Blocked artery

RAMESWOR BONARA
in BARIDYA

I t has been nearly three weeks: nothing moves west of Nepalgunj. By blocking the main East-West Highway west of Kohalpur with barricades and bombs, the Maoists have brought western Nepal to a standstill. Hundreds of thousands of people have been affected. Many people are crossing into India to travel to other parts of Nepal like they used to do 15 years ago. Nepal is a war zone. There are three army bases, one Armed Police Force camp and a Unified Command base on the 60 km stretch between Kohalpur to Chisapani in Bardiya, yet the security forces have not ventured out to clear the road. On the same day that the army claimed a huge success in nearby Pahaun, soldiers at a base here were not moving a few km down to open up the highway that had been blocked for two weeks.

Major Yagnya Bahadur Raju Ram explained why: “It’s a trap. They block the road and ambush forces that go to clear it. We can’t go there, the local people must clear the road themselves.” Between 16-21 November, 13 soldiers and police mobilised to clear blocked highways in Banke and Bardiya were killed by landmines and in ambushes. Desperate bus passengers risked their lives clearing a landmined stretch of highway near the Bahal Bridge last week. Angered, Maoists opened fire on the packed bus, wounding three passengers.

At Pushpanagar a 14-year-old school boy tells us how the obstructions are made: “Last night 12 of them came on bicycles and forced us to stack the boulders, pack it with mud and plant the bombs inside,” he said, warning us not to go near it. It took the villagers, including school children, all night to pile the mud on the road to make it a 1 m high barrier.

Schools haven’t properly opened since Tikar and parents keep children at home afraid they may pick up a bomb or step on one along the road’s side. Twelve-year-old Sutil Puodel wonders what is happening. “We never hurt anyone, why are we being punished?”

Elsewhere, the Maoists have booby-trapped culverts and bridges with landmines. Sacks containing explosives are strewn along the highway with wires running along the road’s edge. There are dozens of similar obstructions on the highway between Kohalpur and Chisapani and even other feeder roads have been blocked. Bus companies in Nepalgunj are on the verge of bankruptcy, losing Rs 1 million a day. “At this rate we’ll become beggars and the banks will take the buses back,” says Binod Shahi of a bus syndicate.

Some of the mined portions of highway are right in front of people’s homes. “Our houses and fields are covered with bombs, where will we live?” asks an elderly farmer in Deudhakaha. On one bridge at Gyang Khola, locals took the risk of clearing a narrow section of a booby-trapped barrier. While we watched, villagers stepped gingerly across only a few metres from wired bombs.

Human rights activist Bhola Mahat points out the irony: “This is a violation of the rules of war, why are the Maoists punishing the people to take revenge on the army?”

Villagers this week cross a mud and bomb obstruction booby-trapped with bombs on the Gyang Khola Bridge along the East-West Highway.
ON HIGH ALERT: Unified Command patrol guards the Humla District Hospital during a health camp organised by the Nepal Trust last week.

FOLK BEAT: French ambassador Michel Jolivet releasing ‘Folk Roots’, a music album by Kutumba and East meets West Music Box at Aksheshwor Mahadev in Patan on 27 November.

WELCOME BACK: Royal Nepali Army brass welcome home Chief of Army Staff Pyar Jung Thapa after his three-day trip to India on Tuesday evening.

MOONLIT: The Tula furnished community celebrates Halimani Bwayagu marking the first full moon after Dasain on 26 November at Annapurna temple, Axon.

CHARLES HAVILAND
KIRAN PANDAY
MIN BAJRACHARYA
KIRAN PANDAY
KING AND PRIME MINISTER: Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba welcomes King Gyanendra and Queen Komal with adda in Lumbini on Wednesday morning as the royal couple arrived by helicopter from Kathmandu.

Hi, I’m Jungey

Namaste. I am what they call the Greater One Horned Asian Rhinoceros but people here in Kasara call me Jungey. If you are visiting the Royal Chitwan National Park, you’ll see me mingling with the locals in the villages around the park headquarters or just hanging around the Gharial Breeding Centre.

In my time, One Horned Asians were nearly wiped out many years ago by guns in pith helmets who found great pleasure in shooting us while perched safe on top of elephants. If they had the guts to face us on the ground, my ancestors would have given them some real sport. Although Chitwan has been protected for 40 years now, it’s still difficult for us here. When humans want more land they take it away from us. And there are those who hunt us for our horns claiming it makes them virile. Dimwits.

Surviving is not easy because competition is tough. There are too many of us here and too little territory despite dozens of our cousins being translocated to Bardia over the past decade. That is why sometimes we go out to the village’s fields and make a little snack of their crops. I guess it’s our way of giving it back.

I was found by a ranger wandering around the jungle after I was wounded in a scrap with a larger male rhino over a girlfriend. This long gash right here on my side was where he gored me. This large cut is what they call ‘tame’, but I would really like to go back into the wild side. We rhinos are not very welcome among locals here as you can see from the cuts on my back, in the jungle we would wallow in mud pools that would disinfect them. The rangers put ointment on them, but they don’t heal as well.

If only humans could learn to live with nature in harmony, we would all be much happier.

Anyway, if you come to Chitwan, I would recommend, drop by and say hello to me. Go to the warden’s office in Kasara and ask for Jungey. They’ll know where to find me.

(Alok Tumbahangphey)
FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- Photography workshop by street children on 3 December followed by an exhibition. 10AM-15PM at NEFEJ, Thapathali. 9861705487
- Children United Against HIV/AIDS Art by Kathmandu Valley School students on 3 December. 5.30 PM onwards at Moksh, Pulchowk. 528703
- A Touch of Purity Paintings by Erina Tamarak at Gallery Nine, Lajimpat. Until 3 December. 4428964
- Nepal Kaleidoscope Photo Competition at Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal. 3-4 December. 4780394
- Life through the Lens Photographs by Kishor Kayastha at Indigo Gallery Until 10 January. 4413860, indigo@tink.com.np
- Near Wild Heaven, Voice from the Mountain Photos by Yuke Akiba at Park Gallery, Pulchowk. Until 5 December. 5520207
- Chinese Handicraft Exhibition at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal. Revisited. 5-12 December. 4247834
- Spirit of Emotions Abstract paintings by Ramesh Khanal. 6-16 December. 4419353
- Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival at the Russian Culture Centre, Kamal Pokhral from 9-12 December. 5542254
- Poster exhibition of Japanese Graphic Art at Japanese Embassy Hall, Pulpani. 9.30 AM-4.30 PM. Until 10 December

EVENTS

- Christmas Spree at Cross Kitchen, Lajimpat on 4 December, 10AM-15PM. 9861838806
- Reception to honour Fr Donnelly on being decorated with the Suprabhak Gokhsh Dakshin Bahu. 5PM on 4 December at GAA Hall. Contributions Rs 100-4417485
- Third Career Carnival at St Xavier’s College, Maharajgunj on 4 December. Free entrance. 4547334
- The Great Dictator a film by Charles Chaplin at 5PM on 5 December at The Film Club, Bagbahan, Patan Dhoka. Tickets Rs 50,
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Into the Thunder Dragon (5) 3:15 PM
Canada, 2002. Sean White
Unbelievingly about Duk Ju.

Some Routs Grow Upwards-The Theatre of Ratan Thiyam (5) 2:30 PM
India, 2002. Kartik Joshi/Malia Rao
The guru and the troops in Manipur.

Nina Tomla Sherpa (5) 3:35 PM
Mr Shopa speaks.

6 DECEMBER, SATURDAY

The Adventure Is Not Yet Over (49') 2PM
Bonington reflects on a life of climbing.

Makalu, That Old Dream (89') 2PM
Italy, 2004, Priscila Botto/Paulo de Barros
A photographic quest to save Tasmazia.

Bigger is not better. Mouse (7') 5"
UK, 2003. Helen Atkinson
Daughters of Everest

The Conquest of K2 (42') 2PM
Italy, 2004, Alessandro Sartorolla
The historic conquest of K2.

Makalu, That Old Dream (89') 3:15 PM
Spain, 2004, Jesus Bosque
Tragedy of a Spanish team on Makalu.

K2. The Second Attempt (42') 2PM
Estonia, 2004, Liivo Niglas
Himalayan quest.

NUTS & BOLTS

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As India moves to meet a new year’s day deadline to comply with the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) regime of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) the cheap, generic anti-AIDS drugs that this country is famed for could be a thing of the past.

Last month, the Hyderabad-based pharmaceutical Hetero Drugs Limited voluntarily withdrew all six generic antiretroviral (ARV) drugs from WHO’s list of approved drugs following concerns about their laboratory tests. ARVs are substances used to kill or inhibit the multiplication of retroviruses such as HIV.

It was the 3rd time since June that an Indian company has removed anti-AIDS drugs following WHO inspections which claimed that bioequivalence tests (meant to show the drugs have the same effect as the original patented brands) were faulty. This has deeply upset those involved in fighting the global HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Earlier this month Indian pharmaceutical giant Ranbaxy pulled its AIDS drugs off the WHO’s list after the global body claimed there were discrepancies in the equivalence tests. It followed the removal by India’s Cipla of two HIV/AIDS drugs in June for similar problems.

Cipla is the Indian company credited with introducing the ‘fifor-a-day’ treatment that dramatically transformed drug access for HIV-infected people around the world. Ranbaxy and Cipla were able to prove to WHO, before the voluntary pull-off, that their ARVs met the global body’s bioequivalence standards — though not before their world business had taken a knock that benefited the manufacturers of costlier patented drugs.

That initially led to charges from activists that the world health body was acting at the behest of Western pharmaceutical giants. Things have now become even more complicated: why did the two Indian pharmaceutical companies pull their ARVs from the market if they had insisted all along that their drugs met WHO pre-qualification standards?

“We are concerned over the withdrawals. Earlier it was WHO which dropped the drugs. This time the companies are doing it on their own. We may ask the Drugs Controller of India (DCGI) to look into the issue,” a senior health official said.

WHO’s pre-qualification list was created to guide procurement by aid agencies and donors interested in fighting the global HIV/AIDS epidemic and includes more than 60 ARVs made by both patented and generic drug manufacturers.

Drug policy expert Mira Shiva says the actual culprit in Hetero, Ranbaxy and Cipla pulling out the drugs was actually the WTO and not WHO. She says Indian pharmaceutical companies that specialise in cheap generic drugs could face legal action initiated by the WTO if they continued to manufacture and sell them after 1 January, 2005.

TRIPS has been identified as one of the worst international trade regimes and resistance to it in developing countries has come from farmers, public interest and human rights groups.

TRIPS agreement, introduced in the late 1990s, defines how products can be protected from piracy. A major criticism has been that in its current form, intellectual property rights regimes such as TRIPS serve to stiffen competition.

“Excessively high levels of intellectual property protection required by TRIPS have shifted the balance away from public interest, towards monopolistic privileges of IPR holders,” says Martin Khor of the Malaysia-based Third World Network.

“This undermines sustainable development objectives, including eradicating poverty, meeting public health needs, conserving biodiversity, protecting the environment and the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights.”

India’s pharmaceutical business has followed the fiercely nationalistic India Patents Act of 1970 that fostered the phenomenal growth of the industry that came to be hailed by the United Nations Council for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) as a model for developing countries.

According to a World Bank study in the mid-1990s prices for four typical drugs were 10 times more expensive in Pakistan, 17 times more expensive in Britain and 37 times more expensive in the United States than in India.

Poonam Mani of UNAIDS says patients should continue using Ranbaxy and CPLA drugs that are available in the market. “We want to clarify this so that patients do not panic. The voluntary withdrawals do not mean the drugs are not good,” she says, warning that those of the drug would develop resistance. India has 5.1 million people afflicted with HIV and the number for Asia is said to be 8.2 million.

Ranjit Devraj

**KATHMANDU INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN FILM FESTIVAL 2004**

The third edition of the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival this year is scheduled for 9-12 December, coinciding with the International Mountain Day on 11 December. Screened back-to-back at the Russian Cultural Centre, it will bring together 40 of the best international mountain films produced over the last three years.

The main aim of the festival is to entertain, inform and educate viewers about life and times in the mountain regions from the Andes to the Tatra, to the Himalaya. The range of presentations from 51 countries include adventure cinema, experimental shorts, light-hearted commentary and feature films. KIMFF 2004 will open with the premiere of On The Road with the Red God: Machhinchandranath by filmmaker Kesang Teeten.

**Eiger North Face**

**Sabuk Uprising**

**The conquest of K2**

This year, KIMFF has several satellite activities lined up: 10 December–Half-day workshop on Learn to Shoot like a Pro 11 December–Photo exhibition on Alps-Himalaya, On-the-spot painting contest for children, a ‘Know Your HIMAL’ quiz 12 December–Slide presentation,lecture on Nepal’s biodiversity by Dr Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha

Films will be screened from 9.30 AM to 6.30 PM at the Russian Cultural Centre, Kamalpokhari. All films are in English or subtitled.
Win-win situation
With a few more tournaments, our golfers could be hitting a win

I grew up playing this game at the Royal Nepal Golf Club. In those days, golf was about trying to win club level tournaments. The biggest accomplishment was to win the Club Championship, the most prestigious event of all, played off scratch (no handicap) in a matchplay format (one on one).

Back then it was rare for any golfer in Nepal to travel abroad to participate in international tournaments. Things changed however in 1993 after Surya’s International tournaments began in Kathmandu.

After this event, Nepal’s golf outlook changed dramatically for everyone involved with the sport, from professionals to general golfers, right up to those developing golfing facilities.

Before 1993 there were just two professional golfers in Nepal, Ghanashyam Thapa and Rithe Sapkota. Today, there are just over 20. The number of golfers has multiplied five-fold and together with them, the golfing facilities. After that watershed year, many Nepali golfers also began playing in international tournaments.

Surya Nepal has certainly helped improve the standards of golf in Nepal. We don’t have many professional tournaments and every pro golfer here and even general golfers, spend the entire year in anticipation. Some wait to participate, some just want to witness it.

Even with such interest and enthusiasm, we have yet to see a Nepali winning. In my opinion, the lack of tournaments for professionals is the main reason for our golfers not being able to come out on top. Pro golfers in Nepal have very few opportunities to compete, hardly five tournaments in a year. This is just not enough for a person to visibly consider making golf their profession. Compare this to the Indian professionals who have almost 30 major events a year.

The result is that the Indian standard of golf has grown tremendously and their players have been performing better every year. As expected, the Indian pros dominate the Surya Nepal Masters. The closest a Nepali came to winning was back in 1996 at the Royal Nepal Golf Club when Deepak Thapa Magar finished second. Few years after that, Deepak Thapa Magar got an opportunity to participate in a preparatory tournament in Kathmandu. He did well and won the tournament.

The world was a blur, my mind was blank as I plummeted 10 meters in five seconds to within nine metres of the boulder-strewn rapids. Why resort to medication when you can jump off a bridge? Then the cord caught and the swing began, the adrenaline rush and euphoria that follows is hard to describe. Swing bungee maybe scarier than bungee but the swing factor adds more fun and pizzazz to the experience.

Travelling at 160 kmph, the thrill is prolonged. The swing adds a feeling of flight, rather than just a fall. They say once you have done it you are addicted to the adrenaline rush and you gain more confidence.

After all, if you’ve jumped off a bridge 160m above a raging river and survived… you can do anything.

Swing bungee is S80 for tourists and Rs 3,000 for Nepalis. Extra swing cost S25. For a fee of S15 and Rs 700 for Nepalis you can go and watch. The Last Resort is located on the Kathmandu-Llhasa highway 100 km from Kathmandu.

Contact: The Last Resort
Tel: 4700525
email info@lresort.com
website: www.lresort.com

AARTI BASNYAT
at the LAST RESORT

The terms of reference given to us were: jump off a bridge 160m above the Bhote Kosi with a cord tied to you and swing like a yo-yo.

Oh yes, the cord is able to sustain 4.3 tons and it is all safer than the bus ride to from Kathmandu to the Last Resort. (That’s not saying much, given the number of road accidents on Nepal’s highways these days.)

Still, all the prep talk did not prepare us for the sheer fear of jumping into the void to swing like Tarzan (or Jane) on a vine.

Waiting out our turn, we watched how the others did it. They walked the plank to the edge and jumped into the canyon below and swung back-and-forth on the bungee cord.

After lunch, we were asked to sign a form stating we were fully responsible for our actions. It felt like we were signing a death wish but we signed anyway.

Like sacrificial goats we were weighed, our weights written on the back of our hands and then we were led down to the bridge where the never-ending wait began.

Unlike the bungee cord, the rope for the swing bungee is not attached underneath the bridge but on to a steel cable approximately 140m downstream. So, unlike a standard jump you don’t just go down vertically but also swing horizontally over the river. Fear crept in, every cell in my being rebelled against the idea of stepping off into nothingness.

The queue for jumping was not according to weight, as we had initially thought. Some had just lost their nerves, so pushed to the front while I had some of my carefully built-up courage.
Bhote Kosi
Kantipur, 29 November

The Bhote Kosi Power Company has put forward a new proposal to seek a "mutually acceptable solution" out of its Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA). Bhote Kosi has been engaged in a controversy for building a power plant that had more capacity than was agreed. The NEA has refused to pay for the extra power, while the Texas-based Pandoa Energy which is the joint venture company, is pressing the government to amend the license agreement. The joint venture company got an agreement to generate 36 megawatt but put up turbines generating 45 megawatt. Dikpa Gyawali, former hydropower minister, had set up an investigation committee under the ministry of water resources Development which had confirmed that the company’s turbines were indeed of 45 megawatt capacity. Ever since, Bhote Kosi has been desperate to amend the license agreement. A member of the development says Bhote Kosi is actually generating power illegally at the moment. The government had tried to push a new agreement in exchange for an additional Rs 9 million annually but it was stopped and now the government claims the NED would be the loser. The disagreement between Bhote Kosi and the NEA is that the payment is for 1.7 million units of electricity over the past three years which would cost Rs 3.5 million. If the NEA's latest proposal would require NEA to pay this final amount and not build the plant to pay for the extra in power. In addition, Bhote Kosi has also proposed to take out a clause pegging unit on the previous agreement of 23 percent annually on the American dollar.

Conrad Umesh
Nepal Samacharpatra, 26 November

Netra Regini alias Conrad Umesh who took part in attacks in Dolakha and Makawanpur, Terathum and Taplejung says he still has not understood ‘Panchangachali’. “They tried to态度 that ‘isp service, but I don’t understand what it was,” he says. “The philosophical understanding within the party has become weak. This grows among gun-toting party workers, arms management will be different,” he added.

Conrad Umesh was the Maoist district secretary for Sindhupalchowk, Seven months ago, after he was wounded in an attack, doctors told him that his left hand might be paralyzed. He admitted himself to a hospital and did not return to the party. He has not surrendered to the state either. Now, he wants to work as an independent leftist. During the Panchayat era, he was a student at the Nepal Law Campus. Later, he worked as a teacher in Sankhuwasabha and joined the UML. He became a member of the District Development Committee but when the party broke up, he contacted the Maoists and began helping their committees in Sankhuwasabha and the eastern hills. The ‘democratic parties’ were corrupt but then the Maoists began to use arms. I did not want to work on the military front and opted to work with the administrative part, whenever questions arose, I had answers,” he said. “There was no inaccuracy that with the party principles were carried out, I was. All the people and asked for forgiveness.” He regrets. “I still want to die for my country but not that way. The mind must always be stronger than the gun.” He is a genuine supporter of the Maoist party, he says he will come out in the open. “I want to see the day when parties begin acting for the good of the country’s common people, and letting them decide.”

Reinstating issues
Sushil Koirala in Desbantra, 28 November

There is a conspiracy against democracy. All alternative state powers after October 20, 1990 should be杜绝了民主性. King Mahendra introduced the advisory council system. This is his political game. We see a similar scene now and that is what Girija Prasad Koirala has been warning time and again. Everything is aimed at taking away the gains of the 1990 People’s Movement and the constitution. There have been some interesting developments in the political spectrum. The king held a lengthy meeting with Biju Bahadur Thapa after which Thapa declared the establishment of a new party. Royalists have been floating authoritarian ideas, bringing elections to the country. This indicates that the king is up to something. And our party president believes the king is setting up an advisory council.

The king’s intentions are quite clear. If he wants to rule. As a lip service, he says he will bring together all political forces and move ahead with democracy and human rights but in reality he has dismantled 1990s one by one: democratic institutions like the constituencies, multi-party system, human rights, rule of law and people’s power. We still believe that the reinstatement of the parliament will bring democracy back on track. It also seems that the political and constitutional deadlock and help chart out a peaceful solution. But certain quarters with vested interests deliberately ignore these arguments. These were the same people who once argued that the house could not be reinstated before its lifetime of five years was over. And now the king himself says that the House should have been reinstated before the five-year timeframe and that it is too late now. This constitution did not envisage a situation in which the country lived without parliament for four years. It has been two and half years since we had a parliament.

Parliament has been filed at the Supreme Court seeking its revision of the decision to approve the dissolution of the House of Representatives. Without an answer to the attacks that were not in accordance with the party principles were carried out, we, the people and asked for forgiveness.” He regrets. “I still want to die for my country but not that way. The mind must always be stronger than the gun.” He is a genuine supporter of the Maoist party, he says he will come out in the open. “I want to see the day when parties begin acting for the good of the country’s common people, and letting them decide.”

Closing in
Raman Giri, government chief of staff

After the completion of the fourth convention of the people’s united committee, we implemented the decision made at the meeting. That includes taking approved decisions to the highest levels. What you call abduction of the people, we call voluntarism. We have been gathering people and training them. We completed the eight-kilowatt micro-hydropower plant in Janakpur which is possible only because of the voluntary labour provided by the local people. We spent Rs 60,000 to build two roads in Chaurajhara and four ponds in Gamala. More than 150 latrines have been established in the villages. The next 200 homes will be located. In the near future, we will produce five kilowatt electricity. There have been significant developments in agriculture also. In Chiplikhola, there is a vegetable plot connected to the village. Farmers. They are also trained to make 500 swails. We plan to popularize the project. We also cooperate because we know they could help raise living standards. Right now, we have 11 vegetable plots which are related to medicine, two to livestock and the rest are hotels. In Rukumkot, the army destroyed a hotel. It is under construction now. We wish to make schools peaceful areas but the security force remains extensive and students who support us morally. They arrest them and they are ‘disappeared’. As a result, we arrest teachers and students who spy against us too. When we begin the people’s war, our aim was to strengthen base areas. Now that we have achieved our goal, we are preparing to declare some VDCs base areas. We have shut down

regions where security forces move frequently. Such places will be allowed to reopen if security forces remain confined to their camps.

Maoist Malaku
Samruk, 25 November issue

TASHIKUAI—Thanks to Maoist conflict, the people of this village below Malaku who had been eking out a living on tourism are back to their poverty-ridden ways. Tourists have fled from the area and with them, the dreams of the locals. Nar Bahadur Gumar, former deputy chairman of Malaku VDC used to make Rs 3,000 working as a porter from Tashikau to Malaku Base Camp. The people of the area made round about Rs 20,000 each season, enough to run their household for the rest of the year. “Now, we don’t have much choice, we head down the valley for work,” says Gumar. The local income resource ran dry after the Maoists destroyed the central office of the Malaku Barun National Park. There is no market even for vegetables and dairy products after the park officials abandoned the area. Another VDC chairman, Pema Sherpa, used to run a lodge here since 1986. He made Rs 20,000 per month until tourists stopped coming altogether in 2000. In the heydays of trekking, Sherpa used to charter helicopters to bring supplies from Hille to his lodge. Gone are those days. “There may be one tourist a day, and even they complain about the money they have to pay the Maoists along the way and stay in tents,” he says. “They used to be up to 50 lodges here in the 1990s, most of them are closed.

The lack of tourists has its positive side: food is now affordable. “A chicken used to cost Rs 70 and honey Rs 60. It has come down to Rs 4. Teachers and students to survive because the villagers would not sell us food,” recalls teacher Mohan Niraula in Setida. But with the tourists gone, the foodstuff is cheaper. “We can afford to live here again,” says Niraula. Then people got worse as the Maoist activities intensified and the teachers had to survive on whatever food their students gave.

Tourists started coming to Malaku, the fifth highest peak in the world, when Maoists began collecting taxes and treating them badly. Some tourists came up to Setida and returned after being unable to meet the Maoist demand of Rs 5,000 per tourist. Harka Gurung, a member of the Maoists in Sankhuwasabha hands his receipt book that shows the group used to collect up to Rs 60,000 a day from tourism. “Tourists who pay who can go to base camp, those who can’t pay,” he says. He adds that the tourists who pay were a blessing to the tourist who he says tried to “bully” him, and adds that American tourists are not allowed in this area.

Rangers in action
Bimal Khaduparsiya, 1-15 December

The battle for Panguna on the 20 November coincided with the third anniversary of the Guerilla attack after which the Royal Nepal Army entered the fray against the Maoists. It was also the army’s most successful offensive so far. Panguna was the supply centre for the Maoists’ entire mid-western region andervoiced a heavily-fortified Maoist base in inhospitable terrain at night. A lot of the credit goes to the army’s trained Rangers which was set up in the last three years. They were trained by the US special forces in various anti-terrorism operations in Lele and are armed with modern Colt Commando submachine rifles, light communication gear, night-vision equipment and closely coordinating operations with the special train. The train is not the only commando unit with the RNA, earlier the British trained ‘Sherpa’ and the ‘Gha’ Unit of the anti- terrorism force. Now the RNA has unified these two units and formed the Blaibat Gan.
Kishore Nepal in Himal Khabarpatra, 1-15 December

NAUMULE, Daillekh—For the Maoists, Daillekh’s Kalika Forest is a strategic corridor joining their training grounds from Achham, Bajura, Kailikot to the north and Jajarkot, Rukum and Rolpa to the east. Naumule is the only place where Maoist violence and killings have been so prevalent in Daillekh. Naumule is a critical buffer zone between the district headquarters and Kalika, which is why they concentrated their actions even since destroying the police post here in 2001. Even till a year ago, the Maoists were solely in control of Naumule. Now, because of their own excesses, the rebel presence here grew steadily weaker and they undermined themselves. They hanged religious activities, didn’t allow the local people to worship in temples, play traditional music during festivals or allow children to go to school. Daillekh has some of the most-revered Hindu shrines in the region including temples where natural gas seeping out of the earth have created eternal flames that have been worshipped for centuries. If only there were better roads, these shrines would be popular pilgrimage destinations. Most of the priests who attended these temples have been chased away and recently Maoists cut off the legs of the 72-year-old priest Bhagwan Nath Yogi. The people of Daillekh had accepted these atrocities because they feared retribution from the rebels. But the Maoists began putting too much pressure on the local people and the last straw was the requirement that every household provide one person as a ‘whole timer’ to the rebel force. It culminated on 24 November when the women of Daillekh spontaneously came together to protest. There were around 5,000 people shouting anti-Maoist and pro-peace slogans. Social worker Krishna Shahi (pictured here on magazine cover) who rallied the women of the 13 surrounding VDCs emerged as the informal coordinator of the protests. “We have set an example for the people of Daillekh and for the rest of Nepal, let’s hope all the victims of Maoism hear our call,” Shahi says. Others warned political parties from trying to take credit for the protests, saying the demonstrations were non-partisan and an eruption of anger and desperation.

After the protests, the army has decided to move a base to guard Daillekh against Maoist revenge attacks. The security forces also want to capitalise on these spontaneous protests by the people. During the Daillekh demonstrations, 27 Maoists surrendered to the security forces and 73 others have given up with documents, small arms as well as the money they had extorted from the local people. Taking its cue from Daillekh, the resistance spread to Naumule and Salleri. The people here were angry at the Maoists for their campaign to ‘join the movement, leave the village or live with broken limbs’. Since October, locals have been taking Maoist recruiters, tying them up and handing them over to the security forces. Fearing that the resistance would spread, the Maoists attacked Naumule and Salleri on 16 November and shot dead 61-year-old ex-servicevman Balbir Gurung, his eight-year-old grandson, Ashok Gurung and farmer Durga Bahadur Khadka. There are now 2,000 refugees from Salleri and Naumule living in schools in Daillekh and they haven’t gone back even though the security forces have taken over their village. Ashok’s mother, Atiram Gurung left her son’s body on his bed at home and says she is too terrified to go back. The Rs 30 million that Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba announced as relief to the refugees is not going to go far, even if it is distributed to the genuinely needy.

Even though the Daillekh uprising was spontaneous and unprecedented, it is not going to be easy for the government to take advantage of it. Government presence is nil in many parts of the country and it first needs to show that it is a viable alternative that reflects and acts on the citizen’s concerns. Given the disarray and disunity of the political parties, it is unlikely that Daillekh’s brave resistance can be replicated nationwide.

Kanti Ranjan Karki, 2 December

Five thousand women gathered in Dullu to protest Maoist atrocities, but what are the chances it will spread?

Security forces. Fearing that the resistance would spread, the Maoists attacked Naumule and Salleri on 16 November and shot dead 61-year-old ex-servicevman Balbir Gurung, his eight-year-old grandson, Ashok Gurung and farmer Durga Bahadur Khadka. There are now 2,000 refugees from Salleri and Naumule living in schools in Dullu and they haven’t gone back even though the security forces have taken over their village. Ashok’s mother, Atiram Gurung left her son’s body on his bed at home and says she is too terrified to go back. The Rs 30 million that Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba announced as relief to the refugees is not going to go far, even if it is distributed to the genuinely needy.

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Iraq’s silent dead

America has lost its margin between insurgents and civilians

Evidence that America’s war in Iraq has killed tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians is mounting. Yet this carnage is systematically ignored in the United States where the media and government portray a war in which there are no civilian deaths because there are no Iraqi civilians, only insurgents.

American behaviour and self-perceptions reveal the ease with which a civilised country can engage in large-scale killing of civilians without public discussion. In late October, the British medical journal _Lancet_ published a study of civilian deaths in Iraq since the US-led invasion began. The sample survey documented an extra 100,000 Iraqi civilian deaths compared to the death rate in the preceding year, when Saddam Hussein was still in power – and this estimate did not even count the excess deaths in Fallujah, which were deemed too dangerous to include.

The study noted that the majority of deaths resulted from violence and that a high proportion of the violent deaths were due to US aerial bombing. Epidemiologists acknowledged the uncertainties within these estimates but presented enough data to warrant an urgent follow-up investigation and reconsideration by the Bush administration and the US military of aerial bombing of Iraq’s urban areas.

America’s public reaction has been as remarkable, for the reaction has been no reaction. The vaunted _New York Times_ ran a single story of 775 words on page eight of the paper on 29 October. The _Times_ reporter apparently did not interview a single Bush administration or US military official. No follow-up stories or editorials appeared, and no _New York Times_ reporters assessed the story. Coverage in other US papers was similarly frivolous. The _Washington Post_ on 29 October carried a single 758-word story on page 16.

Recent reporting on the bombing of Fallujah has also been an exercise in self-denial. The _New York Times_ on 6 November wrote ‘warplanes pounded rebel positions’ in Fallujah, without noting that ‘rebels positions’ are actually in civilian neighbourhoods. Another _New York Times_ story on 12 November, citing ‘military officials’, dutifully reported that ‘Since the assault began on Monday, about 600 rebels have been killed along with 18 American and five Iraqi soldiers’. The issue of civilian deaths was not even raised. Violence is only one reason for the increase in civilian deaths in Iraq. Children in urban war zones die in vast numbers from diarrhoea, respiratory infections and other causes owing to unsafe drinking water, lack of refrigerated food and acute shortages of blood and basic medicines at clinics and hospitals (that is, if civilians even dare to leave their houses for medical care). Yet the Red Crescent and other relief agencies have been unable to relieve Fallujah’s civilian population.

On 14 November, the front page of _The New York Times_ led with the following description: ‘Army tanks and fighting vehicles blasted their way into the last main rebel stronghold in Fallujah at sundown on Saturday after American warplanes and artillery prepared the way with a savage barrage on the district. Earlier in the afternoon, 10 separate plumes of smoke rose from southern Fallujah as it was bombarded against the desert sky and probably convinced extraordinary casualties for the insurgents. There is, once again, virtually no mention of the catastrophe for civilians caught against that desert sky. There is a hint, though, in a brief mention in the middle of the story of a father looking over his wounded sons in a hospital and declaring, “New Americans are shooting randomly at anything that moves.”’

A few days later, a US television film crew was in a bombed-out mosque with US troops. While the cameras were rolling, a US marine turned to an unarmed and wounded Iraqi lying on the ground and murdered the man with gunshots to the head. (Reportedly, there were a few other such cases of outright murder.) But the American media more or less brushed aside this shocking incident, too. _The Wall Street Journal_ actually wrote an editorial on 18 November that criticised the critics, noting as usual that whatever the US does, its enemies in Iraq do worse, as if this excuses American abuses. It does not. The US is killing massive numbers of Iraqi civilians, embittering the population and the Islamic world, laying the ground for escalating violence and death. No number of slaughtered Iraqis will bring peace. The American fantasy of a final battle in Fallujah or elsewhere, or the capture of some terrorist mastermind perpetuates a cycle of bloodletting that puts the world in peril. Worse still, America’s public opinion, media, and election results have left the world’s most powerful military without practical restraint.

Jeffrey D Sachs is Professor of Economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.
Our pilots are being pirated

NAVIN SINGH KHADEKA

Royal Nepal Airlines pilots are regarded as some of the best in the world with thousands of flying hours in some of the world’s most difficult terrain. For a long time, a sense of pride about flying the national flag kept them here. But increasingly fed up with poor working conditions, lack of growth prospects and attracted by salaries sometimes fifty times higher than what they earn here, there is an exodus of Royal Nepal Airlines pilots.

“Nepali pilots have very good job prospects because foreign airlines recognise and value their experience,” says Captain Vijay Lama who has just upgraded from Twin Otters to 75s. “The only way the airline can keep its pilots is to make it financially rewarding for them to stay.”

This is a huge loss for the airline which has invested a lot of money in training the pilots. There used to be 130 pilots flying for Royal Nepal Airlines in its heydays in the 1990s when the airline had four jets, two Avions, two Pilatus Porters and nine Twin Otters. Today, there are fewer than 60 pilots flying two 75s and four Twin Otters. Some two dozen pilots who retired have not been replaced and others have left to join foreign carriers.

Airlines sources say the first phase of the exodus was 10 years ago when domestic private carriers lured away Royal Nepal Airlines pilots with higher salaries. As private airlines expanded and added modern equipment, pilots of the state-owned carrier found it better to switch jobs than keep flying ageing Twin Otters. Only after Capt P N Rai left Royal Nepal Airlines to join Emirates in 1988 and Capt A Z Sherpa who switched to Cathay Pacific did more pilots fly away to foreign airlines. The biggest recruiter of Nepali pilots in recent months has been Phuket Air, a private Thai operator that is beginning thrice-weekly Bangkok-Kathmandu-Dubai flights from January. Phuket has the same model, Boring 750s. By 2008, Nepal has pilot who were flying for the past 15 years.

The first to go earlier this year were recently-retired Royal Nepal pilots, Capt RK Lama and BM Amatya. According to International Civil Aviation Organisation rules, they can fly for another two years. Then Capt GP Nepal and Capt KR Manandhar also left to fly for Phuket. Royal Nepal sources told us more pilots have shown interest and may leave soon.

“This is an insurmountable loss for Royal Nepal Airlines and a big worry for foreign airlines. Phuket says an airline source citing the cost of regular simulator training over the years keeping the pilots licenses valid. The average salary of a Royal Nepal Airlines 757 captain with 15,000 hours is Rs 18,000 a month with allowances for flying time and layoffs. Phuket is said to be offering a minimum of Rs 2,88,000 per month plus perks.

And Qatar and Gulf Air also interviewed a few Royal Nepal pilots, but although a 757 rating allows pilots to fly 767s that Gulf operates, there are problems with equipment compatibility. Former Royal Nepal Airlines pilots who were flying for now-defunct private domestic operators like Necon have also left, with two pilots of IndiGo’s Decem Air which operates ATR-72s.

Paradoxically, the shortage of pilots among Nepal’s rapidly growing domestic airline fleet is being filled by Indian pilots and Cosmic Air’s new Fokker 100s are coming down by European instructor pilots who are training Nepali crew. “The traffic is not all one-way,” says one domestic airline operator, “there are many Indians flying for Nepal airlines, especially those that operate Domer 22s.”

Royal Nepal’s shrinking fleets and irregular service also means the remaining pilots get barely enough hours in the air to keep their licenses valid.

“There is just no career growth even Royal Nepal Airlines, staff morale is low, you see corruption every day, it is disgusting,” admits a pilot who says after flying Twin Otters for many years out of a sense of duty, he is thinking of leaving. But by far the biggest reason for going abroad is poor pay. “It is the money factor,” says Capt Shiva Shrestha. “What we get paid in a month what foreign pilots earn flying for an hour.” Considering the terrain they fly in, Nepali pilots are rather the best and qualified enough to operate in any part of the world and there are carriers willing to pay good money for them.

Not everyone is sad to see the pilots go. “We must be happy for them, they will have exposure to state-of-the-art equipment, they will earn more, and have better job satisfaction.”

What’s going on? “asks Royal Nepal’s chief pilot, Capt VK Shrestha, who retired recently. “When pilots find better opportunities they will leave because at the end of the day it’s all about flying higher.”

Royal Nepal Airlines captains are bailing out

Why this out migration of pilots?

It is a serious problem. Since the open sky policy 10 years ago, 42 pilots have left Royal Nepal Airlines. The main reasons are salaries and perks which are way below market rates even within Nepal. There is only one way to correct this: pay pilots more. If management can’t raise their salaries, they should up their allowances. Or else the pilots that earn a tax-payer’s money may one day have planes and route rights but no pilots.

Which sector is most affected by the exodus?

Domestic has been hit harder and there is actually a shortage of pilots. The remaining pilots are flying up to 100 hours a month, which is the upper limit. How long can they go on like that?

Where are the pilots going?

Actually, I don’t see many of them going to other countries. Yes, some have gone to Thailand and more elsewhere but as the domestic airlines grow there are lots of well-paying opportunities right at home. Until recently, private Nepal airlines were only flying turboprops, now Cosmic is flying Fokker 100s. I hear other airlines are also upgrading to jets. But more important than equipment is that they are paid almost as much as foreign airlines.

How has Royal Nepal Airlines management responded to the departure of its pilots?

They have been quite indifferent. The standard reaction is: people come and go. That attitude has backfired. Management is unable to fill the vacancies. And airline pilots need to be skilled, well-trained with regular simulator tests. More importantly, after 9/11, getting pilot training in the US and in Europe has become more difficult. Even senior pilots like us have to obtain security, justice and defense clearances. That is why private airlines are poaching from Royal Nepal.

Who is to blame?

Our politicians were never serious, they interfered with the operations and ruined it. Opening our sky does not mean you sell off the national interest. We should have never given away our fifth freedom rights at the cost of the national flag carrier. Even Japan doesn’t allow Royal Nepal Airlines to pick up passengers between Osaka and Shanghai, yet our politicians have given away our rights to Kathmandu to onward destinations to foreign airlines. What did the country achieve doing that? We didn’t get more tourists, we just hurt our own national airlines.

Is this a conspiracy to ground the airline?

I wouldn’t be surprised if a liberal mission was working on a plan to kill off Royal Nepal Airlines. We believe that the country needs to have a strong national flag carrier if it wants to strengthen its hold on tourism. Yet our forests and rivers were sold off, today they are selling off our air traffic rights.

But the airline is a victim of politics.

In democracy, it is natural to have a difference of opinion. But when it comes to the interest of the national flag carrier, there is no alternative but to unite. We need to learn from our past mistakes. Perhaps we did not have any vision in the past. But now we need to listen to others even if that means the opposition. We need to take progressive steps and change antiquated bylaws.
On the southern fringes of Patan, Kumalur is growing into an institutional city. It has the latest to strike roots here is the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). At a time when some international organisations are relocating from Nepal, ICIMOD plans to move into bigger and better premises.

This Sunday, King Gyennendra will inaugurate the impressive new ICIMOD secretariat built on a 1.5 hectare plot worth Rs 1 million gifted by the US government. “There are trying times in Nepal,” says Jay Campbell, director general of the institution who speaks fluent Hindi, Urdu and Nepali. “But it gives all the more reason to work with Nepali indigenous people. As an old friend of Nepal, we hope to keep being a good friend.”

ICIMOD set up shop in Kathmandu in December 1980 to spread awareness in mountain development, propel advocacy and influence government policies in the region. Coinciding with its 21st anniversary, a symposium on 'Securing Livable Livelihoods in the Hindu Kush Himalaya: Directions for Future Research, Development and Conservation' is to be held to take stock of past programs and plan new ones.

China and India, the two big ICIMOD members put up $100,000 for the building whose architectural plan was judged first in a design contest two years ago. Last minute touches are still being given as several windows disappear under floor panels. Tom Greis, the architect, takes us on a tour of the place still under construction, painting a picture of what the end result will look like.

Ellegant furniture from China will furnish the reception, he says waving at the empty spaces adding, “A Chinese carpet and dark wood will make it look authentic”. In the conference room, a stage has been set. “That is where the king will sit,” he points out. The wall hangings have a distinct Indian flavor. “This is India’s contribution. There will be a plaque stating it," says Milan Raj Tuladhar, chief administrator.

The sign at the main gate says ICIMOD in the eight different languages of ICIMOD’s member countries; Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Bangladesh and Bhutan have helped set up pavilions behind the main building, built in the traditional styles of their countries by their own craftsmen.

“As an architect, one of the innovations were the pavilions,” says Grees, admitting it was a challenge for his team. “The design had to embody the spirit of the region. This is the Hindu-Kush Himalayan range but it had to have modern standards and efficiency”. To allow it to blend in with Kathmandu Valley, the building exudes a native Nepali look but inside it reflects the diversity of the region that ICIMOD encompasses. The interiors are bright and airy, giving the effect of transparency, spaciousness, efficiency, a sense of community and cooperation. The regional character of the building’s architecture and the elegant country pavilions in the courtyard provide working space for meetings and brainstorming sessions. Even the cafeteria has been designed to encourage group work with more than four chairs at each table. Interconnectedness will encourage us to think in the integration in ICIMOD’s name into joint thinking and action,” says Campbell. “The fact that we will no longer have to use operating expenses to pay rent or loan repayment within four or five years will decrease our overhead and increase our program investments.”

Of course, there is the advantage of having ICIMOD’s demonstration site in Godavari chaur.

A tower is being set up at the back of the premises where equipment to study the phenomenon of the “South Asian brown cloud” is being set up. A laser beam that can shoot up to 60 km vertically is being installed that can measure the growing regional pollution threat, explains Bihytha Pradhan, environmental officer. “It’s the first of its kind in Nepal. We will be able to make an impact on environmental policies here and in the Himalayan regions.”

Cone surfing

While ICIMOD cements its presence in Nepal, a UN regional office has decided the security situation in Kathmandu is too hot to handle and is leaving for, guess where, Sri Lanka.

The head of the Asia South Pacific Regional Resource Facility (SURF), which provides UNDon community offices to those in Nepal, is relocating to Colombo in January. Security concerns have been cited as the main reason for the decision. It has surprised many, not the least some UN staff who told us: “It’s like jumping from the frying pan into the fire.”

In the past, truck bombs in Colombo have demolished the entire business district and an airport attack in 2001 destroyed almost the entire Sri Lankan Airlines fleet. Although things have been quiet in Sri Lanka since the ceasefire three years ago, the Tamil Tigers recently threatened to restart the war after deadlocked negotiations.

The SURF decision was reportedly made after bandas in September and recent Maoist threats, including a hoax bomb in the basement gallery of the building in which SURF is housed. The UN’s security concerns have grown after its office in Baghdad was blown up killing 15 staff. “Kathmandu has been rated a more risky place than Colombo,” one SURF staffer told us. “When we asked if Sri Lanka was safer, they said the conflict there was much more manageable than the West Bank peninsula.” He also said SURF was finding it difficult to find applicants for new positions because they didn’t want to relocate to Kathmandu.

Kanan Dixit in Lumbini

The second World Buddhist Summit, held by the Mayadevi temple and nativity site, was inaugurated by King Gyennendra on Wednesday resembled one of the royal public receptions we have seen in the past year.

The common folk were herded into cattle pens facing the harsh midday sun while the diplomats, high lamas and dignitaries were on the dais in the shade. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba’s faux pas when he missed his speech and welcomed His Majesty King Birendra to the podium was symptomatic of the rest of this confused and ill-conceived gathering.

It was a Rs 5 million plus state-sponsored show organised by institutions and individuals who lack the economic, spiritualism, either by birth or by inclination, seeking to take political advantage of this place at this time.

Kathmandu’s politicians have long hijacked Lumbini for state purposes, hoping among other things to promote a blatant but as yet unsuccessful tourism agenda. They have instigated sectarian competition in the monastic zone within the Lumbini Garden, where money and marble are given preference over ascetic concerns. Religion, variously defined, has largely hijacked what was meant to be a spiritual haven for the world’s seekers.

Part of the chaos at the conference seemed to emanate from a tussle between the Lumbini Development Trust and the government effort headed by Minister for Culture and Tourism Deep Kumar Upadhyaya, who has left next door Kapilputra. While Upadhyaya was making frantic calls to local boarding houses seeking rooms for guests, buses were just stuck on the road. The minister was micro-managing to such an extent he was bringing in all the staff that make shifts loss were best supplied with toilet paper.

The conference venue was in the scope of a permanent wedding hall with side panels made up of incongruous kitchen images showing traditional and modern paddies. Never had the Mayadevi Temple area been trampled by military boots or witnessed automatic weaponry in such numbers. The sound of army helicopters reverberated throughout the conference period.

One reason that the nation was saved from total embarrassment was that there was so little international participation in the world Buddhist summit. In contrast, the conference’s thoughtful slogan was ‘Unity in Diversity’ and this was in ample evidence in terms of Nepal participation. Gathered in this sunny venue in Rupandehi were representatives of Nepal’s hill and mountain peoples, from the Manang to the Sherpa, Loba, Tamu, Thakali, Magar, Kirats, and the Newars of Kathmandu Valley as a sizeable not to be missed contingent.

The substantive agenda of the conference was reserved on behalf of the beleaguered organisations by the two Shaka artists. Their researches have been the basis of much paper work. His heritage artist Kamal Shrestha made the case that Buddhism was the only world religion that had the necessary wisdom to reason enough to respect the legacy and archaeology of Lumbini. He detailed the conversion of Lumbini into ‘a playground of intellectuals’, a place where ‘sacredness, coexistence and conviviality’ were allitlled real estate amid the sublime landscape. There was a hegemonic rat race in progress, he said and Lumbini should be saved from the all-too-apparent dangers of ecoterrorism and religious parochialism. Shrestha added that the Lumbini region could never develop into a space for spiritual renewal if local communities were neglected. “Only with their participation is the future of Lumbini assured,” he concluded.

Bikshu Sugandha (Anil Shrestha), scholar of anthropology and presently a senior monk in Thailand with proximity to King Bhumibol, started his talk by asking whether peace was even possible in a war zone. Repeating a saying of Shakyamun, that “one should not become too enthusiastic,” he asked rhetorically what each of the players in Nepal today—the monarchy, the Maoist rebels and the politicians—was willing to give up in the name of peace.

“You cannot stop the war with more war and war and war,” said the Bikshu, “power will never gain us peace, only sacrifice can. Speaking up.”
Despite the worldwide hoo-hah about the world heritage site around Chomolungma being put on the UNESCO endangered list because of global warming, most people here say it is all hype.

International environmental activists campaigning against climate change have used its effect on Chomolungma and the Himalaya to draw attention to act on the Kyoto Treaty ahead of a big international conference in Argentina next week.

But here in the capital of Sherpaland, few have heard of it and when told refuse to believe that the world's highest mountain is in any danger. "Why is it that we, who live here, are always the last people to hear about anything like this?" asks Sonam G Sherpa, chairman of Namche Buffer Zone Users' Committee that oversees the environment outside the Everest National Park. Elsewhere in Namche, the politicians, hotel owners, students and even conservationists we talked to, laughed out loud when we told them of the worldwide campaign.

"I find it quite amusing to hear that Chomolungma is endangered," says Mingma Sherpa who runs the Chukum Restaurant here.

The green group, Friends of the Earth and mountaineers last week launched a worldwide campaign to lobby for emission controls saying Mt Everest and the Himalaya are melting. They petitioned UNESCO in Paris to place Everest National Park as well as reefs in Belize and glaciers in Peru on the World Heritage Danger List due to global warming. Inclusion in UNESCO's endangered list would commit the world body to take corrective measures like pressing countries around the world to cut carbon emissions.

"The World Heritage Committee must urgently investigate these sites and ensure that everything necessary is done to maintain their world heritage status, to keep people safe and to pass them on intact to future generations," said Peter Roderick of Climate Justice, a London-based green group. British mountaineer Chris Bonington, who climbed Chomolungma and Amnpupum in the 1980s agrees: "Both the beauty of this magnificent area and the livelihoods of its inhabitants are threatened by global warming."

But here in Khumbu, the Sherpas are wondering why no one ever asked them for their opinion. "Everything is decided in Kathmandu, we are the ones who are affected by climate change most. Why don't they come here and raise the issue," says Sonam Sherpa.

He says the people here have noticed the effects of climate change in a single generation: receding glaciers, glacial lakes swelling with snow melt. Dozens of people here have lost their lives in the past 15 years due to avalanches and glacial outburst floods.

Big glacial lake outbursts in 1975 and 1982 destroyed land, livestock, bridges and a hydroelectric plant when two glacial lakes burst. Despite this, people here think green groups are exaggerating the dangers for their own publicity and worry about what it will do to Khumbu's tourism, which has just started picking up again. "It sounds alarming and it is nothing new, why bring it up now?" asks Tsering Sherpa, a Namche teacher.

Even trekkers here find the news of Everest being in danger a bit odd. "Yes, I heard about it but we have to be careful such news doesn't create panic and give the impression that the mountains have melted away," says British hiker Simon Baker on his way down from Kala Patthar.

Scottish conservationist Helen Cawley who has been based in Khumbu for the last 15 years admits the news may be a bit sensational but will serve to focus global attention for industrialised nations to work seriously in reducing global warming. "If it makes powerful governments in the west take action, then it is all right," she says. "But I'd rephrase it to say the people are more in danger than Everest."
RATIFY KYOTO

Many things that urgently need to be done in this country are being sidelined because of the conflict and its attendant crises. In fact, it is not fated. In the same issue Daniel Lak tells us that the Islamist movement up to and including the insurgents is a bad idea. Joel’s article is a very bad idea. Joel’s article is the first time the Nepal media has asked the right questions about this project. As he says, the Outer Ring Road will only increase urban sprawl. It will only be welcomed by the people whose land is going to have a higher property value. What are much more necessary for the moment are: Access to all VDCs in the valley which will help the market centres and concentrate urban growth along corridors. Inner Ring Road as proposed by JICA which will relieve congestion in the city core.

In your editorial ‘The world is watching’ (#222) you say: “They want to revisit the commitments made at the Nepal Development Forum to see if resources aren’t being fungilised.” Now, what kind of a verb is ‘fungilised’? Is this derived from fungility? If so, that seems to take fungibility of English words a bit too far. Or rather it is a microbiology term derived from fungi (as in Italian, meaning to turn something into fungus). Turning public resources into private goods has certain vividness to it. I certainly hope the editors are not going ‘fungilised’ in the head.

Ben Ohara, Kathmandu

W E nepalis pride ourselves in being a tolerant society and never tire of repeating the mantra that our diverse, ethnic, linguistic and religious groups have always existed in peaceful harmony in this beautiful land.

Nepal ratifies is certainly not an issue for Kyoto. But it is an issue for us. 61.6 percent of global carbon emissions and will go ahead (Australia and Kyoto Protocol which is so plainly in our own short and long-term interests. We take pride in the fact that Hindus and Buddhist worshipped the same gods and participated in the same festivals and we boast that people of various ethnic groups claim to be Hindus and speak Nepal.

But have we ever listened to their voices of dissent? Is our tolerance based on acceptance and celebration of differences and on equality, or on a hierarchical ranking of differences or even on indifference? Do we accept cultural diversity as equals or do the dominant groups accept and tolerate other groups simply as long as they remain in their place and do not claim equality?

From the perspective of the non-dominant groups, they seem to be tolerated as long as they do not assert their religious and cultural rights. It is the dominated groups that have to show tolerance to the religions and cultures of the dominating, they have to tolerate the situation of inequality.

This is not unique to Nepal. Many countries which claim to be examples of pluralism and tolerance are in fact tolerant of people from different cultures and social classes only as long as they remain at the margins and do not assert themselves. So long as they remain apart and do not demand to interact with the dominant group as equals, they are tolerated.

Hollanda is a country famous for its tolerance. Whatever may be the official state policy and the relations between the white Dutch and westerners of different beliefs and ideologies—black Surinamese, Indonesians, and other Asians and Africans have always felt discriminated against. (See ‘Holland after van crossing the street, it was supposed to be.) So what do the Nepali people do about this? As you say, they having an incredible tolerance for accidents. If they are going to be "In the Himalayan foothills, the relative absence of such violence in Nepal doesn’t seem to prove our own rhetoric. Whether we have to ask ourselves whether we are really as tolerant of the rest of the world as we make ourselves out to be. Many of us like to believe that the Black Wednesday attack against Nepal Muslins and their mosques, houses and shops were not an example of communal or religious violence but that it was a one-off event.

Muslins have lived in Kathmandu for centuries in relative peace. Be that as it may, we continued to warm well into the 2100s even if the emission cuts under Kyoto are implemented. By 2055. The American administration is certainly not worried about that. Sometime in the middle of this century our Himalayan water towers will begin melting.

It is not a question of politics to have time horizons to worry about what will happen in 2050. The American administration is certainly not worried and our politicians are wont to argue that if the Americans aren’t buying why should we bother? Besides, the Himalayan snows will continue to warm well into the 2100s even if the cuts under Kyoto are implemented.

But the reason Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba should move urgently this week to get Kyoto ratified (by ordinance because there is no parliament) is because we stand to lose millions of dollars under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) trading the carbon we have not emitted because of Nepal’s success in promoting renewable energy.

In the next 20 years, Nepal could be rewarded for not pumping 50 million tons of carbon into the atmosphere and collect up to $200 million just from its biogas program alone. Additionally, as fossil fuels get scarce and prices increase by half the projected scenario, sometime in the middle of this century our Himalayan water towers will have started melting.

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After Russia’s ratification last month, Kyoto now addresses more than 61.6 percent of global carbon emissions and will go ahead (Australia and the United States, the two non-ratified make up the rest). Whether or not Nepal ratifies is certainly not an issue for us. But it is an issue for us. Since we do everything at the last moment anyway, it’s not too late for Deuba to move fast to get Nepal’s ratification in time for the Conference of Parties (COP-10) in Buenos Aires next week. Even if we don’t do it for the planet, let’s at least do it for ourselves.

TOP PRESS: Good news: the cabinet on Monday approved ratification. Not so good news:

COMMENT

I am an engineer of Nepal’s power sector 10 years after the inevitable collapse of the badly planned Arun III (Ten years after abandoning Arun III, #223) should take the debate to new levels for utility engineers. Unfortunately the comments by former and present vice-chairmen of the National Planning Commission do not leave much room for hope: our senior economic planners still refuse to learn the right lessons. It is amazing that Dr Ram Sharan Mahat, who won money committed to Arun III in Kali Gandaki and the smaller bilateralists spent grants their engineers in constructing new transmission lines for Nepal. It is only the World Bank that has shown singular incompetence in utilising its portion of the committed aid to get a Power Development Fund off the ground in all these 10 years. Dr Shankar Sharma couches his comment with an “I” (“if the rate of inflows did not change...”), that is like saying “we can all eat a big omelette if elephants laid eggs”. It makes a good point.

Shiva Bisangkhe, Lalitpur

RION ROAD

Thank you for the revealing piece by Padma Sunda Joshi on the absurdity of having an Outer Ring Road for Kathmandu Valley (Road to nowhere, #223). Aside from the argument against concentrating all development in Kathmandu Valley, as you also say in your editorial in the same issue (“Road to nowhere in circles”) there are other practical reasons why the Outer Ring Road is a very bad idea. Joshi’s article is the first time the Nepal media has asked the right questions about this project. As he says, the Outer Ring Road will only increase urban sprawl.

It will only be welcomed by the people whose land is going to have a higher property value. What are much more necessary for the moment are: Access to all VDCs in the valley which will help the market centres and concentrate urban growth along corridors. Inner Ring Road as proposed by JICA which will relieve congestion in the city core.

Widening of the Arniko Highway to prepare for the eastern Sindhuli access to the tarai from the Valley.

Name withheld, email

FUNGICIDE

In your last editorial (‘The world is watching’ #222) you say: “They want to revisit the commitments made at the Nepal Development Forum to see if resources aren’t being fungilised.” Now, what kind of a verb is ‘fungilised’? Is this derived from fungility? If so, that seems to take fungibility of English words a bit too far. Or rather it is a microbiology term derived from fungi (as in Italian, meaning to turn something into fungus). Turning public resources into private goods has certain vividness to it. I certainly hope the editors are not going ‘fungilised’ in the head.

Ben Ohara, Kathmandu

In your editorial ‘The world is watching’ (#222), I appreciate your courage for bringing up the crux of what I think is the ultimate challenge in Nepal... this I-can-do-nothing attitude, that whatever happens is written. If I get killed by a bus while crossing the street, it was supposed to be.” So what do the Nepali people do about this? As you say, they having an incredible tolerance for accidents. If they are going to be...
Fig-leaf elections

Insisting on polls at any cost may cost us democracy and stability

Like in most of the developing world, polls in Nepal are barely free and seldom fair even under the best of circumstances. But instances of outright intimidation of voters, as in the Indian state of Bihar for example, may be rare here. But that is because inducement makes coercion unnecessary.

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal

The government machinery can often influence the outcome of an election to its advantage without having to steal it outright.

Having been a prominent beneficiary of managed elections in the past, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba knows the advantage of conducting parliamentary elections with a cooperative administration and supportive army running the show.

Premier Deuba’s cabinet colleagues in his breakaway faction of the Nepali Congress realise that the political ground under their feet isn’t very firm. Ministers Birina
dradi Nidhi and Prakash Man Singh lost past elections despite having illustrious daddies. Their eagerness for polls at any cost is understandable.

Political opportunism is the hallmark of the ex-Panchas in the RPP and the Badi Mandal faction of the UML. Never a believer in free and fair polls, former Panchas like Minister Baburam Chauri Magar know that they are better off in a stage-managed election. Even better if such polls can be held under their own stewardship. Unencumbered by ideology, they will sail with the wind and sing praises of authoritarianism if need be.

In post-1990 politics, the UML has perfected the art of saying something in public and then doing the exact opposite. Its ‘critical support’ for the constitution ended up undermining it. Had Madhav Nepal seen in 2002 that Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba was jumping off a cliff by dissolving parliament, he wouldn’t be in the predicament he is in today. But having a reputation for political hypocrisy has its own advantages.

UML ministers sit pretty, endorsing the cabinet decision to issue poll titles and then issuing press statements that polls are impossible without peace. It’s a clever game of heads you lose and tails we win. Sometimes being too clever by half has its own hazards. Aware of risks, prominent ministers of UML are busy securing their own future.

As expected, the Maoists have rejected elections outright. A government that can’t keep national highways open, whose security forces are barely able to protect their own barracks, and which has neither the will nor the capacity to initiate peace talks with insurgents can’t be expected to hold elections except as an excuse to prolong its life or to legitimise hybrid authoritarianism.

A regime that engineered the dissolution of parliament and let the term of elected local councils lapse can’t be expected to form them again without having its own interests and dominance fully secured. It seems the only stakeholders serious about forthcoming polls are Nepal’s donors. They want the legitimacy so badly that they are ready to accept any polls as long as they are held. The argument is that if Sri Lanka, Kashmir and Afghanistan can hold elections why can’t Sindhupalchok, Kathmandu Arghakhanchi?

For a vast section of Nepalis, their representatives are still the last resort to get anything done by Kathmandu back home in the districts. Elected representatives may not be able to do anything to help constituents, but even giving a patient hearing is often therapeutic.

Insisting on an election at all cost may cost not just democracy, but the very stability of the state itself. The priority should be peace-building but the parties in power seem to have lost the will to pursue it in right earnest. That can mean only one thing: they have become irrelevant and can be shown the door without any adverse fallout.

I recognise Daniel Lak’s strengths as a reporter but I don’t understand why he is still given a slot on the editorial section of the Nepal Times. He had interesting things to say while he was still in Nepal and his western background gave him a perspective that I don’t see in our coverage.

CORRECTIONS
In the interview with Bikash Pandey (“Voter Aun there was a paragraph shift”, #223) the road to Num was to take 40 months to build and not 14 months as inadvertently stated.

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A middle-aged woman in Bayapalika lies in bed covered with a blanket, shivering. Her husband returned from India two years ago and died. She too fell ill and was diagnosed HIV-positive. She didn’t try to hide her infection and was ostracised. While she still could she tried to spread awareness among other women in her village about AIDS but now she is too weak.

The 29-year-old man had returned from India four years ago. He had been ill and the villagers all thought he had tuberculosis. Last month, he died of AIDS. “We hadn’t told anyone he had AIDS because it would have been difficult to live here,” admits his brother.

In Muli, two young men who had recently returned from India fell sick. They were being treated in the district hospital but were not responding to the antibiotics. The doctors finally got a blood test done and found they were both HIV-positive. Both are now dead.

MIAMI—In the political salons of my homeland’s capital city, there are sundry noses out of joint. They yawn left mainly but some pitch right, or go both ways according to the vicissitudes of the times. What matters is that they’re angling out of true and for an explanation, blame George W Bush.

But wait, dear reader, this is not yet another anti-American rant. I write this week about how important America is, even to those who pretend to disdain the place.

You see, this past week, Mr Bush visited my native land. He flew up for talks and dinner and flew out to the eastern side of the country to thank people there for being so friendly towards American airline passengers in the wake of 9/11.

For Canada, this was high drama. Newspapers dissected every nuance of the visit and then some. They probed the words that were spoken in public, in all a few hundred. They pondered whether two old friends like Canada and the US could ever patch up their Iraq-strained relationship. Some even printed the menu for the state dinner on their front pages. Beef was served.

Canadian beef, now banned in the USA because of fears over the mad cow disease. Food as non-too-subtle diplomacy.

And those droves of Ottawa nosed out of joint? The self-important of the capital who didn’t receive an invitation to the big feed with Mr Bush at the high table. There were only 700 place settings and like any other political hot spot, Ottawa has thousands of big egos who just know they have something important to tell the President.

Outside the banquet hall and meeting rooms was self-importance of another kind. All week long, protesters shouted anti-war slogans and baited the police. Some protesters even lit up huge marijuana cigarettes and smoked them in public in hopes that the CEO of America Inc. would sense their wrath over his country’s objections to soft drug decriminalisation in Canada. Or maybe they just wanted to get high.

The point is not in what Canadians thought about was going on. The point is that Washington simply could not care less about a visit that Canada put at the centre of its agenda. American newspapers devoted hardly an inch of column space to the trip, save for words spoken by Mr Bush about Iraq and domestic issues. American issues. In the US, no one even noticed that their president had popped across.

And that’s probably how it should be. Canada and the United States share the world’s largest trading relationship, the longest un-militarised border on the planet and a host of other commonalities that go beyond the squabbles over Iraq or beef or anything else for that matter. The US considers Canada family and although Canadians don’t like Mr Bush very much or his wars, they’re fond of their American, er, call them cousins. That’s why Canadian diplomacy is hugely focussed on Washington, on managing a massively complex but abiding relationship that blows hot, warm and occasionally chilly. But never, ever hostile. Even when Ottawa refuses to send troops to help the US invade Iraq. Even when it serves the Commander in Chief beef that’s banned at home.

Now there’s a lesson here for Nepal, for New Zealand, for Mongolia, for Belgium, for Uruguay, for, I dare say, Ukraine, for any other lightly populated or small country that has a huge neighbour. However much they annoy you, however much they seem unable to get it right sometimes, however much they ignore you or don’t take you seriously, get along with them. Keep them largely happy and put some effort into the relationship.

Start getting the dal-bhat ready for Mammoohan Singh, some gundruk and laphi, alu tareko fried in banasaapti ghula. And aila to wash it all down.
Mangalsen (left) has been hit by the twin threats of AIDS and war.ajarShakya (above) a doctor at the Bheri Zonal Hospital in Nepal.

There, addicts attend group meetings openly

This is a story of hope and courage—the very thing Nepali people need to hear today. After being drug free for a year and a half, the parents of two drug addicts approached Suraj to help their sons. The sons had already been to drug rehab several times, with no success. They absolutely refused to return to drugs because their parents give them the need each other. Ironically, many young addicts

This has been going on for four months now. Several more ex-addicts volunteered so that the others could spend time with their families and get some rest. They get no salary, no donations, no help from the government. The families give a small fee, if they can, to cover the rent, food and medicines.

The ex-addicts are inspired as well as an inspiration to others. They are truly alive, they have learnt that we are here to help each other. They have learnt the lesson that an addict can't control a drug with will power. The acid test of an alcoholic is that they can’t have just one drink. They often finish the bottle.

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Vincent Androsiglio is a former monk and Professor of Psychiatry. He runs worldwide email therapy practice while overseeing the Gateway Drug Rehab in Pokhara.

Suraj stuck a needle in his arm almost every day for seven years. He is a brown sugar heroine addict and an alcoholic. Only after numerous attempts at recovery and staying a year at a rehab in Pokhara did his life move out of hell by finding a drug rehab himself with other ex-addicts.

Helping people like us

Ex-addicts at a rehab centre in Pokhara address Nepal’s growing drug problem

Vincent Androsiglio

NATION

Ad, says HIV entered

Achham through workers returning from India. “Most of those infected have recently returned from India or have come in contact with them,” he says. But anti-AIDS activists have been blaming those traveling from India for the epidemic: may have been true in the past but now the virus is spreading rapidly within Achham and Nepal.

The conflict in Nepal’s midwest has escalated outmigration from Achham and surrounding districts, thereby increasing the danger of infection. Officials at the District Health Office in Mangalsen admit that there is no way of telling how bad the situation is because they can’t go to the villages to conduct surveys. "The situation must have grown worse but we just don’t know how much," says Khadga Bista of the district AIDS coordination committee.

A recent survey carried out by two non-governmental groups in 12 VDCs showed that there had been 128 deaths due to AIDS so far with 85 new infections and 250 AIDS orphans. "We went house to house, asking how they died, how many children they had and who else was sick, but we don’t know what the situation is like in the rest of the 75 districts," says Yogendra Oli of Gangotri Gramin Bikas March.

According to the last census, Achham’s population was 231,000, but nearly half of them could be working in India or have become internally displaced by now. If Gangoti’s survey is extrapolated to all the districts, some 1,500 people may have already died of AIDS here.

There is no estimate about HIV infections. Their situation could be serious because the public health system in the mid-west has collapsed because of the conflict. Once infected, HIV patients have no access to health care.

The German aid group GTZ recently gave 100 Kiev drug withdrawal kits to the hospital in Mangalsen but it is clear the AIDS clinic will soon run out of kits. In one week this April, of the 10 persons tested, five turned out to be HIV-positive, and two have since died. All five had returned from India, Jagat Roychow says: "We first treated them thinking it was TB, but they didn’t get better as we tested them."

As it is, Achham already had one of the lowest nutrition levels and alarming anemia especially among young girls and women. The social standing of women in Achham society is poor and food intake has dropped because of conflict-related disruptions. All this adds up to a lowering of resistance so that after women are infected, death comes quickly. Even those with opportunistic tuberculosis or other infections don’t medicate because health posts have closed down and medicines are not sent out to the villages for fear it will go out to Manish hands.

Irj Shakya is a doctor at the Bheri Zonal Hospital in Nepalgunj, he says the AIDS crisis in mid-western Nepal is become very serious because the virus keeps coming into the country through workers returning from India and warns that the response so far has been inadequate. "We must tackle the problem at its root, through local awareness and by targeting returnees. It is already getting too late," Shakya says.

But the parents couldn’t bear it. The screaming, the fighting, the physical restraining of their sons when they wanted to run away was overwhelming. So, the parents rented two rooms in a hotel and the treatment proceeded. Addicts going through withdrawal can’t stand to be in their own body. They want only one thing: drugs. They will do anything to get them. It was their own past experience that gave Suraj and Dinesh the understanding and compassion to take these sons through this ordeal. Suraj and Dinesh got the training at the Gateway and they are now running a similar centre in Pokhara.

This has been going on for four months now. Several more ex-addicts volunteered so that the others could spend time with their families and get some rest. They get no salary, no donations, no help from the government. The families give a small fee, if they can, to cover the rent, food and medicines.

The ex-addicts are inspired as well as an inspiration to others. They are truly alive, they have learnt that we are here to help each other. They have learnt the lesson that an addict can’t control a drug with will power. The acid test of an alcoholic is that they can’t have just one drink. They often finish the bottle.

When a recovering addict feels the urge to use drugs again because of loneliness, boredom or fights with family or friends, he now picks up the phone to call a fellow addict or goes to a NA meeting. An addict needs to abstain from drugs completely and share their urge to go back. We can’t do it alone, we need each other. Ironically, many young addicts return to drugs because their parents give them the

Now, these four rooms at lakeside in Pokhara has a name: The Gateway Drug Rehab. It is government registered and a licensed psychotherapist counsels addicts. They are in the process of requesting affiliation with the Manipal Teaching Hospital, which will oversee medical complications.

Vincent Androsiglio is a former monk and Professor of Psychiatry. He runs worldwide email therapy practice while overseeing the Gateway Drug Rehab in Pokhara.
Better late than never
Cabinet approves Kyoto ratification in the nick of time

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

For successive governments in Kathmandu, nothing could be more of an eye-opener than the Kyoto Protocol to control greenhouse gas emissions. They never understood it and if they did, they didn’t think it was a priority.

Until last week. Suddenly with the big climate-change Conference of the Parties (COP-10) in Buenos Aires on 6-17 December looming, Environment Minister Bishnu Prasad Deuba began the complicated task of convincing the cabinet why it was important. It wasn’t easy, but he was finally able to make Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba understand the benefits to Nepal.

“We convinced the cabinet it was a win-win situation and the ratification process was approved,” Deuba says. “Now that the cabinet has decided to go for it, the legal wheels have started rolling to get the royal ordinance that is needed in the absence of parliament. But there are still potential pitfalls. The government is in a bind since it needs to keep renewing the WTO ordinance and there is nothing in it about the Kyoto. The options now are to wait till March for the WTO ordinance to be renewed again or ask the king to do us a favour by recalling the WTO ordinance and sticking in the bit on Kyoto. This would be necessary to get Kyoto ratified by the Buenos Aires meeting next week, but the government will have to make the embarrassing admission that it goofed up. Once Nepal ratifies in the protocol, it will not only join most countries in the world that want to cut greenhouse gas emissions but also reap rewards for the country’s success in renewable energy.

Under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, countries can sell the carbon they don’t burn through renewable energy and conserving forestry to polluting rich countries which need to meet their Kyoto quotas for cutting carbon dioxide emissions.

Now that the ratification process is moving, and provided there are no major hitches, Nepal can collect the $4.5 million for the carbon it has not emitted by promoting biogas.

Nepal signed a letter of intent with the World Bank last July for the deal. The World Bank’s Prototype Carbon Fund set up a Community Development Carbon Fund, which aims to help governments develop schemes that offset carbon emissions.

Nepal’s biogas program is regarded internationally as a model for successful use of alternative energy for the rural Third World. Each of Nepal’s 125,000 functioning digesters prevents five tons of carbon dioxide from being pumped into the atmosphere every year even though some methane does leak out. Nepal has now overtaken China and India in the number of biogas plants per capita. This ‘saved’ gas is what rich countries are buying to reach their own emission quotas.

The $4.5 million will be ploughed back into clean energy that will make it technically and financially possible to trade even more carbon.

Now that ratification is on the cards, Nepal can sell more of its renewable energy to other renewables such as hydropower and solar energy use. Several Dutch banks are said to be interested. Under the CDM, many banks broker deals in the international market between buyers and sellers. That way the selling countries save money and end up getting less money than the market value.

Those countries that have not ratified the Kyoto protocol need to rely on such ‘middlemen.’ “Once Nepal ratifies, the protocol can negotiate with ultimate buyers and get the real market value,” says senior accountant Ratna Sansar Shrestha who is involved in CDM deals.

Environment Ministry Under Secretary Purushottam Kunwar says Nepal will now be heard when it talks about damage to the Himalayan environment from climate change at the Buenos Aires meeting. “Now that we are in Kyoto we will be in a better position to push the issues,” he says. “It also makes sense for Nepal to join Kyoto before it comes into force on 16 February 2008.”

After ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, Nepal will be entitled to all such benefits without having to cut any per capita carbon emission which are still below quota limits. Even China and India don’t have to reduce emissions to current emission levels, but Kyoto requires industrialised countries to cut their greenhouse gas emissions by 5.2 percent of the 1990 baseline by 2012.
The imposing facade of the new ICIMOD headquarters in Khumaltar (above) with its architect, Tom Crees (far right). Director general J Gabriel Campbell at his old office this week (right).

against violence that was overtaking the country, the Bhikshu said that the role of religious organisations was not merely to act in piety, but to actively condemn violence. Despite the dust and confusion, the tacky conference venue and the travails of room and board, in the end it was the placid ambience of the Lumbini Garden that cast a spell over most of the participants. But one thing was clear: no government should go about organising peace summits when it is in the middle of a bloody war to which it is party. It just does not carry conviction.●
Nepal says no

The government has balked at pressure from some donors to divide Bhutanese refugees for assimilation in Nepal and immigration to Europe and the United States. Foreign Ministry officials said Bhutanese refugees should be repatriated home and any other plan would be unacceptable.

“The donors are pushing re-registration and want to help some of the refugees integrate in their countries, but we think that would only divide the refugees and hamper repatriation,” a senior official told us. Re-registration is a euphemism to allow donors to select refugees that fit into their immigration parameters. Some donors have argued that since not all 100,000 plus refugees can return to Bhutan, resettlement in third countries and ‘‘internal integration’’ in Nepal may have to be considered. Bhutanese leaders in exile are also against the idea, saying it will drive a wedge among the refugees and hinder repatriation. “Only a select few will go to places like Europe and America, and Bhutan will take back a bare minimum,” said Bhutan Human Rights leader Tek Nath Rai.

Cosmic travel

The domestic carrier Nepal carries to the Kathmandu-Delhi route began its flights on 1 December. Cosmic Air’s Fokker 100, which has transformed domestic air travel, started bi-weekly flights to Dhaka last month. Now, the 105-seat has introduced double daily flights to Delhi with a convenient 8.40 AM departure from Kathmandu. By next week, passengers in a hurry can finish their business in Delhi and take Cosmic night flight back to Kathmandu. On Wednesday, Cosmic took delivery of its second Fokker 100 with which it intends to expand its international connections to Bangalore, Bangkok and Bombay. On the domestic sector, jet flights are now available to Biratnagar, Bhairawa, Nepalgunj and Pokhara will soon be added.

Everest profits

Everest Bank Ltd (EBL), which declared that their operating profit has shown an increase by 47 percent over last year reaching a figure of Rs 106.38 million for the first three months of this fiscal year. EBL has added one more branch at Birganj Dry Port and an extension counter at custom point in Birganj raising the number of its branches to 15.

NEW PRODUCTS

TWO YEARS OF FEDEX: Everest De Card, license of FedEx Express, the world’s largest express transportation company held a customer event on 20 November to celebrate its second anniversary. Shipments from the world’s largest express transportation company held a customer event on 20 November to celebrate its second anniversary. Shipments from

ECONOMIC SENSE

Artha Beed

Nepal has an increase by 47 percent over last year reaching a figure of Rs 106.38 million for the first three months of this fiscal year. EBL has added one more branch at Birganj Dry Port and an extension counter at custom point in Birganj raising the number of its branches to 15. have run away without paying bank loans what they are defaulters. Stealing is a sin. And yet, there is this self-righteous debate about whether it is criminal on the part of the regulator to find a mechanism to list the people who do not pay loans in time and publish them in the public domain. Why is it wrong for banks to keep track of people and businesses that are not paying loans? It is because of society’s squirmishness that crooks in our midst hold their heads high. The only way is to name and shame them.

In polite company, banks still don’t call them write-offs, they are called ‘non-performing assets’ and they even have an acronym for it: NPA. It is estimated that out of every Rs 100 the banking community loses, Rs 30 never comes back because powerful businessmen wield powerful political muscle to not pay back. That is sad news for the economy. With multilateral agencies breathing down their necks, banks and regulators have now decided enough is enough.

If a borrower does not pay regularly, or defaults, they will be blacklisted. Embassies in Kathmandu will not give blacklisted guys visas. The reasons things got so bad here is because we tolerated political patronage for so long. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba was expressing his desperation when he lost his cool and blamed businessmen at the FNCCI gathering last week.

A trade-dominated economy like ours always looks for arbitrage, be it increasing the spread by not paying taxes, paying less taxes or by not paying bank dues. Business always thinks that the government should bail them out. In this way, even though their businesses go bankrupt the businessmen themselves emerged fatter at the end of the day. Defaulters are not ashamed, and even take up public positions and seats at public functions with pride. Banks are equally to blame, especially the erstwhile government-managed banks, which had become ‘loan doling’ machines that ensured their own executives got a slice of the pie.

The post-Fincon world of international banking has become more careful. The new Basel agreement that has come into force requires banks to be more watchful in lending to corporate houses and regulating the enterprise as well as their loans. Surely, with Nepal’s omnipresent enthusiasm of signing international agreements, we will make the provisions apply here too.

It is important for Nepal to embark upon credit rating or enterprises and ensure that deserving businesses do not lose out at the cost of habitual defaulters. It is also equally important that while businesses are being regulated, financial institutions should be regulated too. Should business people be allowed to own banks? Should a single business house own a plethora of financial institutions? How do we regulate the non-banking finance sector such as finance companies and the ever-mushrooming co-operative finance organisations? How do we make the central bank an institution that prefers to bite than bark at donor-funded workshops?

Prime Minister Deuba was justified in lashing out, but it would be a good idea to demonstrate delivery by starting from his own extended family.

Nepal's largest international golf tournament.

Do swing by.

Surya Nepal Masters Gorkana Forest Golf Resort 9th - 12th December, 2004

Surya Nepal Masters Gorkana Forest Golf Resort 9th - 12th December, 2004
It’s a jungle out there

Chitwan is going wild in anticipation of new year tourists

Planning to get away this Christmas and New Years? Tired of over-touristified beaches and gawdy whys? A 20-minute plane ride away from Kathmandu is the Royal Chitwan National Park (RCNP) Nepal’s wildest and most-famous nature reserve.

And the beauty of it is that you don’t have to rough it. Chitwan has some of the best safari resorts in the world. And they are going for a song.

A Chitwan vacation deep inside the primordial jungles of the Chure Hills is a vacation of a lifetime: a place you can see and feel nature as it was originally created.

This is not just about getting a glimpse of the elusive Royal Nepali Tiger, it is about getting away from the chaos and disorder of the outside world. Here, the only sounds are of the cicadas, the mysterious rustle in the undergrowth, a heart-quickerening shriek from across the river and a deep rumble in the jungle.

A few days of being pampered by the resort staff, taking long jungle walks with expert guides, canoe trips and elephant-back jungle rides and you feel your batteries are fully charged. Chitwan this time of year is also a bird-watcher’s paradise. The Siberian hibernators are already here, flapping about along with the ex-bows of the Rapti River, honking proudly or nestling in gaggles by the reeds.

The Royal Chitwan National Park used to be a hunting reserve for Nepal’s royals. They nearly hunted the tiger to extinction, luckily it was declared a reserve in the nick of time and the tigers are now back to full strength as is the Greater Asiaic One-horned Rhinoceros (hereafter referred to simply as the ‘rhino’).

This 932 sq km of land is situated in the Ilstit Madhesh between the Mahabharat and Chure ranges and besides the celebrity mammals it has rich wetlands teeming with birdlife (over 450 species), crocodiles, the fish-eating glaucals and the endangered fresh-water dolphins. It is Nepal’s first national park and was enlisted by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 1984 paying homage to its unique ecosystem.

Stay at any of the resorts and you can either just laze around or take part in back-to-back nature trips. “Our programs are designed according to each guest’s requirements, so they get the most out of their time spent here,” says Olivia Taylor, guest relations officer at Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge.

If you insist on catching up with your inner soul, a few minutes of jungle serenity is enough. As the sun goes down on the marshes, the denizens of the jungle come out for supper. But remember you need more than luck to see the elusive tiger. Anna Caplyton has been working at the Temple Tiger for more than two months now and she has yet to see the cat.

“Plenty of footprints, loads of deer, rhinos, wild boars and the rest, but no tiger” says Clayton, who hasn’t given up.

The thing to remember in Chitwan is that you’re not the only one watching. There are bound to be cat eyes fixed on you from the underground.
Machan Wildlife Jungle Resort
Located 2.5 km inside the RCNP, 40 km from the Bharatpur airport, this is one of Nepal’s premier jungle lodges offering elephant and jeep safaris, jungle walks, slide shows as well as the local Tharu dance. It’s run by efficient and friendly staff that make you feel at home and the chef does out great desserts. There is a swimming pool if you want to take a dip and the elephant stable has eight-month-old Sani, whose mother is a domesticated elephant, while her father is a bull from the wild. That explains her temperament but she’s cute.

One night: US$110
Two nights: US$220
(National Park fees and tax excluded)
4225001, 4245402, 4245529

Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge
Nepal’s oldest and probably the most famous jungle resort, Tiger Tops is an experience in itself. About two hours from Bharatpur and an elephant ride from Meghauli, it is an eco-friendly place using solar energy for electricity and heating, serving fresh organic farm products and also providing education for villagers. Trained and experienced naturalists tell you what to look for. Wild boars, elephants, even rhinos sniff around at the edge of the lodge. Mangalay, a three-year-old rhino has taken refuge in the lodge ever since it lost its mother in a flood two years ago.

One night package: US$110
Two nights package: US$220
(National Park fees and tax excluded)
4263480, 4244651, 4221637

Tharu Safari Lodge
Owned and run by the Tiger Mountain group and situated outside the park, the lodge is inspired by the indigenous Tharu people who lived in the plains long before malaria was fully eradicated from the region. The longhouses are constructed in the traditional Tharu style. In addition to the usual activities, it has its own stable of horses and ponies as well as a swimming pool and a lawn tennis court. A school run jointly by the resort and Swiss Airlines is nearby.

One night: US$200
Two nights: US$400
(National Park fees and tax excluded)
4361500

Temple Tiger
Approximately two hours from Bharatpur airport, Temple Tiger has one of the best views of the park from the lodge itself and is located about 4 km inside the park right in the middle of a dense sal forest. Deep inside the forest, the jungle walks offer a good chance to see tigers and an abundance of birds all pointed out by experienced guides.

One night package: US$250
(National Park fees and tax excluded)
4263460, 4244651, 4221637

Machan Paradise View
A half-hour drive from Bharatpur airport and located just outside the RCNP periphery near the village of Jagatpur along the banks of the Rapti, it is perfect for those wanting to spend quiet hours watching ducks and rhinos along the Rapti bank.

One night: US$80
Two nights: US$160
(National Park fees and tax excluded)
4225001, 4245402, 4245529

Update your health through Morning Walk.
Update yourself through Nepal FM 91.8
Américans have once again finished a presidential campaign season in which the quality of the debate over economic policy was abysmal. On the Republican side, hacks, spin masters and many who ought to have known better suddenly developed an extraordinary appreciation for something called the ‘CPS Household Survey of Employment’ as a supposed guide to month-to-month changes in the labour market. The CPS survey was never designed to do this but it offered the most favourable gloss on the Bush administration’s dreadful record on employment.

On the Democratic side, the same sorts of hacks and PR men focused like a laser beam on the bad employment news of the George W Bush years, ignoring the good news about output and productivity. And again, Republicans responded tendentiously by focusing on the unemployment rate rather than on the job numbers—as if it were a good thing that the luxury labour market since 2001 has artificially depressed the number of unemployed people.

Republicans glibly touted the Bush tax cuts—the equivalent of which his father, President George H W Bush, two decades ago called “voodoo economics”—as the saviour of economic wisdom. They paid no heed to the large drag that Bush’s unbalanced budget and perverse use of America’s public finances would impose on the US economy over the next several decades. Democrats pretended that the tax cuts had already hurt the economy when they ought to know the greatest damage is yet to come. The Republicans magnified their economic-quackery by frantically trying to minimise public perceptions of the long-run fiscal problems of America’s social-insurance system, largely to deflect attention from the fact that Bush threw away the budget surpluses President Clinton had bequeathed him—and with them what may have been the country’s last best chance to fix things in this regard short of some form of disaster. These same Republicans argued for government spending restraint while blocking the institutional changes to Congressional procedures needed to make spending restraint possible. All this economic legendarium was magnified by the media.

At this point, I as a pundit am supposed to come up with my magic scheme for fixing things. I don’t have one, not inconsistent with price stability, the Fiscal Stabilisation Board would guarantee that spending authority remains in line with the legislated level of taxes. Let the debate begin...

Project Syndicate

J Bradford Delong is Professor of Economics at the University of California at Berkeley and was Assistant US Treasury Secretary during the Clinton Presidency.

Voodoo economics

Politicians use the economic spell to gain support

Women hit back

NEW DELHI — What should be the penalty for rape? Opinions in India vary from hanging to life imprisonment to castration. But the women of Nagpur have devised a different method to mete out justice. Fed up with delays in the judicial process, police inaction and fear of being victimised again by alleged rapists who procure easy bail from court, they have decided to take the law into their own hands. Last month women from the slums of Nagpur attacked alleged rapists whom they say were walking free often with the connivance of the authorities. A mob dominated by 50 women, led by a rape victim, burned down the houses of the three alleged rapists who had reportedly attacked residents with impunity for months. The accused were lucky to get away alive.

The razing of the alleged rapists’ homes followed a series of high-profile cases that began in August, when Akku Yadav, a gang leader who faced 24 criminal charges, including murder, was stabbed and stored to death in a court by a mob led by women. According to them, he had raped young girls and pregnant women and sent his henchmen to extort money. Despite repeated arrests, Yadav walked out of jail each time and continued to terrorise the neighbourhood. Local people feared he would be released on bail again. The police detained five women after the attack but released them after more than 400 women occupied the courtroom.

In another case in Nagpur in October, two men accused of extortion and sex abuse were killed after demanding that a local woman hand over cash. When she refused they tried to strip her. Both were killed by a group of women armed with sticks and stones.

The incidents in Nagpur have led to a public debate on vigilantism and the state of India’s justice system. Failure of the judicial and police inaction is the two main reasons for the people’s justice at Nagpur. Many women’s rights advocates, including Poornima Advani, head of the national commission for women, have come out in defence of Nagpur’s women.

Bush bags Doublespeak Award

President George W Bush, for the second year in a row, and his administration have been given the honour of receiving the 2004 Doublespeak Award from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Committee on Public Doublespeak. The award is an ironic ‘tribute’ to American public figures who have perpetrated language that is grossly deceptive, evasive, euphemistic, confusing or self-contradictory.

The award was announced at NCTE’s Annual Convention in Indianapolis last week.

According to the selection committee President Bush has set a high standard for his team by the inspired invention of the phrase ‘weapons of mass destruction-related program activities’ to describe what has yet to be seen. Further he has made clear the principle of democratic discussion: “As you know, these are open forums, you’re able to come and listen to what I have to say.” Bush also won for his creative use of language in public statements regarding the reasons why the United States needed to pursue war against Iraq — for unsubstantiated statements, for the lack of evidentiary support, and for the purposed manipulation of intelligence data. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s description of the widespread torture at Abu Ghraib as “the excesses of human nature that humanity suffers” was brilliantly mind-bending. The Secretary is well served by a Pentagon that erased terms like the Vietnam era ‘body bag’ which became ‘human remains pouches’ during the Gulf War and is now known as ‘transfer labels’ as the transfer of which are to be kept from media sight. The Justice Department also deserves mention for its ingenious contributions to the cause of helping us not confront the shame of our government fostering torture.
Govinda Bartaman is the quintessential Kathmandu leftist: versed in all cryptic aspects of Nepali politics, passionate about its obscurantist splits, given to vague ego tussels with fellow leftists, typically a moody poet and a down-to-earth journalist. He is a child of the country’s elite caste structure with none of the privileges of being one. Except for the gift of language. This he has put towards a travel memoir, Aina Samuhlikar (Nine Sixteen Evenings), about his journeys to Liviag, Nepalgunj, Dhangadi and Baglung during the 2002 ceasefire.

Bartaman’s Liviag is checkholcked with shifty move-you-sees them now-you-don’t guerrillas, harrowed government officials, keen reporters and human rights workers, and chipper DFID consultants assessing the conflict’s impact.

It is a surreal town. The District LDO, has been transferred 26 times over the course of his career, has in his tenure in Rolpa District taken on various guises — including of a Hindu ascetic—to avoid being recognised by the Maoists. More than 300 young men from the outlying villages have left in order to avoid being recruited by the guerrillas. People say that 15 women in one village have been raped by state security forces. Eight odd families from all over the district live as refugees in the district centre. Among them is a man reprimanded by the Maoists for having two wives. He went on to bring home five more wives. The casetlue has brought some relief. Locals now laugh, bleakly, about past days with 3PM curfews. But they remain worried that peace might end. The burned-out ruins of the roads department and the agriculture office postots dot the landscape. A former rations supplier for the army, meanwhile, lives in a house decked with marble. Sufa Xanglimbar is not the most artful travellage. At times it reads like an unedited diary. “I had gene to do the short one, but I ended up doing the long one,” he says at one point, of a toilet break that the reader might have been spared the details of. Shockingly, he chronicles his drinking of 62 cups of tea and smoking of just as many cigarettes. (What is shocking is not that he has so much tea or cigarettes but that he wrote about it in such detail.) Each chapter chronicles a day, and ends with a 10PM bedtime. And every now and then there are goody asides, such as his attempt to learn English, or passionate discussions on Steve Wonder.

Still, this book is a must-read. Bartaman embodies Nepal’s democratic left. His reservations about state atrocities is obvious but his horror at what the undemocratic left, the Maoists, have wrought is equally palpable. For those who dismiss all leftists as Maoist sympathisers (a widely-held view among the Kathmandu bourgeoisie) the political nuances in this book are enlightening.

And it contains many very poignant tales of war. An encounter with the niece of the Maoist-affiliated journalist Krishna Sen is one such story. Sen’s own family no longer lives in his family house just outside Liviag. His 16-year-old niece Bandara heads the household now after her father (Sen’s brother) died and her mother eloped, abandoning her with her 13 and 17 year-old sisters. They get by on their family lands with the help of neighbours. Most of the exchange with her is ordinary enough, but in the end, she asks, “They say that Uncle’s been killed, is that true?” Unable to tell the girl that Sen was, infamously, killed in police custody, a companion of Bartaman’s tells her that the case is still being investigated.

As Bartaman moves from Liviag to its outlying villages and then onto Nepalgunj, Dhangadi and back to Baglung, he meets war victims one after another. An 18-year-old Tharu woman talks openly in front of her mother-in-law about being raped by policemen as other policemen kill her husband. A man talks of how he was moved 17 times while imprisoned by the Maoists. Another woman in Baglung tells of how after her husband was disappeared by the security forces, her neighbours have been pressuring her to consider him dead and to wear the widow’s whites. Another woman, whose husband has also been disappeared by the security forces tries to console her mother-in-law saying: “At least you have other sons. You still have the word ‘son’. I don’t have the word ‘husband’ anymore. My son doesn’t have the word ‘father’. So don’t be sad.”

Chronicling these tales, Bartaman depicts today’s Nepal as a country of broken lives. Readers interested in the body counts in the news can finally see in this book the people behind the statistic. And they can see, in the words of one victim, all that is lost when politics ends and only guns remain. •
As you young fellows of reproductive age who have had the pleasure of tying the nuptial knots of holy matrimony this week may have noticed, marriage is not just a popular card game in Nepal. The institution of marriage is a binding contract between a man and his in laws under which in exchange for the Cosmic YinYang motorcycle the groom will provide all possible assistance to bring forth new human beings into the planet and live happily ever after until they are reincarnated, at which point he will have to do everything all over again.

No need to worry, though. Those of you addicted to card games will soon realise that you are in familiar territory because marriage is also a gamble. For instance, you could discover on your wedding night that the person you have chosen to be your lawfully wedded husband because he is the son of a mover and shaker is as hairy as a yak and snores like one. You win some and lose some.

But marriage is a compromise and as generations of married couples before us have discovered, the perfect antidote to a snoring spouse is to learn to snore yourself so you can drown out the all-night nasal saxophone on the next pillow and turn a solo concert into a duet.

As someone who has been married for donkey’s years since the early Malla period, I have some unsolicited advice to all you newly-weds out there about the birds and the bees and what they do in private. May I?

The most important part of a wedding is the marriage party which takes place simultaneously with approximately 15,000 other parties all over town, including the four-party anti-regression torch procession at Bag Bajar. And every one of these jants has a Sgt Pepper’s Lonely Heart’s Club Band playing the latest Bollywood hit. This is the acid test: if you survive the band you will survive anything.

The wedding night. This is the second most important part of a marriage and the time when couples weigh their pros and cons and decide that, despite the armpit aroma, on the whole cohabitation is a good thing.

In a marriage one engages in the most intimate acts known to man: holding hands while watching the sun set, sharing Q-tips and listening to each other’s stomachs growl.

For conjugal bliss, a marriage must be filled with love and passion, and one of the most romantic activity you can engage in is the mutual pleasure of squeezing each other’s zits.

Because it’s like having a room-mate for life, a marriage is about compromise. Even after 20 years of marriage, for instance, it drives a wife nuts when her husband insists on taking a leak without lifting the seat in an upright position. So, as a compromise, she replaces the loo with a squatting toilet, and this drives the husband nuts.

Matriarchal harmony comes from strengthening the bonds of marriage by the husband and wife curling up and talking late into the night about the day’s happenings. Since men and women are from different planets, sometimes it may seem like the conversation is one-sided as exemplified by this transcript of a clandestinely-recorded dialogue in our household:

Wife: Look, my aim is to keep this place clean, your aim would help. How many times have I told you to lift the bloody seat, I’m warning you I’m going to get a squatter. And can’t you screw back the top to the tube after you brush your teeth, you haven’t learnt to do a simple thing like that in 25 years, you dork. Are you listening to me or are you completely deaf?

Husband: Unnh?

Wife: I knew it, you aren’t listening at all are you? So I can tell you anything I want to: no more bed tea, you hear? If you want tea you make it yourself and pour it down your snout. And from tomorrow you wash your Y-fronts yourself, and your filthy socks. Oh, by the way, someone called.

Husband: Whoa, what? Who, when? Did he leave a number? Why didn’t you tell me before?

See what I mean? After 25 years in a blissful marriage one learns to filter out all extraneous noise. Great thing, marriage, wouldn’t be able to do without it.