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## Political limbo

As our rulers hibernate for Dasai, it looks like the political limbo will linger. Despite pressure from peace groups for a Dasai-Tihar ceasefire and Maoist hints that they may consider it, the army doesn't seem to be in the mood. Government spokesman Kamal Thapa's "we will agree to a ceasefire if the Maoists disarm," was a flat no. However, many expect an informal reduction in violence over Dasai. "There may be internal instructions to lessen activities," a source close to the Maoists told us, "But a joint ceasefire declaration is unlikely."

However, the tacit ceasefire between the king and political leaders seems to be fraying as the parties get impatient with the palace's silence. After unprecedented public pressure by Kathmandu-based embassies to mend fences, the parties have toned down their rhetoric. The government has rejected the reinstatement of parliament, and is trying to woo moderates from the parties to form an all-party interim government. "Everyone is waiting for the others to make the first move," the UML's Madhab Kumar Nepal told us. The Nepali Congress leader Ram Sharan Mahat says the bottom line is to bring the constitution back on track. He says: "Our 18-point program is actually the middle path between the Maoists and the government."



MIN BAURACHARYA

# A vegetarian Dasai

**Giving up meat has health benefits, and may even make us less violent.**

### SRADDHA BASNYAT

As *khukuris* are sharpened in anticipation of Dasai, goats, buffaloes, chickens and ducks are not looking forward to Nepal's great annual massacre.

This year, as the country plunges into a spiral of unprecedented violence, there are concerns about animal sacrifices. Some are even thinking this is the time to turn vegetarian. The only thing holding them back is habit and the belief that feasting on flesh is a part of our culture.

Researchers have long linked eating meat, especially red meat, to heart disease, cancer, diabetes, arthritis and osteoporosis. A vegetarian diet, on the other hand, is low in fat and high in fibre and combined with a healthy lifestyle it's known to reverse arteriosclerosis and even prevent cancer. "It's a good idea to cut down on meat after 35," says Dr Sundar Mani Dixit, who prescribes fruits, vegetables, legumes and nuts for the amino acids required by the body to build protein.

Still, the notion that meat is more



nutritious lingers and countries with rising living standards always show an exponential increase in meat consumption.

At 81, Hem Bahadur Basnyat is proof that a vegetarian diet works. After giving up meat 35 years ago, the retired army colonel starts his day with an hour-and-half walk at 5AM.

Many Nepalis cannot afford to eat meat that often. But the urban middle class is consuming more animal products and finds it difficult to give up meat for purely health reasons. Until Nepal has modern meat processing plants, most

Nepalis will turn to ritual sacrifices at home at Dasai, one of the few times in a year they get to eat meat.

But there are genuine health benefits to giving up meat. Vegetarians usually have more energy, need less sleep and lose weight. The remarkable part of giving up meat is that it seems to make people less aggressive. Renowned Nepali film director, Nir Shah, was a voracious meat eater till three years ago. After turning vegetarian initially to lose weight, he found other side benefits. "I am less angry now, and feel reduced tension."

Shah also worried about the psychological impact on children of having to watch animal decapitation. "Children are either traumatised, or they enjoy it. Neither is good for them," he told us. Steeped in rituals, Nir Shah's family is required to carry out a sacrifice at Dasai. Instead of a goat, this year he will bring home a gourd.

Organisations like the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Nepal (SPCAN) are also worried about the cruelty to animals in the name of religion—especially big sacrificial rituals like Dasai and Gadimai Mela in Bara district every five years. "Violence is learned, it could start by beating a dog, or witnessing a sacrifice," says SPCAN's Lucia de Vries.

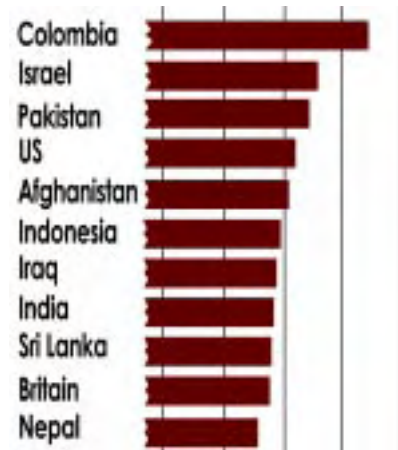
The rationale for Dasai sacrifice is the cult of Durga, the goddess who vanquished demons and saved humanity. Priest Shivahari Rimal says sacrifices today have lost their religio-cultural facets: "These days people justify the sacrifices just to fill their bellies." ♦

We wish all readers happy Dasai holidays. Nepali Times will skip one issue next week, the next edition of this paper will appear on Friday 10 October.



## Terrorism Index

Nepal figures 11<sup>th</sup> on a list of countries in danger of terrorist violence compiled by risk analysts, World Markets Research Centre. At greater risk than Nepal are the United States, Britain and India. North Korea is the safest place on earth.



**Times** nepalnews.com  
Weekly Internet Poll # 104

**Q. How do you rate the chances of an all-party government being formed?**

Good 43.0%  
Not Good 52.1%  
Don't Know 4.1%

Total votes: 1,377

Weekly Internet Poll # 105. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

**Q. Now that the ceasefire is off, do you think the political parties and the king should unite?**

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STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



# Wartime Dasai

Warmongers will win if we, out of fear, stop living.

## HUMAN SACRIFICE

The most important Nepali festival is two weeks away but the country is not in a mood for festivities.

This is the time of year when people go back to their ancestral villages for clan reunions. But this year the few people still left in the villages are leaving. They are fleeing fear, dread and terror, leaving ripening rice on the terraces and their livestock, and abandoning the monsoon-green hills of their homes. They are leaving because there is nothing left to hand over to extortionists. The teachers, shopkeepers, farmers, social workers and nurses who they saw and greeted every day have been decapitated like Dasai goats in front of their eyes. Then there are the untold numbers who have been killed in encounters that we don't even hear about. All predictions that the breakdown of the ceasefire would take the violence and brutality to a new scale have sadly been proven right.

It isn't hard to see that the Maoists' shock and awe campaign is going to backfire badly. It is going to isolate them further from the people and is going to distance them even more from a political resolution. Since neither side can win this war, what is the point of all this blood-letting? To improve their bargaining position in the next round of negotiations? And how precisely is the slaughter of innocents going to do that?

No credo in history which has sought to terrorise the populace into submission has sustained its support for long. This addiction to murder, the temptation to eliminate anyone who doesn't agree with one's dogma, has been justified by revolutionaries throughout history in any number of ways. Besides being cannibalistic, even as a military strategy it is potentially disastrous. Not just for undercutting one's own public support base but also because revolutions always reap the whirlwind.

As we saw during China's Cultural Revolution or the New Peoples' Army purges in the Philippines, when violence becomes an end in itself, the same brutality is ultimately unleashed by hardliners to eliminate rivals, decimating the movement. However noble its original goals, violence corrodes the reason for revolution and brutalises the very people it seeks to liberate.

If last week's three-day bandh was 'successful', it was only successful in proving once more that the Nepali people are in mourning for brothers and sisters killed since the ceasefire broke down. They stayed home because they don't agree with this violence. They kept their shops closed and didn't go to work because they are fed up and want nothing else than for the Maoists and the military to figure out a way to end this unconscionable carnage. And on Sunday they rang temple bells, tooted horns and blew whistles because they wanted to stop this dance of death.

Dasai is here. When dozens of Nepalis are being sacrificed every day, there is no need to appease the gods with animal sacrifices. The gods are horrified enough. Let's celebrate it with flowers for peace and for our nation's future.

Dasai comes every year, but every year it is different. When there has been a death in the family, the living grieve for the departed. A marriage or birth the preceding year multiplies the joy as a new family member is welcomed. Like any other festival in any society, Dasai is redolent with joy for some, tinged with sadness for others.

It is also a time for the larger clan to get together, to visit ancestral farms and re-establish ties to ones roots. But this year, chances are that the ancestral home has been destroyed by the Maobadi, or security forces may be camping in it. Extended family members may have fled to the relative safety of the district towns or the capital, or migrated to work.

The middle-class observes this Nepali festival in the way it does most other things—ritualistically, doing the same thing in the same way year after year. We don't celebrate festivals, we commemorate them with religious fervour. Animal sacrifice during Dasai is mostly a middle-class affair. Most of us realise that this gory custom has little relevance but no one is willing to be the first to discontinue the ritual. It's not easy to stop the cruel practice when goats are slaughtered at numerous spiritual power centres on behalf of the state.

From his study of *jatas* in the Kathmandu Valley, anthropologist Sudarshan Tiwari has concluded that culture is at its most vibrant at the bottom rung of the social hierarchy. This hypothesis holds true for the rest of the kingdom too. The poor celebrate Dasai in a way that has made it a joyous festival—they revel in it with wild abandon. Even though the destitute have to tide it over by borrowing, Dasai is a time to forget their worries.

As violence engulfs the country, there have been calls from several *budhhijibis* that we shouldn't celebrate Dasai this year when there is so much to grieve for in our collective loss. Be it the innocent murdered by the Maobadis or the alleged rebels killed by security forces, they are all Nepalis who died for a cause that has

but not to celebrate our festivals would be to capitulate to the wishes of the warmongers. They win if peace-loving citizens stop living out of sheer fear. The spirit of Dasai must live, it can't be snatched away from Nepalis who have had little to celebrate in the past year of broken promises.

Like the call to call off Dasai, the political parties' rhetoric of regression is beginning to sound equally hollow. It's true that King Gyanendra has been in direct command of the country for one year now. But the state hasn't, at least not yet, regressed to a pre-1990 state. The very fact that Messers Sitaula, Nemwang, Sherchan, Bijukchhe, and Tripathi are free to deride the royal move from public pulpits is proof that the constitution isn't yet dead. The regime that we have is far from democratic, but it's not completely authoritarian either. Rather than regression, what we have is a political manoeuvre similar to Pakistan's Musharrafship, a semi-dictatorship.

It has also become customary in Kathmandu high society to blame "the last twelve years" for the present mess the kingdom finds itself in. Fair enough, but tell me, which democracy in human history has become fully-functional and robust in its first 12 years?

In fact, the first decade of a democracy has always been its most fragile period. Soon after its establishment, the French Republic began the Reign of Terror and the culture of the guillotine. Briefly after gaining independence, Americans started preparing for the Civil War. India

Marcos, Thailand is still trying to find a balance between the military, the monarchy and the masses.

We in Nepal had 13 governments in 12 years, but even an armed insurgency and an earth-shattering massacre of our royals didn't rob elected governments of political legitimacy. The institutions of democracy, however shaky, withstood the knocks. Instead of making fun of our first 12 years, we should take stock of the achievements since 1990 and figure out a way of getting democracy back on track by correcting the mistakes that led to the lack of accountability and bad governance. The trouble with our democracy was that there wasn't enough of it.

Some sections of the intelligentsia also take vicarious pleasure in blaming the leaders of the political parties for spreading the politics of violence. Maobadis didn't rebel against a repressive system of government, they took to the gun to overthrow a democratically elected leadership. Some political leaders since 1990 have indeed been corrupt, and reacted with iron fists against the nascent insurgency, but the law is finally catching up on them. Which one of us in the chattering classes is clean enough to cast the first stone? In any case, better a corrupt you can curse than a mass-murderer who makes society cower in fear.

In the midst of murder and mayhem this Dasai, instead of calling off the festival, let us instead use the festivities to meditate on the universal message of non-violence and then act on it. ♦



been dead for decades: dictatorship of the proletariat.

But despite our sorrows, life goes on for the living. The world didn't stop during the two World Wars, poetry was alive while the Holocaust was going on and people had time to sing harvest songs while the Khmer Rouge was busy killing one-sixth of Cambodia's population. The argument that we should call off Dasai is understandable,

became independent and democratic, but soon got embroiled in its 50-year-war over Kashmir, and lost one with China. In Pakistan, democracy fell into the hands of the military within a decade of its formation. Bangladesh had a military coup that consumed its Father of the Nation. The Philippines tumbled into turmoil after the overthrow of Ferdinand



LETTERS

TIME

I find CK Lal's criticism of us as scare-mongering, badly-informed journalists a little rich ('Getting the story straight', #163). Firstly, the quote he homes in on: "it could all go up in flames" is, as you know, taken from the column "Strictly Business" by Ashutosh Tiwari published in *Nepali Times* (#160). Secondly, the idea that he could write accurately about my poor skills as a reporter when he, er, failed even to contact the central figure in his thesis (me) or any of the people I interviewed, displays an extraordinary hypocrisy and, as any media professional should know, is a fundamental violation of the basic journalistic tenet known as 'checking'. Pots and black kettles anyone? Finally, as for parachuting in, yes, I am based in Delhi, but shall continue to keep a very close watch on developments at this tragic time for Nepal and 'parachute in' as often as I can.

**Alex Perry**  
South Asia bureau chief  
Time Magazine

● CK Lal's views were thought provoking. The *Time* magazine article was a little tacky, if not a confused man's remarks portrayed as every Nepali's dilemma. Most Nepalis have more on their minds than worrying that the glitter from past glory is gone or that their palaces will be bombed during an event, causing more embarrassment than destruction. Fear for one's security is foremost in every Nepali's mind, but we go about our business, leaving the fear at the back of our minds more out of helplessness than choice. Like everywhere else in the world, we have become experts at that. What the heck, maybe all is not yet lost. Our culture, tradition and modest ways may be our salvation.

**Jyoti Singh, Kathmandu**

● Somebody needed to trash Alex Perry, and who else but our very own CK Lal. Nobody could have done it better. When I read 'Living on the Edge' in *Time*, I didn't quite get the Edgar Allan Poe feel. People are trying to get on with their lives and if Club Platinum is opening or if Miss Nepal went on as planned—I didn't see the need for Perry to have such a holier-than-thou attitude about it. This is an irresponsible scribe who looked for

sensationalism, and by filing a cute story he endangered Nepal's fragile economy. Three pages of his one-sided story gives no hint of hope, and has done much harm to Nepal and Nepalis.

**Abhaya Subba Weise,**  
Kathmandu

● CK Lal does not understand that he is giving all the people he pokes fun at in his columns a huge compliment. Who else could he satirise? Not the man-on-the-street, for that would be degrading cruelty. Writers can only poke fun at prime ministers, famous authors, great artists, famous movie stars and those who can afford to live in Budhanilkantha. All the victims of Mr Lal's venom should understand that he is actually doling out praise in his characteristically embittered manner. It is the only way he can get the bile out of his system.

**S Singh, Kathmandu**

KUMARI

Naresh Newar's piece ('Fee fight keeps tourists away from the Kumari', #160) upset me. It is up to the believers of any faith to maintain the institutions or temples of that faith. There is no dharma in receiving the blessings of the Kumari if the believers do not put in the necessary money or support for the institution of the Kumari—including the physical infrastructure and generous compensation for the caretakers of the Kumari, as well as very reasonable support for the Kumari herself. The few thousand rupees per month that she presently gets from the government does no honour to the richest people in the country. The little girl selected to be the Kumari shows us the God that resides in all human beings. We should be thankful to her for the difficult job she performs and recognise the fact that the living goddess herself is a human being and must get the best education available. She should not depend on government handouts; all believers in the cult of the Kumari should share this responsibility: from the Newars of Kathmandu to the king who ritually receive her blessings in order to rule for another year.

The argument that the municipality uses the money raised from tourists to pave the streets of the city is quite obscene. Residents of Kathmandu pay taxes for road maintenance and it is shameful that the country's richest city has to depend on contributions of foreigners for this purpose. There is no doubt that money will continue to be raised from tourists who come to the



Hanuman Dhoka complex. But there has to be greater sensitivity about the fees charged for allowing tourists to gape at the Kumari. If the caretakers feel that they are entitled to even a small part of the money raised from the exhibition of the Kumari, then they are indeed involved in an abusive form of child labour. The caretakers should take up the case of adequate compensation only with those who receive the blessings of the Kumari and definitely not depend on tourist fees. If we continue to accept money from non-believers to see the Kumari, then we have to accept anything outsiders say about her.

I propose that the whole Hanuman Dhoka complex be declared a Kumari sanctuary and its maintenance be independent of tourist revenue. This is an important religious, cultural and political institution that should have nothing to do with foreigners. All revenues raised from tourists who come here should be spent in a way that is in harmony with the true spirit of Kumari worship: like scholarships for the education of girls.

**Kabindra Pradhan, Butwal**

HOPE

Thanks to Netra KC and Rameswor Bohara for their poignant portrayal of the plight of Nepalis in midwestern Nepal who have been forced out of their homes just before Dasai because of the renewed fighting ('Citizens flee fighting in the midwest' and 'We have lost all hope', #163). Once more the Nepali people have been deceived. They were assaulted, terrorised and victimised for seven years. Then the two sides with guns pretended they were for peace, giving us all false hopes. They told us repeatedly they were not going back to the jungle, but it was just a ruse to prepare for war. They are back to terrorising the people. Ordinary citizens are being

beheaded, children are being torn to shreds by bombs, teachers and journalists are being slaughtered in front of their families. The Maoists have now lost the little sympathy they had from ordinary people like us. Meanwhile, what are our Koiralas, Deubas, Chands and Thapas doing? They are just playing musical chairs in Kathmandu. Although the Nepali people don't trust anyone anymore, they have not lost hope. They know that the superiority of one can be overcome by the alliance of many.

**Gaurav KC, Battispatali**

● The proximity afforded through tourism is problematic because it directly brings together people of extreme socio-economic disparity. In no other setting does this take place in quite the same way. In 'Nepal is safe' (#163), Naresh Newar quotes a few tourists braving civil strife for a vacation. One says "Nepal is safe for tourists. This is not our civil war." Another reveals, "I'm more worried about the weather than anything." I too have been a tourist in the 'third world' and I too have been overly conscious of and attentive to my own comfort and safety, but it is problematic when, on an interpersonal level, the struggles of those around you become less important than the weather. It is problematic in any social setting when the struggles of those around you are not your struggles. Thank you for continuing to provide a steady source of top-notch English language reporting.

**Ryan Redmond, Boston, USA**

● After reading Rajendra Dahal's 'All together now' (#162), I was prompted to offer a solution. Since most of our tried and tested political stalwarts have had skeletons discovered in their closets, why not get rid of the lot and bring in the untainted junior leadership of the parties? This could be called the 'Kamraj Plan' after Indra Gandhi's political leapfrogging over veteran Congressites in the late 1960s. Everyone agrees that King Gyanendra and the leaders of the parliamentary parties have to patch up and the ambassadors are prodding them to do just that. But what is holding them back is indecision on which of these senile leaders gets to be prime minister. The only way to break the impasse is to forge a rapprochement between the royalist camp and the democracy camp and let the Young Turks have a go. Why doesn't His

INDIVIDUAL INTERVENTION CAN SAVE TOURISM

It was the same *Time* magazine that CK Lal has trashed ('Time to get the story straight', #163) which devoted four premium pages last year to Nepal and its tourist destinations. Shoba De wrote glowingly on Fulbari Resort and Baber Mahal Revisited in an issue of *India Today Plus*. Today Fulbari is deep in controversy and Baber Mahal's Gautam Rana fears for his life. When there are good news stories about Nepal—and there are plenty—we take them as heaven-sent and remain silent and thankless. When there is bad publicity, we make a lot of hue and cry and beat our breasts.

But individual awareness and initiative can greatly help in these times of e-mail velocity to counter alarmist embassy advisories, sensationalist news stories and wrong information routed through the same medium. Please allow me to give my own modest example.

Joan Windsor Sarasin is a major convention tourism operator in Bangkok and well known in Kathmandu's tourism circles. Re-establishing contact after 40-years though email, she felt sorry for having been forced to cancel her FAO convention at the Soaltee Crowne Plaza because her contacts in Kathmandu and Bangkok warned her of army "tanks" rumbling around in Kathmandu. So Joan's FAO conference would be held in Singapore or Hong Kong. This misinformation culture seems to tally well with CK Lal's reference to the cancellation of the Asia-Pacific Human Rights Forum that was to be held this week in Kathmandu.

I explained to Joan that her convention would be held in a secure hotel and not in some war zone. Also that the Royal Nepali Army doesn't have tanks, and what her lords-of-poverty parachutist FAO friends saw were small armoured personnel carriers. The 500-strong convention did indeed take place. As ordinary Nepalis, we did what we could. Sorry to blow my own trumpet, this is just to show how individual initiatives can turn the tide in tourism or any other sector, and not just efforts by the Nepal Tourism Board.

**Peter J Karthak, The Kathmandu Post**

Majesty emulate the 21<sup>st</sup> Century role model of kingship, King Bhumibol of Thailand, and call an all-party open roundtable and resolve the issue as the Thai king did in 1989? No more beating around the bush, no more dilly-dallying. The people's patience is running out.

**Name withheld on request**

appears in numerous instances, and that seems to be how BP understood his interrogator's designation.

GREAT CAR

Your car special (#163) was indeed very informative for prospective customers making individual choices. However, the rating for one of our vehicles, the Hyundai Terracan, seems misleading. Please do not take this as a reactive response to the conclusions of your esteemed panel. The Terracan which was test driven in Gokarna was the base model and cannot be compared to the fully-loaded version of other competitors. In fact, the Terracan CRDi, newly-launched in India, would have been comparative.

**Dhiren Tamang,**  
Avco International

BPS DIARY

The serialisation of BP's Sundarilal diary in your paper and its translation in *Himal Khabarpatrika* often cites an 'Ass. Anchaladhish' coming to visit BP in his cell. I want to clarify that it wasn't an 'Assistant' Anchaladhish but a co-zonal commissioner. In fact, I was the Co-Anchaladhish during the period of BP's second incarceration at Sundarilal and I was a party to the episodes that BP writes about. I have my own comments on the contents of the diary which I will make known at an opportune time.

**Bishnu Pratap Shah**  
Siddarth Colony,  
Budhanilkantha

*Editor: We have taken care to transcribe BP Koirala's diary keeping as much as possible to the original. The microfilm of the diary makes it impossible to decipher the words in some places. But 'Ass. Anchaladhish'*

CORRECTION

Due to a data processing error, some of the PM10 concentrations for 9-16 September in the air quality report (#162) got mixed up. The correct values should have been:

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Matsyagaon 26  
TU 32  
Bhaktapur 46  
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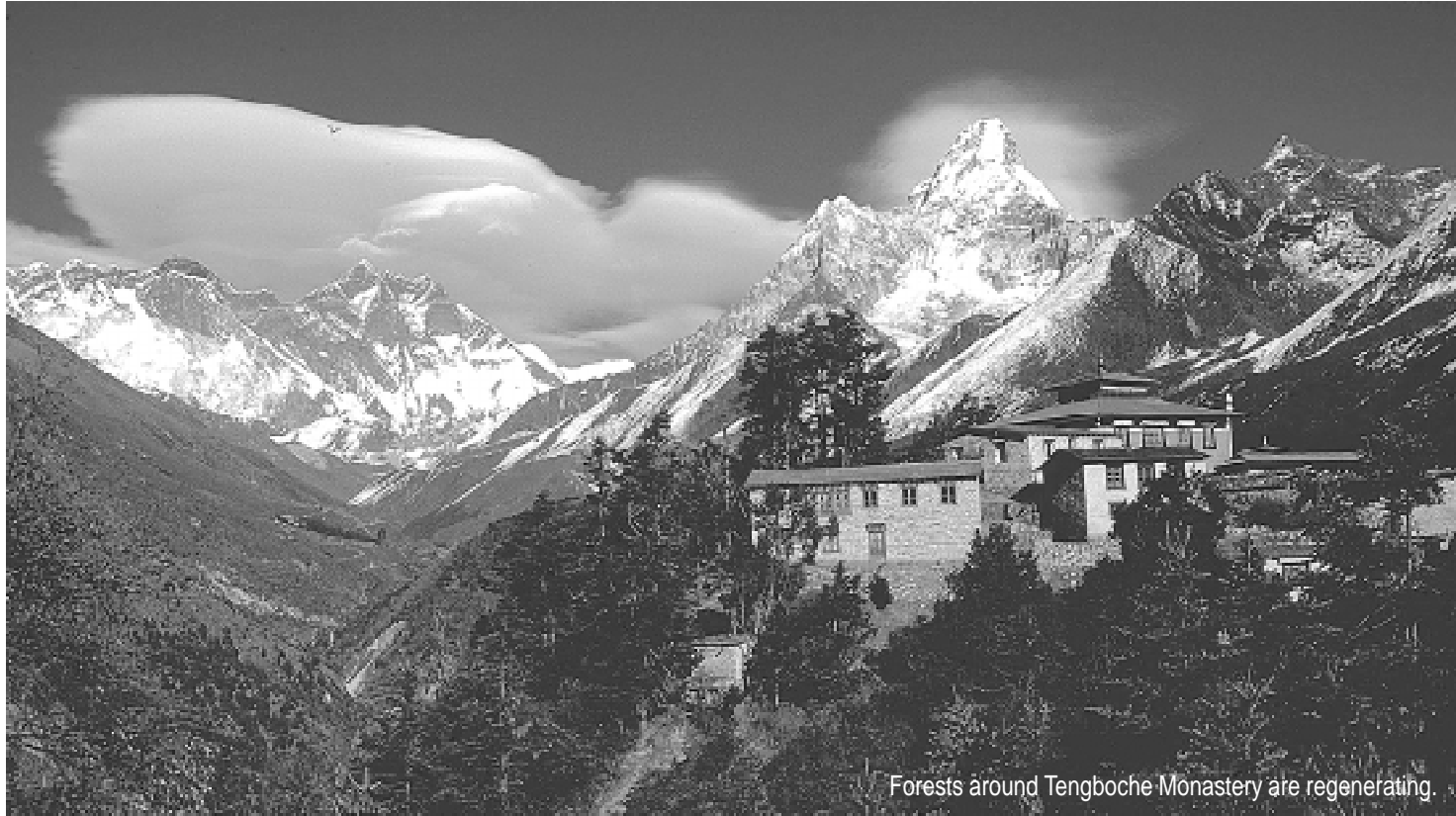
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# Sagarmatha's buffer zone



Forests around Tengboche Monastery are regenerating.

**NAVIN SINGH KHADKA**  
in the KHUMBU

Sagarmatha National Park is a conservation success story, and a model for eco-tourism. The stately lichen-covered spruce and hemlock around Tengboche Monastery that had all but disappeared 25 years ago, are sprouting back. Juniper bushes near Pheriche show regeneration even though plant growth is extremely slow at these altitudes.

Journalists covering the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Everest climb last spring, who were prepared to do the mandatory "trash on the Everest trek" stories, were pleasantly surprised to find the trails relatively litter-free.

But the Sagarmatha's success has come at a price. The growing affluence of the Sherpa villages, and

the growth of tourism has boosted demand for timber. But the ban on logging inside the park has meant that the forests outside the park boundary have fallen under the axe. The rest of Khumbu's forests have become the victims of the park's success.

The rhododendron logs piled high at the office of the Armed Police Force at Lukla airport are pink and smooth to touch. They look as if they were felled recently. "The police cut our trees in our forests and we get blamed," whispers a local lodge owner.

Local villagers say the security forces are in cahoots with "powerful and influential people" to smuggle timber up to Namche Bazar. Park officials are aware that the deployment of additional security forces to guard the airport

has increased consumption of firewood. But trees are being cut for construction timber.

The result is that while thick forests of pine drape the steep slopes of the Imja Khola and Bhote Kosi valleys inside the Park, the rhododendron and oak forests near Lukla have all but gone. The locals, who are not allowed to cut trees, are incensed that the police are openly chopping them down and carting them away. One conservation officer told us: "Villagers have approached us saying that they should also be allowed to cut down the trees if outsiders enjoy that privilege."

The Armed Police Force headquarters in Kathmandu chose not to make any comment.

The Lukla unit of the APF is supposed to get a generous supply

of kerosene because it is deployed in a buffer zone where timber logging is prohibited. Ironically, the national park is guarded by the Royal Nepali Army, while the Armed Police Force is in Lukla only because it has to guard the airport.

The Sagarmatha National Park office at Namche raised this matter with the Armed Police commander last year, but the APF flatly denied it was poaching timber. The last warden who warned the police to stop the logging was forced by the armed police to stand all night in the freezing cold at the helipad in Lukla as punishment.

Since then, relations between the park and the police have become further strained. The new park warden Gopal Bhattarai issued a notice against cutting trees in the buffer zone. An international

**Villagers living outside Sagarmatha National Park get together to stop logging that has destroyed their forests.**



conservation agency said it had asked the Royal Nepali Army to help bring the APF in line and get the police to stop cutting trees. "They stopped for a while, but it has started again," one official told us.

Many of the logs are transported into the park to build new lodges and monasteries. The logging mafia is well-oiled: in Chaurikharka, timber from Pharak and Phakding are mixed in with timber from lower Khumbu and Phaplu and taken into the park.

A few people have been caught and penalised, but a Rs 300 fine doesn't deter the criminals. "The fines don't cut into their profits, so of course these people return to cut more trees," said Kami Dorji Sherpa, chairman of the forest user group in Chaurikharka.

The number of trekkers and mountaineers in the park has climbed sharply from 4,000 in 1982 to its peak of 26,000 in 2000. Although the levels have dropped slightly since then, a mountaineer still uses eight times more firewood than an average trekker and 20 times more than a local Khumbu

resident.

But not all the forestry user group members are honest. Some of its executive members have been known to misuse their authority to sell trees. They say they are selling the timber to repair trails and bridges, but more often than not, the money ends up building private tea houses and lodges that are springing up on the Khumbu trail—many of them funded entirely by the illegal timber trade.

Those in charge of protecting Sagarmatha's environment are now finding themselves in the unappreciated minority. "We try to protest, but the perpetrators have connections to powerful people," says a frustrated Sherpa tourism entrepreneur. "They don't cooperate, and instead try to make us the villains."

The locals still remember how their elected representative in the dissolved parliament, Bal Bahadur KC, freed timber smugglers from police custody two years ago. "Those smugglers were caught red-handed but they had the MP's blessings, and they are still involved in illegal logging. Everyone knows

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



## Cities of hope



Time and again, as I travel around this land, one overwhelming complaint recurs. Kathmandu has too much power and money. Even as hill districts empty of their productive labour force, bound for the capital, people tell you that everything bad comes from Kathmandu. Bahun men listening to the radio news in the remote west, Tharu women netting fish in a flooded paddy field in the tarai, a Dalit activist in Dhading, Rai and Limbu families in the east and mountain people everywhere—all have achieved national unity on one issue. Too much Kathmandu in their lives.

For years, a powerful and compelling development mantra here has been 'decentralisation'. The empowering of the District and Village Development Committees in the 90s may have been the great success story of Nepali democracy, although it seldom gets celebrated by morose foreign aid officials these days. DDCs and VDCs, until they were crudely terminated by the Deuba government in July 2002, were the country's great hope. Some of them were doing sterling work, and hey, guess what, they were political, they were occasionally corrupt, but they worked. Local people saw democracy in action on their doorsteps.

Eventually, depending on the outcome of the current crisis and what's done to restore democracy in this country, DDCs and VDCs will spring up again. They'll be greatly hamstrung by Maoist destruction of their property

and the sheer trauma of post-war life in the countryside. But I have little doubt that they'll recover and start to make a difference in this country. As we saw during the peace, Kathmandu failed to deliver any development or progress to remote or distant areas outside the Valley. Why? Because the government's command structure is too centralised and unresponsive to local needs, which, in any event, are well down the priority list of problems drawn up at the Palace and in Singha Durbar.

But perhaps it's time to do more radical thinking on decentralisation. Really radical thinking. Dr Harka Gurung and others have postulated a "canton" system of government for Nepal, along the lines of Switzerland. (See *Nepali Times*, 'The centre cannot hold' by Harka Gurung, #88) Each of the Swiss 'cantons' are practically independent countries. They bow to the national capital on questions of defence and national finance and that's about it. The plan here to shrink the number of districts to 25 or so and give them greatly enhanced authority is a good one and needs to be dusted off and debated (see map).

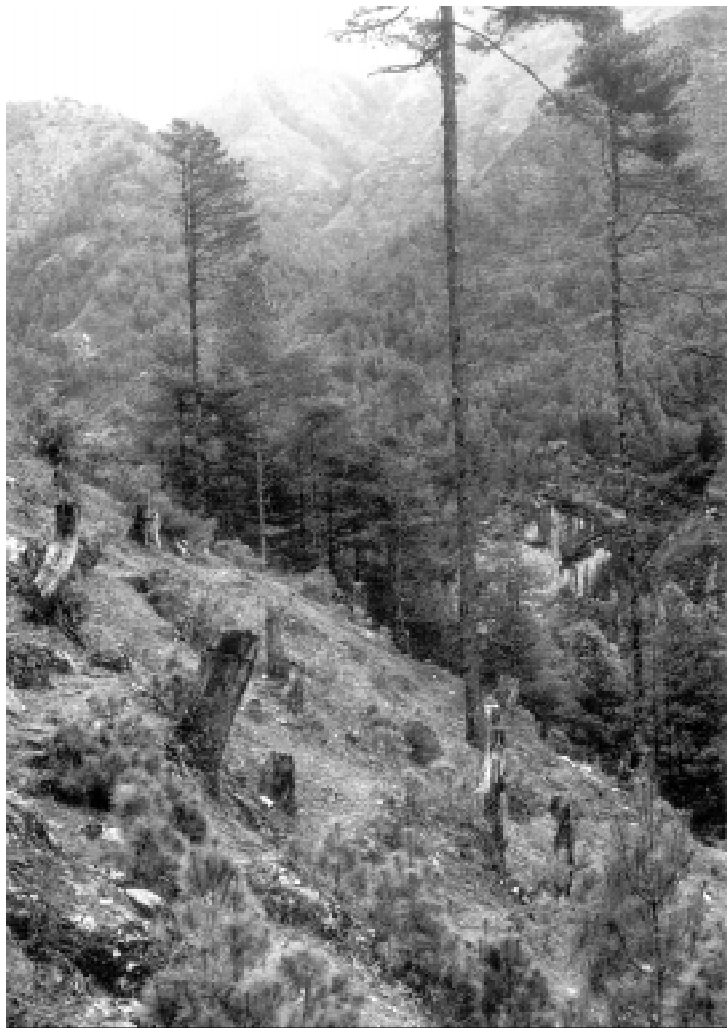
What strikes me though is that political authority alone won't be enough to revitalise the districts of Nepal, even with a gusher of development money flowing through. No, whatever form of local set up is eventually agreed upon, it is going to need is a city. One each, or at least

**Nepalis have national unity on one issue: Kathmandu has too much power and money.**

one between two or three, much as Chandigarh is shared by Punjab and Haryana states in India. The point is that Kathmandu is such a large and lone entity in Nepal that no amount of constitutional or administrative change will diminish its defacto authority. Other cities, with vibrant local and regional economies, can do that.

I humbly propose a sweeping plan to build 10 new cities all across Nepal. Each with the capacity to hold a million people. Each with parks, schools, hospitals, a university campus, regional parliaments, if you like, and so on. Housing stock is a top priority so people can live and work in comfort. And, of course, local markets and industry need electricity and other services. This would be a capital and labour intensive project on a grand scale that could pump immense new life into war-torn regions. Hundreds of thousands of laborers would be needed, skilled architects, engineers, tradespeople and so on. It would be a New Deal that will pull Nepal out of its great depression.

This country would be transformed. Kathmandu court intrigue would never again hold the hills and the tarai to ransom, and the burden on a bursting capital would be eased. Nepal would come into its own, thronging with tourists and prosperous local people who've made it in their own area, on their own, and are proud of it. I have seen the future, and it's urban. ♦



depleted army presence.

The army takes up almost 80 percent of the national park office's budget, and that would have been money well spent if the military was actually enforcing conservation laws. "At the moment they aren't doing much. They are worried about their own security," says Bhattarai.

Another issue that complicates matters is that the responsibility for conservation of the buffer zone has not been handed to the park's jurisdiction. Dawa Sherpa, chairman of the buffer zone council, told us the official process is slowly moving towards a hand-over. But it is so slow that by the time it is transferred, the trees may all be gone.

The Department of Forestry has washed its hands off the buffer zone, while the park hasn't taken over. This bureaucratic limbo combined with apathy and greed has led to wholesale logging. Looking up from the Lukla to Phakding trail, the slopes are littered with the carcasses of white logs stripped of their barks. The sound of axe on timber can be heard right across the valley, and occasionally a warning shout as another tree falls in the thinning forest. ♦

## Tougher buffer

Alarmed by the denudation in Lukla, Pharak and Phakding (above), the government declared the area the Sagarmatha National Park Buffer Zone in 2002 and with help from the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) will be continuing its 8-year-old community agro-forestry program here. Up to half of the revenue generated by the park from trekker fees will now be ploughed into conservation activities in the buffer zone. So far, the project has set up five community forest user groups, established nurseries and replanted entire mountainsides with seedlings. The project is also looking at alternative energy sources like solar and micro-hydro along the Lukla trail to reduce dependence on firewood.

who they are," a local conservationist told us.

The Sherpas of the Khumbu have cultural and religious attachment to the protection of the natural environment. Nature here is regarded as the outer manifestation of the human soul. Rimpoche Nawang Lama of Tengboche monastery, a passionate environmentalist, is credited with restoring the forests on the spur where his shrine is situated. The abbot has also been active in the successful anti-litter campaign.

"Buddhists believe that the deities and spirits dwell in the trees, and the trees influence the weather, the harvests and the wellbeing of human communities," says the Rimpoche.

But some unscrupulous locals reportedly misuse the Lama's name to bypass laws on logging. A local politician flew out a large consignment of logs in a helicopter earlier this year, without a permit, despite a ban from the warden's office. He reportedly told park officials the timber was cut on instructions from the monastery. "These events have happened in the past," admits Namche lodge owner, Jangbu Sherpa. "Many people misuse the Lama's name but I doubt he knows about it."

After the Maoist rebels attacked their barrack at Salleri in lower Khumbu two years ago, the Royal Nepali Army has confined itself to its heavily

fortified base on a hill overlooking Namche. Before the state of emergency, there were five posts at different points in the park. There are now only three. For chief warden Gopal Bhattarai, things are difficult enough without the

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## DOMESTIC BRIEFS

### Court Martial

The Royal Nepali Army has court martialled four junior soldiers on charges of attempted extortion in Banke last year.

Promotions and grades have been suspended of two similar low ranking personnel who kept quiet about the incident while a major has been forced to resign because he did not investigate the matter thoroughly. Brigadier BA Sharma told us one sergeant, two lance corporals and a rifleman ganged up with civilians, carried civilian rifles and extorted villagers. When one of the villagers refused to give the money they had demanded, he was kidnapped for a few hours. When rumours spread that they were soldiers, a major stationed in the same district was assigned to investigate. His report said no army personnel was involved.

"But, we were not convinced. After further investigation we found they had tried to hush up the matter," Sharma said. Among the culprits, the rifleman has been imprisoned for three years while the other three will be behind bars for two years. The civilians have been handed over to Banke police since the amended Military Act does not allow the army to prosecute civilians.

### Cold shoulder

The parties and Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa's cabinet team are not just fighting over the matter of forming an all-party government. The two have not been able to agree even on the issue of local bodies. Earlier this week, Information Minister Kamal Thapa admitted that the government, under donor pressure, had decided to form all party committees to govern local bodies that have remained without elected officials for a year-and-half. But this week, the parties declared they are not onboard. The five-party alliance said it would neither join the central government nor local bodies. "As long as this unconstitutional government is there, there is no question of joining any of its offices," Nepal Workers and Peasants' Party's Narayan Man Bijukchhe told us. The UML has warned its cadre not to join any local bodies. Most donors have frozen assistance to local bodies after the Deuba government refused to extend the terms of elected representatives. They insist that the government must include all the parties in committees to run the local bodies, even the Maoists in their strongholds.

### Poverty fund

In line with the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, the government has formed a Poverty Alleviation Fund. Officials say it will be an autonomous body to work in poverty-stricken areas through non-government organisations and grassroots groups. "Our target groups are women and Dalits and the fund will help them get access to health and other primary services," the fund's executive director Shankar Raj Joshi told us. The fund will use bilateral, multilateral and government funds. "In this regard, we are already holding talks with the World Bank." The World Bank is considering a \$70 million Poverty Reduction Strategy Credit which could be approved later this year. The government has appointed NPC's former vice chairman Mohan Man Sainju as chairman.

The government has also announced mobile teams to provide basic services in areas ranging from health to agriculture to the people in remote areas, but fears most teams will not be able to reach remote areas for security reasons. NGOs working with the poverty fund are likely to be more successful in delivering grassroots development.

### ESCAP chief in Nepal

Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Kim Hak-su is visiting Nepal next week. He will meet Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa, the Vice-Chairman of the National Planning Commission and other senior officials. Korean Kim Hak-su took over in ESCAP two years ago and has served as Korea's ambassador for international economic affairs.

### Columbia alumni meet

The Nepal-based alumni of Columbia University in New York have opened a Nepal Chapter with former ambassador Dr Singha Bahadur Basnyat as president and the newly-appointed attorney general, Sushil Pant, as vice president. Other functionaries include Prabhakar Adhikari, Gandhi Pandit, Arun Rana, Jogendra Ghimire, Primal Jha and Purna Man Shaky. Columbia University is celebrating its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary this month.

## VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT RESEARCH CO-ORDINATOR AND ADMINISTRATOR

International Alert, an independent, international non-governmental organisation based in London, seeks to fill two positions, Research Co-ordinator and Administrator, for a resource centre being established in Kathmandu. The Research Co-ordinator would lead local research and analysis, strategic thinking and communication to the public on comparative peace processes, and the Administrator would manage the centre, staff and resources. Detailed job descriptions and person specifications for both positions can be downloaded from our website at [www.international-alert.org](http://www.international-alert.org) together with more information about International Alert.

### Research Co-ordinator:

- Minimum 7 years programme management experience, and research, analysis and practical knowledge at a senior level in the fields of political science, international relations, development, and/or conflict transformation.
- Post-graduate degree, or higher, in related fields.
- Excellent analytical, strategic thinking and problem-solving skills.
- Fluency in English and Nepali, both written (to a publishable standard) and verbal, with excellent communication skills.
- Commitment to the peaceful transformation of conflict in Nepal, and the aims and values of the work and related activities.

### Administrator:

- Minimum 5 years experience in office management, with additional knowledge of resource, financial and personnel management.
- Bachelor's degree or equivalent, and knowledge of political science, international relations, development and/or conflict transformation.
- Excellent interpersonal, communication and problem-solving skills.
- Fluency in English and Nepali.
- Commitment to the peaceful transformation of conflict in Nepal, and the aims and values of the work and related activities.

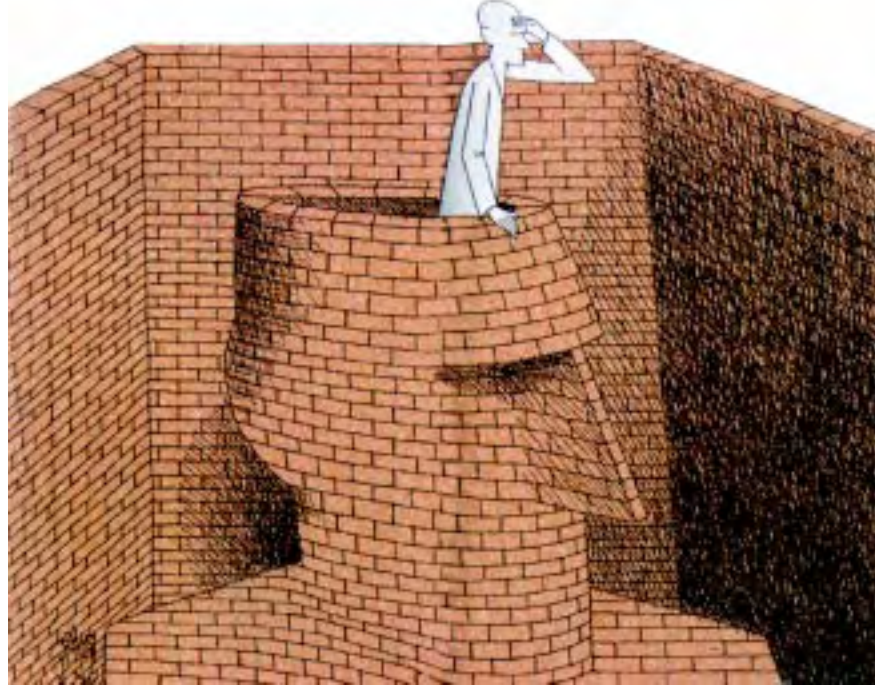
International Alert is committed to the just and peaceful transformation of violent conflict and believes that efforts to resolve violent conflict require inclusiveness, principled impartiality, adherence to ethical codes of conduct, high levels of accountability to partners, donors and parties to conflict, and respect for international humanitarian law and human rights traditions.

The positions are based in Kathmandu, Nepal, and contracts are for one year initially, with possible extension. Salary and benefits will be commensurate with qualifications and experience. International Alert strives to be an equal opportunities employer and welcomes applications regardless of gender, caste, disability or sexual orientation.

Interested Nepali candidates should send a CV with cover letter and three references by e-mail to [fismail@international-alert.org](mailto:fismail@international-alert.org) or by post to P.O. Box 11158 Kathmandu, Nepal. Please refer to the job position being applied for in the subject heading of e-mails. Replies should indicate the earliest date at which the applicant would be able to commence work. Due to limited resources, only short-listed candidates will be contacted for interviews. Short-listed candidates for the position of Research Co-ordinator will also be asked for two recent writing samples. Completed applications should arrive by e-mail or post no later than 6<sup>th</sup> October 2003. Interviews will take place 9<sup>th</sup> October 2003.



# A democratic antidote to violence



This time when the ceasefire broke down and the fighting began anew, the nature of the war changed. Instead of trying to over-run garrisons and district headquarters, the Maoists are targeting the capital and urban areas.

Earlier, when the rest of Nepal was bleeding the residents of the Valley hadn't felt that their security was particularly threatened. Not any more. For the first time, Kathmandu's elite is spooked and there is a siege mentality. This has brought renewed clamour for an end to the violence and a return to the peace process. This yearning for peace is natural and there is really no other alternative to this crisis but a negotiated solution.

But I want to ask: are we ready, for the sake of peace, to give up our freedom of expression and our freedom of the press? Will the private owners of media be willing to give up their independence? Will the burgeoning new middle class be willing to trade its multi-party choice or their hard-won freedoms for peace? One thing is clear: Nepalis have forever bid goodbye to dictatorship and it can never sneak in again in the garb of a one-party system.

The people have been through a bitter experience in the past 12 years, with corruption, partisan politicisation and political leaders who had no qualms about using the administration to put down dissent. We must turn over a new leaf and present the people

with a new age of democracy and good governance. We must convince the people that we leaders are now ready to function strictly as per democratic norms.

We have to be more inclusive than we have been before and bring the Mahdesi, Janajati, Dalit and our women into the mainstream of political decision-making. We have to give them proportionate representation in the civil service and the legislatures. We have to convince the downtrodden in the tarai that we are now committed to giving them a voice. And not just lip service. We must actually convince the Rolpa or Kham Magar youth that there is a place for them in the political mainstream. The Tharu youngsters from Bardia and Kailali should be encouraged to share in this dream of democracy.

We don't want democracy just for the sake of democracy, the marginalised farmers of the of Bajura and Baitadi must be convinced that it will bring them development. We must transform the governing process through local self-governance in order to address existing regional, ethnic and other disparities and ensure balanced development.

The symbol of Nepal's national unity is the constitutional monarchy. We must take this message to the grassroots. We are in danger of falling into the cracks between the economic progress of our two giant neighbours. India's economic growth rate this year may exceed six percent, and China has, for the past 20 years, been growing at eight percent a year. If we lag behind, it will be difficult for us to survive as a yam between these two huge boulders.

For economic growth, a sustained peace is a pre-requisite but not enough. We need to make

**'For the first time, we have indications that the constitutional forces are finally coalescing.'**

our national identity more robust by kick-starting the economy for long-term growth. Is such economic growth possible without a free market and foreign investment? Those who answer 'yes' may want to look at Mao's own homeland today.

The fuel for this growth must come from the development of our hydropower, from tourism and from a 20-year strategy to promote cash crops suited for our conditions. Peace is the precursor and we need the conflict to end so we can set up labour-intensive industries in the tarai that can manufacture goods for the north Indian market. As a new member of the WTO, we now have the opportunity to use our comparative advantage to take a giant leap into global trade. We must seize the opportunity of the new railway link that is soon going to join Lhasa to the rest of the China. We cannot afford to miss the bus again and be waylaid by failed economic models that have outlived their time.

The RPP believes that all these changes and reforms are possible only through a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy. And our party has the capacity and experience to see these projects through. We see this as the long-term guarantee for peace and development in Nepal.

Only a peace process that has the full support and participation of the people will survive. The RPP cannot do this alone, nor does it want to. All parliamentary parties need

to be united in the first challenge: to win over the demoralised and terrorised people of this land. The people are alarmed by this new threat of urban warfare and the parties have to deal with it together.

Ever since they chose the path of violence, the Maoists have adopted the policy of dividing and weakening the constitutional forces. No one has any doubt anymore that the Maoists are solely responsible for the present crisis. The parliamentary parties are now aware that the Maoists are the most aggressive against the party in power and softest on those out of power. The five parliamentary parties have now also realised that they are playing into the hands of the Maoists with their agitation. For the first time, we have indications that the constitutional forces are finally coalescing. I personally have been working towards this precise goal ever since our Third Convention. Sometimes, it seems, time and luck are more important than logic in attaining one's goal.

The RPP is committed to the establishment of an all-party government. Once this happens, sooner or later, the rebels will be forced to come back to the negotiating table. And it will be a united front of constitutional forces that will show the way forward through a new and effective democratic model. ♦

Pashupati SJB Rana is the President of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party. This piece was translated from his Nepali original.



# When violence becomes an end in itself



**The biggest losers from the wanton slaughter that the Maoists have unleashed on the country will be the Maoists themselves.**

The return of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) to a campaign of assassinations after the breakdown of the ceasefire has cast serious doubt on their political nature. It may be common during uncommon times for those who carry the gun to kill each other but indiscriminate killing of unarmed citizens is not acceptable behaviour in any civilised society.

It is also politically unwise to resort to murder and terror as a way to win support from the people, just as it is against international humanitarian law to kill unarmed policemen or soldiers. The state can't go around mowing down

people just because they happen to be Maoists. The biggest losers from the wanton slaughter that the Maoists have unleashed on the country today will be the Maoists themselves. If they want a negotiated solution, they must understand a revolution is about social transformation, not an excuse for violence. When violence becomes an end in itself, it undermines revolutions. The only time violence may be justified is if all other peaceful, constitutional paths are blocked. Resorting to the gun instead of non-violent ways of achieving social and political transformation is a sign of the revolutionary romanticism of

comrades in a tearing hurry, and does not reflect the needs of the country and the people. Time is running out for the Maoists to accept this truth.

Violence and conflict is not the Nepali way. True, there is poverty, discrimination, exploitation and exclusion in Nepal. There always has been and these evils persist. But even though the Maoists have tried very hard to justify their violence, these are not the only factors that caused the conflict. The real reason for the violence is the ideology of Nepali Maoists and the methods they justify in its name. Their argument is that society's transformation can only take

place through violent revolution, and not through peaceful political evolution.

But this is a faulty interpretation of Mao Zedong's thought. And as long as the leadership and the cadre base of the Maoists are guided by militaristic principles they will never show a serious commitment to compromise and a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

After the ceasefire, the Maoists embarked on a brutal campaign to wear down the state and terrorise the people into submission. It is difficult to understand why the Maoists don't see that this isolates them and irreversibly erodes their political

character.

The age of traditional communist one-party rule and rule through personality cults is over. Any political force that doesn't analyse and understand power through the lens of democratic pluralism and a multiparty system will be irrelevant in modern society. The Maoist rhetoric is of the "21st century" but their behaviour is medieval. This has isolated the Maoists not just from the people but from all other political forces. It has resulted in the militarisation of the state and an erosion of the rule of law. Thanks to this, the experience of countries where the rise of left extremism resulted in the upsurge of rightwing reactionaries has now been repeated in Nepal.

The Nepali people, who had won sovereignty and were exercising their freedoms to chart out their own destiny have now found those hard-earned rights slipping away. By obstructing democracy, the Maoists have made the monarchy more assertive. Their concerted attacks on parliamentary parties helped regressive forces turn back the clock on Nepal's democratic evolution.

All Nepalis who are for democratisation, protection of political rights and who believe in parliamentary democracy must stand up to the militaristic tendencies of both the state and the Maoists. The political parties must be the bulwark against regression and they must start by responding to the public's need for an assurance that they will not repeat the mistakes of the past 12 years.

Only if there is a change in the political ideology of the Maoists will there be a change in their methods. And the only way that can happen is if they abandon their militaristic path, return to the political fold by restoring the ceasefire and work towards a resolution of the crisis with a constructive agenda.

The alternative path is one of political suicide that will endanger the country's existence. If they continue on their present path, the Maoists will go down and they will take the country with them. ♦

Raghu Pant is the former UML MP from Lalitpur. This opinion piece is translated from an original Nepali contribution.

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BIZ NEWS

**ADB silence on Kali Gandaki**

A special review team of the Asian Development Bank has mediated an agreement between the government and the Italian civil works contractor of the Kali Gandaki A hydro project on environment and resettlement issues, according to a bank statement Thursday. But glaringly absent in the statement is any mention of a US \$50 million cost overrun controversy. The Nepal Electricity Authority paid the contractor, Impregilo SpA, this amount without the NEA even notifying its board (*Nepali Times* #155). NEA the amount was due to unforeseen delays and complications in the construction. In its statement, the ADB said its review team had found that the overall project cost was still below the appraisal estimate of \$450 million. Responding to a public interest writ filed last week by a Syangja resident, the Supreme Court has issued a show cause notice to NEA on the excess payment made to the contractor.

**ICD logjam removed**

Commerce Ministry officials will be in New Delhi next week for a railway agreement with India that will pave the way for the operation of the Inland Container Depot built near Birgunj with support from the World Bank.

Although the construction was finished two years ago, the ICD has been held up because of the absence of a Railway Act in Nepal. Nepali officials had said they did not want to operate under the Indian Railway Act. With the ICD agreement expiring this month, the government has decided to tentatively begin the operation under the Indian Railway Act. India has already brought its broad-gauge railway line to 400m inside Nepali territory which is linked with the container port. The Rs 920 million project will contribute huge savings for transit costs to Calcutta port for goods to and from Nepal.

Under the ICD project, two other dry ports are already operational in Bhairawa and Biratnagar to facilitate third-country trade and transit.

**De Bono workshop**

A one-day workshop aimed at business executives, corporate houses, banks, media and the travel trade on management techniques of Edward de Bono is being conducted at the Hyatt Regency on Monday, 29 September. Sponsored by Business Service Aadhar and The Himalayan Times, the workshop will be conducted by trainer Ravin Lama. De Bono's theory of 'lateral thinking' promotes innovative thinking and creative problem-solving that is vital to corporate success. (Contact: 4771001)

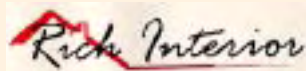
**NEW PRODUCTS**

**YUM TOM YUM:** Wai Wai just took on a new Thai flavour with a distinct lemon grass and shrimp flavour giving it a unique hot and sour taste. Chaudhary Group says they are delighted by the market response. The group also recently introduced Golmol Cheese Balls to snack-hungry Nepalis.



**NEW WHEELS:** Malaysia's Proton spans from east to west. The popular model is out to win Nepali hearts with its sleek European looks. Bhudeo Trading, an enterprise of Golchha Organisation, are the authorised dealers for Proton and have state-of-the-art after sales servicing.

**EAST ASIAN WOOD:** Rich Interiors in New Plaza, Putali Sadak may be the biggest showroom in the kingdom, with furniture imported from Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan and China. Its wide range ensures something to suit every budget. A finance scheme courtesy of Kumari Bank makes them affordable.



ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

**Beyond khasinomics**



One need not go further than neighbouring West Bengal in India to witness the puja-economy in action. Creating carnival type events that showcase religion and culture will lead to tourism development in the long run. Of course it requires local municipal authorities, various community organisations and the private sector to work together. Sadly, Nepali creative flow, with regard to Dasai, don't seem to extend further than setting up a website for buying khasis online. Novel, yes, but hardly capable of leveraging our economy.

Dasai has a direct effect on the country's economy. A substantial chunk of consumption in rural Nepal takes place during the festival. It's boomtime for tailors who conduct nearly 60 percent of their year's business in one month. If Dasai is the barometer of this

economy, then surely consumption patterns as well as the GDP growth for the first half of the year will be affected. But we would still need to ponder on creative ways to cash in on the festivities. This Beed has often harped about the need of turning the holiday into the money-spinner that it has the potential to be in terms of creating events and bringing celebrations outside their own homes.

This year holidaymakers are facing many impediments: fewer people are travelling home because of security concerns. Then there's the problem of logistics—getting from point A to point B is almost never a straight line in Nepal. The shut down of a few private airlines has curtailed air travel. So apart from a few touts, not many people are benefiting.

**We must find more lucrative ways to be original.**

Bipali workers in India, especially from western Nepal are less than keen to come home for the holidays. They are easy targets, returning home with hard-earned money. Besides, in most places, there are no banks to open an account. The chain reaction will set off reactions even among the big business houses in Kathmandu. The new breed of Kathmandu consumers had picked up on a new trend, getting out around the Valley and Pokhara during Dasai. It was catching on till earlier this year. The hotel industry, hardest hit, has become despondent. This year most can't even muster up enough enthusiasm for domestic tourism.

From the looks of it, this is not

going to be best Dasai we've ever had. Nepalis are killing Nepalis all over the kingdom. The current political impasse has sharpened our insecurities. And now, the Beed, as a bearer of bad tidings, has heard rumours of a bandh during the festival. When will begin to realize our potential? ♦

arthabeed@yahoo.com



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**Nepal Remittance**

When it rolls out the red carpet every two years, Film South Asia (FSA) is a showcase for the finest documentaries on the subcontinent.

The carefully selected entries cover a wide variety of the issues and concerns within South Asia. The aim of the organisers, the Kathmandu-based nonprofit Himal Association, is to use the medium of documentary film to expand the boundaries of the viewer's knowledge.

More than 40 extraordinary films have been short-listed for FSA '03 and festival director Manesh Shrestha is delighted: "We have seen an exhilarating advance in terms of the quality, quantity and variety of themes tackled. This year's festival will provide the best opportunity ever to view what non-fiction filmmakers from the region have to offer." Filmmakers from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal will also use the festival as a forum for sharing ideas and looking for methods by which to popularise the documentary format within the region and around the world. For the first time since the start of the festival in 1997, organisers say that almost all of the filmmakers are coming to Kathmandu at their own cost.

"We at FSA believe that the powerful medium of the audio/visual will not only help to better represent the region internationally but will also contribute immensely to attempts at changing things for the better at the local level," Shrestha told us.

At the opening of the festival, the Nepali documentary *Ithas Jitneharuko Lagi* (by Pranay Limbu) was screened and Mumbai-based filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt made the keynote address 'Documentary Films and Popular Perception'.

The three-member jury at FSA '03 is headed by former BBC India Correspondent Mark Tully and also includes Lubna Marium, an artist and culture critic from Dhaka, and Lalsawmliani Tochwang, an ardent film enthusiast and charge d'affaires of the prestigious IIC Film Club in Delhi. Past juries have been headed by well-known South Asian filmmakers such as Shyam Benegal and Goutam Ghose.

After screening numerous films over four days in Kathmandu, the 15 best films from FSA will be selected and taken all over the world as part of Travelling Film South Asia. Each of the past three Travelling Festivals have gone to about 50 venues, half of them in South Asia and the rest across the US, Europe and South East Asia.

## In-house picks



### Godhra Tak: The Terror Trail

*Godhra Tak: The Terror Trail* investigates the Godhra train burning and subsequent rioting that killed 3,500 Muslims in Gujarat, India. Shubrudeep Chakravorty retraces the route of the first batch of *karsevaks* from Gujarat to Ayodhya and back, documents the terror en route and depicts the incident at Godhra railway station.

Chakravorty is a journalist and independent documentary film maker based in New Delhi, India. He has worked with the United Newspaper Network, Asian News International, and Doordarshan, all in New Delhi. He currently runs the production house New Stream Media. *Godhra Tak* is the first documentary he has produced and directed under his own banner.

Hall A 5.35 PM on 25 September

# Film South Asia '03

## Festival of South Asian Documentaries

### Aftershocks: A Rough Guide to Democracy

*Aftershocks* is a "study from below" of the globalising economy and the corporatisation of democracy. Examining the acquisition of two earthquake-affected villages for lignite mining and power generation, the film shows the subsequent displacement of residents and tracks the transformation of the welfare state into an instrument of corporate governance.

Rakesh Sharma began his film and TV career as an assistant director on Shyam Benegal's *Discovery of India* series. His broadcast industry experience includes the set-up and launch of Channel [V], Star Plus, and the Tamil-language Vijay TV. Sharma has also worked for Doordarshan, India as a broadcast-ops consultant, for TV Today during the 1998 Indian elections, and for Zee Gold, USA, as a presenter. *Aftershocks* is his first feature-length film.



Hall A 4.20 PM on 26 September

### Swara - A Bridge Over Troubled Water



*Swara* examines and comments on the Pakhtun practice of giving young girls in marriage as reparation for serious crimes such as murder committed by their fathers, brother or uncles.

Samar Minallah is trained as an anthropologist and has an MPhil from the University of Cambridge, UK. She has worked on two previous documentaries on Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province, focussing on fertility rites and Talibanisation. Minallah is a freelance journalist and works with the Aurat Foundation.

Hall A 10.30 AM on 27 September

### No. 556, 13<sup>th</sup> Lane Kamathipura, Mumbai

This documentary is based on a real-life rescue operation. On the night of 14 August 2001, the Rescue Foundation (formerly known as Maiti Nepal Mumbai) conducted a raid on brothel No 556, 13<sup>th</sup> Lane Kamathipura, based on information given by a customer. Fourteen girls were rescued from a hidden cell above the bathroom in the brothel. However, only four of them were officially declared minors and reunited with their parents. There is no information on what happened to the other girls after the raid, or where they are.

Sushmita Basnet was born in Sikkim, India. She has a BA from Sophia College (Mumbai University). In summer 1999 she did an intensive filmmaking course at the New York Film Academy. *No. 556, 13<sup>th</sup> Lane Kamathipura, Mumbai* is her second documentary. Basnet is currently working on her next project.



Hall A 2PM on 27 September

### In Search of Zhang Zhung



Gelek, a Bön monk, accompanied by an American photographer, *dhamis* (oracles) and shaman priests, undertakes a journey from Kathmandu to discover for himself the ancient kingdom of Zhang Zhung where Bön flourished centuries ago. Travelling through the stark, beautiful landscapes of Nepal and Tibet, the places and people the group encounters shed light on Bön, a religion different and arguably older than Tibetan Buddhism. Throughout the pilgrimage Gelek philosophises on what it means to be a Bön monk,

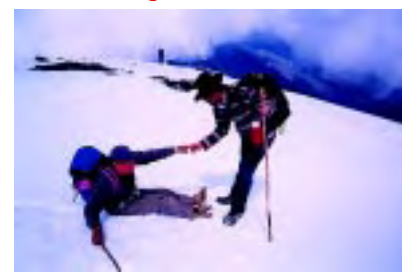
struggles with his doubts and seeks to uncover the roots of his religion and identity.

Alex Gabbay has an MA in Direction and Documentary production and is currently working on a PhD in the same at Sheffield Hallam University in the UK. He has worked on some 20 documentary films in the capacity of director, editor and cameraman.

Hall A 11.55 AM on 28 September

### Bheda Ko Oon Jasto... In Search of a Song

Narayan Wagle is one of Nepal's best-known journalists. For eight years he would sing a folk song he'd heard in the highlands north of Kathmandu, *Bhedako Oon Jasto*, to his friends, to strangers, to singers and musicians. No one knew it.



Early this year, Wagle travelled up the Langtang Valley with members of the popular Nepali band Nepathya and his friend, the filmmaker. They journeyed from rhododendron fields in Nepal's midhills to frozen lakes in the highlands, in search for the source of this song.

Kiran Shrestha worked as a radio presenter and then for five years as a television producer specialising in development issues. His first independent film *Forced* (1999) was on the children of western Nepal, and *Bhedako Oon Jasto* is his first non-development film. Shrestha currently runs a music management company 'event nepa-laya'.

Hall A 5.45 PM on 28 September

### Looking for Kannan



Yasir Khan first met Kannan in the year 2000. The 15-year-old had just surrendered to the Sri Lankan army, which promised to rehabilitate him and release him into society. *Looking for Kannan* is about Khan's trip back two years later in search of the former Tamil Tiger child soldier, to see if the army had kept its promise.

Yasir Khan is a freelance broadcaster living in Toronto. His previous documentary on Canadian pilgrims going to Mecca earned him an honourable mention at the Columbus Film and Video Festival. Khan is also an award-winning radio producer.

Hall B 10.40 AM on 26 September

### Qabool Kuran Dhathi Hageegaiy

*Qabool Kuran Dhathi Hageegaiy* looks at violence against women in the Maldives from the point of view of the perpetrator as well as that of the victim. The film succeeds in bringing psychological, sociological and legal perspectives to the problem.



Ahmed Nazmi has directed a DV feature *30 Dhuvas*, a Maldivian-language film, and has worked on several advocacy and development related films for international donor agencies in the Maldives.

Hall B 11.55 AM on 26 September

FSA '03 from 25 - 28 September at the Russian Cultural Centre, Kathmandu. Tickets (Rs 25 per screening) are available at Saraswati Book Centre, Pulchowk (5521599/5528017); Mandala Book Point, Kantipath (4227711); Suwal Music and Video, Lazimpat (4421522); Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka (5543017).

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# Film South Asia '03

Festival of South Asian Documentaries



HALL 'A'

Thursday, 25 September

**Majma (Performance)** (54 min) 4:30 pm  
Delhi, India, 2001, dir - Rahul Roy  
Wrestling and sex on Delhi streets

**Godhra Tak; The Terror Trail** (60 min) 5:35 pm  
Gujarat, India, 2003, dir - Shubradeep Chakravorty  
Reconstruction of the train incident

Friday, 26 September

**Sita's Family** (60 min) 10:30 am  
Delhi, India, 2003, dir - Saba Dewan  
A Delhi journalist looks back on her life

**Papa 2** (24 min) 11:40 am  
Kashmir, India, 2002, dir - Gopal Menon  
Trail of sorrow in the Valley

**Shei Rater Kotha Bolte Eshechi (Tale of the Darkest Night)** (43 min)  
Bangladesh, 2001, dir - Kawsar Chowdhury  
Pakistani army begins attack on East Pakistan

**Searching for Saraswati** (62 min) 2:00 pm  
Uttar Pradesh, India, 2003, dir - Sudheer Gupta  
Folklore of the Kumbha mela

**Vikas Bandoor Ki Naal Se (Development Flows from the Barrel of the Gun)** (54 min) 3:15 pm  
India, 2003, dir - Biju Toppo and Meghnath  
For the sake of a larger good

**Aftershocks: A Rough Guide to Democracy** (64 min) 4:20 pm  
Gujarat, India, 2002, dir - Rakesh Sharma  
An instance of corporate governance

**The Men in the Tree** (98 min) 5:35 pm  
India, 2002, dir - Lalit Vachani  
Fundamentalism revisited

Saturday, 27 September

**Jab'r Ki Shadi-Vilayat Mein** (12 min) 9:30 am  
Pakistan, 2003, dir - Beena Sarwar  
Pakistani girls forced into marriage

**Swara - A Bridge over Troubled Water** (40 min)  
Pakistan, 2003, dir - Samar Minallah  
'Girl sacrifice' in tribal Pakistan

**Made in India** (39 min) 10:30 am  
India, 2002, dir - Madhusree Dutta  
Visual culture in contemporary India

**Buru Sengal (The Fire Within)** (57 min) 11:20 am  
Jharkhand, India, 2002, dir - Shriprakash  
Extracting coal, but at what cost?

**Hunting Down Water** (32 min) 12:30 pm  
India, 2003, dir - Sanjay Barnela and Vasant Saberwal  
The shortage and surplus of water

**No. 556. 13<sup>th</sup> Lane, Kamathipura, Mumbai** (17 min) 2:00 pm  
Bombay, India, 2002, dir - Sushmita Basnet  
Raid on a Bombay brothel

**Manjuben Truckdriver (Miss Manju Truckdriver)** (52 min)  
Gujarat, India, 2002, dir - Sherna Dastur  
Dreams and aspirations of a lady at work

**The Story Tellers** (46 min) 3:30 pm  
Delhi, India, 2003, dir - Gargi Sen  
Translating literature from the vernacular

**The Unconscious** (19 min) 4:25 pm  
Maharashtra, India, 2003, dir - Manisha Dwivedi  
A different kind of sexual identity

**The Race** (16 min)

Maharashtra, India, 2003, dir - Raghav Dar  
Urbanisation of culture in rural India

**Itihass Jitneharuka Laagi (History for Winners)** (47 min) 5:20 pm  
Nepal, 2003, dir - Pranay Limbu  
A singer who refuses to fight

Sunday, 28 September

**War and Peace/Jang Aur Aman** (138 min) 9:30 am  
India/Pakistan, 2002, dir - Anand Patwardhan  
The repercussions of going nuclear

**In Search of Zhang Zhung** (60 min) 11:55 am  
Nepal and Tibet, 2003, dir - Alex Gabbay  
A journey to the cradle of Bon

**Ujan Beye (Across The Tide)** (58 min) 2:30 pm  
Calcutta, India, 2002, dir - Nirmalya Bondopadhyay  
Revisiting Naxalite sites

**Terror's Children** (45 min) 3:40 pm  
Pakistan/Afghanistan, 2003, dir - Sharmeen Obaid  
Afghani children eke out a living in Karachi

**Tell Them the Tree They Have Planted Has Now Grown** (58 min) 4:35 pm  
Kashmir, India, 2002, dir - Ajay Raina  
A Kashmiri Brahmin returns 'home'

JAI NEPAL CINEMA  
**Bheda Ko Oon Jasto - In Search of a Song ...** (55 min) 5:45 pm  
Nepal, 2003, dir - Kiran Krishna Shrestha  
Following a tune to the mountains

HALL 'B'

Friday, 26 September

**Kathmandu Odyssey** (35 min) 10:40 am  
Nepal, 2003, dir - Shekhar Kharel  
A poet recalls Kathmandu of the hippies

**Looking for Kannan** (23 min)  
Sri Lanka, 2002, dir - Yasir Khan  
An uneasy peace prevails

**Qabool Kuran Dhathi Hageegaiy (Unbelievable Realities)** (25 min) 11:55 am  
Maldives, 2002, dir - Ahmed Nazmi  
Island rises against domestic violence

**Restless Shores** (20 min)  
Tamil Nadu, India, 2003, dir - Noel Rajesh

Tamil fisherfolk compete with big trawlers  
**Resilient Rhythms** (64 min) 2:00 pm  
India, 2002, dir - Gopal Menon  
Dalits and the odds

**Mat (The Vote)** (60 min) 3:15 pm  
Uttar Pradesh, India, 2003, dir - Pankaj Rishi Kumar  
Democracy in action in UP

**A Kind of Childhood** (50 min) 4:25 pm  
Bangladesh, 2002, dir - Tareque and Catherine Masud  
Young Idris on the streets of Dhaka

**A Night of Prophecy** (77 min) 5:25 pm  
India, 2002, dir - Amar Kanwar  
Poets in times and places of conflict

Saturday, 27 September

**Diverted to Delhi** (55 min) 10:40 am  
Delhi, India, 2002, dir - Greg Stitt  
International call centres thrive in India

**Words on Water** (85 min) 11:45 am  
India, 2002, dir - Sanjaya Kak  
An update on the Narmada movement

**Aabar Ashibo Phire (Way Back Home)** (120 min) 2:00 pm  
Calcutta, India, 2002, dir - Supriyo Sen  
Reliving the Partition in the east

**The 18<sup>th</sup> Elephant - 3 Monologues** (62 min) 4:15 pm  
Kerala, India, 2003, dir - P Balan  
Elephants speak up against human atrocities

**Aap Hamare Hai Kaun** (7 min) 5:30 pm  
India, 2002, dir - Madhusree Dutta  
Whatever happened to Gandhi's legacy?

**Naata (The Bond)** (45 min)  
Bombay, 2003, dir - KP Jayasankar and A Monteiro  
Crisis of identity in modern India

Sunday, 28 September

**Sand and Water** (105 min) 10:40 am  
Bangladesh, 2002, dir - Shaheen Dill-Riaz  
Life along the Jamuna

**Ethrayum Yatha Bhagam (The Journey So Far)** (45 min) 12:30 pm  
Kerala, India, 2003, dir - CV Sathyan  
Life and times of a Malayalam poet

**Where Do I Go from Here** (45 min) 2:30 pm  
India, 2002, dir - Yasmine Kidwai  
The elderly look at their cheerless lives

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## High stakes

WASHINGTON – Activists are accusing the World Bank of sacrificing environmental and social balance in poor nations by funding large projects like dams, power plants and pipelines as part of its new strategy to back “high-risk, high-reward” projects. The Washington-based international financial institution (IFI), the world’s largest development agency, also said it was considering renewed support for new oil, mining and gas projects in developing countries, some of which, say “green” groups, are unstable and mismanaged. Now a new report, *Gambling With People’s Lives*, critiques the Bank’s new funding strategy for projects in water, forestry and extractive industries. (IPS)

## Military aid soars

WASHINGTON – Spurred on by the wars on drugs and terrorism, US military aid to Latin America has more than tripled over the last five years, according to a report by three foreign policy groups. *Paint by Numbers: Trends in US Military Programmes with Latin America*, expresses concern over the growing number of obstacles to obtaining reliable information about US military-related programs in the region. At a time when the region’s economies are stagnating or even shrinking, throwing millions more people into poverty, total US military aid to Latin America now almost equals the amount of money Washington is devoting to social or economic development there. (IPS)

## Easier access

OTTAWA – Canada is taking steps to open its doors to more immigrants by scaling back a “points system” that gave the country a reputation as a hard place to get into. Pressure from the courts, immigration lawyers and government members of parliament is one reason for the reversal. Canada, which prides itself on being a magnet for people looking for a new country, has been unable to attract enough skilled immigrants and businesspeople in recent years.

While Ottawa set its sights on 300,000 skilled newcomers a year—one percent of its population of 30 million—the number of people who achieved enough points in applying has steadily declined. In 2002, about 230,000 immigrants arrived in Canada, down from 250,000 the previous year. The target for this year was 220,000-245,000 but new targets are expected in about a month. An estimated 113,000 immigration applicants will now have a new or improved chance to become Canadians. The points system awards applicants for a variety of attributes, such as working skills, education, age, experience, and the ability to speak English or French. Adaptability to the country also gives extra points. (IPS)

# In war and peace

## Reforms transform Sri Lanka’s economy



THARUKA DISSANAIKE  
in COLOMBO

Peace negotiations are rarely just about politics. When Tamil Tiger rebels in April halted what had until then been mostly cordial peace talks with the Sri Lankan government, the reasons were economic. Tellingly—and symbolically—the rebels, who are members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam or LTTE, also refused to attend an important donor conference in Tokyo in June, which netted a reported \$4 billion in aid for the country. When the official talks began in September 2002 hopes were high for an early end to Sri Lanka’s 20-year civil war, which has cost at least 70,000 lives.

Predictably, the initial rounds were dominated by the political aspirations and rights of the Tamil

minority. Now, the LTTE feels that their economic needs have not been addressed—since the February 2002 ceasefire, they argue, there has been little development of roads, schools, hospitals and power in the Tamil-dominated Northern and Eastern provinces, which experienced most of the conflict. They are now asking for an LTTE-led interim administration to control these war-hit areas.

The development challenge faced by Tamils in these provinces is small compared with people in other countries emerging from prolonged conflict, because of a unique phenomenon: the rest of Sri Lanka experienced economic growth during the war. While many countries have had to grapple with the destruction of the formal economy, “two decades of conflict in Sri Lanka in the 1980s and 1990s have paradoxically been a time

of strong economic growth”, says Rajesh Venugopal, research fellow in Britain’s University of Oxford.

According to government and Central Bank figures, the Sri Lankan economy grew at a steady 5 percent a year in the 1990s, and the number of poor households actually fell from 30.4 percent in 1990 to 26.7 percent in 1996. Exports tripled in the first 15 years of the conflict. The reforms which generated such surprising growth transformed the country from a plantation export based economy to a free market-oriented de-regulated economy. Venugopal, says, “The conflict has not been at odds with economic development at all but rather has advanced side by side, in step with parallel changes in the government’s development policy.”

He attributes some of this

economic success to the war itself. The continued high security conditions and state of emergency, for instance, allowed the government to carry out World Bank-proposed structural reforms and liberalisation plans without meeting the kind of civil unrest that such reforms have sparked in many other countries. The population’s distraction with war also gave the government space and reason to privatise many state-owned corporations. But Venugopal is quick to distance his research from any simple cause-and-effect relationship.

The privatisation of some of the largest national companies—including the national airline, gas and telecommunications companies and major tea plantations—occurred in the early 1990s, when the war raged at its fiercest. “The war has in perverse ways cushioned the effects of the reforms,” including cuts in jobs and welfare subsidies, says Venugopal. Whether these impressive growth figures have translated into improved living standards is another matter however.

Jehan Perera, an economist and director of the NGO National Peace Council, says although reforms pushed through during the war years improved productivity and growth, the country continued to pay through the nose for the war. Funds for education, health and poverty reduction stagnated while military spending skyrocketed. A third of the 2000 budget was spent on defence, while 8 percent went into health and 14 percent into education.

Defence spending nearly doubled from \$360 million in 1995 to \$521 million in 2000. ♦ (© PANOS)

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## COMMENT

by PRAFUL BIDWAI



# Meltdown

As India moves closer to nuclear deployment, diplomacy faces a meltdown too.

Five years after it conducted a series of nuclear blasts, the Indian government has taken one more step towards the actual induction and deployment of nuclear weapons into the country's arsenal, enhancing the nuclear danger in the troubled South Asian region. The Political Council of the Indian Nuclear Control Authority (NCA) met recently to review the "arrangements" being put in place for India's nuclear weapons deployment and decided to accelerate work on various parts of the infrastructure needed for "the strategic forces program".

This was the first-ever meeting of the Political Council of the authority, which was created in January this year. The NCA is uniquely entrusted with developing, deploying and, when necessary, ordering the launch of nuclear weapons. The NCA consists of the Political Council, an Executive Council with recommendatory powers and the Strategic Forces Command, composed of the representatives of the three services, which is meant to manage the nuclear arsenal.

The Political Council alone can authorise the use of nuclear weapons. It is comprised of the prime minister, the ministers for home, finance, external affairs and

defence and the national security adviser.

India's nuclear stance has gradually but significantly hardened over the years. First, it abandoned the old Nehru policy of nuclear abstinence and conducted a nuclear weapons test in the guise of a "peaceful" explosion in 1974. Then, in 1996, India walked out of the Geneva negotiations on a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, declaring that the ban would not lead to genuine disarmament. But India announced that it would not make nuclear weapons.

Then, in May 1998, it shocked the world—and its own citizens—by conducting a series of five nuclear tests. But soon after this, India developed some hesitation and experienced problems in operationalising its weapons capability. The US government, which held a dozen rounds of talks with top Indian officials on the issue, also mounted pressure on New Delhi not to openly deploy its atomic weapons.

There was some ambiguity about India's nuclear doctrine and its emphasis on the pledge of "no-first-use"—namely, the commitment that the country would not be the first to use nuclear weapons (it would only fire them in retaliation); and it would

never use them against non-nuclear powers.

In the recent past, the hesitance has given way to active preparation, and US pressure has eased greatly under the Bush administration, itself devoted to nuclear weapons. India is now proceeding to "consolidate its nuclear deterrence". The new emphasis is on making the Indian nuclear threat more "credible" by erecting a command and control structure and demonstrating the political will to use nuclear weapons, as well as the military capability to do so.

Strongly associated with this shift is India's military leadership, which was brought on board as special invitees to the NCA Political Council meeting. Going on official briefings about Monday's meeting, the Political Council was informed that neither the command-and-control (C-2) nor the indications-and-warning (I&W) system is yet in place. The I&W system's function is to alert the NCA of a possible hostile nuclear attack. The C-2 system is meant to take command of nuclear weapons and authorise their use.

According to some other reports, a planned concrete underground bunker, where the nuclear command post is to be housed, is not yet ready, but is

under construction. India has plans to set up an alternative chain of nuclear command in case the normal, regular command is decapitated or otherwise unable to function during a crisis. It is unclear if much progress has been made in this direction.

It seems likely too that the original target for transferring nuclear-capable military equipment from the three services to its operational arm (the Strategic Force Command) by the end of August, has been missed. This may take some more time. As of now, India has the nuclear-capable 2,000-2,500km range Agni-II ballistic missile and two versions of the short-range (150-250km) Prithvi missile, both of which can be fitted with nuclear weapons. It is also in the process of serially producing and inducting a new Pakistan-specific missile, the Agni-I, with a range of 700 to 800km.

Pakistan's response to India's nuclear preparations is entirely predictable. It will try to match, equalise or "get even" with India. Pakistan is believed to be more advanced than India in marrying nuclear warheads to missiles and it will certainly move towards deployment at the same pace as India. This spells a special danger. There is no strategic distance worth the name between the two nuclear rivals. Therefore, "early warnings" and "indications" do not amount to much. Missile flight-time between the two countries' cities is as little as three to eight minutes. ♦ (IPS)

## Maldives unrest

The tranquil holiday archipelago of the Maldives was rocked by unprecedented riots last week in which government buildings were set on fire in the capital, Male (see pic, right). The town remained tense after the unrest, triggered by the deaths of two inmates in a riot at a jail island near Male. Relatives said that the inmates were killed by police.

The government cracked down heavily on the protestors, firing tear gas and making many arrests. One dissident website has put the number of arrested at 100 but the actual figure is thought to be lower. The death toll from the weekend's violence rose to three on Monday, as a convict injured in the prison riot died.

Crowds threw stones at government buildings and set fire to vehicles and public property. Many were protesting against the government of President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who is seeking another term after 25 years in office. Residents in Male said the injured prisoners had been flown out of the country for treatment so they could not provide a focus for fresh protest.

In July this year, human rights group Amnesty International accused the government of imprisoning and intimidating its critics—a charge the government



denies. This week, Amnesty called on the government to end what it called "systematic abuse" of dissidents, adding that the disturbances are a sign of public frustration over human rights. It also said radical reform of the criminal justice system was urgently needed.

President Gayoom blamed the weekend's mayhem on hardened criminals and said they would be punished. In a televised address to the nation on Saturday, he also promised to punish security personnel found to be responsible for the deaths of inmates. Five security staff who were on duty at the prison during the riot have been arrested.

The Maldives' tourism industry, which is restricted to outlying atolls, has not been affected. Even the airport is on an island separated by sea from the capital.

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# Trust the monarchy

Mohammad Mohasin in *Deshantar*, 21 September

देशान्तर साप्ताहिक

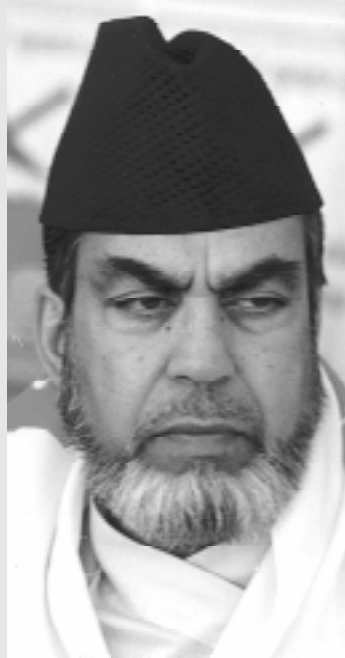
Those who have studied Nepali political history understood long ago that politics flows upstream. This is nothing new. These are challenges that come with the transformation of society and evolution of a political system. A lack of leadership and our weak comprehension of political history kept us from recognising changing circumstances, which is why we find ourselves misgoverned and directionless. If we don't bring the situation under control, things will get worse.

Foreign powers are playing an active role because of our weakness. Their interference in small poor countries isn't novel. Our inefficiency makes it easier for them to meddle in our affairs. The nation must reach some kind of national consensus. The monarchy is the only institution in Nepal's political spectrum that has the capability of giving the country's history and political process a direction. The time has come for it to play a decisive role. All eyes are on the king. The political parties, foreigners and even the Maoist rebels, have accepted the stature of the king. He is in a position to make important decisions now.

There are only two powers in the country: one supports the constitution and the other does not. The king is for the constitution. The parliamentary parties are also committed to the constitution. Unfortunately, there is a crisis of confidence among the constitutional forces, and the anti-constitution bloc is taking advantage of the situation. This is a misunderstanding that has arisen from different concepts of democracy. Nepal cannot blindly follow foreign principles that say the king should stay away from politics, and only political parties should be responsible for the political processes in the kingdom.

Our country has a different historical and social setting. The king represents a political force and a history. The existence of the monarchy is knitted into the very fabric of Nepal. Everyone should reaffirm faith in this institution and get on with nation-building. Why isn't this happening?

On one hand the political and the constitutional forces have not been able to reach an agreement.



On the other, we cannot transform society if we exclude the historical unifier of Nepali society. This is not to say that we must revive the monarchy but we should at least trust it. The political upheaval of 1960 was due to differing views between King Mahendra and BP Koirala. In essence, their rift still divides the country today. But we know that without nationalism, democracy has no value. On the other hand, the country can't be strong without democracy. We need to find an inclusive mantra that combines nationality and democracy.

The fate of the nation is in the balance. And as far as the Maoists are concerned, if they are nationalists and value sovereignty, they should understand they are the reason external threats are increasing. It is up to them to negotiate with the constitutional forces so disaster doesn't befall Nepal.

## Triangular rivals

Hiranaya Lal Shrestha in *Punarjagan*, 23 September

पुनर्जागरण

The present situation is triangular and competitive. The rivalry between the king and the political parties has eased. Responding to foreign pressure, the two big parties have toned down their movement to forge unity among constitutional forces. On the other hand, unlike during the Chand government, the members of the present cabinet don't seem to be able to agree on who should be the next prime minister.

The parties did not receive the kind of support that they expected from the people because their leaders prioritised power over peace. Activists may have participated wholeheartedly in the movement but the people chose to stay away. This tussle between the palace and the parties has only benefited the Maoists.

The need of the hour is an agreement between the king and parliamentary parties, and after that they have to collectively hold dialogue

with the Maoists. A timetable is needed to sequence these measures. If parliament is reinstated, the Maoists will not be present. If a government is formed only with parliamentary forces, it will keep the Maoists out. Since they have consolidated power in rural areas with their own army and a parallel government, keeping the Maoists out of the mainstream will not lead to a longterm solution.

At this critical time, the king, as the head of the state, should call an all-party conference to work on a basic national program and form a government on the basis of national unity. That government should hold whatever kind of election the conference agrees on. Either the Maoists will convince the parties on the necessity of a constituent assembly or the parties will make the rebels believe that constitutional amendments will do for now. If they still have differences, it could be resolved through a referendum on an improved constitution or a constituent assembly.

Civil society has to be active as the fourth force in the country. And we

need help from our neighbours. Friendly countries should help us build an environment instead of interfering Nepal's internal business. We also need foreign aid for the people displaced by war, and it is desirable for the United Nations to monitor the ceasefire. If elections are held, the world body can act as a watchdog to see that everything runs smoothly. We should opt for the UN rather than other nation-states.

## Our forests

NK Dahal in *Spacetime*, 21 September

स्पेसटाइम दैनिक

A recent proposal passed by the World Park Congress in Durban can help Nepal make new rules to implement the concept of community conservation. The congress, organised by the World Conservation Union (IUCN), discussed the criteria for giving ownership of conservation to local communities just as we have done with community forestry. "India

proposed the idea during the Congress and we stand to benefit from it," says Udaya Raj Sharma, Vice-chairman of World Congress of Protected Areas South Asia. IUCN has now defined seven kinds of protected areas. Nepal already has national parks, wildlife reserves, hunting reserves and protected areas. Nearly 20 percent of the country is protected, something that will aid the implementation of the community conservation area, conservationists say. It is also expected to add a new dimension to community forestry in the country.

## My story

Sitaram Baral in *Jana Astha*, 24 September

आस्था

I was waiting for my friend Krishna KC who was the former vice-chairman of All Nepal National Free Students' Union (Revolutionary) at Koteswor on 17 August. As soon he appeared, a lanky figure tried to obstruct his way. Before I could make out what was happening,

another fellow held me by my neck. He was pointing a pistol at my temple and I was already shaking with fear. I showed them my identity card and shouted that I was a journalist. But they snatched the card and a book I was carrying. I was handcuffed and blindfolded. A vehicle arrived at the scene and I was carried inside. A weighty sack was loaded on me so that I could not move. I couldn't see Krishna, but I knew he was in the same vehicle. "Hand over your mobiles or pagers to us," said a voice. "Do you have any weapons?" KC said, "How can we have weapons? It is you who have the weapons." In response, we received several blows. We stopped, I was separated from Krishna and taken to a room for interrogation. They asked me what position I had in the Maoist fold. "You guerrilla, how many persons have you killed so far?" were the kind of questions they asked. I wasn't a guerrilla, so I couldn't answer that question. They used sticks, fists and kicks. The torture continued for several

hours, I was weak and fell off the chair. Then their questions were: How do Maoists contact journalists? What are the news sources of *Jana Astha*?

Now that I am free, I am proud that I never revealed my news sources to them. When the food came I could hardly eat because my face had swollen up. I vomited whatever little I ate. I never knew whether it was day or night because I was blindfolded throughout the ordeal.

Since they kept me asking the same questions round the clock, I decided not to eat, thinking that without food I would fall ill and need medical attention at a civil hospital from where my state would become public. When I resorted to fasting, many of them came to me and threatened that I would suffer and die. I decided to have food to see if they kept their words.

Then they made me change my shirt and put on dark glasses and a hat before driving off with me. I was finally freed at the Dhumabarhi section of Ring Road after five days in their custody.



हिमाल Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 18-30 September

### QUOTE OF THE WEEK

Maoists should know that the people did not willingly or voluntarily support their three-day bandh.

Shailendra Kumar Upadhyay in *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 25 September

## Man Bahadur Tamang, porter

18-30 September, *Himal Khabarpatrika*  
Surya Tumbahangphey interviewed porter Man Bahadur Tamang in Khotang.

हिमाल

**When did you start carrying loads?**  
It's been seven years.

**How much do you carry on your back?**  
This time, I have 135kg with my food and stuff on top.

**How much do you weigh?**  
I am 68kg.

**How much do they pay you for portering?**  
I can earn from Rs 2,600-6,000 per trip.

**How many days is that from Gaighat to Diktel?**  
Roundtrip seven days.

**And how much do you spend on the way?**  
With alcohol it comes to Rs 250.

**Who hires you?**  
I'll carry loads for anyone who pays me.

**Have you been to school?**  
Till grade three.

**Married?**  
Too late, I've become old just carrying loads.

**Have you heard people are getting killed all over the country?**  
I've heard. And I'm scared they may take away my load.



# The river was red with blood

MAN BAHADUR RAI



The real voice of the Gurkhas has often been overshadowed by a romantic version of their role in British Army during both world wars. Retired Gurkha soldiers, most of them more than 75 years old, are now telling their own stories and 13 of their testimonies have been published by Himal Books in *Lahurey ko Katha* and were translated for *Nepali Times*. This fortnightly serialisation of extracts of the soldiers' stories in their own words begins with the recollections of 91-year-old Man Bahadur Gurung from Pokhara who fought in Burma.

In keeping with the prevailing custom then, I didn't go to school and lived in a cowshed till I ran away with an army recruiter and enlisted at Bettiah camp in Darbhanga, Bihar.

The recruiters used to come to the village in secret. They had to meet us in the forest and sweet talk us as if they were courting us. They were apprehensive about entering the village openly because a number of them got lost in that war. This had made parents suspicious, and they forbade recruiters from entering the village for fear they would lead the boys to their deaths. If any recruiter was found sneaking into the village, he was caught and beaten up. This was the way it was even when I enlisted in 1928. The recruiting officer at Darbhanga was British. I was selected for the Burma Army. After enlistment, training and education was at the training centre.

On our arrival at Matila in Burma, we were trained and learnt the basics of marching in the course of a year. After that we were posted at Machina. I was smarter than others in our lot and was selected to be an instructor. I served in that capacity for 11 years. World War II started while we were at the training centre and we plunged right into battle.

At that time I held the rank of sergeant and we were sent to Katha for a junior leadership course. Approximately 500 infantrymen were deputed from Burma Rifles for training. Our British instructors taught us schemes of warfare. During the training, rumour was rife that war had started in Manchuria. In those days, there were no transistor radios and we kept ourselves abreast of the happenings through



big radios.

After our training was completed, we were sent to our respective units. Meanwhile, we heard that the war front was approaching our area. Having successfully completed our training, we were in the process of training others. We had no information that the Japanese had already made their way inside Burma, and were close to where we were stationed. We had no doubt that the Japanese, after penetrating inside Burma, had taken to wearing Burmese clothes and were looking for where we stored our weapons, medicines and food.

The Burmese are a very cold-blooded people, and there were a few of them in our regiment. We usually frequented clubs where one could read, drink beer and play cards. There one could buy all sorts of liquor or beer. Under the

influence of rum the Burmese would blurt out that their father had stepped in. We were at a loss to understand what this revelation by the Duppy implied. Burmese were called Duppy because they let the fish rot inside tins, then mixed it with other things and consumed it. In Burmese such rotten fish is called Duppy hence the moniker for the Burmese. They had hidden Japanese in their places, which made them blurt out that their father had gone, and our father has stepped in. That implied that Japanese were their father and Britishers were ours. Those were the code words.

Information reached us that Japanese were expected to advance along the Sitang river from Thailand. On the basis of that information all of our troops—Burmese, English,

Punjabi, Garhwali, Dogra and Gurkhas—headed in that direction. If the Gurkha regiment was in the front, it was covered by another regiment and that one by another. In case the regiment in the front was wiped out its position was automatically taken by those behind it. In so doing, they were simply complying with strict government orders. Meanwhile, Japanese troops had crossed the river downstream following a shortcut.

Since telephone lines from headquarters were cut off, there was no communication. The supply of rations was disrupted. Under the circumstances, imagine the predicament of our troops. On inquiry it was found out that the Japanese had blocked the supply lines from behind. They had also blown up the bridge ahead. The supply of weapons and rations from the rear was disrupted. Fleeing was the only way out as the Japanese continued bombarding us from the other side. As we retreated we discovered that the bridge was blown up. They did so in order to trap us from all sides and then massacre us.

The only option open was to plunge into the Sitang river and indeed we took that recourse notwithstanding the fact that Sitang is a large river. As we were putting all our efforts into floating, the Japanese started non-stop firing with machine guns. Countless lives were lost. The whole river turned red with blood. Skilled swimmers managed to cross the river; the rest lost their lives. Human bodies floated on the water and naturally, the casualties had to be astonishingly high. ♦

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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **A day in Lazimpat** Photographs by Damien Murphy at the Lazimpat Gallery Café, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Water Colours** by Nepal Water Colour Society members from 22 September-11 October at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. 4428694
- ❖ **Alps & Himalayas - Yesterday & Today** Photo exhibition from Eco Himal, the Society for Ecological Co-operation between the Alps and the Himalayas at Nepal Tourism Board from 26 September-1 October, 8-10 October.
- ❖ **Secrets of Angkor** Photographs by National Geographic Photographer, Paulius Normantas. **Graphics Today and Tomorrow** Contemporary prints by 15 Indian artists at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. 4218048



EVENTS

- ❖ **Film South Asia '03** 43 films screened back-to-back from 9.30 AM to 6.30 PM, 25-28 September at the Russian Cultural Centre, Kamalpokhari. Tickets: Rs 25 are available at Saraswati Book Centre (5521599), Mandala Book Point (4227711) Suwal music and Video (4421522) and Dhokaima Café (5543017).
- ❖ **Lazimpat Film Show: Requiem for a Dream** 30 September 7PM, *A Passage to India* 2 October 7PM at Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Creativity** Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats conducted by Ravin Lama at the Hyatt Regency on 29 September. 4771001
- ❖ **Changa Chait 2060** Kite flying competition at Club Himalaya, Nagarkot. Finals on 27 September. 4410432
- ❖ **Festive Mood** last Friday theme event at Dwarika's Hotel on 26 September with Abhaya & The Steam Injuns. Rs 699 per person. 4479488.

MUSIC

- ❖ **PTY LTD** Australian house lounge band live at the Enticer Deluxe Lounge-A-Rama at Hotel de l'Annapurna from 4PM till late on 26 September. Tickets: Rs 300. 4432583
- ❖ **Catch 22** back at the Rum Doodle.
- ❖ **Cadenza live** 7.30PM Wednesday, Saturday at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Thunderbolt** at Rox Bar on Fridays Happy Hours 6-PM, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu.
- ❖ **Be a DJ** at Tantra, Thamel. Open to beginners, bring your own music (electronic only) from 4PM till late on 27 September. 4218565
- ❖ **DJ Marathon** 2-4PM lounge, 4-6PM reggae and ragga, 6-8PM hip hop and R&B, 8-10PM drums & bass and jungle, 10-12PM trance and techno, 12-2AM house and Latin house on 27 September at Via Via, Paknjol.

DRINKS

- ❖ **Happy Hour** Buy one get one free at Splash Bar & Grill from 5.30-7PM. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu. 4411818
- ❖ **Cosmic Cocktails** and chic home furnishings at Mitra Lounge Bar and Mausam homestyle boutique. Above Cafe Mitra, Thamel. 4259015
- ❖ **Monsoon Wine Festival** at Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Jyatha. 4250440

FOOD

- ❖ **Sumptuous Sandwiches** from 21 September at all Hyatt Regency outlets. 4491234
- ❖ **Dasai and Tihar Bonanza** 50 percent off food at The Fun Café and Splash Bar & Grill. Buy one service and get another for free at Radisson Beauty Saloon. Radisson Hotel Kathmandu. 4423888
- ❖ **Roadhouse Cafe** for wood fired pizzas and more. Opp St Mary's School, Pulchowk. 5521755
- ❖ **Momos & More** The finest momos in town now at Dhobighat. 5520692
- ❖ **Chimney Refreshed** Fine continental cuisine at The Chimney Restaurant, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Traditional Nepali Thali lunch** at Patan Museum Café inside Patan Museum. 11AM-2.30 PM. Cocktails and snacks 2-7.30 PM. 5526271
- ❖ **Saturday BBQ Lunch** at Club Himalaya Nagarkot. Rs 500 per person. 468008
- ❖ **Malay, Singapore food** at Singma, Jawalakhel, Lalitpur. 552004
- ❖ **Festival discount** on vegetarian specialties at Stupa View Vegetarian Restaurant & Terrace, Boudha. 4480262

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Microflight flying adventures** with the Avia Club, Pokhara.
- ❖ **September Surrender** 2 nights 3 days for Rs 7,555 at Shangri-la Hotel and Resort Pokhara. 4412999
- ❖ **Shivapuri Heights Cottage** 30 minutes from Kathmandu, at the edge of the Shivapuri Reserve. Email: info@escape2nepal.com Website: www.escape2nepal.com
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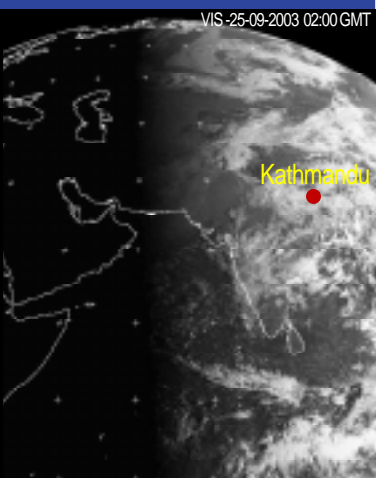
KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

Location	Average PM10 Level (micrograms per cubic meter)
Putali Sadak	98
Matsyagaon	24
TU	30
Bhaktapur	39
Patan H.	130
Thamel	63

Source: www.mape.gov.np

The three day Nepal Bandh last week did wonders to Kathmandu's air quality. Even in usually heavy traffic areas the PM10 (particles that are small enough to enter the human body) levels dipped to about one-third of normal levels. In the Patan Hospital area, the average PM10 level before the bandh was 184 micrograms per cubic meter, is much higher than the national standard of 120. But during the next three days of the strike, the average PM10 went down to 61—proving once more that vehicular pollution is the main culprit.

NEPALI WEATHER



by MAUSAM BEED

This fresh series of late monsoon pulses over the Himalaya has been a surprise for meteorologists in the subcontinent. It brought torrential rains throughout Nepal, and as this satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows, the moisture is massed along the Himalayan midhills, proving that it may be an extra-subcontinental atmospheric process that regenerated a deep trough over northern India. The combined effect of these Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal branches of the monsoon will dissipate by the weekend and by early next week we should finally see the monsoon backing off.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



BOOKWORM



**Nepal Tomorrow Voices & Visions: Selected Essays on Nepal** DB Gurung (ed) Koselee Prakarshan, 2003 Rs 999

This is a volume with an encyclopedic scope, an intellectual assemblage of 39 of the finest minds in the country. What pushes these intellectuals apart is the idiosyncrasy in their subjects of interest and expertise, and what pulls them together is the sense of being Nepali exerted on each of them, driven by a common shared vision. Contributors include Lain Singh Bangdel, DP Bhandari, Harka Gurung, Tara Nath Sharma and Meena Acharya.

**In the name of Democracy: JP movement and the Emergency** Bipan Chandra Penguin, 2003 Rs 560

Finely argued, incisive and original, this book is a valuable contribution to our understanding of the turbulent years of the Emergency, 1975-77. Leading up to it was the JP movement, named after its leader Jayaprakash Narayan, which paralysed much of northern India and directly challenged Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Chandra looks at these happenings sequentially, seeking to understand their character and what they posed for Indian democracy.



Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 4227711, mandala@ccsl.com.np

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Bollywood gets bolder with *Boom*. Directed by Kaizad Gustad, it has a distinctly Tarantino and Guy Ritchie flavour, which will come as a refreshing change from the soft focus depictions so beloved to Bollywood. *Boom's* fast pace is complemented by the sensational music of Talvin Singh and Resul. The movie stars Amitabh Bachchan as the king pin, Gulshan Grover, Jackie Shroff, Javed Jaaferi, Zeenat Aman, Seema Biswas and Padma Lakshmi, Madhu Sapre, Katrina Kaif. With the buxom village lasses and sappy love stories shoved aside for an intricate plot that involves ganglords, Indian supermodels and a large cachet of diamonds, *Boom* blows away the old stereotypes.

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# Eating out Patanside

This side of the bridge has recently seen an improvement in the calibre and variety of restaurants.

The last time most Kathmandulays bothered to look, which as about two decades ago, the Patan side of the bridge was the boondocks—rice fields, dirt lanes and a place to buy carpets. Anyone who bought property thereabouts was asked why they wanted to live near Nakkhu Jail.

Today it looks like Patan is the preferred address for expats, several of the Valley's best schools and is, increasingly, sprouting more restaurant branches than a banyan tree.

Patan Darbar Square is where it all started to happen, and the restaurants and bars are still there. This is where the quality of the view usually far surpasses that of the food. Then again, when you're drinking in the sights from a rooftop vantage you don't need more than a chilled beer and a plate of momos.

Layeku (Newari for darbar square) Kitchen in Mangal Bazar is where you can have genuine Newari food while watching the bustle of Patan unfurl. For an experience in the very heart of ancient Patan, nothing beats the charm of Patan Museum Café inside the museum where old world charm melds in perfect harmony with Italian pastas and delicious desserts—try the Orange Bombe.

It's not difficult to find the newly opened Dhokaima Café. Precisely at Patan Dhoka, it is designed by architect Siddhartha Gopalan to reflect a certain "1920s down-market Rana chic". It calls

itself a café but is actually a restaurant that serves a select French and Sichuan menu. "We wanted to represent the changing tastes of Nepalis towards food," says Sandhya Sharma, Dhokaima's head chef.

Moving right along, the food at La'Soon Restaurant and Vinotheque is simple but usually very good, the braised mushrooms with spaghetti for example. It has a good selection of wines and the best espresso in the area, but you'll wish the slices of chocolate cake were less skinny.



Moksh is indeed a kind of salvation for what used to be less than stellar evening entertainment in Patan. Run by model-turned-entrepreneur Dolly Yakthumba, it has been feng-shuid to within an inch of its life. It also has the best apple and celery mocktails and the yummiest chicken cheese balls. Moksh is also a popular venue for jam sessions with 1974 AD, perhaps Nepal's best loved rock band.

The Golden Strip of the moment, however, is the St Mary's School lane which has four new restaurants. Singma serves Singaporean and Malaysian food at very reasonable prices. It's the place for quick lunches and Singaporean

Eric Tan is very pleased with the volume of business. The bestsellers are the chicken rice (inset), wonton soup and suprisingly, the pratas—Singapore's versions of parathas. "We've been approached to franchise Singma, but we'd like to stay small," says Eric over the bustling lunchtime restaurant traffic.

Roadhouse Café has fabulous woodfired pizzas, and yes those really are the bottoms of green cola bottles stuck into the wall. Unlike the Thamel headquarters, this branch focuses exclusively on pizzas with a few side orders and desserts. A very nice selection of wines from France and Australia, with a stray bottle or two from Chile.

Next door is Dan Ran run by Suga and his wife, Junko, who does all the delicious homestyle cooking. Low key, comfortable and delicious, Dan Ran earns a thumbs up for the wet towels to freshen up with, pretty non-disposable chopsticks (save the trees!) and fantastic options for vegetarians plus a whole contingent of Japanese customers. Only the earlybirds get to sample their bestselling spicy chicken lunch box.

The Sanepa branch of Momos & More, about 200m further down Jhamsikhel, has one of best brownies in the Valley. Strange because most customers usually inhale so many of the momos that there is scarcely enough room for anything else. In a quiet corner of Ekantakuna is Yoek Teck, a family-run Malaysian vegetarian restaurant that serves up tofu and



Clockwise from top l-r: Vegetarian lunch box at Dan Ran, 1974 AD at Moksh, summits from Summit, branching out at Roadhouse Cafe and easy choices at Singma.

yam *fis*, *chic* and *pra*, which are very convincing substitutes for the real thing. Don't judge the place by the interior, culinary surprises, if not delights, await you.

If quick lunches are what you need then make your way to the zoo. Or close to it. Ja-Zoo Café de Restaurant offers lunch combos that are unbelievably easy on the wallet. On the way to Lagankhel is Bawarchi, great for Kolkata-style kathi rolls and North Indian fare.

Then there is Godavari Village Resort, only 7km from the Ring Road but feels a world away. It has already popular for its Saturday buffets: entire families loll about by the pool,

sampling the generous spread and downing cool drinks surrounded by green hills. But if buffets are not for you, trust us, their excellent rainow trout—farmed locally—will be.

It may be a little difficult to find, but once you've discovered the Summit Hotel restaurant chances are you won't forget the way back. The intimate ambience is unpretentious, the menu select but superb. Summit hosts the best Friday barbecue sessions, something of a tradition among those in the know since the 80s. On a quiet autumn night, dine out on the patio overlooking the garden with the Himalaya bathed in moonlight. Magic. ♦

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## Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

# News we can't use

Even though it is our duty as journo to bring events of national importance to our esteemed readers' notice as soon as they happen on a regular basis, the Dasai break means that many perfectly good news items will have to be discarded into the trash heap of history. But due to popular demand, we have decided to resurrect some of them to fulfil our mandate to keep the public informed without fear or favour so that the ugly truth shall prevail.

### Nepal to have a wet port

BY OUR MARITIME CORRESPONDENT

Birganj – After the grand success of finally getting Nepal's one and only dry port off and running, the government is about to sign an agreement to set up a wet port in the near future even though, as far as we know, the country is not blessed yet with a coastline. "This is a slight unforeseen hitch," His Majesty's Government's Minister of Shipping and Oceanography told us. "But we can overcome it by requesting our southern neighbour to permanently submerge our border areas."

News that Nepal would no more be landlocked was greeted with enthusiasm by the business community which saw great potential to promote beach tourism in Nepal, besides trekking and mountaineering.

### Computers hit by Red Eye Virus

IT SECTION

Kathmandu – Computers throughout Kathmandu Valley have been hit by a serious virus attack which is believed to have jumped the species barrier from humans and invaded all computers that run on the Microsoft Windows operating system.

Experts at the Symantec Virology and Immunology Lab at Palo Alto, California said the Red Eye worm which started as a prank has now spread across the world. Symantec has a Ciprofloxacin eye patch, available at all pharmacies at inflated prices, that must be applied to the infected part of the CRT monitor twice a day. Microsoft's Bill Gates, wearing protective dark shades, told reporters in Seattle yesterday: "I feel bad about it, but it is the users' fault for not upgrading in time to my Windows 20/20."

### All cars have to remove roofs

Kathmandu – In an effort to further enhance security, the Valley police has asked all vehicle owners to remove the roofs from their cars to make it easier for them to identify passengers at the capital's numerous security check points. Thousands of motorists thronged the Valley's garages on Thursday to get their roofs cut out with oxyacetylene torches, and turn their sedans into convertibles.

"I like the wind in my hair," said one motorist, whose delight was short-lived when police at Bagmati Bridge told her helmets were now mandatory for occupants of cars without roofs. "We are doing it for passenger safety," police said. "Car owners can take their helmets off when they put the roofs back on their cars after Friday."

### Ambassador-at-Large in NY

New York (CNN) – Nepal's new Ambassador-at-Large today told the United National General Assembly that Nepal was willing to offer its blue helmet troops to the United Nations to restore peace in his own country.

Addressing the world body, the ambassador reminded the international community that Nepali troops had amassed a wealth of experience in peacekeeping in Lebanon and Sierra Leone and would be most suitable for deployment in Nepal's war zones because "we know the terrain better than the Fijians".

### Yeti Exists: Expedition

BY AN ABOMINABLE REPORTER

Jomsom – A group of Nepali primatologists said today they had found indisputable proof that the yeti indeed exists. After three years extensively scouring the worldwide web through several search engines, the scientists said they had found at least 315,000 intercepts of yetis on Google alone. "When we did an image search, we found another 6,600 yetis on Ask Jeeves," the researchers told a press conference today. "It is a myth that the yeti does not exist." Several yetis who were approached for comment via email refused to confirm or deny their existence.

## NEPALI SOCIETY

# "Dudh Kosi in my soul..."

He has been writing continuously for nearly 70 years: songs, books and poetry that have now become a part of the modern Nepali consciousness. Madhab Prasad Ghimire was honoured this week on his 85<sup>th</sup> birthday as Nepal's greatest living poet, our own Poet Laureate.

His respect and affection for Nepal's bounteous nature is expressed in the music, words and rhythms of the land. Nepalis hum his songs as they walk the mountain trails, work in the cities, or toil in the fields. "Gaunchha gita Nepal" has almost become Nepal's second national anthem, a tribute to the country's beauty, our diversity, an indefatigable people, and cultural

richness. The song's "sundara shanta bishal" is not in the high-flying lingo of intellectuals, but colloquial village Nepali that everyone understands. Madhab Ghimire is possibly Nepal's greatest communicator: his talent lies in letting Nepalis, young and old, listen to their own heart beat through words and music and evoke emotions that express our collective existence.

When his wife Gauri died 54 years ago at age 17, leaving behind a four-year-old son and a daughter of six months, the heartbroken poet let his tears flow through his fountain pen. He wrote and rewrote, revising and perfecting *Gauri* for 11 years. This slender volume of 17 songs

may be on the melodramatic side, but it tugs at the heartstrings of every father or mother, and those who listen to the verses inevitably shed a tear or two.

We asked Madhab Ghimire how he would describe himself. "Lekhan was a koeli in spring, Debkota was a skylark soaring and singing in the fog, I'd say I am a mountain owl hiding and singing in the quiet of the Himalayan night."

Kathmandu's FM stations have been playing Madhab Prasad Ghimire's songs over and over again this week to commemorate his anniversary. ♦ (Peshal Pokhrel)



### कार्यालयको काम अनि घरघन्डा साथमा हरेक बिहान नियमित व्यायाम पनि

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आखिर यो सब सम्भव हुन्छ, कसरी ?

स्वस्थ मुटु  
आजको आवश्यकता  
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