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Weekly Internet Poll # 378

Q. Should we have an independent caretaker government for elections?

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BANDOBAST: The Armed Police Force guards an intersection in Birganj on Monday night after security was stepped up in the tarai.

KIRAN PANDAY

Reversed roles

India's Naxalite wars are hotting up just as Nepal's Maoists holster their weapons

PRASHANT JHA
in NEW DELHI

Maoist rebellions are raging in a red crescent stretching across India's most deprived but resource-rich states, providing Prime Minister Manmohan Singh with what he has called his country's "gravest internal security challenge".

The strength of the Naxalites increased after the Communist Party of India (Maoist) was formed in 2004 when two powerful far-left groups merged. The Naxalites seem to have no

shortage of recruits, mainly because India's blistering economic growth has not percolated through to a large section of rural India.

Some policies have aggravated the distress: the state's withdrawal from basic services, the agrarian crisis, displacement for special economic zones. The judicial system is in a mess, with a backlog of cases in local courts. Inequitable land policies, unemployment, and the exclusion of tribals by forest contractors provide ready fodder for the Naxalites.

Some in the government exaggerate the threat since it gives them a pretext to repress and divert attention from non-performance. Others downplay the threat. The government admits the issue has a socio-economic dimension, but in practice treats it as a law and order issue.

There have been harsh crackdowns by police in some states, but analysts say such a strategy only has limited benefits. The Naxalites also need to examine why they have chosen the gun and whether they have

any chance of extending control militarily.

Instead, their 'revolution' stifles the democratic space by giving the state a reason to repress not only the Naxalites, but all other dissenters. As in Nepal, it is the poorest who suffer. The excessive Naxalite reliance on arms, with little attention to mass mobilisation, has raised a trigger-happy cadre using the ideology as cover for personal benefit.

There is no one Maoist movement in India, there are many kinds of Naxalites. Resolution of the conflict needs to recognise this heterogeneity and examine the dynamics in different states. ●

Full story p4

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editors(at)nepalitimes.com
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Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Editor: **Kunda Dixit**
Design: **Kiran Maharjan**
Director Sales and Marketing: **Sunaina Shah** marketing(at)himalmedia.com
Circulation Manager: **Samir Maharjan** sales(at)himalmedia.com
Subscription: subscription(at)himalmedia.com,5542525/535

Hatiban, Godavari Road, Lalitpur
GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu 5543333-6, Fax: 5521013
Printed at Jagadamba Press, Hatiban: 5547018



CEREMONIAL PRIME MINISTER

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala had UN Secretary General's Special Representative Ian Martin and the United Nations Resident Representative and Humanitarian Coordinator in Nepal Matthew Kahane as eye-witnesses when he announced this week that elections are not going to happen.

It seems that the disagreement mainly between the NC and the Maoists is so terminal that the deadlock will be prolonged until the possibility of polls within 2064 becomes impossible. Koirala suggested a delaying tactic himself: a national conference of the parties. Why? The only reason can be to allow the elections to lapse again.

After all, the interim constitution gives the leadership of the seven political parties unrestrained power to do as they wish. They haven't done much for months except hold endless, fruitless discussions.

Holding of constituent assembly elections was the main agenda of the interim government. As prime minister, Koirala has failed to deliver. He tried to deflect attention by blaming his interlocutors of a lack of vision. He is wrong. The Maoists have a very clear vision. They have said categorically they don't want an election they can't win. The UML is into opportunism, so Madhab Nepal will make best use of whatever deal is offered to him by either the Maoists or monarchists. The political party that really lacks a vision for the future is Koirala's NC.

In any case, it is the insincerity about polls rather than a lack of vision that is the problem. History had given Koirala a unique opportunity to redeem himself in the eyes of the people. He has been found wanting. But it is never too late to make amends, and Koirala the statesman must prevail over Koirala the politico.

The signs don't bode well. He is dividing and ruling within his own party by pitting monarchists against republicans to retain control. He needs to come out clearly on issues like 'baby king', federalism and restructuring of the state. And then he needs to assert his authority and declare constituent assembly elections.

Polls have to be held, with the Maoists if possible but even without them if necessary. If Koirala doesn't have what it takes to face that challenge squarely, he has no business being the head of government as well as the state.



KIRAN PANDAY

The tarai card

New madhes front may help resolve political deadlock

In one fell swoop, the political landscape changed last week. Mahant Thakur and others quit their parties, and now there are few madhesi leaders committed to the present process. They are all taking to the streets.

Thakur leaving the NC is a wakeup call for Prime Minister Koirala. He is a clean man, respected and a committed kangresi. Thakur walking out



TARAI EYE
Prashant Jha

reflects the tightrope act that moderate madhesi leaders have been walking this past year.

They could no longer defend the indefensible, the state's dismal track record in respecting madhesis, its security failures. Madhesi leaders realised the way to build or sustain a political base was by getting back to tarai towns and villages, rather than being near Singha Durbar.

And there was, let's not forget, encouragement from India which was angry at major parties for extending the stalemate and

dragging their feet on elections. Upto now, Delhi had treated the madhes as an irritant to the larger process. But it has now backed this new madhesi front, hoping that will put pressure on Kathmandu politicians to either announce election dates or face the prospect of even greater loss in the tarai.

India's use of the madhes card is already showing results: negotiations have picked up momentum and the likelihood of an agreement this weekend has increased. Delhi's other motives include countering the perception among madhesi leaders that India has been unhelpful, and deflecting international angling to get involved in the tarai. As it pursues this fresh initiative, India would do well to remember that this has the possibility of unleashing a wave of instability which will be difficult to restrain. It should not overestimate its leverage if it thinks it can get all the madhesi forces back in the process the day it wants.

The new madhesi front is not just an Indian prop, however. It underplays the potency of domestic factors and exposes the hypocrisy of leaders who criticise Indian meddling while cravily submitting themselves to Lainchaur. Neither is it accurate or helpful to dismiss the group as secessionist. In a context where national parties have failed to accommodate aspirations, regional parties strengthen and deepen democracy.

Thakur and company have the potential to revive politics in the plains and give the tarai a semblance of organised leadership that it sorely needs. Finally, politicians of different hues, some of them discredited, have taken up the political agenda of the madhes. This will

marginalise the fringe and criminal outfits. A consolidation of madhesi forces is likely, with more MPs resigning and a possible understanding between the new front and other madhesi forces, especially the ones led by Upendra Yadav, Goit and Jwala Singh. All have welcomed the new front. Enormous challenges lie ahead for both the state and madhesi leaders. The natural impulse of Koirala and the Maoists will be to try to divide and conquer by engineering splits among madhesis, encourage Tharus to oppose the front, and go in for more aggressive security operations. This will be myopic.

A better way would be to resolve the present deadlock, open channels with all madhesi leaders, implement promises, announce election dates, and try to bring everyone back into the process. India, in turn, must back this kind of accommodation. How the state responds will determine the mood in the plains.

Madhesi leaders need to be responsible as well. Instead of rabble-rousing and escalating the rhetoric to a point of no return, they should have a coherent agenda, limited goals for now, and keep in mind national priorities. Their movement must demand madhesi rights and immediate concessions, but also keep in mind that elections are the most legitimate way to achieve aims like a federal unit.

It should learn from the MJF's mistakes and focus on organisation building to ensure that a maximum of madhesi representatives can reach an elected assembly. They must get the militants to lay down arms rather than abetting radicalisation and advocating violence. In a nascent democracy, political polarisation along solely ethnic lines is fraught with danger. ●

Shock and subterfuge

The Maoists deliver an uncomfortable wake-up call

Accustomed as they are to fooling all the people all the time, the Maoists have shown they can beat the mainstream parties hands down when they wish. Last week, Pushpa Kamal Dahal triggered a series of political explosions with his very own IED – Ingenious Elocution Device. The detonator was his



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

statement about the possibility of a republican front in cooperation with 'nationalist' monarchists. With it he delivered multiple warheads to almost all the important political players.

The main target was apparently India. Unhappy with New Delhi's changed priorities, Prachanda was issuing a warning: back us in electoral politics or we will reactivate old links with our mentors in the traditional Nepali establishment. The role played by the Chinese in this abrupt

Maoist about-turn remains unknown.

A secondary target was the UML, which has been presenting itself as the sole custodian of conservative values in Nepali politics. The lesson here was clear: when push comes to shove for leftist forces in the country, the Maoists will have even less hesitation in embracing a right-wing leadership than the UML had in pushing Lokendra Bahadur Chand in the mid-90s.

For NC, Prachanda had three warnings. By hinting at a rapprochement with the monarchists, he seemed to say that the Maoists too could draw upon the services of those suave and presentable grandees for propaganda purposes. Once hardcore royalists received a certificate of nationalism from the YCL, they could begin to entertain interlocutors from the West on behalf of the revolutionary party. Second, Prachanda was reminding GP Koirala that the Maoists have always been closer to the military than is NC. Third, and clearest of all: in hardball politics,

there are no permanent friends or foes, only varying interests.

There was a message for the king too: he should not lose hope but must stay clear of any clandestine deals with the mainstream parties, since there is only one political force in this country able to rescue the monarchy from complete eclipse – the Maoists.

Reaction to this verbal assault has been swift. India rapidly patched up its differences with the Nepali Army. Conservative NC lawmakers started to canvass openly for a constitutional monarchy. The UML began to soft-pedal on proportional representation and the idea of parliament itself declaring Nepal a republic. And, to keep Kathmandu's leaders on their toes, a realignment of political forces in Madhes has been quietly engineered.

Prime Minister Koirala, shocked by the avalanche of political fallout triggered by Prachanda's statement, has responded by reactivating the team that paved the way for the peace agreement. Certainly the Maoists

have woken everyone with a jolt. But what exactly do they want now?

They no doubt fear their electoral appeal has weakened despite the success of their motion in the special session of parliament. Now that even the Rastriya Prajatantra Party has dumped the monarchy, the republican agenda has lost its sheen. And any adoption of a fully proportional electoral system will be credited to the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum and janajati activists rather than the Maoists.

The simple answer is that Prachanda needed a slogan to go into the electoral fray. The class struggle isn't an issue emotive enough to attract voters to the polling booths, so he had to resurrect the populists' most convenient tool, the battle cry of nationalism in danger. To appropriate that slogan fully for himself, he needed to expose the clay feet of everyone else. Hence this subterfuge of making common cause with monarchical nationalists. Clearly, the Maoists have gone into campaign mode. ●

LETTERS

MAOIST TROJAN

As if we didn't have enough populist but well-calculated slogans from the Maoists, CK Lal's yearning for democratisation of the NA in 'Don't be mean to UNMIN' (#376) is both ill-timed and ill-advised. In fact, his argument in favour of the UN-managed PLA/NA merger and democratisation seems premature and outright dangerous at this point. As much as I support opening the Nepal Army to madhesis, Newars, bahun, chhetris, dalits, Tharus and to everyone including able-bodied Nepali women, there must be a better way. Have we not learnt the lesson by watching what the Maoists and their Trojan-SPA leadership have done to our 'Lokatantra'? Watching Pushpa Kamal Dahal shift the goalposts once more last week with a new and most consequential demand of all—the PLA-isation of the Nepal Army make these concerns more relevant than ever. This is a very dangerous move and you never know, the Maoists may even come up with another demand requiring every party to seek permission from the Ministry of Vice and Virtues. There should be a moratorium on the parliamentary declarations, and it's about time that we allowed the people's voice to be heard. Thus, the only mandate the current government should have now is the election with or without the Maoists.

Alok K Bohara, University of New Mexico, USA

- Very realistic assessment in your editorial 'Sink or swim' (#376). We need to pressurise political parties to adhere to democratic rules and practices. The press also has to understand that it can't swing back and forth from left to right. Except for a handful of media (yours

included) most papers serve the interest of one or other political grouping.

Kishor Kamal, email

- I am really angry with your choice of first page news analysis depicting the end of the monarchy ('Farewell to arms?', #376). Is that relevant news in this hour of crisis fuelled by the Maoists' decision not to contest elections before their preconditions are met? Instead of all these, Kundan Aryal chose to denounce the monarchy. I am sorry, but I don't subscribe to his biased views.

Pravin Rajbahak, Birganj

TARAI

Prashant Jha's column 'Promises unkept' (#376) was insensitive and biased. The allusion to 'pahadi chauvinism' is irrational to anybody who goes through the article carefully. 'Pahadi' is a collective term and by quoting just one person, even a prime minister, whose mandated term is already over, you cannot universalise the sentiment and falsely accuse a whole group for holding such beliefs. By misusing adjectives, Jha very smartly though unsuccessfully tries to add racist colour to the PM's statement.

The 33 per cent of population for which Jha claims there has to be a single federal republic is not concentrated in the region in question and the area is home to others who are in the majority. The term madhes has

been exploited by militant groups, and their sympathisers like Jha to gain political mileage. My family and I have friends in Biratnagar who, unlike you, would never call us chauvinists. We play together, attend each other's functions and help each other out in times of difficulty. Don't provoke ethnic chauvinism where there isn't any.

†Amendra Pokhrel, email

ROLPA

That was a great piece of news indeed from Rolpa ('Change in Rolpa', #376). It will be an example for people all over Nepal. The Maoists seem to have learnt and shown that development must follow violence. We salute the people of Rolpa. If what they have done can be duplicated all over the country, that will be the real New Nepal.

S Markus, email

- Rolpa is a welcome change. Worth pondering: but why is it that Maoists are more relaxed in Rolpa, more at ease with other parties and the wider public than elsewhere?

Keshav U, email

BUFFALOS

The crying buffalos will continue to remain a deeply saddening feature of the highways of Nepal ('Next time you chomp on a buff momo...look how buffaloes are transported', #371) if the public remains unmoved and inactive. The reality is, transporters, butchers and middle men have little incentive to change cruel and

inhumane practices. Introducing proper animal welfare legislation will not make much difference. The Meat Act which introduced humane transport and killing of livestock in 1998 has had very little impact. The first specially designed vehicle with a loading system, separate compartments (ending painful tying up) and watering facilities is yet to ply the highway. Cruelty free meat (from animals which are transported and killed in a humane manner) is yet to be introduced. It seems Kathmandu residents care more about cheap momos than the plight of the buffalo, Nepal's unpaid tractor and donkey. The only force that can bring about real change are we as consumers. So, in shops, hotels and restaurants, request cruelty free meat. Or even better: become vegetarian.

Animal Nepal, www.animalnepal.org

SANDALWOODONOMICS

From smuggling sandalwood to embezzling money from NAC (dropping the 'R' did nothing for the airline) we are a nation of thieves. ('Sandalwoodonomics', #376). From prime ministers to peons we are all criminals. As a Nepali living abroad I see just a vast sea of greed where my country used to be.

J Bhandari, email

MANGO FUNDA

Probably too late to respond, but just saw your coverage of mangoes on Nepali Times eSpecial (www.nepalitimes.com/issue/354/Leisure/13665) and reading here near the North Pole in Minnesota made my mouth water remembering the aroma from mango vendors in Asan and Kalimati. You made me a happy person today.

Samarika Shrestha, Minnesota, USA



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Red Crescent

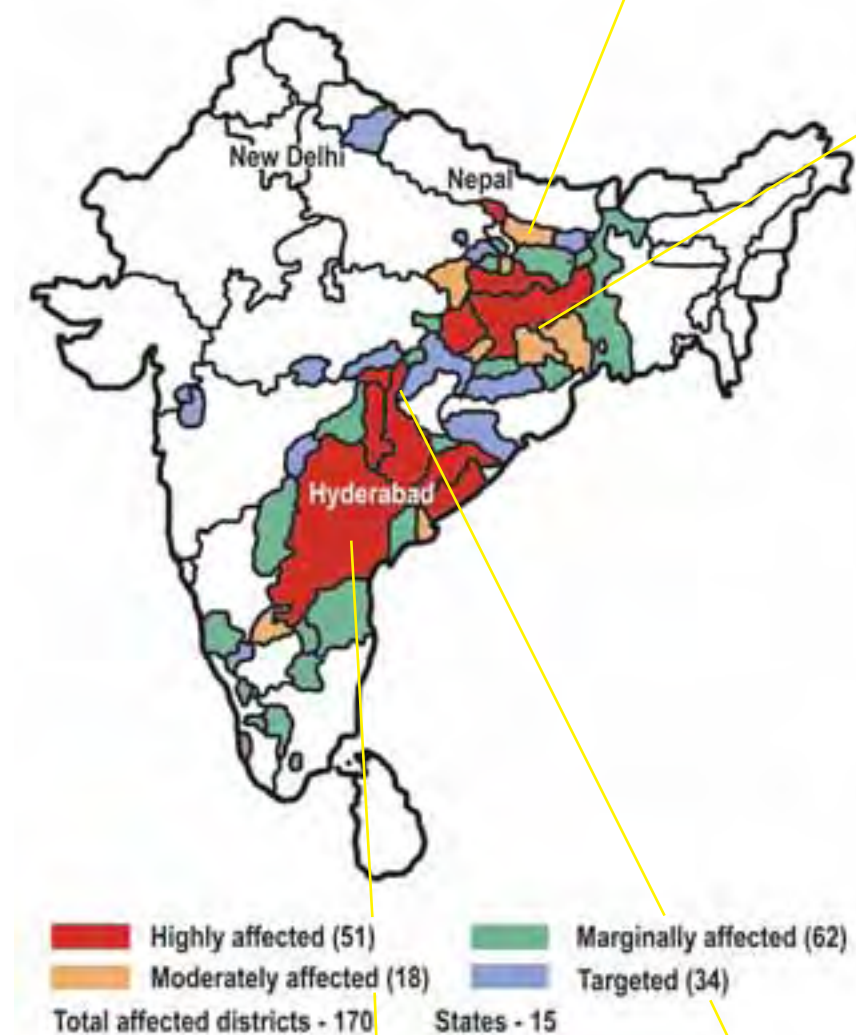
Naxalites vs Maoists in Bihar

While the terms Naxalite and Maoist are used interchangeably in popular discourse, there are several non-Maoist Naxalite groups. They trace their origin back to Naxalbari, where a far-left rebellion ignited in the 1960s. While the Maoists continue to focus on armed rebellion, other Naxalites now participate in the democratic process.

Ram Jatan Sharma of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist, Liberation), also called *Male* sits in his office near the Income Tax crossing in Patna. The neighbouring office happens to be that of the BJP, *Male's* arch rival which is also in the Bihar legislative assembly.

"The Maoists are repeating our mistake, we have to accept that people participate in this system, mainstream parties have support, and a revolutionary situation does not exist," Sharma told *Nepali Times*. *Male* suffers because of its former closeness to the Maoists, but the Maoists accuse them of betraying the revolution. Bihar's Maoists have continued with armed action, engaging in brutal clashes with upper caste private militias. They engineered a daring jail break in Jehanabad and an attack on Madhuban in recent years and have expanded to districts bordering Nepal.

With the state either weak or oppressive, Maoist influence will probably remain. But it is unlikely that their activities will grow to such an extent that it will radically alter the politics of the state.



Anarchy in Jharkhand

What happens when a corrupt state government gives a free hand to a degenerate but strong rebel movement? What happens in a political vacuum without elections? And what happens when such a place sits on precious mineral wealth necessary to sustain the engine of shining India?

Jharkhand is where these layers intersect. The Maoist movement here is shorn of its idealism, and has descended into criminalisation and corruption. A CPI (Maoist) member in Ranchi admits: "There is lack of politicisation of the cadre and people join because they are attracted by the gun." Maoists here are often called 'Money Collection Centre', a reference to their levies on contractors, shop keepers, government officials, industries, and development programs. Differences over sharing the loot, and caste tensions between Yadavs and Dalits, have also led to the formation of splinter groups.

But the picture is not black and white. There is an intriguing connection between mainstream politicians and Maoists. Local leaders require Naxalite support to win polls in areas under their influence and give money in return. And the Maoists are happy to get protection from these leaders in case they get caught and assure them of security.

At the government level, there is no plan to deal with the rebels. A police official in Hazaribagh district told *Nepali Times*: "We are only temporary barriers. Dealing with the Maoists requires a more concerted strategy from the top, which is absent." New mining contracts by the government have led to mass displacement and helped rebel recruitment. Land reforms, job creation and provision of justice are completely absent in Jharkhand.

In Chatra on the Bihar-Jharkhand border, the fear is palpable as the sun sets. A shopkeeper says ominously: "This will only increase sir. Just wait for the explosion of violence."



Andhra setback

Sitting in his sprawling office in Hyderabad, Arvind Rao is a satisfied man. Head of anti-Naxalite operations in the state intelligence bureau, Rao is basking in the glory of pushing back the Maoists. "Sharp intelligence inputs, a specialised fighting force, and political will can together act as the bitter medicine to kill the Naxal virus," he says.

This not just hyperbole. Andhra's Maoists are affected by reduced recruitment, a weakening of their strike power, the killing of key leaders, and the absence of mass mobilisation. The Grey Hyenas, a special force which lives in the forests like the Maoists, have targeted and killed rebel activists. The state used the 2004 ceasefire to build a strong network of informers, infiltrate the movement and track Naxalites closely. It is using this advantage now, while trying to be careful not to violate human rights.

The presence of Andhra Maoists in the Telangana region is also weakened by the second generation not being interested in rebellion. "The success of the Maoists is now limiting their growth," G S Rao, a journalist in Warangal, told *Nepali Times*. "They have broken the feudal structure here. People have benefited from aspects of the rebellion but have also seen the pain that comes with it. And the young would like to move on and make the most of available opportunities." Universities, which were traditionally sites of Naxalite recruitment, now have big boards advertising placements in IT companies.

The Maoists, however, continue to command respect and sympathy of a large section of Telugu society. As a Muslim auto driver in Hyderabad put it: "They speak for the poor and attack the *chor netas*. Maoist politics should be there but there should be no killing."



The Chhattisgarh war

Salwa Judum means 'Peace March' or 'Purification Hunt' and is the name given by the Chhattisgarh government to a brutal anti-Maoist depopulation drive in its southern Dantewada district. More than 50,000 tribal people have been removed from areas under Naxalite influence in forests to government-run camps on the main road.

The Maoists gained popularity in the region by fighting against exploitative forest contractors and living with the tribals. In 2005, resentment among tribals against Maoists grew because of their coercive actions, interference with local customs, and a ban on tendu-leaf collection, a source of livelihood. The government capitalised on this and prodded tribals to translate their anger into anti-Maoist militancy. When the Maoists retaliated, the state decided on the Vietnam-style hamleting strategy. But it used intimidation to force people out of their homes.

The tribals are now caught in a trap. Those still in the forests are seen as terrorists by the government, those in camps are perceived as government supporters by the Maoists. Both sides launch attacks and the tribals get killed even though all that they would like is to be left alone. If the government's original aim was to dry out support for the Maoists in their strongholds and lock people in with the state, it is not working.

"The state outsourced its responsibility, instead of fighting the Naxals," says a Dantewada journalist, as trucks of paramilitary forces move along the road. Even as it devastates the lives of tribals, *Salwa Judum* has benefited many. Local politicians and officials are siphoning off funds, the ruling BJP government is Hinduising the tribals in camps, and mining industries are moving into the vacated land.

There has been an escalation of violence, rationalised in the capital Raipur by a police official. "There will obviously be deaths. This is a war." A war in which the poorest Indians are dying every day.

Three for Gurkha

The Gurkha Development Bank has just completed its three years of service. Promoted by the British Gurkha Group, the bank provides various banking services including collection counters, SMS banking, and foreign currency exchanges.

Bossini

Bossini has revealed its new winter collection along with a new logo. Bossini is the only clothing brand to import clothes straight from Hong Kong. Its winter collection consists of jackets, sweaters and other winter clothes for all ages.

NEW PRODUCTS

BRAVIA: The Sony Bravia range of LCD televisions is now available through Nepa Hima Trade Link. The LCDs run on the Bravia engine with a wide-colour CCFL gamut that produces accurate colour representation. A number of the televisions feature the S-PVA LCD panels that allow for a wide viewing angle of 178 degrees and HDMI inputs that deliver quality signal to the television.





CANON: Canon has launched a full-range of new cameras, including the new 21.1 megapixel Canon EOS 1Ds Mark III. The Mark III uses the most advanced photographic technology with a 21.1 megapixel CMOS sensor, 14-bit analog-digital conversion, DIGIC III imaging processors and a high-speed high-precision 19-point AF system, all incorporated into the 35mm format. Other products launched include the 10.1 megapixel EOS 40D DSLR, the 8.0mp digital IXUS 860 IS and 12.2mp IXUS 960 IS, a new range of Cybershots, and a range of printers. Canon products are distributed by Primax International.

Going nowhere

Why the elite love a good queue

Is there anywhere in the world with as many queues as the Kathmandu valley? Everywhere you look, they are there, right in front of you. Those snaking monsters, hundreds of cars long, which disappear round the block only to eat their own tails in the wait for petrol. Those people standing in line half the



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

day for their cooking gas and kerosene. And in the dry months ahead, we'll see another set of queues, manned patiently by those waiting for their daily share of water. No-one queues like us. If you aren't in a traffic jam, you don't feel like you're a part of the city anymore. The stream of traffic inching its way down to Kalanki from the valley rim can be three miles long or more. At Koteswor you're lucky if it's half that. And who can get to Bhaktapur in 10 minutes? It's only 8km away

for goodness' sake. People queue visibly and uncomfortably to get a mobile connection. But the invisible queues to get an electricity connection are probably among the most expensive. Even diplomatic missions are getting in on the act: night owls on their way to bed will see nocturnal queues expanding in the early hours. Are visas any cheaper at 3AM? Even if you're loaded, even if you have bags of spare cash to fling around, the queue for a new car can last for months. And at the airport, our snarling queues have earned lots of column inches in the global press. What's even worse is that when you finally get to the head of your fifth queue, you are robbed by those nice men in uniforms. With more airlines signing up every week, TIA should be offering free queue management classes for passengers.

Is it just that we Nepalis have all the time in the world? Or perhaps we just pretend we do, so we don't have to put a value on those tens or hundreds or thousands of hours we lose each year in queues. Let's assume there are 10,000 taxis in the valley, and each driver spends one day a week in queues to get his fuel quota.

This fuel shortage has now been going on for about eight months, so we have lost well over 300,000 person-days already. Add on the motorbikes and private cars, and surely the cost is running to millions of dollars-worth of productive human output. And of course the sad paradox is that while the nation is short of petrol, those of us that actually have some end up wasting most of it sitting in traffic jams caused by the queues of those still waiting to buy the stuff. That's not all. We are also losing extra hours of people's work time as the queues become an excuse to not show up for work at all. And the reason nothing is done about all these queues? Well, this Beed has noticed that our society is not exactly based on a strong foundation of equality, so queuing is not applicable to all. Just ask a politician when he or she last queued for something. Queue jumping is an elitist phenomenon and those that can, love to show they are part of it. If there were no queues, how would the elite show their eliteness? Nepal is losing millions of dollars through these queues. It's about time we changed our attitude and looked at them from an economic perspective, not a superficial one. ●

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Don't fear the press

Editorial in *Annapurna Post*,
6 December

Speaking at a meeting on national press freedom, Maoist chairman Prachanda accused feudal and imperialistic elements of operating under the façade of a free press. At the meeting organised by the Federation of Nepalese Journalists, Prachanda also accused the big media houses of playing a game to prevent the Maoists coming to power, and of unnecessarily exaggerating small weaknesses.

Because of this campaign against the Maoists, it is becoming difficult for them to protect themselves, says Prachanda. But we understand this is just his one-sided opinion. His comments clearly show there is but a tenuous relationship between the Maoists and the press.

The press doesn't create news. It just informs the people of political and social events. The press cannot cater to just one party or one individual. It is the voice of the voiceless. Parties take a single idea and go to the people, but the press takes up all the ideas and goes among the people.

Why does the Maoist leadership think such negative thoughts about the press? Can they hide their wrongdoings by blaming the press? Even after the comprehensive peace accord and after joining the government, the Maoists still have not stopped talking about being a separate power. Not going to the CA polls, going back to the jungle, collecting forceful donations, beating up innocents, abducting people, attacking the free press and taking over legal businesses: all these



KIRAN PANDAY

are activities they assured the people they would not do. Maoist involvement can be seen in all of these negative activities.

After facing opposition on all sides, they have got away with a little self-criticism and have turned everything into a political game. It won't be the press that ends the Maoists, it will be their own activities.

Chairman Prachanda should keep in mind that wrongs cannot be righted by attacking the press. The reason the people do not trust the Maoists is because of their own activities and the things they have said. If the Maoists were to improve, then there is no reason why the press would not praise them.

But the danger and fear that has permeated the people is not an issue that can be cast aside so easily. Even during the April Uprising and for democracy, the press acted fearlessly. The Maoists' intolerance of criticism will cost them dearly. The Maoists don't have to fear the press because of the ghosts in their past. They just need to understand that the press is on the side of truth and is against no one.

Driven away

Nepal, 9 December

More than 100 families living on the west bank of the Saptakosi have been forced to leave their homes because of atrocities by the madhesi Tarai Tigers. This is supposedly the first time such a large number of families have been displaced from the same village at the same time.

When the violence began to worsen in the village, the people kept quiet for nearly nine months. Those who suffered say they did not file any case against the group because they were threatened by members of the Tarai Tigers. Those displaced have taken refuge in the homes of relatives in Utlabari and Pathari, in Damak and Birtamod, and in Dharan. There are also 19 families now living in temporary camps on the banks of the Kosi in Khasre in Sunsari district.

Those residents of Haripur of pahadi origin were forced to leave their land and food and live like refugees in their own country

because of the acts of groups such as the Tarai Tigers and Madhesi Janadhikar Forum, claims Kulbahadur Limbu, one of the displaced. Not only did those violent groups take away their material possessions, they also created an insecure environment for the girls and women of the village. Of the 556 families of both pahadi and madhesi origin residing in Haripur, about 150 have been driven out.

Under the leadership of the self-proclaimed local commander of the Tarai Tigers, armed Indian men named Sitaram Yadav, Suresh Yadav, Sajim Miya and Ram Mandal told the pahadi residents to leave. When the villagers refused, the men kidnapped and killed Tek Bahadur Kunwar in the name of Tarai Andolan. They shot Thapa on 30 July, claiming that he had spied on them. Before this incident, the group had kidnapped and killed Tanahang Limbu, whose body was found near the Indian border.

The armed members of Tarai Tigers have been threatening to



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CPN Maoists, who have been helping the displaced families, have constructed temporary camps in unoccupied grounds in Barahachetra, near the homes of people of pahadi origin. The families are still too scared to talk to the media as their new home is only 10km from Haripur.

Sources say that even Queen Komal, who has not been affected by any disease, is rumored to be growing thinner. According to the plan, the prince was to be admitted to the institute's VIP unit and Queen Komal was to follow two days later for a medical check-up. The king was

The mediation between the palace and Delhi was carried out by a relative of Ganesh Man Singh who also happens to be a pupil of the Indian prime minister. Some royalists claim that India was conspiring to announce Nepal a republic while the royal family was in Delhi. They also claimed the king was trying to establish a relationship with India through other means.



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Modernising minstrels

Gandarbas seek a new audience for the 21st century



IRENE PERONI

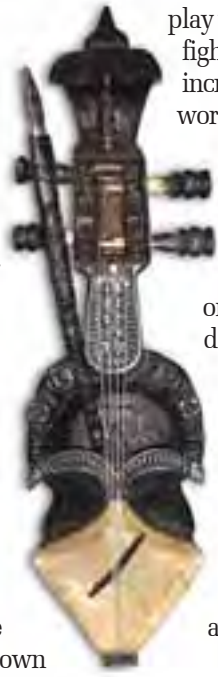
When you bump into the many street musicians wandering the lanes of Thamel with their sarangis, you would hardly believe they are the descendants of Nepal's wandering minstrels with their epic songs.

These are the Gandharbas, one of the 23 dalit castes who until a few decades ago would roam from village to village taking their story-songs with them. Music was their only occupation, and despite the stigma attached to their caste, they would attract crowds keen to listen to their songs or to learn of news from distant parts of the land. In return, the entertainers

received food or a few rupees.

Inevitably their role in society waned with the advent of other forms of musical entertainment, and the Gandharbas know all too well that in the age of satellite tv and FM radio they must reinvent themselves.

Many, especially the younger ones, have already moved to Kathmandu, where they make and sell the four-stringed sarangis which used to earn a living for their ancestors. They have also begun to record their own CDs for sale, and teach Nepalis and curious foreigners how to



play the instrument. To fight for survival in the increasingly competitive world of Thamel, they set up the Gandharba Cultural and Art Organisation in 1994.

The centre relies on its members to donate up to half their profits to support the Gandharba community. Spare money is used to buy school uniforms, pens and notebooks for Gandharba children in rural areas.

An estimated two out of three Gandharbas are illiterate, something the organisation's secretary, Kedar Gandhari, is keen to change. "I am not afraid that once educated they will turn their back on our traditions," he says. "In fact, those of us who manage to get a proper education will research our culture and history and maybe write a book about us."

According to the 2001 national census, there are just 4,500 Gandharbas, representing just 0.03 per cent of Nepal's population, such a tiny proportion of the country's total that they might never get proper

Himalayan bluegrass

"The first time I heard a sarangi being played, I immediately noticed the similarities to Appalachian music," says Jacob Penchansky, a "guerrilla ethnomusicologist" from the US, who has been working on an ambitious musical project with the Gandharbas. Penchansky says the melodic scales and rhythms on the fiddle and sarangi are very similar, and the lyrics touch on the same aspects of peasants' everyday life: "No matter what country you're in, people like to share the same kinds of stories when they're done working in the fields."

Along with Tara Linhardt and Danny Knicely, two established bluegrass musicians who share his love for Nepal, Jacob launched the Mountain Music Project in 2006. A 10-man crew from the US travelled for three weeks to Gorkha, Lamjung, Pokhara, Palpa and the tarai, filming, recording and interviewing the Gandharba musicians they met along the way.

"We were especially looking for old songs that might not be passed down to the next generation, and for any Gandharbas who still went village to village as wandering minstrels," says Penchansky.

But rather than confining their work to simply recording old Gandharba music, the group also spent time teaching local people Appalachian songs and being taught their own, and finally recording the jamming sessions. The group's labour of love is a CD, to be released in 2008, tentatively titled "Old-Time Himalayan Bluegrass". The recording will include six Nepali and six Appalachian songs and feature musicians from both the US and Nepal.

"Travelling around the countryside, meeting and jamming with local musicians, sharing our music and learning about Nepali musical heritage firsthand... it was an absolute blast," says Penchansky, who is hoping to release the CD in Nepal too.

An in-depth account of the group's adventures as well as audio and sound bites can be found at www.mountainmusicproject.blogspot.com



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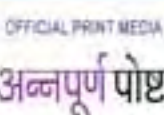
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The cultural centre has many ideas for improving its community’s lives. Top priority is an empowerment project to make villagers aware of their rights.

“The Gandharbas in the districts know nothing of the political developments in the country,” says Gandhari. “They don’t have any social awareness and are not interested in politics. A big revolution has taken place in Nepal, but if we don’t learn about politics, we will always be lagging behind.”

Despite the fierce competition for customers on the streets of Thamel, the most active members of the centre do not let themselves be put off.

“My friend and I thought that since we know the mountains quite well, we could offer to take tourists on musical treks,” says one of the musicians, Kishan, after the daily free concert at the cultural centre. “We once took a group of five to Langtang. The music would really cheer us up

whenever we stopped to have a rest along the way, and made us forget how tired our legs were.”

Stephanie Spray, one of several foreign researchers involved in studying and promoting Gandharba culture, says that many Nepalis are aware they are the members of a unique caste with a complex and rich history.

“Unfortunately, cultural capital does not necessarily translate into forms of economic or social benefit: often they must hustle for support and attention,” says Spray, who is researching a PhD on the Gandharbas at Harvard University.

But she says poor management and internal feuds within the organisation sometimes reduce the benefits the Gandharba community could gain from outside support. Despite such shortcomings, Spray says the cultural centre remains a very important base in the city for Gandharba men and their families when they are away from their villages. ●

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RITA THAPA

You can't help feeling furious about the neglect of Jumla's women

Outrageous conditions

JUMLA—Once you get to remote northwestern Nepal, all the statistics you hear in Kathmandu about improvements in public health no longer make any sense.

This is the part of Nepal where the child mortality rate is up to four times higher than the national average. Four out of every 10 babies born die before their first birthday. And they die of simple lung infections, dehydration from dysentery or of vaccine-preventable diseases like measles.

There are supposed to be improvements, of course, but one wouldn't know it here in the dalit settlements in Sigachaur outside Jumla's district capital, where local women gathered recently for one of those periodic health camps that are supposed to compensate for the lack of a proper government health service.

NEPALIPAN
Rita Thapa

The children are beginning to go to school, and solar-powered lights have improved their health because they don't have to study by the light of sooty kerosene lamps anymore. Incomes have risen because of micro-credit schemes aimed at dalit women. Yet Jumla still has one of the shortest average lifespans for men and women in Nepal.

A hidden problem is the high number of women suffering from a prolapsed uterus. Of one group of 22 women in the health camp, only two didn't have this condition. They don't normally talk about it, much less seek medical help. This is no doubt because of the women's prescribed roles, subjugation, illiteracy and, of course, the absence of state health services and outreach in the district.

Lal Maya Sunuwar (above), 35, had a miscarriage two years ago. She was lucky to survive after being discovered lying in a pool of blood in the forest where she had gone to collect firewood. She bled continuously for six more months and now lives with a prolapsed uterus.

Laxmi Sunuwar is 25 and by nature vivacious and independent. She has three boys and is now pregnant with a fourth baby she doesn't want because she knows she won't be able to care for it properly. Fourteen-year-old Sumitra is the daughter of now-widowed Nili. She eloped recently and is four months pregnant. Nili is worried sick about what may happen to her daughter at childbirth.

A daughter-in-law in Jumla is still judged by how soon after childbirth she goes to fetch firewood and fodder. But Nili seems powerless to ensure that her daughter delivers in a health centre and takes the necessary rest and post-natal precautions – if she survives the ordeal at all.

People here, especially the women, look twice their real age, exhausted by the harsh climate, rugged life and chronic hunger. Almost every woman here has a reproductive health ailment, and because it is a woman's problem they don't talk about it. They don't go to hospital because the doctor, if there is one, is usually a man. The men start drinking and gambling well before the sun sets while the women huddle indoors around the smokey kitchen fire.

Despite decades of development interventions and rampant rhetoric about the liberation of women, the condition of Jumla's most underprivileged women has not improved, and maybe even worsened. Genderspeak and the work of specialists don't mean much to the women here because their analysis is not grounded in compassion.

The responsibility to ensure basic human rights and justice for the women of Jumla lies with those who wield most power and those who are supposed to be entrusted with improving their lives. Yet here, in the midst of western Nepal's stark beauty, cultural heritage and diversity, there is a grinding, hopeless poverty and dependence.

Any thinking visitor to the Karnali region returns angry: outraged by the apathy and neglect of the central government in Kathmandu to the desperate need for the simple things that could improve women's lives here. It is time to convert that anger into individual action and organise long-term sustainable help for Jumla's health. ●

Nepal cuts maternal mortality by half

Ten years ago, 540 women out of 100,000 live births died, today that figure is down to 281

Over the past decade, as pregnancy-related deaths have fallen worldwide at a frustratingly slow rate of one per cent a year, according to the World Health Organisation, Nepal has managed to cut its maternal mortality rate by almost 50 per cent.

It has done so without adding expensive emergency surgical delivery teams, once seen as the only effective way to cut the rural death rate. Instead, it has focussed on more routine interventions – teaching about birth control, giving iron supplements to cut anaemia,

encouraging later motherhood and providing safe abortions, among others.

“A lot of progress has been made here,” said Birthe Locatelli-Rossi, chief of the health section for UNICEF in Nepal. “There’s an international belief you can’t fix this problem except with



RITA THAPA

Staying alive

MALLIKA ARYAL

In 2001, 540 women were dying per 100,000 live births in Nepal. A recent Nepal Demographic Health Survey shows the number of deaths has dropped to 280. Health experts say this dramatic improvement is the result of a combination of government and private initiatives as well as policy changes, but warn that even the current rate of death is higher than it should be.

“Reduction of pre- and post-delivery haemorrhage and infection is the key to saving the lives of pregnant women,” says Shyam Raj Upreti, chief of the Expanded Program on Immunisation in the Child Health Division. He adds that it is crucial to have doctors and health workers who are trained in delivery.

The biggest factor in reducing maternal mortality was

the decision to legalise abortion in Nepal in 2002. From early 2004, the government began providing comprehensive care, training doctors and approving clinics all over the country where women could have an abortion safely.

“The number of deaths related to unsafe abortion was very high,” says Indira Basnett of Ipas, an international organisation that works to empower women to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights. “When abortion was legalised, the number of women dying due to pregnancy-related causes dramatically decreased.”

Today more than 177 approved government and private clinics in 71 districts provide abortion services to women. In 2004, more than 150,000 women underwent successful operations.

Basnett says more women also know about family planning today. The government's network

of village health workers has raised awareness of maternal health and the care of pregnant women, and the growth of privately run health services specialising in obstetric care has also helped to reduce the mortality rate.

The government only provides emergency obstetric care in the zonal hospitals. Patients either have to walk for days to reach them, or must drive or fly to Kathmandu. It is often cheaper for family members to take the pregnant woman to a private clinic in the closest urban centre.

But public health experts warn that the apparent improvement in mortality rates may be misleading. They say that in areas like Dadeldhura, Bajura, Bajhang, Mugu and other districts in far western Nepal, there is unlikely to have been much improvement.

“We are talking about areas

emergency obstetric units. No doubt those are really needed, but there are other things to do too.”

Nepal is an exception in South Asia, which, along with sub-Saharan Africa, has the highest rates of maternal mortality in the world, according to a report released in October by the World Bank, World Health Organisation and several UN agencies.

Together, sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia account for 85 per cent of the world’s maternal deaths. Afghanistan is tied with Sierra Leone as the most dangerous place to become pregnant – with one in six women dying as a result of pregnancies – and death rates are high in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh as well.

But from 2001 to 2006, a government and NGO-funded campaign to increase access to family planning information and contraceptives and to encourage women to wait until age 20 to have a first child has cut Nepal’s birth rate from 4.1 children per woman to 3.1, reducing maternal deaths as the number of lifetime pregnancies falls.

Because many rural women give birth in less-than-sterile environments, agencies combatting maternal mortality have beefed up the country’s tetanus vaccination campaign, which has led to a drop in deaths of both mothers and newborns. Pregnant women who make at least one prenatal visit to a doctor also are given iron supplements to cut anaemia, once a major contributor to fatal haemorrhaging after delivery.

Today just a third of Nepali women are anaemic, down from 75 per cent five years ago. Vitamin A

supplements, given after birth to boost immunity, similarly have reduced infections in new mothers. Through education campaigns and expanded clinic networks, Nepal also has managed to boost births at hospitals from 10 per cent to 20 per cent of the total, and increase the number of postnatal visits to clinics by more than 30 per cent.

Three years ago the country legalised abortion and made it available at 85 per cent of district hospitals, dramatically cutting illegal abortions that were once one of the major sources of maternal deaths. But Nepal is still struggling to get help to the five per cent of Nepali women who need a Caesarean section to deliver their babies.

Because young wives are generally the lowest-ranked members of an extended family household, and women’s health is not a priority in rural areas, many pregnant women are taken to a clinic only after days of unsuccessful labour, at which point most die en route to a hospital or on arrival.

Worse, because a Caesarean can cost \$140, a fortune in rural Nepal, some husbands prefer to save the money and let their wives die, health workers say.

More help is on the horizon for Nepal’s rural women, however. A new study in a few districts indicates that delivering a few oral drops of an easy-to-use drug called mistoprostol, which doesn’t need refrigeration, appears to have reduced likely deaths of women from postpartum haemorrhage by 85 per cent. ●

(Laurie Goering/Chicago Tribune)

Maternal mortality rates are falling but there’s room for improvement

where there are no doctors, women deliver at home, and if they die their deaths are not registered, areas where women suffer from acute malnutrition, haemorrhaging, tetanus and other infections. Pregnancy-related deaths rates are still very high there,” Aruna Upreti, a public health expert told *Nepali Times*.

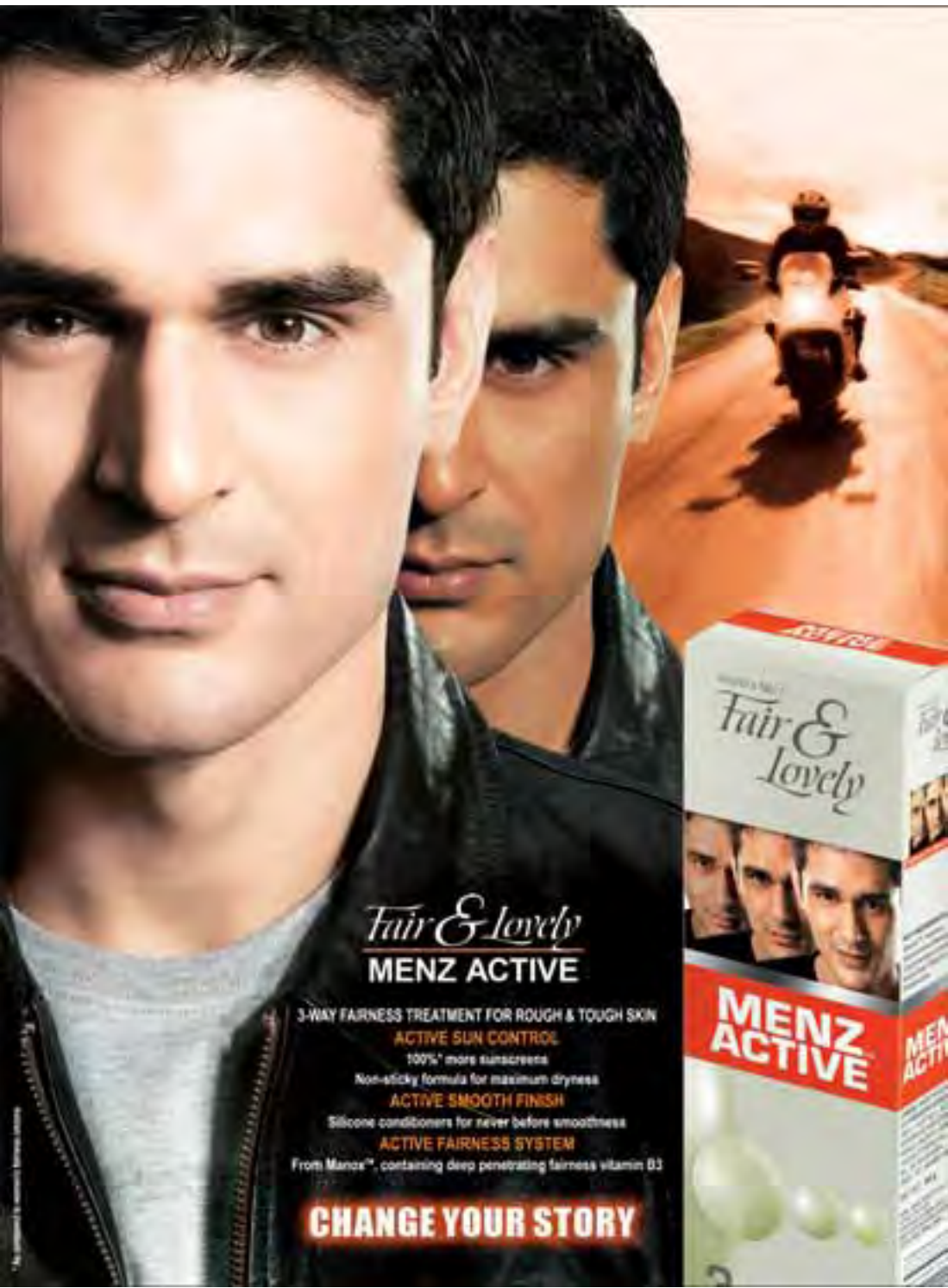
Upreti of Child Health Division agrees: “When the maternal mortality rate was 540 per 100,000 live births, we had estimated more than 1,000 deaths per 100,000 live births in rural Nepal. That cannot have changed much.”

Asok Sharma, a public health expert now working with Merlin Sri Lanka in strengthening local-level maternal and child health, says that the 12 years of conflict devastated the country’s health systems. “In conflict areas, routine services were not provided, health workers were confined to headquarters, not a

single doctor was available, and services were not upgraded. How could maternal mortality have gone down in these areas?” he asks.

Experts say the key to future improvements lies in building the capacity of health workers and midwives deployed at VDC level. There is also a need to register pregnancies and to provide specialised obstetric and neonatal care beyond just the zonal hospitals.

Nevertheless, reducing maternal mortality by nearly 50 percent is no small feat. Basnett is confident that lessons have been learnt and mortality rates can be reduced. “If the service is accessible, acceptable in terms of quality, and affordable, then we can save more women. Let this be the lesson to doctors, health workers, midwives, public health experts and government while devising future policies relating to maternal health.” ●



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Rich polluters won't cut emissions unless the poor do so as well

Glacial negotiations

KUNDA DIXIT in BALI

The best way to save the Maldives from drowning is not to fly there anymore. The most effective way to stop glacial retreat in the Himalayas may be to stop burning fossil hydrocarbons to go to Nepal for a trek.

The UN's crucial climate convention that ends in Bali on Friday could save the Maldives and the Himalayas from catastrophic climate change, but only if all the 190 participating countries agree on a 'roadmap' for ambitious emission cuts in the next five years.

The 15,000 delegates emitted an average of two tons of carbon each to attend the Bali meet. So, US senator Ed Markey of Massachusetts decided to become carbon neutral by delivering a speech via his avatar in Second Life.

For the past two weeks, negotiations here have been stuck in a tug of war between rich countries, which don't want to pay for cumulative emissions, and large polluters like China and India balking at having to cut back without adequate financial safeguards.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has said average global temperatures should not be allowed to rise above two degrees. For this, the draft Bali declaration wants rich countries to slash emissions between 25 and 40 per cent by 2020. The Europeans say they will be down to 30 percent of their



KUNDA DIXIT

1990 levels in 12 years.

Bali marks 10 years since the signing of the Kyoto Protocol, which has been ratified by most countries except the US. But even Kyoto signatories like Japan, Canada, and most recently Australia, are resisting the more

ambitious targets being debated in Bali.

In stark contrast, China announced its own cuts and earned praise in Bali for agreeing to meet international commitments. India has been largely silent here, but its blame-

TERMINAL MORAINES: The retreating Gangapurna Glacier has left an expanding lake at its snout in the Manang Valley. Even if international commitments on cutting greenhouse gases are agreed in Bali this week, glaciers worldwide will continue retreating well into the end of this century.

throwing on rich polluters is not seen as being very helpful.

The American government is isolated not just internationally but also within its own country by progressive figures such as California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, Al Gore and a network of mayors. By being so flexible, the Chinese have weakened the American bargaining position and exposed its intransigence.

For smaller countries like Nepal, the focus is on maximising benefits from a new Adaptation Fund so they can switch to cleaner and more efficient energy and pay for mitigation.

The Nepali delegation in Bali has been lobbying to add the word 'degradation' to an agreement on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation (RED). It's not just semantics. Nepal is entitled to compensation under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) for its dramatic successes in bio gas, microhydro and community forestry for carbon not emitted. Money could also be available to mitigate glacial lake outbursts. The fact that Nepal's

environment minister resigned in Kathmandu during the meeting here doesn't seem to have made much difference. "We are not the culprits, we are the victims of climate change," says Sandeep Chamling Rai of WWF Nepal. "Our intention here is to take advantage of the package of technology transfer, adaptation and financial help that will be negotiated in Bali."

Although they are not major polluters, smaller South Asian countries will bear the brunt of climate impacts this century. The Maldives will be submerged, one-third of Bangladesh could go under, and melting Himalayan glaciers may trigger water wars in Asia.

"The science shows that global warming is rapidly melting glaciers," warns the Nepali head of the Asia-Pacific division of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Surendra Shrestha. "In 50-100 years they may be gone."

UNEP says the retreat of glaciers is most rapid in the Andes, but is also speeding up in the Himalayas, and by 2100 up to 80 per cent of its ice cap could melt with potentially cataclysmic ecological and political consequences downstream.

Nepal's foremost glaciologist, Pradeep Mool of ICIMOD, told a panel in Bali on Thursday: "When the ice melts, glacial lakes grow dangerously big. And when the water towers go, Himalayan rivers will go dry. We better start preparing for these things" ●

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“Climate change will fundamentally change Nepal”



Surendra Shrestha is the regional head of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Bangkok involved in supporting governments and civil society in negotiations at the United Nations Framework Conference on Climate Change (UNFCCC). He spoke to *Nepali Times* in Bali this week about the prospects of an international agreement on meeting emissions targets.

***Nepali Times:* How difficult is it to convince developed countries like Australia and the US to fulfill their responsibilities according to the Kyoto guidelines?**
The informed public in Australia has elected a new government which has made a commitment to sign up to the Kyoto Protocol. In the US over half the cities and states have taken actions to reduce emissions. I am sure the informed public in the US will also prevail and bring in the leadership that will take up the challenges of climate change.

India and China talk about per capita emissions, but their total carbon footprints are pretty large. How successful have you been in convincing them about their role?

The scientific evidence presented by the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) has prioritised climate change on the political agenda. There is more awareness and better understanding of the greenhouse gases. These gases stay around for 100 years and possibly more. Over 70 per cent of the greenhouse emissions are generated in developed countries. China and India are big countries with huge populations and challenges of poverty alleviation for over 600 million people. Development needs more energy that leads to increased emissions with present technology. Both China and India are taking national-level actions to increase energy efficiency and reduce emissions, and they are doing it internally without boasting about it. The current level of emissions is high, but in a few years both will be providing innovation in terms of energy efficiency.

Are the countries of Asia taking seriously the melting of Himalayan glaciers?
The Hindu-Kush Himalayas are the largest water towers in the world. They provide for over three billion people directly or indirectly. All the major river systems in Asia originate in the snows, ice and glaciers of the Himalayas.
The science shows that due to global warming the glaciers are retreating rapidly. In 50 or 100 years’ time the glaciers may be gone. This message is beginning to be understood by increasingly more people. A quick look at our region where recent elections have taken place show the science and public are ahead of policy. With a gradual increase of public awareness, the electorate is deciding with votes.

As a Nepali, how seriously do you think our own country should be taking this issue?
Climate change will fundamentally change human civilisation as we know it. The increase in temperature is changing ecosystems. We are already faced with extreme weather events, and food, water and energy security issues. Climate change has received attention from the major development partners, and new financial resources as well as technology are being made available to less developed countries to address the challenges.
Few vulnerability assessments have been conducted in Nepal to date, but these highlight the vulnerability of the country’s rich biodiversity and natural capital within a fragile mountain ecosystem. The other key sectors that are vulnerable to climate change in Nepal are water resources, agriculture and the health sector. The impact of climate change on water resources will affect Nepal through a number of pathways including disasters, hydropower, irrigation and domestic water usage. There is also a pressing risk to Nepal from the potential increase of climate-related disasters, particularly of glacial lake outburst floods.



Riveting realism

A masterpiece of war and politics that left a nation reeling

Cineastes regularly talk of Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers* with a reverence that is reserved only for the rarest of films. It is remarkable how one as unsettlingly political as this pulled off such a coup in the world of art and culture that is usually so tenaciously apolitical.

Then again, it was never enough just to describe *Algiers* as a film that epitomised a phase in global history where mass movements and collective action sought to change the shape of the old colonial world. Released in 1966, *Algiers* came at a moment when the concept of culture itself was gaining new meanings. Culture, in the 1960s, no longer embodied the sense of high-and-mighty refinement. It had migrated from the patrician sanctuaries to the domain of everyday life and lower-class dissent. The success of *Algiers* in a way came to represent this shift.

Many artists and filmmakers in the period after the Second World War had turned to the disenfranchised for creative inspiration. Italian



CRITICAL CINEMA
Diwas Kc

director Pontecorvo and co-writer Franco Solinas turned to the burgeoning anti-colonial movement. The film takes as its subject a particularly violent episode in Algeria’s

revolutionary war against French colonialism. Desperate for independence, Algerian rebels have taken to terrorism. Snipers shoot and women plant bombs in trendy locales visited by French settlers. The French army responds mercilessly and indiscriminately, hunting down every member of the insurgent cells.

Algiers is an extraordinary feat in neo-realism, obliterating the distance between reality and representation. Like the films of other neo-realists like Roberto Rossellini and Vittorio De Sica, the film’s use of non-professional actors and real locations in the Casbah is remarkable enough. But the documentary-like veracity it achieves through its use of masses of people and a newsreel style is uniquely spectacular.

Moreover, no other film captures as authentically and reasonably the ethical contradictions of human existence (and the colonial mindsets). On one side is Ali La Pointe (Haggiag), the rebel leader, deserving our utmost empathy yet whose modus operandi is downright insufferable. On the other stands Colonel Mathieu (Martin), a menacing disciplinarian whose logic and grasp of the situation is uncomfortably impressive.

More than anything else, though, *Algiers* is stunning for its prescience and earth-shattering social significance. The world may have changed a lot since the Algerian War. But somehow in that struggle, as depicted in this film, are trapped all the predicaments of modernity – nationalism, inequality, imperialism, fundamentalism, and terrorism. American officials would not otherwise be screening the film at the Pentagon.

Watching *Algiers* is a riveting experience that irrevocably binds its viewers to the power of cinema and inducts them into newer world-views. Catch it next Friday at the Alliance Francaise, Tripureshwar. 4241163

Director: Gillo Pontecorvo.
Cast: Brahim Haggiag, Jean Martin, Saadi Yacef.
1966. 117 min. In French and Arabic, with English subtitles.





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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Nan Guinin** an exhibition of paintings inspired by Africa by Siddhant Thapa, till 17 December, 10AM-6PM at Park Gallery, Lazimpat. 4419353
- ❖ **Kathmandu Off Beat** exhibition of the best 15 photos, until 31 December at Alliance Francaise. 4241163
- ❖ **The Mithila Cosmos** an exhibition by SC Suman, from 7 December, at Siddhartha Art Gallery.
- ❖ **The China Tibet Photography Exhibition** at the Nepal Tourism Board until 15 December.
- ❖ **Larger than Life** panoramas by Kishor Kayastha until 15 January, 8AM-6PM at the Indigo Gallery, Naxal. 4413580
- ❖ **Exhibition of contemporary and Thangka** paintings by Kathmandu Gallery at the Patan Museum, until 20 December. 4248094
- ❖ **Enchanting Life with Light** photo show by Rocky Prajapati at The Bakery Café, Pulchowk until 10 January. 9851014930

EVENTS

- ❖ **Sicko** a documentary by Micheal Moore, 14 December, 6.15 PM at the Lazimpat Gallery Cafe. 4428549
- ❖ **Pre Christmas party** with latin live music, 18 December at New Orleans Cafe. 4700736
- ❖ **The Battle of Algiers** presented by Candid Society, 21 December, 7PM at Alliance Francaise. 4241163
- ❖ **Sinners in Heaven** Hotel Yak and Yeti, 31 December, 8PM onwards, Rs 1,799, inclusive of unlimited drinks and dinner.
- ❖ **Why and how I write** an interaction with Samrat Upadhyay, 16 December, 1PM at Gurukul, New Banewor. 4255500
- ❖ **Free children's party** at Welcome Food Plaza, Kasthamandap Bazaar Building, with children's bingo, face painting, 15 and 24 December. 2337201



MUSIC

- ❖ **Ani Choying Dolma** live at the Nepal Academy Hall, 15 December, 5PM, in aid of the National Kidney Centre, prices ranging from Rs 5,000-700. 9851031977
- ❖ **Live Sufi music** at Nhuchhe's Kitchen, The Organic Bistro, every Friday evening.
- ❖ **Ciney Gurung** every Wednesday and Rashmi Singh every Friday, live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex, 7PM. 5521408

DINING

- ❖ **Special seafood lunch** until 23 December, 12 noon-3PM at the Rox Restaurant, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Steak escape** with premium beef steaks at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Radisson Hotel, until 23 December.
- ❖ **Christmas Eve dinner** at the Chimney Restaurant, Hotel Yak and Yeti, 6.30-9.30 PM, 24 December, Rs 6,999 for couple.
- ❖ **Traditional Christmas dinner** at the Summit Hotel, 25 December, Rs 890, 7PM; jazz brunch with Jazztonics Revised, 26 December, 11AM-3PM.
- ❖ **Saturday special** barbeque, sekuwa, momos, dal-bhat at The Tea House Inn, Windy Hills, Nagarkot every Saturday. 9841250848.
- ❖ **Weeklong festivities** with Bella Italia on Monday, enchanting Asia on Wednesday and Mongolian BBQ on Friday at the Hotel Himalaya, 7PM. Rs 499. 5523900
- ❖ **Dice-licious brunch** at Kakori, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, roll the dice to the number of the day and get 50% discount on an individual meal, Saturdays and Sundays, 12.30-3.30PM. 4273999
- ❖ **Vegetarian alternative** at Stupa View restaurant and café, Boudha Stupa. 4480262
- ❖ **Enjoy the new menu** at Roadhouse Cafe Pulchok, Bhatbateni and Thamel. 5521755, 4426587, 4262768.
- ❖ **Jazz in Patan** with coffee, food, drinks, and dessert at the New Orleans Cafe, Jawalakhel, 11.30 AM-10PM. 5522708
- ❖ **BBQ, chilled beer, cocktails** and live music at the Kausi Restaurant and Bar, Darbar Marg, 6218490
- ❖ **Cocktails and jazz** with the JCS Quartet and a choice of cocktails at Fusion – the Bar at Dwarika's. 4479448
- ❖ **Starry night barbecue** at Hotel Shangri-la with Live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs. 666.00 nett. per person, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 6.30 PM onwards. 4412999
- ❖ **Kebabs and curries** at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619
- ❖ **Calcutta's rolls, biryani, kebabs** Indian cuisine at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 9741000735
- ❖ **Rediscover fine Italian** cuisine at La Dolce Vita, Thamel, 4700612
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- ❖ **Fulbari Resort and Spa, Pokhara** Rs 10,999 for Nepali double, \$219 for expat double, two days and three nights package, with transportation from the airport, drinks, tennis and swimming, discounts on food and beverages.

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WEEKEND WEATHER by **NGAMINDRA DAHAL**

After a month-long dry spell, there is still no sign of rain reaching us any time soon. Satellite photos on Thursday morning show a cyclone off India's southeast coast, but this is unlikely to affect us. Without strong cyclonic activity over the Tibetan Plateau, there will not be much significant precipitation over the Himalayas. There are signs of an emerging low-pressure area over the Pamirs, but this may take weeks to mature, pulling moisture from the Mediterranean Sea. Until then, the sunny days will continue, although a heavy haze will hang over the valleys and plains most mornings. Look after your skin as the air humidity decreases.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri 20-03 ☀️	Sat 19-02 ☀️	Sun 19-02 ☀️
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संज्ञा ६ वख र रात्री ८ वख

संज्ञा फिल्म संग्रह कार्यक्रम
Tuning In To Language and Culture
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हरेक साइतबार विडेली (९.१०-९.२०)
रेडियो सगरमाथा विभिन्न सुनी, संज्ञा सुनी-
(रेडियो सगरमाथा र संज्ञा सुनी सम्बन्धित, संज्ञा सुनी-
संज्ञा सुनी)



LET'S STICK TOGETHER: Uniformed Maoist soldiers welcome political leaders from Nepali Congress and People's Front Nepal to their cantonment in Jutpani village in Chitwan district on Tuesday.



ONE HORSE TOWN: Police in Birganj stop a tanga at the India-Nepal border on Sunday to carry out a security check.



SNAP HAPPY: Roland Poon, senior consumer manager at Canon, displays the latest model camera at a photography workshop for Nepali photographers at the Soaltee Crowne Plaza Hotel on Wednesday.



DOWN AND DIRTY: Kathmandu's hungry cows make the most of the free snacks available amidst the stinking piles of uncollected garbage at Bhrikuti Mandap on Monday.



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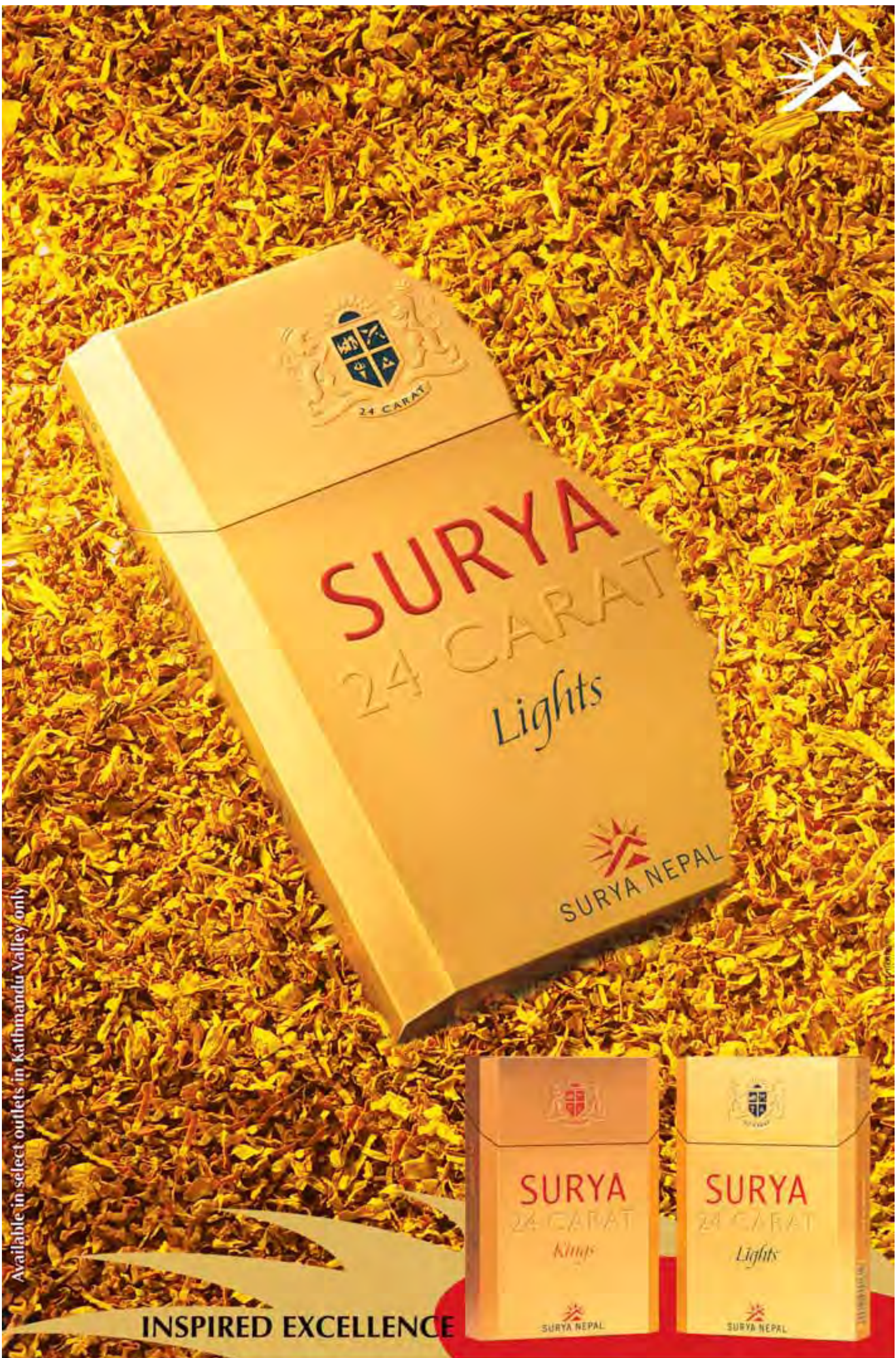
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ISSN 1814-2613

