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Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 374

Q. Which official calendar should Nepal adopt?

Total votes: 6,368

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Q. What should be the first priority of the winter session of parliament?

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JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

"I will resign after elections"

JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI
in BIRATNAGAR

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala's idiosyncrasies are not a secret. He doesn't bother to respond to criticism anymore. He thinks he's now above it all. He seldom talks to the press anymore in Kathmandu.

But once he gets to his ancestral home in Biratnagar, he doesn't stop talking. It is in Biratnagar over tea that Koirala drops his bombshells.

Last week, one member of the press corps took the prime minister's hospitality a bit too far and climbed up to the verandah of his bedroom. "Get out of here," yelled the police. "Who does he think he is," the journalists muttered.

Next morning, the prime

minister sat on a white sofa, looking much more relaxed than he ever looks in the capital. Reporters tattled to the prime minister about the police chasing them off the verandah. An aide jumps to the defence of the policeman. Koirala waves the words away and quips: "Journalists are always right." Laughter. After 15 minutes, the prime minister says with finality: "That's it for today. Tea for everyone."

As the reporters get up to leave, Koirala gestures to the stragglers to gather around. The Maoists are hinting at removing Koirala if his party doesn't follow parliament's directives, so this may be the scoop everyone was waiting for. But all he says is: "Next week's winter session of the parliament will be a

peace session."

The real news comes the next day when it's the turn of the people to interview their prime minister in a public meeting organised by the BBC World Service Trust's *Sajha Sabal* series. (see p4).

"I'll resign after elections," Koirala says in answer to a question from a grade nine student, Pramod Yadav. He dismisses rumours of a coup, and says fellow politicians were becoming paranoid about foreign interference.

Prakash Karna, a grade 10 student, asked the prime minister why he didn't overthrow the king. We have to do it peacefully and legally, answered the prime minister.

The most impassioned questions were about the madhes,

LONELY AT THE TOP: Prime Minister Koirala saluting the flag on arrival at his ancestral home in Biratnagar last weekend.

and Koirala got an earful from people suffering from the violence. At one point, he had to calm down an overwrought member of the audience. "I'm also from the tarai," said Koirala with an 'Ich bin ein Berliner' refrain, adding that the madhes crisis could be solved "in minutes" if India and Nepal worked together.

On holding elections, he admitted the seven parties had failed, but added: "We will decide on a new date and I will have it approved by the parliament."

Full interview p4

Sajha Sabal will be aired on BBC Nepali service on 18 November.

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Mandated monitoring

Nepalis need to be told what UNMIN is up to

RED AND BLUE

The party's over, the parties had better get down to business. The leaders of the NC, UML and the Maoists probably needed that Dasain-Tihar break to clear their heads of political claustrophobia and think afresh about how to break the political deadlock that is hindering progress in the peace process. But don't bet on it.

Let's recap: the special session of the interim legislature passed two directives to the government – on a republic and proportional representation. That should have ended the debate, but ended up actually intensifying it.

On the face of it, it should be fairly easy to resolve this stalemate. It is a matter of conjecture what proportion of the population wants to get rid of the monarchy once and for all, since we haven't done a poll lately. But among the seven parties there is consensus on a republic. The only question is when to declare it. The NC wants the constituent assembly to decide and the Maoists say they want it right now. Although it is debateable how much both mean what they say.

On electoral procedures, the debate is between either 100 per cent proportional representation or 50 per cent. That shouldn't be such a big deal. How about agreeing on 75 per cent?

They say you can wake up someone who is asleep, but you can't wake up someone who is pretending to sleep. A compromise is possible only if both sides want to end the deadlock. If the strategy is to perpetuate the impasse in order to delay or foil elections, the seven parties can negotiate all they want but there will never be a solution.

After all, if it is so easy to agree, we can only conclude that these two conditions are just excuses because the Maoists have decided that elections now would erode their power. And they are willing to sacrifice the peace process to safeguard the one-third membership of the house that they won by waging war.

The exchange of proposals between the Maoists and UML has given some the idea that left-front unity is the way forward. The pressure should be to keep the seven-party unity so that constituent assembly elections can be held at the earliest possible time so the country can experience closure.

Any kind of unnecessary political polarisation must be seen as a deliberate tactic to delay elections.



KIRAN PANDAY

UNMIN has finally confirmed what was suspected all along. It wants a greater political role so that it can openly intervene in areas where it has been active covertly over the past few months.

The public declaration of its ambitions and desire to steer the present process is positive because the UN's motives are now on the table. Unfortunately, such



TARAI EYE
Prashant Jha

transparency has been the exception rather than the norm of UNMIN's style of functioning. Its inconsistent interpretation of its mandate, shadowy behind-the-scenes activities, and secret internal reports combined with a dismal failure in its outreach department together make the word 'opaque' more suitable to describe UNMIN.

UN officials like us to believe that the Nepali people themselves want UNMIN to be more active but can't because of its restrictive mandate. That is a convenient, and inaccurate, interpretation. There is no way of knowing at present what the Nepali people really want.

UNMIN bears prime

responsibility for the misconceptions that have cropped up about its role. For one, its visibility far exceeds its mandate or output. Ian Martin cannot get away with blaming this on the structure of UN missions all over the world. If this disproportionate relationship

between appearance and work profile was so inevitable, it was the job of UNMIN's public information office to clarify the mission's role more effectively.

But the information department must rank as an unmitigated disaster. Producing a radio program in typical monotonous UNese and bringing out a newsletter that is even more boring was never going to be enough.

To be fair, it is difficult for the information office to run around picking up the pieces behind UN officials in flashy cars travelling all over the country meeting politicians and civil society actors, and asking direct questions about the political situation.

People on the ground naturally started thinking the foreigners were powerful people who would address their grievances. Little did they know that the purpose of the field visits was just to prepare daily, weekly, and fortnightly reports for Ian Martin.

Come to think of it, there is no reason why these reports should only be for the consumption of top UNMIN brass. The political and civil affairs officers of UNMIN meet a range of people. What is the nature of these interactions? How is it linked to the given mandate? Nepalis have a right to know.

Some briefings may have to be secret, but there is no reason why detailed reports on key areas like the situation in the eastern tarai, YCL activities, evolving dynamics within cantonments, and Kapilbastu riots, should not be made public.

Then there is the presence of certain people who go around town introducing themselves as Ian Martin's

"unofficial advisers". This is particularly true of a gentleman formerly with OHCHR whose ambiguous relationship with the UN allows him to keep alive links in the tarai, including with some militant leaders.

They are understood to have prodded Goit to write a letter asking for UN mediation. Such moves by UN-supported internationals have made the madhesi situation more intractable. Militant demands have escalated and they have got a chance to play the UN off against Kathmandu and India.

While UNMIN's mandate doesn't explicitly include a role in the tarai, it is likely that 'public security', which is weakest in the tarai, is a cover for direct activity in the plains.

However, the UN must realise it can do nothing to address the systemic issues of state insensitivity, the political vacuum, a weak administration, cross-border crime, fragmentation and unity of madhesi actors, and increasing radicalisation – all of which come back to Kathmandu's political elite and the tarai's leadership.

Come to think of it, who will the UN mediate between? How is it going to use its good offices between the 22 madhesi groups? Who decides which one is political and which is criminal? These are issues for the Nepali political class, not New York-based parachutists.

UNMIN has amassed wide expertise, and some of its officials are competent and committed. The government must make the most of this. But it should remember that prolonged international missions which want to enter areas that should be the preserve of national actors harm the polity in the long run. ●

Who is cornering whom?

When everyone is trying to outsmart everyone else, everyone gets outsmarted

Renewed amity between the UML and Maoists has succeeded in pushing the provisional head of state into a corner. Even though GP Koirala sensibly abstained from voting in the special session of the interim parliament, he faces the unenviable task of choosing between an unpalatable decision and an unacceptable vacillation.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

While most parliamentarians want a republic and proportional representation, these two proposals don't command the required two-thirds majority in the legislature. So, even if the government introduces constitutional amendment bills on these matters, they are bound to fail.

In which case, parliamentary tradition holds that the UML-Maoist coalition will have to consider either bringing a no-confidence motion against the prime

minister or resign en masse, forcing the premier to declare fresh elections.

If Koirala vacillates over the directives of the interim parliament, he may have to consider obtaining a new vote of confidence in the legislature, which will require a two-thirds majority. But faced by the UML-Maoist unity, he won't get that. Having to choose between ignominy and disgrace, he would then have to resign. But that would create even more problems. The peace deal signed between the then seven-party coalition and Maoists would become redundant.

With the emergence of polarised politics in the interim parliament, Koirala is damned if he does pursue the policy directives of the House, and doubly damned if he doesn't. Madhab Nepal is breathing down his neck as the bemused Maoists watch from the sidelines.

But the recently reunified NC is unlikely to follow his dictates without a fuss. The monarch and the Maoists are lesser problems for Koirala. It is critics within his

own ranks who will pose the main threat to his leadership in the days to come.

He raised a very valid point recently: everything that has happened since the postponement of the constituent assembly elections has helped Gyanendra reoccupy the ground he has been so desperately seeking since the April uprising.

Whether it's part of yet another 'grand design' or merely the unfortunate fallout from the Maoists' foolhardiness is a matter of conjecture. But it is clear that the more the interim constitution is amended, the weaker grows the legitimacy of the NC, UML and Maoists. So, even as Messrs Nepal and Dahal and their comrades think they have succeeded in cornering Koirala, they are becoming cornered themselves.

The interim parliament is by definition a collaborative enterprise. When lawmakers meet next week for the winter session of parliament, they will have to make a tremendous effort to bridge the divide between leftist and non-left forces.

Until the CA elections are held, no

political force can afford to consider prolonging the status quo. Any interim arrangement is inherently wobbly: it's the flexibility of the actors on the platform that prevents the structure from falling apart. There is no place for political wrestling on this temporary stage. All political contests must be left to the campaigning for the CA elections.

Fortunately, there is ample space in the directives of the special session to forge a consensus on the elections. Parliament can adopt republicanism with the caveat that it needs to be confirmed by the constituent assembly before its implementation.

The question of proportional representation is slightly more complicated. The parties must design a consensual model that ensures an adequate presence of marginalised communities and neglected regions. There is no precedent of such an arrangement anywhere in the world. This is an opportunity as well as a threat that lawmakers will have to deal with during the coming session. ●

LETTERS

NOT BOGGED

C K Lal takes seriously the commitment to fairness and transparency recently renewed by bilateral donors, UN agencies and international non-governmental organisations operating in Nepal in his State of the State column ('Bogged down', #371). He regrets however that the Basic Operating Guidelines are not binding and suggests that, in the absence of parliamentary and social supervision, the good intentions they express may just be a propaganda tool.

In fact all programs and projects financed by external agencies are subject to close scrutiny by independent auditors, boards of directors, UN governing bodies and the parliaments of the donors' countries. A large number of them report to the Nepali government at the central and local level. Moreover many programs and projects include forms of public hearings and social auditing that give voice to local communities and to the intended beneficiaries. In recent years these attempts to ensure transparency and assess inclusion have been among the most effective instruments adopted by donors to respond to citizens' mistrust of development promoters, concerns about corruption, and growing cynicism about the privileges enjoyed by development workers.

The better surveillance by the Nepali parliament and the engagement of civil society representatives in monitoring donors' commitments suggested by C K Lal would definitely help make donors more accountable to the Nepali citizens. The development partners of Nepal would be pleased to see politicians and members of parliament show a stronger interest in development initiatives and in the many obstacles they face at the central and the local level. It would also be useful for a commission to be established by civil society to critically assess donors' practices and operations. If this body is politically impartial, socially inclusive and avoids conflict of interests by enrolling personalities that do not benefit in a direct way from donors' activities, I believe the signatories of the Basic Operating Guidelines should be eager to

collaborate with it. Indeed, as C K Lal points out, 'this is an opportunity that stakeholders in Nepal must seize'.

*Joerg Frieden
Chairman of the Bogs group*

INDIAN MAOISTS

What is the point of our journalists meeting Indian Maoists ('Not comrades anymore,' #373)? Go and meet Goit and Jwala. What do these Naxalites want anyway? Do they want more bloodshed in Nepal or to see Nepal spiralling down the path of destruction so that their countrymen in Delhi get to say even more about our affairs?

Sandeep Dhungana, UK

**BIRENDRA SAH**

It's appalling and pathetic how the same so-called crusaders for democracy who were up in arms during the king's rule and against the media gag are now silent when journalists are being murdered and beaten by the Maoists. All they can do is remind the Maoists to be faithful to the seven-party understanding.

Prasanna KC, email

● Yes, it does seem we are trying to deal with the political crisis brick-by-brick ('Brick by brick', #373) but we are also building walls that are thwarting political unity.

This is leading to scores of other crises: humanitarian, economic, social, cultural, ethnic, moral and ethical. The

mortar to bind the bricks together is therefore missing. A house built without mortar will loosen brick by brick, and finally crumble.

R Shrestha, email

● There is a flurry of urges for the Maoists to mend their ways. I hope the advertisement on your last page (#373) of The Buddhist Path of Enlightenment organised by the Rangjung Yeshe Institute has attracted the attention of the Maoist leadership. Their dogmatism has already cost the country great suffering that will continue until and unless the comrades emerge from their ignorance. Their attempt to emulate the catastrophes caused by Lenin, Stalin, and Mao is futile. Given their unblemished record of patriotism, Prachanda, Baburam, Ram Bahadur, Mahara, Yami and Co should instead pay heed to the late Poet Laureate Lekhnath Poudel's quote: "Gyan mardacha hasera, roi bigyan mardacha" (wisdom always prevails over science). Buddhism is indeed the middle path, which ultra-leftists should experience to save their souls before it is too late. Otherwise, it is imminent that our comrades' souls are destined for eternal torment.

Ram Chaudhary, email†††

MENTAL HEALTH

I commend you on the publication of 'Stigma therapy' (#372). This provides an opportunity for public discussion on the much ignored and taboo subject of mental health in Nepal. If not given appropriate attention now, the epidemic of mental health will have a serious impact on the country's economic and social development as well as its overall governance. This problem is bigger than the Ministry of Health can handle. Any response to mental health requires a cross-sector approach. Donors are thus required to be more flexible and responsive and not so driven by their own agendas couched in terms of so-called local ownership.

Surendra Panday, Kathmandu

MONEY MATTERS

Some weeks ago, you published a letter highlighting the disastrous effects on health, family and community harmony of alcohol and tobacco use, and questioning the ethics of supporting these industries by

allowing them advertising space. Your cynical caption highlights complicity no different from the politicians whom you regularly slam for their disregard of the country's future. Advertisers' images of sexual, social and corporate success from the right brand of whisky and cigarette should be laughably puerile to your readership. Yet corporations who couldn't care less about their product's contribution to family violence and abuse, poverty and cancer know that their money is well spent in your publication. Let adults make their own choices, you may say. Perhaps you should think about the example you are setting your children? You have even provided a business editorial to a company marketing low-alcohol shandy to teenagers. Wonderful, get them hooked young, and you've got them for life! In an impoverished society like ours, promotion of such products in the media is clearly harmful. And do you really need this dirty money to keep your paper going?

Name withheld, email

JOMSOM ROAD

I can't believe that anybody would allow a road to be built through the Kali Gandaki valley ('Jomsom by road', #373). The area between Kagbeni, Jomsom and Tatopani possesses a stunning beauty. There is no other place in the world where you have a canyon flanked by 8000-metre mountains on either side of it. The villages of Marpha, Tukuhe and Dana with their apple and orange orchards are some of the most picturesque and stunning in the world. This serenity will be gone forever. In the name of development (read 'money') somebody sacrificed the most unique and pristine environment on Earth and wrecked a huge chunk of a fabulous trekking route. The apples are hardly worth such an extensive and damaging project. It sounds like a Nepali version of the Three Gorges Dam. Congratulations to whoever made such a short-sighted decision. What is next, a road to Gorak Shep?

Liba Cunnings, email

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The prime minister meets the people



PICS: JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala is used to being interviewed by journalists. But last week he was interviewed by the citizens of his hometown, Biratnagar. The 84-year-old prime minister looked surprisingly vivacious as we fielded questions for 90 minutes from people gathered in his ancestral home. The interaction was part of Sajha Sawal, a discussion series organized by the BBC World Service Trust.

Sunita Khanal, Kabhre: I feel unsafe because of the conflict. I fear for my children.

Koirala: Such pain and emotions are natural in times of conflict. We have been trying to solve these problems through negotiation. I believe that once the date for elections is announced, things will improve. I want to assure you I will do everything to improve the situation.

Narendra Bahadur Limbu: I am a landless Nepali. We number four million people. But why have you and your ministers not uttered a word about our problem?

Koirala: Show me a country without a problem in the world. America has the problem of the twin towers and so on. It's not unnatural to have problems here.

Sheela Gajmere, Itahari: When will you guarantee reservations [in parliament] for women, for dalits? When will the violence against women stop?

Koirala: I am happy that you asked that question, and even the question shows how important elections are.

To answer your question, there's room for women—for dalit women and for all women. If all the parties make reservations, the position of women will be elevated.

Jawind Yadav: People in other parts of the country think Morang is a prosperous district, but I feel sad that there are still VDCs here that do not have even a single ambulance or proper roads. My second question is the Maoists are still extorting money, killing journalists, so why have them in the government and in parliament?

Koirala: Development doesn't happen overnight. The conflict has also taken its toll. We are doing our best. If there hadn't been a conflict, your village would have had all the amenities you mention. You may have thought that the prime minister is from Morang, but I am the prime minister of the entire country.

Pramod Yadav (Grade 9 Student): I feel the madhes movement has degenerated due to a lack of discipline, and people are dying everyday, people are feeling insecure. How long will this continue?

Koirala: We use to call it tarai, now they say that it is madhes, I still don't understand the term. The movement for their rights should be solved through negotiations. But I think there's an attempt to terrorise the people and deprive them of their rights. And we have the open border and undesirable criminal elements are crossing on both sides which has complicated the problem. Add to that the YCL. I have talked with the Indian government to regulate the border on both sides. The Indian government is positive. The problem will be resolved soon.

Dharmalal Yadav, Saptari: Prime Minister, if you have already identified the groups operating in the tarai as criminal and political groups, why don't you finish them off and negotiate with political groups?

Koirala: Listen, I've been to your village. I am not aloof about the tarai, I am a resident of the tarai, too, although you have separated us by calling yourself madhesi. I know the solution. It will be solved in minutes if India and Nepal work jointly. I am trying to do just that.

Hajji Mahmoud Abdul: Every other group is raising their own demands, but no one speaks about Muslims. In which category do we fall? And my second question: if the Maoists do not believe in this constitution, they should say so clearly, if they do, then elections should be held under the present constitution.

Koirala: Abdul ji, all you are trying to say is where is Muslim identity, isn't it? We are trying to turn Eid into a national holiday, which will recognise the Muslim community.

Badal Dewan: Everyone is raising a political issue, but my problem is different. This year my paddy harvest was bad because we didn't have enough fertiliser.

Meanwhile the finance minister gives a budget speech about SIM cards and internet in every home. What should we do with the SIM card? Can we spray it in the fields? Violence is increasing, and the prime minister's own party member is home minister. And while the voting in parliament was underway, you said you would accept the decision of the parliament, but yesterday on tv, you were referring to a two-third majority. Can you clarify your position?

Koirala: If anyone raises a technical issue, the PM has to respond in technical terms too. Politically, it is a good development that the Maoists have accepted parliamentary procedures. I know even you have a mobile, that's why you know about SIMs. These are processes of development. As for fertiliser, I'm told the stock was low this year but next year there will be enough.

Prakas Karna (Grade 10 student): In the past, the king deposed many prime ministers. Now you have become the most powerful person in Nepal. Shouldn't you overthrow the king according to the wishes of the people?

Koirala: It can be done. But we need everyone's cooperation. Under the present constitution, overthrowing the king won't be credible and legal, and the international community won't support it. An elected body should do it. The present parliament doesn't have the mandate to do it. I don't want bloodshed, I want to do it peacefully. We have brought the Maoists this far through peaceful revolution. While overthrowing the king, we should do it peacefully.

Fulsari Choudary: In my village, there are frequent rapes. Will we Tharu women have to wait for the constituent assembly for violence against women to stop?

Koirala: I understand your point. We need to have law and order for elections to be held properly.

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Tiwari, Aryal at Himalmedia

Himalmedia announced Wednesday the appointment of Ashutosh Tiwari as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the publication house and Kundan Aryal as editor of *Himal Khabarpatrika*.



Aryal is a journalist of long-standing, and served as editor of the political weeklies *Budhabar* and *Dristi* and was also Secretary General of the human rights organisation Insec. He replaces Shiva Gaunle, who is leaving to be even more active at the Federation of Nepalese Journalists, where he is presently Vice-President of the Central Region chapter.

Tiwari, a Harvard graduate, set up and managed Business Service Aadhar for German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) in Kathmandu. For the last three years, he was in Dhaka at the World Bank's International Finance Corporation (IFC) where he advised companies in ready-made garments, agribusiness and light engineering sectors. For the past five years he has also been a contributor to the fortnightly Strictly Business column in this paper.

Nine for Nabil

Nine new Nabil Bank branches were inaugurated on 12 November. The branches are in Birtamod, Damak, Hetauda, Narayanghat, Baglung, Ghorahi, Tulsipur, Dhangadhi and Mahendranagar. The bank now has 28 points of representation spread across the country.

Educational dreams

Dream Age Educational Consultancy has opened up at Bagbajar, next to Padma Kanya College. This educational consultancy aims to find new opportunities in foreign countries for students.



NEW PRODUCTS

DELUXE: The newly launched Gladiator Deluxe comes with a 125cc engine, 5-speed gear, self-start and drum brakes. The Deluxe also boasts a mileage of 76km per litre and is available for Rs 127,900.



ALBA: The Alba is the latest motorcycle from Yamaha. It is a 106cc single cylinder bike with alloy wheels and can be started in any gear. The bike is available in four colours: red, black, silver and blue for Rs 109,900.

INVENIO: Carlsberg has introduced an international brand of quality wine, Invenio. Invenio has almost 40 varieties of mostly red and some white wines, out of which seven red and seven white will be available in Nepal.



Tourism deja vu

Ten years later, we're still going round in circles

It has been a year since your weekly Beed wrote about tourism. Now that there are real tourists actually flying to Nepal again, not just the 'parachute consultants' and staff of permanent missions, the



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

tourism industry folks are smiling. Hotels are reporting improved occupancy rates and one can't walk in Thamel anymore because of the traffic jams. However, we need to go back and talk about the industry like we used to talk about it 10 years ago.

In the early 90s, before adverse travel advisories and people dying became the norm, we spent a lot of time talking about bottlenecks in the tourism industry. Unfortunately, these not only remain but are now worse. We used to complain about the national airline, which is now reduced to one and a half aircraft: two planes but only three engines. And from 18 December, the fleet strength will be down to zero as both 757s are grounded.

We used to discuss the lack of seats available between India and Nepal. While Indian skies have opened in the last 10 years, we in Nepal are still stuck with our quotas. We used to write letters endlessly to newspaper editors complaining about the pathetic

airport facilities. The situation has worsened, and perhaps if Nepal ever gets the magic half-million tourists a year, flying in and out of Kathmandu will be a worse experience than at any other South Asian airport.

The environment was a pet theme in those days, and proactive activism did even succeed in removing smoke-belching three-wheelers from the city streets and make Kathmandu one of the first cities in the world to switch to electric public transport. But the myopia of policy makers, coupled with the mediocrity of the private sector, relegated the experiment to a



MIN BAJRACHARYA

plethora of reports.

Rubbish production in those days, though a menace, was half what it is today. Now, with an increased valley population and a rise in per capita rubbish production, the situation is bound to get even worse. Discussions over privatising rubbish collection will begin where they left off 10 years ago. Tourists do not want to be greeted by garbage heaps. While

we busily cleaned our houses for Tihar to attract the Goddess Laxmi, we forgot that perhaps the filth in the valley would keep her away.

City transportation was a major bottleneck then, and has now become worse. What sightseeing can tourists do if they are stuck in a traffic snarl-up? How do they feel about the self-styled donation collection agencies that now dot the highways?

The only silver lining to be seen is that the government finally decided to appoint veteran Prachanda Shrestha as CEO of the Nepal Tourism

Board. His challenge is to make work an organisation that has demonstrated the highest levels of political wrangling. For him also, it is perhaps like putting the clock back 10 years, to a time when he and some energetic, passionate tourism entrepreneurs and professionals made the NTB happen.

The Beed has always maintained that for long-term sustainable tourism development in Nepal, we must allow foreign players to come in. Just as the hotel industry benefited from the transfer of technology and skills, so we need visionary global tourism players to make it happen. I hope I will not have to write a similar column 10 years from now. ●

"Business intersects with everything"



As editor-at-large of Fortune magazine, Pattie Sellers thinks of power as an ability to impact with a purpose. She established Fortune's Most Powerful Women in Business and its annual Most Powerful Women Summit and was in Kathmandu last week for a program organised by the We for Women group, where Nepali Times talked to her. Excerpts:

Nepali Times: What makes Fortune different from other magazines like *Forbes* or *BusinessWeek*?

Pattie Sellers: *Fortune* is a broader and more beautiful magazine than either of those two because *Forbes* is more of an investor's magazine and *BusinessWeek* is a weekly business magazine. *Fortune* focuses on the top companies and the CEOs of those companies and also on how business and politics interact, how business and the environment interact. We believe that business intersects with everything in the world and we try and write about that intersection.

How do you maintain the wall of separation between the advertisers and editorial content?

Fortune is owned by Time Inc which is the largest magazine company in the world. We talk at Time Inc about separation of church and state, we write very negative stories about some of our big advertisers – whether it is the biggest auto companies or computer companies and their CEOs who get into trouble. One of the companies we've been very critical about is Time Warner which owns Time Inc and ultimately owns *Fortune*. We've done very hard-hitting stories about Time Warner, especially when Time Warner and AOL merged two years ago which was a disastrous merger. So it really doesn't make a difference to the editorial content.

How is online journalism affecting magazines like yours and how have you adapted to the change?

We have to face the reality that the print media business is not growing as digital media is. We have fortune.com but luckily for us, we are also part of cnmnews.com, which is a part of Time Warner and a very successful website. It's thriving and fast-growing, so what we've lost

in advertising on the print side we gain on the digital side, so as a franchise *Fortune* is actually very healthy.

We have learned a lot about Fortune 500 companies. How do you select them?

In the Fortune 500 we rank companies according to the revenues they generate. So this year's number one company is Exxon Mobil because its revenue is the biggest. But we have all sorts of information like profits, market capitalisation, number of employees, return on investments and so on about the companies, but the ranking is basically done by revenues.

Do you intend to bring out editions in China and India and other emerging markets?

We just announced the launch of *Fortune India* in Delhi last week. We have customised editions like our Asian and European editions but *Fortune India* is very special and unusual for us because it's actually an Indian edition that we are going to start. We are doing this because India is such an exciting and fast growing market. We want to invest in India.

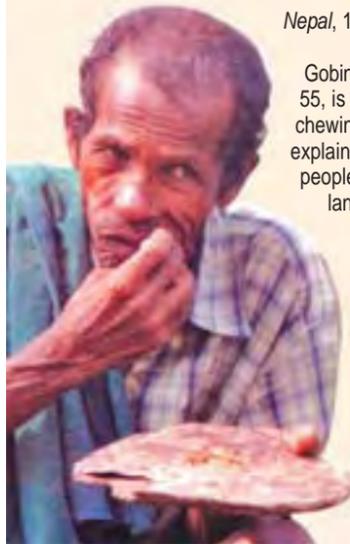
Why are you in Nepal and what was your first impression of it?

I had met Aashmi Rana of *We for Women* (WfW), a group of Nepali women working for the empowerment of women in a mentorship program earlier this year. Because I would be in India for the Fortune Global Forum she insisted that I come to Nepal. Also, I have friends from the US who are working in remote villages of Nepal so I'm here to see them as well. My first impression was flying in and seeing all the beautiful mountains and green valleys and it was stunning. I think Kathmandu is beautiful and fascinating and this definitely has been the highlight of my trip, being in Nepal. I also never imagined that women in Nepal and India would be so dynamic, courageous and inspiring.

Slave labour

Nepal, 11 November

खेता



Gobindapur, Siraha—Jagbir Sada, 55, is sitting outside his house chewing on dry millet roti. He explains to us that this is what poor people eat in that region. "Our landlords would never eat this," he says. His landlord's concrete house stands next to his hut. The graffiti by Janatantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha (JTMM) on the walls of the landlord's house reads: 'Nepali rulers, get out of the tarai'. But groups like JTMM have never fought for the poor people of the tarai because they are into

abduction, ransom, arson and spreading terror. They haven't even thought about the feudal system of landlord, *girhat*, and agricultural labourers, *haliya*, they use almost like slaves.

Sada, father of three sons and nine daughters, tills the *girhat's* land for a living. But the Sada family never have enough to eat. He works in the fields all day, every day and gets 4kg worth of rice (Rs 40) a day from the landlord. Sada knows that if he were earning wages, he would be making more. He has no alternative but to work for the landlord because he does not have his own land, or the means to go and look for another job.

The Madhes Uprising in January last year was against the discrimination of the madhesi people by the state. This tradition of *girhat-haliya* has been present in Nepal for centuries, yet the uprising and leaders haven't addressed this issue at all. Almost a year after the movement, it is now clear that the Madhes Uprising was more about getting rid of the Maoists from the tarai than about fighting for the rights of madhesis. It was just an expression of anger of the middle-class madhesis against the Maoists in the region. The uprising saw the participation of the poorest people in the region but the suppression of these people by the rich remains.

Biltu Sada, 35, of Malhanuwa, tills Ram Lakhan Raya's land. Sada took over from his father because his father could not work the fields any more. The Sada family has to pay off debt to the landlord at five percent interest per year. "The landlord keeps all the accounts, we probably have a lot more to pay off," says Biltu. Their landlord

gives them a small piece of land to till, but they can only do that after Raya's land has been cultivated. They have no water to irrigate and no money to buy fertiliser, so the little rice they get from their part of the field is never enough for the family. "I am bound to the landlord by debt. There's no way out: if I run and am found, the landlord will beat me to death," says Sada.

Kathmandu talks about inclusiveness and a new Nepal, but in the tarai the medieval feudal system persists. The landlords prohibit the labourers' children from going to school because they need more hands to work the field. Sometimes the landlord pays out his own money for members of the *haliya's* family to go abroad, then takes all the money they earn from there and loans it out to labourers at a very high interest rate.

Bisheswor Yadav, a landlord in Gobindapur, says: "Farmers like us have our own problems. The government needs to give us some facilities. If we do not have these agricultural labourers, we cannot cultivate," Yadav says.

When the bonded labourers (*kamaiya*) were freed, the landowners also should have let go of the *haliya*. Jana Andolan II came and went, the Madhes Uprising is over, and it is now clear that those movements were about giving the madhesi middle-class the opportunity to join in Kathmandu politics. Looking back at the Madhes Uprising one year on, anyone can see it was successful in sidelining the Maoists but an utter failure in fighting for the rights of the poor in the tarai.

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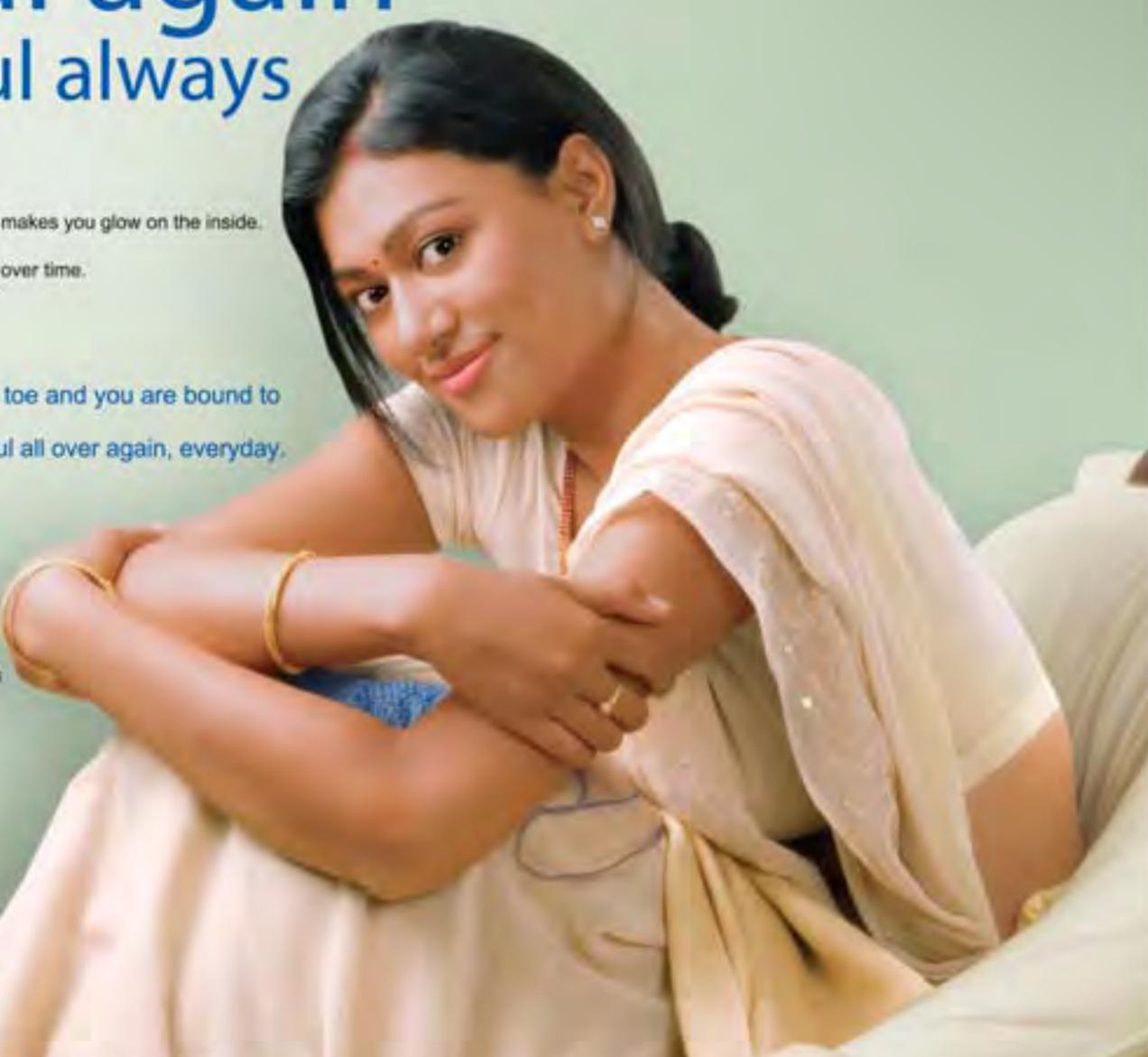
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Prisons

Editorial in *Annapurna Post*, 14 November

अन्वर्त पोस्ट

Nepal's crime and punishment system remains stuck in the middle ages. There is no progress especially in the rehabilitation of prisoners. Houses erected during the Rana regime are still being used as prisons. The roofs leak and the cold is unbearable in the winter. Men and women are often kept in the same cells due to lack of space. Even the central jail in the capital is no different. The facilities and services available inside the prisons have not progressed since the time of Chandra Shumsher. Physical and psychological problems are common among the prisoners.

It is not that there haven't been commissions to improve the standards of the jails. Commissions are made, proposals are drawn up, but no action is taken. In this way, more than half a dozen proposals have been drawn up only to be shunted aside. In a failing country like ours, this is just another significant problem.

Since the Jana Andolan II, even the jails have become centres for protests and hunger strikes. There have been clashes between the prisoners and guards. With these problems in mind, the government created a seven-member commission to investigate the prison problem. The seven-party government

decided to implement the actions suggested by the commission, but rather than being done to uphold the ideals of justice and loktantra, this seems to have been under pressure from the prisoners.

The government's plans for improvements tie in with their plans to grant a general pardon to 50 percent of all prisoners. For serious crimes, prisoners who have served two thirds of their jail term, and for minor crimes, those who have served one third of their term, are eligible for a pardon.

Currently, there are 600 foreigners and 600 women prisoners out of a total of 7,000 prisoners in the jails. What kind of message would this pardoning send to other potential criminals? The government's efforts should be aimed at changing the hell-like living conditions and the medieval Berber thinking that runs these prisons.

More women

Editorial in *Gorkhapatra*, 14 November

गोर्खापत्र

Even though Nepal has seen an increase in the number of female scientists, research and assessment levels still remain lower than expected. According to the Nepal Academy of Science and Technology, among the 28,134 scientists, just 4,219 of them are female. And it is not just the female scientists whose research levels remain low. A lack of funding and of proper equipment are the biggest hurdles to research

and implementation.

Tribhuban University started its Bachelor of Science program only in 1965. Before that, students had to go abroad to study science. Currently, there are 1,742 women in the medical science sector – the most in any of the sciences. Since the sciences are a communal field there is little sexism, say the women scientists. Much of the research depends on the limited funding from foreign sources. Although there is a ministry of science and technology, the government does very little to support scientists.

According to the recently published NAST report, most women are in the medicinal, physical, natural and engineering sciences, with only a handful in the natural resources (four) and weather science (five) sectors.

Crocodile tears

Editorial in *Samaya*, 15 November

समया

Homicide is not just a heinous crime, it is also an expression of cowardice. Murder is not a precursor to conflict, nor is it the path to social change. Murder is a crime. And political murders represent the nadir of intolerance.

The Maoist party claimed to have renounced violence as a political tool because there was no support for it in the international community. But after entering the peace process it has once more undermined itself with the murder of journalist

Birendra Sah.

The Maoists spent a month trying to cover up the crime. Even the interim parliament, which is supposed to defend democratic rights, was confined to making only formal pronouncements. Speaker Subhas Nembang's role made many realise he may not be a friend to the defenders of press freedom. The lack of sensitivity of parliament towards the murder of a journalist has tarnished its reputation. By its endless rhetoric

and debate, the government and parliament gave the guilty plenty of time to make their escape. Whether or not the Federation of Nepalese Journalists knew this or didn't want to know is another serious question. The main role in the cover-up and delaying tactics was played by Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula, and Prime Minister Girija Koirala must also bear responsibility for hiding the truth. No amount of crocodile tears will hide that fact.



समया Abin Shrestha in *Samaya*, 15 November

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“ We have released the monthly allowances to the Maoists, how that is spent is not our responsibility...that may need to be investigated. ”

Ram Sharan Mahat responding to Pushpa Kamal Dahal's accusation on Wednesday in Dang that the government is not releasing funds for Maoist cantonments, BBC Nepali Service, 13 November.

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Rubbish life

The Teku transfer station lies on the banks of the Bagmati and is operated by the Kathmandu municipality. Waste is piled high waiting to be transferred to its final destination, the Sisdol landfill site, and is picked at by families looking for plastic, glass, metal and anything that can be sold for recycling.



Once more, the residents are up in arms about the work for Kathmandu garbage. The row is over local Maoist garbage contractor. The uncollected in the street Teku transfer depot can hold of the 350 tons of garbage generates every day.

PICTURES AND CAPTIONS BY NAYANTARA



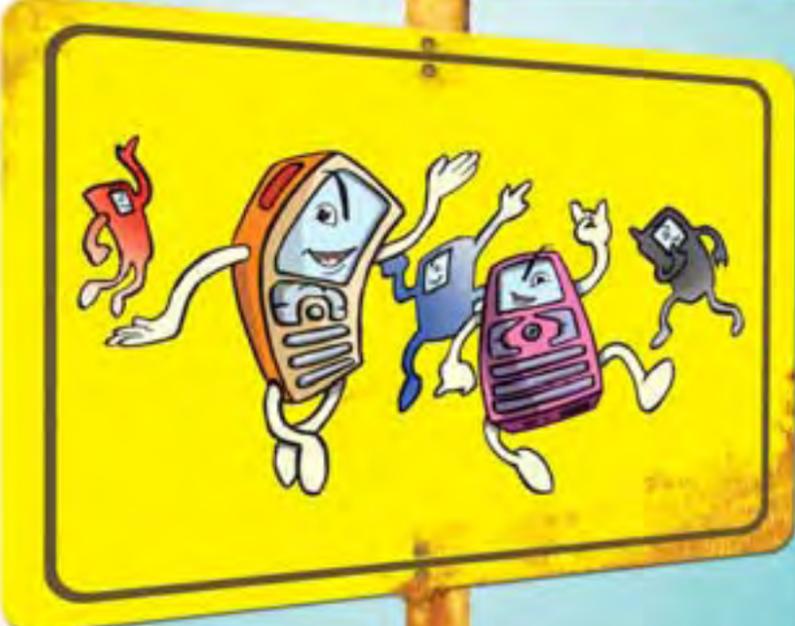
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RA GURUNG KAKSHAPATI



There are waste pickers who have worked at the Teku transfer station for over 20 years. They have raised their children and grandchildren here. Their children are ostracised at school, they have been hurt by bulldozers, and they often fall ill. The government never kept its promise to look after them.

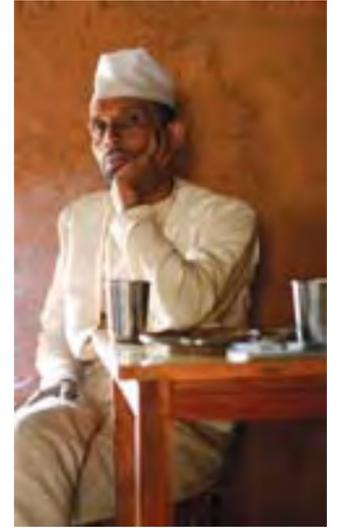


The waste management methods of the municipal authorities have their shortcomings, but it is also up to individuals to take responsibility for the amount of waste they produce and how they deal with it.



By 6AM, 21-year-old Shiva Rai (identity changed) has begun his day, come rain, shine or strike. "In the winter it's still dark when I get here, but I have to come early if I want to make a good day's earnings," he says. Originally from Kabhre, Shiva has worked here for six years earning up to Rs 300 a day selling materials for recycling.

Dangerous medical waste is thrown away in the same way as domestic garbage. Only four of the dozens of hospitals and nursing homes in Kathmandu have treatment and incineration facilities. Institutions often flout their own guidelines on how to dispose of such waste.



Shambu Ghimire lives near the Sisdol landfill site in Nuwakot. "The government promised us electricity, education, health, sanitation facilities and employment for local residents," he says. "Next week, the government said, next week...it has been over two years."



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Reply All

Exiled to cyberia

A test message group-emailed last month by a picture gallery snowballed into a gigantic internet tsunami with everyone pressing 'Reply All' and contributing to chaos in cyberspace that resembled the real-life chaos of Nepal.

Thankfully it's over and we no longer receive hundreds of messages each day. I didn't mind, as some were amusing, such as this esoteric contribution:

"We are being tested by the gods. Gods or aliens – it is all the same. Someone has decided to ping. We are all now awakened. No doubt, instructions will follow. This test message – what has become of us that we are spooked so easily? What is this test message? This test message, maybe it is love? Maybe Fulfillment? Maybe the test is simple Faith itself?
 Test.
 ahhhhhh
 Test, again.
 more pleasure.
 Test.
 Meaning. Love? Love.
 More testing is required !!!"

As the days continued, 're: test mail' became a kind of blog. If you're like me, who receives a mere one or two emails per day, imagine the sheer delight when you read, 'Receiving list of messages from server', to be followed by, '1 of 157'. Wow, at last, I've been discovered.

But most responses were boring, with nothing more to offer than 'PLEASE STOP', or 'DELETE ME FROM YOUR LIST - NOW !' or 'WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS TO ME?' always in capitals, to denote a degree of urgency.

Others indicated confusion and lack of IT knowledge, 'What the f—ing h—l is going on?', or more politely put, 'What is this test mail all about?'. Some deserved more attention before deleting, such as the one from a Mr AM, who apparently was not amused. 'Any further test mails from YOU will be interpreted as INVITATION with my hooligans to your place'. I was so frightened I immediately ran a full scan, restored my system files and fed the dog.

Not all messages were easy to understand, but somehow were still valuable contributions to the ongoing email melee. There was even a gruesome photograph of a man incinerated in the Maoist attack in Beni together with a mysterious caption: 'See this attachment photo, which I have in my calculation about old Nepal'. Credit goes to a Mr K for this excellent portrayal of an internet user besieged by unwanted emails.

Just as the blog was really hotting up it suddenly stopped. Damn, no more 're: test messages', except for one, a charming apology from a Mr T who had previously sent a rather heavy missive that had unnecessarily strayed into xenophobic diatribe about foreigners and their artistic pursuits.

'I really like to apologise for the racist and completely unwarranted remarks I made recently. I was and remain a competent arse. I don't know why I write such letters. Clearly I am both mad, illiterate and have my trousers down. I am very very sorry. Humble pies are me'.

This guy has a sense of humour (or has an urgent need for a dictionary). However the experience was interesting on a different level. It would appear that many of those who responded have not yet understood the difference between 'reply' and 'reply all', and towards the end nobody seemed to care and would willingly perpetuate the problem for the sake of informing all that they didn't want to be part of it. And this despite frequent messages clearly stating that to 'reply all' would merely generate more mail, not to mention hundreds of failure notices from defunct email addresses still on the list.

If nobody had replied to that innocuous initial mail, 'as my email is not working . i am try to send', the whole can of internet worms (and possibly viruses) would not have happened. But a Mr R could not resist. Without knowing the terrible consequences, he politely enquired, 'Can I know what is this mail about?'. That was the beginning.

There must be an interesting psychological experiment that explores this sheep-like tendency of self interest. The fact that the problem got worse as it went on is a sad reflection on the Nepali psyche, if not the state of affairs in Nepal, and in part explains the prevailing chaos that inflicts the country. ●

Sagarmatha's



The juice that's jam-packed with vitamins

DINGBOCHE—Birds, mice and Chinese herbalists have long understood the health benefits of sea-buckthorn berries, but now farmers in Solu Khumbu are looking to make money from these tart-tasting fruit.

At Dingboche, in the shadow of Ama Dablam, the Khumbu Alpine Conservation Council has been teaching villagers to make a healthy juice from the wild

berries, which they can sell to thirsty tourists heading for Everest Base Camp or transport to Kathmandu's cafes and bars for the cocktail crowd. The council has given priority to those villagers, particularly women, who do not own tourist lodges or camp-sites and need an alternative source of income.

The common sea-buckthorn, known locally as *akhrilo*, grows

close to the trekking trails in Sagarmatha National Park, making it easy to collect and process the orange berries. Local farmers have used it to control erosion as it grows well in the thin, dry soils and can survive the icy Himalayan winter. But until recently, few in Nepal had bothered to seek other uses for it.

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about 12 times more vitamin C than orange juice, and research during the past 30 years in other parts of the world has found that oils in the juice and seeds contain high levels of antioxidants which may help prevent cancer and other diseases.

For centuries, Chinese herbalists have used the berry juice, leaves and bark to treat a wide range of ailments, including indigestion, diarrhoea, coughs, ulcers and

blood disorders. The fruits are also known to have anti-inflammatory properties and are a rich source of vitamin E, minerals and carotenoids which provide vitamin A. In some countries people use the flowers to soften their skin.

The berries are unpleasant to eat raw because of their very bitter taste, but entrepreneurs in some north-western Himalayan districts, including Manang and Mustang, have found ways to use the plant to make juice, jams and pickles, with funding and technical advice from development agencies. Tourists trekking round Annapurna can find sea-buckthorn juice listed on the menu at lodges along the route.

The common sea-buckthorn grows throughout the high mountain areas of Nepal all the way from Humla in the far north-west to Taplejung in the east.

"The fruit has it has great potential to boost the incomes of farmers who previously depended almost solely on growing potatoes and barley," says Ang Rita Sherpa of the Mountain Institute. Unusually, the raw juice only freezes at temperatures lower than minus-20 degrees Celsius, so there is no problem with it freezing up



in winter.

Beyond Nepal, common sea-buckthorn grows mainly in China, where farmers admire its ability to survive in dry, semi-desert conditions and plant it to help reduce soil erosion.

In Dingboche, after just a few days of training from the conservation council, the farmers have learnt how to add water, sugar and preservative to the raw juice, and cook the mixture to make it both palatable and healthy. All they need now is for some adventurous, thirsty trekkers to stop off on their way to Kala Pattar, and they'll be in business. Cheers! ●

Khumbu Alpine Conservation Council
www.mountain.org



Buckthorn on the rocks?

Some say sea-buckthorn juice tastes like wild cherries, sour with a hint of sweetness. Others say it tastes like nothing they have had before. Rich in vitamins C and E, beta-carotene and omega-3 fatty acids, not only can the berries be used for juice but sea-buckthorn oil is valuable for reconstructive surgery and the leaves can be used for tea and herbal remedies.

Every year Bishnu Shrestha of Lotus Land Organic Farm in Bhaktapur brings in 840 bottles of sea-buckthorn juice concentrate from the mountains. He sells them at the organic market in the Summit Hotel and also distributes them to five restaurants and one department store in Kathmandu. "The demand is not that much, and it is only foreigners who buy the juice anyway," says Shrestha.

The Green Organic Café and Salad Bar in Thamel has been selling sea-buckthorn juice since it opened two years ago. "I have never seen a Nepali order it," says Krishna Poudel at the café.

The juice that the Lotus Land Organic Farm brings to Kathmandu is processed and packed in recycled beer bottles in Mustang by a community who received training in juice processing from the Danish aid agency, Danida. Each bottle is priced at Rs 175, but Shrestha says there isn't much profit in the business.

"Porters have to carry the juice from Jomsom to Pokhara and then bring it to Kathmandu," says Shrestha. "The cost of transportation alone comes to more than Rs 70."

The cafe hasn't tried to experiment with the juice yet, but Poudel says it should. "If we make exotic sea-buckthorn cocktails, we can probably sell more." ●
Mallika Aryal

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Money is not the answer

If it was, Nepal would have solved its AIDS crisis years ago

A woman in Kaiali was infected with HIV by her husband who was himself infected in a brothel in Punjab. How is she going to benefit from the \$76 million that the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria approved at the fund's meeting Kuning on Tuesday?



NEPALIPAN
Aruna Uprey

If money was the only problem, Nepal would have solved its TB and AIDS problems long ago. These diseases are twin epidemics in Nepal and can't be managed only by money, they need a basic health infrastructure. AIDS was never a medical problem in Nepal, it is a socio-economic disease that thrives in political apathy and cultural norms that discriminate against women.

And we're not even talking



NARESH NEWAR

about malaria because if the millions of dollars that have been spent on malaria eradication since the 1960s had been used properly the disease would have been eradicated from Nepal by now.

These are all communicable diseases. The first line of defence against communicable diseases is communication, spreading

awareness about how it is transmitted. These are diseases in which knowledge literally makes the difference between life and death. But awareness is not the end of the story.

A migrant worker from Achham may know he can contract HIV if he has unprotected sex in a brothel in

Chandigarh, but if he doesn't bother he will still be infected. His wife back in Nepal may know that her husband may be sick when he comes back from India, but if he beats her up when she suggests he wear a condom or get an HIV test it is likely she will also be infected.

Exactly where in this chain of events can the \$76 million be most effectively spent? It is clear that the solution lies in addressing the issues of poverty, gender and ignorance. Everything else is a bandaid.

Ask the rickshaw driver in Nepalganj about AIDS and his answer will be: "Hujur, for us dal roti is more important than AIDS."

A Tharu woman in a remote village in Dang that we spoke to hadn't heard of HIV. Her husband is a migrant worker. There are hundreds of thousands of women like her all over Nepal. Yet, statistics show that 98 percent of Nepalis have heard of HIV. Does it really make a difference to have heard about HIV in Accham, Mugu, Bajura, Dadeldhura or Okhaldhunga? Or, for that matter, at a dance restaurant on Kathmandu's Ring

Road?

It is difficult to see how the millions of dollars will make a difference in HIV control when there is no one in rural health posts to even test for blood pressure of someone infected with HIV, and there aren't antibiotics to treat TB patients, or to test an AIDS patient because the blood count machine is broken.

And what if the patient from Achham can't afford the bus fare to come down to Nepalganj for treatment? Is the money going to take care of AIDS orphans in the mid-western districts? How will they do that when the children are ostracized by villagers? Will the money go to the remote rural areas of Nepal where it is needed the most, or will it disappear along the way like most other funds in the past?

Most likely, only those who can write proposals in English will get the money. The Health Ministry keeps saying that our "female community health volunteers are the pillars of our health care system". Are the pillars going to get any of that money?

Probably not. It will go to the towns, it will go to the big names, it will go to the large NGOs.

Nepal's health activists have worked hard to rekindle the interest of the Global Fund on HIV, TB and malaria control in Nepal. Let's not waste their efforts by wasting this money. ●

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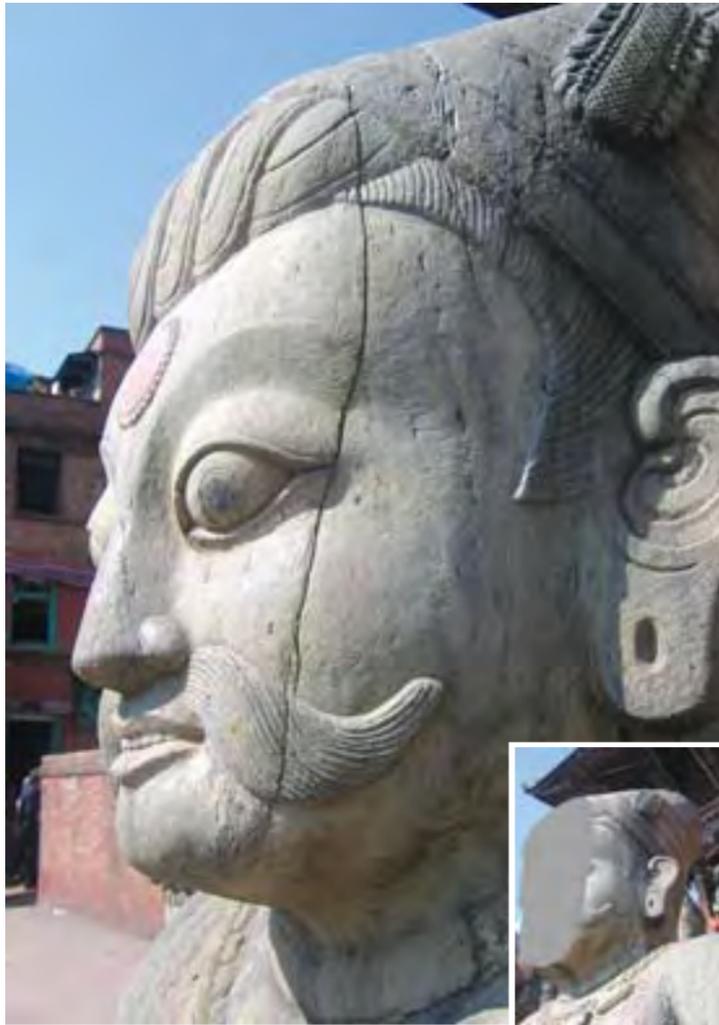
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One of the guardians of the Nyatapola may soon be faceless



ALL PICS: SUKRA SAGAR SHRESTHA

Saving Pratap's face

SUKRA SAGAR SHRESTHA

The Nyatapola temple in Bhaktapur is Nepal's tallest temple. It has withstood several major earthquakes that have struck Kathmandu Valley since it was built in the 17th century. Its brick walls and carved wooden eaves have withstood the ravages of time.

But exposure to the elements over the centuries is taking its toll on the statue of Pratap, one of five pairs of stone figures that guard the staircase reaching up to the first floor.

Among the elephants, lions, griffins are the statues of Jaya and Pratap who were *katuwals* during the reign of Bhupatindra Malla. It is the beautifully detailed statue of Pratap that is now losing its face, its stone mask peeling off along a crack.

Pratap may lose his face tomorrow, or it may take another

10 years, but sooner or later, the face will flake off unless action is taken immediately. Similar damage to the other statues in Nyatapola, or indeed other temples in Kathmandu, can't be ruled out.

The temple was built in a record 100 days by King Bhupatindra. Thousands of Bhaktapuris toiled to drag the granite blocks from Chapagaun, 25km away. Written records show that the workers were paid Rs 18 for their labour, a generous amount in those days.

Nepali archaeologists now need to step in to protect the priceless architectural heritage that our ancestors bequeathed us. There is quite a bit of experience from Cambodia and Italy in restoring stone statues.

Pratap's statue shows a crack that started from the forehead now slicing cleanly across the face to the chin. A second crack has also developed in the nose area,

FLAKING OFF: The statue of Pratap, among the five pairs of stone figures guarding the Nyatapola (left) has developed a crack that could peel its face off. If it happens, computer manipulation shows us what it would look like (right).

but this and another one near the top of the head are not so serious yet.

The reasons for the cracks are the inherent weaknesses in the rock and exposure to the sun, rain, heat and cold. Lately, they could have been exacerbated by acid rain and urban air pollution.

We may not be able to stop the crack, but we can arrest its spread and save the face. A stitch in time may indeed save nine. ●

Sukra Sagar Shrestha is an archaeologist formerly with the Department of Archeology and lives in Kirtipur. sukra_sagar@hotmail.com

BAMAKO

"At least they know that we know"

Nearly 30 years ago, Edward Said defined 'Orientalism' as the way for the West of knowing and representing the East. 'To have knowledge of [the Orient],' according to him, 'is to dominate it, to have authority over it.' And of course, to 'know' the Orient in a way that they can't know themselves means the West has the onus of governing and determining the fate of the East.

If the twin themes of knowledge and power have dictated the colonial discourses of previous centuries, the same is true for the contemporary developmental debates. When asked about the possible impact of his recent film *Bamako*, a heartfelt criticism of the structural adjustment programs dominating many Third World countries since the 1980s, Malian director Abderrahmane Sissako



CRITICAL CINEMA
Diwas KC

replies: "At least they'll know that we know."

In a world inundated by images of African poverty and ignorance, very few see the

intellectual self-consciousness of Africa that brims over from this film. *Bamako* is an exquisite experiment with the inequalities tolerated by the proponents of neoliberal policies of globalisation. In the courtyard he grew up in, Sissako sets up a brilliantly absurd trial against the IMF and the World Bank for the impoverishment and exploitation of Africa.

For the film, Sissako rallied an ensemble of real-life judges and lawyers. Former friends and an ex-minister of culture are some of his witnesses, who – through research and experience – improvise their testimonies in front of the camera uninterrupted. Debt, immigration, education, health: nothing is left undiscussed, as these witnesses impressively articulate the problems of the global order.

Yet *Bamako* is not solely a political film. The polemics in the film are extraordinary by themselves, but what makes *Bamako* a sublime experience is the juxtaposition of the arcane procedures and rhetoric over a meticulously constructed texture of everyday life. Sissako relies as much on the characters who surround the courtyard, who are sometimes disengaged but often quietly involved in the judicial drama. The quotidian treatment the trial receives from its peripheral characters may, on the one hand, highlight the irregularity of the acumen demonstrated by the well-versed witnesses, but on the other hand, it also diffuses the sophistication of the arguments into the general scene.

In creating a picture of a more critical, conscious Africa, Sissako is not simply trying to find ways to judge the West. Like his characters, he is deeply aware of the absurdity of his film's scenario. Instead, his goals are to untangle Africa from its conventional representations, to reclaim control over the images and discourses of the continent, to give something of a voice to the silent majority, and perhaps to give meaning to the silence of that majority.

Sissako even complements these goals with a unique, genre-defying filmmaking. The warmth and humour rife in *Bamako* is reminiscent of Senegalese director Ousmane Sembène, while the narrative is deliberately deviant from traditional styles. One may underestimate the significance of Africa being narrated by Africans themselves, the threat it potentially poses to the cultural and political structures of the world. Dangerously, inconsequential discussions in a neglected courtyard of Mali could teach us a whole lot about the world.

This rare and must-see film will be presented by Candid Society at Alliance Française de Kathmandu on 23 November, 7PM. Admission free. ●



BAMAKO

Director: Abderrahmane Sissako.

Cast: Aïssa Maïga, Tiécoura Traoré, Hélène Diarra, Habib Dembélé, Roland Rappaport

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MIN BAJRACHARYA

SUN AND MOON: A young boy at Itumbahal shares the stage with Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Bam Dev Gautam and other political figures at a function to mark the Nepal Sambat new year 1128 on Tuesday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

PLANE VIEW: An Airbus 320 lines up for a landing at Kathmandu airport on Wednesday as the haze cleared, revealing a spectacular view of Dorje Lakpa.



SUMIN BAJRACHARYA

SAY CHEESE: Himalmedia photographer Min Bajracharya (centre) and Rajendra Manandhar of *The Himalayan Times* are recognised for their coverage of the April Uprising by the Jana Andolan Struggle Committee on Saturday.



KRISHNA MANI BARAL

SQUEAKY CLEAN: Tourists bath an elephant on the Rapti river at Sauraha this week. Visitor numbers at Chitwan have soared this season.

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Nefarious netas

So the petrol queues have started again. Let me guess. We haven't paid our bills.

And the garbage is piling up. The Bagmati is beginning to waft its aroma into the Maternity Hospital once more. Loadshedding has started and will go up to 14 hours a week this winter. And the Republic of Nepal Airlines Corporation (RONAC) is going to be planeless again in December.

At the rate our loktantrick seven-party sarkar is showing its true **mettle** this Ass (and a lot of other asses in this country) is beginning to think, hey, things weren't so bad under a ruthless royal feudal dictator after all. Now that he's got at least another six months in the palace because the seven parties can't get their act together to hold elections, all kingji has to do is sit back, relax and enjoy the ride.



The real story at Loyal Nepal Airlines (LOLA) is that the emergency board meeting on Saturday will discuss an ultimatum by pilots fed up with flying for an airline that has two 757s but only three engines. After they found there was no way they could pocket kickbacks on a major plane purchase because of parliamentary oversight, airline management in **cahoots** with powerful neo-royal relatives, is trying to ground both of LOLA's jets in Brunei so they can wet lease another plane and cream the deal by over-invoicing the rental rate. Alert readers will instantly recognise this modus operandi from the Dhamija, Lauda and China Southwest deals. What do you expect when exactly the same old nefarious netas who were in charge seven years

ago are back on the saddle? Plus c'est la meme chose, plus ça change.



Comrade Lotus Flower is out west doing what he does best: delivering fiery speeches hinting that Comrade Makunay will be prime minister and himself president if the kangresis don't follow the parliament's resolutions. Trouble is most district newspapers are **boycotting** Maobaddie news, so the public never got to read these pearls of wisdom.

Just as well for His Awesomeness that there was a media blackout because he went on to say something even more asinine: the YCL will investigate the murderers of journalist Birendra Sah. Wait a minute, isn't that like getting the Ass to guard the haystack.



Alert to **rumours** of suspicious helicopter movements near Tokha and Panchkhal, Baluwater pulled the plug over Dasain on COAS Katuwal's visit to Honolulu on a US Pacific Command confab. Chief Sa'b got so bored sitting at home he brought together some of his top trusted jarsaps to Bhadrakali to discuss possible threats to national security, evaluate scenarios and plot responses.

It looks like the brass wants to be ready should a situation a la Pakistan or Bangladesh arise. Some of the generals even analysed the lessons learnt from the February First coup and how mistakes could be avoided next time round, if there is a next time.

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A little big problem

The world's cheapest car is a danger not just to India, but to the planet's climate

THOMAS L FRIEDMAN

India is in serious danger, no, not from Pakistan or internal strife. India is in danger from an Indian-made vehicle: a \$2,500 passenger car, the world's cheapest.

Tata Motors recently announced that it plans to begin

turning out a four-door, four-seat, rear-engine car for \$2,500 next year and hopes to sell one million of them annually, primarily to those living at the 'bottom of the pyramid' in India and the developing world.

Welcome to one of the emerging problems of the flat world: Blessedly, many more

people now have the incomes to live an American lifestyle, and the Indian and Chinese low-cost manufacturing platforms can deliver them that lifestyle at lower and lower costs. But the energy and environmental implications could be enormous, for India and the world.

We have no right to tell



Indians what cars to make or drive. But we can urge them to think hard about following our model, without a real mass transit alternative in place. Cheap conventional four-wheel cars, which would encourage millions of Indians to give up their two-wheel motor scooters and three-wheel motorized rickshaws, could overwhelm India's already strained road system, increase its dependence on imported oil and gridlock the country's megacities.

Yes, Indian families whose only vehicle now is a two-seat scooter often make two trips back and forth to places to get their whole family around, so a car that could pack a family of four is actually a form of mini-mass transit. And yes, Tata, by striving to make a car that could sell for \$2,500, is forcing the entire Indian auto supply chain to become much more efficient and therefore competitive.

So what should India do? It should leapfrog us, not copy us. Just as India went from no

phones to 250 million cellphones, skipping costly land lines and ending up with, in many ways, a better and cheaper phone system than we have, it should try the same with mass transit.

India can't ban a \$2,500 car, but it can tax it like crazy until it has a mass transit system that can give people another cheap mobility option, said Sunita Narain of the Center for Science and Environment in New Delhi.

"I am not fighting the small car," Narain says, "I am simply asking for many more buses and bus lanes, a complete change in mobility. Because if we get the \$2,500 car we will not solve our mobility problem, we will just add to our congestion and pollution problems."

Charge high prices for parking, a proper road tax for driving, deploy free air-conditioned buses that reach every corner of the city, expand the existing beautiful Delhi subway system, and then let the market work, she added.

India has become a giant platform for inventing cheap scale solutions to big problems. If it applied itself to green mass transit solutions for countries with exploding middle classes, it would be a gift for itself and the world. ● (NYT)

Wasteful aid agencies contribute to climate change

Gas guzzler charities

Aid agencies are wasting \$180 million a year on gas-guzzling 4x4s they do not need, according to a review of humanitarian operations around the world.

Charities such as Oxfam, Save the Children and Médecins Sans Frontières could divert millions of pounds of donor money from their vehicles to people who need food, medicine and water, according to the findings.

Better management would also substantially reduce carbon emissions, said Rob McConnell, coordinator of Fleet Forum, which counts more than 40 charities, United Nations agencies and donor groups among its members.

"We can't use a Toyota Prius to run around in southern Sudan but we do need to analyse more carefully the type of vehicles we are using," said McConnell. "Do we need a Toyota Land Cruiser for running around Nairobi, for going to meetings or picking up mail? Could we do it in a more efficient, smaller car? Do we have too many vehicles?"

The answer for many residents of the Kenyan capital is a resounding "yes". The city is a hub for aid operations in East Africa with offices monitoring emergencies in Somalia, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, among others.

As a result the giant 4x4s, most frequently a Toyota Land Cruiser but often a Nissan Patrol or Mitsubishi Pajero, are a common sight.

In the evenings such vehicles, decked out with

UN or charity logos and equipped with bull-bars and radio antennae, clog supermarket car parks or block restaurant driveways as their drivers try to manoeuvre into tight spaces.

But there is a more important price to pay. McConnell says that his members run 70,000 vehicles, of which half are hardcore off-roaders, with an operating cost of \$800 million each year. In all they pump 500,000 tonnes of carbon in the air.

At any time, a third of the fleet is immobile, which places another drain on resources that could be better spent, according to research by Jacana, a logistics company. Better management of the vast fleet – such as monitoring performance, buying cars better suited to their use and more regular maintenance – could reduce accidents, cut emissions and save \$180 million a year.

"What we would have to do is change the way that our organisations work and I think humanitarian agencies are not exactly renowned for their ability to implement effective change management quickly and effectively," he said.

The World Food Programme of the UN and World Vision, the world's biggest NGO, are among those that have led the way in making improvements. Catholic Relief Services has also introduced software to help to monitor the performance of its drivers and fleet of more than 1,500 cars and 1,000 motorbikes in 85 countries. (The Times)

Way to go

India's Bangalore-made Reva electric car is taking London by storm. More than 900 of these petite battery-operated vehicles have been sold in London, many more than the 650 that run in Bangalore. Reva is sold as G-Wiz in England and the media has proclaimed it a breakthrough car for city driving in an increasingly environment-conscious Europe.

At \$10,000 the car is not cheap, but it can run for a year at 10km a day for the price of single tank of petrol. And electric vehicles don't have to pay parking fees in London. If the 6.5 percent import duty and 17.5 percent VAT is reduced, the price could come down. At the moment, the 900 users are environmentally-aware, well-educated and upper middle class.

There are four Revas running Kathmandu, but here the taxes are even higher and this puts the price tag at double the factory price at Rs 1,500,000.



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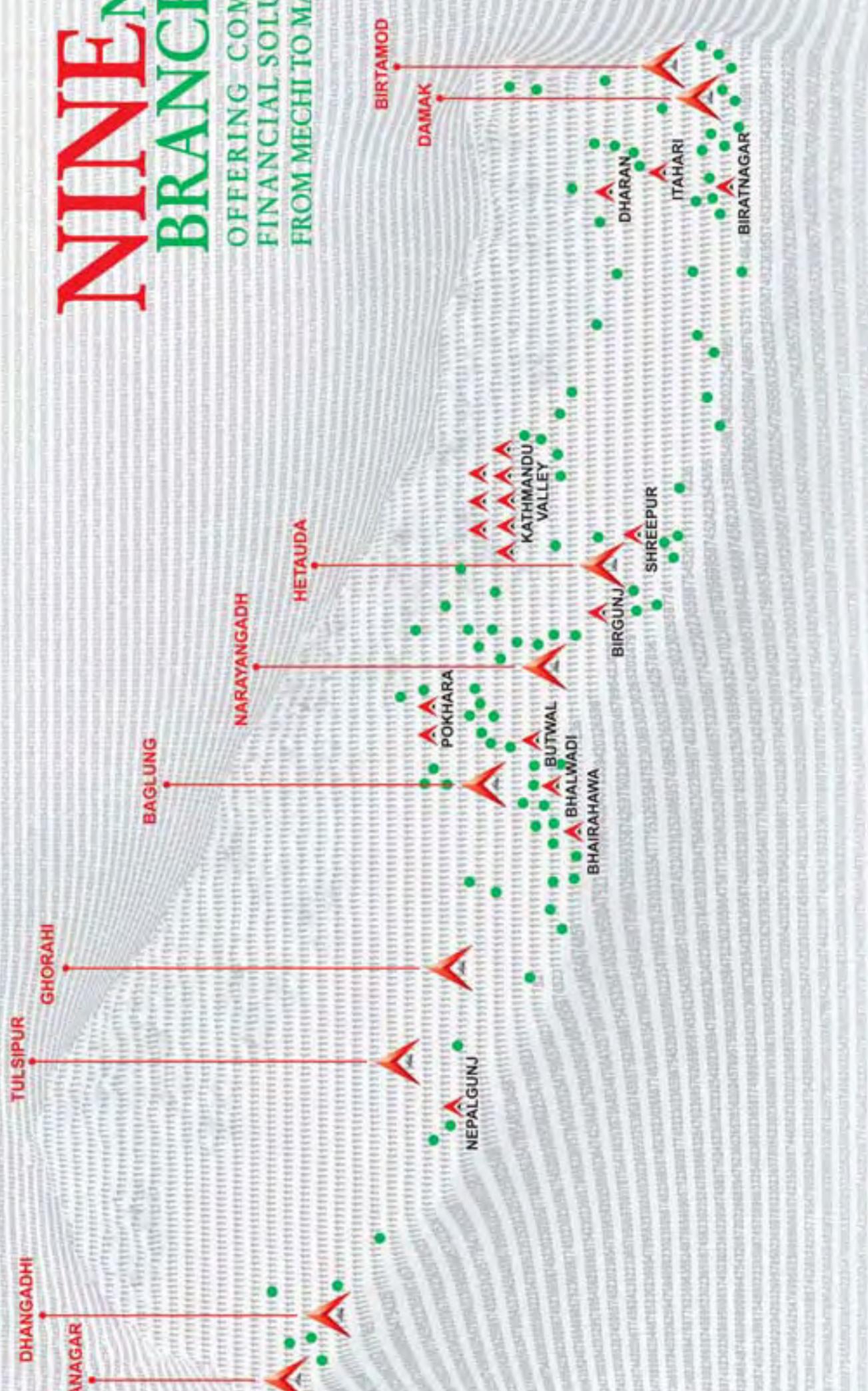
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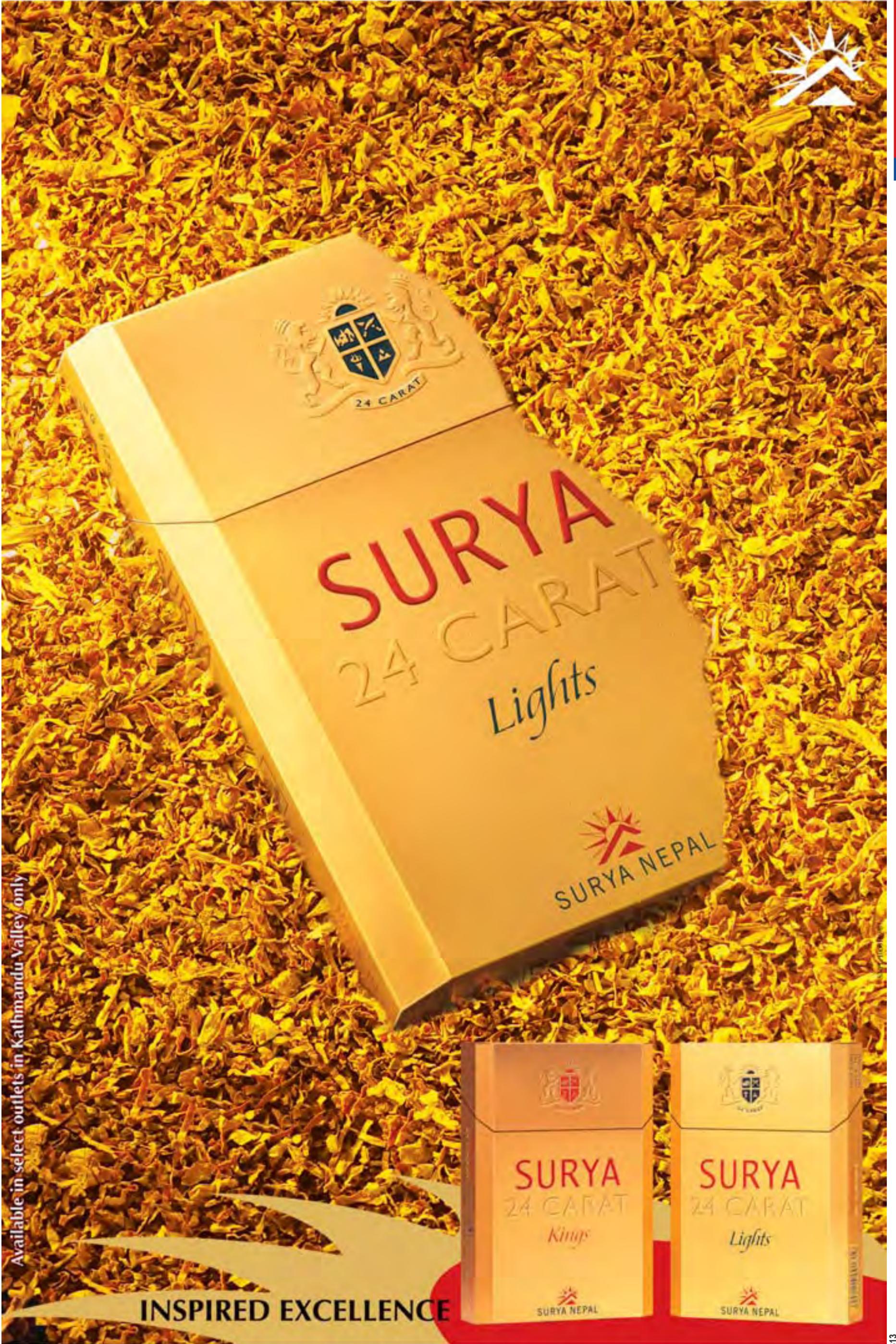
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