The timing couldn’t have been worse. After announcing fuel price hikes last week, the government followed up with pocket money for civil servants and a VAT hike to 13 percent.

Even people who supported the government on the fuel price were ughast. Economists warned it would increase inflation and trigger an exchange rate increase with the Indian rupee.

“The country’s productivity will drop and competitiveness will be hurt,” predicts former Finance Minister Prakash Chandra Lalmani. Another ex-finance minister, Ram Sharan Mahat, agrees. “The loss of competitiveness will hurt investment.”

Nepal is already a high-cost economy but the fuel price hike and 13 percent VAT increase last week were a double whammy that will have repercussions from the macro-economy right down to individual families.

Decreasing domestic productivity would mean increased imports from India with which we conduct 60 percent of our trade and have NRs 50 billion annual deficit. All this will put more strain on the Nepali-Indian rupee parity and force correction of the current 160-100 rate.

Economists agree that the Nepali rupee is already overvalued against IC. Now that the Indian rupee is gaining strength because of the weaker US dollar, there appears to be no option but to devalue the Nepali rupee. “Chances are the US dollar will continue its slide, which means a stronger Indian currency, which in turn means more pressure on the Nepali rupee,” says another ex-finance minister, Badri Shrestha. Economist Bidurwab Narayak says the Nepali rupee’s overvaluation is not sustainable anymore. “Sooner or later, it will have to be revised considering the IC’s strength.”

And when that happens, it will be another blow to hard-pressed Nepali families who will have to endure another price spike of Indian imports.

Experts agree that the government should have avoided increasing the VAT rate at such a critical time and there were plenty of other options for non-tax revenue. “Increasing VAT and fuel together was bad timing,” Shrestha says. However, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, has a very simple logic for the increases: the government needs money.

“Since the Manifesto did not come for talks, we have to go for elections and that means we need to increase revenue for more security expenses,” he said this week.  

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**Catch 'Em Young:**

Two-and-half-year old Aran Shrestha plays with a toy gun in Dharan this week.

**IT Special**

Broadband Internet p10
NepaLinux p11
Nepal web review p12

**Vehicle Insurance**

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**NAVIN SINGH KHADKA**

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**DAMBAR K SHRESTHA**

Dharan this week.

with a toy gun in
NO FUEL SHORTAGE: The four parties and their student affiliates burn effigies to protest the fuel price hike and ‘regression’ on Sunday.

INDO-PAK SUMMIT: Noted Indian and Pakistani journalists before embarking on a mountain sightseeing flight on Saturday after concluding a workshop on media and conflict.

THE WHITE GOD: The figure of Seto Machhindranath being given a ritual bath and a change of clothes on Monday with panchamrud.

SWAYAMBHU: King Gyanendra receives offerings from devotees at the Swayambhu Mahapuja at Swayambhun on 14 January.

SNOWMEN: Traffic jam at Gokarna as Kathmandhauties defy a fuel shortage to go up to Phulchoki to see the season’s first snowfall on Tuesday.

Atul’s dream

Hundreds wait outside the Pashupati ashram near Pashupati to bid farewell to Atul Gautam, the tabla maestro. As family members carry his body to the pyre, the air is heavy with grief.

Doctors pronounced Atul Prasad Gautam dead at dawn on 16 January, four days after he suffered a brain haemorrhage. Survived by two children and wife, Bandana, Atul’s compassion not just as a musician but also as a social worker, touched the lives of many Nepalis. Among those gathered at Pashupati on Sunday was his inner musical circle from the band. Sukarma: tabla drummer Navaraj Gurung; sitarist Dhrubesh Chandra Regmi and sarangi player Shyam Nepali. They lived like brothers, and Atul was cruelly taken away from them just as the band was beginning to make a mark in Nepal and abroad. Abhinanas and Sunanda, who arranged Atul’s performance with Sukarma for the inauguration of Dharara on Saturday (picture, Atul at right), were this time arranging his last rites. Madhusudan, one of Atul’s students, said, “We used to tell him how lucky we were to have a guru like him and he always replied that luck depends on how much you devote yourself to practice.” That was Atul, always inspiring aspiring young classical musicians.

A childhood friend, tabla player Sarita Mishra whose house overlooks Atul’s now traces the emptiness in the street that her friend walked everyday. Atul’s mission was to manifest the knowledge of tabla in all its possible aspects and he was completing a PhD from Banaras under the tutelage of Pandit Pravin Uddav who at one time told one of Atul’s students, “This man is learned and famous in his country and yet he comes to learn more from me.” Atul completed his Masters in Music from Prayag Samiti in Allahbad in 1996 where he got a gold medal and many honourable mentions.

Satirist Chatyang Master was in a sombre mood at Pashupati, contemplating the ultimate satire that nature plays us on by giving life and then snatching it away. Atul was in his early 30s and Chatyang had watched him grow into a fine musician, treating music not just as a profession but as a passion and devotion.

A few months ago, Atul told me about his dream to establish himself as not only a tabla player but as a versatile musical academician. He would have accomplished his goal had he lived, but now others will have to fulfills Atul’s dream. ♦

SALI/Subedi
The cover photo of Himal Khabarpatka's latest issue has this message: the press too has been infected with the low mentality of politicians. The fortieth may have pointed out the need for unity through the photo on its cover but this was an irresponsible act that transcended the bounds of freedom. News along with photos must be based on fact and an event that has taken place. Himal's cover photo that involved the dignity of the monarchy is a naked experiment of imaginative photographic and artistic license. Leading personalities in the intellectual circles feel that such a photograph is an abuse of press freedom.

The press must be aware of this conscious bending of the truth by Himal which has overtaken politicians in trying to turn democracy into a monocracy. At one time, the editor of Saptak Bimansa, Hari Prabir, was punished for publishing a cartoon that depicted the chief justice as a monkey. The country's press code of conduct bars imaginary and artistic portrayal of news that affect the dignity of constitutional organs. The action taken against Bihari for contempt of court has become a precedent. Should those at Himal similarly be punished for bringing out a photo containing the constitutional monarch? Intellectual circles are not only seeing an answer to this question but are also intrigued by the silence of the Department of Information, the Press Council and the Information Ministry. Imaginary and doctored photographs are banned in Europe. Even in India, publication of such works has been prohibited because of the possibility of character assassination. In Nepal, special publications are allowed on the occasion of Ga Jatra when journalists have extra license to lampoon. But even on that day, nationalism, monarchy and the court are not dragged into controversy. What Himal has celebrated can be called ‘Maah Gajatra.'

Naga bhakya. 18 January

The group photograph published in Himal Khabarpatka not only tricked readers but also offended the journalistic code of conduct. This was some kind of an illogical journalism and now everyone, from an ordinary reader to intellectuals and politicians, are saying that such an established publication is trying to show it can go to any extreme by doing something so irresponsible. Both the published photographs, on the cover and page 28, were doctored. Heads of the king, Girija, Deuba, Madhav and Pasupati had been pasted on somebody else's bodies. It is really sad as well as funny to see how this publication has degraded the king and the institution of the monarchy. The monarchy is a sacred institution and the king is the nyal and the royal institution. The purpose of the news may be good, but such take photographs make a bad impact. Intellectuals say that Himal needs to apologise for the damage it has brought to the monarchy and the court.

Resettlement
Kantipur
16 January

The government is considering allowing Bhutanese refugees to settle in any third country, a facility already granted to Tibetan refugees. Discussion has begun at the Foreign Ministry regarding the process because of Bhutan’s recalibration in repatriating its citizens. “Since Bhutan’s policy seems to be diabolically, we have no option,” says Madhuram Acharya, foreign secretary. It has been more than a year since the Bhutanese members of the Nepal-Bhutan joint verification teams left Kathmandu camp, one of the seven Bhutanese refugee camps in eastern Nepal. During the 15th round of joint ministerial level talks between Nepal and Bhutan, it was decided that Thimpu would take back all refugees except those of the non-Bhutan category. The other three categories are Bonafide Bhutanis, Bhutanis who have emigrated, and Bhutanese with criminal records. These three categories comprise 74 percent of the more than 100,000 Bhutanese refugees in Nepal.

Despite the agreement, Bhutan has again cited the security situation in the camp as the main hurdle for the repatriation process. But Foreign Ministry officials believe that is a lame excuse. Having seen that Bhutan is unwilling to resolve the humanitarian crisis, the government is considering allowing the refugees to settle in any third country they wish.

Military rule
Nepal. 23 January

When the army was brought out of the barracks for the first time during the state of emergency, the main aim was to disarm the Maoists. But certain officers in the army who are given the responsibility of maintaining security have crossed the limits of their authority. This was evident in Palisadukad during the anti petrol hike protest by the students. Legally, the local administration is supposed to take the help of the police to control such demonstrations and riots. But on that particular day, Brigadier General D.R. Kuma Karki had come to the street without his uniform was seen ordering his bodyguard to open fire at the demonstrators. It was the restatement of his bodyguard and was also a tragedy. Such display of arrogance only proves that those with power and army will go to any extreme to use their authority. The local administration has been granted the authority to use curbing violence on the streets. The most it can do is shoot at rioters below the knee if the situation goes out of control. But nobody has the authority to fire at demonstrators. When a responsible officer goes beyond his jurisdiction and gives orders to shoot, it is natural for ordinary citizens to be terrified. Billions of rupees have been spent on the army and weapons to control the Maoist violence. But instead of security, ordinary citizens are experiencing terror. The army should know it is necessary to seek the support of the people to control the rebels and it will get that support only if it disciplines officers like Karki.

Bunker terror
Rajdhani. 19 January

MAKOTTARI—The rebels have started digging trenches on the Palisadukad and nearby areas. This has stirred panic among the people here of getting caught in the crossfire. The police as they say the trenches and bunkers are to defend impending attack from both the security forces and the Indian army. “The Maoist’s district leader Sanjeeb said that they plan to dig at least 500 bunkers near the Nepal-India border areas and around Jaleswor, the district headquarters. “The local people are starting to dig bunkers,” said Sanjeeb added. According to the rebels, the bunkers are 2m deep and 10m long, shaped in English letters A, C, W and E. Meanwhile, the security force has destroyed 19 bunkers in Kisan Nagi and on the border of Birajup, Sitapur, Bhanga and Pushpatanigrau. The army believes that this activity could also mark a sign that the Maoists are not a big help. “War tactics are more important,” says Brigadier General Nirmal Thapa, who heads the Conchall Battalion in Pakuli. He added that the bunkers would not affect the security force at all and would only put the villagers at risk.

The conflict in our country will never be resolved as long as the army remains under the king. Padma Ratna Tuladhar in Aznapurna Post, 18 January

Quotations of the week

The conflict in our country will never be resolved as long as the army remains under the king.

Padma Ratna Tuladhar in Aznapurna Post, 18 January

Lock leadership
Rajdhani. 17 January

Multiparty democracy depends largely on leadership of political parties. Leadership can’t be strong unless party leaders have the commitment for an office and service. It is not possible for all political parties to find great leaders like Bishnu Madan Bhandari. Great leaders are born, not made or trained. It is perhaps not fair to blame Madhav Nepal and Girija Prasad Koirala for lacking qualities of their forefathers. They too must be given the same best ability, wisdom and capacity because nobody wants to be weak and face criticism from all quarters. But they can never be bred from some of the qualities they have been born with. That is why party workers should either say they can’t accept their leaders because they lack special qualities or stop criticising them. It will be more sensible for party workers to censures themselves instead of blaiming others for the lack of foresight and inability to make prompt decisions. After all, the cadre are to blame for choosing such people to lead. Party workers can openly criticise their leaders for not showing exemplary sacrifice or not being granted at official or functions. It is not fair to criticise them for not displaying the qualities of a real leader. The public, on the other hand, is free to condemn the leaders on any grounds but it is apparent that even public criticism does not affect these leaders. Koirala was considered to be a more liberal and left Sher Bahadur Deuba in the party for the sake of unity. But he refused. Maul civilian leader Jeevan Shankar Rana stuck with a stereotype attitude. He was often told that showing off his intellect does not suit politics. Truth and practicality would work better but both have not changed with the times. Lately, Nepal has been criticised for weak leadership. He was the subject of public scorn when he stated being unaware of the price hike decision made by a member of his own party, Minister Ishwarchandra Paudel. Even now, his own comrades are disappointed with the way Nepal lied as soon as the anti-hike price decision began. If Madan Nepal has any dignity left he should confess to lying about his lack of knowledge about the price hike issue and ask his comrades to withdraw from the government.

Times 21-27 January 2005 #231

Janakababa, 17 January
The beat within
Atul Gautam was one of those rare souls, happily productive

L ast Sunday, Atul Gautam, a tabla virtuoso, died suddenly of a massive brain haemorrhage. He was only 33. Those of us who had the good fortune, in both public settings and small gatherings, of watching and hearing Atul play the tabla remember many things about him.

Strictly business
Ashutosh Tiwari

But three in particular stand out. Atul’s passion for learning was contagious, both in terms of higher studies and continuous practice. Once he started playing, he displayed what the University of Chicago psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has identified in his widely applied study of productive workers as an autotelic personality. And third, by working closely with some of the leading musicians, Atul served to advance the cause of neglected and under-funded eastern classical music in Nepal.

Most of us do war work that could be mind-numbingly boring once we figure out how the work is supposed to be done. Unless we consciously trouble ourselves to create new ones, there remain few challenges to get us continuously excited about our daily work, regardless of what the work is. Human resource theorists often suggest that managers to keep parcelling out challenging assignments to employees before the inevitable anorexia of routine work sets in sap energy and creativity.

That is, it takes a certain kind of individual, who, without any prompting, keeps finding reasons in their work and continuously aims to improve what they do. Atul was one of those rare people. Lit up by fierce motivation from within, he could go on practicing for eight hours a day—delighting in infinitesimal improvements in the ways he played the tabla. Besides, not content to be a mere practitioner, he enrolled himself in a doctoral program in Banaras. His aim was to contribute to the theoretical foundations of music.

Being a classical musician is a labour of love anywhere in the world but more so in Nepal. There is hardly any money or much publicity. The practice facilities are decrétip and the audience is small. But Atul managed to bloom where he was planted. He devoted himself completely to his music since he was young. His passion and dedication to his art ensured him a place among the greats.

Atul understood that making music, like any piece of good work, was a collaborative activity. Whether in impromptu jam sessions with Santa Mishra and Dhirubesh Chandra Regmi on Saturday mornings at Pashupati’s Kineteswar Sangreet Ashram or elsewhere, he had no difficulty attracting others to play with him, thereby rising above the tales of paltryness and backbiting which, alas, hobble the Nepali arts community.

Interestingly enough, with his striking looks and inspired performances, Atul was the closest thing to a ‘rock star’ that Nepal’s classical music has ever seen.

The US dollar is deprecating, this must be good news for our loan repayments? Yes it is. But it will be an advantage only if we can pay now and that depends on the revenue situation. It would certainly be a good time to pay back our loans. Because we have amortisation schedules for loan repayments we can’t pay early but we can always talk to the creditors and change the timing schedule or currency.

Shouldn’t our reserves be determined by currency values in the international market? That could make some difference and I am sure that the Nepal Rastra Bank and the Financial Controller’s Office are looking into the matter.

Aid has gone up but due to the insurgency, development spending has gone down. How does it work? This has been our concern as well. But donors have been very supportive. We know we have not been able to spend what we should and we have been in touch with donors and line ministries to develop a new mechanism so spending can be increased.

The government had stated that such mechanism would include local users groups and communities to implement programs. The insurgents don’t think that this reaches the grassroots. When we use the community groups for projects on health, drinking water and public infrastructure, they are not getting affected.

How much have foreign aided projects been hampered because of the diversion of the budget to security expenses? It is very difficult to say. But one thing that we can say for sure is that the foreign assistance we have been receiving are all tied to projects and they can only be spent on projects they are meant for. We have not diverted money for security purposes.

What about assistance given for budgetary support, can’t that be diverted for security expenses? I don’t agree. Even if the assistance is for budgetary support, it is meant for development programs and that is where we can spend it. There could be some kind of tradeoff because if there are any domestic savings, which we could use for development programs, they may go for other recurrent expenditure.

If that is the case, how do you find money for the ever increasing security expenses? That is from our domestic savings. We can’t use donor money for that.

So, if we had so much domestic savings why were we turning to donors for foreign assistance for development? The problem is we are not in a comfortable position even now in terms of increasing security expenses. It is difficult for us. I am not saying we have a lot of domestic savings and we can spend it all on security. We have a very tight budget but we are managing right now.

An increasing number of donors are either suspending their projects or pulling out. I wouldn’t say they are pulling out. Some have suspended project activities for the time being. They are trying to investigate incidents that led to the suspension. Donors are keen on a review of last year’s Nepal Development Forum to look at implementation.

It’s not really a review meeting. We hold meetings with donors every alternate month and the next one is due at the end of the month. As far as the NGO review is concerned, we hold the meeting every two years. That will happen in due course.

But donors are worried that the Auditor General’s report hasn’t been made public for three months and want that meeting right away. Regarding the AG’s report, we are also very concerned. Every year we make the Immediate Action Plan to execute certain plans and programs immediately after the National Planning Commission and the Ministry of Finance jointly monitor it. One of the key actions under the SAP this year, is to make the AG’s report public.

In your interaction with donors, how do you find their current mindset? Their general concern is how to implement development programs in the present security situation. They are concerned about peace talks.
The politics of monuments and why we build them

There is a difference in the politics of those who erect victory towers and those who cope with commemorative gates and arches.

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche raked his brains (literally: he suffered a mental breakdown) trying to understand the origins and function of values in human life. He distinguished between master and slave moralities and saw in the former a ‘will to power’ and in the latter its nihilistic absence. He feared that the emerging nationalism of late 19th Century Europe was a false god demanding slavish obedience rather than creating a liberated ‘superman’ with the proper will to power.

We have enough examples in Nepal of this sort of edifice complex running amok if we look at the dhawsar and stambhas around us. Bhimsen Thapa put up the Dhurran, perhaps the first phallic symbol in Nepal’s secular domain, unlike the myriad national religious proclamations of antiquity. It was followed by Bir Shambesh and his Ghanta Ghar. (Why ghara and not stambha?) Both the Thapas and the Ranas exhibited a stubborn will to rule that they appropriately flaunted even if the current of history was already flowing in the other way.

After the Ranas, it seems to have become a symbol of fate. King Mahendra built the Sahid Gate (not a Sahid Mairan!), but it was to domesticate the anarchic unreasons of virgin democracy. After all he built the tower inside the royal palace that even today has all of Nepal peering as to its meaning, almost like the Panchayat he instituted. The Panchas, despite their bluster, were politically a hermaphroditic lot doing both arches and towers. They were famous for putting up welcome arches by the scores every time King Birendra went on a regional tour. So many of them had to be put up (and so much money siphoned off) that in Dharan once a football field had to be requisitioned just to put up the fence that found space on the main road. On their 25th anniversary, shortly before their demise, the Panchas dotted the land with celebratory arches aplenty nicknamed Rajajyanti Pancha Linge.

Unfortunately, when moral authority has slipped away, no amount of phallic branding will work. Or as Lenin is supposed to have said, “A revolutionary situation arises when the ones on the top can’t rule and the ones at the bottom want not to be ruled.” A crowning symbol of this anormous remains Pancha Linga on the Ring Road between Maharajgunj and Chabah (picture) that is a white conch on a black, square pillar. With a missing base for the inverted conch to rest on (such as a blooming lotus), it looks like a bolted circumcision carried out by an overzealous surgeon. But by then, Nepal was out of cultural control via the Gana Pharka politburo, Panchayat had already lost its political base as well.

The problem with obelisks is that form outtakens substance, and the angir with arches is that one does not know which direction it is pointing in. On the one hand, giving it the exit, amplifying the confusion and hiding subliminal hints that are symptomatic of psychic stress. The structure on the Ring Road below the airport is another example. As a ‘gate’ it neither excludes no one, for anything, and as an arch one is not sure if it is saying the Himalayan capital is happy to welcome you glad you are off. The country, on the other hand, would no doubt have been better off if that construct were for national integration, Royal Nepal Airlines.

When it comes to confusion over history, however, a tower in Kolkata takes the cake. Shashid Minar on the Esplanade used to be called the Ochterloney Monument, after the general who tried to invade Nepal in 1814. The monument was disfavored but with some cajoling the caretaker (paid by the Britannica the biscuit maker, it turns out) allowed me in to look at a sign which said:

Shahid Minar (Ochterloney Monument)
The 165 ft high monument was erected during the period from 1828 to 1830, as a victory tower in memory of General David Ochterloney, conqueror of Nepal. In 1869, it was dedicated in memory of the freedom fighters of India and renamed as Shahid Minar.

Maintained by Executive Engineer, City Division, PWD, Writers’ Building, Kolkata 400 001

NOT UNDERGROUND
Pranav Budathoki in Nepalis go underground in Britain (#230) has encountered serious charges against him by trying to entangle my status with illegal migrant workers. This is absolutely baseless. First of all, I am a genuine research student doing PhD at the University of Reading which I embarked upon the completion of my masters degree after being awarded the Chevening Scholarship. At present, I am working on the livelihood diversification issues which I have been researching during the localisation and electrolytisation stage and I aim to submit my dissertation at the end of 2005. I have no intention of sticking in Britain upon the completion of my PhD, I am completely dedicated and committed to my country where I have spent a lot of time doing research in rural areas. To the best of my knowledge, no Nepali student from this university has ever stayed back in the UK. By regulation, all international students are allowed to work not more than 20 hours during term time. Indeed, I had a summer job during weekends at a local department store, but I don’t know anything about any bakery that Budathoki talks about. In November, I was elected chair of student representative committee of the higher degree research students in my department. The critical fact is that, I am not underground but openly overground.

Before charging someone and generalising the scenario, Budathoki should have cross-checked his facts otherwise it is a case of character assassination. There must be ethical issues that prevent journalists from invading people’s privacy and defaming them. The report has caused me tremendous physical, emotional and psychological anguish. My colleagues and I regard the Nepali Times highly. We have unwavering faith in its content, but I would request you to prevent misleading and distorted news items like those from being printed in future.

Badrj P Bastakoti, University of Reading, UK

WIN-WIN
The win-win idea that you provide to cut Nepal’s fossil fuel imports ( ‘Oil and politics don’t mix’, #230) is an excellent way out of the present crisis. But you underestimate the amount of electricity that Nepal wastes every year due to ‘spill’, it is actually closer to one billion units and the price of this would be closer to Rs 3 billion a year. This is the energy that isn’t used and can’t be sold domestically because of the peculiar problem we have of over supply of electricity during the monsoon months when the demand is lowest. But there is a huge energy hungry market right across the border in northern India. Your idea of bartering this excess energy for refined petroleum products from India is brilliant. Someone should start working on it and not just launch street protests and bemoan the fuel price hike.

5 8 Shrestha, email

The street protests following the oil price hike is symbolic of the utter disregard Nepalese politicians both in (UML) and out (NC) of government have for the people.

If the minister was now instead of his brother, Ram Sharan Mahat, would have no option but to raise the price of petroleum. But he’s going to fight it tooth and nail because his party is out on the streets. Similarly for the UML, it wants to have its cake and eat it too. Either way, the Nepali people suffer. Gyan Subba, email

I agree with Kunda Dixit’s economic and market logic in ‘Adding fuel to the fire’ (#220) but he does not address the issue of how to reduce the burden of the fuel price hike on the people: 77 percent of Nepalis who don’t use kerosene, according to Bhushan Tulsroh. It is called cross-subsidy and you do it by using the surcharge in aviation fuel and petrol to subsidise kerosene. The problem is that even after the fuel
Ochteryo got no further than Hetauda in 1814 but the Raj had to tell its subjects and all came there that they had conquered Nepal. The Marxist who came to power when it was renamed Shashidh Minar, despite being imbued with socialist realism, found the myth worth promoting. Of if only the rulers of Writers’ Building had corrected it to ‘Ochteryo, conquering Darjeeling’ they might have had fewer problems with the Supreme of the Hill Council. Mercifully, nobody thought of asking Nepal visitors to lay wreaths there in memory of the freedom fighters like we do at Tundikhel/Sadash Gate.

POKHARA—Tourism in the time of insufficiency requires a lot of ingenuity and innovation. Entrepreneurs have to devise new methods to survive the strain and exploit whatever opportunities are available.

In the business of regional aviation, Cosmic Airlines is trying to make a new pitch with its no-frills flight to Dhaka and New Delhi. The bus service of Greenline Tours goes one step further even at a time when highways have become dangerous as intercity carriers are full service packages that offer complimentary bottled water and even a free lunch. The service is so sophisticated it even keeps the latest issue of the Nepali Times in the seat pockets.

When one gets to Pokhara, one realises hoteliers haven’t been as inventive. Most continue to chase increasingly rare western tourists even though it is now clear domestic and Indian tourists are driving lakeside humming even during winter.

And they will pay more. Across Nepal the word ‘tourist’ has become synonymous with ‘white fur’ and nowhere more so than in Pokhara. Menu cards on display along the lakeside seem to be designed to frighten any orthodox Hindu and Muslim from across the border with non-vegetarian meals of beef, beef and pork. Few hoteliers seem to have realised the importance of offering room rates in Nepali rupees.

There is no reputed eatery on the lakeside that serves staple diets of Indians and Nepalis at reasonable rates. No doubt, quiet tours to hillhuts at the Thakali Kitchen is an eating exotic but such a luxury can’t be an everyday affair. Very few Nepalis will afford to pay the premium price of a plate of rice in restaurants that have dance-troupes outnumbering diners. Lakeside is hardly in need of hotels and restaurants that are functional and cater to a changing tourism demographic.

One of the reasons most Nepalis don’t complain about rates and services of Patan, Baidam and Lakeside hotels could be that most of them are here spending very little with diplomatic number plates vastly outnumber taxis in front of all the fancy bars at the Barahi Temple boating junction.

Another drawback of tourism entrepreneurship of Nepal in general and Pokhara in particular is its traditional nature. Smugglers behave like landlords who are doing Nepali and Indian visitors a favour by allowing them to rent rooms. Between the hustling of tours at the airport and scowls of hotel owners, the service orientation of the hospitality industry is conspicuous by its absence.

Even some upscale hotels have become shabbily due to prolongation of their lavatories, crooked furniture, broken faucets, yellowing bathmats, and faulty lights. There’s a palpable apathy of their owners and managers. Clearly, there is a huge mismatch between the expectations of entrepreneurs and the customers. One gets the feeling Pokhara has given up even without even trying.

Shop fronts along the banks of Phewa lake look neat. The streets are not potholed like in Kathmandu and the sidewalks are a joy to walk on. Ironically, the eye-seer on the lakeside is not tasteless hotel architecture but Radha Manjhi which occupies a large chunk of the lake front. With its prison-like high walls topped with concertina wires and continuous looking pilloswalls, it isn’t a friendly place that builds confidence among visitors.

Even the shutter shops look more agreeable.

Having reached the limit of growth possible under a free-for-all competitive entrepreneurship, tourism in Pokhara now needs some planned intervention to reroute it towards domestic and regional tourism. It needs creative people to tap tourists with direct flights from Banaras and Delhi? Why not ferry Indian visitors up from Nepalgunj and Biratnagar? Why not build that long awaited new airport? Offer comfortable and Markdorf lodges which make their profit from added services rather than room rents that try to wring visitors.

More outestes on the lines of Kailash Hotel of Chipledhunga and more cafer patterned after Padma Dairy will attract horde of middle-class Nepalis catching some shopping at Salesyers in between drives to Bindysabasini and Sarangkot.

John Maynard Keynes once said, ‘Practical men, who believe everything is capable of some kind of experimentation, from quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist’. Pokhara may not recover bad debts that financed follies like Pulbari but innovative and planned development will allow it to go over the present low cycle.

They just need to follow the abundant metaphors in the new innovation like Cosmetic, Greenline and one of the most faithful benefactors of Pokhara’s future, Avis Club, which has stayed through good times and bad.

Price increase there is a shortage of kerosene and diesel in the market. So what was the point? What is the point in reducing the excise on each week for more than four years. Out of the 200 odd Under My Hat writings, I have not read more than 20. Who think they are funny? Like Dave Barry, Dick, should take a break. Jagannath Lamichhane, email

* Kunda Dixit’s satire makes me laugh so loud that my family members think I have gone mad. Two months ago, I夺得 the mistake of reading Under My Hat while eating. The columns should bear a government health warning.

Bijaya, Gurung, Times

STOP IT

Kunda Dixit has been writing his column, Under My Hat, unfaithfully each week for more than four years. Out of the 200 odd Under My Hat writings, I have not read more than 20. Who think they are funny? Like Dave Barry, Dick, should take a break. Jagannath Lamichhane, email

* Kunda Dixit’s satire makes me laugh so loud that my family members think I have gone mad. Two months ago, I夺得 the mistake of reading Under My Hat while eating. The columns should bear a government health warning.

Bijaya, Gurung, Times

CORRECTION

Colours in the pie chart depicting results of the poll are to be corrected. ‘Do you think the Outer Ring Road is a good idea?’ were revised in #238. The correct pie chart is reproduced below.
Gloom and doom on
The conflict turns popular highway stops into ghost towns

CABLE AND WIRELESS: The Manakamana cablecar terminal on the Prithbi Highway was largely empty of visitors this week, and (overleaf) a pickup drives past the charred hulk of a minibus near Mugling.

Looking at Nepal from New Delhi
Kathmandu and Delhi need to work together on establishing democracy and development

NEW DELHI—In the sunwashed daytime on the crowded streets of India’s capital, the problems of a small mountain kingdom seem a world away. It’s a short flight to Kathmandu but the aircraft might as well be circumnavigating the globe.

India, in short, is hardly aware that Nepal exists anymore.

The New Delhi newspapers brim with the aggressive confidence of the new urbanites that are increasingly shaping the destiny of this country. Style overwhelms substance, if it can find any space among the ads for mobile phones and apartment complexes. The news stories are the usual fare: Pakistani perilidy in Kashmir, political insinuating and oddities from the moshfossil. But the subtext, as one billboard for The Times of India has it, states firmly that “India is going Places”.

It’s easy enough to be cynical about all this and to remind Indians about endemic poverty, caste problems and above all, environmental overload from rapid urbanisation.

But these seem nibbles alongside the tremendous conviction of the local middle class that theirs is the society of the future. And I can’t help but believe that these people have the ability to make it so, despite their problems.

So where does this leave Nepal, a land where entropy seems written on stone in the tablets of history. I compare those selfsame aspirational middle classes and come up gloomy, despite the occasional gloss of new media and new buildings in Kathmandu. The king, the king, what will he do next? The question on everyone’s lips is hardly modern and forward looking. And as night descends, fear of the Maoists or the security forces or both settle over a countryside where development is actually unravelling, where the achievements of democracy and aid are eclipsed by violence.

India’s newspaper stories about Nepal, most of them written by stringers in Kathmandu, are mere accounting. So many dead, so much rumour, so little hope. Nowhere does one find analysis or forethought, some attempts to comprehend a neighbour’s woes. It’s a frightful contrast to the attitude at so many Nepali dinner tables, that India is just waiting to take over and create itself another state. On the contrary, those Indians who know anything about Nepal are mostly sad that the hope of the 1980s seems to have been dashed north and east of the border.

India, it seems to me, has never really coveted Nepali territory or its occupants. This is a camaraderie fostered by extremist forces in the kingdom, right and left, to account for their own excesses and incompetence. The Indians would like nothing better than a Nepal that is prosperous, happy and at peace. Of course there would be disputes galore, mostly driven by the rapacious border mafias in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, whose greed and corruption is legendary and who wield more than a little political clout. There might also be misguided Hindu nationalism in New Delhi that sees a Hindu Rastriya in the Himalaya, and wants one for itself.

But more and more, Nepal needs India to be its friend. And yes, even the occasional mentor. No more than that mind but Kathmandu and Delhi need to work together on establishing democracy and development that the kingdom so badly needs. That doesn’t mean any loss of sovereignty at all. Of what use is freedom to those who know only poverty, fear and decline? This then is an urgent call for the diplomats, politicians, leaders, kings, commoners, business types, journalists and development specialists on both sides of this troubled border to start collaborating.

India can be far, far more generous and spacious with Nepal. The kingdom can stop mistrusting its giant neighbour and work alongside all South Asian nations for regional prosperity and peace. It’s the only way forward. •

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lakh
KIRAN PANAYAV

KIRAN PANAYAV

KIRAN PANAYAV
and not lose hope."

Importance and even western tourists have started coming here," says the tourist businesses, we focus on internal tourism, which is why we didn’t temple. by the insurgency he is still upbeat. “As long as there is a Manakamana temple. Still ferrying 1,000 passengers every weekend from the highway to the highway. Up the road, Manakamana benefited from the cable-car that connected the highway to the hilltop pilgrimage spot. Today, the number of people coming to Manakamana has plummeted. “This place is dying,” says Nanda Kumari Gautam, owner of Jorte Guest House. Until three years ago, Gautam’s lodge used to be so packed that people slept outside on the verandahs and terraces. She could name any price and pilgrims would pay happily. Today, Gautam and other lodge owners will rent a room for less than Rs 200 a night—if they find customers. A large number of lodge owners had migrated here from Pokhara and even Kathmandu but most have packed up and left.

“Earlier, the lodges were about profit now they are about survival,” explains Kalika Joshi of Hotel Joshi, who came here from Pokhara three years ago. Heavily in debt and with no prospect of peace or tourists, Kalika is thinking of heading back to Pokhara. Some hotelers have been reduced to selling fruits and vegetables on the highway. Bhum Silwal came here from Godavari and used to run a restaurant. When the business closed, he started selling paan, parapenialma and flowers to Manakamana pilgrims in the highway bed. Now very few bases stop here nowadays and only for a few minutes,” says Silwal.

Media coverage of firesights along the highway, ambushes of army convoys and landmined barriers have made people fearful of travelling. The charred hulks of government vehicles bombked by the rebels in August litter the highway, there are craters along the road where booby trap mines went off. The security checks along the highway were also a nuisance, with passengers having to get off bases and be searched and interrogated up to five times between Pokhara and Kathmandu. But in recent weeks, security has been relaxed and travel along the Prithvi Highway between Thankot and Dunre is swift and smooth. Even the army has become more tolerant and soldiers at checkpoints are surprisingly polite. “It is no longer the fear of ambushes, now it is the blockades and bandas that have reduced business,” says Ramal Sharma in Malekhu, two hours from Kathmandu. Malekhu is famous for its fish and was a popular lunch stop. The famous Sharma Bhandalaya used to be thronged with hundreds of travelers, and people had to queue for lunch. Today it is almost empty. “Sometimes I dream that my restaurant is full again,” says Ramal Sharma. Things have been especially bad since the blockade in August. “I don’t think Ma will ever recover,” Sharma adds, despondent.

At the Riverside Spring Resort in Kurintar, business is down. After the Greenline bus passengers make their stopup in the morning, the hotel is mostly deserted for the rest of the day. “Traveling from Kathmandu has become uncertain, so the people from Kathmandu have stopped coming,” says Suresh Shahi, restaurant manager of Riverside Spring Resort which has 22 rooms, all of them empty when we were there.

Hoping for the best
Raju Babu Shrestha (below), owner and director of Manakamana Cable Car is a born optimist and despite the downturn in business caused by the insurgency he is still upbeat. “As long as there is a Manakamana temple, there will still be people who want to go there,” he reasons. The cable car company, Nepal’s first modern passenger ropeway system, is still ferrying 1,000 passengers every weekend from the highway to the temple.

Shrestha is even investing in an 18 room hotel with a swimming pool to cater to Nepali tourists. “Our main advantage is that unlike other big tourist businesses, we focus on internal tourism, which is why we don’t suffer as much as the others,” says Uwal Shresha, assistant station manager of the cable car.

“Manakamana is still a major attraction for its religious and cultural importance and even western tourists have started coming here,” says the restaurant’s manager Sashi Shrestha, adding, “We have to be patient and not lose hope.”

Extradition treaty with India
The talks between Nepali and Indian leaders held in New Delhi on Thursday, the revised extradition Treaty agreed on between Nepal and Indian home secretaries in New Delhi on Thursday. The details of the updated treaty, initially signed in 1953, has been made public. The revised treaty will come into force once the ministers of the two countries sign it. Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Shankar, while returning from his assignment as Indian ambassador in Kathmandu, had said, “What India will do with the Nepali Maoist rebels found in India depends on the finalisation of the revised extradition Treaty.” Two senior Maoist leaders have been in Indian jail while two others were handed over to Nepal in the past. Many junior level cadre have been either arrested or handed over by the Indian government.

Nepal and India had long differences on extraditing third country nationals that delayed the signing of this treaty. Foreign and Home Ministry officials in Kathmandu were tight-lipped about whether Nepal had formally given in to India’s demands that it hand over third country nationals caught in Nepal to India. Nepal already has an agreement with the US on not handing over each other’s nationals to any third country. To supplement the revised extradition treaty, Nepal and India have also signed the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty at the Home secretary level.

High ranking visits
Lutesh Arbo, the UN high commissioner for human rights is visiting Nepal on 23 January to assess the human rights situation in the country. She is the first senior UN official to visit Nepal since the people’s war started in 1997. Arbo is best known as the chief prosecutor for tribunals of the genocide in Rwanda and human rights abuses in Yugoslavia in the 1990s. She also indicted the former Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic for war crimes. In January 2004, she replaced Sergio Vieira de Mello, after he was killed, as the head of the UN operations in Iraq.

Another UN official, Samuel Tarmil special envoy to secretary general Kofi Annan, is in Kathmandu this week to study the political situation in the country. The UN has constantly offered its good offices as a go-between to initiate peace talks. The rebels are keen to take up the UN’s offer but the government has rejected it outright saying that the conflict is an internal matter. Arbo will make a firsthand assessment of the situation in Nepal during a four-day stay and meet senior officials of the government, judiciary and the military to discuss the state of human rights in the country, says a press release by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Qatar goes double decker
Qatar Airways is among the launch customers of the world’s largest passenger jet, the Airbus A380-800 when it was unveiled in Toulouse this week. The airline has ordered four A380-800s with first delivery in 2009 to coincide with the opening of the new Doha airport which has been designed specifically to accommodate the twin-deck A380.

Soaltee hospitality
Soaltee Crowne Plaza welcomed a group of Thai Tour Operators in Nepal on a familiarisation trip. The operators observed various places of interest in the country, its culture and lifestyle. The hotel says things looking as promising as far as tourism is concerned, with 2004 showing an increase in tourist arrival as compared to 2003.

Branching fourth
Kumari Bank Limited, in a very short period of time has established itself as a prominent player in Nepal’s banking sector. The chairman of the bank, Noor Pratap JB Rana inaugurated its fourth branch in Pokhara. The Pokhara branch commenced its operation by extending its first credit facilities to the boat operators of Phewa Lake.

Foreigner seeks flat/small house, Katmandu
Prefered: reasonably sized living area, bedroom, study, good views, outside space, quiet location.

BEAUTIFUL HOUSE FOR RENT, chakapal, patan.
Five bedrooms, study, living, dining, three bathrooms, immaculate garden, large roof terrace, garage. Near UN, INGOs. Exceptionally peaceful central location. 5520988, 9814234990.
Royal republics

Fine tequila versus bad coffee

Sorry but I couldn’t think of any other way to attract your attention. So much analysis has been done and so many opinions thrown around on everything that I am afraid people will skip this article if I had named it ‘Assessment of the Existing National Quagmire and Future Prospects of Nepal in Light of the Existing Constitutional Loopholes, Regression, and Revolutionary Forces Amassed At the Border.’ I don’t want to be the last person to weigh in on this great debate.

The Maoists think a republic is the only way out. I can’t compete with people that have a JNU gold medal on their team. Hell, I can’t even compete with first year Nepal college students for whom debate is a full on contact sport. The only metal I wear was in elementary school in a sack race after the other three contestants tripped.

But I am told by well-placed sources on the Kathmandu streets (Mohammad Mohsin and subsersive males at Martin Chautari) that the coffee at JNU has been known to give people delusions of grandeur, unmitigated nihilistic tendencies and abominably bad shaving habits. Other sources (florists in Kathmandu) tell me the garlands on anything that moves. If Hitler showed up in shaving habits. Other sources (florists in Kathmandu) tell me the grandeur, unmitigated nihilistic tendencies and abominably bad republic or a democracy anymore.

Let’s start with the DPRK, which is neither a republic (at least from 1945-1990) nor a democracy (not even the Korala dynasty envisions it). If names could deliver us economic prosperity, justice, transparency, opportunity and equality then we wouldn’t need to be so self-right and replace words like Kingdom and Royal with Democratic and Republic and move on. I even change my last name, if that helps. And if the whole Vishnu Avatar thing makes you cringe, how about the cults of personalities and the mythology that have emerged from countries that have ‘republic’ and ‘democracy’ attached to their names.

And France? They are only on their fifth republic since getting rid of those cake-eating-and-severing-fueuds. Their first republic lasted two years. Our politicians can beat that record while balancing their mistresses on both hands. The two years of the first republic is known as (uh-oh) The Reign of Terror. Am I the only one that gets queasy when I hear ‘republic’? And between the first and fifth republics, we see emperors, dictators and strongmen, each wanting to establish their own dynasty.

We can barely put up with our own monarchy. How are we going to deal with a (ahem, Nepali executive president)? I’m not necessarily against republics and am definitely not for feuds. Having lived in the US for so long, I have no idea what a feudal looks like except maybe my wife tells me its easy: just look in the mirror.

I want to go to clubs in Kathmandu just as much as the next guy without getting beaten to a pulp. Walk (stumble in my case) to the house-to-house, the six district-level Maoist leaders who had sheltered in the village had fled. The army rounded up seven villagers, beat them up as they were led away into the Rolpakhia community forest.

Villagers heard the sound of gunfire twice between nine and 11. They gathered around and mastered the courage to go and investigate. The first to be found was Shivshahi Dutla’s body, lying face down 100m below Mast Danda. He had been blindfolded and handcuffed with strips of cloth torn out from his own shirt. “I don’t remember clearly but after seeing his body I fell down unconscious,” recalls Tikaram Dalal.

Five hundred metres further on, the bodies of Jhalak Bahadur Dalal, Bhaktal Dalal, Tikadutta Dalal, Ganesh Gautam and Teising Tamang were lay close to each other. There was a note next to them: ‘Don’t remove the bodies’. The corpses rotting there in the summer heat for four days and by the time they were buried they had been dismembered by animals and vultures. The seven o’clock news over Radio Nepal that week quoted a Defence Ministry statement: “Six armed Maoists were killed in an encounter in Thulo Sirubari and 50 rocket bombs were recovered from them.”

The villagers of Thulo Sirubari are still reluctant to talk about that day. Finally, they told us how Ganesh, Shivshahi and Jhalak had been forced by the Maoists during the ceasefire.
The Maoists fill the vacuum left by the absence of a government in the hinterland. Back in Thulo Sirubari today, it is hard to find a villager who speaks in favour of the Maoists. That doesn’t mean they support the army either. “Neither the Maoists nor the soldiers have come back since the day of the massacre,” says Jhalk Bahadur’s daughter-in-law, Usha, “just as well because if they did we wouldn’t even give them water to drink.”

There is unprecedented interest in earthquake preparedness among Nepalis after the Asian tsunami

There was a house of cards while the resistant design was unaffected. The watching crowd gasped in amazement. Thirty other organisations participated in the exhibition, including the Royal Nepali Army, Everest Bank, ActionAid, United Mission Nepal and others. Many of the stalls belonged to community disaster-preparedness groups which displayed first-aid kits, excavation equipment and other supplies needed for rescue in the aftermath of an earthquake. Many elderly Patan residents flocked to a photo exhibition of grainy black and white photographs of the 1934 earthquake and were seen pointing them out to their grandchildren.

Patan was an apt venue for this year’s anniversary since it is the only town that has implemented an earthquake-resistant building code. It even has an earthquake safety section in the Lalitpur metropolitan city office. Although there was some grumbling from Patan’s tourism entrepreneurs about converting the entire Darbar Square into an exhibition ground, NRET’s Nakarmi justified it: “Just remember 1934, all these temples here had collapsed. If we don’t prepare for the next earthquake there will be no heritage left to protect.”
Development dilemma

Caught between an ineffectual government and Maoist threats, donors wonder if they should pull out or go on

Navin Singh Khadka

Whenever Nepal’s donors are asked whether they are thinking of quitting because of the difficulty of carrying out projects in the field, they are firm in their answer that they will not abandon Nepal in its hour of need. But it looks like the situation is getting too hot to handle and many are having doubts about how long they can go on. The rebels have asked donor agencies to sign-up with them before doing any work, and they have threatened staff and extorted money from them. In fact, it has now become impossible to work in many parts of Nepal without acquiescence of the Maoist presence. The degree of cooperation with local Maoists will vary from project to project, and in many cases it is indirect. But project staff admit privately that they can’t move without a working relationship with the rebel leadership at the grassroots.

In Kanchanjunga, most donor officials we interviewed admitted things were getting difficult but said service delivery to needy Nepalis was too important to abandon. One agency admitted to us that it had told its staff to do what needed to be done but to keep the project going. “There was no way out, we had to go for the facto registration of the project with the rebels,” said the head of the group in Kathmandu on condition that he not be named. Until a few months ago, most donors had been resisting the rebels’ pressure to get their project registered. But working in the field is getting more and more difficult for most aid personnel. The government’s local administration is now almost non-existent and permission to operate must now come from a different quarter.

Johannes Knapp is program coordinator for the German Technical Cooperation, GTZ and admits that his staff is threatened by rebels. “Our staff may have to yield under such pressure, especially if they take place at gunpoint,” he says, “but we have made it mandatory for them to report if anything like that happens. We don’t punish staff for yielding under such pressure but we punish them for not reporting the matter to us.”

Charge d’Affaires at the Danish Embassy, Geert Meineke, too feels that field work is getting more difficult. “Because of the security situation, the space for development work is growing narrower,” he told us.

Not having working relations with the rebels would mean pulling out. An increasing number of foreign agencies have suspended field operations recently. GTZ pulled out of its green roof project in Gorakha. The Danish aid agency, DANIDA, has suspended its rural electrification project in Kanchanjunga. The Swiss SDC is also suspending some field-level projects.

Even so, donors say they are willing to help the government augment its development projects. Most bilateral donors have actually increased aid commitments and the aid graph is projected to rise for the next few years. During the Nepal Development Forum last year, donors pledged to provide $600 million a year as assistance under the poverty reduction strategy.

It is not just the problem of signing up with the Maoists. The rebels’ policies are also inconsistent. What is acceptable in one place is completely rejected in other areas. The Rural Access Project of the British aid group, Dfid, is the only project allowed by the rebels in Bhojpur district but they have prohibited the same project in the neighbouring Khotang district. “It all depends on the whim of the local commander,” says NGO Federation President Arjan Karki.

The Maoists’ clandestine FM radio in western Nepal recently listed NGOs that it said would be allowed to work in the region. The donor community was hesitant because it was told that the list was not sanctioned by the leadership. This flip-flopping has confused donors. As one aid official told us: “In one area they say one thing and in the other they have something else to say.”

In the end it is the people who suffer. As donor-supported service delivery becomes difficult and aid doesn’t get to the neediest, education, health, sanitation and other basic needs projects are being hampered across Nepal. One way out has been to involve community-based organisations to implement projects. The World Bank funded Sukhjet-Jumla highway is going ahead because a Karnali-based project is involving villagers in digging the road. Min Bahadur Shahi, chairman of the Karnali Integrated Rural Development and Research Centre which is involved in the Jumla road, explains: “There can be an understanding with the Maoists even without giving them money or getting ourselves registered with them.” Shahi’s real problem is that the security forces then suspect his project of colluding with the Maoists just because it is allowed to work on the road. The government finally seems amenable to the idea of working with grassroots groups (see interview, facing page). Even though it knows some of the money may get into Maoists hands. But foreign agencies working in the field say the idea is not working as well as it should.

The government makes a strong case for community based development but at present, in many parts of the country, it is not possible if they are not accepted by the insurgents”, says Jorg Frieden, SDC’s country director.

Government officials say they are not as strict about aid disbursement through community based organisations even in Maoist control areas as long as the work gets done. But donors say they can’t work directly with the rebels since their legal arrangement is to work with the state. “An agreement with the rebels is simply out of question,” says Meineke at the Danish embassy. “We have our code that does not allow us to recognise the Maoists as representatives of the people.”

Knap agrees. “The operating guidelines of donor agencies in Nepal does not allow them to reach any formal agreement with the locals.” Ten donor agencies have come with a guideline that requires them to work independent of any paramilitary groups. When queried, the local staff of foreign funded projects say it sounds all very good when seen from Kathmandu but in the field they have to either find accommodation with the local Maoists or leave.
There are two main reasons for the digital divide: people can’t afford computers or they don’t have the English to use it.

Nepal used to have the same problem. Now, with the development of open source software and Nepali unicodes, there is at least a chance for users in Nepal to benefit from the IT revolution.

Microsoft’s Windows2000 and XP are released in English, French, German, Spanish and other variants. The company’s latest version of Office Suite is available in more than 20 languages. Although widely used, such software is out of reach for people in whose language it isn’t released. Software giants don’t benefit from localising their products so they don’t do it. They keep away the underlying source code from alteration.

The way to get around this is through open source software which is widely available in different languages. Programmers can recompile source codes to reproduce the software in their own language. The popularity of open source software has appeared especially in developing countries. In China, India, South Korea, Brazil and other countries, governments are promoting the use of such software which, unlike the proprietary kind, allows users to inspect, modify and freely redistribute its underlying programming.

Adapting open source software is cheaper, they can be freely modified and are easier to translate or localise into indigenous languages. As an end product, for instance, the interface (menu, dialogue box, message strings and help file) will appear in Nepali and spread accessibility of computers in Nepal. They don’t have English. The way to get around this is through open source software which is widely available in different languages. Programmers can recompile source codes to reproduce the software in their own language. The popularity of open source software has appealed especially in developing countries. In China, India, South Korea, Brazil and other countries, governments are promoting the use of such software which, unlike the proprietary kind, allows users to inspect, modify and freely redistribute its underlying programming.

Adapting open source software is cheaper, they can be freely modified and are easier to translate or localise into indigenous languages. As an end product, for instance, the interface (menu, dialogue box, message strings and help file) will appear in Nepali and spread accessibility of computers who don’t have English. One of the arguments that the open source community uses against Microsoft is to question the security of Microsoft operating systems whereas many prefer Windows’ user friendliness over Linux’s geekiness. Yet licensing and high price tag will push users to open source software which are usually free and can be localised.

KDE, one of the most popular open source software, is available in more than 50 languages and 50 more are in the pipeline. Localised Nepal’s GNOME graphic user interface is also being developed and will be bundled with NepaLinux, expected to be released by the end of this year.

Localising software is a tedious job, requiring harmony between programmers and linguists. The project to localise the Nepal operating system, office suites, basic tools and utilities are already underway. Even though there are 92 different dialects in Nepal, localisation of software in Nepal for now would prove to be a milestone and open up avenues for computing in other Nepali languages. Nepal will therefore have both Windows and Linux in the near future, opening up a choice of operating systems for users.

By releasing Unicode based Nepali keyboard input system for NepaLinux, the Nepali Language Computing Project at Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya has at least made it possible to store and retrieve data fed in Devanagari characters. One can even query length of texts, name the files and customise limited menus and desktop labels in Devanagari.

That’s not all, standardisation and development of unicode Nepali fonts has opened it up for localisation. Users will have the advantage of choosing a variety of fonts on different platforms according to one’s need, scalability and purchasing capacity.

Presently, programmers are preparing to release their own versions of Nepali OS, office suite, email and Internet client packages which will fulfil personal and office needs in Nepal. Yet, open-source software is more affordable and does not have propriety and licensing hassles. The debate between open source software and proprietary software will go on. Microsoft products have an edge because of their user-friendliness whereas Linux requires an in-depth knowledge of customisation and there are few experts around who can fix bugs. Even Linux beginners don’t dare run their machines exclusively on a single operating system fix bugs. The open source community needs to establish and groom a support network to spread the use of open source software.

Still, given the fact that users are developers and bugs are frequently self-corrected in open source softwares, they have started ebbing out proprietary software in many parts of the world where localisation is a priority, as it is here in Nepal.

Vibeek Raj Maurya is a freelance software developer with an interest in human technology interface.
Chaitanya Mishra in Nepal, 23 January

The main reason behind the widening gap between the rich and the poor in LDCs is the capitalist system whose main objective is to reap profit. The day there is no profit, the system will collapse. Since profit is earned from investment of profits made earlier, there is no level ground for trade. On a macro level, this situation has benefited developed countries that trade with underdeveloped ones. The rich-poor gap is characteristic of the capitalist system. To stop this system from encroaching poverty-ridden areas, special arrangements have to be made. Education, skill and health facilities enable people to be more productive. If there is famine, the government needs to address the situation. Mass production must result in products being affordable to the poor also. Governments need to keep this in mind and such safety nets are in place in India. The government should look after basic needs such as education, health and skill training of the poor. In Nepal, primary education in public schools is free. Implementing such programs means that the state can minimize the effects of poverty.

Another problem is urban-centred investment. Private investment, foreign aid and government money are mostly spent in the capital. Even when it comes to public infrastructure, these are the places that benefit the most. There was a time when Nepalis serving in foreign armies returned to the villages. The rural economy benefited to an extent. Now even the lauries have begun to settle in urban areas like Pokhara, Butwal and Dharan. Gender and caste-based issues are other reasons for the widening gap between the rich and the poor. After the 1990 movement, the rift between dalits and other castes grew as the issue of land ownership and health facilities began. In the last 50 years, the people who had been left behind are still lagging behind.
Getting into the fast lane

NARESH NEWAR

The capital’s social circuit is abuzz with talk about high-speed broadband Internet. Having a dial-up email account makes you a social outcast, people are showing off about the speed of their cable Internet as if they were talking about a new sporty motorcycle.

Broadband technology is not new in Nepal. Corporations and aid agencies were already using the system through wireless and cable modems provided by ISPs such as Mercantile, Worldlink, Subisu, Vianet and ITNLT. But the service providers are now diversifying into home-based surfers by making broadband Internet affordable so that clients can get not just the Internet but also cable television through the same pipe.

The best thing about broadband is that it does not require a telephone line for network connectivity. This reduces the cost of surfing by more than half since phone calls are so expensive.

Then, Internet speed is up to 20 times faster than a dial-up modem and is online 24 hours.

“Broadband is still seen as a luxury but with affordable prices, this concept is changing,” says Rupesh Sakya of Worldlink, which is providing broadband connections through its radio modems to several upper middle class neighbourhoods in Kathmandu and Patan. The company plans to market cable modem connections and replace dial-up.

“Prices will gradually go down as more people start subscribing,” says Sudhir Parajuli of Subisu, which claims to have the largest number of home based broadband users. Started with a handful of young Nepali IT engineers from Bangalore, Subisu has been making waves in the market. Within a year, the company has managed to penetrate into middle class homes in the Valley. All it costs is Rs 999 a month and the customers get broadband connection along with 80 television channels.

Co-axial broadband is cheaper for several reasons. Unlike wireless radio broadband, the operator does not have to get a license for each subscriber. There is still a huge hassle for getting a subscriber license for wireless modems. The license has to be processed both at the Ministry of Communication and Information and as well as the Nepal Telecommunications Authority. “For wireless broadband, there is always the regulatory issue. Unless our laws change, marketing wireless at the household level won’t be feasible,” explains Binay Bohra from Vianet, which specialises in wireless broadband networking.

Even for cable broadband, there are several hurdles. The cables have to be linked through the street electricity poles for the network and the ISP has to pay an annual rent for every pole used. This is becoming quite expensive for Subisu, which specialises on cable broadband Internet. “It’s not only expensive but also time-consuming, we can’t keep up with the growing demand,” explains Parajuli.

Despite all the hype about broadband, only a few home-based surfers have been able to access the system. There are reportedly less than 500 individuals who have subscribed to broadband Internet and most of the ISPs are concentrating within the city core. Consumers living outside the Ring Road have given up hoping for high-speed Internet reaching them anytime soon. “If we are to convert dial-up users into broadband consumers, we have to first ensure quality service,” says Rajit Kayastha from Mercantile.

The competition in the market is stiff and the five ISPs are working on the new major offers to be announced during the Computer Association of Nepal (CAN) event next week.

Offers are already available with annual subscription charges ranging from Rs 6,000 to Rs 10,000 per year. The price also depends on the range of bandwidth choices from 64-256 kbps. The installation charges have higher costs while the monthly subscription costs are far lesser compared to the monthly telephone bills paid through the dial-up system. For night surfers, the monthly charge could come down to just Rs 500 a month.

Further competition is expected to come from Spectrum which plans to launch its own broadband Internet through fibre optic. “We plan to reach at least 10,000 consumers” says Akbar Shah of Spectrum.

“The charm of broadband is once you get the hang of it, you can’t do without it, unfortunately costs are still very high for individual subscribers,” explains Mahendra Vesawkar from ITNLT, which caters solely to corporate houses.

Internet is very expensive in Nepal, it depends on satellite connection via Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan because ISPs have to pay at least Rs 2,500-3,000 per megabit in addition to taxes, VAT, royalties and so on.

“Information Technology is perhaps the most heavily taxed industry in Nepal,” says Vianet’s Bohra. “The pie is still very small.” The only way to cut down costs is to change uplink sources and this is possible by accessing through the landline connection through India. “Otherwise, ISPs can’t afford to lower the prices and if they do the quality of service will drop, which we don’t want to do,” says Puchandra Man Sakya from Mercantile.

At the moment, some families get a monthly phone bill of Rs 4,000 even though their Internet costs only Rs 1,000 a month. It is obvious that dial-up Internet will be obsolete once people start calculating how much cheaper it is to have Internet through cable.

Vatika Fairness Face Pack free with Vatika Anti-Dandruff Shampoo!

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The sugar season

More bad diets and the world will soon be in ICU

KAARE R NORUM

The marriage season usually consists of overeating and the rampant consumption of sugar is nothing to celebrate. In fact, this seasonal upsurge in sugar consumption is just a part of the huge transition in world health that is now underway.

Many countries, especially the developing ones, are facing the consequences of huge changes in lifestyle: modifications in diet, lower levels of physical activity and increased tobacco use. These changes are determined, to a large extent, by the globalisation and expansion of food markets and by ever-greater levels of urbanisation. Both these factors incite sedentary behaviour at home and at work, as well as profound alterations in dietary habits.

So it should be no surprise that noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), including cardiovascular diseases (CVDs), obesity, diabetes and cancer now kill roughly 33 million people around the world each year and cause almost 60 percent of total deaths. Indeed, they account for almost half the global burden of diseases.

By 2020, that contribution is expected to rise to 73 percent of all deaths and 60 percent of the global burden of diseases. Moreover, more than 60 percent of these deaths occur in the developing world and here NCDs increasingly appear in younger age groups, which can have huge implications for how productive a country’s workers are.

Recent data from China reflect the extent of the problem. In China’s rural areas, with more than 800 million people, NCDs account for more than 80 percent of deaths. Many countries are now afflicted by a double burden of diseases.

Countries that still struggle with malnutrition and illnesses like malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, now must contend with an explosion of CVDs, diabetes and obesity, as well as soaring rates of high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol.

Indeed, five of the 10 leading causes of death worldwide are related to diet and physical activity: high blood pressure, high cholesterol, low intake of fruit and vegetables, high body mass index and insufficient exercise. Clearly, effective strategies to tackle the NCD burden require a critical examination of what people are eating and their levels of physical activity.

The World Health Organisation, together with a group of international experts, has developed a global strategy on diet, physical activity, and health over a period of 10 years through an extensive series of consultations in more than 80 countries and with the input of United Nations bodies, civic groups and food producers. One of the strategy’s key conclusions is that reducing the burden of NCDs requires a multi-sectoral approach. Like a toolbox, the strategy provides WHO members with a comprehensive range of policy options from which to choose.

Governments can act. Transport ministries should provide safe roads so children can cycle to school. Finance ministers can tax unhealthy food and subsidise healthy food. Education ministries should demand healthy school meals. Many countries are already developing their own national strategies. Most of what WHO is recommending has been endorsed by public health officials for many years. But we face a global problem with many international stakeholders and this requires an urgent and worldwide response.

Of course, there is considerable debate about what precisely makes for a healthy diet. This debate is both welcome and to be expected, improving diet and finding ways to increase physical activity is a complex issue. Moreover, there will always be groups with their own interests, using arguments saying we do not have sufficient evidence to act. But there has been no challenge to the strategy’s recommendations from the global scientific or public health community.

The strongest critique has come from sugar associations, who claim that the upper limit of 18 percent on caloric intake from sugar is not based on scientific evidence. However, more than 20 national and international reports from around the world by scientific bodies governing dietary recommendations set similar or lower targets for sugar intake.

The growing CVD and CVD burden is a time bomb for world health. The implementation of the WHO’s strategy could lead to one of the largest-ever positive shifts in human health, putting populations throughout the world on the pathway to lifelong and sustained improvements in well-being.

(\textit{Project-Syndicate})

Kaare R Norum is Professor of Medicine and Nutrition, University of Oslo.

India and Pakistan have eased travel restrictions but getting a visa is still no joke

The best of enemies

I tried to submit the visa application for India for three days. One day I reached there at 2AM. No luck. They open the window for less than two hours and took the application of, at the most, 12 women. The next day, it was the same story. Women coming in from different villages and towns reach there at 2AM and they are always ahead of me. So it is a sour story of the wish and intention to go to India, with a remote hope that it may make Ahler a bit cheerful,” wrote a 40-year-old Islamabad teacher to a relative, about her attempts to get an Indian visa, in order to be with her nephew who had undergone multiple spinal surgeries.

The story of Indians attempting to seek visas from the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi is no different, except that there is not even a ‘drop box’ facility of the kind the Indian High Commission initiated in Pakistan a couple of months ago.

In Pakistan, the demand for Indian visas is as much as 1,500 per day, according to Kamal Parvez, press attaché at the Indian High Commission. However, the High Commission can only issue 300-400 visas a day, since neither country has brought diplomatic staff to full strength. Besides staff shortage, the two high commissions are burdened by being the sole visa-issuing authorities since their respective consulates in Karachi and Mumbai were closed over a decade ago. The groundbreaking SAARC summit in Islamabad in January 2004 led to talk of reviving these consulates. But India has yet to receive a response from Pakistan to their request made in February to open a camp office in Karachi.

Pakistan High Commission’s spokesman Ra Baz Hauser is cautious in his response to requests for information. After duly consulting the ‘diplomatic wing’, he makes no mention of the number of visas being issued currently or what the demand is and bypasses the question on whether Islamabad plans to use a courier service to facilitate Indian visa seekers. “The opening of visa offices in Mumbai and Karachi will be done simultaneously. We are trying to locate some place in Mumbai as India has not given us the Jinnah House. Since the strength of this mission has not been restored, we cannot cope with the visa requirements here,” he says.

Despite these constants, the past few years have seen an increase in exchanges involving students, journalists, businessmen, doctors, dentists, activists, filmmakers and academics. The organisers of annual events like the Pakistan-India People’s Forum conventions, the South Asia Free Media Association, and the Rialt Peer Theatre Workshop’s Dance and Drama Festival in Lahore manage to obtain visas for most of their participants—but not everyone is as high-profile, well-connected or determined. Even celebrities are kept on tenterhooks till the last minute before visas are granted—sometimes too late to enable them to attend the conferences.

“My secretary had to sit in Delhi for four days,” says actor Om Puri, who is among the growing numbers calling for an abolition of the visa system between the two countries. “All a British citizen needs to visit the US is proof of citizenship. This should be the case with us too,” he suggests. As it was before we became entrenched in our positions as the best of enemies. ●

Beena Sarwar is contributing editor, The News, Pakistan.

LETTER FROM PAKISTAN

Beena Sarwar

Too late to enable them to attend the conventions, the South Asia Free Media Association, and the Rialt Peer Theatre Workshop’s Dance and Drama Festival in Lahore manage to obtain visas for most of their participants—but not everyone is as high-profile, well-connected or determined. Even celebrities are kept on tenterhooks till the last minute before visas are granted—sometimes too late to enable them to attend the conferences. My secretary had to sit in Delhi for four days,” says actor Om Puri, who is among the growing numbers calling for an abolition of the visa system between the two countries. “All a British citizen needs to visit the US is proof of citizenship. This should be the case with us too,” he suggests. As it was before we became entrenched in our positions as the best of enemies. ●
Legitimacy and elections

Without legitimacy, there can be no stability in any political system

So Ukraine now has a legitimate government. Or does it? Observers confirm that infringements of the electoral rules were but minor. Yet questions remain. The defeated candidate, Viktor Yanukovich, contests the result. The country is deeply divided. Legitimacy is a delicate, yet utterly important feature of stable democratic politics. It is also complicated. Was George W Bush the legitimately elected president of the United States in his first term, having gained office only after America’s Supreme Court ordered an end to the Florida recount and with Bush having secured only a minority of the votes nationwide? Are the presidents of some former Soviet republics who seem to command 90 percent of the popular vote legitimately elected? Will the planned elections in Iraq be regarded as legitimate internally as well as externally?

It is vital to remember that elections alone do not guarantee legitimacy, even if they are seen to be free and fair. Americans find it hard to understand this, as do others in the lucky democracies of the Anglo-Saxon world. For them, legitimacy simply means voting and counting votes happens according to undisputed rules. What is legal, they think, is also legitimate.

For many others in the world, however, at least two other questions remain. First, turnout is crucial: who has voted and who has not. The second question is whether there remains any systematic, potentially violent opposition to the outcome.

The point about George W Bush’s first term was that despite grumbling and continued vocal opposition, the result of the election of 2000 was generally accepted. Or consider Tony Blair’s ‘landslide victory’ in 2001, when Labour won 40 percent of the vote with a turnout of 60 percent. In effect, 25 percent of the total electorate gave him nearly two-thirds of the seats in the House of Commons. Did anyone doubt the legitimacy of the result? Not in Britain, nor among Britain’s partners.

But there are not many countries where that would be true. Most others would—at the very least—demand a coalition government to reflect the existing diversity of views. Legitimacy by election is particularly problematic in countries with what might be called ‘endemic minorities’.

In Canada, for example, it would be risky to overlook the special interests of Quebec. In Ukraine, the divergent interests of the country’s west and east have to be recognised if legitimacy is to be established. In Iraq, a technical majority in a wholly legal election is almost meaningless if the position of Sunni Muslims and Kurds is not explicitly recognised. The occupation powers are therefore right to be worried about an election in which massive abstention among Sunnis results in a large Shia majority.

So legitimacy is more than legality. It rests on what the people concerned believe to be real. At the very least, there has to be an absence of violent opposition, including the threat of secession.

In western countries, notably in the US, people tend to assume too much when it comes to bringing democracy—meaning elections in the first instance—to others. In particular, we assume an essentially homogenous electorate, so that even a low turnout does not involve any disadvantage for particular ethnic or cultural groups. We also assume an automatic acceptance of rules that in fact took a long time to become embedded even in the US.

Without legitimacy, there can be no stability in any political system, and without elections—that is, an explicit expression of popular consent to the holders of power—there can be no legitimacy. But while free elections are a necessary condition of legitimacy, they are far from being sufficient to assure it. Constitutional arrangements must guarantee all entrenched groups a place in the country’s political institutions. It is equally imperatively to establish the rule of law, exercised by an independent and respected judiciary.

We should remember this as we pursue the elusive objective of democracy in Iraq, so we are not surprised if the upcoming election fails to generate a legitimate government.

Ralf Dahrendorf, author of numerous acclaimed books and a former European Commissioner from Germany, is a member of the British House of Lords, a former Rector of the London School of Economics, and a former Warden of St Antony’s College, Oxford.
When driving, even the world’s best golfers don’t hit every fairway. PGA tours statistics show that top driving accuracy rarely exceeds 80 percent. Amateurs are often just happy to hit fairways on par 4’s and 5’s, as they know that most of the time they’ll end up in the rough. It is that very rough which makes the game so much more difficult.

So even though all those tips on straight and long driving that I give you seem great, what all golfers need in their armoury is how to deal and here, I will share this trick with you.

Yes, a powerful swing (high swing speed) makes a big difference in getting the ball out easier from the thick stuff. An example would be Tiger Woods, who is known to be a monster when it comes to hitting full shots a long way. He uses his massive strength to get the ball flying. Not everybody can have Tiger Wood’s skill and strength. However, with a little bit of knowledge you can improve your shot making out of the thick and tall grass.

First let’s analyse why it is difficult to play out of these lies. With the normal swing speed, the club head just can’t cut through the thickness of the grass. It grabs the club and twists it or just slows it down so much that it either remains in or barely comes out. Here are some quick remedies. Follow them and you will be assured of saving strokes:

1. Hold the club upright and choke down on the grip by almost an inch. Instead of taking a normal big arc, hinge your wrists early right at the start of the backswing. This promotes a steep angle of attack on the downswing and helps with better contact on the ball. Always stay balanced on your feet and try to swing faster if you have more than 50 yards to carry.

Don’t forget—if you have a very bad lie just think of taking a lofted club and getting the ball back on the fairway. Use the same ‘steep’ swing on these shots also.

The odds of ‘going all out for it’ and pulling off a super recovery are heavily against you. Chances are that you will end up in much worse trouble than you started with, along with a couple of lost strokes. Play short from bad rough and wait for another chance to go at it.

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

The ultra experience

Coming soon: long-distance flights on powered gliders

DEEPTI GURUNG

in BHARATPUR

The sky is the limit, it seems, for the potential of ultra-lights to add a new dimension to recreation and adventure tourism in Nepal. This was proved by the pioneering flight of two powered gliders of Avia Club Nepal, Pokhara to Bharatpur roundtrip, on the occasion of the Chitwan Mahotsav on 9 January. The Club has been operating sightseeing flights from Pokhara airport for nearly 10 years now, but the proving flight last week showed it is feasible to also ferry tourists to other destinations and give them the time of their lives en route.

“This is absolutely one of the most exciting flights I have done in Nepal,” said pilot Stefan Shrestha of Avia who flew one of the gliders. “It was very smooth, the scenery was spectacular but it was really cold up there.” Stefan has been flying tourists on ultra-lights along the Annapurnas and over Phewa lake for several years now and if he was that excited, it must really mean something.

The one-hour flight took the old DC-3 route along the Seti River when Royal Nepal Airlines used to have a shuttle service from Pokhara to Bharatpur before the Mugling highway was built. Being slower, the ultra-lights took an hour to make the journey, flying at 11,000 ft above most of the other scheduled Twin Otter flights between Kathmandu to the west.

Once in Bharatpur, the ultra-lights made a low flypast trailing banners and dropping flower petals on dignitaries attending the launch of Chitwan Mahotsav, which included the prime minister. Avia Club then conducted free flights for locals during the two-day festival in and around Bharatpur and the Chitwan National Park. “There was so much excitement and interest to go up on the aircraft that many had to be turned back but we promise to return to Bharatpur,” Avia Club’s Natasha Shrestha told us.

Nepal is an ideal country for ultra-lights and there is great potential for sports and adventure tourism. The aircraft is cheap and easy to fly and besides sightseeing, can also be used for a host of other applications, including national park patrolling, research and wildlife tracking. “We want to explore the possibilities of ultra-lights in Bharatpur, not just for tourism but also for environmental conservation,” says Natasha Shrestha.

Avia has successfully tested flying ultra-lights with pontoons from Phewa Lake and is awaiting civil aviation clearance to begin regular takeoffs and landings from the water.
A graded review of websites for Nepalis, by Nepalis and of Nepalis

**www.chiyapasal.com**

We’re not that good at reading Roman-Nepali but this site gets top marks for originality. Took a long, halting, every-word-spoken-at-time but we have the most young Nepali people are quite adept at that kind of thing. It’s full of witty Nepali slang and nepanglish that had us laughing our heads off. The colour scheme and layout are gentle on the eyes. Check out the mark sheets.

We give it ★★★★ for good entertainment value.

**www.muncha.com**

A Nepal online shopping site which looks impressively well-stocked, with links to almost everything one might need laid out neatly on the left-hand side. The service isn’t just limited to Kathmandu and it easy to pay wherever you may be and there are all kinds of options. Too bad there isn’t an option for bargaining! The layout is pretty bare but it is functional and easy to navigate.

**www.food-nepal.com**

In this mouth-watering site, recipes of Nepal food are organised into categories like appetisers, vegetarian, non-vegetarian etc. The navigation system suggests links to other relevant recipes, so it’s quite fun to just browse through the site. Still, the site doesn’t stimulate the eyes as much as it should. Saliva, since it emptys a number of classes closing schemes and most of the pictures are too small and fuzzy to look edible. We give it ★★★★ for a great idea.

**www.welcomenepal.com**

This site represents the valiant attempt being made by the Nepal Tourism Board to entice tourists to visit Nepal despite all odds. There are maps and guidebooks in several languages but the hotel information link did not work when we were testing, so we guess the site prepares visitors for Nepal and alerts them to expect the unexpected. We give it ★★★☆.

**www.nepalmatrimonial.com**

This is an online matchmaker for Nepalis looking to marry by very specific standards. The profile you enter is pretty thorough, asking you to submit religion, height and even complexion (options are: fair, very fair and dark). You can be your own matchmaker or somebody else’s, thus neatly allowing for arranged marriages as well.

**www.nepalmatrimonial.com**

If you were wondering how to get to the blocked Maoist homepage, wonder no more. Simply go to the Proxify site (www.proxify.com) and you can browse all the banned websites in the world. The underground comrades have a blood red homepage and affiliated organisations like RIM and CCMPUSA provide baskets of related articles. We give it ★★★☆ for doing what it’s supposed to and so elegantly.

**www.sahjha.com**

This site seems to be suffering a major identity crisis, taking up topics ranging from Nepal music to humour, in buttons (wrong colour, wrong size) scattered on the left of the main page and trying to be everything for everyone. Recent posts from the forum are on the front page but the site would be better off selecting more links and just having one called FORUM, which is why most people seem to come here anyway. On a brighter note, the forum is quite lively and updated frequently.

We give it ★ because there is vast room for improvement.

**www.party nepal.com**

A trove of information for party animals. If you fancy looking at pictures of people you’ve never met partying at places you’ve never been to, this is the perfect site for you. It also works for those who went to those parties and want everybody to see what they were up to or to say “There I am, I look awful.”

Gives new meaning to the motto: See and be seen.

We give it ★★★★★ because we like looking at pictures of people.

**www.nepalnews.com**

Nepalnews.com garners the most hits of all Nepal based sites. A comprehensive news portal with all the latest happenings ‘as it happens’. Caters to the Nepal diaspora. Contains excerpts from all Nepali newspapers. We give it ★★★★★ because there is vast room for improvement.

**www.nepal.gov.np**

A much needed site for the student who needs to research the convoluted structure of the Nepali government. The site is well organised and very detailed, some of the links even lead off into separate sites. But particular information has to be opened in .pdf files, though, while most sites would just use pdf files, which are less of a hassle. We give it ★★★★.

**www.nisthashrestha.com**

This is an online matchmaking service that allows for arranged marriages as well.

**www.manilaformalization.com**

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We give it ★★★★★.
ABOUT TOWN

THINGS TO DO

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS
- Zen Paintings by Kang Chin-Mo at the Buddha Gallery, Thamel. Until 26 January. 4441689
- Collective Reverberation Paintings by Manish Lal Shrestha at Gallery Ninj, Lalitpur. Until 26 January. 4442826
- Reflection of Nature II Pressed dry floral Oshibana art by Padma Shrestha at Park Gallery, Lalitpur. Until 28 January. 4419303
- Life through the Lens Photographs by Krishor Kayastha at Indigo Gallery, 131 January, 4413580, indigo@weirn.com
- Kickin’ Up Dust Photographs of Australian contemporary indigenous cultural festivals at Siddhidatt Art Gallery, Until 31 January. 4218048

EVENTS
- Khane Rider, A film by Niko Caro, New Zealand on 23 January at Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikuti Mandap at 5.30 PM.
- News Quiz Team entry Rs 300, three members per team, on 28 January, 6.30 PM at lamped gallery, 4448406
- Sanibara Mela Every Saturday at the Dharahara Bakery Café, 12AM-5PM.
- The God Dance of Kathmandu Valley Tuesdays at Hotel Vija. 4271545

MUSIC
- Shukarab at Patan Museum on 21 January, 6PM. Tickets Rs. 950.
- Sea Biscuit Film show on 25 January at Lalitpur Gallery Café, 7PM. 4324058
- Motoen Nite with Soul T on 28 January at Four season restaurant, Thamel, 7PM-10PM, tickets Rs. 100. 4701715
- Margarita Night at Fusion The bar at Dwarika’s Hotel on 26 January with Ahjaya & the Steam Injuns, Rs. 799. 4474408
- Jazz & it up New York style with Sunny Jain Collective on 28 January at the Jazz Bar, Hotel Shangri-La, 7 PM onwards for Rs 999, 4412999
- Classical vocals and instrumental music, 7PM onwards, every Friday at Hotel Vija. 4271545
- Jatra Saturday nights with Looza, 6.30 PM onwards. 4266622
- Jukebox experience with Poqa Gurung and The Cloud Walkers every Friday at the Summit Hotel. 5521810
- Happening live jazz in town at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lalitpur. Every Wednesday and Saturday, 7.45 PM onwards.

FOOD
- Italian Food Festival at Hotel Yak & Yeti. Until 22 January. 4340520
- Grand Dosa Festival at Hyatt Regency, 30 January. 4419324
- Barbecue Dinner Every Friday at the Summit Hotel, 5521810
- Seasons Special Lunchen at the Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La for Rs 450, 4412999
- New delicatessen Introducing pastas and snacks at Roadhouse Café, Jawadikhel, 5527755
- La Sacen Restaurant and Vinothique, Bukh, 5521766
- Sizzling Weekend Treat with live music, dance, barbeque and karaoke at Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 4273999
- Delicious barbeque dinner Fridays at Summit Hotel, 5521810
- Calé Bahal Newari and continental cuisine under the giant Cinnamon tree at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. Rs 30522
- Splash Spring BBQ Wednesday and Friday evenings, 6PM onwards. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu.
- Executive Lunch at Toran Restaurant, Dwarika’s, 4474948
- The Beer Garden at Vajyajara, Godavari Village Resort, 5560675
- Dwarika’s Thai Lunch at the heritage courtyard. 4474948
- The Tharu Kitchen at Jungle Base Camp. Junglebasecamp@yahoo.com

GETAWAYS
- Shivapuri Heights Cottage Tranquil atmosphere at the edge of Shivapuri National Park, 4419302
- Chiso Chicho Hayana One night two days package for Rs 1,700. 4411706
- Jungle Base Camp Lodge. Bird’s special package and prices. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- Malaysia Dream Holidays Packages starting from Rs 45,500 per person. 201345, malaysiadanys.mermo@pos.com.my
- Getaway package Night’s stay at Godavari Village Resort, includes dinner and breakfast. 5560675
- AAA Organic Farm and Guesthouse Rs 950 with three meals. 6061734
- Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge Pure relaxation to escape the Kathmandu city. 4361000
- Temple Tiger One night package Rs 250. 4263840
- Marcan Wildlife Jungle Resort special packages available. 4225001
- Weekend Special at Park Village Resort, Buddhaniketan, 4378528
- Jomsom Mountain Resort Two nights three days at Rs 5,999 for Nepalis, $199 for expats including safari and food. 446110, salesjm@gmail.com

KATHMANDU VALLEY

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

Thakur has a name new—Bobbi Skander. Extortion, drugs, murder and kidnapping are his game. His very name strikes fear for his rules. He can finish your life while you are still alive. He recognises no geographical boundaries and respects no international laws. One man, Kantilal Shah refuses to yield to his demands and pays a terrible price. Kantilal Shah makes an impossible vow to defy all odds and bring Bobbi Skander back to India and justice. This is his Elan. Directed by Vikram Bhatt, Elan is a crime thriller shot all over the globe. It has an all-star cast with Rahul Khanna, Arjun Rampal, Milun Chakraborty, John Abraham, Lara Dutta and Amisha Patel.

NEPALI WEATHER

The dominant westerly front broke the monsoon spell and brought the rain which was a bit unexpectedly. The persistent pushing of the front appears to have been stronger than we expected. The west has received as much as 40mm of welcome rain on Tuesday and Wednesday. In Kathmandu 24mm of rain was recorded, well above the 14 mm average for January. The snow came down to 2,200m but was melting quickly so the sun came up on Thursday. The satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows another westerly front approaching over Afghanistan with a slow but gentle movement to the north. Expect partly cloudy to overcast skies with some precipitation likely over the weekend and high altitude. The Valley’s minimum temperature will hover at zero.

NEPALI WEATHER

KATHMANDU VALLEY

by MAUSAM BEED

Walkathon

Walkathon

Want to walk with Bhairab Risal?

What for?

To raise funds for Radio Sagarmatha building on Feb 27, 2005.

Nepal Forum of Environmental Foundation (NEFEJ), 4261991, nefej@mos.com.np

For details contact 4442220 for show timings www.jainepal.com

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Now Showing

Now Showing

by MAUSAM BEED

ABOUT TOWN

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Thakur has a name new—Bobbi Skander. Extortion, drugs, murder and kidnapping are his game. His very name strikes fear for his rules. He can finish your life while you are still alive. He recognises no geographical boundaries and respects no international laws. One man, Kantilal Shah refuses to yield to his demands and pays a terrible price. Kantilal Shah makes an impossible vow to defy all odds and bring Bobbi Skander back to India and justice. This is his Elan. Directed by Vikram Bhatt, Elan is a crime thriller shot all over the globe. It has an all-star cast with Rahul Khanna, Arjun Rampal, Milun Chakraborty, John Abraham, Lara Dutta and Amisha Patel.

NEPALI WEATHER

The dominant westerly front broke the monsoon spell and brought the rain which was a bit unexpectedly. The persistent pushing of the front appears to have been stronger than we expected. The west has received as much as 40mm of welcome rain on Tuesday and Wednesday. In Kathmandu 24mm of rain was recorded, well above the 14 mm average for January. The snow came down to 2,200m but was melting quickly so the sun came up on Thursday. The satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows another westerly front approaching over Afghanistan with a slow but gentle movement to the north. Expect partly cloudy to overcast skies with some precipitation likely over the weekend and high altitude. The Valley’s minimum temperature will hover at zero.

NEPALI WEATHER

KATHMANDU VALLEY

by MAUSAM BEED

Walkathon

Want to walk with Bhairab Risal?

What for?

To raise funds for Radio Sagarmatha building on Feb 27, 2005.

Nepal Forum of Environmental Foundation (NEFEJ), 4261991, nefej@mos.com.np

For details contact 4442220 for show timings www.jainepal.com

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Now Showing

Now Showing

by MAUSAM BEED

ABOUT TOWN

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

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Want to walk with Bhai
The more the merrier

Y

et another wedding season is upon us and the nation is busy clearing up the backlog of couples patiently waiting their turn to tie the knot. Why anyone would want to get hitched at a time when the country is engaged in deadly serious debates about reinstating parliament is beyond me. Anyway, the institution of marriage has many advantages but till press time I couldn’t remember any of them. Oh yes, there is one benefit of having a spouse that becomes apparent after being married to one for 25 years, which is that men and women of reproductive age and above are allowed to legally conjugate. Usually, this is followed in due course by the arrival of a brand new Nepali into the world. The more the merrier.

Nepal may be landlocked but it is also wedlocked. Therein lies our salvation. Besides the happy couple, the people who are most ecstatic about the nuptial season are supermarket owners. Their shelves are stacked high with gifts items that are exclusively imported for the wedding season. And since marriages in our part of the world come in swarms, one is best off buying wedding presents for all and sundry at one go and just hearing them in case there is a future shortage. Having just returned from just such a marathon shopping spree, in the public interest I’d like to reveal the utilitarian and functional array of wedding gifts I bought. For some reason, they are all replicas of exotic and mythical beasts, usually a winged dog with hooves and a prehensile tail.

Exhibit A: Adorable Dolphins
A graceful and playful bottlenose dolphin caught in blue crystal leaping high over the crest of a wave on a glass pedestal simulating an underwater tableau. Perfect for living rooms.
Rs 3,000 + 13% VAT

Exhibit B: Sweeping Swans
Romantic sculpture of swans with their necks intertwined riding the spun-glass surface of a placid lake. Mandatory for bedsteads on wedding nights to get the newly-wed couple into the mood. As marriage matures, it can also serve as a projectile.
Rs 4,200 for two swans, Rs 3,000 for one.

Exhibit C: Cute Gargoyles
Griffins and gargoyles are favourites as wedding presents for Kathmandu’s glitterati. No marriage is complete without a set of these. Great resale value, can be recycled to people who give you dolphins.
Rs 5,000 for alabaster griffins but gargoyles, being cuter, are more expensive.

Exhibit D: Gnice Gnomes
On a slightly larger format, we have wedding gifts for the garden including scantily clad marble maidens holding pitchers and gnomes. The latter is irresistible since after the honeymoon is over it can serve as a paper weight. Rs 8,000 for a six pack of gnomes in various poses including fishing, playing the flute, pretending to be a paper weight, peeing, staring into space and conjugating.

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