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Peace sanctuary

KIRAN PANDAY

Tourists look for tigers as elephants waded 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 slump. See 'Manang's middle path', p 8-9.



nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 267

Q. Who is the main obstacle to peace?

Total votes:8,103

Royal regime	25.4 %
Political parties	23.8 %
Monks	20.9 %
All of the above	18.4 %
None of the above	1.4 %
Don't know	1.2 %

Weekly Internet Poll # 268. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. As what kind of a festival do Nepalis primarily regard Dasain?



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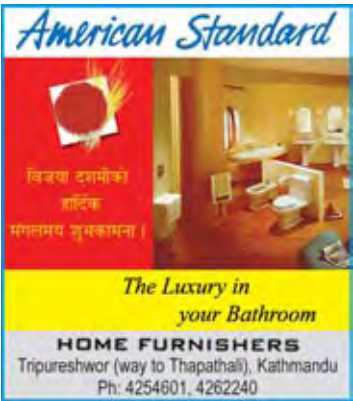


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Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Chief Editor: Kunda Dixit
 Desk Editor: Marty Logan
 Design: Kiran Maharjan Web: Bhushan Shilpakar
 Vicepresident Corporate Affairs: Sneh Sayami
 Advertising: Sambhu Guragain advertising@himalmedia.com
 Subscription: Pushparaj Sharma subscription@himalmedia.com
 Sanchaya Kosh Building, Block A-4th Floor, Lalitpur
 GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu Tel: 5543333-6, Fax: 5521013
 Printed at Jagadamba Press, Hatiban: 5547018

POWER VACUUM

Be warned: we are heading into a cold and dark winter and we don't mean that just figuratively. Among all the looming disasters this country faces, there is now also a power vacuum.

The coming electricity generation shortfall may pale in comparison to the headline grabbing political upheavals we face but we ignore it at our own peril. Despite being a regional watertower and powerhouse, electricity supply in this country is woefully inadequate, frightfully expensive and extremely unreliable. Decades of megalomania, kleptomania and myopia have prevented us from turning the energy of falling water into an engine of domestic growth and a valuable export product.

The reason for a dark winter is simple: demand is growing and generation capacity is stagnant. New plants are not going onstream for at least three years. On top of that, nearly all plants are run-of-the-river schemes where generation capacity depends on the flow of rivers. Problem is, demand is lowest when the plants generate most power (monsoon) and we have highest demand when generation is lowest (winter).

Kulekhani, which is our only reservoir type plant designed to augment supply at peak hour, hasn't filled up this year because of a poor monsoon. The crisis couldn't have come at a worse time for the beleaguered NEA. Middle Marsyangdi is running behind schedule, none of the private license holders have been meeting supply targets and there has been no new investment. We are burning the candle at both ends.

NEA could seriously try to cut pilferage, non-payment and leakage that contribute an astounding 40 percent system loss. Even halving that loss would be equivalent to building a brand new Kali Gandaki. The idea of differential tariffs needs to be fully implemented. Community power management has reduced losses to nearly zero in pilot villages but where is the upscaling? Locally-financed small hydro schemes are encouraging but can't address a grid-wide deficit.

It is already too late to start planning reservoir projects to tide over high-demand, low-flow months and we are decades behind in export projects. Dams take decades to build and the fate of West Seti is not an encouraging sign. Who is to say that the political deadlock today is not somehow related to give-and-take over future investment and control over our water resources?

Ironically, the only thing that has saved Nepal in the past is the lack of development. Our biomass economy is surprisingly resilient against international oil price hikes and electricity shortfalls. But only proactive planning now can ensure that in 10 years we will have power for Nepal's 30 million people and finally an economy that runs on exporting power and not manpower.

Murphy's Law in force

Three years after October Four, we know that if anything can go wrong it will

Heavyweight Indian politicians are in town this week to express solidarity with the pro-democracy movement in Nepal. They should be careful—any sign that future reforms are engineered from south of the border will be their kiss of death. Rumour is rife that a prototype constitution, modelled after the one submitted to the 1990 drafting committee by top army brass, is doing the rounds of diplomatic missions.

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



indicates that the third anniversary of the 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 Maoist menace. The Americans hoped that the end of political bickering would help focus attention on resolving the insurgency. The Indians anticipated dealing with a confident 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 unfulfilled as the country hurtles towards the edge.

February First completed what was started that Dasain three years ago. It removed any doubts that this was a neo-Panchayat experiment all along. The plan all along seems to have been to take over, plain 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 vented his ire at the constitution, dismissing it as a roadblock to peace. Another ominous hint: last week the king charged that the flow of foreign funds was responsible for the nasty activities against his rule. One is tempted to ask: does the establishment really know who its really enemy is? There are Maoists at the gates and they have smirks on their faces.

If a further consolidation of powers is being contemplated that is the wrong road. No one in authority appears to have realised yet that continuation of the October Four order without substantive correction is fraught with dangers unimagined by strategists in the palace. Power has the strange effect of making people nearsighted. Absolute power often means an absolute inability to gauge dissatisfaction simmering below an apparently calm surface. 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 funded by the Americans, and despite the quadrupling of oil prices that gave him vast riches that he spent on pomp and progress, Shah Reza Pahlavi couldn't stop the tide once it turned. Elected leaders can fall back on performance legitimacy in times of crisis but even that is no guarantee for non-representative ones. Even kings with the mandate of heaven need to submit themselves to popular will expressed through the universally recognised mechanism of plebiscite, endorsement of a constituent assembly or periodic approval by a functioning parliament. This is no longer medieval Europe.

Notwithstanding the dire predictions of the monarchy's critics, the king still has several face-saving options to return to a constitutional role. But if he keeps on this path, even a ceremonial role may not be guaranteed. And you don't even need Murphy's Law to know that. ●

Unilateral multilateralism

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

One month of the three-month ceasefire announced by the Maoists has already transpired.

The ceasefire decision came after many informal and official meetings between the rebels and the UML and NC leadership. In

GUEST COLUMN
Raghu Pant



those talks, the Maoists had said they would announce a unilateral ceasefire if the seven-party alliance requested 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 public pressure to prove they weren't the obstacle to peace and to take the wind out of the king's sails. The rebels rightly calculated that after the ceasefire 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 parties, undermine democratic institutions and finish off the 1990 constitution once and for all. But the people now know that seven months after the takeover, the country is nowhere nearer to peace and the regime is on a path to further militarisation.

The Maoists may also have called 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 the 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, geopolitics 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 speaking in favour of 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 clearly 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 revamp 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 as 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 harassment and intimidation of party workers in the districts, this distrust will remain. Both sides think the other is just using them for political ends. But if both sides were committed to the long-term well-being of Nepalis 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 towards irreversible transformation of the Maoists.

The time has now passed to sit and wait for the king. We tried joining hands with him, it didn't work. ●

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



DEEPENDRA BAJRACHARYA

LETTERS

ROYAL TREK

I don't know why all the big fuss about the king walking through Patan ('The Royal Trek,' #266). 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 wounded it?

Sagar Shah, email

● 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 to the people 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 Kupondole 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 Panch Maharajadhiraj 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 advisers 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



KIRAN PANDAY

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 Bleha, 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 against 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 foreigners, have never been deliberately targetted. 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

Nepali 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

His 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. He has no mathematical brain and his aptitude for language is clearly limited. Either his learning environment is not right for him

or he is simply dull. But that's just the way he is, this boy who is essentially good-natured and has a way of putting others ahead of himself almost instinctively. He may not rank high as a student but anyone who cares to look will recognise his exceptional human qualities.

However, for the pair that brought him to the world, he is the shame they must bear, the ignominy that marks them everywhere. Like most educated middle class parents in town, they believe that his academic performance ultimately measures his worth. Whenever friends and relatives inquire about their son's progress, the two faces flush. They mutter something irrelevant before meekly muttering: "The idiot didn't do well." Immediately afterwards, the boy is summoned and assaulted with an ancient tirade: how you disgrace us you moron, you black sheep, good-for-nothing. What will you ever do in life? Then they spit out a flurry of names against whom he ought to gauge himself and realise once again that he is a loser fit for the gutter.

It is very exasperating when you realise how deeply entrenched this attitude is in our society. How our parents, teachers and neighbours hold aloft these narrow standards of merit. True, we live in an age that honours raw ambition and quantified achievements but deep down we all agree that humanity goes far beyond personal victory. We know that the educated are not always wise. That even the highest degree does not teach compassion. And the men who are waging the bloodiest wars on earth also attended the most prestigious universities.

We can name a hundred things they could learn from this boy, who may never win a trophy but who is intrinsically valuable in the world.

But his parents are hardheaded folks. They dismiss anything that does not echo the herd as romantic. In the real world, they repeat, people look for tangible success. Being nice does not get you anywhere. The supremacy of the academic achievement holds. Where will our son go with his third division?

I have no answers. But their attitude has helped neither them nor the child. After swallowing years of hurt and humiliation, the boy has lost his self-esteem. He has grown quieter over the years as though the desperate, demeaning cries around him drowned out his voice. Everyday they drill into his head that he is a failure and he is learning to present himself as one.

If I ever worried about his future, then it is with this thought: what if he grows into a cynical man who resents the world for his unhappiness? ●



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Balancing the books

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

MALLIKA ARYAL

The usual bustle 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 Tribubhan 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.

The recent budget imposed a 6.5 percent customs duty on all imported books. According to the government, the aim was to encourage Nepal's printing industry. 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 Madhab 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 books, 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 Kiran Gurung of National Book Centre, Bhotahiti.

"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 Laba Prasad Tripathi says, "Concerned authorities need to understand that in a country where less than one percent of the total population can read, taxing 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 refused 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 Consultative Committee, Bishwambher 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 down. 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?" ●

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 Maina Sunuwar after severely torturing her (*Nepali 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 their 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 torturing 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. They called on the government to end the army’s practices of impunity and illegal detention and also pressured it to repeal the Terrorist and Disruptive Ordinance. 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 enforced disappearances, extra-judicial executions, torture and secret detention. 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 dismal 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 Cromoart Wrapper and new ingredients, including Zeo Blaster, Naturo 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 (*Majbut Jodh* in Nepal), an epoxy compound used to seal leaks and fill cracks. The unique mix of the resin base and hardener helps to seals cracks by hardening the putty onto the applied surface. M-Seal Instant can also be used on wet surfaces and under water.

Fight for FDI

Why attracting investment is not a political act

Earlier this year, two researchers at Georgia State University in the US tested 200 economists on concepts of economics. To their surprise, the researchers found that 80 per cent of the respondents gave wrong answers to a simple multiple-choice question about

STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari



opportunity cost. That most economists were wrong about an issue was nothing new. That, despite holding doctorates, most appear not to have understood a central concept of their science was shocking.

Closer to home, Nepali economists fare no better. They too misunderstand and then misapply the basics of economics routinely. While US economists face challenges from their peers and the press, their Nepali cousins know that flashing credentials alone 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 Khabar Patrika* (1-16 September) on foreign investment and trade.

Labelling the present government’s decision to open up tourism and retail sectors to foreign direct investment (FDI) as “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

FDI can only mean that it wants to destroy thriving Nepali entrepreneurs. And third, the government wants to attract FDI to confer legitimacy on its authoritarian rule.

Even when one subscribes to Chalise’s politics, it’s hard to see how anyone can intellectually defend the honesty of his arguments on account of economics.

First, just because a sector is open to foreign investment does not mean that FDI will immediately start flowing. Indeed, if Nepal’s experience with FDI is any guide, we still have a long way to go to make our laws



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 so much for the owners of trekking agencies and supermarkets but to consumers who want to access varieties of goods and services at 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.

True, unable to adapt, some Nepali businesses will fold in the process. But should a self-described liberal economist’s concerns be directed toward saving a few businessmen’s firms or toward welcoming opportunities that exploit the comparative advantage that Nepal has in ultimately offering better value to consumers?

It is one thing to slam the government on *legal* grounds by arguing that since it does not reflect the will of the citizens, its decisions are illegitimate, and stop at that. But it’s silly to slam the government by portraying FDI as an instrument that furthers authoritarianism and destroys all local businesses. Cash-strapped Nepal, no matter who runs its government, needs more FDI and economists must do their bit to make the public aware of the benefits of attracting capital from abroad to invest in the country’s untapped potential.

This task has become all the more urgent because, to paraphrase my fellow columnist Artha Beed’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. ●

“English is a worldwide language.”



John Fry, the new country manager of British Council Nepal speaks to Nepali Times about the importance of English and the Council’s activities in Nepal.

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.

Nepal is neither in the Commonwealth, nor is it an English-speaking country. How are British Council’s activities here different?

Fundamentally, the activities of British Council Nepal are not different from any other country. The British Council’s objectives are primarily to work with young people and in Nepal, to work with people in education. Therefore, we work with professionals in primary and secondary schools as well as universities. We are helping schools in Nepal form links with schools in the United Kingdom. We have our own language center, we run British exams here in Nepal, we helped set up Nepali English Language Teachers Association and we work very closely with them. This association has matured and is independently running programs. Our library and information services are very much attuned to young people. We conduct arts program like the upcoming film festival in November, with a young audience in mind.

Education permeates everything we do. However, British Council worldwide also emphasizes on mutuality. What we do within a country has to be useful to that country. We want to build relationships by bringing UK partners and Nepali partners together. We have helped establish a number of higher education links, between universities in Kathmandu and Britain. The staff from universities on both sides is exchanged often. There is mutuality and benefits both ways and British Council is promoting the best of British education, science, technology and arts.

British Council Nepal also supports aid projects and is working in peacekeeping and health. We work closely with

a group of alumni who have studied in Britain before. On behalf of British embassy we administer a scholarship whereby every year two-three students leave for the UK for graduate studies.

Therefore, for most of the things we do, we seek to have long-term impacts.

People say that the English language courses at the British Council are expensive.

I do agree that our language courses are perceived to be expensive. Our teachers are more qualified than the teachers in other schools: they are native speakers of English, professionals with recognised certification and at least two years of experience. Highly qualified and experienced teachers tend to cost more money. I hope that anybody who has been to our classes will recognise that they are getting value for money.

Where do you see British Council in Nepal going during your tenure?

I see my job as the new British Council director in terms of continuity and development. We will continue to work in support of the aid projects and in promoting higher education. We are starting a new project where British schoolteachers will visit Kathmandu and work with Nepali counterparts. A group of music education teachers are visiting Kathmandu in February next year and will work with teachers in Kathmandu. I would like to increase the number of events that we organise in Nepal. When British experts come to Kathmandu we want to organise more discussions and exchange of ideas on issues connected with their area of expertise.

Nepal, 22 September

नेपाल

Barely three weeks after she started classes, six Maoists came, locked the school up and told the students to follow them. Most refused but 10 children were blindfolded and forced to walk. When the blindfolds were removed Suchana found herself back in Panchakule. They were then sent to Deukhuri and Bardiya to extort money. Suchana's group was assigned to travel to Kathmandu for three months and had to walk nearly all the way



held my head. Then one of them hit me in the stomach with his finger. They made me do situps. I begged forgiveness but they beat me repeatedly. Again and again they told me I had to help them, they even told me they'd allow me to join the police force or go abroad. After they got what they wanted, they brought me back to Hanuman Dhoka and locked me up again. What do I do now? If I go back the Maoists will kill me. If I knew this was to happen I wouldn't have surrendered. My life is in shambles but I am worried about my brother. The Maoists had said they'd take him away from me if I escaped again. 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?"

(Suchana Oli's name has been changed to protect her identity.)

Nepal Samacharpatra,
24 September

समाचारपत्र

SYANGJA-Aid agencies have complained that the army has taken construction materials provided by the Japanese agency JICA intended for repairing government schools and community buildings. Sources claim that the army took the supplies without informing local government officials at a time when the district's schools have been requesting assistance. Nabajyoti Secondary asked for 15 bundles of tin to repair damage caused by a fire in April and local authorities agreed to provide high-quality product made in Japan. However, before an official decision was finalised, army personnel took about six bundles of tin in the absence of the local development officer. The school authorities and DDC officials were shocked to learn of the incident. To date, the school has been able to get only six bundles of tin. The army reportedly used the materials to make its tower in Nuwakot village more secure. During an interaction with DDC

Kantipur's Dailekh reporter, Hariharsingh Rathore, wrote this in the 'Notebook' column before being detained by police on Monday. *Nepal*, 23 September

नेपाल

Even though the authorities

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

JKR

Maoist student leader Krishna KC has been detained for 25 months in the army barracks. Despite being released by the Supreme Court, police rearrested 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.

I was blindfolded and kept in a dark room. Then they started asking about the whereabouts of Baburam and Prachanda. They interrogated me for two hours and tortured me brutally. When I fainted they beat me mercilessly. There were blood clots all over my body. There were hundreds of detainees. In Bhairabnath, I met 225 prisoners on my way to the toilet. I could hear screams of tortured prisoners in every barrack.

It's not possible to talk about all the mental and physical torture. Many have died as a result. I was electrocuted and hit on the face until I bled. The worst torture was being blindfolded for two years. For twenty-two months they tied my hands behind my back and kept me blindfolded. I was kept at Bhairabnath, Yudha Bhairab and Ranger Battalion. These are the main barracks where people are tortured and killed.

Officials from the NHRC, UN High Commission and ICRC visited me. Whenever news about a detainee is published in the press, that person is moved to another detention place where he is tortured severely. When I was taken from Bhairabnath to Yudha Bhairab I was taken to the jungle, put in a sack and beaten. A prisoner named Khadka Buda died asking for water. He was not a Maoist. Padam Nakarmi died the same way. I spent days eating rice grains from the floor.

They kicked me while reading the news from Amnesty International and *Kantipur*. When the papers wrote about Matrika Yadab and Suresh Ale Magar they were also tortured. Matrika Yadab is still very ill. Both are in the Ranger Battalion in Chhauni.

They have said openly they will not spare anyone. A general by the name of Biplab Gurung told me that I was lucky. When I was arrested I was the Kathmandu Valley bureau chief. When I was taken in, there were hundreds of detainees in the hall but very few were real Maoists. They end up torturing and killing hundreds of innocent civilians.



Foreign Minister Pandey: Democra...
UN Delegates: Ha..ha..ha..ha..

समय Samaya 29, September



बल्ल, बल्ल एउटा टुरिस्ट
खोजेर ल्याएँ ! लौ चाँड-चाँडो
माला लाइदेर स्वागत गर्नुस् !!
फेरि फुत्किहाल्ला!!!

Finally we found one tourist. Better
garland him before he escapes.

राजधानी *Rajdhani* 28, September

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



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

Retired RNA brigadier general and royalist Dipta Shah, in *Janastha*, 28 September

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 enagaged 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

राजधानी

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. If 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 Aastha, 28 September

आस्था

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, RONA 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 overburdened, are being given more responsibilities and asked to become more involved.

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ALL PICS: ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

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 also 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. Guruing 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 Thorang La pass at an altitude of 5416m 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



MARVELOUS MANANG: The unusual parabolic slope of Swargadwari near Pisang (top) and the Marsyangdi as it flows past Braga (above) rock formations on the way to Tilicho and the statue the people of Manang put up outside the airfield in Humde to honour King Mahendra. Women from Braga offer prayers at Milarepa cave (opposite top).



Panch 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 Besisahar 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 Thorang Phedi, the camp before the pass, 23 years ago. 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 Biswakarma, 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 emphasises 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. ●





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Musicians entertaining visitors in the museum courtyard.

Museum of Manang

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.

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 distressing 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



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

narrative of deprivation and neglect is in contrast to the beauty all around. There is dialogue between community workers, health service providers and NGO-types. Some blame it on the lack of awareness, the health workers point out the perils of unsafe abortions without being

Anchored in reality

A television news reader turns into a documentary maker



INTERFACE

judgmental. Pathak lets them tell the story, and *Newsroom Bahira* ends up being a shocking horror story.

While we follow the story, there is still the impression that Pathak hasn't sufficiently captured the depth of the tragedy of Nepali women. For some 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 enrolls 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



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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 (Machssommim)
This film explores the significance 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.

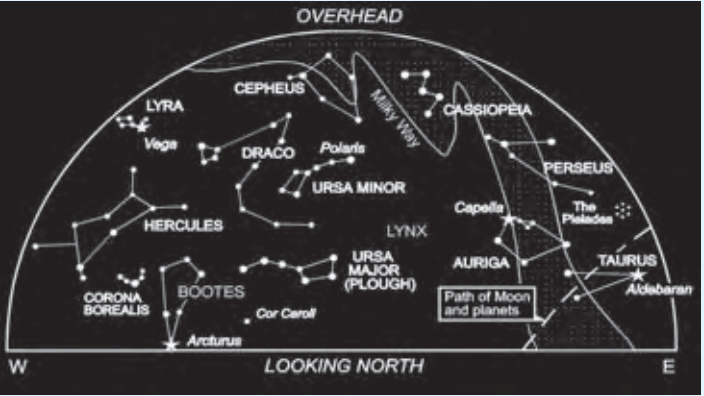
Little Terrorist
A 12-year-old Pakistani-Muslim girl accidentally crosses the mine-laden border into India and makes friends with a Hindu schoolteacher. He must find a way to stop Indian soldiers from looking for the 'terrorist' who has crossed into their country (*pictured above*). Kumari Hall B, 3 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 *Dhruva Tara* (Polaris). 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 edgewise 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 morning of 8 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

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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 signalled the collapse 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 become a camp follower of Washington,” said Gulshan Dietl, 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 Malay-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-soaked 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 polls 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)

Election fatigue in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO—Sri Lanka’s future rests precariously on the outcome of the 17 November presidential election, the nation’s fourth political contest within five years. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse, the contender from outgoing President Chandrika Kumaratunga’s UPFA Party, has made pacts with hard-line southern parties like the People’s Liberation Front (PLF) and the Buddhist monk-led Jathika Hela Urumaya and has pledged to uphold the unitary nature of the country and to renegotiate the truce with Tamil Tiger separatists. Regardless, a sizeable portion of the 13.3 million eligible voters is visibly disgruntled at yet another election exercise. “This is not democracy working for the good of the country, this is democracy working at its worst,” said Renuka Gunawardena, a public relations officer in Colombo. (IPS)

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 exuberant 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,” Arjun 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 studio 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 zany 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 as planned. 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 Hollywood standards, moderate by those of Bollywood). In most Indian films, he said, “the point 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 styles 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)



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भरतपुर: आरबी न्यूज, नारायणगढ चोक, ०६४-४३०६६८ बिराटनगर: आरबी न्यूज, महेंद्र चोक, ०२९-४३३३८७



Ten reasons to tennis

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 there? 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.

GAME POINT
Sujay Lama



#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 longer.

#2 Tennis gives you a great workout
You stretch, you jump, you swing, you run—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 summer months.

#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. Bjorn Borg inspired Sweden's tennis industry. In the US it was Connors, McEnroe, Sampras, Everett and Navratilova. And all the boys in Kathmandu know of Andre Agassi.

#7 Tennis is fun to play and watch
It is fun to hit balls but competing with your friend, partner or opponent makes it even better. You meet wonderful people as you socialise. It's also enjoyable to watch professionals play on tv or live. There are great tournaments to watch, especially the grand slams.

#8 Tennis is less time consuming and produces fewer injuries
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. Also, it results in few injuries. US statistics shows that basketball is the number one sport for injuries. But can you believe that tennis produces 50 percent fewer injuries than golf?

#9 Tennis can be played everywhere and is the world's number two 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 develops the mind and teaches you life skills
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.



Hooked on sudoku

The simple logic puzzles have brows knitted worldwide

KIM CURTIS
in SAN FRANCISCO

Sudoku are deceptively simple looking puzzles that require not maths, spelling or language skills. And unlike crosswords, they don't require an extensive knowledge of trivia. They're just pure and simple logic.

They're also addictive. Sudoku books—pages and pages of grids with nothing more than numbers in boxes—are selling so well that they're quickly filling lists of best sellers. And even in Kathmandu aficionados can be seen in coffee shops, and (yes) even at work.

“I can't think of a puzzle book that has sold like this,” says Ethan Friedman, who edits the *New York Times* crossword puzzle books for St Martin's/Griffin Press, including two volumes of sudoku with introductions by Times crossword guru Will Shortz.

Nielsen BookScan, which lists 10 sudoku titles, estimates they sold a combined 40,000 copies in the US in the first week of September. The only books that sold more were JK Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* and Kevin Trudeau's *Natural Cures They Don't Want You to Know About*.

A month ago, no sudoku books were on *USA Today's* top 150 list. Now, there are six.

In sudoku, the game is laid out in adjoining grids. Players 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 1979, 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

	4	3		8		2	5		1679
6									12345789
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9					4		7		123568
				6		8			1234579
	1			2		9			45678
8	2			5					134679
								5	12346789
5	3	4		8	9		7	1	26
1	5	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	17
2	6	2	3	2	3	3	3	2	
3	7	5	4	3	5	4	4	6	
4	8	6	7	4	6	5	6	7	
7	9	7	9	5	7	6	8	8	
		8		6		8		9	
		9		7		9			

Objective
The object of the game is to fill a 9x9 grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9.

the idea. By the early 1980s, the puzzles—renamed sudoku, which means “single number” in Japanese—filled pages of magazines in Japan.

Enter Wayne Gould, a retired judge from New Zealand and puzzle enthusiast who in 1997 found himself “killing time” in a Japanese bookstore. “I don't read, write or speak Japanese so there wasn't much that I recognised,” he says from his vacation home in Phuket. “I picked up a sudoku book and bought it.”

He was soon hooked.

Gould, who had taken up computer programming as a hobby, wrote software that randomly generated the puzzles. The grids have only some of the numbers filled in—players must do the rest.

He also wanted to share sudoku with the world—and perhaps “make a bit of money.”


So one day last November, he marched into *The Times of London* without an appointment, carrying a copy of that day's newspaper with a square cut out and a sudoku puzzle in its place.

He persuaded the features editor to publish the puzzles for free, as long as the paper included the address of his website.


The Brits went bonkers. Other newspapers quickly realised that they too had to provide sudoku to stay competitive.

His computer program is about to make him a millionaire, says Gould, who now provides free puzzles to 120 newspapers in 36 countries.

“Sudoku will fade but I don't expect it to disappear for good,” he adds. “I think the crossword and the sudoku will sit side by side for years to come. The crossword is there for the wordsmith and the sudoku is there for the rest of us.” ●



Kathmandu University
Centre for Buddhist Studies at
Rangjung Yeshe Institute



3rd Annual Symposium on Buddhist Studies
“Theory and Practice of Reason in Buddhism”

Symposium Opening
Dr. Suresh Raj Sharma
Vice Chancellor
Kathmandu University

Chair Person
Dr. Bhadra Man Tuladhar
Dean, School of Arts
Kathmandu University

Honorary Speaker
Tulku Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche
Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling Monastery
Nepal

Guest Speakers
Dr. Georges Dreyfus
Williams College
USA

Dr. Kenneth Liberman
University of Oregon
USA

Dr. James Blumenthal
State University of Oregon
USA

Dr. Naresh Man Bajracharya
Tribhuvan University
Nepal

Dr. Klaus-Dieter Mathes
University of Hamburg
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Dr. Tom Tillemans
University of Lausanne
Switzerland

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Date: 5 October '05, Wednesday | Time: 9:00–18:00 | Venue: Hyatt Regency Hotel, Boudhanath

"Lata ko desh ma gaando tanderi." (In a land of fools, even a man with a bad goatee can be a hero.) - as translated by UNACOOTs, the United Nation's Association of Cartoonists



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

ABOUT TOWN

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 Lagankhel
- ❖ **Art Walk** Traditional artworks at Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg. 4248999
- ❖ **Arts** from Tibet, Dolpo and the Himalayas by Pasang at Baber Mahal Revisited

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

- ❖ **Film South Asia '05**, 29 September-4 October at Kumari Hall.
- ❖ **An Open Heart and a Clear Mind** meditation, discussions, teachings, 1 October HBMC.
- ❖ **International Day for Older Persons** 1 October.
- ❖ **Creative Mandala Art Workshop** 2 October 10AM-4PM to 4pm, HBMC. 4414843
- ❖ **World Habitat Day** 3 October.
- ❖ **Rosh Hashana** Jewish New Year 3 October.
- ❖ **Ghatasthapana** 4 October.
- ❖ **Changa Chait** kite flying competition at Club Himalaya, 8 October. 4411706
- ❖ **Fulpati** 10 October.
- ❖ **Ashtami** 11 October.
- ❖ **Dasami** 12 October.
- ❖ **Football Tournament** at Dasrath Stadium, 30 October. trophy@tbs.edu.np
- ❖ **Plight of Widows in Nepal** by Lily Thapa, 23 November, 9.30am Shankar Hotel.



MUSIC

- ❖ **Kutumba** at Hotel Manaslu, 30 September, 5.30 PM. 4221679
- ❖ **Jazz at Patan** at Patan Museum Café. Cadenza and friends. 30 September 6.30 PM onwards. 4441067
- ❖ **Nepali and German** songs by Sanjeev Maharjan, 30 September 5.15 PM, Goethe-Zentrum. 4250871
- ❖ **Live in Concert** Anil Singh, 1 October, 2PM, BICC.
- ❖ **Jatra Friday Nights** live music, wine sale and much more. 4256622
- ❖ **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 Moksh, 7:30 PM onwards, no cover charge. 5526212
- ❖ **Cadenza Live!** Upstairs Jazz Bar Lazimpat, 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. 4225272

FOOD

- ❖ **Pizza Promotion** at Coffee Shop, 30th September, Hotel de l'Annapurna.
- ❖ **Celebrate Dasai** and enjoy a tasteful evening of Cocktails, 5 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 Radisson 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. 5521810
- ❖ **The Chimney Restaurant** Signature dishes at Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **BBQ** by the Swimming Pool at Le Meridien, Rs 888
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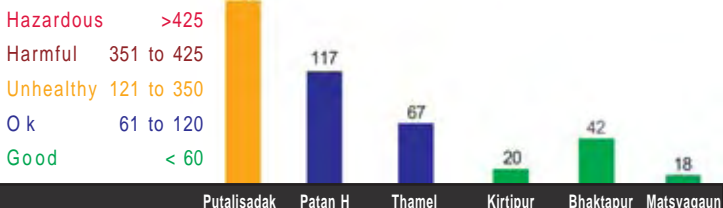
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KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

Compared to last week, the average concentration of PM10 particles (matter less than 10 microns in diameter that lodge in the human body) level for Kathmandu has decreased by almost 33 percent. Of the six monitoring stations, PM10 concentrations at five were below national standard. Putali Sadak, the more polluted part of town, also saw a drop in pollution level by almost 7 percent compared to previous week.

18-24 September 2005 in micrograms per cubic metre.
Source: www.mope.gov.np



NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



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 rain and Kathmandu Valley got only 75 percent of its usual precipitation. Meteorologists believe the main reason for the monsoon's poor showing is that the zone responsible for creating a low pressure track along the Himalaya 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 Dasain-like days are here. However, patchy clouds and humidity are still in place. Expect sunny intervals through the weekend till early next week with chances of passing night showers.

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श्री ५ को सरकार

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Nepal’s zoological society

Now, 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

UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit



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 sychophants 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

These fellows used to hang out in parliament but since that wildlife reserve was dissolved five years ago, all inmates were moved to temporary pastures where their barks are now worse than their bites.

Sloth Bear

Known for lazing 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 behinds 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.

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ISSN 1814-2613

CDO Regd No. 194/056/57 Lalitpur, Central Region Postal Regd. No. 04/058/59