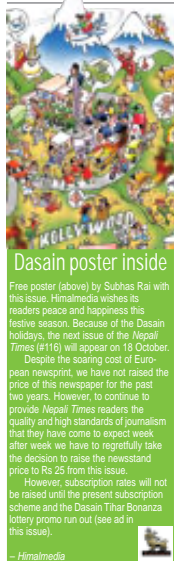


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Dasain poster inside

Free poster (above) by Subhas Rai with this issue. Himalmedia wishes its readers peace and happiness this festive season. Because of the Dasain holidays, the next issue of the Nepal Times (#116) will appear on 18 October. Despite the soaring cost of European newsprint, we have not raised the price of this newspaper for the past two years. However, to continue to provide Nepal Times readers the quality and high standards of journalism that they have come to expect week after week, we have to regrettably take the decision to raise the newsstand price to Rs 25 from this issue.

However, subscription rates will not be raised until the present subscription scheme and the Dasain Thai Bomana lottery promo run out (see ad in this issue).

Himalmedia

The king's move

How will this gambit play out?

ANALYSIS by RAJENDRA DAHAL

The king has sacrificed his own bishop, the pawns are not much help, and a dark horse makes a menacing advance. It's the king's move again, and this one will determine the composition of the interim government that he is about to announce.

When he sacked Prime Minister Deuba last Friday, assumed executive powers, and asked political parties to suggest untainted nominees who are not candidates for elections, the king gave himself a five-day deadline. The delay reflects the difficulty in cobbling together a council of ministers due to the reluctance of political parties to go along with the king.



Six parties from the dissolved House still insisted on Thursday to meet the king jointly to put forward their own candidate for prime minister, who would decide on the cabinet. It was their conviction that the king had acted unconstitutionally. But the king refused to meet them, and flew off to Gorkha.

Despite their bravado, strong criticism of the royal move, and the show of force on the streets, the parties do not really want to escalate this confrontation with the king. They reason that this would only benefit the Maoists, feel they have to somehow atone for Deuba's mistakes, and are also aware that much of the public blames them for the past 12 years of deterioration.

And this can only mean a coalition between the constitutional monarchy and parliamentary parties. However, both the extreme right and the extreme left are intent on driving a wedge between the two institutions. Maoist leaders have been exhorting the political parties to forget about the king and join forces with them, while the rightist forces are telling the king that the political parties have ruined the country and that he should have nothing to do with them.

The king's decision on the interim government is expected on Friday, the same day a Nepal aid consortium meeting begins in Kathmandu, bringing most senior donor representatives to the capital. India, the United States, the Europeans and Japan have all issued strong statements in support of the monarchy and the democratic forces working together.

For their part, the political parties now want the king to "correct his mistake" by using Article 128 of the constitution that mentions an interim government for a "transition period" to set up a multipartisan government of the kind that ruled the country in 1990-91 after the People's Movement. However, Article 128 specifically states that it was a one-shot clause designed for that first transition government.

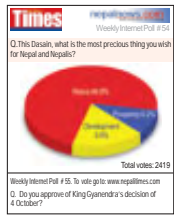
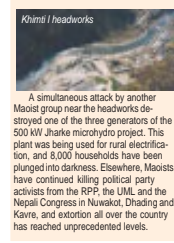
Most of the vocal and visible support for the royal action has come from Panchayat-era figures, those formerly close to the palace who were unable to enter mainstream multi-party politics, or those disillusioned with democracy.

So far, the king has been intriguingly silent on the demands of the political parties, although insiders say that he is losing his patience with them. There is a shortage of theories to explain the king's silence till press time Thursday evening, but one of them is that he is getting ready to activate Plan B, which is to announce a list of his own ministers, perhaps even one led by an executive crown.

Meanwhile, the Maoists

The Maoist raid on the Khimi I hydroelectric plant Tuesday night is the first-ever attack on a foreign joint-venture hydropower plant, and could damage an already-ravaged national economy.

The \$140 million 63 MW installation in Dolakha is still functioning, but will have to be shut down in the next few days because of damage to the machine house controlling the intake. A group of up to 150 Maoists first destroyed the satellite link, but an army platoon stationed at the powerhouse 12 km downstream could not be warned of the attack.



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SECTOR	FLY FROM	DATE	DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	FLY TO
KATHMANDU	HR0119	18.10.02	05:20	08:05	THE HAGUE
KATHMANDU	HR0119	18.10.02	07:25	09:35	THE HAGUE
KATHMANDU	HR0117	18.10.02	11:05	13:30	THE HAGUE
KATHMANDU	HR0117	18.10.02	11:05	13:30	THE HAGUE



It wouldn't exactly say that the Nepali people were euphoric about King Gyanendra's move to sack the prime minister and form a new government. But they were beginning to hold politicians in such low esteem, and had watched the country suffer chronic abuse from greedy and selfish politicians for so long, that they did not complain when the king took over executive powers last Friday.

In fact, they welcomed the fact that here at last was someone who could take a decisive step, assume responsibility, and try to take the country out of the rut it is in or a lot of it. They had stopped mattering who rules over us, as long as peace is restored. Trapped between the far right and the far left, abused by both the security forces and the Maoist militia, the Nepali people were desperate enough to cling to this straw.

But the king's move is fraught with dangers: for himself, for the constitutional monarchy and for this country's future. The king seems to have reasoned that if he waited any longer, the politicians would have made such a mess that the Maoists just walk into Kathmandu. But therein lies the biggest paradox in all this: the king has sidelined the very political parties that he will need in the long term to build public support against the Maoists and restore peace.



The king has gambled his throne on this one. And that act, by its very nature, has dragged the monarchy into the political muck. A constitutional monarchy needs to be above it all, untainted by partisanship and upheld as a symbol of national unity. It is now in danger of being just another political force jostling for power.

Having pushed the envelope on the constitution by dismissing executives, the king has removed the parliamentary buffer, bringing him face-to-face with revolutionary republicans. The country is therefore effectively polarised between the monarchy and the Maoists, the ultra-left and the right. The centre has been pulled away from us, and this is precisely what the Maoists want all along.

The king is also finding it more difficult than he had imagined to cobble together a council of ministers made up of nominees from the political parties. Slung by the royal move, some parties have

THE KING AND US

tried to remain united and resist royal pressure to give in. At a time when the palace and the parties should have remained united to counter extremists, there is now a deep fissure of mistrust between them.

There is a danger of the council of ministers and the appointment of the new prime minister is a critical factor. The biggest danger now is that the palace and the new government will be dragged to the right by reactionary forces. Downfall. Panchayat throwbacks will be doing the monarchy a great disservice if they see this as a chance to turn the clock back. Time has moved on.

And that is our advice to the king: as well: study your history, comrades. Remember how countries pushed to the brink by democratic rebellion are ripe for the picking by outsiders. You have gone as far as you can with this. Use your opportunity to join up with the mainstream, otherwise you'll run up ahead.

by CK LAL

STATE OF THE STATE

Democracy dreaming

SUGA (Mahottari District) - Here in the rural tarai, life is languid and everyday concerns are mundane. Not the wealthy nation we see on the news in Kathmandu, the issue here is the rain, too little or too much. Suga farmers don't remember when the rains were last so erratic. There was less rain than normal, but the floods were more damaging.

The explanation, however, is simple. There is a hectic build building spree downstream in Bihar. The ill-designed embankment causes ponding upstream, submerging rice paddies north of the border in Nepal. But Mahottari's inundation is unlikely to come up during this week's submergence talks between Indian and Nepali officials. We are too far away here from Kathmandu and New Delhi. All the more reason, therefore, for the Nepali and Indian villagers on either side of the border to start working more closely together.

So here I am, basking in the warmth of home with the scent of parijat wafting in the balmy breeze. By afternoon, the autumn sun turns the water buffaloes into dry clay cakes. In the evening, the blue smokes of cowpans paddle rises from the huts, and the smell takes you back to childhood. The nights are cool, and people sleep under the twinkling stars.

At least, they used to. One of the features of village life that has changed with the rise of Maoism is that people don't sleep outdoors anymore. Despite this year's floods, agricultural prospects look fairly good. Encouraged by the quota access to the European market for Nepali sugar, many farmers have diversified into sugarcane plantation. This year's harvests look promising. Progressive farmers have already started harvesting last year's crop, though the 1990 Chinese rice, Mansuli, the staple rice of traditional farmers, is yet to ripen. Connoisseurs cultivate Basmati,

Caught between the devil of authoritarianism and the deep blue sea of Maoism in the tarai.

he has chosen to neglect the sovereignty of the people.

And that is exactly the message that the Panchayat veterans seem to have got as they crawl out of woodwork. They have been emboldened by the tone and tenor of royal proclamation. There is now swagger in their steps. When Manoj Man gets to see the king twice in a week, the Mandales get the message.

Fear of the return of Panchayat-style administration hangs heavy in the air here in the tarai. Mahottari and Dhanusa are in the region that suffered most from state oppression during the Panchayat years. Diamond Sunshere began from the Anarchadhis Niwas of Jalowar, a palace originally built by Ram Sunshere.

Sadly, Nepali democracy seems to be dead on arrival. A Muslim entrepreneur from my village who claims to own a bakery in Attaria in the far-west Nepal thinks Sher Bahadur Deuba killed democracy in the country the day he decided to extend the state of emergency by dissolving the Pratinidhi Sabha and bypassing the Rastriya Sabha. Since then, political parties have been carrying the corpse of dead democracy on their shoulders, hoping against hope that it could somehow be resurrected.

The king was apparently fed up with democratic decay, and he performed the last rites through the royal proclamation last Friday. Suddenly, reality seems to have hit all political leaders, who have now begun to grieve at the loss. There is no way that the constitution can now be revived when the King feels that it was royal benevolence that brought the 1990 constitution. His avowed commitment to the multiparty system is an important point, but even more distinct is the way

The killers of Saroj Koirala operated out of the very same in-ruke-lashy house. Durga Nand Jha, the first martyr during the Panchayat regime, came from Dhanusa, as did Laxmi Kant Jha, the physician who was made to disappear without a trace for his commitment to pluralism.

Mahottari has habitually sent Nepali Congress nominees as all its MPs, and more than deserved the royal kick that he got. However, the sad reality is that it happened only after he had successfully demolished our hard-won freedoms. Perhaps that is the price this country has to pay for the error of judgement of the Maoists, all the major political parties, the media as well as the intelligentsia. Now, all we can do is wait for the rebirth of our democracy. Or, maybe, struggle for it all over again.

Only time will tell whether the kings



by CK LAL

LETTERS

KING G

After reading Kunda Dixit's "King G does it in your interest" edition, I felt he is being a little too optimistic in thinking that regression to direct royal rule would solve the country's problems in this time of great crisis. Dixit seems to be reflecting the Nepali people's yearning for a saviour, any saviour. Just remember that the Panchayat system was an utter failure.

ST Thapa, Thapa, Tokyo

Article 27 of the Constitution of Nepal empowers His Majesty to take necessary steps to take the national interests, integrity and sovereignty. It reads "His Majesty is to preserve and protect this Constitution by keeping in view the best interests and welfare of the people of Nepal." There was no other alternative than the step taken by King Gyanendra. Few political leaders regarded his step as unconstitutional and shocking. But this is what any sensible head of the state would do for the well-being of the people. It has been a decade that the royal family has neglected the world outside the palace.

This was necessary to let the people of Nepal know that the times are always there to help in times of crisis. Now it depends on King Gyanendra how he handles the upcoming situation in Nepal concerning the Maoists pressure and possible pressure from political leaders.

The government he forms in the next five days would reflect his policies towards the country. Being a former businessman, King Gyanendra is aware of the current economic and development situation in the country and has the future welfare of Nepal in mind.

Pravesh Saria, Chicago

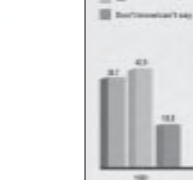
King Gyanendra means business. Love him, hate him, but you can't ignore him. That is the message going to politicians. And also to the public sentiment which is clearly in favour of the royal proclamation as shown from the poll in Nepal Times. Nepali people are gripped by uncertainty and at this moment they really feel safe with a single absolute monarch than with a big corrupt cabinet. No prize for guessing why no one is complaining. The last nail in the coffin for the politicians will be if and when the king restores peace to the country. This is also a great opportunity for the Maoists to come to the table if they really have something

to offer to the king.

Rupa Joshi, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Is democracy threatened?

(% of respondents in 1999, 2001, 2002)



CREATIVE IN THEIR MIND

Otherwise, no one is going to trust them anymore, and we have had enough of them as well. Deuba had no one to blame but himself what happened.

Samer Bhattarai, by email

"Vot poll" by Navin Subedi was instructive. It does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that everything ex-premier Deuba did during his tenure helped the Maoists. It was during his first term as prime minister in 1996 that the Maoists launched their "peoples war". During his second term their strength increased by leaps and bounds. In the past few months he proceeded to dismantle all structures of parliamentary democracy, dissolving parliament, local elected bodies, imposing a state of emergency. All these things were exactly what the Maoists wanted, and it made them stronger. Now that King Gyanendra has taken over, the first thing he should investigate is whether Deuba has links to Prachanda, Baburam B. Co. Prachanda, Kathmandu

GOOD LAK

I will look forward eagerly to issue #115 to see what reasons Daniel Lak finds to be optimistic about Nepal's future ("A glass of hope", #114). I too used to be optimistic. Now I find it difficult to identify any entity in Nepal that is legitimate, capable and willing to work for the common good.

Perhaps the Nepal Times could encourage readers to write in with stories about politicians and civil servants who are honest and competent. That might give us all some reasons to be optimistic.

John Chitli, Ghamskhei

MR TEA

Read about "Rai, the tea-man" (#113) and as he says surely Nepal has a lot to offer tea lovers around the world. Uzbekistan is one such rich loving country. It's what they serve the first thing you go anywhere... a cafe, a home, an office. The bazars and supermarkets are full of tea, but mostly from Sri Lanka sold as Ceylon tea, and some from India. Always with one could find Assam tea in their midst. My Uzbek friends love the "Nepal" tea I prepare brewed with milk. The market in this tea-thirsty nation is immense. It's all a question of marketing, developing taste, adding exotica and building a brand for Nepal tea.

Rupa Joshi, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

As a tea drinker and a close observer of the tea industry in Nepal, I was saddened to read your article on Rai, the tea man. It is quite obvious that you have done your homework, or was the intent just to give a bad press to the tea industry? Daijearling seems comparable to Daijearling second flush with bloom famous all over the world. Nepal too has the potential. And it also has the people who are experts, write about them as well.

Eizo San, by email

ISAS Great story by Janaki Guring ("If we want tourists, scrap visa fees" #113) but are visa fees really a deterrent for tourists coming to Nepal? As a person frequently coming into and leaving Nepal on business, I argue that the "system" at the airport that forces people to rise up in public action on their own terms as a visa fee of Nepal, but I don't think a \$30 visa fee is much of a deterrent as to whether tourists will or won't come to Nepal. Keep taking the money, just make it easier—and spend the money more wisely.

B Moore, Kathmandu

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Janaki Guring's article on the visa handling by the Nepal authorities does present the media as well as public picture. It only proves my point that I have been contemplating since sometime back that the Nepalis, at least those at the top, are not ready for democracy, and are not ready to accept their own responsibility. It is because those who are in a position to bring about the changes, I mean the positive changes, never have the experience and business acumen to do so. Nepal and tourists have to face. There is always someone to exempt you at the airport when you have an audio message at the airport. Customs, security and immigration treat departing Nepalis as a case of nuisance and are jealous as if they ought not to go. I am sure that king about and treat the returning Nepalis with some disdain. Only with that somebody somebody would put in the bubble-badski rule of the Nepalis. Security and immigration that it is not the tourists who are supporting the economy, it is the remittance of the labour force from Nepal who is keeping the country going.

And the problem begins right at the top leadership. The rot is in the head. We are waiting for a superman to come who will bring about the changes in Nepal.

S Nepal, by email

After reading Janaki Guring's article on visa fees, I must share with you readers the rampant existence of corruption at Kathmandu airport. Returning tourists also happens at the security check where a policeman on duty (on 18 September at noon, if anyone wants to check) demanded a Rs 100 "donation" from me after going through my wallet, which he forced me to open. He treated me like a criminal and turned me into one by refusing to let me go. What I want to know is whether this guy was a policeman or a Maoist. Or is there no difference?

N Srivastava, New Delhi

FOREIGN EMBASSIES

Foreign embassies based in Kathmandu give too much aid money to strengthen "civil society". Instead of funding has gone into strengthening "civil society" as both bridges and bulwarks between the state and the people.

And yet in the embassy backing of the king's move, we see a serious contradiction. In the grey area of currently defined "constitutional rights", the stronger standards of the "rule of law" usually so strictly called for by foreign friends, appears to have wavered. Furthermore, instead of seeking to strengthen civil society with the creation of public spaces and the people, embassies have attempted to resolve political crises, unilateral decisions have been made "for the good of the country" and "the welfare of the people."

Civil society analogously understood requires the stabilisation of a system of rights as part of an enabling normative context which guarantees spheres of individual freedom within society. In the monarch's march, backed by embassies, there is no notion of the necessity of people themselves learning the trials of democracy, of learning through their mistakes and the potential positive outcomes of reaching that level of disalienation which brings fresh energies of people to rise up in public action on their own terms as a visa fee of Nepal, but I don't think a \$30 visa fee is much of a deterrent as to whether tourists will or won't come to Nepal. Keep taking the money, just make it easier—and spend the money more wisely.

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Let us make no mistake about who is responsible for what happened last Friday night or the reasons why it happened. Granted, the Maoists have succeeded in destabilising the country, wrecking the economy and making the life of ordinary Nepalis a living hell in much of the country. But that is what the Maoists have done. It is to be expected.

Like-wise, the king, the second element in the equation, recognised that the country faced a constitutional crisis as well as other

crises, and felt the time had come to intervene. In young constitutional monarchies kings cannot easily ignore the fact that both the army and the public see them as the only hope of salvation in the parameters of life. So he has behaved in accordance with his perceived responsibilities and in a predictable way.

That leaves just one element in the political equation that has not been debated in a way that would normally be expected, or that accorded with its responsibilities. This is the democratically elected politicians and the political parties they represent. They have failed miserably to recognise that their mandate to rule is not God-given, or the result of the sufferings in the Panchayat years, but came direct from the people of Nepal.

They have failed to deliver what the people required of them: effective and inclusive government, economic development and law and order. The arrogance with which they pursued their personal vendettas and exploited their power for personal gain when the country was in deepening crisis added insult to injury. History provides many examples of dictators who fell because the sycophants surrounding them cut them off from their people. Could this be the first time a whole democratically elected system consistently and willfully ignored its power base? But the politicians ignored the will and the welfare of the people of Nepal at their peril.

No doubt the king will be able to keep his finger on the pulse of the people, and if he does it is hard to imagine that they will exert pressure on him to return to the democratic process in the short term. Let's face it, the light of their recent experience of democracy it simply wouldn't make sense. So the vital question today is, will the political parties, and particularly those Nepali Congresses finally acknowledge their responsibility for the appalling state of the country by embarking upon an unbecoming campaign of self-questioning and internal reform? Or better still will new and united parties, who base their manifests on principled and truly representative government, emerge to take their place.

Sadly, for Nepal both scenarios are hard to imagine. The transformation of the democratic political scene and the politicians is surely the most challenging task the king has taken on.

IA foreigner resident in Nepal

NEPALI VIEW, FOREIGN VIEW

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IA foreigner resident in Nepal

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N Srivastava, New Delhi

The people are treated as enemy by Maoists

Faced with food shortages, forced recruitment by Maoists and harassment by security forces, the people of Salyan are either opting out or hunkering down.

targets because of past disputes. The Maoists are now turning their attention to local politicians. They've abducted former VDC representatives and imposed conditions for their release without actually charging them with any wrongdoing. The rebels have also been known to like local representatives into custody, saying that they want to audit the funds spent on local projects, but they free their captives only after ransom of up to Rs 100,000 is paid.

Bharab Shah, former chairman of Kalyang VDC and UML worker Rudra Rai Khatri have been in Maoist custody for the past three months. They have also not freed many of the people abducted on 11 September, including Sagarada Shah, chairman of the Salyan Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Travel is so difficult, most people just stay put unless there are really urgent business. The security forces and government officials are regularly by helicopter. Bus journeys are treacherously punctuated by roadblocks. Everyone knows the drill: get down, queue up, wait to have your baggage and body checked. If you have any prized material on you, allow for a longer delay.

On the road between Dang and Salyan, the Maoists have their own checks, to hand out members of the security forces, and others they might have a grudge against. Sometimes they hold up buses for hours and extort "donations" from the owners.

Similar checks have been set up on

the trails leading to the district headquarters. People have been barred from traveling outside their villages: those who must leave do so only after applying for and getting permission from their "people's government" which issues them a time-bound permit. The same is true for people who want to come into a village. If you leave your village without permission, you cannot come back.

The Maoists have invented another way of immobilising people by declaring "area bandhs". This is slightly better than house arrest, as the person can move around in a small, strictly-delimited area. Those under an area arrest are also likely to be detained, even harassed by the security forces sooner or later for being suspected Maoists. Political party workers and teachers who have not joined the Maoists remain under constant surveillance.

Unsurprisingly, all the hardship, uncertainty and fear means that those who can afford it have fled. Which means the Maoists have lost the very people they could hit for extortion. There are also few banks to loot, which has made the Maoists desperate for funds. The "revolutionary taxes" are now ruthlessly applied. You can get away with some time-donation anymore. Businessmen, teachers, government officials, contractors, traders—anyone the Maoists can find—all pay a monthly fee. In the absence of cash, the rebels will take clothes, utensils and foodstuffs. They are also prone to imposing any

number of miscellaneous charges on the people, and "fining" them for perceived transgressions. No one knows how the proceeds of these "collection drives" are used.

The Maoists have also issued dozens asking VDC representatives to hand over all allowances they have received from the VDC after the announcement of "people's governments" in their areas. Former VDC heads and deputy heads must thus pay Rs 20,000-50,000 to the Maoists. If they don't, the rebels seize land and other assets. In order to meet party expenses, they've even begun tilling village plots of those who've fled.

Terrified by being caught in the crossfire, thousands of villagers have fled or migrated to India or other countries in search of work. There are over a dozen families who have been forced to leave their villages and live in the district headquarters, and others have already moved to other districts. More than a hundred are members of political parties who have fled to Kathmandu, and a similar number are living in Dang, Nepalgarh or Kathmandu.

The sounds of the war are never far away. Both sides exchange fire almost every night. A couple of trucks go off. The air is heavy with terror. The lines of people at the District Administration Offices waiting get longer. The number of reports have lengthened. In addition, anyone detained by the security forces must on their release report to the DAO. Anyone entering the office

(Prakash Wala used to be the UML MP from Salyan.)

by DANIEL LAK

Off the trail

Thimpu, Bhutan - There are few things more dreaded by the working journalist than missing a big story back home, on one's "patch" as it were. It happens to me all, as I found out to my cost last week. The venue for my humiliation, my complete humbling, was this tiny city, in a delightful little cafe that is a match for many of Thame's finest places.

A fellow Kathmandu expat came through the door as I sipped my coffee in total ignorance and fired a broadside. "I suppose you're discussing what's going on in Kathmandu," she said, then looked puzzled as I sprayed fragrant Indian java on my dining companions. Not to dwell on the matter, but I was jugged out. Away from home in a time of crisis, and the familiar feeling of disorientation of events, the presence of a befuddled, still embarrassed and far too often abiding Nepal correspondent will do. So I was able to proffer a few opinions and demand a few in return.

The confessor, I have to say, among almost everyone I spoke to, was concerned that political crises had so often gripped Nepal in recent years. But she and I were aware that stability here serves their interests, as well as those of Nepalis. Some people made reference to their own king, Jigme Singye Wangchuk, and his current policy of gradually establishing a more democratic order to allow the Bhutanese to get used to his absence: the centre of things. "Perhaps you should have done it that way in Nepal," opined a former royal official over a few glasses of the excellent Red Panda



beer. (Suggestion to those seeking normal relations between Bhutan and Nepal: free trade in local beer would be a good start.) Another friend, who asked not be quoted directly, said the Bhutanese greatly desired a stable Nepal to perhaps allow the two countries to consult more on relations with India—the large and overwhelming influence in both national life. By and large, people in the Thunder Dragon's eyrie thought King Gyandendra's move was a good thing and not particularly surprising although they had no idea—from news coverage on the Internet—that it was costing. "We Himalayas people need guidance," a travel agent told me. "More and more of us want openness and democracy, but we still may not know what's best for us at crucial times. I wonder about that one, but leave it alone for now. The point is, the Bhutanese seem to have a real empathy for what's happening here. Not one could I detect a note of glee yet another potentially damaging round of political turmoil in Nepal, nor one said, 'I told you so, democracy is a bad idea.' Of course, the issue of the refugees in Jhapa and Morang hangs over the two countries now, as ever, and it's unlikely that a quiet settlement of that sad situation will be reached soon. But just maybe, Bhutanese goodwill for Nepal can translate into something tangible that's pre-empted in Kathmandu." For now, I'll stick to promoting a train-Himalayan beer exchange as the beginning of a long frosty relations. Anyone for cold Red Panda? ♦

OPINION

by PUSKAR GAUTAM

Fight to the finish

The king has an advantage because most Nepalis are fed up with both the politicians and the Maoists, but he has to play his cards right.



REBELS IN ARAW

Everything the Maoists wanted has come to pass. And now, finally, they are face-to-face with the monarchy.

For both sides, this is now a fight to the finish. Seven years after starting their "people's war" the Maoists have got themselves exactly to the point they wanted—thanks in large measure to a series of blundering elected governments.

In a statement last week before the royal proclamation, Maoist supreme Prachanda announced that his forces had now reached "strategic balance"—that is, Maoist jargon for a phase in which the military strength of the guerrillas and the government are evenly matched. After analyzing strategic balance, Mao Zedong started setting up permanent bases with barracks, and behaved like a conventional army.

For his part, King Gyandendra may have decided that a weak and faction-ridden government was only benefiting the insurgents. Time was of the essence, and the sooner he got rid of disoriented politicians and put a working government in place, the easier it would be for him to defuse the widening insurgency. However, by temporarily taking on executive powers, he has now pitied himself directly against the Maoists.

Whether or not the "People's Liberation Army" and the Royal Nepal Army are actually of equal strength is debatable. But what is clear is that the Maoists have been able to deliver devastating blows to military bases. These have psychological value besides yielding large caches of automatic and other heavy weapons. More importantly,

by overrunning heavily garrisoned garrisons, they have been able to demolish the army's aura of invincibility.

Having convinced themselves that they have achieved strategic balance, the Maoist military leadership is now trying to decide whether it should continue with hit-and-run offensives, or launch armys up to take a dramatic leap forward. Prachanda said in the underground newspaper *Janaajit* last month that he feels his forces can defeat the army "within one year".

Others have portrayed the royal proclamation as proof that the "reactionary, fascist monarchy bloc" is now in its final throes and "ictory is at hand". It is in this light that the Maoist

This sounds like bravado and an effort to keep cadre morale high and a military victory for the Maoists not likely to happen that soon. The first factor is that the Indians and the Chinese just wouldn't allow it. Second, the Royal Nepal Army's morale has just got a major boost since the soldiers have always been told that they fight for "king and country". The army's job will also be made easier if the Maoists start fighting out of strength, since it will be easier to distinguish the guerrillas from ordinary villagers. The tables will be turned, and the army may in places now have to be a guerrilla force against fixed Maoist positions—something like the sweeps that the army is conducting in Rolpa and Rukum this month.

Interestingly, Maoist movements elsewhere (in Lanka, Peru) have started going downhill after reaching strategic balance. The ruling elite and its armed forces seem to be suddenly shocked awake when the insurgents arrive at the gates. The other serious mistake the Maoists are making is that they have alienated themselves from the people, especially in the past nine months, with their brutal killings, attacks on schools, infrastructure, and development. This is an indication that the movement is being dominated by extremist thinking, the rationalisation that the ends justify the means. The ends against Mao Zedong's teachings, in which he said that the decisive factor in any war is public support, not weapons and soldiers.

It is in this light that the Maoist

offer for talks must be seen. They need to show parliamentarily parties that they are reasonable and to prove to the people that they are not war-mongers. Talking about talks has propaganda value.

King Gyandendra's dramatic decision to take control is bad news for the Maoists. But politically, it helps them by driving a wedge between parliamentarians and the king, and pits them directly against the monarchy. Militarily, the Royal Nepal Army can now be expected to get more serious about launching offensives, upgrading intelligence, increasing the number of men under arms, and ensuring better equipment and logistics.

Kautiyals said that whoever has the army has political power. Mao Zedong said that the people do not stand without the army. King Gyandendra's move to have a direct say in running this country will only be able to nullify the Maoist insurgency if the puts together an effective government that can win the people's hearts and minds. The king has an advantage because most Nepalis are fed up with both the politicians and the Maoists.

For this, he needs a cabinet of honest and efficient members. He can't have faces from the pre-1990 days, and he can't have reactionaries. He also can't have the first generation of political leaders who have totally discredited themselves. This narrows down the choices, but that is the only way he can launch a social reform movement to sustain the new hope that he has given the people. ♦

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Dropouts

High dropout and failure rates among grade one students are the biggest challenge facing Nepal in its attempt to provide universal elementary education. Figures from the Ministry of Education and Sports indicate that the dropout rate stands at a whopping 13 percent. That means that every year, of the approximately 1,319,400 children enrolled in the first year of primary school, about 200,000 drop out. In addition, 40 percent of the enrolled students repeat first grade.

Getting our goats

For the second year, Nepal's government has declined China's offer of 2,000 goats as financial support to control malaria cases during Dasain. The Food Corporation, however, is far from prepared to meet the demand for live goats this festive season, and estimates are that the government will only be able to provide 4,000 of the 50,000 goats the public expects next week. Since many people will not go back to their villages this year due to security concerns, the goat shortage is likely to be felt especially badly in the capital. Although the government has fixed the price of goat meat at Rs 124 per kg, the price is likely to go much higher in Kathmandu. VLN

Polio threats

The recent identification of 480 new polio cases in India effectively puts paid to South Asia's plan to make the region polio-free by 2005. Nepal is close to being declared a polio-free country—there has not been a polio case detected here since 2001—but the open border with India and the unchecked movement of people between both countries could change that. Countries need to have no identified polioviruses for three consecutive years to be certified polio-free. The World Health Organisation has set a timeline to eradicate polio by the year 2005, but three years continues to cripple more than 500,000 annually in 125 poorer countries of the world.

Rotary health initiative

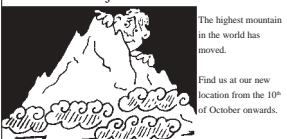
Some 28 Rotary Clubs from all over Nepal agreed Monday to make reproductive health a major focal point for their activities. Reproductive health is a major health crisis in Nepal, and a hidden epidemic, as most of the women are ill or do not receive adequate medical attention. The Nepal Rotaries are following through on the worldwide agreement signed between Rotary International and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) last year. Hartmut Bauer has been elected country chair for the activity in Nepal.

According to the "Kathmandu Resolution" passed by the all-Nepal Rotary Workshop this week, the clubs pledged to undertake at least one project every year that directly influences population, environment and sustainable development, working in partnership with government agencies, NGO's and local leadership. The projects will focus on education and literacy, particularly of girls and mothers and access to health.

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SNV/Nepal is deeply grieved to inform her partners in development that His Royal Highness Prince Claus of the Netherlands has passed away on October 6, 2002.

His Royal Highness Prince Claus of the Netherlands was Chairman of SNV (Netherlands Development Organisation) from 1974 to 1980, after which he became Honorary Chairman. The death of Prince Claus marks the loss of our leading thinker in the field of international development. For Prince Claus, development cooperation was not a question of charity but of social justice. His Highness emphasised the fact that we can make only a limited contribution to development, and stressed the importance of defence: after all, the crux of the matter is not having, but being. With the passing of the Prince, SNV also loses its conscientious inspirer who urged development workers to listen, and always remember that development cooperation is about helping others to help themselves.

Jan de Witte
Director SNV/Nepal
Netherlands Development Organisation

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SOMEWHERE IN NEPAL

Critics' choice

The culture of impunity will thrive as long as the electorate refuses to take responsibility for those it elects.



The latest Himalmedia AC Nielsen ORG survey opinion poll ("Vox populi", #114) provides a pristine portrait of public perceptions of politicians, democracy, the police, military and the Maoists. It would have been nice to know how many Nepalis blame themselves for their plight. The national psyche has never been hurt this hard. This is not to discount the upheaval our forebears had to endure during peace and war. It's just to suggest that the isolation and ignorance of their times must have brought greater bliss. When the drought in western Nepal conspires with the

demolitions on the West Bank to disturb Nepal's mind, you're forced to compute the limits of endurance.

Intentional infliction of emotional distress is agonising even in the best of times. The pain becomes more excruciating when you feel helpless. The healing process can begin when we concede we are part of the problem and the solution. The people must rise up taller to their role as custodians of sovereignty.

When politics is viewed with a mutable mixture of awe, amusement and antipathy, it's hard not to be pulled by the practitioners' perennial pranks. Can we still count how many post-1990 governments were

brought down by the ruling party? Or how the opposition parties managed to get the prime minister they wanted? (Remember that rally the UMJL took out across the heart of Kathmandu in support of former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's land-reform agenda last year when the Kangresis were up in arms?)

In a polity that tends to measure success in direct proportion to the next guy's failure, perversion is compelled to acquire art form. Kangresis, barmahis and purba panche took little time in setting the political row triggered by Giriraj Prasad Koirala's "broader democratic alliance" proposal

by PUSKAR BHUSAL

once they turned consensus-building into a tool of cornering the prime minister of the day (Too bad, they couldn't muster the resolve to resist Deuba entlements until the very end.) When those wedded to the preservation of people power divorce themselves from the basic procedure it presupposes, the deal is doomed. Opposition to injustice merely to avoid becoming a victim doesn't impair one's ability to inflict it on others. This Platonism explains how some of our most liberal leaders can be such autocratic individuals.

Life is complicated by other paradoxes that piqued the ancient Greek philosophers. In simpler matters like shooing, for instance, we think only a specially trained person will serve our purpose. How can we presume that everyone who knows how to get votes knows how to administer a city or state? But, then, we still wouldn't be able to find a way of barring incompetence and knavery from public office without encroaching upon our equality as human beings. When the same reviled people get re-elected, the system decays. We, the people, are party to blame for the putrefaction. The culture of impunity will thrive as long as the electorate refuses to take responsibility for those it elects.

We can start by ceasing to concede achievement with perfection. Our politicians are guided by the same values, attitudes and expectations we have. When we hold them to standards higher than those we are ready to adopt, disappointment is bound to abound. Did we become so egotistic about the anti-corruption campaign because of our abhorrence of tainted transactions. Or because we could no longer stand that class of people who had become sickeningly ostentatious in flaunting their ill-gotten wealth in the neighbourhood? Why then those images of multi-storied houses and late-model cars blocked to cland discussions on the macro-economic violence of corruption? The millions stashed away by some leaders who walked the streets of the capital wearing incongruous pairs of slippers a decade ago have tarnished their democratic credentials. Politics cannot be cleansed by berating the entire fraternity as corrupt. Love 'em or hate 'em, but learn to live with them. They're the ones who will uphold our freedom to choose the people we can blame.

One-third of those polled felt an all-party government was best placed to solve the country's problems. That's no small tribute to the structural resilience of democratic institutions. As long as endemic vilification distorts our capacity for eternal vigilance, we'll continue complaining how each government turns out to be worse than its predecessor. ♦

in the Act in the dark

A NEPALI TIMES REVIEW Sandhya, 23, loves her husband. But at times, she also hates and fears him. The wife of a drug addict who was tested HIV+ two years ago, Sandhya lives in a constant state of fear. She fears that little son may follow in his father's footsteps. Her husband beats her when he's high, injects in front of the child, has violent fits of rage when denied money for his dose, smashes window panes, breaking the legs off furniture, setting alight clothes and sarees, and sells off whatever he can get his hands on. Sometimes he threatens to infect his wife with blood from a syringe, and tries to have sex without a condom. "I feel really scared when we have sex. I'm afraid the condom might tear and I may get infected," says Sandhya. Plagued by economic problems, and mentally and physically exhausted, with little support from her family and her in-laws, Sandhya is depressed and suicidal. "I thought it would be better to commit suicide than to die from his beatings or live with them, so some time ago I consumed poison. But they found out about it and took me to hospital. I was not even allowed to die."

Sandhya is one of a collection of first-hand accounts of how individuals in Nepal are coping when someone in the family gets HIV/AIDS. The voices of fathers, mothers, sisters, wives, barely getting through the day to day struggles of living with injecting drug users who are HIV positive or have AIDS, come through poignantly in *Unheard Voices*, a 105-page volume published by Panos South Asia.

In Kathmandu Valley alone, some estimates say, as many as 50 percent of an estimated 30,000 injecting drug users are infected.

There is a sense of helplessness and hopelessness in the testimonies, of frustration and despair, of resignation, but there are also glimmers of courage and hope. The book comes in the wake of *Positive Life*, another volume published in 1999 by Panos South Asia and containing the oral testimonies of fifteen Nepali men and women living with HIV. While *Positive Life* provides readers with an insight into the lives of people, men and women, living with HIV, *Unheard Voices* takes the reader beyond their experiences' to focus on families whose world is suddenly changed because someone in the household has a chain of repercussions," explains the preface. "In their own words they illustrate the interplay of a wide range of socio-economic problems resulting from HIV/AIDS which directly threaten their survival and well-being."

Since the interviewees came across few accounts of those infected through sexual contact—possibly because issues of sexuality are not openly discussed in Nepali society—the editors note that *Unheard Voices* is devoted to the testimony of families who have been affected by someone who is a drug user in the family, who has HIV/AIDS or who has died after contracting AIDS. The interviewees express a range of experiences, such as the stigma and discrimination felt in society: "people don't treat me well because of my husband," says 30-year-old Sapna. Bhim Lal, 59, and Tulsi Devi, 47, are anguished parents. "He would bully and blackmail all of us at home. Now, he even strikes us," says Bhim Lal of his eldest son, an injecting drug user with HIV. "I wish someone would kill him. Even if he were to live he won't do anything other than make us cry. It is better off with him dead," says Tulsi Devi of her eldest son who is also an injecting drug user. Tulsi Devi is an exception. Unlike many in-laws who extend the same indifference they feel for an HIV infected son to their daughter-in-law, as many of the stories reveal, Tulsi Devi is concerned about her daughter-in-law. "My son will die soon. My daughter-in-law is good-looking. If she doesn't get infected, someone will marry her. I say, 'Son, she's someone else's daughter, don't ruin her life.'"

"Interviewing such families was extremely challenging and painful," says Sangeeta Lama, one of the four researchers who travelled around Nepal collecting testimonies for this volume. "First, it's difficult to meet people with HIV and even to go to them and they are forthcoming about their illness because they want to share their problems with someone or want to know the latest information and cures, talking to the families is extremely difficult. People usually disassociate themselves or ostracised members who have HIV/AIDS. HIV contracted through drugs or the sexual route is looked on more as a crime. There's no sympathy, just a need to get rid of the burden."

Lama also highlights how the current HIV/AIDS awareness programs and media campaigns focus on prevention and control, but rarely address the needs of people already infected and their families who are not well equipped to deal with the trauma of knowing that a family member has HIV/AIDS. "One only hopes that the book will encourage readers to think about people infected with HIV and their families in a different light and with more empathy and understanding."

A beginner's guide to road rules in Kathmandu.



PHOTO BY ANIL KUMAR BUDHATHARA

ANDREW BUNBURY I am profoundly sad to be leaving Nepal, not just because the people here must be among the friendliest in the world—and I have lived in many places—with climate and scenery to match, but because I have failed to solve the mystery of Nepal driving. This isn't about right and wrong ways in which to drive, but about different driving styles. For the most part, as far in Kathmandu, people do not drive very fast and road rage is virtually unknown. Joining a stream of moving traffic from a side road without so much as looking at who may be approaching from the right is upsetting to conservative drivers like me, but people seem accustomed to it, and it does not harm its done. I stop at a T-junction to see if a vehicle is already approaching and

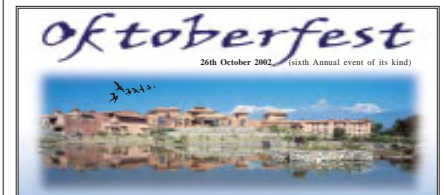
the vehicle behind me simply overtakes and merges with the stream of traffic without a care in the world. The mystery that gives me any anxiety is the use of the right indicator. In countries where driving is on the left, the normal message given by this sign are that one is about to turn right, to overtake a vehicle or to join a stream of traffic from a stationary position. These all have in common an indication that there will be a movement to the right. Yet here in Nepal the sign is also used to communicate that it is safe to overtake. This requires either a leap of faith or uncanny intuition about what is going through the mind of the driver in front, whether he is turning or moving right or merely signalling that the road ahead is clear. Other idiosyncrasies of Nepali driving do not alarm me greatly. My dim memories of science lessons at school several decades ago remind me that "nature abhors a vacuum". The textbooks did not tell me that the same applies to motorcycles in Nepal. If there is a space a motorcycle first has to fill it; only then does the rider have to proceed for the existence of that space, which does not include his presence in it). The classic example is when two four-wheeled vehicles slow down to pass each other in the capital's many treacherously narrow lanes. The motorcyclist

Driven to distraction



Horn Please

The horn is a multipurpose instrument. It can be used for the following: ♦ "I am behind your vehicle" (though you have a mirror to tell you that). ♦ "I am still behind you" (though you heard that the first time and several times since). ♦ "I am behind you pedestrians" (and, because I'm so important, you ought to get out of my way, even though there's no pavement beside this road). ♦ "I am approaching you on the other side of the road" (it's rather alarming that drivers think that others on an open road will hear them before they see them). ♦ "I am approaching a corner too fast." ♦ "The car in front of mine has slowed down or stopped" (and sounding my horn will make it miraculously disappear). ♦ "The traffic lights have turned green." ♦ "Oh, there's my friend." ♦ "Oh, there's a very attractive person on the pavement." ♦ "I can see a pothole and I'd better warn it coming." ♦ "I am a very important bus and I want everybody to recognise that fact."



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Imaginary domestication

A retrospective of artist Robert Powell's work sheds light on ideas about art, reality and ethnography in the Himalaya.



North-South section, Mosque at Gzabal Jaba, Swat

MARK TURIN

A 300-page retrospective panorama of Robert Powell's work, *Himalayan Drawings* is a total book that edifies the visual senses as much as it does the intellect. The high

quality of the photographic reproductions match the intensity of Powell's art, and the full page plates which make up two-thirds of the publication have a depth of colour almost indistinguishable from that of Powell's original drawings. The

most prominent feature of Powell's signature style, now frequently seen in the posters adorning restaurants and middle-class homes in Kathmandu, is his unique form of fentical hyperrealism. Many people should be so true to the originals. When studying the House of Tsak, for example, which graces the dust jacket, one is hard pressed to remember that this is a photographic replica of a pictorial representation, and not the house itself.

The publication of *Himalayan Drawings* was timed to coincide with the first ever retrospective of Robert Powell's oeuvre. The exhibition, with the same title as the accompanying book, was organised by and housed at the Ethnographic Museum of Zurich University in Switzerland and ran from 13 July, 2001 to 3 March, 2002. While previous shows of Powell's work, in Kathmandu where he lives and works, and at the Sackler Gallery in Washington DC, have focused on specific geographical locations depicted in his art, the *Himalayan Drawings* exhibit was more expansive. On display were 142 pieces spanning 25 years of Powell's work in the Himalaya (Nepal, India, Pakistan and China), which he had created using a range of different media (watercolour, ink and pencil).

The first chapter is by Peter Herbstreuth, an art critic and curator, who masterfully intertwines excerpts from an interview he conducted with Powell and his own intellectual appreciation of the artist's work. According to Herbstreuth, Powell "extracts pieces from his real surroundings, reconstructs them and shows the detail on the picture surface," a technique Herbstreuth translates in his writing. Powell himself comes across as modest and thoughtful. According to Powell, in "any traditional architecture you lose the passage of time... And that is what I found boring about so much modern architecture. There is nothing designed within the building to allow for the effect of time on a structure." It is his hard to

disagree when one looks around the modern skyline of Kathmandu. Powell also touches on a central feature of his work to which many commentators call attention: the notable absence of humans. Powell again states:

"They [people] distract from the basic image by building and it becomes too busy. It becomes picturesque with that some local-in-costume-in-front-of-the-building type of thing. This is not what I mean to show."

The absence of human figures in Powell's work is striking, perhaps only because the structures he depicts are so clearly shaped by humans. To return for a moment to the House of Tsak on the dust jacket, everything about it speaks of human involvement and daily use. The absence of people from this painting is quite natural, since their presence is so palpably felt and acknowledged in the structure itself.

Herbstreuth concludes his chapter with a carefully-worded critique of the clichés that abound in popular western imaginings of Mustang, representations partially fuelled by the exciting and sensationalist press reports of the region as a land of mystery. While art critics and journalists are quick to conceptualise Powell's Mustang paintings for their Orientalist imaginings, Herbstreuth makes a persuasive case for reading Powell's art as precisely the opposite. "Contrary to their ascribed 'mystery', Powell's works demonstrate clarity and legibility. He has grasped the architectural culture in precisely constructed pictures" (page 27). For Herbstreuth Powell is an artist who addresses transformation: he creates "a picture taken from a reality that insists on its verisimilitude, without being verisimilité."

Architect and conservation expert Niels Gutschow structures his chapter around the theme of 'imaginary documentation', a phrase coined by Powell to describe his own work. For Gutschow, Powell's 'imaginary documentation' actually

"crosses the line of the imagination to achieve a narrative quality". Gutschow offers a lightly-written overview of architectural documentation, surmising that measured drawing is not truly documentary, as "every line on paper requires a decision". He uses this discussion as a reflective backdrop onto which he projects Powell's drawings and paintings. Detail 1 of the scene in Gutschow's presentation, and the reader learns that Powell counted the course of bricks in the courtyard facade of Kuthu Math in Bhatkapur in order to maintain the correct scale in his drawing.

Gutschow is also highly attuned to the technical aspects of Powell's art. He observes that light always enters from the left in Powell's drawings, and that white perspective makes a brief appearance in Powell's earlier work. It only reappears many years later in his Mustang



collection. Documenting Mustang was clearly an exciting challenge for Powell, and one which encouraged him to experiment more freely with water colours and fine pencil

outlines. The contrast between the architectural techniques and styles of urban Newar buildings and the wildness of Mustang is mirrored in Powell's work.



Ruined fortification on Tsero Hill, Ladakh

In his chapter entitled *Fact and Fiction*, Götz Hagmüller analyzes eleven of Powell's flights of fancy-drawings and paintings which lean rather more heavily towards the 'imaginary' in the 'imaginary documentation' continuum. Hagmüller states at the outset that "visual documentation of the material aspects of a culture... is never without a degree of subjectivity and imaginary content", challenging the misconception that Powell's work can be neatly divided between the super-real on the one hand, and the illusory on the other. Hagmüller, chief architect of the Patan Museum, narrates a charming anecdote. During the 1995 exhibition of Powell's Mustang paintings held in Patan, visitors from Mustang attending the show asked the artist where certain structures could be found in their villages. Powell was obliged to reply that some of them existed only in his own mind and "on paper".

Clare Harris, a specialist in visual anthropology, concentrates on Powell's images of Ladakh. She takes the reader on a brief historical jaunt through the ages by invoking the imperial draughtsmen who documented places they never actually visited. Harris finds some of Powell's work reminiscent of an "archaeological excavation in which the artist has used his eye to unearth the significance of each rock and object encompassed by his vision". Her insights are compelling, and concludes that while "human presence is rarely represented figuratively in Powell's Ladakh pictures... we are presented with the material evidence of thought and action".

Anthropologist and Tibetologist Charles Ramble begins his chapter entitled *Art without Artists*, with an overview of the history of Mustang, and a discussion of the difference

between so-called 'high' and 'low' culture. Through a careful analysis of Rigsum Gonpo, or Protectors from the Three Buddhist families, pervasive architectural features in both the territory of Mustang and in Powell's depictions of this landscape, Ramble illustrates how anthropologists' preconceptions about meaning and continuity are not always shared by locals. Ramble's chapter brings with context: from the environment in which Powell's art may be viewed, to the dusty and harsh reality of daily life in Mustang which contrasts with many foreigners' perceptions of an enchanted land.

Anneget Nippa's chapter offers an intensive examination of a mosque that Powell documented in the spring of 1980. Nippa, director of the Museum of Ethnography in Dresden, uses her comparative and historical learning to demonstrate that the mosque of Gzabal Jaba, located in Swat-Kohistan, is an extraordinary construction with a remarkable heritage. Powell's instinct was spot on when he chose to focus his artistic attention on the mosque which "while not the biggest or most spectacular by any means, did have something very special in its atmosphere, its remote location and its evident non-Islamic details". According to Nippa, Powell's images of the structure preserve a secret that has remained hidden from the missionaries: "Gzabal Jaba reminds people of the old days and the old gods".

Michael Oppitz's chapter, the final one in the collection, is one of the most rewarding. Oppitz does here what he does best: blending detailed ethnographic insight with comparative anthropology, and topping it off with his deep understanding of the visual arts. Oppitz and Powell first collaborated in the 1980s when the anthropolo-

gist asked the artist to illustrate a book on the northern Magar populations of Nepal. Oppitz singles out one of Powell's drawings to show how the artist's focus on documentation resulted in the artistic aspects of the drawing being understood. The emphasis lay in its "auxiliary service to ethnographic explanation. In a sense, the painting was on its way towards mutation into a descriptive chart".

However, Oppitz points out that Powell's creations are often images beyond the documentary, capturing angles impossible with a camera. Oppitz punctuates his analysis with pairs of images, usually a photograph of an object accompanied by Powell's rendition of the same, and the author shows how time after time he perfects the artist's interpretation to the photograph. Discussing a garri beer pot, for example, Oppitz concludes that Powell's version "is more material presence than the corresponding photograph", a presence which is actually intensified through his contextualisation. Oppitz again:

"Unlike corresponding photographs which cannot but catch everything upon which the eyes are focused, Bob's drawings are extremely selective, radically omitting anything secondary. They stand alone on the sheet, undisturbed, undistracted, demanding an exclusive and solitary dialogue with the observer, on the isolated ethnographic subject they capture. Oppitz coins the apt term "ethnographic draughtsmanship" to describe the artist's way of focusing on images of intrinsic cultural interest, while, at the same time, "humbly following the rules of likeness". Oppitz concludes his stimulating chapter by turning to Powell's Mustang oeuvre, which he notes is considerably larger and more colourful than his earlier drawings. Colour is central, argues Oppitz, in understanding how Powell conceptualises Mustang. The artist collected samples of Mustang soil used by local colourists to extract pigment, examples of which are reproduced in the book. We further learn that Powell does not "paint white; rather, he leaves blank, so that 'white' is the white of the paper".

Even more than in earlier work, the physical conditions and travel restrictions of Mustang obliged Powell to paint in his studio in Kathmandu. Nevertheless, the photographs that he necessarily took of his subjects of study never ceased to influence the functional. As Oppitz writes, "for Powell photography will always be a research tool, an auxiliary activity to Powell to paint in his studio in Kathmandu".

While some may think that Powell's art is a little too much of a precious brush, a precise hand and a fertile imagination to assist him in his 'imaginary documentation', while some may



Painted room, Kuthu Math, Bhatkapur

find Powell's adherence to realism and accurate representation outdated, the artist himself is not unduly concerned: "In Kathmandu many in the modern art scene think my work is totally old-fashioned. They are stuck in this 1960's idea of what modern art should be." *Himalayan Drawings* comes a long way in

illustrating both how he does, and in so doing provides the reader with a feast for the eyes and mind.

Robert Powell: *Himalayan Drawings* Michael Oppitz, ed. Volklerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich, 2001. \$14

pages. 283 colour illustrations, 59 black and white, 1 map. ISBN 3-909105-41-6. Rs. 6,000.

(A longer version of this review appears in the October issue of *Himal South Asian*.)

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The wealth of species

The threat to biodiversity affects our modern life more than we realise it.

go extinct, obscures the fact that a large number of species have become greatly concentrated in the range of habitats, primarily due to human activity. We appropriate land and resources for our purposes, release harmful wastes, and introduce alien species that displace natives.

Extinct or endangered species are indicators of a much bigger problem. Little comfort can be taken in the fact that a species survives if it persists only at a fraction of its historical abundance, or if it is restricted to a narrow patch of land or once thriving. They may escape the pressures of climate, and the elements support upon which our life-support systems depend. As we lose natural systems and biodiversity, we diminish our quality of life, threatening our existence.

Competition among nations and among peoples trumps cooperation, and regional and global conflicts obstruct the pathways to a sustainable future. There is insufficient incentive, even at local levels, for taking the long view, and for restraining our tendency to consume in order to benefit of humanity. As a result, we discard resources heavily. As individuals, we ask, if others are not going to restrain their activities, why should I? Governments use the same logic, and this makes it difficult to agree on effective biodiversity conservation to sustain vanishing resources. For this, as with so many global environmental challenges, the problem is that the social costs are not reflected in market prices. Voluntary actions, by individuals or by nations, cannot be relied upon to lead to the essential constraints on profligate land uses at such a large scale.

We need to tighten the feedback loops and create stronger incentives for behaviours that advance the common good, including that of future generations. To cite one example: Costa Rica's government pays private landowners for biodiversity conservation and other ecosystem services, deforestation in that country have diminished dramatically. We need international conventions to change systems of accounting to include fully the social costs of our behaviour, as advocated by organisations such as the Stockholm-based Beijer Institute for Environmental Economics. Incentives that reinforce practices that preserve biodiversity must be applied at all levels if they are to influence individual actions and social norms. (Project Synchro)

by SIMON A LEVIN

with fuel. We also mine natural resources for pharmaceuticals. The majority of commercially available drugs come from their origins directly or indirectly to the diversity of plant and animal life. This includes our food, our clothing, and our medicines. We also mine natural resources for pharmaceuticals. The majority of commercially available drugs come from their origins directly or indirectly to the diversity of plant and animal life. This includes our food, our clothing, and our medicines. We also mine natural resources for pharmaceuticals. The majority of commercially available drugs come from their origins directly or indirectly to the diversity of plant and animal life. This includes our food, our clothing, and our medicines.

With or without UN support, the economic costs of such a war could be huge, both in direct American outlays for war and its aftermath, and in the indirect spillovers on the world economy. It would take place against a background of weak economic conditions globally, and it would exacerbate those weaknesses, perhaps throwing the world economy into recession. If America acts alone, the likely costs to the world economy will be higher than if it has the backing of the UN.

Parents or gods?

OMEN K DAVIS
The birth of Louise Brown in 1978, and with her that of human in vitro fertilisation (IVF), was a landmark in medical science. Surgically harvesting sperm from a woman's ovaries, fertilising their nuclei with her body, and transferring the resulting embryo into her uterus enabled effective treatment of female infertility caused by irreparably damaged fallopian tubes. Since then, rapid innovation has led to new applications for IVF and other assisted reproductive technologies.

Many infertile couples now turn to such advanced technologies when other "low-tech" options fail, and they are the treatment of choice not only for tubal damage, but also for significant forms of male infertility. For example, intracytoplasmic sperm injection is a technique in which a single viable sperm is injected into an egg, allowing for fertilisation to occur even in cases where few healthy sperm are available. Freezing unfertilised eggs is now standard procedure: freezing unfertilised eggs under development.

Perhaps inevitably, our access to human eggs and embryos now enables us to extend prenatal genetic diagnosis to the pre-implantation embryo. Conventional prenatal diagnosis entails removing fetal cells, either from the amniotic fluid (amniocentesis) or from the placenta (chorionic villus sampling, CVS). Both procedures are routinely offered to pregnant women 35 years and over to diagnose chromosomal abnormalities such as Down's Syndrome, or to screen for cyclic fibrosis, sickle cell disease, or Tay Sachs disease.

However, amniocentesis and CVS both entail a 0.5-1 per cent risk of pregnancy loss, and an abnormally diagnosed embryo is the only clinical option



to terminate the pregnancy. Preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) is fundamentally different from its prenatal counterpart. Because the diagnosis is made prior to placement of the embryo in the woman's uterus, the exclusion of specific abnormalities is possible without terminating an established, ongoing pregnancy.

Clearly, couples carrying a transmissible genetic defect and otherwise requiring IVF should be offered the option of PGD, and if necessary, referral to a centre that can perform this specialised procedure. Genetically affected couples also refer to this option to natural conception and the prospect of therapeutic abortion following a conventional prenatal genetic diagnosis.

But now consider a more morally complicated scenario: a couple have a naturally conceived child affected with a life-threatening genetic disease for which the only possible cure is a bone marrow transplant from a matched donor. Understandably, they may want PGD to prevent similar defects in their future children. But they also want those embryos to be typed in search of a sibling who could serve as a bone marrow donor to their first child.

In this case, an embryo is being selected not only to avoid congenital disease and thus directly benefit the resulting child, but also to produce a child whose very existence could provide a cure for another sibling, and with virtually no risk to the donor child. Ethicists have grappled with such scenarios, and many would find this clinical option to be ethically sound. But what if the older sibling requires a donated kidney? The more the donor child is placed in physical jeopardy the thicker the issue becomes.

Gender selection is another highly debated potential application of PGD. Gender selection may be justified in order to prevent transmission of sex-linked disease, such as haemophilia, when it is kin to using IVF to screen for sickle cell disease. But is PGD ethically sound if an infertile couple merely prefers a boy or a girl? If so, then would it be fair to refer to this as "fairness balancing" when a fertile couple with a boy strongly desires a girl, or if a couple wants to choose the sex of their first-born child?

The essential goal of medicine is diagnosis and alleviation of disease, and infertility is a disease. The extension of prenatal diagnosis to an embryo in a laboratory dish will, in turn, reduce the incidence of certain types of genetically transmitted diseases. But new medical technologies also offer applications that fall outside of these conventional precepts. As always, the rapid advancement of science and technology should be accompanied and tempered by careful and thoughtful reflection on the appropriate uses of newly realised capabilities. (Project Synchro)

(Dr Owen Davis is chief of gynecology, Weill Medical College, Cornell University.)

The cost of war

There are considerable economic consequences of a war with Iraq, especially a unilateral one.

by JEFFREY SACHS

ration's fiscal policies, combined with the bursting of the US financial bubble of the late 1990s, have pushed America onto an unstable fiscal trajectory. The US now has large budget deficits that will linger for years to come. War with Iraq will cause those budget deficits to soar, and potent US domestic policies, leading to budgetary gridlock. That in turn could lead to a loss of consumer confidence. Since spending has been the remaining bulwark of the US economy after the collapse of the financial bubble, war with Iraq could puncture the last point of stability in the US economy.

Of course, US policymakers believe that the war will be quick, virtually effortless, and self-financing: as the US effectively gains control of Iraq oil supplies, which will not only drive down world oil prices but also finance Iraq's postwar reconstruction. But postwar Iraq could be unstable even if the war is brief.

An alternative scenario is that they were allowed a two-decade old battle between rights groups and the Union Health Agency, which is under intense pressure from trans-national pharmaceutical companies to introduce the drugs Net En and Depo-Fiver into the health care system without adequate tests or safeguards. Campaigning by SAAMA and other groups resulted last January in the Health Ministry dropping plans to introduce injectables into the Family Welfare Programme (FWP), which it had been planning to do since the late 1990s. A war that pits America against the world could call into doubt globalisation and international trade negotiations. Open and deep political divisions between the US and other countries will include a loss of investor confidence, undermining global economic stability. (Project Synchro)

With Iraq seen inevitable, with or without UN support. The economic costs of such a war could be huge, both in direct American outlays for war and its aftermath, and in the indirect spillovers on the world economy. It would take place against a background of weak economic conditions globally, and it would exacerbate those weaknesses, perhaps throwing the world economy into recession. If America acts alone, the likely costs to the world economy will be higher than if it has the backing of the UN.

A high cost of war is not a case for inaction, especially in the face of a serious risk that Iraq could obtain, and eventually use, weapons of mass destruction. Yet pursuing war where diplomatic means—weapons inspections, threats of retaliation in the face of Iraqi aggression, readiness of the UN to act in concert with Iraq become imminent—might suffice.

War would pose obvious and direct risks to shipping, notably by disrupting oil from the Middle East. The increased costs would further depress the drop of cross-border capital flows that has been underway for two years, since the end of the US stock market boom. The decline in cross-border flows intensified after the 9/11.

Foreign direct investment in many developing regions has dried up, and emerging markets that depend on such capital flows, particularly in South America, have seen their economies thrown into a renewed financial crisis. Even if the US experiences a short-term demand boost from increased military spending, the rest of the world won't. Most countries will only see negative effects—disruptions of trade, higher oil prices, withdrawals of international capital, cutbacks on investment plans—without any offsetting direct stimulus.

Even if the US experiences a short-term demand boost from increased military spending, the rest of the world won't. Most countries will only see negative effects—disruptions of trade, higher oil prices, withdrawals of international capital, cutbacks on investment plans—without any offsetting direct stimulus. American macroeconomic situation is also worrisome. The Bush Administration's economic and budgetary policies have led to a sharp decline in the US stock market. The decline in cross-border flows intensified after the 9/11. Foreign direct investment in many developing regions has dried up, and emerging markets that depend on such capital flows, particularly in South America, have seen their economies thrown into a renewed financial crisis. Even if the US experiences a short-term demand boost from increased military spending, the rest of the world won't. Most countries will only see negative effects—disruptions of trade, higher oil prices, withdrawals of international capital, cutbacks on investment plans—without any offsetting direct stimulus.

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could result in huge and avoidable economic (as well as other) costs. The traditional textbook view that war stimulates an economy, at least in the short term is simplistic. Even in the short term, war can be highly disruptive, and investments on which the global economy rests. Those disruptive effects would weaken production and undermine investor and consumer confidence, limiting private investment and consumer spending. The direct macroeconomic stimulus that could arise from military spending would be overwhelmed by the uncertainties and disruptions that would accompany military conflict. Oil prices have risen several dollars a barrel since late summer. Since June, US and world stock markets have declined by around 20 percent in dollar terms. Each rise in the probability of war has pushed the markets down further.

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A war that pits America against the world could call into doubt globalisation and international trade negotiations. Open and deep political divisions between the US and other countries will include a loss of investor confidence, undermining global economic stability. (Project Synchro)

(Jeffrey Sachs is professor of economics and director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.)

Arming the economy

After starting production in weapons manufacture and subsequently exporting surplus production, Pakistan plans to capture a one percent share of the global arms market by 2007. The government hopes to achieve this by promoting greater private sector participation in arms production, dual-purpose manufacturing for civilian and military use, and by incorporating the cottage arms industry operating in the semi-autonomous tribal belt bordering Afghanistan in the north-west border. Pakistan has 200 million guns and ammunition is expected to reach \$50-\$50 million this year, double its level two years ago, largely from sales to developing countries, according to officials of the Defence Export Promotion Organisation. They hope to raise \$250 million in the next few years. Military planners say the plan will help Pakistan service its crippling external debt totalling \$33 billion, and support defence spending, a major role of Pakistan's national budget. A recent World Bank report put Pakistan's defence expenditure at 20 percent of GDP, "way high" by international standards. Islamabad is eyeing Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which have annual defence budgets of \$17 billion and \$3.7 billion, respectively. Other potential markets in the region include Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Vietnam, and some Central Asian Republics. The US is the biggest player in the international arms market, accounting for almost half the global market valued at \$25 billion. (IPS)

Coercive population control

NEW DELHI—Armed with reports of 50 women who were injected with contraceptives at a government hospital, despite official assurances to the contrary and in contravention of Supreme Court orders that effectively restrict their use to private use, women's rights activists have renewed calls to ensure that the controversial drugs are not sneaked into the country's coercive population control programme. Last week's release of a study by the Indian Council for Medical Research, which is under intense pressure from trans-national pharmaceutical companies to introduce the drugs Net En and Depo-Fiver into the health care system without adequate tests or safeguards. Campaigning by SAAMA and other groups resulted last January in the Health Ministry dropping plans to introduce injectables into the Family Welfare Programme (FWP), which it had been planning to do since the late 1990s. A war that pits America against the world could call into doubt globalisation and international trade negotiations. Open and deep political divisions between the US and other countries will include a loss of investor confidence, undermining global economic stability. (Project Synchro)

A war that pits America against the world could call into doubt globalisation and international trade negotiations. Open and deep political divisions between the US and other countries will include a loss of investor confidence, undermining global economic stability. (Project Synchro)

The mystery of the mosquito

GENEVA—The malaria parasite and the mosquito that spreads it, the discovery, renewed calls to ensure that the controversial drugs are not sneaked into the country's coercive population control programme. Last week's release of a study by the Indian Council for Medical Research, which is under intense pressure from trans-national pharmaceutical companies to introduce the drugs Net En and Depo-Fiver into the health care system without adequate tests or safeguards. Campaigning by SAAMA and other groups resulted last January in the Health Ministry dropping plans to introduce injectables into the Family Welfare Programme (FWP), which it had been planning to do since the late 1990s. A war that pits America against the world could call into doubt globalisation and international trade negotiations. Open and deep political divisions between the US and other countries will include a loss of investor confidence, undermining global economic stability. (Project Synchro)

Israel's new capital

TEL AVIV—The holy city and the unruly conspiracy? is how the Arab world views US President George W. Bush's decision to sign into law a Congress-passed legislation requiring his administration to identify Jerusalem as Israel's capital in official documents. The 2003 Foreign Relations Authorization Act that provides over \$4 billion to run the State Department in 2003 called for the relocation of the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and denied funding for any official US document unless it identifies the city as Israel's capital. Despite Bush's insistence that he reserved the right to override the clause in the bill as signed it Monday, the move from a US administration already sworn in the Arab world as blatantly pro-Israeli caused an uproar across the region. Though Israel calls Jerusalem its eternal capital, foreign embassies, including that of the US, are located in Tel Aviv. This reflects the contested nature of Arab East Jerusalem, encompassing Islam's third holiest shrine, which Israel captured and annexed after the 1967 Middle East War. The annexation has never been recognised by the UN and the US has consistently held that the city's status is negotiated by the Israelis and Palestinians in the context of a final peace deal. (IPS)

Where does all the money go?

WASHINGTON—The World Bank's pro-actor, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), has called on major oil, gas, and mining companies to fully disclose their payments to governments, months after civil society groups made the same appeal. Dozens of NGOs joined with international financier George Soros in June to appeal to transnational companies to publish what they pay to developing nations. The Publish What You Pay appeal was aimed to meet growing concerns that multinationals and oil and mining companies were paying corrupt governments billions of dollars a year, some of which was financing illicit arms purchases in conflict areas. NGOs say if companies like Chevron, Texaco and Total/Electric do not reveal how much money they pay, then it is impossible for citizens to find out how much is missing from their nations' coffers. (IPS)

Beautiful at any age

Beautiful at any age

DASHAIN

DASHAIN IS AS FUN-FILLED AS YOU ARE

NEPAL PASHMINA INDUSTRY

My Dashain is as fun-filled as...

(Hans-Werner Sinn is professor of economics and public finance, University of Munich and President of the Ifo Institute.)

"I can't sit idly by..."

Analysis by Pushkar Shrestha, Samacharparba

After his enlightenment, King Gyanendra kept a low profile and studied the country's political situation. Then, a year ago, he gave an interview to this newspaper and told me: "Pushkar, I cannot sit idly by like my brother when I see the condition of the country and the people. Yes, I will follow my brother's path of multiparty democracy, but I don't want to be just a mute spectator to the pain and suffering of the people. I will remain within the bounds of the constitution, but I am working on a strategy to use the maximum powers vested on the king to serve the people."

The king had given indications, but our political leaders chose to ignore him. In fact, the elected Nepali Congress soon went berserk with its infighting. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba went to the extent of trying to extend his term from six months to a year by saying that he couldn't hold elections.

His Majesty's decision on Friday night has been criticised by some political parties as being unconstitutional. But other constitutionalists argue that although the decision may have been against the letter of the constitution, it is not against its spirit. There is no point arguing this point any further, but to look ahead. After all, we have to ask ourselves: who pushed the king to the point where he was forced to take this decision?

His Majesty is aware of the implications of his decision and the fact that there will be doubters. But he has underlined his trust in democracy and constitutional monarchy. He is not against democracy, he is against those who misuse the responsibilities vested on them by the people.

The one who will try to cash in on the king's decision will be the Maoists. But if they are real nationalists and they have good intentions for the nation, then even they should be able to put forward names of candidates for the new council of ministers. That possibility exists, given the conciliatory statements they have issued last week. Political parties and the king himself will have to create the right conditions for the Maoists to do so. But if the Maoists reject these overtures then they will push the country to greater misfortune.

After the king's decision to take executive powers, the people want the politicians who plundered this country for 12 years to be brought to justice. The new council of ministers will have to crack down on these politicians who ruined the country with their corruption. They should be under surveillance, they should be prosecuted and their ill-gotten wealth nationalised.

His Majesty was well aware of the country's grave situation a year ago. All he has tried to do is steer democracy back on track and go back to his former role. That is the way we should understand it. The king will understand that he will go down in the history of the Shah dynasty as a true leader if he can resolve the Maoist problem and hold parliamentary elections before the date that ex-premier Deuba had declared.

Joined at the neck

Yubang Chimire in Kantipur

Just as BP (Koirala) said, the constitutional monarch and the parties who carry out politics on behalf of the people are joined at the neck. Even Maoist leader Prachanda seems to realise this. But even though he likes to say that the democratic gains of the 1990 Peoples' Movement must be safeguarded, Prachanda's party has been trying to divide the king and people and take advantage of that. The Maoist movement has used the gun and strategy to target precisely the two main achievements of 1990: constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy. They get rid of Gija Koirala, he quit. Now, in a roundabout way, they are supporting Deuba's reinstatement to isolate the king. The supporters of constitutional monarchy and parliamentary system must under-

stand this threat. This is why the political parties must carefully evaluate their future moves. It is the responsibility of the parliamentary forces to defeat the Maoist strategy, and try to get the rebels to support the achievements of 1990 and bring them into the political mainstream. This cannot be achieved if the king and the political forces pull in different directions.

Our misfortune

Editorial in Deshantar, 6 October

They say that history doesn't repeat itself, but events can recur, as Nepal's history of democracy proves. In 1958 King Mahendra dissolved parliament and took control of executive powers. In the same manner, on 4 October, 2002 King Gyanendra took control of the state and executive powers. For democratic Nepalis, it goes to show that even 12 years after the restoration of democracy, political leaders have been unable to protect the institution of democracy and the democratic process. They've handed it over to the king on a platter. If the people were more democratically aware, the leaders more democratic, if every sector of society had been involved in democratic exercises, the people would have poured on to the streets following the abdication of democracy. The king would not have taken such action.

But it is the misfortune of Nepalis—right now, it is a different group that is pouring onto the streets. The leaders who fought for democracy for decades are being criticised. And slogans are resounding against a system that allows political powers to maintain checks and balances within the state and allows for transparency. Just two years into the millennium, we have been compelled to walk down the wrong road. The need of the hour was to move forward, not turn back. Only our political leaders are to blame. Our leaders forgot reality—that once people get a taste of power, they don't relinquish it so easily. They say that after every revolution comes a reaction, a backlash. The question is when. The powers displaced by the 1990 movement were actively looking to regain their former roles. They were patient. They waited 12 years.

They say that even a river returns in 12 years. Today the tide is turning. Our leaders couldn't envision such a situation would arise. They attached themselves to those working against democracy. They were so taken up with personal, party, and group politics, that the cabinet was filled with corrupt people. Corruption was flaunted openly. The corrupt tendencies of the representatives of democracy have played a major role in destroying the system. When domestic aspirations simmer down, something else flares up.

It is not only political leaders who are to blame for bringing Nepal's 12 years of democracy to this point, our constitutional bodies also played a damaging role. The Election Commission's recent decision regarding the Nepali Congress dispute is also responsible for the current state of affairs. If it had recognised one Congress, the party would not have split, and the Congress, along with the UML, would have led the elections. The Election Commission divided the Congress intentionally to weaken it. The Supreme Court is not free from blame either. By deciding in favour of Deuba, following a writ petition filed against the Prime Minister's decision to dissolve parliament and call for fresh elections, the court empowered the executive and undermined the concept of checks and balances in a parliamentary democracy.

Who's next?

Deshantar, 6 October

The new council of ministers will not have more than 18 members. Sources say that the top candidate for the post of prime minister is Tara Nath Ranabhatt who, by virtue of being a member of the dissolved house, will allow it to look like there is some

semblance of a system. Other possible candidates are former prime ministers Kirtinidhi Bista, Lokendra Bahadur Chand, and Dharendra Bahadur Singh. Keeping in mind that candidates should not be those who would have contested elections, the names of former Chief Justice Bishwanath Upadhyaya, Trilok Prasad Rana, and former Election Commissioner Bishnu Pratap Shah have also cropped up. Other names doing the rounds have been those of non-political professionals and intellectuals, like Dr Bhikh Bahadur Thapa, Dr Devendra Raj Pandey, and Kuber Sharma. From the business community Dr Himalaya Sumshere, Rabi Bhakta Shrestha, Dr Roop Jyoti, Rajesh Kaji and Rajendra Khata have cropped up, while Ramesh Nath Pandey and Jeev Raj Acharya represent foreign experts. If Pandey is selected to represent the National Assembly, Rabi Bhakta Shrestha and Rajesh Kaji Shrestha might represent the industrialists. Other possible council members include security expert Sachit Sumshere Rana, social worker Anuradha Koirala, woman entrepreneur Yankila Sherpa, and former civil servant Karan Dhoj Adhikari. Representing the indigenous communities, the names of geographer and former head of the National Planning Commission Dr Harka Gurung, and Jit Bahadur Arjoi of the Nepal Electricity Council have been mentioned.



His Majesty prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba during the royal audience on 7 October, as reported in Rajdhani on 8 October.

NEPALITERATURE

by MANJUSHREE THAPA

POETRY FOR A DERANGED TIME

You deny the hills dumb, I deem them loquacious Certainly, friend! My one inebriation lags behind Such is my state!

Everyone called me erratic when they saw me warming myself on the white, primary heat of the stars in the cold winter months They said a ghost had entered me when I stared blankly for seven days after returning from the cremation pyres They said I'd gone mad when they saw me cry for forty days seeing a spray of forty-five year-old frost on a stand of your hair They called me insane when they saw me dance to the first cuckoo of Spring When suffocated by a soundless new moon I leaped at the part of extinguishing and the idiots placed me in stocks I had just started to sing with the typhoons one day and the learned people delivered me to an asylum

One day I had stretched out flat, thinking I had died A friend pinched me and said— 'Oh madman! Your flesh isn't dead yet' I have called the Nawab's alcohol blood, and the whore a corpse I have called the king poor, and have scolded Alexander I have criticised the saints and placed individuals of no import on the seventh realm of praise

Your grand puns are my idiots, your heaven my hell Your god is my iron Friend! Your religious duty is my sin! When you consider yourself intelligent I see you an imbecile Your progress is my regression, friend! Such funniness in these bargains, friend! Your cosmos is a child to me Certainly, friend! I am moonstruck, utterly moonstruck This is my state!

I see the blind as the world's leaders! I see hermits in caves as evaders! I see those who stand atop false platforms to be dark dancers I see the unsuccessful as successful, the ascetic as unsuccessful I see progress as stagnation, Will I be pushed around, or will I be a conqueror Friend! I'm a conqueror!

See the whorish jig of shameless leadership's bland tongue! See the break in the back of people's rights! See today's cracked crystals, selling as diamonds! When the black lies of sparrow-sized headlines call my brave reason to battle with deceitful enigmas then—my cheeks flush hard, my friend! My cheeks flush as red as glowing coals! When the meek people imbibe black poison through both their ears, before my eyes, saying it is nectar—friend! My every hair stands on end! My each hair twists, harried like snakes in the sky when I see a tiger about to eat a deer, friend! And the terrible power of the sage's soul tries to enter my corroded bones and speak Friend!

Certainly, friend! I'm deranged! Such is my state!

You are shrewd and loquacious! Your (a+b) class a' + ab + b' goes on and on But in my arithmetic if one is deranged from what, what remains is one You work with the five senses, I with the sixth You have brains, my friend! I have heart You can't see a rose as anything but a rose I find it to be Padmini and Helen You are powerful prose, I am fluid verse You freeze when I melt You become limp when I grow turbid—and also the opposite! Your world is solid, mine vaporous Your world is thick, mine thin You take a rock as an object, solid; hardness is your reality I try to hold onto dreams just as you hold onto those cold, luscious coins with engraved letters I have the ardour of thorns, friend! You of gold and coins I have the tempo of thorns, friend! You of gold and diamonds This is my state!

ENCOUNTERS

by MEGH RANJANI RAI

Shared visions Mountain women meet in Bhutan



The chanting from the Dzongs that carries across the mountain air in Paro float into my room with the fragrance of the 'rasang' Spang, picturesque houses their roofs shining with the red chilly peppers that are drying in the sun. The exceptional grace and charm of the Bhutanese hosts: catering to the whims and fancies of 250 mountain women that have gathered from across the globe in celebration of the International Year of Women.

"Yes! La! The hill is a combination of Singaporean and Darjeeling, and the obsequious bow is half-Japanese. Delegates from exotic mountain nations Kryrgyzat (I think that is the latest spelling) Bolivia, Colombia, Kurdistan and Nepal are in another exotic mountain kingdom. Resplendent in their native costumes, mountain peoples display their pride of place and their unique cultures.

It is a rare rendezvous, a sharing of views and many an eye-opener. There are discussions on the endangered position of women in Bhutan to the gendered position of women in Nepal.

As I talk to Dasha Laki Pema and the women members of Bhutan's National Commission, the undersecretaries and the cabinet secretaries and their male counterparts, I am amazed by what I learn about the position of Bhutanese women.

It couldn't be more different than back home. They own land and property, they prefer the female child to the male, they have rights that they can exercise and state informed rules on equal opportunities for women that are very strictly enforced. The representatives of their National Council of Women have been elected by the people.

When will our women ward members ever be really empowered? One looks at the status of conflict resolution and wonders where there is going to be an initiative all in the name of development? We learn in Kryrgyzat, the change in the government has led to many an imbalance between state law and customary law.

We learn that in Bhutan at the moment there is a Move for Health Walk, led by the Minister for Health himself, Lyonpo Sangny Ngragp. The objective is to mobilise support for the Bhutan Health Trust Fund. Anyone can be part of this walk. The team is camping and cooking and trekking across Bhutan to raise money. Having fun for a cause.

From Bolivia we see freeze dried potatoes, fruit and taily, and from the land of the Sanbhas we meet Kalarwalli, the women representative from Bastar, who has struggled with the forest department and has managed to negotiate for better wages for the women 'tendu' collectors. She stands proud in her handspun wrapper, but my friend/wor shoes and never will—"The earth is my Mother and I cannot defile her by wearing the skin of animals to walk over her—and the carillon on her ankle adorned fest, stepping lithely over the freezing flagstones.

The film festival, displays a wide gamut of strengths of the mountain women—from the weather lined faces of the lady from Ladakh, sticic, with tears gone dry, remembering in retrospect, the sons that she has lost to the war, to captivating human emotions in Mukundo.

But while we emulate the Thimpu Declaration, that will be presented at Bishkek later this month, it is the words of the young Crown Princess of Bhutan that leaves us with hope: "Learning from this meeting has given me more than just a year of experience with better access to education than their parents, to learn from their elders." Truth, as we say, comes out of the mouth of babes, and so should I give very rightly be our vision for the future. ♦

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QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"We are not willing to be part of the proposed government."

—Dismissed prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba during the royal audience on 7 October, as reported in Rajdhani on 8 October.



House of Representatives

Local bodies

Nepali Congress

Nepal's Constitution 1990

Sher Bahadur Deuba

THIS YEAR'S GRAND SACRIFICE

दशरथ शर्मा Deshantar, 6 October

Green Bar of the month

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AT GRAND HOTEL

Regular Fusion Bar will continue and get a chance to win exciting Carlsberg award as a Green Bar of the month. When you visit Fusion Bar, please ask the questions and win exciting Carlsberg gift for you.

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITION AND AUCTION

- Paintings by Srijana Rajbhandari. Until 10 October, 11AM-5PM, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal, 356772
- Myths and realities. Paintings by Asha, Bhairaj, Binod and Pradip. Until 10 October, Srijana Contemporary Art Gallery, Kamaladi. 247889
- Light, source of all life. Sculptures and paintings by Pramila Giri, Patan Museum.

MUSIC

- Prism live. Musical night with food at Hotel Shahenshah International, Dhapasi, 28 September, 7PM on.
- The Jazz Commission with Vidhas Friday evenings 7PM at the Fusion, the bar at Dwarika's Hotel. Happy hours 6:30 PM-7:30 PM, buy one get one free. 479488
- Live music by Catch 22, Friday nights at the 40,000 1/2 ft Bar, Rum Doodle Restaurant, Thamel. 414336

DRINK

- 100 things Happy hour starting 1PM Friday, 11 October, exciting games to win shots of 100 Pipers and music collections, Teesta plays live, The Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 491234
- Autumn Special. English premier football with the steak and Rs 55 draft. K-tool Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 430433
- Meat of Mats. Single malt tastings, 12 varieties, the Piano Lounge, Hotel Yak & Yeti, Rs 99, 248999

FOOD

- New menu at the Rox Restaurant. Pastas and pizzas, prepared and family style, more Italian flavour, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 491234
- Table d'hôte menu Rs 1,500 per couple. Hotel Yak & Yeti. 248999
- Vegetarian specialties and clay oven pizza at Stupa View Restaurant & Terrace, Boudha. 490282
- Dasain at Kilroy's. New dishes for international menu and new Batti Indian Dishes, at 50% discount offered. Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Thamel. 250440
- The Tharu Kitchen. Traditional Tharu food and drinks every evening, and cooking courses, at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia, junglebasecamp@yahoo.com.
- Autumn Special. English premier football with steak, and Rs 55 draft. Glass K-tool Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 430433

GETAWAYS

- Dasain offer for students. 50 percent off on swimming with snacks and soft drinks with ID. Dwarika's Hotel. 479488
- Dasain package. Rs 1,555 per head per night on twin sharing with American breakfast, 15 percent discount on food and beverage, 20 percent at salon, children 50 percent off food, and more. 11-17 October, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 491234
- The Great Godavari Getaway. Special weekend packages including room with breakfast and dinner, 25 percent discount on health club facilities. Godavari Village Resort. 560675
- Writing Retreat. Full board package. Aesthetic living, innovative thinking, creative writing and nature at Park Village Resort, Budhanikhani, 375280

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

Hit Education

EDUCATION IS AN ALL TIME GAIN

EDUCATE A CHILD AND THE HARVEST COMES YEAR AFTER YEAR.

NEPALI WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

That is a pretty unusual, but not rare, low pressure system over eastern Nepal this week. Seen clearly in the satellite picture taken on Wednesday morning. The moisture and cooler temperatures brought storms, and there will be residual light night rain till Saturday. After that, cool, misty mornings and clear bright days for Dasain with afternoon breeze perfect for kite flying.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

FR	SAT	SUN	MON	TUE
28-14	27-15	28-14	28-14	28-15

BOOKWORM

Modern Buddhism: Readings for the Uncultured Donald Lopez, ed
Penguin Books, London, 2002
Rs 780

Forging a universal doctrine from the divergent traditions of China, Sri Lanka, Japan, Burma, Thailand and Tibet, the makers of modern Buddhism look back to the most ancient, a homeward journey to the original vision of the Buddha. Stressing meditation and spirituality more than ritual and relics, it embraces ordination of women and values of science, social justice, tolerance and individual freedom.

The Places that Scare You: A Guide to Fearlessness in Difficult Times Pema Chodron
Shambhala Publications, Boston, 2001
Rs 1,750

Pema Chodron teaches that we always have a choice: we can let the circumstances of our lives harbo us and make us resentful and afraid, or we can let them soften us and make us kinder. Pema provides tools to deal with the problems that life throws up, and learn how to break out of habitual patterns rooted in fear with the help of natural reserves of humour, flexibility, courage and wisdom.

Essence of the Heart Sutra: The Dalai Lama's Heart of Wisdom Teachings Geshe Thupten Jinpa, trans. and ed.
Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2002
Rs 1,640

The Heart Sutra contains Buddhist's direct, most succinct teaching about the true nature of our own being and of all reality. Clarifying the meaning of the Buddhist term "emptiness," the Dalai Lama dispels misconceptions that it implies a nihilistic outlook or a philosophical view with no real implications in our lives and points out how we can attain "an unmissable view of reality."

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

CLASSIFIED

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The Tea House Inn Introducing the Tea House Combo, Rs 700 nett per person on twin-sharing basis. Package for Nepalis and expats includes room, breakfast, dinner (Nepali food), free facilities, swimming, and Jacuzzi. For reservations: 410432, 414432, 860048.

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Based on a short story by Philip K Dick, Steven Spielberg's **Minority Report** is set in a 2054 Washington DC judicial system in which killers are arrested and convicted before they commit murder using a psychic technology. Tom Cruise plays the head of this Pre-crime unit and is himself accused of the future murder of a man he hasn't even met. He must trace the robots of what brought him here. His every move is tracked and he is dogged by arch rival as he tries to uncover the truth behind the question he has spent the past six years working to eliminate. Could the system be wrong?

Minority Report

Starring Tom Cruise, Colin Farrell, Samantha Morton, Peter Stormare, and Max Von Sydow.

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Daily	2045-2115	BBC gñrl : Jf
Daily	2245-2300	BBC gñrl : Jf
Sun-Fri	0740-0800	Itg6 s/f
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When in Bhutan...



A trip to Bhutan is expensive, but there's plenty to see, do, and eat.

RAMYATA LIMBU

As the Drak Air flight swoops down into Paro International Airport, passengers brace themselves for a rough landing. But the touchdown is smooth. Once you make it through customs at Bhutan's only airport—the rest of the country is only accessible by motor vehicles and the main highway runs from west to east connecting all the major towns—visitors are driven through the picturesque farming valley of Paro to one of nearly a dozen hotels. The most of the oldest hotels, and the largest in Bhutan, Hotel Clangthang, is spread over 45 acres of wooded land on a hill overlooking the valley, and was first built as a guest house to accommodate royal visitors attending the coronation of Bhutan's fourth and current monarch, King Jigme Singye Wangchuk in 1974. Paro, a farming valley of about 15,000 people, is a major stop on the tourist itinerary. The popular Tsechu or spring festival attracts numerous visitors, both foreign and local, and often it is difficult to find accommodation.

The museum, a former watch-tower and fortress that overlooks the Rimping Dzong, has a 349-year-old history and houses galleries of manuscripts, paintings, arms and armour, anthropology, numismatics and epigraphy, textiles, philately and bronzes. Established in 1968, Ta Dzong houses over 3,000 works of art spanning 1,500 years of Bhutan's cultural heritage.

A 15-minute walk below the palatial, formidable-looking complex with a flagstone path that serves as Paro's administrative centre. Dzong in Bhutan are the centres of religious and political authority, and tend to be palatial, with intricate decorative art. All dzongs, including the Trashichozing, which houses the government and the throne of the King of Bhutan in Thimphu, are open to the public.

Another Paro must is a visit to Taktsang Monastery or the Tiger's Nest about a half-hour drive from Paro and a two-hour uphill hike. Widely pictured in travel brochures on Bhutan, the monastery is perched on a steep cliff and is currently undergoing reconstruction after it was almost destroyed in a fire some years ago. Walking up the steep hill, the echo of gunfire and blasting rounds around the valley as Indian troops posted at the border between Bhutan and Nepal, to get an insight into the valley's acoustics make for an aural-a-cha! sound effect.

About 30 km from Paro is the Tselele Pass, the highest point in this part of Bhutan, from which mountains are visible on a clear day. Although it claims to have the world's highest virgin peak, Bhutan doesn't appear keen to promote mountaineering. "Most peaks here are sacred and in terms of height we can't compete with the Himalaya in Nepal, Tibet, India and Pakistan anyway," says Thuj Dorji Naktok, joint director of Plans and Programmes at Bhutan's Department of Tourism. "We'd rather concentrate on cultural and nature tours, make the most of Bhutan's natural, pristine environment."

While a proposal to sell scuba diving in pristine mountain lakes has been set aside for the moment, Bhutaneese tourism entrepreneurs offer specialised trips in mushroom picking, fly-fishing, and birdwatching. Some are even exploring the possibility of promoting rafting and heli-skiing. More easy to come by than adventure trips, however, is cultural and nature tourism. Apart from the numerous dzongs and the monasteries that dot the Bhutanese countryside, the government and private sector are promoting the cultural heritage of Bhutan. Thimphu's main street houses a handicraft emporium, the recently opened national textile museum, and the post office where Bhutan's famous philatelic rarities abound. The Saturday market in Thimphu is also a must. Villagers gather here to sell their produce—fresh vegetables and fruit, as well as

Getting there

Going to Bhutan can be expensive. Visas must be obtained prior to entry and can be organised through travel agents 15 days prior to a visit. Visas are issued on arrival for \$20, and can be extended in Thimphu for up to six months at a cost of Nu510 (about \$10.50). The catch is the high daily tariff excluding hotels, food and other expenses, which runs to \$200 during the high season in March-May and September-November, and \$165 the rest of the time for groups of three or more. Single travellers pay an extra \$40, and pairs \$30. Students and diplomats get a 25 percent discount on the daily rates. A recent national tourism workshop is said to have discussed the current tariff regulations, and officials say they are aiming at a more market-friendly tariff, but don't expect it to change any time soon. Flights are available on Drak Air from Delhi, Calcutta, Kathmandu, Bangkok and Dhaka. The Butaneese currency, the ngultrum, is pegged to the Indian rupee, and Indian currency is widely accepted.

The capital also houses the National Folk Heritage museum, the National Institute of Medicine, where age-old herbal cures are studied and provided, and the National School of Arts and Craft, where students learn the art of thangka painting, carving, and pottery. The impressive

National Library in Thimphu houses mostly religious texts. At the National Textile Museum, opened in 2000, researcher Bhagwan Uden Penjori shows us a collection of contemporary wear designed from traditional Bhutaneese textiles that will be part of a national fashion collection. Apparently, outside of office hours and for invitations that allow casual wear, many Bhutaneese shed their *kiras*, an ankle-length garment worn by women and ghos, the distinctive calf-length, skirt-like outfit worn by men.

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Recently de-classified ads

Since the festive season has begun, the state of emergency has been lifted, and street protests are once more allowed to snarl traffic, we can finally allow previously-censored notices from our classified section to the see light of daytime:

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

It is herby notified to all concerned that this year's Dasaain Festival has been postponed. The festival was originally supposed to be held in five phases starting 11 October, but has been put off because of rowdy behaviour by our rulers. All concerned should watch this space for new dates, but expect it to be held in April 2003, or thereabouts. Goats and buffaloes earmarked for martyrdom will now be allowed to carry on with their daily lives until such time as they may again be required to be decapitated in the epic struggle of good against evil. For further information, contact the Department of Sacrifices.

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POLITICS

Is there a technocrat in you? Do you have what it takes to be in the New Cabinet? Then you just may be the guy we've been looking for, but can't find. Meet us tomorrow morning before dawn at Nag Pokhari for walk-in interview. Bring us with poster-size photograph. Password: Happy Days Are Here Again.

COUNTRY TO LET

Lovely, spacious, fully-furnished, landlocked Himalayan Kingdom is available for immediate lease on management contract. Excellent access to and from all neighbourhood attractions. Walking distance from India. Period and price negotiable. Highly experienced prime ministers, presidents and junta leaders with good financial capacity may kindly bring their full particulars when they call us after Disaini Holidays. No, wait, make that next year some time.

SPORTS

Immediate job openings for at least 15 Nepali athletes in the category boxing, shooting and weight lifting at South Korean sausage factory. Attractive salary, free hot dogs for lunch. Contact: Relatives in the Greater Seoul Metropolitan Area.

VACANCY

Chief Executive Joker required for Nepal's top newspaper. Incumbent is losing it.

NEPALI SOCIETY

Dress for your country

Rani G Kakshapati practices what she preaches. Every Tuesday, the director and principal of Shuvataru School in Patan dons a sari and goes to work. And she does so with pride. "In our school, wearing the national costume is mandatory on Tuesdays," explains the principal, as she adjusts the white shawl over her black blouse.

And sure enough, glance into any Shuvataru bus Tuesdays, or drop in at the school, and you see 700 or so schoolchildren dressed not in the unisex trousers-shirt combination favoured by most schools, but in a modified form of the national

dress. The boys wear gray daura suruwal with a black waistcoat and cap, and the girls wear ankle-length navy blue skirts with pleats down the front.

"I wanted to drive home the point that you can look good and feel good wearing the national costume. I see it as a reiteration of our Nepaliness, not something to be embarrassed about," says Kakshapati. Nearly five years after the practice was begun, daura suruwals may not have attained the slacker-cool cult status of slouchy shirts and low-slung trousers, but Shuvataru students appear at home in their Tuesday uniform.

During lunch break, primary school students scurried around the playground lagging each other, while older students practice lay-ups on the

basketball court. They've even learnt to be unfazed by the occasional slack-jawed stare. Says Vijaya Adhikari, an A-level student, "People are a little surprised, and sometimes we're even teased. But I'm proud to wear the dress. We stand out."

Initially, Kakshapati met with resistance from students and teachers, who were a little embarrassed, or thought that the idea was just really uncool. "But we've become used to it, we're actually quite comfortable now," laughs vice-principal Chandrayan Shrestha, who also wears daura suruwal to school on Tuesdays.

Kakshapati says there is another reason for the national costume to come out of the closet. "It's a lot cheaper, you can get a set of clothes for Rs 500." Every so often Shuvataru also holds national costume parades, and Principal Kakshapati is even thinking of allowing students to wear daura suruwals and dresses one more day of the week. Now, if only more schools followed suit. ▶



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