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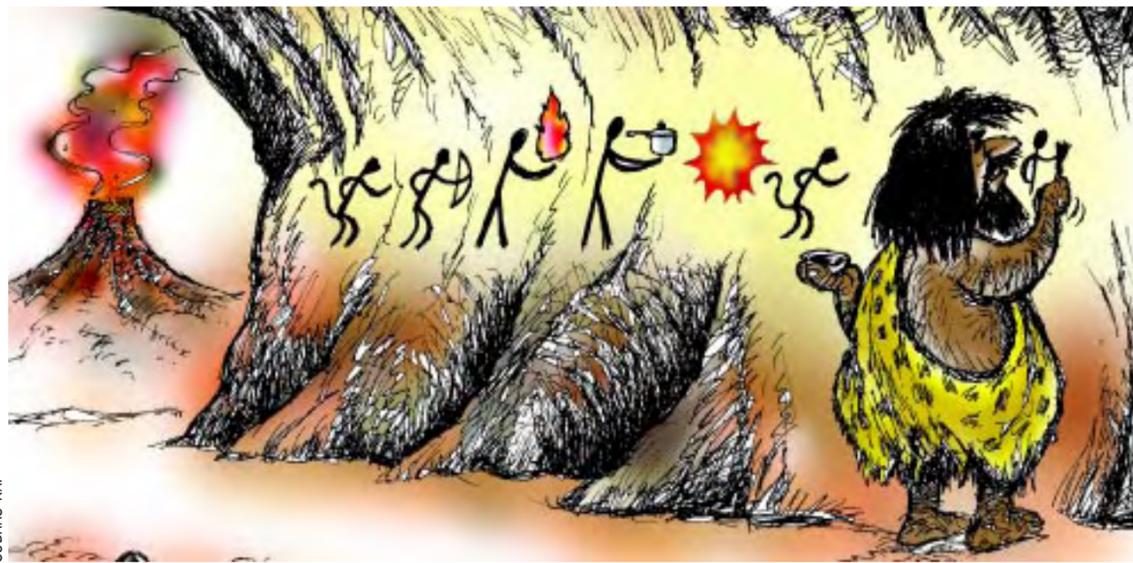
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Forests and trees

After an emergency meeting with 15 Nepal-based donor groups on Thursday, the government withdrew its decision to pocket 40 percent of community forestry earnings. "This is a good decision that acknowledges the immense contribution made by users to Nepal's forests," says Karl Schuler from Swiss Development Cooperation. Outrage over the ordinance, announced by the government last month in its budget statement, has united 13,000 forest user groups, environmentalists, donors and ordinary citizens who said it threatened 30 years of accomplishments.

See page 3.

Back to the drawing board



SUBHAS RAI

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA
More than two months after coming to power, the Thapa government finally has a time and venue for peace talks with the Maoists. In Nepalganj on Sunday, two negotiators from each side will try to move beyond pleasantries to substantial political issues.

The public stands the two sides have on the monarchy, constitution and the army are so contrary that they appear irreconcilable. The seven-month ceasefire period has not seen major outbreaks of fighting, but things are far from normal.

Maoist statements and interviews are designed to confuse, and appear deliberately contradictory. Baburam Bhattarai often takes the ideological hardline on the monarchy, and is

still saying the king must go (see p 12). But there appears to be a slight shift in nuance: gone is the strident call for a peoples' republic. The Maoists are now saying let the people decide through a referendum.

The government says it is ready to discuss everything including constitutional amendments, but the constitutional monarchy is a no-go area. "There will be absolutely no compromise on that," says Kamal Thapa, the government spokesman and member of the government negotiating duo.

Two other things are different in this round: the Maoist's call for the government to get the parties involved and their demand that King Gyanendra personally guarantee decisions reached. Interestingly, it is now Girija Prasad Koirala who appears even more anti-king than

the Maoists. The five party alliance has flatly rejected calls by both the government and the Maoists to take part in the talks because they say it will give legitimacy to the royal government. Commentators have noticed an inconsistency here: the parties say no peace process will be successful without their involvement, yet they refuse to take part in it.

Public posturing and polarised positions have now taken the government and Maoists so far apart that many are wondering whether the talks are a waste of time. There is a widespread sense of foreboding that if this round gets messed up, it will go back to an even more brutal and violent conflict after the monsoon.

Kamal Thapa believes there is a middle path between the entrenched positions. "That is why we are having talks. There certainly will be

some give and take," he said. Baburam Bhattarai told *BBC Nepali Service* on Wednesday that the government's rigidity was only a bargaining ploy. "Their stand on constitutional monarchy is for public consumption and it does not have any meaning," he said. That line of argument opens him to the same criticism: that the demand for a republic is also a negotiating ploy. Bhattarai admitted to the BBC, "It all depends upon the king. If he chooses to honour the people's wishes, the talks will certainly be positive."

The fact that both the sides have agreed to talk despite their rigid positions is itself proof they are ready for compromise, and everything else is muscle-flexing. It is now clear that international pressure played a big role in bringing the Maoists to the table, and it may have a bigger role in the peace process than is apparent. The US-UK line has been to speak softly and carry a big stick. "The international community will do what it takes to stop them [Maoists]," senior British foreign ministry official, Mike O'Brien, said during a visit last year.

But foreign involvement is a double-edged sword. Despite post-9/11 convergence of geopolitical interest in the region, India and China are still suspicious of increased American presence in the Himalaya. Both have ruled out outside mediation even in the peace process, saying that would give a legitimate government and rebel forces equal status.

Indian ambassador to Nepal, Shyam Saran, said on Wednesday, "Both the parties in the peace talks are Nepalis, and they are perfectly capable of solving the problem themselves, so there is no question of outside involvement." ♦

Times nepalnews.com Weekly Internet Poll # 98

Q. Should the political parties join the government's negotiating efforts with the Maoists?

Total votes: 1,063

Weekly Internet Poll # 99. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Should Girija P Koirala retire from politics?

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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 Theravada Buddhism, that he published the book, *The Story of Mahajanaka* 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 Chakkri 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 Darbhanga 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 well-known sages conducted religious discourses. He was also a wise king—even *rishis* extolled his learning and erudition. There is little doubt that King Bhumibol (pic, at right paying respect to a monk recently) sees his role as a modern-day Janak.



continued → p13



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STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



In the king we trust...

...but not in the residual paraphernalia of absolute monarchy.

ROUND THREE, THEN WHAT?

It looks like the Maoist tactic of low-intensity offensives had the desired effect of getting the government negotiator to heli-hop to Nepalganj to fix the date and venue for the third round of talks for Sunday. The government's strategy of deliberate drift wasn't taking this anywhere.

Meanwhile, the political parties are still sulking, stubbornly refusing to take part in any talks, while warning ominously of a "decisive" seventh phase of agitation that will bring "the country to its knees" with the veiled threat that demos could "turn violent". Girijababu is in Mahottari this week thinking aloud about his hunch that the king and the Maoists have forged an "unholy alliance" against democracy. This brought a sharp rebuke from the usually mild-mannered government spokesman and member of the government peace team, Kamal Thapa, who warned party leaders to watch their language.

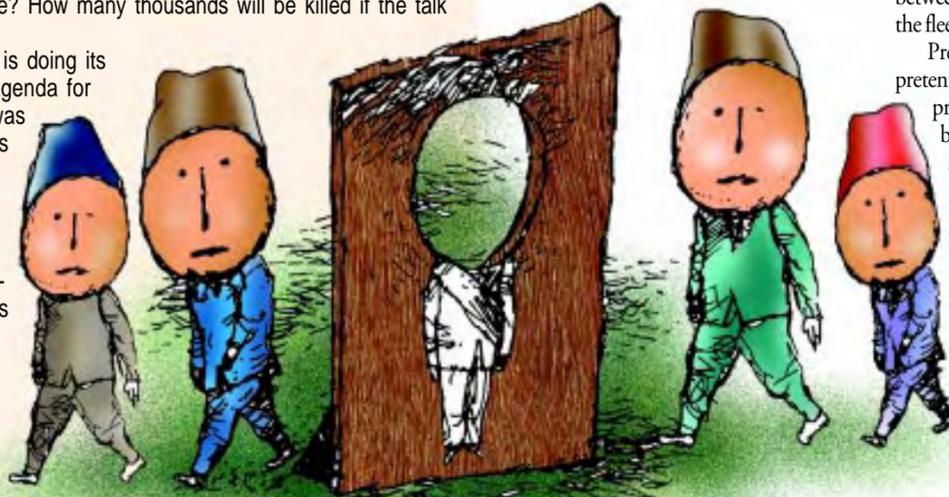
It is Nepal's never-ending tragedy that even in this hour of dire crisis, we are all trying to outsmart each other. Actually, it depends on how you define smart. Showing smartness for short-term gain is almost always stupid in the long-term. We can list numerous examples of governments, leaders and political parties in our region discovering this to be true in hindsight, and too late. Backing a militant outfit for short-term advantage for the national interest always turns out to be a disaster. "We don't care if he is a son-of-a-bitch as long as he is our son-of-a-bitch" is a statement that summarises the idiocy of trying to be too smart by half, as super and regional powers have found out to their grief. You reap what you sow, and by harvest time it is a monster.

Stop-gap damage control with a narrow political time horizon is not what is going to get us out of this mess. Both sides in the peace talks this weekend, and the political parties in the sidelines, need to look at the bottomline: who will benefit if the killings start again? Not the Nepali people. But what the Nepali people want, and what they think, doesn't seem to matter anymore to people obsessed with trying to score political points. And we in the media must not unwittingly allow ourselves to be manipulated by these spinmasters.

Some 7,000 innocent people have been killed in the past seven years. How many more have to die? How many thousands will be killed if the talk don't go anywhere?

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 inclusion, representation and equal opportunities not just as concessions to the Maoists in these talks, but because this country urgently needs those reforms.

Our advice to the negotiators and media-obsessed facilitators is this: spare us your blow-by-blow accounts. Just call us when you have agreed on how to get there.



Rewriting history is a good way to appropriate the past. Rulers down the ages have resorted to this method of reinforcing legitimacy. So we have our own court historians tracing the ancestry of an enterprising Gorkha king to the Thar Desert.

To this day, the genealogical link between the Sisodiyas of Chittor and the Shahs of Gorkha are no less tenuous. True-blue Rajputs of the subcontinent, claiming to have descended from the sun or the moon, frowned upon marrying into 'low-birth' tribal royals from the hills. The founder of the Shah Dynasty in Nepal, King Prithbi Narayan Shah the Great, was an extraordinary empire builder. But he was no more the incarnation of Bishnu than any of the kings that he dethroned in the process of his numerous military campaigns.

Avatar is a Baishnab concept, King Prithbi Narayan was probably a Shakta. Gorkha kings worshipped Guru Gorakhanath, the ascetic who established the austere Nath 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 a little out of sync.

The attempt to fuse the Narayan (sovereign) symbol into Nath (master) legend was a statesmanlike move that helped Gorkhali priests fashion an inclusive

Hindu empire in the Mahabharata and Chure hills, but it didn't render to chronically-squabbling early Shah rulers any celestial origin. The divinity of dynasty is political, in Nepal and elsewhere. It has a mythological base, not a historical or cultural one. And here, the mythmakers were wily *purets* of the middle hills, mainly from Kaski, Lamjung, Tanahu, Gorkha and Palpa. Those myths have been nurtured by their descendants in Kathmandu Valley.

The Ranas, a branch of the conjoined Shah-Rana family tree, are even less divine. After its mid-19th century origin in the bloody aftermath of usurpation through a combination of court intrigue, political conspiracy, and a vicious *coup de etat*, it was Jang Bahadur Kunwar who forced King Surendra to sign a royal decree conferring the title of Rana upon him in May 1848.

With the new surname, Jang also acquired the royal assent for matrimonial alliances with Rajput families. He consolidated his privileges, and his newly acquired caste, by marrying his sons and daughters into the royal family itself. When Jang bestowed the title of Raja of Lamjung and Kaski upon himself in 1856, Nepal's first hereditary prime minister needed a suitable pedigree to match his newfound status. He acquired it by hiring the services of some of the most creative hagiographers of his time who invented genealogical links between the Khas courtiers of Gorkha with the fleeing royals of Mewar.

Pretenders need to be even more pretentious to gain legitimacy. Since privileges of birth can only be justified by resorting to the theory of divine rights, even an absolute ruler like Chandra Shumsher found it expedient to keep the mythical halo of Shah kings intact. The Ranas drew their legitimacy from the *lalmohar* granted to them by the Shahs. It was advantageous for them to publicly revere the sovereign of the realm in whose name they wielded all power.

After a couple of generations of intermarriage, the House of Ranas got completely assimilated into the Shah dynasty. 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 by geopolitical forces of the post-1947 subcontinent. The other branch continues to survive because it consistently reinvented itself.

King Prithbi Narayan Shah the Great rose in response to what Father Ludwig Stiller calls the "silent cry" of the masses to be relieved from the petty tyrannies 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 the world, his descendant King Tribhuban demystified the reigning dynasty. Cold War rivalry ensured that the absolute rule of King Mahendra didn't turn into a catastrophe. King Birendra brought the monarchy under the ambit of a popular constitution. Each of these illustrious Shah kings responded to the needs of their time in their own distinctive ways.

The Shah-Rana claim to divinity has been assiduously cultivated to keep the credulous masses in serfdom. Friday, 1 June 2001 exposed its weak foundations, and the centuries-old myth of god kings was shattered. What remains today is kingship as a useful symbol of Nepali unity and nationality—no less, but nothing more. King Gyanendra needs to handle this new reality with tact and foresight.

Through Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, we have come to know that he is not willing to go down in history as a ruler who snatched away the people's democratic rights. It is a noble wish, but falls short of the resolve needed to reinvent the institution of monarchy for the times. He needs to institutionalise a democratic monarchy to restore peace and ensure progress.

Keeping out of partisan day-to-day controversy is a necessary condition for the continuity of a non-representative institution. Our kingdom needs a kingship, as in trusteeship, not a monarchy that is pathologically prone to the manipulations of court nobles. In the king we trust, but not in the residual paraphernalia associated with absolute monarchy. The Nepali people are now empowered, they can't be forced to believe in divine rights anymore. From here on, they alone confer legitimacy to rulers based on the actions of those rulers. ♦

LETTERS

BANKING REFORM

I concur with TR Upadhyay ('Little to bank on', #156) that this so-called reform is no more than a pie in the sky and we will be back in the woods with an additional debt of Rs 2 billion plus when the World Bank withdraws. However, he has missed a crucial point in his article. The most important reason the vamped up management will be left floundering when the World Bank pulls the "green" carpet out from under their feet is because they lack a strong and honest leader. Correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't the current governor of the Nepal Rastra Bank the same person who was initially ousted from the same post in response to the diagnostic review (referenced in the article) performed by independent auditors deeming him and his team to be mired in corruption?

Preeti Upadhyaya, email

POLITICIANS

I have always assumed that the purpose of politicians was to help their country and the people. If that were the case, 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 that ordinary Nepalis want so much ('Back on track', #156). Their decision not to participate increases the likelihood of more fighting and suffering. So, I'm obviously wrong in my assumption. I'd be grateful, therefore, if someone could please tell me the real purpose of politicians in Nepal.

Alastair Seaman, Kathmandu

KTM CONNECTION

Shiva Gaunle has done an excellent job in 'Kathmandu Connection' (#156) exposing the new and thriving business in human trafficking through the Nepali capital. Innocent

travellers are paying a heavy price for it at different international airports because of human trafficking, rampant counterfeiting and tampering of passports, and blatant corruption. Because the shameful trade enjoys political protection from the likes of Khum Bahadur Khadka and Salim Miya Ansari, many Nepalis suffer. It is because of them that Nepalis continue to face humiliating checks and re-checks at various international airports. There is a well-knit nexus between the trafficking mafia and politicians who exploit the vulnerable. This matter needs aggressive and constant follow-ups, and monitoring from Kathmandu's emerging and vibrant press. Or else it will be a case of said and done.

Surendra Phuyal, Pittsburgh, USA

• Was it deliberate on your part to carry the story of corruption at Kathmandu airport immigration allowing human traffickers and

passport counterfeiters ('Kathmandu connection', #156), with the profile of Nepal's most honest cop, Bimala Thapa ('Bimala's beat')? The answer to the question of controlling these crimes is obvious. Give more police officers like Thapa the freedom to nab the crooks, send them to jail and keep them there.

Bijaya Dhungel, Kathmandu

BAHUNS

That CK Lal in his article Kingdom of Bahuns, tries to poise Bahuns at the forefront even when they were being ruled by non-Bahuns is an indication of his rhetoric to exaggerate the domination of the dominant caste in Nepal. One wonders: is it prejudice that he does not blame the prime minister, for example, but the chief secretary? Not the general of army, but one of his psywar experts? Anywhere else, this would be called scapegoating. Did CK read Manjushree Thapa's 'Thapadom' (#149)? It is



interesting, however, that his article does not go further to use the lexicon 'Bahunbad', as some Janajati's politicians would enjoy doing. Perhaps for Lal this word is either too derogatory or includes non-Bahuns and would therefore undermine his case. Lal seems confused between caste and class. Some influential social groups do indeed dominate the power centres in Kathmandu. And it is true that Bahuns dominate the civil service and the leadership of the political parties. Nevertheless, when we talk about power domination we cannot forget gender and class-based oppression in and out of the caste and ethnicity divide. Lal is right when he supports the parties' demand for a secular state, and when he calls for reform in some social injustices like untouchability. And if Bahuns spearhead this movement for change, Lal should not blame them just because they happen to be Bahuns.

Krishna P Adhikari, Reading, UK

"Hariyo ban Nepal sarkar ko dhan."

ANALYSIS by **BADRI PAUDYAL**

When the government nationalised the country's forests in 1961 it took away control over resources from local communities. Within 15 years, Nepal had lost much of its midhill 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 protecting their forests again, they stall-fed 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's midhills actually had more forest cover than in the 1950s.

Nepal's community forestry experience is regarded as one of our greatest success stories, and is being replicated throughout the developing world. The model was built on the need for grassroots democracy, environmental 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 writ petition by the users, the Supreme Court ruled against the decision. Now, far from withdrawing the rule for the tarai the government has extended the 40 percent requirement to all community forests 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



LOK RAJ CHAULAGAIN

Nepali children learn the ditty in school: "Green forests are Nepal's wealth." But the recent ordinance forcing villagers to give 40 percent of earnings from local forests to Kathmandu will make forests the government's wealth, and undo Nepal's most dramatic success stories. This Jiri hillsides 40 years ago, and today (above). Community-protected forests like these will vanish again if the ordinance is implemented.



of nationalising forests in 1956, now we are going to repeat that same mistake."

There are 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 villagers who entrusted their forests in their hands. There have been numerous cases of village men, women and children staying awake all night to guard their forests when the saplings are young. Some villagers have paid with their lives to guard their trees, others have been burnt trying to save their forests from fires.

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 tying up their cattle and buffaloes, but suddenly found that if everyone stall-fed 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 after all," says Hari Prasad Neupane, the fiery leader of the federation of forest user groups, FECOFUN.

With his white moustache and patriarchal bearings, Neupane has been leading communities from throughout Nepal to agitate against the ordinance and is determined to see it quashed. At a recent public hearing at the Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists (NEFEJ), Neupane got into a heated argument with government officers 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 their springs and water sources, it protects the slopes above their villages from landslides, it brings 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 forests have traditionally been seen as a source of revenue. Nepali political leaders have always parcelled out forests to crony contractors to finance election campaigns, and used trees to dispense political patronage.

"Communities should not see this as the government taking away their earnings, the government will

invest the money back in the villages for the common good," said Jamuna Krishna Tamrakar from the Department of Forests at the NEFEJ hearing. There were howls of protest from the audience.

Apsara Chapagain 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 are trees we planted, 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 array of respected big names to back them up, like Mohan Man Sainju 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 out of 75 districts. In addition, UNDP, the EU, ICIMOD, World Bank, Action Aid, Oxfam, ANSAB, and UMN have also been involved in promoting community forestry. The donors held an emergency meeting on Thursday to decide on their involvement in Nepal's forest development.

● Prakash A Raj's feedback ("Exaggerated dominance", #154) to CK Lal's 'Kingdom of Bahuns' (State of the State, #153) is a typical knee-jerk reaction to the thorny issue of dominance of brahmins in Nepali society. It is always very difficult for the people of the upper class (caste) to understand the oppression faced by those in lower classes (caste). For a person from a privileged caste to profess that Nepal is not dominated by brahmins is obviously living in a land of fantasy. One merely has to look up at the make up of the all the political parties including the supposedly classless Maoists, the bureaucracy, police, parastatals, media and education. The upper caste makes up only 26 percent of the Nepali population, however, their representation in power is highly disproportional to their total population. This is a classic case of self-denial. May I remind the authors that there are two kinds of

casteism (just like racism)—blatant caste-based discrimination which is banned by law and the other institutional casteism which is much more subtle. Although in the eye of Nepali legal system, all Nepalis are equal, in practise it is a separate-but-equal concept. The upper castes maintain their own identity by pursuing scholastic work while the lower caste always performs the same age old menial labour. In the present-day context, there is an undercurrent of institutional casteism practised through *aphno manchhe* nepotism.

It is quite impossible for less privileged Nepalis to rise up the social ladder. In order to level the playing field, there needs to be affirmative action for lower castes, janjatis and dalits. Getting rid of this discrimination will lead to a healthy, dynamic society where everyone, not just a few are equal participants. If this cannot be achieved sooner or later, the class war will turn into a caste war. And it

will make the Maoist insurgency look like child's play.

SN Singh, email

DOGS OF WAR

In 'Dogs of war' (State of the state, #157) CK Lal refers to the decision made in the second round of talks limiting the movement of security forces within five km of the barracks. He says the new team of the king's negotiators don't want to honour commitments made by predecessors. Everybody knows such an agreement, in black and white, was made during the second round of talks. The Maoists would never sit for the third round without implementing decisions made and agreed upon in previously. Unfortunately, neither side nor the facilitators seem to have kept signed minutes of those meetings, which is surprising as it goes against international norms.

N Prakash, email

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‘What’s in it for us?’

Melamchi villagers fear they will be left high and dry when their water is taken away to Kathmandu.

NARESH NEWAR in TIMBUBESI

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, pausing to exchange cold stares with the Sherpas. Last month, the dalits picked a fight with the Sherpas for calling them “untouchable” and preventing the dalits from entering their homes. The compromise was a Catch 22. “Eat beef, and we’ll even let you dine in our kitchen,” the Sherpas told the dalits.

Tension simmers. But there is one thing the Sherpas and dalits agree on: their deep resentment of the Melamchi Water Supply Project (MWSP).

The \$441 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 26.5km tunnel to Sundarjal. The project was originally slated for completion in 2006, but is now hopelessly delayed. When, and if, it is completed, Kathmandu Valley will get about 170 million litres of water every day.

Before that happens, the project has to hand over water distribution and supply in the Valley on a management contract to make the scheme viable. The government also agreed to relocate



ALL PICS: NARESH NEWAR

“We hope this project never gets off the ground. Let them finish the road and go away.” - Baburam Chhetri (right) at a tea shop, Kiul.



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

polluting industries from Kathmandu, illegal tapping of ground water and set up an independent water regulatory agency. All of these prerequisites have been delayed by three years. 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 ahead. About the only item of good news here is that a 5km dirt road from Melamchi Bazar to Timbubesi and eight bridges have been completed. The contractors in charge of road and bridge construction have earned a bad reputation with local communities. Contractors say they have been harassed and extorted by Maoists. Lately, 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 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 the money back. “They should never make the mistake of coming back to my village,” fumes Dawa.

Voices of resentment can be

heard right from the bus top at Melamchi to the villages in the hills 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 Dinesh Lama, ward chairman of Helambu 8. “What’s in it for us?” is a commonly heard question. Every villager is convinced the project is for Kathmandu, and their water is being stolen. Saila Tamang, a local hotelier, attempts a little perspective: “I’m sure they have limitations, but they can at least start by giving jobs to some people.”

Locals say there are qualified builders in Melamchi, but all contracts went directly to Valley-based companies. Contrary to earlier promises, it seems the

project has deliberately kept locals out, not hiring them even as labourers. “They were trying to get away really cheap, paying Rs 100 per day,” says Shyam Nepali. “We maybe poor but we’re not that desperate.”

After enormous pressure from local activists, the project has pledged jobs for three people from each VDC, an empty gesture considering Helambu alone has 5,000 households. “That was really ridiculous. What were they up to?” asks local politician Krishna Lamichhane from Gyalthum. So far, only two people from Sindhupalchok 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 how, where or

when they can get compensated. “The project people don’t even care to come here and see if anyone is missing from the compensation list,” says Lamichhane.

Chandra Bahadur Karki 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 Dhungri Bazar damaged by project bulldozers are still waiting for reimbursement.

The Melamchi project has a ‘social upliftment program’ in about 14 VDCs in the valley and \$6.2 million was allocated for health, education, income generation, electrification with local community participation. Jagat Basnet of the local group, Community Self Reliance Centre, told us, “There is no local participation at all. A lot of villagers don’t even know that the program exists.” Basnet does say the project distributed mosquito nets and condoms as part of its health improvement program.

In Kiul village, 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 Chhetri nods: “We hope this project never gets off the ground. Let them finish the road and go away.”

Almost everyone else is either

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK

Terminator 3 in California



It’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 purveyors of popular taste turn to the bizarre, the wild, the exotic to enrich our lives on the nightly news, AND on the front covers of our news magazines.

Well now. In a development sent from middlebrow media heaven, this week’s big story is the candidacy of Arnold Schwarzenegger for governor of California. *Newsweek* soberly asks in its front page headline ‘All about Arnold’: “Is he really up to playing governor?” Never mind that he can blast or decimate any other living creature and almost every machine known to moviedom. *Time* magazine, always livelier and more in tune to cutting edge (read low) taste, slugs it’s action pic of Arnie with “Aahhhnold”, presumably the way his fans pronounce his name in mock-Austrian accents.

Arnie, of course, is no stranger to politics. He’s married to a member of the Kennedy clan but is proudly Republican, right of centre to the core. Just what you’d expect from a do-it-yourselfer who teased his 90-pound weakling body into a Mr Universe title then movie-stardom as a lone vigilante of truth, justice and kicking the other guy’s teeth down his throat. Never mind that he speaks English like a bad character actor plays Dracula, or gives off the hard-edged persona of someone who’s spent far too long on steroids, Arnie is in the race for governor of California. And the media, that includes me since I’m writing about it, are gaga. Finally a summer story worthy of our word processors and cameras.

To begin with, I’m not against movie stars running for political office. How could you be? So many of them already have, and not just in America. Famously, Amitabh Bacchan, MG Ramachandran and NT Rama Rao enjoyed political careers in India. The last two gentlemen were hugely more



successful than the first, but he’s a far better actor. And far wiser too as he confines himself to the screen these days, enjoying respect and influence long past retirement age.

Here in Nepal, democracy has barely had a chance so we had a fictional movie star contesting an election in Manjushree Thapa’s *The Tutor of History*. Ronald Reagan is by far the most successful film star to hold high office, anywhere in the world. His two terms as US president in the 1980s are loved and loathed with equal intensity, depending on peoples’ political affiliations. Reagan used his acting abilities to deliver some memorable speeches and to charm almost everyone he ever met. Whatever you may say about the man’s intellect or his losses of memory at crucial times of scandal, the sight of President Bush delivering his one-liners at a press conference

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

pales in comparison.

Hollywood has long been political in America, largely at the liberal end of the spectrum, well to the left of the mainstream polity. Top filmmakers, it’s widely felt in the United States, spend too much time on issues like the death penalty, poverty, the danger of nuclear weapons and evil practices by big corporations. Whether you agree with the spirit of that statement or not, it’s plain that right-wingers are indeed correct about the biases of Hollywood. Artists in general are left of centre, and movie making tends to be dominated by people like this.

Not Arnie, he’s done his fundraising for the Republicans and though he’s vague about his political ideas, he’ll be a right-winger, that’s for sure. The voters get a chance to decide on that in October and you’ll not find me arguing against democracy. Not in this column. What I will say about Schwarzenegger and Reagan and all the rest is that there is one crowning virtue to having the odd movie type in politics. And it’s one we might wonder about here in Nepal if and when democracy ever comes back. Movie people aren’t professional politicians. They’re from a difference caste.

So maybe, just maybe, there’s hope of a broken mould or two, some thinking outside a badly discredited box. Let’s see how the Terminator does in California before we start pushing for Hamal or someone similar here. ♦



Square one?

Forget the Melamchi project's crucial 28km tunnel, the initial key condition 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 finetune 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 take at least another year, if the bidding process ends conclusively. Two previous attempts proved inconclusive—both times only one applicant, the French company Vivendi, ended up as the final bidder.

ignorant or indifferent. At the Melamchi Diversion Scheme Office here, there is no consultant or engineer. "There's no work at the moment. So, it is not necessary for them to be here," says a peon, 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 Chettri, 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. ♦

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

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 earlier explorers have given up looking for the yeti, and think it is actually a Himalayan bear that strays into the snows leaving ape-like footprints. A scalp that Sherpas thought belonged to the yeti was also proven to belong to a Himalayan blue sheep.



Maoist 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.

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 interrelated 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 consumers here, but till the laboratory findings are published, summer sales are not likely to drop. An official at the national Department of Food Technology and Quality Control (DFTQC) confirmed it would take at least another week. Earlier this year, a CSE report on Indian mineral water, caused a flurry of similar tests by the DFTQC on Nepali products. No contamination was found, which may have something to do with sub-standard processes curtailed by a lack of department funds (see 'Bottled thirst', #152).

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Should Nepal be secular?

Some arguments presented by CK Lal in 'Security of secularism' (State of the State, #155) are misleading, especially his conclusion that 'secularism is an idea whose time has come'.

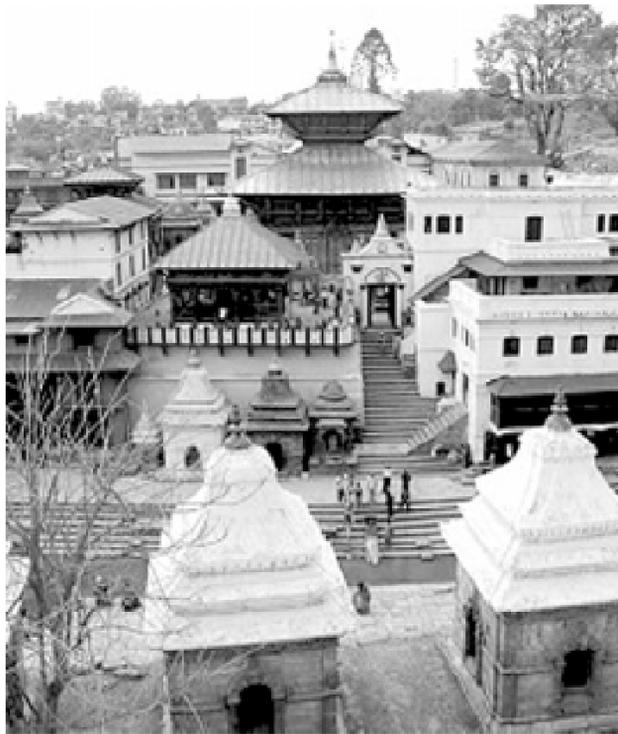
First of all, Lal is factually wrong when he says that the idea of a state religion today only survives in the Arabian peninsula, Vatican City and Bhutan. What about our South Asian neighbour, Pakistan, which calls itself an Islamic state? And what about the Islamic Republic of Iran? Neither Iran nor Pakistan are in the Arabian Peninsula. In fact, Pakistan and Israel are the two states created in the name of religion in the mid-twentieth century. There are other Islamic republics: in Mauritania and the Comoros. Morocco is an Islamic monarchy, and most of the more than 40 countries that are members of the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Countries) with the exception of Turkey have Islam as their state religion. Even Malaysia, where the proportion of Muslims in the population is much less than the proportion of Hindus in Nepal, has declared Islam as its state religion.

Then the question: are west European monarchies like Britain, the Netherlands,

Belgium and Spain actually 'secular'? Can a non-Christian (or non-Anglican) ever become king or queen of Britain? One of the two major political parties in Germany is called 'Christian Democrat'. Does having the label of 'secular' make that much difference?

Actually, Hinduism is in many respects a 'secular' religion. Unlike some of the others, it does not claim that it is the only path to salvation. It does not claim that non-Hindus will go to hell. Hindus and Muslims have lived peacefully in Nepal for hundreds of years and there have been fewer religious riots in this Hindu kingdom than in the secular republic of India. Further, Hinduism does not divide the world into believers and non-believers and does not include the concept of *jihad* or *fatwa*. A huge mosque was constructed next to the royal palace in this Hindu kingdom in the past decade, replacing a smaller one. Are churches or temples allowed to be constructed near the Saudi royal palace or, for that matter, anywhere in the territory of the Wahabi Monarchy of Saudi Arabia?

I would be the first to admit and condemn the grave injustices perpetrated against Dalits in Nepal and India for many



centuries. They were denied entry into temples, and the legacy of discrimination continues to this day. However, Dalits are priests in many temples in Nepal. Untouchability is banned and ceased to have legal sanction in Nepal since 1964. The legal code promulgated in 1910 and the customary laws before then made the state party to discrimination on the basis of caste, but these have all been abolished. You may say that laws are fine, but how

about ingrained social discrimination? Even here, things are changing—observe the symbolic *doro* ceremony on Guru Purnima this week in which Brahmin priests tied the holy thread on Dalits.

Let us not forget that there were also many injustices done in the name of Christianity in the western world when women alleged to be witches were burnt at the stake. The mass murders and genocides in Europe were

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

perpetrated in western 'civilisation', no such organised slaughter has ever occurred in the name of religion here. There were separate churches for blacks and whites in the US south till 100 years ago. Social mores change, cultural relations evolve. This is not to excuse discrimination and injustice in our society, only to say that Nepal as a kingdom and Hinduism as a religion do not have a monopoly on social ostracism.

Lal states: "Bahunism puts women in multiple jeopardy, they can't inherit property, learn the Vedas...no Biswakarma woman can ever aspire to be the royal preceptor." The post of royal preceptor is now ceremonial. Married women have inherited property in Nepal for more than 100 years. Daughters can now inherit property. Nepal being a Hindu kingdom did not stop these reforms from taking place.

Besides, Hinduism isn't the only religion not allowing women into priesthood. In fact, it is a matter of vigorous debate in other faiths today whether to allow women to be priests. When do you think we are going to see a

woman pope, or a black pope? Change seems to take time even in democratic countries where people are sovereign. 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 in spite of it being a Hindu country. Such decline took place because of conversion, migration of non-Hindus and above all, some people who were counted as Hindus previously, no longer wanted to be considered Hindus.

This, despite the fact that it was against the law to convert others, although people could change their religion out of their own free will. If Nepal becomes a secular country, there will be an atmosphere conducive to more conversion. It may not necessarily be a good idea if Hindus become a minority in Nepal. ♦

NEPALI PAN

by NEETA POKHREL



Beginner's guide to socialising in Kathmandu

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

before that, in the hinterlands," 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 six, but by two degrees.

Would you like a lemon soda and some compliments?

Compliments and credits are bestowed in such abundance here, it's little wonder people walk around with their noses pointed at the ceiling. Mediocrity is everywhere, but so is the illusion of greatness. To be fair, it is indeed difficult to retain 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.

Deja-vu.

In the American film, *Groundhog Day*, the hero is tortured 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 everywhere: in the 50th Everest anniversary, book launches, stakeholder forum of electricity consumers, discotheque inaugurations, Volkswagen rallies and national day receptions. And if you were left wondering how everyone knows everyone else in every social affair, here it is: they are the same people.

See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.

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 is better to play it safe.

Hello I am Shanti, and I was born here.

Ran into Nicole at another party. She had come with a lovely woman draped in beautiful silk. "Hi, I am Jane, been here 27 years, and I have seen it all," she said by way of introduction. Nicole winked and explained later about the parallel caste system among the expatriates. Apparently, as 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, the longer the stay, the higher the caste. So, don't be shy in stocking-up numbers, and if you are a Nepali, try "Hello I am Shanti. I was born here."

Now, who did you say you were?

Don't forget people are still curious about how you got invited. I would be interested in the connections myself. While I talk to you, a cocktail in hand and indifference on my face, I will still be ticking the boxes: Xavier product—negative, related to the Gyawalis of Gaushala—negative, Kangresi Bhim Bahadur's son—nah. Who is he, and how did he make it? The more sophisticated ones won't say it out loud, but don't get fooled. They are asking it all the same.

I better circulate. Will see you around.

Neeta Pokhrel is a water and sanitation engineer who is still trying to find her bearings back in Kathmandu.

Drink in hand. Immersed in long political monologue. Inspid small talk to go with finger food. Business card exchanges. Glassy eyes wandering off for the next catch. It could be anywhere, but this time it is Kathmandu's social scene. If I was an alien, dropped-off my saucer, hopping from party to party around the world, it would seem that there is just one breed of humans.

But every place has a distinctive style to socialising. There are the local do's and don'ts, attributed to local cultural norms. And the process of uncovering them is slow and tenacious, nothing less than a fair few trial and errors (some embarrassing errors if you are unlucky). How do I know? Well, I have just uncovered some of these for Kathmandu. And for the sake of the greater common good, I thought I would share them with other newcomers.

Ab it's you!

At a friend's garden party a few weeks ago, I had the pleasure of mingling with Kathmandu's who's who: politicians, writers, actors, INGO officials among others. Whenever I reached someone for introduction, I was thrown a bemusedly raised eyebrow. "I have been away for a decade, and

BIZ NEWS

Tibet, trade and tourism

The visit to Nepal by a delegation from Tibet last week is expected to give a boost to trade and tourism between Nepal and China. Nepali tourism officials have asked to start helicopter services from Nepal to Mansarovar, and also to streamline fares and increase flights from Kathmandu to Lhasa. The trade delegation came to Kathmandu hard on the heels of the agreement between India and China two months ago to open Sikkim's Nathu La pass to trade. At present there is only one regular border crossing between Nepal and China, but trade has increased at Lo Manthang after a motorable road was built from Mustang to Tibet.

Tibetan officials have reportedly agreed to open new border posts at the historic border town of Kerung and Nangpa La above Namche. "The Tibetan delegation was very positive," said Shanker Koirala of the Ministry of Tourism who headed the Nepali side in the talks.

ADB aid to enhance export

Nepal is to receive \$321 million in loans from the Asian Development Bank over the next three years. In line with the bank's country strategy and program for 2004 through 2006, most of the loan projects will basically aim at poverty reduction. The assistance consists of 14 loan projects including eco-tourism, rural and agriculture development, educational improvements, rural electrification and governance reforms. The bank has also said it would help Nepal's private sector gain better access to world markets and improve productivity with a \$400,000 grant from the Japan Special Fund. Nepal is in the process of acceding to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and as a result the economy faces a phase-out of textile quotas. The money will be used to identify policy, legal and institutional constraints that prevent the private sector from responding effectively to market opportunities, and analyse recent developments in the competitiveness of Nepal's industry and services sectors, ADB says. "Nepal could potentially reap large economic and social benefits from increased private sector competitiveness," says Hans-Peter Brunner, an ADB Senior Financial Economist. Although Nepal is among the most open economies in the subregion, macroeconomic adjustments alone are not inducing productivity growth in the private sector.

By popular demand

After the overwhelming popularity of the Yamaha Enticer, the manufacturers were encouraged to tweak their original design for the new Enticer Deluxe. This streamlined machine has a smooth self-start, disc brake configurations and a 125 CC, 11BHP YBX engine. In Nepal, Morang Auto Works distributes the bike that BBC's World Wheels and Business Standard Motoring called 'Bike of the Year' in 2002 and 2003. The Enticer Deluxe is priced at Rs 137,900 and comes in red, gold and lavender silver.

Nourishment

Horlicks, the drink that has long been the staple feature in every sickroom, recently received a makeover after sales in the kingdom dropped by nine percent last year. The new avatar tastes different and comes in snazzier packaging. GlaxoSmithKline says its product continues to combine benefits of nourishment and taste to appeal to its core consumers but with a touch of "modernity". Horlicks will now be available in regular, chocolate, vanilla and honey buzz flavours.

Say cheese

Nepalis are avid snackers, which bodes well for Krazy Cheese Balls from the snack and instant noodle makers, Asian Thai Foods. The new product is made from cheddar cheese and is priced at Rs 8 and Rs 12.



STRICTLY BUSINESS

by ASHUTOSH TIWARI



Revamping FNCCI

They have to woo and wow young entrepreneurs.

Through my work at Business Service Aadhar, I meet many young Nepali entrepreneurs and businesspeople in their late 20s and 30s. I ask them whether they or their firms are members or beneficiaries of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI). Almost all of them—educated, aware and market-savvy—say no. Some blame labyrinthine dealings with the FNCCI bureaucracy.

Their uniform reluctance to join FNCCI struck me as curiously odd. With slightly more than 80 percent of Nepal's 2.5 million population under the age of 40, and with more young Nepalis running, starting and managing their own businesses, why is the FNCCI, the so-called premier body for business and commerce, viewed not as a resource to be tapped into, but as a far-removed, irrelevant entity by most young people? Is FNCCI, as some speculate, doomed to being a nest for quarrelsome traders who, having made their fortunes dealing in cars, arms and garments, want to use it as a stepping stone into national politics?

Image makeover: FNCCI is sorely in need of an image makeover. With a few exceptions, its leaders and members are viewed as those who have made their wealth through inheritance and government-issued monopolistic licenses dating from the Panchayat



days and not by taking risks, engaging in the rough-and-tumble of the marketplace to come up with innovative products and services.

If FNCCI wants to change this image, it needs to start wooing young businesspeople by serving as a platform for them to obtain usable information, make use of available knowledge and tap into networks—fast. To that end, it has to adapt its bureaucracy to be more agile, responsive and service-oriented. FNCCI, the comfortable clubhouse for traders must become FNCCI, the forward-looking knowledge organisation for all, especially Nepali businesses with young leaders.

Market-led: At times, FNCCI, the supposed vanguard of the market, comes across as just another donor-subsidised market-distorting organisation. A case in point is its training programs, which are offered to private sector businesses at prices that range from Rs 300 to Rs 1500 per participant. Though well-intentioned, there are unintended consequences: first, the low prices discourage private

sector training providers from going out and charging full fees for their programs. Second, they do not make recipients of trainings appreciate and pay for the full cost of such programs. And third, they distort the behaviour of both the providers and the recipients to dance to the tune of easy donor money. As a result, as soon as donor funds dry up, such programs are no longer offered.

Sure, FNCCI may want to use donor funds as a catalyst to strengthen its institutional mechanism. But it should stay away from using those funds to subsidise programs for which there already exists a vibrant private sector market. Such an approach is important for the institutional integrity of FNCCI.

Finally, the newly elected FNCCI leaders must ask themselves how their organisation is to remain relevant to Nepali businesses. And it must define how it differs from other organisations that also aim to act as some sort of a chamber for businesses. Aggressively transforming FNCCI into a prompt knowledge-sharing organization would address the first concern, while championing markets and competition—and not pleading the government for special patriotism-mingled protections—would address the second.

Only then, FNCCI can start marketing itself to the next generation of Nepal's business community. ♦

"Things are not as bad as they seem."



MIN BAJARACHARYA

In just two years Kumari Bank Limited has risen to become an important player with its innovative banking style and a focus on ordinary consumers. Kumari's CEO Surender Bhandari spoke to *Nepali Times* about staying ahead, about bankability and white elephants.

Is survival possible with the economy in freefall and banks mushrooming everywhere?

You are right, when we launched Kumari Bank Limited two years ago the economy was not doing too well and the banking sector was already overcrowded. Tourism, garments, trade with India, which formed the bulk of trade activities were slipping. We had to strategise, so we chose a sector untapped by the commercial banks: retail and individual banking. We were also the first to introduce housing and car loans. Other banks followed. That strategy paid off. In two years our lending portfolio stands at Rs 2.3 billion and our deposit portfolio is Rs 2.7 billion. All this from sectors that did not exist before. This July, we recorded an operating profit of Rs 52 million. Just goes to show: if you have something innovative to offer, your bank will succeed even in a saturated market.

How about competition?

It is a very competitive market, and that is reflected in interest rates that

are going down. Another area where it's very apparent is in advertising. Almost every bank today has to advertise its product range, something that never happened a few years ago. The good thing about competition is that quality improves, and customers benefit.

But is there enough money in the market to go around?

About eight percent of Nepalis are middle class, that is two million people with an income of more than Rs 30,000 per month. If Kumari Bank Limited serves just 20,000 middle class depositors, we can make it. But we are not limiting ourselves to this strata: we want to extend our reach to the grassroots, the national mainstream. We want to be the bank that caters to the rural population as well, which is why we open accounts with a minimum deposit of Rs 1,000. We recently did a seminar for small and medium entrepreneurs because we believe the country benefits only if the small entrepreneurs are developed.

Why, what's the connection?

When you look into the GDP of any country, you will find that SMEs make up more than 60 percent. Here in Nepal we do not have a structured economy. People are still intimidated to walk into a bank and open an account. This is why we decided to take the bank to the people instead, and educate them about banking and also about the different projects. That way, the GDP grows and so does the economy. In developing sectors, financial institutions have to take the lead. Then there is a chain affect.

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 our books. 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 underneath. If we were really a structured 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 has been portrayed. Also, we are buoyed by remittances from Nepalis overseas. Lately, the boom in the housing sector has also had a multiplier effect.

How well does the central bank regulate private banks?

There has to be a very good control mechanism in place because if one bank fails everyone else does too and public confidence plunges. This is why we need a public authority that really knows the job. We have a very positive experience with the central bank. It was easy to follow the rigid guidelines laid out by NRB because our internal guidelines are even more severe.

How rampant is insider trading?

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 mess. A customer and staff within a bank can collaborate to make underhand deals. Those are hazards we face. One mechanism we can employ is rotating staff within the organisation. Similarly, NRB should send inspectors to monitor different banks.

But the Rastra Bank is short on technocrats.

That is a pertinent point. They have become serious about regulation only in the last two years. It's a learning process. Had they done it earlier, Nepal Bank Limited and Rastriya Banijya Bank would not have been at the point they find themselves now. Although they have failed to demonstrate the kind of growth they could have, they are doing their job.

Has your bank found the calibre of human resource?

The pool of good technical staff was limited. So, as a new bank, we had to resort to hiring technical staff who already had experience working in other banks. But at the grassroots level, we trained fresh recruits. The onus for each bank is to develop its own manpower and retain them.

There seems to be plenty of liquidity in the market. Why isn't Kumari Bank Limited rushing to fund big, national-level projects?

While we may have enough liquidity, it hasn't been gainfully used. It is up to the government to involve us, the private sector, in their projects. An example of such an enterprise is the government issued national saving bonds. A typical bond has nearly eight percent interest against the five percent that loan banks charge. If the government lent directly from the individuals or banks, they can borrow at five percent. The government must step out from its old roles and encourage our participation in national level projects, which will bring about healthy competition and transparency too.

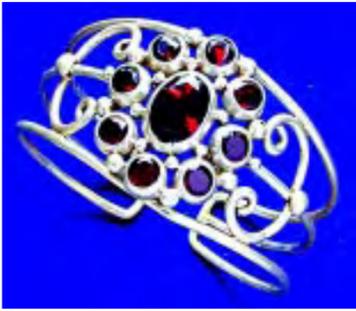
There are a lot of white elephant projects around.

Banks have to be very careful with investment decisions. There are businesses that look wonderful now but a few years down the line, things could change. When a bank is making a lending decision, a liquidation analysis is very important as a measure for recovery. If that is properly done, the bank is reasonably secure. If the project is unable to repay the loan, and if there is no siphoning of funds, then the bank should be able to give the business a working plan to see if it can be revived. Money should be generated through legitimate bank business. It is not our job to sell properties to recover bad debts.

MADE IN NEPAL

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 centres over centuries. What used to be exclusively the preserve of the Shakya and Bajracharya enterprise, has had to admit Bishwakarmas (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—elegantly 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 *pana* (lamp) 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, be they sacred 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 etch details and finally a person to paint the face and body.

Fabric

Who would have thought an innocuous stinging plant could clothe royalty? 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



SRADDHA BASNYAT and SOPHIA PANDE

In the not-so-distant past, Nepalis were hardwired into thinking that the “Made in Nepal” tag didn’t make the grade. Today, we know better. With some exceptions, and despite everything we have done to tarnish the brand name, ‘Nepal’ still evokes things exotic and beautiful, and increasingly, quality and style.

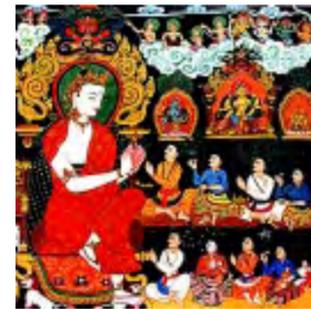
Luckily, we have more to fall back on than just our natural bounty. It is matched by a culture rich in tradition and skill. Carpets, metallurgy, jewelry, woodcrafts and weaving have been passed on through the ages, finding an increasingly wider audience of appreciation. The ‘Made in Nepal’ label may be ubiquitous on shirts and loose pants in Wall Marts, but it is also being found increasingly in the best galleries and shops in Europe, North America, Australia and Japan. Unfortunately, export trade winds are capricious. A combination of the Maoist insurgency, SARS and various wars on 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 fall in tourism. After getting this far, Nepali exporters are left to fend for themselves. We are doing our bit here to showcase a few Made in Nepals that we can take pride in.

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 1993 after he heard about our *sisno*—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 shirts, all hand-dyed and painted by skilled local artists. The silk may come from China, but the art and designs are pure Nepali. The shirts 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*. *Pau* is Newari for coconut leaf parchment and *bha* is used for anything that is nice or lovely. It’s a fitting, if a little understated, description for the jewel toned paintings largely known as the *thangka* today. *Paubhas* date back to the 12th century when Malla kings patronised Newar painters. The Newari style was taken to Tibet by Bhrikuti, the daughter of Amshuvarma the Malla king and patron of the arts, who is now immortalised as the Green Tara. Today *thangkas* and *paubhas* 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 changing tastes and the international market, and within three decades it was a roaring trade. The bottom may have fallen out of the market, but businesses like Surya Rug House have held onto its reputation as a top exporter of fine hand-knotted carpets. At his showroom in Gyaneswor, managing director Dev Anand Sarawagi happily presents wool and silk mixed rugs with 100 knots per square inch, all ready for shipping. Since 9/11, demand from the US has slowed. Regardless, he continues to layout a wide variety of virgin Tibetan wool handwoven rugs in either vegetable or chemical dyes.

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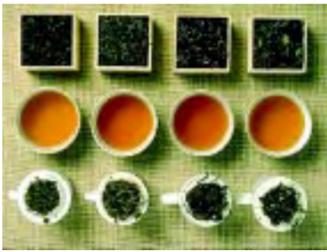
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Tea

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 Saktim, reasoning that it had the same geographical and climactic 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 Kuponole 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, knitware and Mithila art.

Binita Basnet's Clay Crafts & More houses her uniquely floral creations. She specialises in floral designs and though clay 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 Revisted.

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 inlaid Bhojpur 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 *khukuri* is Nepal Distilleries' most famous tippie ever. Khukri XXX Rum is the preferred drink up in the Himalaya 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 Hos!*

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Not looking forward to Cancun

From September 10-14, trade ministers from around the world will meet for the next stage of what is supposed to be the Development Round of trade talks. At their last meeting in Doha in November 2001, ministers recognised the inequities of the previous round of trade negotiations, the Uruguay round. This round was supposed to redress those imbalances.

One would have thought that the developing countries would look forward to the meeting as a chance to achieve a fairer global trading system. Instead, many fear that what has happened in the past will happen again: secret negotiations, arm twisting and the display of brute economic power by the US and Europe—and by special interests in the advanced countries—aimed at ensuring that the interests of the rich are

protected.

While some progress has been made in making the negotiations more open and transparent, efforts to go further have met with resistance, and for good reason: unbalanced processes help ensure unbalanced outcomes. Ironically, the World Trade Organisation, where each country has one vote, might seem far more “democratic” than, say, the IMF, where a single country, the US, has a veto. Yet the realpolitik of economic power has ensured that the interests of the developed countries predominate.

Here is a short checklist against which to assess whether the outcomes of Cancun represent a move towards a true development round.

- Agriculture. Most people in the developing world live in the rural sector, which is why free and fair trade in agriculture matters. It's not

just a question of providing access, but of eliminating the subsidies that encourage production in rich countries and harm farmers in poor countries. The numbers are truly alarming: subsidies in advanced countries exceed the total income of sub-Saharan Africa; the average European subsidy per cow matches the \$2 per day poverty level on which billions of people barely subsist; America's \$4 billion cotton subsidies to 25,000 well-off farmers bring misery to 10 million African farmers and more than offset America's miserly foreign aid to some of the affected countries. Although both Europe and America accuse each other of unfair agricultural policies, neither side seems willing to make major concessions.

- Drugs and intellectual property.

TRIPS, the intellectual property regime adopted in the last round of trade negotiations, deprived millions in the developing world of access to life-saving drugs. As a chorus of researchers has pointed out, the provisions, pushed by the pharmaceutical companies, were so unbalanced that they were bad for scientific progress. Here, there has been some progress—but not enough. Provisions demanded by the US would have made it difficult for small countries, like Botswana, to gain affordable access. Developing countries also continue to worry about bio-piracy—the patenting by Western firms of traditional foods and drugs.

- Textiles. The Uruguay round promised the elimination of quotas in 2004, enabling many developing countries to exploit another area of comparative advantage. But many developing countries worry that trade restrictions will remain, whether through “safeguards” to protect jobs or through high tariffs. Many also fear that the West will find some way to wiggle out of its commitments.
- A more balanced liberalisation agenda. With services comprising an increasing share of production in developed countries, attention has shifted to liberalisation of trade in services. A more balanced agenda would balance attempts to ease capital flows with efforts to facilitate the flow of labour, including unskilled labour.
- Competition. Everyone advocates “fair competition”. But discussions about competition and

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.

fair trade again demonstrate the intellectual poverty and inequity of trade negotiations. Anti-dumping laws are intended to ensure fair trade by preventing the sale of goods below cost. Within the developed countries, there has long been concern about such behaviour—so-called “predation”—and well-defined standards have been developed. With globalisation, it would be natural to extend such principles to the international arena, making it irrelevant whether a producer is domestic or foreign when judging whether he is engaged in an unfair trade practice. But it does make a difference whether a good is produced at home or abroad. Foreign producers are accused of “unfair” competition far more easily than domestic producers. Indeed, if the standards of domestic trade laws were applied internationally, perhaps a majority of firms within the US would be guilty of dumping. Yet America's Supreme Court has set standards so high for American firms to be found guilty of predation that few cases are successfully prosecuted domestically. The trade negotiators are not even discussing eliminating this double standard. So developing countries worry that efforts to introduce “competition” within

trade negotiations will only make life even more difficult. They worry that efforts to promote domestic industries or provide preferential treatment to disadvantaged groups (the kind of affirmative action programs that have been so important, both in developed and less developed countries) will be labelled “unfair” to foreign firms, and thus be prohibited.

There is a real danger that what was intended to remedy the imbalances of previous trade rounds will not only fail to do so, but may introduce new imbalances. Pushing countries to liberalise their capital markets and open them up to speculative capital flows is one example. At the very moment when the IMF has finally recognised that such liberalisation may produce instability but not growth, the WTO is now pursuing it.

Failure at Cancun would confirm the fears of those who resisted a new round of trade negotiations. Needless to say, it would also provide support for the anti-globalisation protestors everywhere. ♦

Joseph E Stiglitz is Professor of Economics and Finance at Columbia University and was the 2001 Nobel laureate in Economics.



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The Anti-abortion

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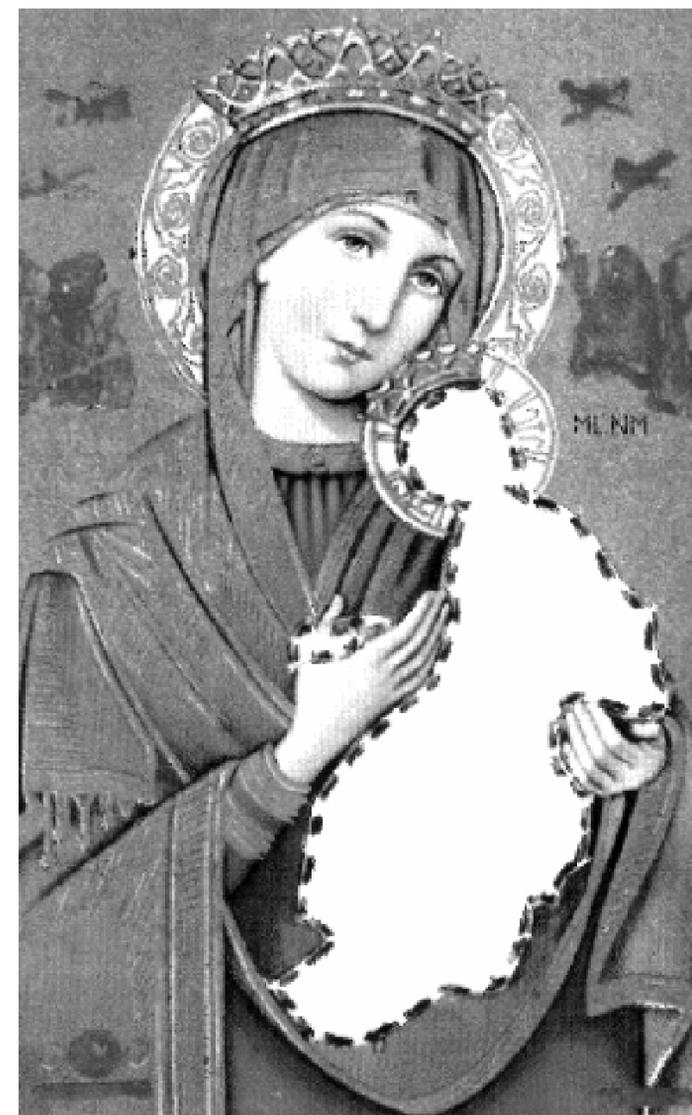
Women's health is threatened by an effective global campaign being waged by conservative Roman Catholic organisations from the United States, in harmony with the policies of President George W Bush, of Protestant faith, and the diplomatic efforts of the Vatican, say reproductive rights activists. The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

The World Health Organisation calculates that 20 million clandestine abortions, often in unsafe and unsanitary circumstances, are performed each year, claiming the lives of 78,000 women, half in Latin America. 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 by 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 from UNFPA its contribution for the years 2004 and 2005, totalling \$100 million. This confirms that “the public policy process is increasingly tainted by misinformation emanating from the White House,” commented theologian and activist Frances Kissling, president of the international group Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC), 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 Northrup, president of the US-based Centre for Reproductive Rights, said recently it is unthinkable that the Bush government is sacrificing the health and lives of women and families in poor countries just to satisfy an extremist 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” Northrup mentioned is represented in the US Catholic world by three powerful



'Glocal' English

RAHUL GOSWAMI in SINGAPORE

A continent that contains a third of the world's spoken codes—and yet one whose astonishing diversity of speech and written systems—is being eroded by relentless globalisation. That, in a nutshell, is the ethnolinguist's lament for Asia.

"In South-east Asia, the response to globalisation is to acquire language skills, not in many languages, but in one, the English language, which is seen as the key to success in the globalised age," said Dr Rujaya Abhakom, lecturer in South-east Asian history at Chiang Mai University, Thailand. It is indeed English, which served the colonial British empire and now drives the knowledge economy and the Internet. "Efficiency and development, growth and human capital, are not tolerant of difference," commented Professor Joseph Lo Bianco, director of The National Language and Literacy Institute of Australia. "Globalised modernisation requires that knowledge is imparted in ways that are comparable across differences of setting, culture and language."

Abhakom and Lo Bianco were participants at a conference on language trends in Asia, held last month by the National University of Singapore's Asia Research Institute. The discussion focused on the sorts of globalisation in Asia today, and whether or not the primary language of an economy is endangering other languages. Generally, some participants pointed out, the endangerment of language is most serious where local globalisation is the

most advanced and includes virtually all economic sectors. Against such a background, the future of languages such as Hovongan, in north-central Kalimantan, Indonesia, and Sou, in the southern Laos province of Attapeu, is in peril: both are estimated to have around 1,000 speakers, and thus classified as being endangered under Unesco's definition.

Even where languages are not endangered, there are confrontations between them and English. Dr Udaya Narayan Singh, director of the Central Institute of Indian Languages in Mysore, explained, "There is always a hidden tussle as well as open confrontation between supporters of Hindi who mostly oppose the use of English, and supporters of the regional languages who look to English as an alternative link between the Indian states."

Globalisation has also brought about what has been called the 'McDonaldisation' of societies, most notably through the entry of cultural products like Hollywood movies, US toys, fast food and pop music. Anthony Reid, director of the Asia Research Institute, however noted that although media is one of the potent forces of globalisation today, it has been beneficial in the past. For instance, he explained, radio and cheap cassettes have helped non-national language communities in Indonesia, East Malaysia, the Philippines, Burma and India.

More than 80 percent of countries with great biological diversity are also the places with the

"Wah! The Inggriish test so dee-fee-kurt one, sure fail. Feddup."



greatest number of endangered languages. The need for protection has never been more urgent—many of the world's endangered plant and animal species today, for example, are known only to certain peoples whose languages are also dying out. One reaction to the conventional idea of globalisation, as pointed out by Anne Pakir, an associate professor at the National University of Singapore, is that English is "going 'glocal', that is, going global while

maintaining local roots". She sees 'glocal English' as a language that has international status but which also expresses local identities.

Already, more Asians speak English than anyone else, and the kinds of Asian English multiply every year. For the many who continue to see it as an intrusion, a destructive force, there may be some solace to be found in the old Malay saying, "your mouth is your tiger". ♦ (IPS)

Magsaysay Awards 2003

India's tough election commissioner, James Lyngdoh, Philippine investigative journalist, Sheila Coronel (pics, right), and an Indian child labour campaigner, Shantha Sinha, are among this year's seven winners of the Magsaysay Award winners.



Lyngdoh defied government pressure for an early election in riot-torn Gujarat and oversaw fair polls in Kashmir, while Coronel's investigative reports on corruption by ex-Philippine president Joseph Estrada started a chain reaction that brought down his government in 2000.

The Philippines-based Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation said in a statement last week: "Mr Lyngdoh is being recognised for his convincing validation of free and fair elections as the foundation and best hope of secular democracy in strife-torn India." In 2002, Lyngdoh rejected for security reasons the ruling Hindu nationalists' plans for a snap poll in Gujarat, where more than 1,000 people died in Hindu-Muslim bloodshed.

The other winners were Chinese AIDS activist Gao Yaojie, Japanese health activist Tetsu Nakamura who has worked in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Japanese environmentalist Seiei Toyama and the head of East Timor's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Aniceto Lopes.

About Coronel, the foundation said the award was a recognition of her "leading a groundbreaking collaborative effort to develop investigative journalism as a critical component of democratic discourse in the Philippines". Last year's Magsaysay Award for journalism was won by Nepali media activist, Bharat Koirala.



Fair chance

BEIJING—Left behind in China's scramble for wealth and ostracised during 20 years of uneven economic growth, millions of migrant workers are now the focus of attention of the country's leadership.

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 don't have access to the courts, and are barred from access to schools, hospitals, nurseries and public housing. But the government has realised it is no longer economically possible to employ the rural population only in agriculture—the surplus rural workforce is estimated at 150 to 180 million. Their remittances often underpin the prosperity of large parts of rural China. Now 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, while prohibiting job discrimination based on residency and potentially opening all jobs to rural migrants. 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. (IPS)

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. These organisations accuse the members of groups like CFFC of being false Catholics and promoting abortion.

In October 2000, the Population Research Institute accused UNFPA of financing the policy in China of coercive abortion and sterilisation, and that was a determining factor the following year when Bush blocked the disbursement of the \$34 million contribution to that agency that the US Congress had already approved. The implication that UNFPA was involved in Chinese abortions was a "bald-faced lie", says Daniela Colombo, head of the Association of Italian Women for Development (AIDOS). That notion was disproved "by three independent investigations conducted in China, one of which was led by the United States."

The current "right-wing" and "fundamentalist" campaign undermines achievements that "we thought we had definitively conquered after Cairo and Beijing. We can't afford to lose," said

Wendy Harcourt, of the non-governmental Society for International Development. In 1994, representatives from the governments of 179 countries took part in the UN International Conference on Population and Development, in Cairo. The next year, the World Conference on Women was held in Beijing. In general terms, these conferences affirmed that reproductive health means that individuals should have a satisfactory and safe sexual life, enjoy reproductive health and the freedom to choose if and when they want to have children.

Since the 11 September attacks in New York and Washington, the decline in reproductive health and rights has worsened, says Harcourt, "and now they are even calling into question the language of the Beijing Declaration." The Vatican published a 900-page book titled *Lexicon on Ambiguous and Colloquial Terms About Family Life and Ethical Questions*, in which it is alleged that the language used at the Beijing conference is camouflage to promote the use of contraceptives and abortion, counter to the mandates of the Catholic Church hierarchy.

"They insist on proposing only

abstinence as a means to preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS. It is just outrageous," commented AIDOS spokeswoman Cristiana Scoppa. The Bush administration agrees with the Vatican's approach in this sense, says Brazilian population policy researcher Sonia Correa. "As soon as Bush took office in 2001 he ordered USAID (the country's international aid agency) to suspend its financial support to NGOs whose programs included the legalisation of abortion. Then he moved to earmark funds to promote sexual abstinence," she said.

But Washington would not be able to cut funds for reproductive health programs within the United States because it would be unconstitutional, the Centre for Reproductive Rights says. The broader picture, however, "is a reality that seems as if it were taken from a feminist text book in the 1970s: a capitalist empire dominated by men and motivated by ambition, beating the drums of war against women's agencies specialising in sexuality and reproduction," Correa said. ♦ (IPS)

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Role of king is crucial

Baburam Bhattarai in *Kantipur*, 10 August

कान्तिपुर

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 him and the army to implement the agreements 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 and the army's fate. This is the knotty issue that will determine the success and failure of the talks.

It will also depend on the sacrifices the king is prepared to make. The monarch, as an intellectual person, must understand that monarchy was a system that was born in the age of slavery. It has become irrelevant and unnecessary in the modern capitalist and socialist age we are living in. In Nepal, the monarchy has lost its historical essence. After the royal palace massacre, even the general people in the remotest parts of the country no more believe the monarchy as an institution. In this context, if the king opts to honour the people's democratic attitude and heed the writing on the wall, by giving up his throne and allowing the republican system in the country, he will get the right respect both from the people and us.

If the king makes that sacrifice, the present conflict in the country will see the easiest exit and the country will make a giant leap based on the new setting and new national unity.

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, the 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 significantly 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



MIN BAIRACHARYA

parties could be a meeting point. True that there are some 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-colonialism. Among all kinds of foreign powers at play here, two deserve the biggest attention. One of them is with the king, while the other backs 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 India 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 are different. It actually wants war, therefore, the royal palace and the Royal Nepali Army may try to sabotage talks.

Next round

Rajdhani, August 11, 2003

राजधानी

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 activists and the people to Kathmandu," said People's Front Nepal's Lila Mani Pokhrel. The tentative launch date is the first week of September. The biggest party among the five, UML, has already asked its workers to be present in the capital by the end of this week. The Nepal Sadhbahana Party have made a similar call. "There will be a typhoon," warns UML general

secretary Madhab 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 FNCCI's Chandni Prasad Dhakal, just after a meeting with GP Koirala.

In collusion

Nepal Samacharpatra, 11 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 18-point demand, their intention would become public," said Koirala at a public meeting in Birganj earlier 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 seventh round of the movement to recover the rights of the people. If the people reject him, 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".

Separated at birth

After 30 years, Madhuri Huger (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.



Girish Giri in *Kantipur*, 2 August

कान्तिपुर

The father...

Tears stream down their faces. Looking at his 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. "Oh God, now I can die peacefully and reach heaven" says Dhaknath 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 Dhorke village. "After giving birth to a son and a daughter, my wife had complications during the third delivery," recalls Dhakinath. He rushed his wife to Bir Hospital in the capital where the doctors delivered twins but could not save his wife, Khem Kumari Acharya. "The doctors told me that the newlyborns would die without a mother's care," Acharya remembers, looking intently at his daughter. "That's why they had to keep you at the hospital. Even then I visited you everyday with milk and curd." A few months later, when he got to the hospital his daughters were missing and so was the their nurse. Someone suggested going to the orphanage Bal Mandir but the girls were not there.

Through *Kantipur* he found out that his girls had been taken to Bal Mandir and been adopted by two different families: Newars from Thimi and a Swiss couple. "During the inauguration of the SAARC Summit, I heard there would a children's parade so I came from the village," he tells his daughter. "With your mother's face in my mind, I hoped to find you in the crowd but of course you weren't there."

...and the sister

Kantipur, 12 August

Separated at birth, 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?" The younger twin shook her head and replied that her foster parents brought her up with love and care.

Born to Dhakni 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 the 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. On 26 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.

Twelve days after the first story made 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.



Placards: Hunger strike

Madhab Kumar Nepal: Hey, don't give us that look. We need energy to run the country tomorrow.

पुनर्जागरण Purnajagan, 12 August

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"After 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 Nepali Service*, 13 August.

NEPALITERATURE

by MANJUSHREE THAPA

Organisers for the arts

Given the conditions that artists in Nepal work under, it is a wonder that they produce art at all. I have written about this before, elsewhere, focusing in particular on the dismal returns 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 author gets a 10 percent royalty, s/he earns Rs 7,500 over the course of the year or more that it takes to sell all the copies. This is only if the distributors pay the publishers, who in turn pay the author due royalties. More often than not, of course, publishers do not offer royalties to authors, instead giving her or him free copies which s/he is obliged to hand out, free, to fellow writers, family and friends—who generally do not read them. There is no mystery as to why the quality of Nepali literature is poor today; unable to make a living wage off of literary writing, poets and novelists hold down other jobs to support themselves, and have little time to devote to their craft.

Publishers argue that they earn too little to treat authors better; but the fault for this is largely theirs. They do not invest in editors who could enhance the quality of the books they are publishing, thus allowing proof mistakes, factual errors, wordiness, and stylistic no-no's that scare off potential readers. There is close to no marketing for literary books: How many of us know when Bimal Nibha's latest collection came out? Publishers have also failed to push for a proper distribution network, preferring to open shops of their own in order to keep for themselves the 30 to 40 percent cut that distributors would earn.

Strong business communities are said to foster the creativity of communities. In Nepal, we can see this to be true in the visual arts and in the field of music. Before the Maoist insurgency heated up around the turn of the millennium, the business community was funding much painting, etching and decorative arts, allowing top artists like Kiran Manandhar and Sashikala Tiwari to earn a cool half-lakh for a single work of art (much to the envy of cash-strapped literary writers). And even through the state of emergency and increased violence in the countryside, Kathmandu has supported a hopping jazz and rock scene that is fostering much young talent: Witness 1974 AD, Abhaya and the Steam Injuns, Cadenza, Sitapati...Nepali singers, too, are increasingly able to support themselves off their talent, thanks in part to organizers like event nepalaya and other event managers, and to FM radios and their avid listeners.

The difference between these fields and the field of literature is that the visual arts and music have been able to hook up to the market. The public is willing to pay to sustain these arts, and channels have been created to make this easy, by art galleries and a growing number of hotels and bars. The private sector is working, in these fields, as it should.

The other funding option—in Nepal—is to have aid industry donors support creative work. This has been possible in the field of drama, though not always to the benefit of the field. Street theatre was ostensibly killed by the donor agendas that they pushed (think street theatre for conservation, street theatre for immunisation, street theatre for international women's day). The country's top dramatists too have been tempted away from courting popular support by the ease of obtaining funding from donors. This, of course, is harder to do when the plays they produce are not entertainment-oriented, but challenging, smart and critical, as are the plays of Sunil Pokharel and Anup Baral. Similarly, because of its 'high' or serious concerns, the field of documentary filmmaking has found easier support in the aid industry than in the wider market. Art films too totter precariously on the goodwill of individual patrons.

Private patrons—be they art-loving individuals or organisations—have of course always been a valuable source of funding for the arts; but they alone cannot sustain drama or filmmaking. What is needed in these fields—and in the field of literature—are organisers who create functioning links between the artist and the audience. For literary books: Let the poet or writer earn a decent royalty. Let the publisher earn her or his share. Let the distributor earn her or his share. Let the reader receive a high-quality book that stimulates thought and emotion. For drama and documentary or art films: Let the actors, filmmakers and crew all be able to make a living. Let the halls and distributors support themselves. Let the audiences sit back and watch something rousing.

Artists and readers/audiences alike are debilitated by the lack of good organizers in the art fields. It is time for art-lovers with good business sense to step up and set up systems that make literature, visual art, music, drama and filmmaking viable. Their effort would not be purely philanthropic. There is a profit to be made in the arts. This profit would be a righteous one, one that enriches all of society.

A king's message for a material age

⇒ from p1

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 was the name of a dynasty, with the particular illustrious monarch being called 'Mahajanaka'. The dates are also murky, although it is obvious he must have preceded Gautam Buddha of Kapilvastu. Mahajanaka is the story of one of the lives of the Buddha (before he became reborn as Siddhartha Gautam, the Prince of Kapilavastu) mentioned in the Tripitaka.

King Mahajanaka practiced perseverance without the desire for reward which resulted in his gaining the throne and bringing prosperity and wealth to the kingdom of Videha and the city of Mithila by the strength of his qualities.

In 1977, Thailand's King Bhumibol happened to be listening to a sermon about King Mahajanaka as recounted in the Jataka. A particular episode related to King Janak's visit to the royal park in the city of Mithila struck King Bhumibol. At the entrance of the park were two mango trees, one bearing fruit and the other barren. The king tasted the delicious mango fruit then entered the park. On return, he saw that the mango tree with the tasty fruits had been vandalised and uprooted by his elephant mahouts, horse handlers and courtiers. The other tree was left proudly standing. The incident of the mango trees demonstrated that good things are ironically the target of greed and are in danger of being destroyed.

After listening to this religious discourse 25 years ago, King



Bhumibol felt that the story clearly demonstrated a worthwhile lesson and should be of great benefit for everyone. He started working on the book and wrote the story with some modifications vis-à-vis the original story from the scriptures in order to make it more relevant to contemporary times, and to get some of his own messages across.

For instance, he has improvised the original text in the section on how the mango tree had been vandalised. In this portion he discusses nine methods that can be employed to restore the mango tree to its former state. The king is an avid agriculturist, and has even patented a pond aerator used by Thai farmers.

The book is illustrated by prominent Thai artists, and the final outcome is such that *The Story of Mahajanaka* is easily as enjoyable for a children of nine as it is to their grandparents. The English illustrated version was an

instant bestseller in Thailand. In the preface, the author has expressed his intention that the story might become an object of constructive contemplation for all well-meaning people.

The king's publication of the book coincided with the Asian economic crisis during which Thailand's real estate bubble burst, tens of thousands were laid off, the stock market crashed and the Thai baht plummeted. The underlying themes of self-reliance, moderation and compassion in the story of King Janak struck a chord with the king's Thai subjects who were increasingly disenchanted with materialism in an era of instant gratification.

The king is known to have expressed his uneasiness with Thailand being labeled an 'Asian Tiger'. His Buddhist inclinations aside, he favours a reasonable state of well-being, allowing for logical consumption while using minimum resources. He is sympathetic to the philosophy of E.F Schumacher's 'Small is Beautiful' school.

The book uses dharma riddles and has lead some to suspect that it may be semi-autobiographical. Some years back, it was rumoured that the king was contemplating abdicating and retiring into a monastery. The king's attachment to Buddhism is well known, and in 1956 he had taken the vows and had become a Buddhist monk for two weeks. In *The Story of Mahajanaka*, the section concerning the mango trees has a part where King Mahajanaka thinks his desire to leave the city on a quest of supreme tranquility was premature because Mithila's prosperity had not yet reached a peak. Many took this passage to be

autobiographical. Just as in the case of King Janaka of Videha, King Bhumibol may have felt that it was not the time to abdicate.

The Story of Mahajanaka by King Bhumibol Adulyadej (which in Sanskrit would be written Bhumibol Atulyatej or 'Strength of the Land and Immeasurable Splendour') has clear evidence that the monarch has put a lot of work to bring his research into its current shape. The Thai king appears to have learnt Sanskrit and closely studied the geography of the part of Nepal and India covered by the ancient Vidhya empire. The king has even sent his assistants to Janakpur to take pictures, and especially to look out for two mango trees that may look like the ones in the story.

The illustrations were done under the king's direct supervision, and show familiarity with ancient Indic dress, building structures and character traits, though some of the styles have been modified to suit Thai sensibilities. The charts drawn in the illustrated book reveal King Bhumibol's familiarity with the subcontinent's geography accurately identifying Mithila, Varanasi, Ayodhya and Mount Kailash. There is some speculation as well: he identifies Thailand with the legendary Suwannaphumi ('Suwarnabhumi'). A Nepali bhikku at the royal monastery, Wat Bovoranives, Phra Vipassani is translating King Bhumibol's *The Story of Mahajanaka* from Thai into Nepali for the benefit of the Nepali public. ♦

Sudhindra Sharma is a visiting scholar at The Institute of Asian Studies at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. sudhindirajsharma@hotmail.com

Nepal's permanent envoy to Thailand

In Bangkok, they call Anil Sakya Nepal's permanent ambassador to Thailand. Not only is he an authority on Thai Buddhism, speaking the language fluently, but he is also close to the two most important institutions in Thailand: the Buddhist sangha and the monarchy.

Anil Sakya's Buddhist name is Phra Sugandha ('phra' is the Thai word for monk) and he is assistant secretary to the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand, His Holiness Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara, something like Nepal's rajguru. Being close to the supreme patriarch has brought Phra Sugandha close to Thailand's King Bhumibol on numerous occasions while helping on his research into Buddhism in Nepal.

Phra Sugandha is also a senior lecturer at Mahamukut Buddhist University where he teaches anthropology and is visiting professor at Mahidol University where he teaches Buddhist studies. He is fluent in Pali, English, Thai, Nepali and Newari, and travels often on lecture tours.

After doing his first masters from Tribhuban University, Anil Sakya received a royal scholarship from the king of Thailand to do an Mphil from Cambridge and then a PhD in social anthropology in 2000 from Britain's Brunel University under the Nepal specialist, David Gellner. His PhD dissertation is on Newar marriage and kinship in Kathmandu.

We asked Anil why he chose that subject, being a celibate monk himself. "In anthropology, you chose a topic to which you are an 'outsider' so to speak. As a monk, I am an 'outsider' to the institution of marriage, thus my interest in choosing it."

Anil was born in 1960 in Lagan Tole in Kathmandu to a middle-class Sakya family, Anil remembers his destination was pre-ordained. "When my mother conceived me she had a dream of the Buddha visiting her house for alms," he recalls, "She

offered alms to the Buddha and other monks in return the Buddha blessed her with a son." He became a Samenera, a Buddhist novice at 14, and after completing Class 8 from Paropakar Adarsha High School in Kathmandu, he was sent to Thailand where he ordained as a monk at age 22.

Today, as Phra Sugandha, Anil takes a keen interest in informing the Thai public about Nepal and is a recognised face on Thai television and media where he is called 'Phra Nepal' (Nepali monk). Lately, Anil is also gaining international recognition as a monk-anthropologist. One subject that fascinates Anil is the historic link between Nepal and Thailand. Mahayana and Vajrayana icons such as those found in Kathmandu Valley have been unearthed in Ayutthya, the former capital of Siam, north of Bangkok. Anil believes this is evidence of the trade and religious links that used to prevail between the two kingdoms and he wants to research these links further.

Anil was also a consultant to King Bhumibol when he was working on his book *Mahajanaka* in late 1988 (see article, above). They worked together while the king was learning Sanskrit and the Devnagari script. "I remember His Majesty's humility towards Nepali monks as well as his interest in Nepal and Buddhism in Nepal," recalls Anil.

In 1985, Anil remembers the king kneeling in front of the Sanghanayaka Bhikshu Pragananda of Nepal, who was seated on a chair while giving a sermon at the royal monastery. Thailand's Queen Sirikit has also shown keen interest in Nepal, and a vihara built in Kirtipur carries her name: Sirikitti ('Srikirti' in Sanskrit).

Aside from the daily rituals of monkhood, Phra Sugandha is often giving discourses and sermons, or preparing papers and articles at Wat Bovoranives Vihara, Thailand's royal monastery. ♦

Sudhindra Sharma in Bangkok



ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Imaging Everest** photographic exhibition from the Royal Geographical Society, London, in association with The British Council, at the Patan Museum till 16 August.
- ❖ **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 9, Lazimpat. 4436944
- ❖ **Nepali Watercolour Paintings in Retrospect 1850-2003** features old masters and contemporary artists till 16 August at Nepal Art Council Gallery, Babarmahal, Kathmandu.
- ❖ **Paintings for Peace** by Govinda Prasad Sah 'Azad' at the British Council, Lainchour from 18 August.

EVENTS

- ❖ **Yogaworkshop** with Carolyn at The Retreat, Palanchowk, 15-17 or 20 August. 5551455 Website: www.carolynboch.com
- ❖ **Ghulam Ali live** on 30 August at the Regal Ballroom, Hotel Yak & Yeti. Tickets, inclusive of dinner and drinks: Rs 2,499 single, Rs 3,999 couple.
- ❖ **Pipalboat Playback Theatre** share your stories on 17, 18 August. Inside Saipal Academy, New Baneshwor. 4437746

MUSIC

- ❖ **Thunderbolt** live on 20 August at Summit Hotel Courtyard. 5524694
- ❖ **Catch 22** back at the Rum Doodle from 10 August.
- ❖ **Cadenza live** 7.30PM every Wednesday and Saturday. Rs 200 entry. Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Vayu live** every Friday night, jam sessions every Wednesday night. Jatra, Thamel. 4256622
- ❖ **Live Acoustic Jam** 7PM on Saturdays at Himalatte Cafe, Thamel. 4256738
- ❖ **jHOLA** on 15 August, **Robin N' Looza**: on 16 August. 8PM onwards at The Jazz Bar, Shangri-la Hotel, Lazimpat. 4412999.
- ❖ **Rusty Nails** every Friday at Fusion, Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488

DRINKS

- ❖ **Uncorked wine festival** at Hotel Yak & Yeti, Darbar Marg. 4248999
- ❖ **Liquor Buffet** 7-9PM at the Splash Bar & Grill. Rs 550 per person. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu. 4411818
- ❖ **K-too! Special** Tropical Khukri drinks at K-too! Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 4433043.
- ❖ **Kilroy's Monsoon Wine Festival** 14 different wines at Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Thamel. 4250440

FOOD

- ❖ **Momos & More** the finest momos in town now at Dhobighat. 5520692
- ❖ **Grand opening** of JJ Café & Bar with Nalina Chitrakar and Sanjeev Pradhan. Tickets: Rs 300. Jamal Junction. 4226543
- ❖ **Biryani and Kebab Festival** from 12-27 August at The Café, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Chef's Special** far east to the west for Rs 499, South Indian specialities at lunch for Rs 199, BBQ on Friday night at Rs 399. Shambala Garden, Shangri-la Hotel, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Café Mitra** New menu, spicy Chinese food every Saturday. Thamel. 4259015
- ❖ **Chimney Refreshed** Fine continental cuisine at The Chimney Restaurant, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Executive lunch meals** at Bhanchha Ghar Restaurant and Bar, Kamaladi. 4225172
- ❖ **Espresso Bar** newly renovated at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4419612
- ❖ **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 500 per person. 4680083
- ❖ **Papaya salad**, seasonal vegetables with fillet or chicken and Italian icecream at Singma, Jawlakhel, Lalitpur. 552004

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Five Star getaway deals** at The Fort Resort, Nagarkot. 4226799
- ❖ **Dakshinkali Package** every Saturday Rs 500+tax. 4370714, 4371537
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- ❖ **Monsoon Retreat** special deals in Bardia for expats. Jungle Base Camp. 061-532112 Email: junglebasecamp@yahoo.com

BOOKWORM

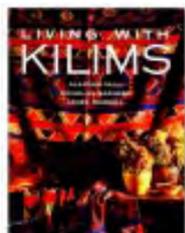


Traditional Arts and Crafts of Nepal CL Gajurel, KK Vaidya
S Chand & Company, 1994 (second edition)
Rs 400

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 threatens 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.

Nepalese Textiles Susi Dunsmore
British Museum Press, 1993
Rs 2,200

Dunsmore travelled extensively through Nepal to record traditional techniques, photographing weavers at work and collecting outstanding examples of their craft. The author has examined ancient manuscripts and stone carvings for early evidence of textiles, also including meticulous illustrations of looms and spindles, and surveying the raw materials used.



Living with Kilims Alastair Hull, Nicholas Barnard, James Merrell
Thames 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, 4227711, mandala@csl.com.np

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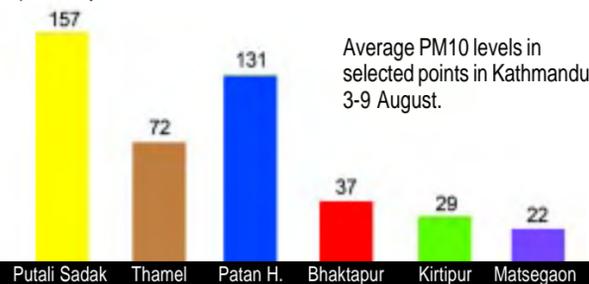
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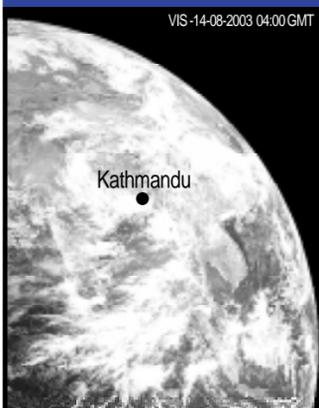
Good	< 60
Ok	61 to 120
Unhealthy	121 to 350
Harmful	351 to 425
Hazardous	>425

After experiencing the cleanest week of the year last week, Kathmandu's air pollution is back to unhealthy normal levels. The average PM10 (particulate matter small enough to enter the human body) count at Putali Sadak 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 Putali Sadak and Patan Hospital. The air in the residential areas of Thamel was comparatively better.



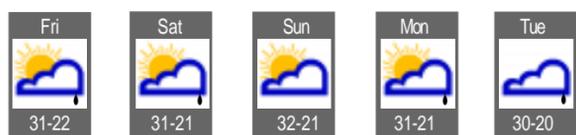
NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



There was a dramatic change in the pressure patterns in the Himalaya earlier this week. Low pressure over the Gangetic plains morphed 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 shine than rain till this weekend. But rest assured, the rains will return with renewed vigour.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



Times Available worldwide in hard copy on PEPC vending machines.

Koi Mil Gaya is being touted as the desi version of ET meets X-Files. Rakesh Roshan's mega production aims at changing our comprehension of this genre in Indian cinema. The movie, starring his son Hrithik Roshan, Preity Zinta and Rekha, uses the expertise of international production teams who worked on Independence Day and Godzilla. As always, we'll have to suspend our disbelief (a spaceship that responds to the sound of "Aum") but at least we can look forward to a new experience and perhaps the slickest Bollywood sci-fi thriller ever made.



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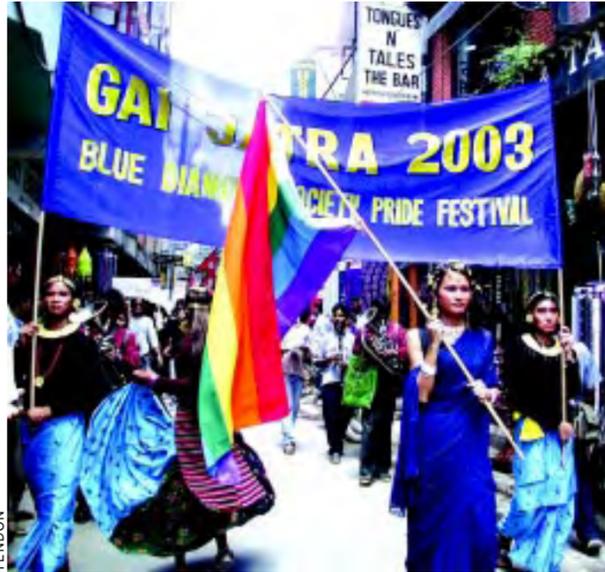
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Gay Jatra

“We don’t want a revolution, just the same respect given to everyone else.”



TENDON

ANGEL ANGELUS

On 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 (MSMs). 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 actually 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 its own set of stereotypes—pull out the chiffon sari and magic marker make-up. 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 in a little black cocktail dress for the parade, puts 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.

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

News in Briefs

Due to space constraints, many important events taking place in the past 24 hours did not make it to page one. All the same, being a newspaper of record, we must mention them briefly in passing so that, centuries hence, researchers poring through the dustbins of history can glean interesting facets of early 21st century life in Nepal. No item of news is therefore too trivial for us, as we can see from a peek into this week's episode of News in Briefs:

Visa Relaxation for Old Geezers

Kathmandu – In an effort to lure visitors back to Nepal, His Majesty's Government has announced a special category of Relaxation Visa for senior citizens in the autumn of their lives, it is learnt.

Details are sketchy, but sources confirmed that octogenarians and above will find safe haven in Nepal for the remainder of their natural lives provided they agree to certain terms and conditions like: not to make rude remarks about our rulers, bequeath a large chunk of their assets to the national exchequer in their last will and testament, and to adhere to prevailing Nepali standards of hygiene and sanitation. In return, HMG will provide each retiree a free voucher for a once-in-a-lifetime Tibetan Sky Burial, and a guaranteed fast-track roundtrip to heaven and back to be reincarnated as an endangered Asiatic One-Horned Rhinoceros calf.

Acute Acronym Shortage Hits NGOs

Kathmandu – Non-government Organisations (NGOs), Quasi Non-government Organisations (QUANGOs), Fly-by-night International Non-government Organisations (FLAMINGOs) and Mainstream Non-government Organisations (MANGOs) are facing an acute shortage of acronyms which is delaying registration of new organisms, it was

revealed today at an all-Nepal convention of Government-supported Non-government Organisations (GONGOs).

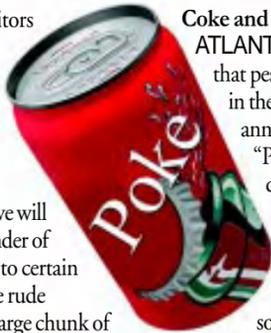
"I don't see how we can go on like this," said the incoming secretary of the group, INSECT. "At this rate, the registration of new NGOs will grind to a halt." The outgoing chairperson of another ungovernmental organisation, HERPES, agreed: "This is an emergency. The government should do something about it."

Coke and Pepsi to Merge

ATLANTA – Faced with huge losses after allegations that pesticide residue was found in samples of colas in the Sub-Indian Continent, Coke and Pepsi announced today that they are merging. "People were mixing us up all the time, so we decided why not?" said the CEOs of the two companies in a joint statement. The new company, Poke Inc, is now the largest manufacturer of carboniferous beverages on the planet. The new fizzy giant will soon launch a range of new products, including Poca Cola, Diet Coksi, Frite, and Poke Lite.

Journo Held

Kathmandu – A journalist carrying a large stash of counterfeit Indian currency hidden inside his fake bottom was held up by police at the airport today. "We apprehended the perpetrator for questioning because he was walking suspiciously on all fours as he went through the x-ray machine," DIG Vijay Singh said. "On closer examination, his x-ray immediately raised eyebrows because none of us had seen haemorrhoids of that size before." Besides counterfeit Indian currency, the journalist was also found in possession of several items of fake news. Said DIG Vijay: "We knew the news was totally fabricated because none of the quotes were properly sourced."



NEPALI SOCIETY

Madan Kala's kala

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 tarai home with intricate motifs and striking colours. Like other Maithili 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.

Madan Kala's dream of becoming an artist was thwarted when, at the age of 14, she was married off. While that would have quashed the ambition of others less determined, Madan Kala was adamant about earning a living.

Three sons later, and with the support of her husband (uncommon among Nepali families even today) she became a health worker with a UNICEF project working with the Maithili community. When she saw how male family members hemmed in the lives of women, she felt an overwhelming desire to help them change their lives.

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 Janakpur Handicraft 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 Maithili Women Empowerment Movement (MWEM) based in Janakpur. 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 grazing 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. ♦ (Sradha Basnyat)



SRADHA BASNYAT

UTL

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