A dove of peace and the dogs of war loiter outside Singha Darbar on Thursday.

Kunda Dixit

ow that the rains are over, the four parties protesting King Gyanendra’s October Fourth are back on the streets. Girija Prasad Koirala can’t stand this government because it is lead by the man he blames for splitting his party. Also, Sher Bahadur Deuba was made prime minister by King Gyanendra invoking the regressive Article 127, and Deuba’s coalition includes the UML, which ditched him.

So, Koirala wants to use any pretext to bring Deuba down: accusations of selling out to India, the double-whammy oil price hikes, failure to curb the 1 September arson, even the airport incident when a soldier stopped him from driving to his plane.

But time is not on the rump four-party alliance’s side, Dasain is around the corner and the festive mood will set in by next week. Koirala knows his demand for the restoration of the house isn’t grabbing people. Most still see the agitation as being motivated by power.

Koirala loyalist Narahari Adharya denies this, and says the NC wants the street agitation to push the government to begin peace moves. “We want to give the government no choice but to negotiate with the Maoists,” he adds.

But the belief among partners that Koirala is offering himself as prime minister under Article 127 has frayed the opposition alliance.

The other reason to resume the street agitation could be Koirala’s need to flex muscles after his run-in with the CIAA and the Supreme Court over a probe on his alleged ill-gotten wealth.

Nepal’s donors blame Koirala of political opportunism at a time of national crisis, and hope that if power is handed to a second tier of leaders, a reunited NC could be a bulwark against the Maoists.

But rumours of a rift between Singha Darbar and Naryanhiti over the India visit are rife, and some coalition ministers admit things are looking shaky ahead of King Gyanendra’s own India visit before Dasain.

All this is a sideshow to the real issue of resolving the Maoist question. The political forces are all bent on depriving each other of the reward for restoring peace, and the military has leaned on peacekeepers in the Deuba coalition to tone down talk of truce. The rebels have declared a two-day banda Monday and Tuesday prompting speculation they may be up to a dramatic offensive to force the government to talk.

(Writing by Navin Singh Khadka)

MIN BAJRACHARYA
The rebel strategy is to make the cost of not negotiating unbearable.

**LETTERS**

**NO HAZARD**

We wish to bring to your kind notice that there is considerable harassment caused to us in the matter of radiation hazard from base trans-receiver towers in the Boudha area. We suspect certain elements, including some foreigners who might not be interested in the telecommunication business, are trying to generate media hype.

Extensive as well as intensive research in the matter of radiation hazards by many international bodies have clearly shown that there is no likelihood of any health hazards to base stations or wireless phones generate radiation that is harmful to human beings. The World Health Organisation (WHO), has concluded: `because of low power emissions, biological or health effects are likely to be occur to the public'. We would be happy to provide you and your readers further information.

S Kannan, United Telecom Kathmandu

**HOOLIGANS**

Navin Singh Khadga’s recent article “Six hours in hell (#213)” makes extremely critical but persuasive reading on what is means to be a Nepali in the midst of prevalent anarchy. No matter who was responsible for Black Wednesday, racism and hatred was around, brought me personal shame in being a human being. The attempt made to nip the problem on its awakening, difficult though that might have been, a faction ridden and demoralised government administration. In contrast, one must salute the magnanimity of King Gyanendra in receiving the various Nepali Majhi representatives at his palace and sharing his grave concern with them.
Praying for a saviour

The price of an unjust peace is usually very high

We hope that the national psyche is rekindled to self-righteous behaviour in future and we will be able to proudly stand up to our international image as peace-loving and liberal-thinking Nepalis, not romping street hooligans.

Surya B Prasai, email

NEVER TOO LATE
Thank you for your excellent editorial ‘Never too late’, #124), which is politically correct. As we go back to 1990 movement and think for a minute what went wrong and who made big mistakes by using the blood of hundreds of people in the streets, it was the leadership who surrendered for their own class interest and undermined the mandate given by the people. If the 1990 movement had been completed, we Nepalis would have gone far further in building the nation. I wish our leaders would read this editorial carefully and think for their role once again and let the new generation take a lead in the political process now, which, I’m sure, would help towards bringing a lasting solution by breaking the current vicious circle. Our leaders also must understand that traditional ways of leading politics are not going to work now. They should encourage their young successors to become more dynamic, so that the new leaders are more accountable to the people and sincere to the nation.

Meena Poudel, Newcastle, UK

HEROIC
It seems that Bandana Rana (‘771’, ‘771’) and Kailash Satyarthi have some personal prejudices against marriage and husbands. Every now and then, our festivals and culture are denigrated as feudal and primitive, our values are condemned as anachronistic, our heritage is ignored as worthless, our gods are insulted by our media. I request this attitude to be corrected.

Viniy Kumar, Kathmandu

HEROIC
Herolgy is not one of my favourite cartoon characters, but the ‘Cartoon Silence’ (#213), mourning marriage and husbands. Every now and then, our festivals and culture are denigrated as feudal and primitive, our values are condemned as anachronistic, our heritage is ignored as worthless, our gods are insulted by our media. I request this attitude to be corrected.

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CORRECTIONS
The byline box on Ashutosh Tripathi’s ‘Raising from the ashes (p.4)’ was once again inadvertently dropped. It won’t happen again.

The caption on the front page picture in our hardcopy edition identifying businessmen entering the Siałtre Cremo Palace (Open Sarcasm) should have said ‘right to left’.

Adapted and translated from the Nepali original.

NATION

24 - 30 SEPTEMBER 2004 #215

Urban guerrilla attacks on symbols of the state in the capital itself.

Since such attacks will involve heavy casualties and attract international media attention, the Maoists had been hesitating. But the lack of expected international response to the blockade has probably assured the leadership that outside powers don’t have the stomach to intervene. Most residents obeyed last month’s Maoist order to vacate Phidim in hill. This could have been a rehearsal for a similar threat to vacate Kathmandu. All this comes at a time when the general citizen’s fear in the security forces’ ability to protect them is at an all time low after the uncheked arson and looting of 1 September, as well as the forced closures of industries and the Valley blockade. The Maoists will need a strong hand when they come to the negotiating table. They are known for that kind of thing.

Despite the lip service, the military and the Deuba government have no intention of talking to the People’s Front Nepal, the moment of truth has come for the Maoist movement. They are trying to give the impression of preparing for a massive last-ditch attack. Whether that is out of desperation or a genuine belief in military victory remains to be seen.

In the dictionary of diplomacy, smallness has nothing to do with the size, population, resources or even military might of a country. Any state that can’t look after its vital interests (security, welfare and identity) is considered small. They depend upon regional or global hegemony.

The state itself is desperately looking for a saviour from outside its borders. The United States seems willing to pay the role of a guarantor to guarantee the Maoist contagion. Its instant offer of $1 million in the wake of the blast at the American Centre on the eve of 9/11 wasn’t a tip for the loyalty of the royal government. It was a diplomatic statement of intent to intervene in a more direct way.

In effect, the Americans were telling the Indicans: if you do not want to handle the Nepali Maoists we will. South Block reacted with alacrity in denouncing Prachanda’s ominons as a ‘common threat’ for India and Nepal during Sher Bahadur Deuba’s New Delhi visit. Early this week, Nepal figured in the talks between George Bush and Mahamohan Singh too. Norway and Switzerland are willing to be facilitators for negotiations between the insurgents and the government, but not in a way that strengthens the status quo of the Royal Nepali Army’s domination over the polity of the country. The UN Secretary General has been offering his ‘good offices’ to resolve the issue, but so far no one has taken it seriously. Publicly offered election is that inviting a third party in the internal conflict of Nepal may antagonise India, but the real reason is perhaps the fear that an UN brokered peace may break the domination of the ruling elite.

By now, almost everyone has realised that Nepal can’t handle the Maoists on its own anymore. The confusion is over the role that we are ready to give to an outsider. The rebels want the UN as guarantor to secure a position commensurate with their armed strength. The royal government is quite happy with the cash and weapons it has been receiving from the Americans, British, and Indians to fight the insurgents. Mainstream parties fear being marginalised if the military and the militants strike a deal. Civil society swears by the UN, but other than a vague faith in the good intentions of Kul Chandra Gautam, Nepali intelligentsia doesn’t know what exactly it wants from the it.

Only Narayanhiti Palace is completely free of all illusions. It knows it has to depend on the Indians now to protect the monarchy from all possible threats. Life certainly is a lot simpler when you know when, where and how to kowtow. This is a lesson that Girija Prasad Koirala never learnt, but Madhav Nepal rapidly grasped.

When King Gyanendra goes to New Delhi, expect him to lay the ground work for yet another Nepal-India treaty somewhat similar to the India-Sri Lanka Peace agreement signed between Premier Rajiv Gandhi and President JS Jayawardene in 1987. Some, it seems, want peace at any cost. The price of unjust peace, however, is usually very high and often turns out to be unsustainable.

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Adapted and translated from the Nepali original.
Ryder Cup update

Representing your nation and continent

The biggest and most prestigious event in golf today concluded last weekend. The Ryder Cup 2004 was the 35th tournament played between Europe and the USA since it started in 1927. In the early days, the Ryder Cup was played between players of the American and British Professional Golf Associations, but the latter were always the underdogs. Thus in recent years the whole of Europe was included in the “against USA” team to make the match more interesting. This is why you will find that players such as world’s number 1 and 3, Vijay Singh (Fiji) and Ernie Els (South Africa), cannot take part, although I am sure both of them wish to participate. Golf is usually known as an individual sport. However in this tournament you are not playing for yourself or the $5 million purse. You are playing for a team. More than that, you are playing for your country or continent! The pressure of performing well is unbelievably high for Ryder Cup players.

TEE BREAK

Deepak Acharya

Europe’s Sergio Garcia blasts out of a bunker during his victory over Phil Mickelson of the USA.

I stayed awake, glued to my tv set till early in the morning for three consecutive days to witness the glorious event being held at Oakland Hills Country Club, Bloomfield Hills, in the US. Most avid golfers are aware of what the Ryder cup is all about, and many would have followed this year’s event. For those of you new to golf, or who missed it, let me give you a brief rundown on its format and how it concluded this year.

Played over three days, the tournament has 28 matches all together, with one point awarded for each match (half a point each for a draw).

Teams are led by a non-playing captain with 12 players in each team. Ten of a team’s players are chosen off the top of their respective PGA’s order of merit, and two players are chosen by a captain’s pick.

On Day One, there are eight matches over 36 holes—four matches of four ball and four matches of foursomes. The same format continues on Day Two. On the final day, there are 12 single matches.

This year Hal Sutton captained for USA and Bernhard Langer led the European side. Players on the American side included Tiger Woods, left hander Phil Mickelson and consistent veteran Kenny Perry. The European side included young and dynamic Sergio Garcia, Padraig Harrington and veteran Colin Montgomerie.

On Day One, the battle was dominated by Europe—6½ to 1½. By the end of Day Two, the Americans had clawed back to 5 against Europe’s 11. This left America in an impossible position, and on the end of Day Two, the Americans had clawed back to 5 against Europe’s 11. This left America in an impossible position, and on the end of Day Two, the Americans had clawed back to 5 against Europe.

On Day Two, the battle was dominated by Europe—6½ to 1½. By the end of Day Two, the Americans had clawed back to 5 against Europe’s 11. This left America in an impossible position, and on the end of Day Two, the Americans had clawed back to 5 against Europe.

Simply put, the Europeans were better team players. They were helping each other on the course to see the line of their putts and judging distances, whereas the Americans were playing more individual games. The US team received a lot of criticism in their local press for their lack of team spirit, which cost them the tournament.

Let’s hope the US understands the need put team spirit before selfish individualism, and that the next Ryder Cup in 2006 ends up being a more exciting match.

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Golf Director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu.
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The missing link

Donald Trump and someone called Angie Everhart (who?) were co-presenters at the Ryder Cup opening ceremony last week

MARTIN KELLNER

It is only once every two years we become truly European, prepared to forgive our neighbours for trying to ban our cheese and onion crisps (allegedly), and saying our chocolate had to contain chocolate rather than vegetable fat, the remains of small rodents and all that other stuff we like, happy to overlook outrages like Europop, Jederhusen and Maurice Chevalier. The most unconstructed Euroscopic, I suspect, will have been transfixed by our continent’s Ryder Cup performance.

Which led me to thinking about what it means to be a European. I think the chief difference between us and the Americans is that, on seeing Donald Trump, we are more likely to look beyond the billions and focus on the hair. Trump was one of the star turns at the Ryder Cup opening ceremony, at which there were frequent references to the “worldwide audience of millions” but little allowance made for viewers born outside the United States.

Co-presenter with Trump, of whom we might at least have been expected to have heard, although without any precise knowledge of how he became so rich and famous—was “model and actress” Angie Everhart. Who is she? Well, I can tell you, with all the authority of someone with a brand new connection, she has been in a number of films, none of which are in immediate danger of the compilers of Sight and Sound’s films of the decade list, and was once signed by Sylvester Stallone.

Angie and Don read alternating lines off a teleprompter. It was typically cornball stuff, with the Trumpeter drawing comparisons between the worlds of golf and business. “I’m a competitive kinda guy,” he declaimed. Cheers and whoops greeted these platitudes, as they did Angie’s opening: “Like many luminaries that will share the stage with us today, Donald and I love being part of this glorious event. Golf is in our heart.”

With these words she adopted her most sincere look and placed her right hand across her small but perfectly formed chest. None of this is to say that the Americans did not put on an impressive opening show, as you might expect from the nation that invented showbusiness.

(13th-Guardian)
Habeas corpus
Nepal Samacharpatra
21 September

The Supreme Court has written a letter to the government and security agencies ordering them to make the whereabouts of people taken under custody by the government and the security forces public. This SC order is a milestone in Nepali history.

On the basis of information received, the joint bench of SC judges Min Bahadur Rayamajhi and Bal Ram KC on Tuesday ordered the security agencies and the Prime Minister’s Office to disclose, within three days, the whereabouts of 41 persons who were said to have gone missing after they were arrested by security forces in the last 15 days.

This is the first time that orders were given to the government and security forces on the basis of a roughly written application letter.

Three weeks back, the Nepal Human Rights Commission filed a habeas corpus writ petition demanding to know the state and whereabouts of 433 missing people.

On the matter of the writ, the SC had issued a show cause notice to the government security authorities. Two days ago, the Nepal Human Rights Commission registered an application written on an unofficial paper at the SC, saying that the security agencies had arrested and disappeared 14 more persons in the last fortnight even after the show cause order was issued. The SC then had a hearing on Tuesday and on the basis of the habeas
Namche looks forward
In the Everest region everyone is readying for the autumn trekking rush

At the entrance to Namche Bajar, a group of armed soldiers relax, chat and greet this season’s first batch of European tourists. Nowhere else in Nepal do security forces seem so friendly and at peace, and for good reason. The Sherpas laugh when asked about the Maoist militants. “It’s too much hard work. They’d have to be expert climbers to cross the passes and come all the way down to Namche,” says Mingma Sherpa, who runs a trekking firm at Phakding, a four-hour walk from Lukla airport. “Only Sherpas can do that. None of the Maoists are Sherpas,” adds her husband.

Changa Chait 2061, 1st Knock - Out Game
Saturday 9th Ashwin, 2061 (September 25, 2004)

- Fewa Tours & Travels VS Specialized Tours & Travels
- Seaqual Travels & Tours VS Surya Travels & Tours
- Yoli Travels VS Tour Nepal Travels
- Shangri-La Hotel & Resort VS Marcopolo Travels
- NIC Bank VS ACE Finance Company
- Nepal Investment Bank VS Godika Brewery
- The Boss- Speciality Media VS ECS Magazine
- Mercantile Solution VS Infocorn
- AVCO VS Amatya Enterprises
- Air Tech Industries VS Hiltake Electrical & Refrigeration

Special Features
- Performance by Nalina Chitrakar ~ DJ Session by DJ Raju
- Food Festival ~ Kite Stalls ~ Special Attractions & Much More

CONGRATULATIONS!
Kumari Bank Limited
Complete Banking

on completing 3 Years!
Himalmedia Family
MONSOON KHUMBU: A man wall near Jorsale below Namche Bajar with moss growing on the ‘Gane padma hunu’ (far left) and the meadow at Tengboche is emerald green.

Miringa invested over Rs 800,000 to renovate her hotel during the last couple of months, and is confident that visitors will keep coming to see the hotel and enjoy healthy, it will be worthwhile.

The investment will attract more tourists to my hotel. Besides, we never worry about tourists. This is Everest and everyone’s full of hope,” says Miringa.

Preparations for the tourist season are in full swing right up the flight from Lukla. Up to 15 flights from Kathmandu landed in Lukla’s famous inclined runway during a break in the weather last week. Porters and yak trains can be seen carrying tons of supplies like kerosene, gas cylinders, mattresses, beverages, and chickens.

Many hotels are being renovated and redecorated to welcome even bigger crowds of Europeans expected next week.

In Kathmandu, trekking agencies report only minimal cancellations, and those who had booked treks in other parts of Nepal have shifted to the Everest area.

Ang Thsherung, a veteran expedition leader, says that this will be the last week that Namche is quiet. “From next week, you have to be very lucky to even get a room for the night. The trek to Tengboche will be full of trekkers,” says Ang Tsherung, who was on his way to Lukla to join Kathmandu to receive 100,000 Australian customers, when he talked to us in Monjo.

The lingering monsoon showers are likely only to add to the trek. If the trek will not be done in the wet, but up there, there are no leeches and the rain is confined to the night. The forest is luxuriant, birdlife abundant and the scenery through the breaks in the clouds, breathtaking. Throughout the monsoon, owners of the 37 or so lodges in Namche have been reporting good numbers. Otherwise there are enough hotel beds to accommodate 1,500 trekkers per night. Locals admit the rest of Nepal’s loss has been Namche’s gain, but they aren’t happy about it. They know they prosper if Nepal’s tourism is in good shape.

The only disruption here has been the Maoist blockade of the Jiri road and the harassment of porters on the trail from Jiri to Junbesi. Nowadays, most supplies are flown in cargo helicopters, which makes many food and consumer items expensive. Some porters do manage to make it through Jiri, but only at tremendous risk. This has given suppliers an opportunity to rip off customers, who have no choice but to buy from them at any cost. Currently, a kg of buffalo meat costs Rs 400 at Namche’s Saturday market.

Tourism in the Everest region has hardly been affected. I haven’t seen any change in the tourists or the guide staff. So far, I’ve been seeing the last 10 years,” says Mingma Sherpa, owner of Chukhung Resort. He has walked three days from Chukhung to Kyanjin, a right place for key trekkers. Like most hoteliers in the Everest region, Mingma expects about 6,000 tourists this season, most of whom are expected to come starting next week. “It’s better for Nepalis to look in advance as they will never get a room once the foreigners arrive. This road will be in decent condition,” says Mingma Sherpa, as he heaves his 66kg pack up the steep uphill to Namche.

Despite the curfew in Namche from 7PM onwards, the security forces are quite lenient and resident foreigners walk around the market area until late at night. “Curfew in Namche sounds odd, we just ignore it,” says Dinesh Chhetri, a local trader.

A night patrol walks by at night sometimes, and they make casual inquiries and don’t bother anyone. It seems everyone knows nothing short of disaster to spoil the chances of a trekking rebound this autumn.

MAMA—The Americas were under siege this week, but not from terrorists, foreign armies or plagues. The most primal and irresistible forces of nature, the outermost, threatening to batter them down and wreak havoc within.

In the United States, people had to cope with two earlier hurricanes, both given female names in the alphabetical, alternating gender list that meteorologists put out every tropical storm season. I wrote about one of them.

Hurricane Ivan, some weeks ago (Disaster in America, #210). And I’ve just come back from feeling the effects of the second. Hurricane Frances. Ivan was far, far worse than either of those two. He’s larger, more intense and completely unpredictable. Just ask the people of the Caribbean. It’s just the first place that Ivan struck. Screwing winds and deluges of rain left 50 or more dead, and wrecked more than half of all the houses on the island. People knew it was coming, but they didn’t expect to hit so hard, so directly.

A little later, an even stronger Hurricane Ivan (tropical storms pick up intensity over water and weaken over land) headed towards the more populous and poverty-stricken island of Jamaica. The nation prepared for the worst as best as people living in tin shacks and slums can. But at the last minute, Ivan veered and hit Jamaica with its fringes and not its full destructive power. It was devastating, but it could have been worse. Up here in Florida, for the third time in a little over a month, people were asked to leave their homes in threatened areas. They were given lots of notice, a week or more, because it takes time to come to grips with the prospect of absolute devastation. Memory of hurricanes Charley and Frances is still frighteningly fresh, so it didn’t take much to persuade Floridians that they should be ready for the worst.

I wonder at times like this about Nepal and its earthquake preparation strategy. I can begin to see how people snorting into their tea all over the kingdom. Preparation? Strategy? Never mind that ‘no culture of being ready for the worst by minimising the opportunity for damage or death. On the contrary, the culture is to see itself as in terminal-decline prepare for those mysterious and unpredictable forces of nature that observe no timetables, or pay no heed to logic?’

Yet if Nepal doesn’t take its earthquake scenarios seriously, it is still well and truly doomed. I’ve often been struck, when I had the privilege of living among victims of the 1995 Nippon-kan earthquake, that every level of society for the coming and certain calamity of the ‘Big One’. Warning after warning that a major tremor is overdue, that the earth’s plates beneath Kathmandu are hugely unstable, that no one is doing anything to get ready—all these pass without notice. This newspaper and others do their best to point these things out, often by invoking memories of the disastrous quake of 1934 that killed 80,000 and informing us that the toll today of such an event would be millions.

Kathmandu Valley, home to 80 percent of the kingdom’s ‘low-lying people’ and two road connections to the outside world, both through mountains that already tumble and block access in every passing shower. A single runway offers fixed wing aircraft the chance to take off or land. The recent riots show how close to the edge the populace is, how ill prepared the government and society will forecast in case of a disaster. Right and left are ready to take advantage of any situation.

Yet again from a scene of distant disaster, I plead with Nepal to get ready for the worst. But I know dear elders when I see them. And they exist at every level of society in the land I learned to love. Good luck to you all.
My second time
How I met the real Nepal on a return visit

M y first visit to Nepal was in mid-March. The only things I knew about Nepal at the time was that it was one of the poorest countries in the world, it had splendid mountains and that it was politically unstable. I stayed here for only four weeks, but it was difficult not to return.

In May I found myself back again at Tribhuvan International Airport, and walked into town. This time I was determined not to live the artificial life of Kathmandu or the semi-artificial one of a trekker along an established route. I initiated my rite of passage into Nepaldom and got myself a guide, Rajendra Subedi to take me on a trip to Dhading.

Everyone had told me on my head on a collision with the dreaded Maoists. My fears were realized in Sattalbatal. A lot of red flags prominently displayed this village’s political preference. Two men, no older than 20, approached Rajendra and my apprehension grew as his face stiffened. All the best sign was to discuss was politics. They grilled me on my views on US foreign policy, my country’s stand, what I thought about Maoism and my take on democracy. Sitting in that tea shop with my guide as my translator, I was struck by the irony of the situation as I recalled the numerous times during my trip that I had sat in similar tea shops hiding from the Maoists to sip a forbidden glass of beer.

All along the trails, the children out to point, giggle and sometimes scream “Hello!” My respect for them increases as I watch them skip past me in their slippers on the long road to school while me in my fancy hiking shoes, pants and sweatering can barely keep up. Their schools are bare, few teachers and the homework can only be done in the dim light of lamps after work on the field is over. Some small children work as porters carrying huge burdens to augment the family income. Still, they wake up every morning, don their blue uniforms and flock to school.

It is hard not to be captivated by the greenery, the landscape, the mystical air and the enormous natural space. But indoors, the space is claustrophobic and no one has any privacy. This has its own advantages: living together and sharing lives creates something beautiful in itself. These villages are real communities everyone tries to help everyone else. Everything is shared from food, the only and the responsibility to babysit children while parents work.

In the village, the lack of privacy affects women the most. They have to wake up at four in the morning to have a few moments to themselves, and they carry the burden of household chores, taking care of the children and joining the men to work the fields.

It has been said before, but foreigners don’t realize it until they see it themselves: the immense pride the Nepalis have. Not only are they proud of their independence and of their country, but they display dignity and a sense of self-worth. All this despite all the hardships that have piled up because of the insurgency. The country may be on the brink of civil war, but I can see Nepal will never give up their self-esteem. I feel ashamed to be so individualistic, and then look at my new-found friends who are so proud of who they are. This something no one can take away from Nepal.

Marie Hippe works for the department of social welfare in Holland, and is currently enjoying a stay in Nepal, volunteering for FOHRA and an orphanage.

NEPAL PAN

Marike Hippe

EXHIBITION of NEW TOURISM PRODUCTS in nepal

DATE
Sept. 34: Inaugural Ceremony (Invites only)
Sept. 35: Travel Trade only (Invites only)
Sept. 36: General Public

VENUE
Tourist Service Centre
Bhrikutimandap, Kathmandu

TIME
9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

FREE ENTRY

ORGANISED by:
Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation
Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Programme (TRAP), and Nepal Tourism Board

For further information, please contact TRAP at: 977-1-4269786 or info_trap@nrib.org.np

“THIS IS Radio People’s Republic.”

The Maoists are taking their revolution to the airwaves with their own FM radio

RAMESWOR BOHARA in NEPALGAU

A n increasing number of antennas are popping up on rooftops all over mid-western Nepal. They aren’t for fmv, but radio aerials to help people in the western terai catch the FM broadcasts of the Maoists’ clandestine Radio Janabadi Ganatantra.

The broadcasts are feeble and not regular since the mobile transmitters are always on the move to avoid detection. But people listen anyway, more to find out the Maoist party line than out of a desire to get information.

“We don’t really believe what they say on the radio. It’s mostly political slogans, but it is interesting to find out what they are saying and planning,” says one Galuari resident, who did not want to be named. A year ago, the rebels launched the broadcasts without much fanfare. The Maoists are currently broadcasting on 100 mhz and say they have a transmitter mast with a capacity of up to 500 kilowatts. This would make the station as powerful as Radio Sagarmatha in Kathmandu. Local need to hook their battery radio to an aerial to be able to catch the signal properly. The broadcasts began last year from the Maoist heartland of Thawang in Rolpa. The Bheri-Karnali Broadcasting Service followed, and now they have also begun the Seti-Mahakali Broadcasting Service.

A typical news broadcast this week went as follows: “Because of a courageous ambush laid by the brave people’s liberation army, 22 Royal American Army soldiers have been killed and a huge quantity of arms and ammunition have been recovered. “The rest of the news contained excerpts of speeches by various leaders of the autonomous regional ‘people’s governments’, information on those on whom a sentence of safety” has been declared as well as announcements on forthcoming bands and blocks.”

Locals are not very surprised by the propaganda-laden style and language of the Maoists broadcast, and tell us it is not so different from what state-owned Radio Nepal broadcasts in its news bulletins “so many terrorists killed and a large amount of explosives, detonators and documents captured.” But the rebel radio is one notch about in the use of jargon and derogatory labels like “killer king” or “Royal American Army”. Lately, there is also a lot of abuse hurled at the “reactionary Indian government for supporting the fascist regime in Kathmandu.”

For programs that are supposed to create awareness and win over public opinion, the language is crude, and provocative, but it does seem to work in some places. One recent evening, the radio announcer reported in a shrill voice: “We must unstop any state power responsible for discrimination.” Soura Bhatta surrendered his head in agreement. Rebel leaders told us they have been trying to improve their radio presentation in order to bring less propagandistic and more persuasive. “We have already begun giving a closer account to our correspondents and program producers,” says Maoist Banka-Bardia in charge, Anal. The Bheri-Karnali service broadcasts three times a day on 100 mhz. From 6-7AM there are discussions, current affairs and liberation songs with news bulletin at the end. The afternoon transmission airs “people’s songs” and news bulletin. In the evening, transmission begins at approximately 6PM and usually goes on for three hours with the day’s news in Nepali and local languages. Agriculture, health, education, communist philosophy and rousing liberation songs are also aired. The radio targets minorities and ethnic communities, and exhorts them to rise up against oppression. A rebel journalist told us their studio equipment is still rudimentary, and none of the programs are aired live. The broadcasts are sometimes aired, and sometimes the transmissions stop for weeks without explanation. The Maoists’ regular transmission is in charge, Bansiwaj, explains that this is because their transmitter has to be moved often to avoid detection. The stations have their own correspondents across the midwest. One of the senior Maoists looking after these broadcasts, Hari Das ‘Prakhar’, was killed in action three months ago, an event reported in detail by Radio Ganatantra.

Ironically, the first people to notice the Maoist’s Bheri-Karnali broadcasts were the security forces. Sentries guarding the television tower in Sukhket intercepted the signals but were not able to pinpoint the location of the transmitter accurately. The most dedicated listeners in fact seem to be the security forces, who say they tune in to find out what the enemy has to say.

MRN BHAKTAPA}
Against the current

Five electric cars are rotting in Birganj customs because the government refuses to give non-fossil fuel cars a tax break

WAY TO GO: A fire-engine red Safa Tempo carries Danish Embassy staff to and from work every day in Kathmandu.

All Reva-ed up

The days of the big Ambassador or even the dinky Maruti may be over, with the latest in Indian automobiles—the Reva. Sure, it looks a little bit like something Noddy or the Leosons may drive, and it’s hard to believe that the two-door hatchback is really capable of seating a family of four, but beauty is superficial—and the motives behind this car are solid on a single charge of 9 units, can run for 80km at up to 65km/hr.

15-ampere, 220 volt socket, and it is less than six hours for full clutch, the Reva is easy to drive and low-maintenance and all for less than $5,000. This month, 300 units were exported to country affordable.

already arrived in Birganj customs into the country. BUT one organisation devoted to electric vehicles promotion hasn’t given up. Founders of the Kathmandu Electric Vehicles Association (KEVA) say alternatives to fossil fuels makes both ecological sense and economic sense.

KEVA doesn’t just talk, it was behind the introduction of Safa tempo in Kathmandu in 1993 with support from USAID and the Global Research Institute. That move did incalculable good to the lungs of Kathmandu residents by removing the polluting diesel tempo. There are now more than 600 Safa tempo in the Valley.

KEVA has now joined forces with Clean Energy Nepal (CEN) to lobby the government to introduce other electric vehicles like electric buses, trolley buses, electric trains and electric commercial cars. “Electric vehicles are the perfect solution to Kathmandu’s growing pollution and fossil fuel problems,” says Bilek Chasagupati of KEVA.

As far as we can make out, the only disadvantage of current model-electric vehicles is that they only run about 80km per charge, but in a city as small as Kathmandu that is more than adequate. Says CEN’s Bhusan Tuladhar: “These vehicles will only be charged at night, during off-peak electricity consumption hours and at a time when excess energy is being wasted.” This means that the public and environment would benefit and there would be optimum usage of electricity.

In a bid to promote these environment and user-friendly vehicles, the company Eco-visionaries imported five Indian-made Reva electric cars (see box) hoping to start off the trend of EVs as private vehicles. The project looked promising, but once the cars reached Birganj they were stopped and refused entry at 10 percent tax, which is what other electric vehicles were required to pay according to the budget on 17 March 2002. The vehicles were not allowed to come into the country and were delayed until 18 July 2002, when the new budget came into play and the EVs were subject to 130 percent tax, with a 30 percent waiver due to their electric status. This would make the electric cars more expensive than petrol ones, and was therefore not feasible. As the debate raged uselessly, the Reva cars have rusted in Birganj and Eco-visionaries has folded.

Bilek Chasagupati says, “The government support for electric vehicles has only been lip service.” CEN’s Bhusan Tuladhar agrees: “We realise that with the state the country is in, this may not be a priority, but we should see this as a way to make the country better.”

\[MIN BAJRACHARYA\]
EVEN before the shady transfer of cost overruns in the Kali Gandaki A hydropower project has been resolved, yet another scam has rocked the country’s biggest power project.

The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) paid $50 million in cost overruns to the project’s Italian contractor, most of it without authorisation from the board. Now, it has been revealed that NEA’s past management allowed the contractor’s $10 million guarantee money to slip away even though a court ruling in Paris a year ago awarded it to Nepal.

As a result, NEA doesn’t have access to the performance bid (also known as ‘retention money’) amounting to $30 million because the contractor has gone for arbitration in the International Chamber of Commerce in Paris. The Intassa Bank in Milan says it can’t transfer the money to NEAs account because of the new legal tangle. The other bad news is that there is no counter bank guarantee in Nepal—yet another flaw on the NEAs part—when it signed the deal with the contractor in the late 1990s. Had there been a counter bank guarantee, the recovery of the money would have been much easier.

“The previous management should have taken the money as soon as we had won the case,” says Minister of State for Water Resources, Thakur Prasad Sharma. “Since they didn’t do that, we are having a tough time getting the $30 million back.” NEA had sent two officials to Milan earlier this month but they came back empty-handed because the bank said the matter was in arbitration.

The legal proceedings will last another year-and-a-half and even at the end of it, there is no certainty NEA will get back the $30 million. The arbitration is over another $20 million the Italian contractor, Impregilo SPO, has claimed over and beyond the $30 million in cost overruns that it has already been paid. NEA has been refusing the payment of the additional claim.

In this tangle, the question now is not whether NEA will get the guarantee money back, but why it didn’t do so. The decision came after Impregilo moved the court following NEA’s bid to freeze the guarantee because the Italian contractor had not extended its term despite the authority’s repeated requests. The extension of the guarantee money had become necessary because the two parties had not agreed on the variation costs of the project during the government of Lokendra Bahadur Chand last year (New Nepali Times #155, 166 and 174).

The court’s decision in favour of NEA had come while when the Chand government was being replaced in early 2003. The successor government did not pursue the matter and insiders say the NEA management at that time was ‘not interested’ in not making any moves to retrieve the money. Fingers are pointed at the then-Tourism Minister and NEA chairman Surendra Nath Shukla, who allegedly made no attempt to get the money back.

“He used to argue that the idea was to settle the variation dispute amicably,” said one former board member. “But, many know that this would be in the Impregilo’s interest. Besides, the theory of amicable settlement simply does not apply here, because Impregilo had already walked away with $50 million in variation costs. NEA insiders told us the additional $20 million the Italians are claiming can’t be justified, and reclaiming the $10 million bank guarantee could have at least compensated for the earlier unauthorised payment.”

Former Minister Shukla said the NEA did not collect the money because he wanted the dispute with Impregilo to be settled amicably. “If we had taken the money, we would have had to face the arbitration then. Our legal advisers suggested that we go for an amicable settlement.” However, board members during his tenure remember suggesting to him that the money had to be collected at the earliest. “But he always discouraged the idea and now money has slipped out of our hands for good,” said one official.

Impregilo’s local agent Sanjeev Koirala says the money is safe in the Milan bank and that it has never said it would not pay NEA. “The bank has never said so and even if it had given the money in the past, the NEA would have an upper hand in the present arbitration,” he told us.

But the Italian contractor has influenced the civil construction deal of the 144MW Kali Gandaki A project from the beginning. It won the contract by bidding the lowest, $130 million, but used a clause in the contract for variation to claim and get the $50 million in cost-overruns, most of it without the NEA board’s approval. Our complicit officials seem to have as much of a hand in this as the Italians.

When the scam became public knowledge, instead of taking action against the culprits, the former NEA board swept the matter under the carpet. Worse yet, it helped the foreign contractor keep its $10 million guarantee money which rightfully belongs to the national coffers.

**The Kali Gandaki tangle**

**NEA management, with official collusion, let $30 million in guarantee money slip away**

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**NAVIN SINGH KHADKA**

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**Times**

24 - 30 September 2004 #215
“They don’t even want to utter the name Iraq”

Nirmal Gurung, President of the Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies, has been trying to get the industry back to normal after the devastating attacks on 300 member offices in Kathmandu on 1 September. Despite everything, he tells Nepal Times he is optimistic.

What actually happened to your own investigation on the 1 September vandalism?

We have done our investigation and we are submitting the report to the government’s investigation committee. We are working very closely with the government in this regard. A copy of the report will also be given to the Department of Labour.

Is the issue of compensation also being sorted out?

Since the government has agreed to provide compensation of Rs 50,000 to the manpower agencies whose offices were destroyed and has assured it will cooperate in other ways, we have suspended the idea of setting up a pressure committee for now.

What “other cooperation”?

We have been assured that documents like passports that were destroyed during the vandalism will be reissued by the government.

What kind of volume are we talking about now?

We can only give figures once we begin to run smoothly and accumulate data. Normally, around 200,000 Nepalis go out of the country to work every year and it will take time to reach that number again. The workers send home about Rs 100 million every year.

Was there an element of rivalry between various groups of manpower agencies that led to the vandalism on 1 September?

This is a conspiracy theory to divide manpower agencies. We are all one and we have nothing against another. The vandalism took place on 1 September was the result of the anger due to the killings of the 12 Nepalis in Iraq. People simply could not control their anger and they went out to destroy things.

But the rivalry between the two sides is said to have existed for quite some time now.

I am not aware of it. What I know is that manpower agents in Nepal have always been and still are united.

Any comment on the arrest of your vice president after he and other association members allegedly ransacked the Department of Labour last week?

The matter has been resolved and I do not want to comment on it. We have reached a compromise with the government agency and so we do not want to dig the dead issue up again.

Your executive members have had differences on this issue too.

The differences are due to the government’s efforts to divide us.

You mean to say the officials at the Labour Ministry and Department are trying to divide you?

Yes. And by doing that, they reap benefits. That has been their way for quite some time now.

The business of peace

Supply peace now, while demand is high

Though lots of Kathmanduites talk about the need for peace, the numbers don’t add up when it comes to demonstrating their support for the business of peace. However, on Monday evening at Maitighar and at Basantapur on Tuesday morning, the peacecikas took to the streets.

Last Saturday, the Beed watched groups of Peace Corps volunteers at Hotel Yak Yeti preparing to leave, still unsure of why they were being pulled out. The continuous flow of advisors have never helped the business of peace. Now diplomatic missions and other offices have to weigh the pros and cons of destroying an economy that affects many in order to save the jobs of a few.

On World Peace Day, the leaders were back to shouting slogans and snarling traffic. Whenever there is even a hint of peace, they all appear again to destroy that chance, proving they aren’t serious about the business of peace.

Peace is an important issue for Nepal’s neighbours too, since disruptions can easily spread to their own territories. A good example of this is how unrest in Indian towns and villages affected neighbouring regions of southern Bhutan as well. Although the Nepali delegation to India seemed satisfied that Dev Gawala hosted a dinner for the prime minister, India and Nepal need to do a lot more to ensure peace.

The donor community uses the phrase “conflict resolution” to keep funding consultants, conferences, workshops and seminars, but there is no guarantee that this will lead to peace. The agenda may need to therefore change from conflict resolution to peace restoration. Of course, the less said of the government the better. It can’t restore peace because, first and foremost, it has never shown any intention of doing so. The business of arms and war are vastly more tempting than the business of peace.

As always, it is sad to see that the business community remains largely indifferent. Here the Beed strongly endorses fellow columnist Ashutosh Tiwari’s suggestion (“Rising from the ashes”, #14) that a Business Initiative for Peace be created. Genuine businesses can only thrive and grow in the absence of conflict. There are businesses that thrive in chaos and strife, but the Beed hopes that is not what most Nepali businesses do, or wish to do.

We are in a do-or-die situation. Tourism has been hit hard, industries are suffering and the business of remittances through labour export has also been affected. The sense of insecurity is high and the options for resolution are low. In villages, where people are willing to walk four hours to a water sprout or two hours to school, Nepal is willing to bear any hardship for peace. Economics suggest that when the demand is at its peak, that is best time to ensure supply.

The cross of the issue is that the business of peace needs to be taken seriously. This business surely has the best short, medium and longterm returns. This business benefits every Nepali as a stakeholder and provides every opportunity to return Nepal to what all would like it to be. That is why we have to applaud the initiative taken this week by informal citizens’ groups for campaign for peace.

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Meeting point
These days, Nepalis need all the blessing they can get. Maoist rebels have been waging war against the monarchy for eight years, displacing hundreds of thousands of people. Amid so much political strife, traditions like the royal kumari provide comfort and continuity. But some Nepalis have begun questioning the tradition, arguing that this once-prestigious position is a violation of human rights.

A generation ago, hundreds of parents would offer their daughters for the royal kumari selection process, considering the post an honour. But in 2001, when royal caretakers went from house to house in Kathmandu looking for a prospective goddess, only five parents were willing to offer their daughters. When the caretakers came to Preeti Shakyas door, her mother was ambivalent about letting the three-year-old be evaluated. “I didn’t want to give her horoscope for consideration,” says Reena Shakyas, sitting in her living room today. “But how could I say no?”

Preetis horoscope proved harmonious with the kings. The next step was to examine the girl for the 32 perfections, a divine rick list that seems more suited to a character in a Harry Potter novel than to real girl. The royal kumari must have a body shaped like a banyan tree, thighs like a deers, cheeks like a lions, a voice like a cow, and a sweet voice. The three-year-old was then taken to live with her new family at the kumari ghar. “You can imagine what a mother might feel,” Reena laments. “My baby was going to be taken away from me for years. As soon as they took her, I knew she had already become a goddess.”

For the past three years, Reena Shakyas has seen Preeti only once a week, when she visits her at the ghar. “I go as an ordinary worshipper,” Reena says. “I go as a normal goddess before I think of her as a daughter.” Preetis older sister, however, is allowed to play with the pint-size deity on Saturdays. From her daughters interactions, Reena has learned that Preeti is now a cheerful, active six-year-old who loves to play dress-up and eat ice cream — when she is not receiving devotees.

As the royal kumari, Preeti follows a strict routine. Every morning, attendants dress her in a red and gold brocade gown, pull her hair into an intricate bun and paint a vermilion, black and gold all-seeing third eye on her forehead. At around 9 AM, Preeti settles into her throne so priests can come and make offerings to appease the Taleju goddess. After that, Preeti spends several hours receiving and blessing a dozen or so devotees before beginning her daily studies. Then, finally, she is free to play. Even in her rare moments of childhood fun, Preeti is restricted. She can walk only on special cloths set down on the floor and she is forbidden to go out in the sunlight, except during a dozen public appearances a year.

Just before she hits puberty, Preeti will be thrust back into the real world. She will return to a family she barely knows and be expected to perform household chores, like any other adolescent girl. But unlike other Nepali teens, Preeti will have never walked down a city street, chosen her own outfit, or helped her mother cook a meal before.

This abrupt shift from goddess to mortal is rocky for both the girls and their families. “It was very hard. All I wanted to do was go back to the kumari house,” says former kumari Rashila Shakyas, 23. The only visible remnant linking Rashila to her days as a goddess, besides the photos of her that adorn her family’s sitting room, is a bald spot on her head from having her hair pulled into a tight bun every day for nearly nine years. “It was home and family to me.” Rashila says. “If I didn’t know how to face my freedom, I had to struggle to get back into the educational system after I came home.”

Rashila, like all royal kumari before beginning her no education during her reign. She began second grade at age 12. After years of hard work playing

DIVINE CHILDHOOD

How to reconcile a little girls rights with the need to protect a national tradition

JENNY DUBIN

Top, left: The Kumari while bestowing blessings to King Gyanendra during last year’s Indra Jatra.

Top, right: The Kumari chariot being dragged across Jai Si Debaal on the first day of Indra Jatra.

Left: On the last day of Indra Jatra in 1994, previous Kumari Rashila Shakyas appears with a co-Kumari.

Right: Reena Shakyas with her daughter, Preeti, when she was four, just after the announcement that she was the new Kumari in 2000.
catch-up in school, she recently began studying for a bachelor’s degree in information technology and she dreams of designing software. When she graduates, Rashmila will be the first former goddess with a college degree.

But despite her difficult adjustment, Rashmila has no regrets about her past. “It was an honour,” she says. “Not everyone is chosen to be the kumari. It is something I am very proud of.”

Rashmila’s successor, Amita Shakya, did receive tutoring, thanks to her parents, who pushed for reform. Amita, now 14, agreed to be interviewed only with her parents present. She is slumped on a stool in the family’s living room, dressed like an ordinary Nepali teenager in faded jeans and a pink T-shirt. She sat by her father describes his struggle to secure a tutor for Amita during her reign as kumari. “I went letters to the palace many times,” he recalls. “But their attitude was, ‘Your daughter is a goddess. Why does she need an education?’”

It wasn’t until Minima Shakya, Amita’s mother, personally handed a letter to King Birendra at a kumari ceremony that changes were made. Five years after Amita had been appointed a royal kumari, the king arranged formal education for the child goddess.

Today, Preeti has a private tutor sent to her quarters each day. Although she is not allowed to attend classes and socialise with other children, she follows the government-prescribed 10-month curriculum for all Nepali schoolchildren.

In September 2002, MP Bidya Bhandari, took a public stand against the kumari tradition during a press conference. She alleged that the tradition should be abolished: “This is a violation not only of the rights of the child, but of women’s and human rights,” she said. “The girl is isolated from normal society and after a number of years, when she begins to bleed, she is thrown out. It is not only traumatising, it is psychologically damaging for a child to be forced to shift between these two worlds.”

Sapana Pradhan Malla, a lawyer and human rights activist who founded the Forum for Women, Law and Development, agrees: “You are chosen when you are not able to decide what is good or bad for you. The child’s interests are decided by parents who see this as a prestige issue, because the kumari is respected by the king.”

It’s no simple matter to abolish a tradition based on centuries of religious faith. “There are some things that are beyond normal human understanding,” says Ramesh Prasad Pandey, a 72-year-old priest who has overseen the selection of these royal Kumaris. “I could place a stone on the table, and if I see the sacred in it, then it becomes imbued with the sacred. But you could see it merely as a rock. It is the same principle with the kumari. It’s a question of belief.”

Sapana Pradhan Malla acknowledges that the kumari tradition is probably too much a part of Nepali culture to abolish. So instead, she proposes further reform: “The girl’s rights should be protected,” she says. “She should be given adequate opportunity for development and education, and she should get counseling before she gives up her position. It is the state’s responsibility to protect her rights.”

While the government does provide a modest lifelong pension of Rs 3,000 rupees a month for its former goddesses this is a pittance compared to the value of a lost childhood.

One day, Preeti Shakya will voice her own opinion. But for now, the goddess remains apart from mere mortals, until she begins to mature and suffers her inevitable fall from grace.
Delhi diversion

Former Foreign Minister Ram Sharan Mahat in Kathmandu, 19 September

Prime Minister Sheh Bahadur Deuba’s Delhi visit was ill timed. The government revealed its weaknesses at a time when the law and order situation in Nepal was at its worst. The 1 September incident was still fresh in people’s minds and the country was still in shock. The prime minister should have focused on these affairs. Instead, he chose to rush to New Delhi. The joint communiqué issued at the end of the visit also proves that the trip was unproductive. Whatever agreements were signed could have been done at the secretary or ambassador level. So why the rush to go to Delhi? The government knows that if the wrath of the people, who saw it remain a mute spectator as the capital burned on 1 September. The New Delhi meeting was a play to divert the people’s attention. Immediately after the visit, Prime Minister Deuba said excitedly that the government would use force if the Maoists do not come forth for talks. He needs to explain what has given him the confidence to say this. Security is quite a sensitive issue, and if India has assured him something in this regard then he owes the country an explanation. Unfortunately, there has been no document issued on any agreements or discussions. If this was a working visit and if discussions took place, they should have involved officials from the Home and Defence Ministries. The nation should have a record of the issues discussed. The prime minister was in New Delhi as a representative of Nepal, not as an individual. But there is no recording system in our Foreign Ministry. When I was in the government, I never held any secret talks or made such visits. I always allowed officials to accompany me. I always made sure that there were records of all the conversations between the two foreign ministers. Even when there were no officials, I made it a point to write down all the issues discussed and maintain records. Even when I had foreign visitors, I recorded all the talks. But the system I introduced has been discontinued.

School shootout

Kathmandu, 20 September

Despite their repeated commitments to the Geneva Convention, the Maoist rebels continue to misuse school premises as war zones. One of the latest examples was in a higher secondary school in Jajarkot district. Roughly a dozen rebels disguised as students entered the school on 19 September. When security personnel began tickling students at the entrance after receiving information that rebels had entered the school, two of the 12 began brandishing pistols as students ran for cover. The rebels then opened fire on the soldiers outside the school premises, and one soldier was injured during the shootout. After firing several times, the rebels fled from the back door of the school. “We could have retaliated and killed them,” said a security official, “but we did not do so because we were concerned about the student’s safety.”

Peace committee

Kathmandu, 21 September

KATHMANDU— The government has made changes in the structure of the High-level Peace Committee (HPC) formed under the prime minister. The Council of Ministers has approved a proposal that allows the ruling parties to send a minister to advise. “To assist the committee, the Nepal Congress (Democratic), CPN-UML and Rashtriya Pragati Party (RPP) can each send one of their ministers,” said a highly-placed government source. The source also said that another sub-committee is being formed which will work under the Democratic Coordination Committee. The committee includes Chhewang, UML general secretary Madhvi Kumari Nepal, RPP chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Nepal Sambhawana Party chairman and Forest Minister, Bishnu Prasad Mandal. The sub-committee’s job will be to settle minor issues so that the committee doesn’t foment controversy. Apparently, the prime minister has asked the alliance leaders to send in names for the committee. Sources claim that NC’s Minendra Rijal, UML’s Bhim Rawal, RPP’s Khusiram Pandit and Amritra Agrahari from Nepali Congress are being considered for the committee. (Nepalnews.com Translation Service)

Twisted justice

Kantipur, 20 September

Gorden William Robinson, a notorious internacional sord- lord who was arrested with contraband drug in Kathmandu, was released from Dilli Bajar Jail on 23 April after the Supreme Court acquitted him. He was arrested in Dharan the next day. A few days later, the police handed him over to a businessman from Kathmandu. He then fled. The Judicial Investigation Committee, formed to investigate the controversial court verdict on the Robinson case, has held the court and the police responsible for the entire saga. The report of the three-member committee headed by Judge Manohar Bahadur Rayamajhi which was submitted to chief justice Govind Bahadur Shrestha two months ago is yet to be made public. The committee was supposed to initiate action based on the committee’s recommendation but has not done anything as yet. It has now Indian nightmare

Nepal, 26 September

These days, security officials become extra alert when they get to hear the term Compact Boundary Zone (CRZ). This, according to the Indian Home Ministry, is a plan by the Maoists of Nepal and India to spread their revolution from Nepal to Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Udaipur and Andhra Pradesh of India. According to the Indian Home Ministry’s latest annual report, incidents related to Naxalites have increased by almost 14 percent. Last year there were around 550 such incidents involving 1,905 persons were killed. The attack on Chandra Babu Naidu last year showed that their activities had really intensified.

When the Nepali Maoists began operating nine years ago, the Indian People’s War Group (PWG) and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) were their source of inspiration. Nine years down the line, their roles have been reversed. Today, the Nepali Maoists are much more battle-hardened and experienced than their Indian counterparts. They are even a source of inspiration for the Indian revolutionaries. As a result, Nepali Maoists and the MCC have made several joint committees in the border areas between Nepal and India. In the meantime, the one-time sworn enemies PWG and the MCC have not only settled their differences, but are even planning a merger. The two parties also recently carried a joint nameplate for post-agglomeration—All India Maoist Communist Centre. Interestingly, the Nepali Maoists are said to have played a pivotal role in this unification by facilitating the induction of a PWG unit into the MCC in Bihar. To deal with a new-hostile India, the Maoists have launched a campaign to unite separate groups in India. There are around 50 such groups and most of them are active in sensitive bordering areas of Nepal, India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and China.
After assimilation

The ingredients of the melting pot are separating

H
dmond,

human migration is an old

has history. Even migration to
distant places and remote cultures is nothing new. In the ninet

teenth century, millions of Europeans sought liberty and prosperity in the

COMMENTS

Ralf Dahrendorf,

Americas, notably in the United States. What is new today is the

scale of migration, often across huge cultural divides—and

often without a definite aim. The African boat people in

the Mediterranean are often not even sure whether they

want to be in Italy, Germany or Britain. Even those who are
certain, like North Africans in Spain and France, or Turks in

Germany, had as their priority escaping the hopelessness of

their home countries, not arriving at a particular

destination. This modern form of migration raises massive

problems for countries on the receiving end. In Europe, it

is probably the most serious social issue today, because no

one has a clear idea about how to manage the resulting clash

of cultures. Once upon a time, North America, notably the US,

seemed to provide the answer. It was that of the “melting

pot”—different peoples made their own contribution to

American culture, but, above all, they made every effort to

accept what they found and integrate. “No,” the Russian

woman who came to the US in the early 20th century replied to

the grandchild who asked whether her ancestors arrived on

the Mayflower. “Our ship had a different name, but now

we are all Americans.”

More recently, this has

changed, giving rise to a

process described by Arthur

Schlesinger, the historian and

former aide to John F. Kennedy,

in his book The Terms of

America. No longer are all US

citizens Americans. They have

become hyphenated Americans: Italian-Americans, African-

Americans, Hispanic-Americans and so on. The ingredients

of the melting pot are separating. Even in Israel, the last true

immigration country—at least for Jews—assimilation is no

longer so easy. Recent

newcomers from Russia have

their own political party, and

old Europeans have become a
distinct minority. Israel and

America continue to have

mechanisms to integrate new

migrants. Language is an

important underlying factor,

and in Israel, there is the

army, while in America, the

values embodied in the

Constitution still represent a

shared secular faith.

But these mechanisms are

weakening everywhere and

are virtually non-existent in

European countries. Modern

societies are characterized by

acute problems of belonging.

They don’t offer the implicit, unconscious ties of

community that citizens felt in the past. As a result, people

have begun to cling to more

primordial group identities.

They resist assimilation,

fearing that it will rob them of

their identity without offering

a new one.

What then is the

alternative to assimilation? The “salad bowl” of so-called

multiculturalism is no real

alternative, because it does not

provide the necessary glue that

binds communities together.

All the ingredients remain

separate from the outset.

The only viable alternative for

which there are examples is

probably that of London or New York. The main characteristic

of this alternative is the

coexistence of a common

public sphere shared by all and a cultural pluralism in the

cultural separation in the

“private” sphere, notably in

residential areas. The public

spaces are marked in terms of

people’s backgrounds, but

is governed by agreed values,
ev

even a common language,

whereas the people’s private

lives are—to use an ugly

word—ghettoized.

This is not a distinctly second-best solution to the cultural

consequences of migration. In practice, it is the best answer

we have so far, although it
cannot be held for nothing.

Even the necessary minimum of a common language requires

a deliberate effort, to say

nothing of certain rules of

behavior.

Living in London, I marvel at the way in which we

Londoners have come to terms with Italian family shops and

West Indian-run public

transport, while not asking

many questions about whole

districts that are Bangladeshi

or Chinese. No one has yet

found a name for this new

version of the “separate but
equal” doctrine that some of us

fought so hard against in the

1960’s separate private lives in

a common public space that is

equal for all.

This is clearly easier in

London and New York than it

is in smaller towns or cities

where the world language of

English is not spoken. Berlin’s

Turkish sector, the London

North African communities

around Paris seem increasingly

separate, with their own public

spaces. Where this is an

explosive condition can arise,

a kind of segregation within,

not by historically separate
groups but by necessity

against natives.

If we are forced to abandon

the hope of assimilation, our

efforts should concentrate on

creating a public space to

which all contribute and that

all enjoy. Ideally, this should

be an expanding public space,

for in the end, the element

of unity in a modern society

is the guarantee of its
citizens’ liberty.

Ralf Dahrendorf, author of numerous

books and a former European

Commissioner from Germany, is a

member of the British House of Lords,
a former Rector of the London School of

Economics, and a former Warden of

St Antony’s College, Oxford.

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Deepak Raynghaya

(Project Syndicate/Institute For Human Sciences)
In a response to the recent wave of terrorist attacks, Vladimir Putin has demonstrated his authority and power by being in control of Russia's military and security services. In Beslan, camouflaged men representing four minions were used, with no clear leaders or goals, losing precious minutes while the violence erupted. Meanwhile, Nikolai Patrushev, the director of the Federal Security Service (FSB, the former KGB) and Rashid Mungalev, the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), both went missing on orders from President Vladimir Putin, were invisible as the tragedy unfolded. So once again, we wonder how face our effective state is. Indeed, none of Russia’s power structures, including the military, the FSB and the MVD, are capable of performing effective anti-terrorist operations.

Most analysts reached this conclusion long before the Beslan attack. In 2002, after terrorists took 1800 theatregoers hostage, Putin ordered that an anti-terrorist component be added to Russia’s military strategic plan. Some military analysts saw this as the beginning, at long last, of serious reforms, as the army was capable only of executing military operations in Russia’s traditional way—using overwhelming force, as in WWI. Russia’s traditional army cannot fight terrorists effectively because it disbelieves the ability of soldiers to work in small groups and does not encourage individual initiative on the part of officers. All are simply expected to execute orders scrupulously. But anti-terrorist operations require individual training and the ability to make split-second decisions in fluid situations. Incidentally, when one such anti-terrorist operation was suggested in the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia, Putin decided against it, understanding that instead of eliminating them it would likely turn into a full blown traditional war.

From the outset, the Defence Ministry was sceptical of Putin’s order to include anti-terrorism on the military agenda. It suggested, instead, that the army should play a secondary role in anti-terrorist operations.

The Army’s hostility to reform is deeply ingrained. Today, Russia’s army has no professional training non-commissioned officers. The Defence Ministry simply names sergeants from senior corporals. This means that sergeants are not very different from their subordinates in either age or training.

The internal conditions of the “power” Ministries—the FSB and the MVD, which bear the main responsibility for antiterrorist operations—are equally grim. Now, for the first time, Putin is trying to increase the FSB and MVD into one Ministry of State Security, thereby creating a single anti-terrorist centre. Putin has already decided to create an operational centre of 13 groups in the Northern Caucasus region to coordinate the actions of the Defence and Emergencies Ministries.

But there is little reason to believe that this proposed bureaucratic monster will provide better security. The only positive result that may emerge from such a structural change could be that the number of anti-terrorist formations will grow. Yet even that is uncertain: before Beslan, the response to terrorist attacks in Ingushetia and Chechnya consisted of efforts to form additional federal and traditional military divisions.

It is now obvious that overwhelming numbers do not provide an advantage in fighting terrorism, because it is the terrorists who have the initiative—they plan when and where to strike. Confronting them sedately will not require root and branch change in order to inspire Russian security services to take the initiative. For example, Russian security services have to date operated only after the underground work of the terrorist organisations, which are spread across the entire Russian Federation. It does not provide any credible intelligence penetration of these organisations. This must change if Russia is to prevent future Beslans.

But fighting terrorism requires an entirely different kind of spring from “uncovering” traditional “spies,” or neutralizing unpopular outlaws such as Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Today, meet Moscow’s threat, troops must be able to take individual responsibility and initiative, and must genuinely respond at a moment’s notice.

These qualities simply don’t exist in Russia’s Soviet-era military organisations, with their rigid hierarchies and culture of blind conformity. The entire military philosophy in Russia must be changed. But neither Russia’s president nor its police ministries seem ready for this.

Instead of confronting today’s new and very real enemy, they would rather confront the old, traditional one—the West. After the Beslan tragedy, Putin offered an exotic explanation for fighting terrorism: the terrorists, he claimed, are instruments in the hands of those who still fear Russia as a nuclear power.

This is nonsense on stilts, though it obviously sounds pleasing to generals in the police ministries, because the only war they know how to wage is with “world imperialism.” They are untested at fighting today’s new terrorist enemy. Without major reform of all security and military forces—reforms that provide incentives for individual officers to show initiative and take responsibility—Russia’s war on terror will remain underminded: the terrorists will be doing all the attacking.

A spokesman for the UK’s KP Snacks firm explains that for any new snack to be commercially successful you have to be able to eat it on the move and it must be light and tasty. So how does she rate the commercial chances of a crispy cricket chip? “It depends on the market. We have to test the concept. There are even ones for chocolate-covered cricket chips at 250 dollars a bag (chocolate and chocolate to eat dry until they are really crunchy). And meekly make cricket paste is another yummy treat. The mealworm is supposed to enrich the snack, and to to the insect growth. Ingeth ringy Navaa.

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A smiling woman is standing in front of a mirror, looking at herself. She is wearing a green dress and holding a camera.
T
there was nothing apparently controversial when, in April 1999, the World Bank concluded negotiations on a project in China’s Qinghai province. China was the bank’s star client at the time, having lifted around 200 million people out of poverty during the previous decade. The Qinghai project was designed to move 58,000 farmers from a hopelessly parched hilside to another part of the province irrigated by a small dam. Farmer’s incomes would rise from around 20 cents a day to a level at which they could actually subsist.

Qinghai borders the Tibetan Autonomous Region and one million of Qinghai’s five million inhabitants are Tibetan, so Tibetan activists called for a stop to the “controversial” World Bank project that would dramatically affect the demography of Qinghai by moving ethnic Chinese into a culturally Tibetan area. This was a strange claim. First, no Tibetans lived in the immediate settlement area. The nearest were 276 nomadic herders (the bank had counted them carefully) who wintered 37 miles south of Qinghai.

But the Tibet Information Network was not deterred. “Population transfer of Chinese into traditional Tibetan areas has become a major concern for Tibetans,” the group repeatedly said anonymously. Within a few weeks, the London activists had forged an international coalition. It drew from an anti-World Bank army of environmental groups opposed to the bank’s human rights and relocation policies, groups opposing cooperation with China. Campaigners deluged the bank with e-mails and faxes, anti-bank posters appeared around Washington and Tibet activists set up camp outside the bank’s headquarters. A top star from the Beattie Boys declared that the bank’s loan would lead to the “destruction of the Tibetan people.”

Despite the inaccuracy of this claim, the activists quickly won allies in Hollywood and the US Congress, most notably the actor Richard Gere, who had recently narrated a documentary film about Tibet and Democratic Representative Nancy Pelosi of California. Sixty members of congress fired off a complaint to Wolfensohn, and Senator Jesse Helms leapt to the case of the poor and the World Bank in a single breath. When a World Bank delegation went to Capitol Hill to mollify the lawmakers, it was confronted with a map that did not even show Qinghai.

The entire province had been labelled Tibet, never mind that Hitler later became apparent that China

The panel’s final report, delivered in April 2000, was a 160-page document that by the time it arrived at World Bank headquarters was underwritten by a progressive coalition. It drew from an anti-World Bank army of environmental groups and NGOs, academics and activists — it has successfully adapted the commissions findings to local realities. Such adaptive processes are essential in many fields in order to moderate the increasing disjuncture between globalisation processes and much more localized cultural, environmental, economic and social perspectives.

Over all, Constructional Dialogue on Dam and Development in Nepal is a good dam book reporting on a good dam process.

Marcus Moncrieff is the director of the Institute for Social and Environmental Transition International (ISET) in Nepal.


The Historical Dictionary of Nepal offers a concise account of Nepal’s history and political evolution, focusing on the period since the rule of Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1743, especially on the developments in the past 50 years. In an easy A-Z format, the dictionary spans Nepal’s history, politics, economy, society, rich cultural and religious traditions, and the country’s historical figures.

 Courtesy: Myndala Book Point, Kathmandu, 422711, myndala@ccsl.com.np
When Paris, Prince of Troy (Orlando Bloom) steals Helen, the most beautiful woman in Greece, away from her husband Menelaus, king of Sparta, it sparks a bloody war that sets the two nations at war against each other. Menelaus’s brother Agamemnon joins the fray, his army led by Achilles (Brad Pitt), believed to be the greatest warrior alive. In a tale of love, bravery, greed and pride, thousands fall in pursuit of glory and a nation burns to the ground for love.

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

After significantly rises the week before, pollution levels around the Kathmandu Valley dropped again this week, bringing PM10 (particle matter less than 10 microns) concentrations to levels within the national standard of 120mg/m³. The PM10 levels around Patan has dropped by 28 percent, and in Thamel pollution dropped by 32 percent.

Nepali Weather by MAUSAM BEED

This monsoon shows signs of not wanting to leave us. The delayed arrival of the seasonal westers have allowed moisture from the Bay of Bengal to keep messing up over the Himalayan foothills. The soil is already saturated, so these heavy bursts of rain can trigger landslides. This is expected to persist over the next few days, both in Kathmandu Valley and its activities, 3PM on 25 September.

The mercury will soon begin its September 22, but this year the rains usually recedes completely by mid-October. This monsoon shows signs of not wanting to leave us. The delayed arrival of the seasonal westerlies have allowed moisture from the Bay of Bengal to keep messing up over the Himalayan foothills. The soil is already saturated, so these heavy bursts of rain can trigger landslides. This is expected to persist over the next few days, both in Kathmandu Valley and its activities, 3PM on 25 September.

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Songs for Smarika

When Situ Kharel appears on stage in London’s Ealing Town Hall on 11 October, she will be the first Nepali to hold a solo concert in Britain. Impressive as this is, when she sings the title track from her new album, Paree, the audience is more likely to be awed by her courage and character than by just the event itself. Situ sings about her 18-year-old daughter, Smarika, who suffers from a rare neurological disorder. With stirring vocals, Situ underscores a point that many ignore: disabled children need love and care, not just at home, but from everyone.

This is only the latest part of Situ’s campaign to promote awareness and acceptance of handicapped children. Situ’s father-in-law, famous lyricist Kiran Kharel, wrote the title track for her first album, also called Smarika, as a personal response to watching his beautiful granddaughter struggle to do things by herself. In a society where disabled children are still not brought out in public, the song has become something of an anthem for the Kharel family.

Situ is studying Indian classical music in London, and her time outside Nepal has taught her a lot about coping with disabled children. “I was inspired to do something for such children after seeing the differences in behaviour and attitude towards them in Nepal and Britain,” Situ says. “They should not be confined inside the home. They should be part of the society and they need more love and affection than normal children.”

Music and singing has always been a part of Situ and Smarika’s relationship, especially as music therapy is recommended for Rett’s Syndrome, which Smarika suffers from. Says Situ, “Smarika inspired me to be an artist, and I thought, if I am to sing for her, why not sing for the society as well?”

People have started calling radio and tv stations to say that they also have a child with a disability and that after listening to Situ’s songs, they are more aware that these children need more love, care and respect. Situ is gratified with the response: “We have brought it out into the open now.”

(Navin Singh Khadka)

AT BUDDHAS FEET: Hundreds of people gathered for World Peace Day at Boudha on Tuesday to light butter lamps for peace.

DEATH TALLY: On Tuesday, peace activists celebrating World Peace Day at Basantapur carry a banner with 10,000 tally marks, each representing a Nepali who has been killed in the past eight years of conflict.

REGRESS OR PROGRESS: Girija Prasad Koirala addressing a rally of the four-party alliance at Katra Park on Tuesday, calling for the restoration of parliament. The billboard in the background quotes late King Birendra: “Let’s unite and unleash the forces of development.”
Royal Uneconomic Class

The aviation sector worldwide is being swept by a tradition of low-cost, no frills airlines offering flights for as cheap as Singapore-Bangkok for one dollar roundtrip. No catch, no fine print.

Thank heavens that in Nepal, despite deregulation, our domesticated airlines haven’t stooped as low as that yet. Our airlines will never sacrifice the friendly and helpful in-flight service that they have come to be renowned for in our internal routes just to undercut rivals by slashing fares and getting into a suicidal price war. No sir, here we have opted to keep fares high and slash services instead.

It speaks volumes about our sense of commitment to comfortable and reliable air transportation, that Nepal’s no budget airlines would rather make passengers pay through their noses than provide them unnecessary luxuries while going from Point A to Point B.

When domestic flights first started in Nepal, they used to offer passengers actual meals. As time went on, they got rid of the sambar, and next to go were the chicken patties, then they took away the barf bags and finally they got rid of the co-pilots. But not to worry, Nepal is still the only country where ex-beauty queens fly planes and we don’t have to pay anything extra for it. In any other part of the world they’d have a surcharge for that.

Nepal is also one of the few places in the world, besides kit Amin’s Uganda, where VIPs are allowed up to the plane in their SUVs if they can prove beyond reasonable doubt to the security personnel on duty that they have contributed in some measure to ruining the country. Next time, ex-prime ministers should take the ramp buses because some of them actually look more airworthy than the aircraft they take you up to.

For a time, airlines used to offer us the luxury of pre-flight cotton wool and candy (“Yes, sir, the cotton goes into your ear canal and the toffee goes into your alimentary canal, or is it the other way around?”). But as a cost-cutting drive and to avoid further confusion on the 12-minute Kathmandu-Simara shuttle these days they pass around chewing gum which you are supposed to stuff into your ears after chewing thus saving the airline industry lakhs of rupees a year.

With the recent hike in the price of av gas, domestic airlines have increased fares and stripped their planes of everything except the bare minimum required to defy gravity. All seats have been taken off on flights to and from Pokhara on Gundruk Class passengers have to strap hang, while in Royal Uneconomic Class at the front of the plane, premium passengers can sit cross-legged on straw mats on the floor of the cabin. In the interest of space, toilets have been done away with, but a hatch is available for in-flight emergencies. (Not to be used while flying over populated areas.) Due to popular demand in the run-up to the holiday season on flights to remote area airstrips, goats will be allowed on board as carry-on baggage provided they do not exceed the dimensions of the overhead racks. If they do, the goats will have to ride on the roof cheek-to-jowl with standby passengers.

“Ladies and gentlemen, in a few moments we shall be touching down in Kathmandu. Please stand in an upright position and hang by the overhead straps for landing. May we remind you to please stow the gum you are chewing in your ear canals at this time. Thank you for choosing Fly-by-Night Airways.”

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