Record year of record-breaking

The 50th anniversary of the first ascent of Sagarmatha was a record-breaking year for breaking records on the world's highest mountain. Appa Sherpa made his 33rd ascent (see p5) and said modestly that he wasn’t trying to break any records. Lakpa Gyeltshen raced to the summit in under 11 hours, setting two world records off the summit set by Pemba Gyatso two days before. Lakpa Gyeltshen became the first woman to climb Everest three times and took her 15-year-old sister Ming Ropa, who became the youngest climber to reach the top. King Chiring Sherpa of Khumjung became the first Nepali mountaineer to reach the top and file a story. The largest number of single family ever to climb Everest were six out of seven Sherpa brothers from Beding in Dolakha. Two of the brothers have climbed Everest nine times, the seventh brother turned back from the summit at 8,400m because of high winds. One of the other brothers is the only Nepali to have climbed K2.

The king castles

Castling: A special defensive move in chess during which the king and the rook move together. If not followed up properly, it can be a trap.

KUNDU DOIT

King Gyanendra’s move on Wednesday to appoint Surya Bahadur Thapa as prime minister was sharply criticized by those who lost out. But it fulfilled the main demands of parties agitating against the king. On Wednesday, the king used Article 127 to appoint Surya Bahadur Thapa as prime minister to expand prime ministerial powers during an absolute monarchy. He met stiff resistance from hardliners in the palace, whom he collectively called Bhumigat Giroha, “The Underground Gang.” Some of them had made a comeback, so this week’s events were in a sense a settling of scores.

Surya Bahadur Thapa is now a much more powerful prime minister than he ever was four times previously. His first order of business is to pacify the five-party combine by offering them a face-saving way to call off their agitation. He can dangle juicy cabinet positions or even announce a willingness to declare elections.

The Maoists have indicated they will talk to Thapa, and he may even be tempted to agree to constituent assembly elections, which would be a re-enactment of the 1980 referendum. It was Thapa who delivered a multiparty defeat to Naryanhiti on a platter then, and he retains some of his crisis management skills.

But the UML is smarting from humiliation, and Thapa needs to do a lot of fence-mending. The UML’s Subhas Nemwang told us: “The king does not listen to parties that commanded 190 seats in parliament and chooses someone whose party had only 11 members in the house. How can we accept that?”
The Kathmandu Shuffle

Every time history brings us to a fork on the road, our leaders have this extraordinary capacity to take the wrong turn. We then meander all over the place, blundering in the wilderness, to come back to where we started. Here we go again. The king, country, parties, and all of us have gone back to October Fourth. Once more we were taken through an excruciating search for a prime minister acceptable to all, or at least one against whom no one has any valid objections. No mean feat, considering that last time the only person who foisted the bill was Mr Caretaker himself, Lokendra Bahadur Chaudhary. Once more we engaged in long debates about the constitutionality, or otherwise, of the process. And finally, we have five-time premiership Surya Bahadur Thapa. If only he had agreed in October maybe we would have been prevented from a national heartburn, and not wasted months experimenting with this and that.

The UML has lost face, and can be expected to pour its fury out on the streets in the coming days. The Nepali Congress was torn by severe internal criticism of Girja Prasad Koirala’s embrace of Madhav Kumar Nepal and will be more subdued. A question mark hangs over the whole peace process.

We are back to square one, but not by 10 October 2002. We are back to May 1990, when the first kangrej-communist interim government was formed to oversee elections after the Peoples’ Movement. In terms of the evolution of democracy we have returned 13 years to a time when a new poet was being crafted.

The only difference today is that the euphoria of democracy is missing, and the hope is gone—there is just an overwhelming sense of weariness with this game of musical chairs in Kathmandu. The Western political class, it seems, will go around in circles till there are no more chairs left. We find ourselves agreeing with Mandela that it is perhaps time to look for a musical box to start a new game.

Mandela first proved his political mettle by humbling Nepali Congress heavyweight Sher Bahadur Deuba on her home turf, in the traditional Koita stronghold of Morang. Naranayani appears to have taken note of Mandela’s remarkable exploit.

His antics as a junior minister during the PLA’s reign of terror were noted when he mumbled a prayer of the departed in the presence of a dead Maoist insurgent. When the king met with the PLA and urged them to give a chance to the king, the then deputy prime minister, deposed in 1990, said that if the Communists couldn’t be brought back, he would lay down his life to teach them a lesson.

The half-hour Mandal harangue at the Narayanhiti Palace on Friday evening irritated the king and the crown prince all on his own. As a street-smart survivor, Mandal knows how to fan his siblings in the direction of the prevailing wind.

As home minister Mandal would probably have to share part of the blame for agreeing to offer Nepali citizenship on a proportion of Bhutanese refugees. But here again, the responsibility for that historic blunder is likely to be shouldered by the technocrat foreign minister Narendra Shakti Shrestha.

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The half-four Mandal-bahurung at Narayanhiti on Friday evening outraged king Koirala no end, but it is very unlikely that Mandal was doing this in the presence of the king and the crown prince all on his own. As a street-smart survivor, Mandal knows how to fan his siblings in the direction of the prevailing wind.

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The king’s way

Maybe now we will find the middle ground between absolute monarchy and absolute anarchy.

by BP Giri

Civil and Political Rights (ICCCPR), and adherent to the ‘General’s Agreement’ of 1960 between UHCR and the Tibetan government in exile, Nepal is bound to perceive the threat of Tibetans who seek refuge from persecution. How is it that Nepal has now turned its back on its Tibetan friends across the border and buckled under Chinese pressure? We trust that Nepal’s free press will now allow this outrageous action to pass without vigorous protest.

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MESSENER: I attended the talk by Reinhold Messner and read your review. ‘Messner: Don’t mess with Everest’, #147. His speech was politically correct and it seems that he spoke from his heart; feelings were genuine. But at the same time, he showed some ‘foreigner’ approaches. The way he talked about corruption, for instance, gave the impression that it is a phenomenon that only exists in countries like Nepal. It’s time to change the question. Instead of what “are the consequences of the conflict on tourism?” the question should be about “what impact tourism has had on the insurgency?” The benefits of tourism have not filtered down to the people and this has helped create the conditions for ‘Maoism’ to grow. Nepal must also discuss other economic alternatives. Tourism is very sensitive to external factors and it is a strategic mistake to have the economy so dependent on this activity.

Luis Paolo Ferraz, Kathmandu

The Everest Golden Jubilee celebrations are over. The way in which the fragile environment of the region was neglected for the race-to-record by the climbers was disheartening. Why are you trying to beat a dead cow? BP Koirala was a good political leader, maybe even a visionary, but he is dead. He has been dead. There’s nothing he can do for the Nepal people anymore. It’s time to wake up and smell the coffee. We are the only ones who can help ourselves. The silent majority needs to awaken and tell the politicians, parties, Maoists, army, opportunists, royalists and elite that they cannot go on living a life of privilege. We need to vote out the malignant tumor that is a plague to our society. Calling on Lord Pasupatinath or BP may merely have a psychological effect. There isn’t going to be any divine intervention. It is we, we have to be responsible for our own actions. For a responsible news media like yours, it is indeed interesting to observe the fatalistic attitude in your editorial. All you are doing is justifying and perpetuating a dysfunctional socio-religious system.

SN Singh, email

The agitation the parties spearheaded forced the king to take the current course of action. There are as many opinions as there are commentators. If there is some consensus, it is that he lost faith in the Deuba-led government and the parliamentary parties to tackle the insurgency, or solve the country’s development crisis. From events that unfolded later, his desire to broker and oversee negotiations with the rebels, too, seems to have been a likely motivation for action. Of course, the king may have used this as a pretext to grab political power in a soft take-over cannot be ruled out. Indeed, many of the parties fervently believe this.

Taking over the reigns of power is one thing, but effecting a lasting solution to the country’s formidable problems is another, and it is here that the king’s course of action has proved to be regrettably flawed. First, the king’s hope that he could impose a Panchayat-style government led by old palace loyalists has failed. It is true that major parliamentary parties are discredited by the near-total anarchy they unleashed in the country in the last eight months.

The agitation the parties spearheaded forced the king’s hand, and he had to roll back the Chaudhary administration. But the real point here is even after the king put together a government of his liking, he seemed powerless to exercise popular authority to bring about much needed political or social change, or impose his will on the people. The king enjoys a variety of command of the country’s executive, legislative and judicial powers unhindered by constitutional provisions. But due to the same weaknesses that plagued Nepal’s monarchy during its Panchayat years, it cannot translate its formidable authority into effective political and administrative action.

Already the signs of its decaying authority are everywhere. Numerous press reports tell us about how the Maoists are running amok in the countryside with extermination, intimidation, and forced recruitment in a scale bigger than the last time they set out for the talk with the Deuba regime. Despite all the negotiation that is taking place, it is clear that the rebels are preparing for battles on a larger scale. Soon, there will be temptation to use accumulated weapons to gain political advantage in a later stage in the negotiations.

The establishment does have international support. But it can’t figure out how to translate diplomatic or military advantage into effective political or administrative action, no amount of international support will make any real difference on the ground.

Now that his government of royal nominees is in place, the king’s challenge is whether or not he can exercise enough political and coercive authority to warrant the political forces to the parliamentary mainstream and encourage constructive leadership toward modernisation. A big leap in economic and political reforms along the lines that China took in the early 1980s, or India in the 1990s, is not just a slogan. It is what the country direly needs at the moment. The question should be: “what impact has tourism had on the real beauty of the region was neglected for the race-to-record by the climbers was disheartening. Why are you trying to beat a dead cow? BP Koirala was a good political leader, maybe even a visionary, but he is dead. He has been dead. There’s nothing he can do for the Nepal people anymore. It’s time to wake up and smell the coffee. We are the only ones who can help ourselves. The silent majority needs to awaken and tell the politicians, parties, Maoists, army, opportunists, royalists and elite that they cannot go on living a life of privilege. We need to vote out the malignant tumor that is a plague to our society. Calling on Lord Pasupatinath or BP may merely have a psychological effect. There isn’t going to be any divine intervention. It is we, we have to be responsible for our own actions. For a responsible news media like yours, it is indeed interesting to observe the fatalistic attitude in your editorial. All you are doing is justifying and perpetuating a dysfunctional socio-religious system.

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SN Singh, email
It's not just soap, it's skincare!

Soft, silky & moisturised,

Does your soap actually deliver this feeling?
A carpetbagger’s utopia

There have been some negative comments in the Nepali media on the Bhote Kosi hydro project, which was started by Mahendra Rai Bhattarai in 1982 (Nepali Times, May 20, 2003; May 23, 2003).The government, which now sponsors the project, was unable to continue operations due to the high cost of production. The project was abandoned in 1986 and has been criticized for its high costs and lack of progress.

One way around would be to give a modest salary, perhaps in dollars, to the daily farmers and experts who do most of the work, which brings up the third principle.

Payment has to be made in hard currency if there is foreign equity involved to protect against the steady devaluation of the local currency. Additionally, it ensures a steady stream of foreign investment, the mantra of all economic development. Once the government agrees to buy all the milk at the site of production and pay in hard currency, foreign investors will come in hordes to invest in Nepal.—SARS or the Madhis may be deterred.

There is one last trick. The government can easily go back on its word if it is important to have strong support. In Nepal, the shareholders of the Bhote Kosi project have a powerful backer who can deliver the goods. A dollars and rupiah cheque for Rs 500,000 (Kabindra Pradhan has a farm in Butwal and runs a furniture factory in Kathmandu).

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2) Communications/Journalism;
3) Economic Development;
4) Education, including Educational Planning, Educational Administration, Curriculum Development, Teaching of English as a Foreign Language;
5) Finance and Banking;
6) Human Resources Management;
7) Law and Human Rights;
8) Natural Resources and Environmental Management;
9) Public Health Policy and Management, including HIV/AIDS Policy and Prevention as well as Drug Abuse Education, Treatment and Prevention;
10) Public Policy Analysis and Public Administration;
11) Technology Policy and Management;
12) Urban and Regional Planning.

Applications must have at least 5 years of progressively more responsible professional experience in Nepal, be under 45 years of age, and possess the equivalent of a U.S. bachelor’s degree (i.e., at least six years of study beyond SLC). Except in the field of journalism, applicants must hold policy-level positions as Managers, Administrators and Planners. PLEASE NOTE THAT TECHNICIANS, TEACHERS OR RESEARCHERS ARE NOT ELIGIBLE FOR THE HUMPHREY FELLOWSHIP.

An applicant’s employment record must show a pattern of exceptional career progress.

Qualified women candidates are strongly encouraged to apply for this exceptional professional development opportunity.

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Application forms and further information regarding the Humphrey Fellowship competition are available at the Fulbright Commission, the American Center, Gyaneshwor. Applicants and information must be received and downloaded from the Commission’s website: www.turbogtpnepal.org.np

NO APPLICATIONS WILL BE GIVEN OUT AFTER JULY 11, 2003. COMPLETED APPLICATIONS MUST REACH THE COMMISSION NO LATER THAN 4:00 PM, FRIDAY, AUGUST 1, 2003. INCOMPLETE OR LATE APPLICATIONS WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED.
The war hasn’t stopped

NARESH NEWAR

in KHALANGA

F or the last seven years, Lakshina Budha has been lying to her daughter Sapana that her father, Chhat Prasad Budha, is still alive and is working in Kathmandu. She doesn’t have the heart to tell her about the brutal murder of her father by a group of Maoists when she was just six months pregnant. One of the villagers had a personal grudge against Chhat Prasad and killed the Maoists at the beginning of falsely accusing him as spying against them.

Around midnight, a group of Maoists entered the house and forcibly took Chhat Prasad. Two months later the Maoists announced his husband’s death during a rally here. The villager achieved his personal vendetta. Lakshina became a pregnant widow at 25. Things did not stop there. Villagers constantly harassed Lakshina and forced her to leave the village. All her cows and buffaloes were slaughtered. The Maoists confiscated her house, land and all her belongings. She went to her brother’s house, and forced to join the movement. His family had to flee, leaving behind all their livestock and property. When they arrived in Khalanga, the army asked Bir Bahadur to join them as a porter and local guide. Reluctantly, Bir Bahadur joined the army patrol and traveled with them twice. He was killed on his third trip out. Post-mortem Rukum is full of the horror stories of relatives of the dead still trying to come to terms with tragedies and desperately surviving from day to day. It is a place of hope and dread. Hope that the peace will be real this time, and a sense of dread about what will happen if it doesn’t. Life for local residents is getting better: the income is good, shops and hotels run till late night, development projects are gradually returning, the political parties are active again, schools have restarted. But for the refugee families there are the psychological scars and the hand-to-mouth existence. The ones to suffer the most are the children, widows and the elderly parents of those killed. Rukum lost more than 700 people in the past seven years, both at the hands of the Maoists and the army. About 300 of them were non-communists.

No one is offering any help or rehabilitation for the displaced people here. The government hasn’t yet paid any of the promised compensation, and the charities haven’t offered effective reintegration. The political parties are too busy holding anti-king rallies to help. Most want to return to their villages, to plant crops when the rains come. But the Maoists are occupying their homes and fields. The Maoists have asked displaced families to come back, but the people do not trust them. Many do not believe the Maoists have given up violence, since the cedle is still extorting and

Here is- Khalanga, where there are some 2,000 displaced people from the interior trying to survive. Bir Bahadur’s family members are refugees in Khalanga. Lakshina Budha with daughter, Sapana, who was born three months after her father was killed by Maoists.

A comedian with whom I share my country’s passive aggressive ambivalence towards the United States, makes the following suggestion. He proposes that our native land, Canada, get together with Cuba to form a single nation. Not so we all can enjoy the bountiful resources of the Caribbean, but so that we can have a right to be heard. He proposes that our native land, Canada, get together with Cuba to form a single nation. For the rest of the world—whether merely sceptical or over the world to tell the mad cowboys who have taken over the United States of Reason that is world-wide, that supports American-style values of liberty and generosity.

The silent majority whose hearts aren’t with Bush and the Neo-Imps are desperate for an alternative.

The United States of Reason

to their government in times of trouble. And these are such times. 2) Constructive opposition and bridge building. These Americans—the silent majority or large minority whose hearts aren’t with Bush and the Neo-Imps—they’re desperate for an alternative. Their natural home, the Democratic Party has never before been so measurably, so obsessed with policy trivial. US politics have never been so utterly dominated by bit money and special interest groups on either side of the narrow American political spectrum. Many, if not most, Americans are troubled. They need to be constructively engaged by intelligent international thinkers from other societies, by governments with broad electoral support and committed policies in Europe and elsewhere. In short, we need a United States of Reason that is world-wide, that supports American-style values of liberty and generosly. Liberal democracies with liberal value systems, it most of them, need to get together with civil society’s representatives from all over the world to tell the mad cowboys who have taken over the middle ground in Washington that enough is enough. Other voices have a right to be heard.

Join with Canada and Cuba and surround them with reason, understanding and nerves of steel.
in Rukum

The Maoist leadership seems to have realised they need to do more to win the hearts and minds of the people. They have been organising public meetings and visiting them in their villages and promising help. Some 8,000 people from Rolpa and Jajuputhat attended a rally at the Rukumkot airfield addressed by Deb Gurung (see pic, right). The speeches lasted four hours, but there was not a single word of remorse or regret for the innocent victims of the peoples war or the displaced, no offers of help or even to consider the people. There were vague promises of how things would be better when ‘peoples’ rule’ came, and a hangover against western ‘imperialism’, diatribes against the UML ‘lackeys’, and predicting an Afghanist-type conflict if the peace talks collapsed. If they came to offer hope, you couldn’t see it in the faces of the crowd at Chaurjhari.

Two Deb Gurungs at Chaurjhari

Deb Gurung is 10-years-old. And like his namesake, he says he is a Maoist, he blames the army for turning him into one. Two years ago, when he was helping an injured Maoist with water to drink. An army patrol spotted him, and since then he has been on the run. He ended up in a Maoist camp and today speaks in Maoist jargon. He can turn serious, and stuns those around him with his mature speaking style and in-depth knowledge of Maoist theories and Maoist thought.

Working as a ‘child representative’ of the Maoists, Deb Gurung goes around villages forming Maoists’ ‘children associations’. Deb still goes to school and attends class six. But he says: “I have two kinds of education. Mandabai skaka and formal education.”

Education is important to launch the revolution and formal education is important in dealing with international issues and agendas, the international language and modern education.

Be it that he spends time reading Marxist books and going around talking to children explaining Maoist principles and theories. When asked about the peace talks he gives us a Maoist lol.salam (see pic, above) and asks us to give this message to the people in Kathmandu. “There should no creating or double standards in the peace talks. The talks should be done with utmost sincerity. To make this successful, we should go ahead without any bias and dishonesty. All people and powers should be working together to make this peace talk a success.”

Mountain men

The Mountain Institute (TMI) in Nepal now has two directors, both Nepal hands. Usha Priyabesh and Brian J Peniston are joint directors of the Himal Program at the TMI. Catherine Nixon Cooke, TMI CEO said the Nepal program of the international NGO is the biggest component and needed two directors. Sherpa was the project manager of the TMI’s Quomolungma Conservation Project and joined the organisation in 2000. Peniston has worked for the TMI since 1986, serving as Nepal’s regional manager directing the organisations’ work in the Makalu Barun National Park. Established in 1972, the US-based TMI came to Nepal in 1986 to begin conservation work and in around the Everest region. Last year it handed over the Makalu Barun project to the local community. The Chomolungma project is already halfway through its five-year period, Peniston told us TMI’s future plans include conservation work at Jaaljale and Mike Danda between the Makalu Barun and Kangchenjunga.

Ambulances

The Indian Embassy Wednesday donated a fleet of 16 ambulances to various rural health groups. Ambassador Shyam Saran, presiding over the function in Lalitpur, said the vehicles symbolised the deep friendship between Nepal and India. In the absence of ex-Health Minister Upendra Devkota, chief secretary Bimal Koirala handed over the keys of the ambulances to the recipient groups.

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Link up

A website to promote information on Japan and its people, businesses in Japan and tips on living and travelling in Japan.
With the most literally-mobile kangresi having made his latest move, some connection to national politics was inevitable. After all that has happened in the last seven days, though, it would be tempting to dismiss Khum Bahadur Khadka’s abandoning of Sher Bahadur Deuba’s ship as an irrelevant ripple. The pertinent point the Nepali Congress (Democratic) ex-general secretary makes is that Nepali politics continues to be enlivened by empathy. To be sure, without Khadka and his band of loyalists, Deuba’s party would probably begin to show some solidarity. The damage had been done. In the current political context, it is perhaps irrelevant to recall how Deuba held his ground when the palace wanted him to sack some of his more sullied ministers. What’s important here is that Khadka showed sympathy long before the kangresi-in-chief got his own summons from the anti-graft watchdog. And after all Khadka did to put Deuba in the prime minister’s seat and Shambhu Acharya on the party president’s. With at least a quarter of kangresi MPs always in his pocket, Khadka’s dexterity has determined the shape of post-1990 politics. From Krishna Prasad Bhattarai to Khadka and Deuba, premiers have staked their fate on the motions of this man. Once he helped you get the top job, he made you perennially aware of your mortality. The UML top brass still seethes when it recalls the most prominent Kangresi face grinning behind the split that denied the comrades their majority government in 1999. With such power behind the throne, why would Khadka ever want to sit on it? Deuba, too, has his set of human foibles. Although it didn’t look so ominous two years ago, his troubles started even before he took the prime ministerial oath. For three days, the planetary position wasn’t propitious for the swearing-in ceremony. For another two days, Deuba tried hard getting the political alignments right while drawing up his cabinet list. In between, aids to the prime-minister-elect tried rearranging the furniture at his Singha Durbur office along directions they hoped would help prolong his tenure. In the end, Deuba decided to underpin the endurance of his government on a three-pronged formula: promises of phase-wise cabinet expansions to accommodate and pacify supporters, peace talks with the Maoists, and a “revolutionary” land-reform agenda.

In each initiative, Khadka was omnipresent. When the home minister flew off to an HIV/AIDS conference in Melbourne two years ago, he left Deuba a list of MPs he wanted abroad just in case the premier planned to expand the cabinet in between. Actually Deuba’s animosity goes back to the 6 March 1997 vote of confidence the first-term premier was never required to take. He had just deflated a no-trust motion the opposition had registered, but the quards within his party were getting nastier. Some kangresi encouraged the premier to strengthen his grip on the government by proving his majority in the house once again. Remember how two kangresi MPs failed to show up for the vote and brought Deuba down? Khadka instantly blamed “foreign elements”. If Lokendra Bahadur Chand hadn’t already cut a deal with Bani Das Gauram, Deuba might have spooked off his fire right there. Khadka’s failure to re-enter the Baluwatar premiers pushed Khadka into the opposition benches and made Deuba’s injury less insulting. A final thought: Maybe Deuba will turn out to be a sympathetic listener if Khadka discovers he can no longer put up with Govinda Raj Joshi and Krishna Sitaula intercepting his calls to Koraila. ♦

JOURNALISTS COMPETITION FOR WASH AWARDS ANNOUNCED

The Water Supply & Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), a multi-stakeholder organization based in Geneva, Switzerland, is holding a competition for journalists from developing countries who investigate issues relating to sanitation, hygiene and water problems in their countries, in collaboration with the International Federation of Environmental Journalists (IFEJ) and the Forum of Environmental Journalists of India (FEJI).

The winner will receive US$500 plus an all-expenses-paid trip to Dakar, Senegal, to attend the first WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) for All summit and Global Forum meeting in March 2004. There will be four other prizes of US$250 each including a “Youth Reporter” award.

A journalist can submit a maximum of three entries. These should be one or more articles which have already been published in 2003 in a newspaper or magazine, or one or more stories which have been broadcast on radio. Entries should be copies of printed articles, with the title of the journal, city in which it is published and date clearly marked, and similar details for video or audio tapes from journalists working in the electronic media.

The organisers will appoint panels of judges for entries in three languages - English, French and Spanish. Any material in Nepali has to be translated in any one of these three languages for entry. The deadline for receiving entries is November 30, 2003.

Please submit entries to: Water Supply & Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) International Environment House Chemin des Anemones 9 1218 Chaintaine Geneva, Switzerland Attention: Ms. Eirah Gorre-Dale printed in 2003 in a newspaper or magazine, or one or more stories which have been telecast or broadcast on radio. Entries

Please contact: Lincoln School, Rabi Bhawan, Kathmandu. Tel: 4 270 487, 4 270 603 Fax: 4 272 685 Email: info@lnepal.com

With at least a quarter of kangresi MPs always in his pocket, Khum Bahadur Khadka determined the shape of post-1990 politics.

Sher Bahadur Deuba
Sushil Koirala
Chiranjibi Wagle

Khum Bahadur Khadka
Bijay Kumar Gachhedar
Govinda Raj Joshi

FOR WASH AWARDS

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EASY TIMES

The Water Supply & Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), a multi-stakeholder organization based in Geneva, Switzerland, is holding a competition for journalists from developing countries who investigate issues relating to sanitation, hygiene and water problems in their countries, in collaboration with the International Federation of Environmental Journalists (IFEJ) and the Forum of Environmental Journalists of India (FEJI).

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Khumbu’s wild dogs
The forests in Sagarmatha National Park have a new predator.

MONKEY BUSINESS

For over 30 years, the WNPC has been active in primate research overseas. The centre maintains a breeding colony housing over 1,000 monkeys in Indonesia and also works with the Institute of Medical Primatology in Russia. At the American Society of Primatologists annual conference held in June last year, Randall Kyes is said to have expressed WNPC’s interest to establish a monkey-breeding centre in Nepal to ensure the availability of non-primate primates for bio-medical research.

Nepal does not have a law on the export of laboratory animals, but a 1973 law empowers the government to fine or imprison up to 14,000 monkeys.

HEMALATA RAJ

Following the Indian ban on the export of rhesus monkeys for use in bio-medical research, Western research labs now seem to be eying Nepali monkeys.

Two years ago the private Natural History Society (NHS) in Kathmandu put forward a proposal to provide monkeys to foreign labs, but dropped it after conservation activists, particularly the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation created a furor. Meenu Chatterjee of NHS doesn’t understand the fuss. “We are not talking about selling our monkeys, we just want to provide scientists with primates to conduct research. It would contribute to the whole of humanity.”

This time, activists allege, the Washington National Primate Centre (WNPC) and its Nepali counterpart, NHS, have decided to come through the back door. A group of US researchers led by Randall Kyes of WNPC conducted a five-day ‘health camp’ for rhesus monkeys in Swyambhu Hill where 20 monkeys were said to have died from a mysterious epidemic.

But this was apparently done without permission from the government’s Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation. During that time, they collected stool, blood and hair from more than 40 monkeys and flew back to Washington. Their activities still largely unknown.


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CLAIRE AINSWORTH

Fat is fab

H eard, feared and reviled, fat is the modern-day bogeyman that scares adults and children alike. Only constant vigilance, diet and exercise, it is thought, will keep this dreadful demon at bay. But it’s time the truth came out. Fat is no evil, lard-demon at bay. But it’s time the thought, will keep this dreadful demon at bay.

If it weren’t for your fat stores, you would need to eat almost constantly just to stay alive. Without a cache of fat to fuel a stroke of biological genius. High in energy, it’s light and easy to store. Stockpiling your fuel as fat is a lucky to last more than a day. Without a fat stores, you would need to eat almost constantly just to stay alive. Without a cache of fat to fuel a silly shock of walking. Life without fat would be a bumpy ride. It could be a bit chilly. Although not all bodies run smoothly. The secret of maintaining your body’s liquid gold reserve. Like a honeycomb of plump fat cells, each hoarding its share of the body’s liquid gold reserve. Like a honeycomb of plump fat cells, each hoarding its share of the body’s liquid gold reserve.

Fat is no evil, lard-demon at bay. But it’s time the thought, will keep this dreadful demon at bay. Fat is no evil, lard-demon at bay. But it’s time the thought, will keep this dreadful demon at bay.

It’s stored in a specialised tissue called adipose tissue—often referred to as body fat. Take a look at adipose tissue under the microscope, and you’ll see that it’s a honeycomb of plump fat cells, each hoarding a fat infusion. The amount of fat that goes in and out of adipose tissue in a typical day is enormous,” says Keith Frayn, professor of human metabolism at the University of Oxford. “It’s best regarded as a sort of buffer.”

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Instead of being concentrated in one place, fat is spread through the body in a number of locations called deposits. Deposits are found under the skin (subcutaneous fat), lining your body, and wrapping around your organs in an intimate embrace. Scientists are finding that different deposits are designed to perform different jobs, from providing a quick-response energy service, to feeding specialised designer fuel to our immune systems. What’s more, the relative sizes of these deposits differ between men and women.

Men have less fat in general, up to a fifth of their body weight. The average, healthy woman has more—between one-fifth and one-quarter of her weight is due to fat. Both sexes store most of their fat under the skin, although men store more around their internal organs and belly than women do.

Why the difference? A woman needs to be good at storing energy to nourish a growing baby. She also needs fat if she wants to be a drop-dead gorgeous sex goddess. A young woman’s body fat is placed in strategic places, such as her breasts and hips, rather than her belly, to give her the feminine curves that men find irresistible. Why do we tend to store their fat around the middle? Steve O’Rahilly, professor of metabolic medicine at the University of Cambridge, has some words of comfort for the modern man in despair of his gut. Our male and female ancestors, he reckons, had different stresses on their bodies. Women would need a steady supply of energy to support pregnancy and breast-feeding—a role fulfilled by her slow-burning subcutaneous fat. However, men needed an energy store that they could draw on at short notice, our hunting and fighting. To this day, belly fat is laid down and burned up three times faster than subcutaneous fat. So if all else fails, blame your paunch on the Pleistocene. Scientists are only now discovering how body fat lies at the heart of a complex and finely balanced system that helps our bodies run smoothly. The secret of fat’s sweeping powers lies in its ability to communicate by secreting a hormone called leptin. When leptin was first discovered in the early 90s, it was hailed a potential new wonder drug to fight obesity. When it was given to overweight mice, it made them lose weight—three times faster than a control group. However, most obese people make plenty of their own leptin, but don’t seem to be very sensitive to it—meaning it has limited use as a drug. But the discovery that leptin can brief the brain on the state of the body’s energy systems offers potent power to the idea of fat as a passive dollop of lard. “It made fat much cleverer than it was thought to

Fat is fab

Maybe it shouldn’t be public enemy number one.
before,” says O’Rahilly. “In healthy people, leptin performs a delicate juggling act—putting a brake on our eating if we have too much fat, and singing the alarm bells if our energy accounts start wandering over the overdraft. But although leptin is important to keep us from starving to death when times are lean, “its real function is to drop below a very low limit,” says O’Rahilly. “That happens when there isn’t enough body fat to keep the levels of leptin in the blood topped up. Not only does this switch on a voracious appetite, but it helps the body save energy for vital organs like the brain by cutting corners elsewhere.

One of the first casualties is reproduction. Women with very little body fat, such as anorexics, don’t have periods, which makes perfect sense. “If you went into pregnancy malnourished, that would be catastrophic for both the health of the mother,” says Coppack. “It’s crucial that the mother’s system knows she has enough energy on board. ‘What’s more, girls with a rare genetic defect who lack the ability to make leptin never go through puberty in the first place. But fat isn’t just a handy way of storing energy for vital organs like the brain by cutting corners elsewhere. The truth behind the most eroticised piece of feminine frippery.

### Keeping abreast

**SALLY WEALE**

Yesterday, I conducted my own little experiment. I went into the office toilet, removed my bra, then spent the day without it. For as long as I can remember, bras have been a source of discomfort. My earliest brassieres memories date back to the first year of senior school, when half the girls in class moved with a quiet pride into their younger bras. Oh, the shame of changing for double PE to reveal a virginal white vest while the rest of them giggled in their little pink roses.

Eventually I graduated to my own trainer. It was white, with little pink roses, and made me feel very grown-up. It was utterly redundant, but reasonably attractive—that is, until twanged repeatedly by one’s fascinated male peers. Next came the teen bra, with its adjustable straps and vicious little hooks that were forever being undone by classmates, male and female. I began to look woefully at my drawerful of flat white bras. By then, however, I began to need a bra and there was no turning back. That was it—for the rest of my life, just like the rest of the adult female population.

Since then there’s been little more, other than swapping one for another. Bras may be bad for your health; they may be good for your figure, they can be a turn-on (black, lacy push-up) or a turn-off (grey, saggy, gone through the wash too many times) but according to Cawthorn they can’t stop the natural ageing process. Not even if you wear one all night like Marilyn Monroe to keep them perky. “There’s no evidence that wearing a bra will prevent your breasts from drooping and sagging,” she says. Which brings me back nicely to my own little experiment. It was much, much more comfortable giving without. No red marks on the shoulders; no sore, itchy bit at the back where the label sticks and tickles; no constricted breathing or pinched ribs. Very earthy, very pleasant. But I stayed very, very still, all day. And when I did move, I clutched something to my chest to hide any unprofessional jigging. Bras: a necessary evil. (© The Observer)

### Tastes like eating a fruit

**EATING, YOU’LL WANT TO EAT THEM!**

Vests are fine for women with flat chests, but for women with big breasts, bras are essential for support. And our breasts are much, much more comfortable, that didn’t leave enormous scarlet wedges on my flesh, that gave me two breasts instead of one; that gave support without stopping me breathing. One good bra!”

Women are fine for women with flat chests, but for women with big breasts, bras are essential for support. And our breasts are much, much more comfortable. A $700 revolutionary plastic inserts yoghurty-sounding Bioform with desperate, but reasonably attractive—that is, until twanged repeatedly by one’s fascinated male peers. Next came the teen bra, with its adjustable straps and vicious little hooks that were forever being undone by classmates, male and female. I began to look woefully at my drawerful of flat white bras. By then, however, I began to need a bra and there was no turning back. That was it—for the rest of my life, just like the rest of the adult female population.

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T he war in Iraq raised sharply the question of the international order, in particular about the role of the UN. Myung Ki Kim argues that South Korea can serve as the guarantor of international law and legitimacy as self-evident, and now that its casualty, undermined by the US-led invasion, must be quickly restored if the rule of law is to prevail internationally. But be a genuine locus of international legitimacy, the UN must become a different organisation—one secure in its own legitimacy and able to function without the endless delays, vested, inconsistent, and unwillingness to ensure respect for its decisions. The UN was born as a community of nations committed to self-determination and promote the values at the heart of the fight against Nazism and Fascism. In an era—with only 50 signatories of its Charter—the UN was a rather exclusive club of countries. Indeed, Article 53 of the Charter defined the former fascist Axis countries as "enemy states" of the UN, so that Italy had to wait until 1955 to become a member. Japan joined only in 1956 and Germany only in 1973. The UN Charter was, above all, a manifesto of nations committed to freedom and justice. It also contained a series of specific political objectives: decolonisation and self-determination of peoples, social progress, and the promotion of fundamental human rights. But with the onset of the Cold War and the emergence of the non-aligned movement, the intentions of the UN founding fathers were progressively thwarted. Indeed, we are so far from today's original spirit of the UN Charter that it is normal for democracies to sit in judgement of democracies and for Libya to chair the Commission for Human Rights. The Charter empowered the UN to react to threats to peace and international order arising from non-member states, including a requirement—not implemented—that signatories provide "military contingents under the command of the Military Staff Committee, composed of the Chiefs of Staff of the permanent members." In this context, the veto power conferred on the victor of World War 2 was not concerned with "internal" conflicts among the member states; it extended only to threats to peace from countries outside the UN consensus. 

Over time the UN was transformed by two factors. First, the presence of dictatorships among the permanent members of the Security Council caused paralysis and made many provisions of the Charter dead letters. Second, the rise of the non-aligned movement, founded by Zhou En Lai, Nehru, and Tito in 1955, launched a sort of substitute ideology for the UN. It emphasized the principle of non-interference in states' internal affairs and this principle's primacy over the rights of individuals enshrined in Article 1 of the Charter. The non-aligned movement also stood for the principle of including the UN in, as a matter of right, all sovereign countries. This turned the UN from a club of countries that share the same values into an assembly of forums of the international community—an indistinct body that never investigates the democratic credentials of its members. Today's UN, which enshrines the protection of fundamental human rights to countries that are themselves among the prime violators of these rights, is no longer acceptable. We must modify not only the working mechanisms of the UN, but also its composition. What is needed is a "World Organization of Democracies," devoted to promoting the original values of the UN, including democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. Such a UN could follow the organizational model of the WFTO, for example, or the Council of Europe. The latter is worth emulating because admission and continued membership are conditioned on respect for specific democratic standards. Countries from the former Soviet bloc, for example, had to adapt their constitutions to these standards in order to join. The same should hold with respect to the new UN: to join and remain a UN member would require respecting the international commitments undertaken by each state, beginning with the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In recent years, a number of countries, often after painful reforms, have become democratic, showing that it is possible to overcome the UN. It must become a different organisation to be fit for democracy.

**G8 for Africa**

EVIAN – While the French and British governments were pressing to keep Africa as a special agenda item, the United States argued that development in all countries should be given instead of pleading to the world to save the continent. Analysts say African leaders need to take responsibility for Africa, and in 2000, the United States pushed for the wealthier countries to agree to a timetable towards making $20 billion a year in aid to Africa and agreeing to a timetable towards making $20 billion a year in aid to Africa. This includes contributing additional $6 billion a year in aid to Africa and agreeing to a timetable towards reaching the $55-35 billion a year which the UN estimates Africa will need in order to meet the Millennium Goals. Meanwhile, political analysts say African leaders need to take responsibility for Africa instead of pleading to the world to save the continent.

**Debt relief**

ANNEMASSE – Civil society organisations issued another call to the Group of Eight (G8) most powerful countries to cancel the $350 billion foreign debt owed by the world’s 52 poorest nations—although they do not harbour hopes for a favourable response. In Annemasse, 40km from Evian, a civil society counter-summit debated questions like the relationship between trade and development, the effects of globalization, terrorism, the environment, and human rights. 

Besides the foreign debt of highly indebted poor countries (HIPC), the chief demand that NGOs made included financing for HIV/AIDS programs, access to water and the need to hold transnational corporations accountable. But instead of writing off the debt, the G8 responded with the promise to reduce the amount by 110 billion dollars, but later announced only $60 million would be cut. In the end the approved reduction of the debt has amounted to just 36 billion dollars, 10 percent of what activists and poor countries were requesting. Activists maintained that the G8 would have no problem writing off the debt if the political will to do so existed.

The war in Iraq is over. But the struggle to transform the economies of the Middle East—the only hope of preventing fanatics from claiming a generation of young unemployed Arabs and Iraqis—is only beginning.

That struggle goes beyond development strategies and touches the roots of Islam. Indeed, the last Ayatollah Khominei is reported to have liked to say, "did not make the Islamic Revolution to lower the price of watermelons." By that logic, capitalism and Islam are incompatible. Are they? History may provide some guidance here. The Industrial Revolution started in the English Midlands and Midlands in the early 19th century. That re-founding should start with Africa, and its leaders must be encouraged to protect their actions and establish common positions.

(Emma Bonino, a former EU Commissioner, is a Transnational Radical Member of the European Parliament. Gianfranco Dell’Alba is a Transnational Radical Member of the European Parliament and the director of the NGO No Peace Without Justice.)

**Industrialisation**

LIFE, Linge, Lyons and Barcelona in continental Europe, much of Britain and the United States, parts of Canada and Ireland, and Melbourne (plus, of course, Tokyo) were centres of modern industrialisation.

Beyond these limits, however, the fires of the Industrial Revolution burned withered, if they burned at all. For two centuries, far-sighted Ottoman visionaries had argued for the need to spur Turkey’s economic and technological development back in 1453. Sultan Mehmet II’s armies had conquered Constantinople, but Mehmet had built the most technologically advanced and powerful empire in the world. In the early 19th century, Egypt’s Muhammad Ali looked at the global balance of economic and military power, and decreed that Egypt must industrialise. He feared that unless Egyptians could learn modern industrial technologies and develop an economic infrastructure to support modern industrial armies, his descendents would be mere puppets of British and French influence. His decree never went: Egypt did not industrialise, and
Schools for development

If your country wants to get ahead, first and foremost you invest in educating your people.

0n 21 September, 1832, in Boston’s Franklin Hall, the first American woman to deliver a public lecture, Maria Stewart, shocked the town when she stood and spoke. What caused her to abandon social norms and deorum so brazenly? “Daughters of Africa, awake! Arose!,” she cried, as she demanded that the United States provide education for black girls. As so often turns out to be the case, our forebears were right. If Mrs Stewart, herself an African-American, knew what we know about development today, her demand would be the same now as it was then. Every shred of evidence we’ve accumulated over the past 30 years of academic and policy research, all the experience of our development efforts, confirm what our pioneering ancestors knew intuitively: education for all our children—poor, rich, white, black, boys, girls—means healthier babies, stronger families, wealthier economies, and more vibrant democracies. Ask leaders of the “tiger” economies of Southeast Asia their secret for rapid development, and they’ll tell you the same thing: first and foremost, we invested in our people. In its most basic form, that’s what development is: investing in people and their welfare. So, where does the world stand today? Roughly speaking, almost every country in the rich world has invested in schools for development. The formerly communist countries did not go to school, including a staggering 40 percent of school-age kids in sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, the Human Development Report notes that 24 countries around the world are making insufficient or no progress—if not actually backsliding—in achieving the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education. One can only imagine how dire conditions may be in the 93 countries for which we do not have the data. In the words of Mark Malloch Brown, Administrator of the UN Development Program, “We’re losing the battle for primary education.” In the 1990’s, we in the development community made a serious and costly blunder by pressuring national governments in developing countries to impose school fees in order to help achieve balanced budgets. Some research suggested that fees might be useful in decentralizing education—a laudable goal—and in helping poor countries to “free within their means” (a natty requirement in an age of global prosperity). In fact, the policy was a disaster for the world’s most vulnerable children: any out of pocket costs for schooling meant no schooling at all. Recent evidence from Uganda and Kenya show just how costly this error was. In 2000, upon receiving debt alleviation, Uganda chose to eliminate all school fees and saw the number of school-age children nearly double thereafter. The new government of President Mwai Kibaki in Kenya announced his country would eliminate school fees, and within days an additional 1.2 million kids showed up for class. We know what to do to educate our children. We know that basic education should be a free public good. We know that school meal programs are a development marvel that do as much as anything else to increase enrollment while providing nutrition to the hungriest youngsters, markers for their fathers’ produce, and often jobs for village mothers. Innovative initiatives providing rural child care mean that kids can go to school, and basic public health provision—such as de-worming—attracts chronically sick children to the classrooms for both learning and healing. (© Project Syndicate)

(Sara Sievers is Executive Director of the Center for Globalisation and Sustainable Development at the Earth Institute, Columbia University.)

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**Foreign hand**

Gokul Baskota in Drishti, 3 June

Nepal has turned into a playground for foreign powers. The biggest question facing Nepal today is where this foreign interference will take the country and its people's sovereignty. The recent visit of KV Rajan, former Indian ambassador to Nepal, raises an interesting point of inquiry. It was during his visit that Surya Bahadur Thapa emerged as a candidate for premiership, despite the recommendation of the five political parties. Of course, this succeeded in making our political future even more uncertain. The nomination, however, did highlight one thing clearly: India intends to turn Nepal into another Sikkim. Surya Bahadur Thapa is a puppet.

Immediately after sacking Sher Bahadur Deuba, King Gyanendra made a tour to India on the pretext of a pilgrimage. While the parties launched their agitation against the king's October Fourth move, former prime minister Thapa trotted off to lobby with the South Block. A royal audience followed his return, and immediately after that Lokendra Bahadur Chand tendered his resignation—seemingly out of the blue. In quick succession the RPP demanded an all-party government and the Maoists sat for a second round of peace talks.

Both took place due to pressure from India and the United States. On 2 June, the British special envoy Jeffrey James arrived in Nepal on an official visit, and there are rumours of Indian defence minister George Fernandes gracing us with his presence shortly. The Americans, who view Nepal through New Delhi's lenses, have vowed not to interfere in Indian interests. India shows overwhelming interest in Nepali politics, perhaps even more than to their own regional elections. While it is true that we cannot change the mindset of our neighbours, we can however, reach a consensus on our foreign policy to protect national interest. When our parties are on the offensive they oppose foreign interference, talk about sovereignty and national integrity. But in the race for power these same leaders will not hesitate to ally themselves to India, neglecting all talk of nationalism. We must ensure that nobody—from the parties to the palace—will curry favour from Delhi and Washington just for power.

The US seeks to exert its influence over Nepal without alarming India. They are looking for avenues that serve Indian interests while securing a niche for themselves. India's palace—will curry favour from Delhi and Washington just for power.

Moreover, the US is exploiting the power vacuum left by the RPP's departure to exert influence on local politics. The US seeks to exert its influence over Nepal without alarming India. They are looking for avenues that serve Indian interests while securing a niche for themselves. India's palace—will curry favour from Delhi and Washington just for power.

**Fallow money**

Desherat, 1 June

The combined effect of defunct local bodies and political instability has badly hit development activities. More than 40 percent of the development activities planned and being implemented by local bodies are in limbo. Sources from the Ministry of Local Development (MLD) say that less than half of the local development budget allocated for the current fiscal year has been utilised and only two months of the current fiscal calendar is left. Statistics provided by the Evaluation and Monitoring Section of the MLD reveal that apart from a few priority projects, others used less than 40 percent of what they were allocated. In this situation, even high-priority sectors like district road networks are expected to use only half of what they needed. An official at the Evaluation and Monitoring Section claims that despite the simplification of budget release, modules lack accountability in the absence of elected representatives. The situation was exacerbated by the fear of Maoists. Despite food for development and west tarai poverty alleviation programs spending more than what they were allocated, the result would be less than expected. Local bodies could utilise only 25 percent of the allocated development budget in the first eight months of the year. It means that more about Rs 5.71 billion of the development budget will remain fallow.

**Our place**

Rajdhani, 4 June

The United States' furor over Nepal's deportation of 18 Tibetans refugees raises some serious questions about our foreign policy. It couldn't come at a worse time: Nepal is being dragged into controversy at a volatile time in its political history. Internal conflict, competition and insurgency have almost brought us to a point where we won't be able to resist external pressures. Nepal is in a pickle and sensitive towards its prosperous and powerful neighbours, and is equally heartfelt in its relationship with the US, its major ally and donor. We cannot afford to be dragged into an interest between them. Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of those countries we count upon as friends to respect, not trap us in such a sensitive situation. We must not be used as a means to their ends. It is clear that we are finding it hard to shoulder our own burden at present. We cannot also be loaded with the interests of other powerful nations. This would go against all norms of civilised behaviour and friendship.

Himal Khabarpatrika, 30 May-14 June

**Age no bar**

Chandra Kumari Wagle describes sex education for her grandson.

A 61-year-old grandmother is in the same class as her grandson at Madanpur VDC of Nuwakot. Chandra Kumari Wagle and Sushil even share the same berth in grade five at Chandra Devi Primary School. Chandra says, "My grandson Sushil helps me with homework, and helps me with whatever I don't know. English is very difficult."

Chandra Kumari regrets not educating her children. "I had educated them, they might have been teachers in this school but in my time we believed those who studied English became disrespectfully and looked at drinking. My son's peers have all done so well, but he is still taking the fields," she told us. Durga, her eldest son, never set a foot in a school but willingly supports his mother's education. Chandra was motivated by the sheer joy of learning. "I can stay in school as long as this old body supports me," she says. Hari Sharman Parajie, the acting principal at the school, does not give her any special treatment. "She is a student like any other student," he says, "but due to her age she cannot grasp things as easily as her younger classmates." Not that it deters her greatness. She finished 20th out of 25 students in the last exams, but takes pride in never having failed a grade since she joined school.
Purna Bahadur Vaidya:
One and the world

Few poets today write as well as the Nepali poet Purna Bahadur Vaidya about how the body, the mind, and the world live together or in tension and relation to each other. His travels through cyberspace. In this virtual interview, Iyer talks among other things about his experiences of foraging my way to new places without ever having been to those places and without knowing what they look like”.

The first poem visits a theme that Vaidya often writes on, the search for personal freedom:

The moment I see a pair of feet
I must step out of myself
I must liberate myself
I must step out of myself

My form is daubed outdoors
My expression is outdoors
Many places I must reach

For Pico Iyer, travels never cease

Pico Iyer was born to travel. Born in England to Indian parents, he moved at the age of seven to California where he did his schooling. Educated at Eton, Oxford and Harvard, he later joined Time in New York, to sit in little cubicles and “write palpitating, breathless accounts of foraging my way through the Philippines jungles or ascending the Andes to find the Sendero Luminoso without ever having to those places and without knowing what they look like”. Ajit Baral recently caught up with Pico Iyer in his travels through cyberspace. In this virtual interview, he talks about the book, Video Night in Kathmandu, that made him (and Kathmandu) famous.

Ajit Baral: What purpose do travel writings such as The Great Railway Bazaar or Video Night in Kathmandu primarily serve? Are there just better written Lonely Planet Guides?

Pico Iyer: That’s a wonderful question. I think that the best books of the kind you mention are not the opposite of guidebooks, in that they don’t tell you what to see, but how to see. In a way they offer a pair of spectacles and a kind of looking-glass—a fresh kind of exoticism—in the ways the East was taking in the West that seemed to speak a new global future forming, in a place that might look like our cities of tomorrow (with people from a hundred cultures walking and talking past one another). The airplane has been more a theme for me than the bullock-cart. You’re between walking around the block and completing it, it has no choice but to accept change no more than people do. In the case of Nepal, I did return seven years after my initial trip and found (as described in my book, Tropical Classics) that there were more mountains and motocycles and the pollution was worse. But the sweetness of the Nepali people, and the various hopes or longings Westerners projected onto them (and vice-versa) had not changed much at all.

You seem to defy a definition of home. What is home to you?

Pico Iyer: Home to me is in part the English language, which has kept me company for every waking moment of my life. It exists in the friendships and beliefs and stories and possibilities and memories that I’ve had. It is, as much as anything, a Japanese friend I return to and a Benedictine monastery where I stay four times a year every year.

VS Naipaul glorifies in his anxiety of belonging nowhere. Your writing, on the other hand, glorifies in belonging everywhere. Don’t you need a sense of belonging?

I feel that movement has been my inheritance, and I’ve rejoiced in it in the way others might rejoice in being Bangladeshi or Indian or French. My particular home has been the state of movement, and that’s where I belong, and what I’m used to—the space between places, or categories. I could wish that I had a different life, but so do us as a rule as weve done immortal, so every day never ended.

You have now started writing fiction. Which is more difficult fiction or travelogue?

Pico Iyer: That is more difficult, and therefore more attractive and interesting to me. It is about surrender, and not being able to bowl the Muse to make house-calls, or force inspiration to come, which makes it at once more frustrating and more magical. It’s the difference between mixing around the block and completing a semiannual in mid-air while holding a torch of flame in both hands. In all my travel-writing, most of what I’m writing about is inside us. So nobody that I’m aware of that talked of Amsterdam as a travel-book in disguise, or travelling incognito. They might note that it has vivid scenes of Damascus and Venice and Agra and Paris and India—but not to mention Calcutta—I think they see instantly that it’s swift and formless a romance, a mystery and a novel of ideas. The scenery is just made up.

Pico Iyer’s books: Cuba and the Night, Abardon (both fiction), The Lady and the Monk, Falling off the Map, Tropical Classic, and Video Night in Kathmandu are all available in Kathmandu book shops.
FOOD

On Saturday evenings at The Piano Lounge & Bar, there is a “Full Circle” event from 7PM on Saturdays at Himalatte Cafe, Thamel. 4256738

MUSIC

The July Jazz Bar reopens with 50 percent discount on beverages. DJ or live entertainment through June. Shangri-la, Hotel. 4473999

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BOOKWORM

This study is probably the most intensive longitudinal study of a single community in the Himalaya. It uses the tools of social anthropology and population in an attempt to map causes and consequences of population growth and some of the effects of change in natural resources. Unfortunately, the conclusions that the author reaches are extremely gloomy.

Art and Architecture: Remains in the Western Terai Region of Nepal (Gan Giri Adoni Publications, 2003)

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This satellite image taken on Thursday morning shows a giant-cyclone building up over the Bay of Bengal. Two powerful low-pressure points, one in the east and the other in northwest India, is pushing moisture laden clouds in our direction. By next weekend, the eastern parts of Nepal will experience the first monsoon showers—just about six days late. We will take another four days to reach Kathmandu Valley. Western Nepal will have to wait another week for a reprieve from the current heat wave and dry spell. The Valley can expect pre-monsoon rain and thunderstorms in the next few days.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

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In the past this beautiful and diverse Asian nation failed to register on our holiday radar. Now, increasing numbers of Nepalis and expats in Kathmandu are discovering the pleasure of a holiday destination that won’t break the bank and allows you to set your own pace.

Malaysia offers something for everyone—from urban animals who get chills of joy just standing in the shadow of the Petronas Twin Towers to those who want to feel dwarfed by the amazing rainforests.

The first stop is usually the capital, Kuala Lumpur, universally known as KL. This city of 1.2 million is where the prosperity and multi-ethnicity of Malaysia is on display. It’s not so much a melting pot as it is a peaceful co-existence of different cultures: Malays, Chinese, Indians, indigenous peoples and even a few May Nepals—little wonder that the Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board advertises the country as “Truly Asia.”

The food and architecture reflect the people who turned KL into a mega-metropolis from a humble mining town in the 19th century. Walk along any street in the city centre and glance upwards: colonial British buildings inspired by Moorish designs share the same skyline with mosque minarets and glass-enveloped towers—centuries of civilisation telescoped into one view.

On street level, KL is a melange of colours, scents and textures. In many ways it retains the local charm and flourish that other Asian cities were only too eager to erase in the bid to become a global city.

Street stalls sell everything from delicious Nonya cooking that simply must be sampled, to designer label knock-offs which vendors insist are the real thing. Bargaining is acceptable and even expected, and since English is widely spoken you need not be reduced to haggling in sign language with the aid of a calculator. Experiencing KL can be tailored to suit every budget. There are upscale hotels that are used to housing state leaders and won’t bat an eyelash over a request for a manicure for your poodle—miniature mums have become the new status symbol among the moneyed class. Alternatively, you can find accommodation as a paying guest with local families for nominal amounts.

Eating out is a joy in KL, especially in the evenings when the Garden City of Lights takes on another dimension (see Eat all you can).
The nucleus is the Golden Triangle—whole blocks of coffee-houses, nightclubs, fine dining establishments, supermarkets and luxury hotels—bordered by Jalan Raja Chulan, Jalan Sultan Ismail and Jalan Bukit Bintang. A visit to Chinatown and Little India is always well worth a culinary visit too.

For those who get a thrill from the smell of burnt rubber and scrunching high-powered engines, KL is the closest you can get to true blue Formula 1 action in Asia. The Sepang International Circuit outside the airport is 5.5km with only two weather conditions: screeching high-powered engines, the smell of burnt rubber and smoke, and the roar of the crowd—hand at speed and banana milk.

The Cameron Highlands are the cool exception, making it the preferred retreat for colonial rulers like the Dutch and the English. Not surprisingly this is where you can enjoy a true cup of English tea from the tea estates they established.

Malaysian history mops the streets of Melaka. Founded in 1396 by a Sumatran prince it became a prosperous port-of-call that attracted Chinese, Indian, Arabian and European trade. Melaka fell to the Portuguese, then the Dutch who relinquished it to the English with another round of back and forth till finally Malaysia claimed sovereignty in 1956. The legacy of the colonists can be seen in Stadthuys, St Francis Xavier’s church and A’ Famosa, one of the most photographed subjects in the town. Even with 600 years of history behind it, Melaka is a strangely unique blend of the old and tourism boom now. You can try your hand at speed and banana milk.

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MARK TURIN in WASHINGTON

t Building number 1145, 17th Street North West in Washington DC, in the Explorers Hall, the folks at National Geographic have created an impressive exhibit entitled ‘Sir Edmund Hillary: Everest Beyond’, replete with an entirely recreated Sherpa school classroom.

The exhibition explores all aspects of Hillary’s life, from his early years as a beekeeper and novice climber, to his celebrated Everest climb 50 years ago alongside Tenzing Norgay, to his humanitarian work for the people of the Himalaya. Told through panoramic landscapes, original film footage of the 1953 expedition, replica Sherpa buildings and objects from the Everest ascent, the exhibit also charts Hillary’s other journeys. They include his South Pole tractor trek from 1956 to 1958 and his jet boat pilgrimage up the Ganges River following the death of his wife and daughter in 1975.

While the exhibition is strong in many aspects, the focus is excessively Hillary-centric. This is particularly ironic and unbecoming given that Hillary (invariably referred to as Sir Edmund Hillary in the exhibition) has retained his charming humility and unpretentiousness to this day. Overt Hillary fetishes on show include the ice axe he used on Everest, his Kodak Retina 35mm camera that recorded the legendary summit photographs, the clothing he wore on the summit, the nylon rope, oxygen frame, pack and mask he used during the climb, one of the three tractors he drove to the South Pole, various religious and domestic Sherpa artefacts, and a selection of Hillary’s many awards and decorations, from the Order of the Garter to the Kathmandu Taxi Drivers Association Award. We are thankfully spared his toenail clippings and used underwear.

The exhibition organisers should be given credit for their sensitive handling of the often acrimonious debate about who got to the top first, the nationality of Tenzing Norgay (Nepali or Indian) and the sore fact that he was never made Sir Tenzing. As for the wall panels devoted to the Yeti, they are unsensationalist and straightforward, combining excellent visuals with solid commentary—the kind of reporting we have come to expect from National Geographic.

The exhibition runs until 1 September, but for the more sedentary readers, there is also an excellent website, www.nationalgeographic.com/everest, which is full of sound and music signifying the Himalaya.

An exhibition pays homage to a mountaineering legend.
KATHMANDU: With no other records left to break on Mt Everest this season, Nepal is running their attention once more to the neglected arena of politics where a veteran statesman shattered all previous records by returning to prime minister’s chair for the umpteenth time.

A jubilant, but visibly tired, Mr Surya Bahadur Thapa was mobbed by reporters as he arrived at Base Camp in Maligau, where he said: “I just wanted to prove to myself that I could do it, each time is a challenge.” Asked if he would try to be king of government once again in the foreseeable future he said: “Yes, my goal is to hold office for a world record 50 times, and if I think I have the right to hold the country’s premier. ‘If nominated, I swear I’ll never become prime minister just so I can do anything about it. Sharada is among the very few who decided to set up WEPCO in 1992 with a handful of friends to reduce, reuse and recycle Kathmandu’s household waste. ‘We used to blame the government, the municipality—all, everyone but ourselves,’ she recalls.

Clad in green saris, WEPCO opened its office files, envelopes, boxes, wrapping paper and periodicals in its own paper plant. A compost site was built in 1996 to produce fertiliser from organic waste. And it runs its collection out of the revenue generated from sales of fertiliser and recycled paper products.

Nearly 65 percent of valley waste is organic, and WEPCO has been trying tell households that garbage is valuable stuff. Sharada’s office overlooks the Bagmati, and the smell reminds residents to separate their waste and advising Kupondol women went around collecting garbage. Initially, they were met with derision. People said it was the municipality’s job, why are you getting your hands dirty? But slowly, the started taking notice and then they began actively cooperating and sorting the garbage. Today, WEPCO collects garbage from 3,000 households in Patan, free of charge. It recycles paper waste into office files, envelopes, boxes, wrapping paper and periodicals in its own paper plant. A compost site was built in 1996 to produce fertiliser from organic waste. And it runs its collection out of the revenue generated from sales of fertiliser and recycled paper products.

Nearly 65 percent of valley waste is organic, and WEPCO has been trying tell households that garbage is valuable stuff. Sharada’s office overlooks the Bagmati, and the smell reminds residents of the enormous work that lies ahead. WEPCO is now planning to turn a stretch along the Bagmati called UN Park into a sanctuary.