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 at this little village, 20km east of Dhusail 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.

Uniform misery

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 ADB has refused to get involved in the dispute between NEA and the Italian civil contractor (For full story see Nepali Times, #116). Impregilo SpA billed the ADB’s Nepal director, Sultan Hafeej 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.

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

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.

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DIVIDE AND RUIN

I don’t believe anyone has a clear idea of what peace means to the Nepalis. If the primary purpose of peace is to create a just and equitable political system in which the Tibetans are group of people after the other and the Tibetans are being forced to leave their homeland. The Tibetans are being deprived of their basic human rights, such as freedom of speech, religion, and movement. They are also being subjected to physical and mental torture by the Chinese government. The Tibetans are preparing for a non-violent revolution to achieve their goal of freedom and independence.

The Tibetans are determined to fight for their rights and will not give up until they achieve their goal. They are determined to fight for their freedom and will not let the Chinese government silence their voices. The Tibetans are determined to fight for their future and will not let the Chinese government control their destiny. The Tibetans are determined to fight for their humanity and will not let the Chinese government deny them their basic human rights. The Tibetans are determined to fight for their culture and will not let the Chinese government destroy their culture. The Tibetans are determined to fight for their land and will not let the Chinese government steal their land.

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

Nepal 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 rift 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 solution is, we have very little time left. If we can’t rise above our petty interests, there is no hope for the country.

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.

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 coalition 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 other claims who 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.
Making eco-tourism work

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

SRADHNA BANJAYAT in POKHARA

A new day dawnin’

by DANIEL LAK

H as 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 a frame of national proportions: “Without peace and security, nothing can be done.”

A three member team, including Chandra Gurung, Min Bahadur Gurung, was instrumental in convincing locals of the benefits of joining hands with ACAP. His generation has witnessed a transformation in the northern belt, “says Gehendra Gurung at ACAP’s office in Pokhara. He is actively working to help local conservation committees manage the project, but faces a stumbling block of national proportions: “Without peace and security, nothing can be done.”

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 manage the project, but faces a stumbling block of national proportions: “Without peace and security, nothing can be done.”

Terrified 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 Mustang 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 mired 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 was pocketed by hoteliers for constructing tea sheds and lodges. Initially, ACAP had full well that its days are numbered. That’s why they’re desperately afraid of 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 in last chance to cash in. Environmental and social legislation around the world will be gutted as the ’90s’ s “d’clos’ opportunity to ramp up their profitability before the backlash. Forests will come down, wetlands and forests will be drained and air will become unbreathable. Big Western drug companies will make a fortune from HIV/AIDS drugs and all the highly competitive third world countries will be under the thumb of the drug companies. Big third world country will make a fortune from HIV/AIDS drugs and all the highly competitive third world countries will be under the thumb of the drug companies. Big third world country will make a fortune from HIV/AIDS drugs and all the highly competitive third world countries will be under the thumb of the drug companies.

There is a glimmer of something amidst the gloom.

A new day dawnin’

by DANIEL LAK

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for the people

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 area 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 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: people’s 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. Gaining the trust of local communities was the hardest part. It meant working 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 Nepal. 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 Nepal 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 faring. “The people cannot conserve an empty stomach in 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 struggling in some ACAP areas as 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 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 with the achievements of the last two decades.”

Threat factor

Trekking agencies are heartened that ACAP has not been attacked (by Maoists). The trouble is, the number of trekkers in Nepal has gone up in recent months. Tourists keen on adventure seem to have been put off by the Maoist insurgency. “We have noticed that they are becoming increasingly confident about going to rural areas despite the present unrest,” Bandirina Sherpa of the Trekking Agents Association of Nepal (TAAAN), told us. “This 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.”

TAAAN 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-blasting 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.

Marsyangdi people power

Fortunately for the people of Marsyangdi, the Rana-Dasharathราช family that rules India. The king had a reputation for being a benevolent ruler and the common people looked up to him. But, when the British East India Company took over India, the locals were forced to pay exorbitant taxes and suffer under British rule.

The locals were unhappy with the British rule and felt that it was time for a change. They realized that they needed to work together and take a stand against the British. The locals organized a series of protests and strikes to demand their rights and demand an end to British rule.

The British government was taken aback by the locals' determination and the scale of their protests. They realized that the locals were serious about their demands and were not going to give up easily. The British government was forced to negotiate with the locals and eventually agreed to grant them some rights and freedoms.

The locals were overjoyed with the news of their victory and felt a sense of pride and accomplishment. They knew that they had fought hard for their rights and had finally achieved victory.

The locals decided to commemorate their victory and organise a series of events to celebrate their hard-won freedom. They wanted to ensure that their children and future generations would remember the struggle and the sacrifice of their ancestors.

Today, the locals celebrate their victory every year on January 15, which is now known as Marsyangdi People’s Power Day. They hold rallies, street theatre, and other events to remind people of their struggle for freedom and to encourage them to stand up for their rights.

The locals also use this day to remember the brave souls who lost their lives in the struggle. They pay tribute to them and remember their sacrifice.

The locals feel a sense of pride and accomplishment every year on January 15, as they celebrate their hard-won freedom and remember their brave forefathers.

The locals also use this day to encourage future generations to stand up for their rights and fight for what is just.

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The locals also use this day to encourage future generations to stand up for their rights and fight for what is just.
Economists Wanted

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

Transcend their immediate personal 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 (NPC) is a month that deigns to favour the nation every five years with its periodic action plans. As the plans enter the implementation phase—when public participation notwithstanding—sustained, non-partisan public enquiry into the bulbs and roots 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 (FEFCOFUN) was immediately on a war footing. Questioning the government’s motive behind such a drastic measure, FEFCOFUN went as far as to accuse the government of trying to arrest the progress made by CFUGs since the handing over 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 FEFCOFUN 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 FEFCOFUN drags on, it’s sad not to find a single rigorous, objective and impartial discussion 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 countermnemonic 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 protesters had already caused the loss of one life in Butwal. The restructuring saga of Nepal Bank Limited and Rastriya Bariya Bank isn’t very different. These banks, one state owned the other previously so, have been funneling 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 politely 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 hardline 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 lony private sector whining. Where are the concerns of the 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, yet, documentation on economic indicators is probably most 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. Wage floors would have to be enforced and working conditions, especially in the industrial and manufacturing sectors, constantly monitored. But can FNCIT—the vanguard of labour market deregulation in the media and in public opinion—be expected to care the least 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, businesses will continue to pay the workers and students like me to have to form countless distance-learning courses from them.

Binit Sharma is the pseudonym of an economist.

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from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candidate

Exortion by the Maoists took their toll, and things became impossible because of constant inspections and searches by the security forces. The dusty little 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 families have abandoned their homes and things became impossible because the security forces made her feel like her doors were being banged shut. An hour by six in the evening, all you hear are doors. Children aren’t allowed out, and everyone stays at home behind closed doors. “Please go away, leave us alone,” they whispered to us through a chink in the door. It was time for the Maoists to come for their monthly visit. That’s when they come to collect,” Sarita explains softly, not daring to look, despite warnings from his friends. He went to take a closer look, despite warnings from his friends. “I thought he was an army informer. One of them was in charge of 500 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 Duraune 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, there are still some running, none of the teachers have left. Terrace farms are being tilled and harvested, mustard stalks never run out of tea on my road and the world. Sarita Sunil Tamang. "All I want to do is finish school and get out of here." When we asked her what they did, Sarita and the rest of their family looked suspiciously at us through a chink in the door. It was time for the Maoists to come for their monthly visit. That’s when they come to collect," Sarita explains softly, not daring to call the rebel by his name. She added that the army presence in the area and constant checking by the security forces makes her feel more secure. Soldiers on patrol near Bhakundebas in Kathmandu.

Restless days with sleepless nights

Unrest in the Nepali 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 Dada’s few shops are locked. By six in the evening, all you hear are doors being banged shut. An hour late, there is complete silence and not even the dogs are barking.

People beg strangers to leave them alone. “Please go away, leave us alone,” they whispered to us through heavy wooden doors when we asked for help. 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 within 24 hours, either the Maoists or the army would come soon to call asking 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 Satra. "All I want to do is finish school and get out of here." When we asked her what they did, Satra and the rest of their family looked suspiciously at us through a chink in the door. It was time for the Maoists to come for their monthly visit. That’s when they come to collect," Satra explains softly, not daring to call the rebel by his name. She added that the army presence in the area and constant checking by the security forces makes her feel more secure. When the people in Dadahe have drawn inward and down the road in Daraune Pokhari villagers have done just the opposite. A year ago, they built a 2km motorable road to reach their village from Calcutta. They added personal contributions from each of the 45 houses. With just Rs 700,000 and within five months, they carved a road across the steep mountainside.

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

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 Parmeshwar Mahaseth at STC. The company took the initiative after a market study revealed the Gulf could be a promising green vegetable market 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 fresh vegetables to clients. Farmers in Bhaktapur are excited about the new venture. “Looks like our good days are back,” said Roshan Prapati of Bhaktapur. “Perhaps we will no longer have to wake up at dawn and rush to Kathmandu to sell our vegetables.”

New literacy

Now a top notch literacy training company, is working closely with the digital divide through its World Computer Literacy Day 2003 campaign launched on 2 December. For every enrolment at NIT sponsored by an organisation, one underprivileged child will be trained for free at NIT 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 2002-03 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 especially 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 butterfly system with a push-button to clean the blades, a lubricating strip to reduce pulling and skin irritation, and is comfortably priced at Rs 18 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.

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Rolleroaster

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

Strictly Business by ASHUTOSH TIWARI

L et’s begin with the good: on 7 December, the boss-of-the-day, who runs a Nepali businesspeople at Soaltee Crowne Plaza for the first ever, Award for Business Excellence. The black-tie event was part to part 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 visibly 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 citizen 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 worst note came on Tuesday when the Nepali office of Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) sent out one of those 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-tier 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 supports to SIPP was being stopped because “the breakdown of the ceasefire in August 2003 created—after months of hopes—a again an unfavourable environment for economic growth and social development. It went on to say: "(Projects which do not contribute directly to conflict mitigation and conflict resolution have to be discontinued", and that SDC would reproject its project portfolio to 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 small businesses—the idea of, say, coffee-growers’ collectives in Galum, marketing agents for Jumla apples in Nepalgunj or a struggling FM radio station in Butwal that broadcasts community-friendly messages—so that they continue to deploy 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 string business of any kind in strictly 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 quickly. 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. Truth to power.
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.

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 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 businesswoman, 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 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 3,500m. 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...
killed for one shawl that commands as much as $2,500 on the black market.

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 trade show. 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.”

The pleasure of fine dining at ‘The Chimney’ - one of the city’s most exclusive restaurants, now comes refreshed with a whole new dash of gastronomical indulgence. Two of Sherling and Picked Cowburger, Oven Roasted Duck Breast, Plate of Herashahyan Rainbow Fruits, Tropical Fruit Sooth... Marvelous innovations by Chef Victor Hoffs to redefine exquisite dining.

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Money and politics and opposing Bush

by GEORGE SOROS

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.

America’s most recent campaign finance law attempts to limit the influence that special interests can gain by financing candidates and to 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 $100,000.

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.

If Americans reject the president’s policies, the US shall have its rightful place in the world. If American Doctrine as a temporary aberration and resume endure a vicious cycle of escalating violence.

I 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 presidential election. We are deeply concerned with the direction in which the presidential election. We are deeply concerned with the direction in which the presidential election. We are deeply concerned with the direction in which the presidential election. We are deeply concerned with the direction in which the presidential election. We are deeply concerned with the direction in which the presidential election.
John Donne, back in the pre-ponderant-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 connections, 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 mumbles about vision and values, we hardly re-focus on the practice of creating platforms of information sharing, healthcare, education, agricultural know-how, weather reports, market prices and pretend that it’s the transformative act of information being shared that makes the real difference, rather than the transformative act of sharing itself.

The implications of so many millions of new beings being able to instantly share their thoughts with each other is, than the transformative act of...
Herbal deals

Rajdhani, 9 December

Valuable herbs are being smuggled out of the Himalayan region through the eastern border. Locals say Chinese and Tibetan contractors take away yarlungba, jamum, panicle, medlar, and other herbs across the border. Since there is no checkpoint or mobile security patrol, smugglers have unrestricted access says Ramo Din Misra, former chairman of Anchalpur VDC. Nepali herbs are sold mostly for use in traditional Chinese medicines. The Nepali government has prohibited the collection of all herbs except yarlungba, 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 running a tidy profit. Tibetans who are the middlemen get between Rs 90,000 – 100,000 for every kg of yarlungba 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 Ghodka 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, Rawal was the main exit point for commodity 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 Bhartari of the Forest Department.

Till my last breath

Chandra Prasad Gautam of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) in Jhapa, 7 December

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. Any arrest, my army has made me more determined.

Many people leave from their mission when they are imprisoned and tortured in jail but I am not one of them. I am still devoted to my goal: a rebel. 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 in the circumstances. I am thankful to the people and organisations that are lobbying for my release and safety. If not for them, my case would not have internationalised. This has shown that India’s revolutionary power and people have solidified for the revolution in Nepal. I would also like to congratulate the Nepali people for their spirit of support of the people’s war. I want to assure them I will fight till my last breath.

Ropla rally

Rolpa, 14-15 December

The people of the Ropla district headquarters are fed up with the war. Now they are also expressing it. Recently, the citizens of Lhaung 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 have a bright future for our children”, and “We want press freedom”.

Sudh Bryant Acharya of the Ropla Development Society. “Even during the ceasefire, we ropla 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.”

Anti-American

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 granted the rebels terrorist status and urged the world to follow suit. Visitors on trekking trails in the far west say the rebels question all foreign but those from the US are subjected to detailed interrogations. The American tourists are asked to explain why they chose to visit Nepal. Non-US visitors are just asked few simple questions and permitted to go on with their trek, tourists said on return. Recently, two American tourists were stopped by the police 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 insisted we are Americans,” says Sheela Chauhan of the trek. “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. The other trekker said: “I found that tourists face no danger from the Maoists. They say citizens of the United States are suspicious of us and can be allowed to continue with their trek in case they were hauled in by another group. The other trekker said: “I found that tourists face no danger from the Maoists.”

Sudh Bryant Acharya of the Ropla Development Society. “Even during the ceasefire, we ropla 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.”

Nepal Samacharpatria, 10 December

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**“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.

**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 first exhibition in Nepal after 18 months of the medium to create strong, descriptive portraits.

As a young girl, Boggs was encouraged by her mother to learn painting. An 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 Rajanath, 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.

“Even fascinate me the more,” Boggs tells us gazing at her paintings on display at the Siddhartha Art Gallery. “I try to connect South Asian faces with colour and gesture.” That she remains true to her muse is apparent in the realistic but appealing painting of a rosy Rajput man, a beautiful Brahmni 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.”

**REVIEW**

**Reflections of Colour Paintings by Susan Gillerman Boggs**

 till 9 January at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal

**REVISED** 4210488

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. I’m 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 feet. 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.
FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS
- Reflections of Colour Paintings by Susan Gillemann Boggis to 9 January at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babha Bahadur Model. Reviewed 4218048
- Abstracts, expressionist oil paintings, watercolours, etchings and unique modern bronze sculptures, photographs and floral art to 13 December at Park Gallery, Lazimpat 4415933 and Pulchowk. 5522307
- Sofa so good Paintings by Kripa Joshi at Dhoikama Cafe at Patan Dhoska. 5543017
- The Last Picture Show: Faces of Cultiton Photographs by Susobhob Sinhob to 21 December at Park Gallery Lazimpat. 4428999
- Thankgas, natural art and pashmina exhibition to 15 December at Caravan Hall, Summit Hotel. 5550415

EVENTS
- Teesta Socials 2003: Reunion of school friends from Darjeeling district. Meet old friends, make new memories. 8PM onwards at 10 December, 1905, Kaptipath. Tickets: Rs 250. Details: Dee (981057570), Trish (981021264), Bin (981052374)
- Summit Hotel’s Xmas Market followed by Friday BBQ, 3-PM 12 December. Free entry. 5522310
- The Kathmandu Choral’s annual Christmas concerts 3.30 PM and 6PM 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: Himalyan Buddhism Meditation Centre, 4242270
- Metro Mall Fashion Show with Inhouse 4PM, 13-14 December. Soothe couture. 4293223
- 1974 AD jam session on 24 December: Single Rs 1,499, couples Rs 2,499. New Year’s Eve dinner and live band: Single Rs 1,200, couples Rs 2,500. Special overnights packages. Dwarika’s Hotel 4479848
- Celebrate at the Hyatt: 24 December - Buffet at The Café, set menu at Royal Restaurant. Live band at Rox Bar. 25 December - Christmas Buffet Lunch at The Café, 31 December - buffet with live band at The Bar. Seafood dinner at the Shambala Garden every Friday. Rs 600 per person (welcome drink and dinner). 4412999
- Roadhouse Café for specialty coffees. Opp St Mary’s School, Pulchowk. 5521755
- Traditional Newari Thali at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4431632
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- Roadhouse Café for specialty coffees. Opp St Mary’s School, Pulchowk. 5521755
- Traditional Newari Thali at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4431632
- Vegetarian specialties at Stupa View Restaurant & Terrace, Boudha Stupa. 4490262

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- Weekend Special for Rs 3,000 per couple, Park Village Resort Bhubaneshwar. 4375280
- Shivapuri Cottage, D reapage Nature, peace and luxury. 4354331
- Magnificent mountains, deluxe tents at Adventure Tentfed Camp & Country Kitchen. 4491899
- Special Christmas package brekkfast and Xmas lunch. Godavari Village Resort. 5566765
- Christmas in the jungle at Jungle Base Camp. Email: junglebasecamp@yahoo.com 061-532112

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

You probably have noticed already that Kathmandu air quality is deteriorating rapidly as we enter deeper into the winter season. Overall, the PM10 (particles that are small enough to enter the human body) concentration in Kathmandu Valley is increased by about 20 percent compared to the previous week. In Putal Sadak, one of the most polluted places in the Valley, the average concentration increased by a whopping 25 percent and was more than twice the national standards. It is time to pull out that face mask, if you haven’t already.

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<tr>
<td>Concentration in micrometer per cubic meter. Source: <a href="http://www.airquality.nepal">www.airquality.nepal</a></td>
<td>58</td>
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hand is awash with restaurants catering to the budget backpacker. If you fancy a banana pancake, or any dish featured in the 1970's Peace Corps cookbook tidies 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 edible choices that rise above the mediocrity 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 there are 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 failkred should transmit loud imperitive mono warnings to men of a certain age, lifestyle and genes 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 good.

But this is a minor complaint. Finally, it is one of the best meals you can eat in Kathmandu. In terms of style, ambiance, 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 Nepal Times and without consulting with my editor, I would like to finish this article with my congratulations to Master Kunal Lama, for the Bhatmara Bhai Best Restaurant Award, Kathmandu 2003.

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And the winner is... Bhatmara Bhai announces his Best Kathmandu Restaurant Award, 2003.
Under My Hat
by Kunda Dixit

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 Dacoitry. 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

This course offers students an extensive and intensive experience in all kinds of extortion, including purloining, kidnapping for ransom, graft, and blackmail. It is also an expensive course, which in itself is an illustration of extortion. Partial scholarships available for deserving candidates and free firearms training.

**Managing Loans: From Defaults to Sharks**
Adjutant Professor: Dean Con Man, PhD
Semester: Year
Level: Advanced

How to be a major loan defaulter and still hold your head high as a respectable member of society. Course supervisor will show you the trick is to be so totally indebted that no one can touch you without setting off a national banking sector collapse.

**School for Scoundrels**

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**From 23rd December 2003 we offer you weekly direct flights to Boeing 737-800ER aircraft with 24 Star Class seats and 240 Economy seats from Kathmandu to Amsterdam and worldwide connections with other carriers such as KLM.**