



# FACES OF BHAKTAPUR 9,10,11



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### EXCLUSIVE

## Court martial

Twenty-eight officers from the Royal Nepal Army's UN peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon are facing general court martial for allegedly selling ammunition to Islamic Hizbollah and Amaal militants. Apparently this wasn't the first time: earlier Nepali officers had sold UN rations and a generator to the rebels. The Nepali weekly, *Jana Aastha*, which broke the story last week, hinted at a cover-up and named important officers. The army has made no official comment on the scam or the court martial proceedings. See: From the Nepali Press. .... pg 6

## Two ordinances

Government sources confirmed two ordinances have been forwarded to the palace for royal assent. One envisages the setting up of a Regional Administrator in each of the five development regions, and the other the setting up of a paramilitary Armed Police Force. Both laws have been in the making for some time now, but the process gathered momentum after the Maoist strike on Dunai last month.

## Melamchi

Kathmandu is running out of water, but this is due more to mismanagement and under-utilisation of existing supplies than a real shortage. Upgrading existing capacity and expanding antiquated water mains would be adequate for now. But at the rate Kathmandu is growing, the Valley will need extra water from outside. The Asian Development Bank is to give the final green light for the \$450 million project next month. But it will take at least six years for the first drop of water to reach Kathmandu. ....pg 4



CK LAL

**T**he first to be worshipped, as usual, was the laddoo-loving, elephant-headed Ganesh, as the five days of Yampanchak kicked off on Tuesday. The next day was devoted to that airborne scavenger, the crow, which this week were feasting on all the uncollected garbage littering the city streets. Thursday was Dog Day in the morning, while offerings were made to Laxmi, the Goddess of Fortune, in the evening. Friday is Cow Day, and then comes the turn of the bull. Tihar will end on Sunday with sisters venerating their brothers. With that the festival season that began nearly a month ago will finally come to an end in most parts of the country.

There are variations in the way Tihar is celebrated in different parts of Nepal. A day before Laxmi Puja, for practitioners of Ayurvedic medicine, it is Dhanbantari Day, when they bow to their founder in reverence. The business community in the tarai celebrates the same day as Dhanteras when families buy a piece of jewellery, or at least a metal utensil, to mark the occasion. The day of Diwali is also when some business communities close their accounting year and open new ledgers by imprinting a yellow swastika on deep red cloth-covers. Friday is also Mha Puja, the day of self-worship for the Newar community which also celebrates its New Year (the 1120th) on that day. On Brother's Day (Sunday), Kayasthas of the tarai worship their ancestor Lord Chitrugupta, considered to be the ledger-keeper of Yama—the God of Fate. It is also the only day when Rani Pokhari in the centre of Kathmandu is open to the public.

Diwali, as it is called in India, is primarily a religious festival. Whereas Tihar in Nepal has taken on a socio-cultural and family-oriented aspect in Nepal. The *deusi* and *bhailo* chanting from house to house has an almost Halloween-like trick-or-treat quality to it. Then there is the legend about King Bali, who was so generous that all who went to see him returned with all wishes fulfilled. He was tricked into giving up his kingdom through the machinations of Devas and their chief conspirator, the wily Bishnu. It is said that during Tihar, Bali gets his kingdom back for five days and that is what the *deusi* singers chant. Meanwhile, some historians say they have traced Bali as a Magar king in Central Nepal.

# Let there be light



## This Tihar, let us light a lamp rather than curse the darkness.

Latter-day traditions of Tihar include the official sanction of gambling. Nepal imports nearly Rs 50 million worth of playing cards every year, and most of them are used up this week. Even women, traditionally barred from gambling, play their hands with modest stakes. In the eastern and central tarai, celebrations continue till Chhath Pooja when the Sun is elaborately worshipped in its female form as Mother Goddess Chhathi Mai. This four-day festival involves fasting, penance and then feasting. It is said that Chhath is the only time when even a setting sun is celebrated for its glory, since the cycle of birth starts with death. In a sense, then the setting sun is even more important than the rising one.

In all these festivities, for five to six days in the hills and for nearly two weeks in tarai, one single leitmotif common to all celebrations is the humble earthen lamp—the *diyo*. From

the day it is lit at the start of Yampanchak, it keeps burning till all festivities come to an end. Truly, Tihar is a festival of lights: from the small mustard oil lamps in tiny terracotta cups to designer candles and colourful electric bulbs that is the rage of the upper middle classes.

All life is said to be composed of five basic elements—earth, water, air, fire and sky. They owe their origin to the sun, which is the representation of the Supreme Being. The earthen lamp is worshipped as a miniature symbol of the life-giving sun. An earthen lamp is the product of all the five elements—the *panchatatwa*. A potter takes raw earth, mixes it with water, turns it on his wheel, lets it dry in the air under the sky and then bakes it in fire. When that earthen lamp arrives in your puja room, it has already passed through the process of life and death. It is now the symbol of eternity, of immortality and of light. It is capable of listening to

your prayers of *tamasoma jyotirgamaya* to lead you from darkness to light.

In the brave new world of triumphant capitalism, everyone is an 'Economic Man', a Vaishya. Just like the original religious antecedents of Christmas are covered by modern commercialisation, so it is with Tihar. From virtual firecrackers on the Internet to Diwali greetings on satellite channels, the original message of Tihar is lost in this blaze of consumerism. Good fortune is translated into wealth, and the implication is that money can buy you happiness.

So we open up our *dhukutis* and paint Laxmi's little feet from the door to the vault. Greed is glorious, and, with globalisation, ostentatious displays of wealth are no longer considered in bad form. Egged on by cable, the new creed is: it's no use having it unless you can flaunt it. Thus the rush at jewellery shops, department stores, illegal cracker vendors in the by-lanes of Asan and the gambling dens of Gyaneswor and Mabharajgunj, not to mention all those casinos in the city where all you need to do to get in is pretend to be an Indian.

The form is prominent, but does the substance of Tihar survive? The best time to reflect upon that question is this week, when expensive sweet packets oust *sel-roti*, dry fruits challenge guavas from the garden, madals make way for electric guitars in the *deusi* groups, and people go for extravagance in a big way even in a festival as religious as the tarai's celebration of Chhath.

But all is not lost, and even that what is lost is not lost forever. Like a potter's wheel, change goes and then comes back in cycles. The realisation that culture is beyond the realm of consumerism seems to have dawned upon many. The little terracotta *diyo* is staging a comeback. It's all a matter of keeping faith. Darker the night, brighter burns the wick. May its flickering flame inspire us to live in harmony with the five basic elements of life. Let us light a lamp, rather than curse the darkness. ♦

**Eating Out in Kathmandu**  
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# 543337







## WET DREAMS

Whenever water shortage hits the Kathmandu Valley, which is most of the time, the subject of Melamchi invariably comes up. Melamchi is whispered in hushed tones, as if it is manna from heaven. Successive gangs of politicians since 1990 have sold Melamchi as the panacea to the capital's perennial water problem. Melamchi has already entered the vocabulary of Kathmandu's socialites as a synonym for water. "Can I have a glass of melamchi, please", or "Make mine Scotch with melamchi". Halfway through pontificating on the Valley's water crisis, politicians on the podium reach for a glass of melamchi.

With a population reaching nearly a million and a half, Kathmandu needs 150 million litres of water a day. Present supply is officially 80 million litres a day, although unofficially it is known that His Majesty's Government's undertaking, the Nepal Water Supply Corporation, pumps only 60 percent of that amount. Leakage and pilferage is conservatively estimated at 40 percent. That means a shortfall of a whopping 110 million litres a day. No wonder some neighbourhoods are on the verge of rioting.

Taps are now dry all year around, you don't have to wait for April. If it wasn't for groundwater, Kathmandu would have been uninhabitable. It may soon be anyway because shallow tubewell water is now contaminated with sewage and chemicals. For the short term, the



Valley's water supply can be substantially improved by demand management, supply management and reduction of leakage. Our investigation in this issue shows that the 6- and 8-inch Rana-era pipes of the Tri-Bhim and Bir Dhara networks are still the mainstay of the Valley's water distribution system. Many of the storage reservoirs on the outskirts of the town are nearly a hundred years old, but they are still functioning. It is the latter-day tubewell pumps that have broken down and not been repaired.

Production engineers told us widening the intakes on the Nallu, Mahadev, and other streams that flow down to join the Bagmati, doubling the capacity of existing reservoirs, adding new ones with small 20-metre dams on the higher reaches of Bishnumati, Kitni, Nakkhu and other kholas, and replacing the antique 8-inch pipes with bigger trunk lines would easily take care of Kathmandu Valley water supply for now. Cut leaks and pilferage by half and you can boost supply by a further 15 percent.

This is the tragedy of modern Nepal: we'd rather build monumental follies than improve efficiency first. After all, monumental follies carry monumental kick-backs, efficiency is only good for the nation.

Even so, we have to admit that the way Kathmandu is bursting at the seams, the springs on the valley rim are not going to be enough in the long term. (Come to think of it, with a capacity of only 170 million litres a day in its first phase, Melamchi itself may not be a long-term solution either). Source augmentation by trans-basin transfer seems to be the only way out for the future. But as our politicians have now painted themselves into such a tight corner by raising public expectations of Melamchi it would be suicidal for them to back out now. In the even longer term there is really no other

option. The only way out is to decentralise the capital. The growth of the Valley's cities and towns is malignant. It is a cancer that will automatically take care of water demand. In the even longer term there is really no other option. The only way out is to decentralise the capital. The growth of the Valley's cities and towns is malignant. It is a cancer that will automatically take care of water demand.



## STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



# Comrade Nepal pedals to work

Petrol had only two uses in my village: as fuel for a Chinese lighter, or as balm for aching muscles after a hard day's work.

What a relief it was to see opposition leader Madhav Nepal cycling to Singh Durbar. For the people of his constituency in Rautahat District, bicycles, together with rickshaws and ox-carts, are the main modes of transport. But I was dismayed to discover that it was just a protest prank: Comrade Nepal will not be bicycling to work every day. A day later the UML Secretary General was being chauffeured to work in a black limousine.

Every time prices of petroleum products go up, symbolism takes over the streets of Kathmandu. There are rallies with empty jerry cans, traffic is held-up, bandhs are enforced, protest letters are handed over, the prime minister and his cabinet colleagues are burnt in effigy with much fanfare for the benefit of press photographers. Consumer activists issue angry statements. And then things get back to normal throughout the kingdom. People have come to take fuel price hikes as a fact of life. And protests are a diversion to be tolerated as a diversion from the dull routine of everyday life. Three-wheelers drive past blaring a call for a jerry can rally, very few people bother to look up.

Why don't Nepalis care too much about fuel prices? A facile answer is: fatalism. That vapid sense of apathy that afflicts us all. Prices are beyond our control, so we accept them. Decades under dictatorship has further ingrained this fatalism into the Nepali psyche. The sense of hope that you can effect a change is not there. But the sense of resignation of a sullen population is not the real reason for this lack of interest.

More important are the sources of energy used in Nepal. Total energy consumption in the country was about 292 million GJ in 1995/1996. Nearly 90 percent of it came from biomass sources such as fuelwood (80 percent), animal dung (6 percent—another reason to keep worshipping our cows and bulls) and agricultural residue (4 percent). Only about one percent of it was electricity, notwithstanding all the hydropower hype. The rest, only about 9

percent of total energy consumption, was met by fossil fuels.

The price of fossil fuel affects us all in one way or another: the newsprint on which you are reading these words is transported laboriously up from Birgunj in smoke-belching diesel trucks. But the impact of a hike on diesel (or even kerosene) prices on a subsistence farmer in Rumjatar is marginal. Despite the claim that kerosene is a poor man's fuel and needs state subsidy, the fact is that it is only the urban-dwellers and a section of rural elite who rely on fossil fuels for their daily needs. For the rest, kerosene is something that you need to fuel your tuki in the hills or dibiya in tarai and if it's

and cry over fuel price hike for two reasons: the cost of fuel constitutes only a small portion of their total household expense, the rich are also aware that a government (in any Third World country) can do little about fuel price hikes.

It's people like me in the middle-class who are hurt most. The seven percent rise in bus fare and the increase in kerosene prices hits us badly. The poor may manage with their three-litre quota of subsidised kerosene—if they can afford to buy even that much. My peers in the middle class will probably brand me a traitor for saying this, but protests over the fuel price hike should be held outside OPEC headquarters in Vienna, not in Kathmandu. The Marxist-Leninists should call an Austria-wide bandh, burn in effigy Hugo Chavez, the Venezuelan OPEC Rambo. He has more to do with the rise of kerosene prices than Girija.

The lesson for Nepal and the world is to lessen our dependence on fossil fuels. If only the transportation and diesel cartels would let go of their iron grip on state policy, we should be using this opportunity to look at a fast east-west electric railway along the tarai, connected to the hills with cargo cable car systems. All powered by the energy of our flowing rivers and not the liquefied remains of prehistoric rainforests.

The government certainly needs to do much more than it is presently doing to keep a check on spiralling prices. The opposition can help by not bringing the economy to a halt by planning bandhs. As it is, prices are on fire. Protests simply end up adding scarce fuel to the inferno. Cool it comrades, and make riding bicycles to work an enduring habit. It's good for the economy, and even better for the environment. ♦

not available, or if it's too expensive, you blow it off and go to bed early. No big deal.

When Rajiv Gandhi imposed an undeclared economic blockade on Nepal in 1989, he had expected us go down on our knees and say we're sorry, please send us our kerosene. Well, guess what, Nepalis held out for more than a year. The reason was that most Nepalis didn't use fossil fuels, and those who did simply went back to cow-dung patties. For the urban users, the government flew in kerosene from Dhaka in Royal Nepal Airlines jets converted into tankers.

As for petrol, it had only two uses in my village in those days—either you needed it for your Chinese lighter, or you wanted some as a balm to apply upon your body when your muscles ached from a hard day's work in the rice-fields.

The Nepali elite which depends on petroleum products is a small and pampered group and does not make a hue



MIN BARBACHARYA



## SAMRAT RANA

In all the cacophony of spin generated by political factions in Nepal's rambunctious democracy, it is often difficult to tell what it is that the Maoists are really after and why they have taken the path of violence. In fact, the lack of a clear consensus in identifying the true nature and gravity of the threat posed by the Maoist movement has been a major deterrent to finding a solution or agreeing on effective counter measures.

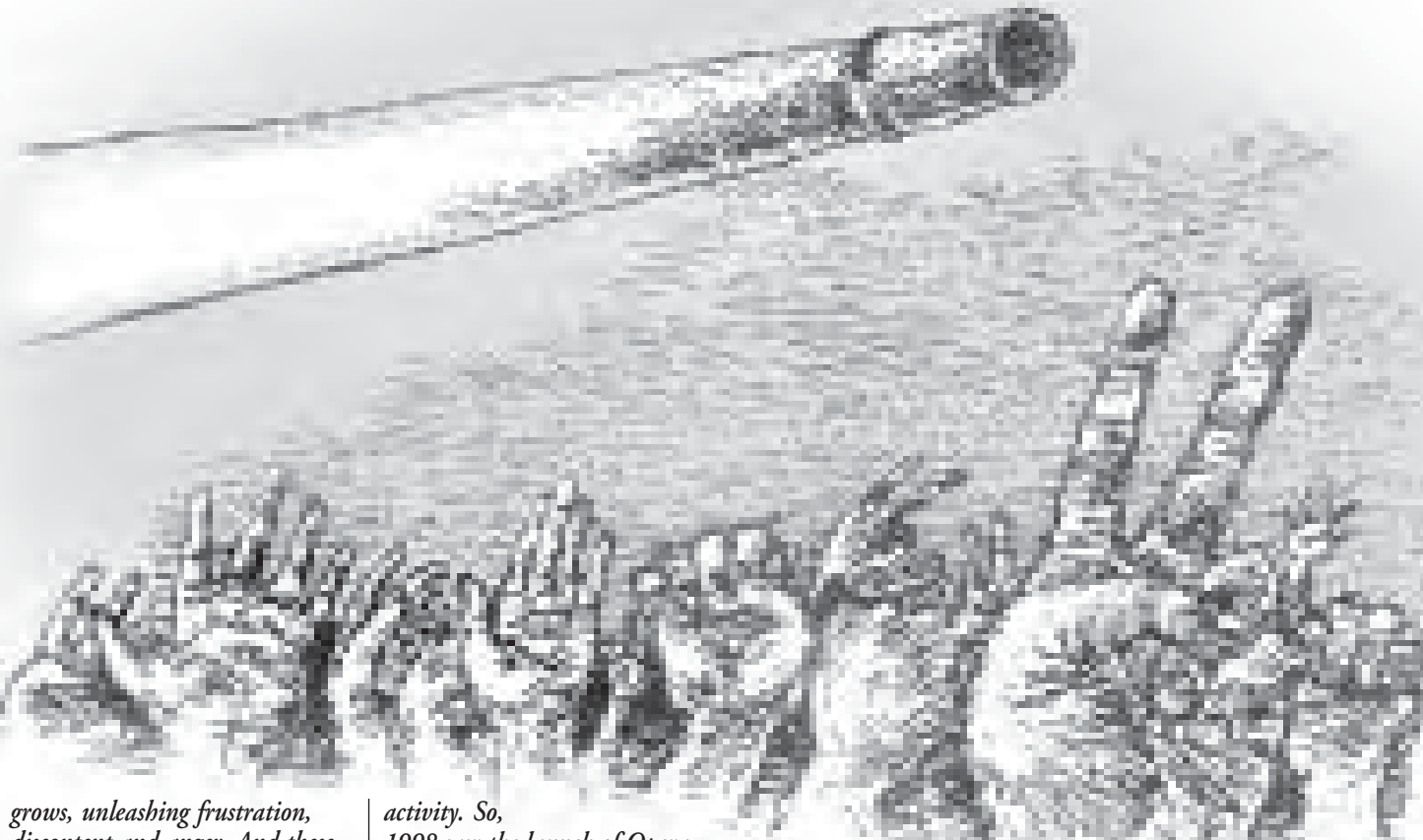
For their part, the Maoists have benefitted from government inaction brought about by aimless, and often ignorant, political debate. The result is there for us all to see: political violence, terrorism, and anarchy in areas affected by the Maoists, and in the rest of the country, fear and uncertainty.

The Maoist crisis is in an "insurgency" phase. An insurgency is the refusal of the people who are indigenous to an area to actively cooperate with, or express support for the current authority figures. An insurgency can exist in many forms and each presents its own unique challenge to governments that want to retain legitimacy and political control. The government has labelled the Maoists as terrorists because they have adopted violence as a means to achieve political ends. This is nothing new; most governments resort to calling violent opposition by the catch-all label—terrorism.

In Nepal's case, calling the Maoists terrorists oversimplifies the issue. Terror tactics, such as those used by the Maoists, are recognised worldwide as an element of political insurgency. Unlike terrorist violence, which targets the public, insurgencies focus on government targets. Real terrorism is an inappropriate means of waging an insurgent war if the real goal of the insurgent is to actually win an objective, rather than simply engage in combat.

A democratic government is supposed to respond to changes in the needs of its people. When change does not come easily since those in power are preoccupied with retaining that power and little else, public dissatisfaction

## If war is the continuation of politics by other means, then an insurgency is politics by other means.



grows, unleashing frustration, discontent and anger. And these are precisely the ingredients that give rise to political violence. It is by now generally accepted that Nepal's Maoist movement was born under these very conditions.

Initially, the government underestimated the strength and the resolve of the Maoists, and treated them like a bunch of bandits. This led to a misleading appraisal of the situation and a series of flawed responses. Operation Romeo in 1997 was a heavy-handed overreaction which used only the police to curb the movement. However, an undue emphasis on the use of counter-force clouded the key political, economic, and social realities, playing right into the hands of the Maoists who gained from the public backlash against the state.

The Maoists responded by starting a pattern of escalating violence, and spreading their base areas. Again, successive governments refused to acknowledge the gravity of the situation and stuck to the conceptually defective plan to crush the spreading guerrilla

activity. So, 1998 saw the launch of Operation Kilo Sierra 1 and subsequently KS 2 and 3 in the following years. It is clear this approach did not work, and only ended up adding fuel to the fire by alienating the people with its heavy-handedness.

In hindsight, the question for governments that have ruled since 1996 is why they chose to use only the police to quell the problem in the first place? The misconceived notion that deployment of the Royal Nepal Army would endanger Nepal's nascent democracy and empower the king remains a major mistake, probably perpetrated by hidden hands. Why was the military, decidedly the trained experts in the business of counter-insurgency, kept on the sidelines? Why was no constitutional or legislative action taken to ban the activities of a group of avowedly undemocratic and openly lawless elements who say they want to overthrow the country's constitutional monarchy? The answers to these

questions lie hidden in the mindset of politicians and political complexes, in their paranoia, and in the ruthless political intrigues of Nepal's post-1990 polity.

Once the government realised the futility of trying to eradicate the Maoist insurgency using a singular line of operation, it made significant adjustments to its plan of action. This now includes the recent drive to mobilise multipartisan backing for dialogue, and the much-vaunted economic package for Maoist-affected areas. At least the government has given up its earlier intransigence and shown more flexibility and vigour. Nevertheless, even these initiatives are plagued by factions jostling for credit and lack a long-term strategy and vision.

The National Security Council (NSC) is the government's pivotal body to deal with crises such as these. But as political hindrances prevented the NSC from being an action-

oriented and effective entity, key decisions like defining the role of the Royal Nepal Army have been unnecessarily delayed. Ultimately, political leaders, through the medium of the NSC and preferably with the appointment of a National Security Adviser, have to take up responsibility for:

- coordinating crisis management;
- identifying and assessing short-, medium-, and long-term threats to national security;
- facilitating intelligence and analysis to political decision-makers and helping them formulate responses;
- passing on NSC's directives and guidance to government departments; and
- monitoring and evaluating the implementation process.

Insurgency is a zone between politics and war. If war, as Clausewitz declared, is "the

continuation of politics by other means" then an insurgency too is politics by other means. The strategic centre of gravity here is the competition for the hearts and minds of the people. If ineffective, the government counter-insurgency strategy must be undertaken to the people through political action rather than by deploying military force. The guiding principle should be that force is a means and not the end in itself, and, when applied, should be decisive.

- The army need only deploy partially to provide security and ensure peace by keeping them safe from insurgent violence and activities.
- It should engage in the delivery of basic services to restore the people's faith and confidence in the government.
- It should assist in training a well-disciplined, and highly motivated police force.
- It should defeat the guerrilla forces through selective and measured use of force. The guiding principle should be that force is a means and not the end in itself, and, when applied, should be decisive.

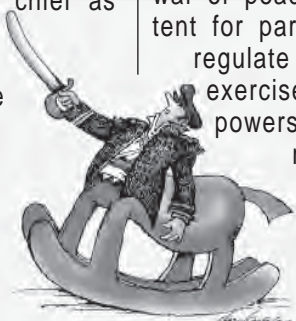
Military operations are not conducted in isolation; their basic intent is to provide support and credibility to government actions. The Royal Nepal Army can offer such support, but it cannot reach and destroy the core of the Maoist insurgency, which lies in the sphere of ideology and political activities. The use of force and the military has to be a specific line of operation within the government's overall counter-insurgency strategy. The primary focus of the government must, however, remain in the political arena. ♦

(Samrat Rana is the pen-name of a military analyst.)

## LETTERS

### WHOSE ARMY?

I have been following the interesting debate in Nepali Times about the constitutional ambiguity regarding who is in charge of the army (#11,12). The provision in the Constitution of Nepal 1990 regarding the Royal Nepal Army provides for a National Defence Council under the chairmanship of the prime minister with the defence minister and the commander-in-chief as members. The supreme command of the armed forces is vested in the King, but this is far less than those of the American presi-



dent or of the English crown. The Constitution clearly states that the king shall operate and use the Royal Nepal Army on the recommendation of National Defence Council. Article 118-(3) states that "The establishment and management of the Royal Nepal Army, and other matters relating thereto shall be as determined as law." This means that although the king may have the power to declare war or peace it is competent for parliament to regulate or control the exercise of such powers. The king's role as supreme commander cannot be construed as

a power independent of legislative control, since as a constitutional monarch he has to act on the advice of an elected prime minister. The Constitution enjoins that certain acts require the king to approach parliament for sanction.

The National Defence Council, as a subcommittee of the Council of Ministers, is a compromise reached during the framing of the present constitution. The role of the prime minister as head of the council of ministers is the most important in the operation of the army. In a modern democracy there cannot be a state within a state, unlike in the days of the warlords. After all, who

pays for the armed forces? It is paid for from the coffers of the state, which is furnished by the taxes paid by the Nepali people.

S Grimaljee  
Kathmandu

### HOPE

Congratulations, John Child, for writing such a positive article "New heroes, quiet revolution" (#13) on current-day Nepal. It is nice to know that there is somebody out there who thinks that there is still hope for Nepal.

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### UPWARDLY MOBILE

Comments on three points

mentioned in "Upwardly Mobile" (#13). The Belgian government loan that Nepal Telecommunication Corporation (NTC) received recently is not for a village phone network. It is for the purchase of telephone exchange equipment meant mostly for urban areas. Secondly, NTC always makes sure that price of any equipment purchased, even with tied loans on bilateral bases, are reasonable. Per line cost of exchange equipment under the Belgian loan, for instance, is less than \$50, which is one of the lowest in the world. The same equipment recently purchased by another SAARC country costs more than \$70 per line.

Also, it is a typical case

of negative Nepali mentality to imply ulterior motives to our Prime Minister's stopover in Belgium. The government of Belgium has been assisting Nepal in the telecommunication sector for the past 20 years. Is it not natural that our Prime Minister wants to strengthen goodwill between the two countries with a brief stopover in Belgium?

A paper like yours with a new vision should try to bring a paradigm shift in journalism and take responsibility to inject positive feelings and emotions in the highly negative mindset of our society. Bad news may be good news, but the print media can also be a powerful tool to brain-wash society.

Sugat Ratna Kansakar



# Melamchi on our minds

After much debate and delay, the Asian Development Bank is finally getting ready to approve the Melamchi Project at its board meeting in December. But, even if all goes according to plan, Kathmandu will have to wait another six years for the first drop of melted snow to arrive at Sundarijal. What do we do till then?



## A NEPALI TIMES INVESTIGATION

The best way to understand Kathmandu Valley's limits to growth is to regard it not as a valley at all, but as a plateau. We should be calling it the Kathmandu Plateau. The terrain on all sides, including the north, plunges to only 800 m above sea level before rising again. This leaves Nepal's capital high and dry, dependent only on the rainfall that is trapped by the hills on its rim. There are no snow-fed rivers running through, and with the population now nearing 1.5 million, the valley's only river has

turned into a sewer. Water shortages have become a year-round phenomenon, not just something that happened in the dry season.

As taps run dry, the cry for water has become louder and louder. Politicians can't ignore it anymore, so they respond with a one-word mantra: "Melamchi". Over the years, the river flowing below this picturesque little village on the boundary of the Langtang National Park, 30 km directly north of Kathmandu, has turned into a panacea for parched Kathmandu. The debate about whether or not

some \$500 million should be lavished on an over-pampered capital is not heard anymore, no one really asks the scientists what they think, and no one questions the unquestionable—wouldn't it be better to just start moving the capital somewhere else, or at least have a systematic plan to relocate key offices and industries?

Politics and populism take over, and the debate is so mired in slogans that any Nepali hydrologist who says that Kathmandu has enough water, that there is really no shortage, is regarded as a crank. Question Melamchi, and you are anti-development. Kathmandu needs about 150 million litres of water a day. Out of this, Nepal Water Supply Corporation, a public sector undertaking entrusted with the task of quenching the capital's thirst and taking care of its sewer system on a monopoly basis, claims that it supplies about 80 million litres a day. Out of that 40 percent is lost in leakage. That means a daily shortfall of about 90 million litres.

With an annual precipitation of 3,000-3,600 mm, there is enough rainfall on the valley rim to fulfil Kathmandu Valley's current and future demand. The

trouble is, most of this rain falls during the monsoon and all that needs to be done is to store it properly. Present storage capacity is woefully inadequate to meet rising demand, and even if it were, some of the water mains supplying the city were laid nearly 100 years ago and cannot carry enough water to the network. Add to this the leakage along the way, the wastage and pilferage, and it is not surprising that there is a shortage. "Simply cutting wastage and pilferage by 50 percent would alone mean increasing supply by 15 percent," one water expert told us. He requested anonymity because, working for the government, he doesn't want to be punished for his

views.

So Kathmandu's hapless citizens have been forced to bore for water. And they have to drill deeper and deeper as the water table falls because of over-extraction. One estimate says Kathmandu's average water table has been falling by an average of 1.8 metres a year. Large hotels and soft-drink makers have drilled deep for geological water—and it is all a gift from nature, since there is no government policy to price extraction of this precious commodity. As Kathmandu's population grows exponentially, storage of water inside the valley alone will not meet demand, and there will have to be an outside source. The ADB says it has studied other

inter-basin transfer possibilities for Kathmandu Valley, but Melamchi is the only feasible one.

Critics of Melamchi say that not enough has been done to upgrade the existing water collection intakes, the capacity of the reservoirs on the valley rim and expanding the diameter of the trunk lines feeding the three main towns. If this is done, there is enough water within the valley to take care of demand for another ten years, they say. Differential pricing could ensure that intensive users like five-star hotels and industries will be more frugal with water that is subsidised for the citizens.

The Melamchi project ran into another problem that nearly derailed it. For once, it had nothing to do with the politicians in Kathmandu but with donor politics.

Melamchi has always been a darling of the Japanese, who have worked closely with the ADB to push the project through. Norway had also been involved, and had preferred the option in which the tunnel bringing the water would generate 25 MW of electricity from a powerhouse at Sundarijal. The Japanese, with the ADB, were sharply opposed to this, and insiders in the Melamchi project say



Confluence of Melamchi Khola and Gohare Khola, and (above left) Melamchi near the intake.

## VILLAGE VOICE

by DUBBY BHAGAT

# Paradise? Lost?

Let's talk of rites of passage, the loss of innocence. Let tomorrow come, we will face it together.

This is a development parable, repeated many times in world history in all corners of the world, of how the very act of trying to save Shangri-La can spoil it. It is a story about schmaltz, about tree-hugging. It is about how do-gooding does not always deliver the goods. This is a serious story of the dynamics of change. How to try to ensure that when change does occur, it is under control of the people who are being changed, and it is a change for the better, at least slightly. In the sixties, Sir Edmund Hillary and Desmond Doig stumbled upon Shangri-La in the Khumbu region. A beautiful village of six homes on a ridge full of conifers, with the Himalaya looming large and set amidst fields of flowers.

So Hillary and Doig set up camp to savour it all, until they noticed a slight glitch in this Eden below Everest, this paradise called Shangri-La: there was no

water.

They watched as the women of the village carrying pots would walk down to a stream in the evening, a water source so far away that they had to spend the night there and labour up to their homes



with the water in the morning. So Hillary and Doig made the first move for woman's lib, for progress, but mostly for compassion. They set up a pump. And as the first gush of water came into the village they wandered off, pleased with a job well done.

A decade later, when the two chanced by the village again, they found it in shambles. A shantytown had grown around the place of the little hamlet that they had discovered on their previous visit. The trees had disappeared, and where fields of flowers once bloomed there were potato fields. Smoke obscured the Himalaya. "What happened?" they asked the village elder. "Two white men came many years ago and gave us a pump," said the old man. "And since the women did not have to sleep at the water source there was population explosion. Then, neighbouring villages came and settled...."

Second story. A famous anthropologist heard of this dreadful change, and determined not to upset the fragility of the Khumbu he went about and studied its people without disturbing a single thing. Then he went back and wrote a thesis which was widely acclaimed in academia. And a hundred anthropological teams followed. They made suggestions, helped the poor and needy, and generally did good. But the changes, people later said, were not good. The first anthropologist should never have written his thesis because it brought hordes of other researchers. The region's awesome enticing beauty became commonplace.

The media is the message, these days. Yesteryear's water pumps and anthropologists have been replaced by an overwhelming force as powerful as nature's many moods that created change in the past. Television heightens expectations, gives us role models and lures with what we don't have, but could have. And a cloistered society has spawned violence, greed, and envy. The Internet whisks us to worlds undreamt of, and whose effects are yet to be understood. Admittedly today it's the elite of Nepal that is privy to most of this but there is also a burgeoning middle class. And there is suddenly the vocal and articulate disenfranchised, be they Maosists or "ists" of a number of hues. There are now robbers

in a place that considered a fish net over a storefront as security enough.

The Gita says change is the only constant. But even the ancient faith from that book is being challenged every day, a faith that once bound us. So paradises are lost and Eden's serpents proliferate as indeed they are forced to. Dr Dhruva Man Shrestha, Nepal's leading psychiatrist, has to cope with the detritus of change.

So let's talk of these rites of passage, the loss of innocence. We may not find a solution to the problem of a region transformed forever by a STOL airport, or a highway, or a village turned into a slum by a water-pump. But maybe it will do good for the catalysers of change in Kathmandu to think about the change they bring. Not the immediate difference they make, but a future typhoon triggered by the flap of a butterfly wing here today. Write to us, and then let tomorrow come. We will face it together. ♦





the bank's mission gave "flimsy reasons" for being against the power generation. The ADB conducted a study last year and said the cost implications of a longer tunnel and a higher intake to justify power generation was not cost-effective. In the end, probably because of the uncertainty, no private sector investor was willing to invest in the hydropower portion and Melamchi became a stand-alone water supply project.

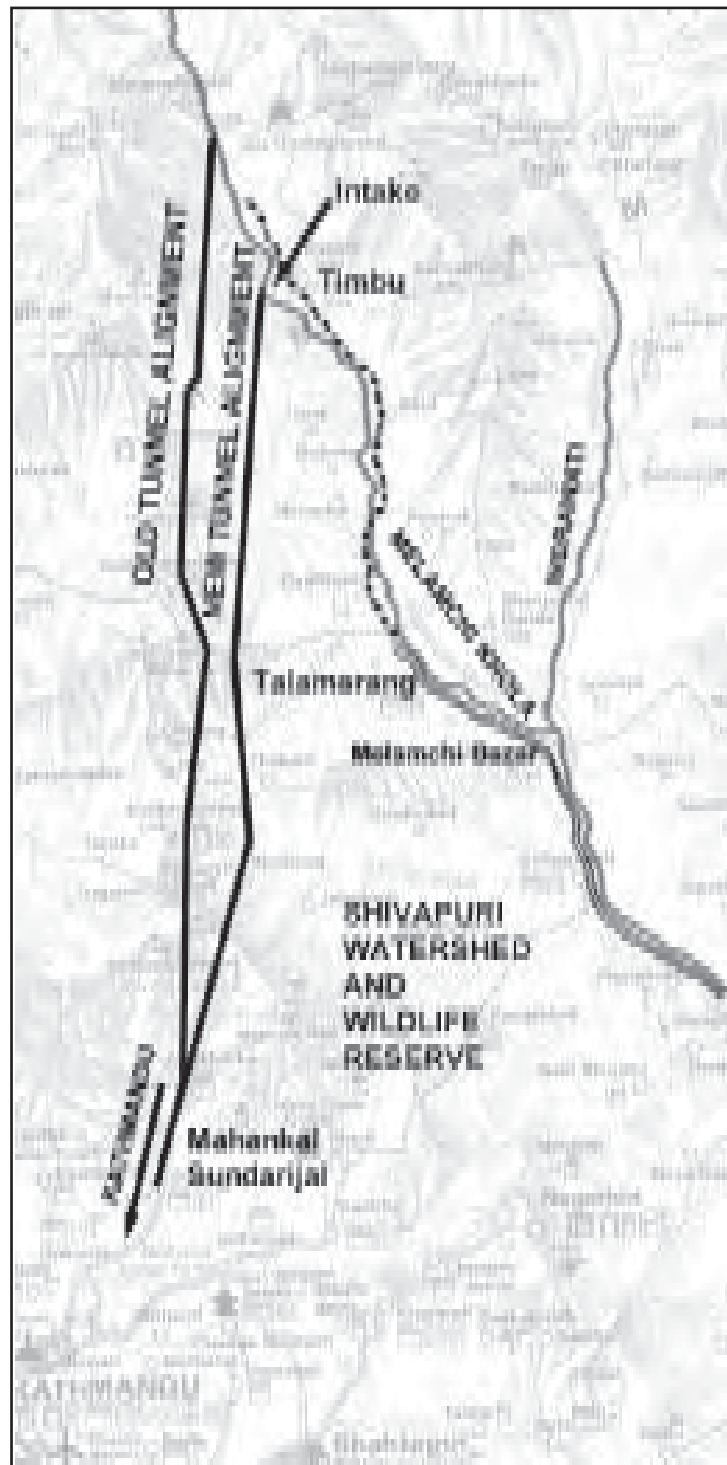
The ADB is the lead agency and the biggest lender to the project, which is supported by a consortium of donors that includes the Norwegian aid agency, NORAD; the Swedish agency, SIDA; the Nordic Development Fund (NDF); the Japanese Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC); the World Bank and the OPEC Fund.

The ADB's final mission was in Kathmandu from 18 September-4 October to appraise the project and prepare a report for the ADB board to discuss. The ADB loan amounts to \$120 million, and it will be upon the endorsement of this that other donors are expected to get their approval processes underway.

The base cost of the project as it stands today is \$338 million. But infrastructure projects are notorious for cost over-runs and after including financing, interest payments, taxes and contingencies for complications in the tunnel drilling activity, the total cost comes to \$441 million. The government is putting up 25 percent of the financing, most of which will be cost for land taxes, duties and interest during construction.

The current design will entail the construction of a low weir and de-sanding basin on the Melamchi Khola just above its confluence with Ribarma Khola at an altitude of about 1,500 m. About 170 million litres a day of water will be diverted through a 26.5 km long tunnel to bring the water to a treatment plant to be built at Mahankal near Sundarijal. The tunnel will have a cross section of 10 sq metres and will be a major feat of engineering. Although the new tunnel alignment is shorter, geologists involved with the project say it will involve boring through unstable rock and the tunnel may actually be more difficult to construct.

The project also has "downstream" components of treatment and distribution once the water arrives in Kathmandu Valley. The existing distribution system will be overhauled to ensure reliable and adequate supply. A private operator will be hired by 2001 to improve operation, management and rehabilitation of Kathmandu's existing urban water supply and sewerage facilities. One way is to ensure people pay for water they use and improve the



**About 170 million litres a day of water will be diverted through a 26.5 km long tunnel to bring the water to a treatment plant to be built at Mahankal near Sundarijal. The tunnel will have a cross section of 10 sq metres and will be a major feat of engineering.**

efficiency of the system.

Supporters of the project say that although expensive, Kathmandu Valley residents will be paying for reliable water supply just like they pay for electricity. Water tariffs in Kathmandu could increase to Rs 23 per cubic metre when Melamchi water is piped to homes and neighbourhoods. At present, water is sold at a subsidised rate of Rs 8 per cubic metre, even though the costs involved in supplying it is Rs 16 per cubic metre. Says the ADB's Nepal representative Richard Vokes: "Melamchi is a least-cost option, and private management has been brought in to ensure people pay for water. Tariffs have to be significant to ensure cost recovery, otherwise it will be difficult to justify subsidies for a rich valley population."

What will remain to be seen is if just charging money will make Kathmandu's water supply dependable and regular and of acceptable quality. The argument is that if it is expensive, people will not waste; this would hold water if Kathmandu citizens showed the same frugality about using expensive electricity, or if electricity

pilferage was cut. Says Vokes:

"To bring water to Kathmandu, water has to be conserved and treated as a precious resource." For a final approval by the ADB board, the government will have to commit to the following conditionalities:

- Implementation of a Kathmandu valley water and wastewater strategy
- Policy on groundwater extraction, licensing and monitoring
- Formulation of a Kathmandu valley development plan—including relocating more water-consuming industries
- Establishment of an autonomous Kathmandu valley water authority (KVWA) by 2002 for water resource management

MELAMCHI FINANCING PLAN (IN MILLIONS US)		
ADB	120	loan
JIBC (Japan Bank for International Cooperation)	52	loan
NDF (Nordic Development Fund)	11	loan
NORAD	29	Grant
OPEC	14	loan
SIDA	25	50/50 loan and grant
World Bank	80	loan
HMG	110	

- Establishment of a regulatory body to control tariff adjustments, monitor performance of water operators and protect consumer interests.
- A clearly defined tariff policy has to be prepared before the loan approval.

The Melamchi headworks are close to the Langtang National Park, and its access tunnels are located within the Shivapuri Watershed and Nature Reserve. ADB says it has mitigation plans to address the negative environmental impact of the tunnels and the social effects of the influx of thousands of construction workers from outside. The plan is to ensure that a minimum water supply level will be maintained in the Melamchi for downstream irrigation, water supply, water mill operation and for maintaining the habitat of aquatic life. A social uplift programme is also planned for 14 village development committees (VDCs) in the Melamchi valley, for which the project has allocated \$5 million. The plan is to ensure that a certain percentage of the water tariff paid by the people of Kathmandu will be made available to the 14 VDCs. ADB has also prepared a resettlement policy, for people displaced by the tunnel, which is awaiting government approval. The Melamchi Board is so conscious of its image and wary of negative press that they are in the process of hiring a public relations consultant.

Critics of the Melamchi project, and there are still some in the woodwork, admit that the plan for resettlement and the plough-back of part of the tariffs to the Melamchi villagers looks good on paper, but doubt whether future governments will keep that promise. "Nepal is full of development refugees who have suffered because the government didn't keep its word," says one activist. Besides, what are the people of Kathmandu going to do till 2006? Some of the immediately do-able activities like improving the storage capacity and upgrading the mains should have been incorporated right away, they say. ♦

## Too many vehicles

Traffic congestion in the Kathmandu Valley is not a result of poor management but caused by too many vehicles, says a government report. With over 154,700 registered vehicles, there's just enough space for every one of them. So much so, that if all the vehicles were to be lined up on the 740 kilometres of road there is in the Valley, there would not be enough standing room for all.

A government task force formed to assess the carrying capacity of Kathmandu Valley roads has recommended that registrations of small vehicles be stopped for plying on routes within the Ring Road, which it says can carry just 28,000 vehicles.

One way to make the roads less crowded would be to phase out old vehicles, Surendra Hamal, Minister of State for Labour and Transport Management said at a press conference last week. However, one direct impact of the government report could be the cessation of registration of electric run three wheelers for public transport.

## Kamaiyas impatient

Bonded labourers who were freed by a government order on 17 July say they will agitate again to demand speedy rehabilitation. Leaders of two organisations—the Kamaiya Liberation Struggle Mobilisation Committee (KLSMC) and the Kamaiya Liberation Action Committee—are to meet early next week for finalise plans for a protest rally to be held on 6 November.

The plan is to submit memorandums demanding speedy registration and rehabilitation of Kamaiyas at District Administration Offices in five districts where the practice of bonded labour was widespread before the government's July decision. That would be followed by sit-ins and culminate in general strikes in Kailali, Kanchanpur, Banke, Bardia and Dang districts. A sit-in is also planned for Bhadrakali, the famous spot to the west of the Singa Durbar, the central secretariat.

Government officials say the Dasain and Tihar holidays have delayed identification and registration of the freed bonded labourers, which they say would be completed in about a month's time.

## Oil prices spark protests, strikes

A series of protests kicked off by last week's increase in the price of petroleum products has forced the government to increase the quota of kerosene to be distributed at subsidised rates. Each family will now get five litres of subsidised kerosene, the Ministry of Commerce said.

Kerosene is used mainly for lighting in the villages and for cooking by urban and semi-urban populations, mainly from the middle and lower middle classes. Rationed kerosene is sold at Rs 15.50 per litre while kerosene sells in the open market at Rs 26 per litre.

The government maintains that price hikes have resulted from the upward shift in global oil prices and that the rates would be revised should international prices fall.

All opposition parties have announced protests against the increase in the price of petroleum products one of which, announced by a group of nine small communist parties, is to culminate in a two-day nation-wide general strike on 16-17 November. The Nepal Oil Corporation says it faces a loss of Rs 10 per litre of subsidised kerosene, which means that the subsidy burden could be as high as Rs 900 million if 40,000 families are to be provided the subsidised fuel. Last year NOC supplied 319,158 kilolitres of diesel and 298,351 kilolitres of kerosene.



Tibetans arrested on 22 October, huddled outside the Immigration office at Baneswor.

## Fresh influx of Tibetan refugees

There has been a fresh influx of Tibetan refugees into Nepal in the past few weeks, which officials say is the handiwork of organised groups smuggling them into Nepal. The police rounded up 31 Tibetans who had slipped into Nepal on 24 October, just days after it had nabbed another 13.

On 22 October, police shot and wounded a Nepali national, suspected to be a middleman involved in helping Tibetans cross the border. The accused was



## NC's view of the Maoist problem

Saptahik Bimarsha, 20 October

For the first time, the ruling party has made public its views on the Maoist insurgency. Congress party spokesman Narahari Acharya presented the party's opinion at the 16 October meeting convened by the committee looking for ways to resolve the problem. The six-part document deals with the problem vis-à-vis constitutional issues, talks and dialogue, deployment of security forces, political, socio-economic and administrative aspects. Excerpts from the document are as follows:

**Issues related to the Constitution:** The Nepali Congress will not be party to or support any effort or action that would go against the basic provisions of the Constitution. The Congress does not have any proposal to amend the Constitution. The party feels the need to make the present democratic institutions more effective by mobilising local governance units through decentralisation.

**Dialogue:** The Nepali Congress is always ready to end any problem facing the country through dialogue. The party is ready for unconditional talks. The party has instructed the government to make efforts to find ways for peace talks to resolve the Maoist problem. The party is ready to ensure the safety of the Maoists coming to talks and their safe passage back should the talks break down, and keep secret the discussions until a final decision is reached by both parties. The Maoists should give up violence while the talks are underway and the government should also not take any anti-insurgency measures during that time.

**Mobilisation of security forces:** One of the major responsibilities of the government is to ensure the security of all citizens. The government always has the right to mobilise its forces for the purpose. The armed struggle aimed at toppling the political system underway is not a simple law and order issue. This is what all political parties and people should be clear about. It is natural for the government to use the forces (the police and the army) at its command to disarm those that have taken up arms against the present political system.

**Political aspect:** It is necessary for all political parties in parliament and other national parties to agree on the following: have maximum policy-level agreement to denounce the Maoist violence and terror, and form joint citizen's security committees; undertake joint public meetings and other political programmes; and resolve the issues related to lawmaking to control the Maoist insurgency.

**Socio-economic aspect (related to the much talked about package programme):** All programmes relating to education, health and development that have been prepared by the government should be promptly implemented. The help of all the political parties will be sought for its implementation. Since most of the affected areas are cut off from the mainstream, provisions will have to be made to provide food grains, education facilities and health services. Income and employment generating programmes should be given priority. Programmes developed for the affected areas in the past have not been effective. The government will, with help from district-level organisations and governance units and political parties, review these programmes and only implement them after making the required necessary changes.

The government should make provisions to provide loans to people to undertake income-generation projects. Loans may be provided by banks or non-governmental organisations. Programmes that exploit the poor should be immediately stopped. Employment opportunities should be provided to those affected by the insurgency. Social inequality, injustice and superstitions are fertile grounds for the rebels to grow. The local people's representatives, the administration and the police should form small groups that move from one village to the other to listen to, understand and help resolve problems as they arise. Programmes relating to backward groups, women and other exploited groups should be implemented immediately.

**Administrative aspect:** Proper rules and laws should be formulated and implemented to control the rebellion. A dialogue with the rebels must also be started. For this an understanding with all political parties is needed. Since all administrative aspects of the districts cannot be overseen by the centre, there is a need to create regional administrative centres. The government will have to make all efforts to provide peace and security to all citizens, by making the police more efficient. There is also a need to make intelligence gathering on the insurgency more effective.

### QUOTE OF THE WEEK

We cannot give up multiparty democracy. In today's context there is also no question of doing away with constitutional monarchy. (The government) should be ready to talk (to Maoists) on all issues except these two.

—Jhal Nath Khanal, Permanent Committee Member, CPN(UML) in Deshanter, 22 October.



How can you cry so much? We will eat as soon as we get the kerosene coupons.

Naya Sadak, 15 October

## Mass court martials

Jana Aastha, 18 October

Based on a report published by this paper some time ago, the Royal Nepal Army is getting ready to court martial 55 soldiers at one go. The news story had made public a scandal in which the commanding officer of the Singhanath Battalion, Lt Colonel Rajendra Khadka, had sent 14 soldiers back to Nepal on the charge of selling 2,000 rounds of ammunition to the Hizbollah and Amal rebel groups during their term of service as part of the UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon. Of the 14 one committed suicide. But it has now become clear that Khadka himself was party to the



deal.

In the end our story has proven to be true and the army has formed a 10-member general court martial committee to bring to book Khadka and his alleged accomplices. Among those facing court martial are 28 officers, including Major Naresh Subba, Major Naresh Bhatta, Adjutant Prabhat Shah (possibly related to royalty) and Captain Bishnu Karki.

Even though delayed, the army has initiated action against those accused of selling ammunition. However, the army continues to remain silent about the generator and ammunition sold by Aditya Bahadur Shah—a relative of former military secretary to the king, Lt Gen (ret) Santa Kumar Malla—who was in Lebanon before Khadka. It is said that arms and ammunition had begun to be reported to be missing when Shah headed the Nepali army unit in Lebanon before Khadka.

In an earlier issue this paper had published that Lt Colonel Shah of the Bhairavnath Battalion, who headed the 36th batch of peacekeepers in Lebanon, had even sold a generator. Even though that report obtained from Lebanon was true no action was taken because of the clout Santa Kumar Malla wields. And Khadka is now facing punishment for continuing a tradition started by Shah. Commenting on Aditya Bahadur Shah, a top army official says: "If this scam were to be investigated further, even Aditya Shah will not go unscathed."

This not the first time this sort of incident has taken place and the army, rather than take action against the guilty, has given them promotions. That is why the army's reputation is beginning to get tainted. It is said that the commander of the army's brigade in Dipayal, Kul Bahadur Khadka had sold goods worth \$70-80,000 and had been sent back with the proviso that he would not be eligible for UN service in the future. He was promoted instead of being punished. Likewise, Dipak Bikram Rana who has been accused of misappropriating money for cigarettes is being readied for more promotion. Khadka and the others accused are

being held in groups of five at different army battalions. Now there are voices for similar action to be initiated against another colonel who is charged to have raised and misappropriated \$70,000 from servicemen who gave him the money to purchase gold. Because this colonel, Rimindranath, is the scion of a powerful family, it is unlikely that any action will be initiated against him. He has just returned from Lebanon (37th branch) and is now attending staff college to prepare to take charge of the Sumsherdal Battalion.

## Centre at fault: Gorkhali

## Commission

Saptahik Deshanter, 22 October

The Gorkhali commission formed by the government to investigate and report of the Maoist attack on Dunai has submitted its findings to the government. The commission was headed by Madhu Sudan Gorkhali, with Binod Kumar Shrestha and Mohan Banjade as members.

The commission has said that officials at the centre were at fault. The commission, which also inspected the site, has pointed out lack of effective co-ordination among different levels of the administration.

According to the Dolpo police chief and the chief district officer, everyone in the vicinity knew that the rebels were planning an attack but no one knew where exactly they would strike. Had it not been for the striking force, there would have been more casualties, as the three-nought-three rifles of the police got heated up during the firing and stopped functioning after police had fired 7-8 rounds.

According to sources, the policemen who were killed were in the kitchen when the rebels struck. The rebels had hurled a socket bomb into the kitchen and the policemen there were massacred. The officials of the looted Nepal Bank Limited also had no idea that they would be attacked.

The commission has recommended that action be taken against high-ranking officials of the Home Ministry. Most of those officials are not holding the positions today. The commission has also pointed out that lapses in co-ordination between the army and the police need to be tackled.

Information that the rebels were going to attack Dunai had been made available to the then Home Secretary and police chief by the parliamentarians representing Kalikot, Humla and Rukum a couple of days before the incident took place. But it was only on the eve of the attack that 48 policemen were sent to Dunai from Nepalgunj, the report adds.

## Cabinet decisions

Deshanter, 22 October

As a way to curb the Maoist insurgency, the government has prepared ordinances in preparation of the Local Administration (fourth amendment) Act and the Armed Police Force Act. The administration act reached the cabinet on 19 October after getting the necessary approval from the Ministry of Law. It envisages the appointment of a regional administrator and co-ordinates the work of the army and the police. The draft ordinance on the Armed Police Force is expected to reach the cabinet this week.

According to a source in the cabinet secretariat the local administration act will make the presence of the local commander of the army unit a member of the district security committee. The presence of an army representative is not mandatory at the moment. The draft proposes having regional administration offices in all five development regions and the government will appoint a first class officer as the regional administrator. According to Clause 4 (c), the regional administrator would have authority to maintain law and order, order others to maintain peace and oversee the work of the district administration offices. He or she will also head the regional security committee, which will have representation of the regional heads of the army, the police and the national investigation department (intelligence office).

The ordinance amends a 1969 law to make the representation of the army in the security committee compulsory. A cabinet secretariat source said because there was no coordinating agency, the army was forced to stand by and watch the Maoist attack on Dunai, the headquarters of Dolpo district.

A cabinet source says the government will forward the armed police ordinance for His Majesty's approval next week. The armed police force is to be under the Home Ministry and will live in barracks. The ordinance proposes to use the paramilitary force to curb armed insurgencies and other conflicts that could take place in different parts of the country.

The force is also to be used in border security and for relief operations during natural calamities. The ordinance says the size of the force would be decided by the government and another clause would also allow the government to transfer personnel from the police to the force which will be under the command of an inspector general.

The Nepal Police presently has a 7,000-strong armed wing. A government task force had recommended that a paramilitary force be created for fighting the Maoist rebels. Even though the task force had recommended a force with 15,156 personnel, Home Ministry sources said that the number had not been mentioned because the government wanted to create the force immediately using personnel from the police.



# Trash is back

The bird scare at the airport closes a landfill site, and trash is piling up once more on the city streets.

HEMLATA RAI

Garbage has begun piling up along the city's sidewalks and main thoroughfares once again after the municipality stopped dumping waste along the banks of the Bagmati River. And matters may get worse once the government's temporary holding site in Teku is used up, mainly because the government and municipal officials have failed to find a lasting solution to manage waste.

ing the birds. The government had been using the waste as landfill material for an 8-km section of road that is being built since July amid loud opposition from locals and environmentalists who argued that seepage from the waste would contaminate the waters of the "holy" river. But it was only the sudden increase in bird strikes at the airport that forced it to reconsider its decision.



Trash piles up again in Thamel, and (above) the Teku "holding site".

The dumping along the Bagmati was stopped after several aircraft suffered bird hits at the Tribhuvan International Airport recently, which many said could have resulted because the waste was attract-

Sources at the Local Development Ministry told us that they were convinced that the use of garbage in road-building was the best immediate solution they could think of for managing the waste. "Studies have clearly established



MIN BAJRACHARYA

that using city waste as filling material for the Gubeshwori-Gokarna road was totally safe and certainly not the cause for the bird hazard at the airport," said Kul Prasad Marhatta, member-secretary of the Solid Waste Management National Council at the Local Development Ministry.

The government's search for a permanent dumping site began after the Gokarna landfill had run out of space. It has been considering four other potential sites since—Ramkot, Syuchatar, Thankot, and Okharpauwa—and has even spent millions to build the necessary infrastructure at Okharpauwa and Ramkot, despite claims by experts that both sites were inappropriate.

In April 1998, the government decided to hand over the responsibility for waste management to the Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC), and committed itself to making arrangements for a new landfill site. KMC came up with a

better idea and proposed that compost plants also be set up to re-use biodegradable waste, arguing that this would generate income and also prolong the life span of the landfill.

KMC went ahead and sought bids from private businesses willing to invest in such a project and even signed a memorandum of understanding with Sushil Vanaspati Pvt Ltd in August last year. "We then asked the government to find us a plot of land to set up the factory as agreed upon earlier but never received an official response," says an irritated Bhusan Tuladhar at KMC. Instead, the government began suspecting the motive behind the MoU with the private company and published another advertisement inviting new bids. The evaluation and selection of the potential company to manage the capital's waste remains in limbo, even as newspapers reported last

week that a plan by the evaluation committee to go abroad to "study" waste management was rejected by the government.

KMC had identified two sites at Chobhar and one at Sundarighat for setting up the compost plant. The government, however, seems to have other plans—to build a link road to Okharpauwa where it would allow companies to build the compost factory.

Thirteen companies had responded to the ministry's call for proposals from firms interested in taking over management of Kathmandu's solid waste. Six were short-listed and three—Sushil Vanaspati, Luna Nepal and NEPCO International—have made it past the second round.

"We'll start building the link road to Okharpauwa (in Nuwakot district 20 km northwest of Kathmandu)

immediately after Tihar," Marhatta told us. "It will be completed in eight months after which one of the three firms will be selected to build the compost plant," he adds. That way, he claimed, Kathmandu's solid waste management problem would be solved permanently in two years' time.

Clearly the city, which generates 300 tonnes of garbage every day, cannot wait that long. Tuladhar says there is still time for the government to re-think its decision. He also adds that if the factory is located closer, less money would be needed to build infrastructure, and should the best proposal be selected now, the composting would be up and running by summer next year. Either way, it will certainly be a long time before Kathmandu is rid of its waste. ♦

## NC readies for party election



Congress warlords Bhattarai and Koirala.

The ruling Nepali Congress (NC) has finally laid to rest a long-standing controversy that was proving to be a stumbling block to the election of a new president during the party's 10th general convention to be held early next year. This came about with the decision of the central leadership to renew the active membership of a small group that was up in arms against party president Girija Prasad Koirala for what it charged was an

attempt to influence the outcome of the upcoming elections.

The party's central working committee met in a marathon seven-hour session at the Prime Minister Koirala's residence at Baluwatar on Sunday—with riot police deployed outside the gates to keep a motley crowd of slogan-chanting protestors at bay—before deciding to renew the membership of all those who figured in the 1995 party list

and who had applied for renewal by 29 September. The applicants would have to provide valid applications, accompanied by recommendations from two regional and/or district units. However, the decision would not cover dissidents who had contested against the official NC candidates in the last elections, said spokesman Narahari Acharya.

Renewals would also be made for those members who had been handed active party memberships by the president in 1996. This includes some Congress stalwarts such as Kathmandu's Haribol Bhattarai and Marshal Julum Shaky, whose names had earlier been excluded by the then district president Prakash Man Singh. Singh was one of the 'stars' whose name did not figure in the roster of active members published by the NC some two weeks back. Neither did anyone from the Kathmandu district committee headed by him that was dissolved earlier this year appear in the list (against which the party

received about 900 complaints).

Singh was among those leading the protests Sunday. Party sources said membership of Singh and his followers had not been renewed not because that would make a difference in the party election but because of the technicalities, namely, they did not re-apply when the

first call was made and had submitted incomplete applications when applications were asked the second time. Others who will get their memberships renewed are those who joined the NC from other parties but had not had their membership renewed and those who had not been given membership so far.

The party also decided not to renew membership of those that had moved to new districts unless the concerned members decided to accept renewals for representation

from districts where they had originally become members.

In 1995, the Nepali Congress had 105,000 active members. The new decision could mean an addition of 1,000-1,500, a number that falls far short of being capable of affecting the outcome of the party election although Sher Bahadur Deuba and the handful of permanent dissenters he leads within the NC tend to believe otherwise. ♦

"Where the mind is without fear  
And the head is held high..."

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BIZ NEWS

**Oil price aftershocks**

After the petrol and diesel price hikes, it was only a matter of time before public transport fares went up which would soon be followed by corresponding increases in the price of almost every commodity. And as expected, within days of announcing the new fuel prices, the government fixed new transport fares. Bus operators can now charge Rs 4.50 for every seven kilometers—they're already said to be charging Rs 5.00 because of the problem of handling change—and Rs 5.50 for distances between 7-13 km, while the fare for a distance between 13 to 25 km is Rs 9.

Taxi rates have also increased: at flag down it is Rs 7 and the charge for every kilometre travelled is Rs 12, up from Rs 9 before the changes. Likewise, the flag-down rate for metered three-wheelers is Rs 3 and Rs 8.50 for every kilometre travelled. The taxi rates will be effective after the Department of Standards re-adjusts the meters, but drivers are already asking customers to pay the increased rates, which is calculated on the spot.

Actually, the government increase of 7 percent fell far short of the 30 percent hike demanded by transport operators for short-, medium- and long-distance public vehicles. It will be some time before the fuel price increase registers in national inflation statistics. This is because fuel, light, water and transport together account for less than 10 percent in the basket of goods on which the Consumer Price Index is calculated. But over time the increased prices will begin to reflect in the cost of production of all goods and services—from restaurant food to labour wages.

In the short run, because of the subsistence nature of the economy, the severest impact of the new oil prices will be felt mainly in urban and semi-urban areas where people rely solely on imported kerosene for cooking. It was thus not surprising that the Central Carpet Industries Association (CIAA) demanded that carpet workers be given 12 litres of subsidised kerosene each month since the proposed three litres would not be enough to meet their needs.

**Carlsberg labels**

Gorkha Brewery Pvt Ltd has begun labelling two of its beers with information on the brew, a move the company says will help customers buy what they are looking for. The company says affixing product information back labels, as they are called, is standard practice in the global market and adds to the standardisation of the beers. The labels come with both of its products Carlsberg and Tuborg.



**NBL shares bullish**

As if triggered by the Nepal Rastra Bank's decision to hand over Nepal Bank Limited (NBL) under a management contract to the private

sector, investors have begun to see a future for the bank, which had been dismissed by auditors early this year as "technically insolvent".

NBL stocks were top sellers in the first full week of business at the Nepal Stock Exchange which had shut down for an extended Dasain holiday. NBL stock transactions accounted for 98 percent of the total banking sector shares that were traded this past week. The value of the stock also went up from Rs 331 a week ago to Rs 655 when the market closed on Friday. A total of 18,739 NBL shares exchanged hands last week.

**Pokhara bank**

Macchapuchhare Bank, a new venture, began operations at Pokhara's Naya Bazaar on 3 October. It plans to open two more branches in the tourist city within three months. The bank's total capital is Rs 240 million and the issued capital is Rs 120 million. The bank presently has 36 promoter-shareholders and has plans to issue 25 percent of the shares to the general public.

**Bad start for Kumari Bank**

Even before it began banking services, Kumari Bank Ltd has been mired in controversy, apparently due to a boardroom dispute that has now reached the courts. The court has upheld the founding-chairman of the bank, Noor Pratap Rana, as the rightful head of the board of directors, as opposed to the new chairman GD Shrestha, promoter of Hotel Radisson, who was appointed some weeks ago. The court also declared illegal the decisions taken by the new board of directors. The bank plans to begin operations in December.

**Qatar's French connection**

Qatar Airlines is to begin twice-weekly flights from Kathmandu to Paris starting 1 November, the company announced last week. The route will be serviced by an Airbus A300-600R which has a capacity to carry 224 passengers.

Qatar already flies from Kathmandu to London via Doha. The Kathmandu-Doha-Paris is a new route from Nepal, says Joy Dewan, the airline's GSA in Kathmandu. The Kathmandu-Doha-Paris will be the 26th destination served by the airline, which also has plans to begin two flights out of Kathmandu every day.

**Tax registrations up**

The number of taxpayers obtaining Permanent Account Numbers (PAN) has reached close to 20,000 up from about 6,000 in early June. Firms and individuals can obtain the PAN from the Kathmandu Taxpayers Service Centre.

**Samsonite suitcases**

Samsonite, the company which claims to produce only the most "reliable, durable and stylish" luggage and accessories opened shop in Nepal last week. Samsonite Nepal, in association with Anirudh International, will distribute the products in Nepal, a market which the company says is dominated by low-priced unbranded products, with little choice for consumers. The company also promises that its products will be world class, supported by after sales service and "soft" on the

ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED



**Harassing Big Brother**

Travel through Nepali highways in a car with an Indian plate to experience highway robbery in broad daylight.

*A friend in India sent a car over to take Artha Beed from Siliguri in India to Dharan in eastern Nepal. The journey in this car bearing Indian licence plates was an ordeal, and left very little doubt in my mind that we Nepalis have found that taxing Indian vehicles legitimately and illegitimately is our national weapon to vent our anger against India. We take revenge against Big Brother by hassling and fleeing every Indian vehicle. For a country that depends quite a bit on Indian overland tourists for revenue, this is a fairly short-sighted activity. Many of them swear never to return to Nepal.*

*It began at the shabby gate at Kakarvitta on the Nepal side of the border. The first was the Rs 30 stop. Nepali cops ask for Indian Rs 30 not Nepali Rs 30, and you'd be pretty foolish to question this if you are sitting inside an Indian car. The next is the entry permit—we were given a receipt for Rs 370, the customs personnel insisted payment in Indian currency, IRs 250, which meant another thirty rupees into the informal sector. Then there was the guy at the gate who wanted 'tea money'. Rs 10 in Indian currency.*

*As the car was parked on the highway while these not-so-official transactions went on, I discovered what decentralisation in Nepal really means. It has*

*empowered municipalities along the highways to conduct highway robbery in broad daylight. We were asked to pay for parking our vehicle on the national highway—Rs 20, as the car bore Indian plates. The next stop was to collect the temporary Nepali licence plates, for Rs 50. We were told to pay IRs 50 without a receipt or face the consequences.*

*The next stop on this eventful journey was to confront various barricades put up by locals on the national highway. The first was a group of six youth under the protection of a policeman who demanded IRs 100 as Dasain pocket money. The sight of the cop frightened the driver enough for him to reach for his wallet, but I put up a fight. In the end I left without paying, but two cars in front were not so lucky. Extortion under protection, a blend imported and perfected so well that it is now a fully Nepali phenomenon.*

*I had by now worked up a sweat, and it wasn't the heat of the plains. We drove into dusty Dhulabari to get some water and soft drinks. The entry fee was Rs 16 for Indian vehicles and Rs 10 for Nepali once. We denounce countervailing duties, but we love to make this difference ourselves. The next stop was at Uralabari where a member of Uralabari's finest asked for Dasain money. We gave him a dirty finger instead,*

*and moved on.*

*At last we were at the Dharan municipality gate to pay the entry fee. The guardian of Dharan told us that we had not taken a permit from the Yatayat Bibhag (Department of Transport) at Itahari. He coolly told us to turn around, drive back the 17 km and get that permit. When told that we were not informed by anybody that we required this document, he replied it was not his problem. After dropping a couple of names, and depositing my driving licence he let us go reluctantly. The net travel time was just over two hours—the total travel time was well over three and a half.*

*A country that depends on tourism for most of its income—much of it from across the southern border—should be going out of its way to welcome Indians to use our roads. Charge them by all means, especially since our roads are much better than theirs. It used to be Nepalis had to travel through India to get to another part of Nepal. Today, it is the other way around. But it won't be for much longer if our policemen behave like dacoits. The Canadians don't have much love lost for Americans, either, but the Mounties don't harass Yankees.*

*Readers can post their views and discuss issues at arthabeed@yahoo.com*

**Grindlays Gazette**

**INTEREST RATE UPDATE**

NEPALI RUPEE	CURRENT%	PREVIOUS%
Call Money Avg.	5.30	5.15
83 Days t/bill	4.95	4.91
91 Days t/bill	5.22	5.17
365 Days t/bill	6.18	6.16
Repo rate	5.72	5.67

The average rate of 91 days T/Bill rate improved slightly on lower demands from the major commercial banks, as RBB and NBL were seen having less interest in bidding. T/bill rate is expected to remain stable with possibility of some improvement in coming weeks if major bidding banks decide not to bid aggressively while bidding for T/Bill in the primary market. Expected range for coming weeks 5.25 to 5.45.

**FOREIGN CURRENCY : Interest rates**

	USD	EUR	GBP	JPY	CHF
LENDING	9.50	6.25	6.00	1.50	5.13
LIBOR (1M)	6.62	4.88	6.05	0.32	3.28

BANK RATES(DEPO/LENDING)Mkt	Hi/Lo	Mkt Avg
S/A NPR	6.0/3.5	5.23
F/D 1 YR	7.5/6.0	6.73
OVERDRAFT	15.5/12.5	13.54
TERM LOAN	14.5/13.0	13.37
IMPORT LN	13.0/10.5	11.52
EXPORT LN	13.0/10.0	10.63
MISC LOAN	17.5/13.5	15.03

**CURRENCY UPDATE**

AG/USD	CURRENT *	WK/AGO	%CHG
OIL(Barrel )	33.40	33.96	- 1.65
GOLD(Ounce)	271.60	271.80	- 0.07
GOLD ( NPR *)		7115	7130
		- 0.21	
EUR	0.8382	0.8515	- 1.56
GBP	1.4535	1.4469	+ 0.46
JPY	108.55	108.16	+ 0.36
CHF	1.7897	1.7744	+ 0.86
AUD	0.5301	0.5226	+ 1.46
INR	46.36	46.30	+ 0.13

\*Currency bid prices at 6.41 p.m. on 23/10 - Source Reuters Oil: Crude oil prices stayed firm after a weekend of continued Israel-Palestine violence. No solution is in sight especially following a statement issued by Iraqi leaders on Sunday which urged Arabs to revolt.

Currencies: The Euro fell to within a half of all-time lows against the dollar reflecting widespread doubts that European policymakers can do much to rescue the embattled currency. Decline of Euro weighed heavily on the Swiss Franc, pulling it to fresh 11-year lows against the dollar at 1.80 Francs. The market was growing more skeptical that central banks will launch another rescue mission to shore up the beleaguered currency anytime soon. The Yen clawed back some territory against the dollar.

**INDIAN RUPEE OUTLOOK :**

The Indian currency hit a new closing low against the dollar on Monday but volumes were thin, with trade marked by poor supply of the U.S. currency. The rupee has lost more than 6.10 percent against the dollar since January and is within striking distance of its lifetime intra-day low of 46.45 hit on Aug 13.



**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 city Vishnu may have built

When you drive into Bhaktapur, your car is a time machine and you are back in the 15th century



large hostelry favoured by Tibetans, still known as the Bhote Bahal. In an outstandingly handsome temple square is a house built for Indian Brahmins imported from South India to teach and translate religious texts. The rich raised fine houses, kings lavished love and money on the city to raise temples, shrines and rest houses for pilgrims. They embellished the city with statuary and carving, extended the palace, built baths and fountains, ghats by the river and large, ornate tanks to ensure an adequate supply of water. The fame of the city spread far and wide. Because of its numerous temples and shrines and the pious nature of its people, it became known as the city of devotees.

Though once the capital of an undivided valley, Bhaktapur fell prey to the politics of ambition that not only separated the cities of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur, but had them almost continuously at war with each other. Perhaps the walls that ringed the cities belong to an earlier age when they were susceptible to attack from numerous enemies. Or they were hurriedly built when the valley divided itself into three kingdoms, each with armed satellite towns that protected the cities. Chronicles make numerous mentions of these walls, but nothing remains of them except two gates in Bhaktapur and one in Patan. Even these are not very old. As targets of repeated attack they must have been destroyed time and time again. The western gate in Bhaktapur, surprisingly Moghul in style, is late Malla. Having seen the assault of the Gurkha king Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1767 and the unification not only of the valley but the whole of Nepal, the old gate has remained an ornament, its two stone lions guarding the city against nothing more serious than invasions of modern tourists.

Through the gate is one of my favourite views; the cobbled road dipping steeply into the medieval city so that houses are elevated on plinths and connected to the road by stone stairways. Carved wooden rest houses that must once have stood free are now part of the walls of houses, most of them housing ceremonial raths of various sizes. Over the rooftops looms the tiers of the temple of the five sages, Bhaktapur's proudest monument. And beyond, are the mountains.

The road is invariably filled with men carrying heavy loads of vegetables, hay and pottery. Time stands still. One looks into the high noon of Newari art and culture. Into a wondrous age that has left so many

brilliant monuments behind.

Only the lampposts and the Mercedes Benz relic remind of the present. ♦

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

Of all the ancient cities of the Kathmandu valley, Bhaktapur is the least changed. There are vistas over acres of medieval tiled roofs interrupted only by the thrust of temple spires and golden images atop tall stone pedestals. In the narrower lanes, carved wooden windows almost meet overhead. Grain is winnowed in the streets and chillies dried wherever space permits, so at times streets, temple squares and rooftops are bright scarlet. Corn and vegetables cascade from wooden eaves to dry in the wondrously golden sun of Bhaktapur. It is a farmer's city, so one surprises people laden with hay or carrying vegetables hung from bamboo yokes across their shoulders. It is not uncommon to see piled vegetables in one basket balanced by a small child or two in the other. Now small tractors have invaded the streets and lanes tremble as they pass.

There is far less Western attire about. The elderly and the old stick to their traditional dress. Women wear striking red and black saris with white shawls, their ears outlined in gold rings. There are as yet no shops selling the enticements of Bangkok and Hong Kong. Although for a while, when the valley discovered videos, there were cinema posters stuck to ancient carved wood or left standing against guardian stone lions outside temples. Youths glued to walkmans or swinging transistors to the rhythms of the Bee Gees and Eagles, were never a feature of Bhaktapur. The young are out in the fields, in their unsophisticated shops, or working in Kathmandu.

In fact, when you drive into Bhaktapur, your car is a time machine and you are back in the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, but endowed with the extra

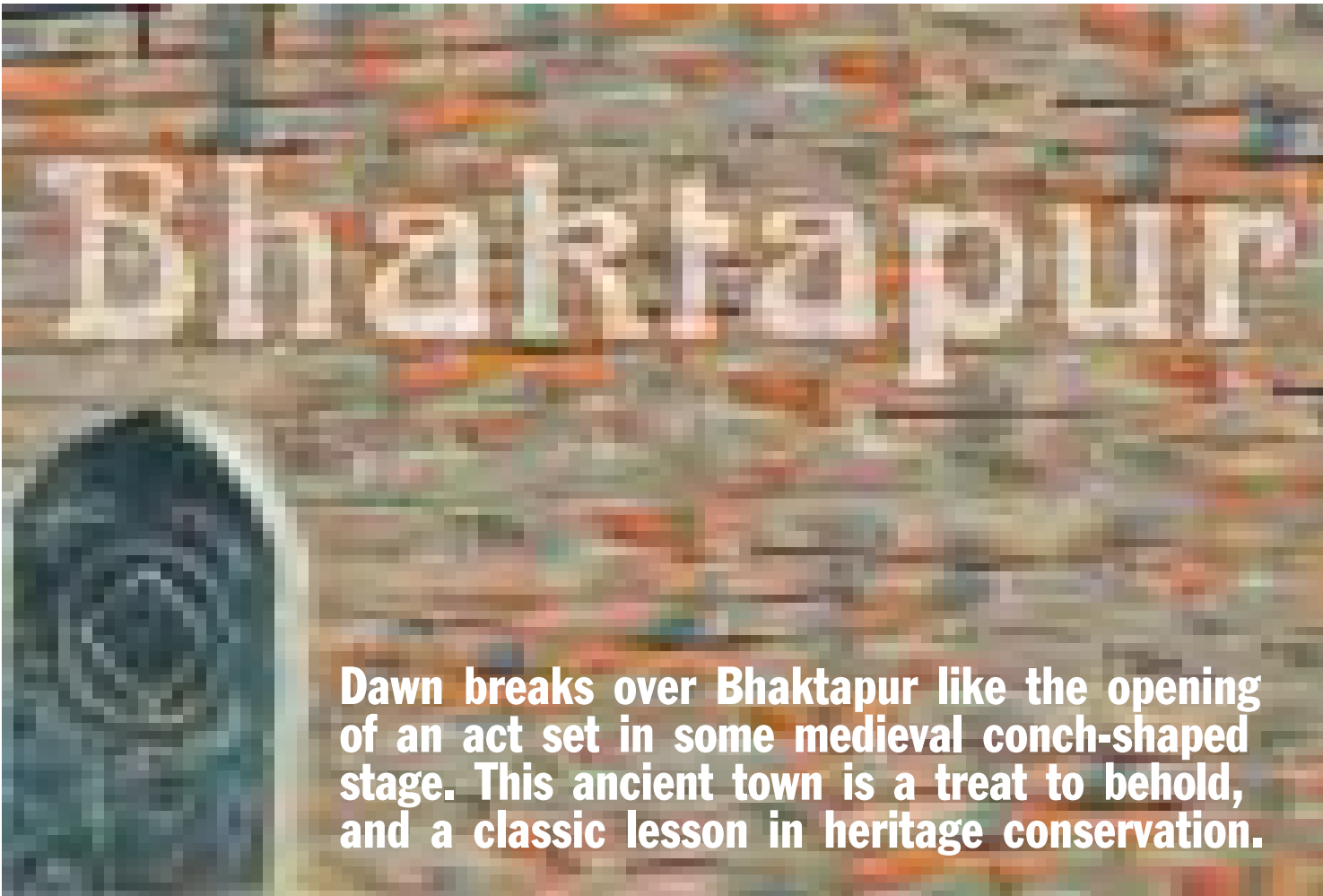
sensory perception of looking into the twentieth century to which the tourists belong. The streets are paved in herring-bone brick. You may meet the nine Durgas, fearfully masked, who strut and dance and hold up traffic as long as it pleases them. Their acolytes, boys dressed in turbans and loose robes hung with heavy silver and copper jewellery demand alms. Or your progress may be stopped by a bull fight on which bets are hurriedly placed. Shops overflow into the streets; earthen pots, vegetables, insecticides, fertilizers, brass and copper ware. On a temple plinth, a witch doctor spreads his potions such as fragments of dead animals, birds and reptiles while making sure of business by including nails, hammers, locks and flashlights among his exotica.

Tradition has it that Lord Vishnu himself built the city in the shape of a sacred conch. Surprisingly enough, aerial photographs confirm the shell shape of Bhaktapur. More believable is the claim that Licchavi kings raised the status of a cluster of villages called Bhaktagiama, on the Tibet-India trade route, to the status of a small city over which a known king, Ananda, ruled in the late ninth century. It is recorded that at the end of the fourteenth century the well-known Malla king, Jaya Sthiti, moved his capital to Bhaktapur.

The city prospered. Mule trains jingled over the passes from Tibet. Caravans of porters came from India. One can imagine the streets filled with traders from as far as Lhasa, Shigatse, Lucknow and Benares. Spices and condiments, salt, brocades, fine cotton silks, tea, grain, jade and porcelain, gilded images, furs, painted scrolls, arms, horses, live birds and animals for a king's menagerie. In the centre of the town was a

## mirinda





Dawn breaks over Bhaktapur like the opening of an act set in some medieval conch-shaped stage. This ancient town is a treat to behold, and a classic lesson in heritage conservation.

**ALOK AND TUMBAHANGPHEY SALIL SUBEDI**  
**G**o to Bhaktapur before your visit there proves costly. The best preserved and least polluted of Kathmandu Valley's cities has placed a further premium on visits. The entry fee for foreign visitors is slated for an increase, beginning Jan 2001. The fee for non-South Asians will be raised to \$10, while those from the region

*Home of Mystery:* "Were there nothing else in Nepal, save the Durbar Square in Bhadgaon [Bhaktapur], it would still be amply worth making a journey halfway around the globe to see it."

And sure enough more than 50 percent of the tourists who come to Nepal take the time off to visit this great city. The city gates, just west of the Durbar Square, welcome more than 500 visitors a day

treasured culture, heritage, social harmony and committed people who are gentle and hard working," says Prem Suwal, mayor of Bhaktapur. "The people of this city are to be credited for having a positive outlook towards the conservation of their town. Earlier, it took quite an effort to make them do it but now everything, from heritage conservation to sanitation management, is taken care of through community efforts."

Bhaktapur, or the "city of devotees", with its myths of Tantrics and Tandavs, is a living heritage site believed to be guarded by the eight power goddesses, or *Ashta Matrikas*, who surround the city. Though official history has it that this Newari town was founded by king Anand Dev Malla in the 9th century, the famed Chinese traveller Hieun Tsang mentions the city in his travel chronicles of the 5th century AD.

Spread over an area of 6.88 sq km, 12 km south-east of Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, or Bhadgaon as it was formerly known, showcases the splendour of the Golden Age of Nepali art and architecture. There are 345 significant monuments (108 Buddhist and 273 Hindu) all of which are part of the Bhaktapur world heritage site since 1979.

The city's architecture is a reminder of the various stages in Bhaktapur's history, and reflect the rule and patronage of various rulers. Among these, there are 232 architectural masterpieces from the Malla period. Several of these Malla period buildings are privately owned, and many of them are still being used as residences. The Shah rulers who came after the Mallas added another 117 buildings and the Ranas have had their own influence as well.

To talk about the timelessness of Bhaktapur's living heritage would be to risk

telling the same story twice over. Yet this aspect is its biggest draw. Dawn breaks over Bhaktapur like the opening of an act set in some medieval conch-shaped stage. Hundreds of ancient monuments, brick houses, shrines and temples stand as props, and the eighty thousand or so citizens who live in this ancient town still go about doing what have done for more than a thousand years.

Devotees get their vermilion tika from the temples, farmers tread well-worn paths to their fields, potters start rolling their wheels, and women wearing the traditional black saree with red border spread the harvested rice grain out in the morning sun.

In the evening, the piths and temple courtyards come alive with bhajans, devotional songs rendered by the

town's elderly men and traditional musical performances by the Kushule musicians. The ten sites of Bhramyayani, Maheshwori, Kumari, Bhadrakali, Barahi, Indryayani, Mahakali, Mahalaxmi, Tripura Sundari and Bhairav Temple are the places to observe these performances at dusk.

"There are two types of bhajans. The morning bhajan wishes people a fruitful day



will have to pay Rs 50. But there is no point cribbing about it since the trip will prove well worth the amount and more.

This easternmost of the Valley's medieval urban settlements has remained a model for heritage conservation since it was declared a World Heritage Site in 1979. Indeed, Bhaktapur and her citizens stand proud with many awards and mentions for the preservation of their culture and heritage. The First Honourable Mention from Asia for 1998-99 awarded by UNESCO, states—"in recognition of its outstanding contribution to the restoration of hope, the reinforcement of solidarity and the consolidation of the culture of peace in everyday life".

The admiration for Bhaktapur is not new. As far back as the late 19th century, when Nepal still had many well-guarded secrets, foreigners like E.A. Powell of the British East India Company wrote in his book, *The Last*

during the peak season. Entry fees are \$5 and Rs 30. (The entry tickets entitle an individual multiple entry for a week. A visitor's pass valid till the expiry of the visa date is also issued for same price should the visitor ask for it.) More than 39,000 non-South Asians and 12,000 South Asian visitors have visited Bhaktapur this fiscal year and the city has already realised revenues exceeding \$200,000.

"They come in all sorts, individual travellers, touring groups, researchers, photographers and artists. And from all over—from Latin America to the small islands in the Pacific," says Damodar Suwal, who is in charge of the Bhaktapur Tourist Service Centre. A total of 202,688 tourists visited the city in 1999/2000, while projected arrivals for the current year is 220,000. The municipality earned \$1,483,365 in 1998/99, of which it spent \$1,117,760 towards heritage conservation.

"This is a city full of



TUBORG





MIN BAURACHRYA

ahead and asks the gods to be with them. The evening songs remind them to rest since the day is done," says one old man as he waits for his fellow musicians at the Bhairav temple *sattal*. Tibetan chants from the music shops reverberate on a serene morning, a reminder of the not-so-distant past when pilgrims from the north came chanting Buddhist prayers and rested in the numerous *paati pauwas* (resting places for pilgrims and travellers).

History is replayed when Sundar Prajapati, a potter at Talako Square, sits down beside the furnace with his eight-year-old son, teaching what was handed down by his

forefathers. "We don't make so much of the old designs anymore, but at least my son is learning," he says.

One difficult aspect of conserving Bhaktapur's living heritage is to maintain a fine balance between the ancient and the modern. Some decisions like the municipality's ban on cable television are met with scepticism by the younger generation. "Do we have to be deprived of what the rest of the world is enjoying? Not everybody would like to stay back and do the same old work here," says Rajesh, a college student.

Not exactly an argument that is likely to move the mayor. "We don't want to spoil our age-old rich culture with

mediocre cultural values aired through cable television," he says.

There are also some critics of the move to increase the entry fee for visitors. Among them is Goetz Hagnmueller, Austrian conservationist and architect, who has been living in Bhaktapur since 1979. As head of the Bhaktapur Development Board, he played an important role in the conservation and restoration of the town. Hagnmueller is not too happy about the increased entrance fee; "I agree that the municipality has been doing a lot from the money raised and has set an example in preserving the cultural and historical heritage. But the income

generation has only helped a certain section of the society. So it is not likely that the increase in the fee will help those in need," he says. "It is not right to use the money raised from the tourists to be used for any other purpose apart from heritage conservation," he says.

Another Kathmandu-based expat says: "If the municipality really wants to increase the fee, the tourists should also be provided with services and facilities of equal value. Even if tourists are charged a hundred dollars they might still come in, but that may not be the best way to go about it."

Mayor Suwal justifies the impending rise in entry fee saying: "We don't just collect money from visitors because it is profitable. People should

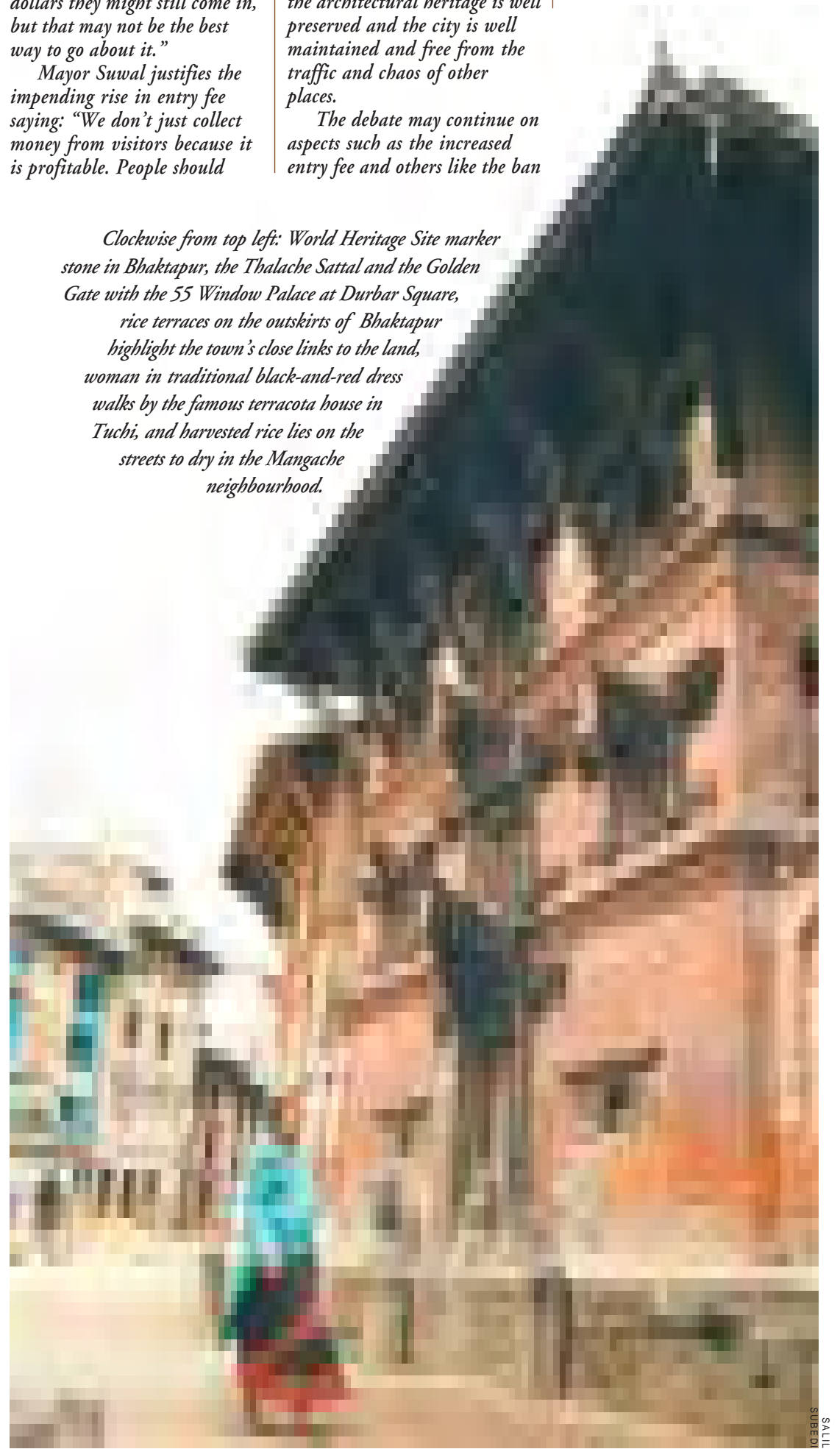
realise that they have actually contributed to the preservation of a unique civilisation for generations to come. Our every effort is envisioned with the future in mind."

The municipality is very confident of carrying out heritage conservation on its own, and has refused grants from big enterprises that have shown interest in restoring the monuments. The revenue generated from tourism has been utilised efficiently and the results are there for all to see; the architectural heritage is well preserved and the city is well maintained and free from the traffic and chaos of other places.

The debate may continue on aspects such as the increased entry fee and others like the ban

on cable television. However, Bhaktapur's guardians have a credible history—of knowing what is best for the preservation of this ancient town. A visit there will tell you more. ♦

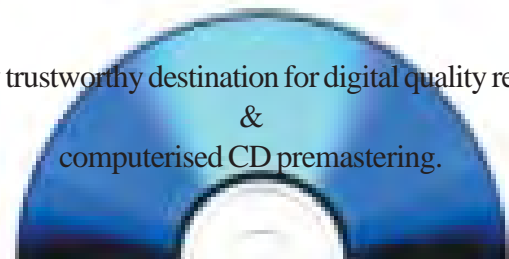
Clockwise from top left: World Heritage Site marker stone in Bhaktapur, the Thalache Sattal and the Golden Gate with the 55 Window Palace at Durbar Square, rice terraces on the outskirts of Bhaktapur highlight the town's close links to the land, woman in traditional black-and-red dress walks by the famous terracotta house in Tuchi, and harvested rice lies on the streets to dry in the Mangache neighbourhood.



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AD



# A gourmet's guide to Kathmandu

MANIKA BANIYA AND SWEETY SINGH

Two weeks after the Dasain feasting, Nepalis (at least those who can afford it) will be gorging themselves once again. After all it is Tihar, certainly a much more colourful and brighter festival than Dasain. And there is no better place for these Epicurean delights than Kathmandu.

The capital offers a varied choice for those who want to break the greasy sel-roti routine. We present a selected survey of eateries that is intended to serve as a guide to both tourists and Nepalis who want to make the best of the holiday by going on a gastronomical tour.

**Wunjala Moskva** is one restaurant that serves the best of Kathmandu's Newari cuisine combined with what once adorned the tables of Russian aristocrats. Moskva (Tel: 415236, 241811) serves exotic preparations that you may not find in restaurants anywhere in the world, not even in esoteric cookbooks. Where else can you find dishes with names which would make any Nepali's mouth water spontaneously like Pavlov's effect: *chbuvela*, *chatamari* and *wok*.

Dinner at Moskva's spacious traditional setting comes packaged with glimpses of Newari culture. Moskva takes into account the festivities and the Newari New Year and may have something special



this Tihar. There are the Newari specialties like *me mana* (boiled water buffalo tongue) for example, that comes with enough *ayla* (home-made rice liquor) to wash it down. The main Newari dinner will set you back Rs 1000—there's a trimmer menu for those not confident of tackling the set menu, which can be had for Rs 700.

That's just the Newari bit, the Russian concoctions are equally tempting. You can go Russian by starting with *zakuski*—a platter of assorted salads. Then sample from an assortment of soups until you settle for the kill—stew of wild boar or chicken with mushroom, carrots and seasonal vegetables, stewed and baked in a clay pot, or *shashlik* or *blinichiki* with red caviar. The Russian meal costs Rs 975.

From Russia to America. If you want to go all-American, there's **Mike's Breakfast** (Tel: 424303) down the road from Wunjala, offering lunch and breakfast, and everything in between. The choice here includes a set country breakfast and breakfast *burrito* (scrambled egg, potatoes, beans and cheese in a tortilla served with salsa and sour cream), among others.

Mike's also makes the best pancakes in town and serves sandwiches custom made to suit your choice of bread and fill-ins. Contrary to its name, Mike's also serves lunch. Mike's has chicken stew, enchiladas, stuffed baked potato or home made pasta. Average spending per person at Mike's would be in the range of Rs 195-260. There is also the Indigo Gallery on the floor above the restaurant for those with an eye for art, and time to while away.

Closer to the tourist centre of Thamel is another pit stop worth considering for a quick sandwich or a sampling of its desserts. The menu at **Kilroy's of Kathmandu** (Tel: 250440) is not as elaborate, it does not serve any speciality but has a mix as diverse as Thamel's tourists—from french onion soup and *gundruk* (fermented vegetable soup) and *tandoori roasts* and *thalis* to tenderloin steak for the main course. Kilroy's "Welcome to Nepal" costs about Rs 630.

Desert at Kilroy's is something to sample especially because the group claims to have stuffed the rich and powerful—from

Bill Clinton to Cindy Crawford and Mick Jagger, and our own former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. Pineapple with cracked black pepper, and vanilla ice cream with hot citrus sauce are worth trying out if your taste buds don't



go totally beserk.

**Bhancha Ghar** (Tel: 419798, 423128), which stands for the Nepali word for kitchen, began a grand and much-imitated ethnic cooking revival 12 years ago. Its fare consists of *saza bhujia* (a rather snobbish name for good old Nepali-style boiled rice), *kalo dal* (lentils garnished with Tibetan herbs), meat dishes, vegetables and pickles prepared traditionally. The desert is *keher* (rice pudding). The entire 10-course set menu, including a cultural show on the side, comes at Rs 900 per stomach. The restaurant, within walking distance of Thamel, is a worthwhile stop.

Another well-known destination for Nepali food is **Bhojan Griha** (Tel: 411603), in a typical Nepali setting with elaborate Nepali dances and comic performances performed around your table. Bhojan Griha's bar is decorated with erotic carvings and goes by the name of *Kamasutra*. Strictly adults only.

Then there's the mother of all restaurants serving ethnic food—**Krishmarpan** at Dwarika's Hotel at Batisputali (Tel: 473724, 472328). Dinner comes in five variants—4, 6, 9, 12- and 16-course meals—and reservations are a must if you want to get a table. The prices also climb with the size of the course ranging from Rs 950 to over Rs 2,000. The only piece of advice for those seeking to sample the whopping 16-course dinner at Krishmarpan is to fast on the day you go there.

What makes Krishmarpan dinners special is the ambience of this classically designed hotel where there's a story about every brick and every bit of antique woodwork. Krishmarpan's ceremonial feasts are served on tables designed with centuries-old latticed woodwork, in traditional plates, bowls and glasses by hostesses dressed in traditional outfits.



Away from the din and bustle of the city centre and ensconced on a quiet residential hillock south east of Kathmandu is the Hotel Kido, whose **Tamura** restaurant (Ph: 240303) offers what patrons say is the most genuine Japanese cuisine in Nepal. Tamura's secret is its Japanese chef, whose culinary skills have made it a haunt for most Japanese residing in Nepal.

What can be said with a great deal of certainty about Tamura's prices is that, at Rs 500-800 per head you pay less than what you would for the same food in Tokyo. One of its dinner specials, the mixed *nigiri* (raw fish and rice) costs Rs 800 and another speciality, *ika sashimi*, comes at Rs 600 per

plate. For lunch, try the succulent *sushis* and *nori maki*.

No attempt to list all the eateries in Kathmandu can do justice to the creativity and class that all classy hotels offers at their restaurants. Still some stand out.

One of them is **Yang Yang** Thai restaurant in Thamel, probably one of the most genuine Thai tastes this side of Kanchanaburi.

Two other must-do places are housed within five-star establishments—the **Alfresco** (Tel: 273999, 272999) at Soaltee Crown Plaza and the **Far Pavilion** (Tel: 488122, 488123) at the Everest Hotel. Alfresco specialises in Italian cooking and is one for fine dining at surprisingly affordable prices (even for the rich variety of wines) which belies the up-market setting and clientele.

Alfresco also has fare for those with deep pockets—try the *gamberoni al cognac* (pan-seared large prawns flambéed in Cognac) at Rs 700 a plate or the *filetti di salmone "Alfresco"* (poached fillet of salmon on spinach with cream topped with onion confetti) for Rs 900.

It's India at its best at the Far

Pavilion, where meals are accompanied by gazals. The menu sports an exciting list of names that sound truly royal and what's more, the taste is rich and flavoured by different eastern spices. Take the *keshari murg mungaar* for instance. This king of kababs is a whole chicken marinated traditionally in saffron-flavoured yoghurt, lemon and cream and cooked in a tandoor. If you're decidedly green then you might like to try the *khumb korma ghazni*, fresh mushrooms and garden green peas in a rich tomato and onion gravy with cashew nuts.

The **Gurkha Grill** at Soaltee Crown Plaza is perfectly suited for a fun-filled evening. With a Filipino band thrown in, GG's offers contemporary global cuisine at its best. There's the GG's Jumbo MoMo served with cilantro sauce for starters. Lobster Thermidore served in a creamy sauce flavoured with mustard and mushroom and served with saffron rice may be just the thing for you and your companion. Or you could go a little classical and do the Smoked Salmon on lettuce with spring onion, green peppercorns, fennel leaf, capsicum and olive Oil. A range of chocolate fudges, rolls and mousses make the desserts

simply irresistible.

Kathmandu is a suprisingly cosmopolitan gourmet's paradise. It's all here, and all you need to do is explore. There are a lot of other restaurants, especially in Thamel, just waiting to be discovered. ♦



## SOALTEE AD



# Entertain and educate



**RAMYATA LIMBU**

Sunil Pokhrel, Nepal's foremost street theatre director, has been preoccupied lately trying to shake up Nepali policy-makers who believe AIDS is not yet a problem for the country. He had his chance on Tuesday when his group, Arohan, was asked to stage a drama event in front of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, government ministers and bureaucrats on the occasion of the 55th anniversary of the United Nations, and this year's theme: "Race Against Poverty: Breaking the silence on HIV/AIDS".

After the speeches were over, half a dozen people sprang up from the audience, shouting: "What's all this noise? Why are you wasting time discussing an invisible disease?" Another ran up to the podium and said: "AIDS is an Africa problem, not a Nepal problem." Another angry man said: "We don't have roads, there is encephalitis, diarrhoea, those are our problems, not AIDS."

Who were these hecklers? Wasn't security going to take them away? No, it turned out, these were actors from Arohan, and this was the dramatic medium they chose to highlight the problem of denial. Later, the audience is told that AIDS is a real problem for the

## Street dramas seek to inform Nepalis about AIDS

country's health and everyone is vulnerable. The aim of the drama, which was staged in a street-play format, was to tell Nepalis and their rulers that they are not as safe from HIV infection as they think, and how to avoid being infected. Perhaps street theatre is the way to take the message to the grassroots, and to spread the message about an epidemic that is going to be the biggest killer of Nepalis in the 19-45 age group in the next decade.

Says the Nepal Resident Coordinator of the United Nations, Henning Karcher: "There is no room for complacency, and the window of opportunity to invest in effective interventions to prevent the spread of HIV is closing fast." The UN says the AIDS virus is increasing poverty in poor nations and undoing earlier gains by draining away resources from education, farm growth and other development sectors, and the danger is Nepal could face the same crisis. Conservative estimates put the number of HIV-infected in the country at 32,000, while the real figure could be five times as many. And it is a number that is

growing. A recent estimate indicated that nearly one in every five sex workers in Kathmandu is infected, and so are half of all intravenous drug users. Equally at risk are large numbers of poorly educated, young village men seeking low-paid seasonal work in India's big cities, and to some extent in Kathmandu also, where they visit brothels.

Makwanpur, the district south of Kathmandu, is one of the nine districts where various non-governmental organisations are staging street plays in the run-up to World AIDS Day on 1 December. Here, the local Taranga cultural troupe will perform *Junge Hawaldaar*, a one-hour street drama, which uses comedy to convey its serious message. "We have to ensure that spectators enjoy the show. At the same time, we provide information that will make them think," says Taranga's Ujwal Sharma. Enlivened by improvisations, the play shows how young and unsuspecting village girls are lured by organised bands of traffickers with offers of jobs in India's big cities. Its main protagonist is a policeman and it depicts

the tough brothel life and the threat of HIV/AIDS that commercial sex workers are exposed to.

The AIDS education street plays are expected to create greater awareness among those at risk and generate popular demand for the government to act. But the artistes admit that imparting the message will not be easy. "The sexual connotation associated with AIDS, and the fact that it is a disease that takes years to show up makes it difficult to express through plays," says Arohan's Sunil, who with his actress wife Nisha has travelled extensively across Nepal performing plays on various health and development themes. "At times, performers have to sacrifice the artistic element to hammer home the message, but it is rewarding when people want to know more about the issue after the performance."

His Kathmandu-based group often uses local village performers and trains them in staging plays. "Street theatre is a powerful medium for spreading awareness. But there have to be follow-up programmes. You can't expect one performance to bring about change overnight," he says.

One of the great successes in the street theatre genre was another AIDS education play that was staged earlier by Taranga for truck drivers along Nepal's highways. *Guruji ra Antare* is about a truck driver and his helper, in which the driver shows his assistant how to use condoms. Recalls Taranga's Sharma: "We performed at highway stops. It became a hit. Fathers and daughters could watch the same play without squirming with embarrassment."

This is also what the new plays aim at—to get Nepalis out of the mode of denial that has marked the general response to AIDS.

tions of young Nepalis, among others. An interview with Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala is also to feature in the broadcast.

For jungle safari, NHK's producers will be taking the Japanese audience to Chitwan. The trekking part will focus on Pokhara and the

surrounding hills. Also featured will be wayside eateries from Patan's Durbar Square to restaurants in Kathmandu's posh tourist hotels.

And because any programme on Nepal will be incomplete without the mountains, NHK's producers will also have a segment on mountain flights with former Miss Nepal, Niru Shrestha, piloting Buddha Air's Beech 1900Ds.

All NHK producers are willing to concede is that the entire effort is "only a nice coincidence" but for a foreign station to devote an entire day's programming on a country 5,000 kilometres away also speaks of growing Japanese interest in Nepal.

NHK broadcasts are listened to by about 20 million people

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK

## Let them eat apples



It all began with an innocent packet of cheese balls. You know, the lovely, locally made junk food that has immeasurably enriched our lives in the Kathmandu valley. Or at least those of our children.

As somewhat of an economic nationalist, wherever I live, I try to buy local and think global. So the arrival of Nepali-manufactured snacks in packages that appeal to my children gave me great pleasure. No more Uncle Chipps in over-inflated packages from a certain neighbouring country. No more of those dreadful, poisonous Pringles that are probably a by-product of the American nuclear weapons programme. My children can overeat salty, fatty substances to their heart's content, with only their parents and their doctor to object.

That is, until I tried to buy some cheese balls in Birethanti, the roadhead in Myagdi district. This village is at the beginning of the long trek and trade route to Jomsom, over the soaring ridge of the middle hills and up the Kali Gandaki river valley. It is a cosmopolitan place, home to Gurungs, Magars, Thakalis and other assorted members of the Nepali mosaic. There's even an Englishman whose company is one of the attractions of the place for me.

But the cheese balls set off a furious series of events; most of them in my fevered imagination, which regular readers can attest is in a constant state of ferment. Or perhaps fermentation. No matter. The cheese balls in question were for my son, a between-meals snack to keep him quiet while I read a novel by the side of the Bhurundi Khola. We were each enriching ourselves, in our ways. I went from shop to shop in search of the junk food in question, and was met with a stone wall of monopolistic obstinacy. There were, it turned out, two prices for cheese balls—one for Nepalis, one for foreigners.

I was flabbergasted that something so inexpensive and innocuous could fall victim to this all-pervasive disease of discriminatory pricing. There's no exaggeration in saying 'disease' for such practices are a cancer upon the face of commerce, society and, I daresay, national pride. Okay, okay, it's just a packet of cheese balls, and perhaps I'm miserly. But think about it. In fact, let me refer to a friend in India confronted with a similar situation. Perhaps the reason for my ire will seem more reasonable coming from my friend's experience, from the other side of the discriminatory equation, if you will.

He is a member of the proud Bengali nation, and as such takes no nonsense from anyone. His nearest and dearest is a talented American journalist. The two of them went to an art exhibition at a Delhi museum and were confronted with a sign demanding, as admission, Rs 10 per Indian national and Rs 150 per "foreigner". My friend, as they say, went ballistic and I paraphrase him but slightly in the following lines.

"What the #\$%\$ is all this about? Are we such a sorry lot that we automatically assume all non-Indians are richer, more easily tapped for funds and by implication, better than us? What about the Ambanis, the Tatas, the IT barons of Bangalore? Will you let them in for a measly 10 rupees and charge my friend here, who earns less than I do by the way, fifteen times more? What kind of ridiculous, grinding reverse discrimination do we have here? And so on. The poor admissions clerk let them, both in for free, just to get rid of my friend."

The point is not that foreigners can't afford to pay more for things like entry permits to the Annapurna Conservation Area, or Bhaktapur, or flights to

Pokhara. Or even cheese balls. They can. But so can

many Nepalis, and why shouldn't everyone pay the same if they can afford it. I suggest, humbly, the plague of discrimination is worth the extra money. In any case, the book is in Kathmandu, where the cheese balls are fairly priced and I'm trying to convince my son to eat apples anyway.

♦ Boston by Luthansa has arrived at the United Books Store in Thamel, the booklover's paradise. Get one free postcard for every book you buy. Hurry, and get to United before supplies run out. These books were especially selected for you from the Harvard Book Store, Kate's Mysterious Bookshop and the Spencer Bookshop in Boston.

♦

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PARKING AVAILABLE

## Nepal calling Japan



Japan's public radio, the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK), is doing an eight-hour direct broadcast from Nepal on 3 November. The broadcast which is part of NHK's "All-Asia Autumn 2000" programme is to be broadcast throughout Japan on the station's medium wave frequency.

A team of two Japanese technicians and four producers are already in town making last-minute arrangements for the broadcasts. NHK's Nepal Correspondents Miki and Laxman Upreti are providing research and logistical support.

The eight-hour programme will consist of music, talks, interviews and short radio features on lifestyle, nature, culture, trekking, tourism, commerce, industry and aspira-



# More sex please, we're In-

**dian**  
With open displays of affection, girls flirting with boys in Internet chat rooms and kissing on TV, India is in the midst of a sexual revolution.

LUKE HARDING IN NEW DELHI

New Delhi - India is in the throes of a modest sexual revolution. After two centuries of Victorian stuffiness, couples now walk about holding hands in Delhi parks as they wander past the Moghul tombs. There is kissing on TV, and teenage girls hang out after school in Internet chat rooms, flirting with male classmates. But in one corner of India's capital the sari has not just slipped a little but has fallen off entirely to reveal a bare midriff. It all happens at Djinns, Delhi's hippest bar and nightclub, not far from a major traffic

intersection where lepers beg. Here is where the capital's young elite rich comes to party. They might even get off with each other, behaviour unthinkable a decade ago.

With

its plastic hippopotamus, red London phone box and fake hunting memorabilia, Djinns may resemble a trendy London pub, but that is not the point. It is one of the few places in India where it does not feel like India. None of the girls wear anything traditional—they flaunt micro-skirts, dinky designer handbags and sheer tops. The boys sport Armani shirts, shiny black loafers and floppy haircuts.

Having talked my way into something of an achievement in itself—I struck up a conversation at the bar with Rajiv. He claimed to have made his money exporting garments. He liked London and had visited Equinox, the Ministry and other London clubs. How easy, I asked, was it to meet girls here? "The thing about Indian girls," Rajiv explained, "is that they are very shy at first. But once you get to know them, they f\*\*\* like wild." On the dance floor behind him, a couple of top-heavy Sikhs bopped away to the latest rave tracks. On a balcony above, the club's Indian DJ waggled his arm in the air. Girls in sequined evening dresses working for Chivas Regal took photographs of the suitably glamorous. Over in the darker



recesses, several matronly chaperones wearing salwar kameez sat around looking bored. Everyone in Gucci, Prada or Armani seemed to be having a good time. The designer labels are just one consequence of India's blossoming consumer revolution, which began in the early nineties when the country's previously closed economy was opened up for the first time.

What gives Delhi its unique hedonistic frisson is that much of the money being spent in places such as Djinns—where a half-pint of lager costs \$3.50—is not strictly earned. The capital is full of bureaucrats, and in India bureaucrats are synonymous with corruption. While a handful of the boys and girls at Djinns are the progeny of neo-rich IT professionals, most have politicians or senior civil servants for parents.

"They are a thoroughly spoiled bunch. If they ever get into trouble their parents always get them off the hook," one Indian friend told me. But it is not just

the young heterosexual rich who are enjoying India's gradual sexual awakening. In another Delhi hotel, the capital's first gay bar has just opened. Its customers are almost exclusively middle-class, educated and English-speaking. Yet the bar marks a modest beginning in a country where homosexuality is still technically illegal and many gay men find themselves bullied by relatives into unhappy arranged marriages. Back at Djinns, it is 2am and time to go home. A procession of chauffeur-driven BMWs and Mercedes swoop down from the hotel car park. The drivers are taking their charges back to monstrous, Dallas-style 'farmhouses' in south Delhi, complete with swimming pools and mock-Grecian porticoes, and to huge flats in Delhi's plusher colonies.

The lepers, meanwhile, have knocked off and gone home too. ♦ (Observer News Service)

## Sri Lanka: Tamils at the top table

A generation after, and against the backdrop of a bloody separatist war, Sri Lanka's Tamil population will have a voice at the highest level of the island's

government.

COLOMBO - For the first time in two decades, which have seen Tamils wage a determined and bloody separatist war against the Sri Lankan government, an elected Tamil member of parliament will hold a cabinet position in the island's new People's Alliance (PA) led governing coalition.

Two parties, the Tamil Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) and the Muslim led National Unity Alliance (NUA) will be backing Chandrika Kumaratunga's People's Alliance (PA), which already has the support of at least ten members of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress. These alliances give the PA a working majority in the Sri Lankan Parliament, with 117 seats in the 225 member House.

While some sections of the island's Tamil community have secured this high level representation, others too have had members returned to Parliament. But theirs is a very different agenda. Three parties, which strongly support the separatist Tamil Tigers, will ensure that a loud voice in support of their cause is heard in parliament. It remains an ironic feature of the election campaign that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) used strong-arm tactics in an attempt to frustrate the democratic process and yet will use their democratically elected representa-

tives to further their ends.

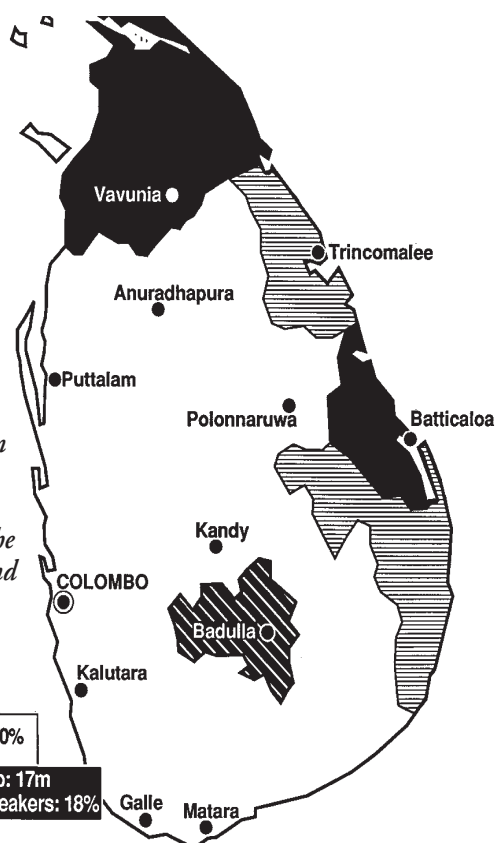
The NUA and the Muslim Congress will also be making their presence felt in order to secure a place in President Kumaratunga's new government. However, this is expected to antagonise some sections of the Sinhalese Buddhist population which fears that the president will capitulate to the demands of the island's minorities. Rauff Hakeem, leader of the NUA, a Muslim party, has already insisted that the PA agree to appoint three independent commissions promised under the new constitution, within the first 100 days of government. These are independent commissions set up for public service, the judiciary and the conduct of elections.

The passing of this new constitution remains on top of the president's legislative agenda, which underpins her ambition to reach a peace deal with the island's Tamil community. The new constitution is aimed at giving equal rights to the Tamils and seeking a negotiated end to the war with the separatist Tamil Tigers (LTTE), but without the requisite two-thirds majority in parliament it remains an uphill struggle.

It is unlikely that the opposition UNP and the three Tamil parties backing the Tamil Tigers will endorse the new constitution. The Marxist People's Liberation Front, which won ten seats and is expected to function as a separate bloc in parliament, is also unlikely to do so. In such a situation, President Kumaratunga may have to make a key decision on whether she will go ahead with transforming the new parliament into a constituent assembly, which would then allow the new constitution to be adopted by a simple majority followed by a nation-wide referendum. The political calculations will have to be made very carefully in this matter, so as to ensure that the new constitution receives more than 50 percent of the votes in the referendum.

Opposition leader Ranil Wickremasinghe, whose UNP party won 89 seats against the PAs 107, has said that the new government is unstable and will not last more than six months. But having led his party to defeat in eight consecutive elections since August 1994, Wickremasinghe's own leadership position is under threat.

This election also saw the entry of the first Muslim woman into Parliament. Feryial Ashraff is the widow of the Muslim Congress leader and Minister for Rehabilitation who was killed in a helicopter crash early in the election campaign. ♦ (Observer News Service)



## After Nobel, Kim faces crises

SEOUL - Basking in a chorus of congratulations after winning this year's Nobel Peace Prize, South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung faces dissenting and restive voices at home amid fears of a second economic crisis. A spate of domestic political and political woes shows that Kim has to convince an increasingly doubtful people that he can fix an ailing economy—thus far described as having made the best recovery from the 1997 Asian crisis.

This despite the fact that many here were in a festive mood after the 74-year-old Kim was named Nobel winner on 13 October, for his pursuit of democracy in South Korea, and his efforts toward peace with North Korea through his 'sunshine policy'. Business conglomerates raced to run huge newspaper advertisements to convey their con-

gratulations, and Seoul last week was graced with fireworks and cultural events.

But not everyone is in a cheerful mood. Indeed, rising oil prices, domestic debt problems, falling stock prices and unfinished efforts to clean up the financial sector have raised new worries about a second phase of economic woes. Kim's government is having hard time trying to convince people of



the need to spend an additional \$44.63 billion to bail out the ailing financial sector.

This amount would be on top of the \$98.2 billion already spent on bail-outs following the economic crisis in end-1997. "I begin to worry that I could be the next to be laid off," said Kim, 38, a sales manager of a conglomerate unit that is under the creditor bank-directed restructuring. (The Guardian)

## China to okay pact on human rights

BEIJING - On 23 October, China announced its intention to adopt the terms of the UN Convention of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights before the year is out. The announcement came at a summit meeting between top officials from China and the European Union in Beijing.

With France holding the EU presidency, Jacques Chirac led the European delegation to China. He said he was sure the Chinese would ratify the convention before the end of the year. The EU has been encouraging the Chinese to ratify for some time.

Beijing signed two UN conventions on human rights in 1997 and 1999 respectively but have been hesitant to incorporate the terms of the agreements into Chinese law. Despite this week's assurances, diplomats believe it may well be several years before the regime ratifies the second and politically more significant of the two conventions—that dealing with political and civil rights.

They likewise doubt if the ratification of the two conventions will lead to advances in human rights in China in the short term. "On paper, the Chinese enjoy a good number of liberties," an American diplomat pointed out, "but in reality these laws are simply ignored."

By contrast, EU representatives saw the announcement by Beijing as "further proof" of progress in the field of Chinese human rights.

According to Chirac, Brussels will continue to work toward the establishment of a state of law in China and the advancement of human rights. To this end EU officials presented the Chinese premier Zhu Rongji with a list comprising the names of dissidents and other victims of state persecution. (Observer News Service)

## War correspondent shot dead

One of Sri Lanka's most respected journalists, Mylvaganam Nimalrajan, has died aged 39 after being shot by unknown assailants. He reported for numerous foreign news organisations from Jaffna where fighting has raged for the past 17 years. He was one of the few independent journalists able to function in the peninsula and at times was almost single-handedly responsible for informing the outside world of the latest developments in a conflict that has killed 60,000 people.



# Mediating the Middle East



**US in the Middle East**

1962 - US policy of arming Israel begins with the sale of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles.

September 1978 - President Jimmy Carter convenes Camp David conference in Maryland where Israel and Egypt agree to a framework for Middle East peace.

30 March 1979 - Treaty between Egypt and Israel signed in Washington.

1989 - US bails out Israel's economy with a \$1.6 billion aid package.

29 October 1993 - Yitzhak Rabin, Arafat and Clinton sign the Oslo Accords on peace and security between Palestinian Authority and Israel in Washington.

July 2000 - Camp David II held in Maryland between Palestinian Authority and Israel, ending without agreement after five weeks.

October 2000 - US and UN intervene to negotiate cease-fire after two weeks of violence between Israelis and Palestinians.

BY DILIP HIRO IN LONDON

The current domestic politics of the US and Israel have begun to impinge on the Middle East conflict to such an extent that new players have emerged as probable mediators. The visits by United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan and the European Union's Javier Solana to the violence-torn region seem to reflect the diminishing role of the US—a country that has dominated the peace process for almost a decade. Anxious to remain in office, Ehud Barak has been trying frantically to cobble together an emergency national unity government for just one month. Then there is President Bill Clinton—a lame duck chief executive, further handicapped by the fact that his wife, Hillary, is contesting a Senate seat in

New York state where Jewish votes and money are crucial to victory. It was in such a situation that Kofi Annan stepped into the breach, followed by Solana, the EU's foreign policy representative.

By being personally involved in alleviating inflamed relations between Israel and the Palestinians, Annan raised the profile of the UN, something that has been missing since the US grabbed the mantle of chief intermediary. In 1991 Israel's hardline Likud Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir had agreed to participate in the Madrid peace conference on two conditions. He wanted the UN to be excluded and bilateral talks between Israel and each of its three Arab neighbours, with Jordan's delegation to include Palestinians who were not members of the Palestine

For nearly 10 years the UN has been sidelined from the Middle East peace process. Now, with the Clinton-brokered truce failing to take hold, the UN and the EU step in.

Liberation Organisation.

This has been the case all along between the Israeli negotiators and their Palestinian counterparts, who represent a fledgling political-administrative entity, called the Palestinian Authority. It also explains why Barak refused point blank to accept an international inquiry into the recent violence, and insisted on a bilateral investigation. In contrast to Israel's lukewarm response to Annan's involvement of the Palestinians, aware of the power imbalance between them and the Israelis, welcomed it.

Domestic considerations weigh heavily on Barak. He has the support of only a third of the 120 MPs, and the device of a national unity administration can only briefly postpone the final reckoning—a no-confidence vote backed by an alliance of religious parties and the Likud, led by Ariel Sharon. It was to bolster Barak's sagging political fortunes that, following the failure of the Camp David II talks on 26 July, Clinton went out of his way to praise him for making "concessions" on the future status of Jerusalem.

Two days later Clinton told an Israeli television interviewer, "I have always wanted to move our embassy [from Tel Aviv] to West Jerusalem." Tel Aviv is the internationally recognised capital of Israel. Jerusalem is Israel's self-declared capital. It is the

standing policy of the 21-member Arab League to sever relations with any country setting up its embassy in Jerusalem. To refresh Clinton's memory the Arab League reiterated its long-standing policy. While Bill Clinton's statement impacted positively on his wife's election campaign, it forfeited his claim to be an honest broker between Israelis and Palestinians. It came on top of his thinly disguised criticism of Arafat and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak as obdurate, and somehow responsible for the failure of Camp David II.

Given the severity of the crisis that enveloped the region, it is incumbent upon the UN Security Council and its secretary general to play a leading role in dousing the flames, and return the parties to the negotiating table. After all, the Palestine problem is the only one that the UN shares with its predecessor, the League of Nations, established after the First World War. And it was the UN General Assembly that in 1947 proposed partitioning Palestine into Arab and Jewish sectors, which led to the emergence of Israel in 1948. ♦ (Gemini News)

(London-based Dilip Hiro is the author of *Sharing the Promised Land: A Tale of Israelis and Palestinians*)

## Better conditions for air travellers

Pressure on the airline industry is likely to increase with the publication of a British parliamentary report calling for better health and safety conditions for air travellers.

The science and technology select committee of the British House of Lords, which is due to report on the medical environment of aircraft cabins in three weeks, is expected to recommend that airlines give passengers more explicit preventive advice about deep vein thrombosis (DVT) before long-haul flights. The condition, often referred to as "economy class syndrome" can be brought on by sitting for long periods in cramped conditions.

According to Farrol Khan, director of the Aviation Health Institute, which researches air deaths, the amount of leg room makes many economy class airline cabins a health hazard. "The danger in economy class is far greater because when the passenger is sitting still the usual pumping action of the calf and thigh muscles no longer pushes the blood up to the heart while at the same time the pressure on the edge of the seat blocks the return of the venous blood," he said.

Although no detailed research has been carried out, Khan estimates that as many as 6,000 passengers a year may die as a result of DVT, with as little as three hours of cramped conditions putting some people at potential risk of blood clots in the deep veins of the legs which can move to the lungs, causing a potentially fatal embolism. The Lords select committee is expected to call on airlines to advise passengers to drink plenty of water, take aspirin—which helps to thin the blood—and exercise leg muscles during the flight to try to fend off the condition. (The Guardian)

## Mbeki attacks CIA on AIDS

Not many people enjoy being criticised—especially men in powerful positions. Like South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki. For months Mbeki has been offering his abstruse opinions on the subject of AIDS. Now, instead of finally accepting research results the whole world considers valid, he is working himself into a lather over conspiracy theories.

According to reports in two South African weeklies, Mbeki told his African National Congress that the CIA was working closely with pharmaceutical manufacturers. He accused the two of colluding to promote a link between HIV and AIDS to boost drug industry profits.

Mbeki has been under fire for months for questioning the causality between HIV and AIDS. In an interview with *Time* magazine he said, "The problem is that once you say immune deficiency is acquired from that virus your response will be anti-retroviral drugs." Many other factors, Mbeki said, could contribute to the collapse of the immune system, citing for example poverty, malnutrition and contaminated water. Mbeki maintained that the deaths of thousands of people could not be traced back to a single virus. Mbeki's latest statements could be catastrophic for a country in which one in five adults is infected with the virus and in which—according to the government's own estimates—six million people will die of AIDS over the next decade. (Sueddeutsche Zeitung)



## Divers open up Kursk hull

Salvage experts engaged in the difficult and extremely sensitive operation to recover corpses from the sunken Russian submarine, Kursk, pierced the inner hull of the nuclear vessel for the first time and found a less threatening environment than had been feared.

The combined teams of Russian and Norwegian divers, who started descending over 100 metres to the Kursk on the bed of the Barents Sea on Friday, cut through the outer hull, stripped away a layer of industrial rubber casing designed to maximise the vessel's stealth and pierced the tougher inner hull at the stern. Russian navy spokesmen reported that the rescue workers found "pure water" inside one compartment. There were no traces of fuel or of increased radiation from the submarine's two nuclear reactors.

Six teams of three divers are working round the clock from a diving platform, resembling a large mobile oil rig, which arrived at the scene of the

# The Insecurity Council Triad

The world's three biggest arms suppliers are permanent members of the UN security council who continue to militarise the world's most volatile regions.

BY RICHARD NORTON-TAYLOR IN LONDON

The West's three permanent members of the UN Security Council account for 80 percent of the world's weapons sales at a time when it is incapable of mounting effective peacekeeping operations, according to a report published yesterday by a London-based think tank.

The US increased its share of the international arms trade last year and now accounts for nearly 50 per cent of the \$53.4 billion annual market, according to the report in the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) publication the *Military Balance*. Britain came second, selling nearly \$10 billion worth of weapons, while France was third at almost \$6.6 billion.

Much of these weapons systems were supplied to the Middle East, the world's biggest arms market. Saudi Arabia, the world's largest arms buyer, purchased more than \$5.5 billion worth of weapons last year.

Taiwan was the largest arms importer in East Asia. Middle Eastern countries spent \$60.5 billion on arms last year, says the report, which also notes that the Israeli air force had set up its first anti-ballistic missile battery some 30 miles south of Tel Aviv. The IISS also reported that 100,000 people were killed as a direct result of armed conflicts in the year up to August, 60 percent of them in sub-Saharan Africa.

The IISS damned the lack of government commitment to international peacekeeping. "It remains the case that the UN continues to overreach, approving ambitious mandates and deploying inadequately supported forces in volatile situations," Chipman said. "The long-term aim of the UN operation in Sierra Leone is unclear and the capacity of the UN to make a sensible contribution to what is a hugely unstable situation in the Congo is questionable," he said. UN member states were "incapable of producing the sometimes very large contingents that a proper operation would require," he said.

While defence spending increased in most regions of the world, including the US, spending by NATO's European members other than Britain and the three new entrants—Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic—continued to decline. "NATO countries in Europe are feeling



"The long-term aim of the UN operation in Sierra Leone is unclear..."

the strain of what looks like an increasingly lengthy commitment in Kosovo," the report said. "Even those with all-professional forces are finding they are over-committed in Europe and beyond."

The report is deeply sceptical about the EU's ability to realise its plans for an independent, 60,000-strong rapid-reaction force. "European leaders speak of a European defence capacity but have not voted [for] the funds to finance it," said the IISS director, John Chipman. If the continent is unable to muster a credible independent force, NATO will have to remain strongly involved in EU security. "European defence, in all but the most trivial of cases, will remain a transatlantic affair," Chipman said.

Britain and France have invested considerable political and diplomatic capital in setting up a joint EU military force, which would conduct peacekeeping operations without the involvement of the US or NATO. France wants to cap its six-month stint as EU president at the European summit in Nice in December with a firm commitment to set up a credible force with at least 60,000 troops. ♦ (Guardian News Service)



# “Corporations advertise, culture jammers subvertise”

Subvertise, don't advertise, says a new international campaigner against globalisation who wants the world to take part in a “Buy Nothing Day”

DUNCAN CAMPBELL IN CALIFORNIA

It carries some of the most striking visual images of any magazine in the world, and perhaps no publication could claim to be more in tune with the current international campaign against corporatism and globalisation. It is *Adbusters*, the “journal of the mental environment”. Next month it will be encouraging the world to take part in a “Buy Nothing Day” and this month it is running a “creative resistance contest” to encourage world-wide cultural rebellion.

It was founded by an Estonian who has worked for the Australian defence department, and is based on the Pacific coast of Canada. Its ideas come from the French Situationists and from Marshal McLuhan but its concepts and execution are very much twenty-first century. The manifesto at the back of the bi-monthly explains who is behind the publication: “We are a loose global network of artists, writers, environmentalists, ecological economists, media-literacy teachers, reborn lefties, ecofeminists, downshifters, high-school shit-disturbers, campus rabble-rousers, incorrigibles, malcontents and green entrepreneurs... We believe that culture jamming will become to our era what civil rights was to the 60s, feminism to the 70s, and



environmental activism to the 80s... Above all, it will change the way we interact with the mass media and the way in which meaning is produced in our society.”

*Adbusters* was actually born more than 10 years ago, but it is only since the events of Seattle last year that led up to

the demonstrations in Prague this year, that it has suddenly started to break through to a much wider audience. Its founder and editor-in-chief is 58-year-old Kalle Lasn, who left Estonia as a two-year-old, and grew up in Australia where he worked for the defence department before moving first

to Canada. There he became an award-winning documentary filmmaker before founding *Adbusters*, which was driven by his increasing disillusionment with the corporatisation of the world and the failure of conventional left politics to combat it. His philosophy is contained in the book *Culture Jam, the Uncooling of America*, where the list of dedications includes “My mortal enemy, Philip Morris Inc which I vow to take down.” Lasn believes that the mass media now dispense a form of the “soma” that novelist Aldous Huxley predicted in *Brave New World*: “The most powerful narcotic in the world is the promise of belonging. And belonging is best achieved by conforming to the prescriptions of America.”

In response, Lasn and his colleagues have set themselves the task of “unswoothing America” and “jamming its image factory until it comes to a sudden, shuddering halt”. *Adbusters* is effectively the bulletin of that movement. Lasn estimates that we receive around 3,000 marketing messages in an average day; from the logos on people’s clothes to the billboards or posters we pass, to the commercials on our televisions and the ads in our daily papers or the signs in our supermarkets. Some research puts the figure

at 10,000. *Adbusters’* aim is to take us out of the process. “At the beginning, I did feel we were talking to the converted,” says Lasn, “but all of a sudden there is a well-spring of interest.” Initially, *Adbusters* was produced on newsprint and had only a small if loyal following, but it now sells 100,000 copies worldwide, mainly in the US, but also throughout Australia and New Zealand and with around 2,000 subscribers in the UK. Its small team of journalists, based in Vancouver, are mainly in their 20s and 30s. “There is a messy feeling that things aren’t quite right.” Essentially, Lasn sees the magazine as a player in the epic battle between corporate culture and civic culture—“a people-driven planet earth or a corporate-

spectre of our TV-addicted nation, the savage anomie of a society entranced and entrapped and living a lie. It’s time to admit that chronic TV watching is North America’s number-one mental health problem and that a society in which citizens spend a quarter of their waking lives (more than four hours a day) in front of their sets is in serious need of shock therapy.”

If you watch people flipping through *Adbusters* in a bookstore or newsagents, you can often sense the slight puzzlement on their faces. Is this ad for Absolut Vodka for real? Is this two-page photo-spread of an elderly man asking “How can I die with dignity?” an invitation to a website about dying? This is part of the magazine’s intent, a desire to

**“We believe that culture jamming will become to our era what civil rights was to the 60s, feminism to the 70s, and environmental activism to the 80s...”**

driven planet inc.”

And for all the playful nature of the publication, Lasn and his colleagues are quite serious. As he put it in *Culture Jam*: “Instead of treating vegetative, corporate-driven TV culture as something to be gently, ironically mocked, it’s time to face the whole ugly

challenge the persuasion industry, to subvert the meaning in the message and to encourage people to become “culture jammers”, taking on the corporations at their own game. “Corporations advertise and culture jammers subvertise”, is one of their credos.

*Adbusters* does take ads itself and will run “advocacy advertisements”, such as either pro or anti-abortion, but it reserves the right to vet every other kind of ad which means that most that do appear are mainly for books and CDs, rather than for, say, cars and alcohol. Some of the visuals are subversions of well-known ads but although all the likely suspects—Nike, McDonald’s, Coca-Cola and Walt Disney—have been lampooned, only one has sued: “Absolut Vodka came after us with a horde of lawyers, but we beat them back quite handsomely. They got scared and ran away with their tail between their legs. We have quite consciously provoked people like Nike and McDonald’s—they haven’t sued but they do subscribe.”

Lasn ran into problems, however, when he tried to advertise his Buy Nothing Day on television. All the major networks refused to run the commercials and CNN only agreed after being hounded by a reporter from the Wall Street Journal. But *Adbusters* remains optimistic. If not culture jam today, then certainly culture jam tomorrow. ♦ (The Guardian)



# Clash of irons

With three major tournaments it is a busy month coming up for Nepali golfers

MUKUL HUMAGAIN

Busy days are in the offing for Nepali golfers as three major golf tournaments get underway in November. These are the Surya Nepal Western Open in Pokhara, the Surya Nepal Eastern Open in Dharan, and the Surya Nepal Masters. The last is a prestigious tournament which will see Nepali golfers compete with some of the best from India and elsewhere from South Asia for the top spot.

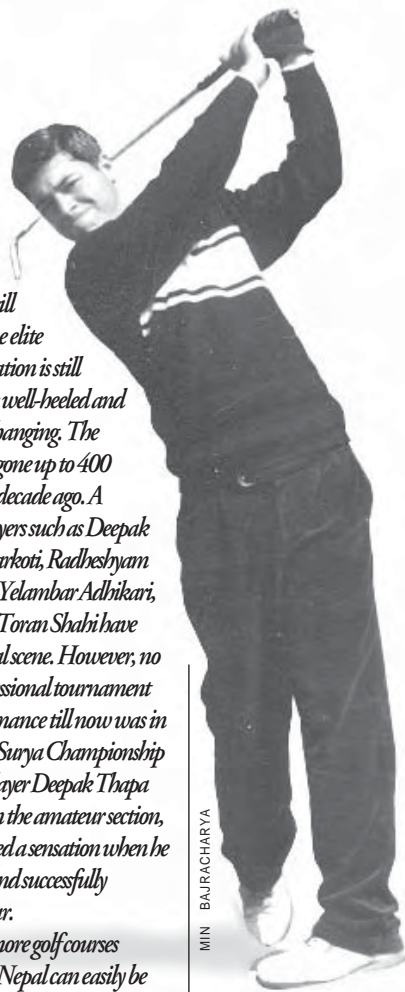
Surya Nepal Masters has its roots in 1993 when it began as the Surya Nepal Invitation Open Golf Championship. Renamed Surya Nepal Masters in 1999, its venue too was shifted from the Royal Nepal Golf Club (near the airport) to Gokarna Golf Club, the only 18-hole course in Nepal. The competition is slowly putting Nepal on the map of the golfing world. It is the only international-class golf tournament of the country and is recognised by the Professional Golfers Association of India (PGA), which has included it in its official tour. The tournament, organised by Surya Tobacco Company (STC), has grown in stature by the year. Not only has the number of players increased, the prize money too has gone up annually. Compared to the Rs 800,000 in 1999, this year the

total purse is Rs 1.2 million (the champion will take home Rs 195,000), making it the biggest in Nepal and comparable to most tournaments in the Indian circuit.

Around 100 professional golfers from Nepal and other South Asian countries are expected to take part in the Surya Nepal Masters to be held 22-25 November. "We are hopeful that 16 Nepali and 80 top Indian professionals will be in the fray", says Binod Thapa, marketing manager of STC. In 1999, there were 15 Nepali and 70 Indian professionals taking part. Rohit Singh of India finished with 2 under 142 and won the first Surya Nepal Masters, while Feroz Ali and Harneet Kahlon (both of India) were tied at second place. The Nepali pro Ramesh Nagarkoti stood at the eighth place with 145. Among the amateurs, Nepali golfer Rajan Thapa took the title. But before the Masters, STC will be organising the second Surya Nepal Western Open at Pokhara's Himalayan Golf Course even as it inaugurates the Surya Nepal Eastern Open at Dharan Golf Club. The two tournaments, which carry prizes totalling Rs 50,000 each, is open only to Nepali professionals and amateurs. Says Thapa of STC, the tournaments outside Kathmandu is to provide a platform to aspiring golfers and also to promote the

sport. Though golf is still known as a game of the elite in Nepal and participation is still mainly restricted to the well-heeled and the expats, trends are changing. The number of players has gone up to 400 from just a hundred a decade ago. A number of exciting players such as Deepak Acharya, Ramesh Nagarkoti, Raulbeshyan Thapa, Rajan Thapa, Yelambar Adhikari, Deepak Neupane and Toran Shahi have emerged in the national scene. However, no Nepali has won a professional tournament so far. The best performance till now was in the 1996 edition of the Surya Championship when caddie-turned-player Deepak Thapa Magar stood second. In the amateur section, Deepak Acharya created a sensation when he won the title in 1995 and successfully defended it the next year.

With more and more golf courses coming up every year, Nepal can easily be promoted as a golf tourism destination. Tournaments like Surya Nepal Masters can provide the initial impetus. As STC's Thapa says, "We want to link golf with tourism. That was the reason behind organising tournaments at major tourist spots outside Kathmandu. Not only does it encourage domestic professionals but it also helps the tourism industry." ♦



MIN BAURACHARYA

# Beckham's burblings

David Beckham's book *My World* might read like something scribbled by a badger, but the aroma will appeal to both male football fans and female

BY TANTASISTON

One suspects that David Beckham wrote *My World* rather in the sense that the Pharaohs built the pyramids. Beckham's prose is as excruciating as one imagines VS Naipaul's shots at goal would be, and reading this aggressively style-less book is a bit like munching your way dutifully through yard upon yard of muslin.

Curiously, though, its very monotone, stream-of-tape-recorded consciousness style begins after a while to seem like some artful, sub-Pinteresque device. "I had," he tells us, "one really, really good friend called John at primary school. I had other friends... but no one like him." There have been livelier narratives. We never encounter John again, or probe deeper into why he meant so much to Beckham. It is just one of those bald, uninterpretable things, like chasing someone with a vacuum cleaner, wearing a sarong or including a close-up photo of your dirty feet in your autobiography. Not that any of this matters much, since the text in this lavish production is far less important than the photographs, and neither can compete with the volume's delicious aroma. There could be no finer reason to buy this book than to sniff it. Readers who buy it but don't inhale are missing out on most of the fun.

Since you can now apparently take a course in the Manchester United star at the University of Staffordshire, there's no point in his pretending to be an ordinary guy. Ordinary guys don't land up on the syllabus alongside Plato and Pynchon. But this is precisely what this crafty, apparently guileless book is out to counterfeit. Beckham projects himself as a shy, modest, chaste, uxorious, home-loving, extravagantly commonplace type, faintly naive and just a mite boring, not quite as geekish as Gary Lineker but tilting more towards him on the football-star spectrum than to the Dionysiac George Best.

He is relentlessly devoted to his wife: "I see us as the perfect couple", he announces, a phrase which avoids odious self-adulation only because it clearly doesn't know itself to be even more unacceptable than referring to oneself and one's partner as a couple of prize turds. For a man who has been regularly "hit by thongs and knickers", Beckham is upright in a moral rather than libidinal sense. At one point, he observes leeringly that a particular set of bra and panties he received in the post must have come from "a big girl". Elsewhere, however, he reveals that he likes to get in touch with the feminine side of himself: hence the celebrated sarong. He even cautiously enjoys a bit of art, and has been known to indulge in a little nature imagery, such as "over the moon". He is also far more addicted to cool new-age tattoos than to tacky old-style booze; indeed he intends to have the names of his future children etched into his back along with that of Brooklyn—which, given his ferocious domestic affections, might end up taxing even his lithe torso. The irony is that Beckham is indeed an ordinary guy, even if he is also playing at being one for all he's worth. The counterfeit is true after all. He comes across as attractively—as well as tediously—low-key, and is as quick to praise others as he is to criticise himself: "I was showboating, hitting flash, stupid balls," he



"I have a camera up my backside almost 24 hours a day," writes Beckham in his new book.

comments of his early days as a player. He also detests racism (he is a quarter Jewish himself), and isn't in the least bothered by being fancied by gay men.

A lot of people will read this book as one might read something scribbled by a badger: what matters is the author rather than the content. But football fans will read it for inside information, and there's a good deal of that. But this regular guy is also a public fetish, and the book can work only by prudishly playing down that whole dimension.

"I have a camera up my backside almost 24 hours a day," Beckham tells us, but it's hard to know whether this is a boast or a whine. He is scrupulously careful not to overdo the moaning to side-step the obvious riposte: how come he's so averse to cameras when half this book, indeed half his life, consists of images?

This split down the book's middle, between text and image, is also the fissure known as David Beckham. In the front half, the bashful lad who loves his old mum and prefers curling up with a take-away to showbiz orgies; in the second half, the sultry, self-displaying narcissist, hungry for the admiring gaze. ♦ (Guardian News Service)

# Pele turns 60

Rio de Janeiro -The living football legend, Pele, turned 60 this week, and he is not so sure how to deal with the anniversary that he will celebrate quietly with his second wife Assira and their twins in Switzerland. "I still am as afraid of my birthdays as of brutal defenders," he said. But defenders rarely had a chance as the facts about Pele's success

speak for themselves. Pele scored 1,283 goals in his professional career spanning 21 years. He won three World Cup titles with Brazil in 1958, 1962 and 1970, two intercontinental championships and 10 Sao Paulo titles with his club Santos, plus a US title with Cosmos New York in his final year 1977. Pele was named World Footballer of the Century last year.

His parents had seen it coming from the start. Legend has it that his mother was stunned by how the yet to be born boy was kicking inside her. And his father reportedly said at the time: "It will be a great footballer." Maybe he should also have been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, since an African tour by Pele and his Santos club in 1969 actually halted the war between Biafra and Nigeria.

"The king of one African country even offered me one of his daughters for a night. But I declined," recalled Pele. Pele's friends believe that Edson Arantes do Nascimento would have gained world fame even if he hadn't been a footballer. Pele himself rates his time as Brazilian sports minister between 1996-1998 higher than his professional career.

"We built 100 sports centres which managed to get the children off the streets and away from crime. These successes are lasting, not like a football result," he said. Pele resigned after several run-ins with Brazilian football officials, but said he will return to politics when the time is right.

Pele has never lacked confidence and even said he could still play pro football: "There was only one Beethoven and there is only one Pele." This underlines how it must have hurt him that coach Tele Santana snubbed him in 1986 when he wanted to play at a fifth World Cup aged 45. He is still astonishingly fit and youthful, and has many plans for the future: "To turn 70 in perfect health, to set up my personal internet site, and to help get Brazilian football out of its bureaucratic chaos."

There is also a short-term aim: "To convert the

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SULUX CENTRE, Khichapokhari / Bishal Bazar / Bluebird  
SHARMA IMPEX, New Road  
ANKIT STORE, Bishal Bazar



ABOUT TOWN

FILMS

◆ **Nepali**  
**Basanti** - Plaza 2  
**Chautari** - Ashok, Krishna (470090),  
**Dhukdhuki** - Bishwo Jyoti (221837),  
 Goon (Kha) (520668), Prithvi (online  
 booking), Ganga Chalchitra  
**Mailee** - Goon (Ga) (520668), Ranjana  
 (221191)  
 ◆ **Hindi**  
**Aaghaz** - Tara (476092)  
**Deewane** - Metro  
**Dhadkan** - Nava Durga (online  
 booking),  
**Dhai Akshar Prem Ke** - Gopi (470090)  
**Fiza** - Radha  
**Hindustan Ki Kasam** - Shivdarshan  
**Jis Desh Mein Ganga Rehta Hai** -  
 Kumari (414932), Goon (Ka) (520668)  
**Jurassic Park** - Padma  
**Phir Bhi Dil He Hindustani** -  
 Manakamana  
**Shikari** - Plaza I  
 Online bookings at <www.nepalshop.com>

MUSIC

◆ **Jazz**-Live jazz by Cadenza at  
 Upstairs Restaurant, Lazimpat. Every  
 Saturday 7:30-10:00 pm.  
 ◆ **Rock and blues**-Robin n' Looza play  
 their selection of rock, blues, soul and  
 Nepali numbers every Friday night at  
 The Bamboo Club, Thamel. Drink and  
 dine while you listen.  
 ◆ **Dances**-Classical Nepali dances  
 based on Buddhist and Hindu epics and  
 the Tantric pantheon, every Tuesday at  
 the Great Pagoda, Hotel Vajra. 7 pm. Rs  
 300. Tel: 271545  
 ◆ **Ballads and Dances** of Old Tibet  
 performed by Tsering Gurmey and  
 Tsering Paljor every Thursday at the  
 Naga Theatre, Hotel Vajra. 7 pm. Rs  
 400.  
 Tel : 271545

EXHIBITIONS

◆ **Art**-Exhibition by three Finnish  
 women artists Marjo Yli-Antola, Umppa  
 Niinivaara & Marita Mikkonen.  
 Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal  
 Revisited. 11am - 6 pm. 411122.

ADVENTURE SPORTS

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

DINING

◆ **Barbecue.** Shangri-La Hotel is  
 hosting barbecue nights for the season  
 at its prize-winning Shambala Garden.  
 Masked dancers of Bhaktapur,  
 Gandharvas and other traditional  
 musicians perform every Tuesday and  
 Friday evening. Steaks of every kind  
 from chicken to wild boar topped with  
 sauce of choice. 6:30 pm. Tuesday and  
 Friday Rs 850+tax. Rest of the week Rs  
 750+tax

FESTIVAL

◆ **Tihar**- the festival of lights and  
 firecrackers. Of people, crows, dogs,  
 cows and bulls. The five-day-long  
 colourful festival started 25 October,  
 with the worship of crows, dogs and  
 cows. Crows, in the hope they will  
 always bring good news to the family;  
 dogs, to guard against evil and death;  
 and the cow, as a representation of  
 Laxmi, the goddess of wealth. After the  
 cow, it is the turn of the bull. Two days in  
 Tihar are traditionally days of *dipawali*,  
 when every household light traditional  
 lamps (*dijo*) or candles to invite the  
 goddess Laxmi home. Evenings are fun  
 for kids who go about singing *bhaili* and  
*deusi* songs, giving blessings and  
 collecting money and food in a late night  
 door-to-door celebration. The last day of  
 Tihar is Bhai Tika (29 Oct), when  
 sisters pray for the long life and  
 prosperity of their brothers and worship  
 them ritually. A vertical *tika* of seven  
 colours is put on the forehead by the  
 sisters to protect their brothers from evil  
 and *Yamaraj*—the lord of death. Brothers  
 and sister sisters exchange gifts.

# HITS FM off air



One of the most popular FM stations in the Valley, HITS FM, has been pulled off the air this week by Radio Nepal in a move that HITS managing director, Sonny Shrestha, described as "unilateral, arbitrary, unethical, and un-businesslike".

HITS used the Radio Nepal transmitter on FM 100 for eight hours of programming daily for which it paid a block fee of Rs 4 million a year. "We were given barely a few hours' notice before we actually stopped broadcasting, and we have immediately protested this action," said Shrestha.

Radio Nepal's board decided Monday to allow another company, Classic FM to broadcast 18 hours a day. The state-owned radio's Shailendra Raj Sharma defended their decision saying that the contract with HITS had expired and the company had not bid for an extension. "How can we give air time to a party that didn't even bid?" he asked.

HITS FM 100 started broadcasting four years ago and had managed to gain a popular following among the valley's youngsters. HITS FM also established a music award and had a chatty tone that was later copied by other FM broadcasters. The company now plans to install its own transmitter within two months and broadcast on FM 91.2. ◆

# 94 FM online

"Sacred Valley, Shakti Radio"—the FM radio station that has managed to generate a cult following in a relatively short time with its unique style of presentation and choice of music has added another aspect to its services: a live webcast on the Internet.

The free monthly periodical, [www.hbc.com.np](http://www.hbc.com.np), from the Himalayan Broadcasting Corporation (HBC) features informative and interactive browsing using an enhanced interactive software called the 'flash' technology.

Currently, the online magazine, already into its second issue, hosts an array of information on philosophy, archival audio and mp3 music that can be downloaded. There are also contents on nature and history, science, trends, philosophy, lifestyle,



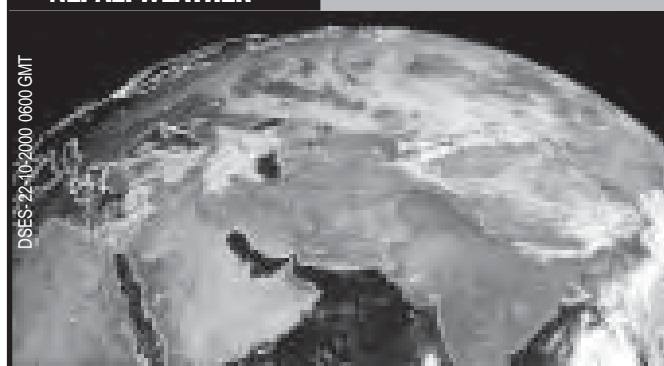
Nepali society, and literature, accompanied by sleek designs and interactive tools. The text is available in both English and Nepali.

Says Bibhuti Shrestha, info-tech manager at HBC, "This is our effort to show the rest of the world that Nepal too possesses the knowledge and ability to produce great websites, so that it might encourage the international enterprises to base their web companies here and thus contribute to the nation's economy."

The station has tied up with Worldlink as its partner in its new endeavour. The live Internet broadcast is done by using a direct audio feed from HBC to a server at Worldlink, running 'Real Server G2' which is attached to the Internet backbone in the US.

The station, known among fans as a music station void of all idle chit-chat and teenage gossip, currently broadcasts 20 hours a day with 4 hours of programmes and 16 hours of music ranging from the history of rock and roll, alternative, 16th to present century classical, indigenous, tribal and various other music. ◆

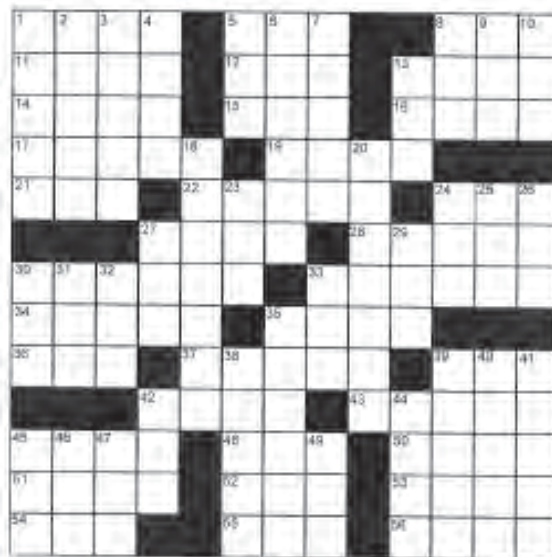
## NEPALI WEATHER



If you were wondering what is causing these clouds to build up over the Himalayan foothills, a satellite image of the water vapour content in the atmosphere provides a clue. The Tibetan plateau and the northern slopes of the Himalaya are blocking moisture. Some of this escapes southward through gaps in the mountains. However, apart from some snow in the high mountain regions down to elevations of 14,500, it isn't bringing rain. Over the weekend and into next week, afternoons will continue to be hazy, and inversion will cause clinging smog in Kathmandu Valley. Worth watching is a cyclone brewing in the Bay of Bengal, it is going to veer eastwards but will bring fresh northwesterly wind, making it colder and clearer later in the week.

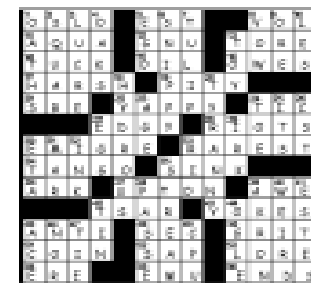
Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
25-11	25-11	25-10	26-10	25-9

## QUICKWORD 4



Across

- 1 Miffed at being hit (4)
- 5 US ship (3)
- 8 Accountant (3)
- 11 Partial ASEAN (4)
- 12 Looked (3)
- 13 Leave it (4)
- 14 Missing in saint (4)
- 15 Jumbled with tea (3)
- 16 Desire to recommend (4)
- 17 More normal? (5)
- 19 747 with front missing (4)
- 21 Another one of 55 across (3)
- 22 Strange fairy? (5)
- 24 UN body (3)
- 27 On top (4)
- 28 Jostle a judge? (5)
- 30 Judge's strong points (5)
- 33 Rounded up (6)
- 34 An ET (5)
- 35 Lean and not very nice (4)
- 36 Sleepy rock group? (3)
- 37 Defile with paint ? (5)
- 39 Resort uses sap? (3)
- 42 On cable (4)
- 43 Doesn't like Mad Hatter (5)
- 45 Said from this pulpit (4)
- 48 Colours changing... (3)
- 50 Chinese math symbol? (4)
- 51 Shaft (4)
- 52 Small world after all (3)
- 53 Ancient Peruvian (4)
- 54 Control, Alt, (3)
- 55 Mo. (3)
- 56 Sage gets older (4)
- 1 Low and profundo (5)
- 2 Jacob's Dad (5)
- 3 Passing out tactic (5)
- 4 Karmic feat (4)
- 5 Insult and manipulate (3)
- 6 This one has a ring (6)
- 7 Paddled with this saint? (5)
- 8 Insult a dog? (3)
- 9 One of three swine? (3)
- 10 Dined and had tea (3)
- 13 Status, or vadis? (3)
- 18 Says sorry to serpent (7)
- 20 Be under (7)
- 23 Aurora (3)
- 24 Not even Dod? (3)
- 25 How old? (3)
- 26 Sick of eating? (3)
- 27 Native American (3)
- 29 A long, long way to go (3)
- 31 Leo's bullfight cheer (3)
- 32 Edge (3)
- 33 Comes before the egg (3)
- 35 Small time (6)
- 38 Hid this insect? (3)
- 39 Is this singer a prick?(5)
- 40 Pennies (5)
- 41 Regions in sq km (5)
- 42 East-south-east (3)
- 44 Nepal is in South (4)
- 45 Pop (3)
- 46 Yike! This ain't an axe. (3)
- 47 Everyone Al knows (3)
- 49 Escudo



Out of 17 correct entries the lucky winner is **Perry Thapa**



Terms and conditions

- 1 The contest is open to everyone, except employees of Himalmedia Pvt Ltd and Infocom Pvt Ltd.
- 2 In case of more than one correct entry, the winner will be decided by lucky draw.
- 3 Entries have to reach Himalmedia, by 5 pm, 31 Oct, Tuesday.
- 4 The winner will be announced in the coming issue.
- 5 The prize has to be collected from Himalmedia within a week of the announcement. 20 Aesthete (3) ID.



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

# himal books



## HAPPENINGS

## OFF THE BEATEN TREK

by SALIL SUBEDI



Japanese volunteer R Sugiyama and JICA representative in Nepal, Ken Hasegawa, inspect choice Thak Khola apples at the Horticulture Centre in Kirtipur this week.



Prime Minister Girija Koirala arrives at the Raddison Hotel for a conference on the Millennium Summit and Its Relevance to Nepal organised by the Nepal Council of World Affairs on 24 October.



Swiss geographer Tomi Hagen is felicitated on the 50th anniversary of his arrival in Nepal by the Tibetan Community in Kathmandu on 25 October. Also in the picture: Samdup Lhatse, Dharmasala's representative in Kathmandu and Mrs Hagen.

A trek off the beaten path can also be a less-ambitious one, where you don't need the paraphernalia of a major expedition. So, if you are the kind whose idea of fun is not the sadomasochistic urge to lug yourself up and down 5,000m passes, and you find yourself in Pokhara and want to get away from lakeside touts for two days, the Landruk Loop is the trek for you.

You start at Phedi on the Pokhara-Baglung road, walk (or rather climb) past Dhampus, take a night break in Landruk, climb up to Ghandruk and then turn your power off and coast down to Birethanti without any effort at all. Then take an hour-long taxi ride back to Pokhara.

The difficult part is getting up at dawn in Pokhara, swallowing some "subcontinental breakfast" (chiura and omelette washed down by tea) to take the buses bound for Baglung. If you don't mind a splurge you could take the taxi to Phedi.

The trail doesn't make it easy for you: it climbs steeply right away but since it is early morning the climb is quite bearable. And true to the adage: the early tourist gets the view, you get some good scene-scenery (as we Nepalis like to call it) whenever you stop to catch your breath. Although steep, the path climbs through forest and the sun rarely gets through the canopy.

After you cross the forest, the air is crisper and the smell and sight of golden rice fields in the



## LOOPING LAZILY AROUND

Sunrise view of Annapurna South (left) and Hiunchuli from Landruk.

Seti valley provide a picturesque foreground to the hills and azure sky to the south. Another two hours of this and you are already in Dhampus. Mountain weather being what it is, it may have clouded up by the time you get

there, so for the really good views you have to wait till sunrise—and that is a view worth waiting for.

From Dhampus onwards, the rhododendron forest opens up more. An hour and a half of a

steady but easy climb later you reach Pothana, which opens up a vista of the Annapurnas and Machhapuchhare. A look back down at the trail you've walked provides a great sense of achievement.

After Pothana you are on the other side of the mountain, on the trail north towards Pittim Deurali, a 45-minute walk. You pass waterfalls and rhododendron forests to reach Tolka, climbing down a path laid out like a staircase. From here, the path winds in and out with the contours of the mountainside and before long you are in Landruk, just in time for some noodle soup made by the sauni of a local tea shop.

Landruk these days is looking like Zermatt in the tourist season, and the restaurants are clean with patios where you can have lime juice in the sun. And like the hotels of Zermatt give you great views of Matterhorn, almost every room in the lodges of Landruk have window seats looking out at Annapurna South and Hiunchuli.

You can also admire the views while walking along the paths as the first rays of the sun catch the tops of the Annapurnas. Our trail now loops down to the Modi Khola and up to the incredibly clean and friendly Gurung village of Ghandruk.

The climb is quite stiff, and there is always a temptation to head further north towards Chomrong and Ghorepani. But we have to get back to Pokhara, and this is only a two-day trek, remember? So reluctantly you head down.

You can stop by to check out the famous Gurung Museum in Ghandruk which has a collection of artefacts—weapons, clothing, utensils and household goods used by the Gurungs, and dating back to the last century. Enjoy a good dollop of traditional millet *dhindo* to give you enough energy for the three-hour descent to Birethanti and you're off. You plunge past fields, rivers, forests and lose altitude so fast it almost makes your ears pop.

Syauli Bazar, about an hour's walk ahead before reaching Birethanti, remains a perfect place to ease back and have a final snack before you get back to asphalt. The green fields, the sound of the river and the tea is your final parting to this simple yet exhilarating trek and also to face the gauntlet of taxi drivers coaxing you to take their vehicle back down to Pokhara. ♦



The golden paddy fields of Dhampus with Nau Danda in the back-

premium





# Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Now that Nepal's national treasure, Manisha Koirala, is hosting India's latest quiz show, *Sabal Das Croreka*, we hope there will be no more major gaffes in questions about Nepal. And to improve the general knowledge of Nepalis, and to train future politicians, we hear Nepal Television is soon starting our own indigenous quiz show called *Ko Banneho Arabpati?* After all, with the many similarities between *Who Wants To Be a Millionaire* and the business of politics this could be an ideal method of training future politicians. Quiz shows and politics are both populated by cerebrally-challenged individuals who regularly appear on television to answer earth-shaking questions like: In the

comes and they have to appear on *Ko Banneho Arabpati*, they can hit the ground trotting and be showered with riches beyond their wildest dreams. The questions are cleverly designed in such a way that they not only test general knowledge, but also force contestants to ask serious questions about Nepal's burning problems of today:

Q: Nepal is a landlocked Himalayan kingdom situated between... and...

- a) Rock and Hard Place, b) Devil and Deep Blue Sea, c) Yam and Another Yam, d) Northern Hemisphere and Southern Hemisphere

Q: The Tribhuvan International Airport is actually:

- a) A vermiculture farm, b) A bird sanctuary, c) Where dogs learn to fly, d) Training centre for smugglers

Q: Kathmandu's garbage problem can be easily solved by:

- a) Asking every tourist to take back 5 kg as a souvenir, b) Opening a landfill site inside Singha Durbar, c) Generating hydropower by using trash to dam our rivers, d) Dumping it on the runway at TIA

Q: The best way to defend the sanctity of the country's borders is to:

- a) Play dead, b) Generate revenue by selling ammunition to the Hizbollah, c) Adhere to the five principles of peaceful co-existence, d) Move border pillars when no one is looking

Q: The recent fuel price hike is a symbol of the Koirala regime's anti-poor policies. We can fight it by:

- a) Organising torch processions using fossil fuels, b)

Declare a two-year protest bandh, c) Use electricity to incinerate effigies of the prime minister, d) Take a 12-member delegation to Kuwait to have a chat with the sheikh.

## Ko Banneho Arabpati?



film, *Titanic*, what or who is the *Titanic*? a) The iceberg, b) Kate Winslet's nickname, c) A large man-eating dinosaur, or d) Margaret Thatcher.

There is another parallel between quiz shows and politics: the intention in both is to become stupendously rich as fast as possible. And the beauty of it is that you don't really need to know anything, you can always phone a friend or bring a brain. Now that NTV is getting into the act, attached herewith is a list of sample questions that prospective participants can practise on so that when the day

### NEPALI SOCIETY



# Mayor Suwal

Mayor Prem Suwal of Bhaktapur isn't the kind of mayor that one would expect to meet in a city with a success story to relate. He doesn't go around in a fancy car, and he doesn't make reckless promises. Being down to earth is his style.

Running a city that is a living museum and heritage site is one thing, being successful at preserving the cultural traditions is quite another. Bhaktapur has been acclaimed for its conservation efforts. This is thanks not just to the motivated citizens of Bhaktapur, but also to the municipality which in other

cities tends to be driven by megalomania (check out the monstrous building the municipality of Patan built for itself).

"The hardest part was making people understand why we needed to preserve what is left, that it wasn't just my city or your city but our city. Once they understood this, everybody cooperated," explains Suwal, letting us in on the secret of his success.

The mayor is modest, as we soon find out. An intermediate in mechanical engineering, Suwal's political career took root when he joined the Nepal Revolutionary Students Union

in 1978. He joined the Central Committee of the Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party (NWPP) as a member in 1991 and worked as its secretary from 1994-1996. Steeped in politics, his affiliation with the NWPP would one day make him mayor of the city he loves so much.

An important feature is Suwal's move to make the city's activities transparent. The city makes public even the minutest details of its financial statements. Last year, the Berlin-based Transparency International awarded Bhaktapur the title of 'Island of Integrity' at the international anti-Corruption Conference in Durban. It seems municipality officials and citizens of Patan and Kathmandu have a lot to learn from Bhaktapur.

# Ambassador vodka

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Grindlays	DAI	SHIT					
	0.74	0.37	0.40	0.22	0.37	0.04	53.85
	0.65	0.31	0.56	0.33	0.18	0.02	44.46
	0.65	0.37	0.57	0.28	0.14	0.05	46.42
	0.25	0.28	0.40	0.30	0.42	0.21	11.82
	0.42	0.44	0.52	0.23	0.12	0.03	57.45
	0.76	0.38	0.63	0.24	0.20	0.03	79.33
	0.65	0.38	0.54	0.33	0.18	0.08	73.50

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