



**EXCLUSIVE**

**Rocca yatra**

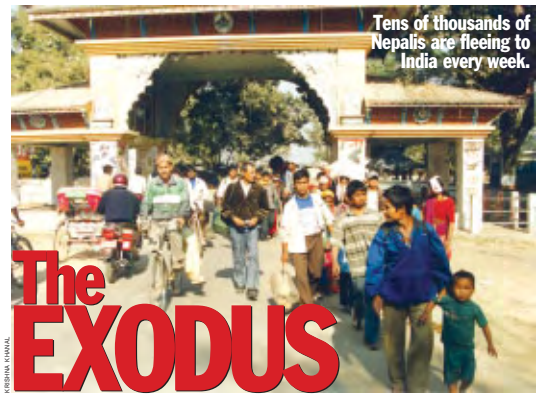
High-profile western diplomacy in Nepal continues with the arrival late Thursday in Kathmandu of US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Christina Rocca. She will be here till Sunday, meet senior Nepali officials and consult US embassy staffers.



Rocca is the seniormost US official to visit Nepal after Colin Powell made a brief stopover in January. Last week, the British foreign secretary, Sir Michael Jay was in Nepal. The flurry of visits signify western worries about the current conflict in Nepal and its ramifications for regional security, officials told us. Rocca is also expected to discuss a proposed \$20 million military aid package for the army.

**Pokhara jamboree**

After its leader was nominated prime minister by the king, the centre-right Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) is going through a power struggle which will climax in Pokhara on Saturday with the election of a new party boss. Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand and veteran RPP leader Surya Bahadur Thapa are fighting it out for influence. Of the three contenders, Prakash Chandra Lohani and Rabindra Nath Sharma are considered Thapa loyalists whereas Pashupati Shumsher Rana is close to Chand. Whoever wins, the RPP will keep its royalist tilt. "We can never criticise the monarch the way the Nepal Congress and CPN-UML are doing right now," Lohani told us. Thapa is a critic of the king's October Fourth move, while Chand has been trying to get his party's endorsement for his government.



**Tens of thousands of Nepalis are fleeing to India every week.**

**The EXODUS**

**KARUNA THAPA** IN RUPEDIYA, INDIA

**T**hey come across the border by the thousands every day. Young, old, men and women fleeing the fighting in Nepal for safety and jobs in India. It is happening in most towns along Nepal's 1,800 km frontier with

India, but the exodus is most visible here on the Indian side of the border from Nepalgunj.

They emerge from under Nepal's welcome arch at the border, and head straight for the bus park or the railway station in Rupediya (see picture, above).

From here they will travel to cities across India to friends and relatives.

This is not new. Nepal hill farmers have been migrating for decades after their harvests to find seasonal work in India. But what is different this year is the sheer volume of displaced people,

and the fact that they are not seasonal migrants—many are not going to return until Nepal returns to normal. It is obvious that added up, there is a massive humanitarian crisis brewing here.

The outflow of villagers from insurgency-hit mid-western districts has now reached a peak. Officials at the border police post at Nepalgunj told us they counted more than 8,000 people passed through during the week 4-11 December, the highest weekly figure that they have ever recorded.

Those leaving Nepal range from three-month old children in the lap of mothers to 60-year-old villagers. Clad in torn jackets, dirty caps, slippers and jute sacks full of belongings, they have been travelling on foot and bus for days to reach this border. But here, their ordeal has just begun as they face an uncertain future in a foreign land.

"We left because it was getting more and more dangerous. The soldiers come and want to know about Maoists, and the Maoists come and punish us for talking to soldiers," says Tanka Shahi, 24, who has left his home village of Janda in Jajarkot and is headed to India. He doesn't know where he is going, or what type of work he will get. All he knows is that he wants to be somewhere safe.

continued > p5

**A classless society  
And we all fall down.**

**HEMLATA RAI**

**H**ill a million children from more than 4,000 schools in the capital are bearing the brunt of adult politics. And it is not just ordinary politics. It is the demonstration of raw and violent power: close down, or else we bomb your school.

It has become fairly clear by now that the indefinite valley-wide school strike that began on Monday is not so much about reforming education as furthering the Maoist revolution by bringing the disruptions and hardships to the capital. And the method used is terrorising children and parents, so that the schools are forced to close.

To be sure, the education sector seriously needs reforms. Schools in Nepal reflect gross inequities in society: high levels of illiteracy, disparities between expensive private institutions and deprived government schools. So, education threatens to perpetuate the rich-poor gap.

The Maoists are exploiting this disparity with their 13-point demand which includes nationalisation of private schools, free education, admission for underprivileged, scrapping Sanskrit and the national anthem.

The government tried to defuse the strike ultimatum by meeting some of these demands with its own education reform package of 6 December, which the pro-Maoist All Nepal Free Student Union (Revolutionary) rejected. There is now a new non-education demand: lift the "terrorist" tag. The government says give up violence first.

There is a possibility that the Maoists are using school closures as a tactic to ensure young people entering their struggle," suggests rights activist Krishna Pahadi.



A recent Nepal country profile by the International Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers showed that a third of Maoist militants are underage children, many of them school drop-outs. The Maoist leadership, from the very beginning of the "people's war", had identified students as the "reserve force" in a future "mass uprising".

The main worry for children, parents and teachers is what will happen to this year's SLC exams, due next month. At a time when tenth-graders should be preparing for their tests, schools are closed. "This year, the SLC results will be even bleaker," cautions educationist Hridaya Ratna Bajracharya. Every year, at least six in every 10m Nepalis fail their high school exams, and only 17 percent of the students from government schools pass their SLC. Some rural government schools have a zero pass rate.

The private school association, PABSON says the idea should be to improve government schools, not punish the ones that have good results. But as the strike enters its second week, children are staying home or playing in the streets. Given the rigid positions on both sides, this "class war" is likely to drag on.

**Times** Weekly Internet Poll #63

**Q. Is the constituent assembly demand a viable option for peace?**

Total votes: 1,135

Weekly Internet Poll #44: To vote go to [www.nepalimes.com](http://www.nepalimes.com)

**Q. Who is the blame for the SAARC Summit being postponed?**

SECTION	EST. AIR	DEPT	DEPT. RTIME	ARR. JAMB.	DEPT. GATE
RTIME ARR	11:45:18	11:45:18	20:20	00:55	16A 29 OCT
RTIME ARR	11:45:18	11:45:18	21:20	00:55	27 OCT 19 ARR
JAMB ARR	11:45:17	11:45:17	18:45	11:05	16A 29 OCT
JAMB ARR	11:45:17	11:45:17	18:45	12:05	27 OCT 19 ARR

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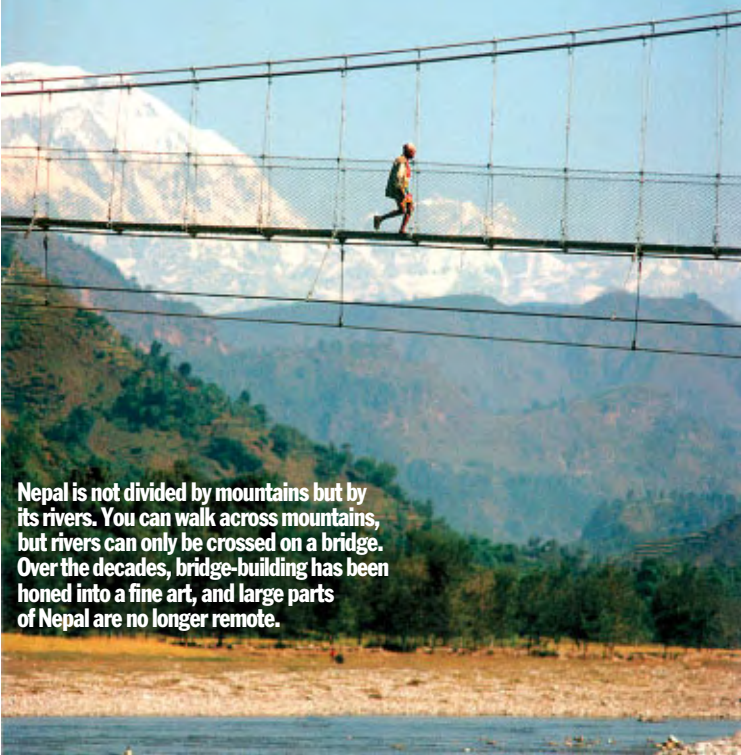
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# Building bridges



Nepal is not divided by mountains but by its rivers. You can walk across mountains, but rivers can only be crossed on a bridge. Over the decades, bridge-building has been honed into a fine art, and large parts of Nepal are no longer remote.

Clockwise from left: Bayanghari Andhi Khola, Syangja district; Kulespani Trail Bridge, Kamali River, Kailkot district; old wooden Kulespani bridge being replaced by galvanized steel handspun ropes using a log crossing at Kunalghat, Bajura district; villagers portering cables.



When Swiss geologist Toni Hagen was walking in Nepal 50 years ago, he would ask villagers what they wanted most: a school, a health post, or a road. The answer all over Nepal was the same: "We want a bridge."

Things have changed a lot since then. But even today, a bridge is still high on the priority list of many Nepali villagers. Hagen wrote in his report in 1959, "The overwhelming wish of the whole population is to have suspension bridges. The government would be well-advised to give this programme top priority. There is really no other development project which, with so little money and in such a short time, would directly affect so many people."

The reason was not just accessibility. It opened up remote valleys and villages to the outside world, it made it easier for produce to go to market, it brought down the prices of commodities imported from outside and it became easier to take the sick to hospital.

Today, even though Nepal has a network of 13,500 km of highways there is still a need for bridges along the foot trails. The bridges have huge economic value and even though it may not be apparent in dollar-and-cent calculations, they are vital for trekking routes. And villagers have got so used to new suspension bridges built in Nepal over the past two decades, that they don't know what they have until it's gone. When the Maoists blew up three strategic suspension bridges across the Kamali in far-western Nepal, they cut off Humla and parts of Kailkot to food supplies from the south. Villagers that were three hours walking distance from each other are suddenly three days away again.

Today, suspension bridges scattered across the Nepali hills are the mainstay of rural transport. Swiss experts were invited after Hagen left and recommended that river-crossing facilities for isolated communities and settlements would lead to the country's economic development. In 1964, the government established the Suspension Bridge Division (SBD) under the Ministry of Works and Transport, and eight years later Hevelast, the Swiss aid agency came up with technical and financial support. Later on, the US and Swiss governments and

## Bridges in photographs

In "In the Forest Hangs a Bridge," a film screened at the recently concluded Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival, a community in north-east India gets together to build a bridge. The film, which is an account of the construction of a bridge, and an evocation of the tribal community that makes it possible, is also a reflection on the strength, as well as the fragility, of the idea of community.

"It's a great film and basically reflects similar efforts of communities in the Nepali hills to build bridges," says Vinay Roukema, who with her team has organised a photographic exhibition dedicated to trail bridges built by communities around Nepal at the Patan Museum.

The exhibition is a celebration of the 1,051 bridges constructed so far. "Of course, there are differences. Today, rudimentary materials like reed have been replaced by modern materials like galvanized steel. But it is the community that decides where and when they want a bridge. The exhibition, which is on till 15 December, provides a close-up view of communities from east to west Nepal who have built bridges that will connect their village to other settlements, important markets and essential services.

About 100 photographs selected from more than two thousand pictures taken by on-site supervisors and workers are on display. They've been cleaned and edited to provide viewers with an insight into the process, the labour, and community spirit which goes into building bridges all around Nepal. The trail bridge project received a UN Best Practice Laureate in 2002.

1000 Community Bridges Photo Exhibition  
Patan Museum  
10 am - 5 pm, up to 15 December  
For more information call: 527828, 521054



multilateral agencies like the Asian Development Bank also got involved.

It was only at the beginning of the sixties that construction of trail bridges became a development priority for Nepal. Since its establishment, the SBD had identified the need for a total of 862 bridges on the main trails of Nepal's mountain regions. Today, the SBD is called the Trail Bridge Division and a new bridge modeled after traditional designs from the Baglung area are being used because they optimize local skills and material and minimise impact on the environment. Among the innovations are long-lasting steel gratings to replace the wood. And even these gratings have been modified for smaller gaps so that hooves of livestock do not get trapped in them.

They are suitable for the relatively short crossing connecting the numerous settlements and are off the main strategic points. So far, more than 1,000 community bridges have been built in 52 hill districts around the country with a cumulative span of 70,000m. "These bridges, which are built

with the participation of the local people, the VDCs and DDCs, have been instrumental in catalysing economic activities and resulting in changes in their localities," says Shiva Chandra Kanha of Hevelast.

Although some bridges have been blown up by the Maoists, the rebels have not touched most of them since they are so valuable to local people. Today, the biggest setback has been the dissolution of elected village councils which means the local initiative is lacking.

A 1999 bridge impact study found that following the construction of a suspension bridge at Sirka Ghar in Ramechhap, the sleepy, isolated settlement evolved into a market square that on average does Rs80,000 worth of business everyday. Four years after the bridge was built, land prices had shot up by a whopping 1,140 percent. Most rural communities know the importance and advantage a simple suspension bridge can bring. The SBD receives requests for 100 to 200 new bridges a year, but the government can only take a quarter of those requests. An overwhelming 95 percent of the



requests come from communities who desperately need short span bridges (under 120 metres) to ease communications. Community involvement ensures not only local labour, but also contribution of material from the VDC or DDC and maintenance.

Strengthening communities economically is only one aspect of Nepal's bridge building success story. When the government started its accelerated bridge construction in important locations along major routes in the mid sixties the technology was fabricated in Scotland and constructed by a Scottish firm. Pedestrian trail bridges benefited a great deal from Swiss expertise. But today, bridge-building in Nepal has been completely indigenized.

Nepali technicians are responsible for planning, location, social impact studies, design, construction and suspension bridges and communities are being mobilized for the maintenance. As a result, bridge technology is cheaper, and bridges can be located to more strategically appropriate locations to benefit maximum number of users.

Bridge-building is now an all-Nepali venture as the Swiss government, whose financial contribution had over the years come down from 100 percent to 37 percent, decentralises construction and maintenance of suspension bridges.

The Suspension Bridge Division was shifted to the Ministry of Local Development in 2000. Under the Local Governance Act, two thirds of the bridges are handed over to local governments and committees.

Proposals coming from local groups that activate women and local communities are prioritised. Village groups identify the need for bridges, provide locally available construction materials and take charge of routine maintenance. The major maintenance is shared by the government and the development committees equally. ♦

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ABOUT TOWN FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS ❖ Snow and other adventures: 'Poems in Frames' by Mark Wyatt at Lazimpat Gallery Cafe, Lazimpat.

EVENTS ❖ Meditation for the lazy and the inspired with Wayne Amtzis, 5.30-6.30PM on 13 December. Free entry. Live classical vocal music by Sunita Mishra and Indira Maharjan.

MUSIC ❖ Carlsberg Rock Yatra 1974 AD in concert, 4 PM onwards on 14 December at Dasrath Stadium. Tickets at Nanglo Bakery Cafe and Blue Bird Departmental Stores.

DRINKS ❖ The Coffee Shop, Hotel de l'Annapurna introduces a fine range of world class coffees from Kenya, Brazil and Colombia.

FOOD ❖ Multi Cuisine at Nanglo's Deli, relocated to Park Marg, 224707 ❖ Wood fired pizzas, cocktails and coffee at the Roadhouse Cafe, Thamel

GETAWAYS ❖ Bardia Bonkers Freshwater dolphins, giant tigers, elephants, safaris, rafting, evening cocktails, traditional food, jungle escape camp. 414336 ❖ Birdwatching, short hikes, writing 30 minutes from Kathmandu at Shivapuri National Park.

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

NEPALI WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL This satellite image taken on Wednesday afternoon shows a westerly front over Pakistan being generated by the jetstream. The Himalayan range is keeping the worst of the cold at bay, but this front is threatening some precipitation into western Nepal, which needs the rain badly.

BOOKWORM Present Fresh Wakefulness: A Meditation Manual on Nonconceptual Wisdom Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche Rabjung Yeshe Books, 2002 Rs 1635

The Yoga of Breath: A Step-by-Step Guide to Pranayama Richard Rosen Shambhala, 2002 Rs 1225 Rosen introduces us to the fundamentals of this ancient Indian method of rejuvenation, self-study and self-transformation.

The Dzogchen Primer: Embracing the Spiritual Path According to The Great Perfection Marcia Binder Schmidt ed. Shambhala, 2002 Rs 1470 Gathered here is the most accessible, down-to-earth writings published on this subject in English.

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

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EDUCATION IS AN ALL TIME GAIN EDUCATE A CHILD AND THE HARVEST COMES YEAR AFTER YEAR.

Rishtey follows the traditional Indian cinema theme of relationships as entangled complicated and peppered with song-and-dance routines. Director Anil Kumar directs Anil Kapoor (Suraj), Kanchana Kapoor (Korari) and Shipra Shah (Ajayanti) in a drama about love, family and friendships.

BBC on FM 102.4 Mon-Fri 0615-0645 BBC World Today Sat 0615-0645 BBC Reporting Religion Sun 0615-0645 BBC Agenda Daily 2045-2115 BBC भारतीय सेवा Daily 2245-2300 BBC भारतीय सेवा



When an audience sings along, you know the band has arrived. Chances are everyone at Carlsberg's Rock Yatra on Saturday will know the lyrics to 1974 AD's 'Pahilo Janaina'.

The 1974 AD sound is what Nirakar Yakshumba, the bassist and unofficial spokesperson, describes as 'fusion rock'. They love to experiment with styles and genres. They believe music is best shared, live and with a positive message.

The band has used their rock star status to promote many social projects, probably inspired by the Irish band U2, who they admire.

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Prakaash's power places by WAYNE AMTZIS The force of that which is worshipped is diminished and yet reclaimed. These he set in his paintings. For Shakti-Shal Prakaash visited the power places to photograph, stone, tree, root, shrine, niche and alcove—wherever the hand of the worshipped could be seen.

NEW alive & cooking CAFE MITRA Sumit X-mas Night Market Friday 13th December 2002 From 4-9 pm For Textiles, Wood Carving, Ceramics, Candles, Posters, Jewellery, Brass, Paper Goods & Much More!





## Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

# Kingdom of Boredom

After being hunted nearly to extinction, wild bores are proliferating once more and have returned to our urban jungles with a vengeance. Only this morning, one of them was reading the main points over the radio with the important breaking news that the president and people of Benin have just been cordially felicitated on their National Day by our leaders who have wished the Beninese people the eternal peace and prosperity that have eluded us. The second main point in the news bulletin over the Boring Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was that the Ministry of Denial has continued to deny having never exactly said in so many words that the state airline should be sold if at all to the lowest common denominator. And the third main news was that the prime minister has stressed once more that only by working together will we be able to build a futuristic Nepal just like we have in the past.

As an endangered species, our wild bores are related to old world swine. Like them, they have the innate capacity to render a fully-grown adult citizen unconscious at thirty-paces just by opening their snouts. Zoologically speaking, the wild bore is frequently male and comes under several subspecies with a geographical range that extends right across the midhills of our landlocked Kingdom of Boredom. They can be found frequently in the vicinity of regional conferences on democracy and development where they can be spotted foraging for the root causes of poverty. They take abundant coffee breaks, prefacing all their remarks with: "Let me put it this way..."

As a service to our readers, we have put together a short biographical sketch of an average adult wild

bore so that wildlife enthusiasts can track this evolving conservation success story from the subcontinent:

**Latin name:** *Sus scrofa ssp. ssp. ssp.*

**Common names:** Wild Bore, Male Chauvinist Piglet, Bloody Swine, Old Sow, Miss Piggy, Porky, Warr Hog, Policeman

**Local names:** *Bangun, Bunde!*

**Favourite song:** "Aya boar bhayo" by the Rock Yogis

**Habitat:** UN conferences, SAARC summits, national seminars and workshops on sustainable development, and scattered across Boredom.

**Behaviour:** Naturally gregarious, usually nocturnal, in daytime sometimes known to snore loudly during break away sub-groups on peace and development, mature males drift off after dusk to nightspots in small bachelor herds, tend to dominate open forums where they never ask questions but make asses of themselves by holding forth on their curriculum vitae. Immature juveniles prone to inebriation and excessive chatter after overdoing on fermented grape juice and single malt distillates.

**Reproduction:** Seasonal farrowing, with dominant males boasting that they have the biggest tusks, and that they stred more piglets in the forest, sows tend to keep quiet about their oestrus cycles so they won't be bothered by boisterous bores used to getting their own way.

**Diet:** Omnivorous, but thrive mainly on airline food, cookies, turnips, tubers and bulbs. Not a fussy eater, will gobble up anything if it is free.

**Vital statistics:** Back from the political wilderness, no more on the endangered list, and future survival prospects good.

## NEPALI SOCIETY

# Gazal siblings

They say only true romantics understand gazals, slow sentimental songs that talk of lovers' eye lashes, broken hearts and stary nights. These cold winter evenings in a hidden corner in Chabahil you will hear the melancholy melodies of Nepali and Hindi gazals of legends like the late Narayan Gopal, Amber Gungun, and Jagjit Singh waiting into the alleyway.

No, it's not a gazal restaurant we are about to visit. It is the home of Sailesh and Sallendra Singh. The brothers are not your usual gazal singers clad in

Indian kurtas, and 24-year-old Sailesh and his two years sibling Sallendra are not celebrity names.

Like most prodigies Sailesh's interest in music started at a very young age when his father noticed him playing percussion with any old cans, or even the dinner plate.

At the age of five he was presented with a maddal, and his father remembers how the shopkeeper was so amazed at Sailesh's talent he gave a hefty discount on the instrument. Sailesh was further encouraged in school by his music teacher who sharpened his skills with a variety of drums. In 1987, his performance in front of the entire royal family with 12 different drums at the same time won him praises from the Queen Mother herself.

But as he approached adolescence, Sailesh found himself in trouble. His voice started to crack. Luckily, his deeper voice turned out not to be a disadvantage at all. And to give his songs the same melody as before, Sailesh started playing the harmonium and

taught his brother to play the tabla.

By then both the brothers were ready to get into serious music. At the first nationwide Narayan Gopal Music Trust competition in 1987, Sailesh stood second, beating several hundred competitors from all over the country. Two years later he won the first prize in the same competition. "I saw Nepal had all this music talent, and it's only because they don't get the exposure and the opportunity that they remain hidden," says Sailesh. Last year his duet song with a female partner was nominated in the Hits FM Music Awards.

With their whole lives ahead of them, the sky is the limit for the talented Singh brothers. So, what plans? Sailesh answers solemnly: "We want to make our country proud of us." ♦



# Carlsberg