



**Syani and Kumle Praja are widows at 15.**



**EXCLUSIVE**

## New chief

Lieutenant General Pyar Jung Thapa took over as acting chief of the Royal Nepal Army from Friday, the day the outgoing Chief of Army Staff General Prajwal Subbaraj began his traditional month-long leave of absence. King Gyanendra, who is Supreme Commander, appoints a new chief at the end of the month. Lieutenant General Thapa is a graduate of the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, and was also trained at the British Army Staff College in Camberlay, UK.

## Talk or terrorise?

Following the Supreme Court verdict quashing an appeal against the dissolution of parliament, political parties have gone into campaign mode. The Maoists, for their part, resumed violence with an explosion at a college in Kathmandu Thursday that injured six people. They have announced a month-long protest against extra-judicial killings building up to a bandh on 16 September. The threat of violence is seen as a tactic to get the government to agree to talks in back-channel negotiations.

Between 9-26 August they plan to mobilise people through mass meetings and processions. From 27 August to 5 September a series of regional vehicle bans and blockades have been announced. They plan violent attacks on individuals and institutions between 6-15 September. However, the Maoists seem to want to leave the door open for negotiations over their latest demands for lifting the emergency and setting up an interim government ahead of polls.

## Unfriendly fire

**MOHAN MAINALI in DHADING**  
CENTRE FOR INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

It is a steep two-hour uphill from the Prithvi Highway to Jogimara in Dhading district. And even from a distance, we can sense the stillness in the air. The village has only older people and children, they all wear a haunted look. They sit on their front porches, with shocked listlessness.

It has been nearly six months since 17 young men from Jogimara were killed while working on an airport runway at Kalikot in western Nepal. Their families don't have any tears left, but grief still sears their hearts. Almost every family has lost a breadwinner, but no bodies were ever returned. There are 10 widows, 18 orphans and 14 bereaved parents at Jogimara.

Today, they are trapped between the need to come to terms with the destruction of their loved ones, a future of destitution and despair, and a government that calls them relatives of terrorists.

On 24 February, 800 km away from home, the young men found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. Piecing together information from survivors, it is clear that the killing was a tragic combination of mistaken identity and other errors. And half-a-year later, this Dhading village is

proof of the senselessness of the violence that has been unleashed on the Nepali people in the name of Maoism, and the callousness of officialdom.

In late November, just when the Maoists broke the truce and attacked the army in Dang, Jogimara's poorest of the poor were getting ready to go to Kalikot. They went because they trusted the sub-contractor, Kumar Thapa.

They knew him, he had never cheated them, and he was even willing to pay an advance. And they needed the money. Of the 20 Jogimara men who left, only three returned alive. Among the dead were nine who were under 21 years old.

"More than the cold and the hardships, we were afraid of the Maoists," recalls Bcl Bahadur BK from the original group. He returned home with two other villagers after a helicopter fired at the workers on 3 January. "We didn't want to die out there."

A month later, the Maoists attacked Mangelsen and Sanfchagar, killing 137

soldiers and policemen. The security forces went on a three-pronged hot pursuit northwards. The fleeing Maoists infiltrated the construction workers in Kalikot, and fired on an army helicopter flying overhead. Fearing army retaliation, the contractor told his men not to come to work and everyone had their identity papers ready in case the security forces came looking for Maoists.

On 24 February, an army attack force stormed the quarters, thinking the workers were Maoists. According to eye-witness reports given to the National Human

Rights Commission, 17 workers from Dhading, seven from Sindhupalchok, and 11 local villagers were killed. Among the villagers were the ward chairman from the Nepali Congress, two Sherpas from Salsakumbar who were working in Kalikot and two minors. Two workers from Sindhupalchok managed to survive. All the Maoists had fled by the time the soldiers arrived. That week, the Defence Ministry statement said 67 Maoists had been killed in encounters in Kalikot.

## "The situation is even more alarming..."

You were unhappy with the decision on local governments, what about the cabinet decision to hold local elections by April?

To start with the government's decision not to take a decision was a mistake. It created a lot of confusion and chaos in the villages and districts. It was a decision clearly against a lot of warnings from the inside and outside. We were all shocked, and took it as a step in the wrong direction. The government has decided to hold local elections in this fiscal year, and is looking for alternatives to local bodies. Frankly, I don't like alternatives. Democratically elected bodies should hardly have alternatives. There cannot be any alternatives to elected bodies.

So, will GTZ's aid to local bodies will start flowing again?

That is basically right. It will, however, be done in consultation with our headquarters and other donors. It won't be a unilateral decision.

Has your food security project been hit by the insurgency?

Food security is a very successful cooperation between the World Food Programme (WFP), the Ministry of Local Development and GTZ. The WFP provides food and supplies, the MLD provides funds, and we are providing technical expertise for rural infrastructure and social mobilisation. It is regarded as a very successful poverty alleviation programme. The project is running in at least

Peter Rhode is head of the German aid agency, GTZ. Before leaving for his new assignment in Uganda, he spoke to **Nepali Times** about the dissolution of local bodies, how the Maoist insurgency is affecting development, and GTZ's efforts to improve business and trade. Germany is Nepal's fourth largest donor.



25 districts, and the beauty is that it combines income and employment opportunities for rural populations, with food used as remuneration. The programme is very popular and up to now, it has been tolerated by both sides of the conflict, the Maoists and the security forces.

Is that changing?

There is disturbing news reaching me from the districts every week. The working conditions are getting more and more difficult. There are reports of human rights violations not only by the Maoists but also by the security forces, which is quite disappointing. There are serious cases of torture, beating and harassment—not our staff but our NGO partners. There are also stories that both parties are using food and medicine as weapons, blocking food convoys even from the WFP.

The Maoists on the other hand are looting food depots that has led to interruptions. In two or three districts the WFP had zero tolerance, and we all agreed that there must be a signal to the Maoists to stop the looting.

Now, with the new situation of not having local bodies in place I hear that the situation has become even more alarming. There is no line of command, and in many places there is an unholy alliance between civil servants like LDOs, CDOs and line agency staff with security forces. This is leading to a situation where the people are even more frightened and have no courage to criticise or put forth their points of view and demands. Whole districts are in a state of fear and terror.

**Times** nepalnews.com  
Weekly Internet Poll #40

**Q. Has the government done enough to rehabilitate victims of last week's blood disaster?**

Weekly Internet Poll #40: To vote go to [www.nepalnews.com](http://www.nepalnews.com)

**Q. Are conditions right for elections to be held in November?**

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The learned justices of the Supreme Court showed this week that they are not only well-versed in legal niceties, but they also have a lot of common sense. They agreed, as we had expected in this space last week, that Nepal should be run through the people's mandate and not by settling political scores in the courts.

The precedent has now been set, and past aberrations have been corrected. The Supreme Court unanimously told our political leaders: It's all very well for you to squabble over power, but keep us out of it. Don't ask us to arbitrate when you can't get along. And you are directly answerable to the people who elected you.

Unfortunately, it is of little comfort to the Nepal people that the justices ruled as they did. We are still stuck with the same politics. And we know it for a fact that Prime Minister Deuba did not go to the royal palace to dissolve parliament and call for general elections on the night of 22 May because of his deep commitment to democracy, but because he was pushed to the wall by his nemesis, Girija Prasad Koirala.

The Deuba camp may be uncorking the bubbly, but they have no reason to. We don't see how the rural Nepal Congress that Deuba leads is going to have any kind of showing in the November elections—even if he has the government machinery under his command. In fact, it may be better for Deuba to listen to his mentor who broke his vow of silence on Wednesday to declare that there was still time for the Nepal Congress to re-ignite.

All eyes now are on the Election Commission and what it decides to do with the tree. And while the Nepal Congress finally be able to see the forest for the trees? If we were either faction of the Nepal Congress (good thing we aren't) we'd have second thoughts

## SEEING THE FOREST FOR THE TREES

about retaining the name and symbol of such a discredited party. Especially for an election where the only symbol that matters is to a socked boot.

The question now is not if elections will be held, but how. Who is going to come to vote if the booths are located behind three layers of barbed wire inside the barracks of the district headquarters? Which political leader is going to be seen campaigning in the villages where the Maoists are running agricultural communities and where (except for the Nepal currency) there is no other sign of the presence of His Majesty's Government? Will there be voter turnout when fear and terror stalks the land? Will the polls be an electoral version of the SLC exams?

So far, our politicians seem to be in a time-war. They are behaving as if the elections are happening in normal times. On the other hand, we see some politicians jostling each other to be the ones responsible for restoring peace before polls. No one wants to give anyone else the chance to take credit for ending the war. This is the reason for all the back-channel peace feelers to people who carry Rs 5 million ransoms on their heads—dead or alive.

The paradox here is that the party that doesn't believe in democracy is the one that will determine whether these elections can be held. By holding a gun to our heads, the Maoists want to dictate the future. If they decide to disrupt this election, then that is the final proof—that we still need a state that there can be no compromise with people who don't believe in compromises.



by ADAM FRIEDENSOHN



COMMENT

## Fossil economy

The government and the diesel lobby are afraid EVs will transform the way Nepalis transport themselves.

According to tourist surveys, pollution is the top reason visitors say they will not return to Nepal, or recommend it as a destination. Respiratory disease in Nepal is critical, and a new Danish ESPS study shows that vehicular pollution is the blame. Kathmandu's pollution remains the worst in all of Asia.

Despite this, the Ministry of Finance claims pollution has "nothing to do with lowered tourism or health issues" and wants to suppress electric vehicles (EVs), fearing that they threaten the revenue base of petrol and diesel vehicles. The public suspects it is not the formal revenue MOF is concerned about, but the lucrative informal revenue.

SafEiV were introduced to help Nepal cope with rampant pollution. EVs capitalise on Nepal's hydropower, saving foreign currency, reducing fuel imports, improving environmental and health conditions, and creating thousands of jobs. Reduced traffic facilities were offered for EVs and locally produced SafEiV templates proliferated until the ban on registration of three wheelers.

The British and Swiss supported "Electro-Bus" (comfortable 15-seater, and the USAID supported Indian-American family car called "REVA" have arrived. Although more EVs would be a tremendous benefit for Nepal, the government's reaction is different and none of these vehicles have been allowed import into Nepal while the existing Electro-Bus from the Himalayan Light Foundation remains unregistered. Whatever excuses are given, the government and the diesel lobby afraid EVs will make real mark in the way Nepalis transport themselves. This fear is encouraging.

The Department of Transport claims that EVs cannot be registered due to lack of road



REVA, the family electric car.



capacity. Despite this "ban", hundreds of polluting diesel vehicles arrive each day, registered every year, including the recent Chinese diesel minibuses. Although 93 percent of battery waste comes from regular cars, trucks, and buses, EVs have been tagged as polluters.

Letters issued from the United States, the UK, Denmark, and Switzerland, all requesting the Ministry of Finance to assure the published 10 percent customs and 10 percent VAT rate and also offer the further reduced tax status for four-wheeled EVs that three-wheeled EVs do not enjoy, go unanswered.

Despite a published tax facility of 10 percent customs and 10 percent VAT which paved the private investment, the former Finance Minister impeded the REVA import process ordering customs to "take no action

leaving Nepal in black smoke. The government is selling the breathing rights of the Nepalis based on erroneous if not repetitious calculations.

Additionally, two Elektro-Buses have been stuck at the Nepal border for six months in MOF's "red tape" with no chance for import. The MOF has squashed the Elektro-Bus file, which asks: "Should we allow an EV chassis to be imported for a local technology test eventually for local production?" Although the entire reason for the Elektro-Bus project was to test the technology so it could be manufactured by our own Nepal industries creating thousands of jobs, MOF has mired the project and has not informed the British and Swiss supporters nor the Himalayan Light Foundation of the reason. It is clear transportation lobby is so strong that it has MOF and the Ministry of Finance in the palm of its hand?

EVs can offer equal comfort and performance as polluting vehicles. When 600 diesel HMGVs have been previously, there was an overnight improvement in air quality. Today the government still pays to pollute by subsidising diesel and taxing for travelling cash by imposing VAT and customs duties on EVs. Cash from diesel gets to be black market (for fuel adulteration) while the financial liabilities of respiratory disease, decreased incomes and lack of Nepal jobs are borne by the public.

The public is rightfully wondering how the government can offer a published facility in the budget and then rescind so casually as if the government's documents do not affect investment in the country. The government seems completely unconcerned about its reputation, and has already lost international credibility. This reversal of a published facility confirms investors' fear that Nepal is a bad investment destination.

The reversal of published intentions for the REVA could well cause the collapse of the Eco-Vision (the REVA distributor in Nepal) and MOF's refusal to allow the Elektro-Bus into Nepal could cause the British Elektro-Bus program to fold, ruining chances of additional aid. Meanwhile, officials are calculating figures based on suspect accounting, keeping the public in an ignorant state of confusion. The government must act quickly to allow EVs proliferation, and must let them in with promised tax facilities and also give EV projects full cooperation while there is still air to breathe.

As a foreigner I feel deeply saddened when seeing HMGVs in self-proclaimed green technology that is in the best interest of Nepalis. I feel even sadder that the citizens have to absorb the repercussions of these shortsighted decisions made based on an accounting that leaves the public out of the picture.



The 15-seater Elektro-Bus

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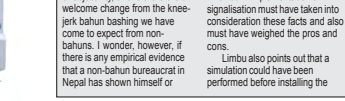
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## "BAHUN BAD"

After reading "Bahuns and the Nepal state" (revisited), #105, by Nuru Lama Sherpa, I came to realise that the post-1990 clash of civilisations has a Nepal corollary as well. The political antennae of Nepalis, which used to be attuned to a single political centre, were suddenly fragmented and the process of ethnic rivalry was fanned. "Bahunbad", as Nuru Lama Sherpa suggests, became the focus because bahuns hold senior positions in government. But this can also be attributed to the traditional bahun commitment to learning and knowledge", as lazied by Sherpa. Salvation, therefore, lies in learning and education. Ethnic groups in particular cannot guarantee corruption-free and competent governance, as it depends largely on the attitude and competence of the bureaucrats. Such virtuous bureaucrats are formed out of ethnic cultures, but out of knowledge and learning.

Although the writer argues against caste prejudice, his sentiments seem to contradict this. Efforts should be to quell not only particular minority castes, but all deprived ones (including bahuns at the bottom of the ladder). Affirmative action without consideration to competence will lead to greater problems. Nepal's diversity and traditional ethnic harmony can easily be sparked into a melting pot of knowledge and learning. The effort of every scholar and patriot should be to conserve the diversity and tolerance that Nepal society is known for. Let love, it admits it and protect it.

**Anup Raj, Kathmandu**

● Thank you Nepal Times for the excellent article by Nuru Lama Sherpa. You have been courageous enough to push this theme consistently through your Nepali and English publications. The favouritism extended by the dominant ethnic control in affairs of its control to its own left is inherently Nepali. Magars, Gurungs, Rais, Limbus dominate and look out for each other in the British Gurkhas. Ditto the Sherpas in mountaineering. These practices are eerily similar to the bahun dominance in every sphere of the Nepal state.

However, the outpouring of the bahun bahuns for the last two decades of Nepal state is justified as modern Nepal history is littered with examples of inept performance by bahun in running the country. The worry about Nepal's future, which has so far been missing from the bahun conscience, not the hunger for power by other castes, should fuel much-needed change in the way tomorrow's Nepal is governed.

**Raja Thapa Magar, Hong Kong**

● Nuru Lama Sherpa's polemical assepaloging of bahuns at least has the virtue of objectivity, and is therefore a welcome change from the knee-jerk bahun bashing we have come to expect from neo-bahunis. I wonder, however, that a non-bahun bureaucrat in Nepal has shown himself to

herself to be any less competent, less inept, less efficient or less lazy than the bahuns that Lama and his ilk love to vilify. Unfortunately, I don't think bahuns hold the monopoly on incompetence. Do you?

**Keshab Raj Acharya, Bafuji**

**CHARMING RAJBIRAI**

As a member of the Rajbirai community I feel compelled to write after reading Prashant Jha's degrading article about our fine city ("Rajbirai revisited", #103). Rajbirai may be lacking some of the characteristics of the bigger cities, but it is not less in learning and education. Ethnic groups in particular cannot guarantee corruption-free and competent governance, as it depends largely on the attitude and competence of the bureaucrats. Such virtuous bureaucrats are formed out of ethnic cultures, but out of knowledge and learning.

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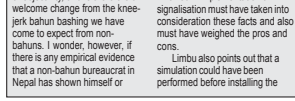
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The 15-seater Elektro-Bus

actual hardware. This is what is done in practice and is called microscopic traffic simulation. But computer simulation requires huge quantities of data that are able to describe existing traffic conditions (volume, turning movements, speed etc) in "microscopic" detail. I don't think any agency in Nepal has that kind of data.

Most simulation software produced in developed countries is designed for entirely different traffic conditions in terms of composition of traffic volume, pedestrian and driver behaviour. Even if such sophisticated software is used to simulate traffic conditions of roads in Nepal, it will not be able to generate statistically correct results. We don't know what kind of simulation or detailed studies were done before designing the traffic signal system for Kathmandu, but some kind of simulation exercise must have been carried out.

Having said this, traffic accidents at intersections in Kathmandu are certainly going to decrease, and with synchronisation traffic movement will also improve. But this will also depend on the performance of the overall system including the response of drivers to the system.

**Rajat Rajbhandari, New Jersey Institute of Technology Interdisciplinary Program in Transportation**

**MALARIA RESURGENCE**

Hemanta Rai's "The return of the parasite" (#105) is appreciated for its attempt to explain the situation of malaria in Nepal. A few clarifications: the resurgence of drug-resistant malaria is a global phenomenon rather than an isolated event in Nepal, and its incidence is higher than what is reported by the government. This is mainly due to faulty surveillance mechanisms and poorly conducted laboratory procedures. The laboratory diagnosis of malaria is one of the simplest lab procedures, which requires neither state-of-the-art laboratory equipment nor advanced skills. All it needs is a light microscope, glass slides, Giemsa stain and tap water, with lots of motivation and time on the laboratory technician's part. As this is tedious and not financially rewarding, most laboratory technicians are either dissuaded from conducting the procedure properly.

There have also been claims that malaria is increasingly being mistaken for Japanese encephalitis and so forth. In an era of evidence-based medicine, it would be irresponsible to bring these claims to the debate and scrutiny of appropriate scientific forums before dispatching them as headlines in daily newspapers

**Achyut Bhattarai, Tangail**

**TRADE, NOT AID**

We are regular readers of your paper and its coverage of foreign aid. We are currently in the UK even though we live in Kathmandu. When you are away from the place you live in, you take a different angle on things. I do not see any reason to bring up aid with Trade, and not aid, is the way out. I have a business here working for help. It could be the future for Nepal as it could make us

self-sufficient. Aid makes us corrupt, greedy, and most of all it turns us into beggars. It also enables those who give aid to control those who receive it. Here is a radical idea for you to consider: if you hydropower potential is so great why don't we export it to India and China and make it free for Nepalis? Use it to power cable cars, stop building new dams, and let the people of Nepal, I mean, I'm not the only one. It's time to think radical, and to start caring for Nepal and not just our pockets.



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## LETTERS

**OPEN LETTER**

This is an open letter to the Prime Ministers of Nepal and the United Kingdom and to the President of the United States. We, a group of professionals working in Nepal, would like to express our grave concern about the political assistance which several foreign countries are considering providing to Nepal. We greatly appreciate the widespread concern for Nepal's dire situation, but we strongly believe that at this point foreign governments, instead of providing political assistance, should orient aid towards dialogue, development, and true security measures for the following reasons:

● **The conflict cannot be solved without social and political reforms.** The Communist Party Nepal (Maoist) (CPN-Maoist) has fanned in areas of stark poverty. The middle class is under great pressure, economic degradation, and social exclusion. Most recruits come from rural youth belonging to these marginalised areas. It is well known that rural poverty and urban corruption are the roots of the conflict. The international meeting of donors on Nepal held in London in June 2002 affirmed an urgent need to tackle poverty, discrimination, corruption, livelihoods and human rights, as well as security. It urged real reform in political leadership and governance and inclusive decision-making, targeting firstly the poorest areas of the country.

● **Military aid will almost certainly result in increased human rights violations.** We recognise and deplore the violence, destruction of infrastructure and negation of human rights that the CPN (Maoist) party has sanctioned and now intensified. Nothing can excuse their brutal actions or their stance against individual freedoms. Yet, one also cannot ignore that they started from idealism commitment to greater justice in Nepal and that this violence cannot be an excuse for the State to be overly aggressive.

We recognise the responsibility of the Royal Nepalese Army to protect the Nepal people, their state infrastructure, and the State itself against threat. While we empathise with the ineptness of the army in fighting this type of situation and their small force size, we can however not ignore that numerous organisations, such as Amnesty International, have documented that the army is also guilty of gross human rights violations. On both sides, Nepalis are dying—Nepali men and women who could be compelling their lives to national development.

and taboos. Anecdotal reports of malaria in the Nepal Highlands (possibly in people who have travelled to endemic areas) must be distinguished from malaria resulting from indigenous transmission. Any conclusions drawn from these reports without proper longitudinal studies would be premature.

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We are regular readers of your paper and its coverage of foreign aid. We are currently in the UK even though we live in Kathmandu. When you are away from the place you live in, you take a different angle on things. I do not see any reason to bring up aid with Trade, and not aid, is the way out. I have a business here working for help. It could be the future for Nepal as it could make us

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## LETTERS

● **Although a bitter war is being fought in Nepal, there is still scope for non-violent resolution.** Three months ago, the CPN (Maoist) offered to resume negotiations with the government, the Prime Minister turned this down. This decision has the political assistance which several foreign countries are considering providing to Nepal. We greatly appreciate the widespread concern for Nepal's dire situation, but we strongly believe that at this point foreign governments, instead of providing political assistance, should orient aid towards dialogue, development, and true security measures for the following reasons:

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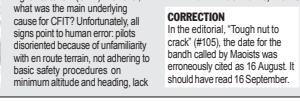
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**TRADE, NOT AID**

We are regular readers of your paper and its coverage of foreign aid. We are currently in the UK even though we live in Kathmandu. When you are away from the place you live in, you take a different angle on things. I do not see any reason to bring up aid with Trade, and not aid, is the way out. I have a business here working for help. It could be the future for Nepal as it could make us

self-sufficient. Aid makes us corrupt, greedy, and most of all it turns us into beggars. It also enables those who give aid to control those who receive it. Here is a radical idea for you to consider: if you hydropower potential is so great why don't we export it to India and China and make it free for Nepalis? Use it to power cable cars, stop building new dams, and let the people of Nepal, I mean, I'm not the only one. It's time to think radical, and to start caring for Nepal and not just our pockets.



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SOMEWHERE IN NEPAL

by PUSKAR BHUSAL

## Disillusioned donors

Donor agencies have assisted those of us who thought the fate about local bodies was pure political posturing to confront our provincial perspective. Nepal's foreign benefactors considered the dissolution of the Lower House of parliament a normal part of our nascent democracy's teething problems. Last week, their patience snapped.

Local government hardly had an auspicious re-birth in 1990. Empowerment of village, town and district councils couldn't gain prominence on the agenda of the movement to restore democratic parity because of the Kathmandu Valley-centric character. That's probably why our constitution says little about the structure and tenure of local bodies. These organisations were primarily seen as tools of implementing the people's participation thrust of the constitution's directive principles. The closest they got to constitutional protection is Article 46(1c), which mandates an electoral college comprising key local leaders to elect 15 of the 160 members of the Upper House of parliament.

After the second local elections in 1997, those who considered grassroots politicians floating professionals susceptible to enticements from all quarters became familiar with the occasional hazards. The Maoists murdered and maimed scores of local leaders and forced countless others to resign. The mayors of Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, Dhulian and Birgunj, among other local representatives, showed they could feed for the people. But they were still identified with the political parties responsible

Why are we surprised that we're losing goodwill?



for the capital's gridlock. Two elections aren't enough to plot a conclusive pattern, but the way the Nepal Congress and the UML each reaped the benefits of incumbency still defines the autonomy debate.

But this ambiguity means that failure to hold elections within a specified period doesn't threaten a constitutional crisis. Since the council of ministers decides when to hold grassroots polls, political calculations gain precedence over a lot of other things. If you're still wondering how a government that concedes conditions are not right for village, municipal and district elections can renege its resolve to hold the parliamentary polls on time, here's what I've figured out. Getting out the people to vote for one parliamentary candidate is difficult, but double when the system is at stake. Asking them to vote an entire line-up of local leaders would be far too intimidating—and distracting when there's no constitutional jeopardy. (Don't even try imagining the chaos

simultaneous polls could create.) The government's case: If the country could live without local bodies for two years after 1990, couldn't it do so again?

While yelling at each other, we forget there was a third stakeholder. Sure, it was little jangling having to read about the first stirrings of donor fatigue in the same newspaper that broke down the \$3 million worth of defence equipment one western power was granting us to fight the Maoist insurgency.

Donor agencies, mostly averse to taxpayers more at ease with aidmen, boroughs and caucuses, were waging the part of our battle that dealt with staggering economic inequalities, social discrimination, political corruption and human-rights abuses. How can they implement and evaluate development projects without their elected local partners around? What about all those pledges of transparency and accountability the finance minister danced to during the Nepal Development Forum? ♦

BIZ NEWS

### RBB on life support

The central bank last week took over the ailing Rastriya Banijya Bank (RBB), which had become leader-less following the resignation of its executive chairman on 30 July. The bank's new executive chief is Basudev Ram Joshi, who was until then the management coordinator of another troubled bank, the Nepal Bank Limited. The central bank appointed Bharat Bahadur Karki as Joshi's replacement at the NBL. The task of the new management would be to control the RBB's liabilities (deposits)—given that it has not made any major investment over the past year—and undertake loan recovery on a 'war footing'. Independent bankers estimate that the RBB's non-performing assets are anywhere between 40-60 percent of all loans.

### FDI flows

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Nepal last fiscal year (ending mid-July) was down by about 39 percent to Rs 1.2 billion from the Rs 3.1 billion in the same year earlier period. The Department of Industry approved 77 FDI ventures in fiscal 2001/02, compared with the 97 ventures approved the previous year. The total project cost of the approved investments was Rs 3.31 billion, of which 21 were ventures with Indian partners and 12 had Chinese investors. The number of projects with foreign investment—mainly Indian—stood at 767 in 2001/02, and brought in Rs 20.8 billion rupees.

### What we've lost

Government officials say that the losses caused by political instability and Maoist violence last year add up to about Rs 40 billion. This includes all the damaged or destroyed infrastructure, and the slowdown in industrial production, trade and tourism. That is about 10 percent of the GDP and means about 200,000 lost jobs. The direct loss resulting from damaged infrastructure is about Rs 16 billion. Another Rs 20 billion was attributed to lost business, according to Dr Shankar Sharma, member of the National Planning Commission. "Other" losses cost the economy Rs 4 billion.

### Fly to Banaras

Necor Air has resumed flights to Banaras from 1 August, and the company says its next expansions would be the Indian cities of Kolkata and Lucknow. Necor flies two ATR-42s—which are used for both its domestic and India routes—and one Beechcraft 1900C.

### Gold prices

Gold prices have come down to mid-April levels, after briefly rising during the wedding season, at around Rs 8,000 per 10 grams. Worked gold was selling for Rs 7,915 early this week and traders did not see a turnaround in the near future. Deregulation of gold imports in India and the slowdown in the local economy are some reasons for the downturn, traders said.



## INTERVIEW

## "Nepal has a long way to go..."

was stuck, and is still stuck. We have heard from colleagues at the Bank that it will hopefully be arranged by the end of the year. In the meantime we found other ways and opened up new financial sources. What has been achieved is amazing.

When I came five years ago I had discussed with private banks with whom we are dealing and had tried to bring small hydro investors and the banks together. They had no idea of the hydropower sector and were full of negative sentiments. This situation has changed and now more than \$40 million worth of investment is in the pipeline, all financed by local banks. I think it is more valuable than opening up another World Bank loan, especially if Nepal banks can allocate the funds.

**Your role has been to facilitate that investment?**  
Yes. The role is to assist the private sector technically, help open doors at the banks and also in dealing with the Nepal Electricity Authority for getting power purchase agreements. The local banks have discovered small hydropower is an area where putting money is worthwhile.

**How soon will the local investments you are talking about start flowing?**

The first investments have already begun two or three projects are under construction in the Arun valley. There are five to eight projects in the pipeline, which have reached very advanced stages. Things are moving and not everyone is waiting and watching how the government will decide.

**There is another huge German hydro project funded by KfW, how do the two approaches match up?**

They are different types of hydro projects. One aims to contribute to the national grid in a different way to help the country cope with the growing demand. At least in the past there was growing demand and hope it remains in the future, which of course depends on the political and economic developments. Our small hydropower projects focus on rural development and remote areas where there is much potential that is hardly used. KfW, the German Development Bank, and GIZ are two sister organisations. They deal with financial cooperation and we provide technical cooperation, expertise and know how.

**What is the progress in small hydropower development?**  
We had built a strategy based on the World Bank's Power Development Fund. We wanted to provide technical advice and consultancies to private investors. The money was to have come from the Bank, but it

ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

## Private initiatives

To make government listen, business needs to be more pro-active.

Depreciate times need separate measures. Last fortnight there was a rather hectic pow-wow between industry captains and business organisations that gave the government one message: take business seriously or else. There's plenty going on—the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) and the Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI) have been having many chats with the government and political parties, and bi-national chambers are actively seeking the support of diplomatic missions to make the government hear what they have to say.

A quick recap of recent developments of significance to industry: you will all remember that the Beed was much amused in a digested sort of way by the promulgation of the Income Tax Act on April Fool's Day; various laws have been amended, and in a month or so, we are told, an industrial policy will finally be pushed through as an ordinance.

The security situation and grim economic scenario are the reasons that the government gives for many of these changes. Fair enough, but this is the Beed's question: can they get anything right? Astonishing as it may seem, many of these changes are likely to simply mine Nepal deeper in the economic doldrums. Government has been spending genuine taxpayers in its quest to find the ever-increasing revenue expenditure gap. The dikats of revenue depart-



ment officials are economic irritants. Worse, they are myopic about what do nothing more than secure the jobs of these officials.

Economies move in cycles, and even if we are approaching our lowest point, eventually we will come back to life. And in order to truly take advantage of that, we must prepare for it now. The budget that the next elected government presents will be vital.

The government needs to sit up, take business seriously. And a good start, at least in the public eye, would be if the prime minister, while reading out a speech, got the name of the FNCCI president right. ♦

**How has your support for the private sector far?**

It tries to assist the promotion of items which are in demand in German markets to help bilateral trade: carpets, tea and tourism. It does not make a lot of sense to try to promote tourism in the present situation so we are concentrating more on carpets and tea. We are trying to make Nepal better known and to create demand not only in Germany but also in Europe. It is also trying to bring the carpet industry up from where it is now. All in all, the project is an attempt to make Nepal carpets the brand and label that they once represented and reverse the situation caused by inferior quality and underpricing of prices.

**What is the potential for tea?**

Although Germany is a coffee drinking nation more and more people are developing a liking for tea. But hardly anybody knows that Nepal is also a tea producing country. Darjeeling, Assam and Sri Lanka are the more established labels. We think there is a niche for good quality orthodox and organic tea where Nepal can move in with good quality and the image that it is grown in the Himalayas.

**How has the training of small businesses helped Nepal?**

We had been doing the project for many years. We have changed the strategy of providing that free of charge and our focus now is to support the establishment of a local consulting industry and enable them to provide the services as a business. It is an attempt to promote a service industry because agriculture has its limits, and so does industrial production. Now, when tourism is also down, a service industry like consultancy and training and software development could be the way for the future. It has the potential to create new employment and good opportunities for educated people.

**Looking ahead would you say you are cautiously optimistic of the future?**

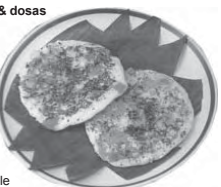
It is a difficult question. A lot of it, not all, depends on if it is possible or not to end the costly speeches on poverty alleviation then the prospects are rather dim and gruesome, and some of the donors might lose their patience. They may react to the present state of bad governance, corruption and other chronic diseases. If the conflict can be ended and the government is then really able to satisfy the demands of the people—not only make nice speeches on poverty alleviation but provide basic services—then donors would be very happy to continue support.

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### Almost-reality TV comes to Nepal.

# CATMANDU

**HEMLATA RAI** ... like this programme comes once in every week for 30 minutes, our TV set turns into a mirror, reflecting the society and its people. It's me and my feelings. I find my parents there, solutions to my problems and most of all, it makes our family come together within a boundary of understanding," a teenage girl wrote in an email to the crew of Catmandu.

Vinita a Catmandu shoot and you'd be forgiven for thinking you'd ended up in a high school instead. The young people—actors, directors and the technicians—responsible for one of Nepal Television's most successful shows ever are an exuberant lot, a characteristic that carries over well into Catmandu.

Although on paper Catmandu could sound kind of, well, boring, and NTV is hardly what most teenagers watch, the UNICEF project targeted at developing life-skills among young people has managed to strike a chord among the capital's young TV watchers. Since September last year Catmandu, which airs at 7 PM on Saturdays, is estimated to be watched by 50 percent of all people who tune into NTV. Tagged mostly at Kathmandu's urban youth, it is above all real and definitely not preachy. The characters go to discos, hang out at fast food restaurants, speak the cringe-inducing mix of Nepali and English you hear on New Road, dream about studying abroad—in short, mirror the aspirations of urbanised Nepali youth.

"We can see young people think about the choices they have in life, be aware of who they are, what they want, what would make them happy," says screenwriter Sushma Amatya. Like all young people faced with the choices that modernity throws up, Catmandu's characters too often have to make tough decisions, or get into messy situations. The difference is that they use such skills as self-awareness, communication, interpersonal relationships, decision-making and problem-solving to sort things out. They come across as people in the process of maturing admirably. The idea is that if the audience can identify with these characters—and they do—they will

pick up some of these vital life-skills from them.

The weekly series has been a major break for director Nitesh Raj Pant. He learned his TV skills while acting in and assisting the director of the popular satirical NTV show Hijo Aja Ka Kura. Catmandu gave Pant with a chance to direct a crew.

UNICEF wanted a young person to run the show, and that's what they got. While most 20-something people like Pant might just be starting their acting careers, the young director has worked with electronic media for about a decade. "My age helped. Catmandu is a project produced by and for youth," explains Pant.

He's doing his job well. The show's reach has far expanded what UNICEF initially envisioned, and has even caught on in the towns and villages. The producers get hundreds of letters and emails every week—one teenager from remote Udaypur writes that since his village has no electricity, he watches the show on a battery-powered TV.

The other big winner in this whole exercise has been NTV—finally, young people are tuning in. "Catmandu is the first programme I've

really liked on NTV," says Vijay Singh, a college student. His classmates Avinash Shrestha and Sumit Malakar nod in agreement and chime in that the serial is "cool" and "reflects the young generation" perfectly.

UNICEF's biggest challenge was encouraging this leap in viewing loyalty, and they realised they could only do it if they made their messages seem like fun, not Lessons. When Amatya came on board, the only resource she had was a research report of a 2001 joint UNAIDS and Unicef project, "A Survey of Teenagers in Nepal".

She then had her imagination—and the expertise of the staff of UNICEF's other hit, the radio show Sathi Sanga Manika Kura. (See "Someone I can talk to," #87.) She spoke to the producers and analysed the feedback sent by the listeners to understand how and what teenagers think these days. Feeling she was still missing something "real", Amatya then conducted extensive meetings with young people from Kathmandu schools and colleges.

The result is a script of near-ethnographic precision. Pant and Amatya, who has a

creative writing degree from Australia and has previously scripted another UNICEF serial, Chetana, are the only professionals on the team. Everyone else is an amateur, often a first-timer. Suraksha Shah, who plays Neeva, and Apaksha Thapa, who plays Abha, are both higher secondary students. The girls say they "glow how much being associated with Catmandu has taught them."

"Nepali youth are very cynical about a lot of issues, and they don't welcome criticism," says Shah. Utsava Lama who plays Binny, a major character, never thought she'd act, but now she is considering trying other acting ventures too. She's most concerned about two things: first, that she wants to maintain the respect that she has earned through Catmandu, and second, that she would keep up her grades as she entered her final year in a BBS program.

One area in which she has had chances to put her new self-understanding into action is in dealing with the repercussions of being a public figure. Often in public people identify her with the character she plays and make comments, even passes. "We try to

educate people about being sensitive towards others, so when people recognise me and try to trespass on my individuality, I feel like a failure," says the articulate Lama.

Santos Silwal-Giri, who plays a male lead, Bhanu, was already a household name as a radio jockey with Hiss FM, but that wasn't

satisfying a making a difference in individually lives through Catmandu. Says Silwal-Giri, who is also chief assistant director of the

show: "We practice what we preach. There are no pretences, everyone can throw in their ideas and they can be themselves on screen." That naturalness continues to draw more young people to Catmandu.

But a number of viewers have one suggestion: Catmandu needs to get more interactive. College student Pooja Thapa says "They should create a channel where we can ask questions and share our problems too." ♦



## Photo novellas

**Melina** : Come on, tell me, you can open up to me!  
**Sunita** : ... Umm..... my tuition teacher touched me suggestively. He also tried to kiss me.....  
**Melina** : Oh my god! And you kept this to yourself...?  
**Sunita** : You see, he threatened me not to tell anyone.  
**Melina** : But it's serious, you must talk to your family.  
**Sunita** : I told my auntie, she says I should keep my mouth shut; it's an embarrassing issue.  
**Melina** : It isn't a thing to keep quiet about. Let's go to your mum and tell her.  
**Sunita** : Really? Should we really tell her?

A little publicised, but powerful and relatively cheap, medium UNICEF has been using to promote life skills a series of photo-novellas: it produced last year. Sumi Devkota, a consultant with UNICEF, came up with the idea. Sangeeta Lama wrote the script. Keshav Thapaliya worked on the storyboard. Kiran Kiran was the artistic director. Laya Sangarala directed the cast, and Raju Bhandari photographed the stories. Most of the CATMANDU cast features in them, since the young actors were already in the public eye and it would be easier for people to immediately identify with the stories. The novellas are being received very well by Nepali youth as well as adults.

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## Australia's new friend

Looks like the Australians are dumping Asia for the US.

SYDNEY—Australia's foreign policy is clearly moving away from its focus on Asia during the 1980s and 1990s and is now headed for a more formal alliance with the United States, reflecting the Howard government's more cautious—even aversive—approach. In a media briefing last week, senior Australian Foreign Minister Howard officially indicated that the Howard government views White Paper on foreign affairs, to be published in two months' time, will formally announce that Australia's single most important relationship in foreign policy is its alliance with the United States.

This reflects Prime Minister John Howard's deep embrace of the United States immediately following the 11 September attacks, when he invited the Australia-New Zealand-US (ANZUS) defense treaty and committed Australian troops to the lead attack on Afghanistan last year. In 1997, after the United States equally welcomed Japan, China and Indonesia as countries where Australia had

"substantial interests." This year's paper ranks not only Australia—rather than the United States—

Signs of Australia's shift earlier Howard was evident even under Clinton. In 1999, Howard made a US tour, including a visit to America's deputy sheriff in Asia, and Australia's role in East Timor's independence is now increasingly seen as reflecting this strategy. In recent months, the Howard government has demonstrated its enthusiastic embrace of US President George W. Bush's anti-terrorism campaign and its tendency to look at Asia with a military focus. "The foreign policy White Paper reflects the growing influence of Prime Minister John Howard over US policy," says the international policy, "argued Geoffrey Barker of the Australian Financial Review.

"In 1997, after the United States equally welcomed Japan, China and Indonesia as countries where Australia had

not have to choose between close links with Asia, on the one hand, and with the United States, on the other. "We went to great lengths to underline the high priority accorded to Asia in current policy, including the new trade and economic agreements we are seeking with Japan and China, the Free Trade Agreements we are negotiating with Singapore and Thailand, and close engagement with Indonesia including collaboration in combating piracy smuggling," said a foreign ministry statement. Australia's trade with the United States has increased in recent years, but Asia still accounts for 57 percent of Australia's total merchandise exports and remains Australia's biggest trading partner. The growing trend of trade with the US needs to be seen in the Australian business community, who see this as a sign of a growing gap against Asia in Australia's foreign policy that may have repercussions for Australian business in the region. Interestingly, Australia's focus away from Asia and toward the

United States in its foreign policy comes at a time when Asians in greater numbers are coming to Australia as fee-paying students, tourists and migrants, as well as asylum seekers, as pointed out by Foreign Minister Alexander Downer in a recent speech. Then why the government's policy shift to move closer to the US? Professor David Walker, author of the book *Antisocial Australia: and the Rise of Asia*, explains: "Australia has routinely oscillated between negative readings of what proximity to Asia might mean in terms of defense and security, the 'ancient nation syndrome,' and more positive readings of the benefits that might flow from proximity, including closer trade ties, collaborative defense arrangements and a richer and more diverse pattern of cultural engagement. It is a history in which the policy change would not be interpreted as more Euro-centric and a realignment of interests along civilizational lines."

Walker argues that during the premiership of Paul Keating in the early 1990s, Australia's strong preference for closer ties with Asia reflected "a more adventurous and innovative approach to Asia, a natural self-belief." Paul Kelly, editor-at-large of *The Australian* newspaper, argues that the problem in Australia's foreign policy lies in the Howard Keating cultural conflict of Australia's identity. "Political assets in Washington and US leverage will be helpful from time to time, as they were during the Timor crisis," noted Peter Drysdale, head of the Australian Japan Research Centre at the Australian National University in Canberra. "But political assets in Tokyo, Beijing, Jakarta, Seoul, other south-east Asian capitals and New Delhi will be critical to dealing with a significant majority of our foreign policy problems over the coming years, as this has not changed since 1911," he warned in *Australian Financial Review* this week. ♦ (IPS)

## Squandering Sri Lanka's peace

COLUMBO—Sri Lanka's peace process got a welcome respite last week when, for the first time in seven years, a Cabinet minister and a top Tamil rebel leader discussed the prospects for lasting peace. At the same time, international true monitors praised the warring factions for a ceasefire that has held now for seven months. But the last news is that the seven-month co-habitation arrangement between Sri Lanka President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, both of which derive their political support from opposing political parties, is slowly turning sour. This is threatening a peace initiative that has for the first time in 19 years yielded this much success and hope in this war-ravaged nation. The president has the power to dissolve parliament after 6 December, a year into the existence of the current session of the legislature, and if she does this, the peace process goes for a six "six" Sri Lanka's editor of *The TamilNet*, a popular pro-rebel website. "Everything will go up in smoke if the two leaders continue fighting in this manner," an opposition MP from Kumaratunga's People's Alliance, who is supportive of the government's peace initiative. (IPS)

## Crazy weather

NEW DELHI—India may be in the throes of its worst drought in a dozen years, but its new flood rivers and lakes are overflowing. The reason? Climate change caused by global warming, say environmental experts. "There are strong indications that the current drought to larger climate change since what we are witnessing is a peculiar and sudden variation in climate as predicted by experts studying global warming," says PK Pathak, recently elected chief of the Geneva-based International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Across northern India, ferociously hot winds seemed to keep away the cooling, moisture-laden monsoon rains on which agriculture on the subcontinent depends. They also melted the snow and ice in the Himalayas that crowns the region, causing floods in the eastern region, which acts like a giant drain emptying out into the Bay of Bengal. Leading scientists across the world, including those attached to the United Nations, agree that global warming and climate change are the result of industrial and other activity that generates greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, which traps heat. (IPS)

## Finally, some debt relief

WASHINGTON—The World Bank has agreed to provide \$1 billion to redirect the debt payments away from rich creditors and spend the money on health and education. Columbia University's Jeffrey Sachs says that the highly-indebted Poor Countries, known as HIPC nations, should be relieved of their debt payments to more pressing domestic needs like health, elementary education and the fight against HIV/AIDS. Sachs' idea has elated anti-debt campaigners, who have long called for a repudiation of the debt of poor nations, but was greeted with skepticism by some creditors. The debt-recycling plan is now being widely circulated among anti-debt campaigners and economists from developing countries, who say Sachs' weight gives the idea desperately needed new momentum.

Activists say the current debt relief programme, known as HIPC, has stumbled over many problems and failed to solve the debt crisis. Those criticisms have been acknowledged by the World Bank and the IMF, who run HIPC. In his paper, to be published in the prestigious *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity* in mid-August, Sachs argues that one of the financial reasons that impoverished countries should continue paying their debts, which amount to only a few billion dollars a year. Nor does anyone in the creditor world (including the White House) believe that those countries can service these debts without incurring human cost, Sachs adds. The money should instead be re-allocated as grants to be spent on more demanding social needs at home. (IPS)

## No diversity in rice

BANGKOK—Asia's premier rice research body has announced plans to sow more hybrid rice diversity in paddy fields across the continent, critics accuse it of ruining the diversity of the Asian rice sector. At the heart of this dispute between the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) based in Los Banos, the Philippines, and its critics is the suggestion that the IRRI is breeding a monoculture across rice paddy fields in the region through its hybrid products. One critic, Jacques-Chai Chomthong, doesn't buy the argument IRRI extends to convince farmers to switch to hybrid rice—that its products are environmentally sound and friendly to farming communities. "IRRI fails to talk about the amount of pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers farmers have to use for a successful crop of hybrid rice," says Jacques-Chai, a research associate at Focus on the Global South, a Bangkok-based think tank. Wilson Lianchammon, director of BioThai, a Bangkok-based biodiversity lobby, has another complaint: "IRRI is keen on producing and promoting few hybrid seeds, creating a monoculture on the fields. But farmers have always developed diverse seeds."

Yet IRRI insists it is convinced that farmers stand to gain by switching to the hybrid rice seeds. "The seeds we are producing ensure high yields and thus enable farmers to use their land efficiently," says Mahabub Hossain, head of IRRI's social sciences division. For one, Hossain, the farmers will be able to reduce their land use for rice while getting a bigger harvest, and "be able to release land for other crops, helping agricultural diversification." Hossain also views IRRI's efforts as a case of science complementing the work of seed development by farming communities. (IPS)

# Chung-hua, Inc

China presents a new geopolitical model: the country as corporation.

Over the coming decades, China will become a thoroughly new form of political and economic entity. Brutally competitive in both politics and world markets, China will be more dominant than any nation save America.

The magnitude of this change is due, in part, to a radical and rapid change in the first time in 19 years yielded this much success and hope in this war-ravaged nation. The president has the power to dissolve parliament after 6 December, a year into the existence of the current session of the legislature, and if she does this, the peace process goes for a six "six" Sri Lanka's editor of *The TamilNet*, a popular pro-rebel website. "Everything will go up in smoke if the two leaders continue fighting in this manner," an opposition MP from Kumaratunga's People's Alliance, who is supportive of the government's peace initiative. (IPS)

Regional governments have been toughened up by the Chung-hua, Inc. But more officials have been appointed, not elected, but their posts are not sinecures. Not only are they held to targets of 7 percent annual economic growth or better, they must also improve environmental quality, build better infrastructure, and reduce local crime levels. In October 2001, six bureaucrats were expelled from China's major cities for not meeting their economic growth and security targets. In January 2001, Bo Xilai, then mayor of Dalian, was promoted to governor of Liaoning province. Thousands of women, many in tears, spontaneously came to a park to bid him farewell. During his nine-year tenure, Dalian evolved from a ramshackle port into one of the cleanest and most prosperous cities in the Chinese language today.

China has the most federal governance structure of any large nation since the US. Two broad categories of regional units exist. The first are relatively small, composed of cities and their surrounding areas, generally with a population of 5-7 million people. Some of these—Shenzhen, Shanghai, Dalian, Tianjin, Shenyang, Xiamen, Qingdao, and Suzhou—are now growing economically at a rate of 15-20 percent per year—faster than Asian "tigers" such as Malaysia, Taiwan, Thailand, and Korea ever did. These smaller region-states are propelling the growth of larger mega-regions, with populations approaching 100 million each. The mega-regions, which tend to share common dialects, ethnic identities, and histories, are becoming economic powerhouses. If they were separate nations, five of them—the Yangtze Delta, the Northeastern Triangles area (formerly known as Manchuria), the Pearl River Delta, the Beijing-Tianjin corridor, and Shandong—would rank among Asia's ten largest economies.

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## ABOUT TOWN

## EVENTS

- ♦ **Bodhicharyavastara** Lessons on Mahayana Buddhism, a guide to the Bodhisattava's way of life. In Nepal by Khenpo Vajradra Shila at the Akeshore Mahavihar, Pulchowk. Saturdays, 4PM-5PM. Free, open to all.
- ♦ **Weekly dialogues on life and living** and books and audiotapes at the Krishnamurti Study Center, Dhyanakuti, Swoyambh. Saturdays 1PM-3PM. 227704.

## MUSIC

- ♦ **The Legend Sings** The Gayak Phattaman Show, 10 August, 5PM. Rs 1,000, Rs 500, Rs 200, Birendra International Convention Centre. Tickets at Youth Vision, 429192, home delivery.
- ♦ **Shangri-La Re-Unites** Friday nights live at the Jazz Bar, starting 8PM. www.hotelshangrila.com. 412989.
- ♦ **Dinesh & Pemba** Live every Friday 7PM-9PM. Himalite Cafe, Thamel. 262526
- ♦ **Live music by Catch 22**, Friday nights at the 40,000+ ft Bar, Rum Doodle Restaurant, Thamel. 414336

## DRINK

- ♦ **Happy hour at the Fusion Bar** Now open from 4PM-midnight with a 30 percent discount on all beverages with buy-one-get-one-free happy hour from 5.30 PM-7.30 PM. Drop your card for lucky draw, Dwarika's Hotel. 479488
- ♦ **Ladies night at the Rox Bar** Wednesdays. Women get a drink on the house, and after 8PM Teesta band plays. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 491234
- ♦ **Mountain Madness Special** Two-for-one cocktails at Rs 250, and BBQ. Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Thamel. 250440
- ♦ **Happy Hour at Splash Bar & Grill** Buy one, get one free. Live music Wednesdays and Fridays with barbecue. Dandoli Buzo 5.30 PM-7.30 PM. 411818

## FOOD

- ♦ **Thomas Kilroy at the historical 1905, Kantipath** Special August offer has any two courses with a glass of wine, beer or local tea for Rs 500. 225272
- ♦ **All new Continental Poolside BBQ** Fridays 7PM onwards at Rs 500 plus tax with a free beer or soft drink, bread rolls and salad bar. Dwarika's Hotel. 479488
- ♦ **South Indian Food Festival at the Cafe 9**, 24 August Authentic flavours such as rassa, idlis, dosas, appams, chettinad curry, seafood. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 491234
- ♦ **Patan Museum Cafe** Mixed menu, garden seating. Lunch only, 11AM-2PM. 25 percent off with Summit Card. 526271
- ♦ **Pasta Mania** Choose from a variety of pastas for Rs 111 plus tax at lunch and dinner, and 20 percent off bottled wines. La Dolce Vita, Thamel.
- ♦ **Paddy Foley's Irish Pub** A wide range of drinks and food, live music on Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday nights. 416096.
- ♦ **Special Thai cuisine** at Ban Thai Restaurant, Darbar Marg. 243271

## GETAWAYS

- ♦ **Secret Garden weekend** Local residents buy one night for \$99 plus tax and get the second at 50 percent, single or double with discounted add-ons. Dwarika's Hotel. 479488
- ♦ **Monsoon mists** at Horseshoe Resort, Mude, two-and-half hours from Kathmandu. Nature walks, birdwatching, drizzle walks, Finnish sauna. Resort@horseshoe.wlnk.com. 479488
- ♦ **Trust your sixth sense** Indulge the other side of The Old Inn, Bandipur, the ancient hilltop town near Dumre, Pokhara Highway. Contact Himalayan Encounters, Thamel. 474266.
- ♦ **Monsoon in Shivapuri** For birdwatching, short hikes, writing. Two acres at 6,000 feet on the edge of the Shivapuri National Park. Rs 1,850 per person with dinner and breakfast. Rs 925 per child 5-14 years. Shivapuri Heights Cottage. info@escape2nepal.com
- ♦ **The Great Gadavari Getaway** Special weekend packages including room with breakfast and dinner, 25 percent discount on health club facilities. Gadavari Village Resort. 560675
- ♦ **Writing Retreat** Full board package. Aesthetic living, innovative thinking, creative writing and nature at Park Village Resort, Buhanihanthika. 375280

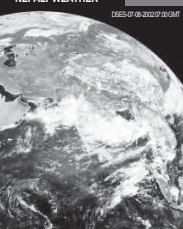
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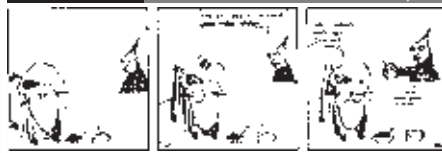
by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The stupendous nocturnal fireworks this week show us that this year's monsoon still doesn't know whether it is coming or going. The thunderstorms indicate localised convection and precipitation due to night time cooling of recycled water vapour and not by any large-scale intrusion of Bay of Bengal moisture. The thunder cells have been enormous; the one on Wednesday night covered the whole of central Nepal. But a gigantic low pressure trough over the Bay of Bengal may cause us with more monsoon-like rain in the coming week. Expect bright sunny days with night rain till then.

## KATHMANDU VALLEY

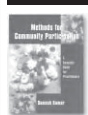
Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
30-35	29-34	30-35	31-36	30-35

## YAK YETI YAK



by MIKU

## BOOKWORM



**Methods for Community Participation: A Complete Guide for Practitioners** Somesh Kumar  
Vitar Publications, New Delhi, 2002  
Rs 608

There is considerable difference of opinion over the very concept of community participation in development work and ways of achieving it. Kumar provides inclusive, flexible methodologies for reaching people to suit the needs of workers in diverse development sectors. It contains tips on best practices, attitudes and behaviour, while also pointing out limitations and precautions.

## Readings in Indian Government and Politics: Social Movements and State

Ghanshyam Shah, ed.  
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2002  
Rs 520

Covering the evolution and spread of various peasant, farmer, tribal, women, student, religious and environment movements in India over the last 50 years, the seminal essays in this volume provide theoretical, empirical and methodological insights into the relationship of social movements with the state by addressing three questions: why movements take place; what their main elements are; and how the state responds to different forms of collective action.

## Globalization and Development Studies: Challenges for the 21st Century

Franz J. Schuurman, ed.  
Vitar Publications, New Delhi, 2002  
Rs 440

Schuurman introduces the theoretical debates and issues surrounding globalization, illustrates the often contentious nature of the concept and considers the implications for the future of development studies. He then reviews more specific theory and policy implications by assessing the impact of globalisation on areas of development studies such as environment, gender, human rights, multinational and urban development.

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**Men in Black II**

Agent Jay (Will Smith), now a lonely and angst-ridden MI6, uncovers a diabolical plot masterminded by Serleena (Lara Flynn Boyle), an evil monster that disguises itself as a sexy lingerie model. Meanwhile he also meets another woman Laura, and sparks fly between them. When Serleena takes the entire MI6 building hostage, there is only one person left for Jay to turn to—his former partner, Agent Kay (Tommy Lee Jones), now a drone in another large government office, the US Postal Service. Director: Barry Sonnenfeld

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## ARTS

## THEATRE REVIEW

by KANAK MANI DIXIT

# Upper Mustang

## in Kathmandu



An innovative stage production of a novel by Sarubhakti successfully takes on the sensitive matter of Bhotiya polyandry.

**T**hangla was put up two weeks ago (27 July) as a one-off staging at the Royal Nepal Academy by Pokhara's Pratinibha theatre group, directed by Anup Baral. It was a powerful presentation of the script by well-known playwright Sarubhakti, and the story is on the subject of polyandry in Bhotiya society.

The central character of *Thangla* (The Himalayan Deity) is Lobang Dolma, the woman of the house and spouse—theoretically—of Gyalo and his two brothers, Tashi and Pemba. Gyalo departs for his annual trade trip to Lhasa, leaving instructions for Pemba to finally 'take' Lobang for his wife. But Pemba has been taken by Lobang and regards her as his mother, the maternal bond reciprocated by the older woman. Besides, Pemba has found his own love in Kichang, the daughter of Gyalo's mer (a non blood relation take as a brother).

The play begins with the kindle seriously awaiting Gyalo's return. Tinkling bells announce the arrival of the yak train off-stage and for a while, the family members are excited and happy. But the drama takes a serious turn as Gyalo discovers that Pemba has not 'taken' Lobang. A monk from the gumba is invited to rid of the demons that have evidently been diverting Pemba's mind.

Sangye Lama completes his rituals, but his mantra have not done the trick, and Pemba and Kichang's love continues to burn strong. They try to make a dash for freedom, and the story ends rather abruptly with a Romeo and Juliet denouement.

Sarubhakti, whose more recent work is the dark novel *Samaya Traasdi*, has said that he was always intrigued by the Loba traders he met as a child in Pokhara. He did some research in the upper Kailash region, which makes for a fair degree of authenticity in setting, characters, and the run of the story. Some might have principled differences with aspects of the script, such as the vehemence with which the polyandry tradition is critiqued, which may be seen as a patronising midlife position against a high Himal tradition. But the production is nuanced, and the characters have enough depth, that such an accusation will not stand, as far as this reviewer is concerned. In any case, Sarubhakti has taken a stand that is his to take.

Anup Baral is a capable stage director and instructor who must be

frustrated at the lack of space for theatre in Nepal. The performances are natural and non-historic. Veteran actor Prakash Ghimire accurately evokes Gyalo, the hardworking family elder who can brook no waywardness in his siblings. Lobang Dolma is carried off with flair by Pramila Tulachan, who acts out well the life of the young village matron, having to manage the entire household, but also being required to respond to the emotional demands of kin. The Mustang landscape is rendered convincingly by was of props—two overlapping dry mountain ridges leading towards the horizon, a horizon on one side and a Loba house-front on the other. The course of the production is regularly punctuated by the stiff breezes of the upper Kailash, when the protagonists have to turn their bodies against the wind and shield their eyes. This is used as a

tool to emphasise effects both comic and tragic. The director's command of the medium is evident in the long scenes he is able to inject into play, the confident mix of comedy with tragedy, the under-the-breath utterances of the actors, the subtle use of a cap falling from the head as a motif throughout, and so on. And for once, the first machine is applied to good effect. Director Baral writes in the playbill that he had to decide whether the cast would use chaste Nepali or speak Nepali with the heavy Bhotiya cadence of upper Mustang. It would have been safer to go with straight Nepali, but the cast pulled it off, and the result is an authentic flavour of life in Nepal's Tibetan rimland. Kathmandu's starved dramatic needs productions like *Thangla* to be entertained and brought closer in touch with the country's cultural specifics.

Someone must invite the Pratinibha group back from Pokhara, for a longer run of *Thangla*. How can there be empathy when there is only Z Cinema? ♦

**WAVE**

Sports: **There she Goes**  
Nepal Under 16 national team

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August Issue  
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## Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

# Gods must be crazy

We have just received a top-secret encrypted message from NATO Headquarters in Bledaigh about its surprise inspection last week of the facilities at Tribhuvan Antinational Airport.

After decoding the message, we have learnt that the National Association of Tour Operators (NATO) found, and we quote, that "TIA meets all required facilities that are needed for an international airport, and its facilities are at par with other international airports of the region."

This is great news, and certain to warm our cockles and give tourism the big boost that it needs as we approach the Destination Nepal Year 2003. The NATO Inspection Team has now made official what we suspected all along: that the facilities at our airport are as good as, or better than, the facilities at Patna International Airport.

Speaking at an interaction programme after the inspection, the secretary of the Ministry of Horticulture, Sports, Gymnastics and Tourism said: "Since tourists are regarded as God in Nepal, the airport has to be like Heaven. Every care has to be taken for the comfort and hospitality of visitors at the airport, which is the first place that they get the general impression about Nepal."

We couldn't have put it better ourselves. And this is not just idle talk. The ministry has taken steps to implement some of these procedures, and recently we have started seeing some dramatic improvements at the airport:

1. There is now a fast-track queue for Nepalis at arrival immigration which has been extended so that the average time passengers spend at the airport has gone down to only three hours, giving them more time to enjoy the facilities.

2. A free sauna has been installed at the Sterile Lounge so that departing passengers can relax, sweat like pigs, and pass out if they so wish.

3. Passengers must have noticed that there are no clocks in the entire airport premises. This is deliberate. It is to give visiting tourists the impression that time stands still in Shangri-la. (Flight Attendant: "Ladies and Gentlemen, Gods and Goddesses, we have just landed in Kathmandu, where the local time does not exist.")

4. For the convenience of passengers, the entire airport has been declared out of bounds for human beings who don't own cars. Arriving passengers have to trek down to the momo shop on Ringworm Road to be reunited with their near and dear ones.

5. Our divine visitors now have gender segregated pre-boarding security checks where they receive a free shiatsu of their kundalinis, and have their wallets mandatorily inspected for tips by uniformed masques.

6. The carousal area now has extra trolleys which are equipped with NASA-designed state-of-the-art oval wheels to give extra traction. Passengers also have a choice of extreme left-leaning and extreme right-leaning trolleys depending on their political affiliation.

7. The airport taxi contract has now been handed over to the Nepal Heritage Society which has deployed only cars 30 years and older to ferry passengers to the city. Besides being a tourist attraction, these vintage Datsuns show the world that we care about our culture and tradition.

8. Since the airport is the first impression people have of Nepal, NATO Headquarters is also thinking of preserving our customs so that any extra perambulations and binocular tourists are trying to smuggle into the country can be nipped in the bud.

## NEPALI SOCIETY

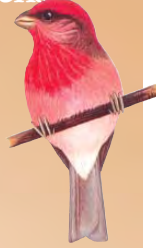
# Hari Sharan nipalensis

Nepal's foremost birdman doesn't have a PhD in ornithology from a fancy western university. He doesn't work as an expert for a swanky conservation NGO. At 74, Hari Sharan Nepali is a self-made walking encyclopaedia of Nepali birds.

And that is saying something, since 834 species of birds have been recorded in Nepal—one-tenth of the world's known birds and as many as there are in the whole of North America. And Hari Sharan can rattle off the Nepali and English names of most of

them, accurately imitating their chucks, tweets, cheeps. Of the species found in Nepal, 15 have Latin names ending in "nipalensis", which means they are indigenous only to Nepal.

A truly homegrown bird specialist, Hari Sharan began his early lessons in birdwatching at 13, when he used to accompany his father on hunting trips. He made friends with his feathered friends, and they have never ceased to inspire him to do more for conservation. He donated about 800 specimen species to Tribhuvan University, which then set up what today has grown into the Natural History Museum. Hari Sharan is personally credited with discovering 13 new species, including the Tibet owl he spotted in Dolpa and three snow finch species (Rufus-necked, Brand's and Mandi's) which he spotted and recorded on a single day during a bird-watching trip in northeast



Mustang. Others include the Black-tailed Godwit and the Booted Warbler, both of which were thought to be extinct.

Hari Sharan's greatest regret these days is that he can't move around as much as he used to. "I'm still fit to go out and track more birds," he told us, "it is the security situation that prevents me from venturing out." Still, every opportunity he gets, Hari Sharan dons his binoculars and is off to Shivapuri or Phulchoki, the two areas on the Valley rim internationally renowned as a haven for birds and bird-watchers.

Hari Sharan would still like to go birdwatching in areas of Nepal he hasn't yet been to. "As long as I am fit, I'd like to be out there. If only I could be as free as the birds and move around without fear." ♦



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