



MIN BAIRACHARYA

INSTANT EVEREST

For those who can't trek up the highest mountains in the world, the accomplishment of a mountain flight is mountaineering itself.

The next best thing to climbing mountains on foot while in Nepal is to take the awesome flight that gives you instant Everest. This unique journey—one of the few airline flights in the world that takes off and lands from the same airport—has now become a must-do for most tourists visiting Nepal.

The success of the flights has now spawned an entire sub-sector of Nepal's tourism industry that caters just to giving tourists a quick flypast of the highest mountain in the world. As word spread through tour operators, through the huge box-office success of the IMAX film *Everest* a couple of years back and by word-of-mouth, air treks have become the rage in 2000.

Tourism arrivals to Nepal may have fallen slightly, but the number of tourists taking the Everest Flypast has quadrupled in the past three years. In the current tourism season (September to December) alone, an estimated 35,000 visitors will take the \$109-a-shot flights that wing you past the central and eastern Himalaya. And for the first

time this year, the flights were not affected by the monsoons as airlines have acquired higher-flying pressurised aircraft. You may be in the middle of a torrential downpour or in mist at Kathmandu, but the mountain flight will still take off, climb steeply over the Kathmandu Valley to get above the clouds, and give you a majestic fly-past of the world's highest mountains.

Drawn by the bonanza, new airlines specialising in mountain flights have come up. Some like Buddha Air and Mountain Air have introduced large-windowed Beech 1900Cs and Ds, which are much better suited for sightseeing flights than earlier planes. There are no aisle seats, and Mountain Air has even painted a panorama of Mt Everest on its fuselage so passengers get a preview of what they are in for, even before they get airborne!

Actually, most flights in Nepal are mountain flights in one way or another. You pay for the ticket to your destination and the view is a bonus. The regular Kathmandu-Pokhara shuttle gives passengers magnificent views of the central Himalaya from Ganesh, Himalchuli to

Annapurna ranges. Pokhara-Jomson really rubs your nose at the close-ups of Nilgiri and Machhapuchhare. The Kathmandu-Nepalgunj flight offers a panorama of the entire Himalaya past Dhaulagiri as well. The flights to Biratnagar and Tumligtar from Kathmandu have great views of Mt Everest and Makalu. Even international flights offer great scenery—some of the best ones being the flights westwards to Delhi, the Gulf or European destinations which fly parallel to the Himalaya for half-an-hour before turning south, or the flights to Dhaka and Hong Kong which overfly Biratnagar and therefore give passengers an unsurpassed view of the entire eastern Himalaya up to even Kangchendzonga and Chomolhari in Bhutan. But the regular airline flight with by far the best views is the thrice-weekly China Southwest flight between Kathmandu and Lhasa. If you are on economy, make sure you get a seat at the back of the plane for unobstructed views of Makalu, Chamlang, Lhotse and Mt Everest gliding past at almost eye-level.

We have come a long way

since a Gypsy Moth piloted by LVS Blacker made the first-ever aerial "conquest" of Mt Everest in 1933. Flying up from India, Blacker survived an open cockpit and icy gale-force winds in his flimsy biplane to become the first person to look down at the top of the world. Thus began a glorious tradition of flying up to Mt Everest.

Nepal has also come a long way since the days of rickety, noisy planes with portholes.

Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld in 1961 were allowed by King Mahendra to take a DC-3 on a flight to Mt Everest (*see box*).

Later, Royal Nepal introduced the turboprop HS-748, which flew at 19,000 ft but had large bulbous engine nacelles that made the whole front part of the aircraft fairly useless for views. Then there were the aisle seats, which made many passengers feel short-changed. The state-run

Himalaya you can imagine the enormous tectonic forces that must have caused the Indian landmass to collide head-on with the Eurasian plate resulting in this pile-up. The collision sent the rocks soaring nearly to the stratosphere, to heights of more than 29,000 ft—and looking out of the window, the summits of many of the mountains are even higher than the plane!

It was only after the deregulation of the domestic airline industry in Nepal that private airlines started gearing up for the profitable sightseeing flights. Three airlines, in particular, have made the Mt Everest flights their niche markets: Buddha Air, Mountain Air and Shangri-La Airways. The cost is \$109 for foreigners, IRs3,000 for Indians and Rs 4,800 for Nepalis.

Other airlines like Necon Air and Cosmic Air also operate mountain flights, but these make up a smaller proportion of their total revenue. Yeti Airlines is beginning once-daily mountain flights in its 30-seater EMB-120 on 10 November. Cosmic and Yeti have aisle seats and the airlines do not guarantee you a window seat, although Necon says it sells only 23 seats at the back of its ATR-42 and offers a \$164 couple discount for a second person sitting on the aisle.

The most frequently asked question aside from which airline offers the best views is which side of the plane it is

Actually, most flights in Nepal are mountain flights in one way or another. You pay for the ticket to your destination and the view is a bonus.

Gone are the times when passengers were allocated seats next to the engine where all they saw was a reflection of themselves on its thundering aluminium skin. Royal Nepal Airlines began conducting mountain flights from the days of the DC-3 in the 1960s, which despite the noisy unpressurised cabin had slow speed, low wings and small engines and were not at all bad for views. Foreign dignitaries visiting Nepal like UN

airline sometimes even conducted mountain flights using Twin Otters, which gave great views of the river gorges below but not much of the mountains above.

In comparison, today's Mt Everest flights are much more geared to hardcore mountain viewing. The Beech 1900s have brought a virtual revolution in sightseeing, and their cruising altitude of 25,000 ft gives an unsurpassed perspective on the mountains: from the violet-brown expanse of the Tibetan plateau to the north punctuated by dark blue lakes, the jagged icy wall of the Himalaya, and the velvet foothills of Nepal that plunge down to the haze-filled plains. The mountains look almost holy in their magnificence and their expanse, and if you are aware of the genesis of the



A film: Look at Everest

Makalu mis-identified as Everest in the article.

comprehension and of the harsh purity we are accustomed to find in the miniature world of crystals. But here it met the eye in proportions that reduced our human world to a microcosm. Everest wore a plume of snow, made by strong northwesterly winds...it had a special rank and position marked with a truly regal ornament.

(From the National Geographic, January 1961)

“A REGAL ORNAMENT”

An excerpt from an account by Dag Hammarskjöld, the former UN Secretary General, of his Mt Everest flight 40 years ago.

After sunrise the next morning, the haze had gone and the sky was without a cloud. When we came down to the airstrip, the icy summits of the closest mountains stood out sharply over the green hills around the valley.

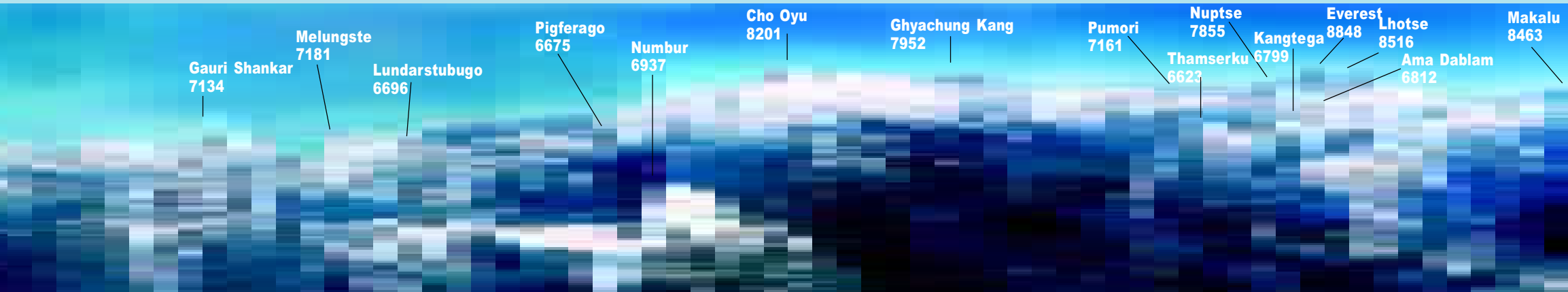
We flew through the valleys in the direction of Gauri Shankar and Everest. Even if we had never come to these mountains, it would have been a great experience just to see the beauty of the valleys and of the hillsides in the early morning light, the structure of the landscape, and the picturesque way in which cultivation and villages have developed. The plane in which we were flying was a DC-3, nonpressurised and without oxygen. That naturally set an altitude limit for the flight, we flew at a height of twelve to fifteen thousand feet. Our route took up first under the overwhelming south wall of Gauri Shankar, with its beautiful double summit consecrated to the two Hindu deities that give the mountain its name. At our altitude we needed to approach it at mid-height. Its vast size gave the impression that we were even closer to the mountainside than we were.

Forbidding in its bold, sculptural structure, it was a world far beyond human

FOR BOOKINGS

AIRLINE	PHONES	AIRCRAFT
Buddha Air	542494, 437025	Beech 1900D
Cosmic Air	241053, 244955	SAAB 340
Gorkha Airways	436576, 436579	Dornier DO-228
Mountain Air	489065	Beech 1900C
Necon Air	480565	ATR-42
Shangri-La Air	439692, 416028	Beech 1900C
Yeti Airlines	421294, 421215	EMB-120 (from 10 Nov)

(Note: Fares may vary depending on the travel agent, but the airline fare is \$109 for all tourists, except Indians who pay IRs 3,000 and Nepalis pay Rs 4,800)



EVEREST

the thrill and

better to sit on. It is now official: the right-hand window seats are better because the mountains are closer on the flight back, but the return flight is also shorter since the plane is descending. If you are on the right-hand seat, you have to learn to curb your impatience on the outbound leg as the left-hand passengers do their “oohs and aahs”.

Another frequently asked question is: how close do we get to Mt Everest? This depends on turbulence and winds at higher altitudes. Later in winter the jet stream makes the flights bumpier, and planes don’t venture closer than 20 km from the Lhotse Wall, and generally the earlier morning flights are less bumpy.

Passengers also have to learn to prepare themselves for mammoth tourist jams that occur at the domestic terminal on days when Kathmandu airport is fogbound, and camera-totting passengers from 20 mountain flights and other domestic routes are stuck for hours while the airlines wait for the visibility to improve.

There is no doubt that Everest is the great draw. Some airlines tried out mountain flights from Pokhara on an experimental basis, and Buddha even had a Sunset Himalaya flight last year, but there weren’t enough takers. But given the congestion and winter fog at Kathmandu, there is no alternative for airlines than to start thinking of creative new routes like Pokhara-Everest, or extending the regular Kathmandu-Pokhara flight to include a Dhaulagiri fly-past. Buddha has begun on-board merchandising of Mt Everest memorabilia like T-shirts, certificates and even a video of the flight, on the return leg.

The airlines also need to pay greater attention to passenger handling on the ground—to make the long wait at the domestic airport more bearable, distribute clearer and more-precise



mountain-identification charts, and treat every passenger like they are potential repeat customers. Otherwise, like the carpet and pashmina industries, the Everest flight may also end up being a flash in the pan for Nepal. ♦

Computer-enhanced panorama (top) of the central and eastern Himalaya as seen from a mountain flight. The mountains look larger or smaller depending on the route flown. (Top, right) Early morning at the domestic apron at Kathmandu airport as one of 20 daily mountain flights return from an Everest flypast. (Right) Passengers stretch to catch a glimpse of the mountains and the spectacular wideangle view (top) as the plane turns around near Mt Everest, with Namche Bazar in the valley below.

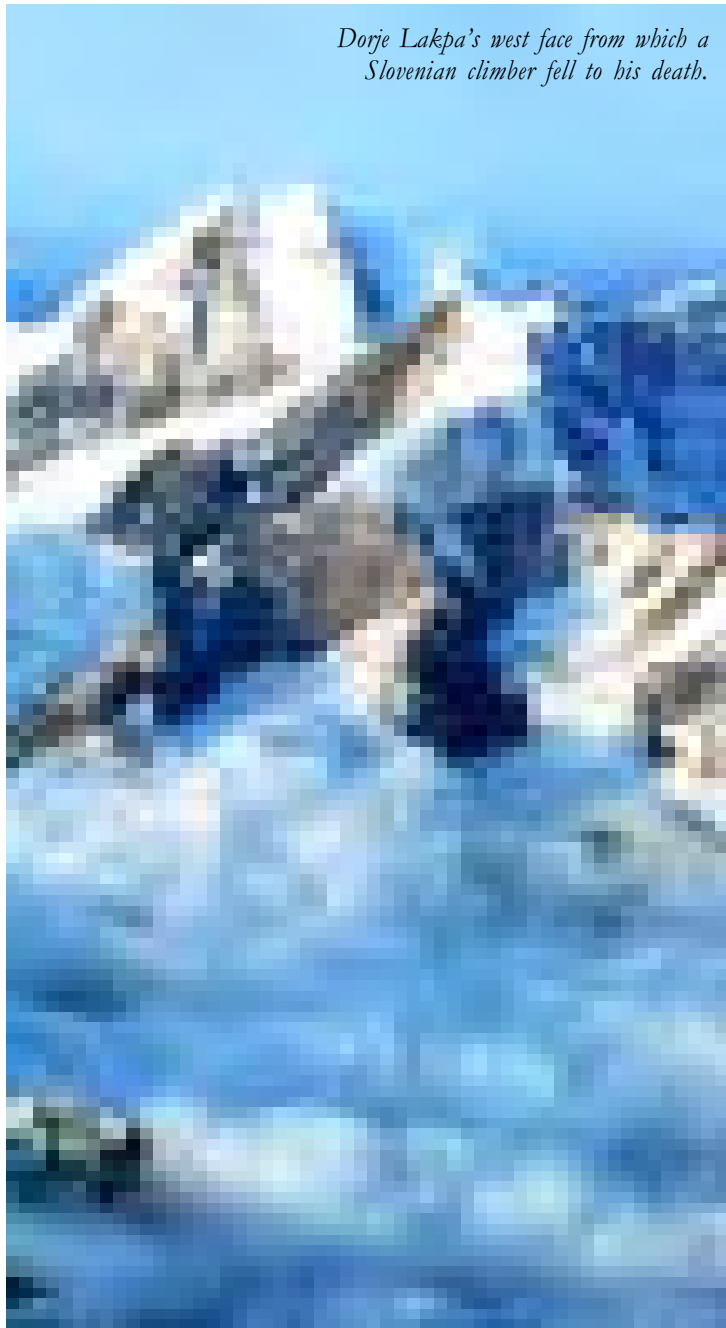


PREMIUM AD C



A Slovenian autumn in the Nepal Himalaya

There were a number of Japanese and Korean expeditions in Nepal this season, but it was the Europeans who stole the show.



Dorje Lakpa's west face from which a Slovenian climber fell to his death.

RAMYATA LIMBU The highlight of the autumn mountaineering season in the Nepal Himalaya this year was the first-ever descent on skis down the world's highest mountain. Not only was this a daring first, but the Slovenian Davo Karnicar's feat also went down in the record books as the fastest-ever descent of Mt Everest.

And so, it was a double celebration when Davo Karnicar celebrated his 38th birthday on 26 October, amidst well-wishers, journalists and friends at a rambunctious party at the Rum Doodle Restaurant and Bar in Thamel, the unofficial hangout of the international climbing community in Kathmandu. At Rum Doodle, he and his teammates, Tadej Golob, Matlej Flis, and Farnic Oderlap, also added their names to Rum Doodle's lengthening list of Everest summiteer-patrons (entitling them to a life-time of complimentary cuisine). "We couldn't have asked for more. The weather and snow conditions were perfect. The gods were smiling on us," said Andrej Kmet, Slovenian climber and communications expert.

Kmet was in Nepal last autumn too, managing the website that covered live the solo first ascent of the south

face of Dhaulagiri by another Slovenian climber, Thomaz Humar, in an attempt described by High magazine as "audacious". Kmet, who plans to accompany Karnicar on the skier's quest to ski the seven summits within a year, is already thinking of the technical challenge, transmitting live, Karnicar's ski descent on the remote Mt Vinson in the Antarctica. "They don't have satellite phone facilities there," he says.

A tiny country of about two million people and where nearly half of them are involved with mountain sport in one form or another (the country's president himself is a mountaineer), Slovenia boasts some of the world's most

accomplished climbers. This autumn saw six teams from this former Yugoslav republic climbing in the Nepal Himalaya, and despite Karnicar's success, they had their share of tragedy too.

A Nepal-Slovenia joint expedition abandoned the effort on Mt Pathivara, Mt Jongsang and Mt Kiratchuli after a Slovenian climber fell to his death, while another Slovenian attempt on a new route up the west face of the 6990 m Dorje Lakpa (visible to the northeast of Kathmandu), too had to be given up when a Slovenian member died. Further to the west, yet another team of Slovenians abandoned their attempt on Annapurna III.

Meanwhile, favourable weather conditions in the Khumbu saw five Koreans ascend the world's highest peak. Two climbers from the Korean Ulsan Everest Expedition and three from the Chung Buk Korean Everest Expedition reached the Everest summit via the regular southeast ridge. Six of their compatriots succeeded on the nearby Lhotse (8516m) from the west face.

But not all Koreans were that lucky. The 2000 Korea Gyung Nam Student Alpine Association Dhaulagiri Expedition abandoned their attempt to climb from the north face after climbing leader, Lee So Ho, died in an avalanche. A Sherpa climber with the Dhaulagiri 1 Expedition from the Nagoya Alpine Club of Japan also died on the mountain. A Russian climber died on Lhotse Shar (8400 m).

A total of 65 teams received permits to climb various peaks this autumn season, which officially ends on midnight of 15 November, by when teams have to be back at their respective Base Camps.

Generally, expeditions tend to concentrate on popular mountains in the eastern and central regions of Nepal. The government has indicated that it would simplify permit procedures and open up new peaks to encourage more

climbers to come to Nepal. That may happen in the spring of 2001 when the tourism ministry, in consultation with Tribhuvan University's Geography Department, is planning to open up new peaks for climbers and to simplify the process of applying for permits. "We want to attract climbers to virgin peaks, mainly in the west, to balance the regional disparity," says Ganesh Raj Karki, head of the mountaineering section at the ministry.

But even as mountaineers eagerly await a formal announcement, there is reason for scepticism. The tourism ministry cannot decide on its own. For security purposes, it has to get clearance from the defence and home ministries, and any such application, even if it is intra-government, has to wind its way through the long and tortuous bureaucratic channels. And that, as everyone knows, can take quite some time. ♦

Sherpa Insurance

The question of compulsory insurance for Nepali high-altitude porters/climbers came to the fore once again this season after three Sherpas accompanying two Korean expeditions to Cho Oyu (8201m) died in an avalanche.

Prior to leaving for the mountains, mountaineering teams have to provide the Ministry of Tourism with signed affidavits of each climbing member and high-altitude support staff, together with insurance details. The Nepali government's mountaineering regulations require porters and high-altitude Sherpas to be insured for a minimum of Rs 50,000 and Rs 150,000 respectively.

However, unknown to the ministry, the Koreans, who were climbing as one team, had hired three Sherpas up in the mountains citing lack of manpower. "They say they hired the Sherpas to carry supplies up to base camp only. But investigations showed otherwise," says a ministry official.

"The expedition said they tried to inform me by phone about their decision to hire extra people," said Ang Karma Sherpa, managing director of Windhorse Trekking, the company that managed the expedition. The Korean climbers, who abandoned their attempt after the accident, face the possibility of being blacklisted, banned or fined by the tourism ministry.

The ministry ordered the teams to pay Rs 180,000 to the families of the three deceased. Other climbing Sherpas on the Korean teams were insured for Rs 500,000 each. "The pity is the families of the dead won't get the same amount," said Sherpa.

"It happens rarely but sometimes teams try to save money by forming small expeditions. Then they realise that they don't have enough manpower and hire staff who may be untrained, inadequately insured and outfitted," said a ministry official with long experience as liaison officer to expeditions. "What happened on Cho Oyu is nothing new. It is only that these incidents are not reported and trekking companies hush up matters and pay off the families of those killed on the mountain."

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Failures in intervention

Peace arrives in Belgrade and fighting breaks out in Gaza. What are we to make of this?

London – When Milosevic fell in the same week that fighting broke out between Israelis and Palestinians, was it merely a matter of the coincidence of bad news and good news that always marks human affairs? What are we to make of this arrival of peace in one place and loss of it in another? In the one case, flawed policy just barely achieved a kind of success, and, in the other, flawed policy has led to a tragic failure. The flaws, too, were of a similar order—policy driven by domestic pressures, policy that paid too little attention to the facts on the ground, and policy too wary of difficulties and costs.

A decade that began in an atmosphere of great confidence in many countries and across the political spectrum has ended with a sharp reminder of limits and an unmistakable loss of momentum. The sense of foreboding arises at this moment in part because this was Bill Clinton's decade and in part because his presidency is finishing with such a defeat in the Middle East. Clinton's departure will mark the end, if not of an era, at least of a time when America had extraordinary opportunities which are unlikely to reoccur. This was because America had a capital of influence and power when he took over which is now much drawn down. Much of the world was awed, ready to listen, and, up to a point, ready to be persuaded.

But America under Clinton did not use its influence to the full or to the best effect, whether in the Far East, south Asia, Russia, or in the Balkans. Above all, in the Middle East it was by turns serious and timorous in its campaign to isolate and bring down Saddam Hussein and it was slow and often partial in its mediation between Israelis and Palestinians. The daily bombing of Iraq, now an activity entirely divorced from any coherent strategy, is one index of America's failure. The savage daily encounters between Israeli and Palestinian young men, boys who grew up during these Clinton years, is another. Perhaps American power to change the Middle East—to the point of largely excluding other outside powers—was

not as great as it seemed. If these were the years in which America failed to live up to its potential, that was also true of Europe, which notoriously mishandled the crisis in former Yugoslavia. But America and Europe together did, in the end, adopt policies that halted the Serbian campaign in Bosnia and later forced a withdrawal from Kosovo, which in turn contributed to Milosevic's fall. A new report by an independent international commission charts how Kosovo was allowed to fester to the point where Serbian suppression of rebellion provoked NATO intervention. It allows that this intervention was "illegal but legitimate". In its broader conclusions, it states in a measured way the need for early engagement in the kind of situations which could produce violations of human rights on a scale that may later give grounds for a humanitarian military intervention. If, as a last resort, such intervention becomes necessary, it proposes "a principled framework" for it, which it would like the United Nations to take up in some way.

What is striking about the Kosovo report, like those others, is their essential optimism. They look to a managed world, in which most disasters are headed off by preventative action, and others are dealt with, when they have to be, by the judicious use of force. In any case, the potentially grave regional crises which the world could face, such as a further breakdown in the Middle East, a confrontation between nuclear armed India and Pakistan over Kashmir, or a clash between China and Taiwan, are of an order in which humanitarian expeditions are irrelevant. It is only in the context of the containment of these larger conflicts that these lesser, internal problems may be amenable to solution. One lesson that has been understood is that such quarrels are more obdurate than is sometimes lightly assumed. The past 10 years should have been a time when the US and Europe, the two wealthiest and most developed regions, took a strong grip on affairs. Instead they have come perilously close to losing it. t (*The Guardian*)



US Elections COMEDIAN CANDIDATES

EDWARD HELMORE Two weeks ago, when Al Gore's presidential hopes appeared to be slipping with each new poll, he took a call from his boss, the president. Otherwise shut out of his deputy's campaign, Clinton urged vice-president Gore to watch a Saturday Night Live parody of his television debates with his Republican rival.

After first resisting, Gore acceded to Clinton's almost unerring political instinct. The tape revealed the public's perception of the candidate and his media-genic shortcomings that no pollster or focus group could have bettered. Clinton touched on one of the few political realities of this campaign—that television comedy has become one of the few clarifying elements of a political discourse obfuscated by hours of punditry, spin and anti-spin.

As Americans tune out from serious political coverage and analysis, they are getting more of their election news from late night talk. A recent survey found that 47 percent of people aged between 18 and 29 often gleaned information from these programmes, along with a quarter of all adults. "So much coverage in the mainstream press is dishonest and manipulative," says Columbia University journalism professor Craig Wolff. "To me, the humorists are in some ways presenting the most honest coverage."

Politics as television comedy is hardly new and has been gaining momentum since Richard Nixon appeared on the 1960s television comedy show, Laugh-In. What's new is just how blurred the line between politics, news and entertainment has become. Late-night comedy talk shows such as those of Jay Leno and David Letterman have become political essentials, both as barometers of how the campaigns are playing and through appearances by the candidates themselves—a way of personalising their brand.

To former Texas governor Anne Richards, it's become important for candidates to show a sense of humour than demonstrate a grasp of issues when debating their opponents. A good joke can be incredibly effective in getting your message out, she says, "because people repeat it". And that's invaluable for politicians because with an electorate disenchanted with politics and an election said to hinge on a small number of swing voters, humour has become one of the few ways of gaining attention.

But while Gore has appeared on Letterman and Leno, and Bush has kissed talk show host Oprah Winfrey on Oprah, and had an unhappy (and un-repeated) experience on Letterman in March, none of the current crop of candidates besides Gore's democrat running mate Al Lieberman have dared venture on to The Daily Show on Comedy Central. The programme, hosted by Jon Stewart, has emerged as America's sharpest satire. First broadcast in 1996, The Daily Show captures the absurdity not just of the US political process but of the media that cover the news and the pundits that interpret and re-interpret it. In a show presented as a seemingly real newscast, Stewart and his team of correspondents spoof what increasingly feels like unreal news. As the 37-year-old Stewart himself liked to quip during coverage of the political conventions in the summer: "We're a fake news organisation covering a fake news event." But that didn't stop the game (and very funny) senator Bob Dole appearing as the programme's desk-bound political pundit, or Republican John McCain agreeing to be interviewed by Stewart faking a real interview.

In creating a comedy show that looks like a news broadcast, The Daily Show's formula is to satirise every element of the political process, from the pretensions of the candidates themselves to the over-heated pronouncements of pundits. Stewart, who started out as a stand-up comedian, understands exactly what it's about: "The longer I'm doing this I'm coming to learn that entertainment, politics and the media are really just juggling the same balls. We're all going for ratings, so we function by the same rules. What's a political poll other than a focus group for a television show?" Madeleine Smithberg, co-creator of The Daily Show, dates comedy's new importance to the political process from the occasion when Clinton went on the Arsenio Hall show in 1992 and played the saxophone. "That signalled a whole new ballgame," she says. "This year there's this huge emphasis on entertainment and whether the candidates can be funny."

But as the hunt to find and win over the crucial but possibly non-existent "undecided voter" peaks before the 7 November vote, US comedians know they have a golden opportunity. To Smithberg, the quest for the undecided voter is itself absurd. "It's ironic, because the undecided voter has become the most empowered voting block. We've somehow given this most important decision over to the idiots who can't make a decision! We've empowered the fools." If, by some strange fluke, Smithberg's fools are also the ones who watch The Daily Show when it beams out of New York on weekday nights at 11 pm, then late-night comedy might indeed prove to be the deciding factor in the election. (*The Guardian*)



The globalisation of hunger

Is a growing trend toward economic globalisation, especially in agriculture, to blame for a lack of progress in fighting global hunger?

DOUG ALEXANDER IN LONDON . .

In today's world, 826 million people are hungry—792 million in 98 developing countries and 34 million in the West don't get enough food to lead normal, healthy lives. And despite a global pledge to cut the number of undernourished in the world by half by 2015, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) now claims the world is nowhere near this goal.

The FAO's newly-released The State of Food Insecurity in the World shows that there has been no improvement in the fight against hunger. The problem is not lack of food: there is enough to feed every man, woman and child. It is about access to food, and some argue that a growing trend toward economic globalisation—especially in agriculture—is to blame for a lack of progress in fighting global hunger. FAO assistant director-general Hartwig

de Haen argues that other factors—"low food supply", natural calamities, economic woes and conflict—have had a greater impact during 1996-98, the latest years for which hunger data is available.

Some regions are doing better than others: South and East Asia are on track, while Sub-Saharan Africa remains far from the 2015 target. Latin America falls somewhere in between. This year's report examines how hungry the hungry are by measuring the depth of hunger with 'food deficit'—how many fewer calories the hungry are getting compared to a well-nourished person. In terms of sheer numbers, Asia and the Pacific have more chronically hungry people, but Sub-Saharan Africa has the greatest depth of hunger. In nearly half of these African countries, the undernourished are getting 300 kilocalories less than what they need to be

healthy. In Asia and the Pacific, 16 percent of countries suffer this level of undernourishment. FAO advocates four measures to fight hunger: reducing conflict; boosting economic growth; establishing a social net for the poor; and improving agricultural production.

But not everyone supports these suggestions. Tim Lang, professor and food expert at London's Thames Valley University, believes FAO is pursuing the wrong strategy to fight world hunger. "At the end of the 20th century it was clear that for the last half century in which the FAO was around the world adopted a productionist, high-tech investment strategy to solving hunger," Lang says. "Without a doubt this had important successes, such as increased cash flow and increased production, but it has done this at immense social costs: driving people from

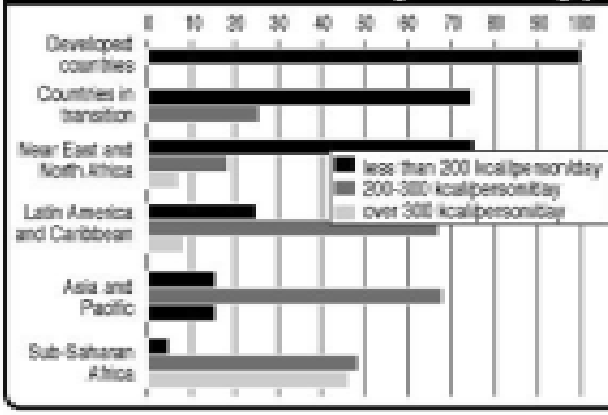
the land, externalising costs of efficient production, destruction of environment ... it has done it by waste." Lang says the FAO is "in love with" big agriculture, big business, large-scale food production and a high-tech investment strategy. What is needed, he says, is a "bottom-up, community-led agriculture" approach.

The UK-based International Society for Ecology and Culture, a non-profit organisation working on 'locally-based solution' to global problems, blames hunger on globalisation and economic changes sweeping through the world's agricultural sector. "The majority of the people in the so-called Third World are in agriculture, living on the land," ISEC director Helena Norberg-Hodge says. "Economic policies that destroy their livelihoods and offer them no substitute are the main culprit behind hunger." She says local farmers are being drawn away from growing food for local needs by producing commodities for export thereby putting their livelihoods at the mercy of international markets. Such 'cash crops' include tobacco, rubber, tea, coffee, cocoa and flowers.

"The imposition of trade policies worldwide is forcing farmers to grow larger and more specialised crops in order to survive... it's merge or die," Norberg-Hodge says. "But millions of farmers in the Third World are small farmers, they are not able to compete." ISEC notes that while threats to food security once came chiefly from natural circumstances—crop failures due to drought or an unexpected frost, for instance—farmers hooked into the global food system today continue to face those same risks plus many others of a purely economic nature. ♦ (*Gemini News*)

Hunger pangs

The number of calories lacking for the hungry:

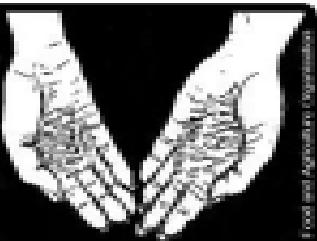


FALLING SHORT

A person requires 1,800 to 2,100 kilocalories daily to stay healthy.

Undernourished people in the following countries get much less:

- Bangladesh: 340 kcal (less)
- Haiti: 460 kcal
- Afghanistan: 480 kcal
- Somalia: 490 kcal
- Mozambique: 428 kcal
- Tajikistan: 250 kcal
- United States: 140 kcal



UNEP/FAO Food and Agriculture Organization

Taliban and Masood in peace talks

Geneva - The feuding parties in the Afghan civil war have repeatedly had confidential talks in Switzerland in 1999 and March this year. Representatives of the Taliban regime which is not internationally recognised and forces loyal to Ahmed Shah Masood had met in the Alpine republic. The meetings were organised by the Swiss foreign ministry, but failed to kick-start proper peace talks. The Swiss newspaper *Le Temps* reported Wednesday that a Taliban vice minister and a minister of Masood's Northern Alliance had discussed health care issues at a meeting in March in the presence of the International Committee of the Red Cross and United Nations representatives.

"In an internal conflict like this one has to open up a contact and further dialogue between the parties which is often very difficult, Berne foreign ministry official Raimund Kunz told the paper. There has been renewed fighting in Afghanistan since last August when the Taliban, which rule 90 per cent of the country, launched a new offensive against Masood's forces in the north. Last month alone some 28,000 people fled the war-torn and drought-stricken country to Pakistan. (dpa)

Kuwait ends ban on Bangla workers

Kuwait City - Kuwait has agreed to end a bar on workers from Bangladesh, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said. Sheikh Hasina said her Labour Minister Abdul Mannan has signed an agreement with Kuwaiti officials on lifting the year-long restriction which was imposed after a Bangladeshi worker allegedly killed his Kuwaiti employer and then fled the emirate. Meanwhile, the two nations were discussing a draft extradition treaty that could affect the ongoing murder case, she told a press conference in Kuwait City at the end of a three-day visit. The labour bar "was lifted yesterday," Sheikh Hasina said. She said that the original measure had been an administrative procedure and not an official ban.

Kuwait had put a stop to processing work permits for Bangladeshis after the alleged killing. Sheikh Hasina said the suspect was in custody in Dhaka and that her government has been providing Kuwait with information about the case which is pending trial. "If necessary" she said, Bangladesh was ready to send the suspect back to Kuwait.

Further exchanges of information about the killing were needed, however, and a proposed extradition treaty still had to be enacted. Bangladesh and Kuwait officials discussed the shaping of a mutual extradition law during her visit, Sheikh Hasina added. Registered workers from Bangladesh in Kuwait number about 160,000 but some estimates of the total have been put at around 200,000. Most are unskilled and are among the lowest paid labourers in the Gulf. The ending of the bar was expected to increase badly needed income sent home by Bangladeshis annually. (dpa)

Narmada activists begin final battle

New Delhi - A week after India's Supreme Court rejected their case against the Narmada dam, activists opposing the scheme have begun what may well be the final battle by the country's best known people's movement. Famed anti-Narmada dam campaigner, Medha Patkar, entered the tenth day of her hunger protest Thursday in the city of Bhopal, the capital of central Madhya Pradesh state. The state is the home of most of the quarter million, mainly indigenous people to be displaced by the four billion-U.S. dollar Sardar Sarovar dam. For well over a decade, Patkar, who has won the Swedish 'Right to Livelihood Award', also described as the alternative Nobel Prize, has led hundreds of anti-dam rallies, been beaten up and arrested several times by the police. She almost died of dehydration, during a similar 22-day hunger protest nine years ago.

Patkar's protest has been accompanied by a series of public demonstrations against the court ruling, held across the country as well as in North America, West Europe and South Africa. The Sardar Sarovar, being built in the western coastal state of Gujarat, adjoining Madhya Pradesh, is to be the first of 30 big and hundreds of medium and small dams planned on the Narmada, which flows westward across central India into the Arabian Sea.

While the NBA's campaign is backed by a number of well-known personalities like famous Indian author Arundhati Roy, the pro-dam lobby does not lack for big names. These include former top journalist B.G. Verghese and prominent development economist Yogendra Alagh, a former federal government minister. (IPS)

Indonesia military feels pinch

Jakarta - Recent attempts by parts of Indonesia's military to flex its political muscle are a challenge not just to President Abdurrahman Wahid, but to the country's bumpy transition to democracy. Since becoming president a year ago, Wahid has taken several steps to assert civilian rule over the military—a major lever of political power for more than 30 years during Suharto's presidency.

Among others, Wahid has replaced many high-ranking military officials known to be Suharto loyalists, moved to cut the soldiers' influence at the village level and told them clear their actions with civilian authorities. But getting the military to accept the changes in political culture brought by the end of the Suharto era has not been easy. Juwono Sudarsono, former minister of defence under Wahid's administration, warns that civilian politicians must seriously develop the democratisation process in the country. "If they fail to set up a democratic political system, the military then will make a comeback," Sudarsono, a political professor at University of Indonesia, was quoted by local media as saying earlier this month. "So, civilian leaders must set up a political system that paves the way for civilian supremacy," he said. (IPS)

Uttaranchal's birth pangs

A new Indian state will be born after a six-year campaign, but the real problems lie ahead.



RANJIT DEVRAJ IN NEW DELHI

The forthcoming 'addition' of a new province to India to be carved out of the central Himalayan foothills in northern Uttar Pradesh state, will satisfy a decades-old demand of the hill folk in that region. Uttaranchal will be one of the three new Indian states to be born on that day, which are being created out of three big states—Uttar Pradesh, its eastern neighbour Bihar and Madhya Pradesh—to its south.

While the setting up of Uttaranchal, with a population of about eight million people, marks the success of a six-year-old mass campaign, a tough job awaits the rulers of the new state. Their goal is to tackle a unique form of underdevelopment.

Uttaranchal has one of India's highest levels of adult literacy and education, but decades of neglect are blamed for the continuing downhill migration of residents from a region that still has a subsistence farming-based economy. It was this feeling of being neglected by the federal government and the rulers of Uttar Pradesh based in the distant state capital Lucknow that had fired the demand for a new state. Its picturesque river valleys, flanked by snow topped mountains, make tourism a major source of income for the region, but not much has been done to develop this in ways to benefit the local economy. Uttaranchal, with its major Himalayan rivers, also has tremendous potential to generate hydro-electricity, but this is not easy in the highly seismic and ecologically fragile mountain region. Fruit and flower cultivation also offers much scope for job and income generation. However, Uttaranchal continues to be a 'money-order' economy, where generations of male migrants have supported families back home with monthly postal remittances

from the big cities in the plains of India.

The creation of the new state is expected to result in better attention to these priorities. But that will have to wait for the resolution of political problems that have cropped up even before Uttaranchal is born. Many among those who agitated for a separate home for the hill people are now complaining of serious flaws in the administrative shape of the new state. They are unhappy with the decision to make the major hill town of Dehradun, some 250 km north of the Indian capital, the 'intercapital' of Uttaranchal.

The problem has arisen because Uttaranchal is made up of the two culturally different sub-regions of Garhwal and Kumaon. Dehradun is part of the former. The relatively obscure, but strategically located town of Gairsen, which straddles the Garhwal and Kumaon areas, has long been suggested as a 'compromise' capital. "There is too much uncertainty over vital issues," says Harish Rawat of the Uttarakhand Sanyukt Sangharsh Samiti, one of the groups which campaigned for the new state.

There are also fears that the kind of development promised by the politicians may lead to further environmental damage to the hills. Studies have found that so-called development work in the area

has only worsened environmental degradation, adding to women's work, by making them walk longer to fetch fuel wood and water. According to Sachidananda Bharati of the Duhatoli Lok Vikas Sansthan, a people's group working in Uttaranchal, the continuing neglect of the hills has hurt women the most. The migration of men to the plains has meant not only loneliness for the women but also forces them to take up hard physical work on farms.

The creation of a new state is also expected to draw in more real estate developers from India's big cities. In recent years, property developers from the Indian capital have bought up picturesque hill slopes from local farmers to build holiday homes for rich people from the plains. "This racket is happening with the connivance of local level officials," says Nathu Begum, the president of an elected village council in Dehradun district. Nobody is complaining too loudly because the racket is keeping land prices up, she adds. Demands have been raised that the new state follow the example of other Himalayan states like adjoining Himachal Pradesh, which have strict laws, banning outsiders from buying local land. ♦ (IPS)

1.2 billion and counting

This mother of all censuses is China's fifth. Under scrutiny will be the one child norm, believed to be responsible for a hidden 200 million—China's "black population".

ANTOANETA BEZLOVA IN BEIJING

The Chinese government will begin facing up to the hidden millions who have eluded its "one child" policy on family planning, as it embarks Nov 1 on the largest population census undertaken anywhere in the world. An army of six million census workers will knock on doors throughout the country next month, carrying out a 500 million yuan (\$60 million) plan to count the number of people in a country home to one-sixth of the world's population.

This will be China's fifth national census, but the first in which census workers will be equipped with computing devices. Hoping to get an accurate picture of China's population, the government has promised households who have not registered their "out of planning quota" children to apply for permanent residence during the census. Beijing claims that its draconian family-planning policy launched in 1980 had succeeded in lowering the population growth rate by one percent a year in the 1990s. Last month, the *China Youth Daily* said the "one child" policy was responsible for preventing 250 million births in the past 20 years. The policy stipulates that each couple living in the cities should have only one child, unless one or both of the couple are from an ethnic minority or they are both the only children. In most rural areas, a couple may have a second child after a break of several years.

Yet despite the policy's strict rules, family planning targets have been loosely enforced in many of the poorest regions. Nowadays it is common to find couples in the countryside where 80 percent of the population live with five, six or even more children. In the 1980s, local officials often forced couples to undergo sterilisation or abortion, and if a couple exceeded its quota of one or two children, officials might confiscate property or levy a heavy fine. But in recent years, family planning authorities have halted coercive measures and called for a more flexible approach in the countryside.

As a result, many rural couples have learned to get around the law by sending the pregnant woman to stay with relatives until the baby is born, or claiming the newborn baby was adopted or belongs to a friend or relative. This loose enforcement of birth quotas, combined with the traditional Chinese preference for boys, has led to a population explosion in rural areas. According to official statistics, China's population reached 1.259 billion at the end of last year. However, some demographers believe that as many as 200

million people could be unaccounted for.

Judging by the publicity accompanying the current census, it seems that the government is preparing to encounter the large number of extra people dubbed the "black population". The government has appealed to people to co-operate with census-takers, and promises no illegal charges would be allowed during the population survey. "Information collected during this census would not be used



to punish anyone for their past mistakes on population-related matters," assures Zhang Weimin, director general of the State Statistical Bureau. He says each of the six million census workers recruited to carry out the registration has received special training. "They were told to be careful when asking questions which people feel might embarrass or endanger them," explains Zhang.

By some domestic media accounts though, when pilot interviews were carried out in the summer, many people refused even to open their doors to census officials. Even in the cities, where the "one child" policy has generally worked, people felt fearful about the census. "We don't worry about having "black children" (unregistered children)," says Zhao Linzhi, a middle-aged Beijing woman who works with a foreign family as a domestic help. "But if census workers want to know about our income, this might get us into trouble with the tax authorities."

Zhang from the State Statistical Bureau admits that many economic elements have been

added to this census's questionnaire. "We want to know about employment and find out the number of people out of work," he says. "We also want to know about the housing situation—this would help us determine the pace of housing reform." "Yet we won't be asking about income levels," he promises. "We just hope to catch on the social welfare conditions of households." To quell fears about the census, the government has launched a campaign to raise consciousness. In the run-up to the census, signs were posted throughout Beijing asking residents to faithfully report their family situations.

During the 10-day census that starts Nov 1, census takers will work from door to door, visiting about 350 million households. Initial results would be announced in February next year. Zhang would not however comment on official estimates of the hidden population that has eluded previous census. "We will have to wait for the results and compare," he says. "The central government expects that the figure in this census would be below 1.3 billion." ♦ (IPS)

Nepal's new neighbours

The reorganisation of states in India has one important lesson for Nepal. It is the demand for development that creates fissiparous tendencies rather than regional or linguistic chauvinism.



SAMUEL THOMAS

A quarter of a century after Sikkim became the fourth Indian state to share borders with Nepal, two new Indian states are soon going to appear as its neighbours: to the south, a truncated Bihar, and along its western border, Uttaranchal.

The two new states have resulted from New Delhi and the parent states finally recognising and acceding to voices from below. Their emergence has been met with some degree of scepticism in other larger states in India. But the confusion and

noise is mainly among people who think that this is the beginning of the disintegration of the Indian union. Supporters of the new states say these fears are clearly unwarranted. They argue that these regions are vastly different from the centres of power that determined their development since independence and earlier, and hence the separation is with just cause.

There are implications for Nepal to having these two new neighbours. The adjoining Bihar is going to be even poorer than before with its resource-rich southern half breaking off to form

Jharkhand with its capital in Ranchi. Bihar of proxy chief minister, Laloo Prasad Yadav, is the vote base of his Rashtriya Janata Dal and therefore where his strength lies. However, the rump Bihar is where land reforms have had little impact, and the politics of caste warfare is rife, the marginal poor are amongst the poorest in the country. The poorest regions of India's poorest state are in northern Bihar next to Nepal, and economic migrants from these areas have traditionally moved to the tarai plains and Kathmandu Valley in search of jobs.

Uttaranchal

NEPAL

Bihar

Jharkhand

Bihar and elsewhere, or Nepali migrant workers find it increasingly difficult in Bangalore and other cities, or why the *madhesi* (plainsfolk from Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and Nepal's own tarai) is much looked down upon in Nepal's hill country. There is enough inter-

The new state of Uttaranchal is coming up in the Garhwal and Kumaon regions that the Gorkhali conquistadors had captured and ruled ruthlessly

ral displacement due to underdevelopment, and the outsider is clearly unwelcome. The lesson can be taken further. Even if not faced with the demand for greater autonomy or statehood, there are lessons in administering distant regions that Nepal could well learn. The poverty of the far-flung areas is in stark contrast to the affluence of the capital. It is the striking disparity that forces people to flee one place for another, seek greater control over their lives and resources like the Jharkhandis, and cause Maoists to be as active in Bihar as in Nepal. Whether it is the Bihari coming across the open border or the Nepali going to the plains or the increasing human pressures on Kathmandu, it is the same forces at work. And the same quiet

desperation to get away. The clamour for autonomy is not merely a product of linguistic or cultural chauvinism, although the organisation of states in India was largely on linguistic lines and had to give way some day. It has to do with development and underdevelopment. For too long these regions were treated as "internal colonies" and remained in various stages of underdevelopment, while the money earned from the resource base fled to the centres of power. It is the clamour for development that creates fissiparous tendencies. Himachal Pradesh is an example of how a state was able to successfully adopt its own development model since its separation from a larger Punjab. There are other demands as well, and some believe that a Gorkhali is not a distant possibility. ♦

The adjoining Bihar is going to be even poorer than before—with its resource-rich southern half breaking off to form Jharkhand

(a fact that is resented even today) around the turn of the 18th century only to lose it to the British in the 1816 Treaty of Sugauli. And it has problems very similar to Nepal's. The people are ethnically and temperamentally closer to the western hill Nepalis than to the plainsfolk down south. The economy is largely dependent on tourism; there is large-scale migration of menfolk to the plains to work (who send back money and bring back AIDS as well); and the state has high hydroelectric potential. Economic disparities too are large and glaring, and the poverty in the hills is strikingly similar to Nepal's own.

Here too there is cross-border migration, but this time it is one that goes from Nepal to the hills across the Mahakali river. While the population of the poverty-stricken hills of western Nepal migrates to cities all over India, there is quite a number that hike across into Uttaranchal, whose own menfolk migrate to Delhi to find better work. In Uttaranchal, Nepalis (called Dotiyals) serve as porters in hill stations like Nainital and Mussoorie and carry loads for pilgrims and the pilgrims themselves at holy places like Gaumukh and Kedamath.

The point to be made here is that all these regions and peoples are victims of relentless economic marginalisation. Economic refugees, and South Asia has loads of them. There is also increased hostility toward migrants these days and may better explain why Bangladeshi refugees are hated in Delhi by other refugees from



Top left, Bihari migrants congregate near the Bagmati bridge at Thapathali; below, Nepali porters toil in Uttaranchal.

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COMMENT

by KRISHNAMACHARI SRIKKANTH

‘Shockingly disgraceful’

India crashes to the most humiliating defeat ever in a title clash. Clearly, a side that lacks consistency is not going to make any headway in the long run.

Toput it in short, it was a disgraceful performance by the Indian team in a title clash. Even this would sound an understatement. Losing is one thing, succumbing without a hint of a fight is quite another. Without taking away any credit away from the winner, the Lankans would never have expected to have it so easy.

In all my years as a cricketer, coach and a critic, I have never come across a side giving in so easily. Being an Indian, it was a heartbreaking sight to watch one batsman after the other, departing as if in a daze. One is sure that millions of fans across the country would have felt the same.

If a side's approach is going to be like this, no coach whether he is from India, abroad, or even from the heaven, can make a difference. What went wrong? Everything. The bowling lacked purpose for most part, vital catches were put down and the batting was shocking to say the least. Was this the same outfit that had defeated Australia and South Africa only days earlier in back-to-back matches? Those heady victories seemed a distant memory. But then, a side that lacks consistency is not going to make any headway in the long run.

What separates the successful sides from the also-rans is the strength of character. That will to buck the odds, that self-belief in sight of a challenging task. Sadly,

during the final in Sharjah, this very essential quality was conspicuous by its absence in the Indian team.

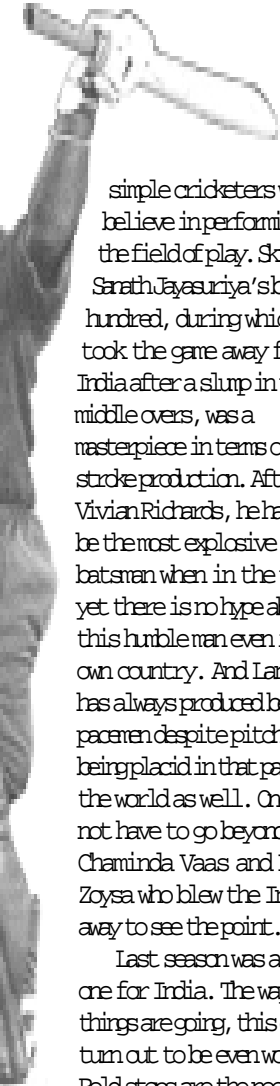
It is also time that the media and the other commercial interests stop playing up some cricketers as a couple

of performances. Players have to be judged over a period of time, with consistency being the key indicator. One does feel there is too much hype about the game in the country. The selectors too should stop catering to regional interests and

Sanath Jayasuriya: single-handed demolition.

should sit down and pick an INDIAN team. These parochial considerations have caused enough harm to Indian cricket.

Look at the Lankans. They are



simple cricketers who believe in performing on the field of play. Skipper Sanath Jayasuriya's big hundred, during which he took the game away from India after a slump in the middle overs, was a masterpiece in terms of stroke production. After Vivian Richards, he has to be the most explosive batsman when in the mood, yet there is no hype about this humble man even in his own country. And Lanka has always produced better pacemen despite pitches being placid in that part of the world as well. One does not have to go beyond Chaminda Vaas and Nuwan Zoysa who blew the Indians away to see the point.

Last season was a bad one for India. The way things are going, this could turn out to be even worse. Bold steps are the need of the hour and the men who matter should have the courage to take them. ♦

(The Hindu)

K. Srikant is a former captain of the India cricket team.

Lankan coach for Bangladesh

Dhaka - Former Sri Lankan test cricketer Roy Dias is tipped to become coach of Bangladesh's national cricket team, according to Bangladesh Cricket Board sources. Dias's name was proposed to Bangladesh by the Sri Lankan cricket authorities recently. The retired star cricketer will replace South African coach Eddie Barlow, who suffered a stroke last April and is unable to complete his two-year contract.

Barlow, the former South African all-rounder, was appointed after West Indies opener Gordon Greenidge was fired as coach last year. Bangladesh, which achieved test-playing status five months ago, have been frantically looking for an effective international coach.

Bangladesh is scheduled to play their inaugural test match against India in Dhaka 10-14 November. Sri Lanka had also proposed the name of Roshan Mahanama who had retired from international cricket last year, but he refused the Bangladeshi offer. Dias served for some time as coach and manager for the Sri Lankan side after quitting active cricket.

After the recent brilliant successes in Sri Lankan cricket, demands for coaches from the island have soared in Bangladesh. Three other Sri Lankan coaches have been appointed by Bangladesh to train junior cricketers of different age groups. (dpa)

Nepal's sporting season begins

With the end of the Dasain and Tihar festivities and the onset of winter, the Valley's sportsmen are gearing up for another round of sports tournaments. From lawn tennis to golf to cricket, the racquets, clubs and bats are out of the closets and being readied for battle.

With leaders of the tourism industry trying to establish Nepal as a sports destination, the theme seems to be well underway. Golf especially seems to be catching up with the capital's upper class. In the month of November alone Nepalis golfers will be putting away at three major tournaments and one amateur game. The first in the series is the famous Grouse International Shotgun Foursomes Golf Tournament to be played on the 4 November at the Le Meridien Gokarna Golf Resort. Organised in honour of Queen Aishwarya's birthday, the tournament will have amateur golfers teeing off to make it to St Andrews in Scotland, the Mecca of golf for the next Famous Grouse. The annual event is being sponsored by Highland Distillers Brands Ltd, Scotland. Favourites are last year's winner Tashi Ghale and runner-up Pradeep B. Rana.

Professionals have set their eyes on a different course. Surya Tobacco Company, in its effort to promote golf in Nepal, will be holding three major tournaments. The first in line is the Surya Nepal Western Open to be held at the Himalayan Golf Course in Pokhara on 10-11 November. Next is the Surya Nepal Eastern Open to be held at the Dharan Country Club on 17-18 November. These two tourneys are only open to Nepali pros and carry a purse of Rs 50,000 each. The last in the series is the Surya Nepal Masters carrying a prize money of Rs 1.2 million, to be held from 22-25 November at the Gokarna Golf Club. Around 100 professional golfers including 16 from Nepal and 80 from India are expected to participate in this mega event. The favourite is last year's winner, Rohtas Singh of India.

On the cricketing scene, Soaltee Crown Plaza along with Surya Tobacco Company, Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN), and Zee Sports Channel is organising the Soaltee Super Sixes 2000 to be held from 3-5 November. This tournament will bring together board members of big corporate houses, along with diplomats from the embassies of Britain, India, and Pakistan, as well as our own hardy British Gurkhas. The tournament in its distinctive six-sided format designed by CAN is being held for the second year in a row. The British Embassy and Kantipur Publications are the defending champions and runner-up respectively.

Tennis fans too have a tournament to look out for. The All Nepal Lawn Tennis Association, in collaboration with Carlsberg, is coming up with the 3rd Carlsberg Open Tennis Tournament 2000. The matches will be held 18-26 November at the Satdobato Sports Complex. The total prize money is Rs 92,905, with the men's singles winner taking home Rs 16,940.

Tennis at future Olympics unsure

Stuttgart, Germany - Men's tennis supremo Mark Miles said he was unsure about the sport's future at Olympic Games after some problems around the Sydney Games. But the ATP Tour chief executive officer Miles also said there were no immediate plans to withdraw tennis from the 2004 Games in Athens: "At the moment we are in." He said talks on the issue were planned with players, the International Tennis Federation (which runs the event) and the International Olympic Committee.

"It is a tough call. There are valuable reasons to be in the Olympics," Miles said. Tennis became an Olympic sport again in 1988 when the IOC opened the Games for professional athletes. But many top players have snubbed the Olympics because they don't fit their calendar in which the Grand Slams normally rank highest. World ranking points were awarded for the first time, but the absentees in Sydney were led by Pete Sampras as the event took place just two weeks after the U.S. Open. The situation in Athens is even graver as the Olympics will be just before the New York Grand Slam. Miles also said the ATP was "close to serious problems" in the run-up to Sydney "to conform the rankings with the Olympic culture" regarding the entry list. (dpa)

Maradona farewell match

Buenos Aires - Former Argentine football star Maradona said he would like a "farewell game" for the national side wearing his old number 10 shirt. "I would be the happiest man in the world if I could play a farewell game in the Argentine shirt with the number 10," he said. Maradona celebrated his 40th birthday into the early hours at a night club in Buenos Aires along with 500 guests. The former World Cup star has returned to the capital to take over as general manager of the first division club Almagro following a months-long course of therapy in Cuba for drug addiction and weight problems. Overweight and suffering a heart problem, Maradona admitted that he was close to death after collapsing in January. "I will thank God if I reach the age of 50," he said. Maradona intends to return to Cuba to continue his drugs treatment, planning to return to Argentina at Christmas. (dpa)

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SAVING FAITH

by DESMOND DOIG

On the banks of eternity itself

A teller of tales or a priest from any of the temples crowding the ghats would have said that gods and goddesses came to bathe unseen at the confluence known as Shankhamul.

The lovely city of Patan is so old its origins are largely forgotten. Legend has the Buddha visit it with his beloved disciple Ananda. The great Mauryan emperor Ashoka built four stupas about the city to testify to its blessedness. From Patan, almost certainly, went the Princess Brikuti to marry the famous Tibetan king Tsrang-Song-Gampo. It is said that she took with her as her sole dowry the begging bowl of the Buddha and through her own indomitable faith caused Buddhism to take firm roots in Tibet. She comes down to us through history as the charming Green Tara, subject of countless statues and paintings.

To the Nepalis, Patan was Lalitpatan or Lalitpur, city of beauty. To Tibetan traders it was Ye Rang, which means eternity itself. The beauty remains, despite the passing of corroding centuries, destructive earthquakes, wars and the attention of vandals who sacrilegiously have wrenched some of its finest detail from the magnificence that still remains. Down every lane, in every courtyard and in the great squares are jewel-like memories of the past which, I like to think, serve as inspiration to the large number of artists and workers in wood and metal who inhabit the city. They were known to be there, feeding a flourishing Indo-Tibet trade route, when whatever there was of the ancient city was rebuilt by King Veera Deva in the year AD 299. It is not known whether he

built the wall about the city that remains only in the briefest snatches or whether it was there already, a bastion not only against invasions but nocturnal intruders. The city also had the protection of a river, more holy than protective since there are seasons when it is almost dry.

It is across this sacred river, at the confluence of the Bagmati and the Manahara, that traders and visitors from the north came, over a medieval bridge of stout wooden beams, brick and earth. It still is easy to imagine their awe and amazement at first sight of the city with its piled pagoda roofs, golden finials flashing in the sun, its stupas and temples across the river. If they had a teller of tales travelling with them, or met a priest from any of numerous temples crowding the ghats, they would have been told that gods and goddesses came to bathe unseen at the confluence known as Shankhamul. One knew they were there when the water suddenly stopped in its glide southwards and sometimes even reversed direction. A couple of years ago an adventurous truck tried to cross the ancient bridge.



I was assured by a garrulous priest that it must have chosen just the moment of the celestial dip to profane the happening. The old bridge fell apart in anguish and no one has bothered to put it together again.

Dominating this particular approach to Patan—there is another downstream where a new bridge and highway obliterate the old crossing between Kathmandu and Patan—is the temple of Jagat Narayan, nineteenth century new, and not very attractive except for four powerful images that face its entrance. Three of them, massively carved in stone as if they intend to sit out the centuries, are under metal canopies. They represent Ganesha, Garuda in his human form, and Hanuman. I have yet to find someone who will date these images that to me appear much older than the temple whose courtyard they occupy. Perhaps they were already there, open to the elements, adding their blessings to the sacred confluence. Perhaps they graced a far older temple long since destroyed and swept away. For, to me, they have the same quality as the colossal statues of Garuda and Bhairab in Kathmandu. Behind the kneeling Garuda, atop a tall stone pillar supported on the back of a stone turtle, is a gilded Garuda, bird-faced and horned and wearing a plume of flames. He crouches, which is unusual, giving the impression of immediate flight on golden wings. A small boy who watched me sketch and claimed that his

name was Amitabh Dhamendra, seemed to have the same idea. As I drew the perched Garuda he clapped his hands and whooped loudly as he would a wayward chicken. "If he flies away," he said, "you cannot sketch him." If he flies away, I said in reply, we will both die of shock. The boy ran off to share his joke with a group of other children, no doubt called Zeenat, Hema and Mithun.

The temple was built by Colonel Jagat Shumshere Jung Kunwar Rana, brother of the famous Prime Minister Maharaja Jung Bahadur, in 1860. Ten years ago he had accompanied his brother to England and Europe and by doing so had disregarded the taboo of crossing the *kala pani*. Some believe he built this temple to Narayan to atone for his sin, while others see it as an attempt to keep up with his famous brother who was planning to build a temple at Kal Mochan in Kathmandu. Perhaps he was merely gifting to Patan a new temple as the culmination of a great deal of building and rebuilding he had done in the area. Several smaller temples and an imposing stretch of burning and bathing ghats owe their origin to the pious colonel, whether easing a guilty conscience or attempting to immortalize himself. Certainly the four handsome images will perpetuate his name. ♦

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

NEPALI LITERATURE

by MANJUSHREE THAPA

CM BISWAKARMA'S COMMITTED POETRY

Thanks to the current resurgence of pride in ethnic identities and languages, there are, now, an increasing number of (largely male) writers from minority ethnic groups. Dalit authors, however, still remain almost wholly unheard from in our literature. The low literacy rate—and negligible rate of higher education—among Dalits, is surely one reason for this. Nepal's scattered Dalit population, which by some accounts constitutes twenty percent of the national population, has yet to be freed from centuries' long economic exploitation and social discrimination. Only now are crops of educated Dalits emerging from colleges; only now will Dalit voices be heard in literature. Yet the exclusion of Dalit voices in literature cannot be chalked up to the Dalits' lack of privilege alone. From Bhanubhakta's days to the present time, Nepal's literature has been the bastion of 'upper-caste' men—which, given the priority placed on education by the priestly caste, effectively means Bahun men. Newar writers, with their extensive and excellent Nepali and Nepal-bhasa compositions, are the only group to seriously rival Bahun men's dominance over our literature. One can only hope this insularity will end—soon—so that Nepali literature may speak in Nepal's many different voices.

Chakra Man Biswakarma brings to Nepali literature a refreshingly down-to-earth perspective. He is founding member of the Dalit Sewa Sang and the Dalit Gair Sarkari Sanstha Mahasang. The best of his slim first collection *Dalit Bastika Suseliharu* (The Whistles of a Dalit Settlement) accomplishes what all good progressive literature aspires to: to speak of the masses and to the masses, with art and instruction both. The first poem below speaks eloquently of the lingering inequality that sharply contradicts Nepal's claims to democratic nationhood:

My Settlement My Country

In places, hungry stomachs
In places, unfarmed fields
For some here, employment
is mandatory to support life
For others here, employment
counts for mere pocket change
The learned people say
this country is a garden of all castes
But for Dalits who are told: don't pollute this and don't pollute that;
who are barred from touching the taps, wells and temples
near their own homes and courtyards;
who can't risk revealing their castes
even in a settlement of scholars—the nation's capital;
who preserve Nepal's culture by playing sarangi and sahanai
melodies
who have made Nepal's renown as a country of the brave
by fashioning khukuri knives;
for them, even after democracy
—oh hajoor!—this country remains
a patch of stinging nettles

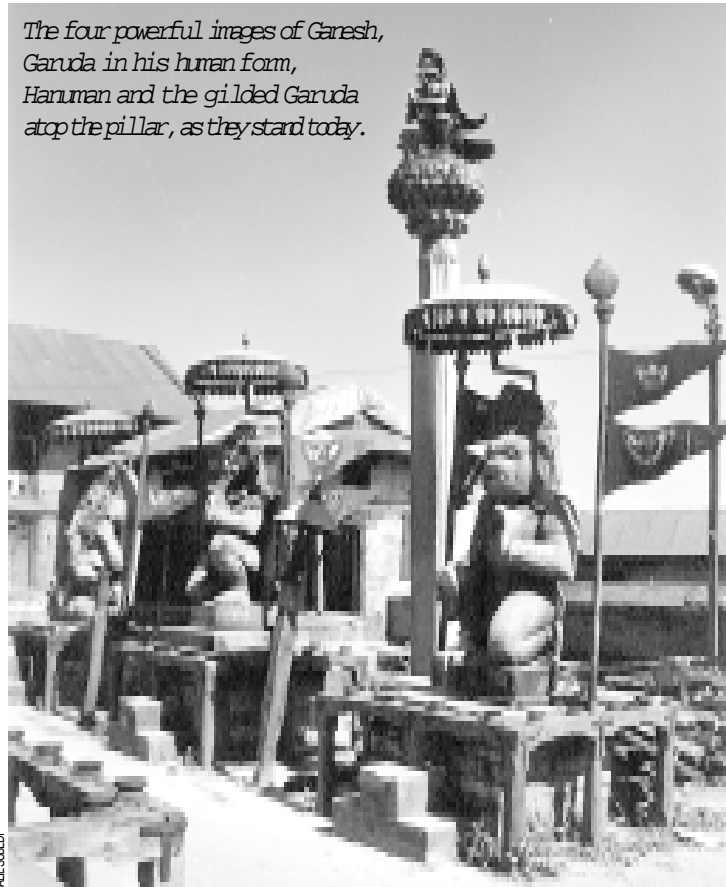
The second poem is more personal; and yet it expresses an unfulfilled longing which is not just universal, but which comes from migrations caused by the economic and social discriminations that are specific to Dalit communities:

Remembrance

In solitude, I keep remembering you
my heart pierced by bitter recollections...
When clouds start dancing in the sky
when cuckoo birds start singing in the spring
somehow I feel that your own sweet voice is ringing
and I feel much love for you in my heart
I see your own ardour hidden
in spring flowers reaching their prime
You must be playing hide and seek, teasing the moon
you must be smiling, jesting with your own youthfulness
you must be roaming the hills and cliffs cutting fresh grass
you must be singing, sinking in melancholy
The waterfalls must weep to hear your songs
Even if you're in great sorrow
don't stop loving me for going abroad
don't stop loving me because our love is out of caste
If not in this realm I'll come to you in another realm
if not as a living corpse I'll come in the guise of a butterfly

Dalit Bastika Suseliharu speaks without guile of the material and emotional suffering of Nepal's most discriminated against communities. Sophisticated readers will be facile to look down on the simplicity of language that the collection adopts: for the fact remains that the majority of Nepalis can access literature only if it is written, as this collection is, in the everyday language of speech. Anyone committed to a literature which speaks of and to the masses can learn much from CM Biswakarma's simple yet elegant expressions. This is the kind of literature which can thrive, as all literature should, outside exclusionary literary circles. *Dalit Bastika Suseliharu*—and similar writings from Nepal's underrepresented communities—should be made widely available for the burgeoning post-literacy readership all over the country.

The four powerful images of Ganesha, Garuda in his human form, Hanuman and the gilded Garuda atop the pillar, as they stand today.



ABOUT TOWN

FILMS

❖ **Nepali**
Basanti - Plaza II
Chautari - Ashok, Krishna (470090)
Dhukdhuki - Bishwo Jyoti (221837), Ganga Chalchitra, Prithvi, Goon (Kha) (520668)
Mailee - Goon (Ga) (520668), Ranjana (221191)

❖ **Hindi**
Deewane – Metro
Dhadkan - Sri Nava Durga
Dhai Akshar Prem Ke - Gopi (470090)
Fiza - Radha
Hindustan Ki Kasam – Shivadarshan
Jis Desh Mein Ganga Rehta Hai - Kumari (414932), Goon (Ka) (520668)
Josh - Padma
Mission Kashmir - Tara (476092)
Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani - Manakamana (225284)
Shikari - Plaza 1

SPECIAL VIDEO SHOW

Video documentary *Qoyllur Rit'i: A Woman's Journey*, produced by Holly Wissler and directed by Gabriela Martinez Escobar. Seventy percent of the proceeds will go towards the continued education of Rajen Rai, the 10-year-old son of a porter who died in a trekking accident in 1993. Indigo Gallery. 6 pm, Friday, 3 November. Rs 300. 413580 or indigo@wlink.com.np

MUSIC

❖ **Jazz session**
Yak & Yeti warms up for the winter with its annual autumn event the "Kathmandu Jazz and Food Festival." A fundraising dinner "All that Jazz" with Kathmandu's premier jazz band Cadenza starting off. This will be followed by a special appearance by French bass guitarist Daniel Givone, solo guitarist Jean Claude Givone, and rhythm guitarist Christine Givone and their gypsy jazz inspirations. Last act will feature the band Chakra. Madhuban Garden, Yak & Yeti Hotel. 7 pm, 10 November

❖ **Unplugged**
Live unplugged performance by Sabu Lama at Las Kus Restaurant Courtyard, Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel, 6:30 pm onwards. 413632.

❖ **Piano and Percussion**
Piano, Drums and Double Bass performance by Budaprithi Trio band from 7-9:30 pm everyday except Mondays at the Juneli Bar, Hotel De l' Annapurna, Durbar Marg. 221711

❖ **Pop**
Filipino band Spice and Ice playing at the Gurkha Grill, Soaltee Hotel. 7:30 pm. Everyday except Monday. 272555

❖ **Classical**
Musicians from Nepal and abroad perform on 11 November at Kirateswor Temple, Pashupatinath. 4-8 pm. Free entrance but charges may apply for special guest appearances. Organised by Kirateswor Sangeet Ashram. 492139

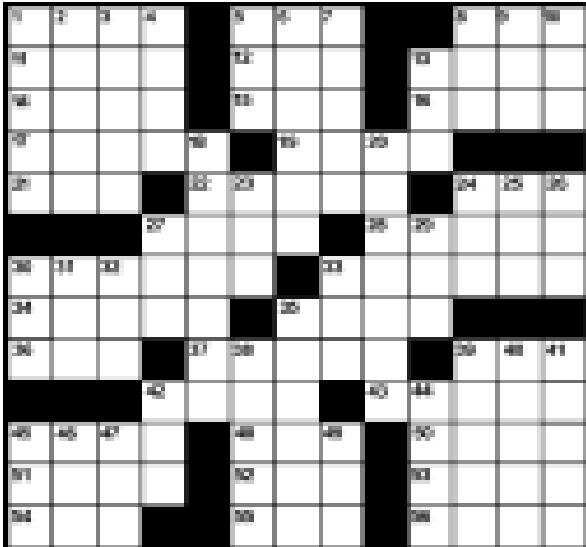
❖ **Jazz**
Live jazz by Cadenza and friends at Upstairs Restaurant, Lazimpat. Every Saturday 7:30-10:00 pm.

Adventure Sports

❖ **Mountain Bike Championship** Second phase of International Class Mountain Bike Championship. 11 November, Saturday. Registration open till event eve. MTB theory and practice workshop follows after the championship by international cyclists. Surf www.bikingnepal.com or contact Peter Stewart, Race Director at Himalayan Mountain Bikes, Thamel. 427427

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

QUICKWORD 6



Across

- 1 Donahue in Manila? (4)
- 5 O! A poem (3)
- 8 Golf beverage? (3)
- 11 Not always to tie shoe (4)
- 12 Ex-federal? (3)
- 13 Look at summit (4)
- 14 Tell it in Israel (4)
- 15 Bureau of 12 across (3)
- 16 Wag this story (4)
- 17 Boom in sound (5)
- 19 LA university (4)
- 21 Microgram (3)
- 22 Slow musical in lent? (5)
- 24 But it's a vat! (3)
- 27 Miss Piggie said (4)
- 28 Untie or merge? (5)
- 30 Sacrifice this Indian? (6)
- 33 A ton of penitence (6)
- 34 Mohammed was a boxer, not an...(5)
- 35 Identical victory? (4)
- 36 Excavate an infra? (3)
- 37 Loot the implements (5)
- 39 Central spooks (3)
- 42 What 39 across would do? (4)
- 43 Chase dog (5)

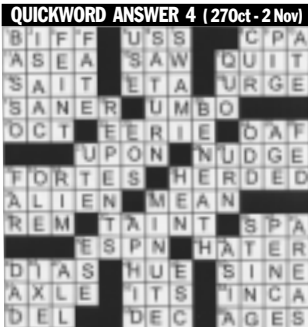
- 45 Second video in Greek? (4)
- 48 Fight over who moves oar? (3)
- 50 Drag a senior student? (4)
- 51 Adjoin a backside? (4)
- 52 Munched with tea? (3)
- 53 Jay may say no (4)
- 54 Nepal Biscuit Enterprises? (3)
- 55 Has in the past (3)
- 56 Paradise garden (4)

Down

- 1 Proto, a lump of (5)
- 2 Chaos (5)
- 3 Cold top on cake (5)
- 4 Jeans in a veil? (4)
- 5 Disconnect (3)
- 6 Expose as junk? (6)
- 7 Ed's decree? (5)
- 8 Jumble 52 across (3)
- 9 Lee's sea food (3)
- 10 Squeeze a living (3)
- 13 Parents and teachers (3)
- 18 Customers (7)
- 20 Stupid-ish (7)
- 23 East northeast (3)
- 24 Push this in the tower (3)
- 25 North American native (3)
- 26 Ed's sleeping here (3)

Terms and conditions

- 1 The contest is open to everyone, except employees of Himalmedia Pvt Ltd and Infocom Pvt Ltd.
- 2 In case of more than one correct entry, the winner will be decided by lucky draw.
- 3 Entries have to reach Himalmedia, by 5 pm, 7 Nov, Tuesday.
- 4 The winner will be announced in the coming issue.
- 5 The prize has to be collected from Himalmedia within a week of the announcement. Please come with an ID.

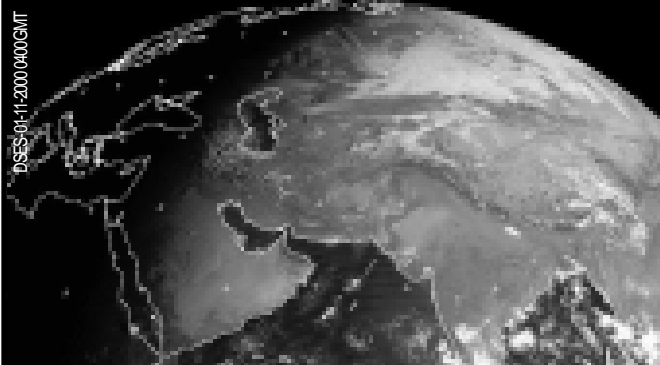


Out of 17 entries, there were no correct answers.

To send in your entries, please fill in the details below and fax to 977-1-521013, or email to crossword@himalmedia.com. Entries can be dropped off at Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur.

Name.....
Ph.....email.....

NEPALI WEATHER



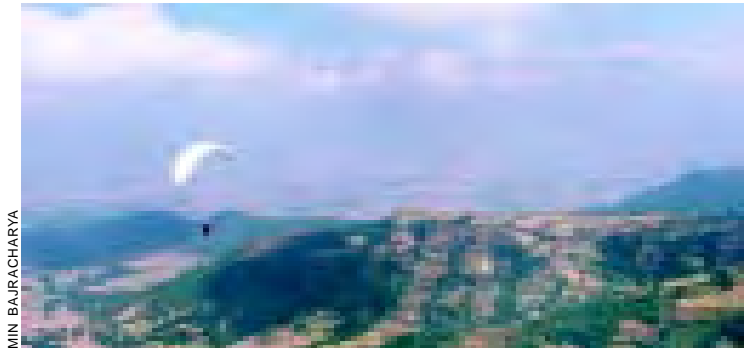
The glorious weather of the past week was the result of northerly winds on the fringes of the Bangladesh cyclone that grazed Kathmandu, and brought some rain to eastern Nepal. These winds have now shifted northwest and will bring clear weather for another week or so. There may be some fast-moving high altitude clouds from the west over the weekend, but these will quickly pass. The wind and holidays were also responsible for clean air in Kathmandu Valley. Unfortunately that was too good to last, expect the morning mists to return as night temperatures fall to 7 degrees next week.

KATHMANDU

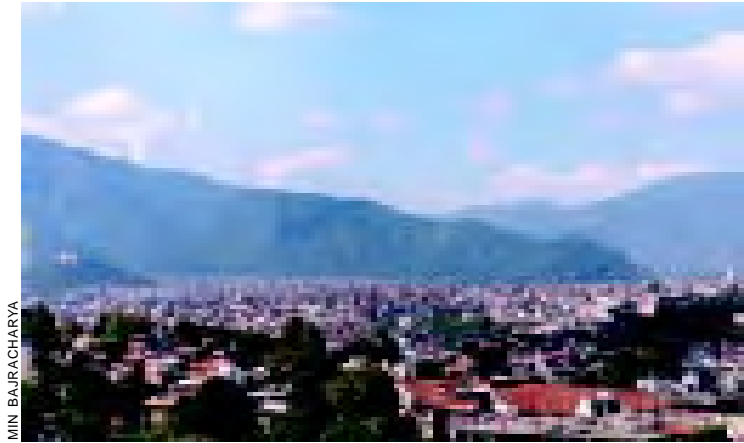
Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
27-09	26-09	26-08	26-08	25-07



A oil-lamp procession taken out by a local community in Kathmandu on the occasion of the Newari New Year 1120 on 27 October. The banner wishes all Nepalis a Happy New Year.



Captain Nicolli Didier makes an inaugural paragliding jump from Chitayan Dara east of Kathmandu Valley to exhibit this new adventure sport in Nepal. The event on 28 October was organised by Mt. Annapurna Adventure Trek and Expedition and Hotel Murti Monastery.



Autumn is here, and with it glorious weather and unobstructed views across Kathmandu Valley towards Ganges Himal. In the foreground is the increasingly congested skyline of Kathmandu, with (from left to right) Swayambhu, the Taleju temple and Thakara, as seen on 1 November.

Andean llamas in the Himalaya

How some domesticated cud-chewing artiodactyl mammals of Chilean origin travelled to Godavari.

SALIL SUBEDI

Three years ago, five alpacas stepped off the cargo hold of a Lufthansa jet at Kathmandu airport. They literally breezed through customs and were whisked off to their new home. At last count they numbered eight, are housed on a farm at Tharika near Godavari, and have adapted well to the Kathmandu climate.

Now, what on earth is an alpaca one might ask? They belong to the same family as the llamas and were once endemic to the rugged Andean mountains where they have been famed for over 6,000 years. They are prized for their wool, which has a fine silky quality like cashmere. The ancient Incas treasured alpaca wool and the finest fleeces were preserved for their royalty.

At Tharika the alpacas graze about totally at home in their new surroundings owned by Hartmut and Pramila Bauder, who may actually have pioneered the introduction of these animals to Asia. The German-Nepali couple (who were also the first to introduce olive farming in Nepal) were struck by the idea on one of their treks. "We thought of ways in which people in the high-altitude regions could supplement their income. After a feasibility study, we decided to introduce alpacas in Nepal," say the Bauders.

The reason they chose the



alpaca is "because of their low maintenance, their eco-friendly nature (animals like goats strip every green off plants), a long productive life of around 20 years, and because they are intelligent, quiet, gentle and hardy". The couple has already extracted around 15 kg of their fleece, which they say is "a token quantity". An alpaca normally yields 3.5-4 kg of wool every year, which fetches a good price in the international market and is free of the fluctuations that affect traditional sheep wool.

Bringing the animals into Nepal was surprisingly very easy. "We were impressed by how everyone, starting from the ground staff at the airport to those in the Ministry of Agriculture, showed curiosity and lent a helping hand," says Pramila.

Interestingly, the alpacas that were once indiscriminately

slaughtered and almost wiped out by Spanish invaders to make room for sheep are now staging a comeback and replacing sheep in many countries. Because of the growing industry of items made from their wool, farmers all over the world are replacing their sheep with alpacas, which are hence in great demand. The Bauder couple had to pay almost Rs 500,000 for each of them.

Alpacas are gentle and docile by nature, and love being in herds. Because of their gentleness, they are also easy to handle. "We haven't faced any problems—they sometimes spit at each other when they dislike their partner's actions but they never fight or bite or kick," says Hartmut. The spit of the alpacas is known to smell so vile that a partner at the receiving end cannot taste anything for more than

an hour due to the overpowering odour.

Here in Godavari the alpacas live on green grass, hay and cereal feed. Alpacas don't leave their droppings all over the place. Like trained pets, they always go at the same place. "Keeping alpacas is very cost effective. They are efficient ruminants and digest almost everything they eat," says Hartmut.

For now, the couple plan to raise at least 50 more after which they might finally let Nepali farmers have them, beginning with the government yak farm in Khumjung, just north of Namche Bazaar. The couple is impressed by the Animal Husbandry Department's interest in alpaca farming. If all goes well, it may only be a matter of time before Buddhist lamas in Nepal's remote mountain regions will have Andean llamas to keep them company. ♦

tuborg





Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

The manager of the Rastriya Baniya Bank is one completely frustrated man. He has nearly given up fighting corruption, and now he is going to (and I quote) leave it to God. It could be that the bank chief is on the right track. Even our god-fearing prime minister has now said he has one last weapon up his sleeve to fight corruption: religion. At least we now seem to have a National Plan of Action. Subcontracting the Commission to Investigate the Abuse of Authority to the Almighty is one helluva move. Basically, our leaders have passed the buck on to the Supreme Being and they are going to let God fight it out with the Devil. We'll just sit back and enjoy the show.

God created us all. So in the end, He is responsible for the greedy thoughts that enter a customs officer's mind when he sees a migrant worker returning from Qatar. After all, He made the migrant worker, He made the customs officer, He made Qatar, and He even made the Devil. I see some restless hands in the audience, and I know what you are dying to ask me. You want to know how I know that God is a He. The simple answer to that is that at the present stage of our investigations we have no idea which gender, if any, God is possessed of. And don't ask me if Satan is a man or woman.

Anyway, it will be interesting to see just how God is going to go about fighting corruption, which in Nepal has been honed over the years into a fine art form. Does He/She have a plan? Or is It just going to provide lip service, and make speeches that go:

"Honourable Ministers, Honourable Members of the House, His Excellency the Devil, Esteemed Bandits, Respected Crooks, Venerable Smugglers, Gentlemen and Ladies. It gives me great pleasure today to inaugurate this new Anti-Corruption Temple Complex dedicated to fighting graft. As we know, the main opposition led by the Devil has been trying to sabotage our divine

programme to ensure a clean and efficient bureaucracy, setting back our effort to bring relief to the people in this period of crisis for the country. There can be no two opinions that the Number One challenge for the Nation today is to fight this scourge that is eating into the vital statistics of our society. So let me assure you that we will leave no stone right-side up in getting to the bottom of this sinful, sinful act."

God could start by

announcing a Zero Tolerance campaign so that those on the take will be awarded draconian punishments on the spot. Ripping off the nation on hydro power deal: Eternal Damnation in the Kingdom of Hades. Kickbacks on jet lease: Slow roast in Hell-fire. Mixing kerosene with diesel: Shovelling coal in Perdition. Harassing Qatar returnees: Serve as a pen to the Devil's advocate. ♦



Leave it to God

NEPALI SOCIETY

Caroline's place



If ever Kathmandu's elite chattering classes had a café culture, then the beginnings of one can be seen at Chez Caroline at Baber Mahal. Writers, poets, artists gather in the veranda setting in an ambience that is so Mediterranean in its feel that it could be situated on the Left Bank of the Seine.

Just pronouncing its official name, Chez Caroline Salon de the Café Restaurant, is a mouthful. The Caroline comes from Caroline Sengupta who first came to Nepal in 1969 at a time when Kathmandu was going through its hippie era. But

Caroline was no flower child hanging out on Freak Street. India had always been on her mind, and Caroline took pains to learn Hindi in Delhi. Later, she began leading tour groups to different parts of India and eventually to Nepal.

"Things happen when they have to happen," she says, and Caroline's destiny led her to meet her husband-to-be, Utpal Sengupta, at the bar of the Shangri-La Hotel in Lazimpat in 1979. Caroline was there with a tourist group and Sengupta was General Manager of the hotel. A year later, they were married and Caroline Dominique added

Sengupta to her name, bid au revoir to the glitz and glamour of her hometown of Paris, and settled down here. Although she still takes time off to travel to Paris every now and then, Caroline says, "I can't imagine living anywhere else."

Caroline has been involved in different activities from leading tourist groups to decorating the Shangri-La Village in Pokhara. She's even had a brief fling with journalism. All this changed when three years ago her husband came up with the Chez Caroline and asked her to run it. "I don't do it for the money," she says. "I wanted to provide a clean, hygienic and affordable place where people could come and just relax even if it's just a cappuccino they want."

What makes the place special is what Caroline breathes into it, and the complete harmony and understanding between Caroline and her team of 16 Nepali workers. "We work more like colleagues rather than employer and employees. If you give people pride in their work the performance is bound to be good," she says. The positive vibes emitted by the team may be just one reason why her clients keep coming back—not to forget the delicious assortment of her family recipes of salads, soups, and cakes. ♦

Ambassador whiskey

m a y o

Grindlays							
DAILY SHARE PRICE INDEX							
Grindlays	0.74	0.37	0.40	0.22	0.37	0.04	53.75
DAL	0.65	0.31	0.56	0.33	0.18	0.02	44.46
BNAT	0.64	0.36	0.56	0.28	0.13	0.05	46.48
INDEX	0.25	0.28	0.40	0.30	0.42	0.21	11.82
	0.42	0.44	0.52	0.23	0.12	0.03	57.40
	0.76	0.38	0.63	0.24	0.20	0.03	79.36
	0.65	0.38	0.63	0.36	0.35	0.09	74.05

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

