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MIN BAURACHARYA

London-based businessman, Gopal Poudyal, with a poster welcoming overseas Nepali delegates to their first conference in Kathmandu this weekend.

Home improvement

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

At 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 (PON), 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 Lohani.

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 us," says the NRN International Coordination Committee's Bhim Udas. "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 or a person of Nepali origin who has been staying outside Nepal for at least 183 days in

a year for employment, business or self 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 themselves 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 overcast with low cloud ceiling. On the ground, in the darkened interior of the airport's radar control room, Ananda Mool and Narendra Sayami watched RA409's blip on the screen as it circled at 19,000ft over Kathmandu. How to bring the plane down when the pilots didn't know where they were? Capt Rijal took the plane south, and asked radar to talk him down. Over the next 15 minutes, Mool and Sayami gave precise instructions to the 757 on bearing and altitude so the plane could descend into Kathmandu, avoiding the high mountains. Suddenly, RA409 came on: "Ok, we are now VFR." The 757 had finally broken through clouds at 10,000ft above Kathmandu, and made a steep descent to land safely.

"All thanks go to the radar operators, it was very professionally handled, we were like a crow in fog," an ecstatic Rijal told us after landing (see pic). The civil aviation authorities are investigating the incident, and they will want to know why the failsafe standby systems on the 15-year-old 757's on-board navigation computers did not work. ♦

Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 105

Q. Should there be a Dasai-Tihar ceasefire?

Total votes: 2,174

Weekly Internet Poll # 106. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Who bears more responsibility to break the current political impasse?

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STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



Homecoming

We should deal with overseas Nepalis with rationalism, not nationalism

CENTRE TO CENTRESTAGE

Paradoxically, the unilateral ceasefire declared by the Maoists has turned out to be unilateral in an unexpected way. It was the government side that seems to have observed the Dasai truce, while there was no real slowdown in the Maoists' intimidation, extortion and attacks on infrastructure throughout the country.

In fact, Prachanda's ceasefire call seems to have been part of a strategy to move his forces during the holidays from the midwest to future adventures in the east, and also to lure salary-earners home to their villages so they could be fleeced for 'donations'. Maoists in the districts fixed a price tag on every level of employee to buy their protection. Extortion has now also gone overseas, with reports of Nepalis abroad being forced to hand over cash in return for the 'safety' of family members back home.

Meanwhile, the destruction of rural infrastructure continues apace. A power plant in Okhaldhunga that had just been repaired has been blown up again and telecommunication towers have been destroyed putting large areas of Janakpur, Dadeldhura and other remote districts out of reach. Residents of Jaleshwar and far-western Nepal now have to cross over into India to make calls to family members in Kathmandu.

The will of the people is different from the will of the armed. As experiences in insurgency-ridden regions of Sri Lanka and India have repeatedly shown, most conflicts are maintained not because groups of people oppose each other, but because very small groups of men, backed up by guns, claim to speak for The People.

This works only because the current political paradigm recognises men with guns as a legitimate power. Unless this changes soon there is no hope for the restoration of democratic norms. The first step towards that goal must be to restore the role of the entity whose very existence rests on the principle of non-violence: the political party. True, our party leadership with its bullheadedness sometimes seems to be a part of the problem, rather than the solution. But there is really no other way than for them to be included on the side of constitutional forces.

One year after the king's direct rule, it is clear that whatever experiment this was, it isn't working. It hasn't worked to restore order, it hasn't worked for governance, it hasn't delivered development and peace and it may not even be in the longterm interest of the monarchy.

Neither the palace nor the parties want to lose face in a compromise. Fine. But is a compromise over the king actually acting out his constitutional role such an insurmountable problem? Only after we cross that hurdle can we contemplate taking on the more knotty issue of the Maoists. It is difficult to contemplate how they can become part of a solution under the present atmosphere of mistrust where almost everyone sees the constituent assembly demand as a trap. The solution lies outside these two binary opposites of the left and right: the revival of the centre.

But resurrecting parliament is fraught with dangers. It will expose the all-too-familiar short-sightedness and narrow-mindedness of influential players in Nepali politics. The way to go then is an all-party government of national consensus that must be committed to radical changes in the existing constitution to make it more inclusive.

And this may be the only way to prove to the Maoists the futility of their violent path.

Deviating from the middle path has exacted a heavy toll on the Nepali polity. There should be no more delays in restoring the centre to centre-stage. Without that, more showcase ceasefires and token talks will be meaningless, and even counterproductive. Call us revisionists or status-quoists, but the middle way is the only way.

A miko, the great architect who took the pagoda to China, was the first known Nepali to migrate in search of fame and fortune. There may have been many others, because Nepal-Tibet trade flourished for centuries.

The Lahur metaphor, on the other hand, stands for the misery of mid-mountains, which forced able-bodied young men to migrate for work. And work meant bear arms in foreign armies. It began when Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab decided to have more Hindus in his army and started special recruitment drives in Lahore. When the army of British India institutionalised the recruitment process, Lahur became a lucrative career option for the youth of the Mahabharat mountains. However, when some 40,000

young Nepali men lost their lives in the two world wars (out of the country's total population then of 4 million), Lahur acquired undertones of suffering and death.

The exodus to Assam, Manipur and Burma was a post-war phenomenon. British rulers in India wanted to settle their trusted Gurkhas in these regions and lured them with incentives of land and employment. Even here, not all migrants fared well, hence the Nepali saying, "Even when you go to Burma, you take along your karma."

Lahur is a word rooted in Nepali history, a part of our poverty-ridden, but proud and adventurous culture. But the Nepali speaking bourgeoisie in north-eastern India preferred to call itself *prabasi*, and thought it was their ancestral right to return to Nepal whenever they wished. The government in Kathmandu was honour-bound to lay out the red carpet for their homecoming.

A *prabasi* like Mahendra Lama, therefore, is merely away from home whether he is in his native Sikkim or at JNU in New Delhi. If he decides to come back 'home', Nepal must embrace him as one of its own, just as it received Randhir Subba, Lain Singh Bangdel and many others. The right of the cultural Nepali to become a citizen of Nepal, it seems, is inalienable. It was this belief in the principle of the Nepali race that made King Mahendra accept Nepali-speaking people expelled from Burma in the 1960s. And it was this hope that made Lhotsampas of Bhutan traverse hundreds of kilometers of Indian territory to refugee camps in their ancestral land.

Non-Resident Nepalis (NRNs) and Persons-of-Nepali-Origin (PNOs) who gather here this weekend for the first *prabasi* Nepali conference are perhaps correct in assuming that it is the duty of the people and the government of their homeland to welcome them with open arms. The hosts, FNCCI, should not expect any reciprocal gestures from this high-profile jamboree.

Every session of this glittering event is planned around government officials—beginning with premier Surya Bahadur Thapa, himself a father of some prominent members of the Nepali diaspora. It can be assumed that the entire proceeding will be dominated by the concerns of the *prabasis*, and not those of the people of their homeland: us. 'Conducive atmosphere for Foreign Direct Investment', 'Dual Citizenship', 'Preferential

Treatment', 'Single Window Clearance', 'Planned Infrastructure', 'Positive Incentives', 'Brain Trust'.

Prabasis, especially those in America and Europe think they can just wave the magic wand and the motherland will be transformed. And here, we have unrealistically high expectations from them.

Unlike Nepalis who toil in Kuwait, Malaysia, South Korea and Mumbai to send remittances that sustain the economy here, those who have accepted the citizenship of other countries aren't our responsibility. Nepal isn't merely a cultural 'homeland', it is a modern state. People who live within the boundaries of Nepal and Nepalis who travel abroad under Nepali passports, are the only 'Nepalis' for the state of Nepal. Others are cultural Nepalis, and have chosen to be loyal to their adopted lands out of their own free will. Since they have made rational rather than emotional choices, they deserve to be treated in a similar way. The government and FNCCI should transact with them on the basis of rationalism, not nationalism.

There is no altruism in business. In the globalised economy, investors go wherever money is safe and gives the highest return. The cultural origin of an investor is often a false category. Unless the discrimination and prosecution in the host-land is too high, a migrant business community has no reason to invest in the homeland that it had deserted as a lost case.

After taking what this land had to offer, our *prabasi* brothers and sisters set forth to seek their fortune. It must have been a wrenching break that must have taken a lot of courage, but that is the way rational decisions are taken, by negating emotion. That is why we take pride in the success of a Nepali woman selling business solutions to Wall Street firms or the one who has made it as an anchor on Fox News. This, despite the fact that remittances from American Nepalis is less than the total amount that unskilled labourers in the Gulf and house-maids in Hong Kong send home to their families every year.

Pride in one's cultural roots is human. But it would be unrealistic to put a financial value on those ties. Business is business. "Take a fistful of earth whenever a difficult decision has to be made," BP Koirala used to say. The rest, as they say in the west, will remain strictly cash. ♦



LETTERS

STATE OF THE STATE

As a foreigner who has lived and worked in Nepal for three years between 1998-2002, I applaud the sentiments expressed by CK Lal in 'Time to get the story straight' (#163). It is ordinary Nepalis, not the Kathmandu elite, not the expatriate community and not tourists, who continue to suffer, physically, psychologically and economically, while the Maoists and the government are engaged in their power struggles. While some concern on the behalf of the embassies and tourists is to be expected—as both usually were on the side of caution—it has been frustrating to see development organisations, in some cases, following suit.

Despite the choice of many development and volunteer organisations to remain in Nepal and continue working alongside Nepali community-based organisations whose services are all the more important during

times of conflict, several others have decided that working in Nepal is not currently viable. Whilst it is important that organisations (both foreign and local) track security situations daily and diligently, and whilst some removal of personnel from particular regions will occur, it frustrates and saddens me that some organisations have abandoned their development program altogether. As a volunteer in Nepal, I experienced no fear for my own safety. Quite to the contrary, I experienced incredible support and protection from my local friends and colleagues. And in all cases where volunteers worked in areas that were deemed 'risky', they were redeployed without any personal injury experienced.

I applaud development organisations, both local and foreign, who have continued to work alongside ordinary Nepalis during this difficult time. I encourage foreign organisations,

journalists, individuals to consider the consequences of their knee-jerk reactions to avoid Nepal, which are fuelled as much by western arrogance as concern for safety. The war in Nepal is not about 'us'. Although experiencing a period of exceptional political instability, Nepal is a diverse and rich country, where much business and development work and holiday-making can carry on, undisturbed.

Christine Mylks,
Body in Toronto,
soul in Nepal



As a regular subscriber to *Nepali Times*, I read every part of the paper, especially CK Lal's column which I think is bold and interesting. Yet, sometimes some of his arguments sound really naive. In 'Wartime Dasai' (#164) I was bewildered to read that Lal also believes that "maturity brings wisdom". When it is in our capacity to make democracy work, we can't put the national interest at risk and wait for

another 200 years for it to mature like in other countries. It's just like our politicians' attitude of passing the buck. Maturity doesn't bring wisdom, it has to come from a sensibility to understand why democracy is in danger.

Yunesh Subedi, Itahari

• We have read thousands of write-ups from hundreds of politicians and journalists like Pashupati SJB Rana and CK Lal (#164) explaining the reasons for our present political fiasco. Now the time has come to go beyond 'Kathmandu high society' rhetorics and increasingly stale intellectual debates. Political stalwarts like Rana should now try to find answers to simple questions like why South Asia is lagging behind Japan, South Korea, China and South-East Asia. How does 50 years of a "fully-functional and robust" democracy in India still bring leaders like Rabri Devi? Of course, intellectuals like Lal could write hundreds of pages of

arguments to prove that Rabri Devi is an exception. As to foreign concerns regarding democracy in Nepal, suffice it to say that among the two largest democracies in the world, India is whole-heartedly supporting absolute monarchy in Bhutan and the Americans are quite comfortable with a military regime in Pakistan. Maybe Rana is right when he says "time and luck are more important". It seems until time and luck (that of 23 million people) manage to throw out incompetent leaders like GP Koirala and Madhab Kumar Nepal (under whose leaderships both parties split, derailing political courses at crucial periods) from their respective parties, those two parties should not be allowed to fool around with the political fate of the nation. Let us coin a new slogan: "Economy Yes, Politics No."

Sugat Ratna Kansakar,
Kamaladi

OPINION

by **RABINDRA MISHRA**



For king and country

The advocates of active monarchy need to closely examine why the past year has been a failure.

can only be used up to a point. If the major political parties decide to push for a republican state, 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 here 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 vertical split on this question in all of them.

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

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 the other political players.

All four kings since King Tribhuban 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 fulfil 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.

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 monarch and the monarchists 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 miscalculation.

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 Dhangadi 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,

● There was a time when desperate people in this country had some genuine respect, and expectation from Maoists because they were frustrated with political corruption, internal wrangling, selfishness and most important of all, lack of vision to lead the country. There was therefore a 'lets-watch-and-see' support for the Maoists. While there is no doubt that Nepal needs a socialist approach in the period leading up to economic growth, people are naturally-born capitalists. Everyone wants to become rich, given a choice. We don't need research to prove that. The key issue to be decided by the Maoists, and for that matter the whole community of people who believe in communism, is whether we go about this by helping the poor become rich, or forcing the rich to become poor. Is it the distribution of poverty or the distribution of

affluence you want to promote? Killing rich people has never automatically made poor people rich. (Anyway, it is mostly poor Nepalis who are being killed in the name of the peoples' war.) The average Nepali is not interested in the ideology of communism's prophets, they just want to live peaceful, decent lives. Nepal's long-suffering people deserve to be told how the Maoists are going to make this a more egalitarian society so they can decide whether to stick around or migrate elsewhere.

Rajeeb Satyal, Kathmandu

● Dasai this year in Nepal may be different but CK Lal's articles are always all the same. In 'Wartime Dasai' he points out the obvious—that violence has engulfed the nation, people of Kathmandu do not know the condition of the country and we had a very

bad period of infant democracy. I think, on this auspicious occasion of Dasai, he should take a break from writing, go to a Maoist stronghold and report on the situation there. I would be indebted to him if he could let us know the form of government they are running and its economic, educational and social care policies. However, this requires huge courage and perspicacity in his part.

A Subedi, Greencastle, USA

ITALICS

The *Nepali Times* is a well-designed newspaper, and certainly one with the most thoroughly done layout and typography I know in Nepal. I take a semi-professional interest in these matters, and I'd like to ask you about one thing that bothers me exactly because you do your job so well: italics. They bother me

because, in the bulk text set in Antiqua, you're not using any. Take, for example, the second word in the recent frontpage article, *khukuris*. These are not italics, but the regular font having been electronically inclined by your layout program. Are you doing this on purpose? Even if you are, I still find real italics more beautiful, and therefore ask you to employ them. If you're not consciously opposing typographic convention, but this matter has simply escaped your attention, just get the italics font that belongs to your regular bulk Antiqua, and let us readers enjoy its curves! Otherwise, keep up the good work.

Philipp Pratap Thapa Lazimpat

Layout guy, Kiran Maharjan, replies: It was an oversight. Bulk text italics will be in Antiqua. Thanks for the reminder.



NO SPIRIT

The interview with the manager in Nepal for Seagram ('The spirit of the thing', #162) looked like a paid advertisement. Yes, alcohol is not illegal to sell, but glamorising it is irresponsible journalism.

P Adhikari, Australia

VEGETARIAN

After reading Sraddha Basnyat's 'A vegetarian Dasai' (#164) I want to thank her for the message about vegetable foods. In my opinion,

vegetarianism is a symbol of peace. It will make people healthy, it will transform their social, economical, political and religion thinking.

Santosh Shrestha, Sydney

CORRECTION

Madhab Prasad Ghimire has two daughters from his wife Gauri, and not as otherwise stated in Nepali Society (#164). The photo of the poet was by Sagar Shrestha.

Storm over Doramba

MANJUSHREE THAPA

In 17 August, as the long-delayed third round of peace talks were on way in the western village of Hapure, Rolpa, anywhere from 17 to 21 people were killed by security forces in the eastern village of Doramba, in Ramechhap 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 on interviews in the Ramechhap district centre, concluded that the Maoists had provoked these deaths by leading two armed confrontations against a security patrol. Five had died in one, and 12 in another, and that is how official media reported the news on 18 August.

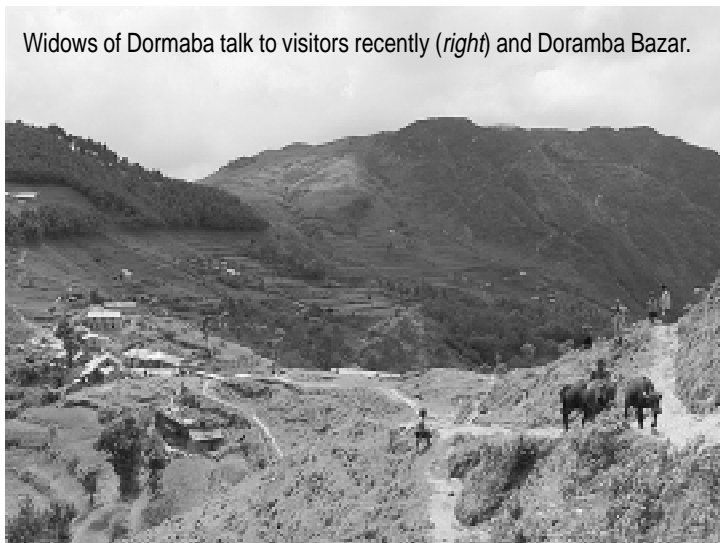
Subsequently, an investigation team formed by the National Human Rights Commission went to the site and concluded that on 17 August, security forces in plainclothes had raided a Maoist meeting, killing one person on the spot and captured 19 alleged Maoists. The captives were then led to a forest and, with their hands tied, summarily executed. One other person, an 18 years-old Maoist girl, was reported missing.

The NHRC's report, strong on eyewitnesses and forensics, prompted the AHRC to begin a second investigation, and is posing the most serious challenge yet by a civilian institution in Nepal for the military to own up to human rights violations. The Head of the Army Human Rights Cell, Brigadier General BA Kumar Sharma and

Member of the National Human Rights Commission Sushil Pyakurel talk to Manjushree Thapa about the deaths in 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 Dormaba talk to visitors recently (right) and Doramba Bazar.



SUSHIL PYAKUREL:

'The army always undermines us.'

On the Doramba investigation:

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 undermines 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



DANIEL LAK

bodies, we saw their bullet wounds.

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 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 Home Ministry, and they are under civilian control, and we can make them accountable. This is my experience. Now, under the constitution, the Royal Nepal 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 this 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? 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.

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



The real foreign hand

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 gets various peoples' dander up as it appears that outsiders are calling the shots here in an unaccountable and unsustainable way.

I, 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 Nepali 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. This influence, I argue, is largely malevolent in outcome, if not intention. This is foreign interference on a grand and grossly unfair scale.

Beyond of all of 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 at large and apply them to Nepal. Because, make no mistake, they do apply to Nepal. Reverse or revise any one of these and you will do more good to this land 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

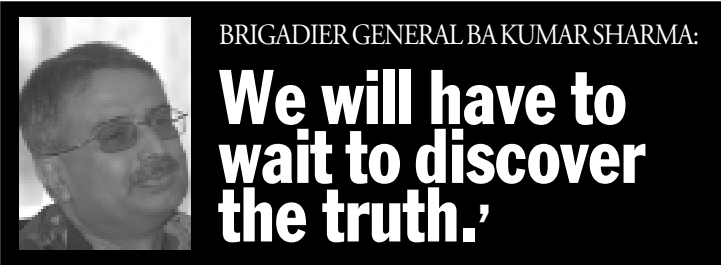
The real foreign interference in Nepal is by market-fundamentalist international financial institutions.

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 apace. Every time a lender wants to forgive debt, or relax 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) vetoes things. As for commodity prices, forget it. From coffee and chocolate to base minerals, all are at all time lows and of little use to hungry foreign lands 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. ♦



BRIGADIER GENERAL BA KUMAR SHARMA:

We will have to wait to discover the truth.

On the AHRC’s work in human rights:
Even before the conflict, the army trained its personnel on the constitution, and on national and international humanitarian law. Now, on the ground, we find that despite our best efforts, some personnel commit wrongdoings. Their commanders are held accountable if they do not take legal action, so they do not overlook wrongdoings.
We start investigations based on any information—newspaper reports, petitions, even phone calls. We conducted 13 court-martials last year, sentencing one man to 7 years in jail, and forcing one Major to resign after he was found obstructing an investigation. We even took action against a unit that fired, at night, by mistake, on five schoolboys. In more minor infractions, our units conduct the investigations by themselves.

On the challenge of observing human rights during combat:
This is not a war, it is terrorism. To combat it, we must investigate people. Sometimes we can’t let a detainee go, because if he disappears, our investigation is ruined. Now are such detentions illegal or legal? We try as best we can to receive the CDO’s authorisation when detaining people in our barracks.
Educated people like you and I may know about human rights. But our soldiers see officers shot in the streets. One of our boys, returning home, was slaughtered like a goat at a Bhagwati temple. I can tell our soldiers—you can’t kill unarmed people, you must bear the arms that the government gave you responsibly. But they will ask me: does wearing a uniform mean that I don’t have human rights, that I don’t have a right to life?

Just because I wear a uniform, can others harm my family? Such big questions are arising.
On the investigations into the Doramba case:
Our four-person preliminary investigation team could not go to Doramba out of safety concerns. They talked to army and police personnel in the district center, and to civilians and the CDO. Our soldiers spoke confidently and smoothly about what happened; they didn’t seem to be making things up. Two incidents took place: five died in one, and 12 in another. That was our preliminary report.
I didn’t meet the NHRC’s team before they went to Doramba, because I wanted them to work independently. I just faxed them a synopsis of our report. The day after they released their report, I received its synopsis. I also received the photos the Maoists had taken.
It seems that the NHRC team went there, spent a night, then went on to exhume the bodies. They didn’t use special forensics instruments. Bodies buried that long bloat, it is hard to see shots or wounds on them. Now we had just left the bodies lying there after the encounters [of 17 August]. God knows who had handled them, how many times they had been cleaned, and what else had been done to them before they had been buried.
The NHRC report also claims that the people had been shot in the head. Some had no skulls. Normally, there would be entry and exit wounds, or the bullets would be in the bodies. It would take special exploding bullets to make the entire skull shatter. We use only normal bullets.
Plus, if the allegations are true, the bodies would be piled in one exact spot, as they were brought up and shot,

one by one. There would have been blood on them all. In the photos, there is all over the front of one of the girls. But the back of her clothes were clean.
The NHRC got these photos from the Maoists. Two days after the incident, the Maoists came, took photos, and buried the bodies. What exactly happened there we don’t know. One of the bodies, of man of about 30, has no physical injuries. The cause of his death is unknown. The Maoists say we shot everyone, but this is the kind of thing we’ve found in the NHRC report. So the question is, in examining the bodies, what depth did the team go to?
On the AHRC’s second investigation:
A second four-person investigation team of ours is now on this case. But even before this incident, Doramba was so terrorised that nobody dared speak openly. The Maoists have since killed a local nurse, and another businessman. Many villagers have been displaced.
Our second team has also been unable to go to the site. Now if I send them with 200 or 300 soldiers, how could the truth emerge? And I can’t send them alone, since we’re being targeted. The team is roving; its 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. If our personnel committed a crime, they would also be capable of lying about it. But then we’re talking about 60, 70 troops who would have done this, that too in daylight. What kind of brazen, inept or idiot officer would tie people’s hands and march them along the main trail, before villagers, and then claim it was an encounter?
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 Rayamajhi, a member of the NHRC investigation team, has since accused the army of willfully distorting the contents of the NHRC report while publicly questioning its quality. ♦

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Student scoop
Pranav Budhathoki, a Nepali student at London Metropolitan University uncovered a notorious ring of criminals exploiting illegal immigrants by working undercover for four months in a poultry-packing company. Budhathoki’s story appeared in The Daily Telegraph as part of a special expose on the issue. He reported that he worked 12 hours a day for 95p an hour, living with 50 people in one house, with each bedroom shared by five to six people. “Gang masters makes millions exploiting foreigners. Companies and factories save on labour costs, supermarkets get their products on cheap and government receives tax from the companies. That’s why no one seems to be bothered,” commented Budhathoki. The Daily Telegraph has already commissioned Budhathoki for another investigative assignment.

A yen for education
For many years Japan supported the Basic and Primary Education Program (BPEP), now it has tacked on an extra Rs 458,293,000 to implement the Project for Construction of Primary Schools. Some 732 classrooms, eight resource centre buildings, 232 toilets, and the installation of 135 water supply units will be put up in Bardia, Sindhupalchok, Dang, Kailali, Kapilbastu and Nuwakot districts.

Still they come
Despite the bad press in the international media, Nepal registered yet another robust growth in tourist numbers in September compared to last year. The 23,754 foreign visitors who arrived by air showed an increase of 25 percent from the same month a year ago. Both non-Indian and Indian arrivals grew by 26 percent and 20 percent respectively last month. Although tourism is not immune to political crises in the country, there are indications that travellers are paying attention to other factors as well: Hotel Dwarika’s, Kathmandu Guest House and Hotel Yak and Yeti have been

listed among the top fifty Asian Hotels. Nepal is also ranked as the first eco-tourism destination for British tourists—their numbers are up by 39 percent—in a survey conducted by the World Tourism Organisation. So far, the figures from the Department of Immigration show an overall 15 percent increase in the nine months till September 2003 compared to the same period last year.
Mountain highs
The Everest Golden Jubilee celebration earlier this year appears to have worked as far as promoting Nepal’s mountain tourism is concerned. Forty-five teams have applied and received permits to climb peaks including Everest, Makalu, Ama Dablam, Lhotse, Nuptse, Pumori and the Annapurnas in the ongoing autumn season. Around 18 teams are still waiting for permission. “Besides these teams, trekking agents have informally notified us that there could be a dozen more teams in our Himalaya this time,” says mountaineering section chief Purna Bhakta Tandukar. “If they all come, we will have nearly 70 teams in total.”
Most teams are headed toward Khumbu. A significant number are also going to Annapurna I, II, III and IV. Notably, four expeditions are headed to Himlung Himal in Manang. Although the government has stopped issuing seasonal expedition permission, climbers throng the Nepali Himalaya between August and November.
Talking poverty
Autumn seems to be the season of choice for conferences: our own NRN, the APEC in Thailand and now the Second Regional Conference on Poverty Reductions Strategies scheduled for 16-18 October in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Sponsored by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the World Bank, the conference will be participated by south-east countries. As it happens, delegates from South Asia are invited only as observers.

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Job Announcement

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- Ability to build, manage and motivate a team of volunteers

The deadline for applications is October 24th. Applications can be emailed (marketing@lsnepal.com.np) or hand delivered to Lincoln School, Rabi Bhawan. Only short-listed candidates will be contacted. (No phone calls please)

United States

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



Sharda Thapa, 55, works as a freelance consultant for US-based businesses and is the 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 reinvest information 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 Nepalis 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 Nepali 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 their 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 NRNs will have to work together and come up with a working document which defines those who are eligible, or not.

Europe

“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 NRNs, 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.

Gulf

“There is a role for us.”



ALL PICS: MIN BAIRACHARYA

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.

Dongol: That is one reason why I took the initiative to establish the Nepali Association in Qatar. We are a network of almost all the 70,000 Nepalis 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 coffer. 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 Nepali citizenship would be useful.

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Overseas Nepalis are here to see how they can help.

A portrait of a middle-aged man with dark hair and glasses, wearing a pink button-down shirt under a dark jacket. He is smiling slightly. The background is dark and out of focus, showing some shelves with objects.

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.

That's right. We are in final preparations. Some Nepalis have even started arriving from abroad. But because of the security situation, we may get fewer than the estimated 300 delegates.

Obviously, the situation has changed since the time we began planning for this conference. There was even talk of holding the conference abroad. But we decided to go ahead with it, because moving the conference would put a question mark over the whole exercise. And since the people attending are all Nepalis, it would not be proper to raise the issue of security. All of us Nepalis are living here, how can you say it's not safe for outside Nepalis? It could open a gap between Nepalis and overseas Nepalis.

Outsiders are convinced the Nepali leadership is incompetent, the bureaucracy is corrupt and they will say so at every opportunity. And among local Nepalis there is a prevalent attitude that their compatriots have emigrated to earn money and compromised their nationalism. But the reality is different. After all, it is the remittance from Nepalis abroad that is keeping the country's economy afloat. And it is because Nepalis are staying in Nepal despite the violence that overseas Nepalis can still say they are Nepali. What we have to do is 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 have to figure out a way to use the brain-drain to the nation's advantage. There is a role here for the government.

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 Nepali 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 encourage 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 linkage between Nepal and the Nepali diaspora.

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.

This conference is just the beginning. We can't be too impatient. Overseas Nepalis can't expect to get special treatment as soon as they come home, and local Nepalis must also not expect a windfall in new investment. We have to first create the conditions for those investments to come.

You can take a Nepali out of Nepal, but a Nepali will remain a Nepali. Bipalis are fond of creating organisations and the organisational positions that come with it, just as back home. Not only is one faced with coming up with a working definition, but also the monumental job of drawing everyone under the same umbrella. With the quest for leadership, there is bound to be the famous Nepali trait of 'leg pulling'.

Our diaspora are a strange and diverse lot. Most Nepalis in the US are reluctant to give up their citizenships 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 meager savings are not 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.



Getting Bipali investment will not be easy. To begin with, the government cannot have a blanket modus operandi for a businessperson

In terms of the meet itself, while it seems preparations are robust for Bipalis to meet the people in government, civil society and the private sector, the Beed is forced to ask just who they will be meeting. In all probability it will be the 'seasoned' older generation. While the voice of the past is all very well, what the Bipalis need to hear and draw from are the future generation of business people. They must meet the new Nepal: English-speaking youth, dynamic Nepali women entrepreneurs who believe 25 million people is a big market and innovation will sell. The current state of Nepal is hindered by a myopic vision locked in the past. If ever there was a time to be future forward, it is here and now. ♦

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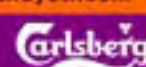
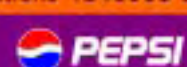
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Carrying Nepal on their backs

An unnamed porter on the Jiri-Namche route outside Karikhola.

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 Tenzing 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 high camps and set the routes for paying climbers. They are poor farmers who flock to popular trekking routes in search of work carrying luggage and supplies for our foreign clients. Although they never travel above base camp, porters carry ghastly loads to altitudes exceeding 5,000m. Wherever paying clients want to go,

their porters follow. Porterage is the only option for employment for many in Nepal's rural hills. It is a type of work that chases the very roots of what it truly means to *work*, and what it means to *earn* one's living.

In Nepal, a porter's *naamlo* (tumpline) proves that our head is first and foremost a muscle. This realisation is a sacred contrast to the helmet-based paranoia found in most developed nations. All of our ancestors have carried in this manner and, as we often turn to our elders for advice, there is much to be learned from porters. The greatest resource in Nepal lies in the minds that rest underneath the *naamlos*.

However, porters compete for jobs with pack animals and often receive similar treatment once on the trail. This year alone has seen four porter deaths in the Everest region. On top of this, there have been two porters brought to safety by helicopter rescue—one of whom was in a coma for two weeks (See *Nepali 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 also be airlifted. Thousands of porters have gone trekking without insurance or proper equipment, knowing full well the risks that they are taking. This year has seen porters forced to take these risks for a wage that doesn't even cover the cost of their food on the trail.

Porters have died and their bodies have been left beside the trail to decompose. Porters have been denied entrance into lodges even when space is available. Porters as a rule have been forced to sleep in caves and under trees

at high altitudes. Decades have passed with foreign clients rarely considering to inquire about the skills, the families, or even the names of the men carrying their bags. There is no record of the number of porter fatalities and accidents that occur in Nepal each year, but there is no shortage of negative publicity and anecdotes.

It is time that Nepal faces the social challenges that line the trails to base camp. It is time to explore the freedom that comes with knowing—with truly *knowing*—the value of a plate of rice, the importance of a smile and the magic of a song. This is a wisdom that is written in the eyes of every porter and a freedom that is burned black into the sticks with which they support their loads. The most under-utilised resource in Nepal is not hydropower or mineral resource, but rather human resource. The abilities, skills and passions of mountain porters and the rest of Nepal's rural citizens have hardly been tapped.

Without developing a new professional standard for porters, the trekking and climbing industry lies in great danger of collapse. One possibility is the continuation of negative publicity regarding the lack of basic human rights for porters. Television viewers are quick to react and a few large productions could certainly stimulate an international boycott or, at the very least, the further tarnishing of Nepal's reputation. Another possibility is an increase in political and social instability fuelled by the natural frustration that results from being subjected to daily discrimination and exploitation.

Change will come to the porters of

Nepal. The current situation is too unstable and porters are too capable and intelligent for the future to be otherwise. It is our responsibility as trekkers, tour operators, members of the government, porters and as ancestors of future porters, to ensure that this change is sustainable and beneficial to all.

A nationwide trekking porter registration program, for example, will construct a professional identity for porters. Once a porter is seen as a professional, a porter will see himself as a professional. Accountability will follow, as will a higher level of service and training. Eventually, this will lead to a fair standard of load and wage limits, which will eliminate the uncertainty and mistrust that turns so many trekkers away.

Tour operators in Nepal are beginning to understand that taking care of porters is good business practice. Investing in the safety and comfort of porters has an incredibly high dividend. A porter that is fed well on the trail is many times less likely to contract altitude illness. A porter who speaks some English can open the eyes of a guest to the importance of blessing oneself while crossing a bridge or of placing some branches and leaves under a rock when one's leg hurts. Should a tragedy occur, the family of an insured porter will have a better chance of surviving, and the sons and daughters of that porter will grow to take up where their father left off.

The community of tourism professionals in Nepal must bring 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 trekkers, 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 this 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 unexplored high passes and seldom-climbed 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. These communities also will benefit the most from any income generated. Trekkers also need to experience millet and hot water, buffalo milk. This type of experience is of critical importance to our shrinking world.

A first step is to discontinue the use of the term 'coolie' to describe a porter. The Nepali for porter is *bhariya*. Coolie signifies classism and servitude. Nepal is not a country of coolies. This is a country of *bhariyas*. A small change on the tongue, after all, can be a large change in the heart.

In the coming years, the Nepali trekking industry can lead this stupendously scenic land by running creative and compassionate treks that will sustain tourism into the future. ♦

Ben Ayers has been living and working among Nepal's trekking porters for the past four years and is the founder of Porters' Progress, Nepal.

www.portersprogress.org

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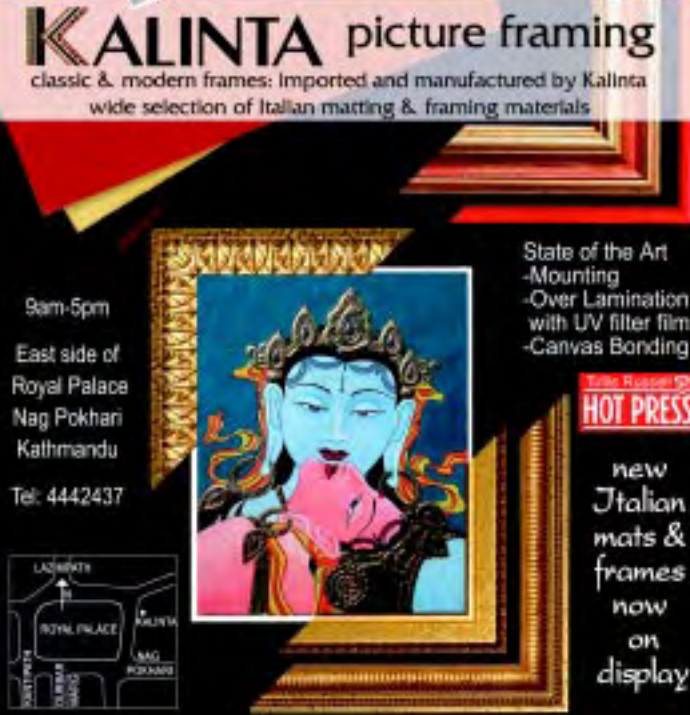
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Gokul Adhikari, Ram Prasad Dhamala and Kamal Nath Bhatta (second from left) with other porters at Sorakhute waiting for trekkers.

Weight of the world

Nepali porters share their burden.

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,” rues Adhikari.

His story is not new to the porters loitering at Sorakhute, south of Thamel, where they wait for trekking guides to hire them. Their 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 SLC 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 barely 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 Gorakhshep, 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 18,000 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 deserted 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 handshake from these tourists.”

Most guides prefer to hire porters from Kathmandu. They are cheaper and docile, unlike locals from trekking areas 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 organisations 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.” ♦

Porters in distress

Drop in trekking and the violence has hit porters hardest.

LUKLA—Till only three years ago, nearly 20,000 trekkers and mountaineers used to land here every year. In the tourist season, they would be mobbed by hundreds of hungry porters from the lower valleys hoping to find work carrying baggage, supplies and equipment.

Today, despite the international publicity from last spring’s Everest anniversary extravaganza, the new airport with its asphalt runway gets only about five flights a day from Kathmandu instead of the usual 15. Most of the flights every morning unload cargo rather than trekkers. The end of the ceasefire has meant that trekking and tourist arrivals in Nepal this season have not been able to rise above the low-water mark. In conflict-ridden districts like the Jiri-Phaplu trail, trekking has disappeared altogether.

The Maoists may not be targetting trekkers, but news of the Maoist insurgency and the breakdown of the peace process has scared off everyone except the most determined trekkers, or those who have been convinced by their trekking agents in Kathmandu that the Everest, Manang, Mustang and Annapurna treks are safe.

The drop in arrivals has hit trekking porters hardest. They are now fighting for even fewer jobs while watching already pitiful wage, load and safety standards drop. Commercial porters (porters who carry supplies from distant roadheads to Nepali store and lodge owners on the trekking routes) are also finding that the market for freight has fallen out. Porters now have to fill more stomachs than their meager crops can provide for, and aside from carrying loads, there is no option for income generation in the desperately poor rural hills.

The government has responded to the Maoist threat by placing security forces at the airports and gateways to the popular trekking routes. Lukla is now home to some 250 paramilitary Armed Police. As Maoist violence and recruitment increases in rural communities, an increasing numbers of porters are fleeing to the relative safety and prosperity of the trekking routes. Once there, they are subject to harassment by suspicious locals and police, fewer available jobs and more competition than ever before.

“We feel unsafe,” states porter Ramesh Pathak. “When the Maoists come to our town we must do whatever they say. Sometimes we don’t even have enough food for our families, but we are forced to find a way to feed the Maoists first.” Porter have learnt never to carry things like torches, pen-knives or even small radios since they are confiscated during numerous security checks along the trails.

Porters are the first to be recruited by the Maoists and the first to be harassed by the police. Porters, like the working-class everywhere, are the first to be killed on the battlefield and in jail. “We are constantly in trouble, threatened by the police and by the Maoists. We feel trapped,” says Pathak.

As the numbers of trekkers continues to drop, the pressure placed on porters by both Maoist recruiters and the security forces will only increase. The most pressure, however, will be on the porters themselves to earn a living for themselves and their families. If a solution is not found to the current troubles, these rugged men and women will be eventually forced to choose between a likely death on the battlefield, or one around the cooking fire. (Ben Ayers)

NARESH NEWAR

Gokul Adhikari is constantly at war with his poverty. Every year, he works as daily wage labourer for 10 months at local farms in his village in Nuwakot and ends up spending all his earnings during Dasai. He is then forced to live in Kathmandu during autumn, working as a trekking porter, hoping to earn enough for his family till the next farm 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

Carlsberg



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 of September 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,

Iraq 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 per 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

Funds are needed for poverty, not Iraq.

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 October donor meeting to address

truly life-and-death issues like the battle against AIDS and hunger.

Consider the battle against AIDS, TB and malaria. Around eight million impoverished people will die of these three preventable and treatable diseases in 2004. In 2001, the world created a Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria. Yet for fiscal year 2004, the Bush Administration is committing \$71 billion to Iraq and just \$200 million for the Global Fund. For every dollar that it is giving to the Global Fund, the Bush Administration is committing \$350 to Iraq. These are grotesquely distorted priorities. Worse, the US is encouraging other donor countries to misspend as well.

It's time for the world to tell America some hard news. Other 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. ♦ (@Project Syndicate)

Jeffrey D Sachs is Professor of Economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

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Migrant headache



MIN BAJRACHARYA

MEENA JANARDHAN
in DUBAI

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 stark 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 here 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 18 percent, other Asian nationalities 15.4 percent and Arabs 10.6 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. "It poses a serious threat to the demographic balance of our workforce and will affect the very structure of our labour market. Non-Asians must be given opportunities, more so workers from Arabic-speaking countries," he said. So the search is on—workers from non-Asian nations and Arabic-speaking African countries are now in demand.

Nationals from Sudan, Somalia, Egypt and Morocco are being recruited right away, as also from Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Yemen.

But there is a catch—many companies here find it a Herculean task to find skilled workforce and cheap labour among these nationalities.

Said Ali Khan, a logistics manager at the Free Zone in Dubai, in an interview, "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

I wanna live in Emirates

Foreigners make up 90 percent of the 1.7 million labour force in the UAE. There are now an estimated 20,000 Nepali workers in the Emirates. Breakdown of the nationalities:

Indian	53.7%
Pakistani	18%
Other Asian	15.4%
Arabs	10.6%

population increased by 79 percent to nearly 3 million, growing by a high average of six percent a year per annum. Foreigners now make up some 85 percent of the population.

The UAE's recent moves are but the latest reflection 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

Worried by a demographic imbalance caused by migrant workers, the UAE wants to restrict new workers from Asia.

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 its records of employees. If it finds that the majority who are to be recruited are of the same nationality, the company 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 unwritten 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—unlikely for most Asian workers to have—were made a minimum requirement for getting such permits. This rule applies to all workers except labourers 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 were 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 said 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 best 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, unwanted 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 on 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 I also 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." ♦ (IPS)





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Positive thinking

Rajendra Dahal in *Himal Khabarpatrika*,
3 October–1 November

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

Violence, disturbance and war saddens people but what makes that grief ironic is the accompanying guilt and apathy toward oneself, the country, society and history during such troubled times. Indeed, this should have been when we are more careful, aware and determined.

Has the situation become that hopeless in Nepal? Have we all become so feeble and apathetic? Will we ever be free from this spiral of violence? Is there nothing positive in Nepal that we can be proud of?

We are South Asia's oldest nation-state that withstood wars, terrorism and sweeping changes for 235 years. We are not going to crumble that easily. The lack of socio-cultural, geopolitical and linguistic knowledge of our own country is the reason why there is a general sense of fatalism. The Swiss geologist and Nepalophile Toni Hagen had this to say: "Nepalis who say they are depressed because there has been no development in socio-economics and politics must know where they came from, their genesis. Only then will they realise how fast Nepali society is actually advancing."

Today, the country reels under the most trying period in its history because of Maoist violence. What ideas and concepts can extricate us? How did the country tackle such situations in the past? Don't we have a national identity, achievements, visionaries like other countries? What do we have that makes



Nepalis from Mechi to Mahakali proud? Why is it that the educated ones, those who seek comfort and luxury, are more negative, hopeless and labour under an inferiority complex?

We have found that Nepalis are successful when they take the initiative after identifying their needs. Take the success of our community forestry—an idea made and nurtured in Nepal. The engineers and doctors from the BE, ME and MBBS courses from Tribhuvan University can take their place in country in the world. No one had to tell hydropower producers like Dambar Nepali how to generate affordable electricity for Nepalis. No one taught us how to draft the constitution, prepare models for national and local governments, carry out elections and transfer state power peacefully. We did all this on our own.

There is proof enough that Nepalis themselves, and nobody else, are capable of solving our own problems.

Marching east

Janak Nepal and Raju Shakya

Nepal Samacharpatra, 8 October

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

Locals at various villages of Jajarkot district are surprised and happy by the sudden disappearance of Maoist guerrillas 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."

The big question then is where have all the rebels gone? "We heard they first went down to the tarai and are marching east," says Amar Bahadur Singh, ex-chairman of Samal VDC. "They used to collect donations regularly from the villages in the past but now they are nowhere to be seen."

Even though the Maoist military is gone, the rebels' political activists and militia are still active in Jajarkot.

The remaining militia carry 303 rifles, homemade guns, pistols and explosives. Says RPP Jajarkot district chairman Dhan Bahadur Adhikari, "We do not see them in combat dresses these days. That is why people are less scared."

Locals here celebrated Dasai with less fear in the absence of armed Maoists. The exodus is not exclusive just to Jajarkot. There are sighs of relief in Salyan and Rukum where there hasn't been any Maoist military activity. In an unprecedented move, a few guerrillas have begun to receive political training in some of the villages. The move could have something to do with the Maoists' overall strategy to carrying on military and political activities simultaneously. Even if the military personnel of the Maoists have left these districts, at least one central level leader in each district is still active. For instance, central member Maoists, Purna Bahadur Gharti, is up and about in Rukum where he used to be a teacher.

Dasai, Maoist style

Hari Narayan Gautam in Baglung
Rajdhani, 8 October

राजधानी

During the Maoist Dasai ceasefire rebels celebrated the festival in their own way. According to locals in Tarakhola of Baglung district, more than 300 Maoists gathered to receive *tika* from their commanders and senior leaders. They justified the ritual not as a religious ceremony but as an auspicious occasion to symbolise their 'victorious war' over the state. One Maoist was heard saying, "This *tika* is to get blessings from our leaders to finish off the old regime." This shocked locals who used to be told that old traditions like Dasai needed to be abolished. On the other hand, there were a huge number of Maoists who protested against Dasai in Resh, Bihu and Bhimnapokhri. They rallied villagers for financial support, shouting slogans like, "The nation is burning.

"I can't be happy anymore..."

BBC Nepali Service, 4 October

BBC

For nine days the guns have been silent. Here in the capital, the auspicious melody of Dasai over Radio Nepal brings on the heartache for those unable to return to their villages for security reasons or those who lost their near and dear ones in the violence (*see pic*). About 10,000 people are now registered as Maoist victims in the Nepal Maoist Victim Association.

The widows, orphans and bereaved say festival time means nothing to them anymore since they are forced away from home, tormented by memories of relatives killed. Seventy-year old Komal Kumari of Ramechhap says Dasai carries no meaning anymore. "Everybody else has bought goats, new dresses and delicious food but what do we have? Nothing except sorrow. None of the ten days of Dasai will be a happy for us." She says Maoist rebels threatened to kill her if she did not ask her sons to go back to the village to join the rebels. Komal and her sons now live in the Valley.

Dharma Raj Neupane says he was the first civilian to be targeted by the Maoists six years ago in his home district of Achham. "Ever since then, I have stayed in Kathmandu and there has been no Dasai celebrations for me," he says. "My wife and children are far away from me. I don't have the opportunity to meet them and if I go home, the Maoist terrorists will kill me."

For Jamuna Rokka of Okhaldhunga, finding her husband is far more important than Dasai. He was a Nepali Congress worker who was abducted by the rebels almost three years ago. He has never returned home. "How can you celebrate Dasai or Tihar when your husband is missing? I just want the rebels to say whether he is dead or alive." The mother of two's other major concern is raising her children.

Jana Kumari Koirala fled her home in Gorkha because of continuous harassment by the rebels who killed her husband, a teacher, last year. "I could not stay back because it was very traumatic," she said. "I have lost my life partner, I cannot be happy whether it is Dasai or Tihar. I can never be happy anymore in this life."

When adults are so frustrated, one can only wonder about the psychological impact on children. Seven-year-old Usha Kumari of Ramechhap remembers how she had to run away from home at night because the rebels threatened her family. That was two years ago and Usha is unhappy in the city. "I don't enjoy it here at all," she says. "I remember our village, our cows, and I liked to play with them."

Ten-year-old Gaurab 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 at home. We used to have so much fun at Dasai."



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Support us. We'll celebrate Dasai next year." In the south of Baglung, Maoists organised a meeting with representatives of various political parties, putting *tika* and asking them to support their demand for a constituent assembly.

Poor attendance

Girish Giri in Humla
Kantipur, 8 October

कान्तिपुर

At Limi of Humla district, education is at a standstill. Schools were established decades ago in all three villages of Limi but today the classrooms are empty, not because there are no students but teachers have a poor attendance record. Humlis, who in the past cared little about the school, have begun to doubt the teachers' intentions. They say they come to the village just to show their face once in four months and take their salaries without teaching the children.

Sonam Jigme, ward chairman of Til village 8, has seen the school here since his childhood and says no one has benefited. "There is neither teacher nor students, so how will this school function?" he asks. "Not a single student has passed even Class 1 from this school."

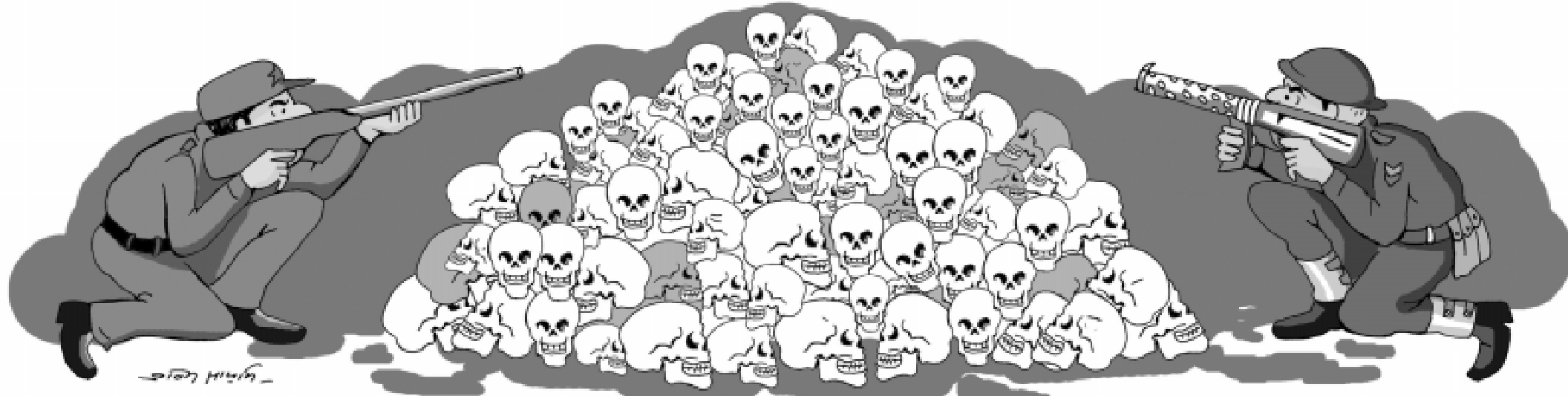
Only few parents value education enough to send their children to Kathmandu or Dharamshala in India, the seat of Dalai Lama's government-in-exile, where they pose as Tibetans to receive facilities. "Our school is nothing more than an empty building," says Jigme.

One of the main problems here is that Nepali is not the mother tongue of the people and there are no provisions for teaching in the Humli language. This just provides teachers with another excuse not to do their jobs. "Even if there is a teacher, we cannot understand a word he says," explains young Pemba Dorje in broken Nepali.

Halji village has had Sunkhani Primary School for over 40 years but not a single generation has passed even the lowest class, says Khenrap Lama. This year, the school received funding and the villagers are planning renovations. "But what's the use when there are no classes?" asks 66-year-old Doche Lama.

Every year, the school is supposed to receive government funds from the district education office under the free education policy. "We haven't seen a single paisa come here," says Karma Tshering, ward chairman of Limi.

Tshering blames the officials at Simikot district headquarters and the teachers for no education in his village. "This year, all the villagers had supported the renovation of the school and extending classrooms but the teacher never came," says Tshering. The school has been closed for the last three months and students are still waiting for their teacher.



हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 18 September -2 October

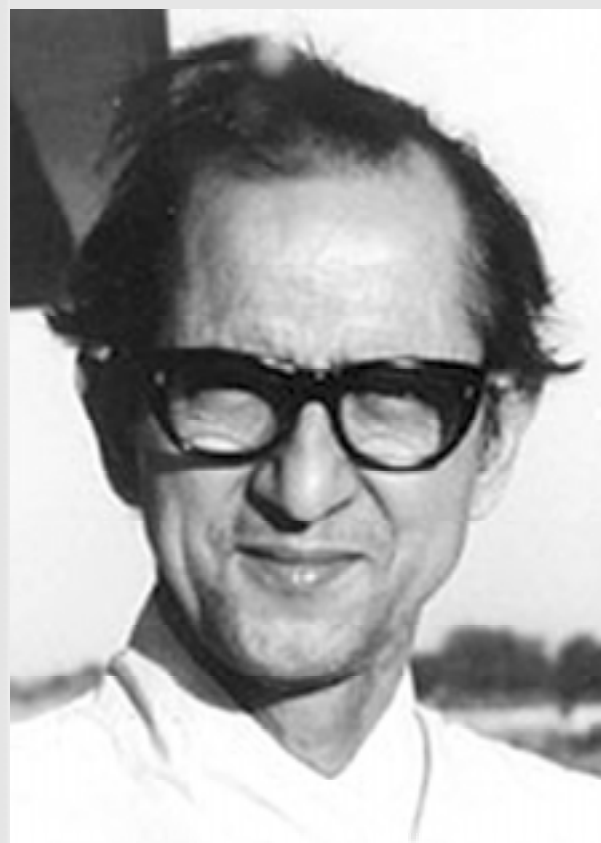
QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"I went to receive *tika* from the king because he is still revered."

- Bamdev Gautam of the CPN UML, Annapurna Post, 9 October.

Back at Sundarijal >45

'A constitutional monarchy is also a monarchy.'



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 birds that take shelter outside his cell. The day before, he analysed the role of monarchies in modern states in words that seem very prescient given the present polarisation between the palace and parties.

Sunday, 24 April 1977

Sundarijal

The study of the growth + decline of the institution of monarchy would be both 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 monarchical 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 Nepal's monarchy written by me in *Tarun*—and asked me whether I was opposed to the monarchical system. I told him I am for, 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—Ashok—was satisfied calling [himself] a raja—not even a maharaja, Well, of course, Maharajahdiraj was beyond his dream. He was an emperor, in addition.

Took a good bath in the sun. Towards the evening every day there is thunder + smart shower, and the weather becomes chilly—which is not good for my throat.

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 it 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 (?) came 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, denuding 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 afternoon watching them and responding to their call for my attention. In the evening they hoot at me from different angles. They know me now, altho 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 gaggle ravenously—a very unpleasant sound. After some time they will have a whole colony of nests in the tree and the air will be punctuated with their hoarse cackle. This house gives shelter to a few pairs of red feet pigeons and swifts + swallows. A flock of doves are seen in the afternoon rooting in the grass under the tree. And crows—it is an amazing sight, their being in love; they attempt at cooing also; + they fondle and caress their mates—these sly negroes of the sky.

CAREER OPPORTUNITY

The Canadian Cooperation Office (CCO) supports the planning and delivery of Canada's Official Development Assistance in partnership with Nepal to support the efforts of poor and marginalized rural communities to protect and improve their livelihoods in an equitable manner.

The CCO invites applications from qualified Nepalese citizens for the post of **Project Officer**. The CCO is an **equal opportunity** organization that aims to reflect the diversity of Nepal. Women and candidates from ethnic minorities are strongly encouraged to apply.

The Project Officer, under the direct supervision of the Local Development Facility (LDF) Coordinator will have the following **responsibilities**;

- Communicate with NGOs and CBOs on project status;
- Assess partners' organization capacity, credibility and past performances;
- Maintain and review working files and financial information for LDF;
- Monitor project progress through field visits and reporting;
- Assist in orientation, workshop and training programs for partner organizations;
- Execute all other related duties and responsibilities as advised by Director, Program and Projects and LDF Coordinator.

Requirements:

- A minimum qualification of bachelor degree in social science or equivalent from a recognized University with at least five years of practical experience in related field;
- Sound knowledge of project management cycle preferably in the field. Understanding of Nepal's planned development efforts and local governance;
- Good communication, interpersonal skills and team commitment;
- Competence in computer use and sound administrative skills;
- Knowledge of and networking with the civil society organizations;
- Fluent written and spoken English and Nepali.

Interested individuals are requested to send their application along with a CV and the names of two referees (one of which must be your current or most recent employer). The selected candidate will be given a **one-year renewable term** contract with a six-month probation period. Salary will be commensurate with experience.

Applications marked "Application for Project Officer" must be received at the CCO before **4:00 PM, 24 October 2003**. Application can be submitted by post, fax, email or hand delivered. Only short listed candidates will be notified and called for a written test and interview. Telephone and e-mail inquiries will not be entertained.

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Canadian Cooperation Office
 P.O.Box 4574, Lazimpat, Kathmandu
 Fax: 4-410422; E-mail: cco@cco.org.np

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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Water Colours** by Nepal Water Colour Society members from 22 September-11 October at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. 4428694
- ❖ **Personal Encounters on the Journey of Life** Paintings by Prakaash Chandwadkar from 15-31 October at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. 4218048
- ❖ **Exploration of the Magical Realm** etchings by Seema Sharma at Café Mitra, Thamel. 4259015

EVENTS

- ❖ **Lazimpat Film Shows:** *Mukundo* 14 October; *Strangers on a Train* (Hitchcock) 16 October; 7.30 PM at the Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **2nd International Classical Guitar Festival 2003** 4-6PM on 11-12 October at Hotel Shanker, Lazimpat. Guitarists from Finland, Germany, Japan, Liechtenstein, Nepal, Thailand and the US. Rs 400 per show, Rs 700 for two consecutive shows. Student discounts. Details: Tora, 981054787
- ❖ **Cine-Club:** *Le bal* 12 October, *Everyone says I love you* 19 October. 2PM at Auditorium Molière at Alliance Française, Thapathali. 4241163
- ❖ **Inter-Cultural Film Society:** *Così rivedano* 11 October, *Fuori dal mondo* 12 October. 5.30 PM at NTB, Bhrikuti Mandap. Entrance free. Email: icfs@wlink.com.np

MUSIC

- ❖ **Catch 22** back at the Rum Doodle.
- ❖ **Cadenza live** 7.30PM Wednesday, Saturday at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Thunderbolt** at Rox Bar on Fridays Happy Hours 6-PM, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu.

DRINKS

- ❖ **Winter Warmers** at the Sumeru Bar with 25 percent discount between 6-8PM at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Festival of tropical black rum drinks** and great steaks at K-too! Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 4433043
- ❖ **Cosmic Cocktails** and chic home furnishings at Mitra Lounge Bar and Mausam homestyle boutique. Above Cafe Mitra, Thamel. 4259015

FOOD

- ❖ **Dasai and Tihar Bonanza** 50 percent off food at The Fun Café and Splash Bar & Grill. Buy one service and get another for free at Radisson Beauty Saloon. Radisson Hotel Kathmandu. 4423888
- ❖ **Café U** Japanese home-cooking, cakes and coffee. Opp British School, Sanepa. 5523263
- ❖ **Roadhouse Cafe** for wood fired piazzas and more. Opp St Mary's School, Pulchowk. 5521755
- ❖ **Momos & More** the finest momos in town now at Dhobighat. 5520692
- ❖ **Chimney Refreshed** Fine continental cuisine at The Chimney Restaurant, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Traditional Nepali Thali lunch** at Patan Museum Café inside Patan Museum. 11AM-2.30 PM. Cocktails and snacks 2-7.30 PM. 5526271
- ❖ **Saturday BBQ Lunch** at Club Himalaya Nagarkot. Rs 500 per person. 468008
- ❖ **Malay, Singapore food** at Singma, Jawlakhel, Lalitpur. 552004
- ❖ **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. 4479488
- ❖ **Smoked salmon soufflé**, Crispy Duck Breast, Shrimp Newburg and fine wines at Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Thamel. 4250440

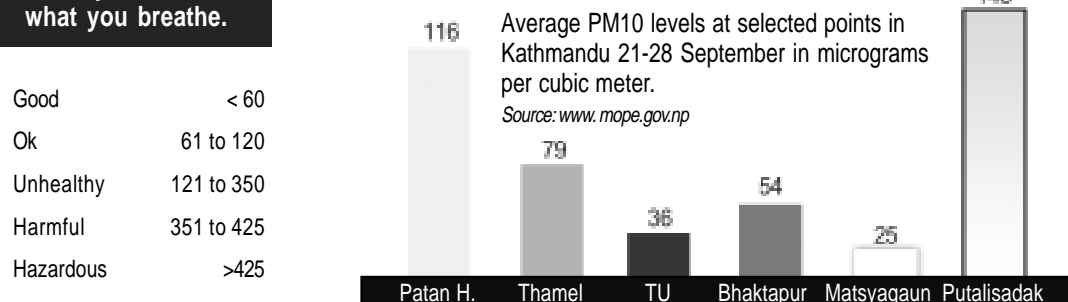
GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Microlight flying adventures** with the Avia Club, Pokhara.
- ❖ **Shivapuri Heights Cottage** 30 minutes from Kathmandu, at the edge of the Shivapuri Reserve. Email: info@escape2nepal.com
- ❖ **Weekend Special** for Rs 3000 per couple, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha. 4375280
- ❖ **TGIF overnight package** at Dwarka's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Bardia tiger madness** Jungle Base camp has extra special deals 061-32112 Email: junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** special offers for Nepalis and expats. 4361500
- ❖ **Back to Nature** overnight package for expatriates at Godavari Village Resort. Second night at 50 percent discount. 5560675

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY



Looks like Dasai 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 Putali Sadak 220 micrograms per cubic meter, significantly higher than the national standard of 120. Away from heavy traffic areas air quality was still breathable.



NEPALI WEATHER

VIS-09-10-2003 03:00 GMT

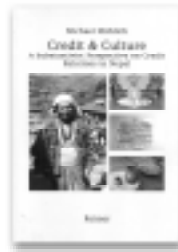
by MAUSAM BEED

This huge cyclonic system over the northwestern edge of the Bay (satellite pic, left, taken on Thursday morning at 8 AM) is bringing post-monsoon rain and overcast skies to half of Nepal. By Friday, the gathering westerly winds should have blown off the outer tentacles of this systems 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 weekend, temperatures will go up again while the minimum temperature will continue to fall.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



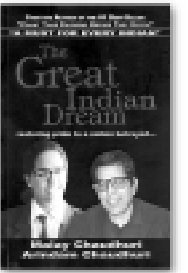
BOOKWORM



Credit & Culture: A Substantivist Perspective on Credit and Relations in Nepal
Michel Mühlich
Reimer, 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...
Malay Chaudhuri, Arindam Chaudhuri
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 authors explore 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.



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

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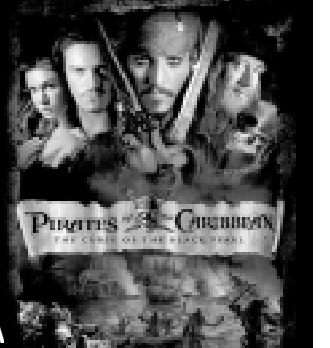
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Pirates of the Caribbean is a film that dares to be smart, reasonably complicated and scary while swashing its buckles. The writing team of Ted Elliot and Terry Rossio have combined the derring-do of their *The Mask of Zorro* with their wisecracking humor in *Shrek*. Director Gore Verbinski has played to both his strengths—stylish horror and offbeat, sometimes violent comedy. He's abetted in the latter by Johnny Depp, who gives a memorably bizarre performance as Jack Sparrow, Geoffrey Rush as the undead Captain Barbossa, Keira Knightley as Elizabeth Swann the governor's daughter and Orlando Bloom as Will Turner, her would-be fiancé. The filmmakers take the fantastical tale seriously enough to give us chills and lightly enough to make us laugh. 6PM



Mein Madhuri Banna Chahti Hoon: 12PM, 3PM

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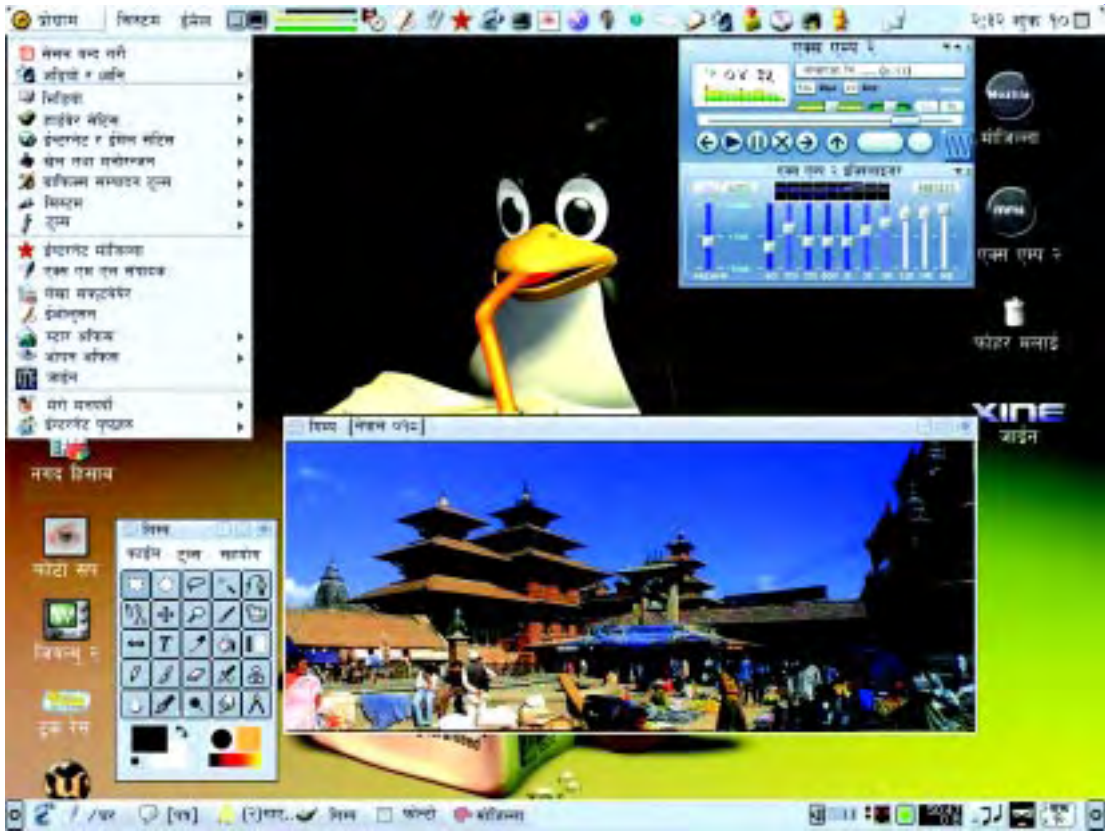
Training on Investigative Journalism

Khoj Patrakarita Kendra (Centre for Investigative Journalism) invites application from young and energetic university graduates for a six month long on-the-job training on investigative journalism. The applicants must have good command over Nepali and English language. The trainees will have to go through rigours of working under a newsmagazine and will also get a modest monthly stipend during the training period.

Interested may apply with full resume to:



Khoj Patrakarita Kendra
Himal Association
Patandhoka, Lalitpur
Tel 5542544 Fax 5541196
email cij@himalassociation.org



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

on. 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 computers are hardwired to English.

Nepali language users are still confounded with the “*ke ho ke ho*” computer. Having to switching 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 Yadab 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. It not only standardises a set of fonts allowing non-Roman 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.

Fontastic Nepali

The standardisation of Nepali Unicode will revolutionise the way we use computers.

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 Devanagiri script has already made a niche in Unicode: fonts can be interchanged without problems.

Madan Puraskar Putakalaya 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 Devanagiri keyboard input system in two different versions.

Project director Amar Gurung says the new system ensures uniformity between different Nepali font faces based on the Unicode system and opens up new possibilities for Nepalis to use 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 Puraskar Pustakalaya. “The database had to be redone in Unicode-based fonts, but now the user 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 2000 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 Nepali 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 counterparts. 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 pic).

“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-reaches of banking, development and some other sectors. Nepali Devanagari in Unicode will make it possible for DDC and 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. ♦

www.mpp.org.np
info@mpp.org.np

गोरोपनाका लागि ५००० वर्ष पुरानो आयुर्वेदिक रहस्य ।

१६ विभिन्न अद्भुत आयुर्वेदिक तत्वहरूका साथमा ।

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

The joys of trekking

A trek is a highly recommended past-time, 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 Afrikaans 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*, *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.

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