

NEPALI Times

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Weekly Internet Poll # 114

Q. If the king were to form an all-party government, who would you like to see as the new prime minister ?

Sher B. Deuba	17.5%
Girija P. Koirala	7.8%
Madav K. Nepal	25.1%
Pashupati S. Rana	28%
No Opinion	21.6%

Total votes: 2,497

Weekly Internet Poll # 115. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Should the Thapa government resign?

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'This place has turned into hell.'

NARESH NEWAR in DAPCHA

This is not Nepal's war-torn midwest, it is 50km from the capital. It is a tale of two villages which are coping differently with violence and conflict. But neither is far from fear, and the people there don't want anything to do with a conflict being fought ostensibly for their liberation.

"It was like a dream," recalls Nirmala Tamang, a hotel owner in Dapcha. Her business thrived as this little village, 20km east of Dhulikhel on the new Sindhuli highway, reaped the benefit of the construction boom of the past three years.

When the ceasefire broke down on 27 August, the Maoists stepped up their activities here and the military began

counter-insurgency operations. Nirmala's business went into a tailspin. "Now all we hear is silence, we are ruined," says 45-year-old Nirmala. Her husband, Narendra, agrees: "This place has turned into hell."

Dapcha was ideally placed to become a major business hub, as it was at the crossroads of the new highway to remote villages up the Mahabharat hills. There was work for everyone as the highway construction began: porters, truckers, wholesalers, traders and the service industry that sprang up around these occupations. After seven months of peace, the Maoists broke the ceasefire and Dapcha's good luck ran out.

continued ➡ p6

Baburam offers a deal

Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai this week proposed elections for a constituent assembly supervised by a UN-type security force. The proposal is mentioned almost as an aside in Bhattarai's column in the Maoist mouthpiece, *Janadesh*, and proposes that the Maoist army and the government security forces could be demobilised during the election.

Political pundits see it as a significant change in the Maoist stance on the constituent assembly demand and the first time ever that they have proposed demobilisation. The government has not reacted to the proposal, but is not likely to agree to it. It had flatly rejected the Maoist constituent assembly demand earlier this year, leading to a collapse of the seven-month ceasefire in August.

Kali Gandaki inauguration may be delayed

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

The inauguration of Nepal's biggest hydropower project by King Gyanendra may be delayed because the royal palace is trying to find out more about a controversial transfer of cost overruns to a foreign contractor, an official source said.

The palace is said to have raised the issue after the government made an official request to the king to inaugurate the 144MW hydro plant, Nepal's biggest-ever project built at a cost of \$428 million on the Kali Gandaki river.

The plant went into operation last year, but has been mired in a dispute over the unauthorised payment of \$30 million in cost overruns to its Italian civil contractor (For full story see *Nepali Times*, #166). Impregilo SpA billed the amount citing geological complications and delays caused by political disturbances, and it was paid without permission from the board of directors of the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA).

"The palace often seeks clarifications, especially in any issue that is controversial," a palace official told us. The NEA board had earlier asked officials for details on the shady payments. Management has played down the issue, saying overruns are common in projects of this magnitude.

Palace seeks details of controversial payment to contractor.



NARENDRA SHRESTHA

Serious differences have also cropped up between board members who want an investigation and others who don't want any scandals to mar the royal inauguration. One official told us NEA is under pressure from the project's main financier, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to go through the inauguration in the presence of the bank's president Tadao Chino.

ADB's Nepal director, Sultan Hafeez Rahman, told us the inauguration was the government's business: "They can always get it inaugurated whenever they want. But our bank's president will certainly need some notice."

But both Chief Secretary Bimal Koirala and Water Resources Secretary Kishor Babu Aryal confirmed the ADB has been in touch for a royal inauguration. "Initially, they proposed November but later they told us that their president would not be able to make it," said Aryal.

The ADB has refused to get involved in the dispute between NEA and the Italian contractor, and says it just wants to close the project. NEA had approved a \$130 million bid by the Italian Impregilo SpA for an open-ended bill of quantities contract. By the end of the project, Impregilo and the American engineering consultant Morrison Knudsen International Inc racked up a total of \$180 million. The extra \$50 million was paid by NEA between 1997-2002. ♦

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If anyone has cast a spell on this land, then it is probably a curse that Nepalis will never be able to work together. Ever since the Pandes and the Thapas were at each others' throats in the early 19th century, our rulers have sought self-preservation by destroying rivals.

No nation has a monopoly on fractiousness and discord, but on a worldwide scale for the most ununited state, Nepal must come very near the top. Most of us can't bear to see a fellow Nepali get ahead, a compatriot honoured or a Nepali getting well-deserved international recognition. So it was that when a leader in the last government got the other side to agree on a ceasefire and was close to working out a peace plan to resolve the conflict, the whole deal was subverted because no one wanted him to earn the peace dividend. Peace is now such a precious commodity that whoever delivers it will not have to worry about legitimacy for the next decade.

Instead of making political parties work together to find a consensus on a common constitutional front to counter extremism, we find the powers-that-be using their bag of tricks to tear them asunder. The RPP is virtually split, the UML has a vertical split and the Nepali Congress was veritably split two years ago.

That was the diagnosis. So, what is the treatment? You can start by agreeing to disagree, but sooner or later you have to work towards a consensus on the necessity of representative government that is inclusive and reformist, that has the moral mandate to end this unconscionable conflict.



There was a time when Indo-Nepal trade used to be fair for

by **CK LAL**



The fall in Nepal's Indian currency reserves is catastrophic.

Free market favours the strong because that's where bigger profits are to be made. Mediated by the Australia-based multinational SMEC, which has been sitting over the West Seti license for well over a decade, Indians will now get clean energy at a price lower than what Nepal is pay and a regulated flow downstream for free.

The irony is that we Nepalis are somehow supposed to celebrate that at long last a huge reservoir will finally permanently submerge a remote valley on the border of Doti, Achham and Bajhang. On the other hand, our balance of payments with India is now so precarious that we could really do with royalty from the project.

There was a time when Indo-Nepal trade used to be fair for



It all began with the so-called renewal (actually, it was a revision that changed the basic spirit of the treaty) of the 1996 Indo-Nepal Trade Treaty that placed quantitative restrictions on major Nepali export items to India such as vanaspathi ghuhi, acrylic yarn, zinc oxide and copper wire. Together, these four items comprised about 30 percent of the value of Nepali exports to India. This was followed by quarantine restrictions on the export of fresh Nepali vegetables. The tradition of Palpa ginger farmers selling their produce in Gorakhpur then buying food-grains in Butwal on their way back home has all but stopped.

Highly subsidised Indian rice freely being imported in Nepal has pauperised the Nepali peasantry, in addition to making the balance of payment further askew in favour of India. You don't have to look at globalisation to see how wealth can be transferred from the poorer to the richer trade partner. The most recent example is the way India has strangled the export of Nepali pashmina—a product that entails some real value addition—illustrating the futility of the doctrine of competitive advantage in transactions between asymmetric trading partners.

Nepal Rastra Bank data on Indo-Nepal

Nepal's Indian currency reserves have fallen from last year's Rs 25 billion to an alarmingly low Rs 6.12 billion in October, prompting the government to allow the import of additional items from India against dollar payment.

In view of the figures and the trend that they indicate, Nepal Rastra Bank Foreign Exchange Chief's statement: "We are in comfortable position to meet the demand and there would be no shortage of Indian currency", sounds a little less than reassuring. Tormented by the Maobadis, people have already fled from the hills and mountains of Nepal to India, taking their savings with them. All this is putting tremendous strain on the free convertibility between the Nepali and Indian rupees. If Indians continue to be unfriendly buyers, even the devaluation of the Nepali rupee will not work.

Amidst all this, Indian envoy Shyam Sharan announced in Janakpur this week that his government has ambitious plans to assist in the development of border regions of Nepal. Such a gesture of goodwill from a friendly neighbouring country needs to be welcomed wholeheartedly. But wouldn't addressing the balance of payments gap be a more sustainable way to improve relations?

Sincerity in bilateral trade gives flesh and blood to international commitments like WTO and SAFTA. Much after the Maobadis have made their peace with the Kathmandu regime or decided to settle in some Indian hill station, the chronic challenge of correcting the Indo-Nepal trade imbalance will still remain. Mutual understanding is unavoidable in trade between unequal partners.

Now that the delay in the agrément over Karna Dhoj Adhikari has been settled, our new ambassador in New Delhi has his work cut out for him. ♦

ACHHAM

I read 'Achham's agony' (#172) by Rabi Dhimi and Rajendra Nath with tears in my eyes. I am now living in the United States, but am from a middle-class family in Doti. I spent my boyhood in those hills of mid-western Nepal. Every sentence in that article seared my heart: I felt for the villagers of my homeland, their hardships, misery and suffering. They are Nepalis who were already the most neglected and poverty-stricken in Nepal, now they are caught in this dance of death between the Maoists and the army. For god's sake, leave the people of Doti, Achham and Bajura where they are. Don't force them to leave their villages, help them to stay. They are already the poorest Nepalis, they don't deserve this brutality.

Subrath Shrestha
Bridgeport, CT,
USA

ICG

The lack of basic facts, objectivity and analytical rigour in the International Crisis Group's report ('Danger of a widening war', #172) was more than made up by high

rhetoric and sanctimonious verbiage. The report claims that “most of those being killed in Nepal are non-combatants”. At the start of the second ceasefire, when the total body count from both sides was around 7,300, Prachanda himself had accepted in a statement that just over 5,000 Maoists had been killed in the past seven years. How did the ICG come up with the non-combatant figure?

In a naively patronising manner, the report prescribes that it is "not difficult to imagine a series of agreements around which the king, the RNA, political parties and Maoists could coalesce". Of course we all know that if all these groups could agree we would not have had this bloody war in the first place! The king, political parties and the Maoists are not the only players in the war. By allowing the Maoists to operate from its territory, India has become the most important protagonist in the conflict. Yet, the ICG report has, like most of the Western embassies, special envoys and human rights and such other do-gooders descending in ever greater numbers in Kathmandu, opted not to include the most crucial variable in the present

conflict. Analytic oversight?

Berating the king and RNA for the war and everything else is akin to blaming the victim. Before the Maoists began the war, Nepal was practicing multiparty democracy, human rights were respected and people had liberty to lead their lives in peace. The government is only trying to regain the countryside back from the Maoists so that people can lead normal lives and democratic processes can start again. So it is rather mischievous to say that the king "suspended the democratic system in October 2002". The democratic system had already been snuffed out in the previous seven years when the Maoists systematically destroyed the local elected government, chased away the other political parties from the districts, killed off political leaders and prevented the holding of local and national elections.

In contrast, the Maoists are treated with kids' gloves. The ICG report strongly opposes labeling the Maoists as terrorists and makes no moral or practical demands on them as it does on the king and the army. The larger question is: if a group that operates against the

laws of the land to get its way through systematic use of terror against civilians, students, civil servants and businesses is not a terrorist group, then who is? If the ICG feels it has the liberty to ask the government to give up its policy of forming civil defense groups in the village, what is stopping the ICG from urging the Maoists to give up arms or to call on the Indian government to stop harbouring a group that is destabilising a neighbour?

There could be no other swifter resolution to this war. Maybe ICG's claims to being non-profit and independent is suspect, as is its claim to knowledge and expertise. As an institution run by former politicians, bureaucrats and business tycoons like the Russian Mikhail Khodorkovsky (doing time in a Moscow jail for alleged embezzlement and malpractices), truth might be a commodity of convenience for the International Crisis Group. After all, war continues to be one of the biggest businesses in the world.

Jack Shaw
Lexington, USA

ABORTION

There is an inaccuracy in the wording of 'Ignorance is death' (#173) on the new CREPHA report which needs to be pointed out. Nepali law allows abortion under the following conditions: up to 12 weeks of gestation for any woman, on request and with her voluntary permission, up to 18 weeks if the pregnancy results from rape or incest and at any time during the pregnancy, with the advice of a medical practitioner, if the life or physical/mental health of the woman is at risk or the foetus is severely deformed. This is significantly different from the statement in your report, which said "up to 12 weeks if the woman's life is in danger and in cases of rape or incest or foetal impairment". The wording of the law is very liberal, and Nepal has reason to be proud of this, particularly as, in the case of an adult woman, only the woman's permission is required, not that of her husband or any other relative. In the case of sensitive and distressing situations, such as rape or incest, this is an important point for women. The

procedure order enabling implementation of the law has still to be approved by the cabinet (this is expected to happen very soon), and thus public services are not yet available. However, the fact that the law has been passed means that no woman should be in prison on abortion charges.

**Cherry Bird
Technical Committee for
the Implementation of
Comprehensive Abortion
Services**

CORRECTION

A glitch in final layout caused the last line in the editorial ('Let's do it', #173) to inadvertently disappear. We reprint below the last paragraph of the editorial with the missing line:

It may seem like it is too late, but we can still seize the initiative. The correction must begin with a step-by-step reversal of the process that brought us here, by relearning how genuine democracy works. After all, if the Nepali people have a say, no outsider will be able to get a word in edgewise.

“An all-party government is the only way out.”

Nepali Times: There are allegations that your demand for the prime minister's resignation and an all-party government is just a ruse to get to power yourself.

Pashupati SJB Rana: Frankly, to me the issue of who is going to become the prime minister is the least important. An all-party government is likely to resolve the situation because we are facing the greatest national crisis since the 1814-1816 war. Unless the parliamentary parties, government or the king, for that matter, do not start working together to resolve the situation then there will be no resolution. Secondly, an all-party government is a return to more normal functioning of government and something that is highly desired by the international community. Once the constitutional forces come together, the Maoists will realise that the time to talk to the state has come and that war is futile. So far, they have been successful in playing off forces within the constitution against each other.

But every time there is an effort towards unity, a huge fight breaks out for prime ministership and important portfolios. Won't it happen again?

At this stage the primary objective is that every party should rise above its narrow interest and its leaders show statesmanship. The Nepali people expect that of the party leaders. If we cannot rise to that level, then we surely do not deserve to be leaders of the parties.

Do the others feel the same way?

Well, I can't speak for the others. I certainly hope that they feel the same way. Things could really fall apart within a few months, that is how serious the situation is, we have very little time left. If we can't rise above our petty interests, there is no hope for the country.

Do you have a concrete road map?

A roadmap would be a combination of consultation between the political leaders, those who are in charge of security operations and a look at the nature of the insurgency. There is a roadmap, but first the parties have to come together.

Is there unity among the parties for an all-party government?

Actually, we have been discussing this with the Nepali Congress or the UML and within our own party for two years now. We know the nature of the insurgency, we know the root causes. At the same time we realise that the negotiating process is a very complex one that starts with confidence building and has got to move through an extremely complex and cautious process to come to an understanding between the insurgents and the forces in power. It is the nature of this problem that one cannot say one, two, three right now. It is not merely understanding the roadmap. It's implementing the roadmap in such a way that you do not lose anybody else's confidence. You have to carry your partners and the insurgents along if you want a peace process that is successful.



MIN. BAIRACHARYA

As chairman of the RPP, Pashupati SJB Rana has demanded the resignation of his own senior party colleague, Surya Bahadur Thapa from the post of prime minister. We asked Rana to explain the rationale for his move, about the future of democracy and the possibilities of peace.

People are intrigued that your demand for the prime minister's resignation coincided with UML's meeting with Maoist leaders in India.

No, it wasn't planned that way at all. I had no idea that Madhab Nepal was going to meet the Maoist leaders. He certainly did not tell us about it. Our party has been talking about an all-party government for a long time.

The central committee passed the resolution for an all-party government with full executive powers while Chand was still prime minister. So, this is nothing new. The UML has been in favour of an all-party government since the time of Deuba.

If there is no unity even within your own party, how can we expect unity among all other parties?

Every party has agreed that there needs to be an all-party government even though some may have separate agendas within that demand. In fact, Surya Bahadur Thapa himself has repeatedly spoken in favour of an all-party government. But the demand for an all-party government is not new. What is new is that we are pushing this issue to the point of demanding Thapa's resignation. It's just a degree more in the expression of strong affirmation of the need for an all-party government. Thapa has consistently spoken in favour of an all-party government. He enunciated the policy of wider national consensus. If anybody within the Thapa cabinet holds a dissenting view now they are dissenting from their own enunciated previous commitments.

You say an all-party government could help resolve the insurgency. But we had coalition governments in the past that didn't work either.

At that time, the crisis was not as serious as it is now. The insurgency was just starting. Also, the coalition then was a compulsion of the nature of parliament. This time we are talking about an exercise that brings all the forces within the constitution together. It is not about just sustaining a government, this is much, much bigger and broader. To me, a visionary thing.

Is the palace pressuring you into this?

Some people have accused me and the party of being egged on to do this by the palace. From our own party, Kamal Thapa has claimed that we are being guided by the UML and there are some others who claim we are guided by foreign forces. How could all three be influencing us at the same time? At the end of the day, our party is mature and clear enough to understand the nature of the crisis and the needs of the country. We act on our own. We don't need any guidance.

So, where is the missing link?

Thapa set out to create an all-party government. But he soon came to the conclusion that an all-party government and a resolution of the insurgency through talks were no longer feasible. He is now unleashing the full force of the security apparatus to bring the insurgency under control. He then changed his strategy and declared his desire to hold elections instead. We disagreed. Thapa deviated from the party policy of an all-party government. Only then, did we decide to ask for his resignation.

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Making eco-tourism work

A watershed in Nepal's conservation history, ACAP struggles to keep going despite the insurgency.

SRADDHA BASNYAT in POKHARA

Dilapidated signboards and checkpoints that are boarded up are signs that the Maoist insurgency is taking its toll on once-flourishing projects like the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP). Nepal's eco-tourism success story and a powerful example of using tourism income for local development and environmental conservation, ACAP has been targetted by Maoists and its activities are a shadow of its former self.

Born and raised in

Ghandruk, Prakash Bahadur Gurung is confident his village is ready to take full responsibility for the project. His father, Min Bahadur Gurung, was instrumental in convincing locals of the benefits of joining hands with ACAP. His generation has witnessed the positive social and economic changes. But with ACAP's village offices closed, he feels the pace of the project slowing and is concerned about the future. He is actively working to help local conservation committees to manage the project, but faces a stumbling

block of national proportions: "Without peace and security, nothing can be done."

Trouble started three years ago, when Maoists made a bonfire of official papers at Lwang. In 2001, when the emergency was declared, NGOs were targeted but all of ACAP's offices were operational until September this year. "After the peace talks broke down, the Maoists came to Ghandruk and destroyed the ACAP office, telling staff not to return. We had to close all our offices in the southern belt," says Gehendra Gurung at ACAP's

office in Pokhara.

Even so, Gurung assures us that the project is on track elsewhere. Staff are working on handing conservation activities to local communities to manage. Villagers mobilise themselves, decide what needs to be done, and put up the suggestions to ACAP. Once the activities are approved, locals participate in implementing them. Since phone lines have been cut off in many parts, villagers walk down to the Pokhara office for financial and technical support and training. Wherever possible, ACAP uses local knowledge

from staff stationed in the area.

ACAP began in 1985 when King Birendra, after a visit to the western development region, ordered an investigation into the impact of the more than 14,000 trekkers on the area. Poorly managed tourism had exceeded the land's carrying capacity through overpopulation, deforestation, pollution of the trails and a severe threat to the biodiversity of the unique ecological wealth of the Annapurnas.

A three member team, including Chandra Gurung, currently the country

representative for World Wide Fund Nepal, walked for nearly three months from Pokhara to Upper Mustang, over Thorung La and down through Manang to study what could be done. They found traditional systems of natural resource management prevailed in the region, but most villagers were against declaring the area a national park.

Gurung recalls: "They were aware that the Sherpa experience in the Sagarmatha had not been positive. A national park, by definition, excludes permanent settlements and 80 percent of their budget would go to military protection. Wildlife reserves, too, had their own set of problems."

Ghandruk used to be well-managed by retired Gurkhas who kept their villages tidy and the trails well-maintained. By 1985, when Gurung's investigation team arrived, trekking pressure had taken its toll: trails were dilapidated and the villages had become littered. From the average \$3 earned from a tourist per day, 20 cents stayed in the village, the rest seeped out to Pokhara and Kathmandu.

Up the trail, Ghodepani used to be one of the largest rhododendron forests in Nepal. By 1985, many of the stately trees along the trail to the pass had been chopped down for firewood and for constructing tea sheds and lodges. Initially, ACAP had

NINA BARRACHHARA

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK

A new day dawnin'

Has the situation always seemed so unsustainable? I'm beyond despair at the state of Nepal and the world. Now I feel optimistic. Strangely, almost inexplicably so. Perhaps it's yet more wishful thinking, but I've been trying to articulate it to myself through the rage, frustration and sheer incomprehension at the state of the world.

The forces unleashed in recent years both here and abroad continue to rampage over blasted landscapes. Maoists and security forces spreading fear and terrorising civilians in this country, various 'coalition' forces cavorting in Iraq and failing to keep the peace in Afghanistan. Mad mullahs still roam freely, dumping videotapes at TV stations and dreaming of the next 9/11. Israel and the Palestinians lurch in all directions save towards sanity.

Movie star governors in California, environmental degradation everywhere, no more fish in the ocean, social programs overturned, rolled back and deliberately bankrupted to make way for the greed-mongering privatisers, a global economic and social consensus based on fairness thrown out without regard for any consequence save instant enrichment of the political-military-economic elite that forms our opinions and dominates our lives.

And yet. And yet. There's a glimmer of something amidst the gloom that those with even a trace of a conscience feel so acutely. The foxes are in charge of the



hen house for the moment, yes. But it can't last. We're running low on plunder and perhaps finally, short of patience with pirates. Oh, it will take time, perhaps a generation or two.

But it'll happen. What's coming is a wave of outrage and scorn for the corporate consensus of the past generation. We of the 40 and 50 axis fancied ourselves different from the old right and left, able to compromise, to mix profit with social justice, to find a Third Way that lead to equity and prosperity. In the 1990s, we enthused about Tony Blair, Bill Clinton, Helmut Schroeder and others. Now we're stuck with President Bush and I for one, am glad. Because you know where he stands, how he acts. And you also know that his side is soon going to lose the battle.

Around the world, demographics are shifting gradually and inexorably. In America, Michael Moore's 'Stupid White Men' still predominate. But they're losing ground rapidly. The United States in 50 years will be much less white, much more multicultural, multilingual and still, yes, the economic engine of the world. Its entrepreneurs will be from Haiti, Latin America, Nepal and Sub-Saharan Africa. The political mainstream will be left of centre, caring, cosmopolitan and sympathetic to international thinking. It's inevitable. And it is being driven ever quicker in that direction by the long, drawn death throes of the white right, which knows

There is a glimmer of something amidst the gloom.

full well that its days are numbered. That's why they're desperately shrill about everything from gay marriage to arms control.

Oh, there'll be a cost, a big one. Petroleum products will be consumed at a ferocious rate as big oil takes its last chance to cash in. Environmental and social legislation around the world will be gutted as swashbuckling dinosaur corporations take their final d'siecle opportunity to ramp up their profitability before the backlash. Forests will come down, wetlands will be drained and air will become unbreathable. Big Western drug companies will make a fortune from treating the imagined agonies of the rich, while ignoring the poor. But watch out. What's coming isn't a revolution—apologies to comrades everywhere—but an explosion of the sort of thinking that informed the American Constitution and the Bill of Rights, an intolerance for the hypocrisies and crap conservatism of the past; a new dawn for diversity, racial harmony and inter-community teamwork that both enriches us all and improves the world.

Or so it seems to me in my more fanciful moments. ♦



for the people



The ACAP office in Ghandruk after Maoists raided and set fire to the building last year.

difficulties gaining trust, especially getting people to relocate, a task that took three years.

But, working with local communities, the project managed to convince them that they could use ACAP's seed money for community development and to protect, manage and use their natural resources. The 100,000 people from 10 ethnic groups who lived and farmed in the region had to be convinced that this was a viable plan. It took another year-and-a-half to formulate a new concept of using tourism fees to be recycled back to the villages and get it approved by locals. Then approval finally came from the government in Kathmandu.

The daunting task of managing the project, with an initial funding of \$1 million for the first five years from WWF, fell upon the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC). In December 1986, KMTNC set up the project in Ghandruk and it was off and running.

The project had a four-point agenda: peoples' participation, sustainability, hiring and training of local project managers and finally, ACAP was to phase out of the area, handing over management to local communities. Gurung recalls the hard struggle to make the plan work, but in the end it did. He says: "Now ACAP is known worldwide as a project

initiated and implemented by Nepalis. It has become a model for protected areas and is the right approach given the political situation. Just look, community projects are not attacked (by Maoists). The power of local communities has manifested itself." Today, ACAP surpasses Sagarmatha National Park as the most popular tourist destination in the kingdom and has been able to sustain the influx with minimum impact on the environment.

Executive officer at KMTNC, Ganga Jung Thapa makes it his business to know how the trust's projects are fairing. "The people cannot conserve on an empty stomach so conservation and development must be complementary. This way, Ghandruk showed other villages that they could increase income and improve welfare." In 1992, when Upper Mustang opened up for limited tourism, the government included it in ACAP.

ACAP's work has included natural resource management, alternative energy, cultural conservation, livestock and agriculture, repair of temples and gompas, research on flora and fauna. Thapa regards developing communities' capacity to manage the conservation area as critical.

In 1996, the 55 VDCs in the project region each had a Conservation Area Management

Committee which worked directly with ACAP. By ensuring that the VDC chairman was an ex-official of the committee, the two groups were able to work on the same level. The focus then shifted to training committee members in office management and project implementation. ACAP took on the role of facilitator since the locals involved were in a better position to implement activities while reaching more people.

ACAP recently began handing over the responsibility of the conservation area to local communities and the project hopes to use the next ten years to extend this process and build local capacity for environmental management. But this process is facing delays because of the insurgency. There are also grumbings in some ACAP areas that the promised recycling of 40 percent of tourist fees to local areas has not happened, and many villagers don't like ACAP restrictions on firewood, grazing, plastic water bottle use and other measures.

We asked Chandra Gurung, who is from the village of Siklis, north of Pokhara, what he would do differently. He is still very attached to ACAP and says he would start with a baseline database and measure change. "ACAP is a milestone in conservation in Nepal, if it goes, the impact will be huge. Local communities must now carry on the achievements of the last two decades." ♦

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Disappeared

Human Rights Day on 10 December this year focussed national attention on the growing problem of disappearances of Nepalis in the Maoist conflict. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) used the 55th International Human Rights Day to publish a list of 709 persons reported missing in the past eight years. Two hundred in that list are said to have been disappeared by the Maoists, and the fate of the rest, who were arrested by the security forces, is unknown.

"More and more people are disappearing after they are held captive by both sides," Sushil Pyakurel of the NHRC told us. "That is why our slogan this human rights day was 'Disappearances of people: a challenge'." Some people on the list have been missing for as long as eight years, like Menash Pokhrel from Rautahat who has been missing since 1995. A majority of the disappeared are from Bardia, Bara and other Maoist strongholds. Some of the more recent have disappeared from Kathmandu.

Human rights experts say the main problem is that the government has detained people without filing cases against them. "No legal procedure is adopted after such arrests are made," says Krishna Pahadi of Human Rights and Peace Society. "People are simply detained and they disappear, leading to speculation that may have been executed." The crisis has become so serious that the government is under increasing pressure to invite experts from the United Nations to monitor the human rights situation in the country. NHRC has repeatedly made this demand and has won the solidarity of seven international agencies, including Amnesty International.

The government, however, has said a flat no. Instead it has formed a parallel Human Rights Promotion Centre at the prime minister's office which is seen as a move to counter what is seen as the NHRC's increasingly critical stance against disappearances by the security forces. But government officials there say the new body will implement recommendations made by the NHRC.



Thrill factor

Trekking agencies are heartened that despite the troubles, the number of trekkers in Nepal has gone up in recent months. Tourists keen on adventure seem to be getting used to the Maoist insurgency. "We have noticed that they are becoming increasingly confident about going to rural areas despite the Maoist presence," Bandinima Sherpa of the Trekking Agents Association of Nepal (TAAN), told us. "That confidence is based on the fact that there has not been a Maoist attack against any tourist, at least not against those who have trekked with registered companies."

TAAN officials say most trekkers are comfortable paying donations upto Rs 1,000 to rebels as long as they are safe. "In fact, they have begun to take the meeting with the rebels as a thrill factor. Speaking to gun-toting Maoists and getting the donation receipt from them seems to be exciting for many trekkers."

The government is not about to promote Maoism as a tourist attraction, but the Nepal Tourism Board says total arrivals of tourists increased by more than 45 percent in November compared to last year. On average the arrivals have gone up by 20 percent in the last 11 months

though official statistics do not specify the kind of tourists coming to Nepal.

Trekking agencies say they had more clients than expected in November. "Our members have reported to us that they have been handling more and more trekkers," says Deepak Mahat, president of TAAN. "Business is definitely up." Trekkers and expeditioners comprise more than 30 percent of the total tourist arrivals to Nepal. After registering a record arrival of nearly 500,000 tourists in 1999, the tourism industry had witnessed drastic decline to 215,000 last year.

Marsyangdi people power

Trekkers in Lamjung on the Annapurna trail this year saw thousands of students marching (*see pic*) on the Dumre-Besisahar road for peace rallies and in support of the Middle Marsyangdi Hydroelectric Project (MMHEP). Since the beginning of the construction of the 70MW project two years ago, the otherwise sleepy towns from Sundar Bazar to Gaunsahar in Lamjung have become hives of



activity. Hundreds of new shops catering to the needs of the construction crew have opened, providing a good market for local fruits, vegetables, poultry and dairy products. General stores, hotels and restaurants, furniture makers, barbershops and even two cable TV services are flourishing here. It is all tied up with the Middle Marsyangdi project. But now this boom is threatened by the suspension of the project because of the deteriorating security situation.

This has sent alarm bells ringing among the people who were benefiting from the construction. Which is also the reason why the peace rallies got such spontaneous and overwhelming response from local people. The participating students took to the streets with placards and banners that read 'We want to grow up in love and peace' and 'We are the owners of MMHEP'. (Bisma Prasad Adhikari in Bhoiteodar)

No longer battered

The 16-day international annual campaign against gender violence ended Wednesday with national events coordinated by the group Saathi in Nepal.

"The event is special because it gets attention on a nationwide scale and reaches all the people," says Pramoda Shah of Saathi. Street demonstrations, marches and awareness programs organised by campaigners helped media coverage of the likes never seen by activists before.

One of the highest rates of crimes against women in Nepal is domestic violence. More women get battered, raped, abused and even killed at the hands of their own husbands and the incidents are on rise even in middle class families. A lack of specific laws against domestic violence makes the police and activists unable to find an easy way to get justice for the victims. Only a few women report their cases to the police for fear of being humiliated, bringing shame onto their families and ending up doubly victimised.

Things are gradually improving, even the government's attitude has changed. "The campaign is to lend public pressure on the government to address violence against women by enacting, implementing and enforcing laws that address all forms of gender-based violence," adds Shah.

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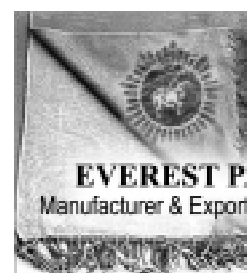
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MINBAURGHARYA

Economists Wanted

Individuals with vested interests in matters of national importance have an unchallenged monopoly of opinion in the Nepali media.

transcend their immediate interests and the interests of their cohort, there is a serious problem.

Public policy discourse in Nepal is hopelessly devoid of the 'public' component. The National Planning Commission remains a monolith that deigns to favour the nation every five years with its periodic action plans. As the plans enter the implementation phase—token public participation notwithstanding—sustained, non-partisan public enquiry into the nuts and bolts of the progress of these activities is glaringly absent.

Take for example the 40 percent tax the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation decided to levy on Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs). The Federation of Community Forest Users in Nepal (FECOFUN) was immediately on a war footing. Questioning the government's motive behind such a drastic measure, FECOFUN went as far as to accuse the government of trying to arrest the progress made by CFUGs since the handover of national forests to communities. The government, on the other hand, cited the inequities inherent within user groups in the decision making and allocation process to justify the need for intervention.

To assume that FECOFUN speaks for all the users within the

2,700-plus user groups it represents is to delude ourselves. But even as the battle between the government and FECOFUN drags on, it's sad not to find a single rigorous, objective and impartial dissection of this issue in the media. Stakeholder identification is an indispensable exercise of any kind of development related study these days. But rather than being vocal and active participants in activities which could potentially determine their futures, stakeholders are mute—their voices often hijacked by small, concentrated groups of people who claim to represent them.

Similar examples are abundant. When the government decided to raise fuel prices in April, it took a foreign economist working in Nepal (the World Bank's country director) to attempt to explain to the public the counterintuitive argument as to why the hikes were indeed good for us. Rigorous though his analysis was, it came a bit late as the ultra-politicised protests had already caused the loss of one life in Butwal.

The restructuring saga of Nepal Bank Limited and Rastriya Banijya Bank isn't very different. These banks, one state owned the other previously so, have

been funnelling money into the capital from all over the country. When it was discovered—in an almost Enron-like fashion—that they were engaged in lending practices that are far from ethical, especially to politically connected big businesses who had no intention of paying back the loans in the first place, alarm bells were sounded.

Keen on mopping up the filth, the central bank contracted out the management of these two banks to foreign consultants and most recently, instituted a set of headline corrective measures, the most controversial of which, so far, has been reinforcing the use of legal channels to recover delinquent loans.

The tragedy is, all you get to read in the newspapers regarding this issue is either blunt government press releases or loony private sector whining. Where are the concerns of small shareholders whose equity stake in Nepal Bank Limited, for example, has been wiped out? Where are the concerns of the small depositors and borrowers who bear the direct brunt of the misguided lending of their banks? Who writes about what good things a healthy, competitive and well functioning financial market can do to the economy?

In the same vein, yes, deregulating labour markets is most probably a good thing. It is likely that a more competitive market for labour will do wonders for its mobility and productivity. Yet, it is also true that such a move would increase the government's welfare responsibility. Minimum wage floors would have to be enforced and working conditions, especially in the industrial and manufacturing sectors, constantly monitored.

But can FNCCI—the vanguard of labour market deregulation in the media and in public opinion—be expected to care the tiniest bit about the welfare concerns of workers? Economists and journalists reporting on economic issues and Tribhuvan University academics should realise that policy wars at the implementation level are won not by producing esoteric manuscripts no one reads but by reaching out to the people, engaging in public debates and swaying public opinion.

Else, businessmen will continue to pose as economists and students like me will have to continue taking distance-learning courses from them. ♦

Binit Sharma is the pseudonym of an economist.
arthatantra@hotmail.com

The most vocal critics of Nepal Rastra Bank's recent blacklisting directive are the handful of big businesses who haven't paid their outstanding loans for god knows how many years.

The FNCCI is the staunchest advocate for relaxing labour market regulations. Flip through the pages of the *New Business Age* and you'll find prominent industrialists sermonising on

anything from budgetary matters to trade issues. Readers on whom the irony of these maladies is lost are missing a fundamental point. There is nothing wrong with individuals and groups with vested interests making their voices heard on matters of national importance. In fact, they have every right to do so. But when they have an unchallenged monopoly on opinion in the media and when their opinions

“Restless days with sleepless nights”

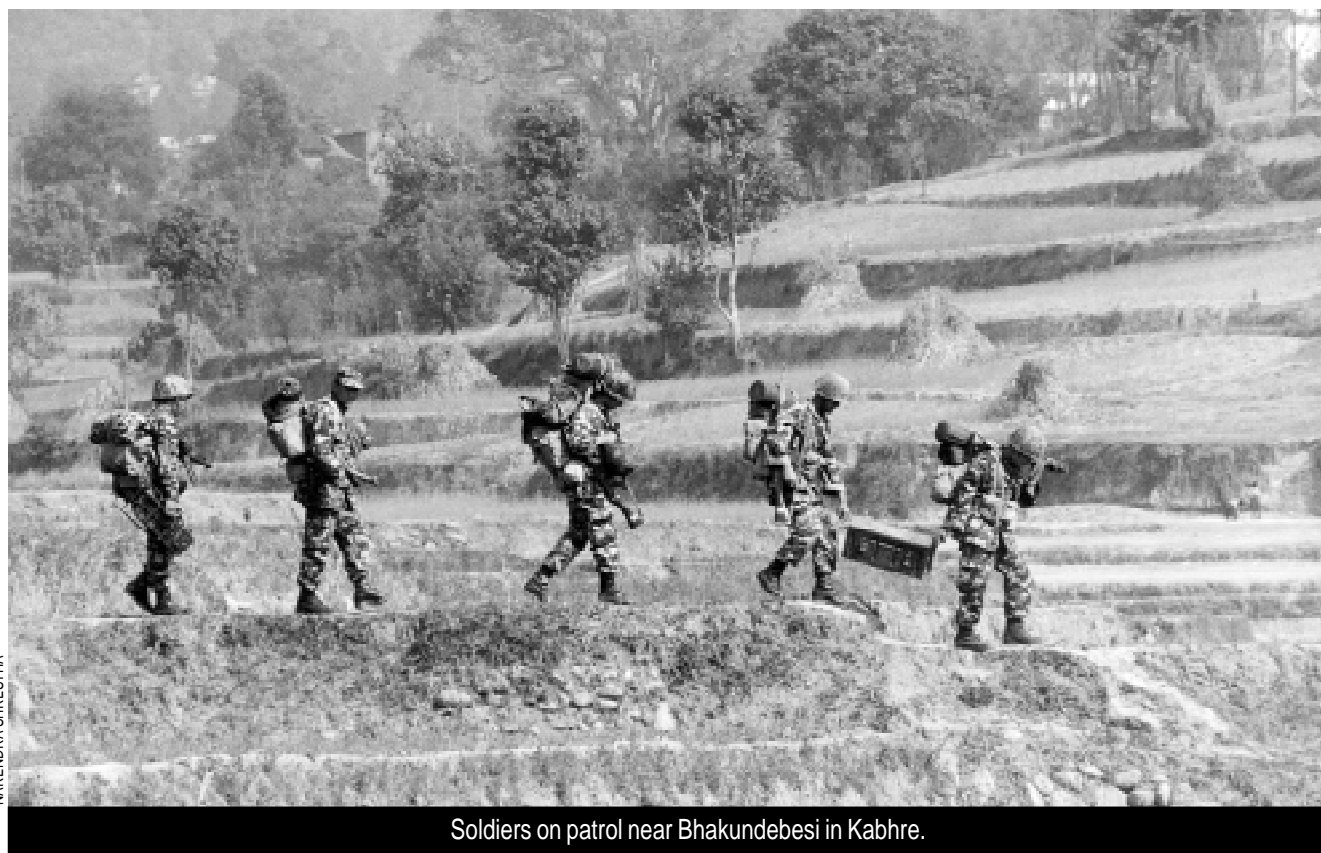
from p1

Extortion by the Maoists took their toll, and things became impossible because of constant inspections and searches by the security forces. The closely-knit village has now thinned down to a few households. More than half of the 50 families have abandoned their homes and live in Banepa. The once bustling bazar is now closed and shuttered.

You can smell the fear and terror in Dapcha as people whisper about the brutal deaths of two young boys. On 17 November, 11-year-old Min Bahadur Lama was on his way home when he spotted a pressure cooker with a Maoist flag sitting in the middle of the busy road. He went to take a closer look, despite warnings from his friends. As soon as he removed the flag, the bomb exploded, killing him on the spot. Earlier, another Dapcha youngster, 18-year-old Sanat Shrestha was killed on 3 September by Maoists who thought he was an army informer.

The level of psychological trauma on families is so high that the community's social fabric has fallen apart. Nobody pays social calls, everyone stays at home behind closed doors. Children aren't allowed out, and by dusk Dapcha's few shops are locked. By six in the evening, all you hear are doors being banged shut. An hour later, there is complete silence and not even the dogs are barking.

People beg strangers to leave them



NARENDRA SHRESTHA

Soldiers on patrol near Bhakundebesi in Kabhre.

alone. “Please go away, leave us alone,” they whispered to us through heavy wooden doors when we ask for *bas*. The family that dared to take us in said we were to leave before dawn the next morning. The news of outsiders in the village travels fast and either the Maoists or the army would soon come calling to ask questions. Who were they, what did they want?

“Restless days with sleepless nights is our never-ending routine,” says Nirmala's 16-year-old daughter

Sarita. “All I want to do is finish school and get out of here.” When we knocked on their door, the family looked suspiciously at us through a chink in the door. It was time for the Maoists to come for their monthly donation. “It is the end of the month, that's when they come to collect,” Sarita explains softly, not daring to even call the rebels by name. She admits that the strong army presence in the area and constant checking by the security forces makes her feel

more secure.

While the people in Dapcha have drawn inward and closed themselves off, down the road in Daraune Pokhari villagers have done just the opposite. A year ago, they built a 7km motorable road to reach their village through personal contributions from each of the 45 households. With just Rs 700,000 and within five months, they carved a round across the steep mountainside. “This road proves that we can build our own village and we are really proud

of ourselves,” says Min Tamang who started a club with his friends to organise similar development activities. Locals actively support the club's self-improvement plans. “Raising funds is not a problem if we are organising activities that benefit us,” he says.

But even here, the fear of the spreading violence is never far. Villagers have heard of the situation in surrounding villages, and even though no one has been killed here, things are getting tense in Daraune Pokhari. Maoist extortion is on the rise, and the locals are afraid of retaliation from the Maoists for the recent deaths of two senior Maoist commanders at the hands of the security forces.

“One of them was in charge of 500 militia members,” says a woman at Daraune Pokhari worried about reprisals against villagers for being informers. But others are more confident: “Our lives are normal here and we have nothing to fear because we are sincere and hardworking,” says Sunil Tamang.

Indeed, schools here are still running, none of the teachers have left. Terrace farms are being tilled and harvested, roadside stalls never run out of tea or customers and shops still trade. Says Min Tamang: “All we do is mind our own business. We are neither close to the army nor the Maoists.” ♦

All names in this piece have been changed to protect the identity of the villagers at their request.

BIZ NEWS

Nepali greens in the Gulf

Who would've thought that Nepali produce would some day find their way onto supermarket shelves in the Middle East? Come Friday, a first-ever one tonne cargo of green vegetables grown in Kathmandu will be at Doha on a Qatar Airways flight.

Cauliflowers, green chilli, spinach, potatoes, ladies fingers and beans are part of the first consignment. It marks the first export of vegetables to a third country, thanks to the Salt Trading Corporation (STC) which played a key role in the deal. "We will export vegetables to the Middle East on a regular basis," says STC's Parmeswar Mahaseth at STC. The corporation took the initiative after a market study revealed the Gulf could be a promising market for our vegetables and fruits. STC is opening a branch office in Dubai to facilitate regular exports to Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Kuwait and Iraq among others. STC's biggest challenge will be delivering farm fresh vegetables to clients. Farmers in Bhaktapur are excited about the new venture. "Looks like our good days are back," said Roshan Prajapati of Bhaktapur. "Perhaps we will no longer have to wake up at dawn and rush to Kathmandu to sell our vegetables."

Winners, all

The boss Top 10 Awards for Business Excellence, the first of its kind, recognised Nepal's best and brightest businessmen and women last week. From the total of nine categories, those who walked off with a coveted tribute to entrepreneurship and business included Karna Shakya of KGH Group of Hotels and Resorts for best Entrepreneur (Company), Sharada Rizal of Milan Garments for Best Entrepreneur (Women), Saurabh Jyoti of Jyoti Group of Industries for FNCCI Young Entrepreneur, Dabur Nepal for Best Company (Manufacturing/Marketing) and Standard Chartered Bank Nepal for Best Company (Financial Institutions).

New literacy

NIIT, an IT training company, is working to close the digital divide through its World Computer Literacy Day 2003 campaign launched on 2 December. For every enrollment at NIIT sponsored by an organisation, one underprivileged child will be trained for free at NIIT centres in the kingdom.

Going public

Kumari Bank has announced an IPO for Rs 150 million of 1.5 million shares 18 December-16 January. Should there be over-subscription, the issue will close on 24 December. Application collection centres have been established in all major Nepali towns and cities. The operating profit of the bank at the close of fiscal year 2002-3 was Rs 52 million. Based on the performance of the last four months, Kumari Bank is expected to record an operating profit of nearly Rs 100 million this year.

NEW PRODUCTS

CLOSE SHAVE: After prolonged research and development, Gillette has come up with a product specifically designed for the average Nepali man ie, someone with low shaving frequency, lack of running water and a tough beard. The Gillette Vector Plus has an anti-clogging twinblade system with a push button to clean the blades, a lubricating strip to reduce pulling and skin irritation, and is comfortably priced at Rs 78 for a razor and cartridge. Extra cartridges are available for Rs 56 for two and Rs 104 for a four pack.

PHOTO FINISH: Brilliant photo-quality output at a print resolution of 2,880 optimised dpi at an affordable price for the home office is what the EPSON Stylus C43UX will deliver to the budget-conscious consumer. Introduced to the Nepali market by Mercantile Office System at Darbar Marg, the printer includes an easy to use photo utility that makes printing a breeze with a large previewing window and new red-eye reduction feature.

ODOUR-FREE: Faber's new electric kitchen chimney promises to banish the smell of Nepali spices that permeates our kitchen. Designed for the South Asian kitchen by a collaboration with Faber SpA of Italy, these chimneys extract kitchen vapours with minimum machine noise and low electricity consumption. Universal trading Circle, the local importers and distributors, say the secret lies in its anti-grease filter technology.

Hat Man Strikes Back!



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STRICTLY BUSINESS

by ASHUTOSH TIWARI



Rollercoaster

This week started off on a positive note and ended on a bad one.

Let's begin with the good: on 7 December, *the boss* assembled a who's who of Nepali businesspeople at Soaltee Crowne Plaza for the first-ever Awards for Business Excellence. The black-tie event was a peer-to-peer celebration with Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa giving away awards to those judged the best entrepreneurs, businesspeople, companies and management students.

The good work that verifiably transparent and accountable small, medium, large and multinational companies are capable of doing in Nepal by providing jobs, making use of resources to create value, providing goods and services and being good corporate citizens was lauded. The event carried a symbolic value—it showed that even in difficult political times, Nepali businesses could celebrate their successes with each other.

The sour note came on Tuesday when the Nepal office of Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) sent out letters informing all and sundry that they were discontinuing their support of the Small Industries Promotion Program

(SIPP). This seven-year-old project with a first-rate team of professionals has worked hard to strengthen numerous chambers of commerce and small and medium businesses across Nepal's semi-urban towns. SDC's abrupt decision came as a shock. Not least because they recently sent SIPP staff to expensive overseas training programs to learn the latest techniques on business strategy applicable to poverty alleviation in Nepal.

At any rate, SDC's formal letter stated that support to SIPP was being stopped because "the breakdown of the ceasefire in August 2003 created—after months of hope—again an unfavourable environment for economic growth and social development." It went on to say: "[P]rojects which do not contribute directly to conflict mitigation and conflict resolution have to be discontinued", and that SDC would reprioritise its project portfolio towards projects that "work in and on the conflict and which directly address social exclusion, inequities and inequalities, in other words the



root causes of the conflict."

This is a case of a donor pressing the panic button too quickly, thereby painting Nepal's difficult situation as a hopeless crisis. There are two possible reasons:

First, SDC's decision showed how narrow-minded certain aid agencies can be about the inherent value in strengthening Nepali small businesses—the likes of, say, coffee-growers' collectives in Gulmi, marketing agents for Jumla apples in Nepalganj or a struggling FM radio

station in Butwal that broadcasts community-friendly messages—so that they continue to play a much-needed civic role in their communities to, well, mitigate conflict by bringing people together, enhancing their social capital and keeping them plugged into information networks. Small businesses, after all, exist neither in a vacuum nor in a capitalist's paradise.

Second, it also showed that some aid agencies may well be ideologically prone to seeing business of any kind only in starkly outdated exploitative terms and not in their value-creating avatar, existing in Nepali communities. Sure, distributing blankets to the poorest of the poor with photo-ops may be good. It certainly makes development workers feel warm and fuzzy. But if 50 years of development aid has taught us anything, it is that finding ways for the poor to link up with local markets could have a better return on foreign taxpayers' money. This enables the underprivileged to sell their goods and services to make money for themselves, perhaps to eventually buy their own blankets. ♦

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Passion for pash

Pashmina is not just a shawl anymore, it's a fabric that can be turned into sweaters, jackets, robes, bedcovers and even hats.



dullest outfit.

What cashmere is to the West, pashmina is to the East. And the twain meet between Kashmir and Kathmandu. In India, and later in Nepal, pashmina was reserved for royalty, but it didn't take very long for it to come to the attention of the luxury loving European imperial families. Around the 18th century, the governor of Kashmir presented a pashmina to a visitor from Baghdad who gifted it to Egyptian nobility. The pashmina then made its way to Napoleon Bonaparte who gave it to his wife, Empress Josephine. Trust the French to recognise a good thing. The empress immediately asked for more in every conceivable colour, starting the First European Pash Boom.

Fast forward to the early 1990s. Western *haute couture* suddenly rediscover pashmina and fashion designers and editors go into hyperbolic raptures: "diamond fibre", "soft gold of Asia", "Rolls Royce of clothing", "king of wool", "fibre of the Gods". The spiel worked extremely well

for what is essentially goat hair. But such hype rarely lasts.

Pashmina, derived from the Persian word '*pashm*' meaning cloth, comes from mountain goats that live above 3,300m. Pashmina is the goat's soft underbelly down, which lies under the coarse outer hair. The goats shed each spring and the hair is either collected or combed from the goats. The fibre is sorted, cleaned and spun into yarn, woven and then individually dyed and dried. (This is cruelty-free fashion, unlike shahtoosh that is made from the endangered Chiru, or Tibetan antelope. An average of 20 Chirus are

NARESH NEWAR

Come winter and all the best-dressed shoulders in the world are wearing Nepali pashmina. Despite the glut in the market and erosion of the earlier euphoria over the fabric, it is

still a glamorous alternative with enough exoticism to bump off other options. Things are exotic as long as they are exclusive, but if they remain exclusive then it can't be a fad—it's a fine balance.

Pashmina connotes a

certain elitism and luxury, but it is surprisingly affordable, especially here in Nepal. High international demand has plumped up manufacture, which has caused prices to settle at very comfortable rates. Comfortable enough for women like 35-year-old Pushpa Sharma, a

businesswomen, to own 50 shawls in various weaves and colours.

"A modern woman's wardrobe is incomplete without pashmina," she says of this extraordinarily light, soft and warm fibre. "I can't go anywhere without it, and no, I don't believe pashmina

is a rich woman's prerogative." Quality determines prices so pashminas can be had for as little as \$20 or as much as \$250 for A-grade 100 percent stoles and shawls.

The reason for its popularity has much to do with versatility. Men in London this winter are wearing pashmina scarves with their tuxedos for a touch of flair, women team it up with everything from floaty dresses to jeans. In Nepal, every bride has at least three pashminas in her trousseau. Like the sari, the pashmina is kind to the wearer: it drapes, flatters and infuses style into the



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killed for one shawl that commands as much as \$2,500 on the blackmarket.)

The Nepali pashmina industry owes its success to the Gurung and Thakali communities from the mountain areas that brought the fabric to Nepal centuries ago. When these hill people moved to Kathmandu they discovered their craft had money-making potential and started selling to the local market. When tourism grew, more families started small pashmina manufacturing outfits. Scattered shops soon became big manufacturing companies and by 1997 Nepal was exporting Rs 3 million worth of pashminas. By 2000 that figure was Rs 5.6 billion.

"I had forecasted that pashmina would hit the international market on a large scale when the fashion industry was on a high and pashmina was in much demand," says Pushpa Shrestha of Nepal Pashmina Industry, one of the largest Nepali exporters. He was a forerunner, starting with just Rs 2,000 as capital in the early 80s. The company's annual turnover today is over Rs 3 million.

"It was a dream come true," says Gopal Das Manandhar of Euro Pashmina, another big exporter and among the oldest families involved in the trade. It was a struggle for his family when they began Manandhar Brothers 40 years ago. The company folded but two decades later, Manandhar revived the family business by starting his own company, which is now one of the most successful in the business.

After 2000, the industry went into a deep slump, falling to Rs 1 billion last year. But pashmina entrepreneurs still hope it will pick up. "Nepal's international market has not deteriorated. It's just that we need to move with the international trend of



fashion," says Manandhar. With China emerging as Nepal's biggest competitor, entrepreneurs are feeling the heat. Chinese labour is cheaper, the production cost is low, their manpower is better skilled and they have their own raw material, something that Nepal imports.

"The thing that works in our favour is that the Europeans have a soft corner for us and we have already established goodwill among our clients," says Shrestha who adds that there is really nothing to worry about. With China and India cutting in on the pashmina pie, Nepal has to stay ahead by being creative and innovative. "If we want continued success, we have to be more creative in design, styling and getting colour combinations right," says Shrestha.

The problem is that Nepal doesn't have institutions to survey foreign markets or specialise in design and style. This is where young entrepreneurs like Meghna Thapa and Sapna Bajracharya step in. A year ago, both designers in their mid-20s put their savings in to establish Weaves & Blends to produce creative designer pashmina items, on display at their Kumari Pati showroom, easily one of the most impressive in the Valley.

Starting with a small loan from their friends, Thapa and Bajracharya

prove that pashmina is still fresh. They have 27 staff, a financial controller and have held an exhibition at a prestigious Parisian tradeshow. Innovation is the key to their success and Weaves & Blends moves far beyond the ubiquitous shawl—the sweaters, mattresses, jackets and hats come in new textures and colours, justifying discrete price tags that climb past \$200. Says a self-assured Bajracharya: "As Nepalis, we're on par if not much better when it comes to pashmina fashion." ♦

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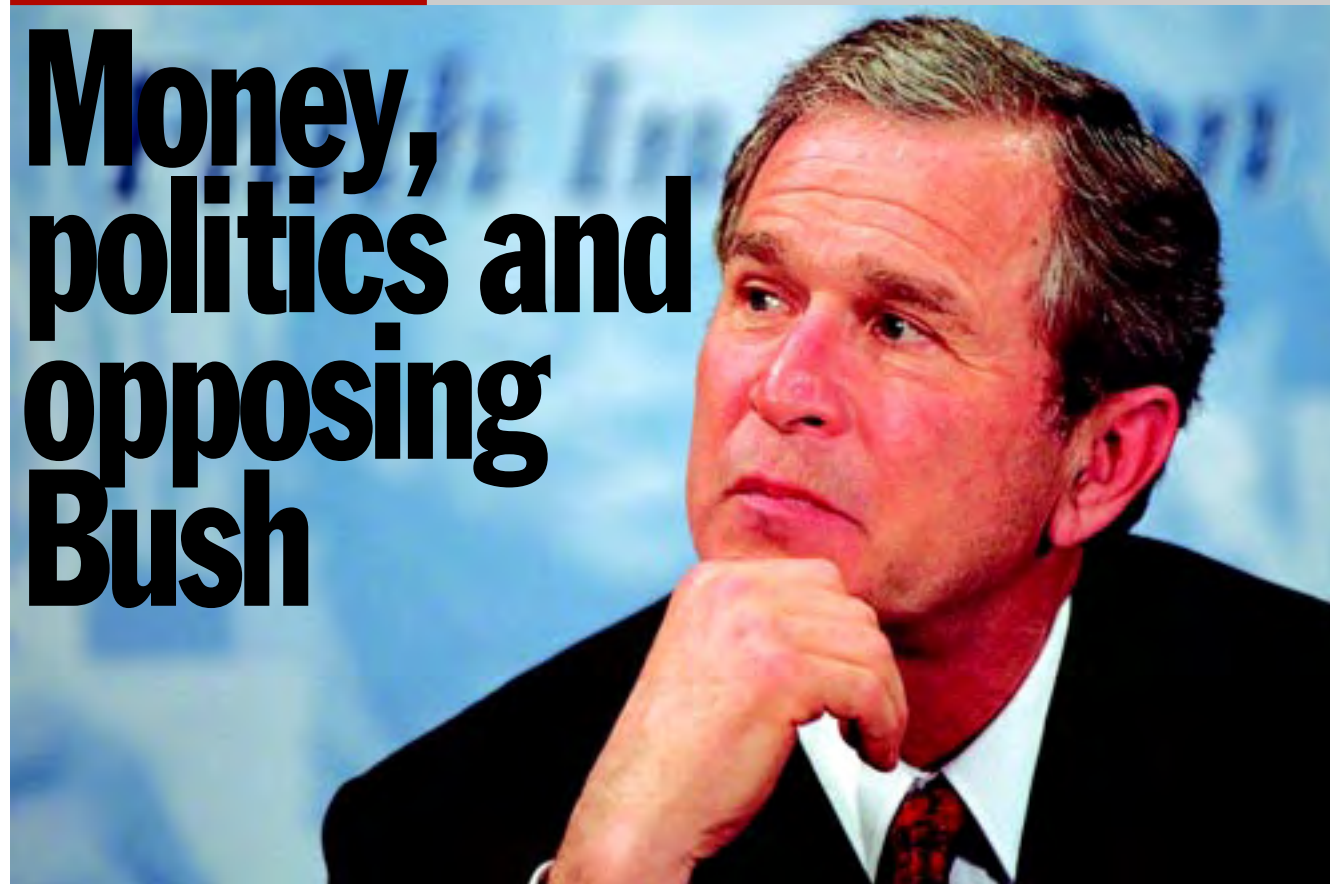
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Money, politics and opposing Bush



Money and its role in American politics is a subject of constant debate. Despite many attempts at reform, the funds spent on US national elections grow every time voters go to the polls. Many believe that essentially unlimited private money favours the Republicans. Billionaire and philanthropist George Soros, a proponent of reform, has been accused of hypocrisy because of his large financial contributions in connection with the upcoming presidential election. In this article, Soros explains his reasons and his views on the subject of money in politics.

Thus they are buying the same level of access and influence for their corporate interests that they previously obtained with their own and corporate funds. With the help of these Pioneers and Rangers, President Bush is on track to collect \$200 million.

To counter the fundraising advantage obtained by this strategy, I have contributed to independent organisations that by law are forbidden to coordinate their activities with the political parties or candidates. That law minimises or eliminates the ability to purchase influence in exchange for my contribution. Moreover, I don't seek such influence. My contributions are made in what I believe to be the common interest. ACT is working to register voters, and MoveOn is getting more people engaged in the national debate over Bush's policies.

I recognise that the system is imperfect, and I wish there were a different way to level the playing field. Making contributions to ACT and the MoveOn.org Voter Fund is the best approach I have found. I have been an advocate of campaign finance reform for almost a decade, including the legal defence of the current legislation. I recognise that every new regulation has unintended adverse consequences, but this does not

mean reform should be abandoned.

Clearly, the rules need to be updated in the light of the 2004 experience. Some good proposals have already surfaced, including one from the major sponsors of the current campaign finance legislation. This bill should be supported.

Among other measures, it calls for an increase in the federal match for small contributions and would raise the spending limit for candidates who accept public funding to \$75 million—changes that would reduce the bias toward big-money donors. Free airtime for candidates is also important. This would reduce the cost of campaigns and the distorting effect of commercials.

Full disclosure and transparency are clearly beneficial. It is important that people know where financial support is coming from. I have been open about my contributions, and I welcome the debate they have sparked. In the meantime, as the debate continues, my contributions help to ensure that the money spent by those trying to reelect President Bush doesn't overwhelm the process. ♦

(© Project Syndicate)

George Soros is chairman of Soros Management Fund and author of *The Bubble of American Supremacy*.

and a number of other wealthy Americans are contributing millions of dollars to grassroots organisations engaged in the 2004 presidential election. We are deeply concerned with the direction in which the Bush administration is taking the United States and the world.

If Americans reject the president's policies at the polls, America can write off the Bush Doctrine as a temporary aberration and resume its rightful place in the world. If American voters endorse those policies, the US shall have to live with the hostility of the world and endure a vicious cycle of escalating violence.

In this effort, I have committed \$10 million to 'America Coming Together, (ACT)' a grassroots get-out-the-vote operation, and \$2.5 million to the 'MoveOn.org Voter Fund,' a popular Internet advocacy group that is airing advertisements to highlight the

administration's misdeeds. This is a pittance in comparison with money raised and spent by US conservative groups.

Rather than a debate on the issues, there's been a lot of name-calling about my donations by such groups as the Republican National Committee and the National Rifle Association. In an attempt to taint the groups I support and intimidate other donors, they imply that my contributions are illegitimate or that I have somehow broken the law.

In fact, I have scrupulously abided by both the letter and the spirit of the law. Both 'America Coming Together' and the 'MoveOn.org Voter Fund' are organisations that, according to a specific reference in the US tax code, are entitled to receive unlimited contributions from individuals. Both groups are fully transparent about their motives and activities. Both file detailed and frequent reports with government regulators.

America's most recent campaign finance law attempts to limit the influence that special interests can gain by financing candidates and so level the playing field between the Republican and Democratic parties. My contributions are made in that spirit.

President Bush has a huge fundraising advantage because he has figured out a clever way to raise money. He relies on donors he calls "Pioneers," who collect \$100,000 apiece in campaign contributions in increments that fall within the legal limit of \$2,000 that any individual can give, and on those he calls "Rangers," who collect at least \$200,000.

Many of these Pioneers and Rangers are corporate officials who are well situated to raise funds from their business associates, bundle them together and pass them along with tracking numbers to ensure proper "credit" to each individual donor of \$2,000.

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Media for all and all for media

John Donne, back in the pre-gender-sensitive days of the 17th century, said: "No man is an island and any man's death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind." Communication is how we make conscious our invisible bonds of connectedness.

Many of us engaging in initiatives to extend access to information and communication technologies (ICT), however, do not draw attention to such soft, idealistic aims. Instead, after a tip of the hat to empowerment and community-building, and some mumbling about vision and values, we hastily re-focus on the practical and measurable benefits of information sharing—healthcare, education, agricultural know-how, weather reports, market prices—and pretend that it's the information being shared that makes the real difference, rather than the transformative act of sharing itself.

The implications of so many millions of us now being able to instantly share our thoughts with millions of other humans is overwhelming. What will be the effect on humans of this new amazing power to communicate? And on those left out of the

charmed circle of connectivity? These are important questions, on both the societal and individual level, for the creation and maintenance of our personal identity depends on the environment (human and non-human) with which we interact. Psychologist Chris Robertson put it more succinctly: identity is interactive. Anyone who denies that people are affected that much by their interactions should consider: what do torturers do when they want to destroy their victims' sense of identity to drive them mad? They isolate them.

One must have an unusually strong identity to hold on to a steady sense of meaning when you are plunged into solitary confinement. Torturers and their victims make up only a tiny proportion of earth's inhabitants. But hundreds of millions of others left incommunicado have damaging levels of disconnectedness forced on them. Tens of millions of young parents suffer severe depression each year when childbirth plunges them into social isolation. Instead of the increased bonding they expected, they find themselves at the mercy of tiny, shrieking tormentors screaming inexplicably through

World leaders are meeting in Geneva this week to frame a new global media policy.



the night.

A few lucky parents have access to a partial solution via ICTs: they find a new community to connect with in the form of online parent-support groups. Cecilia Garcia, Executive Director of Connect for Kids explains that her group offers people a sense of connectedness and mutual responsibility for the

well-being of our children. And that's exactly the point of ICTs. If I could choose to add a Millennium Development Goal, it would be Media for All by 2015. ICTs offer us an historic opportunity to create a new world of mutual responsibility and human solidarity—though only if and when the majority of the world has fair and equitable

access to the means of communication.

A first step is for citizen-consumers to have broader access to the content selected, created, and disseminated by media professionals. But the real communications revolution will only come when enough citizens can make the initial selection, creation, and dissemination of that content, ie, when citizens have the option to become media producers, when they can talk with, as well as listen to, those of us who are media professionals playing the role of facilitator. The People's Media era will begin when the Information Society is replaced by a Communication Society.

An image comes into my mind. It is of a dazed, malnourished young woman standing shakily beside her shack in a slum in Ahmedabad, India, cupping delicately in her hand a baby so puny and weak that his cry is barely audible. The child is the newest member of a once-flourishing tribal community of forest-dwellers from Rajasthan. The community had not been able to prove their landrights to timber-hungry authorities in the language of bureaucracy, legal

deeds asserting that the forest was a commodity belonging to them. They could only explain their right to live there in their own language: a holistic oral history of living in peaceful synergy with their environment for centuries. But their language, dismissed by local bureaucrats, remains unheard by others around the world that might have supported the community's cause.

Now this community, and thousands of others similarly unheard, are broken up and scattered across city slums, living in conditions described by one tribal woman as a living death. The words of such people provide more than information. They are communications conveying the living tragedies endured unjustifiably by our fellow humans and reminding us of our connectedness and our mutual responsibility.

When the People's Media era dawns, we will have no excuses left for being ignorant about what is really going on in the world. We will have no more excuses for global apartheid. ♦ (IPS)

Anuradha Vittachi, director of OneWorld International Foundation, is the author of numerous articles on issues of global justice.

Good fences and good neighbours

RANJIT DEVRAJ in NEW DELHI

India is making good use of Pakistan's offer of a ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) in disputed Kashmir to hasten the erection of a high electrified fence that it says will ensure the cessation of cross-border infiltration. India's leaders complain bitterly that the 26 November Eid ceasefire announced by Islamabad and accepted by New Delhi as part of confidence-building measures has been limited to the regular armies of both countries. This has not stopped the infiltration of armed militants into the Indian side of Kashmir, New Delhi says.

"On our demand that infiltration be stopped and terrorist infrastructure be dismantled, there has been practically no response from the other side," said Deputy Prime Minister Lal Kishenchand Advani last Friday. Advani, who also holds the key interior portfolio and is regarded as a hawk, accused Pakistan of making "tactical moves to ward off pressures from the international community".

Even before the ceasefire came into operation, India had announced that half of the 742km had already been fenced and that the whole enterprise snaking across coniferous forests, snow-laden passes and rugged terrain would be completed by June 2004. "We aim to complete fencing the LoC by June next year," Lt Gen Hari Prasad, in charge of the Indian army's northern command that is based in Kashmir, told visiting journalists on 21 November.

With the ceasefire holding and the constant barrage of shells and small arms fire put on hold, army officers are confident that the deadline for completion of the fencing will easily be met. The fencing is only part of multitiered system that includes mines and troops equipped with ground sensors, thermal imagers and night-vision equipment so that the army's overall efficiency in interdicting militants has gone up significantly.

Pakistan has, in the past, objected to the fencing on the grounds that ceasefire agreements between the two countries that created the Line of Control and dating back to 1949 barred permanent changes pending a final settlement of the dispute. But the Indian army does not regard the fence as a permanent feature. It has erected the fence well within its territory, even setting it back several kilometres away from the Line of Control at some points though at others it is almost on it.

Although the cessation of shelling has stopped, the army and border troops have other impediments to contend with—and these include the harsh winter

conditions along the Himalayan terrain that prevail until March. And then there is the cost. Building one kilometre of steel posts set into concrete blocks and strung up with concertina wire fencing costs an average \$75,000. By the time the project is completed, it would have set the army back by about \$2.5 billion.

Maintaining troops equipped with high-tech equipment along the entire Line of Control that is poorly connected to the hinterland by roads would mean additional costs that is not revealed by the army. But ever since the 1998 war at Kargil on the Line of Control, in which India brought in fighter planes to dislodge militants backed by the Pakistan army from mountain tops well within Indian territory, the defence establishment has been determined to put up the fence regardless of the cost.

After Pakistan-based militants tried to storm the Indian Parliament in December 2001, the two nuclear-armed countries massed close to a million troops along their common border in a dangerous confrontation that was defused only by high-level international diplomacy. The 2001 attack resulted in the two countries banning civilian overflights, the suspension of rail links and the downgrading of diplomatic missions in each other's capitals to the level of deputy high commissions.

After almost two years, the two countries are now ready to restore full staffing levels at their diplomatic missions. The ban on overflights is set to be lifted from New Year's Day 2004 as part of initiatives aimed at improving people-to-people contacts and confidence building. One distinct possibility is the restoration of rail links between Pakistan's Sindh province and India's western Rajasthan state, severed following the 1965 war—one of several fought over possession of Kashmir since the two countries were partitioned on religious grounds in 1947.

The lifting of the overflight ban would help ordinary Indians and Pakistanis travel by air to each other's countries directly rather than resort to circuitous routes such as those via Dubai. Immediately, it would enable Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to fly directly to Islamabad to attend the seven-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit starting on 4 January.

India has ruled out bilateral talks at the summit and said that any talks on Kashmir would have to be preceded by a complete cessation of militant activity it says is still coming from across the Line of Control. ♦ (IPS)



Will an electric fence across the Line of Control help restore peace?

Water treatment

COLOMBO – Sri Lankan rights groups may have won a temporary respite in the battle against the privatisation of water services after a court held in their favour. Plagued by an inefficient public sector and guided by World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) policies of privatising state assets, Sri Lankan authorities are gradually selling off or handing over management to the private sector utility services including water, power, telecommunications and the post.

In early November, the Supreme Court rejected a water services reforms bill which details water management measures, saying that it needs the approval of provincial councils as it involves their assets too. Under the bill, the Public Utilities Commission would sell licences to the private sector to manage water bodies and charge the public for the service. Critics say that, in effect, the government hand will hand over control of primary water sources like rivers and reservoirs to water supply companies who then decide whom they should charge and what price. They also say the government is pursuing a World Bank-promoted agenda to create a land market where uneconomic farmers can sell their land and the power sector, under the cover of the peace process. (IPS)



Clamp down

SEOUL – About 100,000 immigrants have been branded "illegal workers" and are now being targeted by police and immigration officers. They have rounded up 880 migrant workers, and 443 of them were deported to their home countries, according to the South Korean Ministry of Law. Of those deported, 269 were Korean Chinese, 23 from Bangladesh, 20 from Thailand and others from the Philippines and the rest of Asia. Meanwhile, migrant workers who opted not follow the deadline set by the government, live in fear of being caught.

The onset of the government crackdown and what it means for migrant workers' livelihoods has already forced some—reports say at least four—to commit suicide. So far, the South Korean government has decided to grant legal status to migrant workers who can be directly employed by South Korean employer, instead of by an agency in charge of small and medium enterprises as is the current procedure. But the system will only become effective after August 2005, when it becomes the law. At present, Seoul is deporting migrant workers who have stayed longer than four years. (IPS)

Yubaraj Ghimire in *Kantipur*, 8 December

कान्तिपुर

Justice Min Bahadur Raymajhi of the Supreme Court has issued a notice of defamation to *Himal Khabarpatrika* for a cartoon published in the magazine (reproduced on this page, #173). In the cartoon, the Chief Justice has been presented as a member of the Constitutional Council with his eyes blindfolded.

The notice issued by Justice Raymajhi indicates on one hand that intolerance is increasingly dominating the Supreme Court while on the other, it has triggered suspicions about personal or institutional efforts at the apex court to limit press freedom. If the Supreme Court decides in line with Justice Raymajhi's notice, in the future those who come to the apex court to defend press freedom against the executive will think twice. This is not to say the press has the authority to defame and slander the Supreme Court. But on the basis of a common pretext, the court's sword must not hang above the press freedom even for a single moment.

There are fears and suspicion the notice issued against *Himal* will sharpen this sword. The recent recommendation of the constitutional council, the so-called amendment or analysis and the delays by the king in making appointments to constitutional bodies are critical issues that have come to the people's notice. Since the Chief Justice is a member of the constitutional council, he is not free from criticism either. However, his

Caricature of justice

decision to keep mum on grounds of his sensitive position has been respected. But, the council, both institutionally or as a group, has been criticised in editorials and stories in different newspapers and magazines. The court is possibly aware about all these expressions. Therefore, the question that rises quite naturally is why this sudden ire directed only towards *Himal* for its cartoon?

This is a golden opportunity for Chief Justice Upadhyay to eliminate any suspicions raised over the court—a legacy he can leave behind when he retires in a month. Almost a decade ago, the Supreme Court had ordered the week-long imprisonment of the then editor of *Saptahik Bimarsha* for having lampooned the then Chief Justice Biswa Nath Upadhyay as a monkey (see right). The cartoon, which was published while the court was considering the Tanakpur case, showed the monkey holding a coconut to represent the Supreme Court. If only the Chief Justice and other justices of the time, along with their comments, big hearts and pardon, had proved that the “coconut” was safe with them, the honour of the court would not have eroded.

In a democracy, prerogatives of courts or any

other constitutional body are not meant for vengeance or punishment. This issue was paid special attention to when the constitutions of the United States and India were crafted. People ranging from Jefferson to Ambedkar declared a clear understanding on the matter was critical. In response to cases filed later, special justices ratified the theory. In other words, courts have set examples by accepting criticism against them as a way to establish that they exist to protect the people's rights and freedom.

The last 13 years of the judiciary in Nepal has been criticised many times, both from within and outside the bar (This is not to suggest that the judiciary before that was any better. The context today is the judiciary being unable to live up to the expectations of the people). The widespread opinion about the law is that it is expensive, corrupt and inaccessible. The selection process of justices is also controversial.

Why is a cartoon depicting a blindfolded chief justice so offensive? On the contrary, not printing such a cartoon would be a crime. Subtlety in creativity is a gradual process. The Supreme Court should not ignore the fact that cartoon journalism is developing at the same pace.



Herbal deals

Rajdhani, 9 December

राजधानी

Valuable herbs are being smuggled out of the Himalayan region through Gorkha and into Tibet. Locals say Chinese and Tibetan contractors take *yarchagumba*, *jatamassi*, *panch aune*, *shilajit* and other herbs openly across the border. Since there is no checkpoint or any mobile security patrols, smugglers have unrestricted access says Rajma Din Miya, former Chairman of Aruchanaute VDC. Nepali herbs are sold mostly for use in traditional Chinese medicines.

The Nepali government has prohibited the collection of all herbs except *yarchagumba*, known as ‘Himalayan viagra’. But in the seven years since the local administration left the border areas after Maoists made several attacks against them, unscrupulous traders from either side of the border are turning a tidy profit.

Tibetans who are the

middlemen get between Rs 90,000 – 100,000 for every kg of *yarchagumba* but locals receive only around Rs 20,000 per kg of this unique insect-fungus. “The locals are badly cheated in the deal,” says Hari Bahadur Ghale, former vice-chairman of Gorkha DDC. “The Chinese contractors are minting money and we lose out even though the herbs grow here and locals source them for the buyers.” In the past, Raxaul was the main exit point for contraband herbs. Now Tibet absorbs everything. “There are no checkpoints along the northern border because of Maoist activity and smugglers have a field day,” says Dhruba Bhattarai of the Forest Department.

“Till my last breath”

Chandra Prasad Gajurel of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) in *Janadesh*, 7 December

जनादेश

Even before my arrest at Chennai Airport, I was mentally prepared for

the consequences. I have no regrets and am ready to remain behind the bars for a long period if that helps the revolution. If anything, my arrest has made me more determined.

Many people deviate from their mission when they are imprisoned and tortured in jails but I am not one of them. I am still devoted to my goals: a rebel has to submit to the litmus test of torture and captivity. I will pass this test.

Prison conditions are not good for me and the climate of this place is not conducive to my health. The jailer at Chennai Jail refused to give me a first class facility. The Magistrate of Alandur did the same, citing me as a security threat. I didn't think it was important to apply to the high court. Now I own nothing, not even a radio and a fan, and I share the cell with a professional criminal.

I would not like to send any message to my party that is

leading the People's War because right now I am in jail, and that too in a foreign land. I don't think it would be wise to make any comment given the circumstances. I am thankful to the people and organisations that are lobbying for my release and safety. If it not been for them, my case would not have been internationalised. This has shown that India's revolutionary power and people have solidarity for the revolution in Nepal. I would also like to congratulate the Nepali people for their spirit in support of the people's war. I want to assure them I will fight till my last breath.

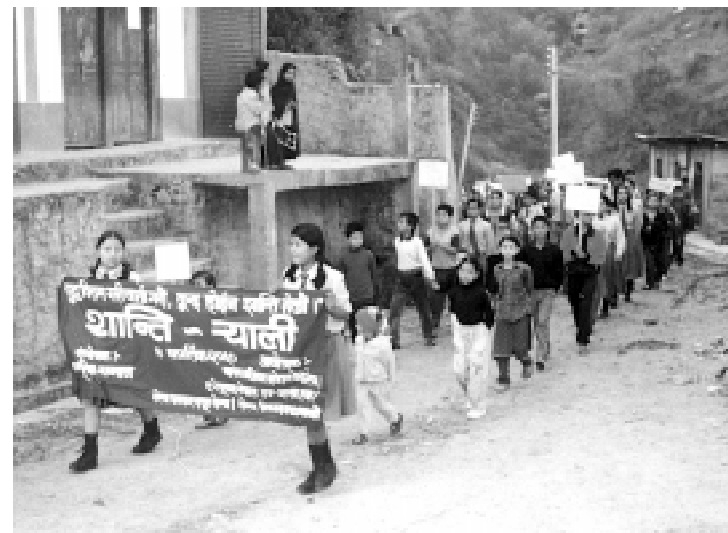
Rolpa rally

Himal Khabarpatrika,

1-15 December

हिमाल

The people of the Rolpa district headquarters are fed up with the war. Now they are also expressing it. Recently, the citizens of Libang



from four to 80 year olds organised a rally with banners urging a ceasefire and a resumption of the peace process. Civil society, NGOs, peace and human rights groups organised the unprecedented demonstration that urged both the government and the Maoists to come back to the table. Participants carried placards reading ‘Stop the violence’, ‘We want development,

not destruction’, ‘We want peace’, ‘Let's leave a bright future for our children’, and ‘We want press freedom’.

Said Bhoj Raj Acharya of the Rolpa Development Society: “Even during the ceasefire, we in Rolpa hadn't really experienced peace. Now, with the two sides back at war, the situation has become much worse. This rally has shown just how strong our desire for peace is.”



Front door: Five parties

Newspaper headline: Decisive movement after Tihar

GP Koirala: “Wait a while, there's still another eleven months till Tihar!”

Drishti, 9-15 December

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“If the king does not agree to our (the five parties) terms, we have to start a more powerful agitation.”

– Krishna P Bhattarai in *Kantipur*, 10 December

Anti-American

Nepal Samacharpatra, 10 December

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

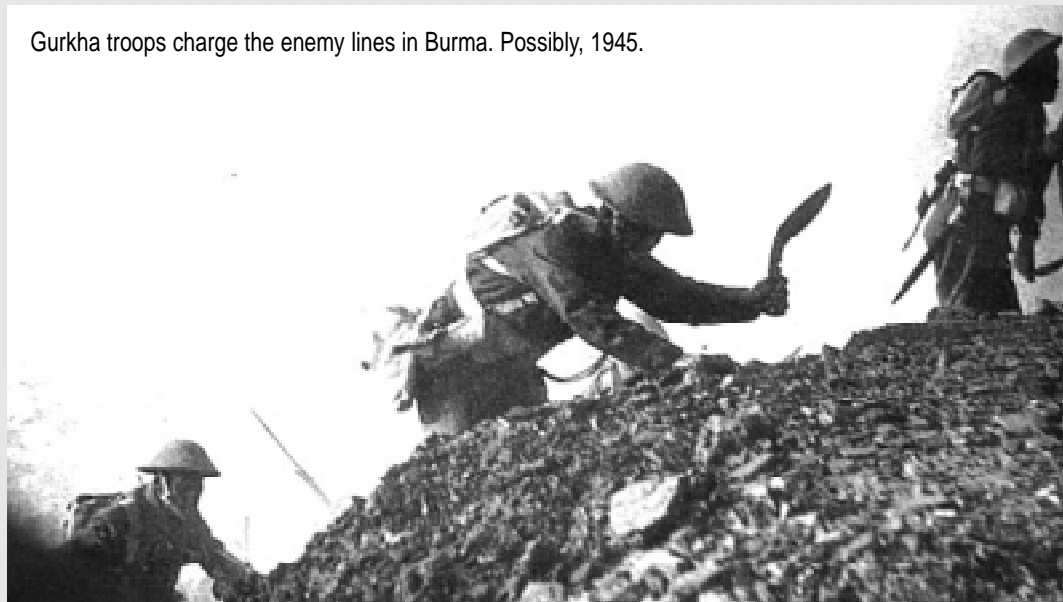
The Maoist rebels are keeping special watch on Americans visiting Karnali Zone. They say citizens of the United States are singled out because the US branded the rebels terrorists and urged the world to follow suit. Visitors on trekking trails in the far west say the rebels question all hikers but those from the US are subjected to detailed interrogations. “The American tourists are asked to explain why chose to visit Nepal. Non-US visitors are just asked few simple questions and permitted to go on with their treks,” tourists said on return. Rebels recently detained two Britons on the suspicion that they were Americans and released them after being convinced they were not. “We were thoroughly interrogated by an armed group that included females,” says Steven Conray, one of the two. “When they were sure that we were not Americans, they bid us a warm farewell.” The pair were given a permit that read that they were not Americans and could be allowed to continue with their trek in case they were hauled in by another group of rebels en route. The other trekker said: “I found that tourists face no danger from the Maoists. All they wanted to know was if there were any Americans spying on them.” Ram Bahadur Magar, a guide from Dhading, said the rebels issue permits to tourists from countries other than the US without any hesitation and that the same rules apply in Jajarkot, Myagdi, Jumla and other areas. He also added the Maoists do not forcefully take donations from foreigners. “In fact, we have seen an increase in tourist arrivals,” said Navaraj Shahi, a hotel operator in Jufal airfield, the gateway to Upper Dolpo. All these regions are devoid of government presence and the rebels are in full control.



WANDA VINEQUIN

“War is the worst of all things”

Gurkha troops charge the enemy lines in Burma. Possibly, 1945.



In the concluding part of Man Bahadur Rai's oral testimony, the Gurkha soldier on the Burma Front looks back at the end of World War II, his two decades as a soldier and recalls fallen comrades. The 91-year-old Rai now lives in Pokhara and his story is part of *Lahurey ko Katha* that records the lives of 13 retired Gurkha soldiers, most of them over 75 years old. Published by Himal Books, this fortnightly column has been translated from Nepali by Dev Bahadur Thapa for *Nepali Times*. Next fortnight, we begin the story of 89-year-old Bharati Gurung of Lamjung.



In a sense it was a war of deception, especially when attacks came from the air. The Japanese swarmed in batches of 25, 35 or 40 planes that flew silently but shook the ground beneath. After the ceasefire, the king [King George VI of England] gave his word that even though thousands of Japanese troops confronted a single British soldier, they would not be harmed. This made the fighting troops lose their spirit and tears fell when the Japanese set prisoners of war free. The Japanese too had been taken prisoners: the British captured Japanese and vice versa. They were assigned work as prescribed by the law of their country but those captured by the Japanese were invariably required to work with human faeces. They also had to dig ditches and plant cauliflowers in soil fertilised by human excrement that they had to carry. War is the worst of all things.

We went to Burma twice. On our second visit we saw the trees planted in our barracks and parade ground had grown very fast in just four years. It took us one entire week of working day and night to clear the grass. Once the war was over, those who survived the onslaught retired on pension.

Those who were too young and whose services were too short to deserve pensions were given about Rs 400 each and let go. The British used them and then bade them goodbye when they were no longer needed. Quite a few soldiers went missing. Rumours say they became guerillas, very similar to our Maoists today. I heard it but did not see them for myself. We heard that Gurkhas, Japanese, Sikh Punjabi and British soldiers made up the group and retreated into the jungle. Till today we hear how they are looting various parts of Burma.

We were still in the army when the division of British and Indian troops took place. The division forms were sent to each unit of Gurkhas only. The letter with it said Gurkha soldiers would be taken straight to the United Kingdom and that salaries and allowances would be the same as that of British soldiers in accordance with their rank. They would be entitled to family and children allowances similar to that of British troops.

At first I wanted to join the British Army but I had problems at home. My parents were very old and every month I'd get a letter from my father asking me to come home. I left the army,

returned home and after being a bachelor till 37 years of age, I married. My first son, born out of wedlock, followed my footsteps and joined the army. He is now on pension. The eldest son from my second wife died a few days ago. He was a retired Subedar in the Indian Army.

All in all, I served in Burma for two decades. Many of the soldiers I fought alongside died in battle. Under unavoidable circumstances we even hid ourselves behind our fallen warriors or used them as shields. Nobody knows how many died in the operation. I nearly became a casualty of war when, on one occasion, instead of lying flat on the ground during enemy fire, I raised my heel. A bullet pierced the heel of my shoe and I thought my leg was gone but thank God it wasn't. He saved me.

I was awarded a certificate of honour, but I lost that document in Burma. Although I sent various letters about a copy, I never received any response. This made me feel sorry for quite sometime: I went through unbelievable hardships as a soldier, took pride in what I did, yet there was no compensation. Perhaps this is the way life is.

REVIEW

The colours of life

The old adage about a picture being worth a thousand words would be especially true about the paintings of Susan Gillerman Boggs. Her commanding use of acrylic paints is inspired—in her on-going exhibition at Siddhartha Art Gallery, the American artist uses the medium to create strong, descriptive portraits of people and nature. *Reflections of Colour*, is her first exhibition in Nepal after 18 months of residence and Boggs is excited about sharing her

passion: “I am amazed to see so many painters and galleries, and the talent is very impressive.”

As a young girl, Boggs was encouraged by her mother to learn painting. At university, she did pastel portraits on commission and honed her skill in acrylic painting during the five years she worked as a professional designer for opera companies around the United States. But her life as a serious painter began in South Asia. In 1985, she arrived in India with her diplomat husband and was exposed to a vibrant world of colours. During a trip to Rajasthan, Boggs was fascinated by the flamboyant use of colour in clothing and the rich flora. It was a catalyst that prompted a new direction in her art that attempts to capture the vibrancy and dynamism colours give to life itself.

“Faces fascinate me the most,” Boggs tells us gesturing at her paintings on display at the Siddhartha Art Gallery. “I try to connect South Asian faces with colour and drapery.” That she remains true to her muse is apparent in the realistic but appealing painting of a rustic Rajput man, a beautiful Brahmin housewife and an unabashedly romantic portrait of a Sri Lankan woman with beautiful flowing hair.

Boggs' paintings are immediately accessible, even to rank novices, which explains why the direct beauty of her art has patrons from Colombo to New Delhi. While many painters have embraced modern abstract art, Boggs says she is not personally fond of it and prefers the old aesthetics. “Art is personal and it appeals to everyone differently.” ♦ (Naresh Newar)

Reflections of Colour Paintings by Susan Gillerman Boggs till 9 January at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. 4218048



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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Reflections of Colour** Paintings by Susan Gillerman Boggs till 9 January at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. 4218048
- ❖ **Abstracts**, expressionistic oil paintings, watercolours, etchings and unique modern bronze sculptures, photographs and floral art till 13 December at Park Gallery, Lazimpat 4419353 and Pulchowk. 5522307
- ❖ **Sofa so good** Paintings by Kripa Joshi at Dhokaima Café at Patan Dhoka. 5543017
- ❖ **The Last Picture Show: Faces of Chitwan** Photographs by Susal Stebbins, till 21 December at Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Thangkass**, natural art and pashmina exhibition till 15 December at Caravan Hall, Summit Hotel. 5550415

EVENTS

- ❖ **Teesta Socials 2003:** Reunion of schools from Darjeeling district. Meet old friends, make new memories. 8PM onwards 12 December at 1905, Kantipath. Tickets: Rs 250. Details: Dee (981057570), Trish (981020164), Bin (981053724).
- ❖ **Summit Hotel's Xmas Night Market** followed by Friday BBQ. 3-9PM 12 December. Free entry. 5521810
- ❖ **The Kathmandu Chorale's** annual Christmas concerts 3.30 PM and 6PM on 13 December at the British School. Free entry.
- ❖ **Eight verses on mind training:** How to develop a peaceful mind. Public talk by Lama Zopa Rinpoche 3PM at 14 December, Siddhartha Hall at Blue Star Hotel Details: Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, 4249270
- ❖ **Metro Mall Fashion Show** with Isotope 4PM, 13-14 December. Soaltee comound. 4283233
- ❖ **1974 AD jam session** 6PM on 14 December at Moksh, Hardic Club, Jawalakhel.

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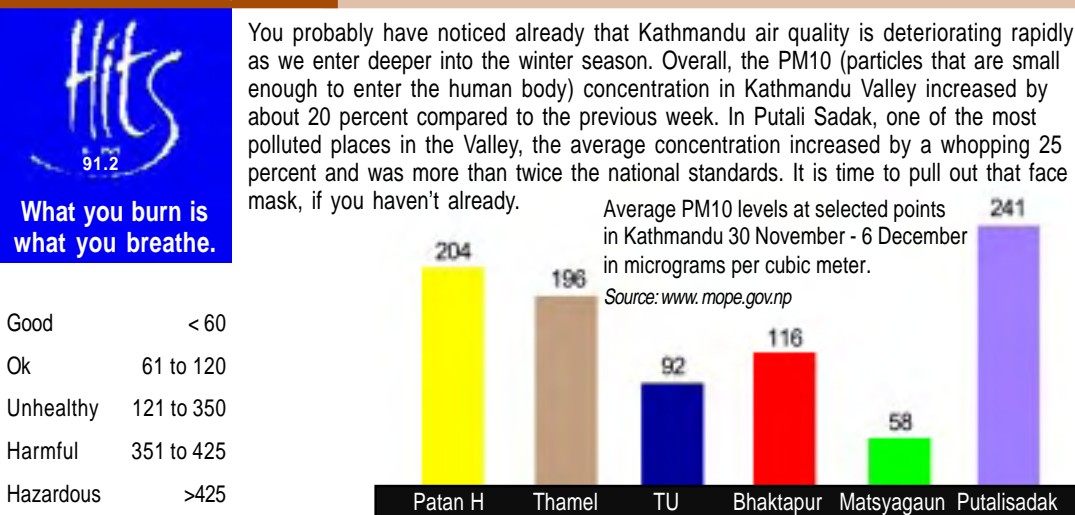
- ❖ **Sunday brunch:** Buckwheat pancakes, scrambled eggs with smoked salmon, roast duck with orange sauce and more. Sundays, 10AM - 3PM at Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka. 5543017
- ❖ **Bring your wine** along every Thursday and Sunday and our dinner. Himalatte Café, Thamel.
- ❖ **Christmas Eve Dinner** on 24 December: Single Rs 1,499, couples Rs 2,499. **New Year's Eve** dinner and live band: Single Rs 1,500, couples Rs 2,500. Special overnight packages. Dwarika's Hotel 4479488
- ❖ **Celebrate at the Hyatt:** 24 December - Buffet at The Café, set menu at Rox Restaurant, live band at Rox Bar. 25 December - Christmas Buffet Lunch at The Café. 31 December - buffet with live band at The Café, seafood dinner at Rox Restaurant, three DJs at Rox Bar with juggling bartenders. 4491234
- ❖ **Momos & More** the finest momos in town also at Dhobighat. 5520692
- ❖ **Bhaktapur Night BBQ dinner** in the Shambala Garden every Friday. Rs 600 per person (welcome drink and dinner). 4412999
- ❖ **Roadhouse Café** for speciality coffees. Opp St Mary's School, Pulchowk. 5521755
- ❖ **Traditional Newari Thali** at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4431632
- ❖ **Vegetarian specialities** at Stupa View Restaurant & Terrace, Boudha Stupa. 4480262



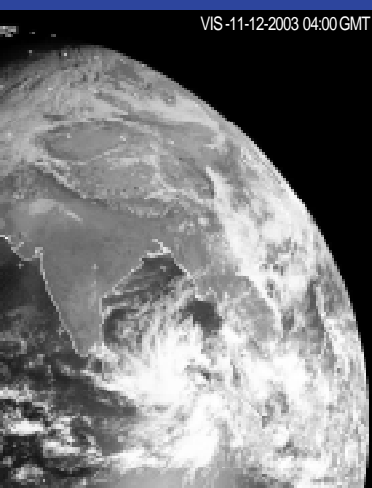
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KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY



NEPALI WEATHER



by MAUSAM BEED

The cloud cover that lidded our horizon from early this week is the result of a moisture deficient front riding the southwesterly jetstream from the Arabian Sea. The deserts of Rajasthan absorbed most of the moisture and we got nothing. But another massive westerly front is surging across Kashmir in this satellite picture taken on Thursday morning. In combination with that big circulation over the Bay of Bengal, the clouds could be pulled eastwards. It will bring clouds over Nepal over the weekend, and perhaps even a sprinkling of the first winter snow and rain in the western midhills and mountains.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



BOOKWORM



Stupid White Men...and Other Sorry Excuses for the State of the Nation!

Michael Moore
Harpertorch, 2003 (3rd edition)
Rs 360

The far-left-of-centre Moore treads a delicate line between humour and serious political comment while raising important issues. His rage is outrageous, couched in shameless gags and madcap comedy and his ideas range from on-the-money (Arafat should beat Sharon with Gandhi's nonviolent shame tactics) to over-the-top. *BBC's Newsnight* calls it "a total masterpiece". We agree.

Power and Terror: Post 9/11 Talks and Interviews

Naom Chomsky
Natraj Publishers, 2003
Rs 312

Chomsky presents his latest thinking on terrorism, US foreign policy and the meaning and true impact of militarism in the world today based on a series of talks and conversations in March and May 2002. This uncompromising critique of American power places terrorist acts in the context of American foreign intervention throughout the post-war decades.



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Grab your tissues, Karan Johar is back with all his legion. His mission is to make *Kal Ho Naa Ho* the biggest tearjerker of 2003. Directed by Nikhil Advani, scripted and produced by Karan Johar, the film has music by Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy and lyrics by Javed Akhtar. The script trudges the tried and tested path of yesteryear's hit *Anand*, but with the contemporary look. Set in a New York neighbourhood, *Kal Ho Naa Ho* takes a look at the life of the Kapurs, a half-Punjabi, half-Catholic family. Naina Catherine Kapur (Priety Zinta) shoulders the responsibility of her family which includes her mother Jennifer Kapur (Jaya Bachchan) and great grandmother. Enter Aman Mathur (Shah Rukh Khan), an incorrigible optimist even in the face of his ailment, who decides to make a few changes in Naina's life. To accomplish this task, he ropes in his friend Rohit (Saif Ali Khan). Weighing heavily on its emotional quotient, *Kal Ho Naa Ho* is guaranteed to get your popcorn soggy.

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EATING MY WORDS

by BHATMARA BHAI

And the winner is...

Bhatmara Bhai announces his Best Kathmandu Restaurant Award, 2003.



MIN BAURACHARYA

Thamel is awash with restaurants catering to the budget backpacker. If a banana pancake, or any dish featured in the 1970's Peace Corps cookbook tickles your fancy, then be my guest. If you fancy something a little more classical then things get difficult. Indian and Chinese are available, but these things are most often uninspired. Delhi and Beijing have moved on. Move your palate Westward and things get yet more spartan, the edible choices that rise above the mediocrity are limited. Think about it for a moment. Italian food beyond the excellence of Fire and Ice's pizza perfection is unknown. And for French brasserie style, Chez Caroline is an obvious candidate. But few others spring to mind.

When Café Mitra, owned by Master Kunal Lama, opened some 18 months ago, it quickly added itself high up the list. With good

reason. On décor alone Café Mitra is different. While set in an old building the style is modernist. There are no other restaurants in the Valley with vibrant orange walls. Regular art exhibitions add to the visuals. Quite how these *oeuvres* manage to sit comfortably—they do—with the colour scheme is a mystery to me but testament to Master Lama's confident taste. Perhaps most attractively, as the winter cold starts to bite, Café Mitra, unlike most other restaurants, is cosy. Tall people, however, be warned. Café Mitra is an old building. A motorcycle helmet is a sensible, if unfashionable, prophylactic.

The reason for Bhatmara Bhai's visit to Café Mitra was the recent (ish) opening of another floor of the restaurant. This time in the shape of a cocktail lounge. The style again, is modernist. Instead of orange, this floor features lively

green walls. Again, from a style point of view, it works. So do the really excellent range of classic and well-mixed cocktails. There are other more eclectic offerings dedicated to the owner's colourful chums. 'Cosmic Chas' is one example. 'Chas', however, shall have to wait, until I tire of Mr Mojito's charms.

Master Lama again wins yet another gold star in Bhatmara's good books for the thoughtful addition of a halfway decent hi-fi and his healthily eclectic music tastes. There appears to be a welcome refusal to play any Bob Marley or indeed the popstastic ambient monk music that pumps out of Thamel's CD shops. The music is intelligently set at a volume that obviates the need for sign language.

Returning downstairs the menu meets with further high marks. It is short and unfussy. The food is accompanied by an equally no

nonsense and sensibly priced wine list. I chose the chicken liver for starters. They were simply prepared and balanced: a nice, delicate sweet and sour. For the main course I chose soy roast duck. A healthy plate of tender sweet duck with roast potatoes and steamed bok choy. Excellent. Neither dish was complex in either preparation or presentation. Good food need not be. And it is this attention to quality and detail that is the leitmotiv that sets the restaurant apart. The butter is not butter but butter run through with cracked pepper. There are not one but four breads to choose from. The bread is warmed. A breed apart.

If I have any grumbles, and this is a minor whinge, it was with the dessert. Both my partner for the evening and I beat the retreat with the Banoffee cheesecake. Cheesecake is good only when it is bad. A forkful should transmit loud imperative neon warnings to men of a certain age, lifestyle and girth to: "Step away from the plate!" Don't get me wrong, I finished my cheesecake. But I had the uneasy sensation that this thing was doing me some unwelcome good.

But this is a minor complaint. Frankly, it is one of the best meals you can eat in Kathmandu. In terms of style, ambience, attention to detail and service I can't think of anywhere better. Master Lama understands food.

It's getting close to the end of the Roman calendar year and Bhatmara Bhai is going on his holidays. There are as yet no awards for 'Best Restaurant in Kathmandu' but it's high time there were. So on behalf of the *Nepali Times*, and without consulting with my editor, I would like to finish this article by extending Bhatmara Bhai's congratulations to Master Kunal Lama, for the Bhatmara Bhai Best Restaurant Award, Kathmandu 2003. ♦

bhatmarabhai@yahoo.com

NEPALI SOCIETY

Uncommon man



When you can't do anything else, you have to be able to laugh it off. In fact, as the situation in the country deteriorates people are seeking more and more comic relief. And this where cartoonists like Rajesh KC come in: to provide the daily chuckle to help readers get through a brand new day. One of a growing band of editorial cartoonists in Nepal, Rajesh has drawn more than 2,500 cartoons with his distinctive style in *Kantipur* and *Kathmandu Post*. All his illustrations have a self-portrait commoner looking on at the absurdities of daily life in Nepal. Rajesh has now collected 153 of the

funniest cartoons in a book published by Ratna Pustak Bhandar. "Sometimes I don't know whether to laugh or cry, but mostly, I laugh," says Rajesh, who runs a travel agency in his spare time.

Largely self-taught, Rajesh admits that in the beginning he was influenced by the craft and style of the famous Indian cartoonist, RK Laxman. "People started saying, where is your Nepalianness, why are you copying Laxman," explains Rajesh. "So I threw away the Laxman books." But the common man is still there, with a slightly bemused look on his face that probably reflects Rajesh's own moods. The cartoonist's subject matter ranges from lampooning authority, poking fun at shoddy services and drawing attention to social ills like child labour and corruption.

One cartoon in the book (see illustration) has a robber holding up a bank manager. The manager tells him: "I told you to pretend you were launching an industry and to come here to ask for a loan, not to rob me!" Some will shake their heads, others will chuckle. Most will do both. ♦

Closeup

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

School for Scoundrels

It is clear that our existing institutes of higher learning, which are steeped in old-fashioned values like ethics, integrity and hard work, do not prepare young Nepalis to survive in the brave new world out there. We need new colleges that move with the times to teach students to be street smart so they learn not to walk on the footpath when they can saunter down the middle of the road.

This is why it is heartening to note that the region's first School for Scoundrels (affiliated to the Charlatan Heston University in the USA) has just opened its gates to all wannabe crooks desirous of pursuing higher studies in hooliganism. Everyone wants to be a ruffian these days, so competition is stiff. But the institute has a strict screening policy that shortlists only the scum of the earth, and from that group carefully selects outstandingly evil geniuses with potential to make contributions to society when they grow up.

Freshers immediately get down to serious academics with a special undergraduate curriculum for young thugs that prepares them for a rigorous four-year degree course under a special Rascals-in-Residence program. This is followed by an interdisciplinary PhD studies course in pursuance of a Doctorate in Dacoity. Then, and only then, can we truly say that we have separated the chaff from the wheat. Interns will have to do compulsory one-year internships in hotbeds of corruption so they garner valuable practical experience.

Full descriptions of the courses offered at the School for Scoundrels may be found under the following appropriate disciplines:

Introductory Course for Smugglers

Course guide: Prof Dr Tusker

Semester: Fall

Level: Intermediate

Nepal has run out of Indian currency as a result of an alarming drop in informal bilateral trade, so there are tremendous job opportunities in this field as we try to fill the shortfall. This course allows students to explore creative new ways to conduct border crossings for their precious cargo, and invites them to view this practice within the broader framework of the WTO.

Extortion as a Force in Nation-Building

Faculty Supervisor: Comrade Johnny Cash

Semester: Fall

Level: Junior

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