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Weekly Internet Poll # 276

Q. Do you agree with the government's action against the relay of BBC Nepali Service through FM stations in Nepal?

Total votes:4,493



Yes 26.4%

No 72.2%

Don't know 1.4%

Weekly Internet Poll # 277. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. What do you think of the new council of ministers appointed by the king?

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Press Freedom for Peace and Democracy

All the king's (new) men



The reshuffle proves King Gyanendra is not deviating from his roadmap

RAJENDRA DAHAL

The dramatic announcement on Wednesday evening of a reshuffle in the council of ministers was a lot of sound and fury, but doesn't seem to signify much.

The cabinet was expanded from 24 to 36. Some incumbents were sacked, others were kicked upstairs, few were moved sideways, fresh faces were brought in. But the fourth royal cabinet after February First is still a status quo government and proves King Gyanendra is determined not to deviate from his three-year-old roadmap just because the parties and the rebels have got together against him.

By now, the king has tried just about everything: from the technocrat-filled Chand cabinet in 2002, the Surya Bahadur Thapa cabinet, to the NC-D UML coalition. What is striking about the new faces this time is that

five of the 12 new ministers are heads of their own showcase parties mostly set up recently.

Keshar Bahadur Bista who formed his own Prajatantrik Nepal party last month is on board with the agriculture portfolio. Durga Pokhrel who launched her own Nepali Congress-Rastrabadi with Prakash Koirala, and Salim Miyan Ansari of the Samajbadi Party are also ministers. Narayan Singh Pun, the architect of the 2002 ceasefire and head of the Samata Party, is back this time as Minister of Land Reform.

By wooing off six central committee members from the RPP, including Kamal Thapa as Home Minister, the king has snubbed Pashupati SJB Rana who has been critical of the February First move. The king even got Buddhiman Tamang to defect from Surya Bahadur Thapa's RJP. Royalist journalist Shirish Rana is State Minister for Information and Communication.

Analysts say the new cabinet is unlikely to help mend relations between the palace and the mainstream parties. There are also doubts about whether the new team can improve service delivery, governance, find a resolution to the conflict, or mend strained relations with international partners.

Some donors may be happy about the departure of Madhukar Rana from the Finance Ministry (Roop Jyoti has been promoted to his post) and the exit of Jagat Gauchan and Senate Shrestha may launder the government's






AND A WOMAN: State Minister of Women, Children and Social Welfare Durga Pokhrel, Minister of Home Kamal Thapa, Minister of Land Reform Narayan Singh Pun and State Minister of Information, Shirish Rana on Thursday before their swearing in at the royal palace.

image abroad, but it is unlikely that the new lineup will convince donors to unfreeze grants and loans suspended after 1 February. The reshuffle is mainly a show of defiance against a critical international community.

However, the timing of the reshuffle three days before the visit here of Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran has raised speculation that there is more than meets the eye. King Gyanendra could be trying to drive a bargain with the Indians for support in exchange for geopolitical concessions. ●

KIRAN PANDAY



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RESHUFFLING THE PACK

The king has tried to buy time by falling back on his father's favourite trick of reshuffling the deck. There seems to have been an effort to bring in smarter people but things are too far gone to regain legitimacy this way. But it shows the king is determined to ride it out and is following his three-year timetable to install loyalists in key places.

The political parties are encouraged by large turnouts at their public meetings. But they are so hung up on process and on chanting the boycott mantra that they are in serious danger of being sidelined by both the king and the Maoists. Instead of being kneejerk rejectionists, they must come up with a proactive plan. Reuniting the Nepali Congress would be a place to start and perhaps even preparing for general elections with a strong and united pro-democracy front.

The reshuffle has coincided with the announcement of Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran's visit to Kathmandu next week. India's role in fixing Nepal's mess has become an issue of heated debate after the party-rebel pact. Our view on this is straightforward: if your house is on fire and you do nothing to put it out, you can't complain if your neighbour hoses you down.

India's leftist politicians had a hand in brokering the Maoist-party pact. So? Defanging the Maoists is in India's national interest because of what a Maoist victory in Nepal would mean for their own Naxalite movement. That aim should coincide with the king's own goal.

What sections of the Indian establishment perhaps disagree on is how to go about preventing a Maoist takeover. The brass thinks the king and his army are the bulwarks against the Maoists while the Saran Doctrine is mainstreaming the Maoists and restoring full democracy for long-term stability. The two sides are having it out in public through sponsored write-ups in Indian dailies by their pet pundits.

The Pink Palace thinks it is cleverly playing these factions and using the China card to gain leverage in Delhi. But it forgets the rising rage here at home. While India-baiting in public, monarchists are actively courting India's VHP-royalty-khaki coalition for moral support. When it comes to Big Brother, whatever they may say at home Nepali political forces of all hues have always sucked up to their Indian patrons.

It comes as no surprise that the Indians are turning the screws once more on a regime that is thumbing its nose at them. There is a strong sense of déjà vu, it looks like 1988-89 all over again. A word of caution here to Indian babudom: diplomatic ragging backfires and you shouldn't try to squeeze the king by squeezing his long-suffering subjects. Many Nepalis still remember the blockade, and that is not the way to win hearts here.



KIRAN PANDAY

Breakthrough or betrayal?

Being in love with the Maoists can be more dangerous to Nepali democracy than being at war with them.

The 12-point Delhi Agreement has many objectionable elements, but it is the very process of engaging in this alliance that must first be condemned. Gandhi's legacy is that even in just political struggles one needs to choose just means. How is total democracy to be ushered in with the aid of total terrorists?

GUEST COLUMN
Prem Jung Thapa



Who has usurped the power and legitimacy of the mainstream parties? It is the Maoists with their violence-backed refusal to allow parliamentary elections. February First could be undone in a flash with a newly-elected parliament.

Yet the parties have chosen to add the Maoist weapon to their arsenal in their fight against the active monarchy. Once unsheathed, who will control this weapon and direct where it will land?

Forging a significant alliance with the Maoists without the latter's pre-commitment to forgo

violence and lay down arms is to acquiesce in their terrorism. Most tragically, it sets a long-term precedent that political parties need only put together an armed militia to get their way.

Secondly, who has given this band of conspirators (mainly four bahun men) the authority and legitimacy to demand a new political order for Nepal through a constituent assembly? Two of them came riding on the tiger of terrorism and the other two on the back of their past failures and incompetence to take Nepali democracy forward after the gains of the People's Movement. Their slogans are 'total democracy' and 'new people's democracy', yet they are autocrats in their own right, representing factions or personal cliques with little practice of democracy.

Their apparent grand design is to hoodwink the Nepali people and the gullible international community with the promise of a 'peace dividend' by ending the 'people's war' and of a return to parliamentary democracy by bringing the Maoists into mainstream politics. With such vain promises, these four believe anything can be demanded of war-weary Nepalis, including approval for a constituent assembly.

Peace is precious to all Nepalis now but not peace at any price. The seven parties have given away too much and departed from democratic values out of sheer personal vendetta against a specific monarch. The Maoists no doubt see great value in this alliance. The end game of a

constituent assembly election offers them the safe landing that they crave so desperately. It does not really matter much to the Maoists what the proposed constituent assembly will decide. Hence, their pledge to accept whatever comes out of it is quite hollow. Their only requirement is to have something to point to as the fruit of their violent methods in order to permanently justify their terrorist past.

We cannot simply acquiesce to a straightforward and painless entry of the Maoists into Nepali mainstream democratic politics. Their leaders and armed cadres must be charged and prosecuted to the full extent possible under our laws for their crimes, including crimes against humanity. Those found guilty must be punished, including possibly being barred from future political participation. We must also require that they recant on many aspects of their core political ideology.

Many in the intelligentsia and media are fascinated with and sympathetic to the Maoist political objectives, condemning only their resort to violence. Not enough criticism is leveled against their core beliefs which are fundamentally incompatible with a free and democratic society. Their forceful political indoctrination of the rural poor, minorities and other vulnerable groups with false promises and utopias known to be unachievable is despicable. The rights of individuals derived from the core values of individual liberty and liberalism (the very rights for whose protection we turn to democratic political processes in

LETTERS

PACT

CK Lal's 'Precursors to peace' (State of the State, #275) is pretentious. By defending the political parties and western-bred ideas Lal and Kanak Mani Dixit in 'Country at the Crossroad' (Issue 275) argue about the finer points of system of governance which has been run aground by 12 years of misrule by the parties. The system is not at fault. It's these politicians by birth who have no sense of democracy. It is in their fiefdom that terrorism was allowed to breed. For them, government was 'by us, for us and to us'. Lal seems to think it is 'fascist' to speak against the party-rebel alliance but why should we allow our neighbour to settle our household dispute? And how come the Maoists are free to interact with the South Block? Do Lal and Dixit espouse the idea of 'end justifies the means'? They see Nepal from their high horse of pseudo intellect. They are only worried about democracy, but not about how to get there. Unless basic fundamentals are in place, democracy cannot flourish. Lets not be misled by

people who want only want to jack up their credentials in the eyes of foreigners.

Pravin', email

● It was very unfortunate that CK Lal was rebuked (Letters, #274) for his State of the State column (Military fatigue, #273) regarding the excesses by soldiers in Jaleswor last month. A columnist and political analyst of his reputation was accused of bias and unfairly supporting his community, which itself was a sign of chauvinism and narrow-mindedness. The RNA never reflected Nepal's true diversity. Racial and caste-based discrimination is prevalent in the ranks and files. There is an unwritten rule that people from certain castes and races are incapable of being soldiers and are barred from recruitment. Only recently has the army decided to form new platoons consisting of excluded communities. And what of cases like Maina Sunuwar? What if she had been their daughter or sister? A girl loses her life after torture in detention and the perpetrator just gets six months suspension by a secret military

court! Incidents like these will just fuel anger and hatred of civilians towards security personnel. If timely steps are not taken, the public's wrath could explode.

Pramod Bhagat, mail

NO MOONIES HERE

It was astonishing to see Nepali newspapers praise Sun Myung Moon, a fundamentalist of the 'Unification Church'. Some newspapers even said 'Dr Moon is famous for his ideas of interreligious harmony and peace around the world'... or 'Dr Moon announced the launching of an alternative forum to be known as

Universal Peace Federation'? Only in Nepal does such balderdash get media play. Despite being accused of gun running, tax evasion, money laundering and promoting a view of women as inferior, the Moonies get a royal reception in Nepal. And trust the Nepali media to fall for it. After all it is a country where criminals have become ministers, the uncivilised are leading the civil society movement and murderers are called true democrats.

B R Giri, email

NEGATIVE

Jemima Sherpa's Guest Column ('Between Mugabe and Shwe', #274) rang true. The outside world has a very negative image of what is happening in Nepal. It is getting harder and harder for us to tell others that Nepal is still a beautiful place and peace will return. Let's hope we don't have to wait too long for that to happen.

Anita Shrestha, email

DIASPORA

The *Nepali Times* keeps using the word 'diaspora' to describe overseas Nepalis. But the word originally referring to the exiled Jews cannot be equated to many of us Nepalis living abroad. Within a globalised economy, I would argue that Nepalis are as free as any other citizens of Europe or America to go and work in any 'developed' country if he or she (like me) freely chooses and plan to return to Nepal in the future. I do not think this is brain drain. Prof Oded Stark, a Professor of Economics challenges traditional views on the 'brain drain' suggesting that this is not the case and in fact the opportunity for emigration can have the opposite effect of



ROBIN SAYAMI

the first place) have little standing in their philosophy. How can Prachanda Path be acceptable as a legitimate political and economic philosophy for a 21st century democratic Nepal?

It is not sufficient to renounce violence, which the Maoists still have not clearly done. Terrorism, to be practiced through absolute controlling power of the state, is ingrained in the basic tenets of the Nepali Maoists. Even if they are not going to win control electorally, they must not be allowed to compete as legitimate political players while keeping their core purpose intact. A change in tactics is not sufficient to rehabilitate them, a change in purpose is needed with justice for past actions.

The alliance with the democratic parties now gives irreversible legitimacy to the Maoist purpose. It gives the Maoists more credibility in the hearts and minds of Nepali voters than they could ever get by military means. The irony of the 12-point agreement is how it highlights the distinction between the Maoists and the seven parties: they agree on everything except the demand for recalling the dissolved House. So now the CPN (Maoist) is of the same democratic progeny and credibility as the Congress, except for this minor tactical disagreement!

Even if the Maoists are genuine in their new-found faith in pluralistic politics, aiding and abetting them in making this transition without changing their fundamental nature does not strengthen democracy in Nepal.

Being in love with the Maoists, unchanged in their purpose, can be more dangerous to Nepali democracy than being at war with them. ●

Prem Jung Thapa is an economist based in Canberra, Australia.

An uncertain centre

Active monarchists are restive because they have realised Nepalis are not docile anymore

Pelting stones is much more than rowdy behaviour. It's a symbolic expression of disapproval and a ritualistic act of rejection. In traditional societies, excited crowds threw pebbles at carriers of evil spirits to chase them away from the village.

In post-modern symbolism, stone-throwing is dissent by deeds. The miscreants who threw stones at the royal motorcade last Friday may have acted impulsively but they cast the first few stones in what they perceive as a symbol of the barrier on the bumpy road

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



to peace. The 12-point pact raised

hopes of peace. True, there are some super royalists, commie-haters and doubting Thomases who think it is fatally flawed. It may have some holes but it is the most positive step towards peace in a long time and that's not just me saying it. Just listen to professional organisations, human rights activists, the business community and ordinary Nepalis. Just about every sector of society has welcomed the move to mainstream the insurgents.

Even usually cautious outsiders like the Americans have lent support, Kofi Annan thinks it is a good idea, the Swiss have been most vociferous in welcoming the move and have even promised to facilitate a settlement. After a long time, an air of optimism pervades the country.

But, hope and despair are two sides of the same coin. Popular support for the pact is roughly proportional to the rejection of the royalists. Soon after the Baneswor episode, Kirti Nidhi Bista lamented that it has become unbearable for him to live in this country. Satchit Shamsheer Rana, a vocal campaigner of active monarchy, complained yet again about the Foreign Hand. Another rabid royalist, Bharat Keshar Singh, lamented that he was ashamed to call himself a Nepali. Bista, Rana, and Singh are of course free to feel embarrassed, but they have no right to thrust their dejection upon self-respecting Nepalis.

Active monarchists are perturbed for good

reason: Nepalis are not docile and submissive anymore. When the people did not rally behind the parties after 4 October 2002, they assumed that meant the populace favoured a tough kingship and proceeded to demolish democratic institutions. Other than the king himself, nothing was left of the constitutional order by the time King Gyanendra finished the job on February First.

Someday historians will study the February First coup for the meticulousness of its execution. However, they will probably also analyse how counter-productive it ultimately turned out to be because the operation had no political purpose. It was just another old-fashioned crude power-grab. It was a tactical success but a strategic blunder. Within a year, the royal rule has begun to unravel and hardcore monarchists are hard-pressed to find excuses to give it continuity in the face of mounting challenges.

Splitting hairs over the 12-point agreement is a sure sign of the existential crisis that the ultra right finds itself in: where would they go if the king's absolute rule came to an end? They have no popular base, very little business integrity to survive in a true free market, and no occupation to sustain the lifestyle that they have got accustomed to. Their fear is not for the country but for their own future. So, they want to scuttle the peace process before it even gets started.

For the seven-party alliance and the Maoists, the coming weeks are critical. The rebels have been playing their cards well, putting the palace on the defensive with its unilateral ceasefire and peace-mongering. But the alliance needs to be more explicit about its programs and tread carefully in dealing with the rebels and the palace. If they fail to adapt to the new situation the Maoists will win the next round without firing a single shot.

In uncertain times, it is the fate of the centre that is most uncertain. But centralist politics has its advantages because it has the capacity to bounce back. The leadership of mainstream parties are understandably cautious about balancing opportunity against risk and balancing both against uncertainty. ●



MARTY LOGAN

OUTOF AFRICA: People at Maiti Ghar eagerly await the arrival of King Gyanendra's motorcade on his return from Africa on Friday.

improving the welfare of those left behind. Apart from the obvious benefits of remittances, when Nepalis work globally in powerful institutions, there is a greater chance to push for international programs and policies that may lean towards or favour the country. In my own work, I try to make sure that the excellent Nepali renewable energy sector experience is well highlighted, that others learn from it and push for Nepali partners to be included in different programs if and when possible. It is the little (or great) things we do for Nepal in our own capacity that matters rather than the complacency of critiquing those who do not!

Kavita Rai, UK

DRUCKER

Not sure where Ashutosh Tiwari got the information ('Homage to Drucker', #274) that 'tenured professors at top-tier US business schools do not respect him (Drucker) enough...' In fact, business schools and their professors revere Drucker and his influence extends beyond the academic arena. Legendary CEOs and entrepreneurs regard

Drucker as a guru of modern management. But I do agree with Tiwari that Drucker's death is a loss to the modern world.

D Mahat, Baltimore, USA

EXPEDITION

After reading 'Turf war wrecks expedition' (#275) the question arises why a program with such a positive mission was done without legal permission. A program of global interest and importance was started only with verbal approval from an official of the Ministry. This shows the arrogance and carelessness of Conservation International and The Mountain Institute towards our national laws and legislation. CI says its intention was not to collect samples, yet another member of the expedition is quoted as saying all collected samples were returned to the habitat. These are contradictory statements. Scientists do not have the right to think even mistakenly that permission was just a formality. It is appreciable that the government stood its ground and cancelled the permit. Nepal has the potential to produce experts in various

fields who can explore our natural resources ourselves. It may take some time but the day will surely come when scientists from our own land discover our resources and make them public. Till then, it is the responsibility of the government to protect the national resources for future generations. So, Nepal has not lost anything.

Sapana Lohani, Tribhuban University

● It is fortunate that the government acted in time to save Nepal's nature from illegal sample collection. We can't let science be trampled and our natural resources plundered by whoever has money and clout. The lessons learnt from the potential bio-piracy implications of this expedition are to sort out the authorship and collection issues beforehand and to repeat such a blunder again. We should be more devoted to contributing our knowledge to science that helps us understand the complexity of our own biological diversity first.



Apar Paudyal, Central Department of Environmental Science


KIRAN BHAWAN

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Letter from Doti

Things are so bad, even restoring peace is not enough any more

DOTI—From Nepalganj, the road to Doti is varied and beautiful. The extension of the ceasefire has brought people out, allowing them to be visible in the fields and along the highway. They prepare the fields for winter wheat in these idyllic mountains of terraces and forests dotted with little farm houses. The only visible sign of the past 10 years of is the Maoist graffiti on bridge pylons from Kohalpur to Karnali.

The Situation in Doti seems alot different from a previous visit two years ago, the people look visibly more haggard and malnourished. Silent hunger stalks the scenic valley of the Seti and the streets of Silgadi's main bazar is piled with dirt and garbage. Wide-eyed children peer longingly into the tea shop as we eat.

NEPALI PAN
Rita Thapa



Peace is now no longer a distant dream here, the people know ceasefire and peace is indispensable. The women can now articulate and organise, thanks to a program of Care Nepal but their increased workload and the cost of the war on everyday life makes it hard for them to cope. Displaced youth are engaged in a Community for Peace program supported by Cedpa/Nepal and they are enthused and inspired by all they are learning and are beginning to hope for a better future. The program is coordinated by an internally displaced youngster who is now an activist and tells us with a sparkle in his eyes: "My life is now committed for peace."

But despite the ceasefire, western Nepal is in the cusp of a humanitarian crisis. Even if peace returns, who is going to take care of the food shortage? The health and education crisis? The destroyed infrastructure? The displaced and broken families?

Recently local Maoists exhorted over 12,000 villagers to take a petition to the district capital to pressure the government to respond to their unilateral ceasefire. The administration stopped them on the outskirts of the town and told them to go back. Most were women with little children. Fearing reprisal from the rebels if they returned, some fled to India. Others camped out in the cold for days.



"What can we do," asked activist Hari Bahadur Buda, "how can we see this situation and not put pressure on the government? We feel so helpless." The pain he was experiencing was writ large on his face. This was part of a nationwide campaign by the Maoists to put pressure on the government to reciprocate the ceasefire.

A young man assisted by a relative came into the office of a local NGO. He had festering sores all over his skinny frame. He had worked in Bombay for nine years and had lost his job due to illness. He said his wife also suffered from sores and that they had a nine-month-old baby. The symptoms said it all but he didn't know it was AIDS and couldn't afford a checkup.

Returning to Kathmandu, it's the same old too and fro concerning the pros and cons of the Maoist-seven party pact. The time for such debate is long gone. The king, the seven party alliance, the Maoists and all those who hold power and influence have as their primary responsibility the health and welfare of the people of Nepal.

They must come to their senses and secure peace for the people. But for Doti and the surrounding districts in western Nepal, even peace is not enough. They must address the looming humanitarian crisis, and then work on a rehabilitation plan to undo all the damage that has been done.

At such a time whoever yields and demonstrates compassion and care for all Nepal's will be judged a true leader. Compromise will not be seen as a weakness but as an act of heroism. And those who fail to act will be held responsible for the crisis that will soon engulf this region. ●



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Stability first to avoid humanitarian crisis

The British aid ministry, DfID, is pumping £32 million into Nepal this year, making it the kingdom's largest donor. It continues to implement its large-scale development programmes in rural areas despite the conflict. Its Asia-Pacific director, Charlotte Seymour-Smith, was in Nepal to study the situation and meet officials and key donor partners. *Nepali Times* spoke to her on the eve of her departure about how the conflict has affected aid and development trends in the country.

***Nepali Times:* How do you see the overall situation in the ceasefire period?**

Charlotte Seymour-Smith: My overall impression confirms what my team has been telling me, that the most important thing for development in Nepal is the peace process and return to democracy. In a conflict situation, it is indeed very difficult to bring sustainable development to the people of Nepal and to the remote areas. It's difficult for donor agencies to provide support for basic services and to work with the government to extend the reach and quality of these services.

It's very good that the government has acknowledged the Basic Operating Guidelines (BOGs) and endorsed them. The Maoists should do the same, and both sides should work not just to endorse them at a high or central level but throughout the country so that development agencies and partners can bring development to poor people.

Did you discuss these issues with senior government officials?

We talked mostly about the leadership of the Ministry of Health, the management reforms that are needed in the health sector and the difficulties of delivering health services to people in remote areas.

Is there a possibility for a humanitarian crisis if the conflict drags on?

We would hope that a large-scale humanitarian crisis will not occur... stability is the prerequisite to avoiding a humanitarian crisis. Peace and democracy and normalisation and stability are what we should work towards. We will also look at different instruments and channels where we are able to be most effective. We will work through the government as long as we can and as long as they are effective.

Will the conflict affect DfID aid?

It can do. If I can't report back to my minister and he can't report back to our parliament that the money

that we are spending in Nepal is reducing poverty, then we can't justify continuing in the same way. We have to look at other ways. There are also concerns about the safety and security of staff.

Your visit is focussed mostly on health issues. What are your concerns?

There are a lot of issues with health services, capacity gaps, lack of resources compounded by the conflict. It means that very many ordinary people in Nepal will not receive basic health services, which have to be provided by the government. There is really no substitute. This is something of great concern.

How would you evaluate DFID's aid effectiveness in Nepal?

We are looking at the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Nepal is at risk of not meeting those MDGs, particularly in the health and education sectors. Therefore it requires action to improve results and effectiveness. That's where we would focus and try and monitor how other's trends are going and what differences we are making.

What is your assessment of the ground situation after the ceasefire?

The levels of violence have definitely declined. The ceasefire is a helpful thing. The international community should definitely work towards a peace process and towards democracy and normalisation.

Is it true that DFID did not increase its aid as planned this year?

It is true for the reasons I have described to you because of the operating difficulties. Under a positive scenario and more normal situation, it becomes possible to disperse high levels of aid more effectively but it's also about effectiveness and the safety of our staff.

Hydro heroics

A Nepal hydro project is one of three winners of the 2005 UNESCO International Hydropower Association (IHA) Blue Planet Prize for excellence. The 5MW Andhikhola Hydel and Rural Electrification scheme received the award, along with two Canadian projects, at the recent UN meeting on climate change in Montreal. “All three projects demonstrate a strong consideration of environmental, social and economic aspects and, as such, are excellent examples of sustainable hydro power development,” said the award committee. Andhikhola delivers water and electricity services to 100,000 local people, making electricity affordable for the first time to 22,000 low-income families

Garment sales slide

The main market for garments, Nepal's largest foreign currency earner, continued to disappoint in October. Exports to the United States plummeted 57 percent compared to last year, following a 48 percent drop in September. Sales to the US have fallen off since 1 January, when garment quotas were ended in line with WTO rules. But according to the Garment Association of Nepal (GAN), if passed the Trade Act 2000 bill pending at the US Senate would help to boost exports from Least Developed Countries (LDCs) like Nepal to the US market.

Golf biz

Surya Nepal is sponsoring the 12th edition of the Surya Nepal Masters golf tournament, 13-17 December. Held at Le Meridien Kathmandu Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, the event begins with a Pro-Am joining professional golfers with local amateurs and ends with the final 18 holes on 17 December. Indian pros like Mukesh Kumar lead the field while Nepal's challengers include Deepak Acharya, Ramesh Nagarkoti and Deepak Neupane.



Anniversary earnings

Sanima Development Bank Ltd celebrated its first birthday on Monday by announcing a plan to boost its paid up capital to Rs 320 million following its initial public offering (IPO), which is nearly complete. It also plans to introduce locker and ATM services soon. Sanima has taken in deposits of Rs 570 million and made Rs 470 million from investments, says a press release.

NEW PRODUCTS

LUXURY CIGARETTES: Surya Nepal has launched the Surya Classic, a 97-mm “luxury cigarette”. Containing a unique blend of handpicked golden Virginia tobaccos, hand packed for aroma, taste and freshness, the new product is targeted at the premium end smoker. The Surya Classic comes in a black shoulder-box pack, priced at Rs 100 for a pack of 20. The new cigarette is available only in selected outlets in Kathmandu.



Crazy as a strategy

Nobel winner Thomas Schelling voiced this theory that might be relevant to Nepal

In Stockholm tomorrow, one half of this year’s Nobel Prize in economics will be awarded to Thomas Schelling. A former Harvard professor, Schelling, 84, is belatedly being recognised ‘for having enhanced our understanding of conflict and cooperation through game-theory analysis’.

STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari



Academic economists are often accused of falling in love with mathematically dense theories that bear no resemblance to the real world. But Schelling’s case is different. Through plain English, logic and creativity and wide-ranging interest in the social sciences, he has extended the reach of economics into topics such as ‘promises and threats’, ‘self-restraint’, ‘reputation’, ‘social co-ordination’, ‘nuclear deterrence’, ‘ethnic segregation’ and even ‘global warming’.

Let’s take one of Schelling’s insights—that by acting crazy one can make a threat credible—and see how it might play out in our political context.

It’s been more than three years since Nepal’s major political parties started agitating against royal rule. They had group meetings at the palace. They published opinion pieces. They called on supporters. They held rallies in Ratna Park. They demanded that the House be re-instated. Some even joined the

royal government for a few months.

But all those efforts have come to naught. Over time, dwindling public support has alienated and sidelined the parties, making them realise that unless they posed a credible threat to the king, they risked being irrelevant. It was at this time that civil society pundits urged the parties to shake hands with the Maoists, which they did recently.

This alliance has certainly helped the parties to increase their appeal. To the war-weary public, the parties could finally say that they are the promoters of peace and can tame even the violence-prone Maoists. But they know what they cannot claim: that the alliance of the seven parties and its alliance with the Maoists will hold for long.

In the short run, the parties have succeeded in communicating that they are serious. This is evidenced by their gathering nationwide support—mind you, not necessarily for their political causes but for peace. Still, if the palace continues to do nothing, which itself is a form of action, then the prediction is that, over time, the party-Maoists alliance will fall apart because of inevitable long-term coordination problems.

The Maoists know the precarious nature of the alliance. Despite a unilateral ceasefire, it’s in their interest to stay unpredictable on the military front, while milking the alliance

for all its political worth. In the past, the palace has shown that it too can be unpredictable.

Thus, with two sides adopting unpredictable behaviour to harden positions and to keep adversaries on their toes, the political game had long been reduced to political parties’ doing a shuttlecock swing—ostensibly for democracy and peace—between the king and the Maoists. The outcome of such a game was that, rhetoric notwithstanding, the parties never posed a credible threat to the palace and the Maoists, both of which continued to dominate the agenda.

That is why to make threats credible in times ahead, the parties need to be strategically unpredictable and do things that no one expects them to do. One such action might be to let go of all old politicians and replace them with stridently republican ones. Another might be to call the palace’s bluff, take part in internationally supervised elections and thereby increase the odds of emerging with an electoral mandate to set a new agenda that their adversaries would have to react to.

Yes, given present realities, both of these actions are indeed crazy. But they are consistent with Schelling’s conclusion that in politics, as in life, a purposeful indulgence in craziness can be of strategic advantage. When other sides find your behaviour unpredictable, they end up believing your threats and do what you actually want them to do. ●

Empowering bilateral trade

India-Nepal trade in power hasn’t taken off because politics has governed economics, it should be the other way around

- **Lack of political will:** South Asian regional politics plays a key role in all trade and investment related issues. At present, politics is governing economics. We should strive towards making the political leaders realise that economics should govern politics, and not the other way around.
- **Lack of Infrastructure:** In most circumstances, hydropower projects are located in remote mountainous areas, where infrastructure such as access roads and high-voltage transmission lines do not exist. Developing this infrastructure for each and every project drives up the cost of projects. These costs should not be added to the cost of a power project.
- **Lack of Funds:** Hydropower projects are capital intensive. Nepal does not have adequate financial resources and in the past has had to seek funding from international donors and multilateral lending agencies. The private sector is now increasingly active in project development, which is an encouraging sign. But in the absence of adequate available investment instruments in the local market, possibilities of investment from neighbouring countries must be explored.
- **Market:** The expansion of the electricity grid within Nepal and the growing energy

demand of India are the major markets for Nepal’s hydropower. With the limitations of the economic feasibility of grid expansion within Nepal, the possibility of power exports has to be pursued aggressively.

- **Enabling a legal and regulatory framework:** Existence of a clear-cut, well-defined, coherent and unambiguous legal and regulatory framework is the first thing that a developer looks at while taking up any venture, more so in the case of developing a power project. This becomes more important when cross-border trade is involved.
- **Power as a commodity:** Power trading should be treated as trade in any other commodity. It should be de-linked from issues, such as security, geo-politics and water. This will lead to greater confidence-building among the countries and will foster rapid development of the sector.

The Indian Electricity Act of 2003 along with the setting up of the Electricity Regulatory Commissions at central and state levels, the development of Availability-Based Tariff (ABT), merit-order dispatch and even the secondary markets of futures and derivatives in this sector are major developments and great steps forward and we in Nepal, need to synchronise with these developments.

There is limited exchange of power between the two countries. The power

generation characteristics and the demand/supply complementarities need to be properly harnessed for mutual benefit. Nepal has a comparative and competitive advantage of being close to the load centres of India, a situation that needs to be exploited to the maximum. Till date, the transmission connections are limited and of low capacity. We need to see high-voltage, large-capacity transmission interconnections established along certain corridors for real power trade to happen.

Efforts in this direction have been pursued in the past more than three decades. However, there is very little to show in the form of actual power trade activities. In the past, the efforts were only at the government-to-government level. Governments should not get into the business of doing business, this should be left for the private sector on. The government should only be involved in creating an enabling environment for trade to occur through the private sector or in Track Two efforts. ●

Sandip Shah, PhD, is President of the Independent Power Producers’ Association, Nepal (IPPAN). The above is an except from an address delivered at a recent IPPAN program on ‘Power Trade Opportunities with India’.

COMMENT
Sandip Shah



a major role to play in improving the socio-economic situation of the people.

Nepal can contribute significantly in hydropower development in the region by utilising its 40,000MW potential. This would not only meet growing national demand but also help fulfil the needs of neighbouring countries such as India as a clean energy resource for export.

The Independent Power Producers Association of Nepal (IPPAN) and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) have conducted a joint comprehensive study on Nepal-India Cooperation on Hydropower. The report has identified key issues that have limited cross-border energy trade and investment so far. Some of them are:

The toon school

How cartoonists in the Nepali language press see the party-rebel pact and other issues



Tulsi Giri: “Impure alliance!”

हिमाल Batsayan in *Himal Khabarpatrika* 1-15 December



Radio: “Listeners! We might be back after a short break or we might not.”

समय Abin Shrestha in *Samay*, 8 December



पुनर्जागरण Uttam Nepal in *Purnajagaran*, 6 December



Nepal mobile telephony progression
2001 2002 2003 2004 2005

नेपाल Rajesh KC in *Nepal*, 4 December



Bridge: 12-point Pact.

कान्तिपुर Dewen in *Kantipur*, 1 December



Tulsi Giri: Wait! You’re a Dalit. You’re not supposed to splash water!
Man: Party (Dal)
House (left): Peace
House (front) Democracy

राजधानी Uttam Nepal in *Rajdhani*, 27 November



जनभावना Khokana in *Janbhabana*, 6 December



News : Maoist ceasefire extended for another month
Tulsi Giri: Why are the Maoists provoking us?

अभिधान Abin Shrestha in *Abhiyan*, 5-12 December



Girija and Madhab: Here, it comes, fresh sweets from India. Come and get it.

गोरखापत्र Yogesh Khapangi in *Gorkhapatra*, 29 November

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ These sycophants are only spreading dirty lies and indulging in useless rhetoric against the positive message that came out of the understanding (between the parties and Maoists) reached in New Delhi. ”

Former zonal commissioner Surya Bahadur Sen in *Samay*, 8 December



“ They (the Maoists) are going backwards because they are still talking about things Karl Marx said 150 years ago at the time of Jang Bahadur. ”

Former minister and hydropower expert Deepak Gyawali in *Nepal*, 3 October

Stoned
.....
Dristi, 6 December

Crown Prince Paras drove to police headquarters on Saturday, grabbed DIG Shyam Bhakta Thapa by his collar and threatened to fire him. The prince was angry about the stones thrown at his car on Friday at Min Bhaban as he drove to meet King Gyanendra at the airport. When the prince reached the police office, representatives from the four security bodies were meeting to discuss the incident. According to our sources, the DIG tried to explain that they were taking steps to investigate the event but the prince would not listen.

The prince reached headquarters at 10.34 AM and stayed for 11 minutes, mostly yelling and threatening. After the joint meeting, a committee was set up under DSP Him Gurung to probe the incident. It was to submit a report in three days but a conclusion was not reached. However, Kathmandu district DSP Indra Neupane, Syambhu Ward Police Inspector Surendra Mainali and Bhaktapur Police Inspector Bhabesh Rimal were suspended on Sunday even before the report could be completed. This demonstrates that authorities were not committed to finding the real culprits. How could these officers be charged when the report was not out and the names of those to be charged wasn't made public?

According to our sources, the streets on Friday were ready and cleared half an hour before the king was supposed to land. When royalist groups such as Desh Bhakta Sangh and Rastriya Ekata Parisad attacked people returning from the UML meeting next to the BICC, there was stone throwing. It is quite clear that the crown prince's car was caught in the crossfire. Right after this incident there was an attempt to attack the UML's central office, proving that the royalists had planned everything in advance.

Our sources say that DSP Neupane was on duty at the UML meeting and learnt about Crown Prince Paras' arrival only two



KIRAN PANDAY

minutes before everything happened. He obviously had no time to act. The army, police and royal bodyguards had prohibited people from moving about freely at the meeting. Had they been allowed to move about, this incident would not have happened. Many people have been charged for involvement in the Min Bhaban incident but for the state to put people in jail for something they did not do, is wrong.

The prince's move
.....
Buddhabar, 7 December

Questions have been raised about the palace crossing its limits after Prince Paras went to police headquarters to question police chiefs. It's true that some demonstrators at Friday's rally threw stones in the direction of the prince's limo but his vehicle just ended up at the wrong place at the wrong time . The rally organisers had absolutely no intention, scheme or plan to target the prince since all this happened after the demonstration was over. Queen Aiswarya's vehicle was attacked in 1990 in the Pasupatinath area . Although she had the authority, the late queen never acted the way the prince did. Last week's incident was a set-up by conspirators inside the police force who want to make the palace happy for their own vested interests. It is learnt that several people, especially Kumar Mohan Bahadur Shahi and Rajbahadur Singh, played key role to replace SP Indra Prasad Neupane with SP Kesab Bahadur Shahi.

ICU closed
.....
Rajdhani, 4 December

The only children's hospital in Nepal, Kanti Children's Hospital, has closed its Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and has stopped registering child patients at PICU (the treatment unit for serious illnesses) and NICU (the unit for newborns). This has caused alarm among the medical personnel, who have warned the move could lead to the deaths of many children. Hospital officials told the medical staff the action was taken for 'sanitation reasons' but the staff allege there is more to this than meets the eye. The Ministry of Health said it is not aware of such a decision and that it will investigate the matter. Most of the children who visit the ICU need treatment for meningitis, poisoning and pneumonia.

Disband RCCC
.....
Ghatna ra Bhichari, 7 December

The Royal Commission for Corruption Control, created to put corrupt officials behind bars, has gone underground for the last several months. In the beginning, the RCCC was busy when it came to busting democratic leaders. Now, it has gone quiet after its successful political vendetta against former premier Sher Bahadur Deuba and some former parliamentarians. Nobody knows what its members are now doing. It only moves after receiving orders to fix someone. It's now time to dissolve this royal commission as it serves no useful purpose.



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PICS: KUNDA DIXIT

KUNDA DIXIT in LHASA

As officials haggle over emission targets and a long-term strategy to address climate change this week in Montreal, glaciological experts have warned of ‘Himalayan tsunamis’ caused by outbursts of mountain lakes swollen by snow melt.

At a recent international workshop here, scientists agreed global warming was now a certainty and it was already bringing dramatic changes to snow cover in the Himalaya.

‘Projections indicate that the magnitude and frequency of flashfloods in the greater Himalayan region may increase in the future as a result of change in climate and its variability,’ said the Lhasa Declaration issued at the end of the conference that was sponsored by the Kathmandu-based ICIMOD and the China Meteorological Administration.

ICIMOD already has a regional flood initiative for exchanging hydrological data but says Himalayan flashfloods need even greater crossborder cooperation because many of the steep rivers flow across boundaries and reaction time is measured in hours, not days.

“Major Himalayan rivers are transboundary river basins and flashfloods will not respect national borders,” says Xu Jianchu, a Chinese scientist with ICIMOD, “that is why we need to think regionally and act locally.”

Indeed, an existing bilateral early warning mechanism between India and China prevented what could have been a catastrophe on the Sutlej River in February this year. By the time flood waters surged through Himachal Pradesh, people had been evacuated and no lives were lost.

Similarly, despite strained relations between India and Pakistan they share warning through radio broadcasts and this prevented another potentially devastating loss of life on the Chenab earlier this year.

However, officials say a lot more needs to be done to map hazardous valleys, glacial lakes in Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet that are in danger of bursting and to transmit rainfall data in real time so downstream regions have time to evacuate.

“There is a lack of exchange of real time data and there needs to be a regional mechanism for

Global war for the

Millions face glacier catastrophe

this,” says Mandira Shrestha, a water resource specialist at ICIMOD.

Although Nepal has got the most experience in the region in mapping and draining glacial lakes, our domestic warning system for big rainfall events is almost non-existent which is why flashfloods triggered by cloudbursts in the central

midhills during monsoons in 1981, 1993, 2002 and 2003 were so catastrophic.

“There is no operational flood-forecasting in Nepal,” says Arun Bhakta Shrestha of the Department of Hyrdology and Meteorology..

Pradeep Mool of ICIMOD is an international expert on glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) and

Available in select outlets in Kathmandu valley only.

STATUTORY DIRECTIVE: SMOKING IS INJURIOUS TO

arning Himalaya

says there is now little doubt that climate variability is causing rapid glacial retreat, especially in the eastern Himalaya. The frequency and damage caused by GLOFs have been increasing due to climate change, and Mool is working with Chinese scientists to study several lakes in Tibet that drain into the Trisuli and Bhote Kosi that are in danger of

bursting. The Bhote Kosi Power Company has installed sensors all the way up to the Chinese border that gives the 46 MW project five minutes warning in case of a GLOF. There are 42 glacial lakes in the Bhote Kosi basin in Tibet and the river has a history of flashfloods. “What we’d like is to have sensors further upstream and extend the warning time,” says Bhote Kosi’s Sandip Shah. There have been 25 glacial lake floods recorded in Nepal and more than half of them originated in Tibet. Of the 2,315 glacial lakes within Nepal, 20 are said to be extremely dangerous. And one only needs to look at geological evidence of past events to see the kind of damage they can cause.

Pokhara is situated on the debris field of a catastrophic flashflood on the Seti some 800 years ago which if it happened today could cause up to 200,000 deaths. Average temperatures across the mountains are increasing at 0.06 degrees a year. Glacial lakes that used to be small ponds 20 years ago are now 5 sq km and larger. Closer cooperation between China and Nepal could protect downstream infrastructure and towns in Nepal not just in the Bhote Kosi but the Trisuli and Arun as well. Says ICIMOD Director General J Gabriel Campbell: “We must make information travel faster than flashfloods.” ●



FIRE AND ICE: The icefall on Mt Gangsang in Tibet is melting fast (overleaf) and the lake on the terminal moraine of the receding Gangapurna Glacier in Manang.

Himalayan tsunamis

ROBIN MCKIE

Nawa Jigtar was working in the village of Ghat in Manang when the sound of crashing sent him rushing out of his house. He emerged to see his herd of cattle being swept away by a wall of water. Jigtar and his fellow villagers were able to scramble to safety. They were lucky: “If it had come at night, none of us would have survived.” Ghat was destroyed when a lake, high in the Annapurnas, burst its banks. Swollen with glacier melt its walls of rock and ice had suddenly disintegrated. Several million cubic metres of water crashed down the mountain. When Ghat was destroyed in 1985 such incidents were rare. Not any more.

Last week, scientists revealed that there has been a tenfold jump in such catastrophes in the past two decades, the result of global warming. Himalayan glacier lakes are filling up with more and more melted ice and 24 of them are now poised to burst their banks in Bhutan, with a similar number at risk in Nepal. But that is just the beginning, a report in *Nature* said. Future disasters around the Himalaya will include floods, droughts, land erosion, biodiversity loss and changes in rainfall and the monsoon. The roof of the world is changing, as can be seen by Nepal’s Khumbu glacier, where Hillary and Tenzing began their 1953 Everest expedition. It has retreated 5 km since their ascent. Almost 95 percent of Himalayan glaciers are also shrinking and that kind of ice loss has profound implications, not just for Nepal and Bhutan but for surrounding nations, including China, India and Pakistan.

Eventually, the Himalayan glaciers will shrink so much their meltwaters will dry up, say scientists. At the same time, rivers fed by these melted glaciers, such as the Indus, Yellow and Mekong, will turn to trickles in the dry season. Drinking and irrigation water will disappear. Hundreds of millions of people will be affected.


“There is a short-term danger of too much water coming out of the Himalayas and a greater long-term danger of there not being enough,” says Dr Phil Porter of the University of Hertfordshire. “Either way, it is easy to pinpoint the cause: global warming.”

According to *Nature*, temperatures in the region have increased by more than 1 C recently and are set to rise by a further 1.2C by 2050, and by 3C by the end of the century. This heating has already caused 24 of Bhutan’s glacial lakes to reach ‘potentially dangerous’ status, according to government officials. Nepal is similarly affected.

“A glacier lake catastrophe happened once in a decade 50 years ago,” said UK geologist John Reynolds, whose company advises Nepal. “Five years ago, they were happening every three years. By 2010, a glacial lake catastrophe will happen every year.”


An example of the impact is provided by Luggye Tsho, in Bhutan, which burst its banks in 1994, sweeping 10 million cubic metres of water down the mountain. It struck Panukha, 50 miles away, killing 21 people. Now a nearby lake, below the Thorthormi glacier, is in imminent danger of bursting. That could release 50 million cubic metres of water, a flood reaching to northern India 150 miles downstream.

Not only villages are under threat: Nepal and Bhutan have built hydroelectric plants selling electricity to India and these could be destroyed in coming years. Worse, when Nepal’s glaciers melt, there could be no water to drive run-of-the-river plants. A Greenpeace report last month suggested that the region is already experiencing serious loss of vegetation. ●



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MANI LAMA

Music lovers cannot afford to miss 'Project Experience', a unique attempt by four major Nepali players to tell the stories of their journeys in music. The four need no introduction, as they are

linked with some of the best music produced here in the last decade.

Nirakar Yakthumba is the bassist and the driving force behind Nepal's premier rock band 1974AD and has also played with

popular jazz-funk ensemble, The McTwisters. With his deep blues vocals, Robin Tamang has had a cult following among the youth ever since he stepped on stage with his ground breaking number '*Nepal Mero Gulafko*

Four of Nepal's top modern musicians will team up solely to play

Kada in 2000.

"Your own image is very different from what the public thinks of you. Professionally we have all come a long way but musically there is a lot more distance to cover and this is an attempt to define our relationship with music through music," says Robin.

The third participant in this musical journey is Yubaraj Chettri, also known as Vicku, the guitarist and vocalist of The Rusty Nails and another revered figure among the youth. Finally, there is percussionist Sanjay Shrestha, who entered the music scene in 1995 with the fusion trio Shristi and now gives 1974AD's hit numbers a special flavour.

The four, along with guest artists such as keyboardist Upendra Man Singh and Spanish saxophonist Mariano, who played alongside Cadenza at Jazzfest, are organising a show they say is solely dedicated to music. And they stress that they still have a lot to learn musically although in their fans' eyes they are already rock stars.

The group has been busy composing new songs as well as working on their own versions of popular tunes by Bob Marley, Cat Stevens and Bob Dylan, who are major influences on the musicians. They also hope that Project Experience can lay deep roots so that next year other players can get together and explore their work.

"We hope other musicians pick it up and put up something like this next year because individually all of us do our own things but working together with others gives new ideas and is an experience in itself," says the youngest of the lot, Sanjay.

Project Experience will take place on 17 December in Patan Museum Café and will be recorded for an album. Looking at the work being put into the event, that album is sure to become a collector's item. ●

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Celine and Sabine

On Saturday, 3 September, 32-year-old Celine Henri signed her name into the entrance book at the gate of the Nagarjun Forest at 12.05 PM. She never signed out. No one has seen or heard from her since.

That morning Henri, who served in Nepal as a volunteer, stored her luggage at Hotel Pilgrim in Thamel and told the receptionist she would be back by evening. Family and friends raised the alarm only a month later when they hadn't heard from her.

Under pressure from Henri's family, French ambassador Michel Jolivet decided to investigate himself. A trekking guide said he had seen someone fitting Henri's description climbing to the summit of Nagarjun on 3 September. The French Embassy checked the register at the gate of Nagarjun and found Henri's name. On 16 October, Jolivet and embassy staff retraced Henri's steps and 20 minutes climb above the twin helipads on Nagarjun's east ridge they came upon a water bottle, a black jersey and a bra. They immediately called the police from a mobile phone who arrived with sniffer dogs. The police found fresh blood stains, a hair clip and a spot where the high grass had been trampled.

The French were puzzled: Henri had been missing for more than a month yet the blood was fresh and grass in the monsoon doesn't stay crushed like that. What they didn't realise was that they had discovered the spot where a 31-year-old German woman, Sabine Gruneklee, had been killed only the day before.

Gruneklee had left the Blue Horizon hotel in Thamel on the morning of 15 October. Her disappearance was discovered only a week later when her Australian friend Peter Dulan



Police have few leads on the suspected murders of two European women on Nagarjun

DHRUBA SIMKHADA



arrived in Kathmandu and didn't find her in the hotel. The two were supposed to go on a trek to the Khumbu. The German Embassy was notified, and on a hunch it checked the Nagarjun register. Sure enough, Gruneklee had signed her name at 10.20 AM on 15 October.

What the French ambassador had found was the site of Gruneklee's murder. So where was Henri? Nepal police under the direction of the Crime Investigation Division led by SP Kesh Bahadur Shahi investigated and the army unit at Nagarjun searched the area but came up with no clues. SP Shahi was, on Wednesday, promoted to the Kathmandu District Police and is not clear on who is now in charge of the investigation.

Under pressure from Henri's family, the French ambassador decided to return to Nagarjun with a unit of French Police that was in India at the time. What they discovered was shocking: items belonging to Henri and Gruneklee were scattered all across the mountain. Strewn in the dense undergrowth on either side of the trail, Jolivet found Henri's keys, torn papers in German and Gruneklee's driving license. Henri's brother who had joined the search found torn

pages of his sister's passport. Beyond the summit on the other side of the mountain, the search team found torn pictures of Gruneklee and a nail clipper.

The Nagarjun Forest on the western rim of the valley used to be a royal hunting reserve and serves as a nature sanctuary. Tourist guidebooks mention the reserve as an ideal spot for birdwatching and to acclimatise before a trek. There is a Buddhist shrine on the 2,600m summit, which the Newars call *Jamacho*. Pilgrims make the two-hour climb from the base of the hill during the frequent festivals held there.

The 16 sq km forest has a high perimeter wall and has served as a retreat for generations of kings, who have held special meetings

there. The gate is guarded by a unit of the Royal Nepali Army. A dirt road snakes to the top and on weekends there are up to 50 visitors, some on motorcycles and cars.

There have been incidents on Nagarjun before. Six months ago, a German woman was mugged and gave a description of her attacker to police. Investigators are certain they are dealing with a serial killer who raped and killed the women and then buried them somewhere in the reserve. "Whoever did this knows the place very well and by scattering the items all over the park is taunting the police, which is the typical psychology of a killer who will strike again," says one official involved in the investigation.

In the past week, the search has intensified further. German police have arrived with their own sniffer dogs. The investigation has now shifted to the steep northern slope below the summit where there are rocks and caves.

Friends and relatives in France and Germany have been posting messages about the slow pace of the investigation and the mainstream media in those countries has started writing about the disappearances. It is only a matter of days before Nepal will hit the headlines in Europe.

There are some notable facts: both disappearances happened on Saturdays, the day of the week when Nagarjun sees most visitors. Both were European women in their early 30s travelling alone. Although the forest gets an average of only 50 visitors on weekends, on 3 September there were 150 entries because there were school children on an outing.

"In most serial killings the murderer is found before the bodies are found," said an official close to the investigation. Police say they are following a few leads and have examined the list of people who entered Nagarjun on both 3 September and 15 October.

For now, the first thing that should be done is to post signs in Thamel and at the entrance to Nagarjun warning visitors not to climb alone. ●

“Ali ali naramro”

Sayuri is a professional river rafting guide from Japan who had just finished an adventurous trip down the Tamur River in eastern Nepal. She loves this country and is learning Nepali despite her traumatic experience.

On the flight to Bangkok last week, 28-year-old Sayuri had a bruised face, a gash near her right eye and cuts on her head. She told us her story.

First, it was the Maoists along the Tamur River—everyone in her expedition was forced to pay Rs 5,000 each. “You pay, you can go up. If you don't, you go back. If you don't pay and go up, we kill you,” was the stark message relayed through the guide. So everyone in the group of 20 rafters paid up.

After the trip, she decided to go to Pokhara. Her friends in Japan had told her she should see Machapuchre from Sarangkot. Early morning on 20 November, Sayuri started walking to the top, took pictures and talked to tourists along the way. Her guidebook said she could descend the steep stone steps to Phewa. The book also said it was safe to walk alone.

Halfway down, three boys came up from behind. “Give us money,” one of them said. Sayuri lied and said her guide was coming along but they started to hit her. She panicked and started screaming. One of them covered her mouth and tried to choke her. They hit her again and she

fell. They kicked her in the head, hit her in the face and tried to take her backpack. Soon, they had the bag and the three ran off in three different directions up the slope.

Villagers heard her cries and took her to hospital where her head wounds were stitched up. The police came and took a description of the boys. The most vicious one had a red t-shirt, curly hair and a round face. A week before, a German man and a Japanese trekker were also mugged by three boys at the same spot. Two women from France and Germany were robbed at knifepoint at Ghorepani in October and another German woman was robbed in the thick forest below the peace stupa. Police asked Sayuri to stay an extra two days in Pokhara to identify suspects but they weren't the ones who robbed her.

Sayuri dozes off on the plane—she hasn't slept for days. She lost two cameras: a Casio digital and a Fuji, Rs 4,000 and \$ 11 in cash. But it was neither this nor the physical wounds that worried her as she flew out. It was the psychological impact and her concern about what is happening to Nepal.

Sayuri hasn't given up on Nepal. She has her ‘Teach Yourself Nepali’ book in Japanese and is determined to return. As the plane descends into Bangkok, she says in Nepali: “*Nepalmaa ali ali naramro bhayo.*”

TIMELINE		
3 September	Celine Henri leaves hotel and signs Nagarjun register at 12.05PM	
7 October	Henri's family notifies the French Embassy	
15 October	French Embassy finds Henri's name on Nagarjun register	
15 October	Sabine Gruneklee signs Nagarjun logbook at 10.20 AM	
16 October	French Ambassador Michel Jolivet finds what he thinks are Henri's effects	
18 October	Gruneklee's friend Peter Dulan reports her missing	
20 November	Gruneklee's name is also found on Nagarjun register	
24 November	French team finds Henri's and Gruneklee's items all over the mountain	
1 December	German Police team arrives with sniffer dogs	

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Warming costly

WASHINGTON - The world has suffered more than \$ 200 billion in economic losses as a result of weather-related natural disasters over the past year, making 2005 the costliest year on record, according to preliminary estimates released Tuesday by the Munich Re Foundation at the international climate conference in Montreal. These damages significantly exceeded the previous record of \$ 145 billion set in 2004, according to the Foundation, which is part of Munich Re, one of several leading re-insurance companies that have warned repeatedly over the past decade that global warming posed serious threats to the world's economy.

Quake radio

ISLAMABAD - UNICEF has teamed up with Pakistan's Ministry of Environment to launch a series of radio programmes to promote health and hygiene awareness among earthquake survivors, officials said on Wednesday. "People in an emergency situation need to know how to protect their health and prevent outbreaks of life-threatening diseases," said Mohammad El-Fatih, head of UNICEF's water and sanitation programme. Two months after the horrific quake killed 80,000 people, sanitation and hygiene in camps housing about 250,000 people, mostly women and children, remains a big challenge, with water and hygiene-related diseases on the rise.

US warns UN

UNITED NATIONS - The United States appears to be on course for a head-on collision with the United Nations over the question of how the world body should run its affairs. The confrontation intensified last week when US Ambassador John Bolton suggested his country would not approve the full UN budget unless the body implements proposed management reforms. The US move compelled UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to cancel his two-week visit to Asia, due to start Monday.

(IPS/IRIN)

War and peace

Nepal's highlanders and Sri Lanka's islanders



The ebb and flow of war and peace continues at the two corners of Southasia. The Maoist insurgents of Nepal have decided, at least at their very top echelons, to opt for open competitive parliamentary politics. They have extended their unilateral ceasefire by a month and all but ceased their rhetoric of revolutionary war. But the state establishment is unmoved.

SOUTHASIA BEAT
Kanak Mani Dixit



At the other end, past the tip of the Subcontinent, a chauvinistic inaugural speech by the newly elected president, Mahinda Rajapakse, suddenly jeopardised four years of precarious peace achieved and maintained by president Chandrika Kumaratunga and opposition leader Ranil Wickramasinghe. The Tamil Tiger leader Prabhakaran rejected the speech and two landmine attacks in Jaffna this week killed 12 soldiers. Rajapakse on Wednesday asked Norway to resume mediation.

While Nepal sees the rays of a possible new dawn, Sri Lanka is suddenly pushed back to the brink of a familiar abyss. It is time

to hold your breath in Sri Lanka and Nepal.

There are significant aspects of the Tamil 'liberation war' and the Maoist 'people's war' which make the two situations dissimilar. The only lesson from Sri Lanka for Nepal is that a ceasefire can hold even if the peace process is stuck.

Nepal's conflict can't be resolved by studying the resolution in Sri Lanka, Mozambique or Sierra Leone. Resolution is always specific to the history of a country and the political and geopolitical matters specific to that society. The millions of dollars spent by the multilateral institutions, assorted think tanks and INGOs in taking willing Nepali politicians, administrators, activists and journalists on conflict resolution junkets to Jaffna and Geneva have served a limited purpose. The answers were always in the hills and plains of Nepal not in the pubs of Dublin nor the seminar hall of the Carter Center.

If there was anything Nepalis could learn in Sri Lanka, it wasn't in Jaffna but in the rural areas of the deep south where the Marxist JVP waged two uprisings in 1971 and 1989. They have much more in common with Nepali Maoists than the Tigers. Also, it would be

instructive to learn how the JVP has in the past decade converted itself into a mainstream party that now plays a king-maker role in parliament.

While the JVP worked within the Sinhala communities of the south, the Tamil Tigers were and are a different cup of tea altogether. Their ruthless war has been based on identity politics. These are more virulent, fanatic and last longer. After all, it was the Tigers who more or less invented suicide bombings. The Maoists of Nepal, while they have tried to cynically exploit the susceptibilities of downtrodden ethnic communities, have been fighting what they identify as a class war. In theory, this is more easily resolved politically and by tinkering with the state's delivery mechanisms rather than with the nature of the state itself.

While the LTTE takes significant support from the Tamil diaspora, not only are the Nepali rebels homegrown, the overseas Nepali working class does not form a significant source of funding for them. The military and state administration of the LTTE comes close to resembling that of a state, whereas the Maoists are ragtag in comparison. The LTTE has heavy artillery, a navy and it is rumoured even

light aircraft. Nepali Maoist weaponry is almost entirely looted from the police and army. The tigers have a massive kitty in foreign banks, the Nepali Maoists on the other hand stash cash they got from looting banks and sponging off everyone from industrialists to the peasantry.

The LTTE has carried out massive bombings in the heart of Colombo whereas the Maoists have left Kathmandu Valley strategically untouched. The Tigers specialise in assassinations of national leaders, both Sinhala and Tamil, whereas the Maoists concentrated on the 'removal' of local teachers, activists and political leaders in rural areas.

No one would deny the injustice done by chauvinist Sinhala nationalism to the Tamil nor the burden of exploitative history on the rural people of Nepal. But by seeking to bring change through the gun, both movements have postponed the people's future.

Till a month ago, Sri Lanka had seemed headed for shore while Nepal was being tossed around rudderless in the middle of a typhoon. Today, it seems the islanders have suddenly been overtaken by the storm while the highlanders have found unexpected hope. ●



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Come see the big one

Surya Nepal Masters, the country's largest pro sport event, runs 13-17 December

Even if you don't play golf, you might still want to witness the spectacle of some of the region's finest professional sportsmen, including over a dozen from Nepal, performing at your doorstep. Yes, the country's largest professional sports event, The Surya Nepal Masters, is just around the corner.

The four-day tournament starts Wednesday 13 December and climaxes with the final round on Sunday 17 December at the splendid 18-hole Gokarna Golf Course at Le Meridien Kathmandu, Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa. Preceding the main event will be the much-awaited Pro-Am on Tuesday 12 December, where amateurs play a competitive round with the best golfers in the region.

The Surya Nepal Masters began in 1993. Until 1997 the tournament was by invitation only, after which it became part of the India Professional Golf Association (IPGA) tour. Looking back, I

realise that I've been fortunate to take part in every one of these Surya Nepal sponsored events. I played on the first five as an amateur and in the seven that I

have played as a professional, the best finished I've achieved is 4th place.

My fellow Nepali professionals and I have been practicing hard in preparation for our bid to come out tops this year. Each time I felt I could win. However, success hasn't come my way...yet. The competition in the Indian tour has become tougher than ever. This year, about 60 players from there will participate here after finishing the TATA Open in Jamshedpur, India.

Defending champ Shiv Kapur is believed to be preoccupied with his Asian Golf Circuit calendar and will be absent next week. Past winners Uttam Singh Mundy, Digvijay Singh and Feroz Ali are expected to participate along with a strong field of contenders from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. From the local side, the challenge will come from, to name a few, Ramesh Nagarkoti, Deepak Thapa Magar, Pashupathi Sharma, Toran Shahi, Deepak Neupane, Sabin Sapkota, Sachin Bhattarai and myself.

This year the total purse has been upped to Rs 1.92 million from last year's Rs 1.68 million. The winner will take home a cheque worth 17 percent (gross) of the total prize money. An exciting preparatory tournament that will give an enviable boost to the local pros is the Mercantile Classic, organised by the Nepal Professional Golfers Association in collaboration with Mercantile Communications. This 54-hole event (which ends Friday 9 December) will provide local pros much needed tournament exposure.

Part of the Surya Nepal Masters was the Surya Nepal Western Open in Pokhara last week, which I unfortunately missed. I had been invited to play a skins game for the La Martinale Cup 2005 in Mauritius. Well, I fared fairly honourably, shooting six birdies (playing the course for the first time), which helped me win seven skins. It was also a great honour to be invited to do a golf clinic for over 100 golfers (including 30 CEOs from Mauritius). Interest in golf over there is enormous. People take the sport very seriously at every level. Mauritius also offers a couple of great golfing facilities and attracts lots of golfers from the west. Seeing how they have developed golf there, I am truly confident we will have the same scenario in Nepal in a few years.

At the Surya Nepal Western Open, two amateurs stunned everyone by beating all the pros. Shiv Ram Shrestha, a regular in the National Amateur Team, took top honours while Surya Sharma came second overall. Ramesh Nagarkoti was the top pro and third overall and took the winner's cheque of Rs 26,000 as amateurs cannot play for money.

Back in the Valley, the Gokarna Golf Course has been tweaked into top shape for the tournament. The big boys from the tour will arrive by Monday, as most of the top players will participate in the corporate Pro-Am event.

So get yourself down to Gokarna Forest from 14-17 December. Now, if you will excuse me, I should start reading back through all the precious tips I've given you over the years in this space. I'm going to need them if I am to reach my goal at the Surya Nepal Masters 2005!

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

For more information call the Golf Resort on 4450444 or 4451212. Entrance is free.



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Tusker trophy

Scotland charges to second consecutive world elephant polo title

Chivas Regal Scotland thundered to its second win in a row at the World Elephant Polo Championship this week at Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge at the Royal Chitwan National Park. The victors clinched the Tiger Tops WEPA Trophy with a 7-6 win over archrivals the National Parks team of Nepal.

Eight teams and players from 11 countries paid \$ 12,000 each to take part in the mammoth sporting event, which included competition for the world amateur title, taken by a team from Ireland. Another event, the All Nepal Challenge, featured teams made up solely of mahouts (elephant handlers) who both drive their mount and play. Proceeds from all the competitions go to local charities.

The final was opened by the Band of the Brigade of Gurkhas, which paraded the players on to the field before the guests of honour, British Ambassador Keith Bloomfield and French Ambassador Michel Jolivet.

When play began, Chivas Regal Scotland leapt to an aggressive start by scoring the first goal in just 18 seconds seizing the initiative. However great play from both sides and dogged defending from Scotland goalie Geoffrey Dobbs left the teams level at the interval.

The second half demonstrated again how elephant polo is one of the most exciting, colourful and certainly the biggest, games in the world. National Parks quickly levelled the score and then notched another goal to make it 5-4. Scotland levelled the scores at 5-5 with just two minutes on the clock. Its star player-manager Peter Prentice, who was playing on the lead elephant, fought hard in the centre of the field but couldn't break free from the expert



stickmanship of the Nepal team, many of whose players work with elephants for their day jobs. But with time slipping away, Prentice changed tactics and opted for a long shot from 30 yards scoring a spectacular and crucial goal to take the lead 6-5. Scotland then held on for a one-goal victory.

The victory makes it three tournaments in a row for the Scotland team following victories in the 2004 World Championship and the King's Cup in Thailand this September. ●

Entries for the 25th World Championship are now being invited. info@elephantpolo.com

No trunking

Four elephants comprise a polo team. This year they were provided by the Royal Chitwan National Park. The pachyderms chase a bamboo ball around a pitch some 120m long by 70m wide. Two riders sit atop each elephant, the first a *mahout*, or elephant handler, who steers by prodding the animal behind the ears, and the second the player, who is tied on with ropes and wields a specially built mallet up to 2.5m long. The games consists of two 10-minute *chukkas* or halves, with a 15-minute interval. At halftime the teams swap elephants, thereby eliminating any possible advantage. No loitering in front of goal is allowed. The use of trunks is also strictly prohibited, although elephants are permitted to kick the ball.

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"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



What Nepali Ravens Talk About Over Bhaat...



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

Little Known Nature Facts: Ravens have their own language.

Quotes of the Week

"Quoth the Raven, 'Nevermore!'" - Edgar Allen Poe, "The Raven"
 "Quoth the Raven - Eat my Shorts!" - Bart Simpson, TV Show

Next Week: Just what are Nepali Street Dogs Talking About All Night Long?

#94 2062 by jigme gaton - read. love. write.

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Rhythm of Forms and Colours** solo exhibition by Surendra Pradhan, at Buddha Gallery till 9 December. 4441689
- ❖ **Don't turn your back on all our daughters: Keep the promise** Oil Paintings of trafficked survivors from Maiti Nepal's Women Rehabilitation Home by Jan Salter, 9-13 December, Yala Maya Kendra, 10AM-4PM.
- ❖ **6h Annual Dolpo and Contemporary Art Exhibition** at Lotus Gallery. 10-11 and 17-18 December. 4253646
- ❖ **Display of Paintings** by various artists at Park Gallery, until 29 December. 5522307



FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

- ❖ **Discussion on World AIDS Day** at Martin Chautari. 9 December, 3PM. 4256239
- ❖ **Human Rights Day** 10 December.
- ❖ **Teachings with Geshe Daddhak** on Lama Tsongkhapa's Lam-rim 10 and 11 December at HBMC. 4414843
- ❖ **Christmas Chaos and Creativity** with gifts galore 11 December, 11AM- 5PM. Babar Mahal Revisited Courtyard.
- ❖ **International Mountain Day** 11 December.
- ❖ **REIKI 1** with Elif Koksal every Wednesday and Friday HBMC.
- ❖ **Globalisation and the Securitisation of Migration:** the Context of Nepali Foreign Labour Migrants and Sustainable Livelihood with Jagannath Adhikari, Social Science Baha lecture, 16 December at Yala Maya Kendra, 4PM. 5548142
- ❖ **St. Xavier's Annual Mela** at St. Xaviers 17 December 10 AM-5 PM, live bands, food stalls, games and more. 5521150.
- ❖ **International Migrants Day** 18 December.

MUSIC AND PERFORMANCES

- ❖ **Jam Session** with various artists at Moksh, 9 December, 7.30 PM onwards, Rs 150. 5526212
- ❖ **Tata Baji Lai Lai**, an improvisational play directed by Morten Crough, 2-17 December, 4PM, Gurukul. 4466956, 2101332
- ❖ **The Kathmandu Chorale** presents winter concert at the British School, 10 December, 3.30 PM and 6PM.
- ❖ **Live Music** every Friday 7PM at Rum Doodle 40,000/2 ft. bar.
- ❖ **JCS Quintet** at Moksh every Tuesday. 5526212
- ❖ **Jatra Friday** nights, live music by Siron. 4256622
- ❖ **Unplugged** sessions with Strings, Jatra Saturday 4256622
- ❖ **Live Music** at Juneli Bar, Hotel de l'Annapurna. 4221711
- ❖ **Live Jazz** by the pond at 1905, Kantipath. 4225272

FOOD

- ❖ **Ciney and Par-e-jat** Fridays 7 PM at Dwarika's. 4479448
- ❖ **Plat du Jour** at the Shambala Garden, Shangri-La. 4412999
- ❖ **Wonderful Wednesdays** at Fusion, Dwarika's, happy hour 5-9
- ❖ **The Sidewalk BBQ** with Shades of Blue, Wednesdays, Shangri-La. 4412999
- ❖ **Ciney and Par-e-jat** every Friday 7PM at Dwarika's.
- ❖ **The Chimney Restaurant** Hotel Yak & Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Jazz Gourmet** fine dining redefined Hotel Shangri-La. 4412999

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Come Meet Santa at Shangri-La Village, Pokhara**, Rs 4999 per person on twin Share. (061) 521995
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge**, Christmas and New Year offers. 4361500
- ❖ **Shivapuri Walk** with Shivapuri Heights Cottage, 18 December. Meet at Hare Krishna Temple near Budhanilkantha at 11AM. steve@escape2nepal.com
- ❖ **Junglewalks**, rafting, elephant rides all at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- ❖ **Conferences** at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675

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Quest Entertainment

Harry's fourth summer at Hogwarts is marked by the Quidditch World Cup and the Triwizard Tournament, in which student representatives from three different wizarding schools compete in a series of increasingly challenging contests. However, Lord Voldemort's Death Eaters are gaining strength and even creating the Dark Mark. The competitors are selected for a Tri-Wizard Tournament by the goblet of fire, which this year makes a very surprising announcement: Hogwarts will have two representatives in the tournament, one being Harry Potter. Will Harry be able to rise to the challenge of the Tri Wizard Tournament while keeping up with school or will the challenges along with Voldemort's rebirth be too much for the young hero?

Call 4442220 for show timings

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NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



A dominant high pressure system over north India and Nepal has effectively kept approaching disturbances from the Bay and westerlies away. Although sunny skies will be a norm into next week, the high pressure has sucked in colder air from the Tibetan plateau so expect thicker morning fog in the Valley and along the tarai. This in turn will reduce the sunlight hours, bringing down the maximum temperature further. This satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows no major system threatening us with snow or rain.

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राम्रा पक्षहरूलाई सगर्व
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जानुपर्छ । यसैमा सबैको
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श्री ५ को सरकार

सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय
सूचना विभाग



TASHI DELEK: Foreign Minister Ramesh Nath Pandey welcoming the Chairman of Tibet Autonomous Region of China Chamba Phuntsok at Tribhuban International Airport on Wednesday at the start of a week-long visit.



BOSS WOMEN: Shalini Wadhwa of boss magazine (left) and Dwarika Hotel's Ambika Shrestha at the 'Crossing the Bar' event on Monday.



YO BBC HO: Kiran Pokhrel of Radio Sagarmatha prepares to hand over to the BBC Nepali Service on Wednesday at 8.45 PM after the Supreme Court issued a stay order against the government's ban on relaying the BBC Nepali Service.



MEN JOIN THE FIGHT: (Right to left) Sancharika Samuha's Bandana Rana, Radio Nepal's Robin Sharma, actor Rajesh Hamal and DIG Kumar Koirala at a program on ending violence against women last Friday.



KILLING TIME WITH THE TIMES: A participant at the Enfielder's Ride and Rage catches up with the times at Tatopani on the Arniko Highway where a landslide blocked the road.

Faces of hope

British artist Jan Salter made the transformation from pure painter to activist a decade ago when she first started painting the faces of Nepali women and girls who had been trafficked. An exhibition of those works, *Don't Turn Your Back On All Our Daughters: Keep The Promise*, is on display at Yala Maya Kendra this weekend. Salter has made Nepal her home for the past 30 years. A collection of her paintings and drawings of Nepali faces was previously released in the book, *Faces of Nepal*. Her work with Maiti Nepal spans almost a decade. The sensitively rendered paintings of Nepali women reflect the artist's concern about Nepali girls being trafficked to brothels in India and her work with those rescued and those living with HIV.

"When I first started working with these young girls, I thought it was going to be extremely difficult but they were like any other young girls, they liked to laugh and tease each other. There was an urgency to stay happy, maybe because some were extremely sick and all had gone through really difficult times," she says. Salter captures the humanity, compassion and tolerance that shines through the faces of Nepalis. "Some critics said I should have put more agony in the paintings," Salter tells us, "how could I when the girls did not want the paintings to reflect

their hardships? They would dress up for the occasion and they said they wanted to like it when they saw themselves in the canvas." The purpose of this exhibition sponsored by the UN's World Health Organisation is to inform people that trafficking is a serious and ongoing problem. Salter admires Maiti Nepal's Anuradha Koirala, calling her a "Nepali heroine" and a champion of the disenfranchised. She also hopes that through her exhibition, more people will understand that those trafficked are no more than little girls, she says "They look just like you, your daughters or sisters. It could have been you, the only reason they are there and not you is by a mere chance." ● Mallika Aryal

Don't Turn Your Back On All Our Daughters: Keep The Promise, by Jan Salter, 9-13 December at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka.





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T H E P O W E R T O L E A D .

Nepal sweeps Conde Nasty Traveller Awards 2005

Just as we were all about to give up on Nepal comes the happy news that three of the country's tourist spots were voted among the World's Top 75 Destinations by *Wanderlust Magazine* this week. (Up to here everything in this column is true. — Ministry of Information and Communicable Diseases). The three spots are: the World's Highest Mountain Chomolungma, the

UNDER MY HAT

Kunda Dixit



World's Deepest Gorge Kali Gandaki

and I think the last one is the World's Largest Cabinet Singha Darbar but let me make a mental note to double check that. These recognitions put Nepal right up there among the world's top destinations even though as a nation we may not know precisely what our destination is at any given moment. For a country that can't

seem to figure out where we it is we are going, we sure as hell are getting there fast. And that's what counts.

The *Wanderlust* honours come soon after Nepal swept the Conde Nasty Traveller Awards 2005 in two prestigious categories: Hardest Place to Get Into and Hardest Place to Get Out Of in recognition of our elaborate visa procedures and shortage of outbound airline seats.

All this means that the strategy of our tourism planners to preserve Nepal's mystique and aura by making it difficult for visitors to get here is working brilliantly. After all, if we flung open our doors for everybody and anybody from anywhere at anytime we would soon lose our magic wouldn't we?

The tactic used to keep all and sundry out is to maintain strict visa procedures and have at least four different queues for arriving passengers at the Tribhuban

Unintentional Airport—that way only the most intrepid adventurer will dare come to Nepal and we can separate the wheat from the chaff or in certain cases, separate the goats from the sheep.

Once tourists get here, though, the idea is to prevent them from leaving. (New promo slogan: 'Visit Nepal and Stay There!'). The way we do that is by strictly limiting the number of airline seats available. Our officials have adopted several extremely effective measures to do just that, like: price disincentives for airlines to fly into Nepal by maintaining the most expensive landing charges and parking fees in the world so that there is always a shortage of seats. The government has also organised an exodus of Nepalis going to the Gulf and Malaysia so all flights are booked till next June. And last but not least the government reduced by half the total fleet strength of Nepal Royalist Airlines during the top

tourist season.

But, as we in Nepal have come to realise the hard way, one mustn't rest on one's laurels. We must prepare now to bag more of the World's Top 75 Destinations of *Wanderlust Magazine* for 2006. Prime candidates are:

- Ghantaghar. The country may have gone back 50 years but it is still ahead of its time because we have the world's Fastest Clock right here in the heart of the city.
- Thamel Trash Heap. What is our unique Selling Point that distinguishes our tourist ghettos from tourist ghettos in Bangkok or Istanbul? That's right, no other country quite rubbishes its own tourism industry as much as we do.
- To offer strong competition to Jaipur, the Pink Turret with strobe lights on Darbar Marg will soon become Nepal's top tourist attraction.



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