**How active?**

**NAVIN SINGH KHADKA**

It’s not a question of whether King Gyanendra should be an active monarch or not, it is about how active he should be. That appears to be the message that the organisers of the Raj Parishad wanted to convey with their controversial two-day conference that began at the BICC on Thursday. “If the country is adrift and the king wants to help rescue it, what’s wrong with that, isn’t that what he should do?” asks the former chairman of the royal council’s standing committee, Keshar Jung Rayamajhi. Raj Parishad members say they are not against constitutional monarchy and democracy, adding that political parties are so hung up on due process that they have lost sight of the need to find a solution to the country’s crisis. They blame the parties for not helping the king in forming an all-party government. But political parties, including the UML, which is a partner in the royal-appointed Deuba coalition, say Thursday’s conference was final proof of the king’s authoritarian ambitions. Indeed, 11 invited UML members in the government including Deputy Prime Minister Bhanu Mohan Adhikari boycotted the conference. The UML also deployed its student wing to block roads, burn tyres and stone the police. There was a brief attempt to block the road at Ghanthaghar that the royal motorcade was to take en route to BICC. The road was cleared of bricks and tyres just in time. “The Raj Parishad conference is unconstitutional and illegitimate, it has widened the gap between the parties and the king,” the UML’s Sitash Baburam told us. The NC’s Ajit Narshingh KC agrees: “This is a calculated move to consolidate the royal takeover two years ago, it will create conditions for a tyrannical rule.” The fact that the Raj Parishad conference coincided with rumours that the king is contemplating sacking Deuba again to reign directly, added to misgivings among the parties. Aside from its legality, many politicians suspect the conference is designed to prepare the groundwork for direct royal rule.

Analysts say that at the heart of the dispute is a deep lack of trust between the king and the parties. Some Kathmandu-based diplomats feel the king is genuinely trying to find a solution and the parties are raising procedural issues to block him. “If the king wants to go beyond the political deadlock to strike a peace deal with the Maoists, most people would welcome it,” a senior diplomat told us.

Speaker Tanka Nath Rambahat, who is ex-officio member of the royal council, told us: “It all depends on what kind of final document the convention comes up with, but going by today’s speeches there is nothing to worry about.”

Chairman of the Raj Parishad standing committee, Pansu Narayan Chaudhary has said the council would recommend measures the king could take. He added: “We’re not here to bash parties, we want to help the king find a solution.”

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**Is it raw ambition or a genuine attempt to find a solution?**

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**Conference at Godawari**

Is not just a business affair...
canvas

was very young. So young, he doesn’t even remember. “My parents are photographers and I must have been nine when I started snapping shots,” he recalls. “The tripods were taller than me, but I still remember clearly the excitement that gripped me whenever I held the camera.” Living in the ancient city has shaped his interest in the architecture and life of medieval Kathmandu so well depicted in his recent work.

“I wanted to recreate what life was like in the 15th Century Bhaktapur,” he explains, as he points out the sienna-tinted compositions at the Indigo this week. “Bhaktapur is living history, the people, the gods and goddesses.” Although he plans his pictures, sometimes there are lucky accidents like the ‘Sadhu at Pashupatinath’.

“I was shooting something else when I sensed this sadhu standing behind me,” he recalls, “I just turned around and clicked and turned back again.” The vibrant colours of the sadhu’s painted forehead and the wisp of smoke curling above his dark eyes create a remarkable and mystic effect.

Life Through The Lens’ is on at the Indigo Gallery till 15 January.
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Stalemate - 
Himal, 1-15 December

A directionless Nepal has been at the crossroads for quite sometime now. The King, political parties and rebels that are supposed to be the guides are themselves confused. The idea for a way out of the present crisis has only complicated matters. The king seems to want an active role, while the government wants talks with the rebels failing which elections by a dozen political parties want elections for a constituent assembly and some of the parties want a reinstatement of parliament.

The first alternative has the least scope. The King may desire direct role but it will be difficult for him to remain in power after that. After his October Fourth move, he has had even more problems on his hands. In effect, he had to gear down his ambitions in order to remain a power center. He faces pressure from foreign powers. In the long run, the king’s popularity will decline among people who have no role in these messy games.

The idea of peace talks and elections is the ‘outlet’ advocated by the present government and its allies. But coalition partners are divided. Ministers and political parties in the coalition government have opposed Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba’s pledge, as ordered by the king, to hold elections. The rebels have rejected the government’s invitation for talks. No one believes elections can be held without peace.

As far as the Maoists’ demand for constituent assembly is concerned, it is not going to happen anytime soon because there needs to be a consensus on the need for one. All power centers including the king will have to accept the role given by the constitution prepared by the people’s representatives. As long as the present political equation remains, the constituent assembly does not appear a possibility. Either the rebels have to win or they will have to reach an agreement with one of the remaining two forces. All power centers including the king will have to accept the role given by the constitution prepared by the people’s representatives. As long as the present political equation remains, the constituent assembly does not appear a possibility. Either the rebels have to win or they will have to reach an agreement with one of the remaining two forces. All power centers including the king will have to accept the role given by the constitution prepared by the people’s representatives.

At face value, the fourth idea—reinstatement of the parliament—is not desirable. The compromise tenure of the dissolved House of Representatives has expired but supporting the idea believe it impossible to hold elections. They argue that the reinstatement of the house would help bring the constitution back on track. Those opposing the idea say that the reinstatement of the house would not make any sense because the parliament has failed to face challenges. Reinstatement is not possible, it is argued, because the Supreme Court has verified the validity of the dissolution of the House of Representatives. But the fact remains that parliament was dissolved on condition that elections be held within six months, the same condition at the Supreme Court was considered when it approved the decision of House dissolution. Since the condition of the elections has not been met, the house can be reinstated and the court’s decision do not appear to be an obstacle. Our constitution has not envisaged a situation with no parliament for the argument that the reinstatement of the house would violate the spirit of the constitution, therefore, is not valid.

Absolute democracy -
Debendra Raj Pandey in Kantipur, 3 December

We often hear this argument: if Girija Prasad Koirala or Madhav Kumar Nepal can do what they like, why can’t the king do the same? In a democracy, leaders tend to dictate and dismiss the people’s strength. That is why people cannot differentiate between a democracy and an autocratic monarchy. fact socialism and capitalism and go, the new generation moves on. Political party leaders often forget this. The first thing our leaders did after they came into power was become allies of the old power centres. The aim of such a relationship was to retain each other. And while doing that, the leaders suppressed progressive voices and the zeal of their younger cadres. In short, leaders behaved like royals. This is why there are now questions about the future of the political leadership. One wonders what will happen to the younger turks. Who will manage them and how? The fact that these questions are being raised indicate that they are expressions of a new generation and the answer is not an autocratic monarchy. There is no country that is completely satisfied with its democracy. In South Asia, we know how it works but even in the US there has been serious critique of democratic practices. The latest US presidential elections showed many pitfalls especially of political patronage in the electoral process. Despite all this, no one says America needs dictatorship. The American people have weaknesses but no one says it was a mistake to make them sovereign. This is also true for South Asia. In his write-up on the fall of the ancient Roman empire, historian Edward Gibbon raised an interesting thought that in the different kinds of regimes in the world, the one that deserves to be demeaned the most is monarchy. He asked: “Could there be anyone in this world who would not react, take the fact that an infant son would inherit the entire
What makes a dog tick

Little can be as rewarding as training a dog so it feels at ease in the human world. Good training is not punishment-based, but reinforcing good behaviours through reward. By understanding what makes a dog tick and using the proven techniques, trainers can learn to socialize and train a dog to be a well-mannered companion.

Obedience training is basically an education in good manners. Dogs can learn to respond to cues such as sit, down, stay, come and loose-lead walking, as well as for troubleshooting issues such as poor manners, jumping up and pulling on leash. Here are 10 do’s and don’ts to train dogs:

1. Keep training simple
2. Start training in a quiet place
3. Set up your dog to win
4. Reward all good work
5. Reward immediately
6. Train just a few times a day
7. Don’t nag or blame your dog
8. Keep encouraging your dog
9. Stop training if your dog is tired or has lost interest
10. Don’t train if you are tired
11. Don’t let anyone use a different command word
12. Always give voice and hand signals at the same time—make sure they are clear
13. The earlier you begin training the easier it is
14. Train at home for five to 10 minutes at a time
15. All dog commands are just one word
16. Develop three tones of voice: command, reprimand & praise

from Basic Dog Obedience Training + The Golden Rules of Training by Val Ronney
A monarchy’s morality

There is a lesson for all monarchies from the person of Thailand’s King Bhumibol

The role of a constitutional head of state is a tricky one. India’s president doesn’t have executive powers which are vested in the prime minister, but President Abdul Kalam wielded power that emanates from his popularity and moral authority. So when he spoke out on something he feels strongly about, like education or communal harmony, the prime minister has to listen.

Nelson Mandela may not be the president of his country any more but he is regarded as the father of the nation in South Africa and his moral stature makes him a global leader, respected and admired everywhere and he is looked up to by other world leaders. Amancother leaders, Cambodia’s King Norodom Sihanouk survived the Khmer Rouge and ensured the continuity of monarchy recently by handing over the throne to his son, Sihamoni. Even though he is not crowned king, he is regarded with high respect by Cambodians.

Thailand’s Bhumibol Adulyadej is the model of a people-centred constitutional monarch whose legitimacy stems not so much from tradition as the moral authority that the king commands because of his personality and honour.

As I see in my recent visit to Thailand, with his involvement in the making of the Thai people, he is the moral compass for the nation and has carved for himself a place in the Thai history. King Bhumibol, whose 77th birthday was celebrated last week, has the image of a reliable guardion and responsible custodian of national interest.

At a food festival organised last week by the BIEC in Kathmandu on his birthday by the Thai ambassador, Penicheorn Inchanak, we were taught not just to savour Thai food that appeals to the Nepali palate, but also to look at the handicrafts that showed the economic advances that Thailand has made in recent years.

There was a time when Thailand and Nepal were at similar stages of development. Like Nepal, Thailand has also battled a Maoist insurgency and bested it with the carrot-and-stick approach of military strikes and rural development. Today, Thailand has forged ahead and a lot of credit for the steering of its sustainable development and democracy goes to King Bhumibol.

The high regard that the Thai people have for their monarch is because of his simple lifestyle, personal integrity and his love for the welfare of his citizens. The source of King Bhumibol’s invincibility is the public trust in his kingship. The public has made a king for himself and taken it upon himself to look after the welfare of his citizens. The source of King Bhumibol’s invincibility is the public trust in his kingship.

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Nepals condemned to forever remain buzzless? To have their elite benefit from green income and pay for the environmental sins of polluting rich countries?

Rajendra Pradhan, Kathmandu

- Thank you for that comprehensive coverage and Bikash Parey’s compelling arguments in favour of Kyoto ratification (KC24). As Parey says, there isn’t just a moral long-term reason Nepal should ratify the Kyoto Protocol. We bear the direct impact of climate change. Those hand-wringing free-marketers who are still in denial may realise 20 years from now that the planet’s surface is indeed warming due to fossil fuel combustion. But by the time they do something about it, it may be too late to save our mountains, and for the Maldives and Bangladesh. The ostriches with their heads in the sand are the governments of the United States and Australia whose politics is governed so much by the oil and coal lobby that their brains are fossilised. Nepal should set an example to the rest of the world by being clean and green, not just because it is ecologically correct but because it makes economic sense. And if someone is going to pay us for propagating renewable energy and for forest conservation, what’s the harm?

Gyan Subba, email

CHITWAN Your coverage of Chitwan fails to mention four lodges, namely Gaida Wildlife Camp, Chitwan Jungle Lodge, Narayani Safari and Island Jungle Resort which have been offering more or less the same facilities and services for decades as those resorts mentioned. You should have been fair and published the names of all seven lodges operating in the Chitwan National Park which are government concession holders so your readers have a choice. The article gives the wrong impression that there are only three lodges inside the National Park and you are intentionally favouring them.

Gaida Wildlife Camp, Chitwan

- Many thanks for the wonderful article about the Royal Chitwan National Park (‘It’s a jungle out there’, KC24). We would like to correct a mistake regarding the rates in the article. Our normal tariff rate for Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge is $135 plus tax per person per night. The rate of $250 per person for two nights package is only for expatriates. Similarly, our tariff rate for Tiger Mountain Tharu Lodge is $150 plus tax per person per night.

Barsha KC, Tiger Mountain

BREEDING SEASON My friend Milan Dixit would have been better off married to one of the many funny creatures in Kunda Dixit’s ‘Another breeding season’ (Under My Hat, KC24). Like the yak he mentions, or the donkey he alludes to in passing, Needless to say, we’ll all support Milan should she choose to go and live in Ulan Bataar.

Dubby Bhagat, Patan

STATE OF THE STATE

CK Lai

surpassing even the royal mango, Nepal’s suffering also inspires a lot of bleeding hearts in the west. Following the footsteps of Alex Perry of Time last year, its conservative soulmate Economist in its 4 December issue urges the international community to save Nepal from imminent failure. Perhaps alarmed by the doomsday scenario, Sir Jeffrey Sachs is paying an unannounced visit to Kathmandu this week. The kingdom may not have grown much better since his last visit in August but it hasn’t become any worse either.

The number of things in Nepal aren’t very encouraging. The conflict has intensified, democracy is in the doobas, and malaria and diarrhoea are threats to turn into something worse. But the state is not in danger of failing, as The Economist would have it. The leader (‘A failing state’), in the magazine, however, could be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Failure is a process involving the weakening of a state’s capacity to provide legitimate governance. Actually, Nepal’s capacity to handle crises has improved and has reached a level of sophistication not found in the failed states of the sub-Saharan. At worst, we are in the same zone where the state is flailing but still has the resilience to bounce back.

Edwin G Gurr calls it the ‘Gray Area Phenomenon’ (GAP) where the stability of nation states is threatened by non-state actors and control has shifted from the legitimate government to ‘new half-political, half-criminal powers’. To do this, we have to go back to legitimate governance. Persistent calls by the international community (the euphemisms for the power triad of the US, UK and India) for a unity of constitutional forces sounds hollow when the constitution is itself in intensive care. A parliament is the soul of a constitutional monarchy and unless it is revived, the Nepali polity will continue to sink into the quagmire of militaries.

When the Mauist uprising started to strain the apparatus of the state in 1996, nation-building in Nepal was just beginning. The 1990 constitution was finding its footing, a hungry parliament was struggling to come to terms with the remnants of a 30-year-old regime. Democracy was yet to build a competent police force, an efficient civil service, an independent judicial system operating under the rule of law and a professional disciplined military under civilian command. These are still some of the challenges and we can’t wait to fix them after the fighting stops. In fact, they have to be done at the earliest to resolve issues of governance raised by Mauists. The US, UK and India have been adding fuel to the fires of war by their one-point agenda of bolstering the Royal Nepali Army. The hardware has whetted the army’s appetite, now it wants more of everything: more money, more men, more machines. As a result we are now regarded as a human rights hot spot. Any hasty parallel with Afghanistan may well turn out to be true if military aid to Nepal continues unchecked.

Nepal’s economy is too primitive to fail. Unlike half-baked countries of colonial Africa, Nepal’s territorial boundary is too old to disintegrate. Communist strife in the kingdom is still dormant, democratic exercise can easily give conflicting aspirations of competing communities a safe vent without seriously disrupting national unity. The complexity of challenges facing us notwithstanding, we are a society that has come to terms with its past. We have realised that despicable rule—whether authoritarian or totalitarian—has no future. What we have failed to produce so far is a national consensus on our common future. That is a task we have to do ourselves, outsiders can’t help.

Outside do-gooders only make matters worse by trying to meddle, just look at the proxy wars in the region. If it is our karma to become another Afghanistan, let us, but without daisy-cutters, helicopter gunships and landmines. At least with, 300s and socket bombs we know we can bounce back when the fighters are exhausted. Peace will return to this land, but The Economist and Times will probably have left for another trouble spot by then.

Speakers Taratnath Ranabhat, Prime Minister Deuba and chairman of the Raj Parishad Paras Narayan Chaudhary greet King Gyanendra as he arrives at the BICC for the council’s central council on Thursday.

Things are bad but outside meddling will make it worse

10 - 16 DECEMBER 2004 #225

NATION

STATE OF THE STATE

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Teachers at the

One era’s terrorist

Historically, ‘terrorists’ have often gone on to become acceptable partners in a political process

clinging on to dear life: People crossing the river at Chupra across a suspension bridge destroyed by the Maoists.

...
Support for democracy: NDI poll

Nepalis overwhelmingly want to see peace, democracy, economic growth and national unity, a public opinion poll conducted for the US-based National Democratic Institute by AG Nielsen/ORGMARG has shown. The survey was conducted among 3,000 respondents in 60 districts.

Three-fourths viewed democracy as the best form of government for Nepal, 60 percent favoured constitutional monarchy and support for a republic was only 17 percent. Economic decline was the major concern with 55 percent concerned about the lack of jobs. 33 percent felt Maoist violence was the major concern. 22 percent were worried about educational corruption and it was the real problem.

Even if 93 percent of the respondents felt that the country is currently headed in the wrong direction, most citizens are still optimistic that the conflict can be resolved. The survey showed more support in approval for the performance of King Gyanendra, likely attributable to the announcement of a ‘new deal’ and the formation of a multi-party cabinet. Deuba also had broad approval with 57 percent approving of the job he is doing.

A vast majority, 85 percent, felt that political parties act only on behalf of themselves, and 43 percent thought that political parties played mostly a negative role. Eighty-two percent of citizens were strongly willing to vote and they wanted to see regional and local elections. However, 72 percent believed elections cannot take place under the current environment.

British help against Maoist extortion

As Maoist extortion reaches unprecedented levels, a Kathmandu-based diplomatic deal has for the first time offered police help in dealing with the problem. Addressing the ninth annual general meeting of the Nepal- British Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Kathmandu on 3 December, the British ambassador to Nepal, Keith Bloomfield said that the British Metropolitan Police had submitted a report to the Nepalese government to help deal with extortion by businesses of the rebels. “The extortion is systematic and well-organized, which is making it difficult for the business community,” said Bloomfield, who also heads the Industrial Security Group that represents countries with major foreign investment projects in Nepal. The Metropolitan Police has also submitted a master plan to the Nepalese government and advised the setting up of a special task force involving all security agencies to launch an anti-extortion pilot program in the capital.

“The problem of extortion is expanding and increasing in amount,” he said. Addressing the function, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Prakash Sharan Mahat urged businesses to say “a collective no” to extortionists. He said the government was ready to help the business community if they stood up against the rebels together as the people in Dalekh did.

India-Nepal aviation agreement delayed

An important meeting between Nepal and India to review the bilateral air agreement scheduled for this week has been postponed. The Indian civil aviation secretary postponed it for ‘unavoidable reasons’ till January. "We want to discuss revision of the agreement to increase flight frequency, air seats and new points," said Naya Gaur, joint secretary in the Indi's Civil Aviation Ministry. Nepal and India allow each country’s carriers to fly 6,000 seats a week but it needs to be increased because of demand. “The air services agreement has to be revised,” says Nagendra Ghimire, general secretary of the Nepal Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal.

Apart from their state-run airlines, private carriers from Nepal and India this year launched their services. Cosmic Air has begun flying to India's Silchar from Nepal and India's Jet Air and Sahara Airlines are flying to New Delhi and Kathmandu. Nepal had planned to request additional destinations like Goa, Ahmedabad, Chennai and Bodhgaya. "We will be signing a MoU when the meeting is held," Oli told us. Other MoUs are in the pipeline for 2004 and there are fifth freedom rights as well as streamlining air routes between India and Nepal.

Cleaning up

Endorsed by an overwhelming level of enthusiasm that the local women’s group of Milan Marg, Tiku, showed in keeping their area clean, Friends of the Bagmati (FOB) organised a Clean Up Programme around the Bagmati Ghat on 4 December. Kathmandu Metropolitan City office supported the program by providing the necessary equipment and technical human resources.

The group of women were trained by FOB under the Nightwatch Scheme project to make compost manure in order to manage their household solid waste. Almost 50 percent joined hands to sweep piles of waste that had accumulated adjacent to Milan Park and along the Bagmati river banks. The women followed different walk of life. They were of the opinion that the local people should be responsible for their own area clean up.

November decline

Tourists arrivals declined in November last year, the second month in a row. There was a 17 percent drop compared to 2003. Nepal Tourism Board figures show both Indian and non-Indian markets recorded a sharp drop. Third country arrivals had shown a 50 percent growth until the first half of this year. But September onwards, the figures began to recede due to riots and news of conflict. A third of tourists come from the US, UK, Germany and France; India makes up the rest with a few other countries.
Dalits not allowed

The violence during the Bharatpur temple incident highlights the tenuousness of Dalit rights

Laurie Ann Vasily in BHARATPUR

The action by Dalits in Bharatpur on Sunday to gain legal entry into a temple and the ensuing violence against police and vigilantes held deep significance to Dalits here who continue to be denied entry into Hindu temples across Nepal.

The events followed the expensive and contentious International Consultation on Caste-Based Discrimination in Kathmandu last week and highlighted the tenuousness of the human rights situation of Dalits in Nepal. Prepared with legal permission to enter the Laxmi Bankeshwor temple in Bharatpur, a Dalit joint action committee had gained permission from the temple management committee to enter the premises. The stage had been set for what was intended as a peaceful and legal temple entry movement.

Instead, what the Dalits encountered on Sunday in Bharatpur could best be described as an intimidating environment where some individuals appeared to be more prepared for conflict and violence than for tolerance. Although the police had been adequately informed about the planned social action, they were remarkably ill-prepared for crowd control, peaceful protest and law enforcement.

The procession to the temple was led by a young Dalit woman who was to perform a ritual inside the temple. Hundreds, if not thousands of Hindu women perform every day. Carrying a simple bouquet of flowers, she had a simple aim: perform a puja to the deity inside the temple.

She is Hindu by birth but had never been allowed to perform this ritual so many times for granted. When she and the Dalit procession leaders arrived at the temple entrance, they were denied entry. The 30 or so priests seated inside the gilded entrance were themselves engaged in a puja surrounded with beautifully arranged flowers and vermillion. Grasping the metal gate and the metal bars around the temple, the Dalits appeared to be jailed both from without and within.

When they were denied entry, the Dalits tried to forcibly enter the temple. Passions ran high and many entered the temple by climbing over metal bars or forcing their way in through the metal gate. Things quickly spiralled out of control and a police lathicharge ensued. Caught in the charge, many were trampled and unnecessarily beaten both by police lathis and butts of guns.

The Dalit procession fled and as they regrouped to attempt further negotiations with the temple management committee, a group of vigilante youths rushed at those who had gathered outside the temple area, hurling stones. A barrage of bricks and rocks split heads and injured many. Those fleeing this attack in many cases were denied even temporary shelter in local homes. The police did nothing to protect the Dalits from this unstructured attack. When they did act, it was a little too late to pursue the vigilantes.

At that point, the Dalit leaders gathered their followers and led a procession away from the area which wound its way back towards Sahid Chok in Narayangad. Even here, the army’s lumbering mine-protected vehicles cleared through the procession and effectively silenced the Dalit’s chants.

Back in Kathmandu, at the closing ceremony of the International Consultation on Caste-Based Discrimination, Minister for Local Development, Yuba Raj Gyawali reiterated the government’s commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Convention on Eradication of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The representatives from multilateral and donor agencies as well as international human rights advocates proclaimed solidarity with the Nepal Dalit communities. Indeed, there are many who do work in solidarity with Nepal Dalits and care deeply about human rights across the world.

But even at this historically important consultation, many Dalit groups felt marginalised and excluded. The events of 5 December made a mockery of the rhetoric shared at the consultation. Practices of untouchability, social exclusion, caste-based discrimination and violence are not just rhetorical subjects but painful realities tragically borne by Dalit communities struggling for respect, humanity and freedom.

Laurie Ann Vasily is working on her PhD at Cornell University whose current research focuses on Nepal Dalit student education issues.

Common roadmap

Worry in India about Nepal’s crisis

Such a big jamboree of Nepali academics, ex-military brass, ex-diplomats and activists to discuss the crisis in Nepal had perhaps not taken place even in Nepal. The two-day ‘Track Two’ conference this week was addressed by top Indian officials who stressed that unless Nepal and India worked together to meet the Maoist threat it wouldn’t be possible to find a solution.

It is perhaps an indication of the seriousness with which the Indian establishment regards the situation in Nepal that it has got an Indian think tank to hold a semi-official forum here.

The meeting comes amid a backdrop of stepped up Maoist rhetoric against India and the unity of the two biggest Indian Maoist groups and two dozen others.

Nepal’s own Ministry of Home Affairs currently lead the regional Maoist umbral organisation, COMPASS and say they want to ‘South Asianise’ Nepal’s revolution. The strategy behind regionalising the conflict appears to be to use Nepal’s experience to widen the front.

Aside from that, the Maoists’ anti-Indian rhetoric and the threat to launch a counter-offensive in India, itself, if New Delhi intervenes militarily in Nepal is a deterrence in case such an action is indeed being contemplated in response to a ‘final offensive against the centre’ by Nepal Maoists.

With the revolutions interlinked, it was necessary for India’s Maoists to unite even if it was to adopt a revolution in Nepal. By the same token, the insurgency in Nepal has become a national security issue for India itself. By coordinating strategies, Nepal Maoists and their Indian comrades will be able to exploit existing tensions between India and its smaller neighbours, between New Delhi and state governments and between states to their advantage.

Recent COCOMPOSA statements hint at taking advantage of India-Pakistan tensions to further the struggle within India. Regional Maoists have also mobilised the Bhilani refugees in Nepal and have already started exterminating ‘class enemies’ in western Bangladesh along the border with West Bengal.

The Indian rebels are using the ceasefire in Jammu and Kashmir to expand their reach to states where they have been inactive or dormant: Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and even Mizoram. It is no coincidence that all three states border Nepal. The Indian central government has admitted that 15 districts are ‘de facto’ Maoist-affected. For New Delhi this is the resurrected ghost of the 1970s Naxalite movement that had to be vigilantly put down.

The Maoist analysis is that despite India’s size, parts of it actually have objective conditions and contradictions that are even more conducive to a long-term people’s war than in Nepal. In this way, a united regional Maoist group could emerge and make a Maoist ‘South Asia’ that could open up an idea which they not be as far-fetched as it may have initially seemed.

A considerable worry among Indian strategists is that the Royal Nepal Army is not shunning enough initiative to go after the rebels and they even opine that the army command structure may have to be revamped. If the Maoists actually capture state power in Nepal, they fear it will send shock waves across India and embolden regional revolutionaries.

But despite the Royal Nepali Army having won only five of the 50 major battles in the past three years, it doesn’t look like the Maoist’s ‘strategic offensive’ will work. For that, India has to be embroiled in a big domestic crisis and that doesn’t look likely. The current ‘stalemate’ in which the Maoists say is to prepare for a future Indian incursion appears to be a symbolic exercise to keep the guerrillas focused on an external enemy.

Despite efforts at unity, Indian Maoist groups are dissident. South Asia’s Maoists say they want to follow Mao by the book but they appear to be excessively doctrinaire and have failed to learn from the experience of other struggles: they may fight but they won’t win.

But by spilling revolution out of Nepal into India’s vast hinterland the conflict will prolong indefinitely into the future. Recent statements by Indian Maoist leader Ganapati, that the group is preparing for a protracted people’s war appears to prove this.

Neither the Maoists nor the democratic forces in India and Nepal will benefit from such a situation. The only ones who will take advantage will be the reactionaries.
Turf war

Jana Morcha and the Maoists are fighting for influence in central Nepal

Jana Morcha's Babarum Nepal (left) addresses a rally in Baglung on Wednesday, saying: “We are leading the people against the Maoists.” A minute's silence at the rally for victims of Maoist violence (right).

Riding a wave of popular anger against the Maoists, the confrontation between the Maoists and the Jana Morcha is spreading. It is a turf war between one communist faction that believes in armed struggle and another that has taken the parliamentary path.

The Jana Morcha's launch of a campaign to 'expose' Maoist atrocities in August but more recently it is trying to ride the wave of public outrage against Maoist atrocities that started in Dalekh last month.

To be sure, the anti-Maoist demonstration in Baglung headquarters on Wednesday was smaller and not as spontaneous as the Dullu rally in Dalekh on 22 November. Chitra Bahadur KC, a former Jana Morcha MP from Dalekh and was here to address the town meeting of 500 people. Baglung has always been a stronghold of the Jana Morcha and two of its three MPs in parliament were from Baglung.

In September, Maoists kidnapped four Jana Morcha members on their way to a party rally in Bhorpatan. At the rally, Jana Morcha's local leader Pari Thapa denounced the Maoists.

The next day, Tulsi Ram Aryal and other party leaders were abducted and some of them only managed to escape after two months in captivity. The protests snowballed, and in retaliation, 300 Maoists attacked Damek VDC on 29 November, where they tortured six people including Pari Thapa's wife. Rupa by drilling holes into her legs. Twenty villagers were severely beaten. "Both parties claim this area," explains Baglung's CDO, Prem Narayan Sharma. "The Jana Morcha used to keep quiet when the Maoists attacked members of other parties. Now it's just them and the Maoists."

The turf war has now gone deep into kidnapping each other's cadre. The Maoists abducted five Jana Morcha members in Dalekh last month, Jana Morcha retaliated by holding six Maoists, although three have now been released. "I think they are bargaining," says Sharma.

He also says the two are fighting for the grass roots even though their leaders don't want to fight each other. Jana Morcha says angry villagers captured the Maoists and handed them over to the party. Chitra Bahadur KC, explicates: "Our party policy is not to capture Maoists, the people sometimes take them in."

Indiscipline in the Maoists' lower ranks may explain why a six point non-aggression pact signed recently between the leaders of the two parties has broken down. "Village level Maoists are acting on their own. They are ultra-leftists so they don't stick to agreements," says KC, who as MP visited Kim II Sung University.

Locals have here their own take on things. "Two years ago, Jana Morcha and the Maoists were brothers," said a shopkeeper observing the rally, holding up two fingers to show how close they were. Others think territory of the grass roots is the crucial issue.

The current trouble in Baglung may be further proof that villagers will no longer tolerate Maoist brutality. Certainly, Jana Morcha found a sympathetic audience for its denunciation of Maoist methods here on Wednesday. But in future, there may be further fracturing of politics between the Maoists and their erstwhile Jana Morcha allies and within the Maoists themselves. The government, for its part, can't take comfort in the anti-Maoist mood. Says KC: "The Nepali people don't believe in the king or this government. The government is also a terroristic."

A trust in Nepal

Humlis throng to Simikot for the Nepal Trusts’ annual health camp in Nepal’s most remote district

The aim: to offer medical services to the people of Nepal’s most deprived and remote district.

The Nepal Trust is based in northern Scotland with directors in the UK and Nepal. It first became involved in Humla a decade ago building clinics in outlying villages. Nurse Janet Griffin, a grandmother of eight from near London and one of the camp leaders, took part in the trek to build the first clinic.

A 65-year-old woman having her 19th child said: ‘Of my 19 children, half are dead and half the children from this village are dead.’ That made me determined to come back to Humla and see what we could do," says Griffin.

A family tie gave rise to Nepal Trust Australia, which raised 40 percent of the funds for this camp, while Nepalis and Indians came from the Nepalgunj Medical School led by surgeon M Kidwal. ‘It’s an absolute condition that the Nepal team lead,’ said Trust chairman Tony Sharpe, a retired forest officer who says the Trust’s initiatives follow invitations from local leaders.

The Trust hoped for an increase over the 6,000 Humlis treated by the first camp in 2003 but below past, perhaps as held numbers to some 4,500. On the first morning, hundreds of people queued from SAM, crouched up against each other and huddled in blankets, women and men separated, babies everywhere. A puppet show with health messages prompted ripples of laughter among those waiting.

There were stories of tragedy. One elderly man felt paralysis creeping up his side and his power of speech seemed to be disappearing. Doctors were sure they could tend to him. The Maoists, who control the district outside Simikot, had stopped or delayed many wanting to attend. It appears they tried to filter sick people from those they believed were just trying to escape the village.

They had stopped HariBahadur Shahi, his wife and their gravel son from moving for a week. Probably as a result, the son died, the third of the Shahi's four children to pass away. A mentally ill woman had just given birth but mother and child, shunned by all, had no shelter.

Major operations were carried out including the removal of an abscess from a breast. A 15-year-old girl was diagnosed with heart disease, enabling the prescription of years’ worth of medicine to prevent acute fever. Nonetheless, about half the patients were not sick, but think they are” said Kapil Sharma, a doctor from Hetauda who examined 145 patients in one morning.

The Nepal Trust has built seven clinics in Humla and has diversified into local electricity schemes, eco-tourism and monasteries' restoration. Tony Sharpe admits a health camp could only scratch the surface, perhaps as the Trust should start by strengthening the poorly-equipped district hospital where the camp took place, rather than with clinics.

The priority now is to give the hospital the tools to conduct small operations and to make it a proper reference centre with stronger links to Nepalgunj.

(Also see: ‘Moving mountains’, #116)
Badri Paudyal
in Moscow

Fifty years ago, the Soviet Union set up the 2.5 megawatt Panauti hydropower station. Moscow also built a portion of the East-West Highway, a hospital, the Janakpur Cigarette Factory, and other industries.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow’s development aid to Nepal dried up. But in its place we have seen Nepali entrepreneurs who settled down in Russia take the lead in investing in private hydropower projects and many other ventures in their home country.

Many of the Nepalis went to study in the Soviet Union, got married and lived there. After the changes in 1990, because of their knowledge of Russian and English as well as their entrepreneurial spirit, they led the pack in Russia’s fledgling private sector. After becoming billionaires, some of them are bringing some of their money home to Nepal. Not only as charity, but as investors to develop their home country, create jobs and run a proper business.

Arun Ojha, Tek Raj Niraula, Biraya Shrestha, Chhanbyam Thapa and Ram Shah run an electronics business in Moscow. They got together to set up the Sanima Group which launched the Rs 300 million hydroelectric plant on the Sun Kosi River. The project has Rs 110 million equity from Sanima and other well-known Belarus-Russian tycoons: Upendra Mahato, Nirij Shrestha and Jiba Lamichhane as well as loans from a consortium of banks led by the Nepal Investment Bank.

The project is located in Sindhupalchok and most of the work including the powerhouse construction and links to the main grid is complete. Power generation will start next month.

Sanima Pvt Ltd’s managing director Arun Ojha has had to battle for six years, for this project. Another obstacle was the impression among locals that the project was a charity and the time wasted in paperwork. “It took us three years just to get the paperwork ready but the actual construction only took one-and-a-half years,” Ojha told us. “If it hadn’t been for the frequent bandas we’d have finished it in a year.”

Despite the delays, Sun Kosi’s investors are happy with the progress and are already thinking of further investment in the 1.5 megawatt Upper Sun Kosi and another project in the vicinity. The group is also looking at a more ambitious 15 megawatt Mai Khola project in Ilam in eastern Nepal.

The investors of Sun Kosi have got together with other Russian-educated engineers and ITPOC, SILT and OSMAT Consulting to set up the Mohiniya Hydropower Company which has started construction on the five megawatt Malung Khola project in Rasuwa. The Rs 70 million joint venture involves a Chinese company, the Himalayan Bank and the Development Credit Bank in Kathmandu. Another Russian group wants to renovate Panauti into an advanced hydraulic lab to training power engineers and offer the power free to the grid, but NIB has not responded.

Sanima’s plans to get into banking has finally come through this week with a Rs 320 million outlay in Sanima Development Bank which is a joint venture with other Russian Nepalis, a third-country partner and with 30 percent of stock options to be sold to the public.

Russia-based Nepalis have also been involved in media, health, education, finance and tourism. Mahato, Lamichhane and Ojha have invested Rs 120 million in Kantipur Television, and the three also have Rs 100 million in the Medicare Hospital in Kathmandu. Mahato owns stakes in Gongabu Bus park, Standard Finance, Salt Trading as well as the mobile tel-exchange joint venture, SpiceTel.

Krishna, Sambhu and Surya Rijal from Moscow have another group that has invested in Kathmandu’s Hermitage Travel Agency and the Hermitage Hotel in Chitwan’s Sauraha. The Nepali Russians are also involved in education. Recently returned Tika Pokhrel and Pemba Lama with Mahato and Lamichhane have put in more than 40 percent of Rs 25 million authorised capital each in Acme and Kantipur Engineering colleges.

More than 800 students are enrolled in Kantipur Engineering College and five batches of BE students have graduated from the Dhapakhel-based institution. KEC’s principal Rameshwor Rijal himself graduated in highway engineering from Minak and says the characteristic of Russian investors in Nepal is that they don’t look for immediate returns.

“They are in it for the long haul, sometimes it feels like they aren’t really interested in profits, they just want the college to be sustainable and maintain the quality of our graduates,” he says. Rijal would ultimately like to set up a technical university. “Nepal is at a point where we need a good technical university, one that would be a model not just for Nepal but also for the region,” says Rijal.

Nepal’s climate, economy and socio-economic status makes Nepal an ideal regional educational centre, he adds.

Asking what motivates them, Russia-based Nepalis say they would like to give back to Nepal society what they got from it. There is great sadness about the conflict and the state of the country and while this may be the reason other Nepalis abroad have given up on Nepal, it is precisely why Russian NRIs want to invest here.

What frustrates them the most is the bureaucracy and how the state slows up in their way. Nepal officialdom is suspicious about where the Russians made their money, says Sanima’s Ojha. “Where we got our money from is for the Russian government to decide, it is none of Nepal’s business. Nepal should be happy we are bringing the money in.”

The Royal Nepali ambassador in Moscow, Lila Prasad Sharma, has made encouraging of Russian investment in Nepal a priority. “They want to do something for their motherland, they have already invested Rs 1 billion or more. No Nepali from America or elsewhere has done that,” Sharma told us. “Yet, back home, in Nepal, they are hounded.”

At the Foreign Ministry’s Nepal Desk in Moscow, Nikolai Listopadov says: “At the moment, Russia may not be actively involved in aid in Nepal but our situation is improving. We are happy that there is greater trade and investment cooperation between Russian and Nepali entrepreneurs.”

Mahato, Lamichhane and others have investments in Cyprus, China, Italy and Korea. Given Nepal’s red tape, they would never have invested here and the only thing drawing them is that this is the land of their birth. Says Mahato: “You can’t stop helping Nepal just because there is a Maoist problem. In fact that is precisely the reason we should be helping.”
During the Soviet era, Russians were not allowed to own private property. Fifteen years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow has nearly as many multi-millionaires as New York. And some of them are Nepalis.

Knowledge of English and Russian as well as prior exposure to the free market allowed Nepali students in the Soviet Union to adjust faster to the consumer boom in the post-communist era. So they got married and settled down here. Not even in that bastion of global capitalism, the United States, has the Nepali diaspora struck it as rich as it has in Russia.

Jiba Lamichhane came to Russia to study engineering in 1986. He used to be a dealer for Sony, LG and Samsung in Russia. “There would be long queues even before we opened the stores, we sold goods worth hundreds of thousands of dollars every day. There was just so much pent-up demand the profit margin was 35-40 percent,” recalls Lamichhane of the period just after 1990. The Nepalis thrived because locals lacked the business acumen in banking and exposure to the outside world. But now the Russians have learnt fast, and the business is more competitive. Lamichhane is managing director of Techno Trust, a company manufacturing the Elson brand LCD TVs for the Russian market.

There are more than 150 Nepali entrepreneurs and more than 36 business conglomerates in Russia and the CIS countries which are Nepali-owned. From Moscow to Minsk, Kiev, Kharkov, Odessa, St Petersburg to Volgograd, you will find successful Nepali traders dealing in electronic goods and appliances. Even the newly-arrived are doing well. Dile Lama came here not to study but to do business. He now runs the Tibet and Jhomokunga restaurants in Moscow and Minsk.

But far by the most successful Nepali in the CIS is Upendra Mahato, who did a PhD, and after 1990 set up a business empire spanning electronics, oil, real estate, banking and heavy machinery. Mahato now has 12,000 employees, 50 of them Nepali. Starting off as an electronics trader, Mahato now owns a television factory in Voronezh, 400 km south of Moscow, making one million sets annually. And he owns the outlets to sell them: a huge electronics mega mall in Gorbushka which sees 80,000 customers a day. He is building a 26-storey $50 million apartment block in a prime residential area in Moscow.

Russia’s Nepali millionaires are now reaping the rewards of the hard work and struggle of their early days here. Most have dachas in the countryside, children attending the most expensive schools in Europe or the United States. They commute to work in limousines.

But the success is tinged with the fear of violence from extortionists and skinheads.
Living in a colony
Suburban residential blocks are not just trendy, they are also practical and affordable

NARESH NEWAR

A

n the Jaypur neighbourhood of Bagdogra, in western India, the community of Maharjans are overwhelmed to see their downscaled neighbourhood turn into a plush residential area.

Six years ago, when Astaman Maharjan bought a huge tract of land to build a colony of bungalows, his friends warned him that he was taking a huge risk. The friends were right, Bagdogra was a backwater. It had bad roads and that the real flop of the estate venture was that it was inimicable.

But Astaman’s gamble paid off. Bishnu Awas, a colony of 36 small bungalows, is thriving. People are moving in and this has set off a chain reaction of groceries, newspaper stalls, cyber cafes and restaurants. Astaman did not just strike it rich but he raised the profile of his entire neighbourhood and created opportunities for others.

“A housing colony is still a new concept but it is practical, affordable and bound to catch on,” explains Astaman, who admits he was inspired by the apartment complex concept initiated by the Chaudhury Group.

Indeed, the trend is spreading in Kathmandu Valley for real estate developers to provide collective housing which individual home builders once had to struggle with. Leading housing companies such as Civil Homes, Sunrise Homes and Comfort Housing have already built several suburban residential areas. In 2001, Civil Homes took the first leap by building 55 houses in Bhisepati. The response was so overwhelming that all houses were booked even before they were finished. The company has added two more colonies in Kalanski and Sunakothi that will have more than 350 bungalows. “Houses don’t sell just because they are in a residential colony,” says IR Tamang of Civil Homes, “People look for design and workmanship.” Tamang’s experience is that selling budget housing is more difficult than selling more expensive townhouses. (See interview, p 13)

The economics of it is that real estate developers save money buying construction material in bulk and that is where the profit margins come from. Reputed housing companies are now under pressure from banks which have a spurt in home loans to develop more residential blocks.

Three years ago, when Everest Bank launched its Home Loan Scheme it started an avalanche of home-buying. Today, Standard Chartered, Bank of Kathmandu and Nabil Bank are all providing attractive home financing packages. The loans can be repaid in monthly installments lasting five to 18 years with 8.5 to 9.5 percent interests. The banks have invested an estimated Rs 4.5 billion in housing alone in the last three years.

“At a time when the prices of land and construction materials are escalating, people prefer not to build houses on their own. They believe they can save money and hassle by buying ready-made bungalows,” says Dilip Neupane, marketing manager of Sunrise Homes.

Located at Balsekumbi near Koteswore bridge, Sunrise Homes already has 37 elegant houses. “We are building 100 more bungalows and more than half of them have already been booked,” says Neupane. Many families have moved out of congested inner city areas like Asan, Laljimpat, Indra Chok and Patan.

The colonies have their own water supply system, the roads are wider, there is ample parking space, security and phones are taken care of. Even if you have to pay slightly more for all this, most people stress they think it is worth while. Some residents have even formed committees to raise funds for garbage collection and maintenance.

“There is a real sense of community, unlike in Asan where there were all these strangers,” says Shamila Shrestha who moved into Bagdogra from Asan a year ago. Airline stewardess Bindya Thapa who moved in with her sister recently agrees: “The neighbours all know each other and give help and support when needed.” Property inside the colony has greater resale value. In Bagdogra, several families have already sold off their property for Rs 4 million, more than double the original price. “The demand for houses is really growing. We are now running out of land,” says 61-year-old Astaman Maharjan who has now begun developing another colony nearby targeting middle-class families.

Future in apartments
As the Valley runs out of land, the future of housing in Kathmandu is in new self-contained high rise apartment blocks. And already housing developers are setting their eyes on it. “The prospect is good because today’s generation prefers community housing with security and easy accessibility,” says Krishna Chakravarty, the upmarket Ace Apartments, which is nearing completion in Near.

About 56 apartments worth about Rs 3.5 million have been sold while real estate companies have been cropping up, building apartment complexes as the demand grows. “The business in apartments is gradually growing and will take off in the next few years,” predicts Sandeep Bikram Rana of Ace Chaudhury Developers, which pioneered the idea six years ago. Area’s apartment complex in Bagdogra with more than 140 units was sold off six months after opening. It has now built another complex in Harisiddhi where nearly all 125 apartments are booked, mostly by Kathmandu’s inner-city residents.

Phenomenal growth in housing colonies

How did you come up with the housing colony concept? Three years ago, the Chaudhury Group introduced the concept of the multi-storey apartment system at a time when Nepal’s housing sector had not quite developed. Civil Homes had just started and we thought why not build on a similar concept by building a colony of bungalows. There were risks but the idea caught on.

What were the risks involved? Since the colony system was a new concept, we foresaw many challenges. In our country, people don’t really trust others to build houses for them. Besides, people today are more quality and environment conscious. If you can’t sell houses according to their design and taste, then all investment is wasted. The investment is billions of rupees in one colony. But the first phase in Baisepati was so successful that we sold all the houses. We immediately began our second colony in Kalanski that second year building about 125 houses. Now for the third phase, we are preparing another colony with 225 houses at Sunakothi.

But has it really made housing more affordable? Certainly, it has helped. The new generation of young professionals want to live independently. Earlier, they would have had to save for 15-20 years to build their own dream houses, now with this concept coupled with housing grants from banks, they can have a house within year.

Isn’t Kathmandu running out of space? While building affordable houses, we should not try to overdo things. The rate of urbanisation is rapid and we must not turn the city into a concrete jungle. The government needs to allocate specific pocket areas in the city to build houses so that the city can be managed effectively. But there is still a lot of space to build colonies for another 10-15 years. After that we will have no choice but to go vertical. Then we have to promote the multi-storey apartment system.

In the real estate business better now? Today, it is the best investment sector. Most Nepalis want to live in the Valley now because they feel secure. Especially middle class families and overseas Nepalis who want to invest in houses. In the last three years, the real estate business has really prospered and helped generate businesses and jobs for many Nepalis.

What is the best thing about living in housing colonies? The social relations between neighbours is really healthy in colony areas. It is a close-knit community where they share ideas and do things together. They also have user communities to help each other. The best part has been helping the growth of small businesses such as groceries in the surrounding areas.
“Chhaplang chhuplung”

If you thought that ordering a glass of Horlicks at a posh bar might make you look like a fool, you’re wrong, for the 130-year-old energy drink has been branded as the coolest drink of the world. According to The Sun, the world’s trendiest bars, clubs and hotels are serving the old barley bedtime favourite instead of caffeine-packed coffee and tea. Horlicks is now available at The Zetter, Clerkenwell, Central London, voted among the world’s 50 coolest hotels and the Groucho club in Soho. The drink is also on the menu of Rivoli bar in Shoreditch, East London and Mayfair’s Embassy Club, the haunt of bling bling’ footballers which offers Horlicks so they can get a good kip before a game.

Starting out

Sanima Bikash Bittiya Sanstha Limited, a new financial institution, was launched this week. Promoted by non-Resident Nepalis who have achieved unprecedented success in their business endeavours abroad, Sanima says it has the vision to help the country prosper. (See p 8-9)

Steeling strong

Kamala Refining Mills has introduced modern technology to make its product Kamala Steel at par with contemporary international standards. Awarded with Nepal Standard for its quality product, the product Kamala Steel is now available in the water heaters with vacuum tube and metal heat tube technology are now available in the market. Nepal’s authorised dealer for the brand RC Trading says that since the water heater has 55mm insulation, the collected water will remain heated for 72 hours.

BRAND AMBASSADOR—Bagger Whiskey re-launched with Deepak Bajracharya as its local brand ambassador. The stylish new pack is said to be an upgrade of its packaging.

STRICTLY BUSINESS

Ashutosh Tiwari

HAIRLESS—Fem, a well-known cosmetic product has launched hair-removing cream in its new Easy Squeeze tube in 25 gm packs. The cream is available in four fragrances—Rose, Chandan, Blossom and Lemon for Rs 31.20. It is available at all general, medical and department stores.

UNFAZED—Morang Auto Works, the authorised distributor of Yamaha motorcycles for Nepal, launched the new Yamaha model Fazer. Available in two modes, the price of a regular Fazer is Rs 108,900 and a Fazer with a disc brake and self-start costs Rs 116,900. For a limited period of introduction, it will be sold at Rs 105,900 and Rs 113,900 respectively.

HEATING UP—Built with Australian technological support, Solar Heat brand’s solar water heaters with vacuum tube and metal heat tube technology are now available in the market. Nepal’s authorised dealer for the brand RC Trading says that since the water heater has 55mm insulation, the collected water will remain heated for 72 hours.

BRAND AMBASSADOR—Bagger Whiskey re-launched with Deepak Bajracharya as its local brand ambassador. The stylish new pack is said to be an upgrade of its packaging.

Stitching a niche

What will the Nepali garment industry do after January First?

Are we seeing the last days of the Nepali readymade garment industry that employs 60,000 people? Yes and no.

The story of garments in Nepal has long been not of entrepreneurship and business savvy but of luck and charity. Sadly, both are about to run out on 1 January when quotas are lifted, forcing Nepal to compete for markets and customers with the whole world. Meanwhile, according to a report published by the Garment Association of Nepal (GAN), Nepal’s annual exports to the US (worth a little over $100 million), which accounts for 80 percent of our garment exports have been declining all of this year.

On the other hand, if Nepal accepts the changing global reality, looks around the region, understands what China, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are doing, then figures out what it can do to carve out a niche for itself, it can remain a player. Such a repositioning would mean weak players would be forced out of the market but the stronger ones can consolidate their operations, focus only on doing things they do very well and transform the way they conduct business to remain competitive.

So far, except for Surya Nepal (whose markets are growing in India, thanks in part to the corporate muscle of its parent FTC) the media reports in Nepal have been coloured by panic, gloom and a cry for help and not by the evidence of quiet and careful strategizing.

A readymade garment company is a low-tech but labour-intensive venture. Historically, countries with low labour costs on the cusp of industrialisation have used it to give themselves a jumpstart to earn foreign currency. As those countries did well economically, they started seeing their labour costs rise. They then moved up the value chain to design, market, distribute and sell the garments while farming out bulk production to countries with lower labour costs.

For many years, this was a template for an arrangement between rich and poor countries, whereby the farmer would offer market-access benefits and provide guaranteed secure markets for the products. Since the late 1980s, Indian businesses came to set up shops with local investors and Nepal has benefited. Indeed, before international buyers started slapping social and environmental compliance codes on their Nepal-based suppliers, there was a time when every fourth house in New Baneshwor was a tube-light-proved garment sweatshop.

Garment exporters made money like there was no tomorrow. The curtains on sheltered markets are about to be lifted, these businessmen will find their products under the glare of harsh global competition. Unfortunately for them, competition is dictated entirely by the actions of companies such as Wal-Mart, GAP, JC Penney, H&M and others, who can now dump Nepal in favour of countries with stronger relationships with buying houses, lower labour costs, or lower political risks, or better technological base for converting fibre to fabrics or lower costs of doing business and higher overall reliability.

(Translation: The elephants next door known as China and India, not to mention tiny Bangladesh with an RMG industry with annual exports worth $3 billion).

Instead of continuing to knock on US Senator Diane Feinstein’s (D-CA) door for additional time-bound protections that are unlikely to happen, the choices before the Nepali readymade garment industry a thousand fold either find a niche in the regional and global markets or perish altogether. ●

NEW PRODUCTS

Hair Care Products—Sanima Bikash Bittiya Sanstha Limited has launched a new hair care product. The hair care product is available in two modes, the price of a regular Fazer is Rs 108,900 and a Fazer with a disc brake and self-start costs Rs 116,900. For a limited period of introduction, it will be sold at Rs 105,900 and Rs 113,900 respectively.

Surgical Instruments—A new range of surgical instruments has been launched by Nepal Medical Technologies Pvt Ltd. The range includes surgical scissors, forceps, retractors, scalpels, and other surgical instruments.

Furniture—A new range of furniture has been launched by Nepal Furniture Group. The range includes tables, chairs, sofas, and other furniture items.

Cookware—A new range of cookware has been launched by Nepal Kitchenware. The range includes pots, pans, and other cookware items.
Kathmandu’s dog day afternoons

The country is going to the dogs, all the more reason for our four-legged friends to learn some obedience so they know who’s the boss.

It has happened to many of us: on a trek or in a gally we are suddenly surrounded by 20 or more yapping canines, some of which are the size of small tuk-tuk. How would most of us react? Probably as I did when I was caught in just this situation last week and not at all frightened or worried about which part of my anatomy was about to be bitten off.

I was attending the ‘Who’s the Boss Dog Obedience Training’ held on the Department of Livestock service’s vet hospital grounds in Tripureswor last week. Leading the group of 20 or so Nepali dog owners was Elke Meyer, a senior Dog Behaviour Trainer from Australia who had come over the pond to volunteer her services to Dogmandu. Sponsored by AnimalNepal.org, Meyer has just concluded her weeklong program. What was amazingly apparent in just the first 10 minutes of my arrival on Day Three was that I did not have to be in fear for my life as these beasts were all on check chains and trotting around the field in almost total control. “Heel! Down! Stay! Good Dog!” And all the dogs did as they were told even though the commands were in English. I had never seen a Nepali dog do such things. My experiences were more of the Bad Dog variety: snap—snatch!

Meyer’s program was for both professional trainer wanna-bes as well as for the public, anyone who had a pooch was eligible. Costs were minimal, Rs 900 and items such as check chains and leashes were on sale for pups who had never seen such a thing. Those completing the course were awarded certificates based on their participation. Aspiring trainers were tested both on the field with their animal as well as in the classroom where they had to correctly answer questions on Alpha Pack Behaviour and other aspects of canine psychology. Both human and canine graduates are now in a continuing program to train others on the topic of ‘Who’s the Boss’.

What I found most inspiring is that the state of pet ownership in the kingdom is approaching a new higher level of proficiency. Whereas most pets used to be allowed to roam the streets sustaining themselves on garbage, owners these days are getting more sophisticated. All of us here in the Doo have had run-ins with strays and pets posing as attack and/or guard dogs. In fact, according to Elke Meyers, most dogs purchased to guard homes or businesses are just as dangerous to their owners as to the would-be burglars if not properly trained.

For example, a properly trained dog may bark at the garbage collector but with a simple command of “Come”, this potential weapon of ankle destruction would immediately return to the owner, tail wagging and grinning from ear to ear.

Dogs that go through obedience training learn that they are not the alpha male of the pack, meaning they do not have to defend the entire family and that they are not the one who make protection decisions. In other words, they are not the leader. After that responsibility is taken off his shoulders, it places the pet at ease, reduces an enormous burden and promotes vigorous tail wagging instead of jaw gnashing.

For example, I watched a large Shepard on Day Three of the training refuse to lie down on command. It took the owner and Elke both to put the yawping nipping stubborn one down but down he finally went. By Day Five, the same unruly pup was going down on command and very happy to get a “Good dog” from his owner. The owner was looking a lot happier as well, he knew now that he was the boss and not the other way around.

Although Elke Meyers has gone back to Australia to continue training dogs and horses down under, she has left AnimalNepal with a strong training program, which is continuing now at 1905 Restaurant in Kantipur every Saturday. All you need is your dog and a free afternoon.

http://www.animalnepal.org/training/
**First country, then democracy**

LONG LASTING. President General Pervez Musharraf has made it clear that he has no intention of stepping down as army chief and becoming a purely civilian president. But any way that he feels it suits his benefit, Pakistan needs him in uniform. “I think the country is more important than democracy,” he said in an interview with The Telegraph.

“We are fighting terrorism in the mountains. The army is suffering casualties and activity moving on against them,” he said. The prime minister underlined that every state in the world joined the Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel mines. “Keeping the Border is not easy and the left doesn’t want this. It is a very difficult thing to do.”

The Prime Minister underlined that the Afghans who were displaced by the Soviet occupation and are suffering from terrorism and the Taliban are living in a very difficult condition. “They are being driven out of their homes and are living in a very difficult condition.”

**Under mining**

NAIROBI—The Nairobi Summit on a Mine-Free World concluded with a renewed commitment by 144 states that have banned anti-personnel mines to work together to finish this insidious weapon. The summit adopted an action plan containing 70 commitments on stopping up destruction of mine stockpiles, clearing mined lands within the treaty’s deadlines and ensuring long-term aid for mine victims. Pakistan undertook to ensure that every state in the world joined the Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel mines. ICRC president Jakob Keulberger stressed the need for more to be done to cut out the horror, pointing out that many less than 20 years could see a significant improvement in their lives through adequate medical care, physical rehabilitation and socio-economic reintegration. He addressed the summit’s political leaders, ministers and senior political officials from more than 90 countries. A group of senior military officials from eight countries reviewed the findings of a study commissioned in 1995 on the mine-use effectiveness and effectiveness of anti-personnel mines. They only reaffirmed the previous conclusion that the appalling consequences of anti-personnel mines far outweighed their limited military value but also concluded that eight years of experience since the study had confirmed that anti-personnel mines were obsolete on the modern battlefield and that their use was not justifiable under any circumstances.

**Americans seek asylum in Canada**

MONCTON—Canadians, not the country’s refugee system, should decide the fate of those who have deserted the US military for asylum in their northern neighbour, according to a support group. One of those soldiers, Jeremy Hinman, went before Canada’s refugee board for a hearing on whether he qualifies for asylum. The adjudicator announced he would not consider the argument that Hinman did not have to serve because the US war on Iran was illegal.

Hinman arrived in Canada on 3 January with his wife and child, fleeing his army unit in the US. After his unit was deployed to Iraq, the American army, who had already served in Afghanistan, had applied to be discharged or reassigned as a conscientious objector. He requested that his request be processed through the process can take up to a year, says Bill Galvin of the Washington, DC-based Centre on Conscience and War, a member of the GI Rights network.

In the United States, according to a new study, an average of 700 people applied for conscientious objector status each year between 2003 and 2005. The study also found that the majority of those who applied were discharged or reassigned on the basis of the laws.

**Missing the Iron Curtain**

PRAGUE—Millions in eastern Europe remain convinced that life was better for them before communism collapsed 15 years ago. A survey in the Czech Republic showed that one in five Czechs, older people, particularly, would like to see a return to communism. More than half of the pensioners said the country was wrong to choose democracy in 1989. Opinion polls in other former communist countries have shown that many old people feel that life was better before they undergo communism.

In Poland and former East Germany, longing for communism has become widespread enough to challenge the governments of their own—Ohio is entirely the German word ‘ost’ meaning east. In a survey in Slovakia by the MK agency, half the respondents said they were disillusioned with changes since 1989. In Russia, opinion polls show that even more people are proving the regimes they lived under were least repressive in the world, the Russian Communist Party is still widely supported.

The transition from centrally planned to free market economies that followed the fall of eastern Europe’s communist regimes brought an end to guaranteed employment and state financial support for everyone. These fears over social security and public order have been translated into real support for communist parties in some countries in the region. But few believe that communism will again become a dominant political force in eastern Europe because only one of generation support the communist parties. (IPS)

**Rich get richer**

T he world’s poorer nations are paying a heavy price in human suffering, economic stagnation and political instability for the failure of the rich to provide the resources they promised to fight global hunger and poverty. In a report to the Millennium Development Goals Summit of the General Assembly, humanitarian agency Oxfam said in a report. If the world fails to act, warned the international body, “45 million more people will die needlessly by 2015—the targeted date for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set by 189 world leaders in September 2000.

“...80 million people in sub-Saharan Africa will be living on the razor edge of poverty, surviving on less than a dollar a day in 2015, 97 million more children will still be out of school and 53 million more people in the world will lack proper sanitation facilities by that date. The sums that rich countries invest in global poverty reduction are shamefully small, the London-based NGO said in its study, Paying the Price. At an average of $80 per person per year in rich countries, the investment is equivalent to the price of a weekly cup of coffee.

The goals for 2015 include reducing by half extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS and ensuring environmental sustainability. The eighth goal calls for a global partnership of rich and poor countries for development. But most of the rich nations have not only failed to do so but have instead increased spending 0.7 percent of their GDP as Official Development Aid (ODA) to the poor as agreed in 1970 but have also refused to sign up to other measures to ensure their obligations to remove tariff barriers, permit market access and cancel southern nations’ debts.

Currently, the world’s poorest nations are paying back a staggering $100 million a day in debt. But tackling global poverty requires more than money said the report: “poor countries’ prospects are also undermined by unfair trade rules, the violent extremes of global warming, the impacts of global warming. Yet cancelling the debts of 20 of the poorest countries would be small change for the rich nations”. The cost to the richest countries would amount to about $1.5 billion each year over the next decade—or an average a mere $2.10 for each of their citizens annually.

Oxfam is urging seven leaders of the G8 nations—the United States, Germany, France, Italy, Japan, Britain and Canada—to make history in 2005 by cancelling poor countries’ debts and increasing ODA. The eighth group of the Member is Russia. So far only four countries—Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands—have consistently met the ODA target after nearly 30 years. Two other European countries have set their ODA deadlines ahead of 2013: Italy (2006), Luxembourg and Ireland (2007), Belgium (2010) and France (2012). By devoting only 0.14 percent of its national income to development aid, US spending in 2003 was one-tenth of what it invested in its invasion and ‘rebuilding’ of Iraq. The US will not reach the aid target needed to halve world poverty until 2040 and Germany until 2057, while Japan is decreasing its aid commitment. Two top recipients of French aid, French Polynesia and New Caledonia and one top recipient of US aid, Israel, are, in fact, high-income countries. The US aid agency USAID’s war on terror” also threatens to divert aid away from those who need it most. Aid is again being used as a political tool, according to Oxfam, with one-third of the increase in ODA in 2002 resulting from large allocations to Afghanistan and Pakistan. The goals of development aid are being redefined to suit that new security agenda: in Denmark, Japan and Australia, ‘combating terrorism’ is now the explicit aim of official aid programs.

Oxfam is also urging both the G8 and other donors to:

- provide better quality and rights reviews, aid funding, including at least 8% 10 billion in extra aid immediately (to meet the MDGs)

- cancel 100 percent debt of the world’s poorest countries, including bilateral debts and those owed to the World Bank and the African Development Bank

- fully implement commitments to improve delivery of aid and eliminate the concept of “tied aid”, according to which poorer nations have to purchase goods from donor nations, irrespective of their needs.

Caroline Green of Oxfam singled out Italy and the US as the “worst offenders” of such aid. About 70 percent of US aid is “tied”, she added. Funding the poor is not simply an act of charity: it is a both a moral obligation and a matter of justice, argues the report.

Time for action to meet the MDGs is running out, yet progress has been “unbelievably slow”. Only one goal—halving income poverty—has any chance of being met but even this is due to progress in just a handful of countries.Poor country governments must also fulfill their commitments to fight poverty. But without finance, these countries will not be able to take advantage of global trade and investment opportunities or protect their citizens’ basic rights, it is a both a moral obligation and a matter of justice, argues the report.

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Mr Chips turns out to be 007
Dutch maths teacher admits fake communist party scam that fooled Mao Zedong

JOHN HENLEY in AMSTERDAM

A 76-year-old retired Dutch maths teacher described how for more than 25 years he was feted by communist leaders around the world as the inspired head of a radical Marxist-Leninist party that never existed. As Chris Petersen, head of the supposedly 600-member Marxist-Leninist party of the Netherlands, Pieter Boeve travelled to Beijing more than a dozen times and met Mao Zedong. He was also welcomed with open arms in Albania by Enver Hoxha, and in the eastern bloc capitals of Europe.

“In fact we had at most a dozen members, none of whom had the faintest idea of the truth,” Boeve said from his home in the seaside resort of Zandvoort. “The whole thing was a hoax set up by the secret services to learn all they could about what was going on in Marxist Peking.”

The Mao regime was so impressed by the revolutionary zeal of Petersen/Boeve and his MLPN that it gave him regular briefings on the chairman’s latest thinking at the Chinese mission in The Hague. Beijing even funded the non-existent party’s newspaper, De Kommunist, which was written entirely by Dutch secret service (BVD) agents.

“We took everybody in,” Boeve said proudly. “As far as I know, the MLPN was the only wholly fake radical party to have existed and certainly the only one to have really worked. We passed inside information on every Maoist policy nuance to all the western intelligence forces. It was a wonderful adventure.”

Boeve was first recruited by the BVD in 1955 when he visited a World Student Congress in Moscow. Soon after, he was invited to China, then still the Soviet Union’s ally, for a similar communist youth junket. After the Sino-Soviet split of the early 1960s, the Chinese began courting western communists and, egged on by the BVD, Boeve played along.

“I was invited to Peking for a month-long course on the wisdom of Chairman Mao,” he said. “It was quite a baptism of fire. I hadn’t read a great deal of Marx or Lenin at that stage, let alone Mao. But I soon got very proficient. I could spout for hours.”

The foundation of the MLPN was announced by De Kommunist in 1969. Its main role was to undermine the official Dutch Communist party, the KPN, by denouncing its deviant beliefs and unreliable conduct, and to garner information on—and gain access to—the Maoist elite in Beijing.

In the latter task, it was successful beyond the BVD’s wildest dreams. “They adored us,” Boeve said. “I was invited to all the big events—Army Days, Anniversaries of the Republic, everything. There were feasts in the Great Hall of the People and long articles in the People’s Daily. And they gave us lots of money.”

Most European Maoist groups, unable to keep up with an endless string of purges and policy about-turns, had lost faith by the mid-1980s and the MLPN gradually began winding down its activities. But as late as 1989, after the Tiananmen student uprising, Boeve was invited to Beijing to praise the regime’s crackdown.

The existence of Project Mongol, as it was dubbed by the BVD, was successfully kept secret until this September, when another former agent, Frits Hoekstra, published a book about the service’s glory days. It caused something of an uproar in the Netherlands, a country where a few genuine former radicals now occupy leading positions in public life.

Boeve, who was never a salaried spy and who, despite his extra-curricular activities, rose to become head teacher of a top Dutch grammar school, said he was at first unwilling to have his name revealed. “My family knew but no one else,” he said. “As far as my friends and former colleagues were concerned, all my travel was to do with educational exchanges.”

Since the revelations about his former life as one of the west’s most productive spooks, Boeve said reactions have varied from shock and disbelief, “How can we ever trust you again?” to mild amusement. “My fellow members of the Zandvoort town council call me 007,” he said. “I don’t mind. I’m satisfied with what I’ve done with my life. I’ve travelled the world at someone else’s expense and I feel did my bit. And it was certainly fun.”

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property of a nation just because he is the king’s son? More so, when they see that top leaders and even generals bave their heads to the cradle where the new king sleeps, an example how these powerful people prove their loyalty to the royal generations.’

Gibson is not against monarchy. He said that some monarchies survived in Europe because the monarchs in these places suffered their positions. But in the last 200 years even the monarchies that became moderate have vanished. In Nepal, he has not experienced the reign of a softened king since 1950. We can’t draw comparisons about one king being better than the other. That is why we need democracy. It is not that we do not know we made mistakes with multi-party democracy. It is just that we have to learn from our mistakes. The leaders should stop treating the people like their personal property as the kings do. They should not think of their parties as ancestral property. They need to hand over the baton to real representatives of the people who show commitment to the people’s welfare. Only a democracy that is not subservient to the monarchy can defeat the Monarchs.

Premier tantrums

Gumasto Luitel in 
Kantipur, 7 December

These days Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba doesn’t miss any opportunity to give people a piece of his mind. A few days ago he was guest at a program related to communications, and he fired a salvo at the media. The following day he attended a program hosted by the civil service and he berated the bureaucracy. Then, at an FNCCI program he lashed out at businessmen. “Journalists should be helping contain terrorism instead of spreading it,” he told media. Deuba’s language and tone resembled that of a police or army officer. This is no surprise given the time he spends with them. Deuba has forgotten the immediate media support he received after his reappointment as prime minister. The reason for that support was the expectation that this government would produce positive results. But those hopes are now dashed. While taking on the business community, Deuba blamed them of paying off the Monarchs. But how can anyone survive in this society without going into extortion demands? For those living within the security shield of the state, there may be exceptions. Even poor farmers are forced to donate to the rebels. They really don’t have a choice. Only when people have nothing left to lose do they rise up like the people of Dailekh have done.

Deuba accused the bureaucrats of not performing. So, why doesn’t he punish them? He heads the government, after all. Isn’t he just trying to pass the buck? Maybe the reason the bureaucrats don’t listen to the politicians in because they know the government’s days are numbered. Deuba didn’t even spare cartoonists, and he particular one for lambasting his official residence aws “Baluwatar Restaurant and Bar”.

Media bashing

Prakash Prakruti in
Samajya, 2 December

I travelled to Tanahun via Palpa to report on civilians trapped by war. I reached Ridi Bajar at 9 AM. A woman at a tea stall said she had seen security forces here for three years. “Everything we do is controlled by the people’s government,” she said matter-of-factly. Lauvedahpahak Bajar Bajar around 10:30 AM and was surprised to find an army patrol there, completely contradicting what the woman had said. They asked me some questions and waved me on. The road entered a forest, the road was steep and I was on first gear. At 10:45 AM an army patrol stopped me. “Take your helmet off,” he ordered and slapped me hard on my cheek a couple of times. “What have I done, why are you hitting me?” I asked. He hit me again. There were other soldiers watching us. I kept telling him I was a journalist and asked him why he was hitting me. Another soldier walked towards me and said: “He’s a journalist, beat him up.” He started pushing and kicking me. I was helpless and broke down. While the soldier was leaving I asked him his name. He returned and pointed a gun at me. I said: “Sir, you have gun and I have a pen. You can go ahead and shoot me. I am not afraid.” “I don’t know where I got the courage from, I thought this was it, I thought of my parents and how they would miss me. Tears came down my face as I faced the gun. Another soldier begun hitting my motorcycle. He was joined by another person whose face was covered with a handkerchief. He interrogated me and I explained that I had come here with the permission of General Kuma Lam at the army camp in Tanahun and acting DSP Sharda Pradhan Ghadari. “They assured full support for my work as a journalist,” I told him. Instead, the soldier shouted at me for taking the names of his superior officers. “Nonsense, you don’t know how to present yourself in front of the army,” he said in English. He finally let me go. Villagers later offered me comfort and nursed my wounds. If journalists are treated so brutally, just imagine what ordinary citizens must go through. I am convinced that the army is bent on repressing journalists.

Out of touch

Nepal Samacharpatra

ROPA—Local government authorities including the CDO still use an obsolete telegram to send urgent messages to the prime minister’s office in Kathmandu. The Monarchs in Ropa, on the other hand, carry satellite phones and cordless sets. CDO Kamalani Kaffe believes that as far as the government is concerned Ropala doesn’t exist. The Monarchs have superior communications and use it for giving orders about army patrols. The CDO has to first write down his message, send it by messenger to the police station where it is then dictated as a telegram and passed on to Kathmandu. Ropa’s telephone communication would improve if the government got around to repairing the nine VSAT telephone lines at Sat Daha and the police district headquarters. Kaffe has repeatedly requested repairs, but it has always happened. Government staff can’t even call their families to let them know they are ok. “Two ministries of the government are from this district but they couldn’t be bothered about our broken phones,” says a civil servant posted there. Most phones have been out since the Monarchs bombed the microwave tower here in 2002.

Vengeance

Dhansar, 5 December

Friends of Prince Paras who brutally beat up Sublee Crowner Plaza chairman Prabhat S. Rana’s son Siddhartha, his fiancée Nilima and journalist Sagan Lawati at Galaxy Disco of Everest Hotel are reportedly in hiding. Siddhartha filed a case against Pragun Rana (former army chief Kiran Shumsher’s grandson), Indrash Singh (former police chief’s son), Prakar Singh (general Dhumbar Shumsher’s son) and Abhaya Shah at the district court but the police did not take action on them. According to sources, after Siddhartha lost hope of receiving support from law enforcement, the Monarchs in Ropa, who is now on bent taking revenge with the help of hired hands. Paras’ friends have stopped walking freely around the city.

The Royal Council acts as a bridge between the King and the people but we will not participate in any activity that will encourage the king to go beyond the constitution. RPP leader and minister for Land Reforms and Management Jagnath Shrestha in Kantipur, December 9

Quote of the Week

Why is constituent assembly necessary? The parliament should be restored

I think we have to go for constituent assembly nepal samacharpatra, 5 december

Immersion Course on Contemporary Social Issues

Applications are invited for the 9th session of the Immersion Course to begin from 31 January 2005. The objective of the Course is to enable Nepali graduates to intellectually comprehend critical contemporary issues through an intense exposure to the social sciences as they relate to Nepali society. The Course consists of a total of twenty modules. Each module, apart from Research Methodology, takes one week. The Research Methodology module lasts six weeks.

The moderators for the coming session are: Subhadra Sinha, Introduction to Sociology & Anthropology/Introduction to Nepali Society, Cultural; Kunda Diit (Media & Social Change); Dr. Bhaskar Bhattawal (Economy & Society); Ajaya Diit (Technology & Society); Pratapshri Ditta (History & Society); Krishna Bhattarai (Electronics & Society); Sains Tamang (Gender & Society); Hari Sharma (Politics & Society); Shanta Giri (Education & Society) and Dilli Ram Dahal/Sudeshra Sinha (Research Methodology). Basic qualification: Bachelor’s degree and good grade of English Class size: 26 participants.

Course duration: 16 weeks (6:30 to 9:00 am, Mon-Fri) Application deadline: 31 December 2004 Course fee: Rs 10,000 (course material included)

Fellowships will be provided to deserving participants from disadvantaged groups, women and members of college faculty. Participants will also have free access to the Social Science Baha Library during the course duration.

For details, please visit www.timesassociation.org/bahais/socmem.htm or call 55425344/5548142.

Application forms are available from Social Science Baha, Vimal Association, Patan Dhokha, and can also be downloaded from our web-site.
The bromide

ABHA ELI PHOOBO

E
verybody knows him. He is that crazy fellow with the camera slung around his neck, taking pictures of the shivering devotees half immersed in freezing waters of winter during the Madhab Narayan Fast. He’s been coming every year for the last 10 years and has become so much a part of the rituals that he is allowed into the sacred areas where nobody else is.

“I’ve been studying the festival,” says Khishor Kayastha. “Now I know every vantage point, timing and process of the rituals. It affords me correct calculations for my photo shoot,” Kayastha likes to call himself an “experimental photographer”, and after every experiment he holds an exhibition to show the world how it turned out. His latest is ‘Life Through The Lens’ at Indigo Gallery and it is about his infatuation with panoramic photography.

The photograph of the Madhab Narayan Fast at the exhibitions is made up of 24 different shots taken with meticulous dedication. “Taking pictures of people is difficult because they move. I have to be really quick,” he explains. “I study my subject, sketch my composition, calculate the exposure, angle and shots before I shoot.”

He keeps returning to a place until he feels that the light and composition is right. Not able to get the desired results with the usual panoramic camera, he went digital and printed the pictures on bromide. “Taking pictures is one thing,” he states, “making them is something else. I like to think that my photos are paintings on bromide canvas. My camera is my brush and the light is my colour.”

Born and brought up in Bhaktapur, Kayastha’s passion for photography began when he

Fair trade, Nepali style

The time has come for Nepalis to buy Nepali goods for a cause

AARTI BASNYAT

A lot of companies these days can be seen paying lip service to corporate social responsibility. It has become the buzzword and many times an excuse for business-as-usual.


So far, TFD had been mainly involved in exporting Nepali manufactured goods but with now, it hopes to market Nepali handicraft products in the Nepali market. The brains behind this ‘buy Nepali’ campaign are Shasta L Rana of TFD (picture, above), Lotus President Sulo Shrestha Shah and Director, Ajay Bhram Shah.

Nepali handicrafts have seen a boom in recent times and the group believes the domestic market is now getting more conscious of house décor, using Nepali products, architecture and style to give it the authentic Nepali touch.

“It made sense to try and penetrate the Nepali market and promote Nepali handicrafts,” says Shasta Rana, who hopes that as a socially-conscious organisation TFD can help local handicrafts gain a foothold in that as a socially-conscious organisation TFD handicrafts,” says Shasta Rana, who hopes that as a socially-conscious organisation TFD can help local handicrafts gain a foothold in the domestic market for instance by reviving the pashmina boom here and giving copper craft a new twist. Shasta recruited many of the craftsmen herself, taking products out of storage and creating new designs.

But producers are used to the prices they get for exports of handicrafts like pashminas, how can they be affordable for Nepalis? “We will rectify this by keeping a minimum profit margin and dealing directly with the producers and eliminatingmiddlemen,” Shasta explains, though she admits the real challenge is to compete with cheap Chinese products. Although TFD is a non-profit organisation, she says there is a way to stay afloat and still provide affordable products.

TFD has participated in trade fairs abroad, but is organising its first ever fair in Nepal next week and plans to have one every six months at its new showroom in Jawalakhel. TFD will not just sell its own products but also provide shoppers with a ‘one stop’ arena.

Customers can make both bulk purchases as well as loose goods. They can design and order their own products and not have to run around Kathmandu trying to find what they want.

If TFD had a motto it would be: ‘high-quality Nepali goods that are environmentally and socially friendly at affordable prices’. TFD doesn’t use child labour, single and widowed women are given employment, and one percent of their labour, single and widowed women are given employment, and one percent of their

TFD exhibition is on from 12-19 December at the HB Complex, Ekanta Kuna. www.tfd.com.np

KIRAN PANDAY

www.tfd.com.np
From Asan to Angkor

British architect John Sanday is awarded an OBE for his conservation work in Nepal and Cambodia

BARBARA ADMAS in PHNOM PENH

The opening of the Swedish furniture giant, IKEA, in the capital six years ago attracted vast crowds and the company still ranks as one of the biggest influences on popular taste. Anything foreign (read modern) still has top cachet but a few, like Illinois, founded Celia Shi, are trying to come up with a new and different Chinese style. 

Illinois' trademark is blonde wood furniture emphasising austere minimalism. Illinois focuses on imposing dark wood furniture pieces that suggest affluence and opulence. And while IKEA aims to produce affordable home products for the average Chinese urban consumers, Illinois targets affluent middle-class consumers—those with an annual income of more than $5,000.

No longer is the term ‘Made in China’ synonymous with cheap, low-quality goods. Catering to increasing demands for lifestyle varieties of its customers, Illinois has so far rolled out 40 distinct series with catchy names such as Aurora, Moli, New Vidi and even Amari. They have a range of neo-classical Chinese furniture made from dark solid wood with oriental twists like engraved bamboo leaves to minimalist modern combinations of home-office chairs and bookshelves in quirky combinations of steel and glass. Living room sets come with marble or glass tableaux accompanied by chairs with velvet and silk upholstery.

The ornate retro-style harking back to China’s past is visible even in the modern art circles in Beijing where the avant-garde and experimental trend to dominate. But it is not only the interior of the houses that is changing. A few years back, when choosing their dream house, wealthy urbanites were in pursuit of Spanish-style haciendas, European mansions or California-style villas—all just a stone’s throw from the city centre. Now, Tang-style housing is quickly making a comeback in Beijing’s sprawling suburbs.

Modern villas built Chinese style with flashing red and gold and glass courts are springing up everywhere. The time is right for Chinese-style villas to enter the luxury villa market in Shanghai, the developer of Cathy View, a new courtyard villa compound in the Shunyi suburb. “Because with China’s growing influence in the world, the Tang-style has become increasingly popular internationally.”

Designer Rebecca Xiu thinks the trend reflects a desire to return to nature and one’s roots. People are looking for an escape—there is too much steel and concrete around. In the past, Beijingers lived close to nature and the earth. The courtyards had earthen floors and were open to the sky. Designers want to reflect that.

The old Chinese saying that a commoner with the natural world is also evident in an innovative collection of holiday homes, all individually designed by 12 top Asian architects and located near the Great Wall. It is a curious melange of ultra-modern and individualist Zen-style design called the Commune that blends with the surrounding nature. On an earlier note, the old Chinese saying of Maoshi-style uniforms with badges that evoke the fervour of the Cultural Revolution.

The originality of this new, made in China style in ‘Made in China’ recognised at the 2002 architectural Biennale in Venice where the Commune’s developer Zhang Xin won a special prize, the Silver Lion, for her role as a ‘patron of architecture’. • (PS)
KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

Kathmandu Valley is cold, dry and clear. Which is why the morning fog has been relatively thin. A high pressure system over the tarai this year has left the lack of characteristic winter fog. The Nepali delegation at a regional air pollution conference in Agra this week boasted that the concentration of PM10 in Kathmandu’s air had gone down by seven percent in the past year. No evidence of that this week, as the concentration of particles under 10 microns is still in the ‘harmful’ zone. Thamel is not such a cool place to hang out, and neither are the major intersections where vehicular emissions are made worse by the soot particles from burning tyres of street protests. The Nepali delegation at a regional air pollution conference in Agra this week boasted that the concentration of PM10 in Kathmandu’s air had gone down by seven percent in the past year. No evidence of that this week, as the concentration of particles under 10 microns is still in the ‘harmful’ zone. Thamel is not such a cool place to hang out, and neither are the major intersections where vehicular emissions are made worse by the soot particles from burning tyres of street protests.

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Nepal hosts international golfers
Surya Nepal Masters brings the region's best golfers to Gokarna Forest

Sory, but no golfing tips this week. I'm holding them close while I endeavour to become the first Nepali winner of the prestigious Surya Nepal Masters that started with the Pro-Am on Wednesday.

Looking back, I realise I've participated in every single one of these tournaments. The first five as an amateur, the last six as a professional. My

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya

successes were in 1995 and 1996 when I won both the individual and team amateur prizes. This is the 12th time I will be playing.

As a professional, the best I have got to is fourth and I'm not satisfied with that. Fellow Nepali professionals and I have been practicing hard in preparation for our bid to come out tops this year.

Before 1998 the tournament was on invitation only, then it became part of the Professional Golf Association of India's tour event. The competition from the Indian tour is as tough as ever. Now that they have all arrived in Kathmandu, let's look at what we're up against.

The top ranked Amby Valley PGA Tour star Ashok Kumar has flown in from down under, fresh from a stint at the $1 million Cadbury Schweppes Australian PGA Championship. His sole aim is to take on the field and win at the majestic and challenging Gokarna Forest Golf Course.

"A champion is one who wins in every conceivable condition," says Ashok Kumar. "I have registered five wins this season, all on different courses and weather conditions, but the Gokarna Forest Golf Resort is a different kettle of fish altogether. The undulating nature of the course with tight fairways and lightning fast greens is akin to world class courses we encounter on the Asian circuit. A win here would give me as much pleasure as would one on the Asian PGA Tour," said the 23-year-old Delhi pro.

In addition to the challenges posed by the course, Ashok will face some stiff competition from the supremely talented field.

Ashok's arch-rival, Shiv Kapur, is an Asian Games Gold Medalist. He has an extremely impressive record in his Rookie season, including a win at the Amby Valley MCC Open in Chenai and three runner-up finishes in six outings. An Arjuna Awardee, Kapur will definitely look to upset Ashok, especially after being relegated to three successive second place finishes by him.

"Ashok is a fabulous player but nothing is going to deter me from my goal of winning the event at the Gokarna Forest Golf Resort," says Kapur. "I have played on some of the best golf courses the world over but the Gokarna facility is special. It is a sheer test of golfing skills and as a professional, I would love nothing more than to have the Surya Nepal Masters title under my belt," said the 22-year-old.

Talented defending champion at this event is Diggviyaj Singh, who stormed to an impressive and inauspicious victory last year. Also present are 2002 Indian Open winner and twice Order of Merit winner Vijay Kumar, 1998 Indian Open winner, Ferruz Ali, Winner of the Patna Open 2004, Rajiv Ali, and twice Honda Sri PGA Golf Championship winner Uttam Singh Munday.

Non-Indian participants include Mohd Ilob Ali, Babu Ahmed and Shahid from Bangladesh, and Anura Rohana and Lalith Kumara from Sri Lanka.

To name a few, the local challenge will come from Deepak Neupane, Ramesh Nagarkot, Deepak Thapa Magar, Pushpali Sharma, Sabir Sapkota, Sachin Bhattacharji and I.

Well, the Gokarna Golf Course has been tweaked into top shape for the tournament, the big boys from the tour have arrived and Friday we'll be on the second day of this four-day international professional golf tournament.

Golf or not, come on down any day till 12 December, and get a feel of a large scale international sporting event where you, as a spectator, can enjoy not only the sport but also a walk in the sun and a relaxing time within the beautiful ambience of Gokarna Forest. For more information call the Golf Resort on 4450444 or 4451212. Entrance is free.

What could be more encouraging than having plenty of resident well wishers walking the course, encouraging us to produce that little extra that could carry us to top place finishes.

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

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SURYA NEPAL GOLF

Diggviyaj Singh lifting last year's trophy at the Surya Masters.
In the last decade, we have seen the rise of various genres of music in Kathmandu—from rock to hip-hop to even trance. We grafted the Mtv culture into our own and neglected long-standing musical traditions. After the short burst of enthusiasm over ‘Wari Jamuna’, Nepali music gradually fused with international genres, not to mention the techno-electronic sounds. In the midst of this entire scramble to imitate and add electric zing, the pure sounds of the flute accompanied by sarangi strings keeping time to the beat of the madal is soothing to the ears.

The new band Kutumba was formed precisely to promote traditional Nepali folk music. They are from the Shukrabar event team and realised that at every event they planned, the musicians played classical music and very little folk. They understood the potential of the lost sounds of traditional folk as Rashil, a band member, says, “We are trying out instruments that are new to us as well as those played in the villages but not much in the cities.”

The band consists of Arun Manandhar (tungna), Rubin Kumar Shrestha (flute), Pavil Maharjan (madal), Raja Maharjan (percussion), Sambhu Manandhar (effects) and Rashil Palanchoke (sarangi). The music created by Kutumba is not only unadulterated, it is inspired by harmony and rhythms that all Nepalis have grown up with.

The band prefers performing live to releasing albums, though they have already released two. The first was their namesake Kutumba and the other Folk Roots was recently released. The next Kutumba event ‘Acoustic Vibes with Kutumba’ is organised by Wave magazine and scheduled for 18 December. You should be there, not just because Kutumba is a promising band but the concert will be a rare opportunity to hear traditional elders like Mahthar and Resham Finni.

(Aarti Basnyat)

Acoustic Vibes with Kutumba Saturday, 18 December PM, at the Yala Maya Kendra Tickets: Rs 200 available at Wave, Dhokaima Cafe, AKA Cafe, Tantra, Himalayan Java

Tickets: Rs 200 available at Wave, Dhokaima Cafe, AKA Cafe, Tantra, Himalayan Java

Your digital discotheque with SAMSUNG music system

DigitAll Life style with SAMSUNG music system
Before we go, the main points once again

ne never knows during these uncertain times how long we in the fourth estate will be allowed to vent bile, so we must take freedom of press seriously. And in public interest, uphold our right to get things utterly wrong. As we hacks in the journalistic profession like to put it: let's make hay while the sun shines. In other words, let's strike while the iron is hot, as many as we have in the fire at this point. We may not like what is going on around us, we may not agree with everything that is being said, but the constitution gives us the right to make things up as we go along. And thank Lord Bishnu for that.

Luckily we are all professionals and we stick to our journalistic code of ethics and consider that lying is ok as long as we don't do it on purpose. That makes life much easier and allows columns like these, which would be banned in any civilised country, to see the light of day.

French Bomb Found and Lost at TIA

The plastic explosive that French police secretly planted in an unsuspecting passenger’s suitcase in Paris last week has been located in the baggage of a passenger arriving at Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA) Thursday morning, unusually unreliable sources said.

The bundle of explosives, which French sniffer dogs could not detect at Charles de Gaulle was ferreted out by Bhalu, the mongrel who has made TIA’s international apron his home and is often seen pre-inspecting incoming luggage for interesting tidbits.

“Yes, I can confirm that we have unconfirmed reports that Bhalu found the bomb and took it to an undisclosed location,” the head of airport police told reporters, requesting anonymity. “He may have mistaken it for a sausage and shared it with friends.” A wide dog-bomb alert has been put out in the capital.

NOC Employees Strike for Expensive Gas

Employees of the state-owned Nepal Oily Corporation (NOC) went on an indefinite strike Monday demanding a steep hike in petroleum prices.

“How can we make our ends meet and provide for our families if gasoline is so cheap,” asked an employee who was gheraoing the corporation’s premises by gham tapoing in the lawn. The All-Nepal Federation of Adulterous Gas Stations also joined the strike to create a manmade shortage demanding that the government hike petrol and diesel prices by 50 percent.

“Otherwise it just doesn’t make economic sense for us to mix kerosene in it,” said one oil baron.

Corruption Day Observed

International Corruption Day was observed in Kathmandu on Friday with special talk programs, rallies, tyre-burning, street riots and arson.

“Nepal has taken the lead among the world’s most corrupt countries, and we don’t want people suddenly developing pangs of conscience,” said an international consultant delivering a keynote speech at an interaction program on ‘Getting Rich Is Glorious with FIDIC Contracts—a Top-Down Approach’.

Cowdung Supplies Sufficient for Winter: Govt

Responding to panic-buying by desperate citizens, His Majesty’s Government has assured all and sundry that its strategic stockpile of cowdung patties are enough to meet the nation’s winter demand.

Faced with a severe kerosene shortage, the public has reverted to dried cowdung, a traditional fuel. Kitchens of five star hotels have switched to cattle droppings, and pizza parlours specialising in wood-fired pizzas are now offering dung-fired double-topping pepperonis.

“Thanks to the contribution of Nepal’s cattle population, our cowdung supplies are enough to meet any exigencies,” said the Minister of Animal Husbandry and Bullock.