Tourists look for tigers as elephants wade through tall grass at the Royal Chitwan National Park on Tuesday. Although the numbers of safari tourists are still sluggish, the tourism industry is elated by a surge in arrivals of trekkers. The three-month ceasefire has helped. The Everest region is full of European trekkers and flights to Lukla can barely cope. Manang would be a lot fuller if there were more flights. Indian pilgrims are flocking to Muktinath and Upper Mustang is seeing more groups. Even Pokhara is picking up from a year-long lull. See ‘Manang’s middle path’, p 8-9.
Unilateral multilateralism

The Maoists and the parties should use the remaining two months of the ceasefire for confidence-building

O ne month of the three-month ceasefire announced by the Maoists has already tramped. The ceasefire decision came after many informal and official meetings between the rebels and the UML and NC leadership. In those talks, the Maoists had said they would announce a unilateral ceasefire if the seven-party alliance guaranteed them to do so. But because of the residual distrust between the two sides, the parties couldn't muster the courage. Had they done so, the parties would have earned the gratitude of the public. To be sure, the ceasefire didn't just happen because of contacts between the Maoists and the parties. There were many factors: international pressure, domestic: the rebels had to genuinely open they weren't the obstacle to peace and to take the wind out of the king's sails. The rebels really calculated the effect of their announcement, the pressure would be on the king to respond positively. It also further isolated the regime, which is seen to have used the excuse of the insurgency to crack down on the political elite to hasten the 1990 constitution. But before the Maoists could seriously call for a ceasefire because they needed military and organisational breathing space. Many of the young recruits are not politically indoctrinated and this would give them an opportunity for ideological training. In statements, meetings and interviews the Maoist leadership has now accepted that they will never achieve state capture and even if they reach such a stage, people won't allow it. Furthermore, they may have reasoned that a people who oppose the king's autocracy would never accept Maoist totalitarianism.

The Maoists have also started signalling to multiparty democracy, the concept of sovereignty and pluralism. In fact, the ideological gap between them and the political mainstream has narrowed considerably. The seven parties should encourage the Maoists to commit themselves more to this path. The Maoists have always said that as long as the king controls the army there will be no genuine democracy in Nepal and that the king has repeatedly used military force to snatch liberty. That is why the rebels say they seek a democratic republic to revamped the country's military command structure. There is now a distinct possibility that if the political parties agree to a democratic republic, the Maoists will give up armed struggle. They have put forth elections for a constituent assembly to satisfy their minimum demand.

But there is still a hurdle. The legacy of past violence has left a lot of bad blood between the parties and the Maoists. And unless the rebels completely halt their conflict and intimidation of party workers in the districts, this distrust will remain. Both sides think the other is just using them to buy time. But if both sides were committed to the long-term well-being of Nepal and showed sincerity in finding a resolution there could not just be agreement but even cooperation.

In fact, the possibility of a minimum agreement already exists: the parties agreeing to a constituent assembly in exchange for the Maoists giving up violence and joining the political mainstream. The two sides should use the remaining two months of the ceasefire for confidence-building measures and there is a lot for them to talk about. The mainstream parties must work resolutely to irreversible transformation of the Maoists. The time has now passed to sit and analyse the situation. We cannot join hands with him, it didn't work.

Raghur Pant, journalist and former MP from Lalitpur, served as minister in the Deuba-led government that was dissolved on 1 February.

Murphy's Law in force

H eavyweight Indian politicians are in town this week to express solidarity with the pro-democracy movement in Nepal. They should be careful—any sign that the monarchy is being displaced from southern border will be the kiss of death. Rumour is rife that a prototype constitution is expected to be submitted to the 1960 drafting committee by top army brass, is doing the rounds of diplomatic missions.

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CK Lal's dystopic, indicates that the third constitutional takeover process that began on 4 October 2002 will further intensify the confrontation between the palace and the people. Whatever the outcome, the struggle will weaken the state. As in life, so in politics—if anything can go wrong, it will.

When King Gyanendra dismissed Sher Bahadur Deuba and assumed control three years ago, he initially got the benefit of the doubt. A ceasefire soon after convinced many he could lift the country out of the quagmire. The middle-class believed the king had an ace up his sleeve to solve the current situation. But the international community hoped that the end of political bickering would help focus attention on resolving the insurgency. The Indians anticipated that the breakup of the Maoist movement would result in a confederation with a powerful king who could restore stability. Big Business expected a former colleague to quickly clean up the mess. All such hopes have now been dashed. The promises of peace, good governance and development remain unfilled as the country hurtles toward an abyss.

February First completed what was started that Darain three years ago. It removed any doubts that this was a non-Panchayat experiment all along. The plan all along seems to have been to take over, plan and simple. The international community hasn’t yet completely ostracised the royal regime but there are signs that our foreign friends are abandoning this sinking ship. Snubbed abroad and shunned at home, the regime now comes to another fork on the road. Perhaps as a sign of things to come, the vice-chairman ventured his views at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting last weekend to peace. Another ominous hint: last week the king charged that the flow of foreign funds was responsible for the nasty activities of the Maoists. One is tempted to ask: does the real enemy really know who is its real enemy? There are Maoists who have hopes have been narrowed considerably. The seven parties should encourage the Maoists to commit themselves more to this path.

A further consolidation of powers is being contemplated that is the wrong track. No one can argue that Nepal has realised yet that continuation of the October Four order without substantive correction is just as absurd as being unimagined by strategists in the palace. Power has the strange effect of making people mean-spirited. Absolute power often corrupts even democratic institutions and ends up snatching. If the king refuses to rollback the royal takeover, the unthinkable may soon become reality.

One need only turn to history books about Iran in 1973. Fully armed and supported by the Americans, and the experts predicted the fall of the Shah by 1975. This has now accepted that they will give up violence and join the political mainstream. The two sides should use the remaining two months of the ceasefire for confidence-building measures and there is a lot for them to talk about. The mainstream parties must work resolutely to irreversible transformation of the Maoists. The time has now passed to sit and analyse the situation. We cannot join hands with him, it didn’t work.

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Murphy’s Law to know that.
ROYAL TREK

I don’t know why all the big fuss about the king walking through Patan (‘The Royal Trek’, #268). This is his country as well, he is trying to rally his people at a time when there is disunity and strife. Why do we have to suspect everything he does and try to find a sinister motive in his actions? Can’t we for once believe that there is a monarch who puts the country’s interest first, unlike the political leaders who let this country die and the Maoists who mortally wound it?

Sagar Shah, email

I in my school days our course book that had a great story on sycophancy ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes’. Never thought I’d see it enacted in real life but the Royal Trek was almost there. The king must realise that public curiosity about the royalty and support for the royal regime are two different things. The sooner the king gets rid of the sycophants surrounding him and listens to candid advice, the better for the future of the monarchy and the country.

S. Hamal, Lalitpur

The visit to Mangal Bajar was indeed a ‘PR event’ as Kunda Dixit correctly points out in ‘The Royal Trek’. What the palace does not understand is people can no longer be fooled by putting up PR banners overnight and fixing potholes at the last minute. Why did the king wait for 7.5 months to go to the streets? Why did he not go there on 1 February itself? If the king has decided to go to the streets, he may be only competing with the political parties.

D Mahat, Baltimore, USA

Walking around Patan, bringing a whole city to a halt the whole day and being a spectacle is not helping the monarchy and the country in any way in these modern times. The money spent on building all those arches could have been so much more beneficial to the thousands of poor and desperate Nepalis who the king must have seen in his visits to the different parts of Nepal. Could Your Majesty please do something to bring about good governance and seek proper advice that will help to prolong the monarchy and democracy rather than prolong the damage that is being done every single day. Your loyal subject.

R Khadga, Lazimpat

His Majesty’s visit to Patan last week was supposed to be to assess the situation on the ground. But how is he going to get a true picture when students were required to stand in double lines from Kupandole to Krishna Mandir? Bhaktapur and Kathmandu students were also mobilised to fill the gaps. The students were given specific places to stand, schools were ordered to make banners that said ‘Sri Pancha Maharajadhari ko jai, jai, jai’ if they were not going to make arches. The cheering crowds weren’t as spontaneous as they seemed. Traffic was stopped on Patan’s main streets and the city ground to a halt. This was an officially sanctioned banda. The royal advisers must know there are many more effective ways for His Majesty to assess the situation in the Central Zone. What is he going to learn he does not already know? These advisors were lazy to do their homework properly and chose a place that would not require minimum effort to show success. They better devise a plan where royal visits henceforth benefit the community in a substantial way rather than waste precious resources on arches and banners. This is a lose-lose situation.

Sharada KC, Lalitpur

CLIQUE

The recent outburst by Tulsi Giri that the present constitution (Editorial, ‘To kingdom come’, #266) is a barrier to the royal takeover does not come as a surprise given this individual’s shameless behaviour since the coup d’etat of 1960. Everyone knows that this individual and his ilk (Badri Mandal, Tanka Dhakal, Sachit Shumsher and Bharat Keshar) are barriers to democracy and freedom in Nepal. They are members of an anti-national, pseudo-nationalistic and power-hungry clique. They are doing the nation a great favour by knowingly or unknowingly, hastening the regime’s demise. However, my sympathies are with the monarch who has chosen the company of such dishonourable men to assist him.

S Shrestha, email

CANDID CAMERA

When will Thai International stop that silly inflight announcement just before landing in Kathmandu that ‘the use of camera over Nepal and at Kathmandu airport is strictly prohibited’? There are some pretty irrational rules in Nepal but this one takes the cake. The use of cameras may be banned at Kathmandu airport because terrorists may want to take snapshots of the lax security apparatus but since when was it banned ‘over Nepal’? As far as I know, Thai is the only airline that makes this announcement and if it were to be followed, all mountain flights would henceforth be grounded. Kunda Dixit should write a column about this inability on the part of the airline and the authorities to distinguish between real terrorists and real tourists.

Sam Bieha, Yak & Yeti Hotel

ADVISORIES

I wish to draw the attention of the foreign embassies based in Kathmandu to their travel advisories. The United States, most European countries, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and others strongly advise their citizens travelling to Nepal. Fine. But I haven’t heard of an advisory against their citizens travelling to London, Madrid or New York which have seen indiscriminate terrorist attacks against civilians. Nepal’s violence has rarely been indiscriminate. In the few instances when it has happened, foreigners, have never been deliberately targeted. Someone please explain to me this hypocrisy and double standard or is it just a case of you covering your legal asses?

Jaya Gauchan, email

LETTERS

Nepal Times welcomes all feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms can be accepted, writers who provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be in text format without attachments with ‘letter to the editor’ in the subject line.

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Third division

A first division doesn’t guarantee wisdom or compassion

H is exam results were out and as usual he had passed in third division. When he was found hiding at his friend’s place, his father dragged him home and flogged him. That night he sat on a motorcycle and zoomed off god knows where. That’s how it is with him—the more he is beaten the farther he goes.

I have known this boy since childhood. I sometimes help him with his homework and realise he is a slow learner. Not even slow and diligent, just slow. He is by nature disinclined to dogged learning.

If I ever worried about his future, then it is with this thought: “If the government is so worried about giving books to millions of children, why not buy them or make lower quality books?” But the only clear impact to date has been booksellers’ refusal to sell books that include the customs tax. The result: volumes worth Rs 20 million have been gathering dust at customs on the Nepal-India border since 16 July.

“We are suffering huge losses,” says Madhub Lal Maharjan, general secretary of the National Booksellers and Publishers Association of Nepal (NBPAN). Most affected are students of higher education since an estimated two-thirds of their textbooks, including medical, management and computer science, come from abroad. “Students usually ask us for discounts on books but with the new duty imposed they will never be able to afford the books,” says Kinni Gurung of National Book Centre, Bhaktapur.

“We have said no to so many customers in the past few days that the number of people coming in to ask for textbooks has decreased considerably,” he added.

Ministry of Education and Sports Joint Secretary Laha Prasad Tripathi says, “Concerned authorities need to understand that in a country where less than one percent of the total population can read, testing books would have negative effects.” He added, “That does not mean we are not doing anything about it now. The process has been initiated and we are waiting for response from ministries.”

Officials in the revenue division at the Ministry of Finance told us they are aware of the widespread dissatisfaction at the decision and are working to respond to it. But they declined to provide further details. Maharjan of NBPAN says, “The government is investing billions in education to fulfil the Millennium Development Goals and to achieve education for all. The recent decision to tax books only takes them further away from their purpose.”

In a new initiative, the government’s Janak Education Materials Centre has started publishing grammar books for secondary schools in collaboration with India’s Oxford University Press. Prior to the budget announcement these books would have faced a 10 percent custom tax, which was levied on all Nepali books published outside the country and imported in bulk.

“If the government is so concerned about promoting national printing industries,” Maharjan asks, “why not encourage institutions, NGOs, government and semi-government entities to print in Nepal? Moreover, why not provide the technology and feasible environment to print foreign books here?”

NBPAN argues the new levy on books violates the spirit of the UNESCO constitution, Charter of Books and an international treaty called the Florence Agreement, which all recommend against such taxes.

Nepal hasn’t signed UNESCO’s constitution or the Florence Agreement but as a member state of the body, the government should respect the objectives of its constitution, reasons NBPAN.

Member of the government’s Revenue Consultant Committee, Bishnuwarth Pyakurel, says it’s not too late to reverse the tax. “The policymakers have to understand that taking the provision back will not bring the government’s credibility in the market. That said, as a member of the recommending body I can assure you that we have been talking to all concerned and the reaction has been quite positive,” Maharjan also says policymakers have been sympathetic but, “That is not enough. It has been more than two months since the decision. We want to see action and we want to see some changes in policy.”

“No country in the world taxes books. With this recent decision one wonders if the government is in so much trouble that it is collecting revenues by taxing knowledge,” he added.

Back at Jamal’s Mandala Book Point, Yogendra Gurung will return home empty-handed again. “The university library does not have the budget to buy the books. That is why we buy our personal copies, no matter how expensive they may be. Now we can’t even do that. What more can I do than wait until the government decides to take the book tariff off?”

Balancing the books

Booksellers and students are worst affected by the controversial new tariff on books

MALLIKA ARYAL

The usual battle at Mandala Book Point, Jamal, has been absent for the last couple of months but this is the fourth time Yogendra Gurung, lecturer of Population Studies at Tribhuvan University, has come for books crucial to his research.

“I have to work with the most recent information on statistics related to ethnicity, migration and conflict but I have not been able to get hold of the books,” he says.

For the past quarter that he has been absent, Gurung has been busy completing his PhD. His research work is being held up for lack of books. “We have said no to so many customers in the past few days that the number of people coming in to ask for textbooks has decreased considerably,” he added.

Ministry of Education and
Soldiers guilty but free

On Tuesday, a court martial ruled that Colonel Bobby Khatri, Captain Sunil Adhikari and Captain Amit Pun were directly responsible for killing Malini Sunar after severely torturing her (Nepal Times #217/222). The girl was abducted on 17 February 2004 by state security forces, which initially did not provide any information on her whereabouts or even admit they were holding her. The three officers received sentences of six months in jail and temporary suspension of promotion but they are unlikely to serve any actual time in prison, as they were found to have served the sentences by being consigned to the barracks. The three were also ordered to pay some compensation to the family from their own pockets. According to Brad Adams, Asia director of Human Rights Watch, “This ruling allows officers convicted for torture and murdering a 15-year-old girl to avoid serving even a single day in jail. This tells soldiers in the Nepali Army that they won’t risk punishment if they continue to abuse civilians.” Over the past two years, Nepal’s security forces have been responsible for the largest number of reported forced disappearances in the world.

ICJ on human rights mission

The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) is in Nepal on a mission to assess the human rights crisis in the country. Led by ICJ Secretary General Nicholas Howen, the delegation will focus on the judiciary’s role in defending human rights as well as on respect for the judiciary’s decisions and restrictions on human rights defenders and lawyers. Howen will meet senior government officials, the National Human Rights Commission, the Chief Justice and members of the judiciary and lawyers. This is ICJ’s third visit in less than a year and despite its constant appeals to the government, there has been little change in the human rights situation and respect for the judiciary. The administration continues to defy the Supreme Court’s order to not re-arrest detainees set free by the highest court. During their November 2004 visit, ICJ officials were highly critical of both the army and Maoists. ICJ also called on the Maoists to stop the torture and unlawful killings of civilians. During the emergency in March 2005 ICJ found that Nepal was in the midst of a human rights crisis marked by mass arrests, extrajudicial executions, torture and ill treatment. The commission also criticised the king for abandoning the rule of law and deepening the conflict after his takeover. “The Government of Nepal continues to surpass its already dismally record of contempt for the Supreme Court’s habeas corpus decisions,” Howen said in March.

NEW PRODUCTS

A NEW CLEAN: Puja Soap has upgraded with a newly-designed Cremean Wrapper and new ingredients, including Zeo Blaster. Natur Fizz and Swiss Brightener: Puja Soap is manufactured by Mahasakti Soap and Chemical Industries, Nepal.

M-SEAL LAUNCHED: Pidilite Industries Ltd. has successfully launched M-Seal (in Nepal), an epoxy compound used to seal leaks and fill cracks. The unique mix of the resin base and water.

What is the role of English in the world today?

English is spoken more by second language users than by native speakers. If a German businessman is working in China, both the German and his Chinese counterpart will speak English. It is purely accidental that English has this role. English no longer belongs to native speakers. Many communities speak English as a second language, and they have enriched English language by bringing all kinds of expressions and vocabularies. English is a worldwide language and in some sense it is an official worldwide language.

Fight for FDI

Why attracting investment is not a political act

Earlier this year, two researchers from the State University in the US tested 200 economists on concepts of economics. To their surprise, the researchers found that 60 per cent of the respondents gave wrong answers to a simple multiple-choice question about:

**STRICLY BUSINESS**

Ashutosh Tiwari

opportunity cost. That most economists were wrong about an issue of such importance. That, despite holding doctorates, most economists have no better understanding of the basic concept of their science than the man in the street. Closer to home, Nepali economists are no better. They too, too often mislead and misguides and then misapply the basics of economics routinely. While US economists face challenges in communicating with peers and the press, their Nepali counterparts know that flashtching credentials, and knowledge, and discarding the people they have been elected to represent, absolves them from any responsibility of arguing the basis of their views in public. A case in point is Bhola Chalise’s article in Himal Khahar Patrick in 16-19 September on foreign direct investment (FDI) in the tourist sector: Foreign direct investment (FDI) is foolish”. Chalise makes three arguments against it. First, he says that since trekking agencies and supermarkets are doing well in Nepal, there is no need for FDI in those sectors. Second, the government’s wanting to bring in friendly to foreign investors-most of whom are far more likely to share tales of woe related to doing business here than spend time plotting against local businesses. Second, FDI can only work when investors see a lower opportunity cost in Nepal to produce goods or services. Investors know that the only way to see their money grow is to ensure that consumers buy more goods and services. And consumers buy more when quality is high and prices are low.

In this respect, FDI is attractive not because it gives the government of treking agencies and supermarkets but to those who want to access varieties of local goods at lower and more competitively lower prices. By bringing additional capital, new technology, know-how and contacts to a sector, FDI helps make it leaner, more sophisticated and competitive. But, unable to adapt, some Nepali businesses will fold in the process. But should a self- interested business person’s concern be directed toward saving a few businessmen’s firms or toward vedoming opportunities that exploit the competitive advantage that Nepal has in ultimately offering better value to consumers? It is one thing to slam the government on legal grounds. But the reality is that it does not reflect the will of the citizens, their decisions are illegitimate, and stop at that. But if it’s stil to slam the government by portraying FDI as an instrument that furnishes autodetermination and destroys all local businesses. Cash-starved Nepal, no matter who runs its government, needs more FDI and economists must work to make the public aware of the benefits of attracting capital from abroad to boost the country’s untapped potential. This task has become all the more urgent because, to paraphrase my fellow columnist Artha Bird’s piece last week, not doing so is only going to raise Nepal’s opportunity cost to be a player in today’s Flat World.
Tortured by both sides

Nepal, 22 September

Suchana Oli is an eighth grader of Banki in Dang district. Her tale of torture and detention shows that many have died in detention.

"Because the king's enemy when I spoke in favour of the nation, democracy and monarchy."

Retired RNA brigadier general and royalist Ditta Slab, in Janastha, 28 September

"I'm sure they have abducted him. I really want to study. If I could find a job, I'd work. What will my future be? How will I survive?"

Interview with Maoist student leader Krishna KC in Prakash, 26 September

Maoist student leader Krishna KC has been detained for 25 months in the army barracks. Despite being released by the Supreme Court, police arrested him and the District Appellate Court of Patan instructed that he be kept in police custody for 20 days. KC was interviewed in detention and had a speech impediment, which he said was caused by torture in detention.

What did they do after they arrested you?

I was blindfolded and kept in a dark room. Then they slapped me, kicked me, pulled my hair and punched me. They tortured me with electric shocks. I was left without feeling in my hands and feet.

What happened when you escaped?

I crossed a river and went to a tourist who was able to help me. I then went to a village where I was able to hide. I hid for two months, but I was still being followed. Then, I was taken to a place called Panchakule where they interrogated me but didn't believe my answers.

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"Many have died in detention"

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are trying to use that diary and the state media against me, anyone who knows me knows it is not true. It is just an effort to scare me and comes at a time when Gorkhapatra has been engaged in a vilification campaign against my paper, Kantipur. Since December, security forces in Dailkeh have prevented me and reporters here from going out to the villages to report and to use a cordless phone. They have threatened to kill us and now the state-run media has been roped into accusing us of being Maoists. It's not that I didn't know Uttam. He was the Maoist source for my articles. Last year, he even asked me to find tapes for his video camera and I used various excuses to refuse. He tried to insist but I said they weren't available in Kathmandu. That's the extent of my dealings with Uttam. In fact, I am a victim of the Maoists, who looted a cordless phone worth Rs 70,000 from me. There is no way I could be in their payroll.

Nation's Health
Editorial in Rajdhani, 26 September
The recent suicide of a woman who was unable to pay her hospital bills reflects the sickness of the nation's health system. Amrit BK from Chitwan chose death to protest against a state that can't ensure proper health for all. The government and civil society could not help her during her time of distress. The ever-mushrooming social service organisations, those that claim they are the voice of poor and deprived people, remained mute when a woman was ending her life. Amrit BK's death is proof that building hospitals and producing medicines does not mean affordable and accessible health care for all citizens. We have hospitals, well-trained doctors and modern equipment but all these are beyond the reach of ordinary people. Amrit BK was at a hospital in the capital that has state of the art equipment but she couldn't afford them. Things are so dire in Kathmandu, one wonders what must be the state of health in rural areas. Government hospitals are less expensive and the services are easier to access but they are not as effective. Sick people are compelled to seek help at private hospitals. Hospital administrators would also have paid special attention to the deprived and social service organisations would have been able to help. This suicide has alerted all concerned to the consequences of neglect and should be a lesson to prevent such mistakes from being repeated.

Palace portfolios
Jana Aandha, 26 September
Since the king's February First move, palace officials have become more involved in state affairs. Three palace secretaries, chief secretary Pasupati Bhakta Maharjan, information secretary Yogeswar Karki and private secretary Sagar Timilsina, supervise numerous ministries. It is understood that Maharjan will now handle the foreign ministry, which had been under the control of the palace's information secretariat. He will also be responsible for the affairs of the home ministry, previously handled by the military secretariat. Even the responsibilities of the education ministry have been transferred to Maharjan's office, along with responsibility for finance, law and justice, population and environment and local development ministries, National Planning Commission, Civil Service Commission, Election Commission, Ministry of General Administration, Supreme Court, Ministry of Law and Justice, RCCC, RONAST and the KMTNC. Even the forest ministry run by Badri Mandal will now be under Maharjan's watch. The ministry of water resources will be transferred from the chief secretariat to Yogeswar Karki's information secretariat. The private secretariat led by Sagar Timilsina will be responsible for running various other ministries related to women, labour, tourism, industry and land reforms. Palace sources say that staffs in those secretariats, who are already overloaded, are being given more responsibilities and asked to become more involved.
or a land this remote it is remarkable how the people of Manang established themselves as successful traders long before the days of the market economy. Their trading goes back to King Prithivi Narayan Shah’s time and continued well into the days of British colonialism, when they traded herbs with India, salt with Tibet and items such as curios and semi-precious stones as far as Thailand, Singapore and Malay. “After India’s independence our trading rights automatically got cancelled because we did not have passports,” says sexagenarian Chowang Norbu Ghale, a former Manang’s middle path

With tourism growing, Manang is struggling to balance economic progress with cultural conservation

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY in MANANG

For a land this remote it is remarkable how the people of Manang established themselves as successful traders long before the days of the market economy. Their trading goes back to King Prithivi Narayan Shah’s time and continued well into the days of British colonialism, when they traded herbs with India, salt with Tibet and items such as curios and semi-precious stones as far as Thailand, Singapore and Malay. “After India’s independence our trading rights automatically got cancelled because we did not have passports,” says sexagenarian Chowang Norbu Ghale, a former trader who has been spending six months every year since 2000 in Upper Pisang heading the construction of a monastery at the foothills of Annapurna II.

After King Mahendra’s visit here in the early 1970s the people were given passports and permits to trade. Customs duty was also waived and they returned to their historic profession. Once again Manangis ventured into Southeast Asia and then established themselves in Kathmandu with their newfound wealth. The two statues of King Mahendra here, one in Humde and the other under construction in Bhraga, the village he visited, are testimony to the Nyeshangte’s (as the locals call themselves) gratitude to the monarch. But the exodus that followed nearly emptied the villages of Manang.

With the region opening for tourism in 1977 and the Annapurna Conservation Area Project’s (ACAP) efforts to convince the people to preserve their culture and environment, the villages of Manang are slowly reviving. Tourism has played an important role in bringing educated youth back to rediscover the land of their ancestors. Along with them have come sometimes troubling concepts of development and amenities of modern life.

Tripple Gurung, the president of the Manang Youth Society and a pilot by profession, is one concerned individual. He returns to his village whenever possible to help chart tourism’s path and assist in the overall development of Manang. Gurung is one of the main forces behind the Destination Manang 2004 campaign and says confidently, “Manang has a lot of potential, whether it is eco or cultural tourism or mountain expeditions. If tourism picks up here the youth will certainly return.”

Manang is easily one of the most beautiful and remote districts in the trans-Himalayan region of mid-western Nepal. The Manang Valley stretches between the Annapurna range to the southwest and Chulu to the northeast. The Tilicho La pass at an altitude of 5,416m joins Manang with Mustang. Together they form a part of the Annapurna circuit that is ranked among the top 10 most popular trekking routes in the world. This is a land abounding in natural beauty and flora and fauna and it is not uncommon to come across herds of blue sheep, the main food source for the endangered snow leopard, along the trek routes, an indication of the eco-system’s robust health. Tilicho Lake, at a height of 5,200 m, is considered the world’s highest lake and lures Hindu pilgrims and trekkers alike seeking the joy and solace of the Himalaya.

As one walks the mountain trails the sight and aroma of the myriad flowers is sometimes so strong it is dizzying. The region is also rich in medicinal herbs like...
Situated in Manang village the recently completed Manang Culture Museum highlights the region’s natural and cultural heritage. Built to represent a traditional home, the museum showcases the traditional lifestyle of the local people or Nyeshangte. Tibetan by origin and mostly Buddhist by religion they do not believe in killing animals for reasons of faith. From their yaks and sheep they take milk to make butter and use the wool to spin fabric for clothes, carpets and rugs, without whose warmth it would be impossible to survive the cold.

Built of stones and wood like most traditional homes the main door of the Manangi house opens to a courtyard where the animals are usually tethered. The space also has handlooms where the women spend their spare time weaving traditional fabric. The upper level of the house consists of the sleeping quarters, storeroom, kitchen and prayer room, an essential part of every Manang abode.

The museum was funded by the New Zealand Agency for International Development and the Manang Youth Society. The land for the building was donated by locals while the Gompa Society and ACAP assisted in collecting items and setting up some of the exhibits.

Punch amle and Yarchagumba, found high in the upper hills. Unlike in western Nepal, locals here have decided to stop harvesting Yarchagumba, which is highly valued as an aphrodisiac, and even assigned guards so outsiders do not steal it. “We don’t want it to finish. Our yaks feed on the herbs which makes their milk so delicious,” explained one villager.

Manang’s high altitude prohibited the growth of crops other than buckwheat, barley and potatoes. But with climate change, a range of vegetables such as spinach, cabbage and cauliflower and fruits like apples and plums, all with their unique Himalayan taste, are now grown. Villagers also come across earthworms in their fields now, something non-existent three decades back, they say.

Most of the area’s villages already have telephone and electricity. Compared to other districts in Nepal, Manang, like Mustang, has been spared the ravages of the conflict. The road from Kathmandu to Besi Sahar has come to Khudi, a few hours below the district headquarters Chame, six hours below Manang village. The other route to Manang is by flight to Humde, two hours below Manang village, but the irregularity of flights is one of the main reasons some villagers are pushing for a road.

Michung Gurung, 47, is one of those who travelled abroad to trade with his father. He has long since settled here, opening the first lodge in Manang village in 1977 and another in Thorung Phedi, the camp before the pass, 20 years later. Michung believes it is important to preserve the cultural and natural heritage of the region but development is also equally necessary. “This is the 21st century. It will only be possible to save our culture and region if we develop. The road will bring enormous economic gains,” he says.

Not everyone is as enthusiastic about the rapid pace of development. Mukhiya Biswalakum, 30, has been working as a trekking guide in the region for the last 16 years and is known throughout Manang as the Snow Monkey. He understands the need for change but emphasizes that it is important to decelerate if the community and the region are to really benefit. “Everyone is talking about bringing a road but we need to question whether a road is really what Manang needs. How will it affect our culture and natural heritage which tourists come here for?”

As Manang opens up to the outside world it is obvious the region will undergo dramatic changes in the coming days. But the people here have one advantage—the community’s ability to adapt to change. Manangis have proven they are strong enough to decide what is best for them.
News anchors are familiar but formidable faces. As they read from the teleprompter, they appear to know everything without being moved by any of it. Sometimes we forget that the faces mouthing the lines are normal human beings. They too are disturbed by what they show and see.

Dil Bhushan Pathak is one of the more perceptive news anchors in the world of Nepali television. Just reading the headlines every evening on camera wasn’t enough, so he ventured out of the studio to see for himself what was happening to his country. Sushila Jaisi died in Aachham but the manner of her death, callous and tragic, made Pathak restless. He decided to explore her story and made it to Mangalsen. Newsroom Bahira (Outside the Newsroom) is the documentary of his disturbing discovery.

The film is about the sufferings of women, unsafe sex and motherhood, unwanted pregnancy and archaic methods of abortion still prevalent not just in Aachham but in many other parts of Nepal. In 23 minutes, Pathak has captured an individual tragedy that is the result of the vicious circle of poverty, ignorance, gender discrimination and fatalism.

“Who cares if she dies?” says a man about his wife. These five words tell us more about gender relations in rural areas than the countless reports churned out by consultants over the last three decades. Amidst breathtakingly scenic mountains of midwestern Nepal, the bucolic charm of village life as women wash their hair in a gurgling stream, the languid pace of a remote village is the stark story of everyday death. The film may be too long (we don’t want to know about Aachham, tell us more about Sushila) or too short (more sociological dissection of a place that makes the Sushilas die in vain).

Pathak’s second documentary about a 79-year young man’s quest for education is more uplifting. Sukh Bahadur Adhikary comes back to his village in Kaski after being a lahure in India for 50 years. Lahure is self-inflicted exile to make a living but the word connotes a return to one’s roots after retirement. But Sukh Bahadur refuses to spend the rest of his days reminiscing about the adventures of youth. He enrols in school with his grandchildren. The film runs with the unhurried pace of its protagonist. The house, the family, the school and the livestock are filmed in their natural habitat. Sukh Bahadur does tell stories but they are tinged with the hopes of his youth rather than the sadness of a person in his twilight years.

Premiered last week, Pathak’s documentaries have been selected for Himalayan Film Festival (4-6 November) in Amsterdam. Producer Shikha Parsai and director Dil Bhushan Pathak have shown they can depict both hope and despair in present-day Nepal with sensitivity and imagination.

CK Lal

Anchored in reality
A television news reader turns into a documentary maker

HORROR STORY: News of Sushila Jaisi’s death shocked the nation after it appeared in the media. Dil Bhushan Pathak, (right) zooms out beyond this tragedy to the larger picture of women’s health in western Nepal in his film Newsroom Bahira. The documentary produced and directed by Pathak, who is also the anchor and editor of the show, was screened recently at the Stockholm Film Festival. The film explores the life of a woman in rural Nepal, who was forced to have an abortion due to poverty and lack of access to healthcare. The film highlights the challenges faced by women in rural areas and the need for better healthcare and education. The documentary was selected for the 12th Annual Himalayan Film Festival in Amsterdam, and has received critical acclaim for its sensitive portrayal of rural life and its issues.
Tales of conflict

The final two days of Film South Asia '05 (3-4 October) will showcase international documentaries that highlight the suffering caused by war prevent, the pursuit of justice against perpetrators of war crimes and internally displaced people trying to find their bearings. In view of the ongoing conflicts in Nepal and other parts of South Asia the festival’s organisers feel the documentaries from abroad will provide many lessons for this region.

For a schedule and more information visit: www.himalassociation.org/fsa

Archivo de la Identidad
A compelling documentary about Argentine children raised by the people who tortured and killed their parents.

Kumari Hall B, 3 October, 2.30 PM.

Checkpoint (Machachommim)
This film explores the significances of checkpoints on the Palestine-Israel border, which often serve as the first point of contact between people from both sides.

Kumari Hall A, 3 October, 5PM.

Deacon of Death
The story of a woman who tries to bring a murderer (whose crimes she witnessed as a child) to justice.

Kumari Hall A, 3 October, 3.45 PM.

Shake Hands with the Devil
The Journey of Romeo Dallaire
An international award winner about the Canadian lieutenant-general in command of the UN mission to Rwanda during the 1994 genocide (see pic). Kumari Hall B, 3 October, 3.30 PM.

Little Terrorist
A 12-year-old Pakistani-Muslim girl accidentally crosses the mine-laden border into India and makes friends with a Hindu schoolteacher. He must find a way to stop Indian soldiers from looking for the ‘terrorist’ who has crossed into their country (picture above). Kumari Hall B, 3 October, 2.30 PM.

October sky

Wishing you clear and dark skies for Dasain

In October, many of us will be leaving the towns and heading towards the villages to celebrate Dasain and Tihar. With a lot of free time, clear and dark skies and longer nights, it will be ideal for studying the heavens.

As a beginner, you don’t really need a heavy-duty telescope even a pair of binoculars (10x50 mm) will do. In fact, there are many objects in the sky (planets, galaxies, nebulae, star clusters), which can be seen through binoculars.

How about starting by identifying some of the prominent constellations like Cetus, Orion, Andromeda, as well as the Milky Way band and Dhruba Tara (Pollux). Identifying Polaris and the constellations are crucial for beginners, as this helps us navigate the celestial coordinate system.

This month look out for the following:

The Sun: During all of the month except the last day, the sun is passing through the constellation of Virgo. (Don’t ever look at the sun with naked eyes.)

The Moon: The new Moon on 3 October is of special significance because the sun and the moon are almost directly in line with the earth and will produce a partial (annular) solar eclipse visible from Europe and North Africa (not from South Asia).

Inner Planets: During the whole of October, the innermost planet Mercury is theoretically an evening star but because of its low altitude, cannot be seen. Venus brightens to become dazzling in Libra but remains low in the southwest as evening twilight fades.

Outer Planets: Mars is the headliner: the red planet rises around 8PM at mid-month and doubles its brightness. It reaches opposition on Sunday 30 October when its magnitude makes it the second brightest object in the sky after Venus has set. During the whole of the month Jupiter lies too near to the sun to be seen and vanishes behind the Sun on 23 October. Saturn is the only other planet visible in the night sky, rising just after midnight at the start of the month.

Uranus and Neptune are telescopic objects visible in the evening sky in Aquarius and Capricornus respectively. The Milky Way, our own galaxy, now is highest at nightfall. A beautiful edge-on view can be seen in country skies during October’s moonless opening week.

Meteor Showers: Some more remnants of Halley’s comet may be seen in the early hours of 21 October, when the earth encounters left over dust of the comet producing the Orionid stream. Up to 25 shooting stars are expected, but this number may be reduced by the presence of the gibbous waning moon. Earlier in the month on the 8th of October, a slight increase in the number of shooting stars overnight marks the peak of the Draconid meteor shower, visible in the constellation of Draco.

Dear Science Teachers! Is your school looking for a telescope? The Permission to Dream Program (PTD) donates telescopes to schools and colleges around the world which are seriously interested to conduct stargazing for children, http://www.space-frontier.org/Projects/permission/

Good luck and a happy Dasain to all you stargazers out there.

Kedar Sharma Badu of the Pokhara Galileo Astronomical Society writes this column on the last Friday of every month, kedarbadu@yahoo.com
India ‘no’ to non-alignment

NEW DELHI—By voting for a western-sponsored resolution at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) meant to reprimand Iran, India has signaled the end of its long-standing policy of non-alignment. Capping recent agreements signed with the United States on military and civilian nuclear cooperation within an increasingly closer "strategic partnership" with Washington, this constitutes the greatest shift in New Delhi’s foreign policy since independence from colonial rule in 1947. By taking this disgraceful step, India is indicating that it has been a "camp follower of Washington," said Gulshan Diel, a West Asia expert at the School of International Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University. (IPS)

Thai village silent after clash

TANYONG LIMO, THAILAND—The only sounds here are clucking chickens, the twitter of caged birds and the odd breeze that wafts through this village, whose ethnic Thai-Muslim inhabitants have fled after heavily armed troops poured in searching for people responsible for the lynching of two marines last week. The marines were beaten and stabbed to death, after being held hostage in a single-room building with stained walls, close to a half-built mosque and the village graveyard, last Wednesday. News of the brutality and accounts of hundreds of Muslim women barricading the entrance to Tanyong Limo during the 18-hour hostage drama, brought to an end the years of obscurity this community lived in. Instead, this village of some 2,000 people, became the latest entry in a growing list of blood-stained localities caught in the spiralling ethnic unrest that has claimed over 1,000 deaths, since January last year, in this region near the Malaysian border. (IPS)

Aussie Muslims fear terror laws

CANBERRA—Members of Australia’s Muslim community fear they will be targeted after authorities approved special powers for security services and police agencies at a national summit on terrorism on Tuesday. Co-convenor of the Australian Muslim Civil Rights Advocacy Network, Waleed Kadous, dismissed assurances by Australian Prime Minister John Howard that the new laws would not be used to target Muslims. “So far, for example, many Muslim homes have been raided but most of those have not led to arrests, so lots of innocent people are being affected. What’s worse is that these new measures remove existing safeguards and are open to abuse.” The new laws give security and police agencies powers to detain terrorism suspects for up to 14 days. (IPS)

Afghan poll a setback for women?

UNITED NATIONS—While the administration of US President George W. Bush describes the recent elections in Afghanistan as a major step forward for the war-torn nation, human rights groups wonder if women will have an effective voice in the new parliament. A few weeks before the 18 September legislative elections, about 140 women were forced to withdraw their candidacies because of security concerns, says Human Rights Watch. In its report Campaigning Against Fear: Women’s Participation in Afghanistan’s 2005 Elections, the group documented many cases where women were unable to campaign in rural areas because of threats from warlords. There were many threats and obstacles not only for the women candidates but also their supporters, it added. (IPS)

Egypt’s ‘Vollywood’

Canada’s ‘Vollywood’

Bollywood chooses Vancouver for its first full production outside India

Canada’s Pacific Ocean jewel Vancouver has become the setting for Neal n Nikki, a romantic comedy that its makers say is the first full-blown Bollywood production—complete with six exorbitant musical sequences—shot and set entirely outside India.

Given generous Canadian government subsidies and the substantial Indian population here, it was perhaps inevitable that this cosmopolitan centre would finally lure Indian film out of India. “I really felt that Indian audiences would be ready for a feature like this one,” AzJun Sablok, the movie’s director and co-writer, said in a recent interview.

Sablok, who has dual Indian and Canadian citizenship, said that while his film would have some sporadic English, it would mainly be in Hindi, with a plot that could easily fit an American sitcom feature. Neal is engaged but in the few days before his nuptials, he is overcome with angst about what marriage will mean. He goes on many adventures with his close friend Nikki. In true romantic-comedy tradition, there is a threat of romance between the two, which must be thwarted if Neal is to marry in time.

The film will feature lavish costumes as well as stunning locations, including mountaintops and beaches. And in the Indian tradition, the actors burst into song and dance at the climax of the more emotional sequences. "Yes, this is a musical but I’m trying to move the musical tradition forward," Sablok said of the $2-million production (low budget by Bollywood standards, moderate by those of Bollywood). In most Indian films, he said, “the plot where characters begin to sing is often just a stopgap in the plot, a poor excuse for a bathroom break. I hope that each number in Neal n Nikki manages to move the story along.”

Sablok said the film is directed at Indian audiences and would probably not suit the tastes of mainstream western moviegoers. "I wanted there to be a certain reality to the film, which will set it apart from many Bollywood features," he said. “But I didn’t want it to be an ethnic comedy in the same way that Bend it Like Beckham or My Big Fat Greek Wedding are.”

The budget for Neal n Nikki has been bolstered by the Canadian government, which Sablok said has given the production tax breaks. The director has made sure he employs some local talent. In June, he held auditions in Vancouver’s Indo-Canadian community, casting 70 percent of his ensemble with local actors. “I was amazed at how many talented actors who were fluent in Hindi were eager to be in this film,” he said.

At times, Sablok added, the mixing of Canadian and Indian crewmembers had its challenges. “Indians tend to talk a lot,” he said. “There are certainly differences in communication style between the two people.”

He added, “The Indians were so happy to be here. Many would just look at the environment and smile. This is the way nature should be treated. Of course, in India we have a much larger population so much of our environment looks worse. The Indians who came over were taken with the sheer beauty here.” (NYT)
Why you should find a court, a partner and start hitting

"You are from Nepal? And you coach tennis at the University of Illinois? Are there tennis courts in Nepal? Do a lot of people play tennis? How did you pick up the game?" I get these questions often and they serve to remind me of my roots. And that motivates me to help the game of tennis grow in Nepal.

I am passionate about tennis. My brother (Raj) showed me the benefits and rewards of this game at a young age. Here are his top 10 reasons to get excited about tennis and I hope they will help you fall in love with the game, just like I did.

#1 Tennis is a lifetime sport
You can learn before you go to school and play long after you retire. You can start out as young as three and play to 80 or older.

#2 Tennis gives you a great workout
You stretch, you jump, you swing—therefore you use most of your muscles. You get great aerobic and anaerobic workouts.

#3 Tennis players are of all sizes
Unlike basketball and American football, you don’t have to be big or tall to play tennis. Some world-class players are actually quite small. Michael Chang is only 5’9” and he won the French Open.

#4 Tennis can be played on various surfaces
You can play on clay, grass, carpet, hard-court and synthetic grass. In India, they even play on cow dung courts.

#5 Tennis can be played indoors and outdoors
You can play indoors or outdoors, all yearlong. In countries with cold winters, they have indoor facilities and outdoor courts for the winters. In India, they even play on cow dung courts.

#6 Tennis stars are international
Sania Mirza is already a household name in her country. That will tremendously boost tennis’s popularity in India. Germany’s Boris Becker and Steffi Graf are known worldwide for their on-court accomplishments.

#7 Tennis is fun to play and watch
Unlike in golf, you don’t need multiple hours to play a match. If you play tennis even half an hour a couple of times a week you get a great workout.

#8 Tennis develops the mind and teaches you life skills
You must figure out which numbers to put in nine rows of nine boxes so that the numbers one through nine appear just once in each column, row and three-by-three square. The phenomenon originated in 1700, when one of the grids, titled “number place,” was published in a US puzzle magazine. The puzzle did not catch on in the US then but puzzle enthusiasts in Japan loved the idea. By the early 1980s, the puzzles—renamed sudoku, which means “single number” in Japanese—filled pages of magazines in Japan.

#9 Tennis can be played everywhere and is the world’s number one sport
Tennis courts are available worldwide in hotels, clubs, parks, schools and universities. Tennis is second in popularity only to soccer because it is more challenging to learn the hand-eye coordination required by the game. Its low cost is definitely a factor too.

#10 Tennis exercise is a combination of running and playing chess. While your body is getting a workout, your mind is also challenged. You constantly need to strategise while you play, such as when to, where to, why to, how to, beat your opponent.

Ten reasons to tennis

GAME POINT
Sujay Lama

#11 Tennis is a sport
Why you should find a court, a partner and start hitting

#12 Tennis is a great way to socialise.
It’s also enjoyable to watch professionals play on tv or live.

#13 Your opponent makes it even better.
You meet wonderful people as you socialise. It’s also enjoyable to watch professionals play on tv or live.

#14 It’s fun to hit balls but competing with your friend, partner or opponent makes it even better.
You meet wonderful people as you socialise.

#15 You can learn before you go to school and play long after you retire. You can start out as young as three and play to 80 or older.
You can learn before you go to school and play long after you retire.

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EXHIBITIONS
- Ganesh paintings by Bipin Raj Shrestha, 22 September-2 October at Nepal Art Council Gallery.
- Our Nature: a photo exhibition, 26 September-1 October at Singh Art Gallery Laganikhel.
- Art Walk: traditional artworks at Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg. 4248999.
- Arts from Tibet, Dopja and the Himalayas by Pasang at Baber Mahal Revisited

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS
- The Sidewalk BBQ: every Friday at Summit Hotel, Fridays, 6:30-9:30 PM. 5521810
- An Open Heart and a Clear Mind: Festival of Aromatherapy. 1 October.
- Fulpati: 11 October.
- The Chimney Restaurant BBQ Dinner: every Sunday, till 30 September. 4217817
- Creative Mandala Art Workshop: by the pool at 1905, Kantipath. 4225272
- Rosh Hashana: 2 October. 4441706
- world habitat day: at Hotel Manaslu, 30 September, 5.30 PM. 4221679
- The Jazz Gourmet: fine dining redefined, Shangri-La. 4412999
- Gokarting: Rs 200 for 4 laps, 4361500

NEPALI WEATHER

KATHMANDU VALLEY

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

油烟水平

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KATHMANDU VALLEY

Dil Jo Bhi Kahey is a tale of cultural chaos set in Mauritius. Jai Sinha and Sophie Besson fell in love while studying in Stockholm but the two find themselves clashing with their respective parents. Sophie happens to be the daughter of a prominent white family. While Jai's father Sheikh Sinha has a liberal view on marriage and approves of the relationship with no hesitation, his mom Sandhya is not comfortable with the idea of having a foreign daughter-in-law. Thus, Jai is forced to marry an Indian girl, who refuses when she realises where the real love lies. The film underlines the conflicts that can occur between societies when each tries to endorse its own culture.

CALL 4442220 FOR SHOW TIMINGS www.jainepal.com

MUSIC
- Kutumba at Hotel Manansu, 30 September, 5.30 PM. 4221679
- Jazz at Palan at Palan Museum Café. Cadenza and friends. 30 September 6.30 PM onwards. 4441067
- Nepali and German songs by Sarjnev Maharan. 30 September 6.15 PM. Goethe-Zentrum. 4250871
- Live in Concert: Anil Singh, 1 October, 2PM, BICC.
- Jatra Friday Nights: live music, wine sale and much more. 4256522
- Live Music at Hotel de l’Annapurna, Darbar Marg. 4221711
- Ladies Night, Wednesdays, one free cocktail to the ladies at Jatra.
- Musician Night every Tuesday at Mohk, 7.30 PM onwards, no cover charge. 5526212
- Cadenza Live: Upstairs Jazz Bar Lazimpal, every Saturday and Wednesday, 8-10PM.
- Live Music at Juneli Bar every day. Hotel de l’Annapurna. 4221711
- Live Jazz by the pond at 1905, Kantipath. 4252722

FOOD
- Celebrate Dasal and enjoy a tasty evening of Cocktails, 6 October, 6.30PM at Baber Mahal Revisited.
- Tawa & Kadai with a lip smacking difference, 2-9 October. Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999
- The Kabab Kurry Karkhana at Radhasan Hotel. till 15th October.
- The Sidewalk BBQ with live jazz, Fridays, Shangri-La. 4412999
- BBQ Dinner at Summit Hotel, Fridays, 6:30-9:30 PM. 5521610
- Chimney Restaurant: signature dishes at Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999
- BBQ by the Swimming Pool at Le Meridien. Rs 888
- Daily Delite lunch at Shambala Café, Hotel Shangri-La, Lalitpur. 4412999
- The Jazz Gourmet: fine dining redefined. Shangri-La. 4412999

GETAWAYS
- Three Days at Nagarkot, health oriented program 30 September-2 October. info@goldenagersnepal.com
- Exciting Holiday Packages with Le Meridien. 4451212
- Unbeatable holiday discounts with Malaysia Dream Holidays, Tel 2012435
- Nature Tour at Shivapuri national park from Park Village Resort, 4434705
- Gokarting: Rs 200 for 4 laps, 4361500

The Adventures of Herajil can also be seen at www.extreme-nepal.com

ABOUT TOWN

Good < 60  Ok 61 to 120  Unhealthy 121 to 350  Hazardous >425

So it’s finally over. A monsoon of drought and flood all mixed up. Despite a late comeback, September was the fifth consecutive month with below normal rainfall and Kathmandu Valley got only 75 percent of its usual precipitation. Montecillos believe the main reason for the monsoon’s poor showing is that the zone responsible for creating a low pressure track along the Himalayas and serving as a corridor for monsoon pulses from the Bay of Bengal never reached its usual destination over Nepal’s southern border. Thursday’s satellite image shows bright Dasan-like days here. On the contrary, monsoon clouds and humidity are still in place. Expect sunny intervals through the weekend till early next week with chances of passing night showers.

NEPAL WEATHER

Gujarat leads the way in terms of passing night showers. The weekend till early next week with chances of passing night showers.

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

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**UNVEILING HISTORY:** French Ambassador, Michel Jolivet holding up Hindu Adhirajya Ko Itihas, the Nepali translation of the French book, Le Nepal by Sylvain Levi. At left are professor David Gellner and Gerard Toffin.

**BLAZE OF BLUE:** Traffic police spring to action at the Bagmati Bridge intersection after getting orders to clear the streets for the king’s procession returning from Patan last Thursday.

**MARTY LOGAN**

**WORKERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE:** Graffiti stenciled on the wall of the Berkeley campus in California that reads ‘Rooftop of the World Nepal Revolution CPNM’ shows that our comrades are busy spreading the word in America too.

**KEEP ON DRILLING:** Work continues on the geological survey for the Kosi High Dam in eastern Nepal despite a Maoist bomb attack on the office of the project in Dharan on 22 September.

**SOME WALK SOME WORK:** Nepali businessmen rallying for peace around Swayambhu area last Friday.

**Mechanical hero**

Krishna Thapa Magar is definitely an inspiration for the victims of conflict. While many in Sankhuwasabha run away from their villages for safety and a better life in the city, he chose to stay in Khandbari and start a new life. And after years of struggle, he has established himself as a successful motorcycle mechanic.

Four years ago, Krishna fled his remote Num village to escape Maoist recruiters. With the help of NGO Rural Reconstruction Nepal, he took a three-month course in Urlabari sponsored by British Aid Ministry DfID. In a short time he started his own workshop with a grant from DfID and today he makes more than Rs 5,000 every month.

“There is so much work and the demand is growing,” says Krishna as he repairs a Japanese trail motorbike. When he started his business three years ago there were hardly 30 bikes in the area and he had no idea if he would succeed. Today the number of motorcycles has more than doubled. Porters carry them all the way from Leguwa VDC to Kurlingtar, a nearly two-day trip with the unimaginably heavy loads.

“I’m glad that I did not go to the city as I am now making more than I could dream of,” says the optimistic Krishna. “I want to train as many young people as I can so that they can also start their own workshops,” adds the only mechanic in Khandbari, the district headquarters.

The 35-year-old believes there is always hope for the area’s young men, mostly from the Magar and Rai communities, those most targeted by Maoist recruiters. “At least now my children are safe and will have a better future. I hope the same for other youths of the district,” adds Krishna, whose two sons and daughter are studying in a private boarding school in Khandbari.

Formerly a farmer who quit school at the end of grade eight to support his family, the mechanic now employs local people to help in his workshop. Already a number of young men are working as his interns in the hope that they can also start their own workshop one day.
ow, kids, listen up. Quiet I said. Today’s field trip is to the zoo. There is nowhere to wee-wee inside so anyone who needs to go to the bathroom raise your hand. Ok, you two run along. Kumar, are you quite finished there inside the rhino enclosure?

It is befitting for a land where the Lord of the Animals is the patron deity that we take young school children to the zoo in order to instill in them a healthy respect for the four-legged friends who command this country’s destiny. In fact, Nepal is one of the few kingdoms in the InterGalactic Federation besides the renegade Planet Voth where sovereignty actually rests in the hands of a mythical being.

As many of you may know, Jawalakhel Zoo has been going through a major upgrade and recently added endemic species to its list of exhibits to make it more representative of Nepal’s astounding biodiversity. Here is a quick rundown of the new specimens we saw on our fieldtrip today:

White Elephant
Several of these ailing public sector corporations can be seen in the Rare Pachyderm section although the zoo administration says they may have to be transferred soon to the Dinosaur Display.

Snake Pit
This is a prime attraction because many of the creepy crawly denizens here have been extricated straight from the corridors of power and feel perfectly at home among other venomous reptiles, nocturnal borrowers and perfectly willing defaulters.

Aquarium
This latest attraction houses leaders fishing for compliments and sycophants from Sukla Phanta wetlands. Inmates tend to gravitate in large schools towards whoever is doing the feeding.

Wild Bore
Some of these swines from the jumbo cabinet who escaped from the Ministry of Jungles in Singha Darbar and were later darted and translocated are now in permanent display at Jawalakhel. But even here they can put all visitors within a 25 metre radius to sleep unless they are wearing protective ear plugs. Approach with extreme caution.

Mountain Guerrilla
Captured simians who believe in a pheasant revolution are kept in this maximum security section. This endangered species has become extinct in its native China because of habitat destruction other remnant populations are endemic to the Peruvian altiplano, rural India and the highlands of Luzon where their numbers are in decline because the species is known to devour its own children.

Lion
The king of the animals is often seen pacing in his lair and muttering “Hakuna Matata” under his whiskers. He knows he is at the top of the food chain and his hangers-on, who tend to be hyenas, jackals and red pandas, seem to know it as well.

Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing
Known for lurking around in the fourth estate, these large and lethargic creatures have a herd mentality preferring to spend the day muckraking and waiting for press releases preferably with free lunches. Often seen licking the backs of Wild Bores and scratching each other’s backs.

That’s it for today kids, be careful it’s a jungle out there. Kumar, stop monkeying around with the monkeys.