





## AFTER THE HONEYMOON

When Sher Bahadur Deuba ousted Girija Prasad Koirala after a long and bruising fight on 24 July, we wrote in this space that he did not need a political honeymoon period. But as it turned out, he got one anyway. Friends and foes alike have been kind to Deuba for the first 100 days of his second term as prime minister. Compared to the hand-to-hand combat of Girija's tenure, Deuba's four months have sailed by in relative serenity. The country is asleep, but at least there is peace.

The prime minister seems to have learnt from the mistakes of his first term, and moved with determination and purpose to fulfil his single-point agenda of resolving the Maoist crisis. Deuba can be stubborn when he wants to be, and he refuses to be distracted from the goal. That is why we get the feeling that everything else is on hold.

Remember the mood preceding Dasain last year when policemen were being butchered like buffaloes at the Kot, and compare it with this year's relative calm. True, there has been intimidation and violence by anti-Maoist village vigilantes, and Maoist counter-killings of UML cadre. True, most MPs and local officials stayed in Kathmandu and did not go back to their constituencies for the holidays out of fear of being abducted. Also true that the government-Maoist talks seem to be stuck, and rebel cadre are itching for a fight. This being Nepal, even the peace talks took a breather during Dasain.

Still, despite it all, the truce has put a stop to the mindless violence of the past year in which 70 policemen were killed during some weeks in Maoist raids. It would be a sacrilege to the memory of the more than 2,000 Nepalis who have been killed by other Nepalis in the past six weeks if, after coming this far, we were to return to violence. The obscenity of the past cannot be allowed to be a rehearsal for even greater carnage in future.

Cutting through the posturing and rhetoric of both sides about the release of detainees, the third round of talks appears to be delayed because the Maoist leadership cannot decide on what to settle for. It has now taken the comrades nearly a month to prepare their bargaining position for substantive give-and-take on the question of power sharing.

Of the three agenda points, there is no way the government is going to give in on the first, the Maoist demand for a republic. That will have to remain a slogan for now. On the second demand for an interim government, there is a way out if the Maoists agree to emerge above ground and go into general elections. Deuba is even willing to consider an all-party national conference to precede elections. On the third Maoist demand for a brand new constitution, the government says it is willing to consider a constitutional reform committee, while the Maoists want a constitutional assembly.

The Maoists need a face-saving way out to sell a future agreement to their cadres. A constitutional review committee would be a compromise both could agree on. As far as we can tell, it is a question of semantics. We all agree the constitution needs tinkering. Let's not be hung up about this.

The clock is ticking for the Maoists. It is also in their interest to have a negotiated settlement. If they had settled three months ago, they may have got a constitutional assembly sooner. Two months ago they may have got their national government. Today, the best they can hope for is perhaps a constitutional review committee.

But just as we were beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel on the negotiations, what happens? Deuba's rivals in the party start getting fidgety because they don't want him to take all the credit for bringing peace. We are seeing an ugly repeat of last year's gnashing of internal Congress teeth. Party president Koirala has given derisive speeches accusing the prime minister of going soft on Maoists. His cousin and general secretary Sushil Koirala is making similar belligerent noises against his own co-leagues in government.

Surprisingly—or maybe it is not so surprising—there is more support for Deuba's negotiating stance from the outside than from within his own party. UML's Madhav Kumar Nepal calls Maoists 'terrorists'. Even the Congress hasn't gone that far. Maoists are now targeting UML cadres at the grassroots for abductions. It could be they are testing the waters to field front candidates in local elections next year.

The opposition of the Koirala cousins to Deuba is understandable. But why are Deuba and his home minister, Khun Bahadur Khadka, having a slanging match in public? Deuba has sidelined the ambitious Khadka, and the home minister believes the prime minister is doing a solo on the Maoist negotiations.

So at a time when the ruling party needs to have a consensus on providing the Maoists a face-saving way out to the whole party can benefit from the peace dividend, we have this clawing and scratching going on. Just goes to prove our old axiom: the Nepal Congress is its own worst enemy.

Nepalis have extraordinary patience. But it is running out. And when the people lose their patience, neither the government nor the Maoists will be spared their wrath.



## For the people, by the people, of the people

A constitution that has endured so much can't be static.

King Gyanendra this Dasain had a poignant message to the nation. It was reassuring to hear him reaffirm his commitment to the constitution, but it was oddly unsettling to see that he felt it necessary to do so. He belaboured the obvious, perhaps the real meaning of the message is a thumb down to the Maoists. The king appeared to be telling Comrade Panchanda directly: a) no national government, b) no constituent assembly, and, c) forget about your republic in our kingdom. In effect, the king has ruled out any major revision in the fundamental law of the land.

This is as it should be. The Constitution of Kingdom of Nepal 1990 has stood in good stead over a period of tumultuous events in national politics. We have held three parliamentary elections and two for local governments. Five national elections—successfully completed and declared to be largely fair and impartial by international observers—should be proof enough, if all that was needed, that Nepal hasn't needed a neutral caretaker government of the Bangladesh model to conduct its polls. Our Election Commission is robust, and it is capable of keeping the partisan attitude of the government of the day in check.

This has also been a period when Nepal faced the most brutal insurgency in its history. At one point, in the aftermath of Hritish Roshan riots, it appeared as if the country would have to compromise its integrity in order to save it from itself. But it was the maturity that democracy has nurtured that helped to overcome national civil insanity.

All-party rallies for communal harmony proved once again that multi-party democracy may be rancorous, but in the end it works. In a multi-cultural society, it's either democracy or disintegration.

When the entire nuclear family of King Birendra was wiped out in the royal massacre of 1 June, the constitution

faced a challenge that has no parallel anywhere in the world. We Nepalis love to wallow in self-pity and we lack the self-confidence to accept credit for our accomplishments, but let's face it—it is nothing short of a sociological miracle that citizens of a struggling democracy faced a crisis of this unprecedented magnitude with such stoic fortitude. Not that an exact comparison is necessary, or even possible, but it helps to remember that the entire political edifice of the country was replaced in the aftermath of Kot Parba of 14 September, 1946, in our own country. In neighbouring India, Nehru plunged into the mess of communal carnage when Indira Gandhi was shot dead by her own bodyguards on 31 October, 1984. For all its flaws, it is the constitution that prevented anarchy from erupting even in the face of a crisis of unimaginable proportions.

The logic that the constitution needs to be amended to ensure stability does not hold water. The main concern should be the stability of the system, not the longevity of a particular government. The explanation that we are too poor to have frequent elections is like accepting that we are too impoverished to afford democracy. This can then be extended further to say that we don't deserve to be free independent. Those who talk of a fixed tenure for the legislature or a constructive vote of confidence fail to realise that it isn't possible to tinker with the parts of the system without affecting the fundamental structure of the whole. To solve the problem of revolving-door governments and frequent elections, it is not necessary to virtually contract out the system for a fixed period to a group of legislators.

No one understands the convolutions of the Constitution of Kingdom of Nepal 1990 better than the man who successfully convinced the king and made him accept in the preamble that 'the source of sovereign authority is the people'. As we enter the 21st century, the prime minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai. When he says that there is no need to fix things that aren't wrong, we better listen. It is tempting to fiddle with a perfectly functioning mechanism when you have seen too many things that are broken and need to be fixed. It is better to let the hammer and resist the temptation to hit where it can only hurt.

That said, it needs to be accepted that certain aberrations have crept into the constitution due to contradictory interpretation of its provisions. The court once ruled that the prime minister could not go to the people if and when he wanted to. This has

seriously limited his options. It is this serious undermining of his prime minister's prerogative that has made him hostage to the threats of legislators of his own party. It has led to a ludicrous situation where a prime minister can become a bit to be thrown around between the legislature, the court and the palace.

The other aberration—the bifurcation of the authority of local government units—also owes its origin to the constitution, but its interpretation. By declaring that the Dharmadate District Development Committee and Rajbiraj Municipality weren't free to use the national language of their choice, the court dealt a bigger blow to their autonomy than merely depriving them their mother tongue. Implicit in the ruling is another meaning: in the interpretation of our learned judges, the constitution is unitary in character, and brooks no interference from local governments for autonomy. If this indeed is the reality, then it is time to change. In the postmodern world, all politics is local.

Denying legally constituted local government units their rights can lead to unconstitutional forms of protest.

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by CK LAL

## INTERVIEW

# “Kathmandu is an island in an ocean of poverty.”

Nepali Times: What changes do you see in the past two years?

Nishimizu: I see Nepal much more integrated with the rest of the world even compared to two years ago. The benefits of that are obvious in Kathmandu, the better living standard is somewhat tangible. That is what integration of economies brings about—people call it globalisation which has become a bad word. It is what economic integration can do to people's living standards, to help reduce poverty faster if policies are right.

And in the villages you visited?

There it is a confirmation of what I learnt last time, the difficult lives that poor people lead in this country, especially women. And how different their life is from yours in Kathmandu. The gap between Kathmandu and the rest of the country is getting wider. Kathmandu is an island in an ocean of poverty. And Dhading is a district just next door to Kathmandu. It gave me a sense of urgency about how important good development policies are to narrow that gap.

The last time you were here you told us you were angry with the poverty you saw? Yes.

How has the Bank helped the government to address it?

People tend to think World Bank has a lot of money and just help Nepal. This is a misconception. The money the Bank can provide is a drop in a huge bucket. The bucket is Nepal's own domestic resources, including the taxes people pay. What we do is really, a part of the government's development program and hopefully good policy. In terms of policies, in this trip I have a sense of encouragement.

In the past two years there hasn't been any major bank lending... has that got to do with policies not being right?

You have to remember that we have financed many projects in the past. The money is being disbursed, millions of dollars, for education, clean drinking water for people to manage forests on their own.

But no new lending?

That is not true. We have recently completed negotiations for a new project in telecommunication. There is a group of people with foresight here in Nepal who have been hard at work in creating a modern telecommunication sector, with modern regulation that enhances not control, but private-government partnership for bringing information technology. We feel that development cannot be brought about by money only, but through information, timely information. That is the future and these people anticipated it and are starting to create a regulatory system to prepare Nepal for the future, so we decided to finance it.

Did you have a special purpose for this visit?

Since the last time I was here, there is a new government. Same party but a new prime minister and cabinet. So my main purpose was to come and meet the prime minister and key leaders in his cabinet who are working on some very important reforms. I needed to meet them face to face to have a better understanding of the quality of policies they mean to introduce in this country.

What was your impression?

I found the people I met to be very candid so I don't have to worry about what I say. The vision of this prime minister is Nepal without poverty. He has a very strong focus on the silent majority, the people who are marginalised from society, including women. Having listened to him, I believe that the focus and the vision is a genuine one, not rhetoric. As for the process of social transformation, part of which is higher income, he believes very strongly that the process has to be participatory. It has to be the nation, not Kathmandu or the rest, or the rich vs the poor. He talks about empowerment, but the way he describes it, I feel he understands it deep down based on his grassroots experience. I feel he understands that

Nepal will hold the potential of becoming a model of local democracy in South Asia. But for that to happen, we need to have more faith in our own capabilities. ■



**The World Bank's Vice President for South Asia, Meiko Nishimizu was in Nepal this week. After a field visit to Dhading, she spoke to Nepali Times and talked extensively about Nepal's progress in the past two years, financial sector reforms and the empowerment of Nepali women.**

the future of Nepal lies with the women. He wants to give the invisible women a voice. He really is focusing on the empowerment of women and dalits.

What about economic reforms?

There is something that Nepal really ought to be proud of—what was announced in the last budget and is being implemented. That is the Medium Term Framework. The value of financial discipline that process can bring to development expenditure is enormous. There are very few developing countries in the world that have implemented something like this. Everybody talks about it, but no one actually here the guts to say 'We'll do it and do it, it is different. I commend the government and this is something that Nepal as a nation ought to be proud of. The people need to make sure this implementation goes well so that the whole country benefits from this medium term framework as you go forward.

On financial sector reforms there was a hiatus from time to time, but I am leaving with a sense of hope and encouragement that things will really start to move. Since the budget there has been a small group of people

in Nepal who have been doing a lot of technical work preparing, but it is not an easy reform and it is not just about the two sick banks the newspapers write about. It is much more than that. It's about the entire banking system, how to help the central bank to regulate the banking system much better so that good money is made, as opposed to bad money.

In Nepal there seems to be the impression that this is a World Bank idea. It is far from the truth. I feel insulted when I read that, and reforms in this country would be doubly insulted by such a remark. It is really, really saying so. The reforms are challenging and there is no way it can even start if it is only the World Bank saying so. It has to come from within, with conviction, with determination and with political will. The prime minister understands the issue is convinced that this reform is about his vision.

From the point of view of a common, hardworking but poor Nepali citizen what would happen if, god-ford, a banking crisis happens. I get his several times, first I lose my saving deposit, then the government will have to spend millions of dollars to stop the crisis from tax money. Who pays tax, it is I. I get hit again. I lose my savings and my tax goes into this to rescue all the rich, powerful, corrupt people who have ruined some of these banks who were once premier institutions, by being defaulters.

What are they doing, they are essentially stealing my money. I get hit twice, and again. Because all taxes are going to stop in this crisis, what happens to development expenditure? The school I was hoping would come up next year a mile down the road is not going to be built. So the hope that I can finally educate my girls and boys is out of the window again. So, I get hit the third time. Then because the problem could be severe, the economy will go into a recession and I will probably lose my job. I get hit for the fourth. A bad policy hits the poor first and most.

What really comforted me is that the prime minister understood this and that is why he is committed. It is very rare for me to speak to a leader of a country who understands such important linkages, without me explaining it, and with a voice of conviction.

What would be your wish list for things to happen in Nepal?

(Laughs) Let me think. Obviously because banking reform is a very important reform that will change the course of this country when this work is finished. After it is done, given everything remains the same, you can hope for the growth rate to go up to 4 percentage faster. I hope that the commitment of the leadership will be translated quickly into consistent, consistent action. I have no illusions, it is not going to be easy.

Another I related to the women I saw in Dhading and other marginalised people, the so-called 'untouchable' people, that have to try. Men in government and civil society will also need to think from the point of view of women.

Last wish?

(Laughs) How about peace. The underlying cause of the Maoist movement had a lot to do with the destitution in remote areas, so not just dialogue with Maoists, which is continuing, but using the whole might of the government through development, I hope that every citizen of this country can get to a point where they can take peace and security for granted. That they don't have to worry about it constantly.

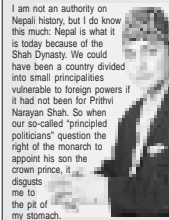
How did the Nepalis you meet come across?

Nepalis are extremely patient people, they have tremendous resilience and inner strength. I could sense that again in Dhading. I would like the people in remote areas, so not just dialogue with Maoists, but using the whole might of the government through development, I hope that every citizen of this country can get to a point where they can take peace and security for granted. That they don't have to worry about it constantly.

## LETTERS

**CROWN PRINCE PARAS**  
It was good to read the sentiments of Prince Paras ('Has Crown Prince Paras mended his ways?', #66). But we Nepalis don't trust him. The palace took advantage of Dasain so there would be no protest. He does not trust the Nepalis, and Nepalis should not trust him.

N Sharma  
by email



I am not an authority on Nepal history, but I do know this much: Nepal is what it is today because of the Shah Dynasty. We could have been a country divided into small principalities vulnerable to foreign powers if it had not been for Prithvi Narayan Shah. So when our so-called 'principled politicians' question the right of the monarch to appoint his son the crown prince, it is to the pit of my stomach.

Siddharth Thapa  
Boston

What have these 'gentlemen' done for Nepal besides trying to look radical with their witless questions trying to garner votes in such a pathetic manner?

Arun Neupane  
Michigan, USA

What the announcement of the crown prince shows is that Nepal is still a long way from being a true democracy. The palace's method showed that the old, dark ways of doing things in secret are still prevalent. If Nepal is to be a modern, transparent monarchy and earn the respect of the people like the monarchy in Japan the palace has to change the way it does things.

Seema Chhetri  
Thyoti

Thank you for a balanced and objective overview of the royal appointment of Paras as crown prince. As you correctly point out, the king really had no choice. But he could have done it in a more consultative and open manner. Now that it is done, it is up to Crown Prince Paras to earn the trust and respect of his people. He should know that the people are watching his every step.

G Hong Kong  
Hong Kong

For the sake of Nepal's unity and nationalism, the monarchy needs to have continuity. With only two men left in the royal family, there was no other option. But let us use this opportunity to modernise and reform the rules of succession so that Paras' daughter can be the next in line. And next time let us do it with more deliberation and grace.

Naresh Pradhan  
Kathmandu

**MAYDAY, MAYDAY**  
Bhind Bhattarai's report ('Mayday, mayday', #64) is right on the mark. What it shows is that the private sector is not the super-efficient answer to everything that it is made out to be. The domestic airline business has become a dog-eat-dog situation. The reason is private greed and the government's inability to regulate.

S Lama  
Kathmandu

**UNDER HIS HAT**  
I'm afraid Kunti Das has finally lost it ('Lights, camera, action', #65). But who can blame him, given the state of the country and the world. There is a message in his lunacy. Hang on to your hat!

Gwen Ridley  
by email

# Bridge builders think nationally



## Development takes a great leap forward as suspension bridges span rivers across Nepal.

scattered across the Nepali hills are the mainstay of rural transportation. The Swiss experts invited in at the beginning of Nepal's planned development era in the late 1950s recommended that river crossing facilities for isolated communities and settlements would be the key to the country's economic development. In 1964, the government established the Suspension Bridge Division (SBD) under the Ministry of Works and Transport, and eight years later Helvetas (the Swiss Association for International Co-operation) came up with technical and financial support. Later on, the US and the British governments and multilateral agencies like the Asian Development Bank also got involved.

Since it was established, the SBD has constructed some 500 bridges in 61 districts with a cumulative span of more than 50 km. The bridges have been instrumental in carrying economic activities and social changes in their localities. A 1999 bridge impact study found, for example, that

following construction of the a suspension bridge at Sirka Ghat in Ramechhap, the sleepy, isolated settlement evolved into a vibrant market square that on average does Rs 80,000 worth of business everyday. Four years after the bridge was built, land prices shot up by 1,140 percent.

Most rural communities know all the benefits a simple suspension bridge can bring. Every year the SBD receives requests for 100 to 200 new bridges, but the government can only take on about a quarter of those requests. An overwhelming 95 percent of the requests come from communities who desperately need short span (under 120 metres) pedestrian bridges to ease communications.

New Nepal adaptations have been made to the bridges after studying how they are used. For instance, bridges are also important crossing points for livestock, mules and yak trains. Animals are terrified of suspension bridges and villagers crossing a bridge via

common daily sight across Nepal. In addition, early bridges used to have plaques and the hooves of goats and cattle used to get stuck in the gaps between them. The design was changed, and the new models now have grills that ensure a good grip for both shoes and hooves. Suspension bridges also used to way in the winter and they say that the ice across the bridge was not a problem. The proposed bridge will be the longest and most technically advanced pedestrian bridge built by Nepali technicians so far.

Soon, bridge-building will be an all-Nepal venture. The Swiss government, whose financial contribu-

# and act locally

responsible for designing and constructing suspension bridges, and communities are being mobilised for the maintenance. As a result, bridge technology is cheaper, and bridges can be located at more strategically appropriate locations to benefit the maximum number of users. Accounting for time saved by a construction of a suspension bridge in conservative manner of Rs. 5 per hour, the 1999 impact study found that Molung bridge in Okladhanga district recouped its cost in 1.5 years, while better located Sirilghat bridge took less than six months.

Once there were enough trained personnel to build bridges, the challenge was to spread that knowledge around and get more people involved in the building and maintenance process. So, engineering institutes now help design bridges, but also conduct classes on suspension bridge technology. Private firms are also encouraged to design and even construct the bridges. Everyone involved in building bridges is now so confident, there are some pretty ambitious projects being undertaken. The central government, together with local government bodies and partners in the private sector, are now all set to construct a 1,450 metre-long pedestrian bridge joining the Dudhara and Chaudhari villages that lie across the Mahakali, with the rest of the world. The proposed bridge will be the longest and most technically advanced pedestrian bridge built by Nepali technicians so far.

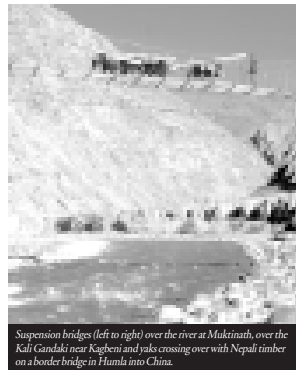
Soon, bridge-building will be an all-Nepal venture. The Swiss government, whose financial contribu-

tion has over the years come down from 100 percent to 37 percent, will next month formalise the final five-year phase of its support. Jan Rouleau, Project Manager of the Trial Bridge Sub-Sector Project at Helvetas says, "We will now be decentralising the construction and maintenance of suspension bridges."

The Suspension Bridge Division was shifted to the Ministry of Local Development last year. Under the Local Self-Governance Act, two-thirds of the bridges in place have been handed over to local governments and communities. Proposals coming from local groups that actively involve women and marginalised communities are prioritised, says Rouleau. Village groups identify the need for bridges and provide locally available construction materials and labour, and take charge of routine maintenance. The costs of major maintenance are shared by the government and District Development Committees equally.

The people who actually need and use the bridges in this way have a far greater sense of ownership and thus responsibility. And it shows. Instead of the few dozen bridges that used to get constructed annually earlier, in the last year, the Helvetas project partnered with the SBD and got local government and communities involved—to construct 165 bridges. Even old bridges were upgraded, with steel grating replacing the wooden walkway decks.

The concept of local ownership is great in theory, and even in practice, as this shows. But there are some stumbling blocks. "Local governments everywhere are not confident about



Suspension bridges (left to right) over the river at Muktiath, over the Kali Gandaki near Kagbeni and yaks crossing over with Nepali timber on a border bridge in Humla into China.

their technical capacity to build and maintain bridges. So, though they are willing to take over identifying the specific crossing needs and managing the budget, they are hesitant to take over the technical part," said Neez Shah, Project Manager at SBD. And this cannot be resolved unless another major problem is addressed—the high mobility among the young and skilled people makes it difficult to develop local skills to sustain the bridges. The only way to deal with this is by emphasising the social impact of

bridges, getting them to realise that with a bridge there might perhaps be less reason to move away. It takes time, but it happens. Says Shiv Chandra Kantha, Deputy Programme Manager of the Helvetas project, "Initially, the social elements of development activities were hard to see, but now all our partners have realised that they cannot be alienated from development activities." □

### HEMILATARI

At December Maoist insurgents destroyed a vital suspension bridge over the Karnali river at Reghilar in Kalikot. Thousands of villagers were affected, the bridge was their social and economic lifeline. Children could not attend school and basic commodities like salt, cooking oil and grain were in short supply. Suddenly, residents across the

mighty Karnali could as well have been living on the other side of the country. The district headquarters, Manma, which used to be less than a three-hour walk away when the suspension bridge was in place was now at least two days away. Neighbouring districts also felt the effect of the destruction of a lifeline—the postal service to Mugu, Bajura and Achham was disrupted. What the Maoists had done was bomb

Kalikot back to the 1950s. When Swiss geologist Toni Hagen was walking across Nepal 50 years ago, he would ask villagers what they wanted the most: a school, a health post, a road to a village after village, the answer was the same: "We want a bridge." A bridge was and still is a vital communication link in most of roadless Nepal. Today, suspension bridges

### HERE AND THERE

ISLAMABAD: There's a new front in the "war against terror". For days now, verbal air strikes on the media have been proliferating. US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld spent about half of a news briefing during a recent visit here castigating questions from newspapers and television networks about their "failure to understand what we're doing".

British ministers—even Tony Blair who ranks with Bill Clinton as one of the great all-time handlers of media—are constantly critical of TV pictures of suffering Afghans, and commentators who point out that bombing of Afghanistan has yet to produce visible results.

By contrast, the verbal campaign has scored a significant victory. CNN is now putting "health warnings" on its coverage. A report showing pictures of dead Afghan civilians, or the catastrophic humanitarian situation there, will also have to mention that "Afghanistan harbours terrorists who have praised the September 11th attacks in America that have killed more than 5000 people".

Praising an atrocity is now enough to justify war, at least for CNN's management. Their journalists in the field aren't happy with this, but none have yet protested publicly. Interestingly only the American people are deemed worthy, or perhaps in need of, the health warning. CNN's international service, seen everywhere but the continental United States, will not be required to add comment to coverage of casualties.

My own frequent employers, the BBC, are horrified at this, although a spokesman said it was up to individual correspondents to add what content they deemed fit to such reports. Other American networks, who capitulated to earlier pressure from the US administration to stop showing videos of Osama bin Laden, have drawn their line in the sand well short of what CNN has agreed to. American newspapers have roundly condemned the news network, in part because a print journalist rarely misses an opportunity to rubbish colleagues in television for being much less in-depth. And

# The info war

Lak is back in Pak, holding a mirror to the media.



more popular, I dare say.

The Pentagon has hired a PR firm to monitor the media around the world, particularly in Muslim countries. That's showing good money after bad in many ways since so few of those countries have a free media. If the local authorities deny the American message to their taste, it goes on. If they don't, it goes on the BBC, CNN and the World Wide Web. But after the Pentagon, never forget, throws far more money around than on defence.

Truth, it's famously said, is the first casualty of war. Philip Knightley, the author of a book called *The First Casualty* has challenged Rumsfeld,

Blair and others who attack the media for its Afghan coverage. He is calling for wartime censorship—if necessary—to be overt, and justified by a full explanation of what is to be gained from restrictions on the press, other than political advantage for elected politicians worried that they are failing to get their message across, and finding reporters an easy scapegoat.

Winston Churchill, for many the greatest wartime leader of all, not only imposed censorship during World War Two. He is alleged to have prevented information from decoded messages getting to the people of the English city of Coventry that might have saved lives in German bombing raids. The reason? Enemy spies would deduce from an evacuation that their secret codes had been cracked and endanger the future war effort. "The truth," he told his cabinet, "must be protected by a bedspread of lies."

Perhaps. But also consider those words from a woman who lives a few miles from where the World Trade Centre used to dominate lower Manhattan. "As appalled, horrified and saddened by the events, the lingering sickening smell alone reminds us New Yorkers constantly I am more enraged by the blatant manipulation of the press. It is as painful to watch and hear... as it is to view the formally spectacular skyline where the towers have simply vanished."

Me, I think the journalist must always try to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable—a cliché that came about long before television and politicians (and now terrorists) began the dual dance that blurs entertainment, enlightenment and the peoples' legitimate right to know. It's going to be a long war, and this front will be no easier than the one in Afghanistan. □

by DANIEL LAK



Strokes Swings

It's about...  
 quality, better quality  
 equipment, better  
 location, better  
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THE HYATT REGENCY NATIONS CUP offer you the opportunity to come together in a game that will work towards changing the lives of underserved children. A small contribution. A great team effort.

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### AIDS update

An alarming picture of AIDS is emerging in the country. A report conducted by Dr Hari Krishna Baskota for UNAIDS indicates that on average 14 people are infected with HIV/AIDS everyday in Nepal—that means more than 38,000 HIV/AIDS carriers by end of this year. While intravenous drug users comprise nearly half the population of HIV/AIDS carriers, commercial sex workers make up about 17 percent. It's the time the government acted. In a follow-up seminar to the 86th International Congress on AIDS in the Asia and the Pacific held in Australia last month, Health Minister Sharad Singh Bhandari said the government would soon constitute a special parliamentary committee on AIDS and develop a multi-pronged approach to prevent the spread of the disease.

### Missing Indian

The Indian Embassy in Kathmandu is seeking information about the whereabouts of Pradip Bhattacharya, a 49-year-old Indian from Kolkata. Bhattacharya was last seen trekking in the Manaslu region, at Village Dharapani in Manang District on the morning of 15 October. The Embassy says that anyone helping to trace Bhattacharya will be suitably rewarded. Contact telephone numbers are 413347, 423390.

### Peace stupa

May peace prevail. That was the message at the inauguration of the biggest stupa in South Asia in Lumbini last week. At 41.5 m in height and 59 m in diameter, the World Peace Stupa towers above Nawagram and is part of the Lumbini Master Plan designed by Japanese Professor Kenzo Tange to commemorate the Buddha's birthplace. The stupa, constructed from 90 metric tonnes of cement and 411 metric tonnes of tumbled iron, is the largest of more than 70 stupas constructed worldwide by Nipponzan Myohoji, a Japanese Buddhist Organisation that wants to realise the dreams of Nichidatsu Fuji, a Japanese Buddhist ascetic.

### Dusty city

Motorcyclists better hold their breath. Studies indicate that drivers of two-wheelers and their passengers are the most susceptible to air pollution. Only then come cyclists and pedestrians. WHO studies say Valley residents spend Rs 30-50 million annually treating pneumonia, bronchitis, dry cough and cold, and red eyes, all caused by minuscule dust particles in the air, especially in the dry, dusty winters. Air pollution tests indicate that traffic heavy areas like Putali Sadak, Chhabhili, Patan, and Paknaji have a high concentration of suspended particles—five times above WHO-recommended 70 micrograms per cubic metre. Tests at Putali Sadak showed 210-375 microgram per cubic metre. Patan 300-350 microgram per cubic metre, and Chhabhili 280 microgram per cubic metre. While health experts say masks can, to a certain extent, prevent dust particles from entering the body, the best way to deal with the menace is by reducing traffic and closing off congested junctions every once in a while. Presently, a record 171,676 vehicles ply Kathmandu's roads everyday—30,000 more than the city's road infrastructure is designed to hold. Over 110,000 of these are motorcycles.

There's another potential upheaval in store for Nepal's long-suffering education sector. Nearly 150,000 public school teachers are threatening to take to the streets soon. The teachers, organised under the Nepal National Teachers' Association (NNTA) and the Nepal Teachers' Organisation (NTO), are unhappy with the seventh amendment to the Education Act approved by the House of Representatives a month ago, especially the clause that requires them to sit for exams to acquire licenses within five years of implementation of the amendment. Failing to do so would mean losing their jobs. The teachers plan to publish appeals, hold dialogues with parliamentarians and educationists, and wear black bands to work. If the government fails to respond positively, they will organise rallies and sit-in protests at district education offices starting 21 December. The NNTA and NTO allege that the government is trying to evade its responsibility of providing education, and is encouraging the commercialisation of education. But that's as far as their like-mindedness goes. The Nepal Congress-supported NTO and UML-supported NNTA plan to protest separately.

### Agitated teachers

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# Climb every mountain, but slowly



There are three rules to avoid mountain sickness. And commercial expeditions on the world's highest peaks may need more.

## RAMYATA LIMBU

Last week, for the first time, medical experts from around the world descended upon the Valley to discuss various aspects of mountain sickness and high altitude medicine.

The Nepal Mountaineering Association sponsored the International Symposium on Mountain Medicine, organised by the international mountaineering body, the Union Internationale Des Associations D'Alpinisme (UIAA), and the Society of International Medicine (SIMON).

"It is important to enhance the interest in and understanding of mountain medicine, especially in countries like Nepal where this

topic is immensely relevant," says Dr Buddha Basnyat, Medical Director of the Himalayan Rescue Association (HRA) and newly appointed vice president of MedCom, the medical commission of the UIAA.

"Contrary to popular belief, Nepalis trekking at high altitudes are equally susceptible to acute mountain sickness as their Western counterparts," says Dr Basnyat. "This is not just a *fishy* affliction, but a *swadhi* one too." A recent epidemiological study of Nepali pilgrim populations that Dr Basnyat conducted with fellow researchers showed that 68 per cent of pilgrims travelling to Gosainkund, a sacred lake at

4,300 m, were susceptible to Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS)—headaches, gastrointestinal troubles, insomnia, dizziness and fatigue.

The symptoms of mountain sickness are basically caused by lack of oxygen—the medical term is hypoxia—as a result of the decrease in atmospheric pressure. Dr Basnyat's study indicated that 32 per cent of the pilgrims had High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE), a more malignant form of AMS in which fluid collection in the brain leads to a dangerous lack of muscular coordination. Another acute, if relatively rare, form of AMS is High Altitude Pulmonary Edema or HAPE, fluid collection in the lungs that

severely impairs breathing. "Women seem to be very susceptible," says Dr Basnyat. "Seventy-three percent of the population were presciently warned, and yet women had significantly higher rates of AMS, HAPE and HACE."

A cross-sectional study of non-Sherpa porters, one at 4,300 m and one at 5,000 m, and a controlled study lower down at 1,500 m, concluded that approximately one-third of the porters suffered from AMS, and two

percent had life-threatening HACE. "Trekking to the Himalayas need to remain alert about safety precautions for their porters, who usually aren't insured, so that both trekkers and the porters are secure in the mountains," says Dr Basnyat.

Discussions at the symposium ranged from high altitude physiology, Himalayan high altitude plants in medicine, the impact of high altitude tourism on local populations, the effects of altitude training on physiological and biochemical parameters of health, and the practical aspects of acclimatisation to high altitude.

Professor Dr Franz Bergold from the Austrian Society for Mountain and Altitude Medicine reiterated that the most reliable key to success is to follow the sacral rules of altitude climbing, especially above 2,000 metres. "Severe AMS, HAPE and HACE are not at all fatal, but they are always the result of disregard of the rules of acclimatisation," said Bergold, who is associated with the University of Salzburg, Austria, and Institute for Sports Sciences. Dr Bergold set out the three major rules of thumb to avoid mountain sickness: don't go too fast too high, avoid overexerting yourself during acclimatisation, and always sleep lower than the maximum altitude you climb in the day.

Dr James A Litch, a medical doctor, Everest summiteer and extreme altitude guide, urged the UIAA to review its *Recommended Code of Practices for High Altitude*

*Guided Commercial Expeditions*. With more and more experienced and not-so-experienced climbers joining commercial expeditions that advertise guided climbs up to 7,000 m and 8,000 m peaks, the risk has become greater for clients as well as guides. Recent studies indicate that of the 4,664 individual ascents of 8,000 m peaks before January 2000, there have been 591 deaths—close to one death for every seven ascents. And it isn't only summiters who are in danger—estimating a 10 percent success rate, the risk of death on 8,000 m peaks is 1 in 79 climbers. In the US, where the highest mountain is Denali (6,195 m), the risk of death while climbing is 1 in 6,000.

"The current UIAA guidelines lack strict definitions of exactly what the duties of commercial expeditions, guides and the like are. They may be insufficient for the unique situation at extreme altitude, when mountaineers, particularly those climbing above 8,000 m, may reach the limit of their mental and physical capabilities, and so may not be capable of assisting others," says Dr Litch. He suggests a specific UIAA Code of Practice for commercial expeditions to 8,000 m peaks, the majority of which fall in Nepal and Pakistan.

"There is a difference in terms of knowledge and experience between guides and clients, but not in the terms of physiology," says Litch. □

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# Democracy in a time of individualism

Ganesh Man Singh used to recall how the Nepal Congress had envisioned the panchayat system as a non-party structure for local governance. Nepal's democracy, the argument went, was too nascent to sustain party divisions and distinctions at the lower rungs of society. The real extent of the Kangressi shock at having been supplanted by their own scheme in national politics can perhaps never be measured.

The first generation of panchas, who were expected by the professional ethics of the day to uphold the fundamental tenets of party issues, was too concerned in the culture of association to be so disgruntled. Since an overwhelming number of recruits to the new order had crossed over from the formerly dominant Nepal Congress in different phases after the Panch 1, 2017 push, they simply found it difficult to abandon their predilection for organised politics.

The tendencies were particularly evident during the graduate constituency elections to the pre-adult franchise Rastriya Panchayat. Since Nepalis then were only allowed to join organisations that represented their age, occupation or sex, most promising candidates who ran on overt platforms of political philosophies found themselves incarcerated.

Nepal's first experience with no-confidence politics, against Surya Bahadur Thapa's government in 1983, exposed the extent of the group dynamics that had gripped Rastriya Panchayats members. Most of the ministers abided by the palace secretary's whim and quit the government to vote against Thapa. A few remained aboard to back the prime minister until the very bitter end. One assistant minister later said he would have done much more than vote against Thapa had he received the directive directly, and not through a shadowy representative of the notorious *bhumjati* *griha*.

This pattern of organisational politics, which was referred to as *sumaharaj* *ajai* in order to avoid having to use the maligned, albeit shorter, *bahadur* *adjective*, continued until the system's collapse seven years later. In the end, the three-way Thapa-Lokendra Bahadur Chand-Marchand Man Singh Shrestha internal split did as much to hasten the demolition of the partyless edifice as the chief of holding houses for the capital's streets.

Twelve years later, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba began voicing dissatisfaction with the composition of his cabinet the day after he swore in the new members.

One reason political analysis goes awfully wrong during these transparent times is that pundits have to take into account who is not in the minority in the majority party at any given moment.

Translation: "I had to get on board as many people as I possibly could to save my wobbly government." One reason why political analysis goes awfully wrong during these transparent times is that pundits have to take into account who is not in the minority in the majority party at any given moment, which isn't as easy as it sounds.

The Nepal Congress parliamentary party has mutated into a ramblous cluster of MPs who have long learned to assert their individuality over their organisational affiliation. The party's chief whip has no amount of leading would try to restrain MPs who know they can't expect to stand for re-election unless they have served in the council of ministers.

Motions within the ruling party sometimes come so mesmerising that opposition groups simply tend to lose their relevance. Public interest in funding politicians has become so intense that the interminable squabbling endemic in almost all of the parties automatically becomes front-page news. Recent comments by two senior Nepal Congress leaders encourage one to make a comparative study of contemporary politics.

Party president Grijya Prasad Koirala spoke of the need to make our education system more responsive to Nepal's soil. Considering that it came from the chief of a party whose success in three decades of opposition was rooted in its refusal to

compromise on the principle of universality, Koirala's call carries special weight. Its significance becomes more conspicuous when you recall that the Kangressi almost succeeded in toppling the panchayat system in 1979 riding on a wave of student dissatisfaction over, among other things, the New Education Plan, which was touted as being more responsive to the realities of Nepal's earth, air and water.

To be sure, Koirala has maintained an enviable record when it comes to thinking aloud. When he described the restoration of multiparty democracy as a victory for the panchas as well, the audience in Tundikhel took note in heeding him. It took seven years after Chand and Thapa returned to the prime minister's office in succession, for Koirala to finally have felt proudly vindicated. Koirala's claim that the vocal commissioners of the panchayat were useful administrators whose continuation would have stopped the Maoist streamer paved the way for the two ordinances on setting up regional administrations.

In the annual post-1990 politics, Koirala embodies the perfect blending of personal ascertiveness with the need to make our education system more responsive to Nepal's soil. Considering that it came from the chief of a party whose success in three decades of opposition was rooted in its refusal to

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the merit of party politics. Former deputy prime minister Ram Chandra Poudel, largely dismissed as a one-man army by his own party colleagues, now seems to be loyally wedded to cultivating the high tradition of democratic individualism. He recently warned of the dangers of multiparty democracy faced from the Maoists perched in the high-altitude forests and the political perversity proliferating in the capital's expanding concrete jungle. Few can accuse Poudel of belonging to either group, which may be his greatest disadvantage. It's quite lonely out there in the middle ground, especially when you have to fend off endless accusations of sitting on the fence.

However, the real merit of Poudel's method lies in his (perhaps unintended) endeavour to amalgamate the cultures of partyless and multiparty politics in a real spirit of generational reconciliation. Since the panchas borrowed much more than their polity from the Kangressi, perhaps it's only fair that the Kangressi should be practising the brand of political individualism the panchas could only preach. □

## VILLAGE VOICE

# Jamuna gets a road

If you ask Nepalis what they want most desperately in their village, more often than not, the answer will be: a road. In the more remote parts of Nepal, many have waited their entire lives for the road to get to their village. But in some places, they don't wait for the government; they build the road themselves. This is what happened in the north-east of Ilam.

It isn't long, just 5 km. But that is all it took to join Jamuna with the road to the district headquarters, and what a world of difference it is going to make. It took the local people over six months to complete the task, and on 24 October two Land Rovers arrived here amidst much fanfare and jubilation.

"A god before Dasa" was the slogan in Jamuna and it happened with two days to spare. It proved to many here that where there is commitment, there is a way. The going was not smooth, especially on a road designed and built entirely by the villagers. The Land Rovers needed a bit of human power to get over the rough bits. The last-flooding Maj Kholia was still swollen with water because of recent rains, and the road builders had waded two days for the water to recede.

On the 24th they decided to take on the river, within half a day, there was a temporary log bridge in place. By early afternoon the vehicles were on their way, negotiating sharp bends up the spur on which the village rests. Villagers clung to every inch of space in the cars, dismounting to get around the quick twists that local engineering had not been able to get right. A housekeeper roared on the hot hood of the Land Rovers, croaked continuously—tiny music that was supposed to be festive. But no one was really that bothered, it was the sound of revving engines that was music to most ears.

As a visitor, I was co-opted to be the official photographer of the ceremony. My grandfather, 90-year-old Devi Prasad Bhatnagar, was cutting ribbons. The bazaar folk had readied two ceremonial copper *ghadas* to mark the arrival of the cars and had strung marigold garlands on everyone that desired one—including the Land Rovers. It took some time for the moment to come because one road gang had marched ahead to level the road beyond the bazaar to take the

vehicles to the high school from where it would be visible to large parts of the village. Local owners, drivers of the vehicles, village elders all had marigold garlands on their necks and vermilion on their foreheads. It was a celebration of victory over the difficult mountain terrain and the triumph of self-help. I was born and raised in Jamuna and was visiting after a gap of about six years. The time that had elapsed since my last visit had effectively made me an outsider, and I was initially unable to soak up the joys of the road getting there. My admiration of my compatriots grew only when I heard the full story.

This was the second road the villagers had built in the past three years. The first one, of almost the same distance, connected it with the district headquarters, and but soon after it was completed, a change in customs rules made it difficult for vehicles with Indian license plates to service the village. That was the end of the road, and all the money and labour that Jamuna had put into it.

"We realised we had to connect with the district headquarters," Jit Bahadur Sawa, VDC chairman told me. He began the work with a Rs 75,000 grant from the Village Development Committee, a promise by MP Keshab Thapa to contribute Rs 25,000 and Rs 120,000 from two local contributors. The villagers put in labour—some families up to 32 worker days. A villager with road building experience in the Indian hills was hired to be the surveyor, engineer and contractor.

The road has injected new energy into Jamuna. "We'll get back to road building again after Thapa," Sawa said. Surprisingly for a politician, Sawa worked on the road-gangs alongside the other labourers throughout the construction period. "I will be a shame if we don't fix the road and make it usable throughout the year," he adds. "Now we're an additional responsibility, thinking about how to build a permanent bridge across the Mai." That may take some time because with less than Rs 50,000 to spend every year, it is clearly beyond the VDC's budget. So what does Jamuna get from the road? Will the quiet little village be converted, like most other newly-connected settlements, into a squallid and noisy town? Perhaps not. The people of Ilam are very industrious, and the village of 6,000 people produces over 20 tons of cardamom, 40 tons of ginger, over 15 tons of potatoes and several hundred kilograms of tea leaves every year. They are sold mainly in India, carried on horseback or by porters. Now there is the road. "We are about to take a great leap forward," Sawa tells me, as the Land Rovers give up a light cloud of soot and leave up to the school grounds with baring horns. "This road will help make it happen."

by BINOD BHATTARAI

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BIZ NEWS

Trade Treaty update

Nepal and India moved a step closer toward coming to an agreement on renewing the trade treaty before it expires on 5 December. At the centre of the dispute are five Nepali exports whose surge India says has hurt its domestic producers. There's another unarticulated issue that India wants addressed—a safeguard to ensure that it will not be hurt when Nepal joins the World Trade Organisation (WTO). WTO rules say a member country must extend to all members the same treatment, and though there are safeguards for concessions given to least developed countries, India would like to ensure that the treaty does not require it to grant facilities similar to the provisions of the treaty to other LDCs. Still, things appear to be progressing. Finally, in the last round (3-4 November) officials took the advice of lobbies in both countries and began talking about value addition as a way to deal with the problem of surges, an indication that a resolution is imminent. Indian officials are said to have suggested different models for calculating value addition and Nepal has its own ideas on how that should be done. Finalising a formula acceptable to both sides, fixing value added percentages and ironing out the implications of this on industry and trade may take some more meetings.

More Belgians

The global impact of the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington are beginning to reflect on tourism here. Arrivals for the first ten months of the year fell by roughly 14 percent. Indian arrivals fell by about 29 percent and third country tourists by about eight percent. The October arrivals, which directly reflect travel plans after the terrorist strikes in the United States and the war in Afghanistan, were 34 percent lower compared with the same period last year—Indian tourists were down by 50 percent and third country visitors by 30 percent. The only nationality that saw an upturn were Belgians, with 13 percent more arrivals.

The slowdown begins

We are now officially facing an economic slowdown. The Nepal Rastra Bank's economic report for August-September records a drop in government spending, including development expenditure, a slump in resource mobilisation, and an upswing in inflation. Overall government spending grew by just 3.7 percent to Rs 6.25 billion, compared with 26 percent growth in the same period last year. The unusual spending slowdown in the early months of the fiscal year is because of delays in disbursement, which was slower this year because of the extra time it took in getting the budget approved by parliament. However, a worrying trend is that over 58 percent of the allocation was spent on recurrent expenses and only 12 percent on development projects. Regular spending dropped by 4.3 percent while the drop in spending on development was 11 percent.

“Special Editions” for Tihar

SAV Mills Ltd, a Chennai, India-based Public Limited Company has added two new outlets to market its upmarket shirts and trousers, and sell the “Special Editions” label. The new outlets are Shrestha Tailoring Centre, Bag Bazar and Chahilahi, and the Kashamandap Bazaar, Kathmandu. The company says its Special Editions garments are “five-star shirt without a five-star price tag.”

New NEPSE listings

The Nepal Stock Exchange (NEPSE) has listed two joint ventures. Nepal Alpic (CHK SPK) Everest Finance Limited, and the Bangladesh Finance and Leasing Limited. Alpic applied for 200,000 of its shares to be listed, and Bangladesh Finance has 300,000 shares for trading at the exchange.

Should Royal Nepal Airlines be privatised?

There is no other way to save RNAC than to hand it over to private entrepreneurs. A virtually resourceless state can not rescue a bankrupt and mismanaged state corporation. The corporation should find its bread and butter from its own revenue. Once it goes to private hands, the state officers will stop bleeding and the CIA, Parliament, the Courts, the Press, and even the general public can use their time and resources for other constructive business. Time is running out, we may not get quality investors if we delay the process for long.

**Tanka Khanal**  
RNAC is marred by inefficiency, mismanagement and frequent scandals; it needs a complete overhaul. The government has proved to be incapable of running any sort of business, including civil aviation. RNAC must be privatised, but it must go to a party that can run the airline efficiently and profitably for the greater interest of the nation.

**Atma Shrestha**  
RNAC is marred by inefficiency, mismanagement and frequent scandals; it needs a complete overhaul. The government has proved to be incapable of running any sort of business, including civil aviation. RNAC must be privatised, but it must go to a party that can run the airline efficiently and profitably for the greater interest of the nation.

No privatisation. Already there is a huge gap between the rich and the poor. Let's not widen this gap by privatising.

**Pukar Bista**  
The way the government is sucking RNAC dry, it is better to keep the airline out of the government's reach.

**Deependra P Acharya, UK**  
Privatisation may not be the best solution to the problem. Nepal is not yet ready for full-blown privatisation. Due care must be taken in protecting the domestic sector so that ordinary Nepalis will still be able to fly.

**Batu Krishna Sapkota**  
Before privatising think of what happened to other companies that were privatised

**Deepak KC**  
Political interference has ruined RNAC, but everyone blames the state. So let the government hand it over to the public.

**A loyal RNAC staffer for 25 years**  
RNAC should be 51% owned by the government, the rest should be allowed to public.

**Iwar Atreya**  
RNAC should be privatised so it is no longer a cash cow for politicians for funding elections and employing cadre.

**Purshotam Rai**  
It is a disgrace to call RNAC a national flag carrier. It is an embarrassment for the country. The attitude of the state is appalling, rude to say the least, and the on-time record is very poor. As a passenger, you just can't plan around an RNAC flight. Flight cancellations are rampant and worst of all, it still boasts one of the most number of employees per aircraft in the

world. Instead of privatising it, it may be cheaper to just close it down. And let other private airlines come in.

**Former RNAC passenger**  
Privatise. Take it away from the politicians. Let Singapore Airlines run it.

**MS Gorikalya**  
Anyone who has worked in the remote districts of Nepal knows the importance and service provided by RNAC. Life without RNAC is unimaginable there. Tell me how a private airline can take you to Taplejung or just Rs 500. RNAC connects poor and remote areas. What will happen to them if you privatise the airline?

**AN RNAC aircraft engineer**  
Give it to business entrepreneurs, and not politicians, to run.

**Varat Pokhrel**  
All good citizens of Nepal should join together to voice loud and clear our determination to rescue RNAC.

**JN Rai, Brunel**  
We've seen how other governments are pouring extra cash to save their respective flag carriers following the attacks in the US. In RNAC's case the government just keeps taking money from the airline.

**SBhatnair**  
Knowing the way business is done in Nepal, it really makes no sense. If other airlines operate under the government or the private sector. Both are corrupt.

**Sabina Neupane**  
Privatise. And save RNAC from corruption and destruction. Digesting and rude flight crew, unreliable service, how long will we let RNAC embarrass Nepal?

**Payal Rai**  
Good question. But you think corrupt politicians will allow privatisation to happen? They won't privatise unless they get a good kickback.

**Dharma Gurung**  
Immediately, urgently and instantly.

**Navraj Dhakal**  
Why stop with RNAC? Privatise the whole country.

**Chandra Prasad Mishra, Korea**  
It should be privatised at least to control the corporation so that RNAC can be an airline with an image like other Asian airlines.

**Pramod Dawadi, Japan**  
Yes. Government is too busy being corrupt to improve the airline.

**SB Gurung**  
Yeah, privatise it. But who is going to buy a bankrupt airline? If you should the government privatise is miking coo? Just ask Girja!

**Samir Tamang**

ECONOMIC SENSE

By ARTHA BEED

That sinking feeling

Every treaty time, we learn anew the importance of timely tete-a-tetes, and firm mano a manos.

At least we agreed on something. But, this Beed and others of our ilk, dear reader, agree that it is becoming a bad habit in this part of the world to agree to talk, and then agree in talks to talk again.

After the fourth round of talks between India and Nepal on the trade treaty, diplomats speak as there is progress. Fair enough, but where on earth are we progressing? With less than a month to go before the 5 December deadline, that perennial South Asian rope trick will be pulled out—miraculously, things will be sorted out, wrapped up etc. But, a few months down the line, or when the treaty comes up for renewal, someone will realise that an adequate solution was not found and we will have to go through this whole puse-footing again.

For India especially the commerce ministry, renewing this treaty is not a priority. The WTO summit in Doha is priority number one right now, as that is where India's interests lie. The commerce ministry is working more under pressure from the country's External Affairs Ministry.

Of course, it is a Nepali's interest to sort out this matter post haste. But rather than deal with it prematurely, we procrastinated. We have forgotten the embargo days of 1989, which resulted almost solely due to Nepal's late-fringe national politics. This time around, the blame lies not only with the government, but also the pex bodies of Nepali trade and industry.



The private sector, after intervening in trade matters so successfully in 1996, has returned to being the clumsy handmaiden of less competent, if higher bodies. Five years ago, the efforts of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) expedited the process, and Nepal also managed to get a pretty nice deal.

There seems to be a sense on the other side that Nepal has become complacent, and that we cannot be trusted to make good on our commitments to curtail smuggling of goods to India. This, together with India's own domestic industry pressuring the government for protectionism has meant real complications. Indian domestic industries, like those in Nepal, have enjoyed protectionism in various forms, and now with the WTO regime nearing, they are nervous. The situation has already become pretty nightmarish with the invasion of Indian markets by cheaper quality Chinese goods. Unlike us, for us, domestic Indian industries are venting their spleen on poor us. What

other explanation is there for such a hue and cry about a 'surge' in Nepali exports that continue to be on the wrong side of the decimal, compared with total Indian imports.

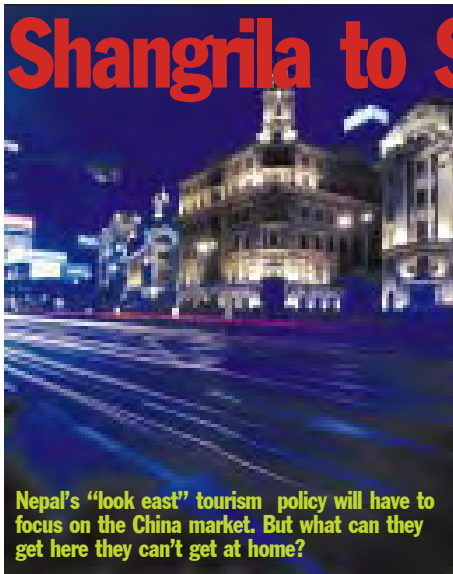
For Nepal, the sops provided by the 1996 renewal of the treaty have been good for those businesspeople who have taken advantage of the loopholes. Overnight, businessmen engaged in informal trade with India became 'industrialists'. Only a few multinationals came, as the industrial and business environment never became conducive. The increase in investments from reputed Indian and multinational companies envisaged during the 1996 renewal never materialised. Nepal lost an great opportunity for industrialisation and rapid economic growth.

The treaty renewal discussions have centred only on issues relating to value addition. Other major issues for RNAC remain buried in the arguments on content percentages. Unable to get the issue of the railway link to Birgunj before the machinery and equipment from the dry port finishes its vanishing act. (See "Treaty time", #55) Nepali exports from taxation by Indian provincial governments. For instance, a luxury tax of 20 percent is imposed on tax by the West Bengal government. This provision should, of course, be reciprocal.

Right then, to word. Speed is of the essence.

Readers can post their views at [artha@beed.com](mailto:artha@beed.com)

ECONOMY



Nepal's “look east” tourism policy will have to focus on the China market. But what can they get here they can’t get at home?

**DANIEL B. HABER**  
IN SHANGHAI  
Nepal has approved Nepal as an official destination for China's outbound tourists. Nepal Rastra Bank has agreed to make the Chinese yuan a convertible currency. That is why Nepal's nervous tourism industry is desperately hoping to fill the vacuum left by dwindling offers and Indian arrivals with Chinese.

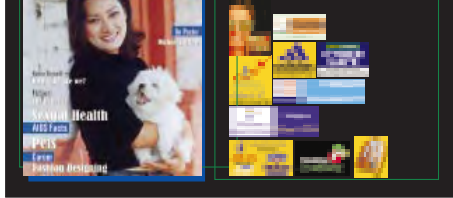
Of course, nobody in Nepal's tourism belt really expects masses of shopaholic Chinese tour groups to immediately start flocking to the Himalayan kingdom.

What can they get here that they can't get at home? Many, however, are initially banking on the large expatriate communities that live in such "hardship" postings as Beijing and Shanghai.

"Our first target group is China's wealthy expatriate community," says Subodh Rana of Marco Polo Travels and Director of NICA (Nepal Incentives and Conventions Association).

Royal Nepal Airlines already flies twice a week between Kathmandu to Osaka with a stopover in Shanghai. Despite the midnight departure there is chatter in the cabin, primarily from Japan-bound Nepalis, some Japanese tourists or aid personnel, and a few Chinese businessmen and workers returning home. By and large, most of the passengers are flying to Osaka, via Shanghai, although a metropolis of 17 million (China's second-largest city), is used by RNAC primarily as a refueling stop.

There are over a quarter million expatriates living in Shanghai and it would be useful to tap into that market, to convince some of them to spend their holidays in Nepal. In Shanghai the first thing to do is to head straight for the shopping malls, and plunk into a Starbucks. Royal Nepal Airlines is not listed anywhere in any travel magazine or brochure. Nobody even knew it flew to Shanghai except for one magazine called *City Weekend*, which a few weeks earlier had published a pictorial travel feature



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Shangrila to Shanghai (and back)

than most Englishmen. Masood has been the Holiday Inn Crowne Plaza regional director for South Asia, has visited Nepal several times, and is happy to help promote Nepal. He has even offered to rent office space to Royal Nepal Airlines in the Crowne Plaza (easier to find, better exposure and support), as the airline's lease at the lobby hole (monthly rental about \$1,300) expires next year.

Royal Nepal hosted a dinner recently for local media at Nepali Kitchen, the one Nepali restaurant in Shanghai, run by Kanachi Ghale from Manang. Although treats only about 40 persons, it is very cozy, tastefully decorated by an Italian interior designer. The occasion was to publicise the airline's summer promotion fare for Kathmandu for only \$400 return. Ghale, who used to work in Taiwan, is well-connected with Taiwanese and Japanese expatriates who patronise the restaurant, and has already brought some groups to Nepal.

Other expats with connection with Nepal are Dominic Baeque, Director of a Beijing-based public relations firm hired by Nepal Tourism Board for its media campaign in China, Sigrid Seel, a German travel consultant in Shanghai who had already brought groups to Nepal. Then there is Dorjee Sherpa, previously with the Soaltree Crowne Plaza in Kathmandu, now general manager of the Glorio Hotel in nearby Suzhou. Masood of Crowne Plaza



From hands to The Bund (left) and a Starbucks mobile dispenser on a Shanghai street.

has offered to run a Nepali food promotion in cooperation with Royal Nepal and to send Chinese artists to Kathmandu's Soaltree to promote their new restaurant, China Garden.

The concern among travel agents in Shanghai is the unstable political situation in Nepal and the region, and the fact that Royal Nepal fares are expensive compared to other regional destinations.

In addition, Royal Nepal cannot always guarantee seats on the Shanghai-Kathmandu sector.

Once all the red tape gets sorted out, will Nepal be ready for inbound tourists from China? Expats living in Kathmandu? □





# And they're off...



**ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY**  
Now that autumn is finally here, and the clear blue skies and sunny afternoons with it, pony rides, especially cycling enthusiasts, say it is time to start gearing up for a season of ups and downs. Mountain biking, which has become an increasingly popular adventure sport here in the last few years, is the sport of the season, and one of the biggest cycling events is about to begin in the splendid

amphitheatre that is the Himalaya. A number of Nepali youth jonesing for the distinctive adrenaline rush of biking, and tourists longing for a taste of adventure, have ensured that the sport has captured public imagination. And it all comes to a head this season, with several biking events being organised, the most exciting and largest of which is the Siemens Action Asia Himalayan Mountain Bike Race Series 2001. This three-day race series, to be held around the Valley on 10,



## Mountain biking is the sport du jour in Kathmandu. And we are about to be hit by its biggest event.

18, and 24 November, might be just that extra boost Nepal's flagging tourism industry needs.

The races will be filmed by TransWorld International, one of the world's leading producers of sport documentaries, and 30 minute packages will be distributed to international television channels such as ESPN and National Geographic, with a potential viewing audience of 64 million. "This could be just what was needed to kick start tourism," says Pradeep Raj Pandey, CEO of the Nepal Tourism Board, one of the sponsors of the event.

The event opens this afternoon on Tridevi Marg, and the organisers say Thamel has not seen a show of this size for quite some time. The ceremony is

open to all and will be attended by a number of high-ranking government officials, ambassadors, prominent figures from the Nepali sporting world, the race participants, naturally, and also Village Development Committee members from Lubbhu, Sankhu, and Kakani, where the races will take place. Ceremony over, the celebrities will be sent off through the streets of Thamel in decorated rickshaws behind a police band, while some 1,000 flags, whistles and ticker tapes will be handed out to onlookers. The procession will end at the Himalayan Mountain Bike office in Thamel with a cultural show.

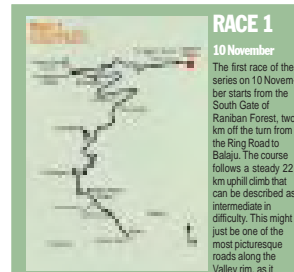
Organisers are expecting about 200 cyclists, Nepalis and foreigners to compete in five different categories:

open, women's, masters (over 40), juniors (under 16), and the inter-school competition. Besides local stars like Ranjan Rajbhandary, who came second in last year's race, the Series will also have big-name international participants like Marc Weichert and Christoph Muller both top European cyclists. The open and masters race will cover a distance of 35 km over five laps, the women go 18 km, while the juniors over 12 km. Winners will take home hefty cash prizes, trophies, and certificates, and other goodies like round trip tickets to Europe. In addition, the organisers have also decided to give away great prizes to onlookers—three mountain bikes worth \$650 each from the world famous brand Fuji

International. With all this ahead, it is not surprising we see all these bikers out training in the mornings and evenings these days. Ranjan Rajbhandary is said to be in Tibet preparing for the race. Peter Stewart, the race director thinks the Nepali riders have a fair chance. "Given that things are tough as it is, what with equipment being so expensive, Nepali riders who take the sport seriously have it in them to do well. Their only disadvantage is that they don't have up-to-date equipment," says Stewart.

Annu Charan Shrestha is a young businessman and an amateur rider. He recently discovered the joys of pedalling uphill and speeding down muddy tracks, and is hooked. The monsoon season for him was exceptional. "This was my first season of mountain biking and I loved it," he says, laughing at how he was covered with leeches and mud when he and a friend biked from Kakani to Budhanilkantha during the rains. He plans to do everything he can to keep riding and getting better, including participating in the Race Series. "Some friends of mine and I will certainly be taking part, even if we will be competing with professional riders," he says enthusiastically.

And he isn't the only one. There is great enthusiasm, especially among young men, for jolting around and even falling off bikes, and with events like this race series to add that professional edge, it will be surprising if in a few years Nepal does not have at least a couple of world class bikers. There are endless places to ride out to, so go! And if you need some inspiration, just get out and watch the races. ☺



### RACE 1

10 November

The first race of the series on 10 November starts from the South Gate of Raniban Forest, two km off the turn from the Ring Road to Bajaur. The course follows a steady 22 km uphill climb that can be described as intermediate in difficulty. This might just be one of the most picturesque roads along the Valley rim, as it winds through small villages, occasionally opening up to glimpses of terraces on both sides. The road is mostly sealed with rough patches, minor water crossings and the occasional muddy and sandy sections. Even for non-participants, for those who love the sport or simply want to see what the sport is all about, the view of the Himalaya from Kakani, at 2,066 m, comes as a splendid bonus. But spectators need to get into the perimeter of the race course before 9.30AM, as the roads will be closed to all traffic and policed during the event, while Race Marshals man the course.

Participants in the open and seniors category will complete the whole 21.9 km course, while those in the women and juniors segments will start their event from the 14.5 km mark of the race and complete the last 7 km. The school relay teams will complete the entire course, with each member riding approximately 7 km. Wheelchair riders will start from the main starting gate and complete the first 7.85 km, up to the first change-over in the schools relay.

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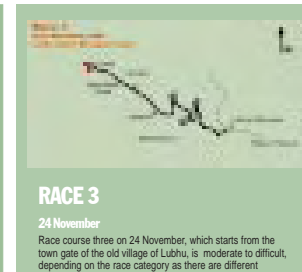
### RACE 2

18 November

The second race on 18 November will commence from the Club Himalaya in Nagarkot. From a starting altitude of approximately 1,950m, the road descends across a fantastic Himalayan backdrop and typical Nepali countryside that will make every stretch memorable. The road is nearly all jeep track, with some rough and monsoon-ripped sections that will require cautious riding. Pros describe the course as intermediate to challenging, with a progressive drop of 515m over 9 kms after a short uphill at the start of the race. All participants will complete the entire length while the disabled will race from the starting point to the Nagarkot Tower.

## ON STANDS NOW

### HIMALAYAN THE PROPHECY, THE MADRASA AND US



### RACE 3

24 November

Race course three on 24 November, which starts from the town gate of the old village of Lubbhu, is moderate to difficult, depending on the race category as there are different courses for some. All riders follow the same route from Lubbhu out to the village bus park near Siserni adjoining a large pipal tree. From here the wheelchair riders will return to Lubbhu while the junior and women riders will continue to the gate of the Elite's Co-Ed School grounds and then return to Lubbhu over the same course. Participants in the open and senior categories will ascend the challenging 7 kms to Lakuri Bhanjyang testing everyone's endurance and then their downhill abilities on the return to Lubbhu. The course starts at an elevation of approximately 1,310 m and climbs steadily as it winds up to Lakuri Bhanjyang at 2,066 m. Once again, Nepali villages and a forested terrain set the landscape, with a stunning display of the Himalaya across the northern edge of the Valley rim. The road is a dirt jeep track, and in sections is stony and tipped.

## National Championship for disabled athletes

This will be the first international sporting event in Nepal where the disabled will also have the chance to prove themselves. Some 30 disabled people will be participating in wheelchairs in all three races. The race courses have been adjusted to accommodate the participants, but be certain, it will be a challenging task. Says Rakunur Zaman, program manager of Handicap International Nepal, and one of the members of the race committee, "This will give an opportunity to the disabled to prove that they are normal, and ensure they are recognised by society." There is even talk of recognising this event as a national championship for the disabled.



PHOTOGRAPH BY ANNU CHARAN SHRESTHA

## PRESENTING SPECIAL EDITIONS SHIRT & TROUSERS

### THE PROPHECY, THE MADRASA AND US

## BOLERO STEEL MEETS SILK

### BOLERO STEEL MEETS SILK

# The worm that won't die

**"Sir Cam, I presume?" And other ways of winning friends and influencing people.**

MICHELLE DELIO

Unlike most of its headline-grabbing predecessors, the SirCam virus that hit us in July was not a transient threat. Almost four months after it was first spotted, the virus and deadlier variants are still pouring into e-mail inboxes. Most viruses peak and then rapidly fade away two or three days after their Internet debuts. But so far, SirCam has been more like a monsoon than a squall. Lists by antiviral companies that track virus infections have SirCam topping all the time-active threat lists by a huge margin. So, either SirCam is one incredibly pervasive and persuasive virus, or its much-heralded predecessors didn't have as much effect on most e-mail users.

Rub Rosenberg of vMyths, a virus hoax site, argues that most "red alert" viruses are really just tempests in a teacup, dubbing them "Hysterics" that do little damage to few users and fade fast. Impact statistics for the best-known viruses seem to confirm Rosenberg's theory. Melissa, which spread across networks in March 1999, only reached fifth place on antiviral company Sophos' list that month, with a mere 6 percent of all reported infections. "VBS/Love/Let," better known as the Love Bug, came in first place when it debuted in May 2000, but claimed only 36 percent of all reported infections. That record was barely topped by Annak in February 2001, with 38.2 percent of all reported infections. Variants of all three of these viruses occasionally turn up, but the originals sputtered out after only a few days of running wild. SirCam's infection rate is far greater than that of its predecessors and, although

infections seem to have slowed somewhat last month, suddenly in the last week, new and more potent variants have surfaced. And experts say it will continue to spread until computer users develop a healthy skepticism of any and all e-mail attachments, no matter who sent them, how legitimate they look, or how tempting the contents of those attachments promise to be. "Viruses like LoveBug and Kournikova all had the same subject line, body text, and attachment name," Shipp said. "So they were easily spotted and all turned out to be one-day wonders, fading out within 48 hours of being identified. But viruses like SirCam, Magist and Hybris change their identity and all these viruses have been very long-lived in comparison to the one-day wonders."

Hybris, first spotted in October 2000, was still rated as the third most active virus on Sophos' summer list, with 4.1 percent of all reported infections. It often crops a top spot on virus threat lists, but infection rates have continued to diminish significantly since last October. Hybris updates itself by downloading little pieces of code that allow it to perform new, malicious actions. But so far, the text of an infected e-mail always refers to Snow White and the Seven Dwarves, which makes it easier for computer users to identify than Magist. Magist has appeared in the top five of most antivirus companies' lists since it was first spotted in March, and has maintained a steady rate of infection. SirCam is similar to Magist. Both create the subject, body and attachment text of their infectious e-mail attachments from files on an infected computer. Magist

sometimes includes random file attachments from its victims with the infected e-mail. SirCam always includes a file plucked from the infected machine. And like SirCam, Magist has its own e-mail engine that allows it to connect directly to a mail server. But Magist trades infected computers, which has limited its ability to spread widely. It's hard to transfer a virus when the computer that harbors it is unusable. "So there is a good chance that SirCam may be with us for a long time." Inboxes filled with messages asking for advice have already become the norm for those hit hardest by SirCam—anyone whose e-mail address appears on a website. Each time the user of an infected computer boots up a program on that machine, SirCam infects a randomly selected document from the My Documents folder and attaches the document to an e-mail. It then sends that e-mail to a randomly selected names gathered from an infected computer's e-mail address book and Internet cache files, which contain copies of recently visited websites.

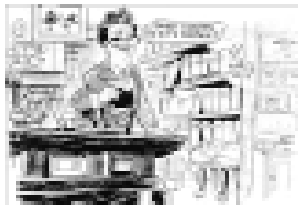
temper, he sends sarcastic memos to his staff. And a Wickes is an accountant with a twisted porn collection. "SirCam packs a double punch with its viral ability to appeal to humans' curiosity, cell, and its bacteria-like ability to self-replicate." Young, the head of high-tech WMC Center for Collaborative Neuroscience, said. "So there is a good chance that SirCam may be with us for a long time." Inboxes filled with messages asking for advice have already become the norm for those hit hardest by SirCam—anyone whose e-mail address appears on a website. Each time the user of an infected computer boots up a program on that machine, SirCam infects a randomly selected document from the My Documents folder and attaches the document to an e-mail. It then sends that e-mail to a randomly selected names gathered from an infected computer's e-mail address book and Internet cache files, which contain copies of recently visited websites.



The virus-laden attachments can be safely priced open by the tech-savvy, so some SirCam victims have been turned into unwitting exhibitors, flashing their private parts to nosy nets around the world. Some people who have been reading the attachments speak almost fondly of their new plague-ridden "friends," saying they feel they have come to know them by peeking into their private documents. "Yes, I read all the attachments," said Terry Anders, a freelance technical researcher. "There's Enrique, he's looking for a job and is getting desperate. I keep getting new 'upgraded' versions of his resume and cover letters. Maria is human resources and is struggling hard to keep a large corporation happy. Genak is an immigration lawyer with a heavy caseload and a short

temper, he sends sarcastic memos to his staff. And a Wickes is an accountant with a twisted porn collection. "SirCam packs a double punch with its viral ability to appeal to humans' curiosity, cell, and its bacteria-like ability to self-replicate." Young, the head of high-tech WMC Center for Collaborative Neuroscience, said. "So there is a good chance that SirCam may be with us for a long time." Inboxes filled with messages asking for advice have already become the norm for those hit hardest by SirCam—anyone whose e-mail address appears on a website. Each time the user of an infected computer boots up a program on that machine, SirCam infects a randomly selected document from the My Documents folder and attaches the document to an e-mail. It then sends that e-mail to a randomly selected names gathered from an infected computer's e-mail address book and Internet cache files, which contain copies of recently visited websites.

## In defence of media



**Are TV and newspapers really to blame for all the spin, war-mongering and fear?**

You can rant and can puke and call the American media a bunch of liberal hype-mongers or conservative war-drunk jingoists controlled by heartless corporate money-slugs who would sell their own mothers for a juicy 175-point banner headline.

Either one you choose it's still a tariffed cabal of fear-happy headline writers who occasionally stumble across the truth, and almost by accident, moments of genuine emotion and human connection, until they cut to commercial.

It's the typical cynical outlook, amplified by innumerable anthems, hoaxes and unaccountable collateral

damaging bombs and absurd TV images of old ladies walking around in gas masks. Donald Rumsfeld placing his foot in his mouth and quickly removing it after a nasty phone call from Al Fleischer. Repackaged reality and dissecting the human drama into tidy sound-bites until they eyes glaze over and you think, there they go again, the goddamn media, skewing everything, pumping out one-sided versions and pro-America headlines a ratings magnet until you don't know who to believe anymore, the ostensibly conservative media owners, the anti-media cynics, or somewhere in between. You can trust no one.

It's the typical cynical outlook, amplified by innumerable anthems, hoaxes and unaccountable collateral

## Fix it, don't sink it



**The WTO could do with a better-defined mandate and less sweeping powers, but it needs to stay.**

WTO's legal status needs to be changed. First, the order of precedence between WTO and national laws should be reversed. As things stand, no country can use trade sanctions to impose its own standards on another country when an imported product is the same as the nationally produced one. Banning imported hormone-treated beef, for example, is disallowed, unless there is evidence that that beef is different from domestically produced beef. The exception is if there is an international agreement to which both countries have subscribed. But such agreements are hard to reach. Countries should be allowed to enforce their higher national standards on imported and domestic goods unless WTO experts find that such domestic standards should be prohibited or are unnecessary.

Few people question the benefits of international trade. And since global markets require international institutions, the World Trade Organization (WTO) is in many ways the most fully developed such institution. It has been successful at creating international law, and adjudicating disputes and enforcing its decisions. But the economic dislocations of the last decade, and the lack of adequate social safety nets in less developed countries have generated tremendous resentment against globalisation. As member states meet in Qatar today, globalisation's opponents want to "shrink or sink the WTO." They are misguided.

The WTO has its shortcomings, but it is designed to guide international trade, not pursue social goals. The trouble is not the inclusion of human rights. World China, soon to be a member, agree to the inclusion of human rights. World China is amenable to the environment. Enforcing agreed-upon rules is not appropriate for achieving social goals, as many countries lack the resources to meet international standards. Instead, it would be better to provide resources to enable poor countries to comply voluntarily. For example, instead of introducing WTO rules prohibiting child labour, we ought to provide resources for universal primary education and then demand that recipients of such support eliminate child labour over time.

Still, there are valid objections that call for significant changes in WTO rules. The WTO is practically the only international institution to which countries willingly subordinate themselves. This makes it too powerful, because its trade liberalisation rules trump domestic regulations aimed at social values. The

Or, you can believe everything you see and read and hear, suck it down, every Rumsfeld shuffle, every Dubya flub and every robotic CNN talking head, spinning yarns, pre-packaging wars and leaving enormous amounts of information out because either you can't handle it or they can't tell you—because it would kill the ratings or affect your vote—or maybe because, very simply, they don't really know. Which isn't unlikely.

There's nothing like a complicated, nasty, lie-splattered war that's not really a war to get people filled about the media. And it's a slippery slope, all major media outlets trying to package the war attractively and excitingly as possible while downplaying the sensationalism and the blood and death, but also clearly leveraging the horror like hell, but then denying it because they're accused of pandering, hyping and lying. Call it a dilemma, a conundrum. Just don't cut it reasonable or in any way something you can condemn with 100 percent impunity.

But know this about journalists and editors-in-chief and news directors and etc.: Most take their responsibility to the public seriously, genuinely want to tell the "real" story, get it at the honest truth, not overtype or instill warm fear and cause you to build a bunker and wear a shamatz suit to have sex and never open another greeting card. Most want to deliver the news as it is, as balanced and thorough information in

a concise, cogent manner so you are entertained and informed, and do so such that they can still make their car payments. Really.

The bottom line is, there is no objective truth in the fluxive worlds of religion and hate and politics (or love, sex, or fire dining, but that's another column). There are two war-time in particular. No black-white absolutes about the human condition or what drives the dark mind or what the appropriate response is when a nation is attacked, while to draw the lines of what's acceptable and moral, and what's pointless, barbarous war-mongering.

"We must consider how very little history there is I mean real authentic history," wrote Samuel Johnson, back in 1755. "That certain kings reigned and certain battles were fought, we can depend on as true, but the colouring, all the philosophy, of history is conjecture." There are few facts. There are few known truths.

It's all about context. And context is all about perspective. And perspective is all about personal experience, a mad tangle of synapses and memory, signifying nothing. Nobody knows the proper spin, the right words, the correct answer. You filter and learn and do your best to make sense of it all and if you're honest, really, really honest about it, you simply say, I don't really know. But I'm trying to.

(Mark Morford writes a column on [sgf@con/newsletters/](mailto:sgf@con/newsletters/).)

## Back in business

BELGRADE - Macedonia has ordered weapons worth "millions of dollars" from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), marking, say analysts, the revival of the country's military industry. The deal was clinched in capital Belgrade in late October. "The important thing is, the military industry is being revived," military analyst Stipe Sikavica told us. "Thirteen percent of all the exports of the former Yugoslavia in the 1980s were from the military industry." Since the Federal Directorate for Special Goods (SDPR), the FRY's military procurement agency, was reorganised in 1994, the country has exported military equipment worth \$23 million. Customers were Third World countries who bought the equipment when the former Yugoslavia was a "respected" member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). "We combined (former) Soviet and East European weaponry with the Western technology at our disposal and made sophisticated goods," said Jovan Cokovic, head of SDPR. "The crown was the M-84 tanks made for Kuwait, and successfully used by the allied forces in the 1991 Gulf War," he added. The tanks ranked in \$500 million in exports. Until 1990, Yugoslavia was a non-traditional Communist country that had good relations with the former Soviet Union and the West. After the bloody 1990s wars of disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, the FRY was placed under sanctions, including an arms trade embargo that was lifted after the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords ended the Bosnian conflict. It was re-introduced in March 1999 to curb the military adventures in Kosovo by the regime of Slobodan Milosevic. After Milosevic was ousted last month, the UN Security Council lifted the embargo last month. (NS)

## GTZ gets active

FRANKFURT - The state-owned German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) has acquired a crucial role in Germany's aid policy following the recent decision by the German parliament to focus on bilateral cooperation with 70 developing countries, rather than the 118 that Germany provided official aid to until recently. The objective, say officials at GTZ's largest client, the Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, is to increase the efficiency of aid and strengthen regional cooperation. "This (new policy) enables us to respond flexibly, and at short notice, within a setting that is changing at an ever-quicker pace—a crucial factor, especially in the case of emergency assistance measures," says GTZ director-general Bernd Eisenberger. The new policy will enable GTZ to respond directly to tensions and conflicts and reconcile divergent interests. This is becoming increasingly important as crisis prevention and conflict management move higher up Germany's development cooperation agenda. Other areas of GTZ activity include helping implement the UN Convention to Combat Desertification in development cooperation for natural resource management and desertification control in dry zones, where 1.3 billion people live. GTZ also has a crucial role in bringing private companies to co-finance government-aided development projects. An example of the so-called public-private partnerships (PPPs) is an innovative solid waste management system in Peru being introduced in cooperation with a Frankfurt company. In Nepal, in cooperation with the Salzburg firm Primavera Life, GTZ is training local specialists in organic farming. Germany's annual budget for development cooperation is about \$4 billion, just under 0.3 percent of gross national income. The UN target is 0.7 percent. (PS)

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George Soros is Chairman of the Open Society Institute and of Soros Fund Management.









## ABOUT TOWN

## MOVIES

□ **The King of Masks** An aged street performer in 1930s Sichuan realises he has no heir to whom he can pass on his ancient tradition and secrets, so he purchases a son on the black market. Wu Tianming, China, 1996. 11 November, 5.30PM, Russian Cultural Centre. Inter-Cultural Film Society, ics@wlink.com.np, 537551

□ **Nepali and Hindi movies** online ticket booking at [www.nepalshop.com](http://www.nepalshop.com)



## EXHIBITION

□ **Digital Art 1995-2001** by Jyoti Duwadi. Until 26 November. Siddharta Art Gallery Baber Mahal Revisted. 411122

□ **Paintings and sculptures** by Surendra Pradhan and Ram K Bhandari. Park Gallery, Pulchowk. Until 20 November, 10AM-6PM, Sunday-Friday, 522307

□ **The Swiss Alps** Photo exhibition. Videos on various aspects of the Swiss mountains, including the highest train in Europe and cheese-making, everyday at 5.30PM, except Sunday. 6-11 November, 10AM-5PM, Hotel de l'Annapurna. Organised by the Embassy of Switzerland, New Delhi and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation for the International Year of Mountains 2002.

## EVENTS

□ **Action Asia Himalayan Mountain Bike Race Series 2001** Opening 9 November, 3PM, parade from Himalayan Bank through Thamel, 10, 18 and 24 November. Open to all, five race categories, great prizes. Himalayan Mountain Bike. Info@bikingnepal.com, 437437

□ **Contemporary Jazz dance classes** by Meghna Thapa. At Alliance Francaise Sundays and Tuesdays 4.30PM-6.30PM, 241163. At Banu's, Kamal Pokhari, Wednesdays 6.30PM-8PM, Saturdays 1.30PM, 434024, 434830

## MUSIC

□ **Live music** Saturday nights with dinner and wine at La'Soon Restaurant and Vinotheque, Pulechowk, 535290

□ **Weekends at The Jazz Bar** The Jazz Commission on Thursdays, Chris Masana's Latin band on Fridays and on Saturdays An Fainne. 7PM onwards, Shangri-La Hotel, 412999

□ **Live music** Tuesday and Friday nights at the 40,000 1/2 ft Bar, Rum Doodle Restaurant, 414336

□ **Live acoustic music** Dinesh Rai and Deependra every Friday at the Himalaite Café, 7.30PM-10PM 262526

## EATING OUT

□ **Le Cafe des Trekkers** New Tibetan and French restaurant. Special Spanish Paella on 2,3,4, 9,10,11 November, Jyatha, Thamel, opposite Hotel Blue Diamond. 225777

□ **Splash Bar and Grill** New fifth-floor outlet with view of city and surrounding hills. Radisson Hotel, 411818

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

□ **Rox Restaurant** Traditional home-style European cuisine from a wood-fired oven. Steaks, trout, roasted vegetables, desserts. Hotel Hyatt Regency, 491234

□ **Peking Duck and Mandarin Music** Chinese chef's mild and spicy delicacies from the far-east at the Imperial Pavilion every Sunday. Hotel Shangri-La, 412999

□ **Saturday lunch** at Restaurant Kantipur, Club Himalaya, Nagarkot. BBQ buffet Rs 500 per head, 410432

□ **Sandwiches** Over the Rainbow American Diner with Fifth Avenue sandwiches, full meals at backpacker prices. Opposite Pilgrims Book House, Thamel, 426518

□ **Saturdays at the Malla** Swimming and French chef's barbecue lunch, 11AM-5PM. The Malla Hotel, 418385, 410966

## GETAWAYS

□ **Chiso Chiso Hawana** Summer B&B package for Nepalis and expatriates. Rs 1,250 per head, Club Himalaya Nagarkot Resort, 410432, 414432

□ **Escape to Jomson** Two nights, three days, B&B package with tours and Pokhara-Jomson return airfare. Expats \$250 per head, Valid until New Year. Jomson Mountain Resort, 434870

□ **Dwarika's Escapes** Breathtaking Escape, two nights package with complimentary Sekuwa for Friday night check-in, Krishnapan dinner, afternoon tea, cocktail, half-hour massage, breakfasts, Rs1,800 per couple. Or bid for the Anytime Escape, full overnight package in one of Dwarika's suites. Bidding starts at \$130, until 18 November, 479488

□ **Nagarkot Escape** Weekends in cottages, views of the Himalayas, valleys and forests. Special rates for Nepalis and resident expatriates. Hotel Keyman Chautari, keyman@wlink.com.np, 436850

□ **Himalayan Feelings** fusion band playing every Friday night at Dwarika's Hotel. Rs555 per person, Rs1010 per couple includes full Sekuwa dinner and complimentary beer/soft drink, Call 479-488 for reservations.

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

## NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



This satellite picture taken Wednesday evening shows a strong westerly band moving across central Nepal, the reason for overcast skies and a drop in maximum temperature. Nepal has also been hit by winter Gargic haze much earlier than usual this year, bringing down visibility throughout the midhills up to an altitude of 3,300 m. More westerlies are expected and they will bring the season's first snow to the high passes. Winter rains have failed for the past two years, but all indications are that this year there will be normal precipitation. Minimum temperatures are now into the single digits.

## KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
24-11	25-10	25-09	24-11	24-09

## YAK YETI YAK

by MIKU



## BOOKWORM

**Wild Orchids in Nepal: The Guide to the Himalayan Orchids of the Tribhuvan Raipath and Chitwan Jungle** Kevin White and Bhagrat Sharma  
White Lotus, Bangkok, 2000  
Rs 2,650

The result of 20 years of observing Nepal's orchids, this is a hands-on companion to Nepal's most accessible orchid habitats, with practical advice for the visitor, and a handbook for the orchid grower or armchair traveller. This volume has a wealth of data on wild species and detailed descriptions, and also reports on sixteen new Nepal records.

**The Throne of the Gods: An Account of the First Swiss Expedition to the Himalayas** Arnold Heim and August Gansser  
White Lotus, Bangkok, 2000  
Rs 2,550

Originally published in German in 1938, this account was written by two geologists who spent eight months in the Himalaya, including in the 'forbidden' lands of Nepal and Tibet. The authors made geological studies, recorded altitudes and observed the lives of the people, animals and plants. The volume includes period photos and maps and is a valuable resource for naturalists, geologists and mountaineers.

Courtesy Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 227711, [mandala@ccsl.com.np](mailto:mandala@ccsl.com.np)

## CLASSIFIED

**Stupa View and Restaurant & Terrace** at Baudhanath Stupa. Well-appointed restaurant and terraces with views of stupa and Himalayas. International vegetarian specialties, pizza from clay oven, ice cream, soft guitar tunes on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays from 5PM on. Special events on full moon. Open daily 11AM-8.30PM. 480262.

**Secretary wanted** Minimum three years secretarial experience, excellent written and spoken English, computer & basic accounts, filing. Travel agency experience an advantage. Immediate start. Position for GM of Adventure Travel Co. Bio-data and photo to PO Box 12673 KTM.

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**The way to Mexico** is too far. Botega Restaurant and Tequila Bar is near Thamel Chowk. 266433. 15 percent off-season discount.

• **The Borderlands Resort** For canyoning, rafting, trekking at Tibet borders, Professional Development Program, Leadership Courses and many more. 425831/425894.  
• [info@borderlandsresorts.com](mailto:info@borderlandsresorts.com), [www.borderlandsresorts.com](http://www.borderlandsresorts.com).

• **Nagarkot Deepswal Special** B&B, three-course international gourmet dinner, transport both ways. Rs 1,440 or \$19. Naked Chef, Nagarkot, 417368, 680115

• **K-Tool Beer and Steakhouse** not the "longest", "highest", "first" or any other superlative. Just a relaxed, easy-going bar and restaurant with the coldest beer and juiciest steaks this side of the moon. By the Kathmandu Guest House, 433043

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## HERITAGE



**ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY** The Buddha said, "The path to nirvana is enlightenment." That may have been just what author Joe Cummings and photographer Bill Wassman were after in the more than eighty years they spent researching the and author Joe Cummings of the philosophical, part-office table book *Buddhist Stupas in Asia: The*

*Shape of Perfection*. Published by the international guidebook purveyors Lonely Planet, the volume has just been released in Nepal and is sure to be a bestseller. Cummings and Wassman, both well known names in the travel guidebook industry, and both devout Buddhists, began

their journey in the late 1960's when they realised that there were more ways to happiness than the West offered.

Cummings was a political science student in North Carolina when he came to his own realisation. On his first day at college in 1970, he recalls thinking about America's involvement in Vietnam, "I had to establish myself as a moral object," he says. He began searching for more information on the East and later came to Thailand as a Peace Corps volunteer. Eventually there came a Master's degree in Asian art history and Thai language from the University of California at Berkeley, followed by more than 35 works

## A new book shows that in the Buddha's Asia, there are many forms.

on Thailand, Laos, Myanmar and other south-east Asian countries. Not surprisingly, Cummings is today considered an expert on the area.

Trekking in Helambu in the mid-1970's, Wassman realised his calling was capturing moments of life in pictures. He began as an amateur photographer and soon worked his way to professional standards. In 1987, he won the Pacific Area Travel Association (PATA) Gold Award for his story on Pashupatinath and was one of the 50 photographers chosen to cover Thailand for the Kodak-sponsored Seven Days in the Kingdom. Since the eternal eyes of Swoyambhunath first stared back at him in 1968, Wassman has had a rather strong case of obsession with stupas. But it wasn't until about a decade ago that he began working on an entire book dedicated to these architectural masterpieces. Wassman was journeying across Asia, staring into its very soul, when he ran into Cummings at a festival in southern Laos in 1998. That, he decided, was what he needed, a master in the subject to write about what he was photographing.

That old cliché about not judging a book by its cover is right on about *Buddhist Stupas in Asia*. It may look like just another glossy on Asia, but the talented

duo have managed to judiciously balance eye-candy with little-known facts and theories. The book covers 11 Asian nations from Japan to Afghanistan, where the Bamiyan Buddhas are now just a memory. With a foreword by the renowned American authority on Buddhism, Robert Thurman, *Buddhist Stupas in Asia* attempts to explain the essence of a stupa, the soul, something the collaborators on this volume feel the many modern stupas groaning all over the globe lack.

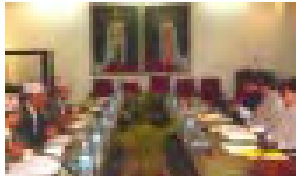
"The stupa needs a soul. The new stupa being built in Godavari certainly has one and transcends politics," says Wassman, referring to the new structure being built in Lalitpur, which is inspired by Burmese, Tibetan and Nepali designs.

Although Cummings says he writes "as an art historian", he is quick to add that for him, personally, stupas are more than just works of art. It is this combination of the aesthetic and the academic that is the book's biggest strength, and sets the tone for what it attempts to do—illustrate the different ways that Buddhist communities across Asia have understood the teachings of the master through the difference in the architectural design of stupas. □

## HAPPENINGS



**QUEEN WITH SPELLING BEES:** Queen Komal poses with winners of the 27th Aishwarya Shield spelling contest at St Xavier's School on 7 November.



**MORE TALK:** Foreign Secretary-level talks between officials of Bhutan and Nepal over "harmonisation and verification" of Bhutanese refugees began in Shital Nivas on 5 November.



**ALPS COME TO THE HIMALAYA:** Swiss Ambassador to Nepal, Walter Coger, drawing Prince Minnie Dasha pictures of the Swiss Alps at an exhibition at Hotel de l'Annapurna on 4 November.

## Green Moments







Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

From all corners of the world, reports are pouring in of Nepalis who have made it big and got major breaks. About time. Nepalis are now award-winning international authors, dot.com entrepreneurs, they have done double PhDs in the mating habits of the Greater Himalayan Red-nosed Langur, and Nepalis like Kirtiman Lama have become the first to jog up to the summit of Mt Everest Alpine Style in shorts, without

only last week to restrict all non-essential travel. He was just being careful, that's all. What has gone completely unnoticed in all this hullabaloo is that in Nepal, a khukuri is part of our national dress. We don't think twice about sticking cold steel into our putaka in the morning before heading off to our ten-to-five jagir at Chakhad Adda. But America is different: there is every man for

Don't mess around with us

oxygen, and without a stun gun. And here is some news just in: a Nepali has shattered all previous world records for the number of khukuris ever carried by an airline passenger in his carry-on luggage. It is indeed a matter of great national pride that a Nepali will now go into the Guinness Book of World Records in the category "Number of Knives Taken Undetected Through Security Check" by beating the previous record holder by eight knives and a pepper spray. Yet another indication that when it comes to brandishing the khukuri and setting new thresholds of achievement with the Knatorial Knife, Kneapalis are right up there with the best the world has to offer.

We don't know what motivated the heavily armed dude to muster the courage to go through with his feat, but given the terror that our Gurkha forebears have struck in the hearts of the enemy by waving khukuris around in the world's wars, we know that this brave young man was just carrying on a glorious tradition of valour and gallantry. But like all humble, modest and self-effacing Nepalis who tend to downplay their own achievements, our man told American network TV that he was carrying the knives to protect himself against the al-Qaeda. After all, Shital Niwas had issued a travel advisory to all Nepalis planning to visit the Chicago area

himself or herself. One knife is not enough. Overwhelming force is the only deterrence against mugging on the mean streets. By allowing himself to get caught, Subash has also become the first Nepali after Girtija Prasad Koirala to make an extended appearance on CNN, and raise the country's national profile in the international arena. All this free publicity can only be good for our tourism and pashmina industries which, as we know, are both going through a somewhat sleepy period. It has been calculated that if we had to pay for all the air time Nepal got after the O'Hare episode, it would have run into \$9 million, almost the exact cost of a brand new Super Puma.

Difficult as it is for us these days to make it to prime time news, Nepalis have found ingenious ways to hit headlines despite saturation coverage of Afghanistan. (Network News Editor: "Look at this coming in the ticker, another Nepali caught trying to take two pressure cookers past security. We'll lead with that, drop the capture of bin Laden to second main.")

Now, everyone worldwide who thought Nepal was just another banana kingdom knows that it is one with a great martial tradition. No one messes around with us. And it is also a country where a major world record is shattered every day. Kirtiman has done it again: first person to climb Everest without breathing O

NEPALI SOCIETY

Gobinda's sweet tooth



If you think fast food is a new phenomenon in Nepali society, consider this: Gobinda Das Rajphandari, 73, claims that his rotl outlet in now-crowded Maru has been serving quick meals to government employees and traders for the last 100 hundred years. In recent decades many have relinquished their generations-old family occupation of making traditional, labour-intensive Nepali sweets and snacks, or have felt the need to include more eye-catching Indian items on their menus to survive changing demands. But Gobinda Das, 73, is undeterred. He firmly believes that trading only in good old Nepali delicacies is still economically viable. Moreover, he believes he has

obligations to tradition. "I am a master craftsman as far as making sweets are concerned, and I am an expert on the traditions and norms of sweet-making," he says with a twinkle in his eye, and no hint of modesty. Traditional sweet-making in Kathmandu Valley is a complex sociological matter that brings together art and tradition. Births, marriages, birthdays, deaths and other cultural and social occasions require a mind-boggling variety of sweets with particular shapes and ingredients, each symbolic of certain norms and beliefs. And these might differ among the many sub-clans within the Newar communities. A real sweet-maker needs to know all of

this—this is not a tradition that forgives negligence. The devotion of Gobinda Das' family to the national sweet heritage of the country means their store has quite a reputation. The Hanuman Dhoka Darbar still relies on supplies from his shop for all the royal pujas there. The Kumari's house ordered the 32 varieties of traditionally prescribed sweets when the new Kumari was initiated recently. And during the Rana regime, the queens used to rely on Gobinda Das' family to keep them *dudh swari*, *mohan keshari* and other delectations required for their Tiya fasts. For eight generations, sweet-making has been the main family business of the Rajphandaris. His great-grandfather Bhandari, migrated from Patan in search of fortune. His start-up capital: "nyarka pyaro" (Rs 5), his skill: traditional sweet-making, already his family's occupation. He did well for himself. So well that five generations later his outlet sells sweets worth some Rs 60,000 per day during the festival and wedding seasons. Gobinda Das's 21-year-old son now spends all his time supervising production and managing the shop. And young Durlabh Das is determined to pass on the family business to his son, one day. Take a walk down Maru and watch Gobinda Das getting ready for the Tihar rush. □

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