

Hundreds of Nepalis are seeking political asylum in Europe or Australia. Nearly all are rejected, but many “disappear” to stay on as illegals.

say they are monitoring the traffic closely, and have been trying to plug the loopholes. For instance, a Nepali with a multiple entry visa would mail his passport home after getting to Britain, enabling a friend or relative to come in on the same passport, sometimes under a different name. Now, British visas have photo identity pasted on the visas with superglue.

Embassy officials say they are unaware if any of the recent applicants have actually

Alternatively, those with immigration in mind destroy their passports and claim political asylum at the immigration counters—in just the amount of English needed to communicate their intent. Others hang out at the airport, lounge waiting to be discovered by officials and taken to immigration, agents helping these people get there have instructed them to say nothing but: "No passport, no money, I Maoist from Nepal, face big problem, I free now."

A group of approximately 15 men standing in two rows. They are wearing white trousers and light blue jackets. The front row is standing on a paved surface, while the back row is slightly elevated. They appear to be a formal group, possibly a police or military unit.

Editorial p. 2
Zero hour

But there is also a more practical reason Deuba needs to expand his cabinet. Besides being prime minister, he manages nine ministries. Deuba may as well offload some key portfolios like Foreign Affairs, Defence, and Industry.

The number of Nepalis seeking political asylum in Australia last year was 95, and the number this year is down a bit. Many say they are Bhutanese, and most apply for political asylum after their student visas run out. This year there have been 11 instances of "unauthorised entry" of Nepalis in Australia, all by air. The applications are processed by the independent Migration

cabinet

cabinet expansion was imminent, and there was a reputation for jumbo cabinets—Ford 48 ministers. To accommodate the idea of unbundling larger ministries like health into smaller units. There are a lot of impatient people helping him oust Koirala.

That is Karki's story. The only thing wrong is that none of it is true. The 28-year-old is actually from east Nepal, he faked his residence in the insurgency-affected Gorkha district to buttress his appeal for political asylum in Britain. Karki (not his real name) is among hundreds of Nepali economic migrants in various European countries and Australia who have sold most of their possessions to pay

Jumbo cabinet

A close Deuba aide said a decision on cabinet expansion was imminent, and there could be as many as 39 ministers. Deuba has a reputation for jumbo cabinets—during his last tenure 1995-97 he had a record 48 ministers. To accommodate supporters, Deuba is even said to be thinking of unbundling larger ministries like Industry, Commerce and Supplies into smaller units. There are a lot of impatient Congressites Deuba needs to reward for helping him oust Koirala.

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ZERO HOUR

Even Sher Bahadur Deuba's fiercest critics have been forced to accept that he has been surprisingly witty during his second term. When he became prime minister on 24 July, Deuba gave himself one goal and one goal only: find a negotiated solution to the Maoist insurgency. He has tried to keep his word, moving single-mindedly in pursuit of this objective.

It is a tight-rope walk. The prime minister is under pressure from his own party and the police-military combine not to be too lenient on the Maoists, but he cannot hurry the underground leadership for fear that its radical wing may splinter off. That is why he has been looking the other way while the Maoists used the time for extortion, threats and setting up parallel "peoples' governments". He even didn't complain much when the Maoists held on to 69 captured policemen, and gave fiery speeches against the monarchy and constitution. But it is clear now that patience is wearing thin even within Deuba's cabinet. Last week, the Defence Ministry stepped in to fire warning verbal salvos against the Maoists.

As we said in this space last week, the Maoists are also feeling the heat from across the southern border. The Indian foreign minister's strong words against Nepali Maoists, the deployment of 10,000 Indian security forces on the other side of the border to check infiltration, and the sweep of Maoist safe houses in Silguri must be giving the comrades the feeling that the rug is being pulled away from under them.

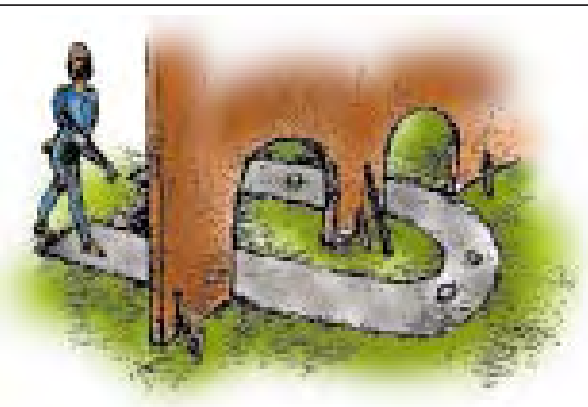
While this is going on, everything else is on hold. There is a sense of vague directionlessness in the ministries. Everyone is waiting for something to happen, but they don't know what. The political limbo has translated into bureaucratic paralysis. One hand of government doesn't know what the other is doing. The Defence Ministry statement against the Maoists comes as a shock to the Home Minister. Other ministers learn of the prime minister's land reform plan from the Radio Nepal bulletin the next morning. Banking sector reforms are stalled. The BPC privatisation is a fiasco. Royal Nepal Airlines is bankrupt. More than 100 parked buses are damaged by mobs in Dang. The National Planning Commission is completely out of the picture.

It is clear that Deuba just can't multitask, and he's not letting anyone else do it. The man is looking after nine ministries—having kept key portfolios like Foreign, Defence, Commerce and Land Reform to himself. The expected reshuffle may spread the load around, but it still will not resolve the potentially divisive issue of Deuba's lack of consultation with his party and cabinet. Party peers say the prime minister is playing with his cards unnecessarily close to his chest, and this has led to speculation about exactly who has his ear. Deuba's cabinet colleagues have publicly complained that there is little team spirit, and privately they have serious fears that the prime minister is isolating himself from advice and feedback.

All this could still be excused. You can't really blame Deuba for keeping things under wraps. After all, Nepali ministers are a garrulous lot and the cabinet is as porous as a sieve. Forget about trying to keep any secrets there, especially sensitive secrets about negotiating strategy. But what cannot be excused is that the drift may result in the government squandering the goodwill it has earned after the truce went into effect and the peace talks began.

Negotiations are not the be all and end all. Talks have to go hand-in-hand with measures to assure the public that the government machinery is still functioning relatively honestly and efficiently, basic services are still being provided, the administration still works. The government cannot think it has hoodwinked the revolutionary women by agreeing to alcohol regulation and doing nothing about it. You can hoodwink some of the people all the time, all the people some of the time, but you can't hoodwink all the people all the time. Sooner or later, they will find out there is nothing they can expect from parliamentary parties and will opt back for the extreme solution.

Even if it is to put pressure on the Maoists to talk seriously and resolve the crisis, Deuba must get his act together. Otherwise the talks will just be an opportunity to let things go from bad to worse. And we all know where that will take us.



STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL

Waiting for Dasain

After the killing and suffering, the prospect of peace is itself worth celebrating.

Most Nepali intellectuals aren't seekers of truth. And quite unlike intellectuals elsewhere, our *buddhijis* embrace fashionable fads of the day.

Derating the government and eulogising the free market are parts of the LPG (liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation) agenda of the Global Right. Nepali *buddhijis* found little to worship in the underdeveloped markets of Nepal in the 1990s. Nevertheless, they took to ridiculing the government. We saw a torrent of vitriol lashing Singha Darbar soon after the installation of the first popularly elected government after more than three decades.

To be sure, the democratic governments under Gijya Prasad Koirala, Manmohan Adhikari, and then the revolving-door coalitions of hung parliaments after the mid-term polls of 1994, offered little to cheer about. Much of the criticism—rampant corruption, naked nepotism, and blatant favouritism—were quite justified. But the scandals helped check a reputation of such undemocratic practices by later governments—dirty-free privileges for MPs have now become history. But nothing can justify the hurry with which our exalted *buddhijis* became Maoist apologists when the "People's War" began in February, 1996.

It was an unjust war to begin with, and it got increasingly destructive as it spread. Five years later, terrorism has played havoc with the economy, disrupted the strengthening of local government, and it has stretched fragile ethnic relations to breaking point. Had the intelligentsia contemplated these possibilities in advance (parallels from Cambodia and Sri Lanka were not difficult to draw) and cautioned society to the dangers of ultras using armed struggle, perhaps things would have been a lot different.

But safe in their perches in Kathmandu, *buddhijis* took sadistic

pleasure in lynching the government on the one hand and glorifying guerrilla on the other. They didn't even pause to consider their stand until the Maoists started to knock on their doors with extortion threats in August and September this year. But chance seems to have played its role in exposing the hypocrisy of the Nepali chattering. The fad now is fighting terrorism "in whatever form, in whichever place for whatever reason" along with the leaders of global capitalism. Maoist insurgents have suddenly become pariahs even for their ardent apologists in Nepali media and academia.

Speaking to a select audience at Bagbikhana last Friday, Prof Richard Rorty of Stanford University emphasised the role happiness plays in political development. Nepali history is replete with example of the ripple effect of events elsewhere in the world. The withdrawal of the British Empire from South Asia in the aftermath of World War II precipitated the fall of Rana Oligarchy in 1950, and the crumbling of the Berlin Wall coupled with undisciplined economic blockade imposed by India helped build democracy in 1990.

The recent surge in anti-terrorist rhetoric too followed a similar historical imperative—the cataclysmic horror of 11 September. Black Tuesday suddenly transformed many Nepali intellectuals into anti-Maoist warriors. To carry favour with the Americans and score brownie points over Pakistan, India is trying to whip up frenzy against terrorism in the South Asian region. India's foreign minister Jawant Singh found it strategically expedient to lump the LTTE and Maoists with the jihadists of Kashmir. Next trick, considering that the first two owe a lot to Indian acquiescence, if not outright collaboration. But, hey, the CIA propped up the Taliban too.

Then reports started coming in that our southern border is now being watched by 10,000 of India's elite security forces. It is not as easy as it used to be for the Maoists to cross the border and train training camps in the hospitable terrain of a friendly neighbouring country. We therefore started talking about the degeneration in the Maoist insurgency. Actually, after agreeing to the release of abducted policemen, I have sympathy for the cornered Maoist leadership.

Maoist terror tactics have been refined over the last five years and less vicious in last three months. They don't lack their opponents to pieces as they often did. Instead of mass murders, Maoists are carrying out mass meetings. This is not degeneration. Despite the glamourisation of the war by fashionable lefties and the fecklessness of successive governments in Singha Darbar, the Maoist war is burning itself out. Hemmed in by Indian security forces from three sides, not tolerated anymore by the Royal Nepal Army, Maoists now have nowhere to go but to the negotiating table. It's up to the government to bring them gently into the mainstream.

But more than accommodating Pashu Kamal Dahal and Dr. Babu Ran Bhattarai into ministerial berths through the back-door of an interim government, the challenge before Sher Bahadur Deuba is to rehabilitate Maoist guerrilla cadre. Absorbing them into the armed police force may be a likely solution—after all, former hangers may be good conservationists. But it will require ideological detoxification of youths raised on hate.

Addressing Maoist grievances about oppressions of ethnic, gender and untouchability, and working to eradicate social ills like drunkenness and gambling won't need a violent revolution. Administrative sincerity, commitment to reform and social justice can produce the same result. And it will be more sustainable than transitional transformations. The Maoists have been able to enforce out of fear. Political power may sometimes come from the barrel of a gun, but social transformation does not happen that way.

Perhaps there will be peace by Dasain, but the government must display its will in a manner so uncharacteristic of them, loose talk about an interim government or a new constitution can weaken democracy. Bhattarai abandoned his favourite acolyte Sher Bahadur Deuba in no uncertain terms: if it ain't broke, don't fix it. Before the task of constitutional amendment can be taken up, the priority for government will lie in first making it prevail. Establish the legal process of constitutional amendment before tinkering with it. After the killing and suffering, the prospect of peace is itself worth celebrating. □



OPINION

So hope for a great sea-change
On the far side of revenge.
Believe that a farther shore
Is reachable from here.
Believe in miracles
And cures and healing wells.

The Cure of Troy by Scamus Heneay

Though natural, the cry for revenge seems more connected to social and psychological processes of finding a way to release deep emotional anguish, a sense of powerlessness, and our collective loss, than it does as a plan of action seeking to redress the injustice, promote change and prevent it from ever happening again.

Always seek to understand the root of the anger. How do people reach this level of anger, hatred and frustration? Explanations that they are brainwashed by a perverted leader who holds some kind of magical power over them is an escapist simplification. Identity-based anger of this sort is constructed over time through a combination of historical events, a deep sense of threat to identity, and direct experiences of sustained exclusion. Our response now may reinforce and provide the soil, seeds, and nutrients for future cycles of revenge and violence.

Movements that use violence sustain themselves by a thorough decentralisation of the power structure, autonomy of action through units, and refusal to pursue the conflict on the terms of the strength and capacities of the enemy. One of the most intriguing metaphors is that this enemy of the United States will be found in their holes, smoked out, and when they run and are visible, destroyed. This may well work for groundpops, trench and maybe even guerrilla warfare, but it is not a useful metaphor for this situation. This is not a struggle to be conceived in geographic terms, in terms of physical spaces and places, that

if located can be destroyed. Quite frankly our biggest and most visible weapon systems are mostly useless.

The genius of people like Osama bin Laden is that they understand the power of a free and open system, and has used it to his benefit. The enemy is not located in a territory. It has entered our system. And you do not fight this kind of enemy by shooting at it. You respond by strengthening the capacity of the system to prevent the virus and strengthen its immunity. It is an ironic fact that our greatest threat is not in Afghanistan, but in our own backyard. We surely are not going to bomb Traveltree, Hertz Rental Car, or an airline training school in Florida.

Realities are constructed. Conflict is, among other things, the process of building and sustaining very different perceptions and interpretations of reality. This means we have multiple realities defined as such by those in conflict. In the aftermath of such horrific and unmerited violence that we have just experienced this may sound correct. This fundamental process is how we end up referring to people as fanatics, madmen, and irrational. In the process of name-calling

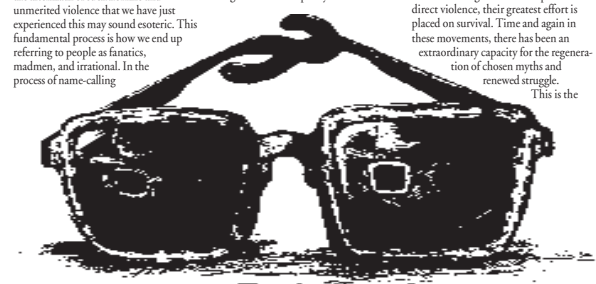
we lose the critical capacity to understand that from within the ways they construct their views, it is not mad lunacy or fanaticism. All things fall together and make sense—years of struggle that used or excluded them, encroaching Western values considered immoral by religious interpretation, or the construction of an enemy-image who is overwhelmingly powerful and uses that power in bombing campaigns and always appears to win.

The way to break such a process is to throw a frame of reference of who will win or who is stronger. In fact the inverse is true. Whoever loses, whether tactical battles or the "war" itself, finds intrinsic in the loss the seeds that give birth to the justification for renewed battle. The way to break such a cycle of justified violence is to step outside of it. This starts with understanding that TV sound bites about madmen and evil are not good sources of policy. The most

significant impact that we could make on their ability to sustain their view of us as evil is to change their perception of who we are by choosing to strategically respond in unexpected ways.

We must understand the capacity for recruitment—the greatest power that terror has is the ability to regenerate itself. What we most need to understand about the nature of this conflict and the change process toward a more peaceful world is how recruitment into these activities happens. In all my experiences in deep-rooted conflict what stands out most are the ways in which political leaders wishing to end the violence believed they could achieve it by overpowering and getting rid of the perpetrator of the violence. That may have been the lesson of multiple centuries that preceded us. But it is not the lesson from that past 30 years. The lesson is simple: When people feel a deep sense of threat, exclusion and generational experiences of direct violence, their greatest effort is placed on survival. Time and again in these movements, there has been an extraordinary capacity for the regeneration of chosen myths and renewed struggle.

This is the



LETTERS

HIGHER UP

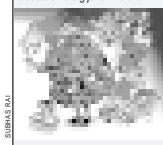
I am extremely surprised by your reference to Nepalis being down on the economic ladder in "Kamkaze" (#60). It is true that the higher you represent, the higher the rent you pay. But it is definitely not true that higher the office the more "important" it is.

How do you judge the importance of a company? Is Cantor Fitzgerald on the 100-105th floors of the WTC more important than Morgan Stanley that occupied the lower floors? The most influential companies in Manhattan are housed in buildings less than 30-40 stories high. And yes, there are quite a few Nepalis who work in these premier firms.

Preeti Upadhyaya,
New York

I QUI

The Maoist threats against schools has to stop once and for all, otherwise I quit. Is education a big joke? Do the



Maoists want to send this country back to the stone-age? Do they want a country which has achieved 100% literacy rate? They have been successful in damaging the economy and are not far from bringing about the total collapse of the education system. My message to the Maoists: lay off schools, leave the economy alone. We will support you only if we feel you deserve it.

Birendra "Khambu" Rai
by email

CAPITAL FRIGHT
Your story "Capital flight" (#57) is right on. Has this government realised that right to property is constitutionally safeguarded?

Can our economy sustain capital flight? Reforms should begin at home. Let all the politicians first declare their disproportionate unaccounted and accumulated wealth. How can they ask Nepalis to part with their property if they stole theirs?

BR Nath
Australia

PARSA
The Maoists have torn apart the interdependence between Nepali pantheists and madhesis. This could ignite a civilisation of communalism. There should be no boundary called hills and tarai, we are all Nepalis. If the misdeeds of



Paras are repeated, we can kiss the Nepal nation good bye. "Sanku" by email

HOW MUCH DO WE OWE?
I was shocked to read in Sudhendra Sharma's "How indebted are we?" (#62) that the Office of the Auditor General doesn't know how much Nepal owes to multilateral credit agencies. There is no doubt that there is widespread misuse and irregularities of foreign aid and grants, but not letting the Auditor General know means not telling the sovereign Nepali people and their representatives in Parliament about the burden of loans upon them. It is a crime against the people and the country.

Shiva K Bisangkhle
Patan

CK LAL
Thanks to CK Lal for remembering the sacrifice of the brave Nepal Police in "A year after Durai" (#62). There may be black sheep in the police, but they laid down their lives in Dunai while the military did nothing to save them.

Buddhi Bahadur RC
Kolkata

I agree with CK Lal (#62) that the root cause of terrorism is injustice

and alienation of the people. The madhesis were born because of the long oppression of poor rural people. And it is the same throughout the world: the jihad, the LTTE. Peace can only come when the laws are equal for everyone. Americans should learn to respect the rights of people all over the world. The only antidote to terrorism is equal justice.

Biggya
by email

I've never read anything so deeply stupid in the Nepal Times as CK Lal's "The eagle is wounded" (#61) a muddle of smug pontifications on the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington which pose as twisted as an argument as the terrorists own perversion of Islamic scripture. America is indeed a flawed enterprise, arrogant, self-absorbed, decadent. But it is other things as well, things not noted in Lal's cartoon of it.

Thomas Duddy
New York

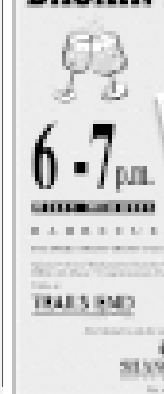
This is not the time for introspection and poetry. We need to heed America's call: show solidarity with her, and bring justice to the thousands who perished. The eagle may be temporarily

wounded but she will heal. And then you just watch her soar.
Bishwa V Basnet
Ashland, Mass., USA

READER FRIENDLY
I read Nepali Times regularly on

the Internet. I am writing to thank you for enhancing your site. It is much more reader-friendly now and easier to switch to other Himalmedia magazines.

Khem R Karki
by email



reality we face: Recruitment happens on a sustained basis. It will not stop with the use of military force, in fact, open warfare will create the soils in which it is fed and grows. Military action to destroy terror, particularly as it affects significant and already vulnerable civilian populations will be like giving a fully mature dandelion with a life club. We will participate in making sure the myth of why we are evil is sustained and we will assure every other generation of recruits.

We must recognise complexity, but always understand the power of simplicity. The effectiveness of the attacks on 11 September was in finding simple ways to use the system to undo it. We must pursue a sustainable peace process to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and do it now. Now we need the same energy to build an international coalition for peace in this conflict that we have displayed in building international coalitions for war.

The biggest blow we can serve terror to is to make it irrelevant. The worst thing we could do is to feed it unintentionally by making it and its leaders the center stage of what we do. Let's choose democracy and reconciliation over revenge and destruction. Let's do exactly what they do not expect, and show them it can work.

Let's do the unexpected. Let's create a new set of strategic alliances never before thought possible. The current situation poses an unprecedented opportunity for this to happen, more so than we have seen at any time before in our global community. If indeed this is a new war it will not be won with a traditional military plan. Just that will provide them new martyrs and new justifications. □

John Paul Lederach has served as mediator in conflicts in the Third World. He is professor of sociology and conflict studies at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, VA and a research fellow at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at Notre Dame.

In the land of gods, thieves

There's not much left to steal from Nepal's temples, but international art-theft cartels continue to try.

statue in its moorings, after which they attach iron bars all around it, replacing the iron lattice windows around the almost 300-year-old statue of Bhupatendra Malla and his queen.

"We're trying to make it as secure as we can. But there's no guarantee that people will not try again," says Chakri Dhan Nanda Rajopadhyaya, a temple priest.

brother found the statue in the nearby forest the day after it was stolen. "Probably it was too heavy to carry far," he conjectures.

Jürgen Schick, a connoisseur of Nepal's traditional art, says almost 90 percent of rare idols, as well as those of exceptionally high quality have left the country since the 1960s, and those that remain are less important or simply

Photographs of numerous Hindu and Buddhist images taken by Schick during his travels in the Valley in the early 80s feature in the 1989 book by Lain Singh Bhandal, art historian and former vice-chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy, *Stolen Images of Nepal* (Royal Nepal Academy).

Schick's own book, *The Gods are Leaving the Country: Art Theft*

the plunder of Nepal's 2,000-year-old cultural history. Shrestha doesn't see what she can do. "Given the large gap in the economic condition and intellectual status of the Nepali people, it's difficult to do much."

Shrestha and his colleagues do, however, hope the statue will return to its rightful, if not original place one day—under a town restoration project. Dhulikhel is planning to carry out, the mayor hopes to build a separate temple for the statue. "The gods would truly have returned, then," smiles the mayor.

In Changu Narayan, the priests lay part of the blame for the disappearance of statues on the guthis. Initially local watchmen took turns to guard the temple area and were paid for their service in kind, with grain. But the guthis stopped the practice and decided to pay them a sum in cash that can only be described as nominal. As a result, says Rajopadhyaya, the watchmen are simply not motivated to look out for their charges.

The dozen or so policemen who patrolled the area after the earlier thefts has now dwindled to two, after they were dispatched to other parts of the country to tackle the Maoist insurgency.

"It isn't only the temple complex, but the surrounding neighbourhood too that we have to patrol," says one of the policemen on duty.

Where the stolen items will land up is anybody's guess. According to INTERPOL, only five to ten percent of all stolen cultural property is ever recovered. Some of these idols, worshipped by genera-

from Nepal, was published in German the same year and carried pictures and accounts of some of the stone and bronze sculptures that disappeared from Nepal in the 70s and 80s. An English version was published in 1997.

The work of both, one an academic whose research spans 30 years and the other an avid art watcher who spent seven years painstakingly documenting the Valley's icons, is detailed proof of

Over the years, numerous idols have disappeared from inside and around the area. Other than improve the lighting in temple complexes and alert the police and Chief District Officer of the need

by DANIEL LAK

have a field day

to patrol areas where there are statues of deities. Shrestha doesn't see what she can do. "Given the large gap in the economic condition and intellectual status of the Nepali people, it's difficult to do much."

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tions of Nepalis, lie in art galleries, museums and private collections in Europe or the US. A 1990 Sotheby's catalogue on Himalayan And Southeast Asian Art showed a 15th century sculpture of Laxmi Narayan. The sculpture was lifted from Patlo tole of Patan in 1984. Another stone sculpture from Patan is in the Denver Museum in the US. And the Guimet Museum in Paris, one of the world's leading museums displaying South Asian Art has an 11th century idol of Maha Maheswor, stolen in 1984. Nepal's laws governing ancient art prohibit the departure of any item more than a hundred years old.

"It used to be just there," says a resident of Bhaktapur's Nasamara Tole, pointing to an empty, moss-covered niche. Just a couple of yards away from the spot is a fake statue of Laxmi Narayan, made to replace the original 800-year-old black granite Laxmi Narayan statue that was stolen in 1984. According to Bhandal's book, eight other sculptures are missing from the immediate vicinity. More than aesthetic works of art, the idols have a deeply religious significance. They were never just museum

pieces, but part of the everyday lives of thousands of Nepalis.

Art watchers estimate that over 1,000 art works have been smuggled out of the country, many in the 70s and 80s. The remaining idols in Patan, Bhaktapur and Kathmandu have been placed behind ugly iron bars or cemented to the ground to deter thieves. But this hasn't prevented a spate of art thefts in



recent months, including the loss of Buddha images from Swayambhu, Maha Vihar, and statues from Patan Durbar Square and Chobar. And these are only the ones that have been reported as stolen.

Because the trade in stolen art invariably takes place across borders, with statues and objects of art changing hands in many countries before reaching a final

buyer, international regulations can provide some degree of protection to artefacts, even if they are not well-protected at home. One major international legislation is the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the means of prohibiting and preventing the illicit import, export, and transfer of ownership of cultural property. Nepal ratified the convention in 1976, and there are currently 91 signatories to it. It will help if countries with important art markets like Japan, Germany, and the United Kingdom join as full-fledged state parties.

The 1995 UNODC Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects and other international legal instruments on illicit trade deals with the issues insufficiently covered by the UNESCO Convention. In late August, UNESCO organised a symposium on the illicit trade in cultural property, which recommended creating a website to be managed by the Department of Archaeology to raise international awareness about the missing cultural property of Nepal, and establishing of a tri-partite investigating commission, including representatives of the Department of Archaeology, the division of customs and the Nepal Police.

The symposium also adopted what it called the Kathmandu Declaration, urging the government to update laws against trafficking in heritage property. As part of its awareness raising campaign to protect cultural heritage, UNESCO has issued postcards of stolen cultural objects, some more than 1,500 years old. (See illustrations.)

Left to right: Gold-plated statue of Bhupatendra Malla being reinstated at Changu Narayan; this seated sixth century Buddha stolen from Patan in 1985 has not been recovered; this 12th century image of Shiva and Parvati stolen from Dhulikhel in 1982 was returned by the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin and is now in Patan Museum; a stone sculpture of Bhupatendra Malla

Not missing

As the third round of talks get underway, both the government and the Maoists appear to be giving a little. On 2 October, 17 policemen detained by the Maoists were released in Surkhet under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The policemen were later transferred by the ICRC to the regional headquarters of the Nepal Police in Nepalgunj. Last week, the Maoists released the most prominent hostage Dev Raj Joshi, former Nepal Congress MP from Bajura who was abducted in early July and feared dead. Now the pressure is on the government. The Maoists want their comrades, including leader Matika Yadav released, and information on where their 69 missing comrades are as a precondition for dialogue. The Home Ministry spokesman told the media that "the process of releasing detainees from the government side is on." However, it appears the government has no due about Maoist central party member Danda Patil Neupane, who disappeared in May 1999. Neupane is not on the government's list of Maoists detained or killed. Before the 17 policemen were freed, the government said the Maoists were holding 189 hostages, including 69 policemen.

ISDP extended

The government has extended the Integrated Security Development Programme to six more Maoist-affected districts. That takes the number of districts where the army will be partially deployed to deliver the government's hearts-and-minds program to 13. Early this year late King Birendra approved deploying troops to build roads and carry out development work in Gorkha, Rumla, Rolpa, Jajarkot, Salyan, Kalikot and Panchthar—the seven districts hit hardest by the Maoist insurgency. Fashioned after the US Army's Vietnam-era counter insurgency strategy, the ISDP has been extended to Dolakha, Ramechhap, Dolekha, Surkhet, Dang and Lamjung. Says Dr Jagdish Chandra Pokharel National Planning Commission member, "The army, police and development workers in these districts are assessing the area's needs according to which programs will be carried out." The Maoist say the on-going peace talks cannot produce results if the government does not scrap the ISDP and withdraw other policies aimed to muzzle the insurgency.

Nepal Oil Corruption

Vehicle owners better watch it. Those substituting cheaper kerosene for diesel to operate their vehicles may not get away with it for much longer. Subsidised kerosene costs a mere Rs 17 per litre, compared with diesel, which sells for Rs 26.50. Nepal Oil Corporation officials suspect the substitution may be accounting for about nine percent increase in



diesel sales for kerosene, and a corresponding 30 percent drop in diesel sales since last month. NOC says it has intensified its anti-adulteration checks. A night bus was recently caught in the act—tanking up with kerosene instead of diesel at a local gas station. Some refuelling stations in Kathmandu have been found doing the same. Transporters are aware that using kerosene could damage their engines—and pollute more than diesel does—but claim the money they save makes it worth the extra maintenance costs. The government pays Rs. 3 for every litre of kerosene NOC sells to the general public.

E-shradhas

E-commerce may be out but E-shradha is in. Shradha Online, started by Web Park Nepal, allows Nepalis in any corner of the world to make arrangements for the annual rituals performed to appease the spirits of departed kin without having to be in the country for the purpose, electronically of course. Interested individuals don't have to fly to the banks of the Bagmati, they can simply forward family details via Web Park Nepal's site and a Bahun priest at Pashupatinath will do the rest.

Web Park captures the religious ceremony on digital camera, posts the footage on the web, and gives the be-reaved a password to view it. All this for \$150.

RAMYATA LIMBU

It's late afternoon in the courtyard of the Changu Narayan temple. Dogs lie listlessly in the sun, and pigeons feed on grain as visitors wander around the premises taking in the stone sculptures and miniature carvings that date back to the 12th century.

A couple of curious Dutch tourists join a crowd of onlookers watching local workmen struggle to reinstate a statue on its pedestal in

front of the main Narayan temple. One night last month, the gold-plated statue of Bhupatendra Malla and two other images disappeared from the temple courtyard.

The statue of Bhupatendra Malla was found the next day by a cowherd, partially buried in a forest about a kilometre away, and was reinstated this week. The two other images have not been recovered.

Directed by the temple priests, the workmen weld and cement the

The first theft in twenty years—in the late 70s and early 80s four statues disappeared from the temple complex—has reinforced the need for caution. Nanda and other temple insiders are becoming used to the suspicious glances of visitors who wonder why they hover around the statues at all times.

"Ten or fifteen people live inside the temple complex and they have two policemen patrolling the vicinity," says a bystander. His

cannot be uprooted.

Schick first arrived in Kathmandu in 1973 as a tourist, and was struck by the wealth of culture concentrated in Kathmandu Valley.

His aim of putting together a comprehensive book detailing the Valley's heritage changed when on his travels he began to notice empty niches, holes in temple walls and mutilated statues—the work of professional, international art-theft groups.

from Nepal, was published in German the same year and carried pictures and accounts of some of the stone and bronze sculptures that disappeared from Nepal in the 70s and 80s. An English version was published in 1997.

The work of both, one an academic whose research spans 30 years and the other an avid art watcher who spent seven years painstakingly documenting the Valley's icons, is detailed proof of

Over the years, numerous idols have disappeared from inside and around the area. Other than improve the lighting in temple complexes and alert the police and Chief District Officer of the need

HERE AND THERE

Quetta, Pakistan: There are times when I wish I'd followed my father into the world of business, or joined the army, or become a beach bum in Australia. This is one of them. It's not that covering the biggest news story of the new century is making me tired, or doubtful. It's not even that I'm away from Nepal, my friends and my family. No, what is troubling is what I'm seeing on the ground zero of world journalism. Here in Pakistan, a 1,000-strong contingent of newspaper, radio and television reporters are living siege to a country, and sometimes, to a religious faith. Their weapons are money, technology and self-assured ignorance. Here in the wild west of Pakistan, a usually quiet backwater is flouting with impatient reporters and rapacious television crews. The only five-star hotels in town, a wonderfully designed place called the Serena, seethes with the press pack in full cry. It begins on the way from the

The truth and nothing but...

On the ground zero of world journalism, too many of us are not up to the task.

airport when a perfectly nice man from Miami, a photographer, tells me that he is afraid for his life, that he sees hatred and zealotry in the bearded faces all around him. "They hate us," he tells me. I wonder aloud where he gets his impressions and information and I suspect it may be his government, a word in his ear as he comes through Islamabad or Washington.

The Pakistani authorities have decreed that no foreign journalist can leave the Serena Hotel without an armed guard. It is a measure to ensure our safety, and to head off potential diplomatic embarrassment for Pakistan that would accompany attacks on the media. But many of my fellow journalists see it as proof that the streets are anti-Western no-go areas just waiting to get involved in Samuel Huntington's clash of civilisations. To be fair, there are also some here who know what they're about, who see the complexities in the streets of Quetta, the challenges before Pakistan. They do the good journalism, they write the truth, they truly enlighten their fortunate readers and viewers. They work for American, French and other media outlets and their work speaks for itself; no need to list their names here, but they are the ones who don't use phrases like "war against terror" and "global coalition" and "fundamentalist pariahs".

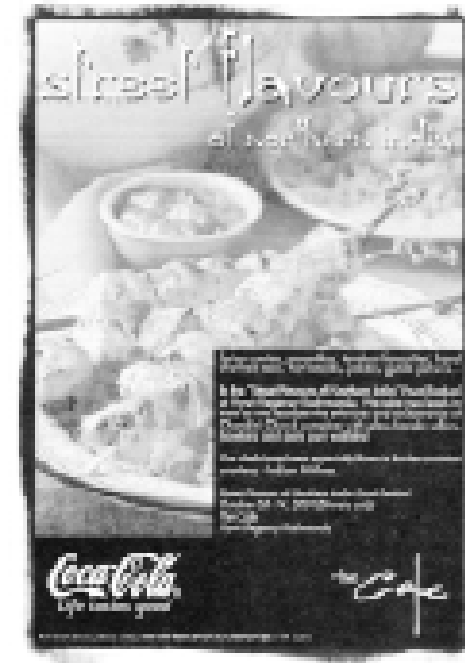
This is a time when decent journalism should not be at a premium. Governments making war on terrorists are not allies of the press at moments like these: they are interested parties with messages to get across. No matter how much one despises the events of 11 September, emotion must not get in the way of impartial journalism, driven by universal principles of getting as much true information as possible to the public. The media must not be uniform, identify with one side or the other, or allow itself to be a

conduit for any side's propaganda. The organisation where I cut my teeth as a reporter, BBC World Service Radio, is still a paragon of this attitude. Until recently, the use of the word "terrorist" was banned there on the wholly defensible principle that it was judgmental, subjective and not helpful in explaining events.

What's coming the next few days, weeks and months is not going to be pretty, nor will it be easy for anyone at the centre or the periphery of this conflict. The trouble won't end when the dust settles from the bombs, missiles or helicopters evacuating ground forces at the end of a mission. It will just be starting. An attack on the Taliban regime of Afghanistan looks fairly simple on paper: American military might and technology against zealous students and fanatical fighters with only a few small arms and rocket launchers. The temptation for the international media, which by and large is not living up to the challenges of the moment, will be to vilify the Taliban, by implication glorifying the other side.

Yes, the bearded zealots of Kandahar have grotesquely violated the human rights of Afghan women, and apparently they've given unquestioning shelter and support to a hateful man who enables the death of innocent people. But there are a multitude of people who are persecuted or persecuted by America that encourage Muslims. If we're to avoid the poisonous mindless implicit in accepting Huntington's civilizational clash, we need our media to guide us.

Too many of my colleagues, I fear, are not up to the task.



One way ticket to nowhere

Once caught, they are held in detention until a lawyer is found to represent those who make formal asylum appeals. During this time, they ring contacts in London who then provide the back-up support needed to follow the application through, or simply help them disappear. The escapes are meticulously planned, rehearsed and carried out under strict discipline, often from within Kathmandu and London. Even those who meet acquaintances to help don't have to worry much: the money goes to the government which pays £36 per week as survival allowance, £10 pounds in cash and £26 in food vouchers.

Nepali who have been through this channel say they pay between Rs 800,000-Rs 1.2 million to middlemen who arrange the visa. Some agents even accompany their "clients" to London and return with the fake travel documents, which are later recycled.

Asylum seekers are typically armed with documents to "prove" their claims. Some have Maoist photo IDs (in English), others have supposed threats spelled out on what appears to be Maoist party stationery. Still others have warrants on police letterheads that say the person in question is being sought for killing civilians. Many also have with them funny page stories from obscure district newspapers speaking of threats to their lives. (We received a copy of one such paper with a page 1 story detailing the threats to the life of an asylum seeker, but couldn't find a copy of the newspaper.)

The profile of the average asylum seeker in England is single, male, 20-something, first entered the UK on a student visa. Those travelling on fake documents are largely uneducated and not interested in studying. These are typically have friends or relatives or relatives of friends in England, or other contacts who help them settle down and find jobs. Most end up working for businesses run by Asians, mainly Indians, and are paid minimum, or less than minimum, wage. But no one complains because both sides benefit: the employer is

happy because he gets docile, exploitable workers and the employees because they have found a means of earning money, even if it is some money to spend home.

The Nepali passport is easy to tamper with. It still uses "cold" lamination, even after the scam that surfaced some years ago where even MPs were found to have sold their passports with visa stamps, which were reused after a photo change. Gently heating the document of the photo page of the passport reportedly allows the laminated cover to be peeled off, and a new photo stuck on.

A trained eye can detect such fakes—many Royal Nepal Airlines staff have actually been trained to look out for photo switches and fake visas. But the fact that holders of fake travel documents have managed to get past airline check-ins and immigration desks at the Tribhuvan International Airport suggests that money changes hands there too.

The British authorities have slapped 660,000 worth of fines on Royal Nepal Airlines for flying in Nepalis without valid documents into Gatwick airport, of which the airline has paid up £30,000. Other Gulf-based airlines flying from Kathmandu have enforced strict criteria to screen Nepalis routed through to Europe.

These days you don't even need a British visa—genuine or fake—to get to England. Recent Nepali arrivals have come hidden in container trucks from Belgium or Germany, which have begun to tighten immigration laws. An even newer way is to get a visa to a nation that would rate far below the world's best. Cuba, Nigeria or the former Soviet Republics—and get a transit ticket through Heathrow or Charles de Gaulle. Once in the transit lounge, the passengers "disappear" and are next seen applying for political asylum as happened to a group of over 30 Nepalis attending an international youth conference in Algeria in August.

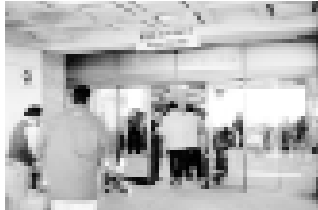
Britain has one of the most lenient asylum laws and has of late come under increasing pressure from other European countries to tighten up. This process has accelerated

since the 11 September bombings in New York, amid suspicions that terrorists may be using the same loopholes in immigration laws and asylum applications these days are from those claiming to be Maoists fleeing persecution. Some asylum seekers even claim they were involved in the Maoist attacks on Dhaulagiri and Annapurna in the Himalayas.

Plumstead, Blackheath and Woolwich in southeast London are areas where most recent Nepali migrants congregate. Many are students, but the numbers also include those there to seek asylum. Because immigration applications are confidential, it is difficult to say

how many have actually applied for refugee status. It is also difficult to estimate the number of Nepalis living in these localities: according to one Plumstead resident there could be as many as 500 there. Aldenham also has a sizeable Nepali population, while others could be scattered in different parts of Britain and are very mobile.

As long as there is unemployment and economic desperation in Nepal, there will be Nepali migrants trying to sneak into Europe or overstay in Australia. And, it seems, they will use whatever political cause is most likely to grant them asylum. (With additional reporting by Binod Bhatnagar in Kathmandu)



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| KATHMANDU | POKHARA | DAILY | 08:30 | 03:30 | 10.00 |
| KATHMANDU | CHITRAKOT (CHITWAN) | DAILY | 08:30 | 02:00 | 8.00 |
| KATHMANDU | SUNGARSHI (CHITWAN) | DAILY | 08:30 | 02:30 | 8.00 |
| FROM | TO | SERVICES | DEP. TIME | ARR. TIME | FARE US\$ |
| POKHARA | KATHMANDU | DAILY | 07:30 | 03:30 | 10.00 |
| POKHARA | KATHMANDU | DAILY | 08:30 | 03:30 | 10.00 |
| POKHARA | CHITRAKOT (CHITWAN) | DAILY | 08:30 | 02:30 | 8.00 |
| POKHARA | SUNGARSHI (CHITWAN) | DAILY | 08:30 | 03:30 | 8.00 |
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| CHITRAKOT (CHITWAN) | KATHMANDU | DAILY | 10:00 | 03:30 | 8.00 |
| SUNGARSHI (CHITWAN) | KATHMANDU | DAILY | 09:30 | 03:30 | 8.00 |
| SUNGARSHI (CHITWAN) | POKHARA | DAILY | 09:30 | 03:30 | 8.00 |

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Statutory skirmishes

The Supreme Court, the CIAA, the prime minister's office, and MPs are all battling for primacy. And it is getting a little spooky.

investigations, the CIAA and the prime minister's office were locked eyeball to eyeball over issues of sphere of duty and executive privilege. After launching a mucky smear campaign in the media and hurling wild allegations of dirty tricks, each side eventually had to find a face-saving formula in a sealed letter strongly reminding the other about its rights and responsibilities.

The struggle for institutional superiority flared up on another front last week. By declaring illegal the way in which the MP's constituency development fund is being administered, the apex court has dealt a further blow to our representatives. The verdict made no distinction between popularly elected members of the Lower House who are constrained to nurse

their constituencies, and indirectly elected/nominated MPs of the Upper House who are under no such compulsion but enjoy a longer and more secure tenure. But that's not the part that lowered the morale of our Lower House luminaries. The ruling came at a time when lawmakers of all persuasions in both chambers wanted the fund raised from Rs 1 million to Rs 10 million a year per member.

Convinced that revenge is a form of justice when a ruling is devoid of leniency, irate legislators launched an instant counter-offensive. Some have called for the impeachment of the justices who delivered the verdict. Moreover, with parliament debating whether to grant the CIAA the additional authority of investigating members of the bench, the tables have been

turned on the judiciary. You now have all three branches of the state locked in combat with one another, maintaining a careful mix of offensive and defensive postures. Members of the fourth estate, meanwhile, are gleefully giving front-page treatment to this deafening display of democracy in action. For many Nepalis, courtrooms, legislative chambers and cabinet meetings have become the only places to learn about the world.

Behind the dust kicked up by this sequence of statutory skirmishes, however, lies a constitutional knot that not even the wisest of our counsels seem to be able to untangle. When the palace sought its advice, the Supreme Court did not take very long to examine and declare the citizenship amendment bill dead on arrival.

However, the people weren't told what kind of funeral the bill should get because, as it turned out, the justices weren't asked. Nepal's democratic experience has established that you can't hope to be Jung Bahadur and Jefferson at the same time. However, grey areas are bound to continue complicating national life in the days ahead, especially when everybody of any consequence has developed an abiding passion for command and control. Prudent jurisprudence, therefore, would dictate against being bogged down in deliberations over jurisdiction. As for the citizenship amendment bill, cremate it, bury it or leave it to the vultures—just make sure it gets to rest in peace. It's getting a little spooky out here. □

FESTIVAL OF SOUTH ASIAN DOCUMENTARIES

FILM SOUTH ASIA '01

4-7 October, 2001 (Thursday to Sunday), Russian Cultural Centre, Kathmandu

| Friday, 5 October | HALL A | Saturday, 6 October | HALL A | Paper Flowers (25) | |
|--|----------|---|----------|---|----------|
| The Art of the Impossible: A Portrait of V. P. Singh (45) India, 2000, dir. Juliet Jayatilleke The man and his Mandal | 11:00 am | Michael Jackson Comes to Monikong (57) India, 2000, dir. J. Nupur Basu Satellite television invades South Asia | 11:00 am | Enricha at work Gulaya (55) India, 2000, dir. Kishore Kumar The woman and the goddess | 5:40 pm |
| Where RU on IQC (6) India, 2001, dir. Anandhi Ray Chaffing on the Internet | 12:05 pm | We Have the Same Kind of Blood (41) Nepal, 2001, dir. Best Madan The Dalt is bewildered | 12:15 pm | The Quest for Peace in Nagaland (51) India, 2001, dir. Prabhat Bhushan Why the Nagas problem and where to? | 10:00 am |
| Turf Wars (41) India, 2001, dir. Sanjay Ramani and Vasant Sabarwal It's park vs. people | | Abhinav's Face (27) India, 2000, dir. Ranjit Parajuli A passion for Mahabharata's Abhinav | 2:00 pm | Pakistan and India under the Nuclear Shadow (32) Pakistan/India, dir. Pervez Hoodbhoy Deadly footrace of confrontation-in-making | |
| Scribbles on Akka (60) India, 2000, dir. Madhulatha Dutta Life and times of an ancient ascetic | 2:00 pm | In Search of Meera's Buddha (29) India, 2000, dir. Murali Ali Murali's Buddha leads for the hills | | Aamala (22) Nepal, 2000, dir. Elizabeth Snider Mustang mother's preoccupation | 11:25 am |
| She Wants to Talk to You (28) 3:20 pm India, 2001, dir. Anika Ching Nepal's women in Krimla | 3:20 pm | Between the Devil and the Deep River (65) India, 1999, dir. Arvind Sinha Vive, the embankled river | 3:20 pm | All the World's My Stage (25) India/India, dir. Farhat Ishtiaq Famous literary jammes speak | |
| Naheed's Story (22) Pakistan, 2001, dir. Beena Sarwar She wants to dance but... | | Between the Lines (11) India, 2000, dir. Parvez Inam The stranded Bangladeshis of Delhi | 4:45 pm | The Play is On... (52) Kashmir, 2001, dir. Parvati Bhat Kumar Performing in a troubled land | 12:35 pm |
| Shere Punjab (11) India, 2001, dir. Anika Ching Nepal's women in Krimla | 4:40 pm | King for a Day (33) Bangladesh, 2001, dir. Alex Gabbay Clinton is coming... so what? | | The Killing Terraces (62) India, 2001, dir. C. S. Carantharodam School with a difference | 2:30 pm |
| Bengalis in the World of Fish (29) India, 2001, dir. Nilanjana Bhattacharya Culinary delight | | We Homes Chaps (70) India/Nepal, 2001, dir. Keating Taiten Old boys talk and talk about school | 5:50 pm | The Dream (35) India, 2001, dir. C. Carantharodam School with a difference | 3:45 pm |
| The Bee, The Bear and the Kurlaba (65) India, 2000, dir. Vinod Rana The tribal, the forest and the modern man | 5:30 pm | | | | |
| | HALL B | | HALL B | | |
| Let Me Also Come To School (56) India, 2001, dir. Samantini Dhruu The state of school education | 11:10 am | Amin An Afghan Refugee (110) Pakistan, 1985, dir. John Baily Reviving a past | 11:10 am | New Year's More Like a Man (35) Pakistan, 1999, dir. Farjad Nabi and Manzar Zaidi Pakistan women talk about their men | |
| Cricket Lives in Lahore (13) Pakistan, 2000, dir. Farjad Nabi Saided over | 12:20 pm | Sunrise Radio (17) India/UK, 2001, dir. Shari Herd London listens to South Asia | 12:20 pm | A Rough Cut on the Life and Times of Lachuman Meekar (39) Nepal, 2001, dir. Dinesh Desai A roughy old man | 5:15 pm |
| My Migrant Soul (35) Bangladesh, 2000, dir. Yasmine Kabir A Bangladesh worker in Malaysia dies | | King of Dreams (30) India, 2001, dir. Anur Karwar What's on man's mind? | | Our Boys (42) Bangladesh, 1999, dir. Manzare Hossain Boys talk about boys | 10:15 am |
| Freedom! (60) India, 2001, dir. Amar Kanwar Environment, Indian centre and periphery | 2:00 pm | Born At Home (60) India, 2000, dir. Samera Jain North Indian midlife | 2:00 pm | Colours Black (30) India, 2001, dir. Mantra Murthy Child abuse in Bombay | 11:10 am |
| Jari Mori: Of Cloth and Other Stories (74) India, 2001, dir. Santhia Sharma Mill workers in Bombay are laid off | 3:15 pm | A Sun Sets In (45) Pakistan, 2000, dir. Shahid Nadeem The husband's ultimate sacrifice | 3:20 pm | Their War (50) Bangladesh, 2001, dir. Aban Choudhury Women resist the 1971 | 11:50 am |
| | | Closed-door-and-strut-inside-the magazine (38) India, 2001, dir. Alit Mard Anonymous Assamese writer speaks up | 4:20 pm | Highway to Hell (38) India/Nepal, 2000, dir. Meera Devan Nepali girls are trafficked to India | 12:45 pm |
| Tickets (Rs 25 per screening) available at: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath (227711/216100); Suwal Music's Movies, Lazimpat (421522); Saraswati Book Centre, Pulchowk (521599); and Patan Chakra Kliba, Patan, Patan Duka (548142). | | | | | |
| Kathmandu's Silent Night - A festival within the festival Over 20 silent short films from all over South Asia Friday, 5th October at 6:45 p.m. at the Russian Cultural Centre, Kamal Pokhari, Entry is FREE | | | | | |

BIZ NEWS

10th plan preview

The National Planning Commission has begun drafting paper in the run-up to the 10th five-year Plan, which comes into effect from mid-July 2002. Until 1990, the National Planning Commission was a powerful coordinator of development activity and government policy, based on five-yearly planning cycles since the 1950s. Its role in development planning has been fuzzy since, but the five-year plans are still around.

According to the approach paper to the 10th plan, (available in a read-only, unprintable form at www.pnc.gov.np) the goal is to achieve an average annual growth rate of 6.5 percent, against the three-year average of 5.3 percent since 1997/98. This would require achieving 4.2 percent growth in agriculture—against the 3.17 percent average of the past four years—and 8 percent growth in the non-agriculture sector, up from the present average of about 6.3 percent. The overall goal of the plan is to expand employment opportunities to reduce the number of people in absolute poverty from the present 38 percent of the population to 32 percent at the end of the 10th plan. The numbers look good, but going by the NPC's past record they may also be difficult to achieve without a major overhaul of the planning, implementation and governance processes. Some other goals:

- a Reduce infant mortality from 75 per 1,000 to 50.7 and maternal mortality from 435 per 100,000 to 350
- b Expand primary education coverage from 70.5 to 85 percent
- c Raise adult literacy (15 years and above) from 53 to 70 percent
- d Raise female literacy from 26 to 50 percent
- e Keep population growth rate at 2.1 percent, against the present 2.4

The plan also envisages building motorable road links to 70 districts, up from the 58 that are currently connected—even though some of these roads are not black-topped—and take telephone connections to every 50 lines per 1,000 people from the present 11. The coverage of electricity is to be increased by seven percent to reach 22 percent of the population. The fixed capital investment needed to achieve the five-year goal is Rs 689.5 billion—almost seven times the money budgeted for spending in fiscal 2001/01.

Letters of intent

The Nepal Rastra Bank has issued letters of intent to three new banks: Siddhartha Bank, Laxmi Bank and the Export-Import Bank of Nepal. The three had applied to set up banking operations in 1995. Of the three the Export-Import Bank of Nepal has an authorised capital of Rs 2 billion (paid up one billion) and the Kathmandu-based Siddhartha Bank, Rs 1 billion (paid up Rs 500 million). The Laxmi Bank will be based in Birgunj and will have an authorised capital of Rs240 million. NRB rules stipulate that these ventures must begin banking operations within one year of receiving a letter of intent—that is by September 13, 2002. One year after they start operations, the banks are required to issue shares to the public.

Philips' new range

Philips has unveiled a new range of consumer electronics that incorporate the firm's patented vooX technology to produce high acoustic bass, a company release says. The products include VCD players, an MP3-compatible mini hi-fi, home entertainment stations, flat-screen TVs, projection TVs and even a five-in-one (VCD/MP3/CD/audio/picture). The products have "super error correction", which allows them to play scratched VCDs and CDs.

Bad governance

Add another Rs 8.11 billion to the loss from public institutions—that is the amount that remained unsettled in mid-July. The Auditor General's office says this takes cumulative overdue/unsettled accounts in government agencies to Rs 26.4 billion—almost seven times the money the government plans to spend on development programmes under the Ministry for Education this year. This amount does not include the unsettled accounts of quasi-government bodies and district development committees, which bring the total money government agencies owe each other to Rs 38.4 billion—an amount that is almost two-thirds the government's anticipated regular spending in fiscal 2001/02. The Auditor General's report says the rate of settlement of overdue accounts is at a paltry 28 percent.

Weekly Internet Poll #3

If the talks with the Maoists fail, should the Royal Nepal Army be mobilised?

From other insurgencies we know they can't be stopped by the barrel of a gun. The only solution is the dialogue. If the government thinks that power, be it police or the army, can overcome the problem this is a mistake. Any such move can push the nation into civil war. Which will be anarchy. Or India even to invade or destabilise Nepal.

Arjun Bandari

If the talks fail, army should be mobilised to defeat these terrorists. We should help our government to kill Maoists who have killed so many innocent people, even children. They threaten people and force to become Maoists. A democratic constitutional constitution is good for our country. But the Maoists is unimaginable.

Surendra Dahal

The Maoists are doing a lot of good for the country. We are always ready to help them. Nepal into a republic.

Netra

The origin of the Maoist problem is in the negligence of government to the 40 percent demand put forward by the United People's Front, led by Dr Baburam Bhattarai. The basic rights of the people should be fulfilled before we go to any kind of insurgency against them. For that, government should be clear that this is a political problem. This is why the army should not be deployed.

Shrawan Pokhrel

Yes, if the talks fail military force should be used. If the talks fail military force should be used. If the talks fail military force should be used.

SK Hjoju

All governments so far failed to solve the people's problems so instead of deploying the army, the government should allow the Maoists to run the country for a while and see how they do it.

Som Tharu

The people should unite and counter Maoists. The bullet will not bring peace, it will lead to more uncertainty and insecurity.

"Nationalist"

It is too late to resolve the Maoist problem through talks. The recent activities of the Maoist demonstrated that there is a major shift in their policies. If Mao was alive, he would have warned them not to misuse his name. Anybody who undermines the Royal Nepal Army is an anti-national element.

Vidhu Prakash Kayastha

It's very funny that the question if government should mobilise the army is coming out now. It should have been done long ago before the Maoists started their bloody campaign. The government has been sleeping. Innocent people are dying but who cares.

Prasjit Tamrakar

No, the army is not the solution. Punish corrupt politicians, and the problem will resolve itself.

Kosh Prasad Neupane

Using the army will mean more violence and flow of blood, but Nepalis won't get peace until they are deployed against the Maoists.

Lekhat Gurung

I don't think it is necessary to mobilise the army. They are there to fight an external enemy. The Nepal Police should do it. And the police should be made stronger.

Nischal

Certainly not Fighting Maoist with the army is not the solution. All so-called terrorists exist for a reason. And the reason is inequality and abuse of power by the ruling class and corrupt politicians. The only solution is through negotiation. As a matter of fact Royal Nepal Army should be dissolved, and its budget used to improve the education system.

Ramesh Shrestha

Yes, the only solution to this problem is army. If Royal Nepal Army is not willing to take action in this situation, what they are for? Why we should we feed them with our tax money? After all, they will be pretty useless against a foreign enemy. Our army knows the Maoists are buying time to reorganise.

Parneshwor Pokhrel

Mobilising the army will hasten the demise of the present so-called democracy. The army will have to choose between corrupt leaders and the people. Let us see who they chose.

"Nationalist"

This will be gravest the mistake the Nepalese will ever make when the Army is mobilised July to counter the insurgency. When the army is mobilised, this once peaceful country will become another Chechnya, Sri Lanka or Kashmir.

Hum Gurung

ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

Auditors' nightmare



The government needs to take its own audits seriously.

The Beed is appalled. Last week, the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) presented a report remaining to fiscal 1999/2000, which showed that Rs 71 billion of expenditure that year by different arms of government was not in accordance with procedure, or has not been accounted for properly. And advances worth Rs 26 billion were made—but have still not been settled.

The 1,542-page audit report is essentially a post-mortem of government activities involving cash. Generally, this Beed and other like-minded individuals have come to accept that audit processes on the government front are a mere formality—they look into financial transactions relating to the year before, and some time in the next year submit a report. The report—if indeed, it does come out in the second year after the fiscal year—may or may not catch the attention of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). If it does, then it might be questioned the following year. Answers can be returned to the committee whenever. In short, a bit of a joke.

And the OAG is so constrained by its own constitution that it has little influence in the world of government. Our good auditors tend to sink around in a self-pitying state

and the Beed does not blame them. But it is a shame—a powerful tool of the legislature that could, in theory, provide the executive with the checks and balances it surely needs, is a mere formality to ensure that the existing legislative-executive nexus is not exposed.

The government spends nearly Rs 100 billion each year—roughly 20 percent of the GDP—but there is only the most primitive of methods of auditing this expenditure.

The government expects audits of private and non-governmental organisations to be conducted in a timely manner, and corrective actions to arise from the conclusions of such audits almost immediately, but exudes a breezy uncaring attitude to putting its own house in order.

The system of rampant, open corruption we see can only be eradicated by good governance. Good governance demands an efficient system of accountability—and audit. But the not-so-hidden truth is we now OAG reports submitted to parliament need to be honoured in the right spirit—how else can we institutionally see the sense of declining government in this country does it disappear?

Accepting and honouring the findings of the OAG is the first step, but if we can climb that mountain, we

then need to turn our attention to strengthening the OAG's office. There is perhaps no real need to say this, but we live in a world of information technology and advanced communication systems. In times like these where we need to build the capacity of our watchdogs, not take away from it. The OAG requires more resources to understand the changing environment in which financial transactions are conducted, it needs technologies and it needs to understand how they work.

Government is not a monolithic entity. It answers to many constituencies and there is no unified chain of command. To control the functioning of an entity like this, there need to be checkpoints every so often—and the OAG is an important one. Its recommendations have to be observed as a mandatory procedure. Bilateral and multilateral agencies in Nepal should make it a point that their grants and loans are tied to follow-up of the audit report. If the government really does not care about proper procedures and systems, then why does it bother funding them? The OAG must be integrated into the system of governance—if only to ensure they don't keep adding 200 pages to their report every year in a desperate plea for attention. All the best, Bishnu Bahadur KC, Auditor General.

Readers can post their views at artbeed@yahoo.com



ALAN HODGSON/ALAN

It is not just the wild winds of the Kali Gandaki that make Jomsom's streets well-swept.

RUPA JOSHI IN JOMSOM

Following the contour of the river bed, and perilously close to the cliffs on either side, the aircraft flies over the towns of Lee, Tukache and Marpha. The plane's shadow

skims swiftly over apple orchards, terraces of pink buckwheat, across the sandy banks of the Kali Gandaki. A tight bank on final brings the swirling grey clouds into the left window and deep blue sky our right, then we are bouncing on Jomsom's recently-asphalted runway and roaring to a stop.

Outside, the clean and crisp mountain air seems vacuum-cleaned. Nigiri's fluted greenery of its tower over the dark green conifers is at base. In the morning, the sun shines from behind the mountain, giving it a hazy

hue. But as the day wears on the mountain plays hide-and-seek with the clouds and finally when the sun dips behind the tall hills to the west Nigiri reflects its ray light.

Life bustles around Jomsom airport in the mornings. Farmers from neighbouring villages sell apples and vegetables to the locals and to passengers flying out to Pokhara. Porters mill about hoping to find prospective clients. And then there are the locals, who just come to watch who comes and goes. Jomsom-based civil servants throng to the airport terminal anchoring up on Kathmandu newspapers that come on the morning flight. By mid-morning, the legendary Kali Gandaki wind tunnel starts to show what it can do. The planes stop flying, the sand starts rising and

people huddle inside houses and hotels. A signboard at the airport alerts everyone that Mustang is a no-fly zone bag district. In fact, alert police men and women in Pokhara airport will frown and remove any plastic bags still in your possession.

The streets in and around Jomsom are clean and litter free. The Mustangs bid to free their citizens of the plastic menace that is plaguing the rest of the country has been assisted by the various organisations working in the area. A water refilling system is in place to reduce litter caused by discarded plastic water bottles. Established by ACAF in association with the New Zealand firm, Safe Drinking Water Stations, the project run by community groups in Kathmandu

people huddle inside houses and hotels. A signboard at the airport alerts everyone that Mustang is a no-fly zone bag district. In fact, alert police men and women in Pokhara airport will frown and remove any plastic bags still in your possession.

Fun & Ride
20th October 2001

The teams of Kathmandu Mountain Bikes and Adventure Tented Camp would like to invite you to 20th October 2001 for a Fun & Ride Rally.

Come and join our adventure trip in the south – east of Kathmandu. The rally will start from the unique Duhar Square of Patan over the quiet and peaceful villages to Lubbhu. In this little ancient villages your legs will get some power supply with refreshing drinks and snacks. Loaded with new energy you continue your ride on the eight kilometers uphill to Pokhara Thumko. After two kilometers strong riding, we provide a bus for the bikes, for those people who would like to hike up to the Adventure Camp.

Arrived at an altitude of 2000 meters, you reach your well – deserved day aim at the Adventure Tented Camp, which lies atop the pristine hill of Pokhara Thumko.

The rustic Country Kitchen of the Adventure Camp built on the edge of the hill facing the valley and the mountain range will serve you with an excellent lunch and at the Lakhuri Bhanyang Bar you can try the local wines, cocktails and beer in – house bonhomie.

After refreshing your power, you can explore the area around the Adventure Camp. The location makes it to an ideal place to discover the local fauna and flora. Many different exotic species of plants are at home at this exceptional hilltop such as wild orchids and medicinal herbs.

You also can just relax and meditate and soak in the tranquility under the canopy of the northern Himalayas where the air is fresh and you are far away from the hustle bustle of Kathmandu.

After a very exciting day, the kitchen of the Adventure Camp will spoil you with excellent snacks.

We will say goodbye to this wonderful day with a glass of Sangria and a last look on the top of the snow peaks of the Himalayan Range.

The members of Kathmandu Mountain Bikes and Adventure Tented Camp would be very pleased to see you on this exceptional tour.

Final registration day: 12th October 2001

What to bring
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Tour Cost: US\$ 35 per person.
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There are parts of Nepal on the Himalayan rim that are more ancient and remote than Tibet. Names of places whose names, just by pronouncing them, evoke mysticism and allure. Dolpa, Humla, Mugu and Mustang lie to the north of the Himalaya and south of the plateau. These are worlds that the world forgot. A vast wilderness of craggy, and mountains that are neither the Himalaya nor the Tibetan Plateau—places that fell between the cracks of history.

Here in Mustang, you can feel that remoteness like nowhere else. The silence so deep, you hear the tinkles of yak bells from across the valley as caravans make their way up

a treeless, scree-filled slope. Nights are still dark, and the inky canvas of sky is perforated by tiny holes giving us only glimpses of what seems to be the blinding white light of a universe beyond. The milky way traverses the sky like a nocturnal river, and in the starlight, dry mountains and river beds gleam with a ghostly glow.

the wind picks up, blowing a brown and grey dust up the Kali Gandaki Valley, but in Geling it dies out and the cobalt sky remains like the colour of a dream.

Mustang is more remote than Tibet. Along the trails here, pre-Mahayana Bon Po shrines are more numerous than chortens and monasteries. Life still sways with animist rituals and aged ways. As elsewhere in northern Nepal, road access is changing things even in Mustang. But the roads here do not come from the south, but from the north, and with it come Chinese goods—beer, plastic buckets, rice and flour.

Inevitably, even Mustang will change as the roads bring the amenities and comforts of a new world which will replace the old. But for now the region is still uncontaminated, the isolation is still splendid, the world is still ancient.

And as the pace of modernisation gathers in Tibet, it will percolate down to Mustang as well.

Tourists and outsiders may lament this change, but for most of the people of the walled city of Lo Manthang this is a long-cherished dream. The challenge now is how to manage the changes that the road will bring, to ensure that rising living

standards don't also bring in social evils, and how to use tourism revenue to conserve heritage and to make development more viable, minimise the destruction of the good, old ways of doing things.

So far, Mustang has coped and this adaptability bodes well for the future. Compared to a visit I made here in 1979, the villages are cleaner, the valleys are greener, tourism has brought a higher standard of living. Mustangis are growing and eating

famous as its apples. But with the bad also comes the ugly: the boxlike structures springing up on the outskirts of Lo Manthang. The snooker clubs, the gift shops that seem to contain the family heirloom of local families for tourists to buy as trophies of their travels.

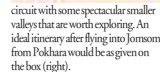
Local businessmen in Lo Manthang collect orders for food and consumer items from locals and go over to the Chinese side to bring back provisions in a truck once a week: cooking gas, cigarettes, and beer. Nepali

Jomsom to the north, every village along the way that has lost out to the trade wants to build a road north along the Kali Gandaki. Some, like the village of Charang, have started digging their section. At this rate, Jomsom will have a road to Tibet before it has a road to Baglung. Tractors and jeeps have already arrived in Jomsom, brought over in the belly of Russian helicopters and used for hotel transport and for construction.

The road is obviously going to follow the old trading route, transforming the landscape and the way of life of this ancient trail. Luckily, there are alternative routes up and down from Jomsom to Lo Manthang that can still be used for trekking when the highway is finished. The side roads are even more remote and forgotten than this remote and forgotten part of Nepal—places with names which would be great names for male deodorants, like Dakmar on a side-valley near Charang.

Joinsom is now a much-cleaner version of Thamel, even Muktinath has become cosmopolitan, boasting a Bob Marley Café Shop and Restaurant which has *Buffalo Soldier* blaring out on to the streets where Indian holy babas straggle along towards the temple with the eternal flame.

For now, before the road is completed, the Mustang trail follows a



North of Kagbeni, tourists (except Indians) need a special permit that can be obtained from the Home Ministry by paying a fee of \$700 for 7 days, and \$170 for every extra day. A bit steep, but believe me, for a trip of a lifetime, worth every cent. Most of this can be arranged by some of the more reputable trekking agencies in Kathmandu. Indians and Nepalis do not need any special permit, but it is better to carry a citizenship certificate or a passport just in case you get stopped. □

Day 1: Jomsom-Kagbeni

At Kagbeni you leave the other trekkers who are not allowed beyond unless they have special permits for Upper Mustang.

Day 2: Kagbeni

Watch the Kali Gandaki fan out into its wide plain and cross the oscillating bridge.

Day 3: Chele-Geling

This is definitely the beginning of The Other World.

Day 4: Geling-Charang

Excellent unspoilt ambience

Day 5: Charang-Lo Manthang

A side trip is the narrow red canyons of Drakmar. The soft conglomerate walls of the narrow valley are riddled with caves, some of them still inhabited.

Day 6: Lo Manthang-Chinese border
Explore the grand Chosar Valley with its intriguing caves on the valley walls.

Day 7: Lo Manthang-Dhi
Dhi is an idyllic village by a stream along the high road back to Muktinath.

Day 8: Dhi-Luri

Nice walk, that also includes a hair-raising traverse of a swollen river strewn with slippery boulders.

Day 9: Luri-Tange

Since you are not on the main trail, there is not much traffic, just the occasional yak and goat herders.

Day10: Tange-Chuksang

A long hard climb up to 4,100 m to an area that looks like something that got left behind from the Tibetan Plateau. Someone definitely needs to build a rest house up here for those who can't make this in one day.

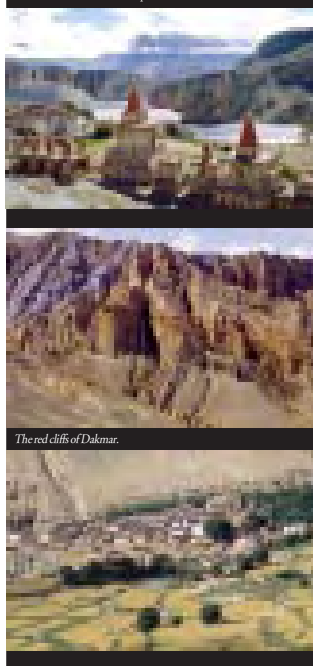
Day11: Chuksang-Jomsom

Whew. Finally made it back.

Green Moments



The cliffs of Chosang loom over prayer flags, while monks in red hats beat blue drums blow on trumpets.



The red cliffs of Dakman

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China and the new world

ANTOINETTE BEZLOVA

BEIJING—In just 11 September world leaders will be in a room to see a replay of Kosovo when it was isolated in its support of Slobodan Milosevic. Also, in theory, China and the US share concerns about terrorism. Beijing is worried about the spread of Islamic separatism in Xinjiang which borders Afghanistan. Both countries are also worried about Muslim fund-amenalism in Central and South Asia. But human rights activists warn that some countries might use the global coalition's efforts as a cover for domestic campaigns against political opponents. Beijing has already laid down conditions for support of any UN resolution, saying Washington should back China in its own struggle against "terrorism and separatism" in Xinjiang, Tibet and Taiwan.

How Beijing stands by its pledge to support the US-led military and diplomatic action might be a defining moment for China's relations and for China's future as a world and regional power. Stalled by a lifetime of media depictions of the US as the country's top enemy, many here believe Washington's foremost goal is to contain China's rise to greatness. The May 1999 US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and the spy plane conflict near Hainan Island after April which left one Chinese pilot dead, only strengthened those perceptions.

Now Beijing wants to assume the

role of a major global player. Some experts say China did not want to see a replay of Kosovo when it was isolated in its support of Slobodan Milosevic. Also, in theory, China and the US share concerns about terrorism. Beijing is worried about the spread of Islamic separatism in Xinjiang which borders Afghanistan. Both countries are also worried about Muslim fund-amenalism in Central and South Asia. But human rights activists warn that some countries might use the global coalition's efforts as a cover for domestic campaigns against political opponents. Beijing has already laid down conditions for support of any UN resolution, saying Washington should back China in its own struggle against "terrorism and separatism" in Xinjiang, Tibet and Taiwan.

War also carries the danger of instability along China's borders and the prospect of US military expansion in Central Asia. With the US military already in Japan and Korea, a lifetime of media depictions of the US as the country's top enemy, many here believe Washington's foremost goal is to contain China's rise to greatness. The May 1999 US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and the spy plane conflict near Hainan Island after April which left one Chinese pilot dead, only strengthened those perceptions.

Now Beijing wants to assume the

The eagle, the peacock, the Taliban

JASJIT SINGH

After half-a-century of cool relations, the United States and India are quietly establishing a strategic partnership. India's foreign and defence minister, Jaswant Singh has already offered India as a base for US military operations against terrorist targets. Three short years ago, few would have forecast this convergence of interests. India's nuclear tests had put it in this diplomatic 'dog-house'. Even though with the end of the Cold War such spots seemed distinctly archaic, until recently, the only similarities between the two were that they were the world's largest democracies. Shared stakes were few and an almost endless laundry list of grievances existed on both sides. Suddenly, these imitations have melted away.

During the Cold War, American efforts to contain the Soviet Union ran head-on into India's aspirations and its leadership of the non-aligned movement. India was seen as the Number One friend of America's Number One enemy, the Soviet Union, sourcing US-India relations. Liberalising India's economy in 1991 improved India's image in the US as it strengthened India's economy at home. But Pakistan has remained the complicating factor. From the 1950s, India's ties to Pakistan as a bulwark against Soviet expansion intruded, as America felt compelled to shade its policies toward India in the light of its relations with Pakistan. Looked in a downward spiral of instability and economic mismanagement for over a decade, Pakistan's standing with America decayed as its role as a Cold War ally receded. In recent years, Pakistan's ongoing support for the Taliban buttressed against it. The countries' misadventures in Kashmir, and the military coup that removed its elected government alienated American opinion even more. The other factor impeding closer US-India ties was nuclear non-proliferation. American policy targeted India with the mantra of "cap, reduce, and eliminate" nuclear capabilities in South Asia. But with the issue of Kashmir alive, India's leadership in the world was willing to unilaterally abandon its search for nuclear weapons.

Paradoxically, India's nuclear tests in May 1998 broke the logjam. A strategic dialogue was initiated between the US and India to discuss security interests. Consultation on such matters with a country that was never enemy nor ally was unique for India. For India, the tests broke new ground, as security issues on this scale were rarely discussed during the Cold War. Consultations during the Kargil War in Kashmir in 1999, when India combined military action with politico-diplomatic moves, inspired confidence in and between both governments. President Bush's readiness to come to India's leadership on the subject of terrorism and nuclear weapons, and India's positive (some say enthusiastic) response, was a sign that the new relationship was progressing.

But Indo-US relations have more than a strategic/military component. America is India's largest trading partner. India's IT industry has ballooned from \$150 million ten years ago to \$5.7 billion today. Two of the US Fortune 500 companies outsource their software requirements to India. The nearly 1.8 million expatriate Indians in America—mostly highly skilled professionals—are vital to the US economy, and are gaining a strong voice in US domestic politics.

Relaxing the sanctions imposed on India in the wake of its nuclear tests has begun, and the sanctions may be lifted soon. Drug trafficking, money laundering and economic crimes are areas where the two countries are already working together. Military co-operation is quietly under way. The Defence Policy Group established in 1995 will push cooperation forward. (I)

Jasjit Singh, a retired Air Commodore, is director of the India Institute for Strategic Studies.



Japan's burden of history

EDITORIAL IN THE NATION (BANGKOK)

When Japan dipped in \$13 billion to help the US-led forces in the Gulf War it was criticised for putting its dollars where it was not aimed to put its soldiers. It was the biggest financial contributor to the operation, but on the geo-political front Tokyo wasn't going to get any respect.

In the aftermath of the attacks in the US, Tokyo has been stressing that it will supply "visible support"—military officials and manned equipment close to the action. The problem is Japan's pacifist constitution restricts war as a means to settle international disputes and governments have interpreted that to mean Japan is banned from going to the aid of allies when they are attacked. Prime Minister Koizumi has promised swift enactment of a new law allowing Japan to provide logistical support for US military action, including the supply and transport of unspecified items and medical services. Aside from Tokyo's long-standing desire to bring its diplomatic clout in line with its economic power, the country has been a target of terrorism—including a chemical gas attack on one of its busiest railway stations—and is dependent on imported oil.

But all that doesn't make Japan's neighbours, particularly China and the Koreans, easier about moves to unchain Japan's military, which despite its unthreatening name, Self Defence Force, is one of the largest and most technically advanced in the world. The plan has also caused unease at home, where memories of militarism and defeat run deep. Koizumi will likely soon visit China, the site of some of the Japanese Imperial Army's worst atrocities in WW II. In addition to discussing plans to support the anti-terror coalition, Koizumi will try to make up for his visit to a controversial Tokyo war shrine last month.

China, like most of the region, has given its very assent to Japan's plans. Beijing and other Asian capitals have reasons for wanting to keep a lid on the challenges to the political status quo. There is also reason to believe that Japan, which is much more pro-Arab than America, may be a moderating influence. Koizumi reportedly hopes to seek understanding from the Chinese side, and to reiterate that he has no intention of justifying his nation's past conduct. Perhaps he should go further and use his first possible meeting with President Jiang Zemin to make a bigger gesture to the role of Tokyo's contention for the deeds of the past and intention to set things straight. (I)

The day after

MUSHAHID HUSSAIN

ISLAMABAD—At the core of a possible cleavage between Islamabad and Washington is the "day after", the post-bin Laden phase. The key areas of difference are, the role of political dispensation would or could replace the Taliban regime would be to unravel. Pakistan Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar visited Pakistan's reservations when he warned recently: "We must not make the blunder of treating a government on Afghanistan. Any such decision from foreign powers to give assistance to one side or the other in Afghanistan is a recipe for great disaster for the Afghan people." Earlier, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice had told TV news anchors America would be "better off" without the Taliban. President Bush publicly sought "the cooperation of Afghan citizens who may be tired of having the Taliban in place." He added a caveat, though: "We're not in nation building, we're focused on justice."

Pakistan has three concerns. First, the anti-terrorism campaign be limited to nabbing Osama bin Laden and his cohorts, not removing a regime perceived as "friendly" to Afghanistan. Second, the Northern Alliance, the Taliban's principal opponents who occupy 10 percent of northern Afghanistan near Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, should not be enlisted, because then the campaign would be a "Get Taliban" operation as well. Third, enlarging the American anti-terrorism agenda could generate instability and uncertainty in Afghanistan, induce a refugee

influx into Pakistan, and earn the Taliban's ire, that could be destabilising for Pakistan, given the Afghan regime's nexus with seminaries and politically-active religious groups in Pakistan.

But others in the region do not share this perspective. Turkey and Russia have announced support for the Northern Alliance that is unlikely to be confined to words. Iran, saying, "we are neither the Americans nor the Russians," would not back any move to oust the Taliban. Nor would China, whose intelligence and anti-terrorism experts briefed their counterparts in Washington on 25 September about Afghanistan, the first such intelligence cooperation since the first Afghan war in the 1980s. And Pakistan President Gen Pervez Musharraf, in his speech to the nation on 19 September, accused India of organising the recent riot in the Tajik capital Dushanbe. There were apparently discussed in the presence of Iran, Russia and Uzbekistan to displace the Taliban and promote the Northern Alliance. The Taliban regime has been further isolated after the UAE and Saudi Arabia broke all ties with it. Finally, direct, intelligence-cum-political manoeuvres seem already underway to weaken the Taliban regime from within—including defections from their key commanders. The Taliban themselves deployed this tactic in 1996, when they used a "civil defence" unit of former commanders and officers, which facilitated the relatively peaceful conquest of Afghanistan five years ago when they captured Kabul in September 1996. US contacts with former Afghan King Zahir Shah, in exile in Rome since 1973 when he was deposed in a coup in Kabul, are part of the process likely to unfold in coming weeks despite Pakistan's reservations. (I) (PS)

What Central Asia wants

ABID ASLAM

WASHINGTON—Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have emerged as possible frontline US allies against Afghanistan. The Bush administration has not clarified the kind of presence it intends to establish in the Central Asian countries, what level of support it expects from their governments, and what price it is willing to pay in return for their allegiance. Many details may come to light until after the initial military campaign, but observers are still worried. Tajikistan is embroiled in clan disputes with religious overtones that have persisted even after a peace process incorporating self-described Islamists in the government. The cash-strapped government had to commit resources to containing incursions by Afghanistan-based rebels fighting Uzbekistan's government. The focus here has stalled political relations and economic activity. Some 10,000 Russian troops under Moscow's command are based in Tajikistan and patrol its Afghan border with the mandate to keep rebels and refugees out. Tajikistan also borders China.

Moscow and Beijing, themselves fighting Muslim separatists in Chechnya and Xinjiang respectively, have said they will contribute in some way to the fight against the Taliban but neither welcomes the prospect of Washington gaining a foothold in Central Asia. Turkmenistan has offered vague assurances of support to the US. It commands uninterrupted territory and air space from the Caspian Sea to the Afghan border. At a minimum, say analysts, Washington will want oversight rights. If a ground war is launched, Turkmenistan could be a valuable staging area. Soviet forces entered Afghanistan from there in 1979. Uzbekistan says it is willing to discuss any form of cooperation with Washington. It has a usable air base near the Afghan border and could provide a valuable base for ground infiltration because the territory immediately across its frontier is controlled by the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance.

Policy, military, and intelligence officials say despite their ties to Moscow and Beijing, the countries could be won over to Washington's side with military and intelligence assistance, bilateral and multilateral loans and aid, and the promise of state visits and other symbolic gestures. But Human Rights Watch has in an open letter to Secretary of State Colin Powell warned that "some governments may cynically take advantage of this cause to justify their own internal crackdowns on perceived political opponents, 'separatists' or religious activists, in the expectation that the United States will now be silent." The risk of such opportunism, the group says, could be reduced if the US were to insist that the governments in question have in recent years imprisoned and tortured thousands of non-violent Muslims for worshipping outside state controls. Washington has sent military personnel there to prepare a staging area for operations in Afghanistan. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, accused of exploding car bombs and attacking civilians, was added to the official US list of terrorist organisations in 1999. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan represent even spiritual religious opposition and organisation has threats to ruling elites, according to the International Crisis Group (ICG), a think-tank for conflict resolution.

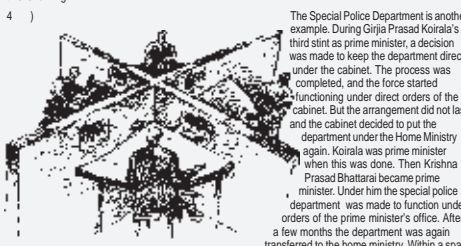
Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are also in deep economic trouble, and unrest is being fuelled by the growing gap between elites who benefit from privatisation and other market-friendly reforms and disenfranchised peasants. A recent ICG report says a "breaking point" is near. "If it is reached, spontaneous uprisings or organised underground political activity, increasing military, and a readiness to seek the overthrow of current regimes can all be anticipated." They fear economic aid, conditional or no-strings, could merely stoke the fires of revolt by fuelling disparity and corruption. (I) (PS)

Government flip-flops

Editorial in Sapakshi Bimsara, 28 September

We agree that the government is barely functioning. Sometimes it makes you wonder whether the problem is the government or the country. The administration is oversized and almost incapable of running the country. If we analyse the following points, we will understand why that happens:

- 1) Take the issue of land reform. The proposal has passed through four phases since the day the prime minister made his first announcement and come back to where the process began—square one. As soon as the prime minister made his announcement (that land reform would be undertaken) the government banned all sale and transfer of ownership, which created confusion. Then a bill was presented in parliament, but before it was passed, the government began saying all actions would be according to its provisions. Then the Supreme Court ruled against the government decision. The people were confused once again on whether they should go by what the government said or by what the Supreme Court ordered. This is one example about how confusing a half-baked government decision can be. And if this is how things happen, then the largest problem the citizens face is the government. This shows how ill-conceived the decision was, one which prevented people from using their own property.
- 2) Another prime example of the functioning of the government can be seen from the way top officials function. It is difficult to believe how soon they can begin to violate their own decisions. The secretaries of government meet every two weeks, led by the Chief Secretary. This is a routine meeting. At almost every meeting they decide on one thing (including everything else they decide on)—that they will reduce the misuse of official vehicles. The minutes of the meeting are there for all to see at the cabinet secretariat. Upon stepping out of the meeting the secretaries, including the chief secretary, begin going against their decision by misusing official vehicles. The secretaries who imported duty-free vehicles are not supposed to use official transport. But the secretaries and the chief secretary keep their duty-free vehicles at home and use official cars to come to the meeting and decide on reducing their misuse. This is one misuse of official privilege which the prime minister can see for himself if he looks out of his chamber windows...
- 3) It is not a very easy job to create, close and divide ministries. But in the last five years the government has done this twice. There used to be 21 ministries. In 1995, six more were added, including the ministry of Population and Environment, Women and Social Welfare, and Youth, Sports and Culture, among others. In 2000, the government decided to bring the number of ministries back to 21 by merging them. Some ministries were split and then merged with different ministries. Take the Ministry of Works and Transport. This ministry was divided in two—the infrastructure section was attached to the Ministry of Planning and the transport part went to the labour ministry. Naturally, the taxpayers paid for all of this shuffling.



of two years, the special police department was required to function under separate bosses four times. Don't ask what this does for the morale of the department.

In 1997, a cabinet meeting held under the chairmanship of the prime minister decided to form an investment promotion council. It was to function under the prime minister's office. It had its members and member secretary named, but the council got lost in Singha Darbar within five months. The council has not been formally shut down, nor has it ever met. If an entire council can vanish like this, what can be said of other decisions taken by the government?

In 1998, the prime minister gave birth to a new institution: it was called the commerce advisory group. The prime minister was the head of this group and it was supposed to be situated within the National Planning Commission premises. Its members and member-secretary were also appointed. It worked for about two months, but did not meet thereafter—it was perhaps not thought necessary. The prime minister remained in office for nine months after the formation of the group but no one cared about it. It soon got lost in the maze that is Singha Darbar.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

The palace massacre, the height in murder, terror, aberration and contradiction, marks the end of an age of feudal nationalism.

—CPN (Maoist) Chairman Prachanda in Jandish National Daily.



Radio Mao

Jana Aasha, 26 September

The Maoists have been operating an FM radio station in Rukum for the past year. The station is in the Mahur Village Development Committee and it broadcasts for an hour everyday, from 7am-8am. According to Comrade Bhatta, a member of the Maoist district committee, cell, this has been very useful—as it is not possible for all people to attend all the Maoist meetings, the radio broadcasts all speeches, directives and orders passed by the Maoists. Nowadays most meetings organised by the Maoists are also broadcast for on local FM. Besides this, the FM also broadcasts revolutionary, educational and other programs for its armed forces. The station's signals can be received as far as a full day's walk away. The station does not have a permanent transmission tower, all components are indigenous and Maoist cadres are responsible for its proper functioning.

Distrust at the top

Ghatana R. Bhat, 26 September

Deuba wants to present himself as a great leader by resolving the Maoist insurgency. But his style of functioning has created mistrust and problems within the ruling party, its members, and the government. His detractors say Deuba believes the Maoists more than he believes his own ministers.



And if he continues this way, there will be no reason for the ruling party and the government to continue against the Maoists. It is spread misinformation and to Deuba say that although he appears very open and frank in public, he is actually just the opposite. He is very narrow-minded, short-sighted and conspiratorial. So much so, that even his own minister, Khim Bahadur Khadka, does not have his full trust. People close to Deuba say that he does not present all facts, or confide in the home minister about the developments in the talks between the Maoists and himself. When he was in the Maoist Valley was a mistake and there he felt it was not the correct decision. This has created a lot of problems for the home minister. He had asked Deuba to negotiate with the Maoists before withdrawing the decision. He had said that he should be withdrawn only if the Maoists could assure the prime minister that there

would be no terrorist activity in the Valley. Since the army was already getting ready to move in and the National Security Council was in a frame of mind to support the move, it was a possibility that Krishna Prasad Bhattacharya would be the prime minister. I then met the leaders of various political parties and conveyed the wishes of the Maoist leaders. All agreed dialogue should be held and this strengthened my position as a mediator. Around this time Khum Bahadur Thapa announced he would speak in Dang that was possible to hold dialogue with terrorists too.

Bomb scare

Jana Aasha, 26 September

Maoists leaders fly quite often these days. Since they come and go all the time, the atmosphere at Tribhuvan International Airport is very tense. On the morning of the 25 September, a "bomb"—a big unidentified bag—was found near a security checkpoint at the airport. There was chaos because of the unidentified baggage, and the airport only returned to normalcy in the evening. All flights were stopped, the RNAC flight to Doha was delayed by two hours. All aircraft were towed to safety, people were evacuated and the army's bomb-disposal squad was called in. Troops surrounded the airport, they moved in and checked it thoroughly. The soldiers then carried the bag out and opened it carefully. Inside it were some ancient books used by Tibetan monks. The bag was later handed over to the police...

"Misinforming"

Sapakshi Bimsara, 25 September

A top Maoist leader has accused Kantipur of spreading misinformation. In its 23 September issue, Kantipur stated that the Maoists were working together with the US. The Maoist leader denied this and said the statement was baseless. He said this was done to malign the Maoist organisation, which was fighting for the rights of the people. He added that this raised suspicion about the intentions of the paper. The leader further stated that the paper's claim that Ram Bahadur Thapa had been expelled from the Soviet Union while he was studying there is also completely false. He said that he would be taking action against Kantipur if it spread misinformation and rumours. The Maoists are a very political force here and saying they are in league with international terrorist organisations is pure misinformation. Kantipur has been denying the Maoists for some time now. It is functioning the same way as the CIA, its intentions are not clear or good.

Do you have proof that these weapons are being held in India by Koila's orders? Unesh Giri has publicly said he was working under the direct orders of Koila and that he himself had the weapons. According to the information I received, these weapons are in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, and the person keeping an eye on them is Narotham Da Kapoor, also Bhajiya. We have proof that Koila had amassed and stored 351, 303 guns, 45 SLR rifles, 25 carbines, 36 Stenguns, and many other weapons.

Guns and talks

Kantipur, 26 September

Escapes from an interview with Durga Subedi, a mediator employed by Krishna Prasad Bhattarai's government to bring the Maoists to talks.

How did you come in contact with the Maoist leaders? I met them when they were in exile. After I moved away from Ghatana Prasad Bhattarai, I started attending their public meetings as a guest. Besides their arguments about Nepal politics and society, we used to agree on almost everything. I came close to them because of this association, I have gained their trust and it is very easy for me to contact them by any means when necessary. It was during the second half of 1999 that Prachanda and I started meeting. He was saying they wanted to meet me. We met and

You could have been made the mediator, then? People representing the Maoists and government sides have become facilitators. A mediator is a person who has the trust of both sides. Once you become a facilitator, there could be problems with trust. I am happy to remain a mediator.

ABOUT TOWN

MOVIES

□ **Film South Asia** Fifty-one documentaries from Nepal, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. Back-to-back screenings all day, 4-7 October, Russian Cultural Centre. Tickets Rs 25 per screening, available at Suwal Music n' Movies, Lazimpat; Mandala Book Point, Kantipath; Saraswati Book Shop, Pulchowk; Patan Dhoka Kitabo Pasa; Himal Association, Patan Dhoka. Schedule and more info at Himal Association, 542544, www.himalassociation.org/rsa

EXHIBITION

□ **In Search of Shogri La** Photos by Nepal and European photographers. Until 12 October, 10am-6pm, National Art Council, Babermahal. Organised the Nepal Photographic Society and Eco Himal.

□ **Paintings and sculptures** by Batsa Gopal Vaidya and Shashi Shah. 14 September-17 October, 11am-6pm. 411122 Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal. 411122

□ **Women artists** Nineteen women artists from a two-day spot-painting event at Bungamati, Lalitpur display their works. Proceeds go to a training course for women in craft skill development. 13-14 October, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 248999

EVENTS

□ **Classical music** Every full moon at the Kirateswor temple, Gaurighat, Pashupati. Next on 7 October, 4.00pm. Organised by the Shree Kirateswar Sangeetashram.

□ **Fourth Momo Festival** Unlimited helpings from 20 kinds of momos with live music. Momo-making, eating contests, door prizes. Rs 350 over 4/6 includes complementary beer. Rs 200 under 4/6, with complementary coke or ice cream. 6 October, Bakery Café, Teku. 434554

□ **Bowling for all** Strikes for Rs 75. 6-12 October, Hotel Shahenshah International.

MUSIC

□ **Live music** Tuesday, Friday nights at Rum Doodle Restaurant. 414336

□ **Live acoustic music** Dinesh Rai and Deependra every Friday at the Himalatte Café. 7.30pm-10pm 262526

□ **Cadenza** Saturday evening live jazz at Upstairs, Lazimpat. 7.30pm-10pm. Rs 200

EATING OUT

□ **Barbecue lunch** with complementary wine or beer for adults, soft drink for children. Saturdays and Sundays at the Godavari Village Resort. 560675

□ **The Cafe de trekkers** New French restaurant with a selection of fine wines and cocktails. French and Tibetan cuisine in a pleasant atmosphere. Jyatha, Thamel. 225777

□ **Patan Museum Café** Mixed menu, garden seating. Lunch only, 11am-2pm. 25 percent off with Summit Card. 526271

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□ **Dine with the birds and butterflies** Chef Sher Singh BBQ, kababs, tandoori, other traditional cuisine Farm House Café overlooking Shivapuri Reserve. Park Village Resort, Budanilkantha.

□ **Sandwiches** Over the Rainbow American Diner has reopened. Fifth Avenue sandwiches, full meals at backpacker prices. Opposite Pilgrims Book House, Thamel. 42651

□ **Barbecue Dinner with music** by Las Sonidos Latinos. Friday nights throughout October. Rs 500 per adult, Rs 250 per child, plus tax. Summit Hotel. 521810

□ **Two for one** International buffet lunch—main courses, on-site cooking, seven kinds of dessert, eight kinds of salad and dressings. Rs 700 plus tax, this month two lunches for the price of one. Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 273999

□ **Splash Bar and Grill** New fifth-floor outlet with panoramic view of city and surrounding hills. Starting 28 September at the Radisson. 411818

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YAK YETI YAK

by MIKU



BOOKWORM

Corruption, Governance, and International Cooperation: Essays and Impressions on Nepal and South Asia Devendra Raj Pandey
Transparency International Nepal, Kathmandu, 2001
Rs 250

Pandey suggests that civil society can help increase transparency in Nepal in particular. He also asks what role development cooperation, donors and conditionality can play in controlling graft and helping governance reform in Nepal.

Asian Commitment: Travels and Studies in the Indian Sub-Continent and South-East Asia David Sridigrove
Orchid Press, Bangkok, 2000
Rs 3,560

An autobiographical account of the travels and studies of a lifetime. Sridigrove deals with, among others, the maritime empire of Srivijaya, the Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms of east Java, the history and culture of the Khmer civilisation, and the role of Islam through the Malay-Indonesian archipelago.

Buddhist Daily Ritual: The Nitya Puja in Kathmandu Valley Shriners Gregory Sharkey
Orchid Press, Bangkok, 2001
Rs 1,112

A comprehensive look at devotional rituals in Newar Buddhist viharas, this study assesses the influence of Vajrayana ideology and the congruity of Newar daily rituals with early Buddhist and Theravada practice. This volume also provides the most complete scholarly study to date of Buddhist Sanskrit hymns and is illustrated with drawings by Manju Thapa, one of Nepal's foremost living painters.

Courtesy Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 227711, mandala@cscl.com.np

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Radio Sagarmatha

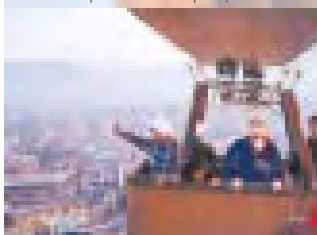
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ADVENTURE

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

It is AM in Sallighai, Bhaktapur after a night of un-seasonal post-monsoon showers. As the first rays of the sun break over the Valley, a crowd of curious onlookers gathers to watch the first flight of the season for Nepal's only commercial hot-air balloon flight by Balloon Sunrise Nepal. The flight team takes notes on the wind direction as the smaller pilot balloon gently glides into the morning air. The larger 90 ft by 60 ft rip-stop nylon hot-air balloon is slowly getting ready for take-off as the burner beneath it pumps 210,000 cubic feet of Liquid Petroleum Gas and a pinch of

In a country whose scenery is worth paying a king's ransom to see, this is a great enterprise. And though in Nepal every successful business is



nitrogen into it. A small group of tourists eagerly waits for the captain, Sunel N Singh Thapa in order to board the wicker basket that will take them floating to about 6,000 ft above the Valley. The weather is exceptionally clear this autumn morning and the flight promises a grand bird's eye view of the Himalaya, including Everest in all her morning glory.

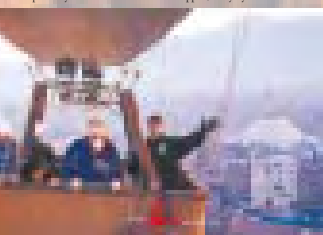
The balloon has now been filled

High fliers

From October to April, hot-air balloons are the way to go.

and is gently tugging at the ropes that fix it to the ground. The group hurries to fill up six-and-a-half-by-four-and-a-half-foot wicker basket carries six passengers, an altimeter, a barometer, VHF and UHF radios, and a global positioning system (GPS). After going through a brief landing exercise and last-minute instructions, the ground crew fires the ropes that anchor the balloon to the ground. The balloon season has begun.

In a country whose scenery is worth paying a king's ransom to see, this is a great enterprise. And though in Nepal every successful business is



copied endlessly, the six-year-old Balloon Sunrise Nepal is the only company that offers hot-air balloon flights over the Valley. The company, started by Phinso Lama, owns two balloons, one of which recently reached its 1,000 hour flight limit. The other is going strong at its over 380 hours flying time to its credit.

If you're thinking of getting into the act, be warned. It is an expensive

coverage of \$20,000, like for commercial domestic flights," Captain Thapa tells his passengers. Sunel Narayan Singh Thapa was a captain in the Royal Nepal Army until he took a hot-air balloon flight in 1996. He was hooked. The next year he quit the army and went to train for his private pilot license in Melbourne. Two years down the line, he was abroad again, to get his

business—one balloon and its accoutrements costs \$100,000. It is much cheaper to simply take a trip—\$195 for foreigners, and IRs 4,500 for SAARC citizens for a one-hour flight. Not cheap either, but this gets you transportation to the take-off site, breakfast, and a certificate to show off to friends. Some times, the winds carry the balloon further than expected—but no fear, your craft carries enough fuel to be airborne for two-and-a-half hours. "This is the oldest and safest means of air travel but in case anything should happen, every flyer has an insurance

commercial pilot's license in California. This is Captain Thapa first season in full command—after almost five years and some 300 hours of ballooning—and he looks thrilled.

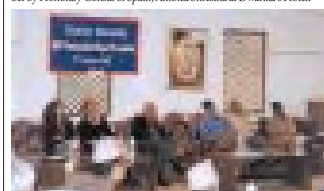
As the balloon slowly gains height, floating with the wind, the Valley below looks like a patchwork of Ligo art interspersed with lush green carpets. To the east is the sun rising over Nagarkot and to the north, the mountains changing shades from misty blue to majestic golden. The Langtang range comes into view and there, just on the horizon, Everest hovers into view with her pre-winter patches of snow and rocks. Climbing at an average speed of 600 ft per minute, the balloon will soon reach a height of 6,000 ft above the Valley. "Part of the adventure of Balloon flying is not knowing what your final destination is," says Captain Thapa, narrating a trip when they were blown out of the Valley to Dhading. But this is not really a problem, as the retrieval crew is always in contact by radio and can be told where to come for the pickup. The hour passes by so swiftly, one barely notices the balloon being gently lowered down. "I thought I was afraid of heights, but it was so peaceful," says one flyer after her feet are back on terra firma. The whole affair is incredibly smooth—from being airborne to landing, there is nothing jerky about the experience.

Thus comes to the end, with a prayer praising the wind for its softness, the sun for its blessing, yourself for flying so high and so well and the powers that be for joining you in your laughter and setting you back gently on to Mother Earth. U

HAPPENINGS



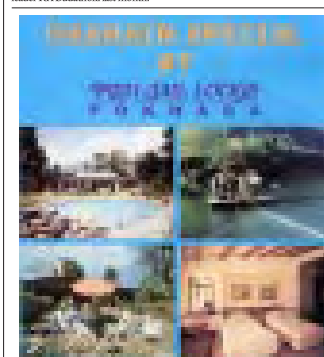
CATALONIA TO NEPAL: Josep D Guardia, State Minister of Justice for the Catalan Autonomous Region of Spain is welcomed on 28 September by Honorary Consul of Spain, Ambica Shrestha at Dwarika's Hotel.



DHULIKHEL MEETING: Bel Prasad Shrestha, Mayor of Dhulikhel with Gert Meinecke of the Royal Danish Embassy and vice-chancellor of Kathmandu University, Suresh Raj Sharma at the Quality Education Project Evaluation Report Presentation in Dhulikhel on 2 October.



BHUTANESE REFUGEES: Bhutan Peoples' Party organised a press conference 30 September to address issues surrounding the murder of their leader RK Budathoki last month.



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NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

This late monsoon surge took us all by surprise and the low pressure systems from last week seem to have reinforced each other and brought this vast band of clouds that stretches from the Arabian Sea right up to the east coast of mainland China. The good news for those planning treks is that the band is now being pushed back by the westerlies and are diffusing without significant post-monsoon precipitation. But it has brought the first snows in the high Himalaya down to about 5,500m. This week, expect dry clouds in the midhills and tarai and a further drop in temperatures.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

| Fri | Sat | Sun | Mon | Tue |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 27-16 | 25-15 | 28-16 | 27-15 | 26-16 |



