A vegetarian Dasai

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

BRADDAH BASNYAT

As Akhaubs 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 and lingers 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 vowing to give up meat, 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 witness 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.

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

If you are interested in participating in our upcoming "Great Bags, Great Bargains at this DASHAIN!" competition, please contact us at 426/6315.
Wartime Dasai
Warmongers will win if we, out of fear, stop living.

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 relented 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, a Dasai that the home has been destroyed by the Maoabdi, 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 a way that does most other things—ritually, during the same thing in the way same 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 denounce the ritual. It is not easy to stop the cruel practice when guest are slaughtered at numerous spiritual power centres on behalf of the war. From his study of ju-maro the Kathmandu Valley, anthropologist Sudhanra Tharu has concluded that culture is at its most vibrant at the bottom range of the social hierarchy. Their 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 ride it over by borrowing, Dasai is a time to forget their worries.

As warmongers in the country, there have been calls from several quarters 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 Maoabdi or the alleged rebels killed by security forces, they are all Nepalis who died for a cause that has 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 World War, 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, 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 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 calls to call off Dasai, the political parties’ threat of negations is beginning to sound equally hollow. It is true that King Gyanendra has been in direct control of the country for one year now. But the staunchly, as at least not yet, progressed to a pre-1990 state. The very fact that Moeen Sinada, Nirmawg, Shechan, Bipakone, and Tipatip are free to deliberate 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 regressions, what we have is a political manoeuvre similar to Pakistan’s Musharrafship, a semi-dictatorship.

It has also become customary in Kathmandu’s 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 in most fragile period. Soon after its establishment, the French Republic became the Reign of Terror and the culture of the guillotine. Briefly after gaining independence, Americans started preparing for the Civil War. India's Kashmiris, 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 Nepal of governments of its political legitimacy. The institutions of democracy, however shaky, stood its shocks. Instead of making first 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 mistake 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. Maoabdis 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 borne corrupt, and reacted with iron fist against the nascent insurgency, but the law is finally catching up on them. Which one of us in the chanting classes is clean enough to cast the first stone? In any case, better a corrupt government that 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.
Joan Windsor Sarasin is a major convention tourism operator who has taken the lead in combating the recent economic downturn in the industry. She has a strong convention did indeed take place. As ordinary Nepalis, we did what we could. Sorry to bogy my own trumpet, but this is just to show how our national identity can help us in this way too. But even those efforts, not just by the Nepal Tourism Board.

Peter J Karthak, The Kathmandu Post

The Nepal government has rejected the proposal to convert the Kumari into a national tourist attraction. Instead, they have decided to keep her in the Kumari's palace and allow tourists to witness the ritual of Kumari worship. This decision is based on the fact that the Kumari has become a symbol of hope and has done much for the education of girls. The government has also decided to increase compensation for the caretakers of the Kumari, including the physical language reporting.

Mahendra Chandra Deuba, Chands and Thapas

The proximity afforded by 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 else'. I too have been a tourist in the third world and I too have been overly concerned of and attentive to my own comfort and safety. It is problematic when, on an interpersonal level, the struggles of those around you become less important than the weather. However, I believe that he is giving all the people he comes across the respect and sensitivity that he should.

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NAVIN SINGH KHADKA IN THE KHAMBU

Sagarmatha’s buffer zone

Forests around Tengboche Monastery are regenerating.

Disappeared 25 years ago, are the Limbu tribesmen in the east and mountain people everywhere—all have fish in a flooded paddy field in the tarai, a Dalit activist in Dhading, Rai and men listening to the radio news in the remote west, Tharu women netting seafood. People tell you that everything bad comes from Kathmandu. Bahun and Newars are incensed that the police are 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 Lukia unit of the API is supposed to get a generous supply chevron so 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 Lukia 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 API flatly denied it was poaching timber. The last year’s 20 people who wanted the police to stop the logging was forced by the armed police to stand all night in the freezing cold at the helpdesk in Lukia as punishment.

Since then, relations between the park and the police have become further strained. The new national capital on questions of defence and national finance and that’s why the Sagarmatha National Park is a conservation success story, and a model for eco-tourism. The currently fenced-off space and hemlocks 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 in these altitudes. Journalists covering the 50th anniversary of the first Everest climb last spring, who were prepared to do the mandatory ‘trails 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 net. The cost 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 Lukia airport are pink and smooth to touch, though they look as if they were shredded recently. “The police cut our trees in our forest and we got blameed,” whispered 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 white thick forests of pine drape the steep slopes of the Tengboche and Dhunche Kosi valleys inside the Park, the rhododendron and oak forests near Lukia have all but gone. The locals, who are not allowed to cut trees, are incensed that the police are openly doing the same and cutting 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 Lukia unit of the API 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 Lukia 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 API flatly denied it was poaching timber. The last year’s 20 people who wanted the police to stop the logging was forced by the armed police to stand all night in the freezing cold at the helpdesk in Lukia as punishment.

After the API took over the park in 1995, the Sagarmatha buffer zone became the victim of the park’s growth. The forest logging mafia is well-oiled: in 1992, the Sagarmatha forest user group in Chaurikharka, the number of trekkers and mountaineers in the park has climbed sharply from 1982 to 1992 to its peak of 26,000 in 2001. Although the levels have dropped slightly since then, mountain tourism 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 timber. They say they are selling the timber to repair trails and bridges, but more often than not, the timber 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 unenviable role of protectors of unregulated minority. “We try to print, but the bureaucracy has connections in powerful circles,” 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 representatives in the dissolved parliament, Bal Bahadur KC, fixed timber smugglers from police custody two years ago. Those smugglers were caught red-handed but they had the MP’s blessing, and they are still involved in illegal logging. Everyone knows...
who they are,” a local conservationist told us.

The Sherpa 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. Rimpochu Nunsang Lama of Tengboche monastery, a passionate environmentalist, is credited with resisting the forces 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 Rimpochu.

But some unscrupulous locals reportedly misuse the Lama’s name by hawking logs on a logging. A local politician flew out a large onyx served in a helicopter earlier this year, without a permit, despite a ban on the spur where his shrine is located. The Department of Forestry has washed its hands off the buffer zone, but the park’s rangers are all the more alert when they see a person cutting logs stripped of their barks. A worker from the park’s 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 mountain slopes with seedlings. The project is also looking at alternative energy resources like solar and micro hydro along the Larkya trail to reduce dependence on firewood.

**Cold shoulder**

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 a half. But this week, the parties declared they are not on the board. The five-party alliance said it would neither join the central government nor local bodies. “As long as the unconstitutional government is there, there is no question of joining any of its offices,” Nepal Workers and Peasants Party Narayan Man Bhattarai told the UN. The UML has warned its cadre not to join any local bodies. The 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 consultation for the local bodies, even the Maoists in their stronghold.

**Poverty fund**

In its latest Nepali Alert 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 Pushpa Bhakta told us. The fund will use bilateral, multilateral and government funds. Its regular income sources are already holding talks with the World Bank. The World Bank is considering a $210 million Poverty Reduction Strategy Credit which could be the approved later this year. The government has appointed NPC’s former vice chairman Mohan Dahal as chairman of the fund.

The government has also announced mobile teams to provide information on issues 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 Bhattarai, Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha and PCDeUML leader Dawa Sherpa, among others.

Mr. Hak-su, who is an advocate for poverty reduction and a proponent of sustainable development, is expected to meet the leaders of the main political parties during his stay in the country.

Mr. Hak-su’s visit comes at a time when the EU is considering a proposal to provide financial assistance to Nepal for poverty reduction.

**Columbia alumni meet**

The Nepali-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 members include Prakash Adhikari, Gauri Pandit, Anil Joshi, Josephine, digital ambassador for international economic affairs.

The Columbia alumni meet has been established to promote academic and professional collaboration between Columbia alumni and the people of Nepal.

**Tougher buffer**

Alerted by the denudation in Lukla, Phakding and Namche (above), the government declared the area the Sagarmatha’s National Park Buffer Zone in 2002 and with help from the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) will be continuing a 9-year old community-based forest management program here. Up till now, the project has set up five community forest user groups, established nurseries and replanted entire mountain slopes with seedlings. The project is also looking at alternative energy resources like solar and micro hydro along the Larkya trail to reduce dependence on firewood.

**Court Martial**

The Royal Nepali Army has court martialled a junior soldier 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 found to resign because he did not investigate the matter thoroughly. Brigadier DA Sharma told us one sergeant, two lance corporals and a riferman 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 the police soldiers, a major station officer of the same district was assigned to investigate. His report said no army personnel was involved.

Let us be very clear: After further investigation we found they had tried to hug up to the major. Sharma said. Among the culps the riferman has been imprisoned for three years while the other three will be held for two years. The civil case will be handed over to Banke police since the amended Military Act does not allow the army to prosecute civilians.

**VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT**

**RESEARCH CO-ORDINATOR AND ADMINISTRATOR**

International Alert, an independent, international non-governmental organisation based in London, is looking for a Research Co-ordinator and an Administrator.

**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 inter-personal, 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.

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A democratic antidote to violence

by RAGHU PANT

When violence becomes an end in itself

The biggest losers from the war-born slaughter that the Maoists have unleashed on the country will be the Maoists themselves.

When violence becomes an end in itself, it is a fateful interpretation of Mao Zedong’s thought. Along with the leadership and the cadre base of the Maoists are guided by utilitarian 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 inevitably 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 in vain in modern society.

The Maoist rhetoric is 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 marginalisation of the Maoists and an erosion of the rule of law. Thanks to this, the experience of the Maoists and other left extremism resulted in the upsurge of right-wing reactionaries and a movement against the rule of law.

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, get rid of the demoralised and terrorised people of this country and return to the political fold by responding to the public’s need for an assurance that they will not repeat the mistakes of the past 12 years.

The RPP is committed to the establishment of a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary reforms are possible only through a United Front of constitutional forces that will be united in the first challenge: to win over the Maoists and the people and strengthen the constitutional forces. No one has any right to assert 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 support on the one hand and our freedom of expression. They have to make our national identity more robust by kick-starting the economy and long-term growth. It is not economic growth that will win support from the people, just resort to murder and terror as a way to the violence and a return to the peace process.

The people have been through a bitter struggle and the fighting began anew, the nature of the war changed. Instead of trying to turn over a new leaf and present the people with a new age of democracy and good governance. We must continue the peace process through the lens of democratic peace, to give up our freedom of expression. We must transform the current process through local self-governance in order to address existing regional, ethnic and other disparities and ensure balanced development.

The Maoists are targeting the capital and urban areas. It is politically unwise to obstruct democracy, the Maoists are the most aggressive against the party in power and support on the one hand and our freedom of expression. They have to make our national identity more robust by kick-starting the economy and long-term growth. It is not economic growth that will win support from the people, just resort to murder and terror as a way to the violence and a return to the peace process.

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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 to the violence and a return to the peace process.

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Beyond khasinomics

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, 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, had caught on by mid-August that the overall project cost was still below the appraisal estimate of $460 million. Responding to a public-interest writ filed last week by a Siyangia 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 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.

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 workshop 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. Chaubary 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 spares from east to west. The popular model is set to win Nepal hearts with its sleek European looks. Whistoo Trading, an enterprise of Golchha Organisation, are the authorised dealers for Proton and have stock of the art after sales servicing.

Nepal Remittance

Remittance

From the looks of it, this is not going to be a bad Dasai we’ve ever had. Nepalis are killing themselves all over the kingdom. The current political impasse has sharpened our insecurities. And now, the Beed, as a bearer of bad tidings, has heard murmurs of a bandh during the festival. When will be realise our potential? ♦

Inland Container Depot built near Birgunj with support from the World Bank.
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 organizers, 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 Manush 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 popularize the documentary format within the region and around the world. For the first time since the start of the festival in 1997, organizers 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 has said.

At the opening of the festival, the Nepali documentary Bibas Athi Bhasako 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 Lohana Marum, an artist and culture critic from Dhaka, and Lalsawmliani Tochhawng, an ardent film enthusiast and charge d’affairs of the prestigious ICIC Film Club in Delhi. Past juries have been headed by well-known South Asian filmmakers such as Shyam Benegal and Gohar Ghani.

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.

Festival of South Asian Documentaries

Festival of South Asian Documentaries

In-house picks

In Search of Zhang Zhung

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

FSA ‘03 from 25 - 28 September at the Russian Cultural Centre, Kathmandu. Tickets (Rs 25 per screening) are available at Sarawati Book Centre, Putatolu (051) 3393383/339511); Mandala Book Point, Kupendhi (2427771); Swayed Music and Video, Lastspat (4216223); Dhekama Cafe, Patan Dohra (5144107).

Email: fsa@himalassociation.org

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

Bheda Ko Oon Jaasto – In Search of a Song

Narayan Wagale 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 Jaasto, 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 of 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 Jaasto is his first non-development film. Shrestha currently runs a music management company ‘event nepal-laya’.

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.

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. Shrabindra Chakravarty retraces the route of the first batch of Aarsavait from Gujarat to Ayodhya and back, documents the terror en route and depicts the incident at Godhra railway station.

Chakravarty 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.

Qabool Kuran Dhati Hageegay

Qabool Kuran Dhati Hageegay 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 film, a Maldivian-language film, and has worked on several advocacy and development related films for international donor agencies in the Maldives.

FSA ‘03 from 25 - 28 September at the Russian Cultural Centre, Kathmandu. Tickets (Rs 25 per screening) are available at Sarawati Book Centre, Putatolu (051) 3393383/339511); Mandala Book Point, Kupendhi (2427771); Swayed Music and Video, Lastspat (4216223); Dhekama Cafe, Patan Dohra (5144107).

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- Ahmed Nazmi has directed a DV feature film, a Maldivian-language film, and has worked on several advocacy and development related films for international donor agencies in the Maldives.
Festival of South Asian Documentaries

**Thursday, 25 September**

**Majma (Performance)**
4.30 pm

**Rajasthan: A Rough Guide to Democracy** (64 min)
India, 2002, dir - Laili Vachani
An instance of corporate governance

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

**Saturday, 27 September**

**Jah's Ki Khadi -Viyao Mein** (12 min)
Pakistan, 2003, dir - Bineka Starer
Pakistan girls forced into marriage

**Seara – A Bridge over Troubled Water** (40 min)
Pakistan, 2003, dir - Samar Minallah
'Sacrifice' in tribal Pakistan

**Made in India** (59 min)
India, 2002, dir - Madhuvansh Dutta
Visual culture in contemporary India

**Buru Sengal (The Fire Within)** (57 min)
Jharkhand, India, 2002, dir - Shirshaphak
Extracting coal, but at what cost?

**Hunting Down Water** (32 min)
India, 2003, dir - Suresh Borde and Vasant Subaraw
The shortage and surplus of water

**No. 556. 13 th  Lane, Kamathipura, Mumbai**
India, 2003, dir - Vasant Saberwal and Sanjay Barnela
The shortage and surplus of water

**Buru Sengal (The Fire Within)** (57 min)
Jharkhand, India, 2002, dir - Shirshaphak
Extracting coal, but at what cost?

**Friday, 26 September**

**Sita’s Family** (60 min)
Delhi, India, 2003, dir - Saba Dewan
A Dhali journal; Indias back on her life

**Papa 2** (24 min)
Kashmir, India, 2002, dir - Gopal Menon
The story of a family

**Searching for Sasewati** (62 min)
Uttar Pradesh, India, 2003, dir - Sudheer Gupta
Folklore of the Kumbha mela

**The Race** (16 min)
Maharashtra, India, 2003, dir - Raghav Iyer
Urbanisation of culture in rural India

**Ilm Us Jihandana Lajg** (History for Women) (47 min)
Nepal, 2003, dir - Pranay Limbu
A singer who refuses to fight

**Sunday, 28 September**

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

**A Kind of Childhood** (50 min)
Bangladesh, 2002, dir - Tanque and Catherine Maust
Young kids on the streets of Dhaka

**A Night of Prophesy** (77 min)
India, 2002, dir - Amal Karmar
Poets in times and places of conflict

**Saturday, 27 September**

**Diverted to Delhi** (35 min)
Delhi, India, 2002, dir - Greg Stitt
International call centres thrive in India

**Words on Water** (85 min)
India, 2002, dir - Sanjoy Kak
An update on the Narmada movement

**Friday, 26 September**

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

**A Night of Prophecy**
Bangladesh, 2002, dir - Tanque and Catherine Maust
Young kids on the streets of Dhaka

**Saturday, 27 September**

**Poets in times and places of conflict**
India, 2002, dir - Amar Kanwar
A Kashmiri Brahmin returns ‘home’

**Tell Them the Tree They Have Planted**
Nepal, 2003, dir - Sharmeen Obaid
The repercussions of going nuclear

**Sunday, 28 September**

**For the sake of a larger good**
India, 2003, dir - Biju Toppo and Meghnath to Democracy (64 min)
Aftershocks: A Rough Guide to Democracy (64 min)
An instance of corporate governance

**The 18 th  Elephant – 3 Monologues**
Reliving the Partition in the east

**Looking for Kannan** (33 min)
Kerala, 2003, dir - CV Sathyan
A man searches for his son

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

**The Return** (46 min)
Delhi, India, 2003, dir - Gargi Sen
Translating literature from the vernacular

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

**The Race** (16 min)
Maharashtra, India, 2003, dir - Raghav Iyer
Urbanisation of culture in rural India

**Ilm Us Jihandana Lajg** (History for Women) (47 min)
Nepal, 2003, dir - Pranay Limbu
A singer who refuses to fight
In war and peace
Reforms transform Sri Lanka’s economy

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 a foot in the door. 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 200,000 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 chance at gaining entry to Canada. The number of people who achieved enough points in applying has steadily declined in recent years.

THARUKA DISSANAIKE
IN COLOMBO

Peace negotiations are rarely just about politics. When Tamil Tiger rebels in April halted a three-decade-old civil war to open talks with the Sri Lankan government, the reasons were economic. Tilling—and symbolically—the rebels, who are members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam or LTTE, also found it prudent 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 of talks 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 challenges faced by Tamil in these provinces is small compared with people in other countries emerging from prolonged conflict, because of a unique phenomenon: the size 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, they argue, have been a time of strong economic growth,” says Rajesh Venugopal, research fellow at Britain’s University of Oxford.

According to government and Central Bank figures, the Sri Lankan economy grew at an annual 5 percent a year in the 1990s, and the number of poor households actually fell by 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 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, Venugopal says. “For example, he says, “the government sold a lot of its stock in the national airline, gas and telecommunications companies and major publications—occurred in the early 1990s, when the threat 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.

Johan Perera, an economist and director of the NGO National Peace Council, says although reforms pushed through during the war years have improved productivity and growths, 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 2003 budget is 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. "(IPS)
Meltdown

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

by PRAFUL BIDWAI

F ive 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 “armaments” needed to 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 representation of the three services, which is in charge of 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 abstention and conducted a nuclear weapons test in the guise of a “peaceful” explosion in 1974. Then, in 1998, 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 round of talks with top Indian officials on the issue, also showed pressure on New Delhi not to openly deploy its atomic weapons.

There was some ambiguity about India’s nuclear directive 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 creating 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. Giving an official briefing about Monday’s meeting, the Political Council was informed that neither the command-and-control (C-2) nor the indications-and-warnings (IWR) system is yet in place. The IWR system’s function is to alert the NCA of a possible hostile nuclear attack. The C-2 system is meant to be the command of nuclear weapons and authorize their deployment.

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 2,100–2,500km 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 producing such missiles 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, escalate 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.
**Trust the monarchy**

Mohammad Mohasin in Deshantar, 21 September

Those who have studied Nepal political history understood long ago that politics flows upstream. There is nothing new. These are the 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 recognizing changing circumstances, which is why we find ourselves misguided 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 ineffectivity 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 Maoists 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 do not look into the historical social and natural 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.

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**Triangular rivals**

Himansu Lal Shrestha in Panauti, 23 September

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 turned their movement to forge unity among constitutional forces. On the other hand, unlike during the Chand government, the members of the parliamentary parties, and after that, the agreement between the king and the Maoists, may have participated wholeheartedly in the movement but the people chose prioritised power over peace. Activists from the people because their leaders couldn’t answer that question. This time, I have 135kg with my food and stuff on top. It’s been seven years.

**QUOTE OF THE WEEK**

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 remarkable number of measures need to be taken 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 be the Maoists. Since they have solid power in rural areas with their own army and a parallel government, keeping the Maoists out of the mainstream will not lead to a long-term solution.

At this critical time, the king, at 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 convulse the parties on the necessity of a constituent assembly or the parties will make the rebels believe that constitutional amendments will be made.

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 in the fourth force in the country. And we need help from our neighbours. Friendly countries should help Nepal build an environment instead of interfering Nepal’s internal politics.

We also need foreign aid for the people displaced by war, and it is advisable for the United Nations to monitor the ceasefire. If elections are held, the world body can monitor the voting and see if everything runs smoothly. We should opt for the UN rather than other nations.

**Our forests**

NKD Khairen, Anwati
21 September

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, organized 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 stood by to benefit from it,” says Udaya Raj Sharma, Vice-chairman of World Congress of Protected Areas South Asia, IUCN. The proposal is aimed at providing a framework that will add the implementation of the community conservation area, conservationists say. It is expected to add a new dimension to community forestry in the country.

**My story**

Stanimaro Jha, Ani-Khal
24 September

I was waiting for my friend Krishna KC, who was the former vice-chairman of All Nepal National Students’ Union (Revolutionary) at Kotwon on 17 August. As soon he appeared, a lady 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 shattering with fear. I showed them my identity card and shouted that I was a journalist. But they shot the card and a book was acrossing. 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 pager,” said a voice. “Do you have any weapons?” KC said, “How can we have weapon? It is you who have the weapons.”

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 wanted to get a guerrilla, so I couldn’t answer that question. They used sticks, fists and kick. The tortute 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 Ani-Khal? Now that I am free, I am proud that I couldn’t answer their questions. When the food came I could hardly eat because my heart was 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 asking me 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.

**Man Bahadur Tamang, porter**

18-30 September, Himal Khabarpatrika
Suya Tumbahangphegy interviewed porter Man Bahadur Tamang in Khning.

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 Diklet?
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.

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Astha
What are the news sources of Jana Times?
They are the news sources of Jana Times.

Robin Sayami in Himal Khabarpatrika, 18-30 September
Shalendra Kumar Upadhyay in Nepal Samacharpatra, 25 September

Maoists should know that the people did not willingly or voluntarily support their three-day bandh.
The river was red with blood

In keeping with the prevailing custom, I didn’t go to school and lived in a cowshed till I was away from an army recruiter and enrolled at Brittania 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 Brit. I was selected for the Burma Army. After enlistment, training and education was at the training centre.

On our arrival at Malar 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 Kahu for a junior leadership course. Approximately 500 infantrymen were depurced from Burma Rifles for training. Our British instructors taught us schemes of warfare. During the training, rumour was rife that war had been 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 Sittang river from Thailand. On the basis of that information all of our troops—Burmese, English, Punjabi, Garwali, 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 in 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 bombing 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 Sittang river and indeed we took that recourse not withstanding the fact that Sittang 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 wholeimmersion turned red with blood. Skilled swimmers managed to cross the river; the rest lost their lives. Human bodies in the water and naturally, the casualties had to be astonishingly high.
The three day Nepal Bandi 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 bandi 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 SHERKARRI**

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, rains throughout Nepal, and as this satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows, the moisture is massed along the Himalayan midhills, the monsoon will dissipate by the weekend and by early next week we should finally see the monsoon backing off.

**KATHMANDU VALLEY**

**What you burn is what you breathe.**


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- **Pulset Sadak:** Mayajyoti
- **Tulshipur:** Patan H.
- **Bhaktapur:** Thamel

Average PM10 levels at selected points in Kathmandu: 16-22 September in micrograms per cubic meter.

Source: www.mopa.gov.np

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Eating out Patanside

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

Eric Tan is very pleased with the volume of business. The bestsellers are the chicken rice (inset), wonton soup and surprisingly the pancakes—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 wood-fired pizzas, and those really are the best. But, as most customers usually inhale so many of the momos that are up for the wet towels to freshen up by the interior, culinary surprises, if not delights, await you.

If quick lunches are what you need then make your way to the zoos. 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 the roadhouse café, which has fabulous woodfired pizzas, and yes those really are the best. But, as most customers usually inhale so many of the momos that are up for the wet towels to freshen up by the interior, culinary surprises, if not delights, await you.

Carbon Monoxide from the top left: Vegetarian lunch box at Dan Ran, 1974 AD at Moksh, Singma from Summit, branching out at Roadhouse Café and easy choices at Singma.

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

The Sanepa branch of Roadhouse Caffe inside the museum where old world charm melds in perfect harmony with Italian pastas and delicious desserts—the Orange Bongi. It’s not difficult to find the newly opened Dhokaima Café. Precisely at Patan Durbar Square, it is designed by architect Siddharta Gopalan to reflect a certain “1920s down-market Rana chic”. It calls itself a cafe 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 slimy.

Singma serves Singaporean and Malaysian food at very reasonable prices. It’s the perfect 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 surprisingly the pancakes—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.

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

"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 Nepal consciousness. Madhab Prasad Ghimire was honoured this week on his 85th 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 toll in the fields. “Gauncha 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 bhaiha” 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 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 bhaiha” 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.

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