Home improvement

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

A time when the country’s economy is reeling under the effect of the insurgency and political instability, overseas Nepalis are getting together in Kathmandu for the first time to see how they can help.

Known variously as people of Nepali origin (PONs), non-resident Nepalis (NRNs), or simply as ‘global Nepalis’, some 200 delegates from all over the world hope the three-day conference will inject a positive outlook on an otherwise gloomy situation in their motherland. They represent some 1.2 million Nepalis settled in 32 countries.

The government is fully on board, and so is the business community represented by FNCCI. King Gyanendra will attend the inauguration on Saturday at the BICC.

The government is confident that, like foreign Indians, overseas Nepalis can be an engine for investment growth. “We need their investment and we will work on ways to make it possible,” says Finance Minister Prakash Chandra Lalchand.

But that may be easier said than done. Foreign investors, even if they are of Nepali origin, will first want to see certain guarantees and incentives like dual citizenship and hassle-free repatriation of profits.

“We will see what the government offers,” says the NRN International Coordination Committee’s Bimal Upadhyay. “We can be as important as other sources of foreign direct investment.” Nepalis abroad sent home nearly $1 billion last year, and remittances have been propping the country’s faltering economy. A bulk of this money is repatriated by the estimated 400,000 Nepali labourers in the Gulf, Malaysia, Korea and Japan, but they are not represented at this weekend’s conference. The gathering also does not have a single delegate from India where there are at least 1.5 million Nepalis working at any given time, and more than 5 million Indians of Nepali origin.

There is another problem: the exact definition of an NRN. The conference organisers say an NRN is “a Nepali citizen nominated or a person of Nepali origin who has been staying outside Nepal for at least 183 days in a year for employment, business or off employment and indicating an intention for an uncertain duration of stay abroad. Non-resident foreign citizens of Nepali origin also covered under this definition”.

The Nepali law prohibits Nepali nationals from investing in business enterprises abroad. Exceptions are made, but it requires cumbersome Rastra Bank procedures. There are many potential investors who still hold Nepali citizenship, and therefore, are not officially recognised as investors by the countries they live in. Government officials say they will have difficulty placing such persons under an FDI category.

Nepali law also does not recognise dual passports, and overseas Nepalis are therefore divided on the issue. Those from America and Europe don’t believe it is important to insist on dual passports, while others want the provision. Even if the government agrees, the move will need reciprocation by other countries involved.

"Like a crow in fog”

Royal Nepal 409 to Hong Kong was just airborne from Kathmandu Thursday morning at 9:48 when Captain GP Rijal noticed the digital navigation instruments on the 757’s cockpit were not working properly. He kept the plane on a standard departure climb, but immediately realised to his horror that the navigation screen had gone blank.

Climbing through 11,500ft, the plane soon entered cloud and the pilot radioed he was coming back, even though Kathmandu was covered with low cloud ceiling. On the ground, in the darkened interior of the airport’s radar control room, Ananda Mool and Narendra Sayami watched as a crow in fog. "Like a crow in fog,” an ecstatic Rijal told us after landing (see pic). The civil aviation authorities are investigating the incident that the navigation computers did not work.

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Home improvement

Overseas Nepali meet in Kathmandu, but will they invest in the motherland?

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A month ago, the great充值 that took the Nepal government by storm was the first round of elections, which were marred by violence and human rights abuses. The outcome of these elections has far-reaching implications for the future of Nepal, and it is important to consider the role that Nepal, Tibet, and the international community can play in resolving this crisis.

The elections were held on 14th September and 20th November, and they were marred by violence and human rights abuses. The government of Nepal has been accused of using excessive force to maintain order, and there have been reports ofbeatings and torture of opposition leaders and activists. The international community has been called on to provide pressure on the government of Nepal to ensure that the elections are free and fair.

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Despite getting nowhere even one year after advising the king to take over, the advocates of active monarchy in Nepal don’t appear to have learned their lesson. The king’s political action of 4 October 2002, and political inaction in restoring the democratic process as demanded by major political parties, are seriously endangering not only the future of monarchy itself, but also of the country.

If the monarchy and the monarchs are under the impression that as long as the ‘general public’ and ‘security agencies’ are loyal, the political parties can do no harm, it is a serious misconception. The ‘general public’ can be divided into two broad groups: active and passive. The silent majority holds opinion, but it is not vocal and organised. The king certainly appears to have more support than any political party in the country from this group. Hence, the tens of thousands of people who cheered the king during his felicitations in Biratnagar and Dhangadhi earlier this year would be largely useless if the monarchy was to come under real threat. They are not going to gather in the streets of Kathmandu to raise slogans in support of the king.

The crowd political parties pulled during their recent agitation may be much smaller, but they are organised, active and vocal. They are at the beck and call of political parties, and have the capacity to create serious disturbances if they wish. The ‘security agencies’, on the other hand, can only be used up to a point. If the major political parties decide to push for a republic, it will be virtually impossible for the king to stop them with force, unless there are brutal crackdowns.

The only force that the monarchy can rely on is the politically active masses, but it is there that support seems to be eroding as the present political impasse and insurgency continue. The relevance of the institution of monarchy was never a question within major political parties until a year ago. Now, there is a veritable split on this question in all of them.

This endangers not only the monarchy but also the future of the country. Linking the country’s future with that of the monarchy is as naive as it may seem to some people. However badly they may have been performing in the past, we cannot and should not question the position of political parties. Similarly, it would be also wrong at this stage to contemplate Nepal as a republic, despite the king’s wishes.

To use contemporary political jargon, Nepal is in a state of ‘Complex Political Emergency’—a situation where the state is contested and can collapse if appropriate measures are not taken. In such a situation, intervention (as has happened in many other Third World countries) is inevitable. We were fortunate that we had an institution which, despite all its weaknesses, commanded absolute faith of the security agencies and a large section of the population.

A time may come when the monarchy is rendered redundant. Till that time, however, we need to build institutions which could command faith and earn the trust of the people, discipline unruly politicians and also curb the possibility of ambitious generals following in the footsteps of junta leaders in our neighbourhood. As the army, Maoists and political parties jostle for power, the monarchy is the only institution strong enough to intervene and pull us back from the brink of anarchy and eventual foreign intervention.

However, the paradox is that in the past year, instead of trying to bring things back on track, King Gyanendra has deliberately snubbed the political parties. By doing so he may have impressed some people who thought the political leadership deserved a bloody nose, but he may be undermining his own position. The royal move has brought the monarchy and the king down to the level of all other the political players.

All four kings since King Tribhuvan have treated political parties as rivals rather than institutions that needed to be nurtured for the modernisation of the country and the continuation and respect of the institution of monarchy. However, instead of being a matter of concern, the failure of the political parties seems to always have been a matter of joy for the palace.

In this, the Nepali monarchy is still a prisoner of the past. It has also not evolved into an institution with a true social and welfare bent, as has happened in Europe. Those monarchies are transparent and constantly under public scrutiny and pressure to justify their existence. Our monarchy has been conservative, and except for a few environmental and charitable causes, has failed to learn the lessons of modernity. The only justification for the monarchy’s relevance has been its oft-repeated recognition as a symbol of national unity.

But if the monarchy fails to fulfill even that role by contributing to the weakening of political institutions which are essential for modern state building it will be difficult to justify its existence. The advocates of active monarchy need to think deeply about this.

Rabindra Mishra is a journalist with the BBC World Service in London.
Storm over Doramba

Two months after the massacre, the Royal Nepali Army and the National Human Rights Commission are still arguing about the real story.

Widows of Doramba talk to visitors recently (right) and Doramba Bazar.

The real foreign hand

The real foreign interference in Nepal is by market-fundamentalist international financial institutions.

MUCH is made here about ‘foreign interference’ by various embassies around town. The US ambassador, envoys from Britain and India meet top Nepali officials and call for peace, order and good government.

This gen’r peoples’ dandies up as it appears that outsiders are calling the shots here in an unaccountable and unanswerable way.

For one, believe that there is much unwarranted foreign influence in Nepal, but I’m not convinced that it comes from the men and women of the embassies who, after all, are here to project their country’s foreign policies. And in each case I would argue that the country in question, yes, even India, wants largely for Nepal to be at peace and working hard towards development and prosperity.

One or two of the Corps Diplomatique may have disagreements over military policy, or the role of various political movements in restoring stability, but I refuse to believe that such people can force their point of view on the sovereign institutions of Nepal. Even in the current state of confusion in the country.

No the push and shove from outside that does the most damage and has over the long and medium term of modern Nepal history, comes from the aid brigade, especially the cutting edge, market fundamentalist shock troops of the International Financial Institutions, the IFIs, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the regional banks, in our case, the Asian Development Bank. These organisations, in turn, exercise huge influence over the ability of a developing country to get aid from bilateral agencies or loans from the open market. That influence, I argue, is largely malevolent in outcome, if not intention. This is foreign interference on a grand and goofy unfair scale.

Beyond of all this is the simple fact that aid (as broadly defined to include the IFIs) enjoys influence far beyond its actual, monetary contribution. Consider some pretty basic economic truths about the world large and apply them to Nepal. Because, make no mistake, they do apply to Nepal. Reverse or revise any of these and you will do more good than a year of aid spending by every one of Nepal’s self-satisfied donors.

First of all, there’s brain drain. Stop northern countries from taking southern professionals at the ever-increasing rate in which they do. Encourage those people with various incentives to stay home and contribute to the society that nurtured them. You could do worse than to end dumping of surpluses and subsidised products by rich countries. If developing countries could ‘develop’ their own markets and create jobs producing goods that they themselves needed, few, Nepal included, would need much of the aid they now receive.

Capital flight from southern countries is worth hundreds of billions dollars a year, or far more when you factor in stolen money. That’s much more than actual development aid. Developed country trade barriers cost the poor nations of the world an astonishing $700 billion a year, not to mention countless lost or never-to-be-created jobs and business opportunities. That’s 14 times official aid flow.

Debt and unfavorable trade terms, like low commodity prices, add ever more insult to the injury already done by the above. Poor country debt is far in excess of available credit, and it grows space. Every time a lender wants to forgive debt, or rework the credit arrangements, an IFI economist, perhaps with links with the US Treasury Department (interestingly not the State Department, a far more savvy and less fundamentalist institution) vouchers the money. For commodity prices, forget it. From coffee and cacao to base metals, all are at all time lows and unrelenting violence and hunger for land ends dominated by poor farmers who can neither sell nor eat their export crops.

To anyone who can tell me, once and for all, why foreign and largely malign influence of this sort in Nepal attracts so little attention, gets a Nepali Times shirt with my compliments. ♦

MANJUSHREE THAPA

I n August, as the long-delayed third round of peace talks went on way in the western village of Napare, Rolpa, anywhere from 17 to 21 people were killed by security forces in the eastern village of Doramba, in Rampur district. It was a major violation of the ceasefire code of conduct, and the Maoist pulled out of negotiations on 27 August.

A preliminary report by the Army Human Rights Cell (AHRC), based in the Ministry of Defence, said that the killings were not conducted by the army’s security forces, but by Maoist rebels, who had attacked the district headquarters on the night of the incident.

The AHRC report, which cited eyewitness accounts, said that the Maoists had taken prisoners from the army and killed them.

Shiv Kumar Thapa, who was in the AHRC team when Doramba was investigated, said that he had been told that there had been an exchange of fire at the site of the Maoist meeting, and that the Maoists had killed the soldiers.

‘The only thing the army have officially given us, so far, is a letter denying that a massacre took place in Doramba,’ a senior officer in the AHRC said.

On Doramba’s massacre:

The only thing the army have officially given us, so far, is a letter denying that a massacre took place in Doramba. That was from before we investigated the case and sent them our report. We have received no formal response to our report. That is their usual manner, the army always underestimates us.

Our investigation was aimed at discovering whether there had been an exchange of fire at the site of the Maoist meeting, or whether the Maoists had been taken somewhere else and killed. We have only one finding: those people were killed after being taken into custody. The army are now saying we produced a one-sided report. There is no basis for this. For the first time in Nepal, bodies were exhumed. We examined the bodies, we saw their bullet holes.

In our report we have asked for an independent, extensive investigation of this case. Our attitude is very positive. We have established that people were killed after being taken into custody. But how were they killed? And who was responsible? This remains to be investigated.

My expectation was that upon receiving our report the army would consult us. We are ready to provide them with information. We are being supportive. BA Kumar Sharma told reporters that they are re-investigating the case. But even that, they have not told us officially.

On the army’s recent court-martials of its human rights violators:

The army has not provided us any official information about the court-martials. We are a statutory body. They are obliged to send us information, but they don’t.

On the differences in working with the police and the army:

It is more difficult to work with the army than with the police. The police is directly under the Ministry of Home Affairs, and they are under civilian control, and we can make them accountable. This is my experience. Now, under the constitution, the Royal Nepali Army is under the Defence Ministry. But to be honest, the Defence Ministry merely works as a messenger. Anything we say to them, they will pass on to the army. They’re like a post box.

All that makes us look like enemies of the army. Whereas we are just trying to enhance their legitimacy. They are a legitimate force of a democratic country. If they don’t observe democratic norms, how can they ask the rebels to do that? That is the problem. Changing is taking place, but it depends on what pressure is placed. It’s sad to say that if the army gets some international pressure—and that too from certain persons in the international community—they will effect changes. They don’t respond to national pressure.

On reactions to our report:

We have received no formal response from the army. But even in a letter denying that a massacre took place in Doramba, the AHRC has been told that they are re-investigating the case. Our attitude is very positive. We are an independent council, and we are trying to enhance their legitimacy. They are a legitimate force of a democratic country. If they don’t observe democratic norms, how can they ask the rebels to do that? That is the problem. Change is taking place, but it depends on what pressure is placed. It’s sad to say that if the army gets some international pressure—and that too from certain persons in the international community—they will effect changes. They don’t respond to national pressure.

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BROAD BRUSH GENERAL BA KUMAR SHARMA

We will have to wait to discover the truth.

On the AHRC’s work in human rights:

From even the conflict, the army trained in its personnel on the constitution, and on national and international humanistic law. Now, on the ground, we find that despite our best efforts, some personal commitments and their commando’s are held accountable if they do not take legal action, so they do not do anything wrong.

We start investigations based on any information—newspaper reports, petitions, even phone calls. We couldn’t track 13 court-martials last year, sentencing one man to 7 years in jail, and filing one plaint to order after he was found obstructing an investigation. We never take action against a unit that fired, at night, by mistake, on five shoddies. In more minor infractions, our unit conduct the investigations by themselves.

On the challenge of observing human rights during combat:

This is not war, it is terrorism. To combat, we must investigate people. Sometimes we can’t let a detainee go, because their discharge is investigation is now. Rare are such detentions illegal or legal. We try as best we can to wipe out the CDO’s authority when detaining people in our barracks.

The soldiers are very kind people like you and I may know about human rights. But our soldiers see officers shot in the street. One of our boys, returning home, was slaughtered like a goat at a Bhagwati temple. I can tell our home, was slaughtered like a goat at a Bhagwati temple. I can tell our

The villagers will tell us what actually happened. But they can’t speak now, they can’t utter a single word against the Maoists. We will have to wait to discover the truth.

Krishna Jung Ramacharya, a member of the UNHRC investigation team, has since accused the army of willfully distorting the contents of our report. So the question is, is examining the contents of our report.

Our second team has also been unable to get to the spot. Now if we send them with 200 or 300 soldiers, how could the truth emerge? And Can’t they send them alone, since we’re being targeted. The team is tiring in members go to the district, and if they need they can come to Kathmandu. We will first question our side and try to find out the truth. Our personnel commenced a crime, they would also be capable of lying about it.

A second four-person investigation team of ours is now on this case. But even before this incident, Doramba was so termed that nobody dared speak openly. The Maoists have since killed a local leader, and another businessman. Many villages have been displaced.

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The Maoists say we shot everyone, but this cause of his death is unknown. The Maoists have since killed a local leader, and another businessman. Many villages have been displaced.

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“Being America doesn’t erase Nepal from our minds.”

Sharda Thapa, 55, works as a freelance consultant for US-based businesses and is a founder member of the Association of Nepalis in Midwest America. He has lived in Chicago for 22 years.

Nepali Times: How do you feel about the first conference of overseas Nepalis?

Sharda Thapa: It’s a very welcome development. India has led the way in terms of how immigrant populations can be useful to the home country. Once you recognise talent, the diaspora can revivify investment and wealth into the mother country. The government here is doing a good job by recognising this.

But aren’t there legal hassles to realise this? This is why we are here. We want to make sure that if we are to invest, there have to be clear definitions for who non-resident Nepalis are. We need a contract law to enable investment and repatriation. Essentially, the motto of Nepalis abroad is to help yourself and Nepal.

Are Nepalis in the US enthusiastic about this event? I represent the coordinating body of all Nepali organisations in North America, the Nepal-Americas Council. Since early May we have been broadcasting the message that the conference will provide an opportunity for people of Nepali origin to help Nepal in ways other than charity and sending money home. There are 40 of us from North America attending.

Are you all American citizens? Not necessarily. For years I have had a green card but I have a Nepalese passport. A large majority of people have taken American citizenship. There is a valid reason to do so. First, it increases participation in the country of adoption. It is far easier to do international business and travel with an American passport. The regulation and disbursement of retirement and the social security fund in the US also become easier. But being American citizens does not erase Nepal from our minds. There are some 60,000 Nepalis in the US. Around one third of them may be citizens. Others are in transition, out of status or they are illegal.

But, if the Nepalis in the US are not fully official, how can the government recognise them as investors? That is the kind of issues that will surface during this conference and will have to be resolved. The Indians had similar problems when they first began. The government and the NRIs will have to work together and come up with a working document which defines those who are eligible, or not.

“Nepal should take advantage of us.”

Gopal Poudyal is a London-based educationist. He heads a college that offers a wide range of subjects from computer science to hotel management with an enrolment of 1,100 students.

Nepali Times: Has this conference of overseas Nepalis begun with the right footing?

Gopal Poudyal: We are proud that we are now organised, there is now an opportunity for us to give something back to our country. We are awaiting the state’s response to initiatives we have taken. How well are Nepalis in Europe represented at the conference? From Britain alone there are more than a dozen participants. Nepalis from Germany, France, Belgium and Holland are also taking part.

Even before the conference, the term NRN has already generated controversy. Who are NRNs? Any Nepali who spends more than six months abroad is an NRN. This way blue collar workers are also NRIs, although at this conference we see only well-established Nepali business people taking part. Everyone was informed about the conference, but since blue collar workers cannot afford to leave their jobs and attend the conference, we don’t get to see them here. Those who can afford to take a leave of absence and bear necessary expenses are representing them. We are here to voice their problems, too.

But don’t you have conflicting priorities depending on where you are from? There are certain difficulties with regard to the case of dual citizenship, not just legal hassles. We agree that if the country agrees on dual citizenship, there will be hundreds of thousands of Nepalis living in India and Burma who will apply for dual citizenship. The government, however, can decide to issue dual citizenship for Nepalis residing in certain countries including the US, the UK, Japan, Australia. Nepal should take advantage of us. Nepalis can then choose to come to Nepal during holidays.

“There is a role for us.”

DK Dangol runs a manufacturing company in Qatar with 300 workers, and also owns a trading house out of the United States.

Nepali Times: We hear a lot about the plight of Nepalis workers in the Middle East. Dangol, that is one reason why I took the initiative to establish the Nepal Association in Qatar. We are a network of almost all the 70,000 Nepal based there.

What is the nature of the problem in Qatar? One of the most pressing problems is sending money home. They resort to ‘hundi’ run by businessmen who act as middlemen and deliver money to their relatives. While doing that, the middlemen keep the foreign currency and pay the relatives in local currency, taking away foreign exchange from the national coffers. This is why I started a money exchange company in Qatar to send money home and keep things legal.

What else can people like you do to build the national economy? I am trying to focus on increasing Nepal’s export of handicrafts. All we need is good marketing and the ability to take the products to the right market. Businessmen like us can play a significant role in promoting. My personal experience shows that customers in the Middle East are developing a taste for Nepal.

How about your airline venture? Yes. Our company, Aero Nepal International Airlines, has already qualified in the bidding process. We have a fleet of long-haul aircraft ready to start operations from Kathmandu. We are waiting for the political situation to stabilise. Once that happens, we will get an aircraft-operating certificate from the government and begin. Many other applicants for international routes have already approached us for partnerships but we decided to operate as a separate company.

What are your views on dual citizenship? I think Nepalis everywhere should have the option of a dual citizenship. In my own case, it is only now when I am active that I spend my time in foreign countries. Once I retire, I would like to come back to my country, for which, retaining Nepal citizenship would be useful.
“We have to forge a win-win situation”

Overseas Nepalis are meeting for their first-ever conference in Kathmandu 24-27 October. We asked Bhim Udas, one of the coordinators of the conference, and himself an overseas Nepali, about the aim of the conference and his expectations.

What is the main issue you will be discussing? We have divided up the conference into three sections: legal, investment and communication. Issues like dual citizenship, the definition of ‘non-resident Nepalis’, or ‘people of Nepal origin’ and visas will come under the legal rubric. India has granted overseas Indians who are citizens of six countries permission to have Indian citizenship. We could think of something similar. The government has to decide what kind of investment it wants to attract and also whether the investments would be treated as FDI (foreign direct investment) or something else. Third, there needs to be a channel of communication between the government and overseas Nepalis, which doesn’t exist at present. That is why there is confusion and a lot of good ideas have been lost. There can be handbooks or websites to explain government decisions and regulations. There has to be a link between Nepal and the Nepali diaspora.

What are the problems overseas Nepalis face? It’s a question of relevance. For example, the ten year visa decision has to be approved by the Home Ministry which takes time. This needs to be streamlined. You can’t try to regulate after you’ve already granted a facility. If Nepalis want to invest money on which they have paid taxes abroad, why not let them? There must also be procedures to allow investors to repatriate profits from businesses in Nepal.

How confident are you that the conference will be successful? This conference is just the beginning. We can’t be too impatient. Overseas Nepalis can’t expect to get special treatment in what they say, and the locals will have to figure out a way to use the brain-drain to the nation’s advantage. There is a role here for the government.

Bipalis in Motherland
Overseas Nepalis are here to see how they can help.

Our diaspora are a strange and diverse lot. Most Nepalis in the US are reluctant to give up their citizenship here, putting them in a bind because of legislation on right to property. A prominent Nepali attorney in the US recently told me that despite the exodus to America, Bipalis-there are reluctant to swear exclusive allegiance to the Stars and Stripes. Meanwhile, migrant workers in the Gulf and Southeast Asia usually return to Nepal because their meagre earnings aren’t enough to invest in property. So only by defining what we mean by Bipalis can we have a body of issues that can be tackled.

The first Bipali meet will focus more on investment issues while keeping the card of dual citizenship up its sleeve. While the government never shies away from verbalised carpet for investments, the best wonders what can be done by an aspiring government that has granted—so pin intended—issues to handle. There will be welcome speeches and commitments, but only time will tell who, and more tellingly, which government will deliver the goods.

Getting Bipali investment will not be easy. To begin with, the Bipalis are not a body. We have to forge a win-win situation between the two types of Nepalis. It is important for overseas Nepalis to exercise restraint in what they say, and the locals must also not expect a windfall in new investment. We have to first create the conditions for those investments to come.
Carrying Nepal on their back

Porters are the Tata trucks of Nepal’s trekking routes and form the backbone of our tourism industry. Yet these unsung heroes are given little of the credit they deserve.

BEN AYERS

The mountain porters of Nepal are the very backbone of Nepal’s trekking and climbing industry. Fifty years ago, Edmund Hillary and Tensing Norgay’s first ascent of Everest was supported by 350 porters. Ten years later, the 1963 US Everest expedition used more than 900. Every expedition before and since has depended upon the kind labour and the strong backs of porters to put climbers onto the highest summits in the world. In turn, this industry has arguably put more food in more stomachs than any other that Nepal has ever seen.

Porters are not the specialised high-altitude Sherpas who carry loads to altitudes exceeding 5,000m. Wherever paying clients want to go, clients. Although they never travel routes in search of work carrying loads to altitudes exceeding 5,000m. Wherever paying clients want to go, farmers who flock to popular trekking high camps and set the routes for high-altitude Sherpas who carry loads has ever seen.

However, porters compete for jobs with pack animals and often receive similar treatment even though the trail.

This year alone has seen four porter deaths in the Everest region. On top of this, there have been two porter brought to safety by helicopter rescue—one of whom was a coma for two weeks (See Nepal Times, ‘Out of danger’ #147). This year, a helicopter with empty seats still took off with two foreign trekkers while the doctor pleaded to let a dying porter off with two foreign trekkers while the helicopter with empty seats still took off. Television viewers are quick to react and a few large productions could possibly attract international attention to boycott or, at the very least, the further tarnishing of Nepal’s reputation. Another possibility is that the continuation of negative publicity regarding the lack of basic human rights for porters will continue to grow. Television viewers are quick to react and a few large productions could possibly attract international attention to boycott or, at the very least, the further tarnishing of Nepal’s reputation.

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The community of tourism promoters in Nepal must realise that the awareness to the governmental level to promote enforcement and strengthening of current legislation regarding safety for porters. Nepal’s trekking industry must reach an international standard of workplace safety and provide for the basic human rights of porters. The trekking companies and tour operators who are indeed setting a great example by treating their porters well, must also be recognised and celebrated.

Nepal must recognise that its rural citizens are the country’s greatest asset. Porters are not asked to dance often enough during treks and their knowledge of local herbal medicine and farm practices is never transferred to the clients. The focus of adventure trekking should shift from expected high passes and old-fashioned peaks to the unexplored rural portering communities.

These villages offer a tangible example of the fruits of hard work and sustainable living that cannot be found in the consumption-based societies which most trekkers call home. Their communities also will benefit the most from any income generated. Trekkers also need to experience millet and hot buffalo milk. This type of experience is of critical importance to the unexplored rural portering communities.

An unnamed porter on the Jiri-Namche route outside Karkhola.
Porters in distress

Drop in trekking and the violence has hit porters hardest.

Lukla—"It's the same every year, I work as a daily wage labourer for 10 months at local farms in his village in Nuwakot and ends up spending all his earnings during Dashi. He is then forced to live in Kathmandu during winter, working as a trekking porter, hoping to earn enough for his family till the next farming season. What he ends up with is meagre savings and severe back pains."

"It's the same every year, maybe I should give up working as a bhariya," says the 26-year-old who has been coming to the capital every trekking season since he was 14. He recalls how he nearly died on a recent trek when he missed his footing on a slippery incline in upper Dolpa. "After going through all those difficulties, I have never once heard the trekkers say thank you," Rasu Dhamala.

His story is not new to the porters lodging at Sorakutte, south of Thamel, where they wait for trekking guides to hire them. That going rate hasn't changed in years—between Rs 200-250 a day—because the porters can't afford to bargain and competition is fierce. Adhikari estimates there must be 20,000 porters just in Kathmandu.

"We have to agree to the wage, there is no choice" says Kamal Nath Bhatta from Dhading. Bhatta finished his SSL exam but couldn't find a job or afford to continue with his education. He became a porter "The trekking agencies are selfish, they are not concerned about our welfare," he says. After each trek, Bhatta returns with hardly Rs 2,000 in savings from a month of work. Porters have to buy their own food and find places to stay, spending a minimum of 150 a day. Hom Nath Bhatta, a 45-year-old porter from Nuwakot, returned from Everest Base Camp just before Dasai. "I have never felt more dejected and exploited," he told us. When he reached Gorakheph, his group of porters were not even allowed to enter the hotel until they paid Rs 200 for lodging, Rs 200 for a plate of rice and another Rs 100 for tea—much more than their daily wage. Tips from the guests were their last hope but the cooks and trekking guides didn't let them get close to the tourists. "Our own Nepali brothers treated us like untouchables, it hurt our feelings," says Bhatta, who later heard that tourists had paid Rs 16,000 to the guides to distribute among porters. "They never saw any of that money."

Shyam Magar is determined to earn the respect of trekking guides. The 40-year-old is among the few who agrees to go to high-altitude areas. Besides luggage, he also carries tents, cooking utensils and stoves. "The guides think we never get tired and angry, but we are human too..." says Magar who deserts the trekking group in the middle of Dolpa when a guide scolded him for walking too slowly. "We are poor people and they have only contempt for us but we have our dignity.

Not every porter can afford to argue with the guides. "We cannot speak the tourists' language and they hardly know what's going on," says Ram Prasad Dhamala from Rasuwa. When Dhamala ends up with a cheap trekking group which doesn't hire cooks, he doubles up in the kitchen. "After all that, all I get is a handful from these tourists.

Most guides prefer to hire porters from Kathmandu. They are cheaper and docile, unlike locals from trekking area who charge five to six times more and don't tolerate rudeness. Porters say guides cheat them even on the weight they carry, often increasing their loads by 20kg with no extra pay.

Hom Nath Bhatta thinks the welfare of porters should be shared by others: "Human rights groups should speak up for us. I don't know if they are ignorant of our problems or just indifferent." Adhikari is trying to start a porter's union but most of his friends are unenthusiastic. "Although a union would address many of our problems, we are scattered around the country and we meet here only during Dasai," says Adhikari.

This time, on the Annapurna trail, he is planning to meet some porter friends in Pokhara to find out how they managed to set up their union. "It's time to speak for ourselves. This kind of exploitation can't go on forever."

Weight of the world
Nepali porters share their burden.

Gokul Adhikari is constantly at war with his poverty. Every year, he works as a daily wage labourer for 10 months at local farms in his village in Nuwakot and ends up spending all his earnings during Dashi. He is then forced to live in Kathmandu during winter, working as a trekking porter, hoping to earn enough for his family till the next farming season. What he ends up with is meagre savings and severe back pains.

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Wither the donor dollar?

America wants the world to pledge billions of dollars to Iraq’s reconstruction at a donor’s meeting to be held in October in Madrid. The world’s answer should be an unequivocal “No!” Iraq’s long-term reconstruction does not need foreign financial assistance. What it needs is a political settlement, and that will be possible only with the withdrawal of America’s occupying army. The billions of dollars that the US seeks should be directed towards true global emergencies, such as the fight against AIDS and hunger.

The Bush Administration probably launched its war against Iraq because it intended to make the country a new base for long-term military operations in the Gulf region. After the terrorist attacks on the US on September 11, 2001, it wanted to withdraw troops from Saudi Arabia, and it presumably chose Iraq as its new long-term base of operation. This, I believe, is why America is so opposed to a quick transfer of sovereignty to Iraqis. A truly sovereign Iraq might well tell the US to withdraw from the country. As long as America remains an occupying force in Iraq, political stability there is unlikely. Without political stability, Iraq’s economic recovery is unlikely, too. The US is seen by many Iraqis as a colonial occupier, and is therefore the target of attack not only by loyalists of Saddam Hussein, but by Iraqi nationalists of various sorts, as well as by Arab fighters from neighbouring countries. The attacks against the US occupation are destroying the Iraqi economy as well as lives. The attackers have successfully stopped the flow of a large part of Iraq’s oil exports. The oil pipeline in the north to Turkey has been repeatedly bombed, and functions sporadically if at all. The oil fields in the south do not have enough electricity to operate at capacity because the power grid is also the target of repeated bombings. Indeed, it is reportedly pumping 1–2 million barrels of oil a day rather than the 2.3 million barrels that the country could quickly achieve in peaceful circumstances. This shortfall in oil earnings, not the lack of foreign assistance, is the real cause of Iraq’s financial crisis. Each reduction of one million barrels per day translates into lost revenues of around $30 million per day at today’s world market price of $30 per barrel. This implies that if Iraq increased its oil exports by one million barrels a day—which it could quickly achieve with a cessation of attacks on its infrastructure—it would have around $10 billion per year in additional revenues to begin reconstruction.

Iraq’s oil production could probably rise to around five million barrels a day within three years. That would represent an extra 3–4 million barrels per day on top of today’s production, or roughly $30–40 billion per year—enough not only to restore basic services, but to achieve big improvements in living standards and economic growth in the medium term. At that level of production, Iraq would be a middle-income country, with a gross national product per person of several thousand dollars per year, including non-oil production. In short, Iraq would not need official development assistance at all.

The biggest costs in Iraq are not for reconstruction but for US troops. America is paying an astounding $51 billion per year to station 140,000 troops in the country, a staggering cost of around $360,000 per soldier per year. The US could save itself tens of billions of dollars per year by withdrawing its troops from Iraq. If the US were then to give just a fraction of the financial saving to Iraq in 2004, there would be plenty of incremental revenues to run the Iraqi Government and to support the recovery of oil production.

In addition to the shocking waste of lives and money from the Iraq war, America has done the world another great disservice. By focusing global attention on an economic crisis that does not really exist, it has diverted public attention from serious crises that do. The world would stand up and cheer if the US called upon the countries won’t pay for America’s occupation of Iraq. The US has to make clear that it plans to withdraw its troops quickly and entirely. Moreover, the US should stop wasting so much money on military spending and redirect its efforts towards the world’s poorest people. That’s a financial effort that the world can and should join.

Funds are needed for poverty, not Iraq.

Winning isn’t everything... it’s the only thing December 2003

for the first time in Nepal a tribute to the spirit of entrepreneurship and business excellence in the country

boss Top 10 Excellence Awards

Business Excellence

Top 5 CEOs
The Best Entrepreneur
Person to Watch
Top 5 Mgmt. Students
A Better Nepal - Our Business
It is called the ‘cultural diversity policy’. But what it means is that the visa applications of workers from mostly Asian nations will be scrutinised carefully and often rejected because of official concern about their growing numbers in the United Arab Emirates.

UAE authorities are voicing their displeasure at the mark demographic imbalance in the country, which has over the decades seen the number of foreigners grow to make up more than 90 percent of the 1.7 million workforce.

Nearly 10 million foreigners, most of them unskilled or semi-skilled migrants, work in the Gulf states and the majority of them are from Asia, welcomed there during the oil boom years and now doing a lot of basic services for the country. The breakup of this foreign presence is a startling revelation of the country’s dependence on migrant workers—Indians 53.7 percent, Pakistanis 29.6 percent, other Asian nationalities 15.4 percent and Arabs 6.2 percent.

Now, however, many Asian workers are worried about the shrinking space for their labour and uncertain about their future as the government steps up action to ease the country’s reliance on foreign, mostly Asian, labour.

“This (dependence on foreign workers) is a matter of grave concern,” Abdul Al Suwaidi, an Arab human resources manager in Dubai, told IPS. “We have been asked not to recruit any more Asians. But for the past six months we have been desperately hunting for skilled labour from among the favoured countries and have been disappointed. Finally we have put our recruitment on hold and are struggling to make do with the existing workforce.”

The working population in the UAE has more than doubled during the last decade, growing at an average rate of 7.5 percent per year. From 1993 to 2002, its total population increased by 79 percent to nearly 3 million, growing by a high average of 6 percent a year per annum. Foreigners now make up some 85 percent of the population.

The UAE’s recent moves are part of the latest of official concern about its reliance on foreign workers and its changing demography.

In January, UAE President Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan said: “This imbalance continues to pose a grave problem which threatens the stability of our society and the prospects for future generations.”

In keeping with his call for measures to ‘remedy this imbalance’, the UAE Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs launched its ‘cultural diversity policy’ to create a balance in the structure of the labour market. This has led to a rise in the number of non-Asian workers, as cultural diversity has become a major criterion for granting new employment visas. Officials stress that there is no specific quota for any nationality. But, when a company applies for an employment visa for a new worker, the ministry checks to see if it has the presence of the majority of the employees. If it finds that the majority of them are from the same nationality, it is asked to recruit nationals from other countries.

That (no quotas) may be true on paper,” said Ajay Singh, an Indian telephone operator in a publishing firm in Dubai, in an interview, “but visa applications of many of my Asian friends have been rejected and they have had to return home.”

Many of the argumented benefits are also being tapered out—earlier, companies used to agree to provide inflated salary certificates so that workers not eligible for family visas because of low salaries could still get their families over. But now they are refused.

Officials at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs say that employment permits granted to Arabs are on the rise after secondary school certificates—unlikably for most Asian workers to have—were made a minimum specific quota for getting such permits. This rule applies to all workers except workers in the construction sector and Arab workers, and officials believe this will make for a more multicultural demography.

According to them, hundreds of visas to workers from Arab countries have been issued since this became effective. Increasing numbers are from African and East European countries. Thus far, some 400,000 work visas are issued annually by the ministry and Asians accounted for 78 percent of them. Among the Arabs, Egyptians and Syrians are issued the most number of visas last year. A UN study states that the demography is one of the major challenges facing the UAE.

It is that most companies have conducted feasibility studies on the basis of cheap manpower, thus excluding UAE nationals in these projects. It has called on the authorities to work hard to qualify nationals and enable them to gain the free skills in the shortest time to boost the ‘Emiratisation’ policy.

“It is warnings like these and the truly visible numbers of Asian workers in the country that have prompted the authorities to sit up and take notice,” said Abdul. “And, as the study shows, even from an academic point of view, such steps are necessary for a country that is keen to see its nationals and its identity develop. It may seem a harsh move, but it is an essential one.”

Cheap, unskilled and at risk is the general feeling that pervades the Asian workforce community, especially among the unskilled. They are apprehensive about their future and dread the thought of renewing their existing visas. This often forces them to stay illegally in the country. “I have to survive,” said Hassan, a Pakistani delivery boy at a supermarket in Dubai, “so I have stayed on in the country without papers. I know that it is wrong, but also I know that my visa application will get rejected if I go through the right channels. Living with the risk of getting thrown into prison is far more preferable to going back home.”
Marching east
Janka Nepal and Raji Shyla
Nepal Samacharpatra 8 October

Locals at various villages of Jajarkot district are surprised and happy by the sudden disappearance of Maoist guerillas from their ‘model areas’. It has been almost a month since the People’s Liberation Army left Kausi Bahadur Khadka of Dada village says, “These were the places where they used to patrol everyday but now it looks like they are gone.”

At Limi of Humla district, education is in turmoil. Locals here celebrated Dasai with less fear in the absence of armed Maoists. The exodus is not exclusive of the Maoists. Villagers say, “We do not see them in combat dresses these days. That is why people are less scared.”

One of the main problems here is the education. Local school teachers say, “We used to collect donations regularly from the villagers in the past but now they are nowhere to be seen.”

Even though the Maoist military is gone, the rebels’ political activities and militancy are still active in Jajarkot.

Reshuffle in Jajarkot

As the Maoists are there no development in socio-economic terms. The lack of socio-cultural, political and linguistic knowledge of our own country is the reason why there is a general sense of fatalism. The Swiss geologist from the BE, ME and MBBS courses from Tribhuvan University can take their place in the country in the world. No one had to tell hydro power producers like Dambal Nepal to generate affordable electricity for Nepalis. The move could have symbolise their ‘victorious war’ over Maoist rebels who killed her husband, a teacher, last year. “I could not stay back because it was very restless.”

Jana Kumar Koirala’s father was murdered in Gorkha and he is homesick for his village. “I know no one here. Every one treats us like strangers in Kathmandu. It wasn’t like that before.” The widows, orphans and bereaved say festival time means nothing to them anymore since wars, terrorism and sweeping changes for 235 years. We are not going to withstand wars, terrorism and sweeping changes. At Limi of Humla district, education is in turmoil. We have to support their demand for a constituent assembly.

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Even though the Maoist military is gone, the rebels’ political activities and militancy are still active in Jajarkot.
A constitutional monarchy is also a monarchy.

Sunday, 24 April 1977

Sundarijal

The study of the growth of decline of the institution of monarchy would be another interesting, profitable + relevant in Nepal's context. The institution itself has not been designed or devised on a single universal pattern—although the authority of a monarch was universally unquestioned, the authority itself was derived + vested from different sources. Some institutional, some traditional + conventional checks perhaps operated on the absolutism of monarchy in the past. The fear of popular revolt was also there, because the state's monopoly of weapons of war was not so total as it is today. Moreover, the very feudal character of the administration with its complement of inefficiency and looseness and the penetration of the state into the lives of citizens not being as deep and extensive as it is today—these provided some freedom to the people even in the most autocratic kings of the past. It will be interesting to study the checks and balances that operated in former monarchies. A further study should be directed towards the classification of this institution in modern times with reference to its context. There are so many monarchial states even today: the English, Japanese, Scandinavian, Arab, Hindu, Thai, Iranian, Portuguese, Spanish, etc. Can they be classified into different categories on the basis of their dictatorial, feudal, authoritarian and democratic character? In Nepal itself monarchy had a history of ups + downs, of nominal character, of authoritarian character, of a character that partook of both authoritarianism + democratic, of dictatorial character—when I will start getting books, I will try to do some serious study of monarchies. The other day the police in interrogation showed me an article of + democratic, of dictatorial character—when I will start getting books, I will try to do some serious study of monarchies. The other day the police in interrogation showed me an article of Nepal's monarchy written by me in Tarun—and asked me whether I was opposed to the monarchial system. I told him I was for as far as our party is, constitutional monarchy. Constitutional monarchy is also a monarchy. Perhaps I will have to make a case for constitutional monarchy in my defence in the coming trial. How many present day monarchies are as royal as our monarchy is—RNAC, Royal Nepal Embassy, Royal Army, etc? It is interesting to note that the greatest king of India—Ashoka—was satisfied calling himself a maharaja, not even a maharajah. Well, of course, Maharajadhiraj was beyond his dream. He was satisfied calling [himself] a raja—not even a maharaja, was an emperor, in addition. Well, of course, Maharajadhiraj was beyond his dream. He was satisfied calling [himself] a raja—not even a maharaja, was an emperor, in addition.

Monday, 25 April

Sundarijal

I am all right—got up cheerfully. Last illness has left me weak, tho. I wanted to resume my normal routine exercises—but after a few moments I found that I was too weak to continue. Did some walking. Washed some clothes—which exhausted me altogether. No study, no writing—both have been neglected since a long time. I wanted to resume writing, but as my mind started wandering as I sat on the table to write, I gave up. Spent the whole day listlessly—not very boringly tho—just spent it as a river does water. I should rather say that it was not I who spent the day, but that the day itself spent over me like a river's water over a stagnant rock. Some of my time is spent over watching two birds that live in the kapur tree or perch for a while to rest their wings. Two pairs of egg snatchers (?) same in the morning—they are shining grey with a beautiful tint of red + seek the sparrow's nest for eggs. When I saw them first, I gave them the name of "red birds" and superstitiously attributed to them some auspicious virtue as birds of auspice. I liked them for their colorization—grey with tints of red. I like them, their sleek slender form resembling the mynah, but since they steal eggs, deruding the poor sparrow's nests, I became philosophical and say that the human conception of beauty + virtue have no relevance in nature + that even on human terms virtue + beauty are not concomitant. My darling birds are dhobinis, and how adoringly two pairs of them live in their tree. In the beginning they were profoundly indifferent to me—sometimes appeared to be resentful of my attention, but now they have started taking interest in me. I pass some time every evening watching them and responding to their call for my attention. In the evening they hoot at me from different angles. They know me now, tho they keep a respectable distance from me. Since today, a pair of ordinary bagula (crane) have taken their abode at the topmost branch of the tree. They gagger ravenously—a very unpleasant sound. After some time they will have a whole colony of nests in the tree. They will be both interesting, profitable + relevant in Nepal's context. It will be interesting to study the checks and balances that operated in former monarchies.

Reading between the lines of these entries from BP Koirala's diary written in English during his solitary confinement at Sundarijal, one gets the feeling that his energy is sapped by medical and psychological conditions. The entry for 25 April is a detailed and lyrical description of the cell. The day before, he analysed the feeling that his energy is sapped by medical and psychological conditions. The entry for 25 April is a detailed and lyrical description of the cell. The day before, he analysed the feeling that his energy is sapped by medical and psychological conditions.
NEPALI WEATHER
by MAUSAM BEED

This huge cyclical system over the northeastern edge of the Bay (ultracstic pc, alt. taken on Thursday morning at 8 AM) is bringing post-monsoon rain and overcast skies to half of Nepal. By Friday, the gathering westly winds should have blown off the outer territories of this system into northeastern India and Bhutan. The precipitation has brought snow flurries to the high passes in the central and eastern Himalaya to an altitude of 5,000m. With the sun returning over the Himalaya to an altitude of 5,000m. With the sun returning over the Himalayas, there will be more sunshine. Expect the temperatures to rise during the day and to fall at night. The minimum temperature will continue to fall.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

* Water Colours by Nepal Water Colour Society members from 22-September 10 to Galaxy Nine, Laxpati. 4289694
* Personal Encounters on the Journey of Life Paintings by Prakash Chandwadkar from 15-30 September at Siddharta Art Gallery. Baber Mahal Revisited. 4218048
* Exploration of the Magical Realm etchings by Seema Sharma at Cafe Mitra, Thamel. 4259015

EVENTS
* Lahit TV Film Shows: Mulkids 14 October, Strangers on a Train (Hitchcock) 16 October: 7.30 PM at the Lahtif TV Film Show Gallery. 428549
* 2nd International Classical Guitar Festival 2003 4-6PM on 11-12 October at Hotel Shanker, Laxpati. Guitars from Finland, Germany, Japan, Liechtenstein, Nepal, Thailand and the US. Rs 400 per show, Rs 700 for two consecutive shows. Student discounts. Details: Tora, 9810547877
* Cine-Club: Le Fair 12 October. Everyone says I love you 19 October. 2PM at Auditorium Molière at Alliance Française. Thapathali. 4241163
* Inter-Cultural Film Society: Cosi rivendita 11 October. Funti dal mondo 12 October. 5:30 PM at NTB, Birikut Mulapan. Entrance free. Email: idfs@wlink.com.np

FOOD
* Catch 22 back at the Rum Doodle.
* Cadena live 7.30PM Wednesday, Saturday at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Laxpati.
* Thunderbolt on Rox Bar on Fridays Happy Hours 6-PM, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu.
* Dasi and Tihar Bonanza 50 percent off food at The Fun Cafe and Splash Bar & Grill. Buy one service and get another for half at Radisson Beauty Saloon.
* Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, 4249899
* Cafe U Japanese home-cooking, cakes and coffee. Opp British School, Sanepa. 5352636
* Roadhouse Cafe for firewood pizzas and more. Opp St. Mary’s School. Pulchowk. 5232755
* Momos & More the famous momos in town now at Dhobighat. 5230692
* Chimney Refreshed Fine continental cuisine at The Chimney Restaurant, Hotel Yal & Yeti. 4249899

Drinks
* Traditional Nepali Thali lunch at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4431632
* Festival discount 50 percent off food at The Fun Cafe and Splash Bar & Grill. Buy one service and get another for half at Radisson Beauty Saloon.
* Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, 4249899
* Terrace, Boudha. 4480262

Getaways
* Microlight flying adventures with the Avia Club, Pokhara.
* Shigmash Hut cottage 30 minutes from Kathmandu, at the edge of the Shivapuri Reserve. Tel: 552004
* Saturday BBQ Lunch at Club Himalaya Nagarkot. Rs 50 per person. 4680188
* Malai, Singapore food at Singma, Jawalakhel, Lalitpur. 5523504
* Traditional Newari Thali at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4431632
* Festival discount on vegetarian specialties at Stupa View Vegetarian Restaurant & Terrace, Boudha. 4480262
* Krishnarpan ceremonial Nepali cuisine fit for a king. Reservation recommended. 4479498
* Smoked salmon soufflee. Crispy Duck Breast, Shrimp Newburg and fine wines at Kiley’s of Kathmandu, Thamel. 4254400

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

Look like Dasi has affected the air quality measurement. We only have the results of monitoring for 21-28 September. Kathmandu air quality is deteriorating steadily as the rains recede, and the diesel emissions pump PM10 (particles that are less than 10 microns and small enough to enter the human body) into the air. Level at Putal Sapad 225 micrograms per cubic meter, significantly higher than the national standard of 120. Away from heavy traffic areas air quality was still breathable.

What you breathe is what you breathe.

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

Average PM10 levels at selected points in Kathmandu 21-28 September in micrograms per cubic meter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>PM10 (ug/m^3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patan Hanumantej</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thamel</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TU</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhaktapur</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manakamana</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basantapur</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: www.mope.gov.np

BOOKWORM

Credit & Culture: A Substantivist Perspective on Credit and Relations in Nepal
Michiel Michiels
Romer, 2001
Rs 2,500

The analysis concentrates on the cultural-historical development of credit relations and on case studies disclosing differing notions and practices in credit relations between Nepali Hindus, Newars and Sherpas. By offering a comparative outline, the study also intends to propose a minimal program for research on culturally embedded credit relations.

The Great Indian Dream: Restoring pride to a nation betrayed...
Mukund Choudhari, Azizun Choudhari
Macmillan, 2003
Rs 472

This book not only analyses the basic impediments in India’s march to glory" but also attempts to identify budgetary resources to end the poverty of the masses. The second aspect the author explores is how inequality among sections of the population can be removed within a reasonable timeframe. Lastly, they show what needs to be done for India to catch up with the developed world by 2025.

Onto! 10 - 16 OCTOBER 2003 NEPALI TIMES #165

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Wake Up!

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Pirates of the Caribbean is a film that does not come to the theater this fall. The writing team of Ted Elliott and Terry Rossio have combined the themes of their latest film with their previous work, creating a movie that is fun for all ages. The story follows Jack Sparrow, the governor's daughter and Orlando Bloom as Will Turner, both of whom are on a quest to save their loved ones. The filmmakers have taken great care to ensure that the film is the best quality possible, giving children and adults alike a thrilling experience.

Men Madhuri Banna ChattihHoon: 10PM, 3PM

CLASSIFIED

Visit Ground Zero Fine series, designer candles, cards, gifts, stationery, wooden items, perfumes and more. Debar Mag, opposite Hotel de l’Annapurna.

Visit Femelines, the Exclusive Lingerie Store for ladies undergarments, nightwear, bathwear, panties and more. Ladies staff. Opposite Salha Yatayat, Hanhur Shwan, Pulchowk. Tel: 547438

To Let: Rabbitawan area two storey house 4 bedrooms 2 bathrooms large kitchen dining living terrace lobby and porch and telephone. Contact: Roshani 4257185

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Pleasant room to let private ensuite bathroom in a quiet bungalow in Lagstip. Share kitchen and large lounge. Perhaps suitable for visiting professional or volunteer. Tel 4289469

For insertions ring NT Marketing at 5943333-36.
The standardisation of Nepali Unicode will revolutionise the way we use computers.

VIBEK RAJ MAURYA

One of the things (besides affordability) that keeps computers out of reach of most Nepalis is that it is all in English. No more.

Ever since the first computer came to Nepal 32 years ago—a second generation IBM 1401—it has been the computer’s language that has stymied progress. To be able to use a computer, the user must have more than a rudimentary grasp of the global lingua franca. This immediately excludes those who read and write exclusively in Nepali.

There has been a proliferation of Nepali fonts, but these only reduce the PC to a glorified typewriter with a monitor added. Even if desktop publishers and printing presses can produce creative Nepali page layouts, the computer still interprets those Nepali letters and characters as distorted English inputs. The digital gap is widened because our computer users are hardwired to English.

Nepali language users are still confused with the "a ho ke ho" computer. Having to switch between different Nepali fonts just adds to the confusion.

"It’s really a nuisance to convert files sent in other Nepali fonts," complains Hari Narayan Yadav of Kantipur Publications. Nepali computing cannot progress with the conventional font system. We need uniformity and if we don’t do something now there could be chaos ahead.

The answer lies in the Unicode system. If not standardised it is a set of fonts allowing non-Nepali users to input data uniformly, but it also has room for 65,000+ characters in contrast to the ASCII system that supports a measly 255.

Documents and databases based on Unicode form an independent platform regardless of the operating system. Users can view the document in any platform without the hassle of conversion. Unicode is also central to the new internationalised domain names, which allows the internet user to have URLs in their own languages.

With the help of Unicode, small linguistic communities all over the world get mainstream software in their own language instead of waiting years for special adaptations that may never come. The Devanagari script has already made a niche in Unicode: fonts can be interchanged without problems.

Madan Purakar Parakalaya in collaboration with United Nations Development Program and the Ministry of Science and Technology have accomplished a Font Standardisation Project by writing a Unicode-based Nepali version of the Devanagari keyboard input system in two different versions. Project director Amar Gurung says the new system ensures uniformity in different Nepali font faces based on the Unicode system and opens up new possibilities for Nepal’s use of computers. "The Unicode-based Nepali font will allow local cultures to be expressed in digital technology," says Gurung. The project is developing a spell checker and dictionary that can be embedded with popular word processors supported by Unesco, making word processing in Nepali as easy and enjoyable as it is in English.

Pawan Chitrakar is thrilled with the results at the archives of the Madan Purakar Parakalaya. "The database had to be redesign in Unicode-based fonts, but now users can interact with the machine to view the result from the name of the book, author, date of publication, publisher and with sundry options."

Before we start celebrating, there is still a slight technical hiccup. Bikram Shrestha, coordinator at the Centre for Software Development and Research at Kantipur City College explains: "A Unicode-based Nepali font ensures logical and scientific data input, but this system requires a minimum of Windows 98 or XP. Most Nepali users have only Windows98. Upgrading means expensive new hardware."

Another project engineer, Paras Pradhan, is flogging Linux. He is currently working on the Nepal distribution of Linux and believes it is "fast, stable, not necessarily shell based and is user friendly". Besides, it is also very secure compared to its competitors. A prototype is expected to hit the market by the end of 2003 and the distribution will have a Nepali language environment that may look like the mock screen (see p4).

A person without any knowledge of English can use the product as all the menus, command and interface would appear in Nepali. This will definitely revolutionise Nepali computing," explains Amar Gurung.

This will do away with the "class barrier" that the need for English puts up in computing. At present computer aided data crunching is almost exclusive to the upper-echelons of banking, development and some other sectors. Nepali Devanagari in Unicode will make it possible for DDC ands VDC to use the computer for email communications, data processing and other activities they cannot currently carry out because they do not have English. The possibilities open up on use of Nepali on the web. Already, www.google.com is available in Devanagari, but there is little Nepali in there other than the MPP site because of Unicode non-compatibility.

The time has come to change all that, but first those at the helm of the national society and economy have to open their eyes to the brave new world that is within reach. We can change in a million different ways because Nepali Unicode will begin to close the digital divide in Nepal.
The joys of trekking
by Kunda Dixit

A trek is a highly recommended pastime, which is by definition a unique and rewarding mountain holiday in which you will come face to face with the real Nepal. The word ‘trek’ is derived from the Afrikaan word ‘trekken’ which means “Carry your body weight and a backpack weighing a ton up and down vertical mountainsides for 10 days, share sleeping quarters with yaks, while attending to calls of nature in the company of local people.” Why we had to import a South African word for a completely indigenous invention of a form of torture, I have never figured out. But I suspect it is because the sheer agony of a trek must be similar to concentration camp conditions during the Boer War.

The whole philosophy of trekking is to get unsuspecting visitors like you to pay $40 a day for the masochistic pleasure of inflicting extreme hardship on yourself so that when you return home to your mundane materialistic existence it will seem like paradise. Here are some useful tips on the joys of hiking in Nepal and how to make your trek fulfilling for mind, body and sole:

Am I fit?
The main pre-requisite to trekking is that you should train yourself in the art of walking straight up and straight down like a gecko. Practice on a wall at home. One month before trek, stop using the lift. Climb 36 floors to your office every day, and use the stairs down. Now multiply this by 10, and you get a fairly good idea of the kind of workout you get on an average trekking day.

What should I eat?
Muesli. This dynamic cereal is what they give mules to eat for breakfast on the Mustang trail so their after-burners can kick in during the steepest inclines, adding critical thrust to propel them over Chuksang Pass in time for lunch. Important hint: According to Newton’s Third Law of Thermodynamics, burping slows you down. (Monitoring cockpit instruments for proper bodily functions is an important part of a trekker’s enroute task.)

Dal-bhat. There is no free lunch on a trek, and tea-shops along the trail have a wide variety of dal-bhat so you never get tired of Nepal’s national dish: dal-bhat with alu, dal-bhat with mula, dal-bhat with banda, dal-bhat with bodi, or dal-bhat with sag, or even dal-bhat with dal-bhat. If, like most people, you get hopelessly addicted to dal-bhat, you can even have freeze-dried dal-bhat packed in foil so you can partake of it in the comfort of your own home and relive nostalgic memories of your trek.

To level out a steep uphill there is nothing to beat the locally-brewed high-octane apple brandy. Pour a little of this into your tank just before a particularly steep bit of ukalo and watch yourself fly like the wind, leaving gasping fellow-trekkers in the valley below. (Statutory Govt Health Warning: Hangovers are a pain in the ass.)

Is it safe to drink the water?
The first rule of thumb is not to drink anything that doesn’t have the mandatory hologram Seal of Approval of the Nepal Bureau of Standards ISO 90002. Adhering to this rule will mean that you will die of thirst on the first day of your trek, therefore exceptions are allowed in emergencies which means you can drink pure Himalayan spring water straight off the spout provided there are no yaks upstream attending to calls of nature. Management does not bear responsibility for any untoward incidents.