King Bhumibol and King Janak

SUDHINDRA SHARMA in BANGKOK

The King of Thailand, Bhumibol Adulyadej, has never visited Nepal. But he has always shown great affinity for the birthplace of the Buddha and for the Mithila kingdom which was ruled by King Janak. Few know of King Bhumibol’s abiding interest in the life and times of the king of Videha. So impressed was he with the story of Janak, as recounted in the Tripitaka, the sacred texts of Theravadan Buddhism, that he published the book. The Story of Mahapajaka which is now being translated into Nepal. The English illustrated version, translated from the original Thai, was published in 1999. Now, King Bhumibol’s daughter, Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn who is a keen student of linguistics and Sanskrit, is taking her father’s research interest in King Janak and Mithila further.

Today’s Janakpur in Nepal was probably the old capital of Videha (and continues to be the cultural capital of Mithila), though the political capital of the kingdom subsequently shifted to Kathmandu in eastern Bihar. Hindu religious texts extol King Janak as an illustrious ruler. Not only was he the father of Sita, but also a philosopher-king who ruled justly over his kingdom. He was known to be a generous host during his reign, in whose court the cultural capital of Mithila (which is now being translated into Nepali). The English illustrated version, translated from the original Thai, was published in 1999. Now, King Bhumibol’s daughter, Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn who is a keen student of linguistics and Sanskrit, is taking her father’s research interest in King Janak and Mithila further.

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I concur with TR Upadhyay’s ‘Little to bank on’ (#156) that this political year has more muck than a pie in the sky and we will be back in the woods with an additional dent of the $2 billion plus when the World Bank withdraws. However, he has missed a crucial point in his article. The most important reason why this political management will be left floundering when the World Bank withdraws is the ‘government’ not pointing out from under their feet is the political parties, the political parties themselves. Nepal’s Bank the same person who was initially ousted from the post by the diagnostic review (referenced in the article) has come back to power by independent auditors denying him and his team to be mired in corruption.

Pradeep Upadhyaya, email

Danielle reform

I have always assumed that the purpose of politicians was to help the country and the people. It was the same for Nepal. Nepal’s politicians would be sitting down and talking with the government, the Maoists and the king in an effort to bring about a stable and lasting peace. The purpose of the Maoists was no more the incarnation of Bishnu than the disagreement between the Khas courtiers of Gorkha with the Shah kings worshipped Guru Nanak, the ascetic who established the ancient Nauk sect in the Ganga plains to propagate militant Hinduism in the region. These two schools of thought may not be incompatible, but they are certainly at variance. The purpose of politicians in Nepal.

Alastrim Graham, Kathmandu

Kathmandu connection

I am sure that I am not the only one who engages in a healthy discussion with people abroad who have moved from the Cho La to Tashi. When I talk about the problems of the post-1947 subcontinent, the other branch continues to save because it was consistently misconstrued itself.

King Prithivi Narayan Shah the Great rose in response to what Father Ludwig Stiller called the ‘silent cry’ of the masses to dismiss the concept of the pre-1947 subcontinentality of tiny principalities that dotted the upper reaches of the Ganga tributaries in the 18th century. But 200 years later, sensing the decolonisation wave sweeping across the world, his descendant King Tribhuvan did not wish to be left behind. But in modern Nepal, the monarchy under the banner of a popular construction. Each of these illustrous Shah kings enthroned the people of their time in their own distinctive ways. The Shah-Rana dynasty has been an attempt to bring about a stable and lasting peace. The two ruling houses had come into being at different times in response to the differing needs of the people. And when the Ranas ceased to be contemporary, the clan lost its relevance and was subsequently dumped into the dustbin of history. The dynasty of the post-1947 subcontinent. The other branch continues to save because it was consistently misconstrued itself.

Surendra Prashar, email

Bhunam

That CR Lal in his article ‘Kingdom of Bahuns’ tries to paint Bahuns at the forefront even when they were being ruled by non- Bahurs is an indication of his rhetoric to exaggerate the domination of the domineering caste in Nepal. One wonders: is it true that he does not blame them just because they are Bahuns?

Bhunam

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The answer to the question of controlling crimes is obvious. Give more police officers like Thapa the freedom to nab the crooks, send them to jail and keep them there.

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Preeti Upadhya, email

The government says it is doing its “homework” on a political agenda for the talks. That homework was long overdue. This country’s long-term security will only be guaranteed by a just peace that tackles underlying causes of conflict. We need new institutions, representation, and equal opportunities not just as concessions to the Maoists in these talks, but because this country urgently needs those reforms.

In my advice to the negotiators and media-obsessed facilitators is this: spare us your blandishments and just talk. Just call us when you have agreed on how to get there.

In the king we trust...

...but not in the residual paraphernalia of absolute monarchy.
“Hariyo ban Nepal sarkar ko dhan.”

NATiON

15 - 21 AUGUST 2003 NEPAL TIMES #158 3

ANALYSIS by BADRI PAUDYAL

When the government nationalised the country’s forests in 1961 it took away control over millions of hectares from local communities. Within 15 years, Nepal had lost much of its madhur forest cover, the country was sliding towards desertification, and there were dire predictions that all forests would go by the year 2000.

Luckily, in the 1980s along came the community forest initiative which allowed villages to lease the commons, protect their forests so they could use it sustainably. Villagers started planting their forests again, they stilled felled cattle so the animals wouldn’t forage in the undergrowth. Soon, mountains that had been nearly denuded, started to regenerate and by the year 2000, Nepal had actually had more forest cover than in the 1950s.

Now, community forestry experience is regarded as one of our greatest success stories, and is being used as a model for many other developing world. The model was built on the need for grassroots democracy, strong local forest protection and decentralised decision-making to strengthen each other. And it worked.

Unfortunately it seems to have worked so well that the central government now wants a share of the revenue from the forests that the villagers have protected.

In 2001, the government promulgated an ordinance to collect 40 percent of the income from community forest users in the tarai area. Following a written petition by the users, the Supreme Court ruled against the decision. Now, from withdrew the rule for the tarai the government has extended the 40 percent requirement to all community forest all over the kingdom through Royal Ordinance in the budget. Environmental and grassroots activist, KK Panday shakes his head in dismay: “It took us 30 years to correct the mistake of nationalising forest in 1956, now we are going to repeat that same mistake.”

The new ordinance now more than 13,000 community-based forest user groups covering 1.4 million families throughout Nepal. Their members are elected by the community, and most are effective and accountable looking after the forests who entrusted their forests in their hands. There have been numerous cases of rape, women and children staying away at night to guard their forests when the cattle is young. Some villagers have paded with their lies to guard their trees, others have been burnt trying to save their forests from fire.

Revenue from community forests generated local income for VDCs which they ploughed into building schools, paying teachers, and repairing health posts. Farmers originally didn’t like trying up their cattle and buffaloes, but suddenly found that if everyone stilled felled there was enough grass and fodder in the forest for everyone. In almost every survey done since community forestry went into effect, family incomes and wellbeing have improved.

“We told the people, this is your forest, protect it and you can use it for the good of your community; and they did. They trusted us. Now we are going back to them and saying sorry, boys, it’s not yours any more,” says Hari Prasad Neupane, the first leader of the Federation of forest user groups, FECOFUN.

With his white mustache and patriarchal bearings, Neupane has been leading communities from throughout Nepal to agitate against the ordinance and is determined to see it quashed. As a recent public hearing at the Nepal Forestry and Environmental Journalists (NFEJ) Neupane got into a heated argument with government officials from the Department of Forests, an exchange that was broadcast on all television channels.

“It was clear there is a wide gap in the understanding of forestry between government and grassroots groups. The Department of Forests sees the trees only as a source of timber and revenue. Community leaders have seen with their own eyes that the forests they protect gives villagers fodder for livestock, thatch for roofs, it protects the springs and water sources, it protects the slopes above their villages from landslides, it keeps back wildlife and helps tourism.

The government’s arguments in support of the 40 percent ordinance is lame: officials say communities are depriving other migrants from using the forests, that there is corruption in the user groups and that the commons are not just the property of a local community but national property. In short, the same arguments that were used to justify the nationalisation of forests back in 1961. It is clear that the unspoken reason for the ordinance is that the government is broke, and forest have traditionally been seen as a source of revenue. Nepal political leaders have always parcelled out forests to contractors to finance election campaigns, and used trees to dispense political patronage.

“Communities should not see this as the government taking away their earnings,” said Jamuna Krishna Tamrakar from the Department of Forests at the NFEJ hearing. There were howls of protest from the audience.

Aparaj Chaigham is a member of a local forest user group with FECOFUN, and says rumours of the ordinance have already reached her village and people are saying they may as well cut down the young trees since the government is going to take it away anyway. “These trees are watered, nurtured and protected for 20 years, are not going to just hand it back to corrupt officials in Kathmandu,” Chapagain said. The communities have a formidable army of respected big names to back them up, like Mohan Man Saini the ex-head of the National Planning Commission, and Nepal’s foremost naturalists Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha.

Donor threat

If the government decision is implemented, international donor agencies are reportedly planning to pull out funding from the community forestry sector, with grave implications for other aid projects as well. “The forest users will suffer irreversibly from the government’s action. We cannot support this further if there’s no chance of community forestry development,” says Karl Schuler of Swiss Development Cooperation, Nepal.

Eight key donor agencies from Denmark, Australia, UK, Switzerland, USA, Germany, Netherlands and Japan have supported Nepal’s community forestry programme, and officials are said to be furious about the government decision. Their projects cover 69 of 75 districts. In addition, UNDP, the EU, ICIMOD, World Bank, Action Aid, Oxfam, AusAID, and UNM have also been involved in promoting community forestry. The donos, hold an emergency meeting on Thursday to decide on their involvement in Nepal’s forest development.
21 AUGUST 2003 NEPALI TIMES #158

Terminator 3 in California

IIt’s a time of year known in the northern hemisphere as ‘the silly season’. This is the media centric view that assumes people are tired of the staples of their news diet—violence in Israel and Palestine, violence in Africa, violence in Iraq and so on. It’s summer up here after all. So our news is a bit weird and wacky.

No doubt you are watching the coverage of Melamchi Water Supply Project (MWSP). The $411 million project supported with a loan from the Asian Development Bank and aided by the Norwegian, Swedish and Japanese governments will take water from the Melamchi Khola through a 26.2km tunnel to Sundarijal. The project was originally slated for completion in 2006, but is far from completion. The government also agreed to relocate villages affected by the project and has set up an independent water regulatory agency. All of these pretexts have had their problems.

Meanwhile, Project staff blame political uncertainty in Kathmandu and Maoist activities in Melamchi. But it is here in Melamchi itself that a visitor sees major obstacles. About the only good news here is that a 4km dirt road from Melamchi Bazar to Timbubesi and eight bridges have been completed.

The contractor in charge of road and bridge construction has earned a bad reputation with local communities. Constructions they have been harassed and tortured by Maoists. Lastly, the project has handed over road construction to the military, and since then there has been even less progress on the road because of security concerns.

Four years ago, a group of consultants and staff from MWSP came from Kathmandu to try and convince Melamchi villagers that the project would benefit them, not just the pampered residents of Kathmandu. They were promised jobs, electricity, health clinics and training programs. “We were really stupid to believe them,” rues Dawa Sherpa. “All these years we have gone by and we never saw those people again.” He has reason to be bitter. Dawa offered free food and stay for an engineer and even lent him Rs 150,000 for workers’ wages. It took him seven months in Kathmandu before he got money back. “They should never make the mistake of coming back to my village,” fumes Dawa.

Voices of resentment are heard right from the bus top at Kathmandu to the villages in the hilltop of Helambu. “I’m beginning to worry about the project, because these people from Kathmandu have not paid any attention to local concerns.” There will be a public outburst soon, predicts Dineh Lama, ward chairman of Helambu 8. “When we are done we will get away really cheap, paying Rs 100 per day,” says Shyam Pratap, politician Krishna Lamichhane from Galchwak. So far, only two people from Sundhupokharka have got jobs as road supervisors, he says.

The other complaint is compensation for the displaced. At least 20 families have lost their fields to road access, and most of them don’t know where or when they can get compensated. “They haven’t even come to see here and so if anyone is missing from the compensation list, says Ramchandra Bahadur Karati is among those who lost his farm. Project staff told him he was not eligible for compensation because his name was not noted prior to the construction of the road. Several houses at Uhrung Bazar and nearby projects have been closed.

Project staff say the project distributed masks and condoms as part of its health improvement program. In Kival, an hour’s walk from Melamchi Bazar, Ram Krishna Sapkota and his friends worry about the future. “We have plenty of clean water and fresh air, I don’t think my grandchildren will have it,” says Sapkota, fearing the diversion of water will adversely affect the environment. Sixty-year-old Baburam Chetri nods. “We hope this project never gets off the ground. Let them finish the project.”

Dawa Sherpa and his friends relax by the rushing rapids of the Melamchi after a hard day’s work in the fields. The vegetation is lush, the air is clean and cool, and they watch the frothing water tumble over huge boulders as it flows down from the mountains.

Nearby, Shyam Nepali and his dalit friends also take a break from weeding the paddy terraces, passing to us a small dish of mutton, mixing it with the scented spices of the mountains.

“The contractors should never make the mistake of coming back to my village,” Dawa Sherpa. (second from left) at Timbubesi.

Terminator 3 Rise of Machines

Arnies just the latest in a long line of actors-turned-politicians in the state that hosts Hollywood.

Hollywood has long been political in America, largely at the liberal end of the spectrum, well to the left of this President and his war on the haves and have-nots. This is why film stars such as Al Pacino and Robert De Niro—not to mention Arnold Schwarzenegger—are involved in the political process. Actors in general are left of centre, and movie making tends to be dominated by people like this.

Arnies just the latest in a long line of actors-turned-politicians in the state that hosts Hollywood.

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Square one?

Forget the Melamchi project’s crucial 28km tunnel, the initial key project hasn’t been met. At the very beginning, the donors of Nepal’s biggest drinking water project had put forward a condition: they wanted a private operator at the Nepal Water Supply Corporation (NWSC). Although the World Bank took the responsibility of fixing the new management at NWSC, they had not fulfilled it when they exited the project nearly two years ago. Now the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is attempting to pick up where the World Bank left off.

A fact-finding mission from the Manila-based multilateral agency arrived in the Valley recently to fine-tune the Melamchi sub-project. The ADB will finance the $19 million Kathmandu Valley Water Management Support Project, which will award the NWSC management contract to a private party, restructure the corporation and form a drinking water regulatory board and the Kathmandu Valley Water Authority.

Even after the ADB finishes its work, Melamchi Water Supply Project officials believe handing over the NWSC management will become furious as soon as they see any project staff. Both try to stay ignorant or indifferent. At the Melamchi Diversion Scheme Office here, there is no consultant or engineer. “There’s no work at the moment. So, is it necessary for them to be here,” says a pensive, the unofficial spokesperson. The locals say a public relations consultant hired to smooth things between the community and the project spends all his time in Kathmandu instead.

Most of the local people become furious as soon as they see any project staff. Both try to stay out of the others’ way,” says Raju Pandit Chhetri, a member of Melamchi Local Concern Group. Chhetri has tried to find out how much water will be left in the river once the tunnel starts taking it away to Kathmandu, but says no-one bothers to give him that information.

It is clear the Melamchi project has a major public relations problem here at the headworks. But it is also evident that honesty, transparency and a genuine effort to redress local grievances can address local concerns. The real challenge is to ensure that the local Maoists do not obstruct future activities. So far, the Maoists have not created many obstacles to the construction work, say the local people. “It’s surprising because they never bombed or destroyed any of the bridges,” says a local activist, requesting anonymity. He believes that the contractors have paid them a good deal of money on a regular basis and even given explosives to the Maoists.

Yeti tracker here

A 60-year-old Japanese mountaineer is undertaking a six-week expedition to prove the existence of the Yeti on the slopes of Dhaulagiri. “Many people say the yeti is only a legend while some people believe in its existence but nobody has been able to prove it,” Yoshiteru Takahashi said in Kathmandu. “I have been fascinated by this creature and came here in 1994 searching for evidence of its existence in Dhaulagiri but failed to capture it on film as I had hoped.”

Takahashi claims to have seen yeti footprints in the snow in 1994 which convinced him of the existence of the abominable snowman. Takahashi is armed with six infra-red cameras which will operate around the clock in the area where he believes the creature lives. Most explorers have given up looking for the yeti, and think it is actually a Himalayan bear that leaves the same footprints. A scalp that Sherpas thought belonged to the yeti was also proven to belong to a Himalayan blue sheep.

Nepal’s road map for peace

As the government and the Maoists sit down for the third round of talks, the human rights group INSEC has come up with a ‘road map’ plan consisting of nine phases starting with the formation of an all-party government that will include the Maoists. “All the phases are interconnected and there is room to develop sub-phases,” says Subodh Raj Pyakurel of INSEC. “It’s a long road and we believe the peace process has not actually started yet.” He said the road map is based on what expressions the government and the Maoist rebels have made public so far. The fifth phase in the INSEC document even requires ministers representing the Maoists to “take an oath in the open-air theatre publicly declaring to withdraw from the peace process if their demands are neglected”. Pyakurel believes this will bolster the psychological pressure needed to push the peace process towards a satisfactory resolution.

Contaminated colas

Nepal has begun testing several soft drinks including Coke and Pepsi after mounting public concern about a potential health hazard. A high level of pesticide contamination in the Coca-Cola and Pepsi brands bottled in India was reported by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), a Delhi-based environmental group, this month. It’s no surprise that the south-of-the-border exposé has affected Nepal. About a potential health hazard. A high level of pesticide contamination in the Coca-Cola and Pepsi brands bottled in India was reported by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), a Delhi-based environmental group, this month. It’s no surprise that the south-of-the-border exposé has affected Nepal. Contaminated colas

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Masot FM

Besides ostensibly preparing for talks and sporadic exchange of fire with the army, the Maoists are currently exploring ways to air their message. They recently began a ‘feasibility study’ for a FM radio station and party activists have set up meetings with media professionals in Kathmandu, possibly with an eye on installation and broadcast training. The group seems to have the necessary funds, but lacks the technical and professional expertise to set up and run a radio station. The Maoists may find their biggest hurdle in acquiring a license for the station. However, since they are an underground party, the issue of license may be a formality. The government has ordered state media outlets to be ‘fair’ in covering the Maoists, but it is unlikely that the Maoists will reciprocate. Details about where and when a station will be set up are not clear, although it is presumed it will be in the mid-west.
Should Nepal be secular?

Nepal is not alone in being a non-sectarian state, and the experience of secular states is not always worth emulating.

But every place has a distinctive style to socialising. There are the people in Kathmandu but you will bump into the same 100 or so people over and over. It’s a bit like that here. There are 1.5 million people in Kathmandu but you will bump into the same 100 or so people everywhere. In the 5th February anniversary, book launches, stakeholder forum of electricity consumers, discourse inaugurations, Volkswagen rallies and national day receptions. And if you were left wondering how longer the stay, desperate as we Nepalis are to know about our acquaintance’s caste, they want to suss out how long one has been in the country.

Tips for newcomers from a newcomer on how to cruise the capital’s social circuit.

Before that, in the hinterland, I would say in reply to everyone’s question about my coordinates. It’s expected you should know them. It’s a place where everyone is famous, and one is separated not by sex, but by two degrees.

Would you like a lemon soda and some compliments? Compliments and credits are bestowed in such abundance here, it’s a little wonder people walk around with their noses pointed at the ceiling. Mediocritry is everywhere, but so is the illusion of greatness. To be fair, it is indeed difficult to remain one’s unbiased judgement when one knows everyone. After just a few parties, I was convinced I was a gifted engineer, able to solve all problems. In Kathmandu you have to reciprocate everyone’s effusive flattery. For those feeling down days, head to the social events.

Drin k in hand. Immerged in long political monologues. I enjoyed small talk. Business card exchanges. Clowy eyes wandering off the next catch. It could be anywhere, but this time it is Kathmandu’s social scene. If I was an aloof, dropped from the sky, hoping from party to party around the world, it would seem that there is just one breed of humans.

Hello I am Shanti, and I was born here.

Now, who did you say you were?

My friend Shital, a smart journalist, works under a similar constraint, the perception that they are pushing the wrong agenda. “Tell them you have to write the truth, even if it is for the sake of the country, for the sake of having well-informed Nepalis,” I advised. She says she can’t because “Kathmandu is too small and I cannot afford to be ostracised.” This analogy applies not just for media, it goes for politics, village, caste, school. You never know who is going to take offence, so it’s better to play it safe.

I better circulate. Will see you around.

Neeta Pokhrel is a water and sanitation engineer who is still trying to find her woman pope, or a black pope? Change seems to take time even in democratic countries where people are sophisticated, Lal must desist from picking only on Hindus.

Conversion to a religion of one’s choice should be a fundamental right. However, there are often cases when people are lured by money and other inducements to change their religion by evangelical faiths which regard conversion as one of their tenets. The percentage of Hindus in Nepal declined between 1991 to 2001 to about 4% of the total population.

Dialogue—

In the American film, Groundhog Day, the hero is torturing by reliving the same day over and over. It’s a bit like that here. There are 1.5 million people in Kathmandu but you will bump into the same 100 or so people everywhere. In the 5th February anniversary, book launches, stakeholder forum of electricity consumers, discourse inaugurations, Volkswagen rallies and national day receptions. And if you were left wondering how long you have been in Kathmandu, you are the same people.
It is a very competitive market, and that is reflected in interest rates that bank will succeed even in a saturated market. Just goes to show: if you have something innovative to offer, your economy was not doing too well and the banking sector was already mushrooming everywhere?

| "Things are not as bad as they seem." |

How can the banking sector do well when other industries are floundering?

Our economy is unstructured and records are not maintained as they should be. But as far as banks are concerned, there is transparency because Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) monitors them. There isn't any corresponding agency to monitor private industries and companies. No one goes through their records, so something else is usually going on underground. If we were really a small, closed economy, we would have collapsed with the downward trend we saw in the last few years. Hotels being the exception. In general, the economy is not in as bad a shape as it appears. We are portrayed, as we are being misled by reports from Nepal's overseas. Lately, the boom in the housing sector has also had a multiplier effect. There seems to be plenty of liquidity in the market. Why is Kumari Bank Limited not seeking to find new business?

We have to woo and wow young entrepreneurs.

How rampant is insider trading? It is quite possible, which is why a system should be instituted to detect such cases early. In a financial transaction, if the integrity of the staff is not very clear, it can be a menace. A customer and staff within a bank will be more open to accepting kickbacks and bribes.

Is your bank found the calibre of human resource?

Similarly, NRB should send inspectors to monitor different banks. It is quite possible, which is why a system should be instated to detect such cases early. In a financial transaction, if the integrity of the staff is not very clear, it can be a menace. A customer and staff within a bank will be more open to accepting kickbacks and bribes. The government must step out from its old roles and encourage our Chambers of Commerce and Industry. They have to woo and wow young entrepreneurs. They have to maintain and supervise the quality of programs which entrepreneurs want to make.
Silver Jewelry
The Newari and Tibetan styles of jewelry from Kathmandu adorn the most discerning necks around the world. Silver jewelry can be found throughout Thamel, Patan and Bhaktapur—the last two being traditional silversmith centers over centuries. What used to be exclusively the preserve of the Shakya and Bajracharya enterprise, has had to admit Bishwakarma (or blacksmiths) too or face the possibility of dying out. Yak and Yeti Enterprises have been collecting and selling unique jewelry since 1984. What they have is markedly different from the mass produced ware out on the streets. For one thing, the finish is impeccable. Closer inspection reveals ancient Nepali designs have been given modern interpretations—elegant fluid turquoise and silver bracelets, coral hair clips, drops and necklaces. Everything in the store is sourced from silversmith families in the Valley.

Metalworks
Every copper statue of Avalokiteshvara or Saraswati, and every brass lamp (lamb) that you see today has hundreds of years of tradition behind it. The craftspeople of Patan and Bhaktapur have preserved the art of making statues, metal pots, lamps and other items, all they seized or profane, over hundreds of years by passing the techniques on from one generation to the next. Today, many of the younger ones have forsaken these traditions and opted for more modern jobs. But lately there is a distinct feel of renaissance in the air. Tamrakar Antiques in Baber Mahal Revisited has a wonderful collection of antique brass items. The items are snapped up by art enthusiasts. Dev Tamrakar remembers his favourite customer fondly, Michael S Friedman bought around 1,500 pieces from his collection and then wrote a book about the art of casting vessels, decanters and bowls. The main workshops of Fabulous Handicraft Centre are at Okubahal, the old metal working area of Patan. They turn out the most exquisite copper statues (see pic), some which take up to three years to complete. In the time-honoured fashion, three craftspeople work on each piece, no matter how small—one to model the wax, cover it with clay and finally to pour the molten copper into the clay mould, another to polish the finished product, and the third to etch details and finally a person to paint the face and body.

Fabric
Who would have thought an innocuous siling plant could clothe royals? Nettles have a long history in Europe, where it was made into fine lace, velvet, satin and muslin—fit for the French court—before Marco Polo brought silk back from the Orient. In Nepal today the very same plant has been harvested for fabric made into everything from shirts to tablecloths. Mark Rose came to Nepal in 1983 after he heard about our pashmina—the special high-yield Himalayan nettle. He soon began manufacturing nettle yarn (see pic, left) under the Wild Fibers label and now has two stores in Thamel, with a third in the pipeline. The Mandala Boutique, part of Yak and Yeti Enterprises, has an array of silk saris, scarves and shawls, all hand-dyed and painted by skilled local artists. The silk may come from China, but the art and designs are pure Nepali. The shawls and scarves are popular export items with their distinctive designs and beautiful hues. The most coveted is the Mandala sari, which is truly one of a kind. Binita Basnet of Clay Crafts & More is just as adept at fabric painting. She works alone on the five and a half yards that make a sari and the results are breathtaking.

Pashmina
Two years ago, if you said “70:30” people would think you were talking about basketball scores. Today, everyone knows it is the standard ratio of pashmina to silk. When our shawls became status symbols among the Western elite, it heralded a boom in exports. Today, what has been lost in the exclusivity cachet is more than made up by the volume of exports. Even though exports are not what they used to be, Nepal Pashmina has produced and exported quality since 1985, while upscale boutiques like Zaren in Baber Mahal Revisited have designer stoles and shawls embellished with fine embroidery and sequins.

Thangkas
Few of us know that Kathmandu Valley’s Newari paubha painting technique (see pic, left) was the precursor to thangkas. Paul’s Newari for coconut leaf parchment and this is used for anything that is rice or lovely. It’s a fitting, if a little understated, description for the jewel toned paintings largely known as the thangkas today. Pashminas date back to the 12th century when Malla kings patronised Newar painters. The Newari style was taken to Tibet by Bhrikuti, the daughter of Amalavijaya the Malla king and patron of the arts, who is now immortalised as the Green Tara. Today thangkas and pashminas are widely available. Tibetan thangkas have gained an appreciative audience abroad where they are found in private homes as well as monasteries and art galleries. Nearly 80 percent of the stock in thangkas at Thangka House in Thamel, who have been in the business since 1970, are made in-house by master artisans and their apprentices.

Carpets
Carpet weaving came into its own only with the influx of Tibetan refugees in the 1960s who settled in small weaving communities around Boudha and Jawalakhel. Designs and colour schemes adapted to trade winds are capricious. A combination of terror has impacted consumer confidence. Advertising budgets were slashed and we lost out even on the old word-of-mouth. The domestic market is stagnating because of the volume of exports, even though exports are not what they used to be. Nepal Pashmina has produced and exported quality since 1985, while upscale boutiques like Zaren in Baber Mahal Revisited have designer stoles and shawls embellished with fine embroidery and sequins.
Tea
Nepalis love their cuppa. Chia is an integral part of the Nepali experience, which goes back to 1843 when Colonel Gajraj Singh Thapa, the son-in-law of Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana, took a tour of Darjeeling and developed a taste for the brew that was grown in the area. He established tea estates in Ilam and Soktim, reasoning that it had the same geographical and climatic essentials as Darjeeling. He wasn’t wrong. In fact, it turns out, Ilam may be even better suited. Today over 3,000 hectares in Jhapa, Ilam, Terathum, Dhankuta, and Panchthar grow tea on public and private estates. At Kamal Raj Mainali’s Nepal Tea House in New Road there is a rich bouquet of teas: fruit flavours, herbal, green, black and more.

Handicraft
From cushion covers to clay pots, they all bear the legend ‘Made in Nepal’. While most never reach the local retail market, many outlets in Kupondole offer a wide sample of Nepali cottage craft. Dhukuti, the retail outlet of Association for Craft Producers (ACP), has been selling a diverse catalogue since 1984. ACP is a private initiative providing design, market management and technical services to primarily women low-income craft producers from over 17 districts. Handicraft stores like Dhukuti and Mahaguthi have copperware, exquisite Dhaka fabrics, funky felt shoes and toys, ceramics, knits and Mihiila art. Binita Basnet’s Clay Crafts & More houses her uniquely floral creations. She specialises in floral designs and the ash is her medium she paints exquisitely on chiffon saris and scarves, silk and satin. Her Bishalnagar outlet has the feel of a community centre with art and cooking classes, and even an in-house astrologer, perhaps to advise you on the best buys.

Paper
For over 1,000 years baidyas wrapped their herbal medicines in Nepali kagaj. The Nepali bureaucracy to this day needs special deeds done in lokta fibre. And now the world is finally catching up to what we’ve always known—paper from the Daphne cannabina is two up on wood pulp, being durable and naturally insect repellent. The lokta shrub grows between 1,200-3,000m in the Himalaya. If cut without damaging the main root, the shrub will be ready for another harvest in five years and the government has taken an active role in issuing licenses and rotating plots. Complying with environment friendly practices Nepal Women Crafts, promoters of women entrepreneurs, has been in the paper making business for the last six years. Its factory in Bajura turns out reams of fabulously textured coloured sheets, some with block prints done in gold or silver, others with dried pressed flowers. According to the weight and quality, lokta paper is turned into diverse items like notebooks, bags and designer lampshades like the distinctive cloud shaped curlicues at Paper Moon in Baber Mahal Revisited.

Khukuris
The curved dagger in a leather sheath is synonymous with Nepal, and popularised when villains in several James Bond movies were seen wielding it. The very antithesis of a decorative jewelled stiletto, the khukuri is essentially utilitarian, which is why the cheap ware on the streets of Thamel fall short. Serious collectors head to Khukuri House, either in Thamel or Ekantakuna. They are the official suppliers of the functional Service No 1 design to British Gurkha regiments and since 1991, their factory in Dharan has turned out exquisite carbon steel khukuris from the Bhojpuri style to the special kothimora given to retiring Gurkha soldiers. The proprietor, Lalit Kumar Lama, an ex-serviceman himself, is proud that his khukuris are used all over the world. The major importers of these unique Nepali knives are the US, the UK and surprisingly even South Africa where it’s called the ‘biltong khukuri’.
The other very popular Akukuri’s Nepal Distilleries’ most famous spirit ever. Khukri XXX Rum is the preferred drink up in the Himalayas that is also fashionable in Valley watering holes. From 1959 onwards, this smooth rum has slowly gained a worldwide fan following. The Khukri Coronation line, with a bottle in the shape of the curved blade, was introduced to commemorate the coronation of King Birendra and continues to be a bestseller with a 99 percent domestic market share. It has earned honours at international rum festivals and it is not without a little pride that we knock back what is lauded as one of the top 10 rums in the world. Jai Ho!
not looking forward to cancun

Richard Grassi in Rome

Women's health is threatened by an effective global campaign being waged by conservative Roman Catholic organisations from the United States, in harmony with the policies of President George W. Bush, of Protestant faith, and the diplomatic efforts of the Vatican, say reproductive rights activists. The campaign charges that the international organisation is undermining the right of women to decide whether to give birth and how many children they want in an age promoting abortion.

The World Health Organisation calculates that 20 million women die each year during pregnancy or childbirth, nearly all in developing countries.

The worst-affected is Africa, where more than half a million women die each year during pregnancy or childbirth, nearly all in developing countries.

The attack on the anti-abortion movement is concentrated—and with some success —on the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the primary source of financing for government agencies and NGOs to be spent on maternal health programs and family planning services in 140 countries. The US Congress voted 15 July to withhold funds UNFPA in contribution for the years 2004 and 2005, totaling $500 million. This confirms that the "public policy process is increasingly tainted by misinformation and lies" the "White House," commented theologian and activist Frances Kissling, president of the international group Catholics for a Free Choice (CFCF), headquartered in the United States. According to the group, Catholic Church law states that it is as much the right as it is the responsibility of Catholics to follow their own conscience in moral matters, even when these are in conflict with Church teachings. Nancy Nordhrop, president of the US-based Centre for Reproductive Rights, said recently that the Bush government is sacrificing the health and lives of women and families in poor countries in order to satisfy an extreme anti-abortion minority. "The UNFPA programs save lives by providing modern equipment to hospitals and by improving prenatal and maternal care," she said. The "extremist minority" Nordhrop mentioned is represented in the US Catholic world by three powerful the WTO meeting in Cancun next month will be a repeat of the secrecy, arm twisting and display of brute power to protect interests of the rich.

The anti-abortion movement is under attack by an effective global campaign being waged by conservative Roman Catholic organisations from the United States, in harmony with the policies of President George W. Bush, of Protestant faith, and the diplomatic efforts of the Vatican, say reproductive rights activists. The campaign charges that the international organisation is undermining the right of women to decide whether to give birth and how many children they want in an age promoting abortion.

The World Health Organisation calculates that 20 million women die each year during pregnancy or childbirth, nearly all in developing countries. The WHO reports that some 25 million legal abortions are performed annually worldwide, more than half a million women die each year during pregnancy or childbirth, nearly all in developing countries. The attack on the anti-abortion movement is concentrated — and with some success — on the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the primary source of financing for government agencies and NGOs to be spent on maternal health programs and family planning services in 140 countries. This confirms that the “public policy process is increasingly tainted by misinformation and lies” the “White House,” commented theologian and activist Frances Kissling, president of the international group Catholics for a Free Choice (CFCF), headquartered in the United States. According to the group, Catholic Church law states that it is as much the right as it is the responsibility of Catholics to follow their own conscience in moral matters, even when these are in conflict with Church teachings. Nancy Nordhrop, president of the US-based Centre for Reproductive Rights, said recently the Bush government is sacrificing the health and lives of women and families in poor countries in order to satisfy an extreme anti-abortion minority. “The UNFPA programs save lives by providing modern equipment to hospitals and by improving prenatal and maternal care,” she said. The “extremist minority” Nordhrop mentioned is represented in the US Catholic world by three powerful...
Battle heats up

Religion and the state are beating the drums of war against aid agencies that specialise in sexuality and reproduction.

Conservative institutions—Population Research Institute, Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute and Human Life International—were among those announcing a boycott of a China conference on population and development in Beijing this week. The conference is being held in the same month by the National University of Singapore’s Asia Research Institute, a globalised age, said Dr Rujaya Abhakorn, lecturer in South-East Asian studies, Mc Arthur Foundation.

The other winners were Chinese AIDS activist Gao Yaojie, Japanese health activist Tetsu Nakamura who has worked in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Japanese environmentalist Seiie Toyama and the head of East Timor’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Antero Lopes. The Philippines-based Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation said in a statement last week: “Mr Lyngdoh is being recognized for his convincing validation of free and fair elections as the foundation and best hope of democratic self-determination in India.”

The vast majority of the Chinese, that is its 900 million peasants, do not enjoy the basic right to choose where they live in their country. Only a relatively small number are temporarily allowed to work in the cities. They do not have access to the courts, and are barred from access to schools, hospitals, nurseries and public housing. But the government has realized it is in a stronger economic position to employ the rural population only in agriculture—the surplus workforce is estimated at 150 to 180 million. Their remittances often underpin the prosperity of large parts of rural China. New major changes are afoot under a directive issued by the State Council. The document says rural migrants would be given ‘legal’ rights to work in cities, whereas earlier laws discriminated against those who were not able to cut funds for reproductive health programs within the United States because it would be impossible to employ the rural population only in agriculture—the surplus workforce is estimated at 150 to 180 million. Their remittances often underpin the prosperity of large parts of rural China. New major changes are afoot under a directive issued by the State Council. The document says rural migrants would be given ‘legal’ rights to work in cities, whereas earlier discrimination laws were enforced.

The policy changes have their economic reasoning, because Beijing sees raising farmers’ incomes as essential to maintaining healthy economic growth and bridging the rural-urban gap.
Role of king is crucial

Baburam Bhattarai in Kantipur, 10 August

After the dramatic ups and downs of the last three months, the old regime and the new regime have once again agreed to sit for talks. However, since the old regime only makes verbal commitment to talks but does not do the necessary groundwork for the peace process, there are doubts if the third round of talks will be successful. Moreover, visible and invisible powers have been the major obstacles for the talks, and their role is yet to be seen.

The role of the king in the talks is going to be crucial. The ground reality remains that after the king’s October Fourth move he has given himself executive powers. Since the talks will focus on the regime, they cannot be conclusive if they do not conform to the king’s wish. Ironically, the king has hesitated to admit that reality in public. Instead, he is drumming up the propaganda that the present government has all the executive powers and he is pretending as if he is talking to us through the same council of minister. The king may have his own compulsions or he may be fooling us. We, however, remain confident that we have been fighting the king’s army and at the same time we are also holding talks with his representatives.

We had accepted the previous government negotiators as his representatives. But, since the army refused to implement the agreement of the second round of talks, a question has reasonably cropped up on the relation between the king and the army. Therefore, either the king should be present at the talks this time, or we want them and the army to implement the agreement of the talks beforehand. It remains to be seen if the king can empower the present government negotiators and give them the authority to decide his army and the army’s fate. This is the knotty issue that will determine the success or failure of the talks.

Next round

Madhumita Raskhbad, 11 August

The five agitating political parties are planning to make their movement so aggressive that, they claim, the entire nation will come to a grinding halt. “All the five parties have decided to call their activities and the people to Kathmandu,” said People’s Front Nepal’s Lila Mani Poudel. The tentative launch date is the first week of September. The biggest party among the five, UML, has already told its workers to be present in the capital by the end of this week. The Nepal Sadbhavna Party has made a similar call. “There will be a typhoon,” warns UML general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal. “The seventh round of our movement will be costly for the regressive forces.” On the agenda are shutdown strikes, keeping taxpayers from paying taxes and obstructing government. The parties want the private sector to participate.

“The parties’ leaders have asked us to close down our factories,” said FNC’s Chaudhary Prasad Dhalak, just after a meeting with GP Koirala.

In conclusion

Nepal Samacharpatra, 1 August

The king and Maoist rebels could have a secret pact suspects Girija Prasad Koirala of the Nepali Congress. “If the Maoists do not hold talks as we have demanded in our 16-point demand, their intention would become public,” said Koirala at a public meeting in Bagmati this week. “If they abstain themselves from the talks, it will be clear that they do not want a political and democratic solution.” He said that the achievements of the 1990 People’s Movement were being eroded by the king and the Maoists. “That is why we need to hold the secret round of talks to recover the rights of the people. If the people reject them, he will not even get a house to stay in,” he said.

He warned that the king may have to leave the country and start a hotel business to earn a living if he does not correct his mistakes. For some, asking the king and his men to allow a republican system may seem like a distant dream. But for those who know the scientific rules for social development and the subjective need of the age, this idea is quite reasonable. If the king cannot give up the throne just like that, we have the proposal of allowing the people to decide on the matter. That is why we have been stressing on round table talks, interim government and a constituent assembly. The future of the third round of talks will depend on what will be the old regimes’ response to this political agenda we have already presented.

Our party deems it necessary that the parties of the dissolved parliament should also participate in the talks. We believe that these parties are specifically present between the armed forces of our party and the king. Without the participation and the agreement of these parties, the talks cannot reach a logical ending. Ironically, the parliamentary parties have not been able to realise this serious matter. Of course, there are some procedural problems for participation as they are not in the government nor do they share our principles. The 18-point demand of the parties could be a meeting point. True that there are flaws in their demands, but most of them do resemble with our own political agenda.

In the present capitalist age, any country is influenced by international politics. More so, with a country like ours that has already been semi-colonialised and is heavily influenced by neo-colonisation. Among all kinds of foreign powers at play here, two deserve the biggest attention. One is the king, while the other bears the political parties. Both are all out to keep us from gaining power, while their lip service has been in favour of peace talks. The American move to use Nepal against Indian and China is very serious. In a reply to us, the old regime recently admitted that there are American military advisers based in Nepal, but temporarily. The US has been stressing talks but its real intentions remain secret. It actually wants war, therefore, the royal palace and the Royal Nepali Army may try to sabotage talks.

Separated at birth

After 30 years, Madhuri Hugler (pic, right) returned to Nepal from Switzerland to find her twin sister. With the help of this report in Kantipur, she not only found her sister but her father as well.

A story first appeared in the first issue of the Nepali Times. Since then, Sirjina Giri, 2 August

The father…

Tears stream down her face. Looking at her daughter, he asks with a dry throat, “Have you married?” Wiping her tears, the woman asks, “Why did you leave us so soon after we were born?” The interpreter struggled to find the words to match translate the emotional outpourings between a father who didn’t know English and the daughter who couldn’t speak Nepali. “On God, no! I can die peacefully and reach heaven” says Dhakninath Acharya, 65, (left) who spent half his life looking for his twin daughters.

On 31 July, the father and daughter met for the first time in three decades. Their story begins 31 years ago. At that time, the Prithvi Rajmarg had not been built and the family lived in a remote Dhorge village. After giving birth to a son and a daughter, my wife had complications during the third delivery,” recalls Dhakninath.

He rushed his wife to Bir Hospital in the capital where the doctors delivered twins but could not save his daughter. “The doctors told me that the newborns would die without a mother’s care,” Acharya remembers, looking interrers his daughters. “Why they had to keep you at the hospital. Even when I visited you everyday with milk and cord.” A few months later, when his wife got the hospital’s doctors were babies. Jamuna doesn’t want her in-laws to find out about these developments in her life. “I was born between her real father and her twin sister when she was visiting her foster parents. She spoke about it to her widowed foster mother, who didn’t take the news well, but her foster father’s best friend helped get all information regarding her adoption. In 2001, Dhakninath, her foster mother finally revealed that she had been adopted through the help of a nurse working at Bir Hospital. The story matched that of Ganga, her Swiss twin sister.

Twelve days after the first story the news, the twins met each other for the first time since they were babies. Jamuna doesn’t want her in-laws to find out about these developments in her life. “A new relationship has begun, but this should not affect my ties with my foster family,” she explains.

...and the sister

Kantipur, 12 August

A story first appeared in the thirtieth, the twins were merely curious about each other till they finally met in person. When they did meet there was no melodramatic tears and hugs: just a direct gaze and a smile, almost of recognition. Breaking the silence, the elder sister from Switzerland asked, “Did you go through a rough time? You’re younger twin shook her head and replied that her foster parents brought her up with love and care.

Born to Dharki Nath Acharya, Ganga and Jamuna (not real names) were brought up in two different worlds—one in the West and other in Nepal. Jamuna grew up in a middle class family and is a working woman. She grew up as a popular Newari girl who was well educated. She read news about the meeting between her real father and her twin sister when she was visiting her foster parents. She spoke about it to her widowed foster mother, who didn’t take the news well, but her foster father’s best friend helped get all information regarding her adoption. In 2001, July, her foster mother finally revealed that she had been adopted through the help of a nurse working at Bir Hospital. The story matched that of Ganga, her Swiss twin sister.

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QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“Afghanistan and Iraq, the US army now wants to create a military base in Nepal. This is why we are crying foul.”

-Baburam Bhattarai on BBC/Nepal Service, 13 August.
G

ven the conditions that artists in Nepal work under, it is a
wonder that they produce at all. I have written about
this before, elsewhere, focusing in particular on the
inhuman hour of writing Nepali literature. The average
print run for a literary book is approximately 500 copies.
The price for the book will generally not top Rs 150. This
means that if the authors earn a 10 percent royalty, s/he
gets Rs. 7.50 over the course of the year or more that it
takes to sell all the copies. This is only if the distributors
pay the authors, who in turn pay the author due royalties.
More often than not, of

| Organisers for the arts
| by MANUSHREE THAPA

It is not clear if Mahajanaka refers to a particular king or to a dynasty that ruled Videha. From the Buddhist texts, it appears that Janak Sadhu was the last king of Videha, a dynasty that can be traced back to the mythological period. The story of Mahajanaka is often given discourses and sermons, or in the form of a book. In 1977, Thailand's King Bhumibol published a book titled "The Story of Mahajanaka" in Thai with the title "King Bhumibol." The book uses dharma riddles and has lead some to suspect that it may be semi-autobiographical. Some year, it was rumoured that the king was contemplating abdicating and entering into a monastery. The monk'sDownloader

Nepal's permanent envoy to Thailand

In Bangkok, they call Anil Sakya Nepal's "philosopher to the masses." Not only is he an authority on Buddhist studies, the author of "Abhidhamma and the Mahajanaka" has also written the study of King Bhumibol's "The Story of Mahajanaka". The book is a bestseller in Thailand and is seen as an important work in the field of Buddhist studies. Sakya's work has been translated into several languages and has lead some to suspect that it may be semi-autobiographical. The book has been translated into Thai, with the title "King Bhumibol." The book uses dharma riddles and has lead some to suspect that it may be semi-autobiographical. Some year, it was rumoured that the king was contemplating abdicating and entering into a monastery. The monk'sDownloader

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### FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS
- Sizzle and Shine Summer Show: paintings, prints, and photographs by well-known local and international artists from noon to 7PM, Tuesday through Sunday at Gallery R, LaxmiRani, 434694.
- Paintings for Peace: Pradip Sodha’s ‘Azad’ at the British Council, Lannachaur from 18 August.

### DINERS
- Yoga workshop with Carolyn at The Retreat, Palanchowk, 15-17 or 20 August. 5511455 Website: www.carolynbooth.com
- Ghatam live on 10 August at the Regal Ballroom, Hotel Yak & Yeti. Tickets, inclusive of dinner and drinks: Rs 2,499 singe, Rs 3,999 couple.
- Popboat! Play Back Theatre share your stories on 17,18 August. Inside Saipar Academy, New Baneshwor, 4473746

### MUSIC
- Thunderbolt live on 20 August at Summit Hotel Courtyard. 5324694
- Catch 22 back at the Rum Doodle from 10 August.
- Cadence live 7.30PM every Wednesday and Saturday. Rs 200 entry. Upstairs Jazz Bar, LaxmiRani.
- Vayu live every Friday night, jam sessions every Wednesday night. Jatra, Thamel. 4256622
- Live Acoustic Jam 7PM on Saturday at Himalaite Café, Thamel. 4256738
- Hola on 15 August. Robin W Lozen: on 16 August. 8PM onwards at The Jazz Bar, Shangri-la Hotel, LaxmiRani, 4415999.
- Rusty Nails every Friday at Fusion, Dwarka’s Hotel. 4479488

### DRINKS
- Uncorked wine festival at Hotel Yak & Yeti, Debar Marg. 4248999
- Liquor Buffet 7-8PM at the Splash Bar & Grill. Rs 50 per person. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu. 4411818
- Kirroy’s Monsoon Wine Festival 14 different wines at Kirroy’s of Kathmandu, Thamel. 4250440

### FOOD
- Momo’s and More the finest momos in town now at Dobhi, 5320692
- Grand opening of JJ Café & Bar with Nalini Chitrakar and Sanjeev Pradhan. Tickets: Rs 300, Jamland Junction, 4250263
- Biryan and Kabob Festival from 12-27 August at The Café, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- Chef’s Special Lunch at the Old Adobe for Rs 499. South Indian specialists at lunch for Rs 199, BBQ on Friday night at Rs 399. Shimabara Garden, Shangri-la Hotel, LaxmiRani.
- Café Mitra New menu, spicy Chinese food every Saturday. Jatra, Thamel. 4250915
- Chimney Restaurant Fire continental cuisine at The Chimney Restaurant, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 4248999
- Executive lunch meals at BanchantaGhar Restaurant and Bar, Kamaladi. 4251217
- Express Bar recently renovated at La Dolce Vita, Thamel 4418112
- Roadhouse Café now in Patan, opposite St Mary’s School. Wood fired pizzas, Baskin Robbins icecream, cocktails and coffee. 5521755
- Saturday BBQ Lunch at Club Himalaya Nagarkot. Rs 50 per person. 4680083
- Popaya salad, seasonal vegetables with fish or chicken and Italian icecream at Singma, Jawalakhel, Lalitpur. 5520004

### GETWAYS
- Five Star getaways deal at The Fort Resort, Nagarkot. 4267799
- Dakshinkali Package every Saturday Rs 500+tax. 4370714, 4371537
- Shivasari Heights Cottage 30 minutes from Kathmandu, at the edge of the Shivapuri Reserve. Email: info@escape2nepal.com Website: www.escape2nepal.com
- Great Godawari Getaway special weekend packages. Godawari Village Resort. 5560675
- Gamcha Organic Farm Guesthouse Traditional Nepali Farmhouse. 6637174
- Escape to Jomsom this summer. Rs 3,999 per person at Jomsom Mountain Resort. 4496110
- TGF overnight packages at Dwarka’s Hotel, 4794948
- Shivasari Cottage a natural environment, luxurious rooms at Shivasari Dadagon. Email: cbbasnyat@hotmail.com 4354331
- Monsoon Retreat special deals in Bardia for expats. Jungle Base Camp. 061-532112 Email: cbbasnyat@hotmail.com 4354331

### NEPALI WEATHER
- After experiencing the cleanest week of the year last week, Kathmandu’s air quality is back to unhealthier normal levels. The average PM10 (particles matter small enough to enter the human body) count at Patu Sattak was 157, an increase of 62 percent compared to last week. The PM10 level was above national standards on five out of the seven days at Patu Sattak and Patan Hospital. The air in the residential areas of Thamel was comparatively better.

### CLASSIFIED
#### For insertions ring NT Marketing at 4226977-4226799
#### BOOKWORM

This book seeks to portray, in vivid detail, an integral part of Nepali social life. The authors believe modernisation and the introduction of new technologies threaten traditional methods employed in craft making. They credit Royal Nepal Academy and National Council for Science and Technology for helping artisans to cope with new innovations.

Living with Kilims Alatekar Hull, Nicholas Bernard, James Merrill Thomas and Hudson, 1996 (Paperback) Rs 2,200

Kilim is the Turkish word for a flatweave or pileless rug. These marvelously decorative tribal weavings have become fashionable features of interior decoration and is the subject of a comprehensive survey in this book. Over 250 colour photographs and a clear and detailed guide helps collectors identify traditional styles with ease.

Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 4237711, mandala@ccdl.com

####neapali weather
by MAUSAM BEED

There was a dramatic change in the pressure pattern this week over the Himalaya earlier this week. Low pressure over the Ganga plains merged into a deep trough over northeast India and swallowed up moisture from the Bay. The emergence of unusually rainless days is a consequence of this pressure war. This satellite picture taken on Thursday afternoon shows this pattern is likely to persist over the weekend, which means we’re in for more than twice in this weekend. But rest assured, the rains will return with renewed vigour.

### KATHMANDU VALLEY
- Average PM10 levels in selected points in Kathmandu 3-9 August.
- Good < 60
- Ok 61 to 120
- Unhealthy 121 to 350
- Harmful 351 to 425
- Hazardous >425

### NEPALI TIMES #158
12.30, 3.30, 6.30 PM
Call 4442814, 4442847

### JALENI CINEMA

Koi Mil Gaya is being touted as the desi version of ET meets X-Files. Rakesh Roshan’s mega production aims at changing our conception of this genre in Indian cinema. The movie, starring his son Hritik Roshan, Preity Zinta and Rishi, uses the expertise of international production teams who worked on independence Day and Godzilla. As always, we have to suspend our disbelief, a spaceport that responds to the sound of ‘Aum’ but at least we can look forward to a new experience and perhaps the skittiest Bollywood sci-fi thriller ever made.

Kathmandu Valley

- Friday 30
- Saturday 31
- Sunday 31
- Monday 32
- Tuesday 31
- Wednesday 30

### NEPAL TIMES #158
12.30, 3.30, 6.30 PM
Call 4442920 for bookings.

www.jainepal.com

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Kathmandu Valley

- Friday 30
- Saturday 31
- Sunday 31
- Monday 32
- Tuesday 31
- Wednesday 30

### NEPAL WEATHER
- What you burn is what you breathe.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Weather Quality</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>PM10</th>
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<td>Hazardous</td>
<td>&gt;425</td>
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### KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

- After experiencing the cleanest week of the year last week, Kathmandu’s air quality is back to unhealthier normal levels. The average PM10 (particles matter small enough to enter the human body) count at Patu Sattak was 157, an increase of 62 percent compared to last week. The PM10 level was above national standards on five out of the seven days at Patu Sattak and Patan Hospital. The air in the residential areas of Thamel was comparatively better.

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ANIEL ANGELUS

O n Wednesday, Nepalis celebrated Gai Jatra with political satire, outlandish costumes and cross dressing. It was therefore a readymade occasion for the Blue Diamond Society (BDS) to stage Nepal’s annual gay pride march. Sunil Babu Pant, the founder, says, “All we want is to bring about awareness about homosexuality and celebrate it. We are not changing Gai Jatra into a gay jatra. This exercises our right to express ourselves.” BDS tried to model Wednesday’s parade after ‘western’ ones, but that’s not how it worked out. There are those who are willing to come out but aren’t prepared for it, while others desperately want to prove to themselves just how comfortable they are with their sexuality. A number of them have peers “pushing them out of the closet”. It is a subterfuge to come out on this day of all those available on the calendar—outlandish costumes, unusual behaviour and political lampoons are to be expected. So who’s to discern that they are, in fact, showing their true colours, if all the other citizens of the kingdom are similarly indulging in what is considered outlandish? This parade was not about pride as much as it was about camouflage. (Much like people wearing GAY AND PROUD t-shirts in a predominantly gay city like West Hollywood in the US.) Whatever point BDS tried to get across was sublimated by the farcical nature of the festival. Having said that, it does take courage to do even that much in an overtly homophobic society.

There isn’t much space in the public sphere here for men who have sex with men (MSM). This mentality is prevalent throughout Asia with little exception. The societal construction of ‘gayness’ runs something like this: if a man is attracted to someone of his own sex, and is willing to express it, he is gay. And being gay means he usually wants to be a woman. If that’s the case, then he must resort to imitating women as a drag queen. And if he does wear frocks and makeup, then prostitution is the seemingly obvious next step. It is this brand of fallacious reasoning that rules stereotypes of gays. In turn, it trickles down to the closet MSM who may identify himself as all man, but with a different sexual preference. Even in a haven like BDS there are those that have no access to an alternate view and are forced to model themselves on such archaic gender roles.

Many, who are definitely masculine, but are aware of their attraction to other men, seem to be estranged from this emerging community because the social strata even within this community is rather rigid. More often than not, joining and identifying with BDS connotes a desire to be a woman, which comes with it’s own set of stereotypes—pull out the chiffon sari and magic marker makeup. Of course the members also have to deal with additional ridicule and abuse from society as a whole, some of which has been reported in the local media.

Nobody wants to be a victim. Everyone wants to be heard, and if nothing else, the BDS parade succeeded in doing that in some measure. As ‘Preeti’, wearing a little black cocktail dress for the parade, put it, “We deserve the same rights accorded to straight people: we don’t want to be afraid, we want exposure. Unless society acknowledges us, we cannot move forward. We don’t want a revolution, just the same respect given to everyone else.”

Angel Angelus is a staff writer at WAVE.
News in Briefs

When Madan Kala Devi Karna was a small girl, it was already clear that she had a special talent for art. She coloured the earthen walls of her tala home with intricate motifs and striking colours. Like other Mahili girls, Madan Kala learned to paint from her mother, but her interpretation of the traditional art form that depicts daily life, religious figures, mandalas and animals, shone with a vibrant sensitivity seldom seen elsewhere.

In 1994, Madan Kala decided to redirect her talent for painting to this end. Her work had taught her that financial independence could be the catalyst for change, so she opened Janapal Graydon Centre (JHC) and immediately took on three women as trainees. Today she employs 20 women trained at the centre who render Mithila art on handmade paper, handicrafts, fabric and murals.

Madan Kala took her work with women one step further last year when she established Mahili Women Empowerment Movement (MWEM) based in Janapal. Eight other women help her teach vocational skills like painting, stitching and basket weaving. She has learnt to work around cultural sensitivities. “I have to work in a way that no one can say anything negative,” she says. By ensuring the women learn inside the small hall she had made on her family property, the men are unable to accuse her of “exposing” the women.

What began as an exercise in women’s empowerment has now become an accessible art form that is gaining global exposure. “Mithila art is so appealing because like a tree its roots are deep in tradition while its branches seek new heights,” says Madan Kala. Which explains how a glowing cow can share the same stretch of rice paper as a train. Despite the accolades for her July exhibition at Gallery 9, this folk artist remains modest and focused. “My purpose and my art is to uplift the women in my community,” she says. (*Shaddha Basnyat*)

Our Heartfelt Recollections on the Auspicious and Glorious Occasion of the 67th Independence Day of India.

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