



9 DASAIN AYO 10
Nepal's bird diversity

NOTICE TO READERS - Because of the Dasain Festival there will be no issue of Nepali Times on 11 October. After the holidays, Nepali Times will come out on Fridays every week and not Wednesdays as it does presently. The next issue will be on Friday, 20 October. See you then. —Editor

EXCLUSIVE

Kosi High Dam

Secretary-level talks began secretly in Kathmandu this week to discuss the proposal to build a flood-control high dam on the Kosi River. A team led by the Indian water resources secretary Jafar Hasan was in Kathmandu for the 1-3 October meeting, but few in Nepal seemed to know about it. Why all the secrecy? Officially, this meeting is a follow-up to the prime minister's visit to Delhi in August when India and Nepal agreed to streamline bilateral water consultations. But India seems to want to bring up the issue of the Kosi and the Bagmati High Dam projects. New Delhi is keen to placate fears in Bihar that it is not doing enough to push the mammoth projects which many Biharis see as a solution to their annual flood woes. For the first time, the Indian team included a Bihari official, Radha Singh, the state's commissioner for water resources, and also Patna-based media.

Why was Ghimire fired?

The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) Director General Nagendra Prasad Ghimire was summarily sacked last week. And that would have been that. But word has come that Ghimire was punished for opposing a government decision granting licences to seven new airlines, one of which wanted to operate a single-engine passenger aircraft.

The Beeb bends over

The BBC backtracked and altered the subject of its South Asia Debate on its World Today programme after the Foreign Ministry sent a sharply worded statement denouncing it. But the emails in the Internet debate, parts of which were also broadcast, turned out to be overwhelmingly in Nepal's favour. Nepali Times brings a selected transcript of the debate on pg 7. See also State of the State on pg 2.



C.K. LAL
Force has masculine connotations in societies that struggled against Nature for their survival. Nature had to be subdued and tamed so that Man could be said to have conquered it. In societies that grew in her bosom, Nature was regarded as feminine in both her gentle and fierce avatars. Nature was the complete woman: the mother, the lover, the sister, the daughter, all rolled into one. All life forces emanated from her, and behind the Supreme Being's every move there was the cycle of creation, sustenance and destruction. God was a she. And she was called the Mother Earth, the Mother Goddess. She made the moon and the earth go around the sun. She made us do what we do, and later enjoy or suffer the consequences. When the Aryans came face to face with the splendours of the Harappan civilisation in the early part of the second millennium BC they must have been awestruck by the power of the female deity that bestowed such opulence, even on a people so unwilling to go to war. The Aryans established their hegemony by torching Harappan cities, and then

Swaha, Mata, Lokmata, Shanti, Pushti, Dhriti and Swosti. Women may have been beaten down by centuries of suppression in our society, but they are still the ones who bestow power upon their men. So, who is empowering whom? Matrikas became even more important when Vedic Hindus (and later even Buddhists to some extent) fused with animism in the mountainous regions of Kashmir, Kumaon, Nepal, Tibet and Assam. A faith emerged celebrating the primal union of the *linga* (the phallus, standing for male force) with the *yoni* (the vagina,



Mother of all festivals

For a society that has a strong matrilineal heritage and a pantheon of goddesses in heaven, it is surprising how strongly patriarchal practices dominate Nepali society today.

establishing their own set of goddesses. Brahmins called them *Shodash-Matrika*—the 16 mother goddesses. Perhaps the 16 originated from escorts of famous patriarchal Aryan chiefs, or from the women that took care of the home and children when the men went to war. The goddesses could have been wives of various saints revered by traditional Hindus who trace their ancestry to them through *gotras* named after famous *rishis*. It is equally likely that these remarkable women were chiefs or saints in their own right. After all, they have survived millennia of patriarchy and are worshipped to this day at pre-ceremony rites (*purbanga*) and ritual initiations and marriages. When they are solemnly recited, the names of these 16 mother goddesses have a hypnotic cadence, a poetry of sound connecting us to our unknown maternal ancestors: Gauri, Padma, Shachi, Medha, Sabitri, Bijaya, Jaya, Devsena, Swadha,

garland of skulls around her neck
• Indrani rides an elephant and looks a little more reassuring, notwithstanding a whip in one of her hands
• Chamunda is a skeleton, with two teeth protruding like Dracula she looks like someone who can send a chill down the spine of sinners
• Kumari is the virgin goddess, her blessings bestow upon kings the right to rule
• Baishnabi appears riding an airborne eagle that has a snake in its beak and she has one hand raised in a gesture of blessing. These Seven Mothers are revered as symbols of primal forces that constitute the universe. In addition to them (are you following me here?) there is Mahalaxmi, the great goddess of Dasain herself. Heavily armed with a lethal-looking trident, a bow, an arrow, an axe, a whip, a snake, a sword and a *chakra* (rotary blade) in her 10 hands and riding a tiger, Mahalaxmi is the very embodiment of power. She is also worshipped as Durga—the slayer of evil and protector of the good and noble. Last, but not least, there is

Astamatrika, Mother Nature at her bewitching best. It is said that one night she appeared in the dreams of King Pratap Malla and directed him to create an image of her and enshrine her. So there she is at the Mohan Chowk of Hanuman Dhoka—embodying all the forces of creation, sustenance and destruction. Ashtamatrika is also revered as Kali, the seductive destroyer. Other faiths ask followers to be perfect like the Father in heaven. All Kali asks for is love: ecstatic love, elevating love, menacing love, punishing love. For those who worship the female form, the Mother Nature, rather than the Father in heaven, there is creation in passion. Unison is the rule of the universe. And that is the Tantric link to Dasain: perfection in union. This universal interface of creation that is possible only by submission, a submission to the partner and submission to the Supreme Source that leads to salvation. The Astamatrika mother is thus the source of all forces: hell and heaven and everything in between rolled into one. She is the woman who makes it all possible. ♦

Clauses 118 and 119

Autumn is here, and Nepali peasantry is taking a break from back-breaking work. Planting and weeding over, the golden terraces sway with a heavy harvest. The sun ripens next year's food. It is time to hang things out to dry, do some Dasain cleaning, and stock up for the winter ahead. It is time to celebrate, thank Mother Nature for a good harvest. It is also time to appease the gods with sacrifices.

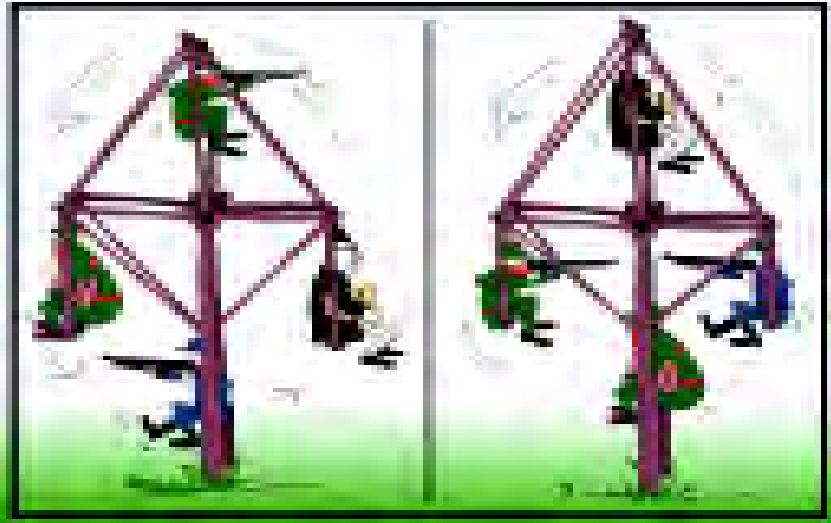
No one in Nepal we have talked to remembers being less in a mood for Dasain than this year. The sacrifices so far have not been goats, they have been humans. At least 22 killed in the last week in Maoist violence. It does not matter who they were, what uniforms they wore. They were Nepalis, and Nepalis killed them.

As the high priests of politics bicker in Kathmandu, blood is spilt on the soil of our country. Our feckless civilian leaders can't get a handle on this conflict, that much is clear. Self-serving, inept, venal, narrow-minded, immersed in their internal intrigues, and incapable of grasping the seriousness of the crisis confronting the nation—that about sums up the track record of politicians on whom people have put their trust for the past 10 years. Even those who spout peace are playing politics with it.

Policemen are being killed by Maoists or vice versa. Innocent sons and daughters of Nepali peasants die. And the leaders on both sides? All that matters to them is power. While the killing fields of Dunai and Bhorletar reverberated with the thunder of pipe bombs and guns, politicians in the capital were jockeying shamelessly to ensure a position in the post-Dasain reshuffle. The Army was busy presenting excuses why it did not come to the aid of the police when they were being slaughtered ("we were not formally notified", "the bridge was destroyed"). And a bigger battle looms between the two Durbars over the destiny of this land.

One outcome of the blood-soaked week is that the debate is now narrowing down to the key issue of who controls the Royal Nepal Army. The Constitution has (probably deliberately) left it fuzzy. According to Clause 118, "His Majesty shall operate and use the Royal Nepal Army on the recommendation of the National Defence Council." Well and good. The Council is made up of three members—the Prime Minister, the Defence Minister and the Commander-in-Chief. Although Clause 118 clearly establishes civil superiority—and one would assume that the tax payers who pay for the upkeep of our praetorian guard should have a say in what it does—there are historical reasons for the army and palace to have a fondness for each other.

Clause 118 may make it look like the National Defence Council is all-powerful. But the very next Clause 119 states: "His Majesty is the Supreme Commander of the Royal Nepal Army." Then, almost as an afterthought, comes a second sub-clause: "His Majesty shall appoint the Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Nepal Army on the recommendation of the Prime Minister." You can't get more ambiguous than that, and it is this vagueness that is coming to haunt us now.



So, the commander-in-chief is flummoxed. What is the chain of command: the king or the prime minister? The clue may actually lie in the third paragraph of the preamble to the Constitution which states that the purpose of the document is to: "...consolidate the Adult Franchise, the Parliamentary System of Government, Constitutional Monarchy and the System of Multi-Party Democracy..." Perhaps in that order of priority. The Head of State is a symbol of national unity, the Head of Government is responsible for safeguarding a "bond of unity on the basis of liberty and equality" But how can the Prime Minister be given such wide-ranging responsibility without commensurate powers? This is the reason for the growing tug-of-war between Narayanhiti Durbar and Singha Durbar.

For its part, the Army is aware of its awesome firepower and the generals say privately they don't want to be pushed into a civil war. The casualty rate is relatively low because the two sides are fighting with crude bombs and antiquated rifles. Given the disarray within the ruling party, the Army has a point when it says the civilians should first resolve their differences before calling for help. But no one has answered one crucial question. Whose side is the Army on?

Goddess Durga is worshipped during Dasain as a slayer of the demon, a symbol of evil that resides in each one of us. The creator has also endowed us all with the force to control that evil, with contemplation and an ability to understand our own inner strengths. From all of us here at Nepali Times, we join you in your Dasain prayers for peace and wellbeing in Nepal.

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STATE OF THE STATE

by C.K.LAL



A state of paranoia

Self-deception is a technique of self-preservation. When faced with extremely harsh realities, the human mind lapses into a make-believe world in order to preserve its sanity. Our excessive pride in our own nationalism, exemplified by last week's outpouring of patriotic fervour over an online debate conducted by the BBC, illustrates this theory of psychology perfectly.

Just look at us: our brothers fight in other peoples' armies, we sell our sisters to brothels abroad, our children don't have enough to eat, we need foreign aid to pick up our own rubbish, it needs an ambassador of a nearby country to write a letter to the editor before a road gets paved in our capital. The disgrace of it all should have made us hang our heads in shame. It should have made us question dogmas, examine beliefs and behaviour.

Instead, we choose to hark back to our glorious past to mask our present squalor and ineptness. "No matter what," we shout from our rooftops, "ours is an independent and sovereign country. We have never been colonised, and our kingdom shall remain independent till kingdom come." The legend about Nepal being an independent country from pre-historic times (that outlandish claim comes from the statement of the Nepali Congress Party's denouncement of the BBC) is a historical flight of fancy. Nepal is still a nation in the making, as B.P. Koirala had no hesitation accepting.

Till the 1940s Nepalis travelled abroad with identification papers issued by the Government of British India. Geographically, the Treaty of Sugauli fixed the present boundaries of the Kingdom of Nepal in 1816. It was enlarged a bit when Jung Bahadur was rewarded by the British for mercenary services rendered during the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Politically, the People of Nepal became sovereign only by the enactment of The Constitution of Kingdom of Nepal, 1990.

The subject posted by the BBC on its web site for its South Asia Debate on *World Today* last week asked how Nepal should respond to a resurgent India. We were so spooked by what the answer could be that we worked ourselves up into a frenzy of self-righteousness and behaved exactly like paranoid Indians do when they see a map of Kashmir with chunks on the two top corners missing. Nepal is not landlocked, it is India-locked. This is a geographical fact, and we had better

Nepalis have to earn the respect of others. They won't just give it to us because six generations ago our forebears cut up their forebears with khukuris.

come to terms with it. India is also a country with which we have a lot in common, but why should an online debate to discuss how this commonality can be pragmatically used for national progress be construed as an affront to our sovereignty, unless our sovereignty itself is so brittle that it will break at the slightest hint of open debate.

It was interesting to note that in the online discussions the loudest protests came from Nepalis abroad. This is the case with the diaspora of most countries: they tend to be more nationalistic than most of the compatriots they have left behind. It has something to do with keeping one's identity when the melting pot threatens to turn all immigrants into alloys. Nepalis abroad are no different, especially because they are assumed to be Indians unless they prove otherwise by swearing in the name of Lord Buddha and Mount Everest. You don't deal with tough questions by stifling debate. The BBC debate was a unique opportunity in a bold new medium to prove the basis of our new-found democracy, show confidence in our own nationhood with maturity and open-mindedness in front of a worldwide multimedia audience. All we did with that obtuse statement from the Foreign Ministry was show the world how narrow-minded and insecure we have become.

The BBC had adopted a provocative method based on what is known as "null hypothesis" in social science researches. According to this concept, if you can show that a thesis is wrong on all counts, its opposite can automatically also proved to be true. We should have attempted to prove the null hypothesis of BBC wrong by showing that the current trend is towards a break-up of larger nations into smaller ones. Before a meaningful South Asian confederation can even be contemplated, perhaps the Indian Union itself needs to break into at least 40-50 workable-sized independent nation-states.

We could have used the debate to show that Nepal may be mired in poverty, but the Indian states neighbouring us are in a much worse shape. We could have pointed out that our democracy may not be ideal, but it is way ahead of the farces enacted by Laloo Prasad in Bihar or Mulayam Singh in Uttar Pradesh. We could have said that we have started to tap our huge untapped potential in agriculture, hydropower,

tourism and trade in a sustainable manner. Our people are creative enough to preserve and manage our forests with full community participation. All Nepalis need is a leadership that will not stifle this creativity and capacity for hard work. But even that may have started to happen with the evolution of our democratic institutions in the past decade. Many of these points did come out on the online debate, and interestingly, some of the people making these points on our behalf were Indians! But the very content that would have shown Nepal in the best light was drowned out by the display of foolish and knee-jerk nationalism in Kathmandu on the week that 22 Nepali policemen were slaughtered by Nepali Maoists.

When an insecure mind works itself into a rage, then you have bizarre scenes like that of the BBC being burnt in effigy at Bhadrakali, or Radio Sagarmatha being forced to chicken out and not broadcast the very debate that was favourable to Nepal. Everyone already knows Nepal is not a developed country, now they also know that we aren't too clever either. Our patriots have insulted the strength of Nepali nationalism by their paranoia.

Doesn't our false pride ring a bit hollow when we rave and rant against the radio station of a country where our citizens seek asylum pretending to be Bhutanese refugees? And in the army of which our countrymen serve, and, we might add, in the army of the country that we are getting worked up about? Let's not deceive ourselves, we have to earn the respect of others. They won't just give it to us because six generations ago our forebears cut up their forebears with khukuris. ♦



In their separate articles published in the *Himalaya Times* and *Nepal*, Madan Mani Dixit, Ramesh Bikal and Dr Surendra K.C., have attempted to define the term “janjati”. None of the three writers are *janjatis* or members of indigenous groups. Neither are they sociologists or anthropologists by training. However, they feel qualified to find fault in the definition of “janjati” propounded by the *janjatis* themselves. (Janjati=ethnic community or nationality. Editor)

This is a testimony of their “bahunbadi” mentality. *Bahunbadis* feel threatened whenever people from indigenous groups, the *janjatis* or the *dalits* try to establish their identity as people from those groups. (*Bahunbadi* means a proponent of *bahunbad*, which was defined by Dor Bahadur Bista in his controversial book, *Fatalism and Development*, as a culture of fatalism; also loosely used to define domination by the Bahun caste group in different spheres of national life. Editor) *Bahunbadis* have always tried to project the *janjati* movement of this country as being erroneous, ill-intentioned, unnatural, meaningless, and with the eventual aim of engendering communal hatred and intolerance.

Dixit refers to the definition of “janjati” provided by the *Nepali Brihat Shabdakosh* (the Nepali dictionary published by the Royal Nepal Academy). According to this dictionary, *janjatis* are “jungle tribes such as Naga, Koche and Kusunda who are primarily hunters and gatherers, who lack education and are isolated from the outside world”. Thus he claims that the definition of “janjati” used by the *janjati* activists is “unnatural and ambiguous and coined to suit their own purposes”. Similarly, without any knowledge of sociological concepts and relying totally on English dictionaries for terminologies, historian Surendra K.C. makes the presumptuous statement that the definition of *janjati* is “sociologically inappropriate” and “sensationalised and politically motivated”. Bikal, on the other hand, recycles the meaning provided by Dixit.

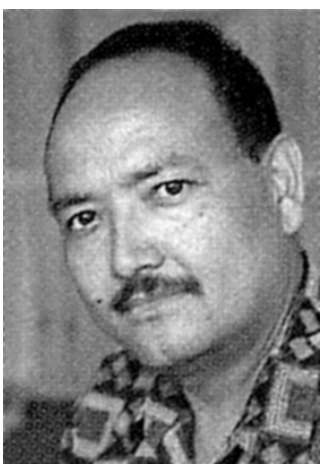
Janjatis, in general, object to the definition of “janjati” offered by the above-mentioned dictionary. The dictionary was edited by a team consisting of Prof Bal Krishna Pokhrel, Dr Basudev Tripathi, Dr Ballav Mani Dahal, Krishna Prasad Parajuli, Gopi Krishna Sharma and Harsha Nath Bhattarai. This team of *bahunbadis* had the authority to select words to include in the lexicon as well as to define them. If the team had included *janjati* linguist Dr Novel Kishore Rai and poet and academician Bairagi Kaila, then perhaps “janjati” may have been defined differently. On page 963 of the dictionary, the team of Bahun linguists have defined “Bahun” as “one of the four classes of Aryas, the Brahmin” or “priests” and “poor, honest and innocent Brahmin”. If non-Bahun linguists had propounded a derogatory definition of the term, would it have been acceptable to Bahuns?

Words and concepts have life cycles similar to that of living beings. They are born, they mature to reach youth, then get old and die. Concepts and words do not determine people’s actions. Instead, people themselves attribute meanings to words and form concepts. Words and concepts survive so long as they serve a practical purpose. When they become obsolete, they either die a natural death or may assume a different meaning. The



Dr VS Dr

TU sociologist Dr Krishna Bahadur Bhattachan (left) battles it out with TU historian Dr Surendra K.C. on the definition of “janjati”.



even though one may be a *janjati*. How is one to respond if intellectuals belonging to communities classified as *janjati* by the Nepal Federation of Nationalities choose not to be identified as such?

In a recent article in *Nepal Jagaran*, Pradip Man Shrestha has claimed that Newars are not, have never been and will never be *janjatis*. Shrestha further claims, “In fact, calling Newars *janjati* is an attack on the community’s proud history. By listing Newars, who have historically been very vocal supporters of *janjati* rights, as *janjatis*, genuine *janjatis* may be deprived of their

rights”. Shrestha refers to the Constitution’s Article 26 (10) to define “janjati” and also to the *Nepal Human Development Report 1998*, which reveals that the human development index of Newars is better than of any other community in Nepal. Prakash A. Raj has made a similar claim in *Nepal Samacharpatra*. Likewise, a satirical article published in *Kantipur* recently proposed that Bahuns are the most genuine *janjati* of this country. These articles clearly indicate that no community can be listed as *janjati* merely on the basis of their claim to be so. All I demanded in my article was an honest intellectual debate on the matter. Unfortunately, Bhattachan misunderstood me and has used a lot of adjectives to label me a *bahunbadi*.

Nepal’s history was never written with the objective of serving the interest of a certain group, but pro-*janjati* intellectuals, who are using the *janjati* platform to camouflage their leanings towards communist ideologies, are attempting to discredit history. Is Bhattachan ready to engage in a discourse on whether cultural and social domination, discrimination and exploitation are perpetuated by the Bahun community or by groups who control the power of the state? There are two classes of *bahunbadis* in Nepal: the *brahminbadis* and the Bahun *brahminbadis*. The first group is driving the country towards inter-communal clash by continuing the tradition of centuries-old social exploitation and dominance of other communities for the creation of a mono-cultural and mono-religious society. The second group of *bahunbadis*, fully cognizant of the intention of the first group, is exploiting the issue to encourage inter-communal hatred.

I am sorry to say that Bhattachan has failed to catch the essence of my arguments. He questions my credibility as a writer and historian interpreting the issue of *janjati* just because I do not belong to a *janjati* or a dalit community. I firmly believe that the success of the *janjati* movement will depend on the support of the poor, rural *janjatis*. Nothing will happen so long as city-dwelling, foreign-educated people claim proprietorship over the issue and use it as a means to receive foreign donations. We have to be careful in case the second class of *bahunbadis* start using the *janjati* movement as a ladder to reach higher positions in society. Bhattachan and his ilk fear that the hidden agenda of this second class of *bahunbadis* may be exposed. Consequently, they are trying their level best to exclude Bahuns and Chhetris from not just the *janjati* movement but also from any discourse relating to it. ♦

(The above articles appeared in the daily Himalaya Times and were translated from the original Nepali.)

linguists editing the *Nepali Brihat Shabdakosh* had the moral responsibility to take into account meanings attributed by the general public to words rather than try to impose their own *bahunbadi* definitions on the users of the Nepali language. Doing otherwise is tantamount to cultural tyranny.

The Nepal Federation of Nationalities, a confederation of 32 *janjati* organisations, defines the term “janjati” as “indigenous peoples and settlers who are not encompassed within the Hindu caste system”. The report prepared by the official Janjati Uplift Taskforce agreed to use the term “janjati” because of its ever-increasing acceptance and use by the general mass. “Janjati” describes the social structure of a community while “indigenous” denotes time and period. These two terms are not synonymous but since the majority of the *janjatis* in Nepal are also indigenous, the two can be considered proximate.

The *janjatis* are today waking up to the fact that over the last two and a half centuries, the *bahunbadi* rulers of Nepal have been exercising the power of the state to create a mono-linguistic, mono-religious and mono-cultural country at the expense of the cultural identity of the majority of the populace. In today’s atmosphere of commitment towards democracy, human rights and equality, different communities (who had hitherto accepted the cultural hegemony of *bahunbadis*) are establishing their own individual identities. Only the *janjatis* have the right to define themselves. It is pointless for other communities to worry about the terminology and meaning of “janjati”.

Dr K.C. makes an appeal to ensure that society’s identity and history documentation are not dictated by hatred, self-interest and political ambitions. But Dr K.C. should take a good look at himself to determine if he is putting his own words into practice. There are many people who know more about “his story” than “history”, who believe that the events mentioned in the *Mahabharat* were real, who believe in written history but totally ignore the oral histories of indigenous peoples. These are the very people who are trying to discredit the *janjati* movement. Democracy allows room for different opinions. Only thoughts and theories grounded in truth, facts and life experience can survive the test of time. Otherwise, they die and are quickly forgotten. The two-penny’s worth on *janjatis* expressed by Dixit, Bikal and K.C. is being discarded by the general public while the concepts and interpretations promulgated by the *janjati* communities regarding their own identity is gaining momentum at a rapid pace. Various philosophers have pointed out that power, knowledge and self-interest are interrelated. The opposition of the *bahunbadis* against the meaning of “janjati” and its interpretation speaks volumes about the strong interrelation of the three.

I find the allegations labelled at me by the well-known Thakali writer Krishna Bahadur Bhattachan against my article extremely intriguing and fascinating. Unlike what he has declared, my article was not intended to be meaningless or misleading.

I was born in Taplejung district of the Limbuwan region in east Nepal to a Karki family of the Chhetri caste. Though I was born a Chhetri, I do not wear the *janai*, the symbol of the *Tagadhari* castes. Nor do I perform *shraddha* in the name of my deceased father. I do not visit Pashupati nor do I do puja at home. Although I have faith, I have no religion. At the same time, I possess no ill-feeling towards those who do. There is one matter I often ruminate over. It has often struck me that unlike Hindus, followers of other faiths have not displayed a decline in their religious convictions and communal sentiments. Even in Nepal, *janjati* activists such as Bhattachan calls for a differentiation between communities within the Hindu caste system and those without. I personally believe that Nepal is a multi-ethnic society. While I agree that Nepal is dominated by a single language, caste and culture, I am of the opinion that its cause is the class-based state structure.

In my article, I was trying to argue that society and *janjati* should be identified on the basis of reality. That process requires answers to various questions. Questions such as if the terms “janjati” and “indigenous” are synonymous, when and how did the Mongolian *janjatis* and Aryan castes begin settling in Nepal; which communities were the original settlers of Nepal; are Newars *janjatis* or indigenous if the social status of Rautes and Newars are similar; which *janjati* group do Bhujels (Gharti) belong to and if the non-Vedic Khas are also Hindus? There are more answers required from America-returned *janjati* academics like Bhattachan: “Where did Dolpo, Mugali, Bahragaule, Panchgaule, Bolung, Tangwe, Marphali, Manang, Topkegola and Syangtan *janjatis* originate? What are the similarities and differences between these communities and Bhotas (Sherpas) and Thakalis? In view of the fact that within the single Rai *janjati* more than 30 dialects are spoken, is it not probable that there may be communities which exhibit cultural similarities despite linguistic differences?” It will not do to make empty claims on the basis of having a Masters degree in Sociology and Humanities from an American university,

LETTERS

BEBB
I would like to use your paper to voice my concern over the subject matter of the BBC’s South Asia debate. The United Nations is busy trying to solve the border dispute and ethnic problems in Africa and West Asia left behind by the British Empire. The Indian subcontinent has the intractable issue of Kashmir—also a British legacy. Internally India has its own separatist problems in Kashmir, Punjab, Mizoram, Assam, Tamil Nadu, and the Hindu-Muslim conflict. Does the BBC now want to add Nepal to this mess? Externally India has problems or disputes with Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and a love-hate relationship with Nepal. If India had played fair all problems in South Asia could have been solved in no time. So what is the BBC up to now? Create problems between Nepal

and India as well? I hope that was not the intention of the BBC.

Ramesh Shrestha
Erbil, Iraq



DEUBA
As you rightly argue in your editorial “Fiddling while Dolpo burns” (#11) the answer to the Maoist problem lies in Kathmandu, not in western Nepal. But by

pinning all hopes on Sher Bahadur Deuba as you did in “Peace in pieces” (#9) Nepali Times has shown political naivete. It may be an indication of how desperate you are to find a silver lining in the dark clouds that you highlight anyone who comes along saying he wants to negotiate. But don’t

you see that throughout his political career Sher Bahadur Deuba has been nothing but a political opportunist? And so it is this time. While the country was in shock after the barbarity of the latest Maoist killing spree, Deuba was busy scoring political points within the Nepali Congress. And while his own party was taking on the might of the army and the palace, Deuba was giving ample indication about which side his ideological loyalty lies.

Ganga Thapa
Kathmandu

TIMES
C.K. Lal’s “State of the State” has been consistently interesting and thought provoking. He provides a leading example for other journalists to follow in terms of substance, truthfulness, and fearlessness in expressing the truth. Keep on writing, Mr Lal you

have made a lot of fans. We like the way you tell it.

K. Karki
Kansas City, USA

Nepali Times! What a newspaper. I just got a copy (#7) and I am impressed. My congratulations. Any vacancies?

Lis Garval
Copenhagen

Big cheers to Nepali Times. I have become a regular reader of your weekly and haven’t missed any of the past 10 editions. Your paper has a unique, straight-forward style of presenting news and comments. Where else but in Nepali Times can you read editorials like “TV or not TV?” (#10) that ends with a sharp punchline like: “NTV must upgrade content. It may have satellite access, but the audience has a more powerful weapon—the

remote control.” Keep your high standards up.

Kumud Kumar Sharma
Kathmandu

I am totally enchanted with the work of Kunda Dixit. I read his column (changed now to “Under My Hat”) and think it is a real hoot. In fact, I felt inspired enough to print it out and share it with my Nepali in-laws. I then read his piece about smugglers and really enjoyed his acerbic wit. Mr Dixit is a credit to this paper. Someone who can write with that kind of clarity, wit and farce is a rarity.

Rosalia Scalia
Baltimore, USA

Like any experienced Nepali citizen living in our modern democratic setup, I could not believe that your paper could keep up its brilliant standard for too long—so I used to buy it from the shops and did not subscribe. To put out an originally

edited news/comments weekly surely poses a challenge—and I could not believe that you guys could keep it up. But after your tenth issue I started thinking that even if you went down to 50 percent of your standard in the future (hope not, though) you would still be worth it. So I have finally become your subscriber. I sure hope that you will succeed, but I also realise that it will depend upon your intelligent readers’ support to make this paper a unique one.

Chirendra Satyal
Kathmandu

Yours is a paper Nepal needs very much: reliable, accountable (to Nepali society and the world community) and a high-quality newspaper. I thoroughly enjoyed reading every page of Issue # 9 and can’t wait for the next issue.
Surya P.S. Dhungel
Phnom Penh

Are Newars *janjati*?



The debate heats up as a new bill a waits parliamentary debate, and it divides the Newar community

HEMLATA RAI

A parliamentary bill on nationalities that proposes to remove Newars from the list of Nepal's 60-plus nationalities has once again stirred emotions on what makes a *janjati* and what does not. Some Newars are happy to have "graduated" into the mainstream. Others suspect a sinister design to erase and assimilate a distinct community into a Hindu-dominated amorphous mass.

The *Janjati Uthhan Pratisthan Bidbheyak* (National Foundation for the Uplift of Janajatis bill) also proposes re-naming some *janjatis*, for example, changing Bhote which some found was disparaging to a location-specific nomenclature such as Manange. This may not be much different than calling a Bahun that travelled west into Nepal from Kumaon, a Kumai, but there are those who say location-specific names may also be confusing if Rais from Bhojpur are to be called Bhojpure, or the Limbus from Panchthar Panchthare. The list of examples could go on and on, as will the debate once the parliament reconvenes for its lawmaking winter session.

The contradictory definitions of what makes a group a *janjati* has contributed to the division among the Newars. A 1996 taskforce formed for the formation of the

proposed foundation for the uplift of the nationalities, defined "janjati" as a community having its "own mother tongue and traditional culture but not belonging to the Hindu caste system".

This team, led by Shanta Bahadur Gurung, described *janjatis* as groups having distinct cultural identities, language, religion, customs and culture, traditional social structures, belonging to distinct geographical areas, groups with written or oral history and "we" feeling, indigenous settlers, groups excluded from the mainstream of state affairs and politics and communities that claim to belong to a *janjati* group. In other words, the definition confuses more than clearly demarcate the boundaries—which is not easy in the first place.

Then there is another definition published in the Gazette in July 1997, which uses the economic status of a community to decide if it qualifies as a *janjati*. It defines "janjatis" as communities having their "original and distinct language and culture" that are "socially backward in comparison to other caste groups". Although this definition is quite different from that prescribed by the taskforce headed by Gurung, it adopted the *janjati* list prepared by the earlier team and listed Newar as

a hill group along with 61 others. There's an economic argument for the de-listing of Newars. The *Nepal Human Development Report 1998* shows that Newars are economically better off than any other Nepali community. But some argue that their economic status goes against the most basic definition, the one in the lexicon that is accepted as standard for Nepali meanings, the *Nepali Brihat Shabdakosh* published by the Royal Nepal Academy. The dictionary definition of a "janjati" is a "jungle tribe living on wild fruits and plant roots," one that is "totally cutoff from the development process".

"Newars with their proud cultural history and economic status were never *janjatis* and will never claim that status," wrote Pradip Shrestha, a Newar, in the weekly *Nepal Jagaran*. Accepting Shrestha's views would mean giving up the "special arrangements for education, health and employment" that the Nepali Constitution promises for "economically and socially" disadvantaged *janjatis*.

Advocates of the *janjati* movement challenge both the dictionary and constitutional terminology, arguing that the definitions could have been different had a *janjati* been represented in the team that came up with them. "A *janjati*

status is more about a community's social status than economics," says sociologist and *janjati* activist Krishna Bahadur Bhattachan. (See page 3 also)

A Bahun sociologist, who did not want to be named, adds another twist. The issue has more to do with fear of other

rights over local natural resources.

The newly elected General Secretary of the Nepal Federation of Nationalities, Bal Krishna Mabuhang, says the term "janjati" was adopted to describe the collective "spirit" of communities battling for

of Nationalities (NCDN). He added that the NCDN has no doubt that the Newars are a *janjati* group, if nine distinguishing points listed by the 1996 taskforce were to be applied.

The multi-religious characteristic of Newars is another reason for the confusion over the community's status. The 1996-taskforce definition requires communities to belong outside the Hindu caste system to claim *janjati* status. But many Newars are Hindus and follow un-*janjati* practices such as observing an occupational caste system and "untouchability". This again could have been caused by centuries of Hindu domination over the Newar cultural space, argue some activists. "Some Newars might have attained high posts and earned much wealth but as a community we have no say in national affairs, we're a group left out in the cold," says Malla K. Sundar, a prominent Newar pro-*janjati* leader. ♦

The dictionary definition of a "janjati" is a "jungle tribe living on wild fruits and plant roots," one that is "totally cutoff from the development process".

janjatis of being co-opted by the larger, richer Newars who they fear may hijack issues related to the collective concerns of *janjatis*, the sociologist who teaches at Tribhuvan University told us. Developing their language and its use for official purposes in areas like Kathmandu Valley is high on the Newar agenda, while communities such as the Kirats from the Eastern hills or the jungle tribes are more concerned over the control and

restoration of their cultural, linguistic, religious and land ownership rights. He adds that, in the name of building a single national identity, the rulers have usurped these rights.

"Though economically well-off, and better represented in the administration, the Newars are deprived of their linguistic rights," says Dr Chaitanya Subba, Executive Director of the National Committee for Development

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“This Dasain, don’t drink if you drive.”

The valley traffic police has stepped up breathalyzer tests on Kathmandu’s main arteries, motorcyclists and bigwigs on Pajeros are all tested.

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY
“I think that was the luckiest day of my life. That was an expensive mistake I won’t ever repeat again,” says Sameer Gurung, recalling a tragic accident last year that took the lives of two of his friends. Sameer was at the wheel of a Toyota van with nine of his friends out on a midnight drive after a Dasain party. On the road to Bhaktapur, the van skidded and slammed into a pole. One of his friends died on the spot, the other in hospital. Sameer, a former airline manager, spent several months in hospital with a broken leg and head wounds and was lucky to get out of it alive. Sameer does not drink anymore and his message for everyone: “This Dasain, don’t drink if you drive.”
The Nepali festivities of Dasain and Tihar are times when more than half of the vehicle drivers at night will have taken more than the permissible level of alcohol, say the Police. This is the time of year when accident rates soar. More than three quarters of all accidents involving drunk



ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

drivers are fatal. “The problem is not that people can’t handle their drinks, it’s the attitude” says SSP Kumar Koirala, Head of the Valley Traffic Police. “People just don’t understand that drinking impairs driving judgement, especially if you are on a motor-cycle.” The most high-profile drunken-driving accident this year was the one that allegedly involved Prince Paras Shah and killed singer Praveen Gurung.
More than 75 people have already died on valley roads since January and half of the accidents were because the drivers were under the influence of alcohol. In 1996, there were 104 fatalities in the Valley and while this figure has gone down steadily despite increased traffic the proportion of accidents blamed on inebriated drivers has gone up.
The valley traffic police has stepped up breathalyzer tests on Kathmandu’s main arteries and even bigwigs on Pajeros are tested. Last week, we came upon an all-too-familiar scene at New Road gate when a man on a motorcycle was arguing with the police in a slurred voice that he was not drunk. “Just one peg. Look, I’m fine, I can drive.” By this time the police had confiscated his keys. Those caught driving under the influence are sent to the hospital for a check up, pay a fine of Rs 200, and sent home after calling a relative. “One need not be dead drunk to cause an accident,” says SSP Koirala. “Intoxication results in careless driving and speeding



ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

which is the most common errors drivers make.” While the officers are at work asking drivers to breathe into the breathalyzer at New Road gate, up ahead some motorcyclists in their 20s realise that there is a checking going on and zigzag off in another direction.
DSP Prakash Aryal of the Valley Police says the checks are to protect the public and the drivers themselves from harm. “Drivers under the influence of alcohol fear getting caught even more than they fear a fatal accident,” he told us. The irony of it all is that the breathalyzer tests are going on under the blinking neons overhead advertising vodka, whiskey, and beers. Alcohol commercials were

banned on television last year, but doesn’t seem to have dampened the Kathmandu citizen’s habit of having what they think is a good time—especially with the festive season around the corner. The proliferation of discos, pubs and dance restaurants haven’t helped matters either. Says assistant sub-inspector Ram Chandra Bista: “Drivers coming out of pubs and bars are more prone to the dangers of drunk driving than those coming from cultural celebrations.”
For Sameer Gurung, the physical scars have healed, but the mental scars of his accident remain. He has a final word of advice: “I was lucky. Not everyone is.” ♦



Joshi hits army

Home Minister Govinda Raj Joshi resigned on 29 September, five days after a Maoist strike in Dolpo and Lamjung left at least 22 policemen dead. But Joshi went down fighting, blaming the military for sabotaging the government’s plans to modernise the police force with semi-automatic weapons and helicopters.
Until new arrangements are made, Deputy Prime Minister Ram Chandra Poudel will look after home affairs in addition to his other portfolio as local development minister.
In a strongly worded pre-departure statement Joshi attacked the Royal Nepal Army for having stood by and watched the massacre of police by rebels. He said he found it hard to explain why the troops did not come to the aid of the beleaguered police garrison. “The army cannot dodge its responsibility in such situations,” he added. Joshi also lashed out at members of his own party, and the peace-making committee headed by Sher Bahadur Deuba, saying that the former prime minister appeared to be speaking as if the Maoists and not the government had formed his team. Also on 29 September, the Ministry of Defence—headed by the prime minister himself—issued a statement “clarifying” that the army was an inseparable part of government. The Defence Ministry statement comes as a hint that Joshi’s departure could be associated more with his outbursts against the army than the carnage in Dolpo.

WFP food transport

A truck convoy carrying 175 tonnes of food grains for Humla district left Nepal from the Tatopani border on 3 October. This is the first of the 350-ton World Food Programme consignment to be transported to the north-western Nepali district via Tibet. The UN agency says it began planning the shipment of food via Tibet two years ago and that this was the first time a “comprehensive agreement” to transport food aid was possible. The supplies are to be used for the ongoing food-for-work scheme that is building a road connecting Simikot with Hilsa on the Nepal-Tibet border. Work on a 10-km section is to begin next month.

More birds hit aircraft

A Royal Nepal Airlines 757 with 179 passengers bound for London had to abort takeoff from Kathmandu airport Thursday morning when a large bird was sucked into the right engine, shattering the fan blades. The pilot managed to stop the plane on the runway before it was airborne. The incident happened on the same morning that a symposium on the threat to aircraft from bird strikes was taking place in Kathmandu.
All of last week, there has been bird havoc at Kathmandu airport with kites and eagles circling dangerously close to the approach and on the runway, airport officials said. Several international flights were delayed, and others had to abort landing at the last moment and go around. Thursday’s bird strike was the third reported in Kathmandu since a Buddha Air aircraft hit a bird on approach earlier this month. Last week, a Cosmic Air Dornier hit a bird after takeoff from Pokhara for Jomsom.
At the bird strike seminar, experts blamed bird danger on increased urban congestion near airports, and indiscriminate dumping of trash and carcasses on river beds. Since July the government has been dumping the city’s garbage along the banks of the Bagmati river 100 metres away from the northern end of the runway.

Citizens want clean air

Following a petition by three activist groups seeking annulment of a recent Nepal-India agreement that allows Indian vehicle imports on the basis of self-certification, the Supreme Court has issued a notice to the government and the concerned departments. Pro-Public, Leaders Nepal and Martin Chautari claim the agreement reached during the New Delhi visit of Prime Minister Gijrja Prasad Koirala in late July violates the Nepal Mass Emission Standards 2056 and is also against the citizens’ fundamental right to breathe clean air. Meanwhile, three groups involved in operating electric vehicles have formed an umbrella organisation called the Electric Vehicle Association of Nepal (EVAN). The Association brings together the Electric Vehicle Manufacturers’ Association (EVMAN), the Electric Vehicle Owners’ Association (CLEAN) and the Electric Vehicle Battery Chargers Association (NEVCA).

Radio apologises

Radio Sagarmatha, Kathmandu’s only community FM station, apologised last week for what it called “erroneous reporting” on an issue concerning alleged bribe-seeking by members of parliament’s Public Accounts Committee (PAC). The radio report had named three PAC members as having sought favours from the Nepal Bank Limited, which is under investigation by the committee. Radio Sagarmatha was put in a tight spot after NBL denied that its board members had provided any such information, as the station had initially claimed. Radio Sagarmatha Management Committee member Laxman Upreti apologised to the PAC on behalf of the radio station.

Ganga and Jamuna



MIN BAURACHARYA

Ganga and Jamuna were joined at the head when they were born four months ago at the Indra Rajya Laxmi Maternity Hospital in Thapathali. Their mother, Sandhya Shrestha, and father, Bhusan K.C., are from Piuthan. Sandhya had to undergo a caesarean, and the babies weighed only 3.5 kg together. They have since grown into two healthy babies and have made steady progress to weigh nearly 10 kg.
Now a group of Nepali doctors led by noted neurosurgeon Dr Upendra Devkota is teaming up with the state-of-the-art Singapore General Hospital to try to separate the twins. This is a case similar to the much-publicised one in Britain in which Siamese twins joined at the abdomen will be separated by surgery, but only one of them will survive. Doctors say there is a chance that both Ganga and Jamuna

will survive their operation.
“This is an extremely complicated case that demands extreme surgical care, and equipment that we don’t have in Nepal,” says Dr Devkota who will be flying out to Singapore with the twins, their parents and his colleague, Dr G.R. Sharma. The brains of Ganga and Jamuna are joined, and preliminary MRI scans done here showed that it would indeed be possible for an operation to separate them. Dr Devkota consulted with his former colleague, Dr Keith Goh, and with help from the Singapore government and Singapore Airlines it is now possible for everyone to fly to Singapore later this month to have the operation performed.
But before that, Dr Devkota and his team will have to come up with a three-dimensional reconstruction of the joined brain, check out the blood vessels in the brain that have to be cut and joined, and perform a computer simulated operation many times before they go for the actual thing. “All this would not have been possible if we did not have access to the most advanced equipment that they have at Singapore General,” Dr Devkota told us. “But we are not going to take any chances, and a lot will depend on what the scans in Singapore show.” ♦



Dr. Devkota

After Dunai

"Whatever may be laid down in the Constitution, the army of a democratic country cannot be anything but subordinate to the government."

The government has to provide answers

Editorial in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 2-31 October

The Maoists succeeded in attacking and, as per their plan, to take control of Dunai, the district headquarters of Dolpo. They also succeeded in routing their immediate enemy, the police, in looting a bank and burning records at the Land Revenue Office. The prime minister who assumed office six months ago after ousting his predecessor has failed to keep his word to bring Maoist violence under control and maintain peace.

To see one elected government after another fail to address the problems facing the country is a matter of concern, a bad omen for the nation and democracy.

It is also a sign that the sovereignty of the people, the constitutional monarchy and the multiparty democracy are all facing problems.

First, the prime minister has to assume responsibility for the current state of affairs. The main question is: why, even after six months in office, has nothing happened on the three issues he had outlined—good governance, corruption control and ending violence and maintaining law and order? It is time people were provided with a clear answer and the answer must be backed by plausible reasons.

If the prime minister cannot deliver because of his own inability or even lack of support within the party, he should not hesitate in stepping down. If there are other reasons, such as those being discussed in public—the role of the Royal Nepal Army, the Royal Palace or lack of laws—those too have to be brought out into the open. Democracy cannot be preserved single-handedly by Girija Prasad or the Nepali Congress or the UML. People do not believe this anymore.

Of late, members of the cabinet have begun saying (unofficially) that the Royal Palace and the army are not co-operating with the government in its efforts to control Maoist violence. Whatever may be laid down in the Constitution, the army of a democratic country cannot be anything but subordinate to the government.

If the Royal Nepal Army has been disobeying the government and is placing hurdles in controlling the bloodshed that is taking place, there can be no greater misfortune for the nation.

It is the prime minister's responsibility to rein in the army. If the army is disobeying the government's orders, the public has to be told and their help must be sought. But no government can pretend that everything is well and continue to push the nation further toward disintegration. Only Singha Durbar is responsible for the lack of transparency till now. Hence it is Singha Durbar itself that should take the lead in changing that.

Democracy threatened

Kishor Nepal in *Naya Sadak*, 29 September

Within 48 hours of killing 14 policemen in Dolpo, the Maoists struck again and killed eight policemen in Lamjung. This proves how redundant the government has become. The present prime minister, while getting rid of his predecessor, had declared that he was going to concentrate on law and order. He has since time and again said there is no reason for him to remain in power if he cannot resolve the Maoist problem.

This festive season the people are frightened and scared instead of being joyous and happy. No one knows for sure who is going to be the next target of the Maoists. Not only

in the outlying districts, even people in the Valley are scared. Those responsible for ensuring peace are busy looking for scapegoats.

Any problem in Nepal is always blamed on the army or the palace. The home minister has tried to place the blame for the present crisis on the army. Some are even trying to blame the palace for this. But the royalty can only survive if Nepal remains a nation and we are sure, that the Cambodian example is still fresh in the minds of the palace. Therefore the palace would not dig its own grave.

The role of the army in any democratic nation is limited. The army steps in only if civil governance fails or if a natural calamity occurs. It has a role if there are separatist movements, but regardless of how one views it, the Maoist problem cannot be called that.

The Maoist problem is a political problem. Therefore a political solution has to be sought. If the army steps in, you will end up with a reign of terror and that would be no solution. Plus it would also scare away donors and again that is not the type of solution we want.

The prime minister had made noises about activating the National Security Council but that too has been sidelined although the opposition is fully prepared to help him. He is in a fix because of his own doing. His cabinet is full of corrupt and inefficient people. He and his men don't understand the gravity of the situation.

The Maoist insurgency has spread to over 28 districts and there is no guarantee that it will not expand further. In how many places can the army be? Secondly, there is no guarantee that the army will succeed. What will we do then? If the army fails, what next?

Democracy in Nepal is under threat, not because of the Maoists, but because of the people in power. We need efficient, clean and hard-working leaders. We need those that can rise above petty politics, someone who is humble, soft-spoken and understands the people. There are alternatives to Koirala within the Nepali Congress.

Does Koirala want to destroy everything?

Punarjagaran, 26 September

Not since the 1950 revolution has any district headquarter been captured by rebel forces. The overrunning of Dunai has changed that. Former prime minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai was prepared to talk to the Maoists and was preparing the groundwork when he was removed.

He was doing his best to bring the Maoists to the negotiating table and was succeeding at that. Koirala removed him and became prime minister, declaring that Bhattarai was inefficient, could not control corruption and there was insecurity in the country.

Koirala promised to check corruption, provide good governance and resolve the Maoist problem. The Dunai attack has proved that he has been unsuccessful and it is high time that



Home Minister: There has been no news of any event anywhere for at least two minutes! How can you say that there is no security?

he left office.

Around 1,000 rebels overran the village, 14 policemen were killed, another dozen or so taken hostage, a bank was looted, government offices destroyed and important documents were burnt. The police, it seems, had prior knowledge of the attack and yet were unsuccessful in holding their ground.

People feel that all this is because of the inability of the prime minister to do anything. A committee has been formed to investigate the Dunai attack but everyone is sure nothing substantial is going to emerge out of that. The prime minister is to blame for this incident and there is no reason why he should not quit.

Army to help government

Saptahik Bimarsa, 29 September

Despite all the allegations, accusations and counter-accusations, the army has finally agreed to help the government to counter the Maoists. Immediately after the Maoist strike in Dunai, there were consultations between the prime minister, the home minister and the army and it was agreed that the army would help the government. The government had planned to mobilise the army to block the route leading out of Dunai for seven days, but on 27 September the army said it would not be able to do that now. The prime minister finally realised that he had to speak to His Majesty and in the evening he

the army was out to make the police and the administration dysfunctional. While that was the case on one side, the refusal of the army to help had created a negative public image of the army. Questions were asked as to why an army should be maintained if it doesn't act in such situations.

The army also has its own grievances. After the re-establishment of democracy the successive governments have been accused of providing preferential treatment to the police. The army wanted the proposed armed police force to be under its control but it ended up with the police.

The army also says that the distrust of the army for its role in suppressing the 1990 movement does not help matters. The police should not be projected as an alternative to the army. The police and armed police cannot do what the army can.

A highly placed army source said that the Maoists have graduated from the "hit and run" stage of their attacks, and that is why the army has to step in. In many democracies the army has been deployed to control such rebellions; democracy will not be endangered if the army steps in, instead it can guard democracy.

This is the first time the army is about to step in. The military believes in doing what it is assigned to do, that is why it wants its authority and limits to be clearly spelt out before it becomes active. This could be done within a few days. Sources say that a package programme is also being prepared for the Maoist-hit areas and the role of the army would also be to help in the development process.

PM seeks army help

Jana Ahwan, 29 September

Rather than lay the ground for negotiations, the government is preparing to mobilise the army. This may backfire in the long run.

A former unnamed general feels that this will only lead to bloodbath and chaos. People from all walks of life feel that negotiations are the only way out. But on the contrary, the prime minister is preparing for battle.

At its meeting on 25 September the cabinet agreed to mobilise the army to suppress the rebels. It is estimated that 1,000 rebels attacked Dunai and fought for almost 6 hours.

After looting the bank, the rebels said they had succeeded in their mission, the village folk were their brothers and sisters and that their battle was only against the government.

In Lamjung eight policemen were killed and guns and ammunition were looted. The local police station, the ranger post and the bank were destroyed. One reason for the attack on the village was to retaliate against the rape and murder of a Maoist worker. ♦



Govinda Raj Joshi

met the king.

The prime minister met the king and briefed him on the state of the country, the public opinion about the army and his own views on how to resolve the problem. He came back a happy man. Sources say preparations to deploy the army has already begun.

Taking advantage of a weak and unarmed police, it is also suspected that



Nepal Samacharpatra, 1 October

They seem bent on self-destruction; I don't think the wait will be long comrade. (The sign in the background reads "Democratic Forces".)



“India has nothing to give that Nepal doesn’t have already.”

While other parts of the Indian sub-continent have reeled under the rule of various colonial powers, Nepal has rebuffed such powers in the past and should do so in the future. It is better to be a first class citizen of a poor country than a second class citizen of a rich country.

Ganga J. Thapa, Nepal

The idea of Nepal being better off under India’s umbrella is superficial when there are many Indian states whose economic growth is as bad as Nepal’s if not worse. What Nepal badly needs is dedicated politicians or leaders who can offer concrete plans to India for the betterment of both nations.

Sujeet, Japan

From geographical and cultural view points, Nepal and India should have a stronger co-operative relationship in different fields. But this does not mean the invasion of one’s sovereignty by another neighbour. This debate itself is nonsense.

R.R. Giri, Nepal

Merely unifying with India does not guarantee any economic development. In the short term Nepal will simply inherit India’s problems. The potential will be in long-term development, and taking advantage of India through intelligent policies. As of now, they are better off independent.

Pawan, India

After living in India, Pakistan and Nepal for about half a decade I am of the view that Nepal with all its similarities to India is a distinctly different country. Nepali culture is a good example of peaceful coexistence which is hard to find in India despite tall claims of secularism and democracy. I am astonished how many of the participants are advocating Nepal’s union with India. Nepal despite being a small country will be better off independent. Small countries have as much right of being independent as the big ones.

J. Simon, USA

It is stupid to say Nepal shares commonalities with India only. How about with China? Lots of Nepalis share the language and culture of Tibet. Why would these people want to merge with India and not with China?

Prasanna, Nepal

Nepal was, is and will always

be proud of being a sovereign nation. We have been able to maintain our national integrity, unity and dignity even though we are sandwiched between the two most populous nations in the world.

Ashok Regmi, Nepal/ USA

Nepal could benefit substantially in all social and economic spheres if it forms an economic alliance/union with India. This will enable Nepal to retain its sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as to sustain a quicker pace of development that can be aligned with the enormous growth potential of the resurgent India in the years to come.

S.K. Sarker, Canada

India has enough problems of its own without adding Nepal to the list. Political unification of India and Nepal would be a bad idea, as it would mean simply tagging on one already corrupt system to another without any obvious benefits. On the other hand, more economic co-operation on both sides and an active partnership with India in building up the Nepali economy could benefit Nepal and India.

Rupa, India

We are certainly close to India when it comes to culture. But sovereignty is a different matter. We Nepalis are proud that we were never colonised by anyone and believe me, all Nepalis will be united to fight against any foreign power trying to dominate us!

Swatantra, Nepal

India has enough misery, corruption and mismanagement in its border areas without needing to cast its acquisitive eyes on Nepal. There is already too much of Indian influence in that country.

Linda, Italy

Nepal can never be a security threat to India and wants to maintain close relations with her. But Indian hawks see everything, even the issue of co-operating in the area of water resources with Nepal, from a security point of view. There is immense potential within Nepal to make her a rich, independent country—only if we had good governance.

Kamal Yogi, Nepal

It is inevitable that Nepal will have to rely heavily on India since we are a landlocked country. Therefore, it is indeed a necessity that we stay in good

DEBATING A DEBATE

Many listeners in Nepal who tuned in to the BBC’s World Today re-broadcast from Radio Sagarmatha FM 102.4 were shocked to hear an e-mail letter being read out saying Nepal should be under India’s security umbrella. As word spread, the BBC, which was just facilitating the debate, was blamed for formulating the question wrongly. Said one senior official: “What if Radio Nepal launched a debate saying the United States and Britain have the same language, culture and religion therefore they should be one country.” Actually, there probably wouldn’t be an uproar, and Robin Cook would probably not write a stiff note to Radio Nepal. But the point was taken.

The Foreign Ministry’s stiff statement on 26 September accused the BBC of hurting Nepali sentiments. “The Nepali people are proud and have shed their lives for preserving their identity and sovereignty,” a spokesman said with rhetorical flair. “For us sovereignty and independence are sacrosanct.”

Sensing that it had picked up a red hot potato, the BBC quickly backtracked and changed the subject of the debate (see original web site, left, and the amended one, right). Nepali Times presents below selected excerpts from the debate, which show many comments actually favourable to Nepal’s point of view.

terms with India. The political rat race in Nepal should be dealt with first, then only can we do something about our economy.

Ram Shrestha, Nepal

Nepal needs to remain an independent nation. India has nothing to give that Nepal doesn’t have already.

Chris Callison, USA

Nepal is in more or less a similar situation as India. Namely, poverty, illiteracy, poor infrastructure, medically backward. Two poor neighbours joining do not make a rich man. What can two politically weak, economically poor, corruptly managed countries produce?

Vikram Chopra, India

There are quite a few states in North East of India which were merged into India, and a lot of them want to be independent again. If merging into India has not benefitted these nations/states, I wonder how it will benefit Nepal.

H.K. Khatri, UAE

I think Nepal and India should work together like the US and Canada, and find out what works economically for the benefit of both.

Girish Kshirsagar, USA

Nepal has always enjoyed good relations with India, and the limited development that Nepal exhibits today is in no small part due to Indian assistance. Imagine the growth that Nepal could attain under the multicultural umbrella that is India. Although it is unlikely that such a change in political structure will happen fast, I believe that there is no doubt that an Indian state of Nepal has a much brighter future than the nation of Nepal.

Satya Ramiah, India/USA

I agree that not only Nepal but other South Asian countries should come under one roof,

like the EU. This will lead to an end to conflict and poverty. Bold decisions by strong leaders are required to achieve this unity. This can only increase security and prosperity in the region.

Srinivas, UK

Perhaps Nepal would be better off as part of India—but how would India benefit from such an arrangement? We Indians are tired of the smaller South Asian nations like Nepal and Sri Lanka requesting our help and money when they need it and then insulting India and cosying up to China. My message to all Nepalis: solve your own problems.

Rajan Koshy, India

Canada and Nepal seem to have more in common than we thought. Because we both have a “similar” culture, language and religion to our bigger republican neighbours in the south, it is suggested that somehow we will be better off if we are simply swallowed up by them. Most loyal Canadians would argue we would only be assimilated and forgotten, and I think most Nepalis would agree. Our sovereignty was established long ago and we should retain and preserve it.

Pete D, Canada

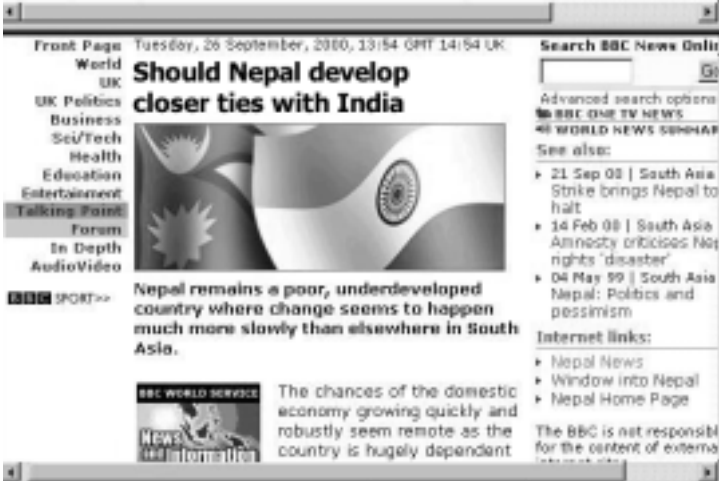
Nepal and India share a lot of things in common but we are quite apart on many issues. The majority of Nepalese people seek a due place under the sun but do not want the Indian umbrella over their head.

Dhruba Kuwar, Nepal

Nepal has always been a friendly neighbour and we should keep it that way. Anyway Indians can go there freely and trade today as there are no visa problems or anything else of that sort.

Sandeep, USA

Nepal, sandwiched between India and Pakistan has been very



“I am sick and tired of these people who only talk about pride, history and culture.”

vulnerable to infiltrators and foreign emissaries. It would be wise for the country to come directly under India’s umbrella to contain this effect. They share the same culture, language and food.

Guru Shenoy, USA

Culture and religion are becoming less important as the deciding factors for integration. The main consideration for Nepal would be economic and given the fact that the country is so dependent on India for almost everything, it is already under a de facto Indian umbrella. It is for the Nepalis people to decide whether political integration with India would benefit them.

Laksh Nukala, USA

It makes sense for Nepal to enter into a more strategic alliance with India. It will be a win-win situation for India as well as Nepal.

Amit Taneja, France

All Nepal has is its pride. Who cares about pride nowadays? I am sick and tired of these people who only talk about pride, history and culture.

Ram Sharma, Nepal

Nepal can and will survive on her own as she has done for centuries. Let us not forget that Nepal is a much older nation than all other nations in South Asia. Nepalis would rather die a rather horrible death than become part of India.

Amar Singh Thapa, Nepal

India has its own 500 million living below the line of poverty. How can it help Nepal? Nepal will have to educate its people.

Mo Akhtar, Canada

Nepal is a country with its own religion, people and culture. It should try and be more closer politically to democratic countries like India and try to stay away from communist ideology.

Shardool Vyas, USA

As a sovereign and more or less democratic nation, Nepal has the right to decide its own future. If closer ties with India is to the benefit of the Nepalis, why not?

Prasenjit Medhi, India

The recent hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane from Kathmandu is merely one of the many cases in which India’s hostile neighbors have used Nepal’s open border with India

to undermine India’s security. Since many Nepalis already work in India (legally and illegally) and India has a large number of Gorkha soldiers in its ranks, a confederation between the two countries is a good idea.

Vish, India/USA

Five million Indians are already in Nepal legally or illegally working. Nepal has to absorb the poor of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and provide them with business opportunities. Furthermore, India despite being a Hindu majority state has never been friendly towards Nepal. It has imposed the problem of Bhutanese refugees, and provided minimal economic assistance that is lower than the proportion of trade surplus it has with Nepal.

Suo Bi, USA

Nepal was, is and always will be a sovereign and independent country. Though we Nepalese are poor and our country is underdeveloped, we are proud of our country and in our view, being independent and a first class citizen of a poor country is far better than being controlled by any foreign power be it India or America.

B. Nepal, Nepal

Without strong ties with India, Nepal cannot prevail on its own.

Manorama Rauniyar, Nepal/ USA

First and foremost, I think these countries should resolve their own problems (not to mention the nuclear chaos). Otherwise, Nepal is a beautiful country with mostly honest people there. It’s a sovereign state and does have the right to remain independent.

Raja Dutta, USA

This is the 21st Century. All large countries are breaking up into small ones. Every nation is searching for its own identity. Nepal has had its own sovereignty and history for ages.

Kuber Chalise, Nepal

Closer ties to India is not a solution. India has actually been a hindrance to Nepal’s development. While it is important to maintain working ties with India, the solution to the pressing poverty in Nepal will only come from internal reconstruction. The governments need to change, people’s attitude needs to change, we need a better education and health system and much more.

Diwakar Thapa, Nepal

New bus/truck terminal for Kathmandu

A parking-loading terminal with a capacity to accommodate 700 trucks and buses is coming up at Teenthana, near the Kalanki intersection on the Ring Road. The facility, which will be ready during Dasain, is being built by Kathmandu Parking, a private company which will also operate it and will have a multi-storeyed parking and terminal complex with ticketing counters, waiting rooms, fuel stations and warehousing facilities. Nepal Bank Limited is financing the project's first phase, which is expected to cost Rs 150 million.

ATMs at Grindlays

Nepal Grindlays Bank has commissioned five new full-service Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) in Kathmandu and Pokhara. Grindlays Access Cards holders can now make deposits, transfer funds between accounts, request mini-statements and chequebooks and cash withdrawals using the machines. The machines also allow Visa and MasterCard holders to withdraw money from their accounts abroad.

With 11 branches, Grindlays is the largest among the joint venture banks in Nepal and also claims to have been the most profitable one since 1996. Over 60 percent of Grindlays possessions are treasury bills, bonds and foreign currency holdings, the remainder has been invested in "risk assets," something it plans to expand in the coming years.

Grindlays, which paid Rs 135.8 million as dividends to shareholders in 1998/99, is also among Nepal's largest corporate taxpayers, having paid Rs 206 million in taxes in 1999/00.

RNAC extends aircraft lease

Royal Nepal Airlines has extended its lease agreement with China Southwest Airlines to lease a Boeing 757 for one more year. The extension was signed on 26 September, a day before the existing three-month agreement would have expired.

Royal Nepal faces a chronic shortage of aircraft on both domestic and international sectors and will be under added pressure this season because of its new twice a week Kathmandu-Banglaore flights starting 29 October, and an additional flight a week to Osaka. The bird hit on 26 September has grounded one of RANC's three 757s. The airline's plan to buy new ATRs for domestic operations remains on hold because of an ongoing inquiry on its purchase procedures by the parliament's Public Accounts Committee.

Meanwhile, beginning 1 October, smoking has been banned on all Royal Nepal flights, except in the Kathmandu-Osaka sector.

Nepal Lever profits

Nepal Lever posted an after-tax profit of Rs 120.6 million in the year ending mid-July 2000, a slight increase over last year's Rs 119 million. Its turnover crossed Rs 1.72 billion, bolstered mainly by exports that grew by 8.5 percent and a 30 percent spurt in domestic sales which reached Rs 581 million.

The company's exports included Rs 37.9 million worth of detergent manufactured by ancillary industries being promoted by the company. The company has also doubled its toothpaste manufacturing capacity and dedicated two ancillary units to produce detergent and to package tea. An interesting point to note is that all the 75g soap packs bearing the Lever name sold in India are produced by Nepal Lever.

Black & Decker appliances

Universal Trading Corporation has been appointed the wholesale distributor of the Black & Decker range of appliances in Nepal. The US-based manufacturer is famous for its electric drill machines, which was invented in 1916 by the company. It markets and produces a range of home appliances, including drills that come in different configurations, shapes and capacity.

Necon's frequent flyers

Necon has announced a frequent flyer programme called Necon Premier starting 1 October. The programme is open to all passengers between ages 16 and 65. The airline says it is also working on other give-aways for Necon Premium cardholders.



Qatar's Adventure Club

Qatar Airways has announced an Adventure Club that would allow passengers to make use of special guidance and advice for leisure activities in Nepal from the Club's London office and Qatar Airways in Kathmandu. Club members are also entitled to an additional 10 kg extra baggage allowance, priority baggage handling, and special check-in assistance.

Qatar flies between London and Kathmandu via Doha and also plans to connect Paris from November.

More insurance companies

The Insurance Board has decided to award operating licences to four insurance companies and forward the applications to the Ministry of Finance for approval, reports said. Two companies—the American Life Insurance Company (ALICO) and Nepal Life Insurance Company (NLIC)—already have ministry approval but have not yet obtained the operating licences issued by the Insurance Committee. ALICO's entry into the insurance market has been delayed by a lawsuit and NLIC was approved only last week.

Others waiting for ministry approval to join the life insurance business are Laxmi Life Insurance Company (promoted by the Khetan Group) and Kantipur Life Insurance Company (backed by the Tibrewal Group). By law the Insurance Committee recommends companies for ministry approval and it issues companies their operating licenses. Only 1.6 percent of Nepal's population has life insurance and those seeking coverage are expected to cross the half a million mark by 2005. By then, the Insurance Committee expects premium payments to total Rs 1.19 billion.

Captain's wife

The wife of the captain who piloted a domestic airliner that crashed last year has not yet received her insurance money.

A NEPALI TIMES INVESTIGATION

One year after a Necon Air flight from Pokhara hit a telecommunication tower on approach to Kathmandu airport and crashed, killing all 15 passengers, relatives of the foreign passengers and the captain have not yet received the insurance payments.

Martina Joshi, the widow of Capt Jaya Krishna Raj Joshi, says she has spent the whole year in a legal maze trying to collect her husband's \$30,000 insurance. All she has collected so far is a sizeable portfolio of legal papers and debt.

Neither have relatives of two Bangladeshi and three Indian passengers on the flight that crashed on 5 September 1999 received the money. Necon Air says paperwork has delayed payments to foreign nationals. It also says that in Martina's case the delay has been caused because the insurance money is also claimed by her mother-in-law.

"We are ready to pay Martina also, but we have to act according to what the law says in such cases," Deep Mani Rajbhandari, managing director of Necon, told us. "The delay is due to legal problems."

The Insurance Board sent instructions to Neco Insurance Ltd (Necon's insurer and also a sister concern) to make the payment to the rightful beneficiary. But even this did not help Martina, who is raising a six-year-old child. She says Necon asked her to accept half the total insurance amount, and more

recently asked if she would agree to take two-thirds. But she is firm on getting all due to her.

The confusion has resulted because both Martina and her mother-in-law are listed in Necon's Personal Data Information (PDI) sheet as beneficiaries, and both have applied for the money. The PDI (dated 14 August 1992) names the two as recipients of "100 percent" each. Necon says its lawyers say that would mean 50-50 percent. Martina's legal counsel argues that as spouse and mother of Joshi's son, she is the rightful heir.

"I have asked to see the original of the PDI but have only been given a photocopy," she says. Martina, a Hong Kong Chinese, met Jaya Krishna when she was here as a tourist in 1987, and married him a year later. The PDI also provides "100 percent" of Capt Joshi's provident fund to both Martina and her mother-in-law. But as her claim was backed by another document listing her as sole beneficiary, Martina was able to collect this amount.

The airline says relatives of all others who died in the crash, except those without adequate documents, have been paid. But this is contradicted by a Bangladesh Embassy official who told us that it had written to the airline repeatedly, most recently two weeks ago, but that Necon had not responded. Necon says that it is in touch with two Bangladeshi beneficiaries via email and the payment of one of them would be processed as soon

Martina with her son, Calvin



as next week when an additional document arrives. In the case of the other, Necon says it is trying to locate the husband of the deceased before making payments.

Getting insurance payments from Necon was not easy for Nepali beneficiaries either. A relative of travel entrepreneur P.P. Prasai who died in the crash told us the family was only paid the insurance money last month. "For six or seven months, they didn't even bother to contact us," the relative said.

Martina adds that she has received a very cold response to her inquiry at Neco Insurance, which has been instructed by the Insurance Board to make all payments within 35 days of its letter dated 17 August, 2000. She says nothing has happened since.

"All I want is to cut this pain short and concentrate on bringing up my son," says Martina. "I don't speak Nepali and this fight has been very long and harassing," Martina's lawyer, Lok Bhakta Rana, says the airline is deliberately dragging things to "wear her out". Says Rana: "Martina's case is very strong, because the wife is the first relation, and rightful beneficiary. In court we may also get to see the PDI originals." ♦

Grindlays Gazette

INTEREST RATE UPDATE

NEPALI RUPEE	CURRENT%	PREVIOUS%
Call Money Avg.	5.00	5.00
84 Days t/bill	4.35	4.54
91 Days t/bill	4.56	4.75
365 Days t/bill	6.18	6.16
Repo rate	5.06	5.25

Average rate of 91 days T/Bill dipped lower due to aggressive bidding some of the government banks. In coming weeks, the average rate is expected to improve slightly due to heavy festival withdrawals. Expected range for coming weeks 4.50 to 5.00.

FOREIGN CURRENCY : Interest rates

	USD	EUR	GBP	JPY	CHF
LENDING	9.50	6.25	6.00	1.50	5.25
LIBOR (1M)	6.62	4.68	6.06	0.40	3.30

BANK RATES(DEPO/LENDING)	Mkt	Hi/Lo	Mkt	Avg
S/A NPR	6.0/3.5		5.30	
F/D 1 YR	7.5/6.0		6.81	
OVERDRAFT	15.5/12.5		13.54	
TERM LOAN	14.5/13.0		13.49	
IMPORT LN	13.0/10.5		11.52	
EXPORT LN	13.0/10.0		10.96	
MISC LOAN	17.5/13.5		15.13	

CURRENCY UPDATE

AG/USD	CURRENT *	WK/AGO	%CHG
OIL(Barrel)	33.20	35.59	- 6.71
GOLD(Ounce)	272.50	272.25	+ 0.09
GOLD (NPR *)	7135	7115	+ 0.28
EUR	0.8820	0.8533	+ 3.36
GBP	1.4634	1.3980	+ 4.68
JPY	107.80	107.12	+ 0.63
CHF	1.7240	1.7845	- 3.39
AUD	0.5445	0.5435	+ 0.18
INR	46.02	45.99	+ 0.07

*Currency bid prices at 12.30 p.m. on 25/9 - Source Reuters

Oil : Oil prices continued to fall after US president's order on Friday to release of 30 million barrels from its 571 -million-barrel reserve. News of other nations considering interventions in their oil markets also influenced the sentiment.

Currencies : The Euro rose higher on Friday after major industrial nations intervened jointly to halt its decline, taking the market by surprise ahead of a key Group of Seven (G7) meeting. Market estimates about the size of the intervention ranged between \$2-5 billion. Sterling and the Swiss franc also benefitted from the Euro's performance.

INDIAN RUPEE OUTLOOK :

The Indian currency ended at 46.01/03 per dollar after opening firm at 46.14 /17 on Monday . It had closed at 46.18/ 21 on Friday. The Rupee held on to early gains against the dollar to finish firm on Monday, aided by falling oil prices and a steadier Euro.

Standard Chartered

INTERNATIONAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES FOR NEPALI TIMES

	6 months	1 year
SAARC countries	US\$25	US\$48
Other countries	US\$40	US\$75

marketing@nepalitimes.com

The scapegoats of Dasain

SALIL SUBEDI

When you see a mountain goat climbing into a three-wheeler for the first and last taxi ride of his life you can tell Dasain is here. At the Nepal Food Corporation outlet in Thapathali, mountain goats from southern Tibet are selling like, well, mountain goats from southern Tibet. At the Ring Road, truck upon trucks crammed with water buffalo have arrived. Goats are being goaded out of the godowns, terrified sheep are dragged through the sidewalks. And some smaller *bokas* are being hand-carried through the streets—all being prepared for the great massacre next week. It's enough to turn even hardline carnivores into vegetarians.

But this is Dasain and animal sacrifices are a part of our culture, and the animal-buying spree is gathering

It is that time of year again: mountain goat, sheep, duck, chicken, water buffalo are all lining up for the Great Dasain Massacre this week.

steam in Kathmandu. There are four basic types of sacrificial livestock: *khasi* (castrated goat) tops the list, followed by *boka* (normal goat), *chyangra* (Himalayan mountain goat) and sheep. The food corporation picks up its selection of *khasi* and *boka* from three major tarai markets of Lahan, Janakpur and Nepalgunj. The *chyangra* and sheep are from China—an annual gift from the Peoples' Republic to the Kingdom of Nepal for the festive season. The local suppliers get their animals from all over: North India, tarai, middle hills and the high mountain areas.

There are three major *khasi*-selling hubs in Kathmandu—Kalanki Khasi Bazar, Tukucha Khasi Bazar and the Nepal Food Corporation godowns in Thapathali. At the moment, it is difficult to tell which are more numerous, the *khasi* and *boka* or the humans thronging to buy them. Since the early human gets the goat, there is a rush to find a healthy and plump animal since late-comers may have to be satisfied with ones that are a little under the weather, or haven't fully recovered from car-sickness. The *chyangra* and sheep sold at the Food Corporation have to take a two-day truck ride from the high plateau.

"The Chinese government has been very generous. We receive 2,000 *chyangra* for free every year," exults Murari Prasad Adhikary, Bagmati Zonal Chief of the Food Corporation. On their way to the Valley, many get sold along the Kodari Highway in Tatopani and Barabise. The sheep and *chyangra* are corralled in Thapathali and look distinctly homesick; it's too hot for them here. "Due to health hazard and inability to cope with the weather conditions there was a high mortality rate and the corporation has backed off from importing sheep," says Adhikary. Although the animals are free, the Food Corporation makes a packet: it keeps a quarter of the income from sales, minuses the transport cost and send the rest (which usually amounts to about Rs 3 million) to the national coffers.

There are still some in Kathmandu who prefer sheep. "It's not necessary that sheep buyers turn up only during Dasain season. The *kage bheda* is a popular sacrificial sheep and the demand remains stable throughout the year," says Mahendra Thapa at Tukucha Khasi Bazar. "But we only keep few of them since it's hard to take care of them." The price is determined according to the demand of the livestock. The Food Corporation for instance averages its expenditures and the local market price. "Ours is always slightly lower than the

local market. This helps maintain a standard price as the private sellers are compelled to fix reasonable rates," Adhikary says. However, local sellers like Mahesh Shrestha of Kalanki Khasi Bazar believe that their prices are just as reasonable. "We give our buyers the best goats and the best deal while at the Corporation there's no such guarantee that one can get a healthy goat according to the price you pay," he says. The main issue is whether the animal you buy is healthy or is suffering from infections. The best way to find out if the animal is healthy: pick up the animal by its tail—if it lets out a bleat don't buy it. "The healthiest ones are those that run away when you approach," says Purna Dongol, a veteran *khasi* buyer at Kalanki.

Khasi buyers who have some space for the goats to roam at home buy early to nab the healthy ones. This way the animals also get a few last days of peace and quiet and can munch on some juicy grass before facing the guillotine. But many wait to buy till Phulpati (4 Oct), a day before the actual sacrifices start on Asthami (5 Oct) and Nawami (6 Oct). Many of the animals lay down their lives in front of cars, buses, and motorcycles. Royal Nepal Airlines has a standing order for about 150 goats, the bigger ones are sacrificed in front of the nose wheel of Boeing 757s to appease appropriate gods. This year, there will be added demand from private airlines which have bought new planes.

The Food Corporation is selling *khasi* and *boka* under the same category at Rs 113 per kg (Rs 110 last year) and *chyangra* at Rs 102 per kg (Rs 101 last year). *Khasi* bazaars at Tukucha and Kalanki have more subtle classifications: The hill *pahade khasi* (short ear, sharp horns) are sold at Rs 120 per kg while the tarai and Indian *madhesi khasi* (lean, long ears and legs, curled horns) are sold at Rs 128 per kg. The favourite scapegoat is the black *boka* which sell at Rs 120 per kg and the brown and white ones at Rs 110 per kg. "The black ones are very popular sacrificial goats and therefore their prices are a bit high," says Thapa. The *kage bheda*, also a popular sacrificial animal, has a price range upto Rs 250 per kg. A total of 10,000 *khasis* and *bokas* and 2,000 mountain goats are expected to be sold in this year's Kathmandu bazaar this Dasain. The *khasi* and mountain goat counter at the Food Corporation at Thapathali is open 7am-7pm. Tel: 246399,228365. The *khasi* bazaars in Kalanki by the Ring Road and the Tukucha in Putalisadak operate from dusk till dawn. ♦



PHOTOS SALIL SUBEDI



mirnov

Name: Chyangra
Age: 1.2 years
Weight: 16 kg
Birth: Southern Tibet
Characteristics: Fluffy hair used to make pashmina, short but strong legs, stuffy meat, less fat, nomadic ways
Habit: Aggressive, herd mentality

Name: Kage Bheda
Age: 1.7 years
Weight: 20 kg
Birth: Chapagaon, Lalitpur
Characteristics: Curly hair also used to make wool, meat needs time to cook, belief is you can catch cold eating its meat. Sacrifice for goddess Kali.
Habit: Dirty lifestyle, has to be dragged

Name: Madhesi Khasi
Age: 1.5 years
Weight: 22kg
Birth: Lahan
Characteristics: Long ear and legs, less fat, easy to cook, the most popular buy.
Habit: Has no interest in sex.

Name: Boka
Age: 1.2 years
Weight: 16 kg
Birth: Dhading
Characteristics: Has goatee, stinks, popular sacrificial animal at devi temples, especially the black ones.
Habits: Harasses female goats

Birds in p

There are 850 species of birds found in Nepal, more than the entire continent, and bird watchers from around the world are flocking to the ever greater numbers.

the terrain rises to nearly 9,000 metres—all within 100 km as the lammergeyer flies. Of the species found in Nepal, about 620 breed and live in Nepal, another 124 breed in the neighbourhood but live in Nepal in significant numbers, and then there are another hundred or so migratory species that transit through Nepal in their long-range migrations from Siberia to Africa, Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

And it is these migrations that yield some of the most amazing stories of birds in the Himalaya. The playful Himalayan choughs, for instance, have been seen by mountaineers soaring at altitudes of nearly 8,000 metres above the South Col below the summit of Mt Everest. George Shaller in his book, *Stones of Silence*, reports bar-headed geese being seen at an incredible 9,375 metres above the Himalaya. Even if that was a fluke, and the flock was lifted by an updraft in the jet-stream, there are plenty of regular sightings by mountaineers of bar-headed geese honking their way past Dhaulagiri at 7,300 metres.

Some of these geese (*karyankurung*) are known to take off in spring from the banks of the Rapti River in the Royal Chitwan National Park, head due north and reach their cruising altitude by the time they arrive at the Himalayan wall. They fly on non-stop to roost by the lakes in southern Tibet. The most interesting theory to explain this stratospheric bird flight is that the birds have been migrating along

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

It has become a cliché to say that Nepal is a diverse country. But perhaps nowhere is this diversity more apparent than in the breadth of birdlife found in Nepal: some 850 species are crammed in this country—more than in the entire North American continent. The reasons for this variety are three-fold: Nepal's great altitude variation, its location in the boundary between the Paleo-arctic realm to the north (Tibet, Siberia) and the Indo-malayan realm to the south (India, south-east Asia), and the country also lies smack along an east-west Himalayan divide of which the Kali Gandaki Valley forms a distinct avian boundary.

From the Kosi Tappu at barely 90 metres above sea level

this route when the mountains were much younger and lower. They flew higher and higher as the Himalaya grew, and evolved better lungs and flying ability over millions of years. Whatever the reason, there is no doubt that Nepal's birds are high-flyers. And you just have to look at the Siberia-bound terns and ducks refueling at Gokyo Lake to shake your head in disbelief.

Nepal is now a major destination for bird watchers from Europe and Japan. Bird watchers so avid that they can be seen whipping out their binocu-

lars and training them on raptors feeding on worms by the edge of the runway even as they get off the plane at Kathmandu. Most then head right away to Kosi Tappu Wildlife Reserve at the point where the mighty Kosi River flows into India, and the richest bird viewing area in Nepal. Kosi Tappu is low, it is a wetland, it is in the east, and it is on the migratory route of birds travelling down from Tibet along the Arun River—all factors that contribute to the great variety of birdlife found here. At 88 m, the Kosi Barrage

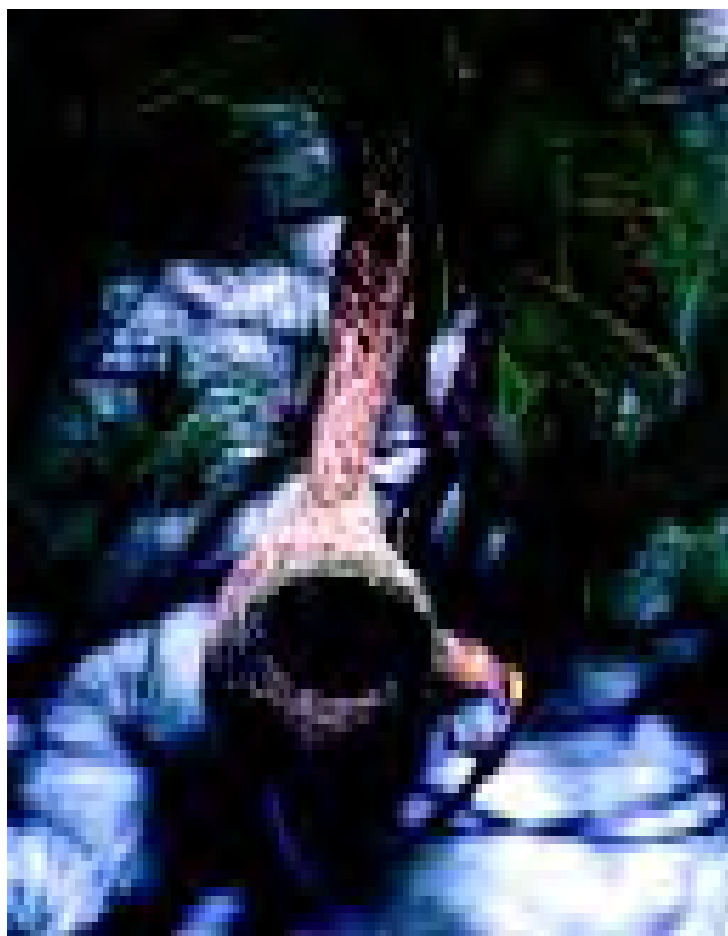
and the big reservoir that it has built up is the favourite haunt for ducks and geese—Robert Fleming, Sr (one of the authors of the classic *Birds of Nepal*) counted 32,000 ducks of 19 species here before the preserve was established. Today, with protection, there must be more.

Less numerous but equally magnificent are the bossy looking black-necked adjutant storks, and the flippity finch larks. It is when you can swing your binoculars at a rustle in the bush, focus quickly and whisper: "rufus-necked laughing thrush"

that you know you have arrived into the fascinating world of Himalayan bird watching. But habitat destruction is a worry. Bharat Basnet, the Managing Director of The Explore Nepal Group which runs the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Camp, has tried to get local schools into bird watching so that they can work as guides and benefit from bird-watching tourism. "What is more important than a specific species is the habitat. If the habitat is preserved then all the inhabitants will be protected," Bharat told us.

Even if you are stuck in Kathmandu, there are some fabulous bird-watching areas nearby. If Nepal is a treasure house of birdlife, then Phulchoki Hill south of Kathmandu is Nepal's bird and butterfly vault. Deforestation along the margins of this once-protected broadleaved forest, blasting in a nearby marble quarry and raucous picnickers have spoilt the atmosphere somewhat, but Phulchoki is still alive with birds. The peak soars to 3,000 metres and has

Black headed oriole in Chitwan (top), a tailor bird weaving away in Nagarkot (far left), and a cattle egret with its brown breeding feather in Kosi Tappu (left).





paradise

North American the Himalaya in



ATLANTIC MONTHLY

sunbirds, finches, minivets, barbets and the elusive and legendary spiny babbler, one of two bird species that is endemic to Nepal (the other being a sub species of the kalij pheasant). Many birdwatchers make regular pilgrimages to Phulchoki to look for the spiny babbler, but you have to be very lucky to see it.

A morning hike in Godavari leads us to a small clearing in the woods. Right in front are half a dozen kalij pheasants feeding on the ground. Our arrival disturbs them, and the kalij erupt into wings and flap off into the undergrowth. Within Phulchoki's vertical variation of 1,500 metres and 70 sq km area live 265 species of birds—one-fourth of all bird species found in Nepal. Some 86 of the bird species on Phulchoki are migratory. Godavari resident, Mahendra Singh Limbu, is a lepidopterist-turned-bird watcher. He tells us: "At least six of the species found in Phulchoki are rare and endangered." The blue-napped pita, rufus throated hill partridge, blue-winged laughing thrush, grey-sided laughing thrush, grey-chinned minivet, Nepal cutia and the spinny babbler, are all threatened. Mahendra says that the success of community forestry around Godavari and Lele means that many of the birds like the kalij

and Alexandrine parakeet are returning. Nepal's rich bird diversity is also drawing international avian conferences to Kathmandu, like this month's International Galliformes Symposium during which more than 100 bird watchers and scientists from around the world have gathered to devise strategies for conservation of six of the world's 22 pheasant species found in Asia. The symposium plans to identify new areas for conserving pheasant habitats in Nepal, and have set their eyes on the Pipar region near Ghasa in the Annapurna region. This area is at 1,400-3,300 metres and was made famous to bird watchers by long-time Pokhara resident, Colonel Jimmy Roberts. An enthusiastic bird watcher and collector, Roberts donated his entire collection of pheasants, fowls, pigeons, and several other smaller species to the Fulbari Resort's aviary in Pokhara before he died two years ago. The Pipar region has all six species of Himalayan pheasants found in Nepal as well as their lowland cousins, the blue peafowl and the red jungle fowl.

Amrit Bahadur Karki, who was on a pheasant surveying team in Pipar, says the place is full of Himalayan munals, blood pheasants and other common species. "One day we heard the faint calls of the rare cheer pheasant," says Amrit, describing the distinctive gobble of this pheasant. The cheer and the swamp frankolin have not yet been included in the endangered list even though they are threatened. Hunting has now been banned in Pipar and the local community is helping to conserve the Himalayan snowcocks, chakor partridges, and the cheer and the koklas pheasants. The Annapurna area is home to half of Nepal's bird species. Another bird watcher's paradise is the Makalu Barun National Park and Conservation Area in the northeast. This rarely visited park reserves a total of 440 different species of birds, of which fourteen are rare eastern breeders.

Loss of forests, wetlands and grasslands are a threat to Nepal's bird diversity. Areas like Phulchoki, Ghodaghodi Lake in the western tarai and Mai Valley in the east have not yet been declared protected areas. There is a move to declare Phulchoki and Chandragiri ranges nature sanctuaries, but that may take time. In the past 15 years, forests in Nepal's midhills have returned, and with them many of the resident and migratory birds. What worries conservationists is that tarai forests are disappearing fast, and this is where most bird species are. When the hardwood forests go,

marshes are drained, pesticides are used indiscriminately, then birds disappear. "Conservation of Nepal's forests is vital, for the future of people as well as for birds," write Carol and Tim Inskipp in their book, *A Guide to the Birds of Nepal*. "The aim should be to balance the needs of local people, trekkers and the natural environment." Most of Nepal's endangered birds are dependent on forests, and 90 percent of these species are also found in Nepal's national parks and nature reserves. So the answer lies in bolstering conservation in these areas, and what better way to do that than to use income from bird watching tourism to protect Nepal's rich bird diversity. ♦



premium
whiskey



BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING

From credit card slips to video surveillance cameras, almost everything we do in our daily lives is watched by someone. Privacy on the net is getting harder to maintain.

ANTONY BARNETT IN LONDON

From the moment you wake up tomorrow, nearly every movement you make will be tracked by somebody, somewhere. Walk to your car, turn on your computer at work, visit the local supermarket—all will be noted by cameras or databases deep in the bowels of corporate HQs and within shadowy government agencies.

Already these databases are bulging with intricate details of every facet of our private lives. Your eating habits, hobbies, whether you have children or prefer Hindi songs or hip-hop—your tastes, preferences and passions have all been downloaded. Never in the history of mankind has personal privacy been harder to secure.

Simon Davies, head of watchdog group Privacy International, says: "Government and corporations are desperate to turn the world into villages where everybody knows everything about you. Everything you have ever done will soon be available at the touch of a button."

As you switch on cable TV, companies are eagerly taking note of your favourite programmes and what time you're at home. Maybe it will help them choose the best hour to call and tell you about a new service. Or maybe they'll offer a personal loan with the bank they've just got into bed with. As you head outdoors, stepping over the junk mail piling up on the doormat, it won't be long before a CCTV camera's unblinking eye will capture part of your journey on tape. And if you drive to work it won't just be the police's speed cameras that make sure you're rarely out of sight for long. Filling up with petrol may mean you are being listened to as well as being watched. BP was forced to

admit a couple of years ago that it uses secret microphones to listen to the private conversations of millions of petrol station customers. Hidden bugs in forecourt shops are picking up every word uttered.

If you think arriving at work provides a sanctuary from prying eyes, then think again. Swiping your corporate security card through a barrier on your way to the office tells your boss what time you arrived and what time you leave. The moment you log on to your computer is the point when personal privacy really disappears. Emails, as we should all know by now, are not private or secure. The number of employees being sacked after the boss has read a damning email continues to grow. Last summer Kwik Fit sacked two workers who were having an affair after their erotic emails were intercepted by management.

Philip Ryan is a consultant from Peapod, which helps companies spy on workers suspected of wrongdoing. He said: "Everything an employee does while logged on to a work computer can be watched. The emails that are sent, the websites that are visited. It is difficult to keep secrets on the internet."

Described as 'dataveillance', the ability to track people by monitoring the shadow they cast in data is now big business. What's more, there are now hundreds of downloaded programmes that secretly snoop inside PCs. A programme called SurfMonkey, which is supposed to protect children surfing the Net, but as

well as stopping children accessing porn sites it collects information, including users' phone numbers and email addresses.

Some companies are using 'web bugs' that hide computer codes behind images only a pixel in size on your computer screen to gather information about your web surfing habits. Effectively, this means an invisible dot on your screen is watching every move you make. These dots mine information about who owns the site you are surfing as well as details about your computer. "They are a secret way of gathering information about someone," said David Banisar, a civil liberties expert from the Electronic Privacy Information Centre (Epic) in Washington.

These bugs work best in conjunction with "cookies"—devices that leap on to your hard drive the first time you visit a particular website. They are your own personal calling card and identify you next time you visit the site, but they also record what sites surfers come from and trace what sites they go to and how long they spend online. This detailed profile of a computer user is highly valuable marketing information which

can be sold to other on-line advertisers. According to Epic, 86 out of 100 tested online com-

panies work with cookies.

But it is not just corporations eager to enhance their profits that are keen to survey your personal internet traffic. Last week in the UK, the Regulation of Investigatory

police unparalleled powers to use the new generation of mobile phones to pinpoint the location of any individual. They will act like a homing device planted secretly on the phone's owner without them realising. But don't think it's just state-of-the-art technology that challenges your privacy. Paying bills over the Internet can also be a risky business as personal details can easily be appropriated by unscrupulous users. This month John Chamberlain decided to test Powergen's security before paying his electricity bill after seeing a Panorama programme on computer hacking. 'In under three minutes I had access to 5,000 credit card details, names and addresses,' said Chamberlain.

Supermarket loyalty cards are another tool through which your habits are monitored. These cards build up pictures of what you like spending your money on. Are you vegetarian? Do you prefer organic food? Do you favour Chilean chardonnay over French? Few things can be hidden these days. Those who have chosen to make their phone numbers ex-directory will

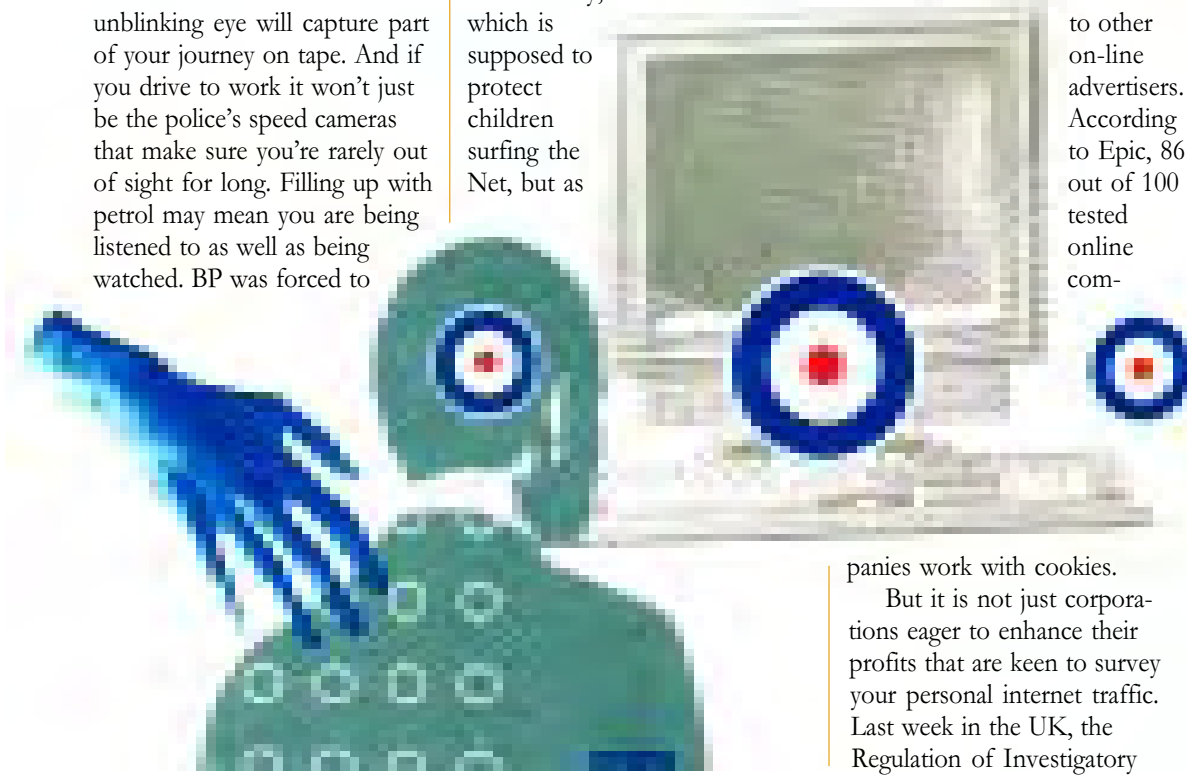
be unhappy to know that with one call this newspaper can find out what that supposedly secret number is. CD-Roms are available that will allow you to reverse search on phone numbers—the opposite to directory inquiries. You give it a phone number and it tells you whose phone that is and where they live.

The Land Registry will provide anybody with details of the owners of a particular piece of real estate, and reveal if there is a mortgage on it and which bank is lending the money. You can even hire a company to check out neighbours before you move into a new home.

Of course, if you are prepared to use a little subterfuge with a confident telephone manner, then much more can be obtained. When the row erupted over Labour millionaire donor Lord Levy's tax bill, the Inland Revenue said it received calls from someone pretending to be Lord Levy, requesting his tax return.

Lord Levy argued that his tax details were personal property, but it is clear that when it comes to personal privacy it is not strange-looking men lurking in dustbins that most of us need to worry about. ♦ (The Observer)

mirinda



Peking Duck vs Kentucky Chicken



Catering to local palates, KFC launched spicy chicken burgers and wings which sold so well that McDonald’s was pressured to introduce its own even-more-spicy chicken wings.

ANTOANETA BEZLOVA IN BEIJING
Chinese consumers may not know where Kentucky is in the United States, but the logo of Kentucky Fried Chicken will soon become as familiar to people here as the calligraphy-adorned red sign of Quanjude, the old and revered restaurant brand for Beijing roasted duck.
Famed for having a high regard for their own cuisine, Chinese people have voted down all attempts by local companies to establish an indigenous fast-food chain. Increasingly, they flock to the mushrooming outlets of KFC and McDonald’s, defying cliched perceptions of being conservative and biased towards foreign products.
“At first, going to KFC and McDonald’s was more about ‘tasting’ the Western culture than tasting the food,” says Han Guoqiang, a middle-school teacher. “Now, people go there because it is convenient, clean and they have learned to enjoy the food.”
After years of imposed isolation during the Mao

Zedong’s regime (1949-1976), in Deng Xiaoping’s era of openness and reforms China has eagerly embraced everything new and advanced, from mobile-telephone technology to foreign fast-food chains.
KFC opened its first restaurant in Beijing 13 years ago. Today, there are 380 KFC outlets in nearly 90 cities across China. A survey of 16,000 people carried out by the US market-research group ACNielsen shows that KFC is the best-known international brand in China.
Local fast-food companies have tried to put up a fight and stop KFC’s market invasion. But after six years of harsh resistance, Ronghuajiji—China’s home-grown fast-food chain whose specialty is chicken wings, beat a retreat and recently closed down its last Beijing outlet.
Red Sorghum fast-food chain, another chain trumpeted as a local opponent to KFC and McDonald’s, is deeply mired in financial troubles. KFC’s march in the market here has been obstructed only by America’s other food giant, McDonald’s.

McDonald’s moved into the market later than KFC, but has pursued an aggressive expansion strategy and now has more than 300 outlets throughout the country.
Frustrated with China’s failures in local fast-food chains, authorities were even more vexed to see domestic market becoming a battleground for two foreign food companies. Ever since McDonald’s launched its spicy chicken wings last year, the two giants have been involved in a ‘chicken war’.
Catering to local palates, KFC was first to launch spicy chicken burgers and wings. In regional markets such as Shanghai and Beijing, they have sold so well that McDonald’s was pressured to introduce its own even-more-spicy chicken wings. “I personally find KFC more suitable to Chinese people’s taste,” says Chen Lin, accompanying her 12-year-old daughter to a KFC outlet.
“We eat chicken and we enjoy spicy food, while big chunks of meat like those in McDonald’s hamburgers are quite strange for

us. But now, it is really hard to decide where to go because you can eat chicken at both places,” she adds. Chen’s daughter Xiao Liu favors McDonald’s, because it’s “more fun, the chips are great and you can get a Snoopy toy with your meal”.
In July this summer, KFC responded to McDonald’s ‘Snoopy attack’ by unveiling its latest attraction: free Pokemon toys, patterned after the monsters in a popular Japanese game. “Many of us were educated to think that capitalist competition is bad because it brings misery for workers,” says Wu Jingxun, a company employee, while lunching at KFC. “But the competition between KFC and McDonald’s has benefitted both consumers and workers. Look how excited children are.”
In Beijing alone, KFC employs 23,000 people—one reason why the government seems not to mind the ubiquitous sight of KFC brands in the capital regarded as a symbol of Chinese tradition and communist power.
For a country suspicious of foreign influences like China, well-known foreign brands such as McDonald’s and KFC have had a relatively smooth ride. Unlike the average French consumer who resents globalisation as the loss of indigenous culture and sees McDonald’s as a threat, ordinary Chinese people are just curious of everything foreign. “We don’t ask ourselves: if we eat American fried chicken, would Beijing roasted duck industry go bankrupt,” says Han, the teacher. “We are just happy to have all that variety and eat the same things we see in the films.” ♦ *(IPS)*

Chandrika has edge in Sri Lanka poll

COLOMBO - Sri Lanka is preparing to elect a new parliament next month with the two main rivals running neck and neck, amidst expectations by some that voters may have to give yet another verdict. Battered by military losses against Tamil Tiger rebels and public anger over rising prices, President Chandrika Kumaratunga’s People’s Alliance (PA) is still seen to have a slight edge over the main opposition United National Party (UNP).
A UNP win could create complications because it would then have to work with the country’s real executive head, Kumaratunga. The UNP has said it would clip the powers of the president if it wins the poll. But the PA says this cannot be done and the president would remain the all-powerful head of government as provided by the new constitution.
Fears have also been expressed by the international community that polls on 10 October to elect a new 225-member parliament, would be marred by growing violence that is undermining one of the developing world’s oldest democracies.
Most political analysts expect the PA to win the most seats in parliament, but not enough to form a government on its own. “We may be faced with a hung parliament for the first time. Whichever party is able to form a government, will have a fragile coalition that may be forced into elections before its term is over,” said Keethish Loganathan of the Centre for Policy Alternatives.
Both the PA and the UNP, led by former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe, are offering to find a political solution to the 17-year-old ethnic war in the north and continue with economic liberalisation.
A major contender in the poll is the left-wing People’s Liberation Front, better known by its acronym JVP, which is becoming popular with young voters. Analysts expect the JVP to draw away a large chunk of the undecided voters, estimated by some to be 40 percent of the total electorate. Despite its involvement in two bloody revolts against the government in the 1970s and 1980s, the JVP is now an influential democratic political force. *(IPS)*

India-Russia “strategic partnership”
MOSCOW - Russian President Vladimir Putin is in India this week where he is due to sign a declaration on a bilateral “strategic partnership” which will advocate a “multi-polar” world concept, a buzzword meaning no single power—the United States—should dominate.
The idea is not quite new. In 1998, then Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov said he favoured a strategic triangle involving Russia, India and China to ensure regional geopolitical stability. The idea was promptly dismissed by Beijing, though Russia and China have developed a separate “strategic partnership”.
Putin’s visit is being capped by the signing of a number of business deals, including arms trade and cooperation in the oil, agriculture and diamond cutting sectors. Moscow has always been eager to strengthen ties with its Cold War allies in Asia, particularly India, but bilateral trade with that country has remained sluggish, and involved mainly arms shipments.
Total trade between Russia and India is expected to dip to \$2 billion this year, from \$3 billion last year. Trade between the two was averaging \$4 billion a year in the early 1990s, but it fell to \$1.3 billion dollars in 1996. Among the products traded are tea, tobacco and pharmaceuticals from India and metal products, fertiliser and newsprint from Russia.
Bilateral trade still revolves around arms. During the Cold War, the former Soviet Union and India maintained close ties, Moscow being India’s biggest arms supplier and an important trade partner. India and Russia have agreed in principle to extend to the year 2010, a long-term programme of military-technical cooperation, which was signed in 1994 and was due to run out this year. *(IPS)*

B’desb takes India’s place in Sierra Leone
UNITED NATIONS - Bangladesh has offered 900 troops to replace a large part of the Indian contingent pulling out of the beleaguered UN peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone.
The proposed withdrawal of the Indian troops—numbering over 3,000—created a virtual crisis in Sierra Leone as the UN last week began scrambling for new troops to prop up its peacekeeping mission in the West African nation.
Currently, Bangladesh has nearly 800 troops with the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). If Secretary-General Kofi Annan accepts the offer, the two additional infantry battalions could bring the total number of Bangladeshi troops in Sierra Leone to about 2,600 making it the second largest contingent after Nigeria.
The Indian withdrawal was primarily blamed on the growing tension between the UNAMSIL Commander, Major-General Vijay Jetley of India and his deputy, Brigadier General Mohammed Garba of Nigeria. But India’s official position is that the withdrawal is a routine rotation of its troops.
Currently, there are 32 countries providing troops to UNAMSIL, the five largest contributors being Nigeria (3,205 troops), India (3,073), Jordan (1,830), Bangladesh (792) and Guinea (789). Although Britain has sent in some of its paratroopers to Sierra Leone to rescue its nationals caught in the crossfire, it has refused to field any British soldiers in UNAMSIL. The United States, on the other hand, has kept away from most of the UN peacekeeping missions ever since 18 of its soldiers were killed in Somalia in the early 1990s. *(IPS)*

US runs out of patience in Indonesia

JIM LOBE IN WASHINGTON
Senior US government officials are actively considering steps, including moving to postpone next month’s donors’ meeting for Indonesia, if the government of President Abdurrahman Wahid does not follow through on a pledge to disarm militia forces in West Timor and take strong measures to improve a deteriorating human-rights situation throughout the archipelago.
US officials, led by Pentagon chief William Cohen, who visited Jakarta last week, have warned their Indonesian counterparts in unusually blunt language that they are prepared to cut off all but humanitarian aid. As Cohen was speaking, the Pentagon confirmed that it had suspended military-to-military ties with Indonesia just five months after they had resumed.
“It’s not even clear if the top brass in Jakarta really have control over their own army,” said one administration official who added that the formal chain of command within the military appears to have broken down in the wake of last year’s UN intervention in East Timor after militia, with military support, virtually razed the former Portuguese colony.
In addition to disarming the militia and prosecuting those responsible for the murders of the UN staff, Washington is demanding that Indonesia permit the UN Security Council to send a mission to West Timor to assess the general security situation in West Timor and permit the East Timorese there to return home.
Indonesia, which has yet to recover from Asia’s devastating financial crisis in 1997-98, is particularly dependent on external aid at the moment, so the threat of an aid suspension, which was first raised by World Bank President James Wolfensohn in a letter to President Wahid shortly after the militia murders, is seen as a major threat. The Bank convenes and chairs the meeting of the Consultative Group on Indonesia (CGI), where both multilateral and bilateral donors pledge assistance for the coming year.
“I would ask you to do your utmost to stop the violence before any more innocent lives are lost,” Wolfensohn wrote in a letter delivered to Wahid. The Bank Friday sent out formal invitations to the CGI, which is scheduled to meet 18-19 October in Tokyo, but there is no certainty



UN helicopter rescues aid workers from West Timor last month.

that it will take place then. If the army fails to move decisively against the militia after Monday, the Clinton administration is likely to try to put off the meeting, although European donors and Japan are more reluctant to take such strong action.
On 12 September, the National Council of Timorese Resistance (CNRT) called for putting it off until Jakarta dismantles the militia and arrests all those responsible for the violence there and for recent infiltrations into East Timor, and permits East Timorese in West Timor to return home. New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) added its voice Wednesday, insisting that the CGI delay its meeting until specific conditions are met; among them, an independent investigation into the killing of the UN staff; clear steps toward disbanding the militia “in a way that does not simply export the thuggery to another location”; and the arrests and beginning of trials against 19 officers and militia leaders identified last month by the Attorney-General as suspects in last year’s rampage in East Timor.
“We’ve had enough promises,” said Sidney Jones, HRW’s Asia director and an Indonesia expert in her own right. “Now we want results.”
While Timor is currently the focus of US and activist concern, continuing violence elsewhere in Indonesia, particularly recent high-profile killings in restive Aceh province, an important oil- and gas-producing region, has also become worrisome. ♦ *(IPS)*

THE SPACE ODYSSEUS

LUKE HARDING IN COLOMBO

Sir Arthur is exhausted. “I’ve just done a video for Australian TV,” he wheezes from his wheelchair. “My executive secretary is away organising UN conferences. I can’t speak to you for very long.” He is dressed in a green sarong and a Hawaiian yachting shirt. He is not wearing any shoes. And he is about to go for his afternoon nap.

The reason the world’s most famous futurologist has, at 82, grudgingly agreed to do yet another interview (“I’m fed up with them,” he grumbles) is to promote the publication of his latest book, *The Light of Other Days*. It quickly emerges, though, that Clarke is already bored with this project. “I’ve done three novels since then,” he sighs, swivelling to check his inbox. Which is a shame, because this novel is not just good—but fun, capacious, and in parts brilliant.

His home in central Colombo is surrounded by a high wall and an electric fence. Sitting in the office, among three computers and a giant short-wave radio, Clarke explains that the “ideas” in the novel are all his. Most of it was actually written, though, by someone else—in this case Stephen Baxter, the 42-year-old doyen of modern British science fiction writing, and a Clarke fan. The two authors hammered out the text via a series of emails. But it was Clarke who came up with the WormCam, a time-viewing device which abolishes privacy, speculative biography and unsolved crime.

The book, with its vision of a relentlessly voyeuristic society, includes a memorable sex scene on a bench in AD 2041 Rome. Who wrote the sex bits, I wonder? “I had an operation for prostate cancer 10 years ago,” Clarke says. “I haven’t the slightest interest in sex. But you have to keep up with

The principal baddie in Arthur C Clarke’s new sci-fi novel is Himal Patterson, a megalomaniac media tycoon who invents WormCams to get to the news the instant it happens.

reality.” He pauses for a moment. “Don’t print that,” he adds.

Rupert Murdoch’s HarperCollins publishes the novel next week. Its principal baddie is Himal Patterson, a megalomaniac media tycoon who invents WormCams (which can link any point in space to any other) merely as a means of getting to the news the instant it happens. Clarke concedes that “there are certain elements” of Murdoch in the scheming Himal. Rupert and Arthur are good friends. The author of *2001: A Space Odyssey* faced his trickiest moment three years ago, when he was turned over by the *Sunday Mirror*. It was Murdoch who wrote him a “very nice” note promising him that the reporters responsible would never work in Fleet Street again. “He is a rather shy, modest person,” Clarke says teasingly. “I find him very deferential.”

The Mirror claimed that Clarke had paid young boys for sex. It produced affidavits from the boys in question. Sri Lankan police later disproved them, he says. The story ran two weeks before Prince Charles flew to Sri Lanka to confer a knighthood on the grand old man of science fiction. The saga was the lowest point in his career. The episode still upsets him. “I take an extremely dim view of people mucking about with boys,” Clarke says. “The whole thing was distressing to me. It was vindictive and very unpleasant. I can only assume it was a plot to embarrass Prince Charles.” The novelist was finally knighted this May, at a low-key ceremony at the British high commission in Colombo.

Clarke’s private life remains a mystery. He was married briefly to an American, Marilyn



Arthur C. Clarke

Mayfield, now dead, whom he met while diving in Florida in the 50s. Asked whether he is gay, Clarke always gives the same puckish pro forma answer: “No, merely cheerful.” The answer, presumably, lies in the “Clarkives”—a vast collection of his manuscripts and private writings, to be published 50 years after his death. Like most brilliant obsessives Clarke was not, one suspects, an easy person to live with.

Since growing up on a farm in Minehead in Somerset, Clarke has become exceedingly famous. He has written more than 80 novels, which have sold 50 million copies. Back in 1945, aged 28, he wrote an essay for *Wireless World* in which he invented the concept of communications satellites. His celebrity reached a dizzy peak in the 50s and 60s, as the space age he had so confidently anticipated became a reality. And then there is *2001: A Space Odyssey*, a Clarke story filmed in 1968 by Stanley Kubrick which transformed him into a household name. Did he think it would turn out like this? “I never dreamed I would be reasonably successful. Writing was always an enjoyable hobby.

If it made some money, good.”

Before trundling off for his afternoon sleep, he recounts how the greatest influences on his career were H.G. Wells and his half-forgotten contemporary, Olaf Stapleton. To his regret, he and Wells never met.

Clarke makes it clear when he has had enough of my company. He has to speak to Alastair Cooke later, he says. Most afternoons he also pops down to his club for a game of table tennis. He has lived in Sri Lanka since 1956, when he stopped off in what was then Ceylon on a diving holiday. He doesn’t go out much these days and spends most of his time at home. He has seven staff—including an apolitical private secretary called Lenin—to deal with the fan mail and interview requests. It is an eccentric, affected, self-regarding, bach-clor-ish existence, but then at 82 why not? Just before we say our farewells, Clarke reverses his wheelchair and heads back to his desk, with its three computers and giant Logitech mouse. He has to check his emails again. He is a compulsive emailer. Without Sir Arthur C. Clarke, much of what the 20th century was about—the space race, moon landings, geostationery satellites, laptops, and even email itself—seems unthinkable. These days, though, in the context of a generation which has lost interest in space travel, one can’t help thinking that the technology he has helped to create has in some way enslaved him. “The last thing I wrote was a little squib of 500 words. It isn’t easy to write because I spend so much time dealing with emails.” And then he goes off to bed. ♦ (*The Observer*)

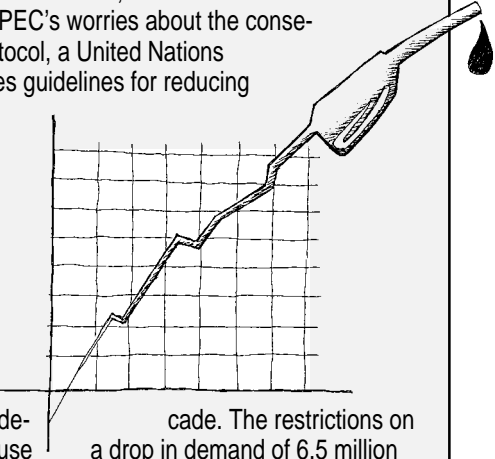
OPEC looks beyond markets

CARACAS - The final declaration at the end of the second-ever Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) summit in the oil cartel’s 40-year history, formalising the commitment of its 11 member nations “to seek new and effective channels of dialogue between oil producers and consumers, for the purpose of market stability, transparency and sustainable growth of the world economy.” But the delegations to the meeting, held in the midst of international pressures against high crude prices, also concentrated on issues outside the oil trade, demonstrating unease about environmental and development matters.

“The biggest environmental tragedy facing the globe is human poverty,” says OPEC, stressing that it is a reality all industrialised nations must confront. The document, known as the Caracas Declaration, expresses OPEC’s worries about the consequences of the Kyoto Protocol, a United Nations convention that establishes guidelines for reducing fossil fuel consumption.

The Protocol’s principal goal is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, based on 1990 levels, by five percent between 2008 and 2012. This would imply a sharp reduction in the rising demands for petroleum forecast for the coming decade. The restrictions on oil consumption would cause a drop in demand of 6.5 million barrels per day, and could cost the OPEC nations a combined \$23 billion in export losses, according to the organisation’s General Secretariat.

The leaders stressed the importance of creating conditions so that oil-dependent economies can diversify their sources of revenue. Concerning development, OPEC said in its declaration signed Thursday that the eradication of poverty must be a global priority, and calls on the nations of the industrialised North to take part in related efforts. The oil cartel also announced that it would continue its efforts to fight the social effects of poverty by maintaining the OPEC Fund for International Development, which has provided \$5.6 billion in resources since its creation in 1976. (*IPS*)



US poll swing states

WASHINGTON - The contest between George W. Bush and Al Gore on November 7 will be decided by a handful of votes in a body called the electoral college. The presidency is settled not by a national tally of Bush voters against Gore voters—the “popular vote”—but in a state-by-state contest in which the winner in each state collects all of that state’s votes in the electoral college.

The number of votes each state casts in the electoral college is equal to its members in the US House of Representatives and the Senate combined. Since a state’s representation in the house is based on its population, while each state has two senators, California has the most electoral college votes, with 54.

There are 538 members of the electoral college, therefore 270 electoral college votes are required to win the presidency. The effect of the electoral college is brutal, especially for voters in smaller states. The big states matter most of all, especially in an electoral race as close as this year’s.

California and New York, with 87 votes between them, are both leaning towards Gore. In all, the Associated Press’s senior analyst Ron Fournier estimates, 15 states and the District of Columbia, worth 224 electoral college votes between them, are likely to go for Gore, while Bush looks to have 21 states worth 171 votes. This leaves 14 swing states, in which the election is likely to be decided, with 143 electoral college votes in all. The majority of the most important states in this group are, as so often in the past, in the midwest, led by Ohio (21 votes), Michigan (18), Missouri (11) and Wisconsin (11). But the battleground is not confined to the midwest: states such as Washington (11 votes) and Florida (25) also remain very much up for grabs. (*The Guardian*)

Fighting for Belgrade

PODGORICA - The power struggle between incumbent President Slobodan Milosevic and election winner Vojislav Kostunica has dominated the headlines, but the question of who really holds power in the Yugoslav federation is far more complicated than just deciding who occupies the presidential office. Yugoslavia’s presidency is largely representative. The power of the current incumbent, Slobodan Milosevic, derives from his control over the federal parliament and of its largest constituent republic, Serbia. Yet in both legislatures in Belgrade he depends on his allies and, in both cases, they could desert him at any time.

In the Serb parliament, whose seats were not up for grabs in this election, Milosevic’s Socialists and the hardline Radical Party have so far held sway. But on election night, Radical leader Vojislav Seselj seemed to distance himself from the regime. Moreover, he recognised the victory of the opposition presidential candidate, Kostunica, thus rejecting the Milosevic win predictably announced by the electoral commission. The next day the opposition stepped into the breach. Vuk Draskovic’s Serbian Renewal Movement called on the Radicals to change sides. Were they to join ranks with the west-leaning representatives of the Vojvodina region’s Hungarian minority, they would form a majority in parliament. The Democratic Party, the strongest force after Kostunica, is not represented in the Serb parliament after boycotting the last election. (*Die Welt*)

The Battle of Prague

PRAGUE - S26, code for September 26—it was a date in the diaries of people the world over concerned about what the policies of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) are doing to the world’s poor. Last year it was N30, a day of action at a World Trade Organisation meeting in Seattle. Protesters then blockaded the delegate’s hotels, and stopped the meeting from going ahead, at least for a few hours.

Could they do the same in Prague? Just after 7 am on S26 I stroll round the corner from my modest pension to the Prague Hilton. Dozens of police there but not a protester in sight. I walk through a city that’s about its normal business to a 7.30 am press conference that the S26 organisers, the Initiative Against Economic Globalisation, the protester umbrella group, has called. Amazingly for that hour the room is packed.

A young Norwegian woman explains the tactics. Non-violent marches will start from a city square mid-morning and head for the Prague Congress Centre where the Bank and Fund are meeting. Other marches will start at different places in the city and all converge on the centre at about 1 pm. The idea, she explains, is to prevent delegates from leaving the building.

Walking to the start of the main march, I join a group from the north of England who had arrived overnight to take part. “I was inspired by what happened on N30 in Seattle,” one told me. “It shows what ordinary people can do.” In a grassy square the protesters assemble. A band is playing, a group is performing street theatre, there’s a good humoured, carnival atmosphere. A huge inflated balloon reads “Balls to the IMF”. Police keep a discreet distance. Helicopters circle overhead.

“Drop the debt” banners are prominent. The march begins. Around 5,000 strong I guess. Many are singing and dancing, the world’s photographers are snapping up the action. But as the marchers approach the long Nusle bridge which leads to centre, the mood becomes sombre.

Leading the march are about 200 people, many of them Italians it

seems, dressed in white boiler suits, with car foam on their arms and gas masks round their necks. At 12.30 they arrive at the bridge. The police presence is no longer discreet. A line has been drawn. Behind the line are armoured tanks and hundreds of police, shoulder to shoulder in riot gear. Facing them are the white suits and the car foam, perfectly symbolic, it seems of the rich and the poor.

Just after 1 the police order the marchers to disperse. The order is ignored. Tear gas is fired. This doesn’t worry the white suits, they were expecting it, but journalists and photographers have rarely been seen to move so fast. The stand-off goes on and continues all afternoon. We hear that another group has forcibly got through a police barrier to get within 50 metres of the Bank IMF meeting and that there are casualties.

♦ (*The Observer*)



Fire and water: water canons and molotovs last week as police battle protesters in Prague. Not all protests were violent.

IFAD ready to work in Maoist areas

The International Fund for Agriculture Development has so far spent over \$90 million in Nepal, mainly in projects implemented by the government.

The International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) says it is still ready to implement poverty alleviation programmes in the mid- and far-western hills, the very areas hit hardest by the Maoist insurgency. That is, if the government gives the go-ahead. "Our plan to work there has not been derailed, but delayed," Phrang Roy, IFAD director for the Asia Pacific region, told us. "We felt that we needed better knowledge about the socio-economic situation before moving in. We've told the government we're willing to work in that area." Roy was referring to a possible \$8-10 million loan to support poverty reduction programmes being considered by his organisation for several years now.

The UN agency also says it is ready to re-allocate funds from an existing project to assist in the rehabilitation of kamaiyas, who've been left homeless since the government announced their freedom from bondage on 17 July (see *Nepali Times*, # 7). The \$8.8 million poverty alleviation project in the western Tarai has been going on since 1997 and Roy told us it could be refocused to include kamaiyas. But it has to be proposed by the government first.

IFAD officials recently visited the districts where the beleaguered kamiya families have been living to assess the situation.

"We faced a similar situation when India abolished bonded labour in the 1970s. We learnt then that going in fast and creating employment guarantees help," says Roy, adding that experience there had shown that working with the poor is possible anywhere. He himself came from India's northeast where the IFAD has been working in insurgency-hit districts. IFAD is a small UN organisation with three major

Small Farmer Development and Production Credit for Rural Women (PCRW).

"The PCRW was a star project in the sub-region because it helped us recognise women as change agents, while the small farmer programme was the first that introduced the concept that the poor were bankable," says Roy.

IFAD has so far spent over \$90 million in Nepal, mainly in projects implemented by the government. Among them is the Hill Leasehold Forestry Project, which seeks to help people that

"We learnt then that going in fast and creating employment guarantees help."

voting blocs—the oil producing, industrial and developing countries (its initial funding came from OPEC's petrodollars, hence the group's voting power). It doesn't have a large budget and is generally involved in small grassroots projects that provide support directly to the poor. It was also among the first international donors that came in and helped kick-start some of Nepal's better-known poverty reduction programmes like

have been bypassed by the successful community forestry movement. It also helps women without land make a living by protecting degraded public land which is obtained on lease from the government. The project has already organised 1500 groups, reaching 15,000 families though that is still far short of its initial target of 20,000-24,000.

Though the amount it plans to spend in the western hills is not much, other partners are likely to



Phrang Roy, IFAD director, Asia Pacific



follow once it gets a foothold. "We've taken slightly long than usual because we found that we needed deeper understanding of the socio-economic processes there. We hope that pro-poor economic growth may eventually also help to broker peace," says Roy. "In Northeast India, we have been pleasantly surprised at the way development has taken place despite the insurgency. We are also find that if women are given a role, they can also become peacemakers." ♦

Not Hindu enough

For long, the shaven-headed western adherents of the Hare Krishna movement have had to content themselves with praying to Pashupati from a distance. They are not allowed within the temple premises on the grounds that one is born a Hindu and conversion to Hinduism is not recognised by the shastras. Now it seems that being born a Hindu is not enough to enter the holiest Hindu shrine in Kathmandu; you have to be born in Nepal or in India. At least that was the reason provided by authorities at Pashupati while denying entry to 11 Hindus from Indonesia last week.

The 11 Indonesians from the predominantly Hindu province of Bali were in Nepal as part of a pilgrimage tour that started from India. "Their documents clearly show that they are born Hindus, and that should have been sufficient to gain them entrance to the shrine of their faith," said a furious Bishwesh Shrestha, the Nepali tour operator who organised the trip.

Having faced problems earlier at the Pashupati gates with other Indonesians, Shrestha had sought the advice of the World Hindu Federation (WHF). The WHF told him that since the pilgrims were bona fide Hindus, they shouldn't have any problem at all. But when the group reached Pashupati in the morning, they were turned back.

Shrestha and his clients returned in the afternoon with a letter addressed to the Mul Bhatta, the chief priest, of Pashupati requesting that the Indonesians be allowed to enter the temple. But the temple authorities not only refused to recognise the WHF endorsement



but, according to Shrestha, the Mul Bhatta also said that the WHF is a Bombay organisation and not a Nepali one and as such he did not recognise its authority to make any recommendation. As for the Indonesians, they were told they could not be allowed in because they were not born either in Nepal or in India.

"We issued the recommendations on the basis of the official documents they carried. The documents identified them as Hindus, which we thought should be enough to let them into the temple," said Keshav Prasad Sapkota of the WHF. Indonesia has advisory status in the current executive body of the World Hindu Federation.

Tour operators like Shrestha are expecting some 300-400 Indonesian Hindus in the coming three months. But they fear that if the pilgrims are not going to be allowed into Pashupati it will certainly put a damper on their religious enthusiasm.

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK

Anti-poverty TV

That the biggest disaster of all doesn't come from the sky, the sea or the earth, but from poverty.

Ispent several days this week, wading through waist-deep water along the highways of India's West Bengal state. That's right, wading. For as viewers of BBC television will know, it's flood season again in Eastern India and Bangladesh.

That phrase, "flood season", is one that I often use with cynicism when my colleagues at the BBC in London call to ask me about reports of dozens of people dead or thousands displaced in the low-lying regions of South Asia.

"Oh it happens every year," goes the refrain in a cynical tone. "Too much monsoon rain and you have a flood." Usually I lose the argument and go forth grumbling into the flooded areas to report for my bosses at the BBC. I used to talk about

something called "Natural Disaster Television", a channel given over to storms, fires, floods, earthquakes and calamities in general. Fellow journalists chuckled over such an idea, and made spurious offers of seed capital to start up the service. My friends and colleagues in the humanitarian aid business were probably appalled by such merriment at the expense of the suffering masses, and I don't blame them.

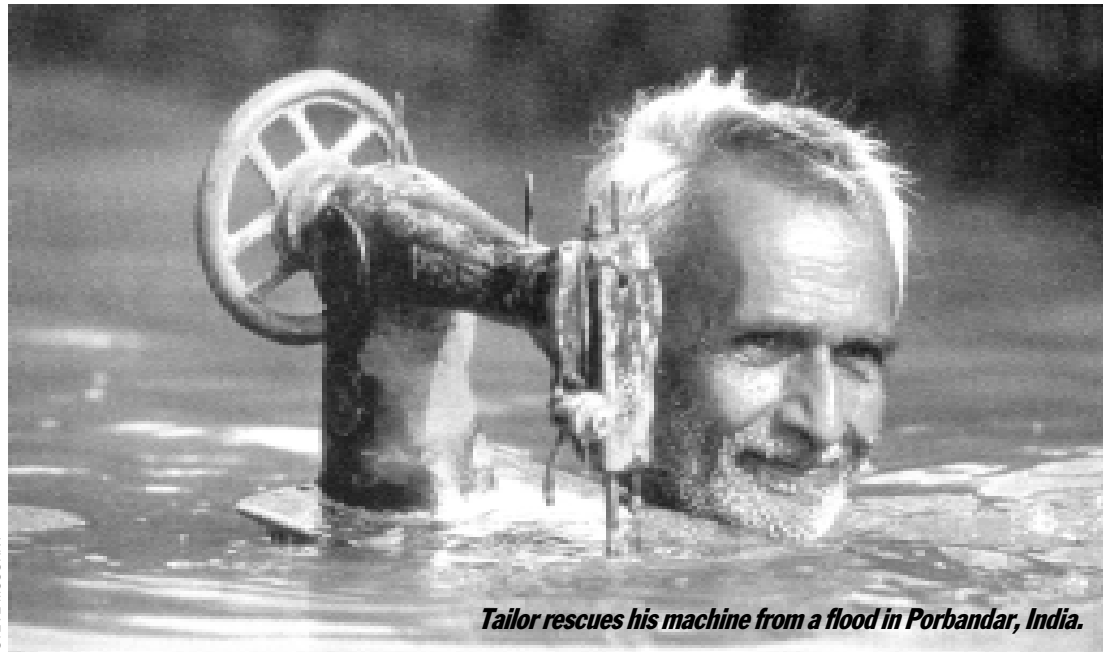
I suppose my cynicism, unforgivable really, came from the limited ways in which one can cover such events for the mainstream media, especially TV news. The dash to the scene of devastation often makes the reporter seem a hero, bearing relief for the hungry, unhealthy and deprived. In reality, all we can ever offer those whose misery we cover is a few minutes of airtime that might help international agencies raise money. Recently, I started to take a holistic view, if you like, of natural disasters and the relationship with poverty.

Perhaps I am stating the obvious, but it seems to me that the biggest disaster of all doesn't come from the sky, the sea or the earth, but from poverty. And that's an invention of the human

race. When an earthquake hits Kobe, Japan, or California, lives and livelihoods are indeed devastated. But revisit the scene a few months down the line, and people are restoring normalcy - often on their own without much government help, using savings, insurance money and community spirit to rebuild. Poverty denies people many of those things. A marginal life without savings can end with the simple flooding of a subsistence crop, or the loss of cattle in a big storm. Families become beggars or day labourers, orphaned children enter prostitution. Communities cease to exist. What's the bigger disaster? Certainly not the one I'm covering with my sonorous tones and my face in front of a flooded village. I'm accused on occasion, and rightly, of flippancy. But I am deadly serious in proposing "The Poverty Channel". Change the name if you like, but let it flourish. How else can we afflict the comfortable of this world with the challenges that surround them. I'm not suggesting an endless stream of tele-visual images of malnourished children with bulging bellies, or the hungry waiting for handouts in sub-Saharan Africa. We cover

acute crises well enough already. What we rarely do is look at the aftermath, ways of preventing them, and success stories. There are some out there. The Poverty Channel would be given over to a mix of negative and positive. We need to show that some things work if not brilliantly and consistently, then occasionally. Micro-credit, local democracy, simple health and education reforms, encouraging women to play a fuller role, reforming police, curbing corruption, the list is endless and there are good and bad things to say about each item.

I'm not starry-eyed about the effects of television on bad situations. Too often it comes across as a way of underlining just how good the middle classes of the world have it. But can it hurt to show that people can improve their lives, along with vivid illustrations of their problems? Can it hurt to show the poor as people, not just statistics, victims and illustrations of political points? Ideas and emails, and seed capital, all welcome. ♦



Tailor rescues his machine from a flood in Porbandar, India.

Nepal wins golds for junketeering

MUKUL HUMAGAIN

When the Nepali contingent arrived back from Sydney on 3 October there was no fanfare to herald their return. For there was nothing to celebrate. As expected, all the five Nepali players crashed out of competition in the first round of their respective events. The Nepali athletes had gone to compete world's only a half of hind them. Medals course, thing they even dare dream of. The only hope was that in competing with the superstars they would be able to better the national records.

The hope was not belied. Gyan Bahadur Bohara and Runa Pradhan set new national records, while Chitra Bahadur

Gurung bettered his timing.

Before leaving for Sydney, Gyan Bahadur (*left*) had been confident that he would break the existing national record in 5000m (14.34:43). And he did it with a timing of 14.34:15. Runa improved her own national record by clocking 31.28 in 50m freestyle. Her previous best was 31.79. To her credit, Runa came third in her first round heats, finishing ahead of swimmers from Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Iraq. Chitra Bahadur also did better shaving 0.26 seconds of his earlier timing of 27.28.

But the performances of sprinter Devi Maya Paneru and shooter Bhagwati K.C.'s performances were below par. National record holder Devi had a poor run in 100m. Her timing of 12.74 sec at Sydney was far below her best of 12.17sec. In the 10m air rifle,

Bhagwati K.C. could score only 486, compared to her personal best of 488. Sydney 2000 will, however, not be remembered for the athletes' performance. If it stays in memory for long it will be for the number of Nepali sports officials that went to Sydney. Twenty-one officials accompanied the five players. The top brass of the National Sports Council and the Nepal Olympic Committee were there in full strength.

Despite their protestations that the trip was necessary to gain exposure and experience, it was clear that the Olympics was nothing more than a junket for most of the officials. And if proof was needed, the website of the Games provided it. A random search of www.olympics.com showed two of them figure as assistants in water polo, a sport that is not played in the country. Of those

two, Ajay Rana is a medical doctor associated with National Sports Council and Dhruva Timilsina is the vice-chairman of the Nepal Olympic Committee.

In the end Sydney 2000 only eroded the image Nepali sportsdom had managed to build up with the successful hosting of the 1999 South Asian Federation Games. Beginning with the bickering among members of the Nepali contingent and the shameful attempt to provide the athletes with a pittance of a daily allowance compared to what the top officials allocated for themselves, Nepali sports is a long way off from the professionalism required for world-class performance. And it is obvious who is to blame—the sports bureaucracy. As for our players, at least they went out and gave their best. ♦

HOW DID OUR PLAYERS FAIR?

	event	overall performance
Runa Pradhan	50m freestyle	66th out of 74
Chitra Bahadur Gurung	50m freestyle	69th out of 80
Devi Maya Paneru	100m sprint	71st out of 84
Gyan Bahadur Bohara	5000m	34th out of 36
Bhagwati K.C.	10m air rifle	43rd out of 49

Hi-tech games

prevent muscle vibration, and compression features are built into swimmers' gear for the same reason.

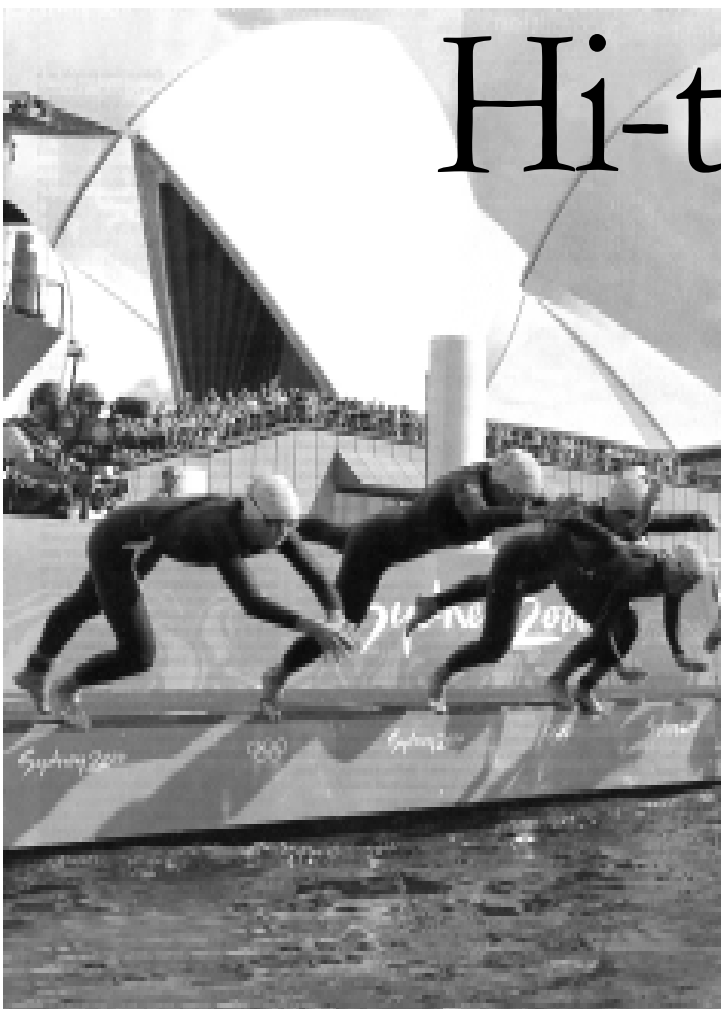
Weightlifters' costumes in Sydney were coated with slippery Teflon and strengthened with Kevlar: that helps the bar slide over the lap better while giving a point on the chest to rest the barbells on between the clean and jerk.

The jerseys worn by the cyclists are notable for having practically no seams: that cuts drag. They also encourage the rider to adopt the optimal aerodynamic position. Experts claim special suits can cut runners' times by 2 percent and save a full stroke in the pool.

High-tech gear does not come cheap: the swimsuits cost \$300 and runners' suits can cost up to \$1,100. Nike of the United States and Adidas of Germany, the world's two sportswear leaders, both make body suits, but Speedo and Arena are also in the business. Asics, Converse, Puma and Reebok compete with the two top firms in footwear. Among other developments from the Adidas labs at the Olympics were the Gamarada, the football used in Sydney, and an all-synthetic red ball used in the handball tournament. The German company's three-stripes symbol showed up in 26 of the 28 Olympic disciplines.

So big is the Adidas promotional programme that the company has exclusive sponsorship agreements with 27 national Olympic committees and dresses 3,000 of the competitors in Australia. "All our product innovations have been a big success here," said Adidas spokesman Oliver Brueggen, pointing to golds won in Adidas gear by Thorpe and Ullrich as well as by fencers, wrestlers and weightlifters.

Among its other innovations are wrestling shoes with rounded outer soles and asymmetric shoes for fencers, whose fore feet and back feet need different sorts of support. Another shoe improvement is the Z-spike, said to offer better grip than sharp spikes in track events. Within their shoes, many runners and jumpers have profited from a carbon-fibre "performance plate" that stabilises the joints in the instep. Cyclists have also been helped by carbon fibre. Bikes used for both the time trials in Sydney and the Tour de France were developed by Pinarello at the Ferrari design works in Maranello, the same workshop that builds the chassis for Formula One racing cars. ♦ (dpa)



Rather than physical condition, advanced materials have been the little-noticed key to many Sydney Games successes. Manufacturers and research laboratories have poured huge amounts of money into the Games to show off their inventions. Take the bodysuits, which have provided a second skin for competitors as diverse as runners Cathy Freeman and Marion Jones, swimmer Ian Thorpe and cyclists Jan Ullrich and Lance Armstrong.

Cotton clothing has almost completely given way to synthetics tested in wind tunnels and hydraulics basins. Best known are the scaly surfaces of the new swimsuits, which imitate sharkskin and reduce drag. The athletes' suits comprise five layers and are designed to cut air drag and retain the optimum amount of body warmth. Throwers wear compression suits to



OLYMPIC BRIEFS

Sydneysiders get Olympic cup

The people of Sydney and New South Wales are winners of the 2000 Olympic Cup in acknowledgement of their outstanding contribution to the huge success of the Millennium Games which end Sunday. Speaking at the International Olympic Committee session, IOC boss Juan Antonio Samaranch praised the organisation, transport and crowds in Sydney and said the locals' examples of fair play had earned them the cup. Samaranch said the long jump final duel between Australian Jai Taurima and eventual champion Cuban Ivan Pedroso showed a real example of fair play. "Before the Cuban was jumping, all the people in the stadium were shouting for him," he said. "For that reason, the IOC is proposing to afford the Olympic Cup to the people of Sydney." IOC director general Francois Carrard said the cup was "an important gesture to compliment the people." The Olympic cup is given at the end of each year to an individual or a group who have made outstanding contributions to the Olympic Movement. (dpa)

Games of the dames

Women were banned from the first modern Olympics and were treated as poor relations for decades after, but not in Sydney, which is being ranked as the most feminine Games ever. Both the growing attention paid to women's sport and the record number of women attending have made these Olympics the "Games of the Dames".

Women's participation still lags markedly on the boards of management of sport, despite one Sydney first. When the Games conclude, a woman will become the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) senior vice president. Anita Defrantz will then be only a heartbeat away from the top job. The former US rower would take over if anything happened to Juan Antonio Samaranch before his successor is elected on 16 July in Moscow. The election of Sweden's Gunilla Lindberg has meanwhile brought a second woman at long last into the 15-member IOC executive board.

It has been a long and difficult battle for women over the years. The Australian hosts have deliberately put the focus on these Games as the centenary of the first participation of women in the Olympics. Australia issued for example a special series of Olympics postage stamps, and only women were portrayed on them.

The organising committee has proudly announced that 42 percent of the 11,084 competitors in Sydney were women, a new record. That makes 700 more women than in Atlanta four years ago.

Women still do not have equal rights in many sports: they remain banned from boxing and wrestling. In Islamic nations, many sports codes are still taboo for women. Nine of the Olympic teams in Sydney did not have a single woman in them. While women athletes have been adept at baring skin to garner more attention and promote sporting success, not all the firm tummies paraded in Sydney have been voluntarily exposed. Despite the cold, beach volleyballers had to play in bikinis. The dress is part of the rules, and the world federation is run by men, not women.

(dpa)



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SAVING FAITH

by DESMOND DOIG

NEPALITERATURE

by MANJUSHREE THAPA

A house for Shiva and Parvati



The wooden images of Shiva and Parvati rest on the window rail, looking out over the passing scene in a manner suggesting interest in all they see.

It is important to remember that Kathmandu is the valley of the gods. If deities no longer descend in disguise to watch festivals, their favourite pastime, they pose as virgin children or the masked religious dancers who represent them on special occasions. I have often seen dancers so agitated by the divinity in command of them, they have had to be held by people on both sides.

In ancient Bhaktapur, the mysterious nine Durgas contrive to make themselves appear inhuman, in masks smeared with vermilion, saffron and sacrificial blood. Their gait, the exaggerated way they breathe and talk, their

they would fight to their death, so great care is taken to keep them apart.

In the artists' city of Patan, at Dasain young men impersonating the eight mother goddesses, the *ashtamatikas*, are worshipped as real goddesses and lavishly fed. So colourful are these ceremonies that often blaze in the darkness of night, it is no wonder the gods are often tempted to drop by. It seems the great Lord Shiva himself made a habit of coming to see the divine dances held in Kathmandu's Durbar Square. At first he came alone but it was not long before his consort Parvati pleaded to be taken along.

King Rana Bahadur Shah

ornamented top floor, the middle of its nine window frames are carved and painted wooden images of Shiva and Parvati in mortal form, a unique representation.

They rest on the window rail, looking out over the passing scene in a manner suggesting interest in all they see. And what wondrous things they look upon. Just across the square from them is the house of the Living Goddess. She can be seen occasionally at her gilded window or being taken in vivid procession. They have witnessed numerous coronations, two divine people in a confetti-bright crowd that fills every inch of space in the square, to watch the newly crowned king walk to pay

baithak khana added to the old Malla architecture of the place by the Rana maharajas? Were they amazed by the first automobiles, surprised by the first foreigners and startled by the coming of the hippies?

Not far from their pavilion is a temple on a towering plinth which became a favourite abode of hippies, a smoker's paradise, a rent free rest house. The hippies went, the huge coaches with London-Constantinople-Tehran-Delhi-Kathmandu, the more frequent Kathmandu-Goa, the extraordinary Chapati Express, they all went. The trippies, the budget travellers, came.

Colourfully dressed women selling Jaipuri minor work, old clothes, old saree borders set up shop below Shiva and Parvati. So also curio dealers, and a bicycle hire shop. Shiva and Parvati have watched them all, have posed for endless photographs and starred in many films. What they'll see next is anyone's guess. Like all capital cities, Kathmandu changes fast. But the festivals and processions will always be the same.

Women with votive offerings, men leading a sacrificial goat or playing old fashioned musical instruments will always come by at dawn and dusk. Sometimes, even in the late of night. Then unnoticed, just two people among a worshipful crowd, Shiva and his consort might leave their ornate pavilion and walk the streets of Kathmandu again. ♦

(Excerpted with permission from *In the Kingdom of the Gods*, HarperCollins, 1999)

AVINASH SHRESTHA'S GLOBAL SENSIBILITY

By now, it has become common to find world references in Nepali literature. Still, writers who don't use obviously "Nepali" images can be subjected to snide remarks. Allusions to global "high culture" (such as world literature) are of course always revered; but allusions to low culture (say, rap songs) are still viewed, by those who aspire to an ideal Nepaliness in Nepali literature, to betray somewhat inauthentic sensibilities. In the seventies and eighties, those who migrated from Darjeeling and Kalimpong were particularly vulnerable to such criticism: so modern were their Nepali-language creations that homegrown writers and critics easily dismissed them as outsiders.

Poet and screenplay writer Avinash Shrestha is one such migrant writer often viewed as authoring "un-Nepali" Nepali literature. Shrestha's poems are written in an intense and passionate tenor. Aquariums, champagne bottles, blues rhythms, and quotes from world literature pepper his verses. To readers who refuse rigid Nepali/un-Nepali dichotomies (surely an anachronism in this age of mingling and mass migration), Shrestha's work is fresh and innovative: gone are the clichés about Nepal, gone are the stock images that too many Nepali writers rely on. Shrestha's poems read as singularly contemporary, and can be enjoyed by those who inhabit today's jangling modern (or postmodern) Kathmandu.

The poem translated below is lovely to read not just because of its ardor; here, Shrestha finds beauty in dark African skin—a unique expression from a "wheatish-white" skin enamored country.

A NEGRO WOMAN: IN MY DREAMS

I saw her for the first time
in a busy street in Nairobi how pleasing
she was, how polite she was
an educated Negro woman

In dreams of my many nights: a figure of
modern Africa that woman

Her dark beauty
enchanted me and offered
unbounded pleasure
to my eyes

"For that unknown beauty
calumny of one color;
a black rose."

I remembered my own woman she who is always present
in my mind, like the reverberations always present
in the veena's tight strings as with raga melodies
there only need be a slight wound
and she resonates all over my heart all over my body

She is my Indian lover flashing eyes
exactly like that Negro girl's sharp nose
long neck slender blouse I used to call her
my moon I thought—
that moon was picked off the Indian sky
given a dark complexion
and tossed, by some brute, onto African soil

The Nile is a far ways off her youth, all over the spine
of the Niger and Senegal the oases of her smiles
ease the aridity of the Kalahari and
the harshness of the Sahara I kept meeting her
again and again I kept getting to know her

In my dreams for many nights
Africa in my eyes that Negro woman
who I always met—in the passes of the Congo
the streets of Nairobi, by the shores of lakes Victoria and
Nagami
and again in the dark alleys of Kampala one day I saw her
at the center of a storehouse
in embrace

From time to time I kept thinking
there's only one terror in her full young breast....
terror at the fearfulness of light one contention
in the jungle of her eyes—
"Light can't swallow the dark"

Maybe that's why she came in hiding
to ask for her rights
taking strength from duskiness and sleep
always in my dreams

Avinash Shrestha edits *Samakalin Sahitya*, the literary magazine of the Royal Nepal Academy.



collective sense of secrecy set them apart. After centuries of familiarity, they are still held in awe. Kathmandu is no exception. Indra's elephant dances in streets at Indra Jatra, as do Bhairab and two attendants, also the demon Lakhe and the demoness Dogani. Should Lakhe and Dogani meet

decided to build a pavilion befitting the pleasure of Shiva and Parvati, and so, on a raised plinth that has a grandstand view of all the many excitements that fill the old Palace Square, he had a suitable house constructed. A house it is despite its elaborate decoration. In the heavily

homage at a nearby Ganesh shrine, then come by on elephant back, his queen at his side, leading a glittering procession bit of wonderland.

Did they recognise other gods and goddesses masquerading as mortals in the crowd? Did they wonder at the Victorian

ABOUT TOWN

FILMS

❖ **Nepali**
Basanti - Bishwo Jyoti (221837), Plaza 1, Krishna (470090)
Chalchitra - Ashok, Ganga Chalchitra, Hira Ratna, Prithvi, **Mailee** - Goon (Kha) (520668), Ranjana (221191)
❖ **Hindi**
China Gate - Tara
Dhadkan - Jai Nepal (411014), Tara (476092)
Dragon - Kumari (414932)
Fiza - Gopi (470090), Goon (Ka), Manakamana (225284), Metro
Kaho Na Pyar Hai - Sri Nava Durga
Karobaar - Padma
Shadi Aur Barbadi - Goon (Kha) (520668)

MUSIC

❖ **Jazz**-Jazz by Cadenza at Upstairs Restaurant, Lazimpat. Every Saturday 7:30-10:00 pm.
❖ **Rock and blues**-Robin n' Looza playing their selection of rock, blues, soul and Nepali numbers every Friday night at The Bamboo Club, Thamel.
❖ **Traditional**-Dhime baja and dance in various courtyards and temple premises within the Kathmandu Valley. These ethnic Newari bands are dedicated to the goddess Durga. Evening is the best time to encounter such bands on the streets.
❖ **Live shows**-Various bands performing every day at The Red Onion Bar, Lazimpat. 416071
❖ **Chakra** at the Piano Lounge, Yak & Yeti Hotel. 7 pm onwards. 248999
❖ **Guitar unplugged**-Guitar performance by Syabu Lama at the Coffee Shop, Hotel De l' Annapurna from 7:30 to 10 pm. 221711
❖ **Classical guitar**-Kishor Gurung plays classical favourites at the Chimney, Yak & Yeti Hotel. 8 pm onwards. 248999.
❖ **Dance**-Saturday Night Fever dance floor featuring Salsa, Merengue, Swing, Rock & Roll and much more by Dance Master Andreas at The Piano Lounge Bar, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 8:30 pm onwards. 248999

EXHIBITIONS

❖ **Photography-Celebrating the Mountain Porter**. An exhibition of photographs on porters by 15 photographers from around the world. Organised by International Porter Protection Group (IPPG). 30 Sept-5 Oct, Hotel Yak and Yeti. 10am-6pm. Free Entrance.
❖ **Platform Nepal Online Art Gallery**. Currently displaying black and white photographs of renowned Nepali photographer M.K. Panday. Contact gallery@platformnepal.org

Adventure Sports

❖ **Mountain Bike Championship**. An International Class Mountain Bike Championship in three phase. 11 November, Saturday. Registration open till event eve. MTB theory and practice workshop follows after the championship by international cyclists. Surf www.bikingnepal.com or contact Peter Stewart, Race Director at Himalayan Mountain Bikes, Thamel. 427427

Festival

Dasain is a Nepali festival which starts in earnest from Phulpati (4 October) till Kojagat Pumima (12 October). Banks and other institutions remain closed for about a week. It is a time for family members to get together and renew bonds. On 8 October, the main day, elders put *tika* (rice mixed with red vermilion and curd) on the foreheads of those younger than them. *Jamara* (budding leaves of seven crops) is offered along with blessings, and generally female relatives and her children are given *dakshina* (cash gift). It is said the blessings bestowed during Dasain has divine strength.

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com

Going home

HEMLATA RAI

The Dasain rush is on and as usual there are far too many people seeking a passage out of the Valley than there are airline and bus seats. Airline counters are swamped by hopefuls who regret not coming earlier, while the bus terminal at Gongabu is teeming with people arguing, pleading or shouting their way to a ticket.

With a migrant population of half a million, a majority of whom head out of Kathmandu for the festival, the scramble for seats is only to be expected. And it takes a combination of timing, luck and perseverance to get the required bookings. The reaction of people who reach the counter after a long wait in queues attest to that. Some like Kumar Rai have learnt from experience. Last year he had to stand in line from four in the morning to secure seats in an overnight bus to go home to Katari in east Nepal. That was not something he wanted to go through



again, so this time he bought tickets two weeks before the festival began on 28 September. "But, look, I was sold a seat at the back of the bus," he complained.

Getting a ticket should not be a problem like it the past, says Sharad Upreti, president of Nepal Association of Transport Entrepreneurs. "We have added buses to busy destinations. New bus companies have also entered the business and long-distance day buses have also become popular in the last one year...In

Dasain the business is doubled," a visibly satisfied Upreti said. The increased business may bring smiles to bus operators, but it is a different story for their passengers. "You never know what may happen. Sometimes seats are sold to more than one person," said Sundar Subedi from Kakarvitta in east Nepal. He also claimed that passengers are in constant danger of accidents during bus journeys during Dasain since drivers are not immune to the festive mood and tend to drive under the influence of alcohol.

The story is not very different for air passengers. No danger of drunk pilots, but then air seats are just too few. "The number of passengers has increased many times in comparison to seats available," said Rupesh Shrestha, Marketing Manager of Buddha Air. His airline is operating additional flights during Dasain, but all seats were sold out three weeks in advance.

Dasain means pressure on airline employees too. "Relatives expect special favours from us around this time, but how are we supposed to produce tickets when there aren't any left?" moaned a frustrated official at the Necon Air. Royal Nepal Airlines announced a advance bookings for its priority destinations and has also introduced 'local people charters' during Dasain. But tickets are as scarce as ever. "At RNAC if you are willing to pay the double of normal price the tickets are available, otherwise not," said a disgusted Tara Rai of Bhojpur, who has tried to buy tickets for almost two months before Dasain.

Even if she does get a seat in the end that is only half the trouble over, for when she tries to get back to the capital, an equally tough time awaits her. But this is Dasain, and people have learnt to live with these hassles and take it in the spirit of the festival. ♦

NEPALI WEATHER

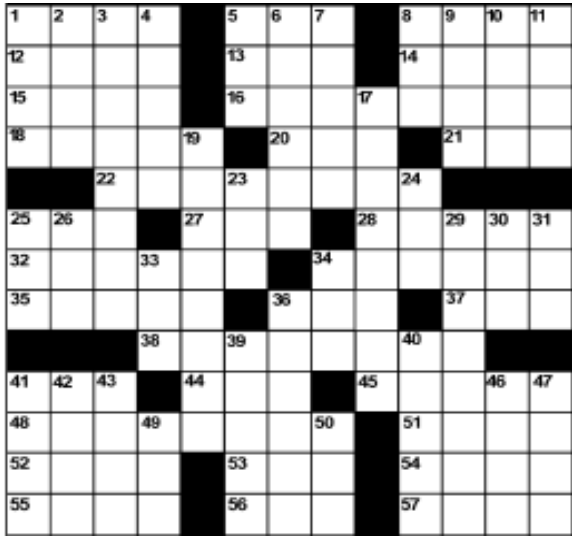


Precisely on schedule, the dramatic 180-degree shift in wind direction characteristic for this time of the year, has chased away what was left of the monsoon. This is the annual southward migration of the westerly jet stream and it is now asserting itself over the northern subcontinent and has pushed away a low-pressure circulation over Bangladesh towards Burma. There is afternoon cumulus buildup over the Mahabharat Lekh and High Himalaya that can result in the occasional drizzle or flurry. Minimum temperature in the Valley will touch 13 degrees by the end of the week. Mist and onset of inversion will delay morning flights.

KATHMANDU

Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
27-15	26-15	27-15	27-13	26-13

QUICKWORD 2



Across

- 1 Baby Abraham (4)
- 5 Tea with Spanish separatists? (3)
- 8 Pain in the head (4)
- 12 Imitated a primate (4)
- 13 Zero for Lin (3)
- 14 For crying out (4)
- 15 Only the tip of this ice (4)
- 16 Can be weathered, but not eaten (8)
- 18 Along an axis (5)
- 20 Nay, whichever (3)
- 21 Nab an outlaw (3)
- 22 Widest brother (8)
- 25 Utilise (3)
- 27 Oh, in debt? (3)
- 28 Many limping James (5)
- 32 Mexican cloak fit for angels (6)
- 34 Can't spell an Italian car (6)
- 35 Whiz past a drunken Swiss? (5)
- 36 Lazy in Los Angeles (3)
- 37 Can't be lax about paying it (3)
- 38 At loggerheads on the pole (8)
- 41 Extremely high frequency (3)
- 44 Allow (3)
- 45 Allowed the air in (5)
- 48 Very tops of triangles (8)
- 51 Line on a river (4)

- 52 Rain, but not in Iraq (4)
- 53 One Italian (3)
- 54 Big event in Los Angeles (4)
- 55 Let the imbecile out (4)
- 56 Infection in pig's eye? (3)
- 57 Sliding cart (4)

Down

- 1 Nepali Dad (3)
- 2 Top excursion fare (4)
- 3 Very very vitamin deficient (8)
- 4 Alan Poe (5)
- 5 Dropped a letter in bene (3)
- 6 Tyrant's outburst (6)
- 7 A loan by himself (4)
- 8 A boxer (3)
- 9 Mix Calvin with Hobb (4)
- 10 Hoopla (4)
- 11 Aden is not one (4)
- 17 Disability with memory (8)
- 19 Use one to get around pool (8)
- 23 Regard with wonder (3)
- 24 Blemish with asphalt (3)
- 25 US ship (3)
- 26 Pronounced sow (3)
- 29 Girl made of this (8)
- 30 New age (3)

- 31 Half dozen boundaries (3)
- 33 Anglo-Saxon Protestant, not white (3)
- 34 Distance (3)
- 36 Hidden talent (6)
- 39 Luxury car nexus (5)
- 40 Sings with a zing (5)
- 41 Live with bad one (4)
- 42 Brave bicycle (4)
- 43 Not that German woman again (4)
- 46 Magazine for her (4)
- 47 As a dodo (4)
- 50 Sauce made of bean (3)

QUICKWORD 1



Out of 15 correct entries the lucky winner is **B. Sangami**



To send in your entries, please fill in the details below and fax to 977-1-521013, or email to crossword@himalmedia.com. Entries can be dropped off at Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur.

Name.....
Ph.....email.....

SHANGRILA AD



St. Xavier's Godavari School organised a cross country run below Phulchoki. 23 September to celebrate its 50th Anniversary. The winners pose with school staff in the grounds.



Mukti's Revival with its lead guitarist Mukti Shukya performs at a concert organised by Wave Magazine on 28 December at the Dasain Mahotsav at the Bhrikuti Mandap.



Excited visitors throng the Philips stall at the Dasain Mahotsav in the Bhrikuti Mandap which commenced on 28 September.

Celebrating the porter

SALIL SUBEDI

Although portering is the only way of moving goods in much of the Nepali mountains, porters generally are not the subject of much attention. Whether it be the village sahaji or the western trekker, people who carry loads for others might as well be mules or donkeys for the way they are treated. But as the week-long exhibition of photographs entitled "Celebrating the Mountain Porter" shows, it is a profession that deserves respect as well as sympathy from those who employ them.

The 44 pictures on display provide a glimpse of the hardship and the struggle of these heroes and heroines of the trail. The photographs show traditional, trekking and mountaineering porters at work and rest, with contributions from well-known mountaineering photographers like Jeff Hersch, Tim McCartney-Shape, Chris Bonington, and Doug Scott. Two Nepali photographers, Arthur Pazo and Min Bajracharya, are represented as well.

The exhibition is organised by the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG). Set up 1997 at the initiative of Dr Jim Duff while he was volunteering at the Himalayan Rescue Association health post in Manang on the Annapurna circuit trekking route, the IPPG seeks to help trekking porters by raising awareness about their



This week-long exhibition of photographs shows that portering is a profession that deserves respect as well as sympathy from those who employ them.

vulnerability at high altitudes. In fact, the motivation for Dr Duff, an Anglo-Australian who has been part of mountaineering expeditions in the Himalaya since 1974, was the death of a porter from acute mountain sickness just a short distance from where he was. "He could easily have been saved," says Dr Duff.

"Some trekking agencies treat their injured or ill porters really bad," says Dr Rachel Bishop, who is associated with the IPPG. Dr Bishop has just completed a two-year stint at Khunde Hospital, above Namche Bazaar, where she had to deal with many cases of porter maltreatment.

The photo exhibition is its third programme since the IPPG was established. The earlier two were conferences where IPPG tried to sensitise representatives of trekking companies, trek leaders and guides and the press on looking after the porters properly. "Rather than focus on the negative aspect, this time we want to disseminate a positive image of the porters through these photographs. We want people to look at them and

appreciate the tremendous effort that is required of porters in their work," says Dr Duff.

Dr Duff himself has contributed some of the images and among them is a series he took of Balti porters during an expedition to K2. "Different faces, but they share the same struggle and hardship. The good thing is that the Pakistani government has been taking the issue of mountain workers seriously, and have been doing so for more than 20 years now, a process that has not even started in Nepal," says Dr Duff.

"Trekking is a great experience and great source of cash income for porters. But then we want to encourage trekkers to take good care of their porters. We hope an exhibition like this will help them understand their porters prior to their treks," he says. The exhibition, which was inaugurated by Pema Doma Sherpa, the first Nepali woman to summit Everest from the north, is on at the Yak and Yeti Hotel till 5 October. It will then move to Thamel before travelling to Canada and the UK. The entire roster of pictures will later be on permanent display on the IPPG website www.ippg.net. ♦



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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

If you thought the Prime Minister is the most powerful man in Nepal, you'd better think again. The most powerful man in Nepal is not even the Commander-in-Chief. The most powerful man in Nepal is the Thai Ambassador. His Excellency has managed to do something that the rulers of this country tried but could not accomplish for the past four months: get the Maharajgunj Road paved for us by Dasain.

This incredible feat has reminded us once more how we have cleverly managed to subcontract Nepal's entire development process to friendly donor nations. And the awesome thing about it is that it doesn't cost us a cent! It's all free. Since we have given others the responsibility of building our schools and hospitals, picking up our garbage and gifting us mountain goats, we can now sit back, relax and enjoy the inflight entertainment. We need not worry one bit: responsible people who know what they are doing are taking care of us. This frees us up for all kinds of extra-curricular activities that we otherwise would not have time for: like spending quality time in the company of our near and dear ones in the festive season, decapitating ducks, and sucking in the joys of a juicy *supari* in our molars.

There is a Sanskrit saying passed down from one generation of Nepalis to the next that goes something like this: *rajadoot deva bhava*, which roughly translated means "an ambassador is a god-send, put him to work". But one plenipotentiary from a friendly ASEAN country—however committed to Nepal's

prosperity and well-being he may be—cannot have the entire burden of this valley's upkeep on his shoulders. It would be unfair on the Thais. So, His Majesty's Government is mulling over a plan to divide up the Kathmandu Valley sectorally and hand over each area to a different embassy to handle. Any Ambassador who wants to take these up should contact the Ministry of Work and Leisure after Dasain:

- The Nepal Olympic Committee has decided that Nepal has a great future in synchronised swimming, and on return from Sydney has been scouting around if any Kathmandu-based Embassy would be willing to sponsor Nepal's national synchronised swimming team. The sport would promote discipline, commonweal, and be a symbolic sport for Nepalis to show that we can surpass any hurdle—even if we are underwater, and have our noses clipped with clothespins.
- The Great Crater of Ekantakuna. This gaping cavity, through which you can see Mexico if you look carefully, needs an urgent root canal. The Swiss charge d'affaires has sent a *note verbale* (Latin for a message with lots of unprintable verbs in it) to the Ministry of Waste and Mismanagement to get it fixed, or else no secret bank accounts.
- The German embassy is looking into the 150-year-old garbage heap at Kalo Pul. It has a Secret Plan to transfer the rubbish from Gyaneswore to Baneswore by cover of darkness.
- His Majesty's Government wants Tribhuvan International Airport to also serve as a bird park and a dog sanctuary. The biodiversity of Nepal's only international airport needs to be protected so that it can be a model for sustainable development of the country's ecotourism. Any embassies interested? ♦

Nepal's national synchronised swimming team



Ambassador vodka

NEPALI SOCIETY

Up where the air is clear

Sunil N.S. Thapa says it is better than working for a living. And what a job he has: floating in a cane gondola at 3,100 m above Kathmandu Valley drifting slowly across the cobalt Himalayan sky and making a dramatic landing on a field as water buffaloes watch lazily. While some pilots like to fly 747s, others love the thrill of a F-16, what is the glamour of piloting a large object that is technically lighter than air, and is at the mercy of the elements? Isn't it boring?

"No, it's not monotonous at all," says Sunil, who is Nepal's only balloon pilot. "Every flight is different. The view, the wind direction and speed, the scenery, the landing and the enthusiasm of passengers are different each time."

At 34, Sunil is already General Manager of the Balloon Sunrise Nepal and has clocked about 250 hours flying balloons in Australia and Nepal. Sunil has a taste for flying, he had jumped off planes and paraglided for ten



Wide-angle view of the Valley and Ganesh Himal from 3,200 m (top), Sunil pumps hot air into baloon before takeoff (above) and in the cockpit at cruising altitude.

years as an officer in the Royal Nepal Army, before taking up ballooning.

"We're completely dependent on the wind for direction of travel," explains Sunil as his balloon coasts past Nagarjun forest. "The only control we have is over elevation, and we go up and down to tap different wind direction by turning the burners and vents on and off." For navigation, Sunil only has a Global Positioning System, a VHF radio for contact with the air traffic controller at Kathmandu and a UHF walkie-talkie to keep in touch with crew and the vehicles on the ground who follow the balloon to anticipate the landing site. Now that the monsoons are finished, the wind direction is usually from the west, and not more than 8 knots. Kathmandu Valley is a ballooning paradise with light winds, and spectacular scenery. Says Sunil: "There is almost never any ground wind, which means the landings are really smooth."

Tomorrow morning at six, when the grass is wet with dew and the eastern sky is just beginning to light up, Sunil will be blowing hot air into the balloon and making it rise above a field on the outskirts of Kathmandu. And when the tower clears him for take off, he'll soar once more into the wide blue sky with seven passengers who will remember the ride for the rest of their lives. ♦

Grindlays							
DAILY SHARE INDEX							
Grindlays	0.74	0.37	0.40	0.22	0.37	0.04	54.15
DAL	0.65	0.31	0.56	0.33	0.18	0.02	44.46
BLT	0.65	0.37	0.57	0.29	0.14	0.05	46.05
IND	0.25	0.28	0.40	0.30	0.42	0.21	11.82
EXPT	0.41	0.43	0.52	0.22	0.12	0.03	58.20
IND	0.75	0.38	0.63	0.24	0.20	0.03	79.52
IND	0.66	0.38	0.55	0.33	0.18	0.08	73.25

All prices are in US dollars, collected from informal sources, and are only indicative.