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Weekly Internet Poll # 110

Q. Are you generally optimistic or pessimistic about Nepal's future?

Optimistic 47.8%
Pessimistic 48.8%
Don't Know 4.2%

Total votes: 1,357

Weekly Internet Poll # 111. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Should the political parties patch up with the king, the Maoists or continue with their agitation?

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Winging it

As passenger volume peaks, airlines cash in.



NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

On Tuesday evening, a Buddha Air Kathmandu-Biratnagar flight flew by mistake to Bhairawa.

Given the present rush in domestic airline traffic and the chaos at the terminals, a slip-up like that was bound to happen sooner or later. Domestic airline executives say they are reaping a bonanza because security concerns along highways have diverted travellers to fly rather than

drive. But they add that traffic is reaching saturation point because of capacity and infrastructure bottlenecks.

Domestic airline capacity has been severely cut because airlines with larger aircraft like Necon have grounded their 50-seater ATRs and Cosmic is only operating one of its SAAB 340s. This means airlines with smaller planes like Buddha, Yeti, Skyline, Sita and Gorkha are stretched to the limit to pick up the slack.

Because of its larger fleet of six Beechcraft, Buddha has profited the most from the current crunch, carrying nearly half of all domestic passengers since Dasai. But its managing director, Birendra Basnet, says the traffic will drop off once the buses start running normally again. Basnet also says airlines don't like to work under such pressure. "It is difficult to maintain schedules and we have to make sure our customers are happy," he told us.

In an effort to meet passenger demand, Buddha has shunted nearly all its Biratnagar and Bhairawa flights to late evening and night because they are the only airports with night-landing facilities. Nepalganj's nightlanding is out of action because of technical problems with equipment, making matters worse. With morning fog in Kathmandu, there just aren't enough hours in a day to fly everywhere.

continued ➡ p5

Land grab

The Maoist policy of confiscating land aggravates an already precarious food situation.



SHARAD KC

Maoist threats to farmers not to harvest grain, confiscation of land and looting of granaries has spread concern that Nepal's already-precarious food situation may worsen in the coming months.

Across the country, the Maoists are occupying farms taken from absentee landlords or confiscated from political opponents. There is no estimate how much farmland is directly under Maoist control, but reports from across the country this is a nationwide trend. Elsewhere, tillers who used to hand over a part of the harvests to landlords, are now forced to give the produce to local Maoists. Food security experts say this has set off a chain reaction of lower harvests, falling productivity and a general food shortage.

Since the landlords know they won't be able to collect the harvest, they do not invest any more on fertiliser, seeds and other inputs. The tillers or sharecroppers can't afford to make that investment and the Maoists are too busy fighting to help with farming. As a result, productivity is dwindling and adding to the plight of middle and lower-income farmers.

A large number of landowners in western Nepal have abandoned their property and this trend has accelerated after the Maoists descended to the tarai during the post-Dasai harvest season. Many farmers have migrated to India, or to the cities. In the fertile Rajapur region which is an island between two branches of the Karnali, many farmers have simply stopped planting because of Maoist extortion and threats.

Sita Devi Upadhyay, a 51-year-old widow, lost all her land to the Maoists when she could not meet their donation demand. She took a loan of Rs 30,000 to pay them off, but the Maoists wanted more. Now they have taken over her land. Her neighbour, Shankar Tharu, was forced to hand over all his harvest and since he had nothing left to feed his family, he left for India.

Further west in Kailali, the Maoists have confiscated more than 200 hectares of land mostly

One of the remaining families in Rajapur winnowing grain.

owned by local political activists and are farming it commune-style. This trend is spreading east. In Sindhupalchok, a Maoist flag flutters on a tree in the property of UML leader Amrit Bohara. "First we were targets of the panchayat government and now we are under attack from the Maoists," Bohara told us in Kathmandu.

In Panchthar, Maoists looted the granary of RPP leader Padma Sunder Lawoti and, after harassing his 80-year-old mother, they looted his house and took away his horses. In Dhankuta, the ancestral home of Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa, his land and property have been seized. In Morang, the Maoists harvested the entire rice crop of Nepali Congress leader Amod Upadhyay and took it away. In Bhojpur they forced local UML leader Hemraj Rai to hand over one-third of his harvest, but later apologised and returned the grain.

Maoists have not only targeted rich landowners but also poorer farmers who they suspect of being informants, or those who refused to cooperate with them. All this goes against the revolutionary agricultural plan of the Maoist United Revolutionary Peoples' Council that pledges not to confiscate land from farmers and lays out a land-to-the-tiller policy. So far, most farmers targeted by Maoists own less than 10 bigha.

The Maoists justify their action, saying it is against zamindars and capitalists. But it is the middle-income farmers who have suffered the most—the same hardworking Nepali farmers who long ago gave up expecting anything from the government and had built and cultivated their own farms. ♦

With reports by Jhalak Gaire in Nepalganj and Rajendra Nath in Nepalganj

Prachanda feeler?

Maoist supremo Prachanda's fiery statement Thursday in which he lashed out at the army, government and Washington, had an overtone to the political parties. He asked them not to dismiss his movement's commitment to multiparty democracy. But, Prachanda added that a multiparty system would only work after "feudal dictatorship

and military fascism" was rooted out from the country. He accused the Royal Nepali Army of acting under instructions from the United States to set up a unified command, which he said was trying to establish military control in South Asia and encircle China. Another Maoist leader, Ram Bahadur Thapa (Badal), in an interview this week with the party paper *Janadesh* said that his group was trying to coordinate with the anti-king agitation of the political parties.



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PARTY POOPERS

Things are finally moving on Nepal-India cooperation. Whatever created the logjam, it seems to have been removed. Several hydropower projects are moving ahead simultaneously: Budi Gandaki, Upper Karnali and even the on-again-off-again private sector joint venture West Seti. The last is such good news in India that the *Economic Times* newspaper gave an exultant headline to the story this week: 'Nepal to light up North India'.

In other fronts, the Birganj dry port agreement was finalised amidst cheers from the business community here. Nepali banaspati *ghiu* exporters are happy that they can start selling again in India. Even the Nepal-Bhutan bilateral agreement on repatriation of refugees, however flawed, appears to have unjammed. This week, after more than a decade, India announced it is resuming bilateral cash grants to local bodies with a first package worth Rs 500 million.

For the intrigue-minded in Kathmandu, all this is too good to be true. Where is the catch, they ask. Is all this tied up somehow with domestic political developments?

To be sure, Indian aid to local bodies comes at a time when elected VDC and DDC councils don't even exist. Positions are being filled by nominees who are handed their appointment papers at the Local Development Ministry at Sri Mahal. At a radio talk program this week (*translated on page 12*) some of the new nominees argue that their responsibility is towards the people and the people can't wait for the politics in Kathmandu to sort itself out. They have a point.

The debate really should be over how to quickly deliver development in a time of crisis, not a theoretical debate over the process of democracy. That is the current conundrum: how long do we wait for things to get worse before we start working to make them better?

The Maoists dismantled democracy at the grassroots over the past eight years by systematically killing off, or hounding out, elected local officials and blowing up most VDC buildings. At the national level, a parliament, an elected prime minister and other institutions of democracy have been extirpated one by one by the royal right. Just go through this checklist: Parliament is dissolved, the Auditor General's office hasn't made a report in two years, the Election Commission is commissionerless (the prime minister has clarified that some names are still in his pocket) and, although the Attorney General has his hands full, it is not clear who he is accountable to these days.

In fact, the only institution that is extraordinarily active is the CIAA, leading to speculation about who it choses to prosecute. One does not have to be a conspiracist to see that it really does look like shadowy forces are dismantling the superstructure of democracy.

The only entities that could start rebuilding democracy, the political parties, have shown themselves to be out of their depth. Their fragile alliance seems to fall apart every time a prime ministership is dangled in front of them. The Nepali Congress and the UML are still waiting for that phone call from the palace. Sher Bahadur Deuba and Girija Prasad Koirala hate each other so much that it is certain they will take each other down without anyone else's help.

Collectively, the parties are trapped between the right and left. Their anti-regression logic is now tired, and they know that the people know it is a hollow slogan. They don't want to intensify the agitation for fear the Maoists will infiltrate it. In the end, as is the norm in Nepal, the losers are the people from whose grasp sovereignty granted by the 1990 Constitution has now been all but taken away. They have lost their voice, and have nowhere to turn now to ask the questions that they want to about whether international agreements involving national resources will ultimately benefit them. Through all this, the king is keeping an enigmatic silence.



After repeatedly asserting that the country was not being militarised, the prime minister has suddenly changed his line and accused his predecessors of starting the process. There is no smoke without fire and Girija Prasad Koirala is indeed guilty of allowing the military to meddle in civic affairs by inviting it to begin pilot development projects in districts with security problems. However, that was an anomaly in a democratic system.

But with royal-appointed governments in Singha Darbar, the army has begun to call the shots. Thapa can say that he is in charge, but everyone

STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



Halt the alms race

...before militancy and militarism devour the country from within.

A discrepancy between word and deed is one of the defining features of authoritarian regimes. Pronouncements usually hide real intentions of the authority. A contradiction between a government's policies and their implementation over a prolonged period hollows out a regime from within. And when such regimes finally fall, their collapse is so sudden that it takes even its opponents by surprise.

knows who his real bosses are. There are just too many signs of creeping militarisation.

A study of the militarisation of politics and society in Southeast Asia has shown that there are parallels across Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines.

In addition to unnecessary violence, militarisation results in:

- Repression and human rights violations
- Loss of resources
- Underdevelopment
- Dependency

Instances of repression and human rights violations are on the rise, there is constricted freedom of expression and there is a curtailment in the freedom of movement and association. When armed men in uniform suffer from road rage on Ring Road and shoot taxi drivers dead, we know there is a problem.

For some years now, we have seen development resources being diverted to defence. Soldiers who flaunt shiny Belgian guns may not realise it, but money to buy those weapons will probably mean their own children will suffer from the reduction of public investment in education and healthcare.

Underdevelopment is difficult to detect at the initial stage, but the fact that the economic growth has contracted for the first time in several years is a clear indication that the economy is in a tailspin. A war economy propels growth only in those countries that manufacture military hardware, it benefits only arms merchants. For the rest, it takes money away from investment in sectors like public infrastructure and social welfare. Nepal and Pakistan are the only two non-sub-Saharan countries on UNDP's list of lowest human development index.

Militarisation leads to dependency as the armed forces rely on foreign donors. Alms of arms have deadlier strings attached than development aid.

The militarisation of Nepali polity is proceeding at a pace that hasn't been seen since the days of the Ranas who

were stooges of the British and helped out militarily whenever the empire found itself in a bit of a tight corner. Where will the process of militancy and militarisation lead us this time?

The process of militarisation usually means that authoritarian regimes are more loyal to the forces that prop it up than to the people of the country. Which doesn't augur well for the future of democracy in the country. It seems that the promises of the current crop of ministers notwithstanding, the likelihood of elections being held anytime soon are remote. The mainstream political parties have concluded that the present regime has no intention of restoring democracy in the country.

Perhaps that explains the contradictions in Surya Bahadur Thapa's public pronouncements. As his flip-flop on the delay in the appointments of constitutional bodies show, the prime minister is a loyal courtier who takes flak when things go awry. The identity of invisible decision-makers remain hidden.

In the developing world, authoritarian regimes often take up the reigns of government on the pretext of restoring order, justifying it by saying that elected leaders made a mess of things. But as Pakistani human rights advocate Clement John observes, the breakdown of democratic governance in Asian countries isn't due to the corruption of politicians alone, "It is because most Asian societies are faced with complex problems relating to race, culture, religion, nationalism, ethnic parochialism and last, but not least, their class base. In such circumstances, it is difficult to obtain a political consensus on such complex issues."

The antidote to this creeping militarisation is aggressive politicisation. Messers Koirala and Nepal have their work cut out for them in the days to come—political mobilisation and grassroots activism to fight the ogres of militancy and militarism that are devouring the country from within. ♦

LETTERS

MAYOR
Kathmandu's mayor Keshab Sthapit comes across as a bold and visionary dreamer in your profile of him ('My city', #169). But he should also pay attention to saving the Valley's open spaces and its agricultural land. His new urban plan should incorporate the basis of the Valley's heritage and civilisation. New settlements should use minimum prime farming land by going highrise. Kathmandu



needs proper management and relocation of its settlements, especially those which came after 1985. Kathmandu can be a modern cosmopolitan city, as the mayor says, but we shouldn't make that happen at the expense of our past glory.

Basanta Kumar Gautam, Kasugai, Japan

- There is no doubt that Kathmandu has lost its charm due to unplanned urbanisation, population growth, overcrowding, traffic, dust, pollution. Mayor Sthapit seems confident he can bring the city back to its past pristine glory. This is not possible without the help and the full co-operation from the government. I believe it is the duty of all residents of Kathmandu to lend him a helping hand in achieving the goal. I hope the promises he has made in your article will not be like the empty rhetoric of today's politicians.

Dr Eli Pradhan, KMC

Here we go again with CK Lal ('Our praetorian guards', #168). Were the NEA and NTC, those models of efficiency, not charging exorbitant fees way before the insurgency? The cost per kwh was certainly a major issue behind the derailment of Arun III, if I recall the debates correctly. Also, one would be hard-pressed to find a nation that has not been united or created by force. The Greeks, Romans, Aztecs, Zulus, European nations, South American nations and so on have been united by force. It is an undeniable and flawed element of human nature and utopians tend to conveniently ignore this. Paul Johnson, an American historian, asks (I partially paraphrase) "...can a nation, born in sin and war, rise above the injustices of its origins, and by its moral purpose and performance, atone from them?"

In Nepal, we need to right past wrongs but this doesn't have to occur through an insurgency that

unleashes even more pain and misery and drains our meagre resources even further. Working within a system can also bring change and opportunity—with far less misery. Finally, one needs to have a nation like Rome before reaching for a comparison with its Praetorian Guard. We are talking about a country that never even approached a millionth of the glory of Rome. When has the RNA ever made or broken emperors, kings or prime ministers? They can barely hold their own. Earth to CK Lal: please return from Planet Hyperbole to writing great articles again.

P Rana, email

NRN
Glad to see that NRNs are lining up to invest in Nepal. As an overseas Nepali myself, I wonder why they want to invest in Nepal at such a troubled period. It is evident that

if there is anything that will uplift Nepal in the next few years, it must be a reversal of its politics. All economic laws warn against investing in Nepal at the present time since there will be no return on investment because of the prevalent negative growth. But if investments are to be made, it must be on the poor. That alone will guarantee some returns.

Pradeep Thapa, Baltimore, USA

WATRIN
Your praise of Fr Eugene Watrin ('In the name of the Father', #169) was much-deserved. It is the likes of Fr Watrin and his contemporaries who came as youthful Jesuits to serve in Nepal who have been role-models for many of us. We must learn from their dedication and work ethics. Your article failed to mention the 'Fr Eugene L Watrin Scholarship Endowment Fund', which was established in 2003, and is dedicated to

improving educational opportunities for young Nepalis. The fund provides scholarships, both merit and needs-based, to school-going children. It has earmarked support for children affected by conflict. There are already 200 students who are being helped.

Shanta Dixit, Patan Dhoka

ARIAS
I very much appreciated your eloquent and on-the-mark editorial ('Boy on a swing', #169) invoking Oscar Arias and Esquipulas as a possible example for restoring peace in Nepal. Having been active in solidarity with the Central American revolutions of the 1980s and opposition to the Reagan and Bush administrations, it warmed my heart to see that historic moment resurrected and applied to the present juncture in Nepal.

P Constantini, Seattle



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KUNDA DIXIT

shakeout as the fly-by-nights go bankrupt, and only the professionally-run and efficiently managed airlines survive. At one point the number of operating license holders had reached a staggering 44. Nepal's domestic aviation history (and the apron at Kathmandu airport) is littered with the rusting hulks of airlines that didn't quite make it: Mountain Air, Lumbini, Flight Care, Nepal Airways, Everest Air.

Airline owners blame faulty taxation and inconsistent civil aviation policy for their plight. They complain that they have no more tax holidays nor can they import spare parts at reasonable custom duties like they did in the past. "Initially, the policies were right and helped us grow, but they changed policies midstream and that has threatened our existence," Rana explains.

The other factor is the downtrend in tourism since 1999 and especially post 9/11 when airline insurance premiums went up. In fact, the airlines that have survived are the ones who don't solely depend on tourist traffic and derive a proportion of their income from operating trunk routes.

Officials with Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) charge private airlines with mishandling their companies. They say if policies were wrong, all airlines should have been equally badly affected. Even some private operators agree with that. "It all depends on whether you want to get rich quick, or you want to build an institution," says Buddha's Basnet. "Those who run airlines professionally have been able to sustain themselves."

To be sure, government policies have been haphazard and ad-hoc. The mandatory requirement for airlines to ensure that 40 percent of their flights are to non-tourist destinations and remote areas is not enforced anymore. When asked, a senior CAAN official passed the buck to the ministry saying they aren't allowed to exercise autonomy on policy-decisions.

Some investors are now flexing their wings to fly international routes. After keeping application in deep freeze, CAAN has finally selected Air Shangri-La and Cosmic Air for international licenses. Air Shangri-La has permission to fly as far as Munich via Sharjah and other destinations, provided at least one of its two aircraft is widebody. Cosmic has asked for regional destinations, mainly in India and is required to operate at least one jet. Both have one year to start operations, or else they will go the way of previous ill-fated attempts to start private international airlines. ♦

⇒ from p1

The unexpected turnaround in tourist traffic also caught domestic airlines unawares, although they aren't complaining about it. Domestic airlines make most of their profit from dollar-denominated tourist rates on flights. A tourist on a Pokhara-Jomsom flight, for instance pays nearly four times more than a Nepali. Another money spinner is the Mt Everest sightseeing flight which costs \$100.

On a single day last week, there were 25 flights to Lukla, Pokhara saw a record 107 flight movements on a single day in mid-October during a Maoist bandh, and Kathmandu airport has been regularly servicing over 250 takeoffs and landings a day, most of them planes on domestic routes. "The airport is as busy as it was during the Visit Nepal Year in 1998," one airport official told us.

Even state-owned Royal Nepal Airlines

is responding to the demand. With seven Twin Otters, it has the largest fleet among domestic airlines but till last month only two of them were airworthy. "We made it a priority to get them flying again, and now we have five in the air," says Captain Vijay Lama, head of domestic operations.

Despite the surge in traffic, domestic operators have been cautious about expansion. If Necon starts flying both its ATRs, for instance, a lot of the pressure on other carriers could immediately ease. But that doesn't look likely.

Fish Tail's Bikash Rana, for one, has decided that this is the right time to expand. He has sold off his Ecuriel helicopters to plan an ambitious foray in domestic routes with used Fokker F-50s. "There is a demand for domestic air seats which are not being met, we will fill it," he told us.

After its initial phenomenal growth following deregulation in the early 1990s, the domestic airline industry has seen a



HAPPIER TIMES: Pokhara airport apron last year with two airlines that are not flying anymore: Mountain Air and Necon (*above*) and Kathmandu's domestic airport crowded with flights waiting for the fog to lift.

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



Full circle

Doomed to repeat all our old mistakes.



Fallen soldier in France, World War I.

This past week was one of remembrance of things past. On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in the year 1918, a horrible war came to an end—the first war fought with modern technology but still using human cannon fodder on a grand scale. Many, many millions died in the conflict known as World War I, most of them from Russia and the territories that would form the Soviet Union. So horrified were the survivors that 11 November has henceforth been recognised in many countries as a day to recall the cost of war; not just by honouring fallen soldiers, nurses, workers and civilians but by renouncing violence as a way to resolve conflicts.

Of course, being human means lessons are rarely learnt from history. We repeat our mistakes, and often modernise them. The carnage and tragedy of Europe's first horrible war of the 20th century was soon surpassed by the genocide and cynicism of the second. Not just on the German side either, although few would argue that the Nazis were not evil incarnate. World War II saw the British, American and other Allied powers engaged in the deliberate targeting of civilians as a tactic to discourage German war planners from their own bombing campaigns. Overshadowing even the battlefield and urban bombfield casualties of that war, though, were the victims of Nazi hatred—Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, Poles and other groups that somehow offended Hitler.

Europe's second descent into barbarism of the last century ended in victory for the anti-Nazi forces and a great outpouring of collectivist human behaviour on a scale the world hasn't seen since. American largesse rebuilt the bomb shattered lives of Europeans, sparing no expense and pouring resources into defeated Germany, every bit as much as victorious England. And the British soldiers, who survived and came home heroes, threw their efforts into rebuilding their country politically. They voted for a socialist

political party, Labour, that promised and delivered on some of the most sweeping economic reforms outside of Bolshevik Russia. Universal health care, unemployment insurance and protection for the weakest in society, these were seen as the hallmarks of the new, post war civilisation.

In effect, the war dead were being honoured by attempts to forge a consensus against poverty and ignorance, to move away from corporate and elite exploitation of the poor. Yet the platitudes of brotherhood and

cooperation that kept the anti-Nazi alliance together collapsed as military technology proceeded apace, delivering the worst weapons of all time—atomic bombs—to both America and Russia. Anti-communist paranoia took hold of the United States, not entirely without good reason, as Soviet expansionism clapped shackles around Eastern Europe. China too, for its own reasons, followed a Communist path.

The Korean War entrenched fear, anger and cynical exploitative political behavior in Western countries. Senator Joseph McCarthy began his infamous witchhunt in the United States and President Eisenhower's infamous 'military industrial complex' easily bested the forces of peace and reason that once seemed ascendant. A new decade, the 1960s, saw America enter a new, and later disastrous, war in Southeast Asia. A prosperous country sent its young into battle despite the misgivings of its friends and allies around the world. The US still bears the scars of its intervention in Vietnam, and as for the people of that region, one statistic will suffice to paint the picture. More bombs were dropped by US bombers on the sparsely populated backwater of Laos than on all of Europe by all of the aircraft that flew in World War II. To this day, the Laotian countryside is still the most dangerous minefield on the planet.

Now, in the week of Remembrance 2003, a new millennium, the aftermath of an unprecedented economic boom in most Western economies, technology once again resurgent and liberating, literacy, healthcare and other development indicators largely improving, where do we stand? Why, we're once again at war, often it seems against chimerical enemies who barely exist, but make no mistake, it's war. War for war's sake, perpetual war, war, war, war. A grim week of remembrance then, of the stark fact that we seemed doomed to repeat our mistakes. Again and again and again. ♦

Mixing Maoism and tourism

ALL PICS WANDA VIVEQUIN



WANDA VIVEQUIN in HELAMBU

From talking to independent trekkers here in these scenic mountains north of Kathmandu, it seems people holidaying in Nepal are treating travel warnings with a grain of salt.

"I don't want to sound irresponsible, but I have to say that nowadays there are so few adventurous tourist destinations left that are not on some sort of hit list," one Dutch tourist in Sermathang told us. She added, "It's been a couple of years since the travel warnings were upped for Nepal, but the fact remains that not a single tourist has been harmed as a result of the conflict."

In the villages above the Melamchi river, a scant one-day walk from Kathmandu, we wander through villages sporting Maoist flags fluttering from treetops. Anti-American graffiti denouncing the 'Royal American Army' adorn the walls of school building, and look like they are from another era, and another war. Other slogans: 'People's liberation is not terrorism', 'American Imperial Army Hands off Nepal'. The Maoists here seem to have run out of red paint, because the writings are all in fresh blue paint, the colour of peace.

Most trekkers we ran into in Helambu were prepared, rupees handy

and sometimes even eager for an encounter, perhaps to provide them with added adventure for the slide show back home. "I am sure those were Maoists we saw on the trail today, did you see them?" one woman asked me at night in the lodge. They were actually the family of a sick young girl being carried down in a *doko*. But because they did not call out the customary 'namaste', were assumed to be Maoists. "I mean, what does a Maoist look like anyway?" another trekker asked me. She might have been surprised to know that sitting in the kitchen of the lodge that evening were three local Maoists.

In Gol Bhanjyang, locals said the local Maoist cadre leader had "enough money for now" and we would not have to part with any rupees. Two days later as we headed back to Kathmandu we awoke to a stream of army personnel sweating their way up the valley. Their undercover operatives had been sent through the area a couple of days earlier to gather intelligence on Maoist activity. What we were witnessing was a mopping-up operation. We walked one way, and the army went further up the valley. "All the Maoists disappeared now," the lodge owner said with a flick of his hand.

Up on the Annapurna trail, there

were similar stories last month. Trekkers on the trail were carrying souvenirs of Maoist receipts for 'donations'. "We had a fantastic time," two trekkers in Pokhara chirped enthusiastically. "You want to see our receipt?" They had been stopped in a lodge at Ghorepani, where one evening in mid-October, a couple of pleasant young chaps had come in asking for a donation.

"They were polite enough to let us finish our dinners first and when we explained we were volunteers in Nepal. They said we should meet them later in another room downstairs," one of the trekkers said. They were given a 'special discount' rate, but still tried to explain to the young Maoists that they were not happy about the forced donation and that they should consider reclassifying the request. "Calling it a 'fee' would be better," they said.

The following day, after a hefty, hot climb to Damphus from Phedi, our own group were happily enjoying refreshments when another Canadian friend and her trekking group appeared. They had just spent two days walking the trail from Landruk through Tolka and Pothana where a large number of Maoists amassed in one of the villages.

"It was a schoolyard full of young Maoists being called out by name to

come forward...comrade so and so, comrade so and so," she said. "They were all very young and this might explain why further up the valley I really noticed the absence of teenagers coming home at the end of the school day."

The following day, during the only day of action in the area so far, moving through the forest towards Damphus, the trekkers heard gunfire as the army began flushing out Maoists in the nearby jungles. Since then, this particular phase of activities in the Annapurna seems to be over, and the area has been quiet. The army presence is not so pronounced and Maoist extortion has tapered off.

My trekking clients often ask what they can do for Nepal when they get home to New Zealand. I simply ask that they put the situation into some sort of context that moves beyond the sensational headlines that have scared people off for the last few years. If tourism numbers this year are any indication, this seems to be working. ♦

Wanda Vivequin is a Canada-based trekking group leader.

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Maoists in Manaslu

JOEL SCHONE ON THE MANASLU TRAIL

A Sherpa who had worked on a trek with me had come to my hotel for his salary, and unwisely, I had paid him in view of the hotel staff.

After he had gone, one of them had approached me; "Why do you give this man money? He is a dirty peasant. I am educated, give me some money also..." It is hard to explain to someone when logic goes that way.

I tried to explain to the hotel staff that the Sherpa worked hard to make a living, but it was clear he simply saw me giving away what to him was a vast sum of money.

That was 15 years ago. In October, our trekking group was held up by Maoists in the stunningly beautiful Manaslu trekking circuit. The rebels told us we would not be allowed to proceed unless we paid a 'war tax' of \$100. In conversation, the young man was forthright, telling us the money was being used to equip his comrades for their struggle. Around us villagers were in the middle of their own struggle: harvesting millet and down the hill we could see children in the school playground, their struggle for education about to begin for the day. Like most Nepali children, they got up early to finish their tasks on the farm before walking uphill to school.

It was obvious that none of the money we were forced to donate would go to local education, agriculture or health care. It was obvious that, unlike what Mao Zedong taught, they were not interested in the people of this mountain village above the Budi Gandaki. This man sat in his office, well fed, healthy, waiting for the next group of trekkers to take money from. We paid, of course. We had come from around the world to see Nepal mountain peoples and \$100 was not a lot of money.

While all this was going on, our Sherpa crew sweated up the hill, unloaded and started to prepare lunch. Two seven-year-olds on their way home stopped and watch their countrymen work while I try to reason with the comrade who wants our money. The children walk past just as I am handing over the wad of \$100 notes. They see a foreigner give another of their countrymen—the city man who sits at the entrance of the village and does nothing—a fortune in rupees.

After 20 years of wandering across the Nepal Himalaya, I am convinced that the Manaslu region is the most beautiful trek in the country. You look at the yellow signs painted on the rocks as you enter the villages: they tell you how much it costs to pave the streets and put in the clean communal toilets. Sometimes up to \$1,000 per village. Each sign says how much the local Mothers' Group contributed, occasionally up to 70 percent.

The people of Nepal do not want charity, they do not want handouts. Like anyone, they want to lead a dignified, meaningful life in their villages. To work, to follow the cycle of the seasons and their various faiths. The Maoists are behaving in the same way as the hotel clerk did with me in Kathmandu 20 years ago. They are setting the wrong example by robbing tourists in full view of the future of Nepal, its children. This is incredible shortsightedness if they are truly interested in their country's biggest asset: its people.

Joel Schone has been trekking in the Himalaya for the last 20 years.

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Sold

The Snowy Mountain Energy Corporation (SMEC) has signed a draft power purchase agreement with India's Power Trading Corporation (PTC) to sell power from the West Seti hydel project to north Indian states, according to Indian media reports. The Australian company will now get a generation license to begin construction of the 750MW storage type hydro-project. One of the most lucrative hydel schemes in the country, West Seti has been designed with the sole purpose of exporting power to India. According to the agreement, West Seti will provide eight hours of peaking power to north Indian states at the rate of IRs 2.60 per unit. It took SMEC years to reach an agreement with India's PTC. The Indian government has also begun negotiations on the construction of the Upper Karnali hydropower project in west Nepal. NEA officials believe it is almost a done deal and that the Indians might start work by the end of this year.

Documentary fest in Pokhara

POKHARA - Travelling Film South Asia 2004 kicked off in Pokhara this week with full house back-to-back screenings of the top films from this year's documentary festival. This is the first time that a documentary festival has been held in Pokhara, and the organisers Himal Association were surprised by the turnout. "It was amazing, the two halls were sold out for every film and we had to screen some of the Nepali films twice," said Basanta Thapa of Himal Association.

The event was co-organised in Pokhara by Ex-Gandaki Boarding School Alumni Association (EGBOSA). Fourteen films from Travelling Film South Asia, which will be screened internationally from January, were shown along with other documentaries of interest to Nepalis. The festival ended with the screening of Tony Hagen's *Uhileko*

Nepal with archival footage of Pokhara 40 years ago. The enthralled audience broke into applause twice during the screening. The last two screenings of *Bhedako oon jasto* and *Uhileko Nepal* drew 1,000 viewers in the 600 capacity hall.

Up in arms

Amnesty International (AI) has expressed concern over the government's plan to introduce Rural Volunteer Security Groups and Peace Committees, announced on 4 November, which would arm local volunteers to resist Maoist violence. "The creation of such groups could also have a negative effect on reconciliation efforts when the two sides lay down their arms and peace negotiations resume, since they have the effect of setting neighbours and communities against each other," Amnesty International said.

Sky runners

The first Everest Sky Race 2003, to mark this year's golden jubilee of the first ascent, began on 10 November. Forty-five mountain runners from around the world are competing in 10 gruelling stages that span 11 days. Organisers Base Camp Trekking & Expeditions are sponsoring seven Nepali runners including two women. The race begins and ends in Lukla and extends 280km with a climb of up to 5,540m at Kala Pathar. Runners will cross three major passes all above 5000m: Kongma-La, Cho-La and Renjo-La. Runners carry their own backpacks and plot their own trail using a map. On 11 November, after Stage 2, 18km from Monjo to Namche, Nepal's Sumba Sherpa was in first place with Frenchman Pascal Beaury second. The runners took a break on 12 November at Namche to acclimatise and for medical check-ups. Friday, Stage 4, runners left Pangboche at 9AM to hit the snow-laden trail.

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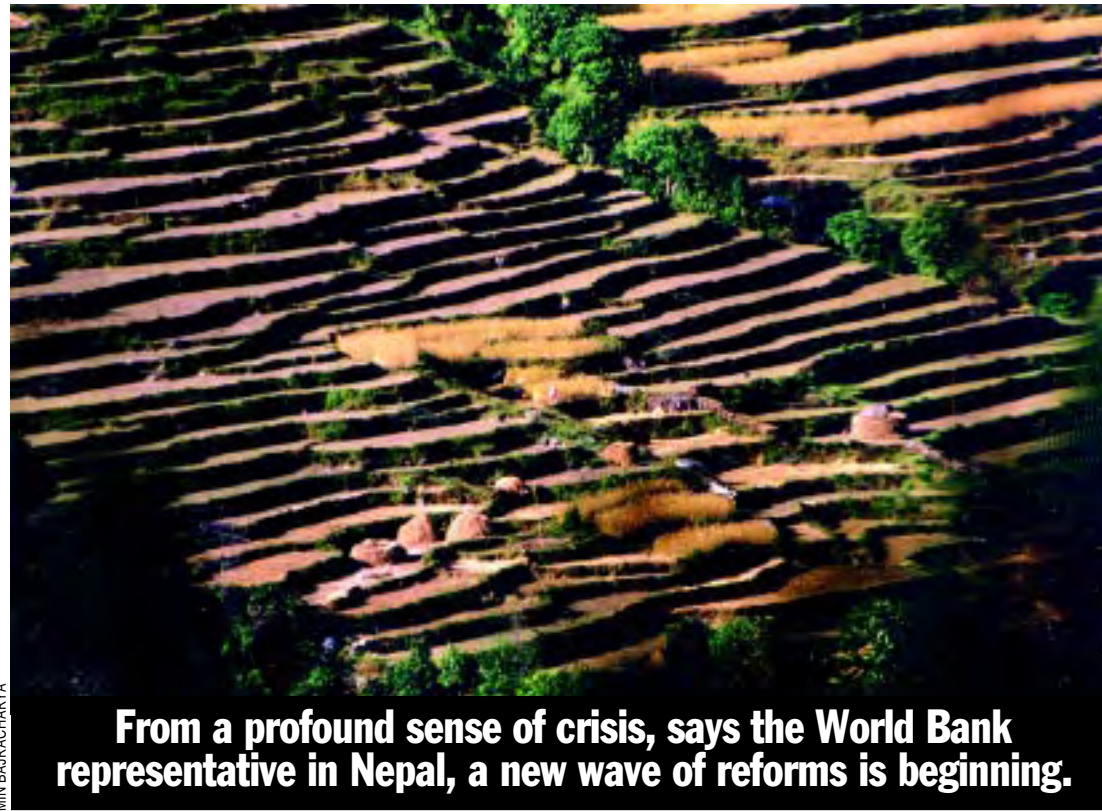
The third war in Nepal

We are all aware that there are at least two wars being fought in Nepal: one pits the Maoist rebels against the government, the second is between the main political parties and the king.

In fact, Nepal is fighting a third war: a war against poor governance, exclusionary and feudal social structures, and ultimately poverty itself. It is being fought mostly by less-than-fearsome-looking technocratic reform leaders and an enlightened breed of politicians who have transcended the day-to-day business of politics. On the flanks are change advocates all across civil society.

Some of the local level political leaders have been the important 'field commanders' of reforms. Unlike in the other two wars, no bullets are being fired and no mass demonstrations have been held. Yet, the consequence of defeat is no less serious than in the other two wars. Together, they could lead to nothing short of a failed state.

Despite the many positive changes that Nepal has seen since the advent of multi-party democracy in 1990 and the first wave of economic liberalisation measures in the early-1990s, stark and worsening inequities persist, not only in terms of incomes, but also of



MINBAIRACHARYA

the fundamental ability of the Nepali citizen to participate in social and political decision-making processes. The Maoist insurgency is a particularly acute expression of the disillusionment over these adverse developments. After the Maoists escalated violence in November 2001, the economy went into a

tailspin and the government's fiscal position weakened sharply. When this crisis did not seem to prompt the political leadership into serious corrective action, the frustration of many turned into utter alarm that the nation was heading for catastrophe.

It is from this profound sense of crisis that a new wave of reforms was

born. The deepening political turmoil contributed to this crisis, but it also produced the space and creative stress for technocrats to begin implementing some important reforms. Nepal's reform leaders already knew that unless decent public services begin to reach the poor masses quickly and their trust in the state is restored, Nepal would not have the foundation for either sustainable peace or meaningful economic development. Now was the time to run with the reforms. Serious reform efforts have thus emerged in a range of areas:

Public expenditure management: Nepal's budget system had been plagued by waste, corruption and political interference. In 2002-03, Nepal introduced a 'medium-term expenditure framework.' Simply put, the Government is trying to impose a realistic spending ceiling on itself, prioritise spending through a transparent evaluation process and hold line ministries accountable for effective implementation of the agreed work plan. Nepal's expenditure reform efforts are beginning to draw attention internationally as a little-known success story.

Public service delivery: For the last 30 years, Nepal's centrally-managed primary education system has performed poorly. Last year, Nepal started the process of handing

over primary schools to community management. Other countries (eg, Guatemala and El Salvador) have done something similar, but what Nepal has done is breathtaking in its scope. The government has told all communities that they have the option of taking over the management of public schools, and in 2003-04, it expects 1,000 communities to sign on (out of about 20,000 public primary schools). In health, 460 sub-health posts (out of about 4,000) have already been handed over to community management.

Fighting corruption: People had come to see corruption as the norm in politics and public administration in Nepal. Even when the legal power of the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) was strengthened in 2002, many expected little change. Since its creation under the 1990 Constitution, it had won but one conviction. During the last fiscal year, however, the CIAA won over 40 convictions, and has changed the basic equation for the corrupt. To be sure, most of the cases involving 'big fish' are still pending, but they are in considerable fear now.

Financial sector reform: The two largest and ailing commercial banks had accumulated estimated losses of about \$450 million, nearly 8 percent of GDP. No doubt, much of these losses arose because the politically well-connected elite have abused these two banks. The reformers became convinced that left alone, the banks would eventually bring down the whole financial system, and wreck the economy and government finances. The reform is already showing some encouraging results in stemming financial haemorrhaging and improving loan recovery. The Deputy Governor of the central bank of Bangladesh came to Nepal recently to learn how Nepal has done what his country has not been able to do.

Greater role of the private sector: Like many developing countries, Nepal's public sector tended to be involved in too many things. This has been changing rapidly. For instance, to expand telephone services in the rural areas, the government has just selected a private operator to cover 538 VDCs in the Eastern Region. Such a venture is not viable on a strictly

commercial basis, but instead of relying on the public monopoly, the government has opted to harness private sector efficiency by offering a one-time, capital subsidy to attract a competitive private bidder for this service.

These are only part of a much longer catalogue of reforms underway. To be fair, the impact of many of these reforms have not been felt widely yet at the grassroots levels. Only when many of the poor come to see the change first hand and regain confidence in their own government, will there be a foundation for sustained peace and development.

Impressive and sustained reform efforts in many other countries have emerged often after catastrophic events. Only such events seem capable of breaking down the entrenched social and political norms, and opening up space for a new vision and leadership. But, what a costly way to do what is clearly right for the nation. Nepal's reformers refused to accept this historical 'rule' and started a bold attempt to avert catastrophe in the first place. While the original impetus for change came more from technocratic leaders, many more in the political leadership now appear to be taking notice. A far deeper appreciation of the centrality of reforms to peace building is beginning to emerge.

Take for example either the change agenda forwarded by HMG at the last round of peace talks with the Maoists, or the 18-point program of the agitating five party coalition. Polemics aside, the bulk of either composition is about social and economic reforms.

Nepal's donors can only hope that Nepal's themselves will find the courage to set aside political differences in the pursuit of peace through their first two wars. Accustomed to inaction and corruption, donors have been somewhat cautious in the past to acknowledge the progress made in reforms. Now, however, many donors appear willing to give Nepali reform leaders the benefit of the doubt and provide stronger support to their efforts at winning Nepal's third war. As Nicholas Stern, the World Bank's chief economist till recently, said: this is indeed a "special moment" for Nepal. ♦

Ken Ohashi is the World Bank Country Director for Nepal.

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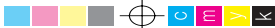
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BIZ NEWS

Top 30

Nepal has figured prominently in the Lonely Planet's list of 30 of the world's top tourism hotspots. The list, which appeared in various leading newspapers around the world, included Machapuchre described "as perfect as the Matterhorn, only bigger" and the legendary Kathmandu Guest House in Thamel. So, Nepal still has what it takes.

NEW PRODUCTS



HEAVY WEIGHTS The global logistics giant FedEx began the FedEx 10kg and FedEx 25kg Box service in Nepal through their local agents Everest De Cargo. Designed to do away with strings, scissors and accompanying headaches, these boxes can be assembled and shipped in seconds. Even better, with one flat price for each zone, expressing international box shipments are easy and affordable.

OBJECTS OF DESIRE Gadgets and gizmos galore for the 21st century home, all conveniently found under the same roof at Jumbo Electronic's new showroom on the first floor of Hotel Classic in New Road. Brand names jostle for attention in home appliances, entertainment systems and state-of-the-art communication media in what the company says is the biggest showroom of its kind in the kingdom.



RELAUNCHED Iceberg, the old staple from Himalayan Breweries was revamped and relaunched recently. The strong beer is all set to hold its own against other competitors, branding itself as "Freedom with Iceberg" and aligning itself to youth and the great outdoors.

DIAL IN STYLE The new P900 from Sony Ericsson blurs the definition of a mobile phone with an inbuilt video recorder. It's smaller, faster, simpler and more flexible than ever before. Based on the open symbian platform, it is a high quality phone providing full PDA/ organiser functions as well as a good gaming experience. It is also possible to view and edit word and Excel files, and present Power point presentations, which can easily be saved on a Memory Stick Duo and transferred to a PC. The fabulous P900 is available at Ocean Computer in New Road.



STRICTLY BUSINESS

On surveying the present Nepali business landscape, a generational difference becomes clear.

In the younger set, leaving instances of youthful arrogance aside, good news is aplenty. There now exist a number of private-sector management colleges in and out of Kathmandu, enrolling more men and women than ever in various BBA, MBA and Executive MBA programs. Two monthlies, The New Business Age and The Boss, have firmly established themselves in the market, complementing each other's business-related coverage. Profiles, even puff pieces, of young entrepreneurs who have, on their own, started successful shopping malls in Pokhara, coffee houses in Thamel or event management companies regularly hit the business page of newspapers.

On meeting, talking and working with a slice of this urban younger section, you sense energy, optimism, an eagerness to learn more and a can-do attitude. When you ask them who their role models in business are, you hear them citing the names of Indian or American businesspeople, but rarely do they make mention of any older non-family-member Nepali businessmen.

That, however, should not come as a surprise.

With a few remarkable exceptions, most elderly Nepali businessmen who get written up

Old and new

Reasons why Nepali business' old guard fail to impress our young turks.

by ASHUTOSH TIWARI



about in the press for being, well, captains of Nepali private-sector, inspire neither respect nor confidence—as far as younger businesspeople are concerned. There are, for instance, well-known traders, who, upon being blacklisted by banks, rush to rally others of their ilk for collective protection. Then there are those who have long been notorious for never paying their ad agencies, suppliers and, in some cases, even employees for long periods.

There are many who still run their conglomerates in a traditionally closed, command-and-control "munshi-ji" style, forcing any employee with brains to quit within six months of starting. Others seem to spend so much time at politically-charged organisations like the FNCCI that you wonder—unless they operate on extremely high levels of energy (which is doubtful)—how they ever find time to work as CEOs of various companies that are exhaustively listed on their business cards. Still, the worst are those who, upon given a microphone anywhere anytime, see themselves as quasi-Planning Commission members, and start talking about national policies, when all that they can honestly do is talk about their own businesses. As Narayan Manandhar, an economist who studies industrial relations, puts it, "If you really want to appreciate the working style of even an HMG office, try working for one of these captains of private-sector industries first."

To be sure, most of these elder businessmen have evolved to this present avatar for a reason. Historically, many of them started as traders who could milk the advantages of arbitrage opportunities

that arose in trading routes between the Indian planis and Tibet. Few of them started out running competitive entrepreneurial ventures that depended on market forces. As the Nepali state asserted increasing control over commercial activities, the businessmen's success depended on earning the blessings of the HMG bureaucrats and politicians of various parties to get the monopoly licenses.

The name of the game, then, was not free-market capitalism with its attendant set of rules that ensure a level playing field. Instead, the game consisted of fixing and finagling, which led to many legally-sanctioned cartels and interest-groups. They, in turn, legitimised narrow business interests even if it meant distorting the markets. Over the years, one result of all this has been that whenever you talk of ways to make markets competitive and transparent in Nepal, it's these old but politically powerful businessmen who are usually the most vocal ones to oppose market-friendly ideas.

In this context, one strategy for coming years is clear: for any market-reform measure to succeed in Nepal, the fears of the old should be allayed while the optimism of the young need to be built upon. ♦

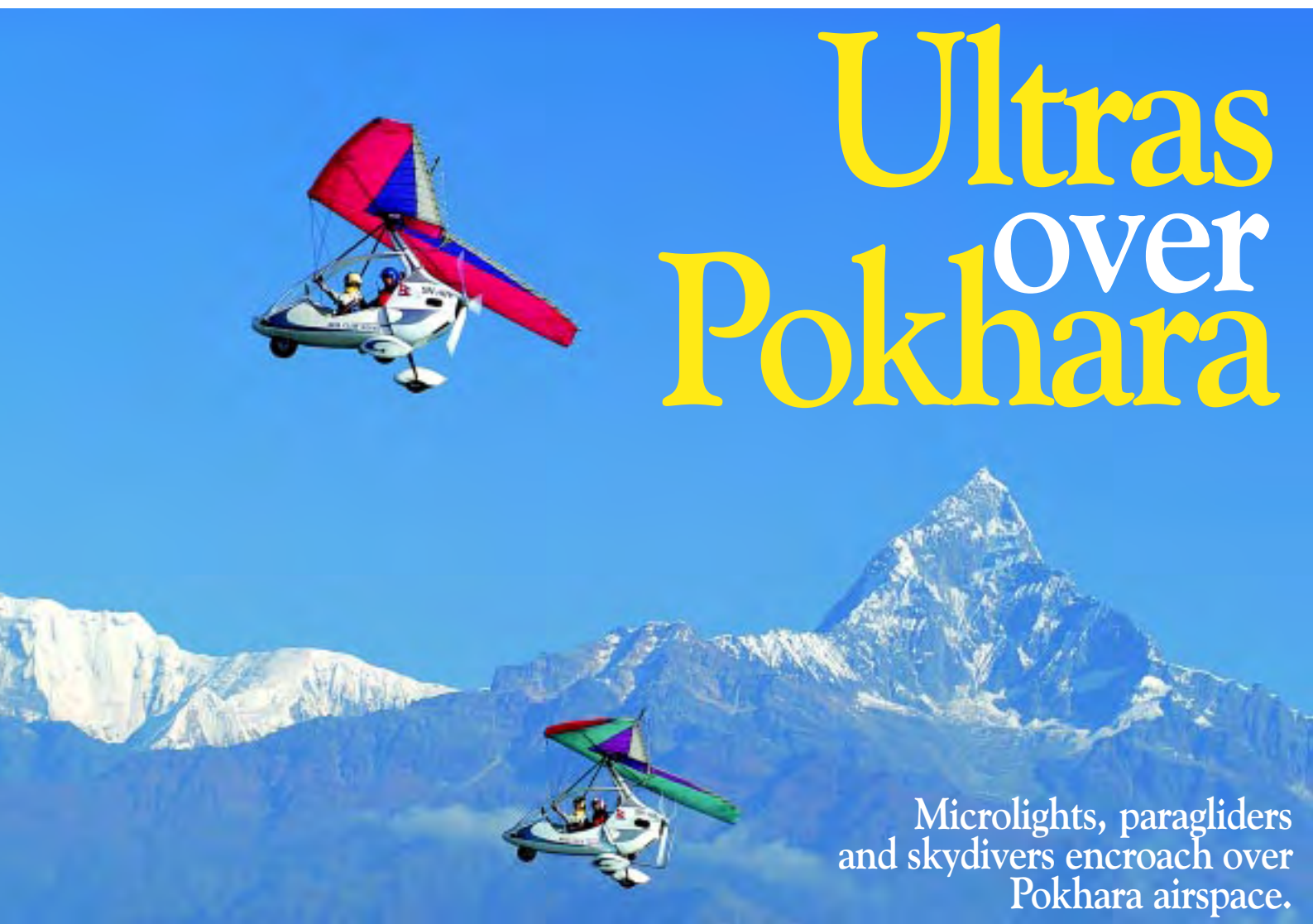


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Microlights, paragliders and skydivers encroach over Pokhara airspace.



ALL PICS MIN BAJRACHARYA

MIN BAJRACHARYA in POKHARA

They say there are six directions in Nepal: north, south east, west, up and down. And one of the most vertical places in Nepal is Pokhara. From barely 700m above sea level, the terrain rises within 35km to the summit of Machapuchre at nearly 7,000m. Very few places on earth have such a perpendicular topography.

And yet, what Nepal has promoted so far is only a horizontal Pokhara with the lake and the reflection of the mountains on it. There is a whole new Pokhara that a lucky few have discovered: its air space. Today, almost by default, this tourist town is fast developing into a centre for aerial sports, as ultralights, paragliders, skydivers and freefallers take to the skies in growing numbers.

Ultralight

The pioneer was Avia Club Nepal which started taking tourists on microlights (hang-gliders with engines attached) for sightseeing flights from Pokhara airport in 1996. It was tough in the beginning: the project initially ran into turbulence as government agencies found one reason or other to block it. Natasha Shrestha, founder and director of Avia remembers those days well. "For two years were just doing proving flights and trying to convince the government it was a good idea, but finally we convinced them it would add to Pokhara's draw as a tourist destination," she recalls. Today, Avia gets full cooperation from the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal and the Ministry of Tourism.

Getting the operating license was the first hurdle, the second was ensuring that the seasonal flights would be a viable business proposition. But marketing efforts are finally paying off. Despite a tourism slump this year, Avia logged more than 210 hours of flights in its three ultralights this month—nearly five times the normal for this season.

At the hangar in Pokhara airport, Avia's brand new Russian-made tandem ultralight with side-by-side

seating is getting ready for the first flight of the day. As the fog lifts, pilot Alexander Maximov, who is a Tupolev engineer in his spare time, guns the engine and asks Pokhara tower to taxi out. "Hotel Charlie, cleared to taxi out to runway 04," replies Debendra KC, air traffic controller at the tower, who by now, is used to the early morning flights of the microlights in his airspace.

The cockpit looks like a motorcycle, it even has a rear-view mirror. The only difference is that it also has an altimeter, vertical speed indicator and a compass. Maximov goes through the pre-flight check which involves nudging the control bar to see if the big kite-like wing above us is ok. Cleared for take off, the noise of the engine behind us rises to a whine, the craft hurtles down the runway and takes off effortlessly.

Pretty soon, Pokhara is hidden in haze and the Annapurnas rise up to the north in a gigantic wall of ice and rock. Maximov puts the craft on a slight bank over Phewa Lake, and we notice two other ultralights circling the Peace Stupa like dragonflies.

The plane is surprisingly easy to fly, push the bar down means you go up, push it up and you go down. Move it left, you go right and move it right and go left. It's opposite of flight controls on a big plane. Leveling off at 6,000ft, the twin peaks of Machapuchre heave into view: a more elegant and dignified peak is hard to find on this planet. You never get tired of looking at it.

At 45 knots, the speed is just right, and the wind chill factor isn't unbearable. As winter sets in, it is a good idea to wear a down jacket and gloves. This is just like riding a motorbike on a winter morning on the Ring Road, the only difference is that you are flying 4,000ft above the ground. We pass Sarangkot below us, and notice a Jomsom-bound Dornier has just taken off and is straining to get over Ghodepani Pass.

The descent is slow and



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From l-r: In formation with Machhapuchre in the background, paraglider coming in for a landing above Phewa, Rajesh Bomjan takes off his harness, Natasha Shrestha at Pokhara airport.



out later this month. Avia's ultralights were used for shooting scenes in Pokhara.

Paragliding

Our next stop is Sarangkot, heading up in a jeep is a lot clumsier than flying, but we need to get up there so we can jump off the mountain on a paraglider. One of the pilots is another Russian named Ilya Milkov who is trained as a MiG-21 pilot in the Russian Air Force. We ask him a silly question: what is the pilot of an advanced supersonic jet doing riding thermals under a parachute in Nepal? Milkov is a man of few words: "It's fun."

Rajesh Bomjan and his brother, Binod, are two Nepali pilots licensed to fly paragliders. Rajesh takes his

passenger through pre-flight instructions. (There is one embarrassing question about how much I weigh, which I deflect.) We go through tips on how to run downhill for the take off, then how to hit the ground running during landing at the bottom of the mountain.

So we sit in our hammock-like seats and start running like mad down the slope. Suddenly, without even realising it, we are airborne, held up by the updraft coming up Sarangkot. This is the closest one gets to real flying: no sound, just the rush of wind circling to catch the thermals. Rajesh takes the paraglider towards where he sees a group of griffon vultures soaring on the thermals. We go round and round just like the birds, rising all the

Skydiving over Pokhara

Jorge, a Canadian of Venezuelan descent (*right*) has become the first person to make a freefall from an ultralight over Pokhara during a test flight on 19 October. The skydiver went up on an ultralight which climbed to 7,000ft above Pokhara, and once the pilot switched off the engine he jumped off freefalling for nine seconds before opening his parachute. On ground to receive Nepal's pioneer skydiver was the manager of Pokhara airport, Sagar Man Pradhan, and other dignitaries from the Civil Aviation Authority.



while. Soon, we are about 500ft above the takeoff point, at eye-level with Sarangkot. Below us are the phosphorescent ripples on the lake, and beyond the ever-present mass of Annapurna South.

Unlike in the ultralight, here it is completely quiet, except for the rush of wind. Pilots shout to each other, and as we get closer to the ground we can even hear the sound of dogs barking and buses climbing the highway. The material in the parachute makes a rustling sound as we come in for a landing on a road on the banks of the Phewa, there is a final swoop and...yes...the eagle has landed.

Rajesh immediately unfastens my harness in case the wind picks me up again, he gathers up his sail and we go into the nearby Mayadevi Lodge for refreshments. Rajesh has adopted some raptors that he has trained to fly with him to guide paragliders towards

thermals. They take three years to train, and a National Geographic film about 'para-hawking' in Nepal received honourable mention at the film festival in St Hilaire in France.

We ask Rajesh if he would ever like to be an airline pilot. He shakes his head: "This is real freedom, here you are face-to-face with nature, you have to know about wind patterns how they behave along mountain slopes, no two flights are the same." Rajesh has already logged 3,500 hours on paragliders and says there is enormous potential in Nepal to develop this sport. Pilots need to have at least 500 hours and a basic instructor's course before they are allowed to take passengers. ♦

Ultralights:

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www.avianepal21.bc.net

Paragliding:

Sunrise Paragliding, Pokhara 061-521174
sunrise@mos.com.np

smooth, no ears popping. We are cleared to land and swoop down towards the runway, the flare is quick and thrillingly close to the asphalt, followed by a slight squeal of tyres.

Natasha Shrestha's future plans are to expand the fleet of Avia's ultralights to include one with floats so pilots can use the lake to pick up passengers for sightseeing flights. She is running into some bureaucratic opposition to this idea, but she is used to that. Her son Stefan is now working on developing Pokhara as a venue for international ultralight championships. Avia has already become a member of the Federation Aeronautique Internationale (FAI) and last year, it undertook the first-ever cross country ultralight flight in Nepal from Pokhara to Bharatpur and Meghauli. "If we can get cooperation from the government, Nepal will be a sought-after destination for ultralight championships," says Stefan Shrestha. Mother and son also plan to turn

Avia into a flying school for ultralights that will also draw foreign trainee pilots because there is nothing else like it in the region. Air sports groups involved in ultralight, paragliding and hot air ballooning are also forming the Air Sports Association of Nepal to promote the industry.

Avia is also planning to start a Young Fliers Club on 17 December to commemorate the first flight by the Wright brothers 100 years ago to encourage young Nepalis to be interested in aviation. Avia's Deepthi Gurung is working with schools to get students from Grade 8 and above to join in a programme that will include familiarisation of aviation concepts and an ultralight flight.

Ultralighting in Nepal may get a lot of publicity after the Bollywood blockbuster *Love in Nepal* starring Sonu Nigam comes

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Corporate unreliability

Wittingly or unwittingly, individuals do things that injure other individuals. For society to function, it must provide individuals with incentives not to do so, through rewards and punishments, regulations and fines. By polluting the air, one harms anyone who breathes. The legal system has an important role here. If I injure you, you should be able to sue me.

Of course, individuals have a moral responsibility not to injure others. Indeed, this is perhaps the central moral imperative—do unto others as you would have them do unto you, and do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you.

Immanuel Kant, with his categorical imperative, provided the philosophical foundations for those who wanted an alternative basis for ethics than that provided by religious aphorisms. But modern society cannot and does not simply rely on individuals doing the “right” thing. It provides carrots and sticks.

Motivating corporations to do the right thing is even more difficult. After all, corporations don’t have a conscience; it is only the conscience of those who run the corporation, and as America’s recent corporate scandals have made all too clear, conscience often takes a backseat to profits.

America’s legal system makes sure that firms that produce a



defective, and particularly an unsafe product, are held liable for the consequences. Firms are in a far better position than consumers to assess the safety of their product; we all benefit knowing that our legal system has provided corporations with incentives to pay attention to the safety of what they produce.

Similarly, environmental laws make firms liable for their toxic wastes, and many countries, including the US, have enshrined the principle that “polluters pay,” that is, companies must pay for the damage they cause. It is a matter both of incentives and social justice.

In other realms, however, we are only beginning to think about what

corporate responsibility should mean for our legal system. In World War II, German corporations were all too willing to profit from the slave labor of those in concentration camps, and Swiss banks were happy to pocket the gold of Jewish victims of Nazi terror. Recent suits have made them at least pay back some of what they took.

More recently, oil companies have demonstrated little conscience in providing money that feeds guerrilla movements—so long as their own interests are preserved. When, in Angola, one brave firm, BP, wanted to do the right thing by trying to make sure that oil

royalties actually go to the government, rather than to corrupt officials, other oil companies refused to go along.

In the Congo, the profits of mining companies helped maintain the late President Mobuto of Zaire, now the Congo, in power for decades—enabling him to pillage his country, allegedly facilitated by the secret bank accounts that are the specialty of countries like Switzerland, the Cayman Islands and Cyprus. World Bank and IMF money also helped sustain Mobuto. These institutions knew, or they should have known, that their loans and aid was not going to help the country’s desperately poor people.

If corporations had a conscience, they would act, without being forced to do so.

It would only leave them deeper in debt.

Today, we believe that individuals, corporations and institutions should be held accountable for their actions. But what should that mean, if it is to be more than rhetoric? For a start, it means debt forgiveness: international lenders may not be able to compensate fully the damage caused when their money helps maintain odious autocrats in power, but at least the victims should not be burdened by a disastrous financial legacy.

In South Africa, it was arguably the economic pressure brought by sanctions which eventually brought down the racist Apartheid system; but by the same token, it was economic support from the outside—including loans from multinational banks—which kept the system going for so long. Much the same may be true about Iraq during the 1990s.

Those who contributed to maintaining Apartheid—and especially those who did not adhere to the sanctions after the UN approved them—should be held accountable. The Truth and


Reconciliation process may or may not work to heal South Africa’s wounds, but if corporations are to be provided with incentives to do the right thing, they must now pay the price for the profits that they reaped from that abhorrent system.

If corporations had a conscience, they would act, without being forced to do so: they would estimate their profit from the Apartheid system and pay it back to the country, with interest. For Apartheid’s demise has not solved the country’s deep economic problems, including an unemployment rate in excess of 25 percent.

So far, there appears to be no rush to make amends in South Africa, and, as elsewhere, the evidence is meager that the corporate conscience runs very deep. But it is to be hoped that the West’s legal systems will provide an alternative recourse, one that will not only partially redress past injustices, but provide incentives for corporations to think twice before profiting from brutal regimes in the future. ♦











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Joseph E Stiglitz is Chief Economist and Senior Vice President at the World Bank.



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Jayalithaa first tried to give the whole issue a regional or state-versus-central government character to mobilise Tamil-chauvinist sentiment. In particular, she objected to the federal home ministry's willingness to grant the request

A press for freedom

Old laws must be revised to open new frontiers.

Many Indian courts, including the Supreme Court,



A resplendent Jayalalithaa.

Among the most controversial of these laws as the Prevention of Terrorism Act, enacted in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. This imposes harsh penalties on suspected terrorists and accomplices and in some cases, reverses the burden of proof. One can only hope the current spirited debate on *The Hindu* leads to a revision of these obnoxious laws. ♦ (IPS)

Praful Bidwai is a New Delhi-based columnist.

Migrant

Mohammad Abu Siddique went to Malaysia on a proper passport and managed to get a good job. He had previously worked in Saudi Arabia. “The pay there is much less,” says Siddique. From 1994 Kabir regularly sent home between 25,000 takas (\$428) and 13,000 takas (\$223) every other month, which his father wisely invested . Despite being cheated of a huge amount later, Kabir has not been badly off since his return. Very few of the returnees have had that comfort. ♦



Mohammad Enamul Haque and fellow Bangladeshi male workers in Kuala Lumpur built the Petronas Towers, the tallest building in the world. They live in nearby containers.

“The people have been orphaned.”

‘Aja ko Kura’ hosted by Kiran Pokhrel
Radio Sagarmatha, 11 November

Excerpts from a radio talk program with Sanjay Adhikari of the UN’s Participatory District Development Programme (PDDP), the newly-nominated DDC chairmen of Kathmandu and Humla, Bikram Thapa and Jeevan Shahi, and Kiran Bhandari of Kantipur newspaper.

Jeevan Shahi: Nothing is happening in the districts, the people have been orphaned. The government had to step in to provide relief to the people, it had to act. In the two years since the DDCs were dissolved I have been in my district trying to do my best to push projects we initiated, like the Hilsa-Simikot road, or our nutrition programs. The people’s needs don’t wait for the politicians to get their act together.

Of course, the best option would be for us to stand in local elections and obtain the peoples’ mandate. But there is an extraordinary situation in

the country, and we have to ask ourselves how we can provide basic services to the people. Are we going to wait for an ideal democratic process to be restored, while the people are facing an emergency because of the breakdown of services?

There has been a lot of donor pressure on the reinstatement of local elected bodies since the days of Sher Bahadur Deuba. Since bureaucrats could not run the local bodies properly, the donors’ stand is that if elections are not possible, let’s at least bring as many of the previously-elected officials back to run the VDCs and DDCs.

We all know things are bad, we can’t go to the villages. I am from a district which is best known for food shortages. I believe that despite all obstacles, we can get small things done for the people. But despite the security situation, we can’t give up, we have to try to do what little we can. We will start rebuilding, trying to work with whoever is there on the ground. We can never stop trying, we can’t let our country self-destruct.

Bickram Thapa: I am accountable to both the

people, and to the government. A representative once elected, if he isn’t a convicted criminal, is still accountable to the people and it is petty to argue that we are not responsive to the peoples’ needs just because we were not elected. Unless we get over the power struggles and look at how we can deliver development, nothing is going happen. The government is saying, ok it is impossible to hold elections now, let’s at least get some development moving, why not help them? I agree, nominating representatives to local bodies is not the best solution, but under the circumstances it is the best the government can do. But if we are doing this only to show the donors that something is happening, then I’m not very happy with it.

Kiran Bhandari: The process is important. It is important whether a representative is elected or not. If you are not elected, there is no accountability towards the people, you are accountable to the person who nominated you. The situation on the ground is that outside the capital and some districts, development has ground to a halt. We all know this is

because of the Maoist insurgency. But after 9/11 the world is moving towards US-led militarisation and Nepal is also affected by it. The government is trying to get the DDCs to work and automatically get the VDCs activated, but I don’t think the VDC chairmen are in a position to go back to their villages.

Sanjay Adhikari: We have to look at what are the alternatives in the current political scenario. You have to see this as the best option, under the circumstances, to bring relief to the people through a participatory process. This is better than the vacuum that existed last year. Even if they are nominated, the representatives are local people who are still accountable to the citizens of the villages and districts from where they are. We are concerned about how support from the donor community can be most effectively used during this period of deficient political decision-making. The questions should not be about whether or not it is possible to get work done to reduce poverty, but about what we can do concretely to deliver development to the grassroots where it is needed most.

Cabin pressure

Chalpal, 9 November

All cabin restaurants in the Valley have been recommended for closure to the government by a research team which says these places exploit young waitresses to ‘entertain’ clients. In response, restaurant owners say they are ready to remove all female staff to improve the atmosphere in their businesses.

The government’s decision will be far-reaching. Closing down cabin restaurants will only jeopardise the livelihood of these girls who could to end up jobless and penniless. With no alternative, most will be forced into prostitution, exacerbating the situation.

At present, cabin restaurants are registered as eateries and don’t fall into any specific category. Around 1,200 restaurants are registered with the government, with 80 percent of the 30,000 waitresses working in cabin restaurants. Owners who run a clean business blame the government for not introducing strict laws to control immoral

activities. “It would be irresponsible for the government to close down the restaurants,” says a restaurateur who says the NGO Maiti Nepal pressurised the government into taking such an irrational step.

The owners, who have been paying more than Rs 8 million in taxes annually, are willing to bring in improvements that would include a minimum salary of Rs 2,200, uniforms, removal of privacy curtains, bigger cabin rooms and lower dividing walls. They also plan to provide literacy programs for the waitresses and punish those who promote immoral activities.

Gatekeepers

Samacharpatra, 10 November

LIPING – Sabin Das Shrestha could hardly wait to reach Khasa to shop for clothing. But when he tried to enter through the Tatopani border area, Chinese border security guards tore his immigration papers and beat him up. “All I wanted to do was buy some goods,” says Shrestha who was slapped around and made to turn back.

Locals in Liping are complaining about the continuous mistreatment of Nepalis by Chinese soldiers, despite proper documents that should allow them to enter Khasa. This action is a violation of the Nepal-Tibet Treaty that allows both Chinese and Nepali citizens who possess entry papers to travel within 30km from the borders for the duration of a day. “I don’t understand why they are acting like this,” says Shiva Ram Gelal, chief of Tatopani Immigration Office, who personally went through a similar experience at the hands of the Chinese. A lot of Chinese can be seen travelling inside Nepal without any papers. They are never



questioned or stopped by Nepali immigration, but Nepalis are harassed with guards manhandling even those with legitimate papers.

“At times, I have been refused entry,” says Shiba Kumar Katuwal, chief of Tatopani Customs Office. “It’s difficult to comprehend why this is happening. Our entry to China depends on their mood.” Last week, a dozen Nepali journalists visiting China were held up for almost an hour near the gate, especially after the Chinese guards found out their occupation. “You need visas,” they were told.

Jumla, a year later

Shyam Krishna Budhathoki, CDO of Jumla in *Rajdhani*, 12 November

JUMLA – Last November the people of Khalanga went through a great tragedy when the Maoists killed my predecessor, two police officers and dozens of army personnel. I had just been promoted to the post of under secretary at the ministry. My superior persuaded me to fill the post of Jumla CDO. “This is the time to prove that you can really

serve your nation,” he told me.

With that, I mustered all my courage to take up this challenge and started work two months later. It was a tragic beginning. On my first day, a grenade left behind by the Maoists accidentally killed two children. The people, already desperate, were in despair. The CDO office building had been destroyed, Maoist corpses still floated in the river. It was a difficult start.

The first thing I did was to assemble the local people and politicians from all parties. With their consensus, we used the state fund of Rs 1 million to rebuild the CDO office, the District Police Office and the Regional Police Post. With the remaining money, we renovated Chanda Nath School and temple. After that came the task of managing our local government bodies.

Three VDC secretaries had resumed work during the ceasefire, but they left soon again after the rebels attacked one of them. The local administration work stopped completely. So, I sent a letter to a local Maoist commander to seek his support. It wasn’t long before the Maoists sent Angad Mahat to

participate in our mass interaction program. It was there that Mahat agreed that VDC secretaries would not be mistreated. Soon, all 30 VDC offices were back in operation. Things were getting better.

But after I reached the Maoist-affected Tatopani, I received unpleasant news of a minor encounter between the security forces and the Maoists. The government had sent the army to run a relief program and the rebels wanted to run the army out. The secretaries fled their posts and are now back in Khalanga, the district headquarters.

The Maoists are spreading terror in the villages and we have not been able to reach every VDC. But things will get better once the government dispatches additional armed police forces. Right now, the local people live under extreme fear, especially after new rumours that the Maoists are planning an on the district headquarters. As for me, I live in a government quarter guarded by six civilian policemen. I have let behind my loved ones, my wife and children for my job. I am not running away, no matter what happens.



Tap wall: Constitution of Nepal, 1990

Madhab Kumar Nepal: No matter how hard I try, I can’t squeeze out a single drop, Girija babu!

समाचारपत्र Samacharpatra, 9 November

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“We urge the agitating parties not to doubt our commitment towards the multiparty system.”

- Prachanda in www.cpnm.org, 13 November

Words worth

Rishikesh Dahal in
Space Time, 9 November

स्पेसटाइम दैनिक

Religion is a way of life for Rimpoche Tenzing Jangbu Sherpa of Tengboche. Although daily rituals at the monastery keep him occupied, a year ago he began working on a Sherpa dictionary. He met two Koreans working on a similar project last year, and while he appreciated their efforts, the rimpoche worried that words would be distorted by foreigners who may not have the necessary grip of the language. It spurred him to begin his own Sherpa dictionary. “I have already finished the basic work,” says the chief abbot, pointing to files where he has a handwritten collection of Sherpa words. The rimpoche is pleased with a computer a local politician donated for word processing.

He knows he has a bigger challenge to face—dealing with linguists. “That’s the tough part,” says the rimpoche. “There are no easy meanings of Sherpa words in English and Nepali.” He is aware that the dictionary may not receive formal status without endorsement from linguists. “I have read Sherpa books for a long time but only recently realised how difficult translations can be.” Once the work is finished, even non-Sherpas will understand the language. Known for his work in environmental conservation, the rimpoche is now working at preserving the integrity of his people. He is concerned that a day may come when the Sherpas will have forgotten their language and will need to turn to what foreigners have put together, but his greatest worry is a lack of funds. So far he has managed to make ends meet from what the monastery receives for religious ceremonies. “This won’t work longterm and I worry about how I’ll finish the dictionary,” he says.



Stretching three cans of rice



Man Bahadur Rai and the rest of the retreating Gurkhas are plagued with hunger as they cross into India over the Naga hills from Burma. They find an unlikely source of help in an old Naga man who speaks some Burmese. The men stretch out three cans of rice to feed 375 hungry soldiers. Rai's story is part of *Lahurey ko Katha*, a collection of memoirs based on oral testimonies of 13 retired Gurkha soldiers. Translated from Nepali by Dev Bahadur Thapa for this fortnightly column.

We wished there was someone who could understand Burmese. Despite our total ignorance of the local language, we went into a Naga village. Luckily, we met an old fellow who had served as a reserve in the Burmese army. In keeping with Naga customs, he was thoroughly filthy, making him look older than what I estimated was his age, about 45-years-old.

"*Sya*, do you speak Burmese?" I asked politely. "*Sya*" in Burmese means "respectable man". He replied that he understood a little. We told him we were hungry and tired and asked if some rice could be spared. He said there was no rice on that side of the hill. We told him we were dying with hunger and asked him what their staple diet was. He replied that they made gruel so we begged him to get some for us because we had eaten nothing

for three days and were close to dying.

The shabby Naga told us a shop in the next village used to sell rice, but wasn't sure if the shopkeeper could spare any. We implored him to help us. He shouted in his native language to his neighbour in the lower part of the village and reply came. The fellow there had a small stock and was willing to part with it.

Our Naga friend asked his neighbour to bring everything he had, which was about three milk cans of rice. Our expectation was high but all we saw was a small package wrapped in black rags. On closer inspection, we found out that it was rice of dry land variety. Since they have no husking device they put paddy on stone and beat it with a wooden stick. He charged us Rs 15 or 20 for the lot.

The next problem was distributing three cans of rice

among 375 soldiers. Each man would get no more than a fistful. We hit upon the idea of making rice soup so we asked the old man fellow for a big pot. He understood what we were trying to do. Being an ex-serviceman, he took pity on our predicament. He brought us a big earthen pot, which was all he had. When I looked inside, we saw something had burned right into the pot. I was scared the pot would break if we cleaned it with water so we scoured it with a stone to make it somewhat cleaner after which we poured in the rice and water.

Suddenly, while we were busy making our rice, a captain, a major and quite a few British soldiers accompanied by an Assamese porter came into the village. The major was Gurkha and enquired about our wellbeing. We told him we had some rice. They said with a smile that they had only a packet or two of

biscuits and could not part with it. The major asked us if we could get a goat. Once again we rushed to the same old man. He said the rest of the village wouldn't understand why, but there was a goat in the village.

The major agreed to buy the animal. I can't recollect how much we paid for the uncastrated goat with a long beard. I got a Naga boy to carry it to our place, for which he received a rupee. I informed the major about the cost of the goat and offered to return the balance. He, however, refused and asked us to keep it. He asked us to slaughter the animal and skin it. All he asked for was a leg, the rest we cleaned, cut and prepared to cook.

We had just one pot, now full of our rice soup, and wondered how we'd cook the meat before hitting upon the idea of grilling the meat although some men ate it raw. We distributed the rice soup equally among the men and everyone relished this meal. That night we slept soundly.

The following day we had enough energy to walk with ease. On our descent we discovered *thotne*. It grows abundantly in high altitudes and tastes like seasoned bamboo shoot. We stopped and ate to our full satisfaction, but *thotne* has an intoxicating effect so we all became weak. Nevertheless, we went on crawling. That evening we slept on empty stomachs. ♦

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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Fate and Freedom** Unique handmade carpets by John Collins till 23 November at Siddhartha Art Gallery. 4218048
- ❖ **?! an installation** on Nepal's present situation by Ashmina Ranjit organised by Nepal Association of Fine Arts (NAFA), Royal Nepal Academy. NAFA, Naxal at 12PM on 15 November.
- ❖ **Living Culture** by Krishna Gopal Ranjit 11AM - 6 PM, except Monday, from 16-30 November at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Everest Climb** Exhibition of Everest photographs taken by Ang Chhering till 18 November at Rum Doodle Restaurant & Bar, Thamel. 4425107



EVENTS

- ❖ **Himalayan White Water Challenge 2003** at Bhotekoshi River. Organised by Nepal Association of Rafting Agents, 23 -25 November. Details: Nepal Tourism Board, 256909-140
- ❖ **Sur, symphony and sounds of valour**, more than just military tunes. The Indian Embassy presents an Indian Army Orchestra, 5PM on 20 November at BICC. Passes available at the Indian Embassy from 14 November.
- ❖ **Friendship Everest Sky race** 16km from Namche Bazar to Thame, Khumbu. Organised by Cho-Oyu Trekking, 18 November.
- ❖ **AWON presents The Masquerade Ball** 14 November at Hotel Yak & Yeti. Rs 3,500 per person, Rs 6,000 for couples.
- ❖ **Fair Trade Con-Ex** craft exhibition and conference from 14-16 November, Royal Nepal Academy.
- ❖ **Magic show** at Belle Momo 1-5PM on 14 November at Belle Momo, Darbar Marg.

MUSIC

- ❖ **Abhaya & The Steam Injuns** every Friday at Fusion, Dwarika's. 4479488
- ❖ **Orient Express** Latin Jazz band at the Rox Garden 7PM on 14, 15 November, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu.

DRINK

- ❖ **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

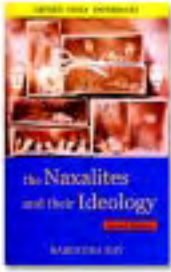
FOOD

- ❖ **Bring your wine** along every Thursday and Sunday and buy our dinner. Himalatte Café, Thamel.
- ❖ **5th Momo Mania** on 22 November at The Bakery Café, Baneshwor. 16 exquisite varieties of momos, fun competitions, games and live performances. Tickets available at all Bakery Café outlets.
- ❖ **Mediterranean Food Promotion** till 16 November, dinner only at Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Kathmandu.
- ❖ **Sunday Brunch** at Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka, 11AM to 3PM. 5543017
- ❖ **Momos & More** the finest momos in town now at Dhobighat. 5520692
- ❖ **English Premier League**, steaks and draft beer at K-too! Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 4433043.
- ❖ **BBQ in the Shambala Garden** everyday at 7PM. 4412999
- ❖ **Roadhouse Cafe** for wood fired pizzas and more. Opp St Mary's School, Pulchowk. 5521755
- ❖ **Authentic Chinese food** at Tian Rui Chinese Restaurant, Thapathali. 4243078
- ❖ **Traditional Nepali Thali lunch** at Patan Museum Café, 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
- ❖ **Traditional Newari Thali** at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4431632
- ❖ **Weekend Ban Bhoj** at the Godavari Village Resort. Reservation recommended. 5560675.
- ❖ **Krishnarpan** ceremonial Nepali cuisine fit for a king. Reservation recommended. 4479488

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
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- ❖ **Shivapuri Cottage, Dadagaon** Nature, peace and luxury. 4354331 Email: cbbasnyat@hotmail.com
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- ❖ **Escape to Godavari** Special holiday package on half board for the entire family at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675

BOOKWORM



The Naxalites and their Ideology Rabindra Ray
Oxford University Press, 2002
Rs 250

This second edition of a comprehensive sociological analysis of the Naxal movement situates itself within the contexts of Bengali society, strains of Indian communism and the peasantry. It distinguishes between the movement's ideological position and its actions, relating Naxal ideology to Nietzsche's philosophical tradition of Nihilism. The author presents a vivid portrayal of the social and cultural heritage of Naxalism.

Social Suffering Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, Margaret Lock (eds)
Oxford University Press, 2000
Rs 345

Social Suffering takes in the human consequences of war, famine, depression, disease, torture—resulting from political, economic and institutional power—and also human responses to social problems as they are influenced by those forms of power. This cross-disciplinary investigation challenges traditional research and policies, allowing us to see the 20th century in a new frame. It provides new perspectives on social suffering and should prove timely to on-going examinations of India's partition.



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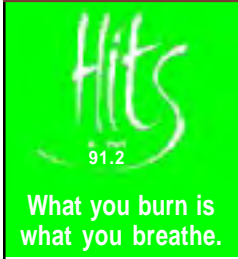
Everything that has a beginning has an end, and so it is with the final instalment of The Matrix trilogy. *Revolutions* makes good on the genius brothers Wachowski's promise to fuse Kafka, *Alice in Wonderland*, the New Testament and *The Wizard of Oz*. If *The Matrix* and *Reloaded* chartered the spiritual/prophetic path to the war between the machines and mankind, *Revolutions* delivers on their promise with bombastic action and climactic delight. Neo (Keanu Reeves), Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss) and Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne) maintain those intense, serious expressions throughout, and Hugo Weaving reprises his role as Agent Smith with his usual sado-masochistic lopsided grin. Their roles are flawless, perfectly planed but the mood is darker, more fatalistic, the stakes higher.

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KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY



What you burn is what you breathe.

With the overnight temperature in Kathmandu dipping into single digits, an inversion layer traps pollution, making the air quality worse. Throughout last week, the levels of PM10 (small particles that can enter the human body) in urban areas such as Putali Sadak, Patan hospital and Thamel were higher than the national standard of 120 micrograms per cubic meter. Which means we were in the red zone right through, breathing particulates that are harmful to health. The average PM10 for last week was 183 microgrammes per cubic meter which is almost twice the level for last week. Similarly, roadside areas of Putali Sadak and Patan Hospital showed PM10 up by 70 percent.

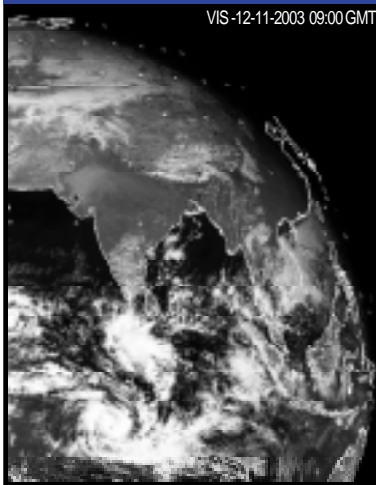
Average PM10 levels at selected points in Kathmandu 2-8 November in micrograms per cubic meter.

Source: www.mape.gov.np



NEPALI WEATHER

VIS-12-11-2003 09:00 GMT



by MAUSAM BEED

A trans-Himalayan low pressure area brought afternoon showers across the mountains of central Nepal this week, even dousing the northeastern parts of Kathmandu Valley and dusting snow down to 5,000m. This trough is being pushed out, and a few days of clear weather will last till the arrival of another weak westerly front currently seen over Afghanistan in this satellite picture on Wednesday morning. The effect of this front may be more pronounced because of the pull of a depression over the Bay of Bengal. Expect cooler nocturnal temperatures with thicker fog in the mornings.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



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EATING MY WORDS

by BHATMARA BHAI

Kathmandu's Tempura Top 10



Spartan conditions have led to a higher overall standard of Japanese cuisine in the Valley.

our stoic Japanese restaurant owner is forced to go just a little further 'off road'. The style of Kathmandu's Japanese cooking, to keep costs in the affordable, is home-style. It is definitely not the more performance art end of Japanese food. Spartan conditions have led to a higher overall standard. Japanese food compares well to other cuisines featuring in the Valley.

On my list of favourites is Royal Hana Garden in Lazimpat. Once nothing out of the ordinary, it appears to have recently pulled its culinary socks up. I regularly indulge. The garden is a peaceful and relaxing place to eat, although the tranquility is occasionally shaken by the music that digs from a collection chosen by Mr Elevator. The last time I went, the Beatles were being assaulted by a choir. A gentle friendly grumble will change the CD.

My choices when eating Japanese are firmly conservative, the result, I believe, of my initial trauma induced by their incomprehensible healthy eating philosophy. Therapy has done nothing to make me more adventurous. To open the batting, a crisp tempura and a very cold beer make an amicable coupling. Royal Hana Garden's tempura (with apologies to King Wenceslas) is light, crisp and even. In the Kathmandu Tempura Top 10 it is only beaten by the tempura of the

Durbar Marg Koto. I normally follow the tempura with California roll with crab (tinned, sadly). The rice in the sushi is as it should be, compacted but not overly sticky and the coat of sesame generous. Yummy.

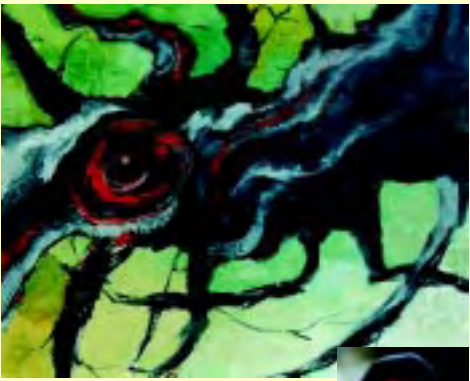
There are a number of things that makes Royal Hana Garden stand out from the crowd. Firstly the service is just right. And this is enhanced by the ebullient owner—a woman (!)—whose engaging and helpful style makes a very refreshing change.

The next difference is the delivery of complimentary treats in between courses that guide the non-Japanese glutton into the wider world of Japanese food. There is life beyond sashimi. The meal begins with a complimentary salad of *mouli*, carrot and seaweed salad in an unusual but pleasing dressing. Of the in-between course offerings that I have had, I particularly enjoy the tongue with wasabi. The desert is yet another unexpected final touch. A bizarre sweet bean concoction duly arrives. Although my initial reaction was one of fear, suspicion and general sneering (I mean, sweet Heinz beans?) my taste buds disagreed. Don't dine with me. I want your beans. Sweet.

Royal Hana Garden also has hot springs, but did Bhatmara Bhai brave these? Japanese philosophy has its limits. Health and food should not be mixed. ♦

Linking heaven and earth

Artist Sarita Dangol has been painting trees—and only trees—ever since she cares to remember. She explains: "What that would fascinate me when I first attempted landscapes were trees as a whole and in part: bent and fallen, stems that are coarse and knotted, branches crisscrossing and leaping out, and leaves drooping and withered."



Little surprise then, that Sarita's sixth solo exhibition, 'Creation and Creations' concentrates on trees. However, although her subject remains constant, her style of presentation has never been more different. Sarita has veered into a style that leans on expressionism with her old palette of blue and green giving way to warmer hues.

Her earlier work portrayed trees conventionally in light and shade as a nod to her formal art education. 'Defining Trees' in 2000 showed the trunks in her paintings beginning to grow branches that swirl and swarm up and down. 'Trees and Trails' in 2002 was, more or less, an extension of the preceding style but showed more maturity in the way she handled colour and created depth. Since then she has tried to break away from traditional conventions and her later work depicting tree trunks follow no prescribed logic and are a riot of colours.

The poet Manjul, who was inspired by Sarita's work, wrote:

When the Earth wants
to meet the Heavens
it climbs up stepping on the branches of trees.

When the Heavens want
to meet the Earth
they descend stepping on the branches of trees.

This is the way they help,
the trees
introduce the sky and the land

Sitting beneath a tree,
you can send the Earth up
or invite the Heavens down

but
you must have the language with which to talk to them
(the trees can teach you that).

(Ajit Baral and Manjul's poem translated by Maya Watson.)

'Creation and Creations' by Sarita Dangol is on exhibition at NAFA, Naxal till 28 November.



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