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EXCLUSIVE

Congress SWOT

Koirala

+

Has grip on party and he is prime minister. His protégé and cousin, Sushil Koirala, holds the party organisation.

-

Aloof, and perception that he is dictatorial, and has ruled party and country longest with iffy results.

Deuba

+


Has sheltered Koirala refugees. Easy-going personality, has Bhattarai's blessings, links to Kathmandu elite

-

Never worked in party organisation, may not be able to control ambitious new allies, few new ideas.

Economic suicide

Tourism was just coming out of the hijack fallout, now there is the threat of *bandhs* and a hotel strike smack in the middle of the peak tourist season. The strikes will cripple tourism and the economy. If hotels are shut down, there will be fewer tourists in Basantapur, Bhaktapur and Pokhara; trinket-sellers and taxi drivers will suffer; farmers can't sell to hotels; mountain flights will be grounded. Last year tourists brought Rs 12 billion to Nepal, if you add the multiplier, it is much more. This is



obviously the best way to cripple the country. Politicians who control the unions hold the answer..... p 15

Who is a Hindu?

The gatekeepers at Pashupatinath seem to have devised a unique test to tell if you're a Hindu. Find out. ....p4-5

SHOWDOWN





Sher Bahadur Deuba



Khum Bahadur Khadka



Chiranjibi Wagle



Bijay Kumar Gachhadar



Sushil Koirala



Nona Koirala



Mahesh Acharya



Govinda Raj Joshi

**BINOD BHATTARAI**

At 78, Girija Prasad Koirala, still thinks he has the muscle to be the next president of the Nepali Congress. And he is telling his old friend and present foe, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai: come and get me if you can. The other Congress 78-year-old, is not contesting, so Koirala is now preparing for a showdown with Bhattarai protégé Sher Bahadur Deuba.

On Tuesday, Koirala put speculation to rest by announcing that he was contesting the position of party president one more time. Control over the party can be even more important than the prime ministership, Koirala says it is going to be "one man, two jobs".

Deuba showed his nervousness at his own press meet later the same day. He sat surrounded by his trusted generals, who, we were told, had advised him to declare his challenge. He did that in Janakpur on Wednesday.

Koirala and Deuba are now officially at war that will be more cut-throat than a rational election. Now, the focus will be on serious electioneering, which is also time for horse-trading. To increasingly-disgusted Nepalis, it does not matter if it is Koirala or Deuba who is leading this feckless party. And we all had high hopes about the younger generation of leaders

**A hopelessly divided ruling party, an aggressive opposition cashing in on a disenfranchised citizenry. Neither have time to see which way the country is headed.**

being cleaner and more business-like. Sensing the disarray, the leftist opposition has snelt blood, and is cashing in on the fuel price hike to launch a season of strikes that threatens to cripple tourism. In this melee, no one seems to have time to address this country's urgent problems-not even to try and revive the stalled talks with the Maoists.

We'll find out who's boss in two months when the Nepali Congress holds its general convention in Pokhara. But even then there may be no clues to why the Nepalis have to suffer this endless Congress cockfight, and why the party cannot function as a cohesive political organisation. OK, all political parties fight. But what is serious here is that every time they clash, the dust chokes the entire government machinery.

Now that Koirala is in the fray he will have to also get down to serious campaigning. Signs of campaigning were

already evident as in the bizarre sight last week when both the opposition left parties (against fuel prices) and the Deuba faction (haggling over the nitty-gritty of party membership) were out picketing.

Congress insiders say both sides know very well that the fight over active membership is immaterial since the 2,000 memberships in question will not affect the outcome in Pokhara, where only delegates chosen by over 107,000 will vote. The outline of a possible future leadership will emerge after the 1,450 delegates are picked.

The Deuba-Bhattarai camp is now suggesting that the old electoral list be used. But the Koirala side says that list does not include new memberships Koirala had approved. The numbers that are indeed crucial for control of the party in the post-Koirala, post-Bhattarai Congress.

Then there was the resignation of two Deuba-Bhattarai supporters from the

party's selection committee stating that the other three in it voted down their request to scan memberships. Narayan Khadka, a Bhattarai aide told us: "This was wrong. Members had a right to see the lists."

We asked Congress spokesman, Narahari Acharya, if this was true. His reply: there was just no time to re-examine the memberships and it would be done when the time came for the vote—even predicting that this would be the most organised convention the party has had.

Sher Bahadur thinks he, a former prime minister, should be next in line of succession. Koirala and his supporters have got used to power, and done nicely for themselves, and don't want to let go. Koirala had no choice but to contest himself because he has not yet picked a successor. The winning side will have a full three years to build its own fiefdoms, till the next general elections in 2003. In the end it is money politics pure and simple: the chance to earn the money to buy themselves to power so they can earn more money. The tragedy for Nepal is that regardless of which side wins, it is almost certain that the Congress infighting will begin the day after. ♦

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## KP and GP

In all our collective careers as observers of Nepali politics, we have not seen anything quite like it: a majority party, with everything going for it is bent on committing political hara-kiri. With brains gone into hibernation, senior leaders of the Nepali Congress are too busy fighting each other to be bothered that talks with the Maoists are off, that the country's tourism industry is teetering on the edge threatened by a two-day *bandh* and a hotel workers' strike. The ruling party has become its own worst enemy. With enemies like that the opposition lefties needn't bother with their nation-wide shutdowns. If you feel a bit confused about exactly what these common sense-challenged clowns in the Congress are haggling about, don't worry, so are we. Whatever it is, it certainly isn't about the country's most-pressing problems.

In fact, instead of trying to get the Maoists to agree to more informal talks maybe our master mediator Padma Ratna Tuladhar should get KP and GP to sit down and hammer out a truce! In the end, there is only one conclusion: the Nepali Congress may be the most senile political party in the country, but the mental age of its leaders hasn't progressed beyond single digits. And that is an insult to the children of this country. If this doddering duo can't pull in their stooges, can't they at least agree to disagree and go their separate ways? Their quarrel is not confined to the leadership of the party machinery anymore, it is damaging the nation's body politic. Do we have to suffer the agony of tolerating a ruling party that is incapable of governing its own divided house, let alone a fractious country?

We're getting pretty sick of writing editorials about this, but the tragedy is that the fighting is not about issues, but as usual about personalities. Those from the KP Camp can't stand the smell of Koiralas, who, we must admit, do give off a whiff. Well, with the company of sidekicks Bhattarai keeps around him these days—Khum Bahadur Khadka, Bijay Gachhedar, Sharad Singh Bhandari—the odour is pretty overpowering at Bhaisepati, too. Let us remember that barely a year or so ago, all the stars of the Bhattarai camp were die-hard Koirala loyalists and they were hauling manure for him. These so-called Young Turks from both sides all have lean and hungry looks and they're all up to their necks in the stuff. Which doesn't give us much hope for the second-generation of leaders once the two septuagenarians are out of the picture. But at least younger leaders have sharper claws and deadly fangs, and after the dust has settled a clear victor will emerge.

## Al and W

The messy photo-finish of the US presidential election had the world watching the scores as if it was the Superbowl. For Nepal, it didn't really matter who won. But for Planet Earth, a lot hung in the balance. The global environment is threatened as in no time in history by prosperity and poverty. Such is the economic might and the ecological footprint of the most powerful nation on earth that who the president of the United States is has an impact on the future existence of the Maldives, and the health of Himalayan glaciers. Alarm bells are going off all over the world about a planetary climate crisis, and this is when the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases needed a leader who can start reversing its wanton and wasteful energy consumption. The United States has only two percent of the world's population but burns up a quarter of its energy.

Everyone made fun of how there was really no difference between Al Gore and George W Bush. They said both had the same corporate sponsors. True. But the two differed on one key issue: what to do about the global environment. Bush is an oil man, and has said he couldn't care less. Gore is committed to an America that burns less fuel because it makes economic sense. Why does America still use twice as much energy as Japan to make the same can of Coke? Europeans, reacting to public opinion shaped by better media coverage, have embarked on a committed drive to cut emissions. Unfortunately, the world's most-powerful nation has public opinion shaped by a media that is becoming more insular. Under-informed Americans are electing leaders whose actions will impact powerfully on the rest of the world, even on the very survival of the biosphere.

They're not going to like it, but we'll say it anyway: the world has too much at stake to let only Americans decide who becomes their president.



CMS

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### STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



# The bluff stops here

The paradox of the present stalemate is that the government and Maoists are both under pressure to talk, but neither side really gains from talking.

The Maoists wanted to know the whereabouts of their comrade, Dinesh Sharma, as a precondition to talks. Dinesh was released. There was a bit of a drama that accompanied his freedom, but the Comrade is back underground and, for all intents and purposes, free. So what is the problem, why are the Maoists sulking, why is Padma Ratna Tuladhar throwing tantrums?

For some murky and seemingly intractable reason, serious talks (even informal) between the Maoists and the government are unlikely to resume in a hurry. Both sides and their mediator will need to lick their wounds and mend egos bruised by the antics of Comrade Sharma who defected and then undefected himself within a two-hour period on 4 November.

After the Dunai and Bhorlestar massacres of policemen in September, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala stuck his neck out to get the palace and army brass to agree to partially deploy soldiers in insurgency-affected districts. It could have been the distinct possibility of having to fight the army that made the Maoist leadership realise the importance of peace talks. The government was also under pressure from public opinion to explore peaceful means to end the five-year-old conflict.

And that is the paradox: both sides were under pressure to talk, but they didn't gain anything by talking. Enter: Padma Ratna Tuladhar, Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Ram Chandra Poudel, and the Maoist Kathmandu commander, Rabinendra Shrestha. Date: 27 October. After the tete-a-tete, there were smiles all around. Poudel thought it went well, Padma Ratna was happy, and we have his word that Rabinendra Shrestha was also enthusiastic.

The feeling everyone had was that all this sounded too good to be true: the Maoists put forward such easy pre-conditions to stop shooting and start talking. All they wanted was that the whereabouts of Dinesh Sharma be made public (not even his release) along with several others of their comrades being held by the government. The implication of this

demand was clear: the government would be forced to release them the moment it accepted that they were under its custody. The second pre-condition was even simpler: the next round of official talks had to be with a designated government representative. This was a clever ploy to fish in the troubled waters of chronic infighting in the Nepali Congress, and the sting was an ultimatum to meet the demands by 3 in the afternoon of 3 November, or else.

On D-Day ('D' for drama here) it was a cloak-and-dagger show right from the word go. Communication Minister Jai Prakash Gupta personally called leading journalists

and assembled them in his office at Singha Durbar. From there, they were herded into a van and taken to the International Convention Centre. A few minutes before the three o'clock deadline, the government popped young Dinesh out of the hat along with this brother-in-law and comrade-in-arms, Dinarath Gautam.

With a rather nervous demeanour, Dinesh dutifully denounced the violent ways of Maoism. He vowed to renounce arms, and adopt peaceful means in mobilising the masses for Marxist politics. Those present there said that although Dinesh had shifty eyes, there was not a hint of coercion. No, I wasn't tortured, he said. The government appeared to have scored a propaganda coup.

But, as we all know by now, within an hour and a half Dinesh sent a fax message retracting every statement he had just made and declared that he had made them under duress. Even for the intrigue-laden politics of Kathmandu, this was dramatic stuff. In one fell swoop, Dinesh had plastered eggs on the faces of Jai Prakash Gupta, Deputy Prime Minister Poudel, mediator Padma Ratna and even his boss, Prachanda.

Rabinendra Shrestha was so livid he wrote an op-ed article the very next day in *Kartipur* charging the government with double-dealing, threatening Koirala with dire consequences. Prachanda followed it up with another fax declaring that the chances of talks were "nearly over". Nearly over also means almost open: and presumably he still hopes that the government will pick the ball. The lesson from the farce is this: the Maoists and the government are not serious about talks. It was a PR exercise to assuage war-weary Nepalis.

In any case, Dinesh Sharma's left-right acrobatics may turn out to be a blessing in disguise. Now that the government and the Maoists have succeeded in calling each other's bluff, they may finally realise that such diversionary tactics can backfire. Another lesson: future talks will have to be in secret so that posturing will not derail it. But first, the government and the Maoists must be made to feel the public pressure for peace once again. ♦



DIPENDRA BAIRACHARYA

Mediator Padma Ratna Tuladhar raising the red lantern.





# “Gender equity may be one of the best ways of saving the environment and countering the dangers of overcrowding”

world. This reassuring overall picture hides the fact that population growth rates are falling very fast in some regions and very slowly—sometimes not at all—in others.

It is, in fact, extremely important to avoid complacency and to understand that it raises other serious issues not captured by the old Malthusian perspective. One such issue is the environment—global as well as local. It is true that environmental adversities such as global warming are influenced by total consumption rather than the total size of the population (poor people consume much less and pollute far less). But one

hopes that in the future the poorer nations of today will be richer as well, and the compound effect of a larger population and increased consumption could be devastating for the global environment. There is also the important challenge of overcrowding in a limited habitat. Children, too, have to be raised, not just food crops.

But perhaps the most immediate adversity caused by a high rate of population growth lies in the loss of freedom that women suffer when they are shackled by persistent bearing and rearing of children. Global warming is a distant effect compared with what population explosion does to the lives and well-being of mothers. Indeed, the most important—and perhaps the most neglected—aspect of the population debate is the adverse impact of high fertility imposed on women in societies where their voices don't count for much. Given the connection between over-frequent

childbirth and the predicament of women, there are reasons to expect that an increase of gender equity, particularly in the decisional power of young women, would tend to lower fertility rates. Since women's interests are very badly served by high fertility rates imposed on them, they can be expected to correct this adversity if they have more power.

Why, then, do women have little decisional power in some societies, and how can that be remedied? There are various distinct influences to be considered here. (I discuss this question more fully in my book *Development as Freedom*.) First, social and economic handicaps contribute greatly to muffling women's voices in society and within the family. Second, the absence of knowledge or facilities of family planning can also be an important source of helplessness. Third, there are cultural, even religious, factors that place young women in a subservient position, making them accept the burden of constantly bearing and rearing children. These inequities may not even have to be physically enforced, since women's subservient role as well as frequent childbearing may appear “natural” when these practices have been sanctified by a long history that creates uncritical acceptance.

Indeed, there is much evidence now, based on intercountry comparisons as well as interregional contrasts within a large country, that women's empowerment can have a very strong effect in reducing the fertility rate.

India is a statistician's paradise because of tremendous variations among its distinct regions. While the total fertility rate for India as a whole is higher than the replacement level of two per couple, many districts in India have below-replacement fertility rates and substantially lower fertility rates than, for example, the United States, Britain and China. Fertility rates have

been falling in India, but the rate of decline has been extremely uneven. Speedy fertility declines in the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu or Himachal Pradesh can be closely linked to the rapid enhancement of female education and empowerment of young women.

Indeed, as a number of studies demonstrate, the two principal variables that explain the bulk of the interdistrict variations in fertility rates in India are female literacy and female employment opportunity. These achievements not only enhance women's voice in family decisions, they also have other favourable social effects. For example, female literacy has a strong impact in reducing child mortality rates, which also contributes, indirectly, to reducing fertility (since the desire for a large family is often related to insuring support in one's old age). The states in India with high fertility (for example, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan) are precisely those that give few economic and educational opportunities to young women.

It is also interesting in this context to note that while China's sharp fertility decline is often attributed to coercive policies, one could have expected a roughly similar decline because of China's excellent achievements in raising female education and employment. The contrast between China and India is a useful one to examine, since both countries have

much gender-based inequality and persistent male preference in the treatment of children. As a whole, China has done far more than India to give women educational and economic opportunities. However, there are parts of India (which is much more diverse than China) that have done more than China in this respect. Kerala, for example—a sizeable Indian state with about 30 million people—has a higher rate of female literacy than every province of China. Kerala's rate of expansion of female literacy has also been faster than China's. Correspondingly, Kerala has experienced a substantially faster decline in fertility rates. Also, thanks to the process of fertility decline being freely chosen without any coercion, the infant mortality rate has continued to fall fast in Kerala while it has not in China. The female infant-mortality rate now in China is, in fact, more than twice that in Kerala.

Variations within India also bring out the important fact that even cultural and religious influences on fertility can be swayed. For example, it has been argued that Muslim populations tend to have a higher fertility rate. Insofar as there is any truth to this, the linkage seems to operate in an indirect way, through various

correlates of gender inequality. Significance is sometimes attached to the fact that Pakistan has a much higher fertility rate than India (around five, in contrast to three), but that divergence corresponds closely to the difference between the two countries in terms of women's empowerment.

Also, the Muslim population in India is itself very large—around 120 million—the third-largest among all countries in the world. As it happens, the most successful state in India in reducing fertility, Kerala, also has the highest percentage of Muslims among all states, with the exception of Kashmir. In general, the fertility rates of Indian Muslims are much closer to those of other communities in the same region in India, including the Hindus, than to Muslims in Pakistan. Insofar as there are intercommunity contrasts in fertility within India, they too relate to such social and economic variables as education, employment and property rights.

It is also significant that Bangladesh, with a predominantly Muslim population, has had a sharp reduction in fertility rates, which can be associated with the gains that Bangladeshi women have recently made through the expansion of family-planning opportunities, greater involvement of women in economic activities (through microcredit programmes) and much activism against the prevailing pattern of gender disparity. The bottom line, then, is this: While cultural and religious influences on fertility rates cannot be ignored, they are neither immutable nor independent of the social and economic factors through which the cultural connections work.

There are many influences that operate on fertility rates, and it would be a mistake to look for one “magic variable” that would work uniformly well in reducing high fertility rates. What is needed instead is a unified approach that places different variables within a general framework of family—

decisions on fertility. The advantage of subjects making fun of the attitudes, accents or foibles of “natives” has always been exposed in this genre of Western-centric world-view fertility decisions. The example of Nepal is all going to Britain and observing that British judges looked like “lost lambs on a cliff” would be the classic antidote to this. The problem with patriarchalism is that they never stay around long enough to understand the nuances of local life, and shows sensitivity towards the subject. They are, in fact, no different than early explorers who wrote disparagingly about the forest-dwelling savages who walked around naked, as if wearing trousers and ties would have made them civilized.

Dr. F. Ehrlich via Internet and from newspapers and other media for restrained public discussion. These institutions

## AMARTYA SEN

The magnitude of the population problem is frequently exaggerated. That worrying tradition goes back 200 years, when Thomas Robert Malthus declared that the world was overpopulated already and that the growth of food supply was losing the race with the growth of population. However, as in Malthus's time, food production now continues to grow significantly faster than world population, with the fastest expansion of food output per head occurring in relatively poor countries such as China and India.

But there is a danger of complacency here. The fact that population growth is much slower than the growth of world output (of food and other commodities) often generates undue placidity, reinforced by the further recognition that fertility rates and population growth are falling as a whole and also in most regions of the

## LETTERS

### NON-ISSUE

Your expose of the public issue of Oriental Hotel three months ago (“Buyers beware” #15) was insightful. But the question that came to my mind as I was reading the article was: so what else is new? The earlier public issue of the Hyatt was the same story: share offerings here are not accompanied by transparency or information to investors. In fact, the concept of providing adequate information to the public has never been an issue here. If anything, Oriental Hotel provided more information than normal public offerings in Nepal. And the public was so desperate to invest, that they willingly allowed themselves to be hoodwinked.

S Singh  
Kathmandu

### RAGS

I read your newspaper regularly with interest and enthusiasm. But it is sad though that you did not consider giving a thought to the real story behind the army court martial reprinted from *Jana Aastha* (From the Nepali Press, #14). You seem to support anything written against the army without any considerations of your own. It is indeed sad to see such a popular paper as yours unthinkingly reprinting stories from rags like *Jana Aastha*.

Ram Gopal Sharma  
via Internet

### CK LAL

This is in response to “A state of paranoia” (#12). After reading the column, my deep question is: CK Lal a dalal? Is he an agent? Wonder if he would be offended

by the question. If he is offended, then his prestige is brittle, and even a simple question like that would break him. If he is not offended, then it would presumably mean that he is a real dalal. Dalal or not, that is the question.

Som Aryal  
Arkansas, USA

Where is CK Lal? Have you dropped him? Has his brilliantly crafted, non-conformist edge, and hard-hitting analysis got too hot for you to handle? If

so, that would be a pity and an indication that we still don't have a free press. Let's just hope he's just on holiday and will be back after the Dasain-Tihar break.

Janak Prasad  
Via Internet

### SOS, AMBASSADOR

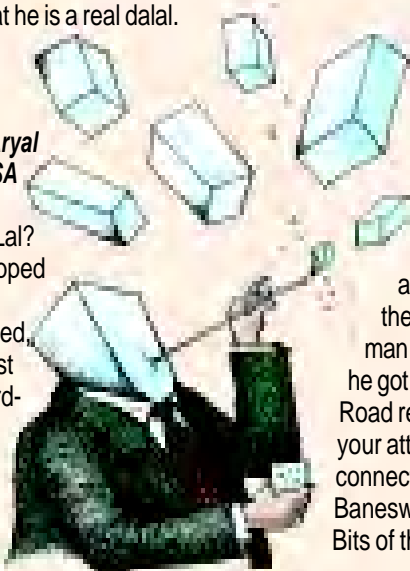
After reading Under My Hat (#12) on the Thai ambassador being the most powerful man in Nepal because he got the Maharajgunj Road rebuilt, I must draw your attention to the road connecting New Baneshwor to Battisputali. Bits of the middle were

asphalted, but the two ends are still unpaved. Vehicles leave behind a trail of dust, thus jeopardising the health of all and sundry. Will the Department of Roads kindly explain what on earth prevents them from paving the remaining sections? Or shall we ask the Thai ambassador to intervene again?

Shyamal K Shrestha  
Kathmandu

### SAVAGES

I haven't yet read Jonathan Gregson's book, but from your review (“Kingdoms in cloud-cuckoo land”, #15) it is apparent that Gregson exhibits the same pretentiousness of authors who have not overgrown the Orientalist traditions of their anthropologist forebears while dealing with Third World



# Who is a Hindu?

The chief priest of Pashupati has once again banned a group of Indonesian Hindus from worshipping at the temple, igniting renewed debate on why bona fide Hindus cannot enter Nepal's holiest of holies.

HEMLATA RAI

Pashupati is one of the holiest Hindu shrines in the subcontinent, and houses Nepal's patron deity. A stem sign at the gate, enforced by a policeman bearing a stick, warns all non-Hindus that they cannot enter. But two recent incidents have begged the questions:

- Who is Hindu enough to enter the temple?
- Who decides who is a Hindu and who is not?

At present, any brown-skinned Caucasoid, even if he is a Muslim from Aligarh, can easily slip in. A Syrian Christian from Kerala can get in without problems. But a Hare Krishna devotee from Italy with a shaven head and saffron dhoti, cannot enter the temple. Tall, fair Nepalis with goatees have sometimes been stopped. It seems the only criteria that the gatekeepers of Pashupati have to judge Hindu or non-Hindu is the colour of the skin and the length of the

nose. While this arbitrary religious apartheid goes on at the gate, tourists with digital cameras can be seen video-filming cremations on the banks of the Bagmati: turning the private last rites of Nepali families into cultural entertainment. One devout Nepali Hindu, who does not want to be named, told us:



"Where does dhama end and sacrilege begin?"

Last week, for the second time in a month, Hindu pilgrims from Bali were denied entry into Pashupati. Not only was the group of 41 turned back, but they suffered humiliation and unbearable

discrimination at the gate. Security personnel deployed at the temple gate blocked the way, declaring that the 'Hindu' status on their travelling documents was insufficient proof of their faith. Bali is the predominantly-Hindu island east of Java and the pilgrims were in Nepal as part of a

tour of holy Hindu sites in India where they had no problems entering temples. The Indonesians were here for three days on a planned trip to pray at Pashupatinath, and do some sightseeing.

After they were not allowed in, the Indonesians sat on the asphalt outside the gate and finished their prayers (see picture).

Bishwesh Shrestha, the Nepali tour operator who was handling the pilgrims' group, is livid. He told us: "After this incident at Pashupati, they cancelled all their

planned activities and left the country without ever stepping out of their hotel for the rest of the time that they were here."

In September, another group of 11 Indonesian Hindus were denied entrance to the temple by the office of the Mul Bhatta, the South Indian chief priest at Pashupati, with the explanation that one has to be born either in Nepal or India to be able to enter. The office of the Mul Bhatta refused to recognise the endorsement of the World Hindu Federation (WHF) that recommended entrance to the Indonesians.

Having faced the problem earlier, Shrestha this time requested permission from the Pashupati Development Trust (PDT). The PDT declined to provide it in writing, assuring him that the Indonesians would have "no problem" entering the temple. "The incident would not have happened, if the tour operator had informed us about the problem with the security," PDT treasurer Shankar Raj Pathak said.



KEVIN BURRISK

The PDT office was closed on 29 October, the day the 41 Indonesians were denied entrance, as it was both a Sunday and the day of Bhai Tika. But Pathak sought to assure us that such incidents would not occur again if Hindus "from abroad" request an entrance to the shrine of their



## FEEDBACK

# Almost Heaven

If we continue to ignore change, and furthermore show that we are incapable of coping with it, we risk turning many more Edens into hell on earth

The two stories in "Paradise? Lost?" printed in this space (#14) about change in the Khumbu are certainly emotive, but the implied direct causality between the introduction of the water pump, and the resulting devastated landscape may be a bit stretched. The two scenarios paint a contrasting picture between the serene idyllic rural life of a village prior to development and the raw crude consequences of creeping urbanisation and materialism after development.

Of course, one has to ask whether the perception of this change, as observed by the Doigs and Hillaries of this world, is one that is shared by the villagers of that region. Many people would gladly give up a good view of the mountains in return for eliminating the daily drudgery of fetching water several kilometres away. Perhaps, however, this is missing the point. Looking in there, I suspect, is disenchantment with development and our collective inability to mitigate the changes that inevitably result.

The question you pose to all of us in the world of INGOs, NGOs, and indeed government is, "Will the flapping of our butterfly-like wings bring a breath of fresh air, or another billion-dollar typhoon?" I wish I had a clever answer to this question. There are plenty of examples of disasters but at the same time many have also benefitted from progress brought about by technology and its constructive application. I would, however, agree that our ability to create technologies has, for the most part, far outstripped our capacity to use them in a fulfilling way. Technologically we can get

to the moon but emotionally we are still rooting around in caves. This does not bode well for our characters in your Khumbu story. We may have learnt how to install and prime the pumps of progress but we have not yet learned how to harness these changes to make us happier.

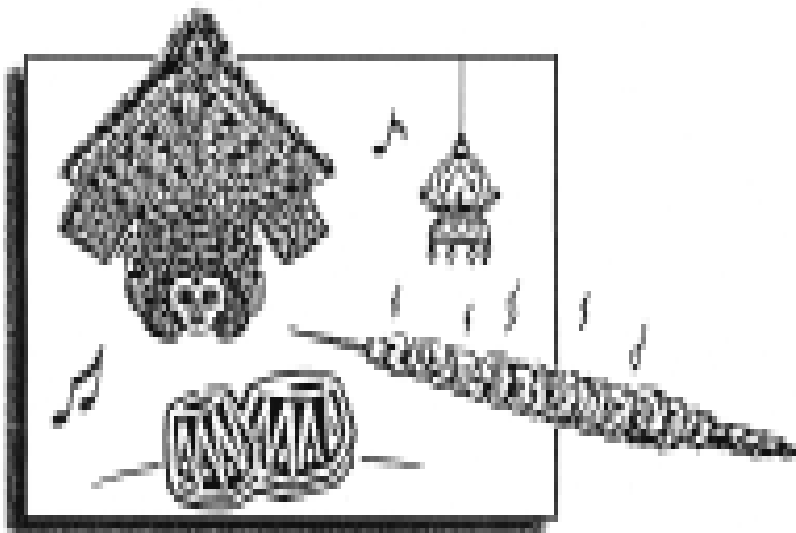
So, where should we intervene? Should we just stop flapping our wings and hope that somewhere in that pantheon of gods, one of them will bestow enough grace on the situation to make us happy? Not likely! Your two stories point out that in spite of our ability to create and stimulate change we are incredibly inept at managing change.

Where do we start? My simple answer is: Education. Not the 2+2 type of education, this is just more change for its own sake. What is needed is rather education on how to manage change. This is essential because, as you say in the Gita, change is the only constant thing in our lives. One may try to avoid it, one may try to deny it, and one may even try to go back to the way things were before changes happened. Why do our public education institutions not teach us how to play with change, how to use it creatively, how to harness diversity and how to forestall needless conflict? If we continue to ignore change, and furthermore are unable to handle it we do so at our own peril, and risk turning many more Edens into hell on earth. Herein lies the challenge of our modern leadership.

Jim Tomecko  
Team Leader

GIZ Private Sector Promotion Project  
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faith.

The small PDT unit and the police at the main gate are not given the authority to determine who enters the temple. But, according to the police officer on duty on 29 October, his unit had earlier that day received strict orders from the office of the Mul Bhatta that the Indonesians were not to be allowed in. "We were only carrying out an order from the Mul Bhatta that was delivered to us by a junior *bhatta*. We have no authority to determine if anyone is to be allowed in or not," the policeman said.

When approached, the Mul Bhatta's office refused comment. However, the Kathmandu liaison officer for the Rangoon-based Indonesian embassy that is accredited to Nepal, Shiva Sharan Rajkhandari, believes the tour operator is at fault. "If the pilgrims had informed their embassy in Rangoon, I would have known of their tour and I could have taken them to Pashupati, as I have done many times earlier," he said.

He may have a point there but the fact remains that the Indonesian Hindus were not allowed into Pashupati. And all because the Mul Bhatta decreed it so. There are one billion Hindus in the world, and the World Hindu Federation has a membership of 57 countries, with Indonesia having an advisory status with the present executive body of the WHF. Hinduism predates both Buddhism and Islam in Indonesia, having been taken to the archipelago by

settlers from the east coast of India 2,000 years ago. They later ruled the Hindu Sri Vijaya Maritime Empire that stretched from Sumatra to the edge of the Pacific Ocean.

Most observers, including the PDT itself, blame the all-powerful and conservative Mul Bhatta for being the main obstacle. Says PDT member-secretary and industrialist, Basant Kumar Chaudhary: "After the establishment of the PDT, the Mul Bhatta is no longer the

authority to decide on Pashupati affairs. All bona fide Hindus, regardless of their nationality, should be allowed to enter the temple. The Indonesians were regretfully denied their rights to worship at the shrine. I have already sent a personal apology for what happened."

Travel documents attested by the World Hindu Federation and Pashupati Development Trust proving the Hindu status of pilgrims should be enough to allow pilgrims in, but the temple's

traditions are unbending about allowing non-Nepali and non-Indian pilgrims. Sociologist Sudhindra Sharma says the Mul Bhatta is just a priest, and he is exceeding his authority by giving himself the power to define who is Hindu and who is not. In Nepal it should be the premier Hindu institutions like the Hindu monarch who should have the jurisdiction, says Sharma, adding: "At a time when Hinduism should be opening its doors wide, we are being parochial and myopic by not letting genuine Hindus in."

The temple authorities are even more rigid and unsympathetic to those who have converted to Hinduism from other religions. They say one is born a Hindu, and that the *sashtas* do not recognise conversion. As a Pashupati *bhatta* puts it: "Anyone can follow the Hindu *dharma* but cannot become a Hindu unless he is born one."

President of WHF Nepal National Unit, Narayan Prasad Pokhrel, says conversions into Hinduism should be encouraged, but converts should pass religious tests to attain any higher status in the religion. He says: "Not every converted Hindu can be allowed to worship at Pashupati, or made a priest." But that still doesn't solve the problem of what happens to the next batch of Hindu pilgrims from Indonesia, Mauritius, South Africa or Trinidad. ♦



MIN BALACHANDRA

# “There’s no alternative to socialism, no alternative to Marxism...Socialism never fails.”



Communists and socialists from 19 countries and 28 organisations met in Kathmandu 5-10 November in a post-Soviet Union soul searching exercise that began in Pyongyang in 1992. The goal was to share experiences and try to devise ways to take carry socialism forward.

Luminaries at the opening included Sukomal Sen, representing the Communist Party of India (Marxist); Yu Honghuan, chief of the research division of the International Department of the Communist Party of China; Betty F. Carlsson, leader of the Danish

communists; D. Raja, member of the national council of Communist Party of India; and Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist).

Conference convenor, Pradip Nepal, explained what the meeting was all about: to unify socialists the world over, to pull down the walls built by capitalism and "to achieve globalisation in the real sense of the people, by the people". At the well-attended opening, keyed off by the singing of the "The Internationale" and amidst flag-

waving uniformed cadres, General Secretary Nepal denounced forces backed by the "imperialist forces"—the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation.

Another highlight was a six-page speech by Nepal which traced the history of the Nepali communists, and after a meandering analysis of national and global developments came to the conclusion that "the validity of Marxism and Leninism has not diminished at all". He also explained the rationale behind UML's adoption of parliamentary

politics as a method of class struggle. According to him, Nepal's communists, unlike their comrades elsewhere, have a large mass following which was made possible by the party's adoption of the home-grown people's multi-party democracy (BMPD). He explained that BMPD had a strategy against possible isolationism—a policy of compensating co-operative landowners for the smoother implementation of revolutionary land reforms.

"Different countries have different objective conditions and have different roads to socialism," said China's Yu. India's Raja agreed, extolling "unbaited" Cuba's stand against US imperialism, and the achievements of "victorious Vietnam" led by Ho

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**Nepal's communists, unlike their comrades elsewhere, have a large mass following which was made possible by the party's adoption of the home-grown people's multi-party democracy.- Madhav Nepal**

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Chi Minh. Raja said: "There's no alternative to socialism, no alternative to Marxism, socialism never fails." ♦

## Nepal-Bhutan talks stalled, again

Bhutan is once again delaying on what seemed like some progress in the refugee repatriation talks. Nepali foreign ministry sources say the talks have effectively come to a "standstill" since Bhutan has not been acting on a compromise verification formula suggested by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In late May, Bhutan had agreed to name a verification team that was to visit the Bhutanese refugee camps in eastern Nepal "very soon." But Thimpu has so far been ignoring Nepali requests to get on with it. The UN compromise formula suggested that both sides use a family as a unit of verification, and that the family should include all unmarried members under the age 25. Bhutan has insisted on individual verification, while Nepal has maintained that it be done on a family basis.

## “Package” for Maoist areas

The government has unveiled an integrated development fund of Rs 190 million to be used to fund development activities in five mid-western districts where the Maoist insurgency is most intense. The development "package"—with contributions from the Finance Ministry, the Prime Minister's relief fund, the budgets of local governance units and the MPs' fund—became effective on 4 November.

Rukum district is to get about Rs 38.8 million, Rolpa Rs 40 million, Jajarkot Rs 42 million, Kalikot Rs 35.5 million and Salyan Rs 35.8 million, according to Deputy Prime Minister Ram Chandra Poudel. The money from the Fund is to be used on prioritised programmes that benefit the largest number of people, and spending would be monitored by all-party committees at both the central and local levels.

## SAARC resolution on trafficking

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Radhika Coomaraswamy, has said that the proposed SAARC document on trafficking in girls and women needs to be re-examined once more before it becomes official. "The declaration fails to differentiate trafficking from prostitution, concentrating singularly on trafficking of girls and women for commercial sexual exploitation," she said. The aspects of trafficking that have been left out include crimes such as smuggling children to work in sweatshops and even as seasonal labourers. The Kathmandu-based South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has been working on the document for approval by the seven member-states, before it is signed in Kathmandu in a few months. Coomaraswamy said that the document also needed regimes to protect the rights of women and children and was critical of some Nepali government measures, which restrict the mobility of women in the name of fighting girl trafficking.

## ICIMOD downsizes

The Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) has cut eight senior posts citing budgetary constraints. Eight senior staff positions, including those held by Indian and Nepali officials and divisional heads are affected.

The research institute specialising in the Himalaya and Hindu Kush regions has been in Kathmandu for the past for 15 years. ICIMOD's international board, which met last week, decided not to renew the contracts of the staffers because of a \$400,000 hole in the budget caused by the devaluation of the Euro vis-à-vis the US dollar. According to insiders, making its decision the board declared that ICIMOD is "not a long-term employment agency". Some board members were said to be unhappy with the decision, and maintained that the termination should have been done with greater participation and transparency. Others welcomed the decision, and told us "the clearing of deadwood was long overdue".

Among those whose contracts have not been renewed are: Indians Anup Bhatia, Tej Pratap, NS Jodha, Nepalis Pradeep Man Tulachan, Pitamber Sharma and Suresh Raj Chalise, and Canadian-Pakistani Shahid Akhtar. All of them are reported to be very unhappy with the manner in which the board terminated their services.

In an internal letter to ICIMOD staff, Director General Gabriel Campbell explained that there were two reasons for the staff cuts—budgetary, and ICIMOD's philosophy that the organisation should build regional capacity. The organisation has long been criticised for being top-heavy and spending too much on staff salaries and overheads. "There is just no way to balance the budget, it was either this or letting off 50 Nepali staff," Campbell told us. ♦

## “We have left the Maoist party”

The Himalaya Times, 4 November

(Excerpts from the interview given to the press by CPN Maoist central committee member, Dinesh Sharma, before his release.)

Q. Where and when were both of you [i.e. him and Dinarath Gautam] arrested?

A. I was arrested on 18 Mangsir 2056 at the Dhunge Dhara bus stop between Banasthali and Swayambhu. My friend was arrested on 25 Strawan 2056 on a road in Dallu.

Q. Where were you kept?

A. In police custody in Kathmandu.

Q. What were your positions in the Maoist party?

A. I am a central committee member and Gautam was an ordinary member.

Q. Where are you from?

A. Both of us are from Kavre district. My house is in Majikheda VDC and his is in Pokhri chowhi VDC.

Q. You all have different names. Are these your actual names or do you have different ones in the party?

A. These are our actual names. Party matters are a different thing.

Q. Your party had set a deadline for your release. You say that you have given up violence. Have you really left the party?

A. For a party carrying out a people's war setting deadlines is no big deal. We have left the party. There is no question of going underground now.

Q. Why this political change in you?

A. A political reason is one of them. Events, happenings and changes, national and international, and how we relate to them and move ahead are others.

Q. After leaving the party, do you believe that you can work independently?

A. More important than that, after we decide on a peaceful political agenda and after having open discussions maybe we can come together.

Q. When you were a central committee member, what would the reaction of the party have been towards a step like this?

A. I cannot say for certain. I was in police custody for 11 months and have not been able to understand their thinking. Therefore I cannot make anything of their call for a dialogue.

Q. Surely you haven't reached this decision under the carrot-or-stick policy of the government?

A. No. We reached this decision on our own. We felt that an open and free dialogue was the political need of the time.

Q. When you were a central committee member, did you ever push for an open political environment?

A. At that time we did not.

Q. What is your programme from tomorrow?

A. We are free. We are going to talk between ourselves and then decide.

Q. Has the government really released you?

A. If not, how do you think we are here? They have released us.

Q. Have you really been released or has this been staged only for us?

A. The government has the intention of releasing us.

Q. Have you got the papers for your release?

A. Nothing like that has happened. We had discussions in police custody and they told us that we were being released.

Q. How many others are being released?

A. We don't know.

Q. Were discussions held at the prime ministerial or ministerial level before your release?

A. We informed the police about our decision to leave the party and on that basis we were released.

Q. Where are you going from here?

A. To meet our friends in Kathmandu.

Q. Do you feel safe after your release?

A. Security depends on the circumstances.

Q. You have taken this step without informing the party. How is the party going to react?

A. Not the same as before.

Q. What type of politics are you going to get into now?

A. We haven't thought of that. After we go out, we will hold discussions and only then can we decide.

Q. Do you think that the massacres you committed earlier happened on the spur of the moment?

A. No, they were political. Now we are sure that was wrong.

Q. Is this due to differences with the party?

A. No. This is the result of a new thinking that occurred to us only 15 or 20 days ago.

Q. You are being released today. Where shall we meet tomorrow?

A. Don't know where, but it will be an ordinary place.

### QUOTE OF THE WEEK

When talks reach a deadlock, the only way forward is to talk some more.  
—Padma Patra Tuladhar, in Nepal Samacharpatra, 8 November.



Talks...Talks...Talks  
Himalaya Times, 5 November

## Stupid move by government

CPN (Maoist) Kathmandu commander, Rabintra Shrestha, in Kartipur, 5 November

The drama that took place when Comrade Dinesh Sharma was released was a farce. He was tortured and kept in solitary confinement for 11 months. The government, in order to fulfil its narrow



goals, put him under tremendous pressure and made him state that he had changed his beliefs and line of thinking.

In the process, the government violated the Constitution. Clause 5 of Article 14 of the Constitution states that, "Any person who has been arrested will be allowed to consult any lawyer of his choice and act according to that." Recent events show that this too was not followed. When our party had stated that the minimum ground work for dialogue be prepared, we did not want that only these two be released. We want all our arrested members to be presented to the public. They should all be released and state terrorism stopped. Instead, the government is using force to coerce our colleagues into making statements to its benefit. This is cheating, injustice and criminal.

Comrade Sharma was presented to the public, but why not Comrades Dandapani Neupane and Matrika Yadav? Why aren't Comrades Ishwori Dahal, Chitrannarayan, Rajendra Dahal, Milan Nepali, Navin Gautam, Ajab Lal and Bilkash Sharma brought out in the open too? Is it because they refused to change their beliefs? Or have they already been killed by the government?

## Bhattarai's letter to Koirala

Deshanter, 5 November

Respected Chairman,  
On the eve of the 10th party convention, the central committee has dissolved some of the elected district committees and nominated members who toe their line to the now vacant positions. This raises questions and is against the democratic principles of the party. Since then, party members and followers have raised questions expressing concern over whether the elections are going to be free and fair.

We, in our many central committee meetings, had agreed to tackle these problems once and for all and hold free and fair elections. But every time we come to an agreement, that agreement is immediately broken. Breaking agreements seems to be the new trend in the party. This is a matter of grave concern for the party. In the last committee meeting, we had come to an understanding agreement and agreed to work on it, but it seems that nothing that was mentioned was carried out and the agreement has been broken. Harinath Bastola was asked by the party to study and solve the problems concerning the party

voters lists. He has now resigned and according to his resignation letter it seems that a lot of irregularities and malpractice are taking place in publishing the voters' lists against the decisions taken by the party.

Similarly, it was agreed that the election committee would work in consensus, but again we find that this was not done and Bimalendra Nidhi and Gyan Bahadur Karki have had to resign from the election committee. Party leaders like Dauba, Khum Bahadur, Wagle and Gachhadar have held

the present leadership responsible for the crisis and have stated that this has led to genuine and hardworking party members being sidelined. They have mentioned this in a statement released by them. The president should take notice of this statement, understand it and take corrective action and see to it that the party is not harmed in any way. I humbly want to petition the president and state that the responsibility of holding the 10th party convention in a free and fair manner lies with you. I would also request the president to remain neutral and hold the 10th party convention in Pokhara as agreed upon earlier and then only move to the elections to be held for the VDC, district, towns and regional bodies. If the party elections are not perceived to be free and fair, then no party worker is going to accept those results. In fact party workers are not going to accept the results of any election even if irregularities or malpractice take place in any one election. As a founding member of the party, I too, have to fulfill my duties. There is still time for the president, in the interests of the party, democracy and the country, to rectify and solve all problems in the party, honestly and with justice, and to get the party together and move ahead. In doing this everyone's future lies secure. If the president so wishes, I am prepared to meet him anywhere.

Krishna Prasad Bhattarai  
Former President  
Nepali Congress

## RNAC-Lauda Air deal scam

Space Time Dainik, 5 November

Irregularities to the tune of Rs 160 million have been detected in the leasing of a Boeing 767 from Lauda Air for 18 months. Political figures, businessmen, government employees and higher officials of RNAC are all party to this deal.

According to RNAC sources, Lauda Air will be providing a 12-year-old jet, at the rate of \$3,500 per flying hour on a 'wet lease'. This was done without calling for any tenders. Taking other "hidden costs" into consideration, the cost of leasing the jet is actually going to shoot up to \$3,900 per flying hour.

According to the agreement signed, a minimum of five sets of Austrian pilots are going to be hired and this will mean an additional expenditure of \$350 per flying hour. In addition to this RNAC will have to

provide these pilots board and lodging at a four-star hotel.

RNAC had earlier leased a Boeing 757 from China South-West Airlines and in that agreement all costs—the cost of leasing and hiring pilots—were bundled together. In the present agreement with Lauda Air, these two have been presented separately. Additionally, the cost of spares, landing and takeoff fees, ground services and other expenditure are not mentioned in the agreement, indicating that RNAC will probably be paying for all these. This is going to increase the lease cost drastically.

It is reported that certain people are going to earn a commission of up to \$400 per flying hour. For a period of 18 months this works out to Rs 160 million. Of the \$400 per hour, half is expected to go to a political fund, \$100 to the Lauda Air agent in Nepal and some businessmen, \$50 to high officials in RNAC and the remaining \$50 to middlemen who helped clinch the deal.

## “Koirala's dictatorship will not last”

Chhalphal, 5 November

(Excerpts from an interview with Harinath Bastola, Nepali Congress member who recently resigned from the party's 'active membership verification committee'.)

Q. Does this mean, to get leadership in their hands, irregularities and malpractice have taken place?

A. We have been forced to state that irregularities and malpractice have taken place. If, without going into the details, voters' lists are published, then irregularities have taken place. Irregularities have mainly taken in the lists from Kathmandu and Solu. The committee sending the voters lists must have a meeting. Without calling for a meeting and without letting members know, voters lists were sent on the sly. This proves that irregularities have taken place.

Q. Party workers allege that old and honest workers have been sidelined and new and crooked people have been made members. Do you agree with that?

A. New and crooked people are now active in the party. Snugglers, the Mafia and corrupt people are now prominent in the party. Not only that, people who have got Koirala's support and who wear the cloak of democracy are now prominent in the party. This is the reason why the Congress is turning into a dictatorial party. The controversy started because honest and old party members are being sidelined and new members are being inducted into the party. This is against the central leadership directive which had stated that new members should not be inducted. This shows that these new members are all powerful. If the directives of the centre are not followed, then where are the old members going to look for justice?

Q. How has this controversy affected the unity of the party?

A. This has brought about grave problems for party unity. It has shaken the party unity, and to solve this we have dragged Kishunji into this. This is the outcome. Because of our own problems, the country is in a bad state. We have raised our voice stating that this should not happen again. We are not going to forget about it, till we are successful.

Q. What will you do if something like a Godavari Agreement takes place between the Jains?

A. The situation is now different. None of the past agreements were followed upon. Kishunji himself has said that he will never again believe Koirala. If he himself does not believe Koirala, then the question of an agreement does not arise.

# The struggle for dignity

**A caste struggle is on in the village of Melauli, and the Dalits are pitting their collective strength against an oppressive social order.**

The old social order has not changed much in the village of Melauli. Nearly a third of the inhabitants of this hamlet, which lies some 40 km south of the headquarters of Baitadi district in Nepal's northwestern extremity, remain "untouchable". The Dalits, as they now call themselves, do not share space with the "upper castes"; they don't sit or eat together. The upper castes sprinkle water over themselves in an act of "purification" before entering their home if a Dalit touches them—even by mistake. Dalits cannot enter the homes of the upper castes. Neither can they use the wells, taps and other water sources that are reserved for the high-caste people.

To this day, people in this area do not even sell milk in the markets, fearing that a Dalit might consume the milk. Some people actually stopped selling milk to restaurants that began serving tea to the Dalits. Although Dalits are now served at a few eateries, they are still hurt by the treatment they receive. "The higher castes pay the same amount of money as us. But while they eat and move away, we are made to sit and eat outside in dishes kept apart for us. Most humiliating is that we have to wash the dishes after we have finished eating. Restaurants are a business, and they ought to hire people to wash dishes," says Ishwori Dayal of Melauli.

In theory, the country's laws have guaranteed all Nepalis equal rights since 1962, but the reality is a different story altogether. Bhani Lochar complains, "Since we are out off from the mainstream, we remain weak and poor. Even now, when we participate at

are Hindus, they are not allowed entry into temples. Arjun Dayal, a recent graduate of the School Leaving Certificate examination, says, "We are forbidden to enter places of worship. Since we cannot enter the temples, we keep small pictures of deities in our houses and worship them."

Dalits are not allowed to participate in any religious function, and since they are not allowed to recite *mantras*, their marriages too are performed without the attendant recitation from the scriptures. Neither are they allowed access to books and other learning material, since books represent Saraswati, the goddess of learning. This is borne out by the literacy levels of the Dalits—of 100 children of school-going age in Melauli only 23 attend school, and most of the

**"We are made to sit and eat outside in dishes kept apart for us. Most humiliating is that we have to wash the dishes after we have finished eating."**

youth and elders are illiterate. If matters were not bad enough, even among the Dalits there exists a stratified pecking order. A Lochar will not eat something that has been touched by a Damai, who in turn will not eat anything touched by a Parna. A Sarki still considers a Bhardan untouchable. But this system is undergoing changes faster than the larger upper caste-Dalit divide is narrowing. As Madan Damai puts it, "Change for the better can come only if we try and attack the very root of this problem.

Madan Ram Damai as its chairman and Rukma Dayal as director, has initiated a boycott of restaurants where Dalits are discriminated against. Ishwori Lochar, a member of Jai Durga, says, "We want to put up posters in every restaurant stating that Dalits will not have to sit outside and eat, nor wash the dishes, will be able to eat openly in the marketplace and will not be discriminated against."

The socially fractured groups among them have begun interacting with each other. They have also realised that there will be no improvement in their status without education and have started community literacy programmes. They also conduct regular community meetings. Being organised has helped them become more aware of their situation and also of the world outside. Lochar says that earlier they could not even carry on a conversation properly, but now they are capable of doing that with confidence.

Members of Jai Durga have constructed village roads, built a house to hold meetings, and because they were denied entry to temples, even built their own temple during Shiva Ratri last year. "Now even upper caste people come and worship at this temple," says Arjun Dayal.

The condition of women in the Dalit communities is even worse due to the double

marginalisation they face. Dalit women are now following the example of their men and are slowly asserting themselves. Shova Dayal was a timid woman when she began attending community meetings, but within a period of four months, she was elected member of the Aawaj De Samaj Sewa Yuba Club. Similarly, Dalit women affiliated to other organisations in Melauli have constructed their own office buildings, are helping their men in their work and are also engaged in employment schemes that will ultimately give them greater economic independence.

The focus of most of their activities has been to secure economic independence. Since they hardly own any agricultural land, they have had to rely on the upper castes for everything—for loans, for food, to lease land or to work in their fields. But now the Dalits have pooled together their savings and are offering loans to members without collateral. Other income generation activities like animal husbandry, poultry rearing and small retail business, have helped them improve their financial status.

Jai Durga's chairman, Madan Ram, sums it up: "Earlier when Dalits used to go to a gathering, upper castes never made an effort

to tell us anything. We remained unaware of programmes that were supposedly being conducted for our benefit. Now that we are organised and self sufficient, we

don't need the upper castes. We can take care of ourselves." ♦

(Adapted from Hiral Khabar-patrika, 17 September-1 October)



The village of Melauli (above); members of the Jai Durga Social Organisation at a weekly meeting (right); and Sra Damai with her poultry.



village meetings or attend trainings, we sit with upper caste people. But as soon as refreshments are served, some of them slowly move outdoors to eat. This attitude hurts us. What further insult can anyone suffer than this?"

Although all the Dalits here

Nothing will change if we only try to remove the system practised by the upper castes, but continue to follow it ourselves."

As a step towards that Dalits have begun organising themselves with assistance from external agencies. The Jai Durga Social Organisation, which elected

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# Licence to call

With Khetan-Modi Telestra having won the private mobile phone licence, maybe the backlog of 269,000 fixed lines in Nepal will finally be met.

BINOD BHATTARAI

The auction for a private mobile phone licence on 1 November was hailed as an unusually clean process, but questions are being asked about whether the winner of the bid used a loophole in the auction process to get away with the licence.

The Nepal Telecommunication Authority (NTA) was praised by all bidders for its transparency in pulling off what is perhaps Nepal's most transparent licensing auction ever. "I am envious, this is a totally open and honest process. I wish we had auctions like this," said one foreign bidder. However, the euphoria was short-lived as it became apparent that the winning bidder could have been gambling on opting out after

ten years without paying the Rs 24.1 billion licence renewal fee.

Nepal's Khetan Group and India's Modi Telestra Ltd outbid five other business consortiums by offering to pay a total of Rs 9.08 billion (\$122.6 million) as licence fees, royalty and the discounted renewal charges (Rs 20 billion in ten years). The licence fee was Rs 210 million and royalty Rs 3.9 billion. The unusually high third-round offer by Khetan and Modi—in the three-stage auction process—caught other bidders on the wrong foot. It was almost nine times the winning bids in both Round One, quoted by Turkey's Rurelli (Rs 1.32 billion), and Round Two winners India's United Telecom (Rs 1.34 billion).

"The licence renewal charge

offered by Khetan and Modi (for years 11-15) does not make business sense," said a source in a consortium that lost the bid. "They have managed to use a loophole to their advantage. I don't think it is possible to pay the high renewal fees." The understanding is that renewal is optional, and comes 10 years down the road. It apparently only occurred to Khetan and partners that there would be little to lose by quoting high now, and keeping open the option of quitting after ten years.

But that is not what the NTA thinks. "I cannot imagine an investor quitting after putting in so much money and time in a project," Bhup Raj Pandey, NIC chairman told us. He dismisses concerns, and maintains that

there will be laws to take care of contingencies. "We have acted in good faith and expect businesses to do the same."

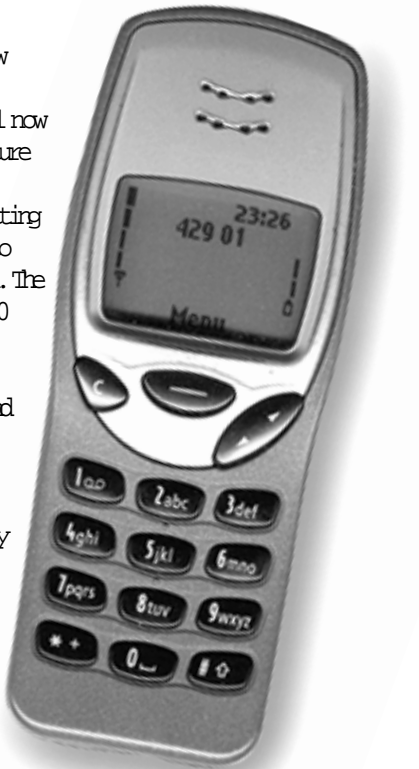
And that is precisely the question, are the parties acting in good faith? When we put it to Rajendra Khetan of the winning team, he said: "Ten years is too far away even to think about it right now. We're optimistic we'll run this business as a proper commercial venture. But we also have to remember there are many

uncertainties ahead, such as new laws and policies."

The Khetans and Modi will now have to incorporate a joint venture and meet certain licensing requirements before actually getting their permits. One is the need to submit a detailed business plan. The group says it plans to sell 75,000 cell phones in 10 years.

The question then is: Can businesses the size of Khetan and Modi afford to default on renewal of licence without tarnishing their image? The winning bidder now has to pay 30 percent of the quoted licence fee before actually getting a licence. The remainder has to be paid not later than the third year of licensing, while the royalty is payable every year.

Six companies were short-listed for the financial bidding, which included joint ventures between Nepali and Indian, Singaporean and Turkish companies. The Nepali



partners are required to own at least 20 percent of the equity in the new company to be set up to run the service. ♦

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### BIZ NEWS

## Economic health

The central bank reports that the National Urban Consumer Price Index (NUCPI) declined on a point-to-point scale in mid-September compared to mid-September 1999, mainly due to the decline in the prices of food and beverages. The NUCPI, which indicates national inflation rates, rose by only 0.3 percent compared to a corresponding rise of 5.6 percent a year ago, the Nepal Rastra Bank stated in its economic report for the second month of the fiscal year. The numbers, however, have not taken into account the increase in fuel prices in early October, which is likely to give the overall index a push.

On the trade front there has been a decline in the export of readymade garments, carpets and silver jewellery, while export of tanned hide, niger seeds and pulses is picking up. Exports during the second month of the fiscal year grew faster than imports, leading to a 10.2 percent drop in the trade deficit of Rs 8.54 billion.

The bank said the balance of payments (BoP) position, based on figures up to mid-July 2000 was a favourable Rs 14.28 billion, while the current account reported a deficit of Rs 5.62 billion—due mainly to a decline in service income and a huge trade deficit.

## Auto Show 2000

Global Exposition and Management Services is organising Nepal's second auto show 22-26 November, which, organisers say, will showcase the latest models from about 50 companies in the business. Organisers say they expect 75,000 visitors to visit the five-day exposition. The Nepal Automobile Dealers Association (NADA) and the Federation of the Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry are backing the event. In addition to motor vehicles, the event will also display vehicle accessories and safety equipment and financing schemes.

Among the top names that will be participating in the show are Tata, Maruti, Nissan, Mahindra & Mahindra, Daihatsu, Suzuki, Daewoo, Toyota, TVS-Suzuki, Hero Honda, Escorts, Tempo Trax, Kawasaki, Mazda, Hyundai, Fiat, Kymco and Sanyang.

## NSLMB Bank to upgrade capital

The Nepal Sri Lanka Merchant Bank (NSLMB) is increasing its paid-up capital to Rs 100 million, a move that is to be soon followed by a public issue to raise Rs 40 million. The bank—with a paid up capital of Rs 45 million—reported a Rs 18.8 million profit in 1999/00. Its assets include deposits of Rs 360 million and loans amounting to Rs 320 million.

## More Indian rice

Basket Traders, authorised distributors of Khushi Ram Behari Lal of India has begun marketing five brands of its Basmati rice in Nepal. The company is among India's largest exporters of Basmati rice and some of its brands—Doon, India Gate, Bemisal, Nur Jahan and Lotus—are exported to 20 countries. Nepali imported rice worth Rs 2.7 billion from India in 1999/2000, which is a 43.6 percent increase over 1998/1999.

## NEA partnership

The Nepal Electricity Authority has entered into a partnership valued roughly at an annual \$100,000 with two utilities from the United States, Tacoma Power and Wisconsin Electric. The overall focus of the partnership is to find ways to improve NEA's efficiency by reducing distribution losses, improving management and co-operation with Independent Power Producers and tariff restructuring. The USAID-supported partnership could later also result in technology transfer, and even possible investment in hydropower generation—something hinted at by the US president early this year during his visit to India and Bangladesh.

### Grindlays Gazette

#### INTEREST RATE UPDATE

NEPALI RUPEE	CURRENT%	PREVIOUS%
Call Money Avg.	5.20	5.25
84 Days t/bill	5.02	5.03
91 Days t/bill	5.27	5.28
365 Days t/bill	6.18	6.16
Repo rate	5.77	5.78

The average rate of 91 days T. Bill rate remained almost unchanged at 5.2702 pct compared to 5.2805 pct in the previous week. However, with the gradual return of the funds withdrawn during the festivals, the market liquidity is expected to improve in the coming weeks which will put some pressure on the 91 days T. Bill rate. Expected range for coming weeks 5.15 to 5.35.

#### FOREIGN CURRENCY : Interest rates

	USD	EUR	GBP	JPY	CHF
LENDING	9.50	6.25	6.00	1.50	5.13
LIBOR (1M)	6.62	4.94	6.05	0.33	3.26

BANK RATES(DEPO/LENDING)	Mkt Hi/Lo	Mkt Avg
S/A NPR	6.0/3.5	5.23
F/D 1 YR	7.5/6.0	6.73
OVERDRAFT	15.5/12.5	13.54
TERM LOAN	14.5/13.0	13.37
IMPORT LN	13.0/10.5	11.52
EXPORT LN	13.0/10.0	10.63
MISC LOAN	17.5/13.5	15.03

**Oil :** Oil prices moved back above \$33 on Tuesday with export disruptions in Nigeria.

#### CURRENCY UPDATE

AG/USD	CURRENT *	WK/AGO	%CHG
OIL(Barrel )	33.10	32.60	+ 1.53
GOLD(Ounce)	264.65	265.85	- 0.45
GOLD (NPR *)	7050	7055	- 0.07
EUR	0.8636	0.8507	+ 1.52
GBP	1.4299	1.4637	+ 2.31
JPY	107.26	108.60	+ 1.23
CHF	1.7637	1.7936	+ 1.67
AUD	0.5261	0.5255	+ 0.11
INR	46.65	46.62	- 0.06
*Currency bid prices at 1.30 p.m. on 07/11 - Source Reuters			

**Currencies :** The euro soared after a second day of intervention by the European Central Bank (ECB) on Monday, but quickly tumbled off its peaks, hurt by weak euro zone economic data and growing concern about the bank's action. Europe's central bank intervened on Friday and then again on Monday, citing concern about the global and domestic repercussions, sending the euro sharply higher against major currencies. The dollar meanwhile recovered from Friday's six-week lows against the yen around 106.75 yen, which dealers attributed to a spike in euro/yen in the wake of intervention.

**INDIAN RUPEE OUTLOOK :** The Indian currency rebounded to 46.56 against the dollar as sentiment on the rupee has improved slightly on reports of good collections through an overseas deposit offering by the State Bank of India (SBI). SBI's India Millennium Deposit Scheme, which opened on October 21 and closed on Monday, has raised more than \$4.5 billion. The foreign exchange market is unlikely to receive direct inflows from the scheme, but the country's foreign exchange reserve will be boosted and analysts expect this to relieve some pressure on the rupee. The rupee closed at 46.62 on Monday.

#### INTERNATIONAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES FOR NEPALI TIMES

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

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# Kathmandu's Kashi connection



ALL PHOTOS: KANAK MANI DIXIT

## Prakash A Raj in Banaras

If Calcutta used to be Nepal's commercial connection to India during the 20th century, then Banaras was our spiritual link. No other city in India has closer historical and cultural ties to Nepal than this holy city on the banks of Ganges. During the middle of the monsoon, the river is brown and swollen, and flows swiftly past the temples and ghats. These are waters so holy that one dip will cleanse your soul, and so precious that pilgrims take it in tiny bottles to their homes and keep the holy water to sprinkle on special occasions.

I was back in Banaras, contemplating a river that is the cradle of the north Indian civilisation and one that is a spiritual umbilical for nearly 800 million Hindus from India, Nepal and beyond. Having stayed there 40 years ago, I am familiar with this crowded, frenzied town. But this visit wasn't a pilgrimage, it was a trip to re-know the city and research a new guidebook for an Indian publisher.

Lord Buddha, born in Lumbini in what is now Nepal, chose Samath on the outskirts of Banaras to preach his first sermon. Samath is a serene enclave of Buddhist shrines, monasteries and archaeological sites.



Kashi, as Banaras is also known, has close historical links with the kings of Nepal. King Prithvi Narayan Shah, visited the city before he embarked on his conquests of Himalayan principalities to amalgamate them into the nation of Nepal. Ranjit Malla, the defeated king of Bhaktapur went to Kashi to spend the last days of his life. In fact, *Kashibās*, became a sort of tradition for dispossessed monarchs, or exiled Nepali leaders to be banished to Banaras so they could not create mischief back home. King Rana Bahadur Shah spent four years in Banaras in the beginning of the nineteenth century. The infamous queen Rajyalakshmi was exiled here after the Kot massacre and Bhandarkal episodes in 1847, which saw the emergence of Jang Bahadur and the Rana dynasty. Poet Bharukhata studied in Banaras. Another Nepali poet, Motiram Bhatta, spent much of his short life here and went on to play a significant role in developing the Nepali language, inspired perhaps by what Bharatendu Harischandra, a native of Banaras did for the Hindi language, at the end of the nineteenth century. Such renowned Nepali Sanskrit scholars as Hanraj, Somnath, Kulchandra Gautam and

Pedra Prasad Bhattacharya all studied in Banaras.

The city also played an important role as a base for Nepal's fledgling democratically-minded leaders. Nepal's first elected prime minister, BP Koirala, was born here and was actually named after the city's presiding deity, Bisweshwar. BP spent many years of his life in the city including his years in exile in the 1970s after his release from prison in Nepal. Veteran Nepali communists, like Man Mohan Adhikari and Madan Bhandari lived here, either during their college days and/or in exile. The Banaras Hindu University was where many Nepalis of the day studied, and the city also was for many years the major centre for books published in the Nepali language.

Interestingly, all the water from Nepal flows down to the Ganga. But at Banaras, not a drop of it is from Nepal. All the major rivers from the Nepal Himalaya—Mahakali, Kamali, Gandaki, Bagmati and Kosi, meet up with the Ganges downstream from Banaras. Yet, the city has remained sacred for the Hindus of Nepal as they have for Hindus elsewhere. Banaras' famous cremation ghats are listed in UNESCO's World Heritage Sites (as are seven sites in Kathmandu Valley). Almost all of the ghats were constructed in the 17th and 18th centuries by princely families from what are now the states of Maharashtra and Rajasthan in India. There is one named after a Nepali queen called Lalita Ghat, which also has the familiar silhouette of a Nepali pagoda-style temple dedicated to Shiva, complete with eorticeaves. What is striking is that despite the materialism and consumerism that is sweeping India, the numbers of the devout from all over India and beyond who come to Banaras to take their holy dip have not diminished.

At the famous Vishwanath Temple—one of the twelve *jiatirLingas* of Shiva demolished by Moghul emperor Aurangzeb in 1669 and re-constructed by Rani Ahilya Bai of Indore a century later, is a mosque that Aurangzeb built. Ever since the demolition of a similar mosque in Ayodhya, communal tensions have risen and this mosque now has a posse of policemen guarding it. Even though Banaras is a holy city for Hindus, a quarter of its population is made up of Muslims who are concentrated in their own neighbourhoods. Banaras is indeed a cosmopolitan city, an Indian melting pot where Bengalis, Maharashtrians, Punjabis and south Indians live in their traditional quarters. Doh Birajek is the locality where Nepalis have congregated to permanently settle down, or to rent rooms from where they commute to the university.

The narrow alleys and by-lanes are fascinating to explore on foot or rickshaw, if you can negotiate the hills

Over the years, Nepal's spiritual and educational links with Banaras have been overshadowed by other destinations. But the bonds are still there.

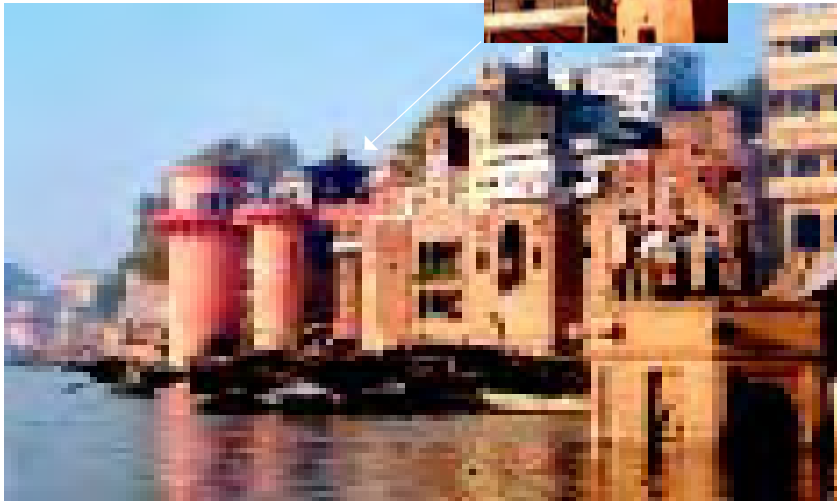
and cows that seem to feel very much at home on the streets. In a lane named Chaukharaba is the house of the famous Hindi poet Bharatendu, the 'Moon of India'. Nearby, adjoining the city's red light district stands the shop where the famous Hindi poet Jaya Shankar Prasad wrote his masterpiece *Kamayani*. Then there is the village of Lanchi, home of Prem Chand, perhaps the greatest novelists in Hindi and Urdu. At Tulsi Ghat is the house where Tulsi Das lived in the sixteenth century and composed his famous epic *Ram Charit Manas*.

No visit to Banaras is complete without a meeting with Bir Bhadra Mishra, the environmentalist and teacher who launched the "Clean the Ganges Campaign". Mishra is actually a professor of Civil Engineering at Banaras Hindu University and also chief priest of the famous Sankat Mochan temple. His can-do attitude has helped clean up the Ganga, and

the professor-priest has been given the coveted Magsaysay award and even featured in *Time* magazine earlier this year as one of the seven environmental heroes of the planet.

Everyone talks about how it is a sacrilege that the holiest river in India should also be one of its most polluted. Mishra thought there was enough talk, and decided to do something about it. The Ganga-Jamuna drains one of the most densely populated regions of the world, flowing past large cities like New Delhi and Allahabad, where untreated urban sewage and industrial wastes are dumped into the river. Perhaps the only stretch of river where the pollution levels are still "acceptable" for taking a holy dip is at the southernmost stretch of the ghats, before sewage from the city enters the river.

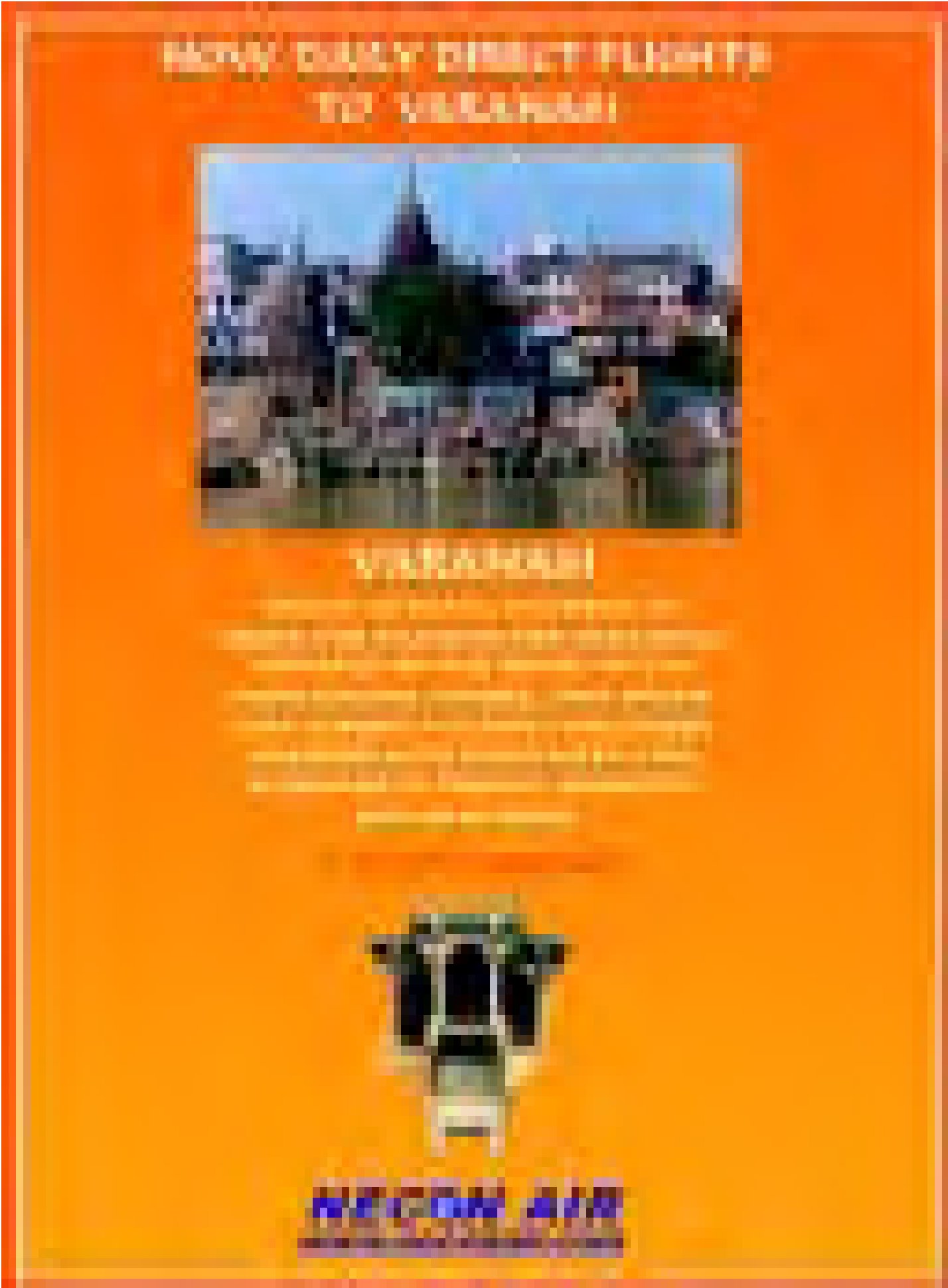
Times are changing, Nepal's Banaras connection is being overshadowed by our links to bigger centres in India like New Delhi, Bombay and



The Nepali temple at the ghats along the Ganga (top); the priest of the temple (below, left); and tourists observing pilgrims (left).

even Bangalore. Banaras' importance as a hotbed for Nepali politicians has also diminished. And elderly Nepalis don't head down to Banaras for *Kashibās* anymore, preferring the Nepal tarai where malaria has been eradicated and where there is now electricity and good transportation.

And Kathmandu has also changed, it is no longer a Himalayan boomtown in comparison to Banaras. But there are now new air links between Banaras and Kathmandu with daily flights by Indian Airlines and Necon Air. It may be premature to say goodbye yet to the Kathmandu-Kashi Connection. ♦





# Navel-gazing in Nepal

Kathmandu is becoming a world hub for meditation—a refuge for the burnt-out, stressed and troubled masses.



MIN BAIRACHARYA

SALIL SUBEDI

In the canopied silence of the Shivapuri forest's ashram for Vipassana meditation north of Kathmandu, 85 disciples sit cross-legged, eyes closed and minds shut off. It is a mixed group—men and women in nearly equal numbers, both Nepalis and Westerners from all walks of life. When they emerge from the 10-day retreat, many of them will have learnt about the art of living free from anger, greed, ignorance and negative thoughts. This is where your soul gets a spring cleaning, and the mind is renewed.

It used to be that young refugees fleeing the materialism and consumerism of the West flocked to Kathmandu for spiritual cleansing. But surprisingly, the ills of modern living and stressful lifestyles seem to be pushing an increasing number of Nepalis to meditation as well. "I have changed so much from the past. I have become calm, patient, and full of inner happiness," says Kishor Bhair Pradhan, a *sadhak* (disciple) of Vipassana meditation since 1989. "It's all about mental purification through total silence so you are free of fear, anger and jealousy."

Ardo Lama of another meditation centre, the Seto Gumpa in Kathmandu, has been teaching meditation and says it helps out the flow of negative thoughts coming into the mind. "Evil and wisdom both reside in our minds. When thoughts are calmed down through meditation then we can feel a positive aura rising that will help spread love, peace and harmony," says the monk. However, the guru warns against taking shortcuts. Meditation is a life-long exercise; it will not give immediate gratification. "Many want this blissful state fast, which is very wrong. Meditation has to be done every day, slowly but

continuously," he adds. The idea is to integrate the body, speech and mind like the wheels of a well-oiled machine.

Swami Ananda Mastana is a guru of the Osho Rajneesh school of meditation. He also warns against shortcuts: "You have to make it a part of your life. It's not like aspirin that one takes to relieve pain in minutes. It's an effort from within yourself for which you might be rewarded with inner peace and compassion."

In the silent alleys north of Baudhanath stupa, French photographer Raphaelle walks about with a beatific smile. She almost has a halo around her head, such is the immense positive drive she carries about. "We have to avoid being a slave to our thoughts. We have to find a way to liberate ourselves and meditation is the only way," she says with the conviction of a true convert.

It's not just Europeans and North Americans who are coming to Kathmandu to find peace. Vera Lucia is from Brazil, and she has been working in Kathmandu helping needy children. She calls herself a "holistic therapist and peace educator" and says meditation is just a fancy word which teaches you to be aware of living. "Meditation does not require much effort once you feel that you really want to do it," says Vera in that soothing, relaxed and almost hypnotic voice that is therapeutic just to listen to. "You can watch your mind while you cook, while you ride a *tempo*, while you walk and while you just sit back and listen to music." Vera uses a lot of meditation in her healing therapies, and says it is also good to calm the mind.

Nepalis are joining meditation centres in increasing numbers, rediscovering the calming techniques that our culture gave to the West and which have now come back a full circle. There are now meditation farms and spiritual rejuvenation centres popping up on the hills surrounding Kathmandu Valley, in Pokhara and even in Chitwan. But

by far the most popular is the Nepal Vipassana Kendra started by industrialist Mani Harsha Jyoti in 1992 under the guidance of guru Satyanarayan Goenka, who now appears on the Indian Zee TV channel every Monday at 8:15. Mani Harsha's son, Roop Jyoti, now oversees the centre and recalls how his father's death convinced him of the important benefits of meditation. "As human beings, we grow old, we fall ill, we die. That is certain. My father had lung cancer, and he faced

death calmly, till the last moment of his life he was at peace with himself." Roop himself has taken the meditation course and now regularly practises *dhyana*. "This is the art of living, the art of dying, it teaches you that if you have negativity in you, you are bound to be miserable."

Although the practice of *dharma* was initiated by the Buddha, the Vipassana centre does not have traditional religious rituals. In fact, Catholic nuns, Muslims, Hindus, all come here for courses. A group of nuns from Patna who had just done a course said: "The meditation helped us become better Christians."

Meditation can also have medical benefits, since even modern medicine has now discovered the link between mind and body. But Roop warns against taking a meditation course with the expectation that a physical ailment will be cured. "Meditation strengthens you spiritually, any medical benefit is a side-effect."

Most importantly, meditation helps people find a clear direction in life. You don't have to give up trying to get rich, or doing politics. "If you are making money, meditation just makes you ask yourself, what is it all for?"

The Vipassana Centre warns people not to try meditation by themselves. Says Roop: "It can be dangerous. Meditation is like a deep surgery of the mind to take the pus out. That is why you need a guide."

The enthusiasm among Nepalis can be gauged at the reservation desk in the basement of the Jyoti Bhawan at Kantipath where young and old, Nepalis and foreigners alike, queue up for their confirmation slips for the forthcoming ten-day Vipassana meditation retreat which is conducted twice a month. Neer Kumar Chettri sits behind the desk and cautions youngsters in their 20s as he writes out the slips: "If you think you cannot remain silent and follow the teachers for the next 10 days, you'd better pull out now." The Centre prefers middle-aged people since younger apprentices tend to take more handling.

The Centre is now also conducting meditation for inmates at the Nakkhu Jail, learning from the great success by the Magay say

Award-winner Kiran Bedi at New Delhi's Tihar jail, where die-hard convicts, terrorists and murderers went through Vipassana. The twice-monthly courses are now getting up to 60 foreigners and 200 Nepalis for the course at Shivapuri. Participants have to cut all ties to family, work and community.

They cannot take their mobiles, cannot receive phone calls, it is a process of diving off the deep end to discover your soul. People ask

donations given by people who take the course. Some give Rs 100, others give Rs 10,000. "If they benefitted, they hope others will also benefit, and they donate money. So far, it has been enough to run it."

Many Nepali luminaries have taken the courses, including the Governor of Nepal Rastriya Bank Dipendra Rana, Dipendra Rana, leftist leader Mohan Bikram Adhikari, senior army generals, politicians and civil servants. Some have even

criticised for being vulgar by those who haven't understood it. In fact, it's as powerful as any other. It's enlivening, it uses a lot of music, chanting and encourages openness in the expression of thoughts and emotions. One might find techniques like the dynamic meditation quite absurd, but once you master it, the positive vibes start coming your way," says Swami Ananda.

There are a number of Buddhist meditation centres in town starting from the Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre where mandala teachings through meditation and audiovisual presentations are conducted regularly. The other popular spots are the Kopan Monastery, Pharping Monastery, the Red Shechen Gumpa and the White Ka-ning Shedup-ling Gumpa in Boudha where the rinpoches themselves conduct classes.

Spiritualism is clearly back in a big way, and Kathmandu is becoming a sort of world hub for the disenchanted, burnt-out, stressed and troubled masses. An increasing number of people from North America, Europe, Australia and even Japan are coming to Nepal, specifically for meditation. It is just a bit ironic that Nepal's tourism industry is cashing in on the very activity which preaches that money isn't everything. ♦

## Meditation helps people find a clear direction in life. You don't have to give up trying to get rich, or doing politics. If you are making money, meditation just makes you ask yourself, what is it all for?

Roop: how can I find ten days to go and do nothing? What I tell them is: "If a doctor says you are sick and need to spend ten days in hospital, would you do it? It is the same thing. Here it is your mind that needs healing, and it could very well be the biggest change in your life."

The Vipassana Centre (phone: 223968) is all run by volunteers, and there is no fee. It runs on

returned to conduct courses for the junior batches. Even King Birendra visited the Centre when Satyanarayan Goenka came to conduct courses last year.

Another well-known retreat is Osho Tapoban in the Nagarjun forest which holds regular meditation camps and other special courses that sometimes last for weeks. "Osho's meditation has been

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ANITA CHAUDHURI IN LONDON

Column inches devoted to Meg Ryan's split with husband Dennis Quaid often included the delicious detail that they had squabbled, in very spiritually suspect style, over which of them had rights to their guru. The lady in question, one Gurumayi Chidvilasananda, dispenses Siddha yoga from her ashram in upstate New York, and a bitter custody battle was only averted at the eleventh hour, when Ryan and Quaid decided to get back together. Other celebrity worshippers must have exhaled serenely; knowing that no further bad karma would surround their Chosen One.

The likes of Isabella Rossellini, Diana Ross, Lisa Kudrow and Lulu, (the British 1960s pop singer) all make regular pilgrimages to receive official blessings from the forty-something leader, a procedure which involves being tapped on the head with a wand of peacock feathers. It is rumoured that some of her servants hold her in such doiseance that they anoint themselves with her dirty bath water. It'll come as no surprise then to learn that although gurus traditionally frown upon worldly goods, Gurumayi's ashram is apparently worth a cool \$21million.

The rise of the career guru really began in earnest back in 1967 when The Beatles pledged their faith in the Hindu swami, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the man who introduced Transcendental Meditation to the West. During that period, a rival guru also attracted famous disciples, a sacked Ivy League psychology professor named Richard Alpert, who went to India and returned as Ram Dass, servant of God.

# NEW AGE GURUS

Eastern spirituality and mysticism is omnipresent and seriously chic in the West. But psychologists suggest seeing a shrink instead.



Maybe they feel that the level of commitment demanded by conventional religion is too high, yet they've got to do something to fill the spiritual void. This is where the guru comes in. You pay them, they tell you something deep and incomprehensible, and you feel you've had your money's worth. But while people may believe that this equals commitment, it doesn't. You can't buy spiritual development; money is no substitute for faith, time and love. It's a quick fix."

Psychologist Oliver James, author of *Britain on the Couch*, believes there are other reasons people are going to gurus. "Human

beings have always put their faith in authority figures to help them work out what to do. Generally, we all want certainty. But in the past 50 years, we've moved from a collectivist society to an individualist society. Our identity is no longer determined on the basis of family position or social role."

"It's no longer so clear who the authority figures are, which is why we're seeking consolation in self-appointed gurus, be they involved in alternative medicine, herbalism, psychotherapy or religion," says James. He believes followers would be better off spending their money on therapy. "Shrinks are the opposite of gurus—they're going to be your disciple."



*Yahoo. Frenzied and free Rajneesh devotees*

His scepticism seems well placed. A few years back, two of Gurumayi's most ardent followers gave their baby the middle name of Mayi to bestow spiritual wellbeing

on their family. Alas, even the blessing of a top guru could not save Melanie Griffith and Don Johnson from getting divorced for the second time. ♦ (Observer)

Once a guru gets a celebrity endorsement, the rest of us are right behind buying the books or the beauty regime.

your saliva, suggests Deepak Chopra, ayurvedic spiritual maestro and adviser to the likes of Demi Moore), to how do I survive mid-life

## SURYA



*Did Mahesh contribute to this bliss?*

These days, laying claim to a guru is an instant signifier of power, wealth and status. For some peculiar reason, entrusting a complete stranger with the wellbeing of one's mind, body and spirit is not only accepted as sensible behaviour, it is positively essential if you want to get ahead. In some cases, it's a guilt thing.

pregnancy (ask Bharti Vyas, the spiritual beauty guru who helped prepare Cherie Blair for baby Leo)? "Right now there is a tendency to turn to gurus because organised religion is increasingly not meeting people's needs," says the Rev Dr Geoff Scobie, who has researched the psychology of belief systems at Glasgow University, Scotland.

# The e-United Nations

The United Nations is pushing a new standard language for e-commerce that it hopes will boost e-business and help small enterprises, especially in the Third World.

JACK SCHOFIELD, IN LONDON . . .

The United Nations wants to do for e-commerce what the web has done for information: create a global standard that will allow anyone and everyone to join in. If it succeeds, it should boost e-business everywhere—especially between small companies, and in the Third World.

Through UN CEFACT the UN has been the major force behind the Edifact (Electronic data interchange for administration, commerce and transport) standard. But while UN Edifact has been successful, it has not taken over in the American market—many US companies still use their own X12 standard—and it has been too expensive for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Klaus-Dieter Naujok, chairman of UN CEFACT, is keen to redress this with a new standard called ebXML.

On a visit to London last week Naujok, from San Francisco, was accompanied by Ray Walker, Britain's e-trade guru, DIT (Department of Trade and Industry) advisor, and chair of the UN CEFACT steering group. They had contrasting styles: Naujok jolly and outgoing, Walker more quietly-spoken but the same message, and the tendency to finish one another's points that comes from working in tandem.

"We did something for the big companies with Edifact, and that goes on. But it's vitally important that we get the SMEs involved, and that's much more appreciated in the developing countries than it is here. By getting interoperability, you'll be able to do business with anyone anywhere in the world at any time," they said. "It's trade facilitation, basically." This was important for countries such as Bulgaria, Iran and Pakistan, which have been a bit out of the mainstream. It's a huge step forward in opening those markets up and enabling those countries to participate in world trade," added Walker.

The UN's initiative is based on XML, the eXtensible Markup Language backed by Tim Berners-Lee's World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). When Berners-Lee invented the web, the aim was to provide a simple way of sharing texts and pictures across many different types of computers: HTML (HyperText Markup Language) did that. Now companies need to move structured data around—the kind stored in spreadsheets, databases, and accounts packages. XML does that.

For real electronic trading, the data also has to be identified and presented so that a machine can read it, and process it. This is not the same as, for example, phoning in a purchase order, or putting the details in an email message. That may be e-commerce, but it usually depends on having a person to accept and probably retype the data at the other end. In an electronic trading system, a computer could place a purchase order with the supplier's computer (perhaps when prompted by a stock control system) and make the payment without a person being involved at either end. That is already possible using Edifact, but it is used mainly by large companies across dedicated networks or Vans (value-added network services). With XML, small companies will be able to do

their electronic trading cheaply "over the Internet in a secure way. That's the most important part," said Naujok.

XML, which first emerged in 1996, is rapidly becoming an important open standard. Its leading backers include three major rivals, IBM, Microsoft, and Sun Microsystems. Indeed, Microsoft is basing its whole future strategy, called .Net, on XML. But the problem with XML, quipped Ray Walker, "is that it's extensible. There are three or four hundred different purchase orders out there in XML format. Businesses don't want that: they want one way of going forward." So for global electronic trading, businesses must not only use a common language, they must also standardise their datasets and interfaces to provide interoperability. If ebXML takes off, there could be a single XML standard for business, instead of hundreds.

Traditionally, big businesses wrote or customised their own software to handle what they perceived as their unique business needs. Wal-Mart (store chain) would neither know nor care about how Marks & Spencer generated purchase orders. That is why the UN project is using business processes as building blocks, rather than terminology, which vary between firms. "It's a big thing for Wal-Mart to use the same data set as M&S [Marks

and Spencer], but we should distinguish between the internal implementation and what it takes to exchange information. At that level there is more commonality than people like to admit."

Obviously not every company can be involved with defining ebXML, but UN CEFACT is working in partnership with Oasis, the Organisation for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards, and numerous industry bodies. These include Accord, for the insurance industry, the Automotive Industry Action Group (AIAG), footwear manufacturers in the Confédération Européenne de la Chaussure (CEC), the Open Healthcare Group, and the Open Travel Alliance. Last month, members of the Global Commercial Initiative (GCI) adopted ebXML, and membership includes 40 leading manufacturers and eight trade organisations representing a grand total of 850,000 companies. Peter Jordan, a GCI board director and European systems director for Kraft Foods, said: "It is clear to us that ebXML will soon become the standard for all global trade."

All the draft specifications have now been drawn up, and should be finalised at meetings in Tokyo next month, in Vancouver, Canada, in February, and in Vienna, Austria, in



May 2001. Naujok thinks off-the-shelf ebXML software could be available by the beginning of 2002, if not earlier. Walker expects prices to start at around \$150.

Companies that intend to trade with other companies over the web, or have already started trading electronically, can start asking their software suppliers about their plans to add ebXML compatibility. Especially Microsoft, which has so far remained strangely silent about the whole affair. ♦ (The Guardian)

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## PREMIUM AD C



# The battle beyond Gaza

The Palestinian insurrection has unified the chronically fractured and factional Israeli political front into a massive chauvinistic and nationalistic propaganda machine. But there are voices of dissent.



MICHAEL JANSEN IN JERUSALEM

When Yossi Beilin, the Israeli Justice Minister, launched negotiations with the Palestinians, he had the backing of a large section of Israeli public opinion. Today he has little influence over the decisions Prime Minister Ehud Barak takes. "The Jews are against Oslo; it is dead," says Dr. Israel Shahak, a well-known maverick political commentator, referring to the so-called Oslo Accords designed to achieve peace between the Arabs and Israel. For the vast majority of Israelis have rallied once again behind the hardline right-wing 'national camp' and the army. And public opinion is expected to stay that way for some time.

In many ways, the present political atmosphere in Israel can be compared to the mood of 1967, when Israel fought a war with its

Arab neighbours. "Israelis are united because they feel threatened by Muslims—not just Arabs. There is a religious dimension now," Shahak says.

The result of an opinion poll of members of the secular leftist Meretz party backs up the view. Ninety per cent want the party to join a 'national emergency government' which would include religious parties and Meretz's arch enemy, Ariel Sharon, leader of the right-wing Likud and the man who sparked off the current uprising with a provocative visit to the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. By comparison, public opinion was divided during the first few months of the *Intifada* in 1987.

There are some immediate political implications. Although Barak has taken a tougher stance against this *Intifada* than the Likud government adopted against the

first one in 1987, he would lose if elections were to be held now. A poll taken last week revealed that Sharon would win 41 per cent of the vote while Barak would get 31 per cent. Although Barak's approval rating has been dropping over the past few months, this was the first poll that gave Sharon a clear advantage.

Ordinary Israelis believe that it was Barak's 'concessionary attitude' towards the Palestinians, rather than his refusal to implement the Oslo Accords, that brought about the *Intifada*. In the opinion of the Israeli right, Barak encouraged the Palestinians to demand more than Israel is prepared to 'give'—that is, the return of the land Israel occupied in 1967. Clearly, Israelis have reverted to the clichéd notion that "the Arabs only understand force". While 140 Palestinians have been killed and more than 3,000 wounded since the uprising began, eight Israelis have died. Sharon and the right wing have ably exploited the 'siege mentality' cultivated by the Israeli politico-military establishment.

Although Israel is the regional super-power and the Israeli army has far greater firepower than any combination of Arab armed forces, ordinary Israelis consider themselves to be under continual siege. Israeli fears have been heightened during this *Intifada* by the rising of the oppressed and underprivileged Palestinian citizens of Israel. Consequently, Israelis see themselves as being besieged on four fronts now: in Gaza, the West Bank, the Arab-inhabited areas within the country and by the Lebanese Hizbollah, an enemy they respect on the northern border.

The Israeli 'peace camp' is in disarray, but its stalwarts are not intimidated by the rise of the rightist 'national camp'. During previous conflicts, Israeli leftists and liberals were silenced once the guns began to sound. Today, opponents of Barak's policies

continue to speak publicly and comment in the press, although they receive short shrift on television, the main medium for news.

The main vehicle for the expression of moderate and left wing opinion is the quality daily, *Haaretz*, read by about six per cent of the Israeli public. Peace campaigners writing in *Haaretz* express views that are viewed as heresy by the mass of Israelis. For example, veteran peace activist, Uri Avnery, laid the blame for the present crisis on the Israeli side. He reminded his readers that the peace camp had been warning the public and the government that there would be a conflagration if Israel failed to seriously pursue the peace process. "We have a partner for a just peace in the Palestinian Authority. We do not have a partner for a peace that is dictated by Israeli colonialism."

Shulamit Aloni, a human rights activist and founder of the Meretz party, is even sharper in her criticism of Israel. "There would have been no unrest," she says, if Sharon, guarded by more than 1,000 troops and police, "had not gone into the mosque compound on 28 September. Our insensitivity and arrogance and the assumption that justice is on the side of the strong, is the cause of what happened. The Palestinians are demeaned and persecuted, and their rage is just."

However, the so-called 'national consensus' in Israel is temporary. The Palestinian rising will, ultimately, sharpen the fundamental divisions in Israeli society, widening the gulf between secular and religious, Westerner and Easterner, rich and poor, hawk and dove. ♦ (*Gemini News*)

**Veteran reporter Michael Jansen has covered the Middle East for years. Her books include The United States and the Palestinian People, The Battle of Beirut and Dissonance in Zion.**

## Gore, Bush and the Third World

GUMISAI MUTUME IN WASHINGTON

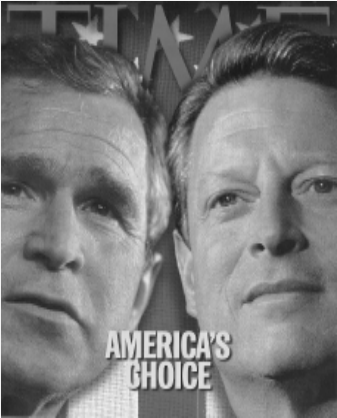
At the time of going to press, the US elections are looking like any other Third World election: delays and recounting. The differences between the candidates may not be much, but it will matter for developing countries which of them, Vice President Al Gore or Texas Governor George W. Bush, becomes the next US president.

Bush is more leery of the current role of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. This may lead his administration to push for a scaling down of the institutions' roles in developing countries, especially if he obtains a Republican majority in both houses of Congress. "The Bank and IMF have increasingly become unpopular, it is taxpayers who finance these organisations, but activists hope they will have more powers to clip the institutions' influence, especially under a Republican administration," says Robert Naiman of the Centre for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR). The 2001 foreign-aid bill freed \$435 million to pay for US obligations under the IMF and World Bank's Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC). Congress also increased funding for HIV/AIDS prevention programmes to about \$300 million, a 50 percent rise. Bush has said that the IMF must not be viewed "as a way to say to world bankers, 'If you make a bad loan, we'll bail you out.' It needs to be available for emergency situations".

Gore has been less clear on how his administration will relate to the Bretton Woods institutions, but it appears he will continue the current relationship. He said during one of the presidential debates, however, that he would look at curbing corruption in the agencies. Gore says he will seek greater efforts, through the Bank and the other multilateral development banks, to provide adequate social safety nets for economies facing turmoil. Gore also supports calls by the Group of Seven industrialised nations for stronger IMF efforts to contain financial crises. The vice president has come out in support of the Asian Growth and Recovery Initiative, a multilateral initiative involving the World Bank and Asian Development Bank to promote financial restructuring in the region.

But how the developing world will fare during the next US presidency does not depend only on who occupies the White House, according to Barry Bosworth of the influential Washington think-tank the Brookings Institute. What matters most for developing countries is whether the president has a Republican or Democratic Congress, he says. "Perhaps the worst-case scenario for developing countries would be Gore as president, with a Democratic majority in Congress," says Bosworth. A Gore/Democrat administration would likely have to accommodate its powerful trade union constituency and the green lobby, analysts say. Gore has said in trade he will push for "standards to end child labour, to prevent the exploitation of workers and the poisoning of the environment". This could lead to less favourable trading arrangements for a number of major emerging economies that rely on cheap labour and use under-age workers to compete in the global market.

Bush too would be under pressure to accommodate conservative Republicans some of whom welcomed the Meltzer Commission's recommendation for a reduced role for the Bretton Woods institutions. The Commission said the Bank should pull out of developing countries and abdicate its role to regional banks such as the Asian Development Bank. It noted that the failure rate of Bank projects was 65-70 percent in the poorest countries and concluded that the institutions were not efficiently executing their roles. ♦



# Chronicle of a farewell foretold

A puppeteer-ventriloquist scripts a purported "farewell" letter by Nobel laureate Gabriel Garcia Marquez and creates a flutter.

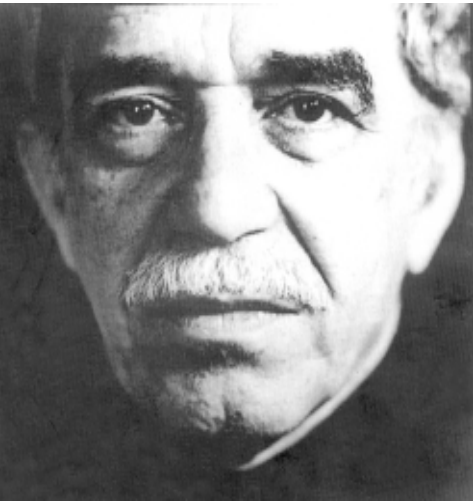
A poem published in several Latin American newspapers last week and said to be a farewell ode by Colombia's ailing Nobel laureate Gabriel Garcia Marquez turned out to be the work of a little-known ventriloquist. The poem titled "La Marioneta"—"The Puppet"—appeared under Garcia Marquez's name in the Peruvian daily *La Republica*. Mexico City dailies reproduced it the next day and it was read on local radio stations. "Gabriel Garcia Marquez sings a song to life," read a headline in Mexico City's *La Cronica*, which published the poem superimposed on a photo of the novelist on its front page.

"My God, if I had a bit of life I would not let one instant go by without telling the people I love that I love them," read the sentimental poem that was also widely circulated on the Internet (*reproduced alongside*). But like the speech supposed to have been delivered by American novelist Kurt Vonnegut in 1997, urging graduates at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to use sunscreen, the author of "La Marioneta" turned out not nearly as famous as advertised.

"I'm feeling the disappointment of someone who has written something and is not getting credit," ventriloquist Johnny Welch told Mexico's InfoRed radio. Welch, who has worked for 15 years as a ventriloquist in Mexico and other parts of Latin America, said he wrote the poem for his puppet sidekick 'Mofles'. Across Latin America, the poem moved readers

to tears. When they heard that it was hoax, they said it was good enough to have been written by the master.

Garcia Marquez won the Nobel prize for literature in 1982. His seminal work, *100 Years of Solitude*, has been translated into 36 languages and sold millions of copies worldwide. In an October 1999 interview with New Yorker magazine, the 73-year-old author acknowledged having been treated for lymphatic cancer in the summer of 1999 in Los Angeles. Rumors of his failing health have surfaced several times in Latin America in recent months. Garcia Marquez has not commented publicly on the apocryphal poem, but several close associates denied he had anything to do with it. ♦



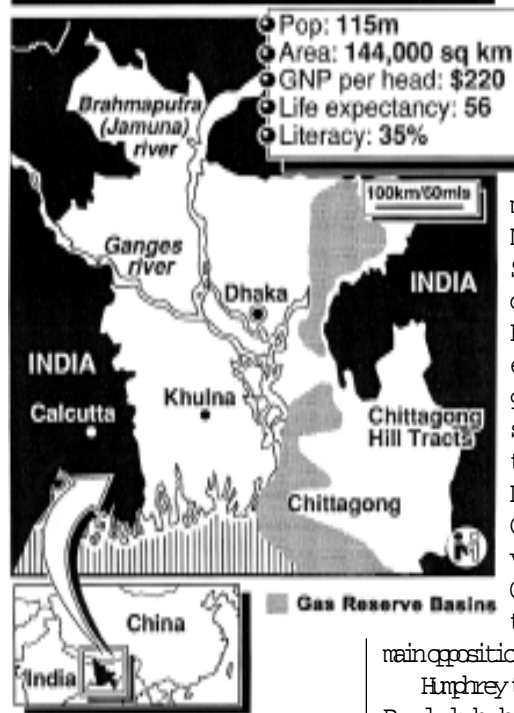
"If for an instant God were to forget that I am a rag doll and gifted me with a piece of life, possibly I wouldn't say all that I think, but rather I would think of all that I say. I would value things, not for their worth but for what they mean. I would sleep little, dream more, understanding that for each minute we close our eyes we lose sixty seconds of light. I would walk when others hold back, I would wake when others sleep. I would listen when others talk, and how I would enjoy a good chocolate ice cream! If God were to give me a piece of life, I would, simply, throw myself face first into the sun, baring not only my body but also my soul. My God, if I had a heart, I would write my hate on ice, and wait for the sun to show. Over the stars I would paint with a Van Gogh dream a Beredetti poem, and a Senat song would be the serenade I'd offer to the moon. With my tears I would water roses, to feel the pain of their thorns, and the red kiss of their petals...

My god, if I had a piece of life... I wouldn't let a single day pass without telling the people I love that I love them. I would convince each woman and each man that they are my favourites, and I would live in love with love. I would show men how very wrong they are to think that they cease to be in love when they grow old, not knowing that they grow old when they cease to be in love! To a child I shall give wings, but I shall let him learn to fly on his own. I would teach the old that death does not come with old age, but with forgetting. So much have I learned from you, children... I have learned that everyone wants to live on the peak of the mountain, without knowing that real happiness is in how it is scaled. I have learned that when a newborn child squeezes for the first time with his tiny fist his father's finger, he has him trapped forever. I have learned that a man has the right to look down on another only when he has to help the other get to his feet. From you I have learned so many things, but in truth they won't be of much use, for when I keep them within this suitcase, unhappily shall I be dying." ♦

# Dithering over gas

While Bangladesh determines its reserves and debates whether to export or not, investors ask the government to step on the gas.

## Bangladesh



TABIBUL ISLAM IN DHAKA

C aught between pressure from Western oil companies backed by the US government, to export part of its huge natural gas reserves, and domestic political opposition to this, the government of Bangladesh is finding it hard to satisfy both.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's administration has till December to make up its mind when a team of American experts is due to submit the findings of its survey of the natural gas reserves in the country. Political observers expect the government to permit the export of natural gas if the survey reveals that Bangladesh's gas reserves can last for

at least 50 years.

Some economists have advised the government to rely not only on the US survey, but to invite experts from other nations to make doubly sure.

Meanwhile, the United States has stepped up diplomatic pressure on Bangladesh to permit export of the surplus gas. US deputy assistant secretary for international affairs in the Department of Energy, Calvin Humphrey, visited Dhaka twice in October when he met the prime minister and

main opposition leader Khaleda Zia.

Humphrey told reporters that Bangladesh should take a decision immediately if the country wants to be in a position to profit from the gas export in the next five to seven years. He added that buyers like neighbouring India would not wait for Bangladesh to take a decision and was already negotiating deals with other nations to meet their energy needs.

In recent years, the issue of export of Bangladesh's natural gas reserves, variously estimated at between 10 and 50 trillion cubic feet, has stirred a major political controversy, with opposition parties accusing the government of buckling under foreign pressure. The US has a big stake in Bangladeshi natural gas. The

country has been divided into 23 blocks for exploration of gas and oil. Nine blocks have been leased to foreign oil companies, seven of these being US-based. Major US oil companies are bidding for the remaining blocks.

Donor nations, Western oil companies and multilateral lenders like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank are advising export of the surplus gas to India. They argue that Bangladesh has far more than it can use and sale of the natural gas will not only generate valuable foreign exchange, but attract large amounts of foreign investment.

But opposition political leaders, a section of geologists, and academics in the country, caution that a decision should not be taken in haste. The prime minister insists that gas exports will be allowed only after ascertaining the extent of the reserves and after meeting national demand. "(Natural) gas is our national resource. We have to preserve it for at least 50 years for posterity," Hasina told reporters in Dhaka on her return from a four-day official visit to the US late October. However, she added: "We will think about its diverse use when the quantum of its reserve is determined after an on-going survey by the United States geological survey team."

Though the main opposition party is totally opposed to export of the gas at once, its top leaders say they are not against this if it is proven that there are sufficient reserves. During a September

meeting with visiting British Home Secretary Jack Straw, opposition chief Zia told him that her party would not object to gas exports if the present and future domestic demand is taken care of, and it proves profitable to the nation. Gas-based industries would have to be set up in the country, before the natural resource can be exported, she told the British official.

Hasina too favours natural gas-based industrial development in Bangladesh by setting up power generating plants, fertiliser factories and petrochemical industries. However, John C. Holzman, former US ambassador to Bangladesh, who lobbied hard to persuade the country's leaders to permit gas exports, argues that domestic use alone will not bring economic gains. Holzman told a seminar in Dhaka that without any prospect of gas exports, foreign oil companies would lose interest in Bangladesh, because local consumption alone could not ensure quick return for their "high-risk investment". "Gas in the ground is not wealth. It is only a potential asset," he said. The country could earn at least \$450 million annually by exporting three billion cubic feet (tcf) of gas over the next 20 years, he added.

According to junior energy minister Rafiqul Islam, Bangladesh has about 10 tcf of recoverable natural gas reserves. Of this, three trillion cubic feet has already been utilised. The present gas reserves could meet national demand till the year 2015, he said. However, the president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh, Forest E. Cookson claims that new discoveries would boost the reserves to 50 tcf. "With this level of reserve, there is sufficient basis for limited export to India," he says. "You don't need 50 years of reserves to go for export." ♦ (IPS)

BYLINE

by MJ AKBAR

## The man who did not become Prime Minister



Jyoti Basu should have been Prime Minister of India. Jyoti Basu could have been Prime Minister of India. Unusually, opportunity came to his door twice. On the first occasion his comrades stopped him; on the second an alleged ally betrayed him. If Jyoti Basu had become Prime Minister on either occasion, he would have changed history.

This is not an exercise in adulation, although if any contemporary politician deserved it, then it is only Jyoti Basu. This is recognition of fact. The first opportunity came after the collapse of the Deve Gowda Government in 1997. The BJP and its allies did not have the numbers to form a majority Government, and the Congress had neither the numbers nor the moral and psychological authority. The dreams of that uncertain cause called the Third Front survived; the only question now was getting the right man to lead. Fringe politicians once again began to float on hope, but there was only one leader whose name brooked no dispute when it was suggested. That of Jyoti Basu.

In an astonishing display of masochism, a self-important majority within the CPI(M) Politburo stopped Jyoti Basu from taking the oath of office. Apparently this would have interfered with some revolution they had been planning for six or seven decades. I have too much respect for the political maturity of the CPI(M) to call this stupidity, but in the history of political suicide this will merit a very long and detailed chapter. Jyoti Basu, being the calm personality he is, accepted his party's decision without a demur.

The decision to have political expansion party had very a half of the strangest thing about this was that the CPI(M) should rejected the idea that a party can use power to its base. After all, the in Bengal done this same thing brilliantly through the second Sixties and from 1977 onwards. The CPI(M) was not the most important component of the United Front that replaced the Congress in Bengal in 1967. Yet, within a few years the Bangla Congress had become irrelevant and the communists under Basu had become the pre-eminent opposition to the Congress.

It was preposterous of the politburo to conclude that Jyoti Basu as Prime Minister would actually hurt the party in Bengal. The consequences of that decision three years ago have not been fully realised. The communists could pay a very heavy price—as heavy as the price the Congress is paying for having denied Jyoti Basu the chance to become Prime Minister of India in 1999.

Once again, Jyoti Basu did nothing to either create or further that chance; it flew into his lap because it really had nowhere else to go. It came about after Jayalalitha withdrew from the Vajpayee Government forcing a confidence vote in the Lok Sabha, which the Prime Minister famously lost, by a single vote. He received 271 votes when he needed 272: a number that would soon become famous in both Hindi and Italian.

The Congress sought to become the successor Government with Sonia Gandhi as candidate for Prime Minister, a situation so heavy with irony it could barely walk. The merits of the reservations about Sonia Gandhi can be argued elsewhere, but many parties found it deeply unacceptable that a person of Italian origin, still green in her understanding of India's polity, politics and people, should be made PM. The one group that wanted the BJP out so anxiously that they were ready to vote her in, was the Left. Sonia Gandhi herself revealed levels of ambition that she had effectively disguised—she made her own elevation to power a non-negotiable condition of Congress participation in government.

At this point, someone began to speak some sense. The only person who could lead and sustain a non-BJP Government was Jyoti Basu. He was perfectly acceptable to everyone—except for Sonia Gandhi. Basu had no problems about Sonia Gandhi when she had her chance. When the time came to reciprocate, Sonia Gandhi actually went on television to sabotage his chances. He looked imperturbable while Sonia Gandhi wielded the knife. Sonia Gandhi hurt Jyoti Basu, true; but the person she really destroyed was herself. In the elections the BJP showed her precisely how popular she was.

Appreciate the scenario if Jyoti Basu had become Prime Minister of India then. Kargil had already started; it would have been discovered under his watch. The BJP's negligence would have crushed its reputation, Jyoti Basu would have won the war for India, and been in power till today. Instead, he heads towards retirement. Within a short while, one of the greatest Indians of our times, and perhaps the finest politician of the post-Nehru age, will voluntarily leave the office from which he could not be defeated.

This itself is unusual. Indian politicians retire only once, when God intervenes. Jyoti Basu does not wait for God, or being an atheist, for nature to take the decision out of his will. Power did not come to him for long decades of his political life. When he became a communist, and then remained one (unlike many of his leftist contemporaries) he knew that public life demanded service whether it offered power or not. He did not enter politics merely for power, so it is easy for him to relinquish. ♦ (The Asian Age)

## When global goes local

RANJIT DEVRAJ IN NEW DELHI

There was a time when popular American fast food global companies took pride in the strict uniformity of fare served at their outlets around the world. But when McDonald's added the 'McKebab Burger' and the vegetarian 'McAloo Tikki Burger' to its menu in India, it was a sure sign that Indian tastes were asserting themselves.

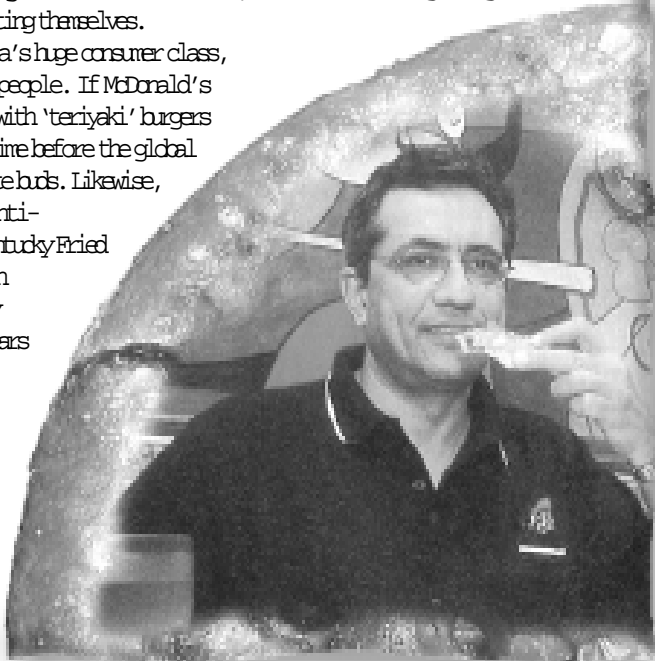
It also showed the growing clout of India's huge consumer class, estimated by some to be about 200 million people. If McDonald's could pander to Japanese and Israeli palates with 'teriyaki' burgers and kosher meat, it was only a question of time before the global food giant was forced to cater to Indian taste buds. Likewise, it was Indian consumers who scored where anti-globalisation activists could not against Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC). The unbending KFC, which shrugged off violent attacks on its outlets by radical anti-globalisation protestors some years ago when foreign fast food chains were first allowed to open in India, finally folded up because Indian patrons rejected its bland offerings suited to Western tastes. Pizza Hut and Domino's, that quickly stepped in to fill up the space vacated by KFC, are scoring because their pizzas use a variety of toppings customised to Indian palates.

New Delhi housewife Tara, who regularly orders home-delivered food—a fast-growing phenomenon in India's big cities—says pizzas are popular because they are closer to the staple north Indian, wheat flour-based 'roti' and 'naan'.

"Pizzas are here to stay and grow," says Pizza Hut chief Sandeep Kohli (above), quoting statistics that Indians now gobble up 50,000 pizzas a day, compared to a mere 10,000 just two years ago. The pizza market in India is estimated to be growing by a steady 40 percent annually. The pizza chain runs exclusively vegetarian outlets for strict Hindus. It even offers a 'Vain Pizza' for orthodox members of the Jain religious sect who cannot eat roots and bulbs growing below the ground, like onions, potatoes and garlic.

Coca Cola, which bought out the locally popular Thums Up because it stood in the way of the 'all-American drink', finally decided that it was more profitable to keep the Indian brand name going. Coca-Cola itself is bottled

with slight variations in flavour to take care of regional preferences on the vast sub-continent. "We realised that India is not a homogenous country but is actually made up of many smaller 'countries' and so we even have different marketing strategies for different regions," said Apurvi Seth, Marketing Manager for Coca-Cola in India.



Indians gobble up 50,000 pizzas a day, compared to 10,000 two years ago.

- Sandeep Kohli, Pizza Hut

esoteric world of post-colonial Britbay to Western readers with *Midnight's Children*. Both Roy and Rushdie, as well as other contemporary Indian writers in English, liberally sprinkle their works with the vernacular and extensive use of Indian idiom.

Indian usage has been creeping into the English language since the days of the colonial British Raj, which even produced *Hobson Jobson*, an extensive glossary of Indian words and terms for the then colonial rulers. But globalisation has revived the process. The millennium edition of *Webster's New College Dictionary* has a whole new lot of Indian words. ♦ (IPS)

It also did not take long for the global entertainment and information industry eyeing the huge Indian market, to realise the need to be sensitive to Indian and even regional tastes. For those who despaired at the assault on Indian culture and values by that most visible phenomenon of globalisation—satellite television—a new crop of channels in the vernacular languages must be reassuring. Channels like Discovery and National Geographic have now switched from simply dubbing programmes in the Hindi language to a completely Indian content.

The trend of finding the global in the local is working with literature as well, as evident in the international success of Indians writing in the English language. Arundhati Roy's close descriptions of small town snobbery and politics in India's southern Kerala State in *God of Small Things* earned her the prestigious British Booker Prize. Salman Rushdie brought the highly



# Tourism up in smoke

Tourism is good for the country. Strikes are bad for tourism. Ergo, strikes are bad for the country.



MANJUPACHA/PA

SUJATA TULADHAR

It's taken decades, but Nepal's tourism has finally outgrown its image of being an appendage to the India circuit. Kathmandu has emerged as a regional tourist hub for visitors going on to Bhutan, Tibet and even India. The average number of days a tourist stays in Nepal has increased dramatically. New international airlines have started services, others have increased their frequencies.

Just when Nepal had recovered from the hijack crisis, we are in the process of shooting ourselves in the foot once more with a two-day national shutdown and a paralysing hotel strike called by unions (see box). This time we can't blame the Indians. The strikes are symptoms of larger problems of this country's malgovernance and a failure of

leadership. Tourism contributes 20 percent to Nepal's total foreign exchange earnings, and has a multiplier effect employing 700,000 people. Tourism is a fragile industry, sensitive to even a hint of turmoil.

As if news of the Maoist insurgency beamed all over the world by the international media wasn't bad enough, Nepali tour operators now have to grapple with cancellations, lost bookings and irreparable damage to the country's reputation caused by the *bandh* and the hotel strike. "It's a Nepali problem, Nepalis have to solve it," says Stan Amington, of Malla Treks and author of the Lonely Planet guidebooks on Nepal. "The politics of *bandhs* and strikes is only an outward manifestation of the mess the country is in."

The unprecedented two-day *bandh* has been called by nine leftist

parties on 16-17 November to protest the recent fuel price hike. But even more worrisome is the threatened strike by hotel workers, it has the potential to wreck the tourism industry and the economy. Said one exasperated hotelier: "We are facing a total collapse, and the negotiations are going nowhere." It is all in the hands of the political leaders who control the Unions.

The strikes will happen smack in the middle of a major gathering of foreign dignitaries (including Britain's Prince Philip) and more than 700 big names in the global environmental conservation movement attending the annual meeting of the World Wildlife Fund. This is a meeting that has used Kathmandu as a venue to showcase Nepal's conservation efforts over the past four decades that have shown dramatic results in saving endangered animals and habitats. The WWF event will also put the spotlight on Bhaktapur with a gathering of religious heads and representatives on 15 November.

The mayor of Bhaktapur, Ramesh Swal, is looking forward to the event. Ironically, the Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party that Swal represents is part of the nine-party alliance behind the *bandh* call. But when we asked Swal whether such shutdowns would hurt tourism prospects, he gave us the party line: "It is up to the parties to think about and consider the effect. I am fully in support of their decision."

There are reports of frantic behind-the-scenes negotiations with the group of nine to either postpone the two-day strike or cut it down to one day. Whatever the decision, the damage has already been done. There has also been a flurry of cancellations for arrivals because of the threatened hotel strike. Negotiations are deadlocked, and appear to be politically motivated. Said a Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN) source: "In any negotiations, there should be

give and take, the Unions are just not prepared to listen."

A thoroughly disgusted Bishnu Basal, proprietor of Nibraj Travels, says: "These *bandhs* are going to ruin our business, ruin our people and ruin our country. A single-day *bandh* costs us up to four lakhs, and now like Bangladesh they are talking of two-day *bandhs*. This is crazy." Others, like Padam Ghaley of Mandala Treks have learnt to live with strikes. "Sometimes we take the risk. Tourists arriving have to be received anyway, so we get extra people to get our clients safely to the hotels in the *lagadis* (pushcarts) or rickshaws." Unless he has adventurous clients who don't mind beginning their Nepal trek right at the airport, there are a lot of frayed tempers and it can get quite embarrassing, says Padam.

More than the direct economic loss, it is the long-lasting negative impression of the nation on incoming tourists that is worrying. Tourists arrive at the airport, are hassled by touts and beggars, and find themselves herded to "Tourist Only" vans with armed guards and kept under hotel-arrest for the rest of their stay. These so-called tourist vans were given conspicuous green plates and were supposed to be immune from attacks during *bandhs*, but no one is willing to take the risk of having the windows smashed.

The resident manager of Everest Hotel, Raju Shah, says tourists visiting Nepal at this time of the year are usually "culture" tourists who don't trek, but want to go sightseeing at the durbar squares or take mountain flights. "Their main purpose of visiting Nepal is defeated because they can't leave the hotel," says Raju.

But if there is anyone in Kathmandu who just can't get enough *bandhs*, they are the rickshaw pullers who are allowed to pedal around. "This is the day I can earn more than I earn in two months," says Bhim Bahadur, who shuttles passengers in

## HOTEL STRIKE

The Nepal Independent Hotel Workers' Union is threatening to go on strike from 19 November onwards unless the Hotel Association Nepal (HAN) adds an extra ten percent service charge on all bills—later to be passed on to them. Having staged motorcycle rallies, workers are planning to wear black bands to work to put pressure on hotel-owners this week.

HAN says the service charge would bring the total tax to 22 percent: 10 percent VAT + 2 percent Tourism Service Fee + 10 percent the proposed service charge. They could pass this cost on to their clients, but say they cannot cope with escalating demands in future. HAN has turned to the government, which is presently acting as the mediator. "The government has taken the initiative to solve this problem, and is doing its best," says Shankar Koirala, Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation. But top government leaders are distracted by infighting within the ruling party, and with the stalled talks with the Maoists. HAN has written a strongly-worded letter to the prime minister, warning him that unless the government mediation goes into high gear, the country's economy could collapse. If the strike threat is not resolved, the result would be disastrous for the country's tourism industry during its peak season. Charter airlines have already stopped flights, and others may follow suit. The strike could in fact be much more devastating than the *bandhs*. Already, tour operators and trekking agents have sent out warnings to their clients that they cannot guarantee hotel rooms after 19 November; and they expect many tourists to cancel their trips.

The strike threat has obviously been timed for the peak season to maximise their bargaining power. Hotel workers disagree that the compulsory service charge will do irreparable damage to the tourism industry. "We are ready to sign a written document saying that in case this service charge shows any undesirable effect, we shall withdraw the demand," said Bishnu Lamsal, Secretary of the Hotel Workers' Union.

Samir Khanna, General Manager of the Hotel de l'Annapurna says there is already a tipping system, and this is the way hotel guests mark their appreciation of service. "If there is a service charge, tourists will have to tip hotel employees irrespective of what they think of the service," he said. It is the employees in the food and beverage department that get tipped. The extra service charge means that even those employees who never come in direct contact with guests will be receiving the service charge. .

HAN has asked the Union not to have a 19 November deadline since negotiations could be protracted. But Union officials said the deadline was non-negotiable. ♦

his rickshaw between the airport and Thamel on *bandh* days, earning about Rs 5,000 in about five to

and five trips. Many Kathmandu residents also find the traffic-less streets ideal to take walks, or go on bicycle tours

along the pollution-free streets to the valley's historic towns. After all, Kathmandu was never meant to be a car town, so this forced pedestrianisation is actually a boon or would have been if, like Bangladesh, Nepal didn't have a tourism industry. ♦

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK

# Star crossed

"Honest, officer, I only drove my car into the road sign because of the influence of Mercury and seven large asteroids."

A long time ago, my mother bought me a poster with my astrological sign at the top. The text read "Capricorn: You are a lazy, practically worthless individual who has to be forced to undertake any activity more strenuous than sleeping. You must avoid standing still for too long or a dog might mistake you for a tree and..." You get the drift. But before waves of sympathetic readers start commiserating with me about a cruel parent, let me explain.

My mother was giving me something

that emphasised her feelings about astrology. She didn't like it and she passed that dislike on to me. It drives me crazy when I'm told, "You're a typical Capricorn/Leo/Gemini, whatever". My response was to point to the poster. What astrologer, with his thoughts on the wad of cash he was about to be paid for his predictions, would tell me that I was a lazy sod, and that it was because of the stars? No one has ever been able to explain to me how celestial objects billions if not trillions of kilometres away

influence hairless mammals on an insignificant watery planet near the edge of the Milky Way?

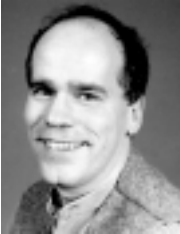
A friend with an astrological bent once suggested to me that gravity was somehow behind the phenomenon. I think not. If gravity shaped our personalities, our own Earth must surely be the biggest influence on us. The moon, the sun and the other planets of solar system would make us happy, sad and indifferent by turns. We'd each have multiple personalities that dropped and changed as Venus passed by, and the moon was in the seventh house (what does that mean? Are there "houses" in space?). When Jupiter and Mars are lined up, we'd all crave cheeseburgers or go to war with a nearby country. Think of the great excuses we'd have. "I'd love to come and see you but, Neptune is pulling me towards the pub." "Honest officer, I only drove my car into the road sign because of the influence of Mercury and seven large asteroids."

I know, I know. That's more or less what happens. I can hear the astrologers telling me that as I write. But it isn't true. Gravity doesn't influence personality, destiny or politics. Nor do the other forces that physicists believe shape the universe—all measurable and pondered over by men and women of immense intellect. There is a certain haunting mysticism to theoretical physics. The late great Carl Sagan used to talk about the fundamental harmony of the universe and its component parts—matter and energy. Sagan was demonised by the religious right in the United States for appearing to question the existence of God, but what he was actually saying was that the universe was perfect. It could not have come about in any other form, and that was something to marvel at.

Such lofty science can seem cold, distant and irrelevant to daily life. But theoretical physics is almost like religion. It tries to explain why things are the way they are. And it is necessarily democratic,

open to constant debate, revision and change. There is no dogma. Physicists admit that they are simply human beings with theories that could be wildly off base. Astrologers, by contrast, predict events and give personality profiles that depend on what they perceive to be position of stars and planets. Some are so far away that they may have blown up millions of years ago and the light from the explosion has yet to reach the Earth. The astrologer still gets paid, whether or not the star exists. It's all the same to him.

Yes, yes, it is just a (largely) harmless pastime that most people don't take particularly seriously. But don't expect me to take an interest in my fate as ordained by the stars. I'm just too lazy to care. And watching out for dogs. ♦



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**MUKUL HUMAGAIN**

For years, Nepali cricketers have watched international cricket at Sharjah and dreamt of playing there some day. Their dream has finally come true. The stage is set for the 3rd Asian Cricket Council trophy to take place in the capital of the United Arab Emirates 15-24 November. This particular ACC tourney is special because the two finalists will qualify for the next Asia Cup, involving Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. And the hope is Nepal will be one of them.

The ACC Trophy is also special for Nepali cricketers since it is the only international event in which cricketing babes like Nepal can take part. (Only those countries with full membership of the International Cricket Council/ICC are allowed to play one-day internationals/ODI. Nepal is still only an associate member of the ICC.) A good performance at this eight-nation tournament would take Nepali cricket to new heights. For after all, it was through the ACC tourney that Bangladesh got international recognition, and

# Sharjah, here comes Nepal



MIN BAIKACHARYA

ultimately achieved the much-coveted Test status.

The national cricket team has been participating in the ACC Trophy for the last five years, but the performance so far has been nothing to write home about. Even the semi-finals have eluded them, and it has always the batting that let them down. Coach Arun Aryal says that Nepali batsmen don't have the temperament. "Since we

don't play enough tournaments, our boys struggle when playing at the highest level," says the former national player.

The Nepali team now has the services of former Pakistani all-rounder Haroon Rashid, who as the country's chief cricket coach worked with the under-19 team for the World Cup earlier this year. Rashid is confident that his team is going to make it to the ACC final.

"There is not much difference among Nepal, UAE, Malaysia and Hong Kong. But UAE will have an edge over the others playing on their home ground," says he.

In the bowling department, the selectors have chosen three spinners and two pacemen. "Since the pitch at Sharjah is a flat one, we thought it would be better to have more spinners," says Rashid. The bowling is going to be spearheaded by 19-year-old left-arm fast bowler Mehboob Alam. The team also has seven specialist batsmen and two wicket-keepers, but there are no genuine all-rounders. Opener Kiran Agrawal will be expected to provide a good start since he has it in him to play the anchorman. Providing support will be Dipendra Choudhary and Paras Tichani, both of whom have been among the runs of late. ♦

## Cricket in Nepal

When cricket was introduced in Nepal in 1928 it was a contest between two Rana generals—Gen Brahma SJB Rana of Babar Mahal and Gen Nara SJB Rana of Javalakhel. Each patronised a team that played one another regularly. There was nothing spectacular about the games they played then except that, in 1934, Brahma became the first Nepali to score a century.

But perhaps the foremost father figure of Nepali cricket was Gen Madan SJB Rana. Madan's is an interesting story. After not being

allowed to play for the Babar Mahal cricket team, the cricket-crazy youngster went to Calcutta and trained under the then famous coach, Kartik Bose. After a couple of seasons, Madan found himself in the playing eleven of the Sporting Union club. Madan's offside strokeplay was exemplary—he was even compared to the legendary Lala Amarnath of India.

After his stint at Calcutta, Madan began actively promoting cricket in Kathmandu. He hired coaches from Calcutta, with the likes of S. Banerji and Tara Bhattacharya coming to

Kathmandu in the late 1930s to coach his team, and helping in laying the turf at his Sri Durbar estate at Bulchowk. By 1935, Madan had his own cricket team, the Sri Durbar Eleven.

After his death in 1950, his wife donated a shield to a cricket competition and thus was born the Madan Memorial Shield. By 1952, there were two tournaments in Kathmandu. One was the Bishnu Trophy that was played on a league basis, and the other was the knockout Madan Memorial Shield. The generals' teams had by then vanished with the end of the Rana regime, but two new teams had come up—the Cricket Association of Nepal Team and Kathmandu Khel Mandal. These two, along with a team from the Indian Embassy, battled it out for the honours in the early days.

Two more tournaments were started by 1960, and about the same time B division tournaments also began. But it was only after 1980 that cricket finally spread across the country with the establishment of the Jai Trophy. Designed after the Ranji Trophy in India, Jai Trophy is the only national level cricket tournament in Nepal and every year 12 zonal teams compete to become the national champion. But perhaps the most important factor in making the game popular in Nepal was the introduction of satellite television in the early 90s which brought world-class cricket directly into Nepali homes.

By far, the most important event for Nepali cricket was its being granted associate membership of International Cricket Council (ICC) in 1996. This recognition from ICC not only put Nepal on the cricketing map but also helped get much needed financial assistance from the ICC. From 1997 onward, Nepal has been receiving \$40,000 annually from ICC.



MIN BAIKACHARYA

Now, the ACC Development Committee has identified Nepal, along with Malaysia, UAE and Singapore, as the four 'fast track' countries. With the objective to upgrade two more nations to one-day status in 2005 and Test status in 2010, the fast track system has been designed to achieve this in countries that have the potential for rapid growth in terms of interest, participation and performance in cricket. The countries also get special financial assistance from the ACC.

So far, the Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN) has done remarkably well despite limited support from the National Sports Council and the very little sponsorship money available for the sport. But cricket in Nepal has all been about one-day limited-overs cricket. Three days and the regular first class matches have yet to be introduced, although plans are on to redesign domestic cricket to include two days to begin with.

There is only one pitch of international standard in the country and the infrastructure is minimal. But it is more than made up by the enthusiasm of Nepal's cricket administrators. Buoyed by Bangladesh's rather amazing success they believe Nepal too can achieve ODI status. As things look, there is reason for optimism, and if everything goes Nepal's way, Nepal and UAE could well be the next two teams from Asia to play one-dayers. ♦

### Kramnik, new world champion

Vladimir Kramnik of Russia ended Gary Kasparov's 15 year reign as world chess champion with an 8.5 to 6.5 victory in a 15 match Brain Games world championship staged in London. Kasparov, 37, has dominated the game like no other since winning his first world title in 1985. 25 year old Kramnik won the 2nd and 10th games while the other games were drawn. For the first time in his career, Kasparov looked out of form and showed little of his famous fighting spirit.

Earlier in 1995, Kasparov successfully defended his title against Viswanathan Anand after losing early games. At that time, Kramnik was Kasparov's second (advisor). Kramnik came into the limelight after he became world junior champion. In 1986, he was one of Kasparov's pupils in Moscow.

### Foreign coach for English soccer

When Sven-Goran Eriksson of Sweden arrives to take charge of the English soccer team, he will be making history. For the first time in their soccer history, England will have a foreign coach.

After the dramatic resignation of Kevin Keegan, the English Football Association decided to hire a foreign coach to regain the status of Europe's foremost soccer country. The last few years have been disastrous for England as they failed to make any impact on the world soccer scene.

But for Eriksson, it won't be an easy task. Some key players may retire when Eriksson joins next July. The most obvious problem the stylish Swede will face is the no-passport-no-passion card that will naively and unfairly be thrown at him if England struggle even for a game or two.



### Khetan group wins Super Sixes

The Khetan Group emerged as victors in the finals of the second Soaltee Super Six cricket tournament beating the Surya Tobacco team by 41 runs. Batting first, Khetan Group scored 63 without losing any wickets with openers Monir Shrestha and Sandeep Shrestha scoring 22 and 29 not out respectively.



MIN BAIKACHARYA

The asking rate of more than 21 runs an over proved too much for the STC batsmen as they only managed 22 runs losing five wickets. Inspired by Hong Kong's super sixes tourney of the mid-nineties, this tourney was started last year. Altogether 16 teams from different corporate houses took part this time.

### Both ANFAs to host Birthday Cup

The ongoing battle between the Geeta Rana and Ganesh Thapa led ANFA factions regarding the legitimacy of their respective organisations is far from over. Early this week, Ganesh Thapa in a press conference showed a letter from the FIFA and AFC, which recognized his organisation as the official one. The battle took a new turn this week, when both the ANFA factions announced their intention to hold the Birthday Cup Football Tournament.

The Ganesh Thapa led ANFA has announced that the tournament will kick off from Dec 16 while the other ANFA has plans to start from Nov 23. All the 'A' division teams from the country along with Mahendra Police Club, Tribhuvan Club and teams from Eastern and Western region, and from Bangladesh, Sikkim, Darjeeling and Bhutan will participate, says the press release of the Geeta Rana led ANFA. Meanwhile, ANFA led by Thapa has announced that they will give away the 'Rupak Best Player Award' on Dec 30.



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ABOUT TOWN

FILMS

❖ **Nepali**  
**Basanti** - Plaza I  
**Dhodhar** - Plaza II, Bishwo Jyoti (221837), Goon Ga (520668)  
**Choro** - Plaza II (from Monday)  
**Dhukdhuki** - Radha (470090),  
**Aago** - Goon *kha* (520668), Ranjana (221191), Padma (522354),  
❖ **Hindi**  
**Mohabattein** - Gopi (470090) from Sunday  
**Kaho Na Pyar Hai** - Krishna (470090)  
**Mission Kashmir** - Manakamana (225284), Gopi (470090), Krishna (470090) from Sunday, Tara (476092)  
**Kurukshetra** - Goon (Ka)  
**Har Dil Jo Pyar Karega** - Kumari (414932)  
**Besharmee Ratein** - Ashok  
❖ **Citizen Kane**. Orson Welles' classic. Presented by the newly-formed Kathmandu Film Archives, in association with the Godavari Alumni Association and Martin Chautari. Venue, GAA hall, Thamel, 5:30 pm, Friday 10 November. Fee not exceeding Rs 50.  
❖ **Queen Margot (La Reine Margot) 1993**. August 1572 – France is torn apart in bitter religious wars. Marguetire, known as Margot, catholic sister of King Charles IX, is forced to marry the Protestant Henri de Navarre in an effort to reconcile her native France. After the wedding, the infamous St. Bartholomew's Day massacre takes place. Thousands of Protestants are brutally murdered, but one of them, La Mole, is badly wounded and, in desperation, knocks on Margot's door. She takes him in, and falls in love... with the enemy. Directed by Patrice Chereau with Isabelle Adjani, Jean-Hugues Anglade and Daniel Auteuil. 5 November, Sunday. 2:00 pm, Alliance Francaise auditorium, Thapathali. French with English subtitles. Entry Free. **Next (12 September) - Cyrano de Bergerac.**



EXHIBITIONS

❖ **Tribal Village Rugs and Flatweaves**. This exhibition cum sale features woven items from Iran, Turkey, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, including rugs, kilims, cushion covers, bags and other small woollen artifacts.  
These pieces were collected to study, so each one has been researched and written up for the purchaser. The sale will be on from 10.00 am to 6.00 pm. Slide shows on the craft of weaving and dyeing at 11.00 am and 3.00 pm. A few representative items will be discussed in detail about their make. These shows will be at 12.00 noon and 4.00 pm. Entry free. Tea and coffee served all day. Organised by Sue Vokes. Venue: Dipankar and Dharmakar Hall, The Blue Star Hotel, Tripureshwor, Sunday 12 November.  
❖ **Architect and Farmer**. Exhibition of wood and stone carvings with demonstration and a model of a temple to give insight to visitors on the interior of a temple, accompanied by continued film projection in French, Nepali and English. Exhibition jointly presented by the Kavre Integrated Project, the Alliance Francaise and the French Embassy. Aims at presenting aspects of French cooperation in Nepal and work done by Nepali artists. 14-23 November, Alliance Francaise, Thapathali.



CLASSICAL MUSIC

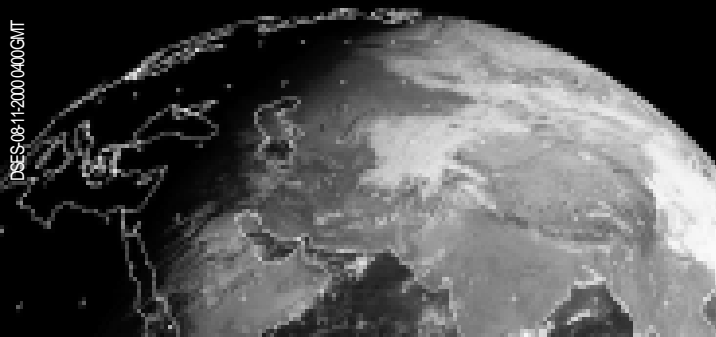
Musicians from Nepal and abroad perform on 11 November at Kirateswor Temple, North of Pashupatinath. 4-8 pm. Free entrance, but a nominal fee may apply for guest performances. Kirateswor Sangeet Ashram. 492139

FUN AND FROLICK

❖ **Fun Fair**. The Royal Nepal Army Officers Wives Committee Open Fair on the occasion of HM Queen Aishwarya's birthday. 7-12 November. Fun, food, and games including horserides, bingo and the like. 11:00 am to 8:00 pm. Tundikhel ground (Shahid Gate). Entry Rs 5.  
❖ **Dance and Ballads**  
Classical Nepali Dances--Buddhist and Hindu--every Tuesday at The Great Pagoda. Also 'Ballads and Dances of Old Tibet' by Tshering Gurmey and Tshering Paljor every Thursday, Naga Theatre. Hotel Vajra. Time: 7:00 pm. Rs 400 per individual. 271545  
❖ **Eating out**  
Barbecue. Lavish barbecue nights for the season with a Thai theme in Kathmandu. Venue: Shangri-La Hotel's prize-winning Shambala Garden. A relaxed and filling evening. Lazimpat, 7 minutes ride North from Thamel. 412999

For inclusion in the listing send information to [editors@nepalitimes.com](mailto:editors@nepalitimes.com)

NEPALI WEATHER

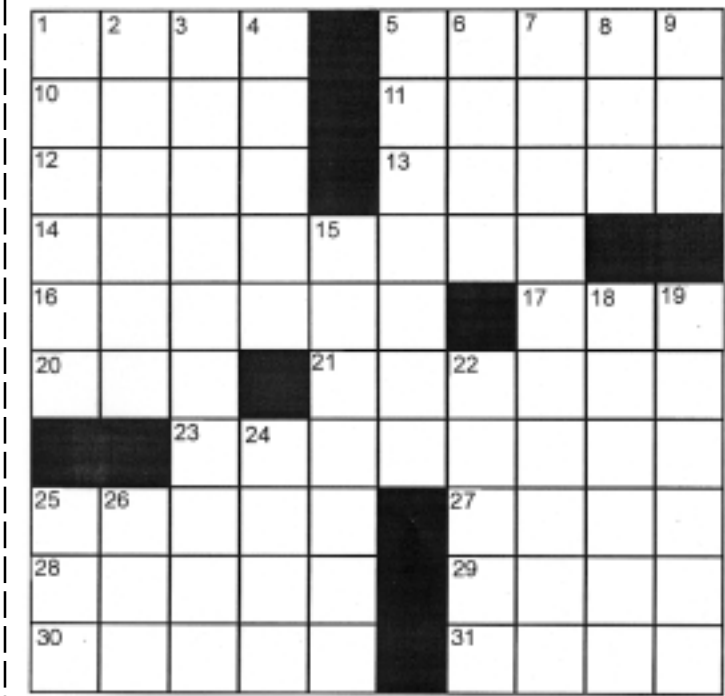


A westerly disturbance, the first of the post-monsoon season, is making an approach riding the jet stream. By Friday it should be over central Nepal, resulting in high-altitude cloud cover, chances of rain, and the first snows of the season down to 12,500 ft in western Nepal. The system will also bring temperatures down and set off thicker morning fog. The disturbance itself will quickly pass, and bright afternoon sunshine will be back by midweek next week. Small patches of local clouds lifted by daytime heating will continue to appear. Contrary to popular belief, much of the thick daytime haze seen over the mid-hills has nothing to do with inversion-driven valley smog, but with southwesterly winds carrying in dust-laden air from the Ganga plains.

KATHMANDU

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
				
22-09	23-09	24-08	25-07	24-07

QUICKWORD 6



Across

- Look, for the seer (4)
- Tata and Freddy Mercury were (5)
- Wields a lawn tool (4)
- Early Everest climber (5)
- So long, Norway (4)
- Mrs Fawty Towers (5)
- Little vine, sketch at book opening (8)
- Provoke to fury (6)
- Keep up the rear, perhaps (3)
- The original Miss Saigon (3)
- Passed unwritten (6)
- Less fat (8)
- Resting on this (5)
- Trimmed torso of bull (4)

- Relent, concerning Ann perhaps (5)
- Cart track scars on Trial runs (4)
- Risks cutting many a platinum (5)
- Cream of Latin Essence (4)

Down

- Push with the muck raking tool (6)
- Theo brings soluble dye with Greek angle (6)
- Snaky, aquatic plants on stream bed (3, 7)
- Swedish money drops Abruptly (5)
- Monica comes in through the back door (7)
- Approach the editor, you had it (4)
- Showing tendency to reorder (10)

by Cross Eyes

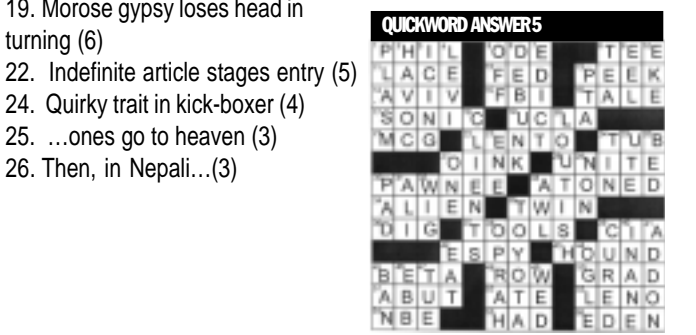
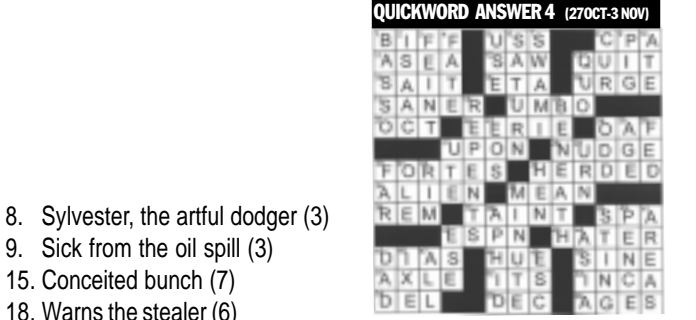


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Out of 12 entries, the lucky winners are **Silvie Walraven & Celia Alldridge**



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Ph.....email.....

ART REVIEW

by AJIT BARAL

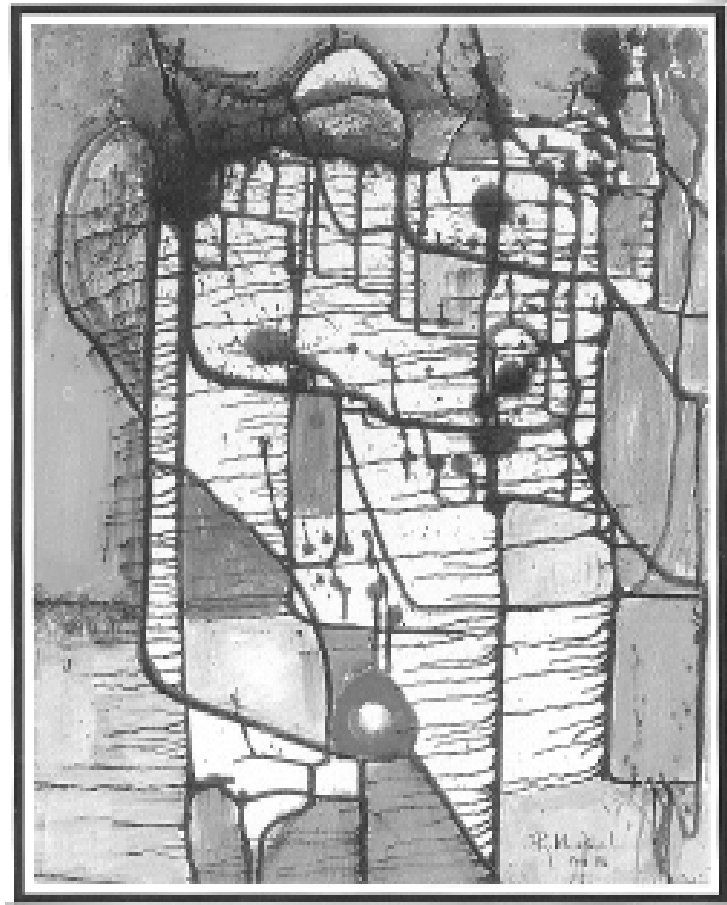
Abstract aberration

This exhibition highlights the aberration so common in Nepali abstract art. In the name of abstraction, the unimaginable is passed off as art.

Gimmicky in art is not a new thing. Even renowned artists like MF Hussain resort to publicity stunts. Why then can't Nepali artists resort to some subterfuge? Especially since the level of artistic and aesthetic appreciation among Nepalis is low, a little gimmick here or there is always desirable for this helps draw people to art.

Kiran Manandhar is the one who brought gimmickry into Nepali art, the most well-known one being his action painting-painting while others are writing and reciting poems. But I for one, have tended to look upon such attempts with suspicion for the simple reason that this often turns out to be nothing but a ruse to lift one's own art into the high brow category. It was therefore with a fair amount of caution, if not scepticism, that I went through the ongoing exhibition of Ramesh Kharal's paintings, Anupan. In the end, my suspicions seem confirmed.

I have attempted to be thoroughly disjunctive and detached in my assessment of the works of the artist—I make no overtures to the artist, or attempt to know from



the artist of the process that led to the creation. Often one can't judge or interpret—especially when it comes to abstract or non-figurative paintings. Yet I endeavour to critique Kharal's collection based on BP Koirala's stories that are on show at the J Art Gallery at Durbar Marg.

As the title of this exhibition itself suggests, all the paintings—most of them are miniature paintings—are abstract in form and,

I dare say, content. Some visible form emerges from the melange of predominantly primary colours rendered in swift and easy strokes. Or in the black that is splattered or allowed to flow over the paper. There is a certain similarity in the application of colours in almost all the paintings, and below the transparency of the colour no preliminary sketches are visible. It points to an artistic preference for action paintings, characterised by

the direct application of colour without formal conceptualisation, an over formalistic approach.

But action painting entails a spontaneous use of strokes or of any other colour application technique and generally precludes any thought or concept. So, if my reading isn't wrong: How could paintings done in the manner of action paintings be based on stories of BP Koirala? Besides, most of Kharal's paintings are miniatures—unlike the large spaces that action painters prefer to play on till the desired composition is attained.

Since the paintings are putatively based on BP Koirala's stories, the search is for characters, emotions, and themes of BP's stories in these paintings. Do these paintings provide a glimpse into BP's work? No. Forget the postscripts below the painting, even the thematic aspects of BP's stories are lost in the abstraction.

This exhibition highlights the aberration so common in Nepali abstract art. In the name of abstraction, the unimaginable is passed off as art. While the genre does allow for loose interpretation, the tendency of our so-called art critics is to take what artists say at face value, together with the post-modernist definition of art, has contributed to this aberration. These apart, any painting has to show some indulgence of the artist. Kharal's paintings lack even this indulgence—they appear to be just some strokes delivered in a few minutes. ♦

# Valley villages

In this story lies the moral: those who taste of the delights of the Kathmandu Valley are forever blissfully enslaved.

outside the Valley, its name; it seems that in the dawn of time three princes were out hunting near the spot when they happened upon a tigress and her cubs that were so starved they were near death. The youngest prince fed them his own flesh until he himself died, an act of such grace that the Buddha himself recognised the prince as a Bodhisattava.

One of my favourite hamlets, distinguished by a small Rana palace, is Nagarkot from where one can see Everest and almost forever. Apart from being the retreat of an endearing Rana Prime Minister, Nagarkot has a connotation of happy indolence one cannot help appreciating. It seems a ruler of

Kathmandu once imported a large force of mercenaries from the Punjab for defence against the encroaching Gurkhas. He settled them at Nagarkot where these staunch and valiant fighters soon succumbed to the local air, local wine and local beauty. So much so that when the Gurkhas invaded and were at the city gates, the imported stalwarts were merely useless. The years have reduced their share and identity. They now pass as Nepalis but to this day are known as Nagarkotis.

In this story lies the moral: those who taste of the delights of the Kathmandu Valley are forever blissfully enslaved. ♦

(Excepted with permission from My Kind of Kathmandu, HarperCollins, 1994)



To get a clear view of Ganeshi Himal these days, you have to go outside the city (above). Only then are the mountains as brilliant as Desmond Doig saw it in the 1970s in this magnificent water colour (left).

The countryside is still a few minutes outside Kathmandu but imperilled as the city races to expand. The Ring Road, only a few years old, has encouraged a rash of new buildings so that what is now a roller-coaster drive through fields and hamlets about the city shows signs of becoming a highway through busy suburbs.

A drive along the Chinese road past Bhaktapur to Dolalghat on the river Sunkosi, or to the Chinese frontier beyond, carries one through some of the most enchanting scenery I have ever seen. Before it leaves the Valley, it climbs and dips and snakes through fields so luminously emerald in summer, so vividly mustard yellow in spring that the colours almost hurt. Willows weep beside meandering streams across which old bridges arch, and bottlebrush bleed.

Huts and hamlets glow white and ochre and terracotta red, draped in season with scarlet chillies and green garlands of drying vegetables. Golden cornucopis are piled against trees or sprout like fungus below overhanging eaves. There are geraniums and marigolds in tins on window ledges. In the hedgerows are pink and white roses, bouquets of Lantana and wild flowers I cannot name. Above this profusion of loveliness the mountains rise ridge upon ridge to meet the snows and there are no two hours of the day when they look the same. Often they wear blossoms of clouds or are truncated by brewing storms. And though one may have seen them a thousand times, the great snow peaks when bright with day or flushed with dawn or sunset are breathtaking, humbling, unforgettable.

Hardly a village in the Valley is without a history of a hundred legends. They sat across trade routes, faced invaders, were commissioned by kings or inspired by gods. So Sanga owes its legendary origins to the God Bhimsen, who, when the Valley was a lake, used to moor his boat where the village is now. Bhimsen is the patron saint of traders and so Sanga, straddling the trade route to Tibet,

built him a shrine. A Malla king of Bhaktapur, while out hunting, met and loved a girl of Pyangon who bore him several children. To them in time he gave exclusive rights to manufacture the bamboo measuring pots called *hapa*. To this day Pyangon goes on making *hapa* which are used throughout the Valley.

For centuries Thakot has guarded the trade route to India where it enters the Valley. Its ancient name is Shonitapur, which commemorates a battle fought between the son of Krishna and the demon brother of a legendarily beautiful woman who lived here. Much was the blood spilled and Shonitapur means the place of blood. The Gurkha King Prithvi Narayan Shah realising the strategic importance of the village posted a military garrison there and changed its name to Thakot—a place of garrison. The quiet beauty of Lukhu attracted a Malla queen so powerfully that she abandoned her palace in Patan and settled in the village. There she sold a golden dish to raise the money necessary to expand the village. Her endowment is remembered in the name Lukhu which means dish of gold. Royal passion of another kind gave the village of Sangaon its popular name Thasi. The settlement was infamous for its destructive malaria: so much so that political prisoners of the Malla era were sent there to perish. When a king once visited Sangaon the inmates of this penal colony begged him to settle them elsewhere to which the king said “*Sisa thasi*” which translates more or less, “I don’t care if you die or not”. The word Thasi stuck but happily, the malaria disappeared.

I remember Sankhu on a rich northern trade route as a handsome village of five houses and four gates. It is greatly changed but the story of its origins remains. Above the village on a wooded hillside and approached by a long flight of stone stairs is a temple to Goddess Bajra Yogini. She once lived there and legend has her inspiring the Saint Manjusi to visit the holy Kathmandu lake and drain the water from the Valley. An early king of the Valley hubbly offered himself

to the goddess to sate her great hunger. She obligingly ate him and later one of his sons built Sankhu in her honour which makes one

wonder whether he particularly liked his forbear or not.

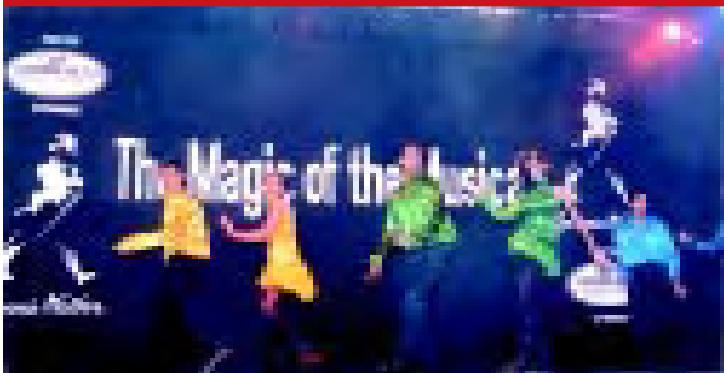
Self-sacrifice gave Narobuddha, a beautiful spot actually

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HAPPENINGS



**Keep walking:** Johnnie Walker and Soaltee Crown Plaza launched the Black Label Club on 3 November with a well-attended performance by leading Indian singers, Sharon Pradhan, Gay Laxer, Jose Alvares and their troupe which rendered Broadway musical hits.



**Save the world:** Sixth graders from Lincoln School in Kathmandu after a performance of "The Elegant Escalator". Gandhi was played by Shrish who said from the stage: "The world needs a leader like new who will give more than take."



**Stay Diner:** Shangri-la Hotel turned into a haunted house, complete with skeletons and skulls, for an invites-only Halloween night on 3 November.

OFF THE BEATEN TREK

by SALIL SUBEDI

# Sauntering from Sanga to Sankhu

There's a misconception that a trek has to be a long, hard journey into a rugged and remote Himalayan valley. Nothing could be farther from the truth. In fact, there are excellent trails for short treks right on the Valley rim. Here is one which is off the main trails: the short, sweet walk from Sanga to Sankhu on the Valley's eastern rim. The hike starts from the mediaeval Newari town of Sanga (30 km east of Kathmandu where the Chinese road leaves Kathmandu Valley and enters Bangea) and climbs north to Nagarkot before meandering down to Sankhu (14 km from Kathmandu) via Kartike Bhanjyang. Take a bus ride to Sanga from Kathmandu on one of the local buses bound to Bangea, or Dhulikhel. They depart every 15 minutes or so from the city bus terminal at Patna Park.

Kathmandu slumbers in the foggy depths of the valley below, while beyond and above is the entire range of the central and eastern Himalaya: Gauri Shankar, Sisha Pangma, Langtang, Ganesh Himal and the Manaslu family. In about an hour, you are at Sanga, now famous for the Dipendra Police School. There are *chityapasa* (sall) along the trail, but you may need to hightail it to try out the *local alu tarkari* or *churia* for the hiker's breakfast. Carry sufficient safe drinking water, and although you may be tempted to quench your thirst at the many springs along the trail we would

advise against it. You never know who has done what upstream. The trail from Sanga first leads through the cobblestone streets of the village. It carries a whiff of what the Newari towns of the Valley probably were like before the roads came. At the centre of the town is a little pond flanked by old Newari houses with

more or less north you're ok. After an hour or so, you will pass scattered Thakuri settlements, where the children come out to sell fruits, or rhododendron flowers when they are in season. By now, you are nearing 7,000 ft, the air is fresh, the views fantastic and the forests near the summit of Nagarkot alive with

reach there. If you want to avoid Nagarkot bazaar, walk along the ridge to Changu Narayan, the most ancient temple complex in Kathmandu. Or walk right through Nagarkot and the touts selling postcards, before plunging straight down to Kartike Bhanjyang. Sankhu is another two hours'



SALIL SUBEDI

gardens of red chilli peppers hanging out of the windows today. Beside the pond is a small statue of Lord Ganesha, to whom you can pay your respects as you strike off across the terraced fields of freshly harvested rice. Keep asking the locals for the Nagarkot *ko bato*. There are many trails, and not all roads here lead to Nagarkot. But if you generally follow the one that is parallel to the ridgeline and goes

birdlife. With the winter rains in early January, the snow will be a kled deep at this altitude. The summit of Nagarkot has an ugly steel view tower — someone's idea of a tourist attraction. The arrow showing Mt Everest at the top is always pointing in the wrong direction. Besides, Everest is a tiny speck from here and usually obscured by clouds or haze by the time you

downhill, and this is a beautiful part of the trail. By late afternoon the patchy fields are bathed in the golden sun, small rivulets reflect light that is momentarily blinding, the scenic landscape with solitary dogs barking out of nowhere. From Sankhu, you can take the bus to Kathmandu. If you want to be picked up there and dropped off at Sanga by a private vehicle, call Dhakal Baje at Kartipur Vehicle Service - 258129, 241477. ♦

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## Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

The cabal of nine left parties and another alliance of four left parties (that makes a total of 13 left parties in Nepal—more communist parties per head than any other country on earth) have called for a two-day ban on fossil fuels next week. All 13 parties deserve to be nominated collectively for the Right Livelihood Award, also known as the Alternative Nobel Prize. No other political party in the planetary system has shown the guts to take such a progressive step to curb the emission of greenhouse gases as has the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist-Titoist-Trotskyite-Liu Shaoqi-Chou Enlai-Deng Xiaoping-Kim Il Sung). By the way, what's it with our comrades that their role models are either hirsute unsmiling fellows from Central Europe, or follicular-challenged men from Manchuria?

Be that as it may, in the final analysis it is not who their mentors are, but what their actions amount to. And on this score our comrades have shown a commitment to the world environment that goes way beyond petty national interests. In the International Panel on Climate Change in Kyoto, the rich countries agreed to cut back greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels, but no country is going as far as Nepal is: banning fossil fuels altogether. Granted, this is still only a token two-day ban,

but it is a bold and courageous move and at the rate we are going the ban could be extended to weeks, and then months. In a few years' time, the idea is to shut this country down completely. Nothing will move, and we won't need to import anymore fuel from anywhere ever again.

The question now is, given our open border, how are we going to enforce this ban? Our 13 left parties need to think up creative new ways to sabotage the internal combustion engine. Here are some quick do-able things we can implement immediately

## Fossil fools

to enforce a fossil fuel ban:

- Turn sparkplugs into cigarette lighters
- Adulterate petrol and diesel with "thirst-pee" mineral water
- Stick coals into the exhaust pipes of all four-wheelers, including ox carts
- Turn petrol pumps into dairy outlets
- Distribute easy-to-assemble kits to all Nepalis so they can convert motorcycles into hair dryers
- Carnibalise Pajeros to make sofa sets and garbage pick-ups
- Turn micro-buses into solar-powered microwave ovens

Once we do that, the CPN (MLSTILCK) will be better placed to build a socialist paradise in Sringila. ♦



## Ambassador whiskey

Grindlays							
DAILY SHARE PRICE INDEX							
074	0.37	0.40	0.22	0.37	0.04	54.00	
065	0.31	0.56	0.33	0.18	0.02	44.46	
064	0.36	0.57	0.28	0.14	0.05	46.63	
025	0.28	0.40	0.30	0.42	0.21	11.82	
043	0.44	0.53	0.23	0.12	0.04	56.30	
075	0.37	0.62	0.24	0.20	0.03	80.30	
065	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.

### NEPALI SOCIETY

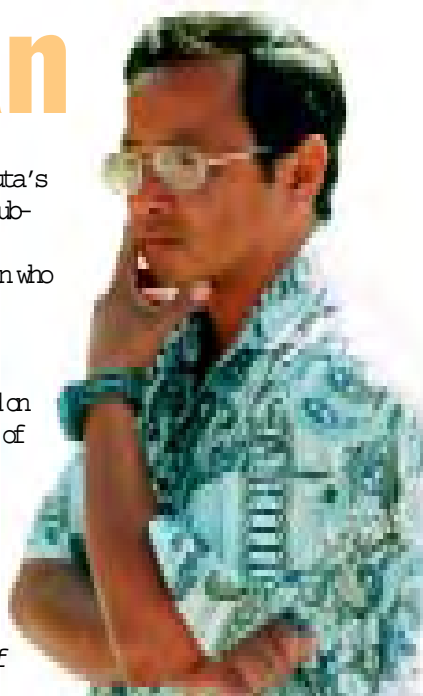
## Butterfly man

Few people know that Nepal is a butterfly paradise. It is a lepidopterist's dream-come-true. The kingdom is a Moth Super-power.

Mahendra Singh Limbu is too modest to say it himself, but he is one of the few Nepali authorities on Nepali butterflies. "I was interested in the outdoors since early childhood, but my schooling furthered this interest even more," says Limbu, who has been working diligently since high school graduation to be a butterfly expert. Mahendra

specimens for Toshiro Haruta's *Moths of Nepal*, and the unpublished *Butterflies of Nepal*.

Toshiro Haruta of Japan who helped found the Japan Heterocerists Society, was considered to be one of the leading experts in the world on lepidopterology, the science of butterflies and moths. Five volumes of *Moths of Nepal* were published between 1992-98, the only books on the nocturnal moths found in Nepal. The second part of their venture, *Butterflies of Nepal* never made it to the



Yellow Swallowtail (*Papilio machaon*)

MAHENDRA LIMBU

doesn't have a fancy foreign university degree, and he doesn't need it. He is a self-taught lepidopterist, he has travelled extensively across Nepal in the past ten years to collect

press—Haruta passed away in September 1996.

Mahendra's research stopped for a while, and Nepal's 670 species and subspecies of butterflies lost the attention they had

received from the duo. Butterfly collection started out as an economic venture just like collecting a Picasso or a Rembrandt, but Mahendra says that today these beautiful and fragile insects are indicators of the health of the environment. Mahendra comes originally from the hills of Taplejung district, but has been living in Godavari since the early 1970s—mainly because Nepal's treasure house of butterflies and birds on Bhulchoki is right in his backyard! Mahendra leads groups on bird and butterfly-watching expeditions as a nature guide. It is in these walks that Mahendra is in his element. He says: "The forest of Bhulchoki is a paradise not only for butterflies, but also for birds." And also, it seems, for those who admire them. ♦

m a y o s