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“We couldn’t take it anymore”

Dailekh’s defiant mothers rise up against the Maoists

Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 163

Q. Are you proud to be a Nepali?



Total votes: 584

Weekly Internet Poll # 164. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. What should the king do to end the crisis?

- Restore parliament
- Talk to Maoists directly
- Hold elections
- Rule directly
- Don't know



KRISHNA KHANAL

KISHORE NEPAL in DAILEKH

For the first time since the insurgency started in these mountains of mid-western Nepal nine years ago, a women-led anti-Maoist uprising has spread across Dailekh in the past week.

“Down with Maoism,” the demonstrators shouted at a big rally in Dullu on Monday, “Down with Prachanda.” Most demonstrators were surprised at their own audacity, wondering where they got the courage to be so defiant?

The protests were started by women, the men joined in and some came from as far as a day’s walk away. They were protesting rebel demands for money and food. Krishna Shahi, 42, says she and others in her village had

complied fearing they would be killed: “When they said every family had to give one son, that is when I lost all my fear. We told them, kill us but you can’t take our sons. We had nothing left to give them, we couldn’t take it any longer.”

Indeed, the rebel threat to take away young sons and daughters appear to have been the main reason the women spearheaded protests in Dullu, Salleri and other towns in northeastern Dailekh.

The villages have mostly women, young children and the elderly because the men have all fled. And despite the traditionally low social status of women here, something seems to have snapped.

The uprising was triggered by the killing of Raju Bajracharya earlier this month by the security

forces. He had been forced by the Maoists to head Dullu’s ‘people’s government’. When the rebels came to drape his body in a Maoist flag, Raju’s relatives beat them up and chased them away.

Anger was already seething when the rebels prevented locals from observing Tihar and forced young boys and girls to become WT’s (‘wholetimers’). Villagers thrashed Maoists in several villages and protests began. There was swift retribution. In Salleri, the Maoists killed three people, including a eight-year-old boy, who were organising a resistance meeting on 20 November. Twenty-two others were abducted and villagers say six of them have been already killed. Nearly 1,200 people have fled Salleri and arrived in Dailekh Bajar.

Nara Bahadur Basnet from

Salleri says local women and citizens has started to organise protests since Tihar. Women from 13 VDCs in the area have been organising small village gatherings in open defiance of the Maoists since 9 November.

But 19-year-old Babita BK of Nauli, who delivered a baby a week ago after escaping to Dullu, says villagers are now afraid they may have stirred a hornet’s nest. “We are really afraid what they will do to our village now,” she says.

In Kathmandu on Thursday, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba said Dailekhis would be protected and announced a Rs 30 million aid package. He also gave the Maoists a deadline of 13 January 2005 to come for talks otherwise he would announce elections.

See also p8-9

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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER





MIN BAJRACHARYA

PARACHUTISTS: The Royal Nepali Army took more than 60 journalists to the site of the Pandaun battle in western Nepal by plane and choppers from Kathmandu on Wednesday



KIRAN PANDAY

STONED: A surprise afternoon storm dumped hailstones on this car park at Hyatt Regency, while the rest of Central Nepal got heavy showers.



RAM HUMAGAIN/NEPALNEWS.COM

MAKING THEM LAUGH: Comedian Haribangsa Acharya belts it out at a program to mark International Child Rights Day and the 14th anniversary of CWIN on 20 November.



KIRAN PANDAY

SIZZLERS: A band performs at the launch of Sizzling Weekends on 19 November at the Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza.



LAXMI SHRESTHA

SAY CHEESE: The winners of the Kathmandu Mountain Bike's women's race pose for a photograph at the finish line on 20 November.

Riches to ragas

Ajay Edwards is heir to Darjeeling's famous Glenary's bakery and restaurant. The business whizkid tripled its annual turnover to Rs 7.5 million. He expanded it into a restaurant chain across northeastern India. Today, Glenary's is synonymous with Darjeeling. Barely 30, a millionaire and father of five, Ajay realised that if he continued this way he would die a rich man but wouldn't have done anything for his community.

So, Ajay took a sabbatical from work and started making up for lost time to save Darjeeling. First thing was to organise the annual Darjeeling Carnival to promote tourism and improve the livelihoods of people here.

A Himalayan Region Youth Forum for young people from conflict-ridden areas of the Indian northeast, Kashmir and even Nepal is in the works. He wants them to be able to come together, share their experiences and help each other overcome the trauma of conflict and growing up amidst violence. Ajay himself had a troubled youth and did not study beyond class eight.

The people of Darjeeling still have to travel down to Siliguri for medical treatment and are cheated by hospitals there. Ajay decided to establish a diagnostic centre in Darjeeling itself. This project will cost Rs 1.5 million and

Ajay has come up with an ingenious method to raise funds: he plans to ask each Darjeeling resident to donate a minimum of IRs 100, which will be transformed into a coupon that can be used at the centre once it is established. The hospital gets built, and Darjeelingays benefit. It is easy to see why this man struck it rich. He is a socially and politically concerned citizen and as he puts it "This is no coincidence, it is providence". ●

(Aarti Basnyat)



KASHISH DAS SHRESTHA

DigitAll Life style

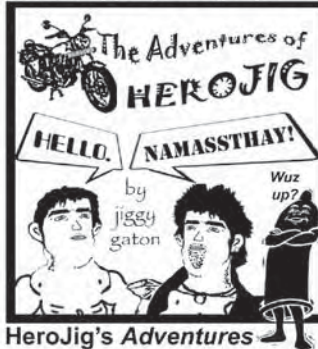
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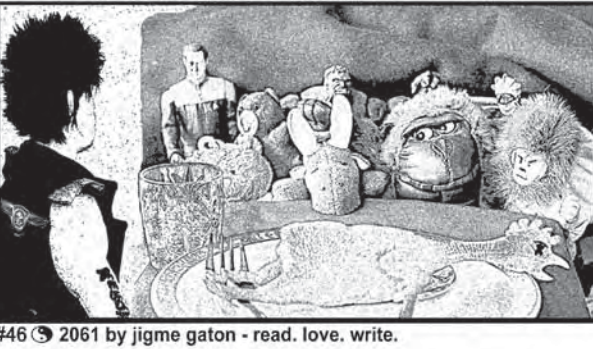
"Lata ko desh ma gaando tanderi." (In a land of fools, even a man with a bad goatee can be a hero.)



Our Heroji, hoping for a traditional Thanksgiving Puja this year, realizes that's just not possible in Nepal.

but why me?

Herojig's Adventures can also be seen at www.extreme-nepal.com



#46 © 2061 by jigme gaton - read. love. write.

KE GARNE? WHATEVER.
But be a Heroji - Be thankful for what you have.

Q. Why did the turkey cross the road?
A. It was the chicken's day off.

~ famous thanksgiving day joke from america

Next change: Herojig makes reservations for next year at Mikes Breakfast in Lazimpat.

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **A Retrospective** Paintings by David Douglas at Park Gallery, Lajimpat. Until 30 November. 4427779
- ❖ **November Medley** Collection of paintings and sculptures by various artists at Siddhartha Art Gallery. Until 1 December. 4218048
- ❖ **Life Through The Lens** Photographs by Kishor Kayastha at Indigo Gallery, 3 December-15 January. 4413580, indigo@wlink.com.np
- ❖ **Poster exhibition** of Japanese Graphic Art at the Japanese Embassy Hall, Panipokhari. 9.30 AM-4.30 PM, 29 November to 10 December.
- ❖ **Near Wild Heaven, Voice from the Mountain** Photos by Yuko Akiba at Park Gallery, Pulchok. Until 5 December. 5522307
- ❖ **A Touch of Purity** Paintings by Erina Tamrakar at Gallery Nine, Lajimpat. Until 3 December. 4428694



EVENTS

- ❖ **African Night** on 26 November at LaSoon Restaurant & Vinotheque, Pulchok, 7PM onwards for Rs 599 each, includes dinner and drink. 5537166
- ❖ **AWON Christmas Bajar** at Hyatt Rox Garden on 27 November from 10AM to 4PM. 4423593, 4244418
- ❖ **Celebrating 53 wonder years** of St Xavier's Godavari School with great food and music on 27 November, 1PM onwards at St Xavier's Godavari. Entrance Rs 100. Proceeds will go to Godavari Expansion Fund.
- ❖ **WCN Amateur Nature and Wildlife Photography Competition** for amateur photographers. Deadline 15 December. 5524202, www.wcn.org.np
- ❖ **Santa Calling** Celebrate Christmas at Shangri-La. 4412999

MUSIC

- ❖ **Hey DJ** at the Yak & Yeti on 26 November.
- ❖ **Reggae Night Special** DJ playing favourite reggae numbers at Moksh, Pulchok on 26 November. Free entry. 5528703
- ❖ **Phiroj Shyangden** of 1974 AD performs old favourite hits at Moksh, Pulchok from 6.30 PM onwards on 27 November. Entrance Rs 250. 5528703
- ❖ **Folk Roots** an album by Kutumba and East meets West Music Box will be released at Aksheswor Mahabihar, Pulchok, 2.30 PM on 27 November. 4256411
- ❖ **Abhaya and the Steam Injuns** at Moksh, Pulchok from 6.30 PM onwards on 30 November. Entrance Free. 5528703
- ❖ **Ramailo Saanjh** fusion music with Ishwor Gurung and his bands on 1 December. Entrance Rs 1,200 from 7PM-10PM. 4479488
- ❖ **Jukebox experience** with Pooja Gurung and The Cloud Walkers every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at Rox Bar. 4491234
- ❖ **Jatra Friday Nites** Live music by The Strings. 4256622
- ❖ **Happening live jazz in town** at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lajimpat. Every Wednesday and Saturday, 7.45 PM onwards.

FOOD

- ❖ **Persian BBQ** Persian cuisine BBQ-style with live music by Abhaya and the Steam Injuns at Dwarika's on 26 November, 7PM onwards. 4479488
- ❖ **Sizzler Week**, sizzler of your choice at Rs 99 at The Bluestar Hotel, Tripureswor, till 30 November. 4228833
- ❖ **The Spirit of Christmas** Christmas goodies at Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Tickling Tastebuds** barbeque every Friday at The Shambala Garden Café, Shangri-la Hotel, 7PM onwards. 4412999
- ❖ **Sizzling Weekend Treat** with live music, dance, barbeque and karaoke at Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Genuine Thai** cuisine at Royal Lotus, Bakhundole. 5521231
- ❖ **Delicious barbecue dinner** Fridays at Summit Hotel. 5521810
- ❖ **Friday Nights** at Subterranea Club Kilroy. 4412821
- ❖ **Farm House Café** Unlimited nature, delicious meals at Park Village. 4375280
- ❖ **Café Bahal** Newari and continental cuisine under the giant Cinnamon tree at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4700632
- ❖ **Nepali Platter Unlimited** drinks in Splash at Radisson Hotel throughout November, 6PM-8PM. 4411818, 4423888
- ❖ **Barbecue-Ban Bhoj** at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Vegetarian Creations** at Stupa View Restaurant. 4480262
- ❖ **Splash Spring BBQ** Wednesday, Friday evenings at Radisson Hotel.
- ❖ **The Beer Garden** at Vajjayantha, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **The Tharu Kitchen** at Jungle Base Camp. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Dream Holiday** package tour to Malaysia for Christmas. Marco Polo Travels and Qatar Airways, 2012345, malaysiaholidays_marco@polo.com.np
- ❖ **Canyon Swing** 150 m at The Last Resort. 4439525
- ❖ **Getaway package** night's stay at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Shivapuri** Tranquil village, superb views and birdwatching. Shivapuri Heights Cottage, on the edge of Shivapuri National Park. Steve@escape2nepal.com
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** Pure relaxation. 4361500
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- ❖ **Golf** at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa. 4451212
- ❖ **Weekend Special** at Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha. 4375280



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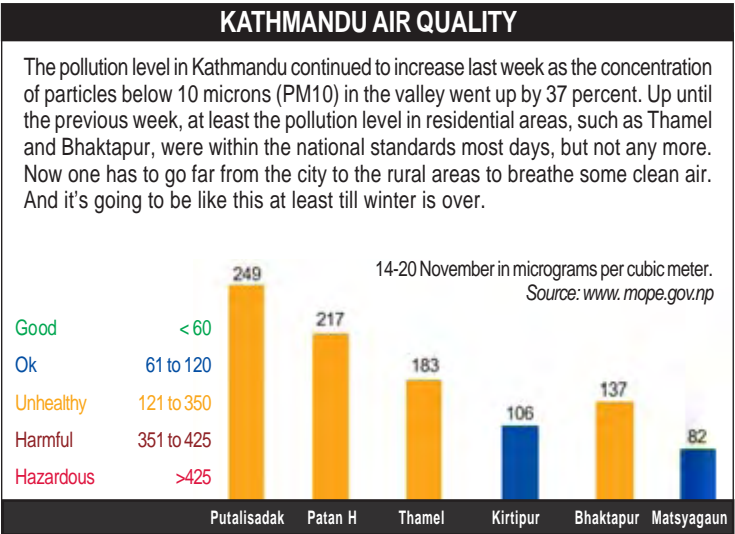
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KATHMANDU

by MAUSAM BEED

Tuesday's surprise storm that hit central Nepal dumped 38 mm of rain with hail and snow down to 3,500 m. It was a result of a surprise low pressure zone riding the high-altitude westerly jet over the Himalaya. In one afternoon we got three times the average November precipitation. The first winter rains came in earlier than usual this year, usually it arrives at the end of December or early January. The moisture will increase the likelihood of fog along Himalayan valleys and the tarai, which will also be thicker and linger longer till late morning. The satellite picture taken on Thursday afternoon shows fog already unusually thick over the Indo-Gangetic plains. The valley will see partly cloudy skies over the weekend with snow flurries in the higher altitudes. Bright sunny afternoons.


KATHMANDU VALLEY

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21-06

Sat




20-07

Sun




20-06

Mon




22-06

Tue



22-06



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DJ night



On 26 November, British Council and Hotel Yak & Yeti will present 'Hey DJ!', featuring DJ Bee and DJ Chloe's Husband from the UK. They will play a five-hour set spinning the latest club beats. The fun starts at 8PM for Rs 1199 (inclusive of food and unlimited drinks) at the Hotel.

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Golf is in

The town is bursting with golfing events

Golfers rejoice. We are in the midst of the peak golfing season. In November and December, there is so much happening it's hard to keep track.

The big one is the Surya Nepal Masters, sponsored for over a decade by Nepal's largest corporate house, Surya Nepal Pvt Ltd. Scheduled over five days from 8-12 December, the venue is once again the stunning Gleneagles designed Gokarna Golf Course.

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



A major attraction will be the arrival of the region's leading golfers, giving local talent the rare opportunity of competing with top players. Being a point-scoring

event on the Amby Valley Air Sahara Indian Golf Tour, most players on the Indian Professional Golf tour circuit will be participating.

"This year, Nepal Tourism Board has joined as partner to promote golf in Nepal," says Sam Roy of Surya Nepal. "We are looking at promoting standards and helping golf grow. The plan is to target the over-100,000 existing golfing population in Southasia. Our promotion outside Nepal will be through tournament hoardings at 40 of the largest golf clubs in the region. The tournament will be telecast on Ten Sports channel in three half-hour viewings."

Standard Chartered Bank has also joined hands this year by sponsoring the Pro-Am event. The Pro-Am is for both serious and fun-loving amateur golfers. Participants will have the opportunity to play in a group with professionals, receiving valuable tips and seeing firsthand some so-called 'impossible shots' being executed.

The Surya Nepal Masters is not just the biggest golfing event in Nepal, it is also probably the biggest sporting event in terms of prize money. The total purse this year is a whopping Rs 1.6 million. It will be up for grabs to some 80-odd professionals from Nepal, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and a few tour regulars from Malaysia.

All this is exciting news with Surya Nepal realising our dreams of using the development of golf to the advantage of the tourism industry. They are building on the foundation of the expensive golf infrastructure and opening up new dimensions for growth in golf tourism.



So what else is happening?

Scheduled this weekend is the prestigious 'amateur only' golfing event, the Nepal Amateur Open 2004 at the Royal Nepal Golf Club. This three-day 54-hole event concludes on Sunday with an interclub friendship match.

Next week sees a four-day 72-hole preparatory tournament for both professionals and top amateurs – providing the perfect occasion to tune up for serious tournament play before the Surya Nepal Masters. Last week's Surya Nepal Western Open at the Himalayan Golf Course in Pokhara saw professionals Deepak Neupane stand first (+7), Deepak Magar second (+12), and Ramesh Nagarkoti third (+13). Not great scores but the course was set up beautifully.

Golf is happening everywhere, isn't it time you got on the course?

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Golf Director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu.
prodeepak@hotmail.com



The clash of ivories

All you need is a long mallet, a ball, two teams and a herd of elephants

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

Twenty-two years ago, a wacky Scotsman figured out a way to play polo in slow motion by replacing horses with elephants. What he didn't realise is that elephants can gallop too!

So, a languid pachyderm version of polo actually turned out to be wilder than the equestrian edition. Accounts of whether elephant polo is more exciting may vary on whether you consider the size of the tuskers an advantage or disadvantage but there is no doubt that elephant polo has taken off in Nepal. And this mainly because of the annual

Tiger tops Elephant Polo tournament, which this year takes place from 28 November to 4 December in Meghauli. If you haven't already booked your tickets and rooms, you should.

Unbelievably, elephant polo has been held once annually in the last 22 years, except in the third year when there was confusion about the dates and it was held twice. So much the better.

This year, seven teams are participating. After the first day of festivities, the real fun begins on the second day with the league match, which

consists of four chukkers of 35 minutes each. The quarter and semi-final matches will be held on the third and fourth day with the grand finale scheduled for 4 December.

There is no historical evidence suggesting the origin of elephant polo but there seems to have been one eccentrically inclined Maharaja of Jaipur who staged a similar tournament some 50 years ago, just as a joke. There are miniature Mughal era paintings of women that could be described as playing modern day elephant polo. ●

Contact: 4361500,
info@tigermountain.com

How to play

Excerpts from the World Elephant Polo Association (WEPA) Rules:

- The Game will be played by four players on each team on a marked pitch of 120 m by 70 m using a standard size polo ball.
- The game will consist of two 10-minute chukkers of playing time, with an interval of 15 minutes. The whistle blown by the referee stops and starts the play.
- The pitch will be marked with a centre line. A circle with a radius of 10 m in the centre of the field and a semi-circle in front of the goals, with a radius of 20 m, measured from the centre of the goal line at either end of the pitch, will form the D.
- Elephants and ends are changed at half time.
- The complete ball must travel over the sideline or backline, to be out, and completely across the goal line to be a goal.
- Men must play with the right hand only and ladies may play with both hands if desired. However, if ladies play with one hand then it must be with the right only.
- There shall be no restrictions as to the height,



weight or sex of the elephants.

- An elephant may not pick up the ball with its trunk during play. To do so shall constitute a foul.
- Sugar cane or rice balls packed with vitamins (molasses and rock salt) shall be given to the elephants at the end of the match; and a cold beer, or soft drinks, to the elephant drivers, but not vice versa.
- Intentionally hitting another player, elephant, or Umpire with a stick is a personal foul. A free hit shall be awarded to the opposing side, with only one elephant defending 15 metres from the goal.
- Elephant drivers and players must wear a hat in form of the traditional solar topee or a polo helmet. Should a player's hat fall off outside the D, the game is stopped while it is recovered.

“After Arun there was a paradigm shift”

Bikash Pandey was with the Alliance for Energy group that opposed the Arun III project 10 years ago. He is now an energy specialist and Nepal representative of Winrock International. He talked to us about lessons learnt from the Arun debacle.

Nepali Times: It's been 10 years since the Arun III project was dumped. Any regrets?

Bikash Pandey: If you were a resident of the Arun Valley, it was bad news because the road didn't get built. In terms of the power sector, if Arun was built it would have meant a huge jump in power tariffs, even more than we are paying today. In the best case scenario the project would have been completed this year, with the insurgency it may even have been delayed by a few more years. The risks with Arun were enormous, the road was already a mega-project which was to have been built in 14 months back-to-back with the biggest project in Nepal, and this multiplied the risks. The massiveness of Arun meant that nothing else would have come online, and we'd have had much more serious blackouts. It was because the smaller alternatives started coming onstream already in 2000 that we haven't had power shortages.

Were the alternatives really better?

A mix. Kali Gandaki was from the public sector and was fairly big but it was built under the same modalities as Arun. There were the private sector Bhote Kosi and Khimti, and there has been a cost in dealing with the international private sector, but we have learnt from that. You've got Chilime and Indrawati, completely Nepali private sector. The Eighth and Ninth Plans were very much dominated by the so-called least-cost generation expansion planning where one big project crowded out other smaller ones. But the Tenth Plan has all of sudden made plurality a policy: 60 percent to be built by the private sector, more than a third small hydro category. There has been a paradigm shift, but learnt the hard way.

In hindsight, would you have done it differently?

The reason we had a strong campaign 10 years ago was because it wasn't just an anti-Arun thing. We were not being purists and saying small is beautiful. We said there are better alternatives, one need not do this now. In fact, our concern was that the systemic weakness in the way the government and World Bank operated was turning what was one of Nepal's best hydroelectric sites from an asset to a liability by making it too expensive. We said let's build Arun 10 years from now. It wasn't that Arun was expensive it was the process through which Arun was going to be built. So, you had a situation where public funded large projects were coming out to be three times more expensive than locally financed small projects, putting economies of scale completely on its head.

What are the lessons in dealing with the local population?

We never could get this message across to the people of Sankhuwasabha. They wanted the road, the country was going to get power and they didn't really understand why the activists



KUNDA DIXIT

had any problems with it. They said these guys are taking away development from us. One can understand there is disappointment at the local level, but is it worthwhile for the country on the whole? We had the challenging task of telling them there are much better and cheaper ways to build the road than attach it to a \$1billion project.

You can take a very attractive project and increase the cost to a point where it is barely feasible. You could have got very high returns from Arun if you had built it at a reasonable cost. So, you build big when the time comes to build big. In the meantime, you build capacity to handle bigger projects.

If the argument was economic, it must still be the case.

Our concern at that time was that Nepal's whole hydropower sector had been hijacked by this single-project mentality. You build one project and then you wait ten years to get the next one, there could be no other players during that period. This would take costs beyond the \$5000 per kilowatt range, hydropower would stop being a resource for this country because it would be too simply expensive to build. The only way to get out of this trap would be to have plurality, you have

competition, you bring in the private sector where appropriate, the public sector should continue. You can take a very attractive project and increase the cost to a point where it is barely feasible. You could have got very high returns from Arun if you had built it at a reasonable cost. So, you build big when the time comes to build big. In the meantime, you build capacity to handle bigger projects.

It seems we learnt our lessons, but did the World Bank?

This is a development philosophy question. The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank can be extremely useful if you are dealing with a competent government. That is the model to which they work. India and China run circles around the World Bank, they use it as a supplementary investment. They do more than 90 percent themselves, and rely on World Bank for only 10 percent. Whereas we are completely dependent, and the World Bank has its own procurement rules, due diligence processes which are cumbersome. It doesn't make sense for them to do small ten megawatt projects. On the other hand, a host country like Nepal tends to be over-ambitious because there is a large donor. If we approached a private lender we may go for a 15 megawatt project, but if it is the World Bank it will move up to 500 megawatts. Then the World Bank bureaucracy kicks in: they say the host government wants it, but the host government is not competent, so they add all kinds of conditionalities and consultants. The system moves you towards large projects and consultants and conditions. So they tell you to raise tariffs, and it is a disaster for building local capacity. It becomes a case of the tail wagging the dog.

What was the one big positive outcome of the cancellation of Arun III?

We predicted it, and it happened: there is a lot of private Nepali money and hydropower has now become an investment opportunity instead of an infrastructure thing to be built by the public sector. It is a different thinking. The international private sector opened the doors for the local investors who saw the rates they were getting and were attracted. Bhote Kosi and Khimti did that for us.

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Displaced mothers and daughters receiving survival skills training at a government office in Simikot (*left*), soldiers guarding a Nepalganj flight about to take off last week.

member from that household has to join the rebels.

In Jaira VDC, a three-day walk from here, about 80 young men and women were recruited in October to be ‘whole time’ cadres and taken to training camps. Some returned to spread ‘revolutionary education’, while 18-20 year olds were taken away for militia training.

“They say the revolution has reached its final phase and are confident they can take over Simikot whenever they want,” adds a political activist who recently visited his home village. There he met Comrade Balbir, the Maoist secretary of Humla, and local commanders.

In villages like Badagaun, the Maoists announced the names of 100 young men and women on 24 October and asked families to keep their sons and daughters ready when they returned on 16 November to pick them up.

Parents watched quietly as the Maoists took away 116 children.

“We performed a funeral ceremony as if we would never see our children again,” recounts 55-year-old Sima Lama from Limatang who let the Maoists take her two young sons, “I have been praying and crying every day. Only God can save our children.”

Parents comply out of fear. Last month, the rebels set an example by killing the mother of a girl who ran away to Simikot. None of the parents want help from the security forces fearing they will be interrogated and detained for allowing their children to join the Maoists.

Rani Shahi, 17, also escaped from the Maoist recruitment camp in Khampey four months ago and fled to Simikot. “The army won’t be able to find them even if it tries,” she told us, “By the time they reach our village, the Maoists will have left.”

Twelve-year-old Sendup Lama from Thehe was also listed for Maoist recruitment. On the day he was taken, he cried so much Sendup’s 14-year-old sister offered herself in his place, and the rebels let



Sendup go. “I was scared that is why I cried,” says Sendup who feels guilty and anxious about his sister.

Since the Maoist recruitment intensified, most Lama parents here have started sending off their daughters instead of their sons to become Maoists. As in the rest of patriarchal Nepal, sons are regarded as more precious. A local activist explains: “The daughters are angry at their parents and some of them have vowed never to return. The Lama community pampers its boys.” He estimates up to 60 percent of the Maoist recruits in Humla are girls.

As the 16 November deadline approached, more than 3,000 mothers and 300 teachers from outlying villages came to Simikot to pressure the local officials to start peace talks. “They thought we had come to beg for food and insulted us, actually we came to beg for peace,” recalls 35-year-old Hima Pariyar from Baragaun. Hima has brought her son, Sundar, whose name is on the Maoist list. “I’m not going

back,” Sundar tells us defiantly.

As the number of displaced people grows, food is running out in Simikot. The district administration distributes five kgs of rice per family three times a week, and officials are worried the food will run out. The UN’s World Food Programme has stopped its Food For Work program due to the Maoist blockade in Simikot.

There is a new Maoist commander in Humla who has stopped recruitment for now, and one human rights activist here explains: “The comrades may have realised their new regime will be worthless without the people’s support.”

But the villagers are skeptical. The Maoists recently lifted their blockade of Simikot so villagers could attend a health camp organised by the Nepal Trust, but warned them to return to their villages otherwise they could be killed when Simikot is attacked soon. ●

(All names have been changed to protect identity)
(See also: ‘Cold war’, #124)

Mountain film festival

The third Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF) will screen 50 films on mountains and the lifestyle of mountain people from 9-12 December. KIMFF will bring together the best mountain films produced over the last three years worldwide at the Russian Cultural Centre, Kamal Pokhari. The range from 21 countries include anthropological films, alpine documentation, adventure cinema and more. The festival will open with ‘On the Road with the Red God: Machindranath’ by filmmaker Kesang Tseten. A ‘Learn to Shoot like a Pro’ workshop will be held on 10 December. Day three of the festival, which coincides with the International Mountain Day, will have a photo exhibition, on-the-spot painting contest for children and ‘Know Your Himal’ quiz. On the last day, Dr Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha will present a slide show/lecture on Nepal’s biodiversity.



Granting assistance

The main message from the official visit to Nepal by the Asian Development Bank’s Vice President Liquan Jin was that the Manila-based institution was ‘not abandoning Nepal’. Half of the assistance from the ADB would be grants from 2005, with the bigger chunk of it conditional on ‘significant progress on governance and reform’. Jin said, “We know we are running out of time in terms of assessing progress but we will complete it soon and decide on the grant component. We stand with Nepal at this critical hour and remain committed to enhance our assistance should peace be restored.” ADB was concerned about the conflict and its adverse impact on Nepal’s development and he added: “This has become the most serious impediment to sustained economic growth and poverty reduction. ADB hopes that the government will continue its efforts towards achieving lasting peace.”

Everest wins Banff award

The Daughters of Everest, directed and produced by Sapana Sakya and Ramyata Limbu won The Alpine Club of Canada award for Best Film on Climbing at the Banff Mountain Film Festival in Banff, Alberta, Canada. The film tells the story of the first-ever expedition of Sherpa women to climb Everest. “A delightful and very honest film that captures the camaraderie of a group of women who take pride in their mountains,” says jury member Florian Camerer. A film made 35 years ago at a Polish film school called *Odwrót* (Retreat) took the Grand Prize at this year’s Banff Mountain Film Festival.



In transit

The government has begun feasibility studies on a transit route that India wants through Nepal to Tibet. In response to Indian requests, several routes are being considered. “One of the most feasible so far is the Kerung-Rasuwa border that includes the Trisuli road,” says Commerce Secretary Dinesh Chandra Pyakurel. “But we have also been studying the Jogbani-Kimathanka road.” The Arniko Highway already links Tibet’s Khasa with Kathmandu but officials say it is too narrow and would not allow the volume of traffic the Indian government wants. “That is why we need to think about building a new highway,” says Pyakurel. (See also p 10)

India has said it is keen to have a Nepal transit route to Tibet in order to boost its trade with China. Indo-China bilateral trade between January and September this year stood at \$9.78 billion, up by 85 percent over the corresponding period last year. Since Nepal too has trade interest with Tibet, government officials say they are working on modalities that do not hamper the Nepal-China trade while allowing India the transit route. “We will make sure that our prime export products do not suffer.” Government officials say Nepal would benefit from its inland container depots by allowing transit for Indian and Chinese goods.

The Nepal-India transit treaty allows the two countries reciprocity in transit. An official said once transit to Tibet is allowed to India, Nepal may seek similar facilities to Pakistan via India.

Monks not Maoists



As Maoists intensify their campaign to forcibly recruit one member from each family many Lama families from Humla are sending children away to Dharmashala to become nuns and monks. In the first week of November, just before the deadline for Maoist recruitment, 28 children went to India from Badagaun and Torpa.

“I don’t want to throw my 13-year-old daughter to the Maoists,” says 40-year-old Siba Lama. “She would have a better life as a nun.” The tradition of sending children to monasteries had been dying out in Humla but was revived again because of the Maoist threat. Forty-year-old Chandra Lama sent his 12-year-old daughter to India too and says she insisted on it. “She said she’d rather be a nun than a Maoist,” he says. But some, like Hari Lama, are worried about what the Maoists will do if they find out he has sent his son away to a monastery.

नेपाल अधिराज्यको संविधान २०४७ ले प्रत्येक नेपाली नागरिकको आधारभूत मानव अधिकार सुरक्षित गरी स्वतन्त्रता र समानताको आधारमा नेपाली जनताका बीच भ्रातृत्व र एकता कायम गर्ने कुरामा जोड दिएको छ। जुनसुकै विचारधाराका भए पनि नेपाली सबै एक हौं भन्ने भावनाले राष्ट्र निर्माणको काममा अग्रसर हुन सके मात्र यस देशको विकास तीब्र गतिमा हुन सक्ने हुँदा विचार फरक भएका विषयहरूमा आपसी समझदारी र सहयोगको भावना लिएर छलफल गरी निष्कर्षमा पुग्न र संपूर्ण नेपालीलाई भ्रातृत्वको दृष्टिले हेर्नु प्रत्येक नेपालीको कर्तव्य हो।

श्री ५ को सरकार
सूचना तथा संचार मंत्रालय
सूचना विभाग



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ROUND AND ROUND IN CIRCLES

The same malaise that has alienated Nepalis in their own land and helped stoke the conflict afflicts us still. Kathmandu Valley always behaved as if the rest of the country didn't exist or didn't matter. After all, Kathmandu was known as 'Nepal'. The rest of the country is now getting back at Kathmandu for decades of disregard.

Yet, our rulers party on in their walled fortresses pretending it is all ok, it will sort itself out, and somehow we'll muddle through like we are doing now. With this "let them eat cake" attitude, they distract themselves with inane ceremonies and the hollow rituals of power, playing musical chairs. They continue to lavish on themselves luxuries that can only be described as obscene.

We aren't saying they should all be living in penury, moping day and night about the sorry state of the state. But we have yet to see some hint of recognition of the despair and misery of their subjects, a flicker of compassion perhaps and a determination to set things right. Instead we see apathy, wanton escapism, or a frantic last-ditch attempt to rake it all in before the curtain falls.

And of those erstwhile politicians who are now in and out of government, the less said the better: just look at the way they are playing politics with the spontaneous outpouring of outrage against the Maoists by Dailekh's mothers. Instead of showing some empathy we heard from these usual suspects in Kathmandu more empty slogans.

Now, more than ever before, the capital should turn its attention to the mountains beyond the Valley rim. But there are few signs of that happening. Kathmandu still lavishes most of the country's budget, infrastructure and services on itself and even manages to convince donors to build new ring roads, traffic intersections and water supply systems for itself. Bloated by the internally displaced, the Valley is bursting at the seams. Only by investing on the rest of the country will this pressure ease.

The answer to Nepal's woes has always been to devolve power, privileges and opportunities away from the centre. After 1990, hesitant steps were taken in this direction and had started showing results. But we are back to building an Outer Ring Road so we can keep going round and round in circles.



Of more than academic interest

The unseemly scramble of sycophantic scholars

In the heat of conflict, the dirty war being waged by the country's men of letters has receded into the background. But the fracas at the Royal Nepal Academy is nearly as detrimental to the development

STATE OF THE STATE

CK Lal



of the democratic spirit as the battles raging in the west. An 'RNA' is involved in both: the Royal Nepal Academy in one and in the other the Royal Nepal Army.

Saying they were put off by politics to select academicians from hundreds of applicants, the left-out literati have petitioned the king for the restoration of the *ancien regime* at the Royal Nepal Academy. One group was made up of professors and doctors who are behaving as if they hold monopoly rights over intellectualism. The other group consists of litterateurs specialising in penning panegyrics. Yet another has a poet famous for creating an epic in praise of Hillary Clinton.

The stated purpose of these self-declared scholars is that the king take over the chancellorship of the Royal Nepal Academy. With a constructive king at the helm,

their exhortations may just work. The belief that the fiercest battles in academia are fought when the stakes are smallest may after all be correct.

There isn't much to gain by becoming an academician these days except the privilege of being called one. The RNA premises are better known for holding shareholders' meetings of private sector banks and its driveway is the venue for various Kathmandu-based artistes before their departure to Arya Ghat for cremation.

In the name of opposing the politicisation of the arts and literature, all that these sycophants want is a return of the certitude of Panchayat politics when everyone knew their place and stayed there. Their notion of artistic purity is that competitive politics is a blemish on the soul. Only the Great Father, the earthy incarnation of the supreme being himself, is fit enough to rule over academe. After all, the prime minister is untouchable because he is tarnished by democracy. With scholars like these, no wonder our national psyche is dominated by the wait for the second coming.

In an op-ed piece in *Kantipur* this week, writer Ramesh Bikal has admitted that,

like many others of his ilk, he had held Brother One in high esteem. Even when the insurgents were drenching the hills and plains with the blood of fellow Nepalis, many public figures from the left and right valourised the Maoists as brave patriots engaged in freeing their beloved fatherland from the scourge of democracy. Bikal has shown the courage to publicly admit his blunder, but several others have quietly become ardent apologists of the post-October Four order. This is not

surprising because monarchists and Maoists are wont to worship mirror image saviours.

Monarchists hold that a hereditary king has heaven's mandate to rule, while the Maoists kneel at the feet of the awesome possessor of the Ultimate Truth. Both believe in Aristotle: "It is natural that some beings command and others obey, that each may obtain mutual safety." No

wonder, scholars critical of the excesses during the democratic period before the royal takeover went silent all of a sudden. To their understanding, even if a patriarch gives himself a hefty raise or acquires another fleet of limousines, he must have done so for the collective good.

To our misfortune, the lack of intellectual leadership is even starker than the shortage of principled politicians. Where are the social scientists who can separate the wheat from the chaff, demystify events, and clarify issues? There is no shortage of those who readily proclaim that violence is abhorrent, that both sides to the conflict are guilty, but very few show the scornful courage of Khagendra Sangraula to hold a mirror to the Maoists and monarchists alike, not to mention parties practicing nonviolent politics.

Kanchan Pudasaini and Ramesh Bikal are opposite faces of the same coin of moral certitude — the two validate each other. They share the horror of human fallibility inherent in any democratic system. Unfortunately, none of the 'Prof-Doc' signing petitions have it in them to even question, let alone stop, the parallel march of authoritarianism and totalitarianism in the kingdom. ●



LETTERS

LABOUR LOTTERY

I agree with Ashutosh Tiwari's assessment in Strictly Business ('Losing the labour lottery', #221). First of all, it was mysterious why the rookie minister would make the employment lottery an agenda for his administration. As a labour minister of a country with a shameful national employment rate, he should not even make this an issue. Imposing restrictions and conditions only deteriorates the already ailing labor market. As Tiwari says: let the market decide what is best for the consumers (employers in this case) and what is best for the people seeking jobs. He should make the safety of workers his primary agenda. His administration should work with suppliers, both domestic and foreign, and ensure that contracts are in place to safeguard the lives of our poor Nepali workers working in foreign countries.

D Mahat, Baltimore, USA

- Ashutosh Tiwari missed out an important aspect of Nepal's labour market and Raghuji Pant's disastrous policy of a lottery. Instead of patting ourselves on the back about how much we earn from our overseas workers, we (and this includes the minister) should take the lead in adding value to our workers so they can earn more. This can happen with proper training, orientation to upgrade their skills. It has been proven that a two-month language and skill-based training can improve an average worker's salary by up to \$150 a month.

Ashim Shrestha, Bangkok

- It is easy to blame minister Raghu Pant for trying to implement the labour lottery scheme as Ashutosh Tiwari has. Seen through the blinkers of the free market, it may seem like he tampered with the laws of nature. But Nepal's trouble is precisely that an unbridled free market and a corrupt regulator lead to price-gouging and exploitation of thousands of poor Nepalis by the unscrupulous manpower middlemen. It was this anger that spontaneously poured out into the streets on 1 September. Pant was just trying to set things right and bring a semblance of justice. Why blame him? Blame the crooks in the manpower agencies and the labour mafia

which put a spanner in the works. the only criticism of Pant that I have is that he didn't resign on moral grounds when he couldn't see his plan through.

Hem Gurung, Pokhara

PLURALITY

It needs courage to transform polarity into plurality, as Dipta Shah argues in his Guest Column ('Polarity vs plurality' #222). But the author tries valiantly justify the existing elitist powerbase by trying to castigate both left and right-wingers in Nepali politics as useless which then gives undenied political freedom for people like Deuba to rule under the monarchical directive. The truth is it is high time the king himself took some valiant steps to redress equilibrium in Nepali society which can only happen if an active and dynamic premier is chosen to lead the country, and he himself partakes correct political advice like his late father King Mahendra did. This way, Surya Bahadur Thapa has lent some credence to the need for a new political force in Nepal that can capture the essence of polarity and plurality. Democracy in Nepal is actually being trampled upon by the Nepali elite, not the masses, lest one forget, so forget about blaming the foreign hand or trying to define the 'absolute middles' which are non-existent. The Maoist problem can solve itself automatically if the king takes the right steps now, thus giving him mass popularity like King Juan Carlos or King Norodom Sihanouk.

Niki Kunwar, Sat Dobato

- Dipta Shah hit the nail on the head. What Nepalis can't stand is a fellow-Nepali without a label. You must be either a royalist or a Maoist, you are either pro-Indian or anti-Indian, Mohsin is a Panchayat throwback Girija is democrat. Actually Girija is the biggest dictator around, Mohammad Mohsin at least is trying to set things right from within government and has the guts to call a spade a spade. I am sick of the bleeding heart liberals you carry in your paper (Lak, Lal, et al) who only know how to pontificate from their pulpits, tarnish everyone who doesn't agree with them with labels, and don't offer anything constructive. It's intellectual onanism.

Gyan Subba, email

DIVIDED THEY STAND

Re: 'Divided they stand' (#222). It may be true that the Maoists are loosing their ground to the army in the government's perspective. But one needs to view this through the eyes of the common Nepali people. Though the RNA is on a better footing, building its arm forces, purchasing new and sophisticated weapons, the question is whether it is really winning the hearts and minds of the people. The answer would be a resounding no. Just look at the article on the opposite page Muna Sharma's 'Maina's story' (#222). The Nepali media also seems highly influenced by the government, because this ground reality is not coming out. The government, RNA, diplomats, and human rights organisations claim that any war can be won only by public opinion and not by arms. Maoists are branded terrorists and they are, but the security forces need to function better also so the people trust them. The security forces' involvement in corruption, atrocities, and harassing women is pushing more people unwillingly to the Maoist fold. At this rate, even if the RNA wins the war militarily, it will have lost the people's support. We are in the middle of nowhere, and people are harassed and killed by both sides. 'Divided they stand', remains incomplete: who is divided: the government, Maoists or the Nepali people?

Pravesh Saria, email

DARJEELING

I miss Darjeeling! Every March, my parents and I hit the road from Kathmandu to take me to boarding

school in Darjeeling. Reading the article ('Darjeeling', #222) brought back memories from those trips: eating at little restaurants along the narrow highway, the swirling mist rising up the hills, slopes green with tea bushes. It has been a long way for me from Darjeeling to Iowa but I miss the little town where I left behind many friends and, yes, foes.

**Vivek Shrestha
Cedar Rapids, USA**

- The piece on how Darjeelingays identify with Nepal and cling to their original language and culture makes one think about the two-facedness of the establishment in Nepal. The article gloats that the loyalty of these Nepali Indians lies with Nepal ("I would never consider myself an Indian".) If Tarai Nepalis or Nepalis of Indian origin had said something like that in Nepal, they would have been denounced as being anti-national elements. It is India's liberal outlook that has allowed Nepali Indians to preserve their language and culture. It would be nice if Nepali Nepalis had a little of that quality.

N A Pityata, Kathmandu

- Thanks to Aarti Basnyat for the excellent update on Darj. Kathmandu and Darjeeling have always had a symbiotic relationship, a cultural crosspollination. The number of artisits, singers, writers and poets who have come to Kathmandu from Darjeeling, and the veneration with which Nepali writers are held in Darjeeling and Kalimpong over the decades is a

strong bond. Not even the violence that has wracked and is afflicting these two places and the fact that they are located in two different nation states can tear it asunder.

Jaya Moktan, Darjeeling

KUDOS TO KASULA

It was wonderful to read about Bal Krishna Kasula's extraordinary feat ('A Bhaktapur brick-layer', #222). His efforts in earthquake resistant construction technology has proves he is a real asset to the country. However, it seems that his expertise is getting promoted outside the country more than within. There are many like him. Their skills should be used by Nepalis people first. NSET and the government should also provide people like Kasula support so they are able to further improve their skills.

**Sunil Shrestha,
Coventry, UK**

TYRANTS

In his enthusiasm to boost Nepal's tourism by providing retirement benefits for foreign tyrants, Kunda Dixit in Under My Hat ('Old age home for the world's tyrants', #222) says Emperor Bokassa invested his hard-earned money from the Chadian exchequer in France. As any despot worth his salt knows, Bokassa hailed from the Central African Republic (yes, that is a country). And, as long as I have the editor's ear, let me ask this: we can give refuge to other people's dictators, but who will give refuge to ours?

Ganesh Rai, email



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Red alert in Simikot

“The parents performed a funeral ceremony, as if they would never see their children again.”

- Humla mother whose two sons were marched away by Maoists last month



ALL PICS: THOMAS L KELLY

NARESH NEWAR
in SIMIKOT

The freezing winds have brought down the temperature to minus three and for people in this besieged headquarters of Humla district this is good news.

This means it may be too cold for the Maoists to launch their threatened attack on the town.

“Let’s pray there will be more

snow soon, that is our only defence,” says a senior civil servant posted to this district on Nepal’s remote northwestern tip. The official is shivering inside his freezing office: there is no money for kerosene and firewood is scarce. Electricity is solar-powered and the batteries last only two hours.

The Maoists have threatened to attack Simikot, and even though past warnings did not

materialise, the locals seem to take it seriously. “We shouldn’t take it lightly,” says the official, who has recieved intimidating phone calls from the local Maoist commander. Last month, the Maoists staged simultaneous attacks on Gamgadi in Mugu and Jumla Bajar. Locals who have fled their villages for fear of forced recruitment say thousands of people have been seen being

led by about 200 Maoists near the Bajura border to the south.

The official says the Maoists are not bluffing and has relayed the message to the capital but Kathmandu isn’t listening. The security force here is only 200-strong and is vulnerable to Maoist human wave attacks. “They can easily take over Simikot,” explains a local politician pointing out the strategic passes on a map from

where police have withdrawn. Government presence is seen only in seven wards of Simikot, state power is non-existent in the other 27 VDCs.

The Maoists are on a recruitment spree and in the past three months launched a campaign with the slogan: ‘Wear your shoes, take up arms and prepare for war.’ The rebels leave a shoe overnight outside the house as a sign that one

Forget the fundos

Is god staging a comeback?

Religion, we’re told, is rising again. America’s Christian fundamentalist right is said to have put George W Bush back in office. The Muslim equivalent, the Islamist movement up to and perhaps just shy of al Qaeda, is seething on Arab streets, Pakistani madrassas and Philippine jungles. Sri Lankan Buddhist fanatics are heard from each time they perceive an insult to the founder of their faith and Hindu nationalism remains powerful in India (and Nepal) despite the BJP defeat at the polls earlier this year.

So, is god making a comeback, as the authors of most of these movements and fearful secularists would have it? Well, I’d say the evidence was mixed but the answer is definitely trending ‘no’ or at least ‘probably not’. For one thing, I’d say the Christian influence in America is overstated by a largely secular-minded media that finds the right wing, Jesus-loving Churchgoer somewhat of an alien being. In fact, the religious component of the American electorate is as diverse and divided as ever with many Catholics, mainstream Protestants and even some Evangelicals going for hapless Senator Kerry in the election.

The Christian fundos make a lot of noise and wield a lot of influence. Many of their outlandish ideas (evolution isn’t true, gay marriage is ‘bad’, guns are good) are anathema to many of America’s elite and successful people. But they are by no

means a majority. The hard, church-going, literal Bible believers in America are still less than half of those who call themselves ‘religious’ and only around a third of the adult population, a figure that hasn’t changed hugely over the years. America has prospered and lead the world in Enlightenment thinking through many decades when its fundos were more numerous and noisy.

The Islamic world, we’re told, is seething with hatred for all things western and secular. The plight of the Palestinians, American heavy-handedness in Iraq and repressive, corrupt Arab regimes all these things inflame mosque-goers and make it ever more likely that next Friday’s prayers could bring about the revolution we’re all told is coming. Well, no, actually. It’s true that many Muslims have huge issues with Washington at the moment. The Iraq invasion hasn’t gone down well in the

souk or the bazar. And in Pakistan, you can find various bearded characters calling for jihad on a grand scale and paying tribute to Osama bin Laden in his hidey hole somewhere.

And yes, Saudi Arabia’s royal family is a collection of decadent crooks who would be tossed from power in a free election that might just elect a fiery preacher or two to a free parliament, were one to exist in Riyadh. Jordan, Egypt and Syria might follow suit, given such an opportunity. But there’s more than an element of anti-Muslim thinking at play if you take it further than that.

Iraqis, the most secular and aspirationally-Western people in the Arab world, don’t much like President Bush at the moment. But they love America. They still do. And so do the people of Karachi, Kuala Lumpur and Damascus. If love can somehow be

defined as the desire to emulate economically and politically. The Muslim world wants democracy and free-level playing field market economics. It also wants respect for Islam and various other religious things. But this is not resurgent fundamentalism, not by a long chalk.

As for the Hindus and Buddhists, I’m not much worried that their ancient faiths will post many problems to the rest of the world. Indian Hinduism in particular is thriving because it embraces modernism every chance it gets and the urbanisation of India is both reinvigorating and changing Hindu social practices for the better. Nepal, well, there’s a strong case to be made for Hindu reform here. But fundamentalism, as such, isn’t likely to pose much of a threat.

To all those Cassandras then, who look to the Next New Thing that endangers life as we know it, the clash of cultures or civilisations that will shake the foundations of what the Enlightenment has wrought, I offer a single thought, one to ponder and pray to your individual god that I’m wrong. China. Amazing economic growth. Nearly three quarters of US non-oil imports and rising. Authoritarian politics. Deep corruption. Huge population. Environmental degradation on a grand scale. An ancient culture devastated by communism that just might be tempted by assertive nationalism.

China. Keep your eye on Beijing. Forget the fundos. ●

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



“I will never leave Nepal again”

I was jailed for a crime I never committed

My desire to become rich led me to Thailand. Eleven years ago, I had been making enough money for my family with the small business I ran. My daughters were just five and six years old.

When my friend invited me to Bangkok in 1993 to start a garment export business, I jumped at the chance of striking it rich. For two years I did quite well. It was around 1995 while touring

Yuham with my friend that we came across six of his Thai and Burmese-Nepali friends. We were having tea in a restaurant when suddenly the

Thai police came and arrested all of us.

I had no idea what was going on. I didn't speak their language but my friend assured me there was nothing to worry about. They took us to a police station in Bangkok and interrogated us individually. I was made to sign a document I could not read. The police officer slapped me when I requested translation. I had no choice but to sign it. They took me to Bankwang prison where I was confined for 18 months without trial.

I found out that the six Nepalis I was with that day had been involved in a robbery of a Sikh's house. They confessed to the crime and received 13-year prison sentences. I did not admit to the crime, so the judge sentenced me to 17 years and eight months of imprisonment. I defended myself with the help of a government lawyer but he did not make much of an effort, the prosecutor was more aggressive and provocative in his depositions.

All my friends testified that I was innocent and not a part of their gang. The daughter-in-law of the Sikh household, who had been at home during the robbery, had seen their faces. She told the police that I was not among them. During the court proceedings the police stated I was innocent but the prosecutor turned it all around. The other family members were made to say they had seen me. The daughter-in-law was not brought to court. The judge listened to the prosecutor and delivered his final verdict on 29 August, 1996.



I was transferred to Lard Yao jail for a crime I had never committed. All I thought of was my 21-year-old wife and two young daughters. I did not know how they would survive without me. I had no future.

An American charity worker named Ben Parks and some missionaries helped me keep my hopes alive. Nine years later on 29 October, because of the efforts made by the activists, I was pardoned by the Thai King Bhumibol and returned home without serving the full sentence.

So many Nepalis are serving life imprisonments in Bankwang and Lard Yao. Many of them are innocent and have been framed or were picked up by mistake like I was. Their trials were a sham, like mine was. Some, it must be said, were turned in by fellow-Nepalis. I met at least 16 Nepalis in both jails serving sentences from 15 years to life.

The human rights situation in Thai prisons is very bad. Our personal letters are opened and read by the prison authorities. Letters can only be written in English. The food is stale and dirty. I once found a dead mouse in my vegetable curry.

It was strange returning home. My daughters had grown into teenagers and they felt awkward calling me “Bua”. But now I have time to get to know them. I have learned my lesson. I will never go after money again. I will be satisfied with what I have. The best lesson I learnt in prison is to live my new life to the fullest, to savour every moment with my family and be thankful for this gift from the Almighty. I will now find fulfillment by helping those less fortunate than me. I will turn into a social worker and I'll never leave Nepal again. ●

NEPALI PAN
Sanu Kaji Maharjan

Untouched even

Some Dalits suffer discrimination not just from the



SAGUN S LAWOTI in SINDHUPALCHOK

Madhab Nepali is a 28-year-old Dalit teacher whose students at the Mahendrodaya High School in Sindhupalchok's Pati Danda are from various castes and creeds. But he has never been allowed into local tea shops.

“I don't even try to enter because I'd probably be thrown out,” says Madhab, recalling an incident six years ago when a friend was beaten up for defying the social practice of Dalits not being allowed into eating places. But what pains Madhab even more is that there is discrimination even within Dalit society, where some ‘untouchables’ regard themselves as more ‘touchable’ than others in their community.

Madhab is about to complete his B Ed degree and is aware that the law of the land treats all citizens equally. Like many other educated Dalits, he knows that the constitution guarantees no person shall, on the basis of caste, be discriminated against as an untouchable, be denied access to any public place or be deprived of the use of public utilities. Still, he does not defy residual social exclusion. “It would just provoke conflict in society,” he reasons.

Bishnu Maya Sarki is in her 50s and explains the stark reality of Nepali village life. “We have been dominated, we are poor, we are not educated, we are helpless. We aren't even confident enough to speak for

ourselves. How can anyone fight injustice on an empty stomach?” she asks. But what makes it worse, says Bishnu Maya, is that Dalits are not united and rues: “If we were, maybe things would be different.”

Here in the mountains north of Kathmandu Valley, despite education and media campaigns against untouchability, Dalits are still not allowed to enter teashops, restaurants and kitchens of families higher up in the caste ladder. They are discriminated at the public tap: the high caste families fill their taps first. “Even if we touch their *gagro*, they regard it as being defiled,” explains Nepali.

Paradoxes abound. Dogs roam freely inside the houses of high caste families, but Dalits aren't allowed in. If Dalits do have a meal inside a high caste home, the family member throws bits of cow dung at the spot where they sat to purify it. “It is humiliating, how can cow dung be purer than human beings?” asks Harka Sarki.

Sadly, the social discrimination prevalent in mainstream society is reflected within Dalit society as well. Here, as in other parts of the country, some Dalits see themselves as higher in the caste hierarchy than others. The oppressed, in a desperate



Khadga Bahadur Majhi (*top*) is from the fisher community. Madhab Nepali and Arjun Sarki (*above*) explain how despite entrenched discrimination, things are changing for their community.

by the untouchables

higher castes, but from fellow-Dalits



PICS: SAGUN S LAWOTI

attempt to secure social status, sometimes turn oppressors.

Madhab Nepali explains that some Kamis and Sarkis consider themselves higher in status than, for instance, Damais, who are not allowed to enter their kitchens. There are restrictions in marriage between Damais and Kamis. "In short, some Dalits impose the same set of discriminatory practices on other Dalits," Madhab tells us, shaking his head.

Dalit leaders say their community can't be blamed for such lingering internal discrimination. Since they grew up in an environment where discriminatory practices were normal, they follow the same tradition even though in their hearts they know it is wrong.

But 49-year-old Arjun Sarki, says the winds of change are blowing away the old practices. "Times are changing, the younger generation is more open and flexible," he says. The local community runs adult literacy classes in Sarki's house which people from all castes attend. "There is no restriction, there is no discrimination," he says.

Madhab Nepali agrees. "People from supposedly higher castes would invite me over, if it wasn't for their rigid parents," he says. "There is a long way to go but change is coming." ●

Majhis lose their livelihood



Conventional wisdom has it that roads bring development. But here on the banks of the Sun Kosi, at the junction of the Arniko and Jiri Highways, fisherfolk of the Majhi community still struggle to survive.

There are less and less fish in the river, the Majhi don't own any land, and although the two highways are at their doorsteps, it hasn't made a difference to the Majhis of Khadichaur in Sindhupalchok. So the community takes odd jobs as farm hands and restaurant helpers.

But not all Majhis have given up their traditional occupation. One member from a family, usually a young man, will still fish in the river while relatives are away working in the city. "Fishing is tedious and hard and doesn't give you much in return," says Dhan Bahadur Majhi, 19, readying the line that he will leave in the river overnight (see pic). Usually he catches a kg of fish, which he can sell for about Rs 30.

These days, Majhis are not the only fishers in the Sun Kosi. "Chettris, Kamis, Paharis, Newars everybody fishes nowadays," says Dhan Bahadur Majhi, adding that many are illegally killing fish by electric shock and this has reduced the catch in the Sun Kosi.

Dalit conference

The International Conference Against Caste Discrimination is being held 29 November-1 December in Kathmandu. Organised by the Dalit NGO Federation (DNF) and International Dalit Solidarity Network, it is the first of its kind. According to DNF, the participants of this event are from countries where caste discrimination is still prevalent.

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Defiant Dailekhis



KRISHNA KHANAL

from p1

The unprecedented uprising in Dailekh appears to have been a result of the unusually brutal methods that the comrades in this district have used to cow down the people. The rallies were a spontaneous outpouring of anger and they don't appear to have been government-instigated. However, security forces and Home Minister Purna Bahadur Khadka did go to Dullu on Monday to attend the rally. Khadka even made a speech, assuring locals of security and relief support from the government. "We fully support the people's uprising," Khadka said amidst applause. An army base has been set up in Dullu to prevent Maoist attacks. The Maoists appear to have realised that the negative publicity from Dailekh could spread across the country and its Western Command in-charge, Comrade Dibakar, issued a

statement Wednesday apologising for the Dailekh killings and the setting up of a three-member investigation panel. But that seems to be for outside consumption, in the district itself the retaliation has already begun: local rebels cut off the two water supply of the district headquarters on Wednesday. Meanwhile, the army appears to have scored a military victory by overrunning a Maoist supply base in Pandaun in far-western Nepal this week. Journalists taken there on Wednesday saw bodies and blood littering the jungles. Piles of socket bombs and grenades were scattered over a wide area. The battle for Pandaun lasted six hours on Saturday night and commandos engaged the guerrillas in hand-to-hand combat on a steep slope. The army admits losing 10 soldiers with 18 wounded and says 300 Maoists were killed. ●

(With reports by Rameswor Bohara in Dullu and Shiva Gaunle in Pandaun)



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The rally in Dullu on Monday (left) and a commando holds up an unexploded rebel mortar round, as a rotting Maoist body lies nearby.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

Getting businesslike

What's it like starting a business in Nepal?

According to *Doing Business in 2005*, a global report put out by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the cost of starting a business in Nepal involves dealing with seven different procedures that take, on average, 21 days to be completed. Though both measures are lower than the

STRICTLY BUSINESS Ashutosh Tiwari



regional average of nine procedures and 46 days, many small firms in Nepal do not even bother with the formality of registration.

That is because (and this is not quite in the report, which obtained its information primarily from Nepali lawyers who seemed to have furnished cautious explanations) apart from their reluctance to face the time-consuming bureaucratic hassles, business owners often have neither the extra cash with which to grease the palms of relevant officers nor the manpower needed to work the system. With this, the government loses revenue, the business owners remain cut off from easily accessible credit lines and other business-oriented formal facilities and an informal economy bulks up, occupying a share of almost 40 percent of Gross National Income, as in

Nepal's case.

The IFC report details what different countries around the world have done to make it easy for their citizens to take risks to become entrepreneurs. Last year, the Portuguese Entrepreneurs' Association, for instance, opened 10 business help centres that act as 'single access points': places where representatives of various agencies gather to assist entrepreneurs complete the necessary paperwork. In Nepal there is no reason why the FNCCI and its district branches cannot double up as platforms to be such help centres for starters. After all, it's not only the established businesses that need to patronise FNCCI, all those interested in business should be able to find something of value for a fee at their local FNCCI chapters.

The report talks about putting forms on the www, thereby giving the same standard information to all new businesses. Such a process makes it easier for firms to submit documents online. Of course, the paper option will still be there for those without Internet access. In Vietnam and Moldavia, says the report, this web-based approach more than halved the time required to file business registrations. That is why, as talks related to e-governance once again heat up in Nepal in a run-up to January's

CAN Info-Tech, Nepali software firms push the idea of putting relevant forms online to the Office of Company Registrar and other government bureaucracies.

The report also mentions that 43 countries have adopted statutory time limits on registrations. Of these, four have added a 'silence is consent' rule. The idea is that once businesses submit the paperwork, they are automatically considered registered after a few days. This method helps speed up the registration work by shifting power to start business from the hands of bureaucrats to those of entrepreneurs.

True, some Nepali academics given to expressing romantic notions about the supposed attractiveness of firms that make up our informal economy. But the reality is that's where the majority of our working poor toil — under unsafe working conditions without health insurance, pension benefits, procedures to file grievances and rights to form unions. The first step toward addressing their plight is to make it easier for the businesses they work for to be legally registered so that they become a part of the formal economy. Only then can our businesses be serious about growth, which ultimately benefits everyone by increasing employment levels and employees' incomes. ●

Ten years of banking

Everest Bank Ltd (EBL) celebrated its tenth anniversary on 24 November. Launched in 1994 as a joint venture of Punjab National Bank, it has 15 branches in Nepal and is the only Nepali bank to have a



Representative Office outside Nepal in New Delhi. EBL is considered a pioneer in retail lending having introduced various customer friendly products such as Home Loan, Education Loan, Flexi Loan etc. At the celebrations, DVSSV Prasad took over as new executive director of the bank to replace SS Dabas.

Cool photography

Studio 7 has added a Konica Minolta R2 Super Full Digital machine services to provide better service. This is the first time that such technology has been introduced to Nepal. This machine has the capacity to print 400x800 DPI high-resolution photographs. Studio 7 also has a reliable printer that is able to print large, life size pictures.

With their well-equipped mini lab, spots and scratches can be removed from the digital machine print and corrected.

Card cartel

Nepal Credit and Commerce Bank (NCC) has introduced Cash Card and Debit Card with Smart Choice Technology (SCT). This new service is available for all account holders of NCC. The cards can be cashed at any ATM centre in town. There are 26 SCT ATM centres in Kathmandu open 24 hours. A maximum of Rs 25,000 can be withdrawn per day.



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Sankhuwasabha is still smarting from the loss, but the rest of the country is probably better off



The Arun River near where the power house would have been located and (below) the rusted gate of the project compound in Tumlingtar.

PICS: KUNDA DIXIT

Ten years after abandoning Arun III

KUNDA DIXIT
in KHANDBARI

It was going to be Nepal's biggest hydroelectric project, and had construction gone ahead the Arun III would now be nearing completion.

With a price tag of \$1.082 billion, it would have cost more than the kingdom's annual budget and generated 202 megawatts from the mighty Arun River near this town in eastern Nepal.

Ten years after the project was abandoned, a rusted gate at a walled compound in Tumlingtar is the only forlorn reminder of this controversial scheme. Some here have still not forgiven Kathmandu-based activists who killed the project that they thought would have transformed eastern Nepal.

"We lost out, and so did the country," says Shyam Sundar

the local economy and new tea estates are coming up.

Whatever progress is seen here is because of local effort. Because after Arun III was abandoned, governments in Kathmandu abandoned Sankhuwasabha too.

The World Bank itself was badly burnt, it has kept off hydropower ever since and only recently hinted at taking a new look at potential projects. It was on 5 August 1995, after a year of mounting international protests that the World Bank's newly-appointed president James Wolfensohn announced he was pulling out of Arun. The Japanese and German governments were under fire pressure at home too.

Arun III was one of the first examples of internet-based international activism. The International Rivers Network, Friends of the Earth Japan and

from Dharan to the dam site near Num cost Rs 50 million per km, when other roads in Nepal cost only Rs 6 million to build. Because the road would not be ready in time, the project even planned to fly equipment on heavy-lift Chinook helicopters from Biratnagar.

Arun III had its supporters, and they were not just in Sankhuwasabha. Former finance minister Ram Sharan Mahat says, "We lost in many ways, we will have to wait another ten years to develop a good project the size of Arun, and about \$400 million in committed grants and loans had to be written off." Shankar Sharma, now with the National Planning Commission, agrees: "If the rate of return calculation made sense, it would have worked, and the road itself would have benefited the people through the multiplier effect."

But Arjun Karki, who now heads Rural Reconstruction Nepal and a Tumlingtar native opposed the project even though it made him a lot of enemies here. "My argument was how could one of the poorest countries in the world afford to produce electricity more expensively than the United States?" recalls Karki. After Arun was dumped, for half the cost and in half the time, smaller public and private projects produced the same amount of electricity Arun III would have, he says.

In the decade since, the road from Hile is still crawling up the Arun Valley and has only reached Leguwa. Fed up with waiting, people here dug their own road, air-lifted jeeps, and now carry diesel in dokos up from Hile so locals can commute. Says Khandbari's ex-mayor Kiran Shakyra: "We realised no one would come to help us, we would have to do it ourselves."

The Arun River starts in Tibet, north of Kathmandu, and

flows eastwards winding its way around Makalu to slice through the Himalaya and meet the Sun Kosi near Dharan. The river's gorge offers the perfect route for a north-south highway joining India and China (*see box*) and would make a revival of Arun III finally feasible. At a public meeting in Khandbari on 20 November to push the highway, locals were wary about having their hopes dashed once more.

"We have been let down so often, we take it with a pinch of salt," says FNCCI's Udas, "but the Kosi Highway would not just benefit us, it would benefit the whole country as well as India and China."

Hari Bairagi Dahal, Sankhuwasabha's ex-MP from the UML, admits Arun III was a loss, but he has no time to be

upset. Even as MP he was busy staging sit-ins at Singha Darbar to force the government to complete the Khandbari road. After parliament was dissolved, he started small hydropower projects he jokingly called "baby Aruns" with local financing and expertise. Dahal has now set up a trust to lease a power plant in Khandbari damaged by the Maoists, sell electricity to the grid and plough the profit to run three colleges here. (*See: 'An alternative current', #204 and 'People power', #166*)

Says Dahal: "We can't say how sad the Bank pulled out, or there is a war going on, and fold our hands. For our own self-respect we have to work to improve our living standards and the Kosi highway is one way of doing that." ●



Udas of the FNCCI's local chapter. "If Arun had gone ahead we would all have been prosperous." Businessman Tileswor Shrestha in Tumlingtar shakes his head: "We woke up one day and found out it was just a dream."

Compared to other parts of the country, Sankhuwasabha district is relatively better off: there are phones that work. Food is plentiful. Several daily flights connect Tumlingtar to Kathmandu and Biratnagar, and electricity is regular. The hills below Dingla and Khandbari that were denuded two decades ago are now covered in thick community forests. Cardamom farms have injected cash into

German green groups joined Nepali activists opposed to the project to successfully lobby against the Bank and bilateral donors. Unlike other hydropower projects, their objections to Arun III were not so much environmental or social, as economic.

Economist Bikash Pandey, who was a member of the Alliance for Energy group that questioned Arun III, recalls: "We weren't anti-Arun, all we were saying was time was not right, we should wait ten years." (*See interview, p 11*). Arun III would have cost \$5,000 per kilowatt when similar projects were being built for less than half the cost. The access road

Trans-Himalayan shortcut

For decades, Nepal played off neighbours China and India for aid. Now, Kathmandu seems to have realised that it can benefit from their friendship for trade.

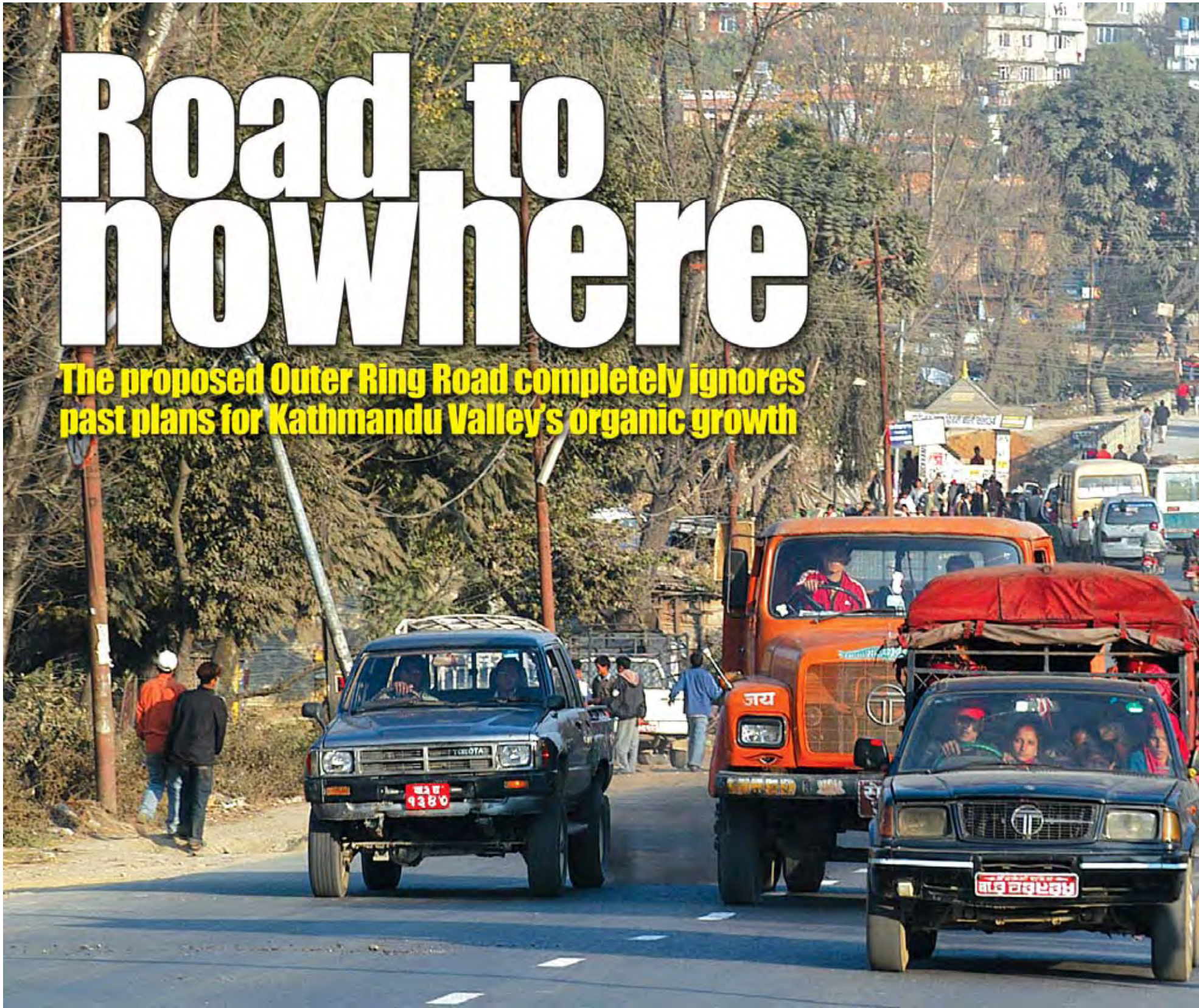
A highway linking India to China via eastern Nepal's Arun river valley would be the fastest all-weather trade route between Calcutta and Haldia ports in India to southeastern China. Current options through the 4,000 m Nathu La in Sikkim is difficult and snowbound four months in a year.

But if the 310 km Jogbani-Kimathang highway through Nepal is opened, it would be a shortcut. Furthermore, half the road already exists and only a 140 km stretch, most of it from Num to Kimathang on the Tibet border, needs to be built. Nepal is urging China to help build it. During an inspection visit to Khandbari last week, Chinese ambassador Sun Heping said: "China is in favour of opening more border links with Nepal and will look favourably into the proposal." However, analysts say China may be interested in first finishing the Rasuwa-Dhading link and Kathmandu's Outer Ring Road.

India requested Nepal to facilitate a transit highway to China at a bilateral meeting earlier this year. Nepal subsequently offered three options: Bhairawa-Mustang, Birganj-Rasuwa and Jogbani-Kimathang. Of the three, the last is the most direct route.

Khandbari can-do locals have been let down before and have already started a symbolic 'One Rupee Each' campaign to raise funds for the highway. "Even if no one cares, we want to show we care," says local youth Dipan Kumar Shrestha, who spearheads the drive (*see pic*).





PADMA SUNDER JOSHI

The residents of Kathmandu see it every day: a city straining to cope with urbanisation. Unplanned settlements, water shortage, overcrowded streets, air and water pollution have all but wiped out a Valley once known for the harmony of its architecture and fertility of its land. Indeed, Kathmandu Valley’s unique heritage is derived from this rural-urban symbiosis. This has been taken into account in numerous urban

development plans in the past 35 years, starting with the 1969 Kathmandu Valley Physical Development Plan. The challenge has always been to translate the plans into reality. In 2000, the IUCN’s *Kathmandu 2020* study tried to address the issue of urban sprawl and how to contain it. The government has strongly backed the containment policy and advocates densification of already settled areas of the Valley contained in that report. Containment keeps the population within given boundaries and controls urban sprawl. In Kathmandu Valley it

makes sense because land resource is limited and there has been unplanned growth in the past. Since the cost of infrastructure is high and there is a need to sustain the Valley’s ecological balance, *Kathmandu 2020* proposed to keep at least 300 persons per hectare (ppha) population density with optimal 500 ppha. According to the 2001 Census only the city core of Kathmandu has a density of more than 500 ppha. In the rest of the metro area, population density is 150 ppha or below but there is alarming growth rate in the outlying VDCs. Out of the 20 urbanising VDCs 10 have population growth rates higher than six percent per year. Kapan scores highest with 12.12 percent, Jorpati has 13.41 and Gongga Bu has 13.46 percent. In its 20-year plan, *Kathmandu 2020* wanted to limit the builtup and non-builtup ratio of land use to 40:60 by 2021, which is the accepted upper limit for ecological balance. By 2001 this ratio had already topped 32:68. The result: fragmentation of land, narrow and meandering access roads, no attention paid to drainage and slopes, and no consideration of land suitability which is turning the Valley into a huge slum. *Kathmandu 2020* tried to

address the problem by introducing a rural-urban boundary to be maintained by improving roads, water, power, phones and sewages in already developed areas and restricting development in the agricultural zones by not providing infrastructure. The gazetted document states: ‘...the provision of regional trunk infrastructures such as highway or arterial road, drinking water...need to be consistent with the goals of compact urban form, so they don’t help further urban sprawl.’ In hindsight, many planners believe that premature construction of the existing Ring Road in 1983 was one of the main causes of haphazard urban sprawl in the Valley. In the absence of a connecting road network and other infrastructure, the Ring Road has been overrun by construction. Not a single major link road has been added after the Ring Road was built. A road designed as an arterial access (with average vehicular speeds of 80 kmph) is compelled to cater to all types of vehicles and can hardly average 30 kmph. In 1993, the Japanese aid group JICA made an extensive transportation study of Kathmandu Valley. Building on land use and other strategic plans it suggested several short,

medium and longterm remedies. One was for a part of the Outer Ring Road to link Budhanilkantha-Thimi-Lubhu-Bungmati since the existing Ring Road does not cover the eastern end of the Valley. There were other short term and medium term proposals and almost none of them were implemented. The Outer Ring Road proposal to be built with a Chinese grant is considerably different from the JICA alignment. There are questions that need to be answered about its feasibility given the land use, traffic load, economic viability and how it fits with the urban containment strategy. The preliminary map appearing in the media of the Outer Ring Road running along the foothills of the Valley rim does not show strong justification. Worse, this is a supply side management approach and completely ignores the *Kathmandu 2020* urban-rural divide to ensure the Valley’s balanced growth. We need an Outer Ring Road but not now. Also, the proposed alignment ignores the *Kathmandu 2020* strategy plan and would seriously threaten the future ecological balance of the Valley. Then there is the question of





MIN BAJRACHARYA



priority: given the state of the country does the capital deserve yet another free infrastructure? Politicians like to bequeath large projects to the country as a legacy of their tenure. But such desires must match overall strategies and national priorities. The tragedy of Kathmandu's planning is that it has historically been used by politicians and betrayed by experts. There are two options to go

with this road project: switch from an outer ring road to an inner ring road following corridors along the Dhobi Khola, Bagmati, Bishnumati and in the northern part of the Sorhakutte-Handigaon link to meet Dhobikhola. This decision would be perfectly in line with the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works and the Kathmandu 2020 containment policy. It will also be easy to implement since the

preliminary design work on three sides have already been completed. The second option demands strong political commitment: bring the whole Kathmandu Valley (at least the area encircled by the proposed Outer Ring Road) under planned development. It will be a challenge but with our experience in land pooling, be possible with nominal investment from the government. Taking the Outer Ring Road as an opportunity, there should be political commitment not to allow land in Kathmandu Valley for construction without designated infrastructure. Strict enforcement would ensure that the Kathmandu 2020 urban rural boundary proposal is respected. Municipalities and VDCs could then plan and manage growth. The key challenge is the lack of political commitment. Land is valuable in this vertical country and being the capital it is even more scarce and precious. Any intervention that undermines land use would be suicidal. We can stop repeating mistakes, learn from them and not blunder again by going for an Outer Ring Road for all the wrong reasons. ● Padma Sunder Joshi used to be with the Planning Unit of the Kathmandu Metropolitan City and is now a lecturer at the Institute of Engineering.

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Best Song In a Foreign Language

Here I come - Abhaya and the Steam Injuns

Life's so strange - Full Circle

Rock Me - Garima Gurung

She N' I - DXP3

Slide - Garima Gurung

Best Music Video

Alok Nembang - Dubna Deu

Bhusan Dahal - Kahiley Timro

Colour Cubes - Ek Mauka

Maya - Timi ma Bhanda

Simosh Sunwaar - Saanjh Ma Pani

Best Rock Composition

Adhuro Prem - Axix

Baato - Lochan Rijal

Chaha Chaina - Cobweb

Jeevan Ma - Nabin K. Bhattarai

Pinjada ko suga - 1974 A.D.

Best Pop Composition

Bus Stand - Sanjeev Singh

Dubna Deu - Anil Singh

Eh Joon - Bidur Shrestha

Pal Pal - Bishwo Shahi

Yehin Ho Ta Maya - Pranil L. Timalsena

Best Composition

Aau Maya - Sambhujit Baskota

Bachan Tode - Raju Singh

Kahiley Timro - Alok Shree

Pardesh Bata - Karna Das

Timilai Jitne - Kiran Pradhan

Best Song Originally Recorded for a Motion Picture Soundtrack

Aankha Bhari Ka - Ranjit Gazmer - Dul Kinarama

Baadai Barsha - Sachin Singh - Kartabya

Kasto Nasha - Rahul Pradhan - Lakshya

Saanjh Naya - Sambhujit Baskota - Suvakamana

Timi Phool Manjari - Laxman Shes - Upahaar

Best Vocal Collaboration

Pranil L. Timalsena / Nabin K. Bhattarai - Yehin Ho ta

Ram Chandra Kafle / Sindhu Rana - Lathi Charge

Udit Narayan Jha / Deepa Jha - Banmaara ley

Udesh Shrestha / Bhugol Dahal - Yo Junima

Various Artists - Garima Garima

Best Performance by Group or Duo with Vocal

1974 AD - Pinjada ko Suga

Nepathya - Sa Karnali

The Axix - Aduro Prem

The Boffins '98 - Ma Mare Pani

The Seasons - Suneko Kura

Folk Album of the Year

Bara Ropi Chhaya - Dilendra Rai & Friends

Ghintang - Tulsi Parajuli

Hamro Sanskriti - Subi Shah & Friends

Kafal Gedi - Mahesh Budhathoki / Sindhu Malla

Subha Bibaha - Buddi Sagar Basyal & Friends

Folk Record of the Year

Banma Kanda Cha - Bhagwan Bhandari

Bhannu Nabhako - Dinesh Kafle / Gita Devi

Maya ko Bheti - Prabin Raj

Phool Ko Dalima - Hari Devi Koirala/ Purushottam Neupane

Sunkoshi Kinarama - Tulsi Parajuli

Best Pop Vocal Performance (Female)

Anita Subba - Timilai Timi

Eli Sherpa - Hardin

Mausami Gurung - Parelma

Pratima Rajbhandari - Najau Najau

Sukmit Gurung - Pal Pal

Best Pop Vocal Performance (Male)

Anil Singh - Dubna Deu

Nabin K. Bhattarai - Chaina Jun

Nima Rumba - Sajha Ma Pani

Sanoop Paudel - Sambandha

Sugam Pokharel - Maya Ko Baato

Best Female Vocal Performance

Chanda Dewan - Na Garzi De

Gyanu Rana - Aasha ko Diyo

Kunti Moktan - Manko Maya

Reema Gurung - Timro Biyogley

Sukmit Gurung - Yo Maya Lai

Best Male Vocal Performance

Karna Das - Pardesh Bata

Ram Krishna Dhakal - Bachan Tode

Shishir Yogi - Jun Ley Sodhyo

Thupten Bhutia - Timro Biyog Lay

Udit Narayan Jha - Kahiley Timro

Song of the Year

Aru Ko Jastal - Naresh Dev Pant

Ma Mareko Chaina - Arun Tiwari

Ma Sapana ko Kura Garchu - Shree Purush Dhakal

Pardesh Bata - B.B Thapa

Pet Michi Michi - Rajan Raj Shivakoti

Album of the Year

Highway - Sugam Pokharel

Megahertz - Anil Singh

The Blue - Nabin K. Bhattarai

Upahaar - Udit Narayan Jha

Voice - Sanoop Paudel

Record of the Year

Bachan Tode - Ram Krishna Dhakal

Dubna Deu - Anil Singh

Kahiley Timro - Udit Narayan Jha

Ma Aina Agan Ma - Yash Kumar

Sajha Ma Pani - Nima Rumba

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The freedom play

The initial euphoria that greeted the freedom granted to nearly 4,000 prisoners, recently released from jails in military-ruled Burma seems to be dissipating fast. Analysts say the amnesty may not necessarily translate into political reform. The profile of most prisoners freed, the timing of their release and the reasons being offered by the junta have fed the assessment. And this undermines any hope the military rulers may have had of profiting from this goodwill gesture.

Only 20-28 of the 3,937 prisoners granted freedom on 18 November were jailed for political activities. The majority were criminals. Currently, Burma has close to 1,400 political prisoners in 39 prisons spread across the country. They include parliamentarians, writers, pro-democracy activists and Buddhist monks. Among them is Win Tin, a close aide of Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been in jail since 1989 for his political beliefs. (IPS)

Now, regime change in Korea

The coalition of foreign-policy hawks that promoted the 2003 invasion of Iraq is pressing President George W Bush to adopt a more coercive policy toward North Korea, despite strong opposition from China and South Korea.

North Korea ranked high in bilateral talks between Bush and Chinese President Hu Jintao at the summit of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Santiago, Chile, although the final communiqué did not address the issue. Bush reportedly tried to make clear that his patience toward Pyongyang and its alleged efforts to stall the ongoing 'Six-Party Talks' was fast running out and that Washington will soon push for stronger measures against North Korea in the absence of progress toward an agreement under which Pyongyang will dismantle its alleged nuclear-arms program. Bush claimed that his interlocutors, who included the leaders of the four other parties, Russia, China, Japan and South Korea, agreed with him. But Hu and South Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun have opposed a harder line toward Pyongyang.

William Kristol, an influential neo-conservative who also chairs the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), faxed a statement entitled 'Toward Regime Change in North Korea' to reporters and various 'opinion leaders' in the capital. PNAC has Vice President Dick Cheney, Pentagon chief Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and Cheney's powerful chief of staff, Lewis Libby as signers of its 1997 charter. (IPS)

Thai-Malaysia tensions

Friday sermons in mosques across Malaysia are often read from texts prepared by the government and are an important barometer of undercurrents in Malay Muslim politics. This month, however, some of the sermons had a discernible difference. Where before the diatribe was against the occupation of Palestine by Israel, the US-led war against Iraq, and Russian military action in Muslim-dominated Chechnya, now a new word has emerged generating anger among the country's 15 million Muslims. It is Takbai, the town in Thailand where 80 Muslim protesters suffocated to death after police detention on 25 October when 1,300 people were stuffed into vehicles for at least six hours.

"Islam is under attack right here at our doorstep," said a preacher over loudspeakers at a mosque in the upscale Bangsar suburb on Friday. "The Thai military is slaughtering our Muslim brothers in southern Thailand." Across Malaysia's Malay Muslim heartland, the anger over the Takbai deaths is pervasive. Extensive media coverage of the tragedy has turned the name and the tragedy of Takbai into a household word and a rallying cause for many. Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah telephoned Thai Prime Minister Thaksin after the killings to voice his concern. Taking note of the tensions between both countries, the Malaysian premier offered to send a high level team to Bangkok led by Deputy Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak, for talks. But to date Bangkok has not responded. The Takbai killings have also brought tourism, largely from Malaysia to southern Thai towns, to a standstill, especially after Malaysia warned its citizens against heading north. (IPS)

Pipeline dreams to be reality

KABUL—Prospects for the trans-Afghan pipeline seem good with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) indicating that it is set to launch a preliminary report on the \$2 billion project linking the vast gas field in Turkmenistan to Pakistan through Afghanistan. The American oil and gas company, UNOCAL, and its Argentinean rival, Bidas, had earlier agreed to pay \$300 million to Afghanistan per year as a premium for using the land. Half of the 1,800-km long pipeline will pass through Afghan territory to supply gas from Dawlatabad in Turkmenistan to the Gawadar port in Pakistan.

The trans-Afghan pipeline has been one of the most controversial issues among (western) politicians, investors and major world gas companies, including UNOCAL and Bidas, since 1995. The three countries involved in the project will hold a meeting in Islamabad at the end of November before the final results will be announced. Oil analysts in the region say, whoever takes the project will clearly reap millions of dollars each year from the venture. But Afghanistan's security has been a major concern for the investors. Earlier Bidas withdrew from the program and analysts suggest this was due to security reasons. And UNOCAL's role within the ADB venture is still not clearly defined.

Turkmenistan, the world's biggest producer of gas, is desperate to get its huge reserves out to the market and thereby boost up its weak economy by presenting its gas petroleum supplies to south and central Asian countries. The trans-Afghanistan pipeline will first go to Gawadar and on to India from where the gas will then be transferred to Bangkok through tanker ships.

The three partners have discussed how to ensure security for the pipeline in all three countries and to specify the portion for India in this project. Salam Azemi, a former UNOCAL adviser, said the pipeline project would bring \$300 million annual income to Afghanistan. (IPS)

China and India are converging

Economically, Asia's two giants are becoming more alike every day



A recent newsletter from the management consultancy firm McKinsey presents three points of view on one of the hottest topics of debate — China and India: The Race to Growth.

The contributors, a Harvard University professor and two McKinsey consultants, appear to agree on very little except that the two economies have adopted opposite growth models: China's way since 1978 has been state capitalism; India's path since 1991 has been private enterprise.

All three commentators did a good job highlighting the Asian powerhouses' strengths and offering insights about which model may triumph. Yet, none discussed the possibility that the paths followed by China and India may actually converge.

For the next 10 years, China will keep trumping India in industries that rely on 'hard' infrastructure: roads, ports and power, the Harvard University professor Tarun Khanna says in his essay in the *McKinsey Quarterly*; India will be ahead of China in biotechnology, computer software and other areas where 'soft' infrastructure like a ready talent pool and private enterprise matters more than physical capital, he adds.

As for what happens after 10 years, "The conventional view that the Chinese model is unambiguously better of the two is wrong in many ways," says Khanna, a professor of strategy at Harvard Business School. "Each has its advantages."

India opened up its economy in 1991, 13 years after China. Chinese policy makers welcomed foreign-direct investments and decided which domestic companies should get money to expand.

India, suspicious of foreigners because of its colonial past, depended on its local entrepreneurs, who as a group had much freer access to credit and capital markets than their counterparts in China. China last year got \$54 billion in foreign direct investment, 10 times as much as India. China's expansion has outstripped India's six percent annual growth by an average of four percentage points since 1980. The \$1.4 trillion Chinese

economy, Asia's second biggest after Japan, is three times India's size.

"As India opens up further to foreign-direct investment," Khanna concludes, "we might well discover that the country's more laissez-faire approach has nurtured the conditions that will enable free enterprise and economic growth to flourish more easily in the long run."

That may not happen, Jonathan Woetzel, a director in McKinsey's Shanghai office, says in his essay. It's true that the Chinese government decides which companies should grow. It's also true that an efficient market would have allocated capital better and achieved the same amount of economic growth without the estimated \$205 billion in bad loans that now burden the four major Chinese state-owned lenders and 11 commercial banks, in addition to the \$230 billion transferred to asset managers since 1999.

Yet, "China is not an efficient market and the Indian model," Woetzel writes, "essentially one with relatively little funding, whether by the government or private sector, could not have achieved as much growth for the Chinese economy as the approach China's government took."

Diana Farrell, director of the McKinsey Global Institute, provides a third view. The auto industry is one where the Chinese and the Indian growth models are in close

competition, she says. India's car industry is half China's size of 1.76 million vehicles in 2003. Still, the productivity of foreign joint ventures in China is lower than Japan or the US. In India, local engineers have been innovative with their designs.

The Mumbai-based Mahindra & Mahindra has created Scorpio, a sports utility vehicle that sells for a fraction of an equivalent car in the United States, says Farrell. Does the auto industry offer evidence that India's laissez-faire system, which encourages local entrepreneurship, works better than China's combination of state capitalism and foreign investments? Not so fast, says Woetzel. Look at Geely Automobile Holdings, a Chinese maker of cheap cars that is not state-supported.

Geely has about five percent of the Chinese market and aims for 10 percent by 2010. "In five or 10 years' time," Woetzel predicts, "at least a third of the Chinese auto industry will be completely private. And this will have started with the state saying, 'We want to build a car industry'."

That provides us with a fourth point of view. Communist China started with statism because it had no entrepreneurs. It's now moving toward a free market in capital and ideas to resemble India.

Democratic India had a strong tradition of private enterprise that blossomed around a weak state; the next step for India is to improve its physical infrastructure, something that will need a strong political will. In other words, what India needs now is a strong state.

A more India-like China and a more China-like India, that's how the two growth models may ultimately fuse. On a 10-year time frame, the rivalry between the two nations is a race too close to call. In 2015, it may look like a race both can win. ●

(Bloomberg)



Holland after van Gogh

As racism spreads, the Dutch realise tolerance is the issue, not differences

The murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh and the ensuing arson attacks against mosques, churches, and Islamic schools have caused more soul-searching in Dutch homes in the last week than in the past two decades. The old Netherlands, it seems, has ceased to be, never to return.

ANALYSIS
Nobert Both and
Nabil Taouati

It is said that various immigrant groups in the Netherlands lack the ability to ‘cleanse themselves’ through honest self-appraisal and criticism. There are many who want to change. Non-committal multiculturalism has long kept the conservatism of Dutch Moroccans and Dutch Turks hidden from the public eye. Among immigrants soul-searching is closely related to belonging and commitment, which in practice boils down to feeling part of society and responsible for the city, neighbourhood, and street you live in.

We native Dutch find it hard to hold a mirror to ourselves. We are bad listeners and air our views whether or not we have thought deeply about them. As a result, many people no longer understand themselves, which makes it hard for them to understand others. Freedom of expression is becoming a caricature.

When asked what it was like to be interviewed by Theo van Gogh, European Commissioner Frits Bolkestein said, “He was



impertinent, and that is a good thing, he was offensive, and that is not.” It is as simple as that. In today’s Netherlands, assertiveness is seen as a good thing, modesty as a form of self-chastisement. Respect is for wimps.

Moral relativism has damaged public life. Many youngsters now see politics as a kind of computer game. It is no longer about messages or content, it is just one more form of entertainment, and what matters is who wins and who loses. Context has been lost.

Extreme ideas offer an alternative compass to disoriented souls like Mohammed Bouyeri, van Gogh’s suspected murderer. He is not so much a product of zealous imams from rural Morocco as of the west’s information society.

The gospel of Muslim extremism has found a global market through the Internet. Something similar is happening on the extreme right, with ‘white power’ offering an apparent certainty to youngsters who are adrift.

The real struggle is about ideas. What is ominous is that extremists realise this more clearly than the moderate, silent majority, who find the noise irritating but do not know how to start a serious dialogue.

Meanwhile, tolerance degenerates into multicultural segregation. We live in isolation from each other. The Turkish-Dutch headmaster of the Muslim school in Uden that was burned down after van Gogh’s murder voiced the inhibitions we feel when he asked rhetorically, “Is the enemy not within us?”

A revived permissive society

is not the answer. The state must battle terrorism, public space must not be abandoned to extremists and Islam in Europe must adapt to the continent. People who live in a society they hate, amidst people they despise, cannot contribute to a shared future. Life in Europe will only remain worth living if all cultures and religions accept the laws that represent common interest.

A European Islam is needed urgently. It can be given shape by, for example, training imams in Europe, encouraging mosques to promote social cohesion in their neighbourhood and by a more active participation of Muslims in public debate.

At the same time, native Europeans must learn to

accept that Islam may offer new vantage points on such moral issues as euthanasia, abortion, individuality and solidarity. The Netherlands need not be the focus of international religious conflict. What is precious must be preserved and what enriches must be absorbed. This process must begin in school. Children must learn that they do not live in a monoculture but in a pluralist society bound together by universal values and common laws. They must learn that critical thought is valuable, and doubt is healthy. Restoring the past is not an option. Rudderless societies are easy prey for bigotry. ● (Project Syndicate)

Norbert Both is a political scientist and co-author of the book Srebrenica: Record of a War Crime; Nabil Taouati is a business economist.



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Dailekh's brave mothers

The women of Dailekh did something the men never had the courage to do

Chitra Singh Gaunle in
Rajdhani, 23 November

राजधानी

"We don't need Prachandapath. You can't kill people anymore." These are the anti-Maoist slogans the people of Dailekh have been shouting for the last two weeks. Young and old, men and women, they protested openly against the rebels. Once sympathisers of the Maoists, they are now protesting spontaneously. Not too long ago, they had applauded and carried Maoist flags, but things have changed. The rebels didn't show fear when the Royal Nepali Army attacked their villages but now they have to hide from the rebellious public. They are facing the consequences of having taken the people for granted. It is time for them to acknowledge that the sickles of the mass are more powerful than the AK-47s of a few armed militants.

The Maoist rebellion did not start with evil intentions. It was necessary to give birth to a party with a powerful and revolutionary ideology to restore the people's rule of law. The Maoists made a positive impact on the people in the early phases of their movement. But since then, it has been ridden with its own contradictions. At a time when consolidation is needed and not expansion, Maoists have lost more by going underground.



KRISHNA KHANAL

The Dailekh rebellion will spread across the country if the Maoists do not apologise. The mass protests are staged with very good intentions and both the state and the rebels should create an environment where the people can breathe in peace. If injustice against the people continues, mass

fury will not be contained. It will lash out at both the state and the Maoists. The Royal Nepali Army indicated provision of security if the elections took place. This will only lead to an authoritarian rule, what the people need is peace.

Anti-Maoist uprising in Dailekh owes much to the women who did

what the men did not have the courage to do. To rebel against the Maoists is not easy but such was the desperation of the mothers, who though illiterate, rose up to protest. When politicians feared going to villages, teachers fled, schools closed down and men migrated, the women defied the gun. ●

Mothers' army

Kantipur, 25 November

कान्तिपुर

The Maoists had locked up all schools for over a month and student bodies requested us to talk to them about calling off the school strike. We travelled to the west of the district where we met Chandra Shah, a teacher who had just returned from Dullu. He gave us a news peg. "Last night, villagers beat up half a dozen Maoist leaders," he told us. The security forces had also headed for the place where the locals had beaten up rebel district leaders.

What had actually happened was that the security forces had killed the 'people's committee' chief Raju Bajracharya when he tried to run away from them. The rebels had forced Bajracharya to join the committee. When the rebels came to cover Raju's body with a Maoist flag, the villagers beat them up. Raju's sister and brother-in-law saved rebel leader Gopal telling people not to act like Maoists. The people were furious and even willing to die. In the last two weeks, the number of anti-Maoist demonstrators has snowballed and spread across 14 VDCs. Starting in Dullu, it spread to Badalamjari, Gamaudi, Rawatkot, Paduka and Chiwripushkot. The women started it by coming out into the streets armed with sticks and soon the men joined them. Husbands had no choice but to

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support their wives. Their protest was so strong that five-dozen Maoist rebels including four chiefs and deputies of the village people’s government surrendered to the public.

In Dullu, women stood guard with their sticks and began interrogating us perhaps thinking we were Maoists. We said we were journalists. “Why have you journalists come so late? This kind of protest has not been organised anywhere else in the country,” one woman told us. “Our protests should be aired on your radio so everyone in the country and especially the ministers know what’s happened here.” On 22 November, more than 20,000 people joined the protests in Dullu. Later in the evening, the villagers had a big feast and animals were slaughtered. The women who stood guard celebrated throughout the night dancing at their sentry posts.

Deuba exit

.....
Deshantar, 21 November

Six months after his reappointment as prime minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba has been asked to resign by the royal palace. It has charged him with failing to restore peace and of being unable to bridle the CPN (UML), which the palace believes is creating trouble. Deuba refused and the palace then reportedly told him he had to go. Arzu Deuba reportedly sent a message to the palace saying her husband would resign and that was when the king and queen attended a dinner hosted by the Deubas at Baluwatar on 19 November. The chairman of the World Hindu Federation, former General Bharat Keshar Simha was the one who told Deuba the king wanted him to step down. The palace is peeved the present coalition government has been a

non-performer. It is angry at the way the UML opposed the government’s decisions on the ordinance of the royal palace’s expenditure, on holding elections and it raised the infamous issue of the Dasain expenses that the government doled out of the national coffer. Arzu Deuba has been given a seven-day deadline, which if missed, will result in the palace sacking the prime minister once again. To seek Deuba’s resignation now appears to be a strategic move. If Deuba announced election dates he would put the palace in a fix because it wouldn’t have an excuse to sack Deuba. It would be too late to sack him. When Deuba was reinstated six months ago, it was on condition that his government begin elections before mid-March.

Consensus needed

.....
Shailaja Acharya in *Janasatta*, 20 November

Almost three decades ago, BP Koirala said a national consensus was needed to save Nepal. Only then could the country form a constitution that provided space for the king and all political parties. If amended, even the Maoists could be brought into the mainstream. The two forces that can bring stability in this country now are the monarchy and the Nepali Congress. The monarchy may fall short on some issues but it is known as the symbol of unity. The Nepali Congress has become an institution representing stability because of its struggle and things could improve if these two forces joined hands. The monarchy however, made its biggest mistake when King Gyanendra readily dissolved the parliament on Sher Bahadur Deuba’s

recommendation. He should have allowed the Supreme Court to decide as his brother had done in 1999. Parliament is a forum where differences between the king, the people and the political parties are sorted out. If the king wishes democracy to thrive in Nepal, he must reinstate parliament. This move can save the country. The Maoists may have demanded a constituent assembly but we need not get carried away. The world is against terrorism. When my party, the Nepali Congress accepted the constituent assembly and referendum as possible alternatives, I disagreed. I said that the party had derailed from its political principles.

Rolpa roads

.....
Nepal Samacharpatra, 23 November

ROLPA—For the first time after they began the ‘people’s war’ in Rolpa and Rukum, the Maoists have started development work. A road project was launched recently in Gairigaun, Deukholi, Thawang in Rolpa and Chunwang in Rukum under orders of Maoist supremo Prachanda and joint decision by the Magarant Autonomous People’s Government. Locals are participating in the construction of a 91 km road which will take three years to finish. “The plan is to stretch the road from Nuwagaun to Thawang,” says Comrade Prashant, coordinator of the road construction committee under the All-Nepal Revolutionary People’s Council. The Council says it started the road in response to local demand. The Maoists say people from other districts will also help in the construction and a brigade will be

mobilised to ensure security during construction, states Comrade Bibek of the Mangalsen Division. All schoolteachers and students based at the construction sites will be mobilised for a week. According to Santosh Buda, chief of Magarant Autonomous State, a budget of Rs 10 million has been allocated for the work and 200,000 people will benefit.

People rise up

.....
Editorial in *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 25 November

Villagers for 25 village development committees in Dailekh have joined the Maoist-resistance campaign and as a result, the rebels are on the run. Some of those rising up against the Maoists have been killed. The locals in Dailekh have set an example for the rest of the country. They have shown that the people have a limit for patience and tolerance. If any force crosses that limit, they will have to face the wrath of the people. The people of Dullu were happy to see the security forces arrive but they now run the risk of being hit by a rebel counter attack. Ensuring their safety and resettlement is the duty of the government. Only if the government lives up to its duty will the recent speeches of the ministers in Dullu make any sense.

Uninsured jobs

.....
Kantipur, 23 November

More than 20 Nepali migrant workers come home in coffins from Qatar every month according to the Foreign Ministry. The deaths take place due to industrial accidents, road accidents and sickness. Most Nepalis in the Gulf are from the hills and they usually

fall ill and die due to the parching heat of the Middle East. The number of those killed in road accidents is also significant and are attributed to rules on driving on the right side of the road. The recent death of five Nepalis while trying to clean a septic tank in Qatar is because of lack of training. Chairperson of the Non-Resident Nepalis Association in Qatar, Badri Prasad Pandey, said they would not have died if they had used simple masks. “We have begun training sessions for such workers,” he said. Pandey added that most Nepali workers in the Gulf are not insured so they have a hard time getting compensation. “In most cases, they have to fight legal battles.” In Qatar, workers get insurance worth Rs one million if they pay only Rs 2,500. Nepali envoy to Qatar, Shyamananda Suman, said a petition had been filed in court to claim compensation for the death of the five Nepalis.

Police on standstill

.....
Annapurna Post, 23 November

DAMAK—A gang of armed robbers raped three women and two young girls from two families and terrorised the whole village in Dhimal Basti. The dacoits came to the village on Saturday evening and entered each household. They tied up the parents and dragged the girls aged 10, 12, 15, 17 and 18 outside. They were tied up and then raped. The children were too scared and ashamed to report to the police. The police on the other hand are doing nothing. They are waiting for the victims to first file the case. The villagers accused the police for not taking action even after receiving reports about what was happening.

Deuba: That’s his personal opinion
Mohsin: That’s what I’m saying. That’s his personal opinion
Headlines: *Autocracy will prevail if this government fails*-Mohsin

समय

Samaya, 25 November

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

“The risk of being a victim of Maoist violence is clearly much lower than the risks of going trekking, mountaineering, rafting, or simply going in a bus. The threat is fairly small.”

British Ambassador to Nepal, Keith Bloomfield, in *Outside* magazine in its 10 November issue.

KUNDA DIXIT

Kosi-Lhasa Highway

Rajdhani, 23 November

राजधानी

China has committed itself to help in the construction of the proposed Kosi-Lhasa highway. While the news overwhelmed residents of Sankhuwasabha, it put pressure on the government which has not shown as much interest as it should. People from the eastern region have been raising funds with their ‘Rs 1 per person’ campaign. They are doing all they can to help with construction. It is estimated that the overall cost will be Rs 1.2 billion. The finance minister and vice chairman of the National Planning Commission have assured that money will be set aside. But since we can’t take them on their word, it would be better if they released the funds immediately. The government must understand that if it were to provide Rs 500 million now, the work could start right away. This move would also oblige China to provide support as promised. The people of the eastern region are willing to contribute their share if more funds are needed to complete the work. The highway will not benefit just the eastern region but will also increase economic relations between China and India. China plans to extend its railway line to Lhasa. Nepal can benefit from this railway service also once the highway is built. The Chinese ambassador, Sun Heping also attended the program and is seen (above) being greeted on arrival at Tulmingtar on Saturday.

Revolutions devour their own children



Studied by many but understood by few is the French Revolution and the subsequent rise of Napoleon Bonaparte. Erik Durschmied begins this compilation of ‘revolutions, mayhem, betrayal, glory and death’ with a prologue dedicated to the obsession of

BOOK
CK Lal

‘the incorruptible’ tyrant Maximilien Robespierre (‘The king must die so that the country can live’) and blames the ensuing anarchy upon the indecisiveness of Louis XVI. But he fails to explain why the resolute and the decisive alike died in an all-consuming flame of revolution.

Eventually, all pretenders to the republican throne, including Robespierre himself, fall pray to the insatiable thirst of Madam Guillotine, the emblematic apparatus of the Reign of Terror.

With the French Revolution, the age of autocratic monarchy in Europe came to an end, but it also brought into being the pathology of totalitarian ideologies: purges of entire classes, brute justice of ‘people’s courts’, trials without defence, and executions without trials. As Pierre Victorien, a victor as well as a victim of the revolution rued before going to the guillotine, “The revolution...devours its own children.”

The Tyrolean Uprising during the Habsburg Empire gets an even more moving epigram

Epigrams on the birth and death of revolutions

from Simon Bolivar: “He who serves the revolution, ploughs the sea”. The author, a revolutionary himself, seems to have a soft spot for the non-ideological rebellion of Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa in Mexico’s Chiapas region.

Then it’s time to quote Lenin who rather recklessly declared: “Revolutions are locomotives of history. Drive them full speed ahead and keep them on rails.” Exactly how to prevent a revolution from being a runaway train seems to be the question, as Russia’s Red Terror, Mao’s Cultural Revolution and Brother Number One’s Cambodian genocide would later show.

The most heart-rending story in the book is that of Rosa Luxemburg, who was silenced by soldiers unwittingly preparing the ground for the rise of Hitler in Germany. The author quotes Oscar Wilde: ‘It is personalities, not principles, that move the age’ as an epitaph to her momentous life. Luxemburg lives long after her death in the memories of her admirers all over the world.

The tale of Japanese Tenno, on the other hand, is full of hyperbole about loyalty, betrayal and redemption of legendary samurais. The only notable quote in the entire section is from Emperor Hirohito: “The ties between the emperor and his people do not depend on myths and legends. They are not predicated on the false conception that their emperor is divine.”

The chapter on the struggles of Che Guevara in Cuba and Bolivia is riveting mainly because it is written as a news report. Commandant Guevara is

hunted like a rabbit in the Dead Earth of Bolivia and killed mercilessly after his capture. The author blames, perhaps rightly, Cuban strongman Fidel Castro and the Soviet Union for cutting him loose, and absolves the CIA of complicity. If true, one of the most charismatic revolutionaries the world has ever known was done in by his own comrades. Ironically, it is Che who has become immortal as an emblem of revolution just as the non-violent revolutionary Gandhi has become the emblem of an alternative path.

Erik Durschmied, a veteran of war reporting, can’t seem to forgive the American establishment for the mess it made in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution in the 70s. The Shah failed to realise the futility of divine authority in the post-war world and tried to live by the dictum of Louis XIV: d’etat et moi. The Shah ruled absolutely with complete faith in the unflinching support of the Americans. Ultimately, when the streets of Tehran began to resound with the slogan ‘Death

to the Shah’, his sponsors in the CIA and State Department ‘threw him out like a dead mouse’.

The book is racy and jumps from one chapter to the next with effortless ease. The thread running through them concerns the desirable traits of a ruler. Durschmied writes in the prologue: ‘Throughout history it has been a weakness of those in power, men who failed when the situation called for strong, even brutal measures, that allowed the barbarous to take charge.’

That’s certainly account of history but it fails to present the complete picture. No less often, the fault lies in the tendency of rulers to predict the future on the basis of the past. Since history runs a zigzag course linear-thinking leaders fall off its pages the way ‘incorruptible’ Robespierre, ‘courageous’ Che, ‘glib-talking’ Trotsky did despite their resoluteness. And just as Louis XVI, Wilhelm II, and Tsar Nicholas did due to their indecisiveness, procrastination, and frailty.

After 9/11, it has become clear that Americans are still pursuing their material dreams. But while that may be enough of an objective to live, causes to die for are much more complex.

To quote Durschmied: ‘Revolutions are waged and decided in the minds of individuals, their cutting edge is words, not swords’.



Whisper of the Blade by Erik Durschmied
Coronet Books, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 2002
pp: 392
Rs 1095



The AIDS crisis

1 December is World AIDS Day and South Asia is at a critical stage of the epidemic as infections top eight million

Asia, the world's most populous region with 3.9 billion people, has long been identified by the United Nations as prone to an epidemic, which threatens to be as bad as in sub-Saharan Africa, home to two-thirds of the people with HIV. The virus is spreading fastest in Eastern Europe and Asia.

The number of infected Asians jumped by one million over the past two years, bringing the regional total to 8.2 million, according to an annual AIDS epidemic report by UNAIDS and the World Health Organisation. Some 5.1 million of those live in India, the highest number in the world except for South Africa. China had some 220,000 new infections since 2002 to take the total to 840,000. Infections among East Asian women jumped by 56 percent over the same period, representing the largest global increase for women.

The booming sex trade has contributed to the HIV/AIDS crisis in Asia with more than eight million people now living with the virus and numbers rising sharply among women, according to UN reports. It revealed alarming increases in infection rates among intravenous drug users but said the sex industry was still the main driver of transmissions.

Most new infections in Asia occur when men buy sex, and up to 10 percent of Asian men do so, said the report. Many sex workers were still prepared to work without condoms because some clients were willing to pay much higher prices for unprotected sex. Fewer than one in five sex workers in Jakarta massage parlours reported using condoms.

Men who slept with sex workers were often responsible for passing the virus to their wives and girlfriends, who are now being infected in record numbers, said UNICEF regional AIDS advisor Wing-Sie Cheng. "For women, remaining faithful is no longer a good enough precaution to ensure they are safe from the risk of HIV infection."

Women have seen higher rates of infection than men because it is easier for them to get HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, through heterosexual intercourse. Some 2.3 million out of the 8.2 million people currently living with HIV in Asia are women, an increase of 56 percent since 2002. Nearly 50 percent of the 39.4 million people infected with HIV worldwide are women.

The report said illegal drug injectors were the second largest factor in the spread of HIV in many Asian countries, particularly in Indonesia, Nepal, Vietnam and parts of China. One in two injecting drug users in Jakarta now test positive for HIV, while in cities such as Pontianak in Indonesia, more than 70 percent of drug injectors are being found to be HIV-positive, the report cited. It recommended more nations adopt opiate substitution and needle-exchange programs to cut down on the use of dirty needles.

HIV epidemics were already deeply entrenched in countries such as India, Myanmar and China where current anti-AIDS campaigns were making limited headway. A 2003 survey revealed one in five Chinese could not name a single way to protect themselves against the virus.

Many Asian nations can still avert potential epidemics. Bangladesh, East Timor, Laos, Pakistan and the Philippines have low HIV prevalence rates and could stave off potential epidemics if they adopted the sort of prevention programs adopted by countries such as Thailand.

Thailand was widely praised in the 1990s for its unflinching response to the AIDS epidemic, including promoting the use of condoms, which helped reduce new annual infections from a high of 143,000 in 1991 to 19,000 last year. The kingdom has also been a regional leader in the distribution of cheap, generic anti-AIDS drugs that have allowed thousands of people in the region living with HIV to continue relatively normal lives.

The UN agencies estimated that 3.1 million people will have died worldwide from AIDS in 2004 — more than 540,000 of them in Asia — the most in any one year and 200,000 more than in 2003. They said nearly 40 million now have HIV, the highest toll in the 23-year history of acquired immune deficiency syndrome. While countries such as Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand were hit early, others including Indonesia, Nepal, Vietnam and China are only beginning to see the disease spread rapidly and must launch efforts to stop it. ●

The cultural bias of genetics

Humans and apes. How similar are we really?

JONATHAN MARKS

All cultures impose on their members ideas about who they are, how they came to be, and where they fit in socially. For example, pre-modern Europe believed that a woman who had sex before marriage might carry the imprint of her lover within her, so that her child born in wedlock would resemble the earlier lover rather than the husband? This served to justify the premium placed on female chastity.

Folk ideas about heredity are a particularly powerful cultural tool, but they are not unique to pre-modern societies. Even contemporary science has its own cultural ideologies about heredity, which are often difficult to disentangle from the complex data and high technology we believe produces objective, value-free glimpses of nature.

molecular comparisons in the 1960s, and DNA technologies in the 1980s, presented a new way of comparing species. The comparison of linear polymers — proteins made up of chains of amino acids, or DNA made up of chains of nucleotides — held out the promise of a simple tabular approach to evolution.

When we compare the genetic material of humans and chimpanzees, we find that it corresponds at nearly 99 of every 100 comparable sites. But this method omits much of what has been learned about genomic evolution in the last quarter-century. Mutational processes are far more complex than was thought a few decades ago; with strand slippage, duplication, transposition, and illegitimate recombination producing qualitative differences between closely related genomes.

humans are at least 99 percent identical — bone for bone, muscle for muscle, nerve for nerve, organ for organ. If anything, the DNA comparison underestimates the profound similarity of the human and ape bodies in the great tapestry of nature.

Context reveals something at the low end of the scale as well. Two DNA sequences generated at random must be 25 percent identical by virtue of the fact that DNA is a sequence of only four bases. Therefore, all multicellular life, having presumably developed from a single common ancestral form must be over 25 percent identical in their DNA sequences.

In other words, a human and a carrot have much in common genetically despite their being little similarity between them



In the field of human origins, it is known that a human DNA sequence is nearly 99 percent identical to the corresponding part of a chimpanzee's DNA. It is not uncommon to hear the conclusion that we are 'nothing but' chimpanzees (and fated to be aggressive or to possess whatever attributes are being imputed to apes these days), or that apes merit human rights. Once again social meanings are enmeshed within beliefs about heredity.

That overwhelming similarity between human and chimpanzee DNA is actually a product of two cultural facts: our familiarity with the chimpanzee's body and our unfamiliarity with DNA. After all, when the chimpanzee was new and interesting (in the 1700's), contemporary scholars commonly judged it to be overwhelmingly similar to the human form — so much so, that it was commonly classified as a variant of humans.

After several centuries studying apes, we are familiar with every subtle difference in form between our species and theirs. But the emergence of

While measuring nucleotide similarity in homologous regions is indeed in the 98-99 percent range, this number does not incorporate or acknowledge the measured difference in the size of the human and chimp genomes, or the widespread differences in chromosome or genome structure. Because a DNA sequence is a one-dimensional entity, it lends itself much better to single-number comparisons than a four-dimensional body does. The genes that lead to the production of the human and chimpanzee femur may be 98-99 percent identical, but it is impossible to say whether the bones themselves are more or less similar than that.

Perhaps the most seductive aspect of the DNA comparison is its lack of biological context. The value of 98-99 percent similarity between human and ape DNA stands outside the rest of life. We can gain some zoological perspective on what that number really means by comparing another species to apes and humans. Compared to the body of an oyster, for example, chimpanzees and

physically. Here the DNA comparison grossly overestimates the actual relationships between species. Genetic comparisons simply do not afford an 'inner view' of the relationships between species or an encapsulation of those relationships.

In other words, this apparent fact of nature — the overwhelming genetic similarity of human and ape — is a fact constructed from culture. That is not to say it is inaccurate or false; just that it's meaning is far less obvious than it may appear superficially.

We make sense of the world, and of our place in it, culturally — and science provides more information for constructing that place. But like other people, our own application of that information to the puzzle of our existence is strongly influenced by non-scientific ideas and pervasive folk ideologies of heredity. ● (*Project Syndicate*)

Jonathan Marks is a biological anthropologist at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and the author of *What It Means To Be 98 percent Chimpanzee: Apes, People, and Their Genes*.

Thamel street festival



DJ Anjal in last year's Peace Project



Zone 1, Tridevi Marg



The crowd at last year's Thamel festival

On Saturday, the streets of Thamel will come alive with music

AARTI BASNYAT

This year's Thamel street festival is going to be bigger and better than the previous years. On Saturday, 27 November, the streets of Thamel will be pedestrianised from 12PM to 10PM and the neighbourhood will come alive with an open-air street dance festival.

Nepal's finest DJs and International DJs from UK and India will be spinning their magic in the streets for the passers-by to dance to. This massive open-air multi-genre party aims to promote peace, love and harmony among the people through music. Thamel will be divided into two main

party zones, with R&B, Hip Hop, Disco, Pop and other kinds of commercial music being played in Zone 1 while Trance, Techno and House will be played in Zone 2. The rest of Thamel, meanwhile, will host stalls set up by different restaurants and bars. The event is sponsored by McDowell's and supported by the British Council, Wave magazine, Metro and Tuborg. This is definitely an event not to be missed.

The tradition of turning Thamel over to concerts and celebration started last November with an unprecedented musical event: Peace Project Thamel Street

Dance Music Festival. PartyNepal.com and Funky Buddha Bar & Café organised Nepal's first open-air dance event and the messages were simple: peace, harmony and a good time.

The organisers aimed to bring the nation together and eventually the world with music as a medium. The party started by 2PM and the 20,000+ crowd danced all afternoon without missing a beat. Thamel had been divided into Zone 1 and Zone 2. Zone 1 pumped out Hip Hop, R & B, Pop and House, while Drum & Bass and Psytrance poured out of Zone 2. The festival was a huge success and received wide international media coverage. ●

The DJ lineup this year is:

Zone 1 Tridevi Marg, Thamel: R&B, Hip-Hop, Pop, Funk and Remixes
Aseem vs DJ SickFreak: 2PM till 4PM
DJ Larry BlackMan Junior (Dubai): 4PM till 5PM
DJ Bee and Chloe's Husband (UK): 5PM till 7PM
DJ Ankit: 7PM till 9PM

Zone 2 Narsima Chok, Thamel: House, Drum and Bass, Asian massive, Psy Trance
DJital: 2PM till 3PM
DJ FB Sequence: 3PM till 4PM
DJ Bhatte: 4PM till 5PM
DJ Mahesh: 5PM till 6PM
DJ Zion: 6PM till 7.30 PM
DJ Nissan: 7.30 PM till 9PM

Vacancy Announcement

An INGO dedicated to democratic development is expanding its office in Kathmandu and is requesting applications for a Senior Professional Program Manager.

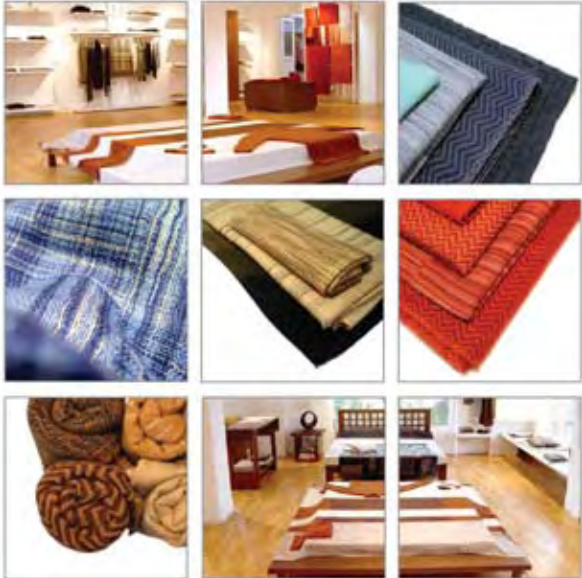
The ideal applicant will have:

- Complete fluency in English and Nepali, both oral and written,
- A higher degree in Political Science, Law or another relevant field,
- Ability to analyze the political situation in Nepal, and help design effective programs in response,
- Leadership qualities, as well as ability to work in a group environment,
- Ability to interact with different stakeholders, line ministries and government agencies,
- Professional demeanor and ability to represent the organization publicly when necessary,
- Familiarity with MS-Office suite and internet,
- Significant experience in the politics of Nepal,
- A firm non-partisan commitment to the development of democracy in Nepal,
- Three to five years of experience with INGOs desirable,
- Nepali Citizenship.

The position is based in Kathmandu, but would entail some travel to the districts. Salary would be comparable to that offered by other INGOs in Nepal, and commensurate with experience.

Please apply with CV and short essay of no more than 500 words on how you would go about developing and strengthening democracy in Nepal.

Female applicants are especially encouraged to apply, as are members of under represented population groups. Last date for receiving application December 08, 2004.
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Restoring the august house

With only a little bit more training our honourable peoples' representatives could soon join the Nepali martial arts contingent heading out to the Olympics. An intensive karate clinic was held recently to ready them for battle with the best MPs the world has to offer.

And so, for the first time in the history of this sports-loving nation, a session of parliament was converted for half a day into a *dojo*. Our MPs showed mastery of the three elements that every great

karate expert needs: an instinct for speed, strength and technique. I know talent when I see it. And looking down at the floor of the august house last week, I could

tell that the honourable representatives of the Unfed Marxist-Leninists are born martial artists.

During the first round, the UML's resident black belt made a lunge from his seat, carried out two impressive triple flips down the aisle, and emitting a warlike cry, pirouetted in the air to land a perfectly placed knuckle punch on the solar plexus of a rather astonished honourable Nepali Congressman.

That day, the Unfed Marxist-Leninists showed why their forebears of the Great Proletarian October Revolution rocked the world in ten days. Following Lenin's famous advice to "take one step forward and two steps back" the honourable member from the UML then turned around quickly and placed an accurate reverse jump kick on another unsuspecting member of the ruling party, following it up quickly with a finger jab into his (the ruling party member's) eye socket.

If they were actual blows, these karate movements could have been fatal. It is a tribute to the non-violent nature of the Nepali people that punches were pulled, and tremendous restraint was shown by all concerned. True, some honourable nose cartilage got mashed, an elected groin or two needed first aid, some parliamentary earlobes were chipped. But in the spirit of this great sport, participants showed great accountability and transparency.

By noon, the tournament was in full swing with the quarter-finals and semi-finals being waged in various parts of the august house. A particularly interesting bout was going on near the exit where an exasperated marshal was trying to untangle two MPs who, it seems, mistook this venue for the knockout of the World Wrestling Federation-Nepal (WWF/N) Tournament which was actually being held in the Upper House.

While the Nepali Working Peasants' Party cheered, the UML MP had got the Nepali Congressman in a firm half-nelson. The desperate NC MP then stuck his fingers up the nostril of his opponent, briefly easing the vice-like grip. The Honorable Speaker, who was trying to play referee, himself got embroiled in hand-to-hand combat and after that it became a three-way fight, leading to an electrifying finish in which the judges pronounced the Speaker winner.

Another infighting was taking place under the Royal Sceptre between two Nepali Congressmen who had abandoned karate rules and were involved in a Thai-style kickboxing match which was now in its final round. Further up the aisle, two honorary members were practicing throwing the Treasury Benches at each other.

By the time the final bell rang, participants, spectators and media in the gallery agreed that a good time was had by all, and that martial art was an important part of defending democracy in Nepal. If the august house was so much fun, I can't wait for the September house.

From 'The August House', Nepali Times #4, 9-15 August 2000



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