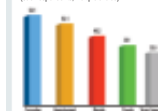


EDITORIAL

Hear, hear

Public opinion polls are useful only when political forces heed them. Sadly, our elected national leaders have stopped caring about what the people think. And on the other side, the Maoists, in their revolutionary zeal, are so convinced that they have all the answers, they don't need public opinion. In fact, their punishment for disagreeing is physical elimination. And yet, the results of the public opinion poll we publish in this issue remind us that our rulers and those who aspire to rule ignore public opinion at their own peril. The Nepal people know that the leaders they voted for have squandered their mandate, but

What are the most important issues facing the nation today?
(% of respondents, multiple choice)

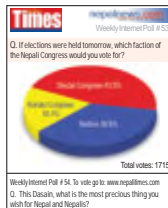


they don't agree with the Maoists: neither with their brutal methods nor their ultimate goal.

Disapproval of the decisions taken by the Deuba government are glaringly evident. More than three-quarters of those polled said that the term of local bodies should either have been extended or fresh elections held. More than half didn't agree with the way elections were called.

There are other revelations. This is the first public opinion poll taken since the royal massacre, and we see that less than 1% of those polled see absolute monarchy as a reliable solution to the Maoist problem. And despite the nostalgia in Kathmandu Valley for strongman rule, the people blame the failure of politicians, and not the breakdown of the system, for the country's problems.

The message from the people is clear: they want all political parties, the king, the security forces and even the Maoists to work together to get this country back on track. If that is unrealistic, then there should at least be a coalition among those who believe in parliamentary democracy. The people want such a force to emerge out of this chaos.



VOX POPULI

The latest Himalmedia-AC Nielsen ORG Marg public opinion poll shows that Nepalis are fed up with politicians, they regard corruption and conflict as the main problems, they don't think much of the Deuba government, they are convinced democracy is in deep danger, and they see the Maoists as the main threat.

NAVIN SUBEDI

The people have spoken. And they show maturity and an understanding of the country's crisis. They know exactly who has messed things up, and also have an idea about where possible solutions lie. This public opinion survey is based on the responses of more than 4,000 Nepalis in 22 districts carried out from 6-20 September. This is the third Himalmedia poll, and it shows growing public disillusionment with national institutions, and apathy towards politicians. Respondents were asked to qualify the state of the country at present. Over 65% said "bad", 26.5% said it was "horrible", and only 3.6% felt it was "like before". What did they think were the reasons for the country's sorry situation? Nearly 55% blamed corruption, 40.2% blamed the Maoists and 35% said it was because of poverty. (This question, like some of the others



in the poll, was multiple-choice, so the total sometimes adds up to more than 100%.)

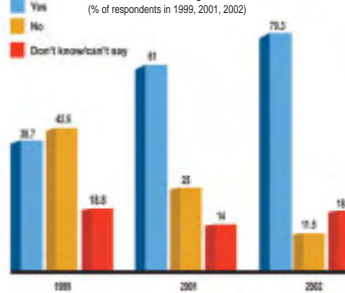
In the 1999 poll most respondents saw no danger to democracy, but by

April 2001 over 61% said democracy was endangered. In the present poll, 70.6% see threats to democracy.

Asked where they thought the threats stemmed from, more than 70% of the

respondents in the current poll blamed the Maoists. Last year, only 8% percent blamed the Maoists and 82% said it was because of the activities of political parties.

Is democracy threatened?



Himalmedia-Nielsen ORG Marg Poll

Given Nepal's fast-paced political changes, conducting the 2002 Himalmedia-Nielsen ORG Marg public opinion poll was more challenging than the 1999 or 2001 surveys. The polls were intended to determine public perceptions ahead of the 13 November elections, but the questions also focused on the uncertain security situation, the public's views on democracy, politicians, the monarchy and the Maoists. A scientifically selected sample of 4,025 respondents all over the country from 22 districts across the high mountain, midhill and tarai regions were surveyed. Nearly 60% lived in rural areas, and the rest were urban-dwellers. Only people whose names are on voter lists were interviewed. Nearly 38% of respondents were in the 26-40 age group, 36.5% percent above 40 years and 26% between 16-25 years. There were equal numbers of women and men.

ORG Marg is a market research group owned by the Dutch firm VNU, which has just acquired the US-based AC Nielsen.

Himalmedia is the publisher of Nepal Times and the Nepal fortnightly Himal Khabarpanika.

4,025 respondents in 22 districts were surveyed.

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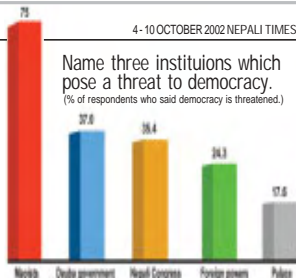
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HONDA

Name three institutions which pose a threat to democracy.

(% of respondents who said democracy is threatened.)



So, do the people see a way out? A full 80% of the respondents felt talks were the only way to resolve the insurgency, while only 5.5%

The Himalmedia poll tried to gauge the people's enthusiasm for general elections, and more than half the respondents felt it was "inappropriate" for the prime minister to call elections during an emergency, while 29.4% agreed with the decision. Asked who they would vote for if the elections were held, most of the respondents

STATE OF THE STATE

The prime minister should finally stop listening to his advisers, and listen to what the people have to say.

The postponement of parliamentary elections now further confounds the country's constitutional crisis. But on this, it would be unfair to blame Deuba alone. After all, mid-term elections were welcomed by the main opposition UML and RPP, endorsed by a section of the donor community, cheered on by an influential media house, and declared

Little wonder, then, that 66 percent of the respondents should also feel that

call mid-term polls.

The polls were taken before the Election Commission decided on the tree symbol, and respondents favoring the Congress were asked to choose between the two factions: 39.1% favoured the Deuba Congress while 31.3% were for the Koirala Congress. Nearly 20% said they would vote for whoever got the tree, and many of these may now have

Another dramatic shift has occurred in the perception of the constitutional monarchy and the role of the army. In the poll taken in April 2001, 41.32% of respondents supported the king's authority over the Royal Nepal Army. After the army was mobilised against the Maoists in November, this figure has fallen to 29%. About 35% said the army should be under the control of the "government", up from 20.7% last year.

In another question about who is best placed to resolve the country's problems, one third of the respondents felt it was an all-party

To the question "Who do you wish to see as a future prime minister?" 19.1% voted for UML leader Madhav Kumar Nepal, 11.5% preferred Shri Bahadur Deuba while Girija Koirala had 7.4% while Surya Bahadur Thapa of the RPP got 4.5%. Senior Congress leader Ram Chandra Poudel got 2%. Baburam Bhattarai and Prachanda got 1% between them, while "other Maoist leaders" got another 1%. Former Panchayat leader Marich Man Singh made a surprise showing 0.8% respondents, largely in Kathmandu Valley, wanted him to be prime minister again.

More than one-third of all respondents felt the constitution should be amended, about 24.3% said the present constitution needs no changes, and the remaining had no opinion or declined to comment.

(The full details of the survey will be posted on www.nepalitimes.com on 11 October.)

by CK LAL



desperate times, and we expect our leaders to rise above envy and ambition. And perhaps it would also be the last chance for Deuba to redeem himself in the eyes of history. Since he has seldom hesitated from abruptly changing his stance, there is no reason for him to resist the urge to correct his course now. For once, Deuba should stop listening to his advisers, and listen to the people instead. ♦

LETTERS

Times nepali
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VISAS
Janaki Gurung hits the nail on the head with her piece "If we want tourists, scrap visa fees" (#113). Worse still is the bureaucracy, and that applies painfully to those of us here working as volunteers and on humanitarian or development programs. In May of last year I was asked to volunteer as professor at a local college and research centre that agreed, as part of the arrangement, to obtain the necessary study/research visa. That was almost five months ago. Last week, just shortly before I'm to leave Nepal after eight years working on development projects, and for a total fee of about \$500, the college was finally successful in getting that

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RULERS
If only Nepal's so-called rulers gave a good read to Ekta Ghimire's letter (#112) and also took a good look at themselves in the mirror and

● Every week, the news from home is progressively worse ("Enough," #111 and "Hunger for peace" #112). You think of the

Who then is responsible now and who can we turn to? The political parties and their leaders have all exposed themselves as being unable to rise up to the task. They are selfish, corrupt, and

blatantly shameful, and the people have lost their trust in them. The police was never trained for this kind of war, and the army obviously does not have the necessary intelligence to carry on. Civil society is virtually non-existent. NGOs are fragmented

● Is anybody getting a good

night's sleep in Nepal? Is the prime minister sleeping? Or is he getting sleepless nights thinking about the political vacuum that is leading to the uncertainties? Are the prime minister's advisers losing any sleep over this government-less situation? Can the politicians



Then, of course, there are also those who sleep because they are no more with us, caught by the blow of a khukuri, a bullet from a .303 or a light machine gun or a pressure cooker bomb. The only ones alive sleeping peacefully are those without a conscience who do not worry about their motherland, who do not care for others or for the people's future during their waking hours. When will we search our souls and begin the healing process? Who is going to take the first step?

Shanta Dixit
by email

CORRECTION
The data in "Red Against Green" (#112) was drawn from Pralad Yonzon's article "Wounds of Neglect" in *Habitat Himalaya*, Volume 9 Number 1. Yonzon is Team Leader at the group Resources Himalaya.

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Why is doing business with

Political hurdles have been removed, but Indo-Nepal trade is still stuck in red-tape, badudom and corruption.

manufacturer who has not exported a single consignment to India for the past two months. "Now were thinking of selling only in the domestic market."

After the 1996 trade treaty, Nepal's export to India grew a whopping seven times in five years. But this boom is now all but over. Export growth last year was just 11 percent compared to about 80 percent two years ago. The statistics, however, do not reveal all because they do not portray the impact of the new export quotas on vegetable ghu, copper wires, zinc oxide and acrylic yarn, among others. What is more worrying is that even exports of Indian multinational manufacturing in Nepal have entered a downward spiral.

Until some years ago, every cask of Nepal Lever's Liril soap sold in India was made in Hetauda. And in the best years the Nepali subsidiaries of Indian multinationals were exporting Rs 2.26 billion worth of toothpaste. But last year, toothpaste exports to India slid to Rs 1.6 billion, and is plummeting further. Nepal's soap sales last year were roughly half the one billion two years ago (1999/00).

Companies like Lever have already switched gears to concentrate now on the Nepal market. But Colgate-Palmolive which came to India mainly to export to India is still in deep trouble. The Inter Governmental Committee (IGC) meeting in New Delhi last month agreed to review the problems affecting Nepal's subsidiaries of multinationals but it may take months

before the IGC meets again to make the adjustments.

The multinationals came to Nepal because they saw advantages in the domestic market and selling to the vast north Indian market. But their profit margins were wiped out when the Indian budget slapped an excise tax based on the Manufacturers' Retail Price, and not the price at which they transacted with their parent companies in India. Additionally, over time, India introduced other fiscal measures to support its domestic producers, which have made manufacturing in India more attractive.

This is one of the issues the IGC in August agreed to look into, especially the adjustments needed to look into the difference the excise duty has made. India's fiscal policies and emergence of new tax-exempt zones in India have changed profitability," Gurdeep Singh, chairman of Nepal Lever Limited told us in Kathmandu last month. "I don't foresee major changes in our export in the near future."

It's not just the Indians. Nepal levies its own service charges on exports, and the multinationals have been complaining of messy taxation problems and delays in duty drawbacks. Then there are the complicated procedures involved in exporting to India, which dissuades all but the most determined Nepali manufacturers. Six months after resumption of the trade treaty, Nepal exporters still complain about rules and procedures in the Indian

states bordering Nepal that seem to be designed to make it difficult for them.

The treaty is fine, but the real hassles are with the day problems across the border. Since May Ghlu exporters have to sell all their exports through India's state Central Warehousing Corporation (CWC) to which an Indian importer has to apply for an import license.

This license has to be used within 15 days, but because all ghlu sellers have to get every export batch tested and certified by a laboratory in Patna delays have become routine. Strikes in Bihar and the arbitrary hassles given by lab personnel to Nepali products stretch delays and disrupt delivery deadlines.

Exporters complain that the Patna lab will reject a sample for being sub-standard, even though another from the same batch passed the tests.

Sometimes exporters are required to send samples from trucks at the border to Patna and wait for the reports to arrive before they can move on. The argument from the Indian side is that exports have to be tested because narcotics were discovered in some shipments in the past.

Kumud Dugar, an exporter of agricultural products, faces another problem and is pretty blunt about it: "Free trade ended the day we put restrictions on quantity. What is the point of being in business if you cannot expand volume and grow?"

by DANIEL LAK

BINOD BHATTARAI

Nepal exports to India were fixed with the renewal of the 1996 trade treaty in March, everything looked set for a smooth flow of goods across the border. India wanted quantitative restrictions on some Nepali goods, Nepal agreed. Nepal

wanted some inter-state taxes removed. New Delhi got its state governments to comply. And yet, things remain stuck. Nepal exporters are amassing large inventories at warehouses because of bureaucratic hassles from the Bihar and Uttar Pradesh state governments. They have a big impact on our exports," says the manager of a vegetable ghu

border, and the recent strike in Bihar. Many exporters now fear that exporting to India is just not worth the hassle, and are concentrating on building up a Nepali market for their products.

"The problems are procedural, even petty, but they have a big impact on our exports," says the manager of a vegetable ghu

A glass of hope

As an elder of the diminishing worldwide community of optimists, I am often asked for my opinion on particular issues. At which point I usually wake up and utter the phrase "half full" before nodding back to sleep and hoping my questioner will go away. Lately though, it's been hard to find any trace of liquid in the proverbial glass that's supposed to be fifty percent water, fifty percent empty space.

Let's start with Iraq. Now if there's anyone, anywhere who find anything resembling an upside to the absurd theatre of retubed demolition emanating from Washington towards the Tigris-Euphrates basin, I'll rush to sit at their feet and listen in awe. Maybe that rotter Saddam Hussein does have all these hellbait devices that he's accused of possessing. Never mind that the leading anti-Saddam hawk on the UN weapons inspection team, the American Scott Ritter, now says he doesn't. Just presume he does. Then the best thing to do is to jolly well bash him about until he gives them up, isn't it?

Er, no, says just about everyone else but the Americans. Even the Israelis worry that Saddam—with B52s bombing Iraq into rubble all around him—might just decide it's time for the last walk, for him to go out with an anguished poisonous bang before he turns out the lights. So if we accept Washington's argument that he has them, and he plans to use them, where's the wisdom into provoking him into poisoning his

neighbours, Israel or the Himalayan-Hindu Kush region that lies down south of the Gulf, especially in January when the fireworks are due to start.

So we optimists are forced to grasp at the following microscopic straw. He doesn't have such weapons, at least on any scale, and fifty percent water, fifty percent empty space.

President Bush's plan is hammer him—like the Taliban in Afghanistan—until he collapses, then loudly trumpet a victory for the war on terror. A rare victory, perhaps the only victory. Then I'll be free to fly to America to retreat into resolving its growing domestic problems and for the White House to focus on its most important task, getting George W Bush re-elected in 2004. History tells us that the presidents who don't get the economy right get more time to play golf than bomb enemies. Okay, Iraq. Sorted. Now what about India-Pakistan. Well, the elections in Jammu and Kashmir are proceeding despite violence, apathy and fear. Yet there's no doubt any number of Kashmiris are voting, wanting peace, normality, jobs for their kids. That wretched evil attack in Gujarat last week provoked little in the way of a response from the last walk, for him to go out with an anguished poisonous bang before he turns out the lights. So if we accept Washington's argument that he has them, and he plans to use them, where's the wisdom into provoking him into poisoning his

The world is an increasingly difficult place for an optimist.

To Kashmiris, all of them, separatists, pro-India types, Muslims, Hindus, business people and so on. The talks will be fraught with difficulty and there will be frequent displays of pique on all sides. Quietly, Pakistan will be talking to India too, even more quietly to some of the Kashmiris.

Eventually, in the name of the economy and under immense western and Japanese pressure, a troubled, controversial settlement will be worked out along with plans for referendum. Pakistan will claim that voting fulfils its inalienable demands for a UN-sponsored plebiscite on the fate of Kashmir. India will say nonsense, it's yet another exercise in the sort of democracy we've been practising for decades. Pakistan's mullahs will howl with outrage but Musharraf will be committed, under fierce pressure from his many creditors, to get his act together and opt for regional peace.

Third generation in India, Pakistan, Kashmir and indeed, South Asia, will live somewhat less in fear of nuclear annihilation. Now Nepal. Oh dear. Here. I worry that too few of the fundamentals are in place, even for an elder optimist like myself to start postulating properly. But I promise to spend the next week ignoring the Byzantine going-in in the political courts of Kathmandu. Instead, I'll reflect on the sufferings of the people, the shadowy plans of the Maoists and the overwhelming goodwill of the world for Nepal. I hope, pray even, that I'll lead to a ray of hope. Otherwise I may have to give up on optimism. ♦

India so difficult?

Dugar's main grouse is quarantine, which India began enforcing in August 2001 and has turned out to be a real hassle for exporters.

Dugar argues there is in effect no need to have quarantine checks because we have a porous, unrestricted border and same age-of-manufacture regimes and have been doing business in farm produce for ages. And the problems at the quarantine system seem to be geared for making the process as difficult as possible. Initially, there was only one checkpoint at Kakarvitta, and exporters in, say, Dhangadi had to truck goods 1000 km right across Nepal to get the certification. Two more checkpoints are operational now, but exporters told us that testing is done in Lucknow or Patna and they have to wait at the borders for reports to arrive back. The delays cause further losses of perishable agricultural exports.

Indian sources say the best they can do is simplify the quarantine system. India has promised to have three more quarantine checkpoints on the border by November. Now Nepal would have to formally tell India where the checkpoints should be located before the Indian bureaucracy will begin to budge, which has not happened.

Infamously, Dugar says it wants them near Janakpur, Surawal and Jogbani, but has not officially requested it.

India has agreed to reduce quarantine fees by half but again that will take time and until then exporters have to live with what is in place. Some business sources argue that because Nepal also imports agro-products from India, and is also trying to join the WTO, it should also begin thinking about its own quarantine checks. But even that may not solve the problems exporters would face in India and further may add to the cost of the imports, which will then affect Nepali consumers.

In the end, traders and government officials say, it comes down to making sure that political decisions to streamline political decisions to streamline trade trickle down to the border posts and the quarantine centres. Says Dugar: "Our bet is to try and focus on agro-products and processing. Only that can help us over the long run." This is because agricultural exports would have 100 percent local content and would be immune to pressure from India's domestic lobbies to protect trade, and also some of the new non-tariff barriers that have resulted from the treaty renewal. ♦

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Project Manager

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DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Attack helicopters

The Home Ministry is planning to spend Rs 960 million to bring in two 20-year-old Mi-24 attack helicopters.

Here's how the deal is being planned: the Home Ministry buys the choppers and hands them over to the army, in exchange for Mi-17s currently owned by the RRA. Interestingly, two years ago the army had actually rejected the offer of these aircraft, saying it did not need them. The Home Ministry is buying the two choppers for \$6.2 million—enough money to buy two brand-new multipurpose Mi-17s, complete with armour and night vision. There are questions about whether the army even needs these choppers. The attack helicopters are used largely to destroy area-type and group targets, including armoured and concrete installations, capabilities not of immediate use in the war against the Maoists. Then there is the question of training operators and gunners and maintenance crew for the choppers, which normally takes over three years. The single-function attack helicopters carry 12, compared to the Mi-17s, which can transport up to 36 people and also be used entirely to transport supplies.

And finally, the two helicopters now parked in Australia need a total overhaul of all components before they can be brought in. Sources say that the suppliers—local agents believed to have family ties with powerful politicians—have promised to send the choppers for a complete overhaul in Russia after the deal is done. The process will take six full months from the day of dismantling, if the factory can fit the job into its production schedules. A source told us that if the army really needs attack helicopters, the Mi-17 comes in a version with rocket and cannons pods. Mi-17s would also be more compatible with the fleet already existing. The basic question remains whether we actually need attack helicopters.

Women's law

Finally, six months after parliament passed a bill to fulfil a long-held promise, the so-called "women's bill" is law. Last Thursday King Gyanendra gave his consent to the new law legislating abortion in specific instances, criminalising paedophilia and giving women property rights. Women's rights and reproductive health activists are hoping the new law will help reduce the maternal mortality rate in Nepal, which is one of the highest in Asia. According to WHO estimates, maternal mortality here is 1,500 per 100,000 live births. Under the new law, women will be allowed to have abortions up to 12 weeks into their pregnancy, and up to 18 weeks in cases of pregnancy resulting from rape or incest.

If the pregnancy poses a danger to the physical or mental health of the mother, or if the foetus is abnormal, the new law permits a woman to have an abortion at any time. Under the previous law, all abortions were prohibited and violations were punishable by three years of life imprisonment. It is estimated that nearly 20 percent of the women in prison have been convicted of having an illegal abortion. Abortions performed beyond the time limits in the new law are still punishable by one to five years in prison.

The legislation also makes paedophilia a crime punishable by up to 16 years in prison, says women's rights advocate Sapana Joshi. Under the new law, there is no law against sexual abuse of children in Nepal. The new law also gives women the right to inherit their parents' property.

Microfilm for TU library

Finally, the Tribhuvan University Central Library will begin copying some of the rare texts in its possession onto microfilm. The library is said to hold over 70 million pages of texts on Nepal (in both Nepali and English), which will be microfilmed using a Japanese government grant of Rs 20 million, under the agreement is formalised. Library officials say about 500 manuscripts need immediate duplication and another 21,000 books are on a priority list. This includes 430 rare books in Nepal and 425 rare journals. The TU library's Nepal collection alone has 35,000 journals; the library has 250,000 holdings in all.

More Maoist attacks

As if it were for the tourist season and the Dasara holidays, a group of Maoists attacked and damaged the communications and other traffic control equipment at Phalu airport in Solukhumbu last week. They struck after the airport had closed for business on 28 September, when no security personnel were around. The airstrip has not had additional security after the 26 November attack on the airport. Under the agreement that left about 200 rebels dead in Solukhumbu, the damage was assessed at Rs 2.5 million. The airport remains open, with landings guided by VHF equipment. The Maoists attacked about a half hour walk from the district headquarters Salleri. Two days later, the Maoists attacked the home of tourism minister Bal Bahadur KC in Salyan VDC.

On 28 September the Maoists attacked the Begnas Lake Resort and Village in Pokhara, causing damage totalling about Rs 30 million. The Home Department of Nepal has condemned the attack. The Maoists also attacked schools in Kathmandu and VDC buildings and government offices throughout the week.

Road worriers

It's obvious to anyone who's been in the country's eastern and central regions since the monsoon that floods and landslides have wreaked havoc on the roads. But the extent of the damage is shocking. Suresh Kumar Regmi, who is responsible for maintenance at the Department of Roads, said in an interview with *Rastriya daily* that repairs will cost over Rs 450 million. Most of those roads remain in a poor state because the department does not have the funds to repair them. The department has been asking the government for about Rs 100 million annually to spend on maintenance every year, but has been getting only Rs 30 million. Floods and landslides damaged the two main roads from Kathmandu to the two ends of the country. Two years ago, the government invited a private party to build a direct road linking Kathmandu and Hetauda via tunnels in the hills in the south. The plan has been caught up in red tape. Now the government is considering another alternative—building a road along the banks of the Bagmati and connecting the highway network near Pathiyala, shortening the 300 km drive on the Prithvi Highway to just 90 km.



The murkiest member of the Maoist triumvirate has the most right on the precariousness of our existence between the boulders, Comrade Badal has gained political prominence ever since Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba suggested he might have to open peace talks directly with the main responsible for the insurgents' battlefield ferocity. The rebel

Keep 'em guessing

Our combustibility might be just what delivers us from calamity.

the east-west ideological battles and the north-south geo-strategic rivalries. With periodic adjustments between equi-distance and equi-proximity, the yam meliorator made economic sense, too. Yellow American school buses, Soviet-aided tobacco industry, Indian-built railways and Chinese-designed roads coexisted. The end of the Cold War and the cooling of Sino-Indian tensions appeared to diminish our strategic importance. We were about to concede how multiparty democracy's second coming heralded the end of history when the Maoists sprang up.

Of late, the rebels are disheartened that a large section of Nepal's intelligentsia and political parties fail to recognise the disastrous ramifications of increasing hobnobbing with external powers. They

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These premises will be rented by the Organisation and cannot be shared with other tenants.

The premises should be in Patan or its immediate surroundings (up to Baneshwar in the north and down to the ring road in the south).

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draw our attention to the danger of Nepal being sucked into the vortex of a large international conflict, which, they say, is impeding the search for a genuine political solution. The Maoists' own proclivities for linguistic legende-mani, however, preclude a full understanding of their cause. Comrade Badal, by continuing the tradition of pompous prose, does little to clear the clouds. It does contain enough powder to trigger a productive debate on our nationhood. If you're willing to concede that dynamite needn't always have a destructive connotation.

Small states always strive to chart their own course in turbulent international waters. Some Pacific and Caribbean islands have become leading tax havens. Switzerland was synonymous with the international diplomacy for decades before it decided to join the United Nations this year. Lebanon was emerging as the banking mecca of the Middle East before the prospects of doom prevailed in the mid-1970s. Al Jazeera TV has helped Qatar carve its own personality in a region awash in petrodollars.

True, we don't have that kind of affluence to make a difference. Building on Badal's assertion, we can draw the world's solemn attention and strategic assets. The overriding objective is to prevent the dynamics from exploding. Afghanistan encapsulates the perils of indifference to failing states. The idea that states too weak to secure their own territory could hardly represent a threat to the international order is antiquated. Proponents of defensive imperialism insist such places can provide a base for such

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"Society still looks down on businesspeople."

You also see Bosch power tools, how are sales on that front?

Since last year we've been representing Bosch power tools from Germany which is among the 10 largest companies in Germany that make power tools for carpentry, civil construction, electrical and plumbing works. There has been a good response here because we also have after sales service and spares supply. I myself have been in furniture and have used power tools from Japan, Sweden, India, Taiwan, and others, and faced spare parts problems and lack of after sales services. Taking lessons from that, we guarantee repair and maintenance of all machines we are sell—all repairs are done within 48 hours. For the initial marketing in Nepal we also have very good, special rates from Bosch, which makes our products 50-100 percent cheaper than those sold in India.

And how is the automobile industry doing?

The government continues to look at automobiles as a luxury and puts them in the highest tax bracket. This is one industry that is growing fast everywhere, including India and China. Automobiles reflect the change in people's needs as a society develops, so growth in this sector is inevitable. There are other benefits, too. The automobile industry contributes about 14 percent of direct revenue, including two-wheeled, scooters and lubricants. Indirectly, it employs over 200,000 in the formal and informal sectors, drivers, mechanics, their helpers, people working for spares stores, etc. There are issues about congestion, to solve which we need to find ways to phase out old vehicles with proper compensation schemes. Pollution problems also need to be tackled. The solution is not to stop importing cars but find better ways to deal with old vehicles, which often cause more problems than the new ones.

What caused automobile imports to drop by 15 percent last year?

There is still some confusion on certification vis-a-vis pollution standards. The pollution standards, COP and type approval, became controversial because the government did not consult the private sector adequately. Last year the government decided to phase out 20-year-old vehicles. That wasn't implemented because we didn't have adequate consultations with the people affected by the decision.

What's your general assessment of the ease of doing business in Nepal?

It is difficult. In manufacturing, we have very high cost of production, because we are landlocked and have high electricity costs. Our labour is cheap but not disciplined. We want productive labour, not cheap labour. Tourism depends a lot on externalities, making it unpredictable despite the huge investments that have been made. Then there's trading, which depends on the demand generated in the overall economy, which is beyond the control of individual companies or industries. It is challenging to succeed in business in Nepal.

What about the representation side of things?

This is another service sector. I represent several international companies who appoint local firms and individuals to facilitate marketing. It is uneconomical for large companies to set up their own marketing offices, so they seek individuals and companies to represent them.

But representation has become almost a dirty word?

Unfortunately, no one in business in Nepal has a "good" name. Society looks down on businesspeople. It has to change. In other places, entrepreneurs have a very different standing in society because there they are recognised as employers and drivers of the economy. We need to change our mindset, because political change without economic activity can't solve our problems. The government employs about 300,000 people, while the carpet sector alone used to employ 200,000. The private sector employs millions. Attitudes are slowly changing, including in government, but not fast enough. It is easy to blame businesses for being corrupt and profit-seeking. But everyone in business actually wants corruption to come down because they don't want to keep giving money from their pockets. Since the system does not work that way, they are often forced to pay their way to the top and other businesses associated with the transactions. There is a need for change across the board. We must focus on how we can do business and support and those in business.

Chinese tourists

The first batch of Chinese tourists to visit Nepal after the new tourism arrangement made in November 2001 arrived here this month, and more are expected to come starting October. The first batch of 17 tourists arrived on 26 September. The itinerary most Chinese tourists are expected to follow is a 10-day tour of Kathmandu, Chitwan and Pokhara. The tours are managed by Anirudh Travels.

Bank reforms

Though delayed by about three weeks, reforms at the Nepal Bank Limited (NBL) are moving ahead as planned. The LIC Bank of India, which took over management of the NBL earlier this year, has presented to the Nepal Rastra Bank a plan detailing how it believes it can go about reforming one of the most troubled banks in the country. The plans relate to financial evaluation, budget and management planning. Meantime, the central bank has still not found a replacement to take over the management of the Nepal Bank (RB) after the US firm Deloitte Touche Tomatsu (DTT) backed out of an earlier understanding to take on the responsibility.

Award-winning rum

Khukuri XXX rum has been awarded the prestigious Gold Award at the recently-concluded International Rum Festival that was held in St John's, Newfoundland, Canada. Despite stiff competition from well-known global brands such as Bacardi, Captain Morgan, Navy's Gosling's, Lamb's, amongst others, Khukuri XXX rum was the Gold Award winner, "according to a company press release.

LIC shares

The Life Insurance Corporation (Nepal), a Nepal joint venture with the Life Insurance Corporation of India has allotted 470,000 shares to about 25,000 of the roughly 60,000 subscribers who applied for them. LIC Nepal has reserved 500 shares for its employees. Fifty-five per cent of the stock of LIC Nepal, which has authorised capital totalling Rs 250 million, belongs to LIC India, 25 percent to the Bishal Group of Nepal, and 20 percent to the general public, including employees.

Scratch & win

Bluebird Department Store and R (WHO) have put together a number of sponsors for its Scratch & Win scheme for Dassin shoppers. The prizes will come mostly from manufacturers of consumer products—Philips, Samsonite, The Bluebird Hotel, Cosmic Air, Carlsberg, Imperial Beer, Trisa, Fa, Johnson & Johnson and Wella. Every shopper spending Rs 1,000 is entitled to one scratch card that could open the doors to a range of prizes including Philips TVs, CD players, Braun blenders, juicers, hair driers and other household items. All in all there are 30,000 prizes for taking, says a Bluebird press release.

Snooker with Surya

Surya Nepal and the Billiards, Snooker and Pool Association of Nepal (BSPAN) have put together a Nepal-wide snooker challenge to last throughout the festive season, which kicks off next week. The first rounds are already underway in 28 snooker stops across the country from where contestants qualify to compete in the final rounds in Kathmandu (25 October - 2 November). The total prize money is Rs 460,000, of which the winner and runners up will take Rs 75,000 and Rs 50,000 respectively.

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The piwancha produces a firm, warm, thick sound and it heralds the revival of Nepal's ethnic music traditions.

Globalisation. Sure, it sometimes seems to be all McDonald's and Levi's or their rip-offs. But the other side is the diversity of cultural artefacts that enter the mainstream. Look at the increasingly popular genre of music called World Music. Africa has exploited it well, pushing the frontiers of pop music with infusions of ethnic flavour on the one hand, and the promotion of traditional music forms on the other, and Southern and Western African popstars and griots are singing their way to the bank.

concert tour of the US shows. The jazz outfit Cadenza takes a more cerebral music form and interpellates it with Hindustani classical music. (See "Himalayan standard time", page 15.)

In the midst of these admittedly exciting developments, it's easy to forget traditional music at its purest. But organisations and individuals working for the preservation of indigenous cultures are keeping their ears open, and have started to do something. Ramprasad Khandel, a thangka artist, collects traditional folk music instruments. To him they represent an opportunity to understand indigenous Nepali cultures, and he believes that keeping documenting folk instruments and keeping alive knowledge of them is a vital step towards preserving what makes these cultures unique.

It all began with the purchase in 1996 of a conch, an instrument found in many a Hindu home. A year later Khandel had 168 Nepali instruments, and housed them in a building adjoining the Bhadrakali shrine in the Bhadrakali Mandir Square, courtesy of the Nepal Heritage Society. The Folk Musical Instruments Museum exists

different ethnic groups during the course of his research. He regularly travels to different areas to interview local musicians and older people who are more likely to remember instruments that are no longer played.

His documentation will no doubt be central to the work of future ethnomusicologists. Khandel's personal favourite is the rediscovery of an instrument

long with a little drum at the end.

The drum is made of sandalwood covered either by sheephide, or snakeskin, which is considered to be lighter and allow for better resonance. Two tuning handles sit at either end of the neck. Sliding one's fingers down the length of the string produces different pitches. The 60 cm long bow is either wood or bamboo with horsehair running between the

two strings, unlike the violin and the Nepali sarangi. The tone of the piwancha is firm, warm, and thick.

Khandel is interested in more than just collecting museum pieces. The museum started music lessons last year, and recently concluded a 10-day instruction course on the pivanha and sharanghi. The fees are modest, between Rs 150 and Rs 250 per lesson, on a sliding scale to match the finances of a prospective student. Classes are free for the physically impaired, and all teachers are volunteers. The museum needs all the help it can get, but Khandel strongly believes that it is important for the public to realise the worth of folk music before he can legitimately go out ask for assistance. ♦

Not just beautiful

For 18-year-old Nira Gautam, there was a lot more to it than just being able to look good when she was persuaded to join the Saffi Queen pageant. It took a lot of courage to stand up to the prevailing beauty culture. It involved going out there to create your own identity, being different, deviating from stereotypes.

According to the norms of pageants, Nira Gautam is 2 kg overweight. But it does seem to be the standards the Saffi Queen contests are in serious need of medical scrutiny since none of the 20 contestants were deemed fit enough to drop below.

of the grueling training for contestants in the pageant last week where 20 young Nepali women spent in 15-hour days of cat-walking photo shoots, question answer sessions, smile analysis, and even training in singing courses, football and even rock climbing.

At the end of it all, judges which included anti-trafficking activist Anuradha Koirala, Himakar Mir Shah, arjun Rajesh Hamal and India's Nagma Malik chose Nira as winner. At 57, Nira looks stately and mature, she is quick to smile and has a no-nonsense look about her.



Blood donation was part

But in the end it was her brains that the judges seen to have been most impressed by. Asked "How can George W Bush and Saddam Hussein become in-laws?" Nira didn't hesitate with the answer: "Saddam's son has to wed Bush's daughter because it is well known that children inherit their parents' characteristics so a son of someone who is considered to be a terrorist can only be controlled by a powerful woman." Applause. As winner, Nira now has a whole series of engagements for modelling, and will be replacing the Indian model on Sali commercials. And there are trips: she will represent Nepal either in the Miss Earth contest in the Philippines next week and the Miss University contest in China later this year.

Nira is donating her Rs 50,000 prize money to Sungsava Orphanage where she is a volunteer every Monday, and the Old Age Home in Gausshala, (Astha Daba! The Circle)



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The collage features several magazine covers. The most prominent is 'WAVE' magazine, which has a woman in a black t-shirt on the cover. To the left, there's a cover of 'The New York Times' with a woman's face. To the right, there's a cover of 'The New York Times Magazine' with a woman's face. The text 'On your nearest newsstand' and 'Get your Cagy Now !!' is overlaid on the collage.

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Unilateralism vs. multilateralism

Many allies of America say they resent the excessive unilateralism of the Bush Administration's foreign policy, but even President Clinton admitted that America must be prepared to go it alone when no alternative exists. International rules bind the US and limit America's freedom of action, but the US is the only country that America must be prepared to go it alone when no alternative exists. International rules bind the US and limit America's freedom of action, but the US is the only country that America must be prepared to go it alone when no alternative exists. International rules bind the US and limit America's freedom of action, but the US is the only country that America must be prepared to go it alone when no alternative exists.



by ALBERTO ALESINA AND FRANCESCO GIAVAZZI

Divided Europe stands

In coming meetings of the G8 (the world's club of rich industrial countries plus Russia), four members—Germany, France, Italy, and the UK—will participate individually and as members of the European Union, whose president also attends to represent the EU as a whole. Should the EU have a single representative? Unilateral EU participation would affirm a common European stance in international relations and international cooperation. Joint participation by the EU would increase Europe's weight in international relations, especially vis-à-vis the US. After all, a key reason for European integration was precisely to provide a more powerful voice for Europe in the international arena. The EU's member countries share strict rules on fiscal policy, a common currency (except, for the moment, the UK, Sweden, and Denmark), a common trade policy, a common antitrust policy, and common market policies, just to name a few. Germany, France, Italy, and the UK basically share a common stance on international economic policy, so why not present a united front to the world on these issues?

There are two possible answers. One is that despite occasional shows of unity, European countries really represent different views on foreign policy and don't want to dilute their voice in the G8 meeting while trying to seem to be doing the pragmatic. Consider the recent strained relationship with the US. Although the UK remains very close to its transatlantic ally, France is extremely critical, regardless of the colour of its government. Italy's position pivots 180 degrees depending on who is in power. Germany has recently taken a more anti-American stance (perhaps for electoral reasons), but is beginning to like flexing its international foreign policy muscles.

The risk is that agreeing on a common foreign policy would either be impossible or require adopting a minimum common denominator that would leave the EU ineffective and weak. Taking strong positions and influencing the majority voting within the EU may lead to very strained relations between member states. The European Union may become even 25 or more members. Agreeing on a united foreign policy will become even more difficult. Reaching a

Watershed election

On 6 October, Brazil will hold its first round of presidential elections in a vote that is seen as a referendum on President Fernando H Cardoso's eight years in power. Cardoso came to power in 1994 with the promise of economic stabilisation. He privatised telecommunications, the national mining company and part of the electric sector. Inflation fell, but unemployment, public debt, and urban violence all rose sharply. Social inequalities heightened, and last year Brazil suffered blackouts and electricity rationing.

Brazil's severe summer market jitters, during which the country's risk index suddenly topped Nigeria's and short term credits for international trade dried up as public debt exceeded 60 percent and bankers feared a default, changed the face of the election. In early August, Brazil speeded up its IMF timetable and began negotiating a new \$30 billion agreement. To bring the presidential candidates "on board" (as was done in South Korea in 1997), Central Bank President Américo Fraga invited their representatives to his office for a chat. Ten days later, Cardoso did the same with the four leading candidates. Although no candidate formally signed off on the agreement, all lent verbal support to it. This calmed the markets temporarily, but the candidates became wary. If they rejected the agreement, they would be accused of being anti-market and anti-Brazil. If they agreed to it, then they would lose their ability to freely criticise Cardoso's policies. (Project Syndicate)

Using the WTO

GENEVA—Brazil has challenged the world's two trade superpowers by initiating dispute settlement processes at the WTO, tackling the subsidies the United States gives its cotton growers, and the European Union in its sugar producers. Fernando Henrique Cardoso's government called for consultations about the subsidies US cotton growers and exporters, and EU sugar producers and exporters receive from their governments. Oxford International says in a study released last week that the US spends \$3.3 billion a year to support its 25,000 cotton producers, "more than three times the US foreign assistance to Africa's 500 million people." Oxford also states that the consumers and taxpayers in the 15 EU countries pay \$1.5 billion a year to support the EU's 150,000 sugar producers. The WTO's dispute settlement process has also been used by the Australian government to challenge the US regarding sugar. Brazil's complaints are significant because they represent the first efforts to open up the WTO to handling lawsuits involving subsidies for farm commodities. (IPS)

Slippery prices

CARACAS—The average price of OPEC's set of benchmark crude oil contracts fell 1.5 percent to \$28.68 a barrel on 28 September 2000 when the \$28 a barrel limit established by the cartel, closing Friday at \$28.69 dollars per 159-litre barrel, reaching an average of \$27.60 for the month of September and \$23.49 since January, reported the Energy Ministry of Venezuela, the only Latin American member of the group. Last week, the closing price of the basket of seven OPEC crude was \$27.60 a barrel. At its meeting 19 September, in Osaka, Japan, OPEC nations decided to limit production to 21.7 million barrels a day, unless the prices remain above the \$22 to \$28 price band for more than 20 consecutive days. If that happens, the members agreed to increase output by 500,000 barrels a day to push prices back within the band. The last time the OPEC basket surpassed \$28 a barrel was 4 December, 2000, when it reached \$28.26. The price band was established at the OPEC summit in September 2000, a year after oil prices had suffered historic lows. (IPS)

Forests, not timber

MANAGERIA—Community development and environment groups in Papua New Guinea fear that last week's deferment of a forest conservation project will undercut efforts to put up a system to manage new logging operations, further harming the country's forests. At the centre of the controversy is a stand-off between the PNG Forest Authority and the World Bank over the implementation of the six-year Forest and Conservation Project (FCP), agreed to in December 2001. The World Bank planned to launch the \$39 million project in mid-September 2002, but the World Bank's environmental agencies. But last week David Nelson, managing director of the PNG Forest Authority, demanded that the workshops be postponed indefinitely. Critics say the postponement shows pressure from the timber lobby, which has been getting new logging concessions in recent years, and casts doubt on the government's support for the conservation project and a willingness to review logging projects. They worry that the PNG government's move could prompt the World Bank to ease up on the terms of the project to push it through. (IPS)

Blackmail by water

GENEVA—The IMF and World Bank pressure developing countries to sell their water services to a handful of transnational corporations as a condition for financial assistance, says Gunnar Aegisdottir, author of a study published by the British-based World Action. Aegisdottir's report, *The Great Water Robbery*, stresses that access to water is a human right, not an economic commodity subject to market forces. Aegisdottir also calls into question decision-making and water services management. Poorer outlying areas, where the lack of potable water pipelines and drainage services cause disease and increase infant mortality rates, have largely been ignored by governments. One reason is that poor populations lack political influence in developing countries. The IMF and World Bank, in this context, pushed for privatisation with the argument that open competition in a free market would lead to increased efficiency. (IPS)

Saudi Arabia's racial dilemma

America's next target. Yet cooperation with the US may not gain the Saudis much, because relations with America are strained to the breaking point. Since 11 September, the Saudis have been a strategic interest—once central to American strategic interests in the region, has been made free to deal with the US, which drops strong hints that there are alternatives to Saudi military bases, even Saudi oil. Although the Saudis were not included in President Bush's "axis of evil," some American policymakers view the country as a "herm of evil." Al-Qaeda is seen as arising directly from fundamentalist Wahhabi teachings, with the American may guarantee long-term stability, and accept that the Saudis have a long-term strategic interest in the region's rising domestic problems. War against Iraq will be divisive and weaken the kingdom's delicate unity. She is in the oil-rich east, and called herself the Wahhabi authorities, which likely weaken the Wahhabi establishment's role to the social sphere and the state's religious oversight in Iraq. The Saudis are seen as a "herm of evil." Al-Qaeda is seen as arising directly from fundamentalist Wahhabi teachings, with the American may guarantee long-term stability, and accept that the Saudis have a long-term strategic interest in the region's rising domestic problems.

As war talk builds, the Saudi regime's room for manoeuvre and modernisation narrows

Saudi Arabia broke ranks with the Arab world's opposition to military action against Iraq when Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal announced that the kingdom would allow the use of its military bases if the UN sanction to place the UN's 150,000 troops on Iraq. The official Saudi press explains the new stance as reflecting the government's desire to abide by Security Council resolutions, but it highlights the Saudi regime's growing feeling of internal fragility and external vulnerability. Domestic pressure on the Saudi royal family, the Saudis, arises from widespread opposition to any war against Iraq, as well as to America's military presence. Disent from the street, and from the Wahhabi religious establishment, the Saudis' longstanding ally and source of their legitimacy. External pressure arises specifically from the US, Saudi Arabia's primary strategic protector. The Saudis fear that cooperation with the Americans may guarantee long-term stability, and accept that the Saudis have a long-term strategic interest in the region's rising domestic problems. War against Iraq will be divisive and weaken the kingdom's delicate unity. She is in the oil-rich east, and called herself the Wahhabi authorities, which likely weaken the Wahhabi establishment's role to the social sphere and the state's religious oversight in Iraq. The Saudis are seen as a "herm of evil." Al-Qaeda is seen as arising directly from fundamentalist Wahhabi teachings, with the American may guarantee long-term stability, and accept that the Saudis have a long-term strategic interest in the region's rising domestic problems.

government's ability to control public opinion. A declining economy has made the rising generation restless. War on Iraq could reduce the importance of Saudi oil in world markets because increased Iraq production is likely when sanctions are lifted. Saudi political and economic control declines, and in the absence of democratic reforms, the regime's policy will likely shift from pragmatism to repression. The Saudis realise that American demands will persist even after any war on Iraq. America wants to restrict the influence of the Wahhabi religious establishment, and bring about more towards democracy. To suppress these discussions are taking place about restricting the Wahhabi establishment's role to the social sphere and the state's religious oversight in Iraq. The Saudis are seen as a "herm of evil." Al-Qaeda is seen as arising directly from fundamentalist Wahhabi teachings, with the American may guarantee long-term stability, and accept that the Saudis have a long-term strategic interest in the region's rising domestic problems.

Modified, unimproved food

GENEVA—The World Bank and the World Health Organization (WHO) are warning that the state might be undermined by crop failures have not deterred India from going ahead with plans to allow farmers to grow genetically modified (GM) food crops developed indigenously, as well as from seeking support by transnational firms. In March this year, the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) under the Ministry of Environment and Forests cleared for commercial planting BT cotton, whose seeds are spliced with genes from the bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) that is deadly to the bollworm pest. GEAC cleared BT cotton developed by the US seed giant Monsanto, despite the legal challenges to its planting pending in the Supreme Court by farmers' unions and the Research Foundation for Science Technology and Ecology (RFSTE).

There have been spectacular crop failures in the three major cotton growing states of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. A fourth state, southern Karnataka, has banned the sale of Bt cotton seeds. Monsanto officials told IPS that the crop failures in Gujarat and Karnataka are the result of drought conditions that resulted in root rot, to which the Bt cotton crops have no resistance, but newspaper reports say that reason in Gujarat was bollworm attacks. The government remains keen on another crop to be developed by the Delhi-based Indian Agricultural Research Institute (ARI)—the "golden acre" cabbage consumed in large quantities locally. As with Bt cotton, the main advantage of BT cabbage is its vastly reduced use of pesticides, says its developers at the ARI, one of the world's major agricultural research organisations. (IPS)

(Yam Yam is a research fellow at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London.)

Arms and Saddam

The UN's weapons inspectorate chief and Iraq have agreed on tentative terms for the conduct of weapons inspections, which in theory could begin two weeks from now. But the success of any such deal depends as much on the men who will carry out the inspections as on the details of when, and how they are carried out.

Hans Blix will head the UN arms inspectorate charged with searching for, finding, and destroying Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. He has known Blix for over forty years. In 1960 he was my dog when I was a boy of another Swedish. Ambassador Rolf Ekensköld, Blix's native and relatively ignorant about technical details—his field is international law—is usually mislead. Even after the Gulf war, he failed to realise that the Iraqi officials, who were again assured by the UN that they were hiding nothing, were but consumed later. Blix believed Iraq had no program to develop nuclear weapons. David Kay, perhaps the most effective arms inspector, insisted that he did not trust them. Blix reproached Kay for his attitude. You must believe in official information. Blix implied.

The timing of the inspections came when Iraq invited inspections of suspect buildings without notifying the Iraqi about his intentions in advance. This new, aggressive inspection strategy had dramatic consequences: Kay discovered material confirming that Iraq was 12 to 18 months away from producing a nuclear device.

This historic discovery ended up in a confrontation at a parking lot in Baghdad. UN cars were surrounded by 200 Iraqi soldiers and a mob, ordered out to the scene by Saddam. For four days and nights the siege continued, as Kay's helicopter used satellite telephone to fax crucial documents to the world.

Blix had opposed the raid. Fortunately, Ambassador Ekensköld backed it and supported the inspectors during the siege. Experts on Iraq's weapons and mass destruction often compare the two Swedes. "Ekensköld is brilliant," they say. "Blix is terrible."

Saddam's chemical and biological arms, and his determination to get nuclear weapons, are a threat to the world. The dictator could use his arms himself or make them available to terrorist organisations. And the use of war is not dependent on a man repeatedly duped the Iraqi regime. The Bush administration probably understands Blix's weakness. My guess is that the US will not allow Blix and the inspectors that he oversees to be deceived by Iraq. Regardless of how his risks develop from this point, the UN has neglected its duties by asking a man to lead the inspectors who are supposed to stand up to the brute of Baghdad. (Project Syndicate)

(Per Ahlmark is a former deputy prime minister of Sweden.)

When you can't say 'condom'

BEIJING—Chinese officials praise the government's attempt to safeguard "socialist" morality through its recent crackdown aiming to rid Chinese cities of the vices of prostitution, drug abuse and gambling—levels of the capitalist society that has made a steady comeback in the last few decades of wrenching market reforms after having been banished from this communist land more than 50 years ago.

But this same tough government response is also being blamed for the authorities' failure to raise HIV awareness in the sexually conservative society and to step up prevention efforts in the battle to contain China's growing AIDS epidemic. China's punitive treatment of high-risk groups, such as sex workers and drug addicts, has hindered effective preventive strategies. It has also made the question of treating HIV/AIDS and helping people living with the pandemic if not a taboo, then a very sensitive issue.

Because prostitution is banned in China, efforts to promote use of condoms in places like bars and parlours are slighted as attempts to legalise sex work. Most recent government guidelines such as the Medium and Long Term Plan for AIDS Prevention and Control of 2001 reiterate that "prostitution, drug trafficking and drug abuse must be vigorously cracked open." China has an estimated 1.7 million people with HIV/AIDS. The UN forecasts that some 10 million people in China could have HIV by 2010. While UN missions and non-governmental organisations are lobbying the central government to give the green light to a condom distribution program in areas outside of the few trial cities, local officials are fearful of implementing them. Kumiko Yoshida, a coordinator of HIV/AIDS local point at the UN Fund for Population (UNFPA) mission in Beijing, says: "Condoms are seen as a sex commodity rather than a health product and you can't go around the place distributing them." (IPS)

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(Per Ahlmark is a former deputy prime minister of Sweden.)

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITION

♦ **Myths and realities** Paintings by Asha, Bhairav, Binod and Pradip. Until 10 October, Srijana Contemporary Art Gallery, Kamaladi, 247889

♦ **Expressions: creative young souls** Art exhibition and sale of the Creativity Club of Buharikantika School, 5-9 October, 10AM-5PM, NAFA Art Gallery, Bal Mandir.

♦ **Light, source of all life** Sculptures and paintings by Pramila Giri, Patan Museum.

♦ **Three women artists** Paintings by Erina Tamrakar, Pramila Bajracharya and Sunila Bajracharya, until 9 October, Lazimpat Gallery Café, 425950

EVENTS

♦ **AWON** Dasain mela 5 October, 10AM-5:30 PM, Hotel Soaltee Crowne Plaza.

♦ **The Magician, the rings, and fish** Magic show, 6 October, 4PM, Alliance Française, 242832

MUSIC

♦ **Himalayan Dns Clash** Mumbai DJs, 3, 4 October, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 491234

♦ **Anarkita and Prism** 5 October, Hotel Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Tickets Rs 180 at Suwal Music & Video on Lazimpat and Tik'n Tok, New Road.

♦ **Table d'hôte menu** Rs 1,500 per couple, The Chimney, Hotel Yak & Yeti, 248999

♦ **Vegetarian specialties, clay oven pizza** Shiva Restaurant & Terrace, Boudha, 408262

GETAWAYS

♦ **Dasain package** Rs 1,555 per head per night on twin sharing basis, 11-17 October, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 491234

♦ **Bardia Dasain Special** Jungle Base Camp Lodge, junglebasecamp@yahoo.com or 061-32112.

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

TO DEPRIVE YOUR CHILD OF EDUCATION IS NOT ACCEPTABLE. FULL STOP. NO DISCUSSION.

NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The moon is now definitely on the retreat and has now pulled out of eastern Nepal, as is clearly seen in this satellite picture taken early on Wednesday morning. Expect a rain-free Dasain, with cool misty mornings and rather hot afternoons. A high pressure area is being formed right on schedule in northwest India and is chasing the moon back over to Assam. The mercury level is now showing a one degree decline every week, and this trend will continue. The snowline had descended to 4,300 m on south-facing slopes, but will go higher because of increased sunshine before dropping again by mid-October. This should make the terrain on the high passes perfect for trekking.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

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For insertions ring NT Marketing at 543333-36.

A thriller, Road is about Arvind (Vivek Oberoi) and Laxmi (Anita Mali), lovers who flee their homes when their parents oppose their relationship. On their way escaping, they come across Babu (Manoj Bajpai), who asks for a lift. What happens next catches the viewer unaware. Road turns out to be about just these three, but about four principal characters, Arvind, Laxmi, Babu and the Road. Produced by Rangopal Varma, Road is directed by Rajat Mukherjee, who also directed Vamma's Fandeen-Umish-Sonak starter Ryaan Tane. Kya Kiya, Sandesh Shandilya's music complements the script beautifully.

JAI NEPAL CINEMA

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5 MUSIC

Himalayan standard time

From the first notes of their new album, Jazz at Patan, it's obvious that Cadenza is a band with a common purpose. The album begins with the group setting down the theme from Wislauer Reports' classic jazz-fusion anthem "Birdland". They then take turns soloing, starting with Manose Singh's ethereal bamboo flute. As they solo in turn, it's obvious that their playing is focused and professional, but neither flashy nor excessive. (And mercifully devoid of noodling.) After each takes a modest turn in the sun, they all come back, in unison, to the main theme.

Growing on classic tracks like "Girl from Ipanema" and "In a Sentimental Mood," Cadenza has put together an album of standards that also draws on the group's roots in South Asia. Essentially a guitar band, Cadenza mixes in classical Indian instruments like the bamboo flute, sarod, tabla and tabla to forge a unique sound. The result is

BUFFET AT ITS BEST

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Visit Nepal While
It's Still Dark™

There used to be a time when all tourists could do in Nepal was trek to Kala Pattar, chase yetis, and visit the carpet shops at Jewelakheh for a souvenir rug. Today, due to creative promotion and an imaginative product diversification strategy, we are in a position to cash in on a vast new array of activities not only to lure more tourists, but to lengthen the average duration of their stay once here. Our motto is: "Think positive. There is an opportunity inside every crevasse."

So what if only 15 percent of Nepalis have electricity? What we have to remember is that tourists are sick of electricity, that they want to go to a place where there isn't any. This is why we have now started successfully selling our darkness under the "Visit Nepal While It's Still Dark" campaign.

All right, all right, there have been some complaints, including this one from a hard-to-please visitor who wrote in to say: "We booked a tour to Nepal because the travel agent assured us that it was powerless and promised that the whole country would be pitch dark for the duration of our stay. Imagine our dismay when we arrived at Kathmandu airport at two in the morning to see that there was one neon light still on in the arrival area. Our holiday has been ruined, can we get refund?"

Fat chance. We can't please all tourists all the time, and some are rather finicky. But one promo that is working extremely well and shows great potential for growth is the campaign launched by the Ministry of Marxism, Leninism and Tourism to attract Chinese tourists with the "Nepal Cultural Revolution Retrospective".

Now that there is yuan convertibility and Nepal has been declared an "Official Destination", it is now much easier for mainlanders to visit Nepal to see our unique selling point, viz., an actual revolution under construction. The following excerpt from an effective promotional brochure sums it up very nicely: "Miss Mao? The Great

Helmsman and the Gang of Four are alive and kicking in Nepal. Get into a time capsule that takes you back to 1960 China. Relive the Great Leap Forward, watch Red Guards in action as they trample Capitalist Roaders and Imperialist Running Dogs."



In order to ensure that tourists don't waste a moment of their limited time while in Nepal, there has also been a highly effective programme to not let them sleep while here. An average tourist has 24 hours at their disposal every day. Unfortunately, they waste about eight hours of this sleeping uselessly in their hotel rooms. In order to add value to their Nepal sojourn, and so they get their money's worth, we are now lining up new nocturnal attractions.

Unfortunately, let's face it, Kathmandu has no night life except the excellent body massage tired motorcyclists get for free at the military checkpoint every time you cross Bagmati Bridge after 8.30 PM. But all is not lost. Private airlines are now acquiring night-vision helicopters to conduct mountain sightseeing flights in the dead of night. Passengers get image-enhancing goggles through which they can admire the scene-scenery of the Himalaya by starlight.

Pokhara has slightly more nightlife than Kathmandu, but even there tourists have nothing to do after ten o'clock. However, all that is set to change with the installation of extra high-power halogen stage lights on Sarangkot which will illuminate Machhapuchhre by night.

In this way, we can keep tourists occupied day and night. They will remember Nepal as an area of darkness, and keep coming back. ♦





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