



MIN BAJRACHARYA

A photograph showing a person riding a dark horse through a rocky, arid landscape. The rider is wearing a light-colored shirt and dark pants. The horse is dark-colored and is moving towards the right. The background consists of dry, rocky hills and some sparse vegetation. The overall scene is in a natural, outdoor setting.

SUBHAS RAI

But all this could change overnight. One senior army officer told us: "This is a potential Vietnam. The rules of engagement are too messy. The army should be the last line of defence, you can't use it piecemeal like this and risk getting into a quagmire." ♦





WORLDWIDE WEB OF LIFE

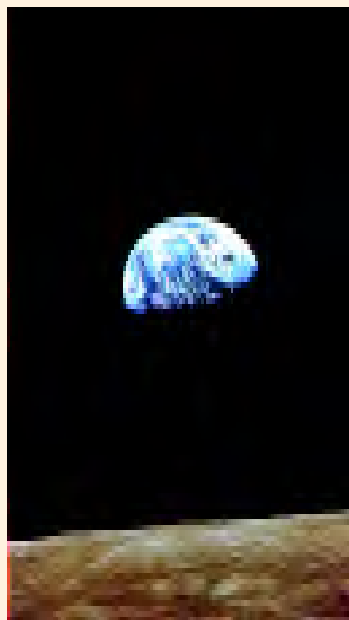
As information technology makes the world smaller, we will need to change the definition of the word "wilderness". There may be vast open spaces still left in the middle of Siberia or up on the Tibetan plateau, on Antarctica, or the islands in the eastern Pacific. But they are not truly wild anymore in the way the world was wild even 100 years ago. An Iridium satellite races across the sky at sunset, a yurt has a dish antenna poking out of its side, vapour trails of high-flying jets crisscross above Greenland. And from the top of Mt Everest dying climbers call home to say farewell to their dear ones.

In Punta Arenas, the southernmost city in the world, shades, hats and long sleeves have become a part of the school uniform to protect children from harmful ultraviolet rays passing unfiltered through the ozone hole. The atolls in the Maldives have lost 70 percent of their coral reefs in the past three years because of a warm plume of ocean current, and the archipelago may have only 50 years before it is submerged forever by sea level rise. In the middle of the Amazon, the sky suddenly goes dark at noon because of blazing rainforests upwind. Trekking northeast of Kathmandu you come upon Tsho Rolpa, a lake that is nearly bursting because global warming has caused the Rolwaling Glacier to melt and recede. And who will forget that apocalyptic sight of Machhapuchhare this April—a black pyramid almost devoid of snow. Nature, and wilderness probably remains pristine and intact today only on National Geographic or Discovery channels.

Economic globalisation has another, less promising by-product: the ecological globalisation of its impact. Today, scientists, economists, futurologists and sociologists are trying to find out how the earth can live in ecological equilibrium. This shift to a new earth ethic is no longer some hippie dream, it has sound economic basis. The goal is to make human societies less wasteful, more frugal with resources, more equal. As Gandhi said, there is enough for everyone's need but not for everyone's greed.

This is the real world-wide web, a web of life intricately linked to natural processes and human factors. In the thin film of life on the planet's surface, nature is threatened as in no time in history by human activity that exploited resources as if there was no tomorrow. An exponential growth in the world's population, the wasteful extravagance of some countries, the worldwide bonfire of fossil fuels are bringing irreversible changes that threaten livelihoods and the lives of those to come. But there is now hope: economics is making a paradigm shift from the industrial-information age to a biological age that recognises the limits of what ecosystems can sustain. It is moving away from an anthropocentric worldview that treats nature as a honey-pot for the apex species. As long as the human demand for food, energy and other needs are within nature's capacity for regeneration the biosphere will survive intact.

The message from this week's meeting of the World Wide Fund for Nature was clear: let's learn to live and thrive without threatening the planet's biodiversity and the natural resource base. It is more than symbolic that WWF chose Nepal as its venue: one of the world's ecologically richest countries is also its economically poorest. But Nepal's achievements at preserving nature while ensuring better living conditions for its people is also a model for the rest of the world.



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STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



The dynasty strikes back

To be counted in Nepali politics today you either have to swear at a Koirala, or swear by one. Is this Nepal's new political dynasty?

The very idea of a dynasty goes against the basic concept of democracy. And yet, we see the possible emergence of one in that bastion of democracy, the United States. Indeed, most democracies seem to be pre-disposed to political dynasties. The Nehru-Gandhis in India, the Bandaranaike-Kumaratunga in Sri Lanka, the Bhuttos in Pakistan, the Sheikh Mujib and Zia-ur Rahman families in Bangladesh, the Sukarnos of Indonesia, the Aquinos in the Philippines. In Nepal, we didn't need democratic dynasties because we had the monarchy. But now that we are ten years into democracy, this is as good a time as any to start our own.

In fact, the dynasty-making potential of democracies is most evident not at the apex of the national power structure, but at the grassroots. Power families at the local level have always elected members of their clan to the political seat of that constituency. The prime example of this is the Gwalior royal family in India, who have invariably managed to elect scions to office after India became independent.

Al Gore himself is the son of a long-serving senator. The pedigree of George W Bush is even grander—he is the son of a president, the grandson of a senator, brother of another governor, and is related to at least 15 presidents in one way or another. Then there are the true-blue political dynasties of the New World—the Roosevelts, the Kennedys, the Rockefellers, the Tafts, the Longs—you name a president and there will be a daddy or brother who served in high office. The British have simplified matters by a system of hereditary peers who sniff snuff to stop themselves from snoring in the Upper House.

It is the charisma of the name, the brand-recognition of the political family. And as we know, branding is as important in democracies as it is in the cut-throat world of corporate marketing. An election symbol is as valuable as Nike's swoosh. Widows stepping into the political shoes of their dead husbands is so common the world over that there is an academic study of the phenomenon entitled "Over My Dead Body". When it is so common, democratic dynasties may not be a bad thing after all. Devils you know are better than those you don't.

Post-democratic Nepal is blessed with its own political dynasties. We have our own Adhikaris, Bhandaris, Mainalis, Singhs and Nidhis, but the First Family of Nepali Democratic Dynasty is undoubtedly that of the Koiralas. Political identity is defined in terms of Koiralas—if you are neither a staunch loyalist nor a severe critic, then you ain't nobody in Nepali politics. Whether you are Sher Bahadur Deuba or Comrade Prachanda you have to blackguard a Koirala to establish your political identity. You either have to swear at a Koirala or swear by one.

Krishna Prasad Koirala (or Pitaji, as he is almost always referred to) laid the foundation of this political clan. A small-time government contractor during the rule of Chandra Shumsher (1901-29), he created history by sending a parcel containing the tattered clothes of a *bharija* (bill-porter) to 'awake' His Highness to the poverty stalking the land. Little did he know that this attention-grabbing mail would end up delivering three of his sons to the prime ministerial throne.

Matrika, the eldest son, became the first commoner to become prime minister of post-Rana Nepal.

BP Koirala became the first prime minister to be democratically elected. Taking the instances of firsts even further, the youngest of the Koirala brothers, Girija, became the first prime minister to be elected under the new 1990 constitution. Love them, hate them, but ignore them you can't—Koiralas are the democratic dynasty of this country.

Unfortunately for Girijababu, charges of nepotism and relatives with feet of clay have stuck over the years. The charge that Girija may be fronting for his cousin Sushil ignores the reality that this *Bhole*



Baba from Banke is a behind-the-scenes operator and lacks the élan needed to head the clan. Ms Clean Shailaja could have been a flag-bearer, but she has already let several opportunities pass. Could it be that Shailaja doesn't believe in dynasties?

Other Koirala names being bandied about—Nona, Shekhar, Jyoti, or even Sujata—do not carry the hint of a promise with their names, largely because almost all of them take themselves far too seriously. Prakash had a fighting chance, but he threw it away by associating himself with Marichman Singh during the days of the Jan Andolan. These days, this son of

BP is better known as the father of Manisha Koirala. Speaking of whom, now that *Sawal Das Crore Ka* has bombed at the ratings, maybe Manisha will be inclined to come home?

There may yet be a dark horse. Someone not tarnished in the dirty vat of Kathmandu politics. And that precisely could be his advantage. In an environment where politics and politicians have become objects of disdain, Dr Shashank Koirala carries the credibility of a respected professional. An eminent Nepali eye surgeon who is as good a manager as he is a doctor. And being an eye doctor, could he not also have a vision for the country? Like his father, BP, Shashank considers politics to be a mission, respects the legacy of his family name, and likes to quote philosophers. (Immanuel Kant's famous proposition "Reality is seldom what appears to be" seems to be his favourite.) Apart from all that, he has been the permanent host to his uncle in Kathmandu whenever Girija is out of Baluwatar.

Poor Deuba is apparently wasting his ammunition attacking his former mentor. The senior Koiralas are not his rivals. Sushil is probably a red herring. Shailaja is too straightforward. Koirala loyalists have an ace up their sleeves—the grandson of Pitaji. The forthcoming Pokhara Convention will not be the end of tussle for the leadership of Nepali Congress. The arithmetic being what it is, a clear victory for Girija there is a foregone conclusion. But the real competition for succession in the ruling party will begin in right earnest only after Pokhara. That may be when the dynasty strikes back, and when it does, who knows, it may finally have a fresh face. ♦

Democrats vs Republicans

GYAN JUNG THAPA

The current national debate about who controls the army, and who it should be answerable to, has brought into sharp focus the condition of state-military relations in Nepal. The issue emerged after the tragic events in Dunai in September when the army stood by while 14 policemen were massacred by Maoists, nearly triggering a constitutional crisis. A breakdown or unacceptable

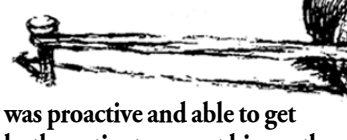


deterioration of state-military relations is dangerous for the country, to the parliamentary democratic process, to the necessary system of checks and balances and to the autonomy of the army. Unless immediate and appropriate corrective measures are taken to get this relationship on the right track, events may snowball out of control.

Now that the armed forces have been partially deployed in some districts, a rectified civilian military relationship is going to be crucial not just to manage any future escalation in the insurgency but also for any future dialogue between the government and Maoists. Insurgents increase the level of violence either when they feel that their political base is narrowing both externally and internally, or when they desire to strengthen their negotiating position vis-à-vis the government. The government, for its part, should always attempt to talk formally or informally with the insurgents and their political allies whenever an opportunity presents itself: even if the guerrillas themselves shun peace overtures. All legitimately elected governments battling insurgencies must be able to display an ability to survive politically and militarily. We have seen with peace talks elsewhere that the level of violence actually increases

during peace talks because both sides try to bolster their bargaining power. Violence could escalate when peace talks are deadlocked, as has happened now. And it is when the prospects of peace are tantalisingly near that the government must be even more vigilant to prevent violent radicals of the right and left who may feel compelled to try to derail the peace process.

As we have seen time and again in Sri Lanka, Palestine and in Central America, the role of mediator and external factors are crucial. In El Salvador in 1990, for instance, it was the trust both parties vested on the mediation role of UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar who



was proactive and able to get both parties to accept him as the sole arbitrator to settle the bloody 14 year near-civil war. What helped was that the Cold War was over and Washington gave its blessings to the talks and promised economic aid. And it worked.

Every conflict is different, and every mediation effort too must differ. When there are two warring factions with diametrically opposing views engaged in a low intensity conflict as there is in Nepal, it is not easy to agree to talk peace. Each insurgency requires specific and surgically precise tools to defeat. A display of physical and moral strength, honesty, flexibility and mutual trust backed by corresponding actions by both parties involved in the conflict are needed to create the right environment for negotiations.

Historical records reveal major crises when the military is deified as the only saviour of a nation. Under the cabinet government system from 1885 to 1945, when Japan followed *niju siefu* or dual government, the civilians had no say in matters military, but the military could trample on civilian turf with its

political and other influences. The 60 years of *niju siefu* saw 30 prime ministers heading 42 cabinets, with half of the prime ministers coming from the military and three of them generals—Yamagata, Katsuri and Taruchi—governing for half of the period. In China, the vehicle of the revolution was the peasant army that overthrew the forces of oppression and the tenet that power flows from the barrel of the gun is yet to be harmonised with a normative state-military relationship. The sacking of Admiral Vishnu Bhagat in India by Defence Minister George Fernandes last year, and the overthrow of the Nawaz Sharif government in Pakistan can also be viewed as a collapse of state-military relationship in our immediate neighbourhood.

When it becomes evident that democracy under elected civilian leaders is not serving the national interest, the military option does acquire some degree of legitimacy. The military coming to the rescue of a beleaguered state has sometimes worked well as in the Philippines in 1986 when Gen Ramos gave crucial support to the People's Power Revolution and so also in Turkey. But these were exceptions to the rule, and the credit for the initial success in both cases went to the professionalism of the armed forces.

The modern state no longer functions as a division of various departments, it is a single, invisible unity, a comprehensive machinery. Consequently, no affairs of the state could be considered outside the province of the military. It is also essential that the autonomy of the military must not be interfered with, but at the same time, the military must be made to understand that it is not an extra-government authority, and cannot act as one.

A battle royal is looming between "democrats" represented by political parties following the 1990 constitution, and "republicans" whose avowed aim is to abolish the constitutional monarchy. Civil-military relations need to be mended first before the fast-closing window of opportunity for a political solution is lost forever.

Under this arrangement, civilian control of the military becomes essential and non-negotiable. Effective civilian control of the military must be governed by the rule of law, and proper legislation anticipating future scenarios and potential future crises. When the civil bureaucracy takes advantage of political reluctance or inaction to manipulate

late or arrogate to itself powers not rightfully theirs (and they are not capable or qualified to handle) state-military relationship quickly deteriorates. The principle that is being violated here is that the

authority has been taken over by the bureaucracy, and has not been legislated. Arrogation by civil servants with all the authority, but with no responsibility, ultimately leads to a condition where the superficial veneer of "all is well" persists, but there is

chaos under the surface.

In every democratic society, the military has to be brought into the mainstream of decision-making simply because if you keep it out it will remain an extra-government authority. It is also equally impractical to claim that you have a democracy when the military has been excluded from or pushed out of all committees. Integration of the military in the decision-making process will make the military part of the policy formulation of the government, and this will enhance morale as well as give a feeling of belonging to the military establishment. Non-integration of the military will most likely lead to a crisis.

More things than just

working relations have to be rectified, but this is only possible if the military is considered a part of the government machinery.

To have a balanced state-military relationship, political leaders must have

the will and vision to nurture and develop it. The civil service should not expect a slave-master relationship with the military and the military should not expect the civil service to rubber stamp all their recommendations and actions. In an ideal situation, the relationship must be governed by legislation and not by personal contacts and whims, likes and dislikes. Civil control of the military must be confined to matters of policy framework preferably arrived at in consultation with the military leadership on matters of strategy, peace and war. For its part, the military should be equally open, more transparent and adhere to the law of the land. ♦

(Gyan Jung Thapa recently retired as a Colonel from the Royal Nepal Army. He is a graduate of the US Army Command and Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, from which he has a Masters in military arts and science.)

LETTERS

OUTRAGED HINDUS

As a Hindu, I was outraged by Hemlata Rai's article "Who is a Hindu?" (#16). It is indeed shameful that a country that prides itself on being the only Hindu kingdom in the world will not allow the world's Hindus into Pashupati. And I haven't ever heard a more absurd statement than the one attributed to the chief priest that only people who are born in India and Nepal are Hindus. So, if you are a Zoroastrian born in India



Indonesian devotees praying outside Pashupati after being refused entry into the temple on 29 October.

that automatically qualifies you as a Hindu, but if you are a Brahmin from Bali you're not? His reasoning defies logic and shows just how irrational and arbitrary the entry procedures of the temple are. It's time the protector of the world's Hindus acted to remove this discredited chief priest.

S Arjel
Austin, Texas

Hindu pilgrims from Indonesia were turned back from the gates of Lord Shiva, what else could be more humiliating than this for them, and for us as Nepalis? This incident has not only revealed the monopoly of Mul Bhatta but also his despicable thoughts. It is really ridiculous as well as sad to hear about such profane actions from a so-called holy person.

Naran Malla
Bhaktapur

What Hemlata Rai's excellent article "Who is a Hindu?" (#16) lacked was an analysis about whether the practice of barring non-Hindus is a Hindu

practice. We can argue until we are blue in the face about whether Indonesians or Malaysian Hindus are qualified to worship Lord Pashupatinath. But the much more fundamental (fundamentalist?) question here is whether even non-Hindus should be barred in the first place. India has many Hindu temples, and non-Hindus are not barred from entering them. I'm not saying that Hinduism should do what other religions do, but what is wrong with being inclusive and welcoming all religions to your place of worship? Isn't that better than having an exclusionist, outdated and Brahmanical attitude about who is "pure" and who is "impure"? As Ms Rai points out, how do you in this day and age distinguish a Hindu from a non-Hindu? We suffered an Indian blockade for not allowing Sonia Gandhi into Pashupatinath, maybe it is time to lift the blockade on our holy sites.

Ashok Sharma
Kathmandu

LOCOMOTION

You gave timely projection to the mayor of Bhaktapur "Nepali Society" (#14). Prem Suwal reminds us of the celebrated mayor of Dalian in China, who has accomplished many successes in resolving that city's urban problems. Mayor Suwal doesn't go around in a fancy car, he doesn't make reckless promises, he is not driven by megalomania. Can't our own "communist" mayor of Kathmandu and our "socialist" prime minister emulate Prem Suwal's example and shun their Mercedes Benzes? The leader of the opposition did pedal to Singha Durbar last week, but as CK Lal reports in "Comrade Nepal pedals to work" in the same issue, he was out in his chauffeured limousine the very next day.

D Gajraj
via Internet

JANA AASTHA
Ram Gopal Sharma ("Letters" # 16),

wherever he may be living, would be wiser if only he had a bit more respect for *Jan Aastha* because it is the only Nepali-language paper in Kathmandu that has the guts and the reliable sources to expose the ever-increasing rot inside the army. The story about the court martial has been lifted by your paper and others precisely because they are true. The reason *Jana Aastha* seems so biased about the army may be because its author was detained and mentally tortured for a whole night by army intelligence for exposing their dirty linen, but he has continued to he has continued to dutifully inform the public. Take it from me: most of what *Jana Astha* writes about irregularities in the army (more than 80 percent) is true.

R Gurung
Bhaktapur

TIMES

I really enjoyed the last three issues of Nepal Times on the Internet. It is a great job you are doing to keep the light shining at

the end of the tunnel. Really, your paper is great on-line fun to read and it has such diverse and interesting views.

Surya Prasai
UNAIDS, Botswana

I am a new reader of Nepali Times online. I must say I am very impressed with the quality of the articles you publish. They are not only informative and present an impartial analysis of the subject, they also have a high standard of composition, choice of words and clarity. Keep up the good work.

Ashok Srivastav
GE Transportation Systems
Erie, Pennsylvania

CORRECTION

The story "ICIMOD downsizes" (#16) carried an erroneous list of staffers involved. ICIMOD has also informed us it was a board decision and not a management decision. Nepali Times apologises for the mistake. —Ed.

Halting progress

HEMLATA RAI

When Lenin died, the Soviet Union observed a one-minute shutdown in silence. The country could not afford to miss more than that—only work would help the communist state materialise.

The march towards a socialist utopia continues here in Nepal but our communists have adopted exactly the opposite means to that end. They believe in shutting down business and bringing life to a complete halt to make a political point. In the last decade since the re-introduction of multi-party democracy, one or the other of the assortment of socialist groups have been involved in more than 80 percent of the nearly 50 national and valley-wide bandhs. (See box)

This time around, the consortium of nine minor leftist parties called for an unprecedented two-day bandh to protest the 14 October fuel price hike. The government initially pretended not to notice but made some attempt at negotiations at the last moment. Predictably, the effort failed and the nation was saddled with a bandh that couldn't have come at a worse time.

The business community believe losses will be two times more this week since the two-day bandh comes smack in the middle of the peak tourist season. Following the two-day bandh is a weekend. "Business loss of four days in a week is suicidal," says a peeved wholesaler at New Road.

The tourism sector—which contributes 20 percent of Nepal's total foreign exchange earnings and employs around 700,000 people—is another major loser. The industry is only just getting back to its feet after a disastrous first half-year due to adverse publicity following the Indian



It is difficult to see how forcing shops to shut and cars off the roads helps the cause of the political parties calling for shutdowns.

Airlines plane hijack from Kathmandu last December and the concerns raised by various diplomatic missions about law and order in the country due to increased Maoist activity. The bandh was something that the country could least afford at this juncture. Even if the government had succeeded in getting the bandh called off, the damage had already been done. Industry insiders reported mass cancellations of both hotel bookings and trekking groups in anticipation of the uncertain political climate.

To add to the woes, a host of foreign VIPs and more than 700 big names in the global environmental movement were in Kathmandu to attend the annual meeting of the World Wide Fund for Nature. Rather than revel in the wonderful opportunity the

event provided to make a show of Nepal's successes in conservation practices, the bandhs cast a dark shadow over the proceedings and only contributed to causing long-lasting damage to Nepal's reputation.

There has been no comprehensive study on the negative impact of these shutdowns on the Nepali economy, but a survey carried out by a Kathmandu-based independent research institution three years ago, estimated that a day's closure of business can cause losses of about Rs 30 million in Kathmandu alone. A fact that political leaders are not entirely ignorant of. They, however, resort to philosophical rhetoric to justify their action. "We have to lose some to gain some," says parliamentarian Lila Mani Pokharel of the United

People's Front, one of the nine leftist groups. He also argued that the bandh call was a last resort against a government that has turned impervious to reason.

But past record shows that none of the demands voiced during the 50 or so bandhs of the last ten years have yielded results. As recent as September, the same leftist coalition called a day-long national shutdown to force the government into agreeing to a host of issues, including the immediate implementation of a two-year-old understanding between the government and the communist grouping. Transport, educational institutions, factories and markets ground to a halt but it all came to naught as far as wringing concessions from the government was concerned.

Besides the effectiveness of



Deserted Singha Durbar avenue; police on pickup escort tourist transport; and (right) rickshaws make hay while the sun shines.

bandhs, the very premise of bandhs is worth questioning. The shutters do come down, but everyone knows it is definitely not in support of the bandh call. Closures are forced on a people responding to fears of the potential for violence from bandh organisers. It is far removed from the 1990 People's Movement when calls for shutdowns had mass public support and the momentum of the agitation led to one popular bandh after another. But this legitimate political tactic has since degenerated to small sections of society holding the rest hostage to their whims. The most absurd of them all was the

one organised by the Rastriya Prajatantra Party in 1998 to protest the murder of one of their MPs with well-known criminal antecedents, Mirza Dilshad Beg, in a gang war. It is ironical how even that was a success.

It could be that the Bangladesh experience gives hope to bandh organisers. Having successfully been used to bring down two governments, the effectiveness of a series of bandhs was clearly demonstrated in the neighbouring country. But, as a Bangladeshi journalist points out, there is a great difference between the two countries. While Dhaka is a

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



A rude awakening

The next Master of the Universe was being decided by a group of octogenarian bridge players in Palm Beach

On the morning of Wednesday, the 8th of November, I leapt out of bed and raced down the stairs of the finest hotel in Kakarvitta, Jhapa. The first person I met was the friendly sweeper, errand boy and porter, who never failed to smile and say namaste. "Hajur, I stuttered in my broken Nepali, 'American elections, bho, er.. ke bhayo, um.' The young man looked at me with a smile, nodded his greetings and went back to sweeping the restaurant floor. He shook his head gently as he worked. I turned in desperation to my host, the owner of the Hotel Rajat, Rajesh Shrestha. He too beamed broadly at me. "Do you know who won the US elections?" I demanded breathlessly, probably a touch rudely as well. Rajesh regarded me with a sideways look as a timely phone call relieved him of the burden of having to deal with me. A news junkie bereft of the information of the moment is an unsightly and off-putting thing.



Rajesh's usual customers, wisely, showed little interest in international television news channels, so no BBC or CNN in his hotel.

A Christian missionary on some mysterious assignment came down for breakfast and he too professed total ignorance about the fate of Messrs Gore and Bush. I spent that day, last Wednesday, in a state of some agitation. I accosted border guards, bus drivers, arriving and departing tourists. All gave me blank looks that suggested they had far more important matters on their mind than the will of voters on the other side of the globe. It was a good twelve hours before I found out about the still-unfolding political fiasco in the United States. A friend wrote from Washington to observe that the next Master of the Universe was being decided by a group of octogenarian bridge players in Palm Beach and by expatriate voters—the sort of people, my correspondent reminded me, who were summed up in song by the late, great Steve Goodman: "Some of them are running from lovers/leaving no forward address; Some of them running tons of ganja/some are running from the IRS (Internal Revenue Service)". A reference to a tiny minority among the expats, I'm sure, but a reminder of how the fate of us all can hang in the weirdest of balances.

I can only think of the pious, well-meaning folk who make a living travelling the world and monitoring the elections of poorer nations. Where are the foreign observers in Florida? Why isn't, say, Benazir Bhutto calling a news conference to express her deep unease at the ballot paper situation in Palm Beach, and the alleged irregularities in New Mexico? Don't get me wrong. I'm not against election observers, as such, especially in places where governments and elite have not

convinced their citizens that polls will be honest and impartial. And I'm not picking on the Americans either.

The twenty-first century is beginning with a series of reminders to the rich, developed countries of the world that they too live in fragile constructs, at the mercy of fate and unforeseen, potentially catastrophic failures of process and technology. Take the recent Singapore Airlines crash in Taipei. The record of the world's safest airline now stands besmirched because the plane tried to take off on a construction site. The tragic funicular fire in Austria is another horrid example. Many of us cheered the European fuel protesters who in September shut down their countries with their demands for cuts in petrol prices, and shook their governments to the core. For me, it all contributes to a sense of unease that worse lies ahead. The latter years of the last century, the *fin d'siecle*, were awash in smugness on an unprecedented scale as my generation, the forty-somethings, made vast sums of money and came to power in many democracies. We were Masters of the Universe. A surging stock market, the incredible pace of often frivolous yet always lucrative technologies, progress on the gaping wounds in global peace such as West Asia and Northern Ireland—it was all our doing. Or so we thought. Has a run of immense of good luck been mistaken for competence and exemplary stewardship? The more I think about it, the more I wonder why Bush or Gore want to be president at all.

And oh yes, profound apologies to the people of Kakarvitta for my day of relative rudeness and agitation. It won't happen again. ♦

Rs 900 million lost in 5 years

National and Kathmandu Valley bandhs in the last five years*

Date	Organiser
21 September 2000	Nine leftist groups
2 August 2000	CPN(ML) fraternal organisations
2 April 2000	CPN(Maoist)
27 March 2000	CPN(UML)
16 November 1999	National People Movement Coordination Committee
7 October 1999	CPN(Maoist)
5 September 1999	Language Right United Agitation Committee
5 March 1999	Newa Khala
17 December 1998	National People's Movement Coordination Committee
20 July 1998	Eight leftist groups
14 July 1998	Rastriya Prajatantra Party
5 April 1998	United People's Front
29 March 1998	Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry
22 September 1997	Nepal Students' Union—student wing of the Nepali Congress
8 September 1997	Chamber of Commerce
29 August 1997	Four leftist groups
17 August 1997	Four leftist groups
8 July 1997	Nepal Students' Union
30 April 1997	19 small parties
18 April 1997	VAT Agitation Committee
12 December 1996	National People's Front
18 September 1996	CPN(United Centre)
12 September 1996	National People's Front and Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party
21 August 1996	National Republican Front
21 August 1995	CPN(UML) fraternal organisations
1 August 1995	Nepal Students' Union
4 June 1995	Pashupat Sena
19 June 1995	Nepal Students' Union
4 May 1995	United People's Front (Pampha)

*In the decade since the restoration of democracy there have been 44 calls for Nepal and valley-wide closures.



sprawling metropolis, Kathmandu is little more than a large town where almost every place is within walking distance. Hence, the impact of bandhs is considerably less. Also, because the number of urban poor is relatively less in Kathmandu, the sum of human misery caused by bandhs is not great enough to affect governments. But most important of all, he says, is that since Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala is pre-occupied with inner-party wrangling and the larger issue of the Maoist insurgency, the present bandh can only be an irritant.

Adademic Surendra KC is even more blunt. "Bandhs are irrelevant in the present context; they symbolise lack of vision and an absence of intellectual and social sensitivity among the political leadership," says KC, a Tribhuvan University historian who has studied Nepal's communist movement. "Bandhs can be counterproductive especially for communists in Nepal. People have pinned hope on the communist parties to relieve them from the burden of social and economic disparities but when they cause difficulties by calling for irrelevant political displays like bandhs people could turn unsympathetic to them," he adds.

MP Pokharel doesn't buy that argument but avoids a direct response when asked if the national shutdown will force the government to reduce fuel prices. What he has to say, however, can only be cause for greater concern: "Our protests might not always be peaceful like this."

That threat does not seem to have deterred other political parties—from the right-wing Rastriya Prajatantra Party and Nepal Sadbhavana Party to the main opposition Communist Party of Nepal (UML)—from extending support to the shutdown. Even the Maoists declared they were all for it. Lost in there somewhere is the realisation that the ruling party will use the same tactics to force the country to a standstill if and when they sit in the opposition. And having suffered bandhs during their tenure they will not need to be apologetic about it at all.

One can only hope that two-dayers are the most our politicians will impose on us. And that they don't take comfort from and emulate the fact that fellow politician Subhas Ghising did get away with a 40-day bandh at the height of the Gorkhaland movement in Darjeeling in the 1980s. ♦

Pre-election Congress bouts

The ruling party has expelled 16 members for disrupting a meeting to elect delegates to the 10th Convention in Saptari district. Party president Girija Prasad Koirala ordered their expulsion for allegedly being involved in a brawl that led to the injury of an election observer. The chairman of the Saptari district development committee, Dinesh Yadav, is among those expelled for three years.

Meanwhile, Sher Bahadur Deuba, who is challenging Koirala's bid to be party president for a second time, says the president's decision goes against the practice of a hearing before a disciplinary committee prior to taking any action. But Congress spokesman Narahari Acharya described Koirala's action as a "special decision" that the president can take in serious circumstances, and that it was not routine disciplinary action.

Stop torture: AI

Anmesty International launched a worldwide campaign against torture from Nepal last week. The campaign aims to build public opinion to make torture a punishable offence. Speaking to reporters on the occasion, AI Secretary General Pierre Sane said that torture of children, women and prisoners of conscience is a problem in Nepal. He also said that the Maoists, who claim to be fighting against similar atrocities by the government, themselves have a bad record where torture was concerned.

Sane noted with surprise that Nepali politicians, many of whom have has first-hand experience of torture in Nepali jails, are hesitant to enact laws that would make it a criminal offence. Nepal has a law to compensate torture victims but its implementation is cumbersome because it requires torture to be proved. Compensation is also delayed because of the time cases take to get a court hearing.

\$5 million from UNCDF

The United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) is to provide \$5 million to a Local Development Fund to fund decentralised planning and financing activities. The programmes will be implemented in Achham, Kaski, Rupandehi, Dolakha, Kabhre, Dhanusha, Udayapur and Tehrathum districts under existing UNDP projects. Of this amount \$3 million will be provided to district development committees in instalments while the remainder will be spent on human resources development and technical assistance. District and village development committees will allocate the money to specific projects.

Exhibition in exile

A group of Bhutanese refugee students called "The Rose Class" will present an exhibition of photography, art and writing. The exhibition, called "Voices with Vision", will run from 15-22 November at Baggikhana, Patan Dhoka. The Rose Class is a participatory project co-ordinated by the UK-based NGO PhotoVoice. There are currently over 98,000 Bhutanese refugees living in seven camps in the Jhapa and Morang districts of southeastern Nepal. These refugees make up one-sixth of Bhutan's population and the majority have been in exile since 1992.



South Asian writers

A group of South Asian writers, including big names like VP Singh, former prime minister of India, and Khushwant Singh, controversial columnist and writer, are meeting in Kathmandu from 22 November. The team will also hold seminars at Tribhuvan University and the Royal Nepal Academy.

Goodbye Hans

Hans Rothenbuhler, World Bank Country Director in Nepal since July 1997, left Kathmandu in the middle of a bandh Thursday heading into retirement. Hans led the Nepal office in the crucial years since the cancellation of a major loan for the Arun-3 project and the metamorphosis of the traditionally tight-lipped club of banker types into one that talks more easily about issues such as poverty alleviation and social support. Hans also led the team that prepared the Nepal Country Assistance Strategy 1999-2000, where the Bank said it was poor governance and weak institutions that were the main obstacles to Nepal's development and not so much the finances. He was also instrumental in convening the Nepal Development Forum in Paris in April after a gap of four years. Asked about who was going to succeed him, Hans told us: "They're still working on it."



WORLD BANK

Time out for hotels

The strike threat that loomed over the hotel industry has passed for now. Employee unions have decided to put away for later the indefinite strike that was to have begun on 19 November—but only until 11 December.

But there's a complication though. Both the hotel owners and the unions say that the commission formed by the government to find a lasting solution to the fight over service charges was done without consulting the parties in conflict. The said commission is to submit a report in three months and recommend a concrete solution to the problem that has seriously threatened the hotel industry.

Earlier this week, union representatives said the strike was postponed because they had received a "sympathetic response" from the government on the 10 percent service charge they are demanding. The decision was reached in the presence of representatives from the government and the Employer's Council of the Federation of the Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FNCCI). The final compromise was hammered out in the presence of the tourism minister. Hotel owners stayed away from this meeting and instead called upon the Prime Minister to form a high-level commission to look into the issue and settle the matter once and for all.

The unions argue that owners have nothing to lose because they can pass on the service charge to tourists. They say the charge would also force hotels to maintain transparent accounts—something that could also be in the interest of the government for taxation purposes. Presently, only the larger corporate hotels are said to maintain open accounts.

The 10 percent service charge is something workers

The hotel strike has been put off for a while, but talks between workers and hotel owners remain deadlocked.

have been demanding for over as many years, and many hotels privately admit that they would have no problem with it if the government says OK. "The unions should agree to postpone the next bi-ennial collective bargaining if they are to get it," one hotelier told us. "Both sides should be ready to give and take something." But the smaller family-run hotels that comprise the majority oppose the charge because it would force them to open their books to their employees, and ultimately to the taxman.

The dispute would not have been as threatening had the hoteliers decided to engage the workers in talks and not warned lockouts, a union source told us. He also said that all the hotels wanted was that they be declared "essential services" when they went around meeting top politicians—who ironically had trade union backgrounds and were not ready to listen their "anti-democratic" demands.

Hoteliers point out that India's Taj Group of hotels is the only major chain that currently add the service charge. The Taj, however, is also said to be the worst paymaster in the Indian industry. The unions want hoteliers to come to an agreement within the month-long deadline, while HAN maintains it would need at least a year to work out a deal.

The unions also have their own list of hotels all over the world that levy the charge and say that they are even prepared for removal of the charge in a year if that actually hurts the tourism industry, as claimed made by the hotels. ♦

An American in Kathmandu

RAJENDRA S. KHADKA . . .
MacAlister Brown fondly remembers the days when he bicycled from Kalimati to Patan and along the banks of the Bagmati. Which is why he told his group of fellow travellers from Massachusetts that the Kathmandu air in October is crisp, the skies clear and the vistas of the Himalaya are good viewing. But that was Kathmandu in 1982, when he made a last brief visit.

“The magical experience outside of the Western middle-class experience is shrinking [in Kathmandu]—the city is horribly scarred by trash and pollution, but one can still find delight in the artistry of the medieval structures,” is what Prof Brown has to say now. MacAlister Brown, Professor Emeritus of Political Science at Williams College in Massachusetts, USA, and his wife, Adriana, were leading a 32-member Williams alumni group on a tour of Nepal, India and Tibet. He first came to Nepal in 1968 on a Fulbright grant to teach Public Administration at Tribhuvan University. The couple stayed here for ten months and their son was born at the Shanta Bhawan hospital. He made brief visits again in 1974 and 1982.

The professor moved on from his view of the state of the environment to more contentious territory. The Panchayat era, according to him was “a mild form of autocracy and people were certainly cowed, but it wasn’t a ruthless, murderous regime”. He remembered that in those days too, students were restless and eager for democracy. And one day, the students asked him if he would speak on the subject of democracy instead of public administration, which he did. And did the university or the government take any kind of action against him? “No,” he said, laughing. The politicians of today, he said, are busy “feathering their own

nest” and practising a “politics of personal greed and aggrandisement,” leading Nepal into a “negative development phase”. Reflecting further Professor Brown said that he did not foresee the emergence of a “strong man” (a la General Musharraf in Pakistan, or to refer to our own not-so-recent past, the Kot Parba and the emergence of Jung Bahadur Rana) who might put an end to the “endless series of corrupt bargains” in the bazaar of Nepali politics. He was optimistic in the sense that while he realised that Nepal’s nascent multi-party system might be in danger, “democracy itself was not in danger of slipping out of control”.

Besides his interest in Nepal, Professor Brown has also studied the communist groups of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia and written or edited three books on them. Asked to compare the communists of Indo-China with our own Maoist movement, Prof Brown said the situation was different. First of all, both the Laotian and Cambodia communist parties were under the tutelage of the Vietnamese communists, and the communists of Cambodia and Laos were affected by and benefitted from the war in Vietnam in the 1960s and 70s. Consider this for a fact he says—two weeks after the fall of Saigon, communists were victorious in Cambodia too. But he didn’t see how Nepal’s immediate neighbours would benefit if it were destabilised by the Maoist insurgency.

However, he noted that the Indo-Chinese communist groups were both rural-based, and had mass support because they targeted the landlords, merchants, money lenders and other privileged classes. But instead of taking the Khmer Rouge seriously, Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia dismissed them as an inconsequential force. Prof Brown felt that Nepali political leaders ought to closely examine the



An American professor, who once taught at TU, talks about the Kathmandu he knew, the state of our politics, and compares the Maoist insurgency with other movements in Indo-China.

peasant and the working classes and ask themselves if perhaps a rebel leader might emerge from amongst them. And, whether this leader will mobilise the restlessness and dissatisfaction of the peasant and working/lower classes and channel it into an effective political movement that may eventually challenge the political status quo? It is also necessary to find out if the Nepali Maoists received support from any external forces, as was the case of the Indo-Chinese Communists fighting the Americans and US supported regimes. He warned that unchecked violence will eventually “desensitise the people to normal human emotions”. And then it may

be too late. It was late evening when our chat ended at the Everest Hotel in Baneswor. As we stepped out, we saw several guests scrambling up the staircase to the roof. We followed them to be greeted by a picture-postcard view: the sky indigo-blue, the air sharp and clear, and the rays of the setting sun tinting the snow-capped mountains with a delicate orange. Professor Brown’s face lit up with a beatific smile. Only an hour ago his brow had furrowed with disappointment at not being able to view the mountains. He was now a man transformed, a disappointed supplicant whose expectations were unexpectedly rewarded. ♦

NEPALITERATURE by MANJUSHREE THAPA

SHRAWAN MUKARUNG LOCAL DEPICTIONS

Desh Khojdai Jaandaa (While Searching for the Country) is songwriter Shrawan Mukarung’s first poetry collection. It shows the strong influence of progressive literature on the poet’s imagination—many of the works focus, with didactic intent, on raising issues of economic and social justice. Some of the more whimsical poems speak more effectively, however, of rural life. Nepal’s literature being Kathmandu-centred, it is refreshing to find work which doesn’t romanticise country life, depict an over-simplified rusticity, or drown out local stories with grander national narratives. Mukarung’s best poems are based on subtle aspects of life in the eastern hills, where he originally comes from.

The work selected below is one such poem. There is nothing complicated about the piece; but the quirky tone, the quick details, and the deft twists lead the reader to the surprising ending, which throws a darker light on the implication of the original rumour about drowned stars.

Rumours in the Majhi Fishermen’s Village

When rumours spread in the village
that the stars had drowned in the river
he headed off with his hook
in the early hours of dawn

Above all he felt
a profound love for the north star
because peering through his wicker portal
the north star always spilled over his bed
No matter if it was a night of sleeping in hunger
no matter if it was a night of sleeping gluttoned on
booze
the north star would stay on his forehead
and he would light up, aglow

Resolute
at the heart of the river
he was casting his hook
when from far away
a crowd of children came in fun and mirth
“Majhi-dai, Majhi-dai
we found the shit of the stars.”
As a finale
they shouted in chorus,
“Star shit looks a lot like rocks.”

Without rest
he kept casting his hook
but never did a star get trapped in it
Father, many fishes got trapped
and soon there was stew enough
to feed everyone in the village

By now
determined to fish out the north star
he wouldn’t stop sporting his hook
even as he ferried people across the river on his dinghy
The children started raising a fuss on the shores—
“Majhi-dai, Majhi-dai,
fish out the stars for us fast.”

It was but the season of rains
One night
there was a great flood
and this unkind flood swept off
the one who was so practised at fishing for stars
and it reached him far away
The next morning
in the early hours of dawn
another rumour spread in the village—
“An alluring moon
has also drowned in the river.”

FILM REVIEW by SHANUJ VC

Ready, aim, Fire

Aago
Directed by Narayan Puri

If you are masochistic, this is just the movie for you. And to hear that both the government and the Maoists are hopping mad about it comes as a surprise. Lighten up, you guys, why take such atrociously deficient cinema seriously? The script boils the plot of the five-year-old insurgency down to its simplistic and most populist essence, discarding anything that would restore the slightest nuance to the story.

Of course, *Aago* can do a great deal of damage, simply because there will be many who will believe in it, and come out of the theatre thinking that they now have the Maoist issue figured out. For the first time in contemporary Kollywood, a director has challenged head-on a hot, burning national issue. The subject matter would have lent itself to a great plot, fabulous cinematography, and world-class acting. But Kollywood being Kollywood it is not surprising that director Puri has not been able to rise above a formula production. After all, the Maoist insurgency has all the real-life ingredients necessary to make a B-grade copy of a Bombay musical: violence, blood, corruption, and great fight scenes. The only thing possibly lacking would be sex, but there is nothing a rape scene will not solve.

Aago heralds the peddling of the Maoist insurgency as art. And if that is



the way we are to go, the only thing I can say is let’s hope reality does not imitate art. Having gone through such a tormenting time watching it, it is my solemn duty to warn readers that you may be better off staying home to watch *Crorepatti*. Don’t worry; I will not inflict the plot line on you. Aside from being violently boring, it is boorish, crudely made, and what it lacks in subtlety it makes up for by being a bad copy of something Bollywood would make on Veerappan, for instance.

Why the government even bothered to censor this film and give it a notoriety it did not deserve is beyond me. Why ‘Maoists’ infiltrate the cinemas and shout slogans makes it all even more mystifying. In fact, the reaction of the government, the Maoists and the public to *Aago* deserves a politico-sociological treatise that will summarise the mediocrity of present-day Nepal.

All of this is very sad, especially because the average audience that watches a Nepali movie is intense and committed about it. They do deserve better bilch. And here one is not even subconsciously comparing Nepali moviedom with Bollywood. The less Kollywood learns from Bollywood, the better.

But yet, I shall not spare you the Maoist angle in *Aago*. The Maoists live in filmi-villain caves, their leader is a woman (played by Saranga Shrestha—who seems to have modelled herself after *Bandit Queen*), the hero (Sushil Chhetri), as happens in such cases, is pushed into the insurgency by family tragedy at the hand of the State. And yes, he is the literary kind, a brilliant student etc, who is in love with an MP’s daughter. The establishment is represented by cruel and corrupt cops, and a nasty MP. So what does all this build up to—with all the due blessings of the State and the Censor, the good hero gets his comrades to surrender at a ceremony held under the name of veteran democracy fighter, Ganesh Man Singh. Death does have its good points—like not being around to suffer such celluloid. ♦

Going microbus crazy

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

While the debate over efficient and clean mass transportation continues, daily commuters in the Valley are enthusiastically exploring their different options. The new microbuses are posing stiff competition to a motley collection of Safa electric vehicles, creaking buses remaindered from highway duty, and minibuses left over from 70s overland journeys to Nepal.

Diesel tempos, the old Vikrams, made their government-approved appearance on the roads in the early 90s when Kathmandu was trying to cope with a sharp increase in daily commuters. The blue smoke they left billowing in their wake was a clear sign that this was a mistake, and the government banned Vikrams in 1999 when their emissions became intolerable. Smooth-talking environmentalists aided in the clean-up by discussing science like politicians extolling the virtues of democracy, but the owners of Vikrams were not turning green without some sort of payback. So the government allowed them modern replacements, the microbuses.

There's no doubt that microbuses present a different face of public transport. The lay Nepali gets to ride the fancy Toyota, Mitsubishi, and Nissan vans, something only INGO employees did earlier. And the dark smoke emitted by the three-wheelers dissipated in the wind. But has transportation in the valley become any easier and is the air any clearer?



Daily commuters are riding high on the sleek new microbuses. But an efficient mass rapid transport system is still a long way off.

Not all would agree.

Getting rid of the 3000-odd diesel Vikram tempos was tough because they had influential owners. The 641 operators given permits to import replacement microbuses were also given subsidies – 75 percent off the import duty on diesel engine microbuses and 99 percent off for those running on petrol. Each of the larger diesel microbuses cost around Rs 1.4 million after the reduced duties, and most have been funded by bank loans. The repayment plans demand an average payment of Rs 30,000 a month for five years. The microbuses do earn enough to meet the banks' demands. A microbus doing the Lagankhel-Ratnapark stretch ferries around 600 people a day spending an average of 28-30 litres of diesel. This nets the operator between Rs 1,700-2,000 after fuel costs and wages. That's close to Rs 60,000 a month. But for the city, the 250 Vikram-replacements cruising the streets are creating new problems, congestion and more pollution.

"Microbuses are not only convenient and comfortable but also cost-effective," says Dinesh Sharma, a daily commuter whose Tokha- Tundikhel ride costs Rs 6. "I prefer the bigger ones among the

micros because they are safer and more comfortable," he adds. Microbuses are allowed to carry a maximum of 14 passengers, four more than the electric and gas-run tempos. Some people do prefer the three-wheelers for the relative ease with which they can clamber in and out, but most have no problems with the micros.

Moreover, microbuses don't have designated stops and the drivers stop anywhere they're asked along the route approved by the Bagmati Zone Transport Office. Reacting to the suggestion that this causes traffic snarls, Raman Shrestha, a transport department official said, "In an open economy we cannot dictate to owners the route they should operate on. They are free to decide." However, operators do need route approvals and have to be on the move most of the time unlike other vehicles that have regulation stops, Shrestha adds.

Vehicle operators tell a different, more difficult story. "They've not planned anything properly," says Rajendra KC, a microbus owner. "We don't have parking space and we're not allowed to stop anywhere. The only reason we're surviving is because the ride is cheaper than metered taxis and more comfortable than three wheelers and minibuses."

The traffic police says the situation is out of its hands. "Almost half the nation's vehicles run in the valley. How are we supposed to

provide parking space to every new idea that the government comes up with? There's no parking space at all," says Superintendent of Police Sharada Bhakta Ranjit of the Valley Traffic Police. "Private entrepreneurs should come up with private parking lots like in other metropolitan cities," he suggests.

There's another black mark against microbuses. They are gradually pushing clean electric vehicles to the periphery. Microbus emissions are not as immediately noxious as those of their predecessors, but they do add to pollution levels in the valley. "They will kill the local electric vehicle industry," says an environmental economist. "And over time we will be back to breathing more polluted air."

The government is planning a blanket ban on new commuter vehicles within the Ring Road. Ironically, this plan will specifically target electric three-wheelers. However, there are more effective measures to address both pollution and overcrowding. The old, large diesel-run buses could ply the major arterial roads, while microbuses could be restricted to less-served routes on smaller roads. New subsidies could be provided to convert smaller microbuses to run on gas, and import subsidies could be altered to encourage operators to bring in the more expensive battery-operated microbuses.

Whatever the government plans to do about the valley's traffic and the resultant air pollution, one thing is certain, a well-planned mass rapid transport system is the only real solution. Whether or not the government has anything specific in mind, for now commuters in Kathmandu seem content with riding the microbus. ♦

FEEDBACK

by RIC COCHRANE

Protests throughout the United States and worldwide debate over the current presidential election pose challenges to the original framework of the US Constitution, long considered the blueprint for successful democracies.

Asian governments like China have relished the opportunity to ridicule the electoral process and, by inference, the democratic system, as "flawed." Perhaps the Electoral College system should be rethought, since Vice President Gore who won the popular vote might not win the Presidency. But decrying democracy based on this amounts to desperation by leaders of communist and autocratic nations who seize any chance to introduce new propaganda to their oppressed, undereducated and impoverished constituents.

One could argue that Nepali Prime Minister Koirala employs similar tactics in reassuring the Nepali people of the efficiency of his administration. The misconception in many nascent democracies such as Nepal is that democracy automatically leads to wealth and a high standard of living. Actually, democracy is a most inconvenient political system. It requires constant management, oversight and, yes, restructuring. Democracy's strength is its fragility, its reliance on many separate components rather than a single, autocratic, self-governing head.

President Clinton, addressing the United States during the vote recount in Florida, said the closeness of the ballot and the resulting dilemma are signs that democracy is alive. Clinton's moral character may be in question, but his assertion is correct. When an entire nation takes to the streets to make its collective voice heard, the system is strong. After all, democracy is government "for the people, by the people," according to the US Constitution. Its strength derives from the active involvement of citizens.

A Nepali friend said to me, "We expect this sort of thing in Nepal, but not in America." Why not? New democracies and citizens of non-democratic countries should take heart in America's current situation because it proves that individuals can make a difference when they are educated and have the right to free speech. Nearly 100 million votes were cast and now the presidency hinges on the vote count in one state, Florida. The individual matters.

Koirala, like Clinton, has many faults, but he, too, has made one astute statement. "There may be faults with individuals, such as myself," Koirala said recently. But, he cautioned, the integrity of Nepal's constitution is not to be questioned. Koirala's self-deprecation is not a gesture of nobility, but a political strategy of those leaders who benefit most from the economic freedoms afforded by capitalist, multi-party systems. They turn on their under-educated constituents saying, "If

Hoste ma haise garera



Actually, democracy is a most inconvenient political system. It requires constant management, oversight and, yes, restructuring.

there are problems, as citizens, we all are to blame." Citizen Koirala's "I am one of you and suffer as much" stance is suspicious posturing, especially to Americans accustomed to rhetoric and impropriety hidden beneath the blessed canvas of the ideal that is Democracy.

The difference now between the democracies of the United States and Nepal is that between an educated, literate populace practised in the ways of free speech and activism, and one still reeling from decades of oppression. Personal issues of morality aside, Americans do not tolerate impropriety from their elected officials. Koirala, veteran of a different system, realises that he can placate voters by assuring them they live in a democracy, while leading a corrupt government.

The United States is not immune to the effects of poor education, as evidenced by the focus of the election debacle, voters misreading a simple ballot and voting for "the wrong candidate." I can only hope these ballot-challenged troglodytes are part of the same American demographic enthralled by the mind-numbing

game show "Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?" This is a classic case of the mental atrophy that arises even in a society blessed with freedom of opportunity and excellent academic institutions. Democracy requires constant care.

The challenge facing Nepal is to overcome the ill effects of the past and the corrupt elitist administration of the present and choose a future that will not be easy or necessarily lead to immediate economic stability. Sacrifice is required in order to achieve a future in which the population is educated enough to set the will of the people in action, as has happened in the US.

But, as a friend who has lived in Kathmandu for 40 years recently commented, Nepalis have been downtrodden for so long they have forgotten how to work and sacrifice. The attitude now is one of *ke painchha*, "What's in it for me?" The opportunity to achieve financial liberation at some point, which is more than most Nepalis have now. The choice must be made to sacrifice the now for the future if Nepal is to have one at all, and not self-destruct and become India's 28th state or the South-of-Everest State of China.

Given the poverty of most, the thought of sacrificing hard-earned gains for the future of democracy is laughable at best. But it is a choice that has to be made. Errors in

judgement, corruption and other weaknesses are inherent, but only because freedom also is. It is better to be given the option to err than to live in fear, prisoner to despots and tyrants.

Yes, democracy is the reason the United States is in turmoil regarding the selection of its next leader, but such a fate is enviable as it indicates that the power of the system lies with the people. We were once also a tiny nation teetering on the brink of absolute success or eternal failure. Credit the courageous whose sacrifices built the foundations of what has become the world's final superpower. That we still question our system and change components is a reflection of the sustained vitality of democracy in the United States. A powerful statement has been collectively made that some institutions are still sacred and that faith and devotion lie in the sanctity of nationhood and the freedom therein.

Nepal should be so lucky. I am reminded of a phrase I am told was once popular here: *Hoste ma haise garera, Nepal lai uchalaun* (Let's join hands and push each other to uplift Nepal). ♦

Ric Cochrane is an American journalist living in Nepal who writes for The Seattle Times and The Tabby Cat magazine, Seattle.

BIZ NEWS

Urea subsidy back

The government has decided to reinstate subsidies on urea. The subsidies were phased out in December 1999 under the terms of an Asian Development Bank loan funding reforms suggested by the 20-year Agriculture Perspective Plan. The new subsidy will cover the interest on loans obtained by both the state-run Agriculture Inputs Corporation (AIC) and the private sector for importing urea. The AIC's sale price of urea shot up from Rs 740 to Rs 894 per quintal after government support was phased out. The move is aimed at helping Nepali agro-products compete with Indian imports which are cheaper due to subsidies on fertiliser, irrigation and support prices.

Nepal Battery Co. shuts down

Nepal Battery Company, one of the first Indian joint ventures in Nepal, closed shop last week. Industry sources say the closure of the company, a Union Carbide India venture, resulted from a protracted labour dispute that involved 19 local staff members alleging discrimination in favour of Indian workers. Nepal Battery's closure has left 74 workers without jobs.

“Dry Port” update

Nepali officials say the Indian Railways Board is moving slowly on decisions regarding the commissioning of the rail link between the Inland Container Depot (ICD) being built in Birgunj, and Calcutta's Haldia port. This could delay the start of operations after the ICD is ready in December.

Nepal sent Indian authorities a draft proposal on the operation modalities early this year but has not received a response despite several reminders. The rail link between the ICD and Haldia port would reduce freight costs by as much as 30 percent. The late start of construction of the rail link has already delayed the completion of the ICD by nine months. The US\$28.5 million “dry port” is being funded by a US\$23.58 million World Bank loan and a US\$5 million contribution from the Nepali government.

Aqua joins conservation

Aqua, the “ultra pure water” retailed by the HC Dugar Group, has been selected as the official supplier of drinking water for both the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Alliance of Religion and Conservation conferences. “We're proud to be part of this important conservation meeting,” says Sanjay Dugar, Managing Director of Aqua Minerals Nepal P. Ltd. “This is a recognition of the quality of our product.” Specially labelled 1000ml Aqua consumer packs have also hit the market.



Tea policy

The Nepal Tea Policy 2000 was approved by the government last week. The policy envisages expanding the area under tea cultivation to 40,800 hectares in the next five years. The government hopes the new policy will increase production of Nepali tea to 6.1 million kg annually by 2010, with hill tea constituting 65 percent of the total output.

Other provisions of the policy include low interest loans for producers and bank loans covering up to 80 percent of the project costs of firms setting up processing plants. The government also plans to identify fallow land in tea cultivation zones and lease them for up to 50 years to private growers for tea cultivation.

First prize: a Hyundai

AVCO International, the sole distributor of Hyundai vehicles in Nepal, will give away two Hyundais as prizes in a lucky draw to be held later this year. The first prize is a Hyundai Accent, a family sedan valued at Rs 1.45 million, and the second prize a Santro Zip Drive (Rs 1.02 million). The scheme, open to anyone who books a Hyundai vehicle between mid-October and Dec 31, 2000, is an effort to strengthen brand image, says a company press release.

Honour for Prisma

Nepal's Prisma Advertising has bagged the Bell Ringer Award 2000 given by Johnson & Johnson School of Advertising in New Brunswick, USA for its activities in executing the growth of J&J business in Nepal. The award was handed over to the J&J India team on 9 November in New Brunswick.

‘Stop Indian trucks’

An organisation of Nepali truckers has called upon the government to check the entry and illegal operation of Indian trucks in Nepal. A statement issued by Nepali truckers in Butwal last week says Indian trucks violate the 10 ton legal load limit and even misuse their entry permits and haul goods in Nepal during their 72 hour transit.

They also charge that Indian trucks are unsuited to Nepali roads and are a major cause of deteriorating road conditions. Also last week, truck operators in Biratnagar obstructed the operation of trucks with Indian license plates stranding goods headed to different parts of the country.

ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

Another burning issue



Another oil price hike, another strike. When will the NOC learn to be a model state-run endeavour?

There I was contemplating a life of forced shutdowns, going to work once a week to conserve oil, cooking every third day to conserve oil, shutting down the airport and every service deemed non-essential to conserve oil. A life of roadblocks, permits and zero services. And I wondered why we stop at just a two-day strike to protest an oil price hike. We could just shut everything down for months.

Alternatively, we could put our fine minds to figuring out what the problem is really all about. It is worth asking why, when fuel isn't really subsidised anyway, the business of retailing it continues to be monopolised by the state. The Nepal Oil Corporation will never be a model state-run endeavour. If the government intends to run the corporation like a business, it is a long way from learning what any successful business knows off the bat. To do well, your product needs to be reliable and trustworthy, you need to provide uninterrupted service and you need to add value. Oil retail and distribution (even of the unadulterated stuff) are not hugely profitable by themselves anywhere in the world. Higher margins come from add-ons, value added services, the sale of related



products like lubricant, maybe even convenience stores attached to gas stations. The oil regulating bodies in India, too, have recognised this, and international and local firms are turning a trip to fill your tank into a pleasant, even an enjoyable experience. The key here is regulating this Rs 10 billion business, and that is something we need to learn. Someone, somewhere in the bowels of the NOC may understand the economics of subsidies and recognises that everything else in the oil-retailing business might be better off in the hands of people who know how to sell. The government doesn't have to look farther than its own backyard for inspiration or

lessons. Allowing private operators into the LPG sector has been a successful move. There are numerous private operators, and despite higher prices for the gas in Nepal, there's been virtually no illegal trade across the border with India. An efficient regulatory body would ensure that while oil prices in Nepal can't be divorced from the machinations of global players and the rumbles in India, lower prices here don't immediately imply that supplies start slithering over the border. Of course, this means that the NOC would have to clean up its act and not be a source of easy money for every bureaucrat or politician who sniffs oil or jumps on the back of a tanker. The government would have to see how best the oil business could be opened up to the private sector. A regulatory body would need to be up, running and alert. Or, we could just continue the same way and have tankers disappear half an hour after a price hike in London. The upside is that you could join me every day to contemplate even more unproductive futures, since none of us will have a life anyway. FNCCI, what do you think? ♦

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

Grindlays Gazette

INTEREST RATE UPDATE

NEPALI RUPEE	CURRENT%	PREVIOUS%
Call Money Avg.	5.25	5.20
84 Days t/bill	5.04	5.02
91 Days t/bill	5.29	5.27
365 Days t/bill	6.18	6.16
Repo rate	5.79	5.77

The average rate of 91 days T. Bill rate remained almost unchanged at 5.2893 percent compared to 5.2702 percent in the previous week. Expected range for coming weeks 5.15 to 5.35.

FOREIGN CURRENCY : Interest rates

	USD	EUR	GBP	JPY	CHF
LENDING	9.50	6.25	6.00	1.50	5.13
LIBOR (1M)	6.62	4.90	6.05	0.33	3.21

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)	33.55	33.10	+ 1.36
GOLD(Ounce)	264.80	264.65	+ 0.06
GOLD (NPR *)	7040	7050	- 0.14
EUR	0.8582	0.8636	- 0.63
GBP	1.4319	1.4299	+ 0.14
JPY	107.84	107.26	- 0.54
CHF	1.7699	1.7637	- 0.35
AUD	0.5203	0.5261	- 1.10
INR	46.78	46.65	- 0.28
*Currency bid prices at 8.00 p.m. on 14/11 - Source Reuters			

Oil : Oil prices rose on Tuesday reacting to the prospect of colder weather in the U.S. Kuwait's oil minister added to the bullish tone of the market when he said that an output increase was “out of the question”.

Currencies : The euro fell in the absence of the central bank intervention on Monday, surrendering overnight gains and falling to capitalise on America's political uncertainty. The ECB, which bought euros twice in the open market last week, did not intervene this time. The yen tumbled to a one-week low against the dollar, hurt by political uncertainties in Japan and a drop of over two percent in the Nikkei average.

INDIAN RUPEE OUTLOOK : The Indian currency ended Tuesday marginally weaker on import demand sparked by worries over firm oil prices. The rupee ended at 46.7875/7950 per dollar compared to Monday's close of 46.7575/7625. The Indian rupee is expected to remain under pressure.

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		



In US\$	Dal-Lentil 1 kg	Bhat-Rice 1 kg	Petrol 1 Litre	Diesel 1 Litre	Kerosene 1 Litre	Electricity 1 Unit	\$ Rate
Bangladesh	0.74	0.37	0.40	0.22	0.37	0.04	54.00
Bhutan	0.65	0.31	0.56	0.33	0.18	0.02	44.46
India	0.64	0.36	0.57	0.28	0.13	0.05	46.78
Maldives	0.25	0.28	0.40	0.30	0.42	0.21	11.82
Pakistan	0.43	0.44	0.53	0.23	0.12	0.04	56.39
Sri Lanka	0.75	0.37	0.62	0.24	0.20	0.03	80.44
Nepal	0.65	0.38	0.63	0.36	0.35	0.09	74.05

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

A green earth

It could be a general knowledge quiz question: what is the organisation with the panda logo that has the same acronym as the World Wrestling Federation? And most people around the world would get it right: WWF, the World Wide Fund for Nature. In North America the organisation is still known by its original name, World Wildlife Fund. The Switzerland-based WWF runs the largest private nature conservation programme globally. It works with more than 30 partner organisations, has a membership of nearly five million and is active in 100 countries. WWF has a threefold goal: biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of natural resources, and reduction of pollution.

There is no doubt that these are compelling priorities. There is a serious global spurt of species extinctions, rainforests and coral reefs are under grave threat, 1998

The Worldwide Fund for Nature is exploring exciting new ways to get big business, green groups and even religions to help save the earth's endangered ecosystem.

Outgoing WWF president, Ruud Lubbers, who is in Kathmandu this week for the annual meeting of the organisation, told us that his organisation's ultimate goal is to stop and eventually reverse the accelerating degradation of the earth's natural environment. To do that, WWF needs to work closely with governments, civil society, religious groups and businesses. "But above all we have to work with people, so that people themselves feel that they benefit from nature

past 25 years (see page 11), the decision by India's Supreme Court to stop commercial shrimp farming in mangrove tracts, the setting up of a marine reserve around the Galapagos islands and the scrapping of two dam projects on Austria's wildest rivers.

"These successes would not have been possible without WWF's partner organisations and national offices," says WWF director general, Claude Martin, who is especially pleased with his organisation's efforts to get transnational companies to adopt



"Transnational companies have now realised that they are being scrutinised, so even when they come to developing countries they have to use their best practices."

was the hottest year on record, the earth's population has crossed the six billion mark, the ozone hole is getting bigger. The WWF's own Living Planet Index concluded that the health of the planet as measured by changes in forest, marine and freshwater parameters declined by 30 percent in the last three decades.

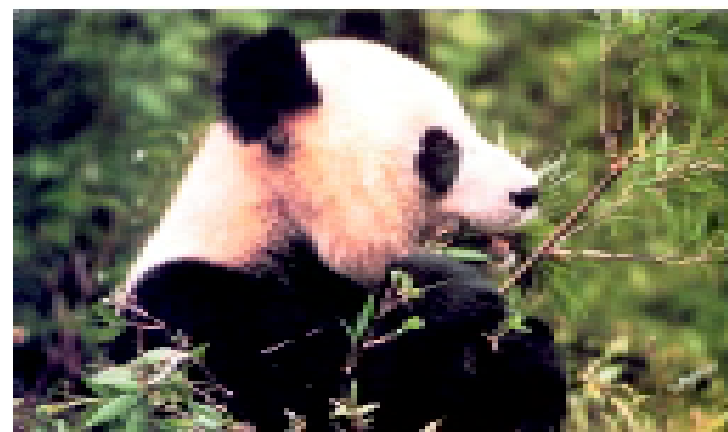
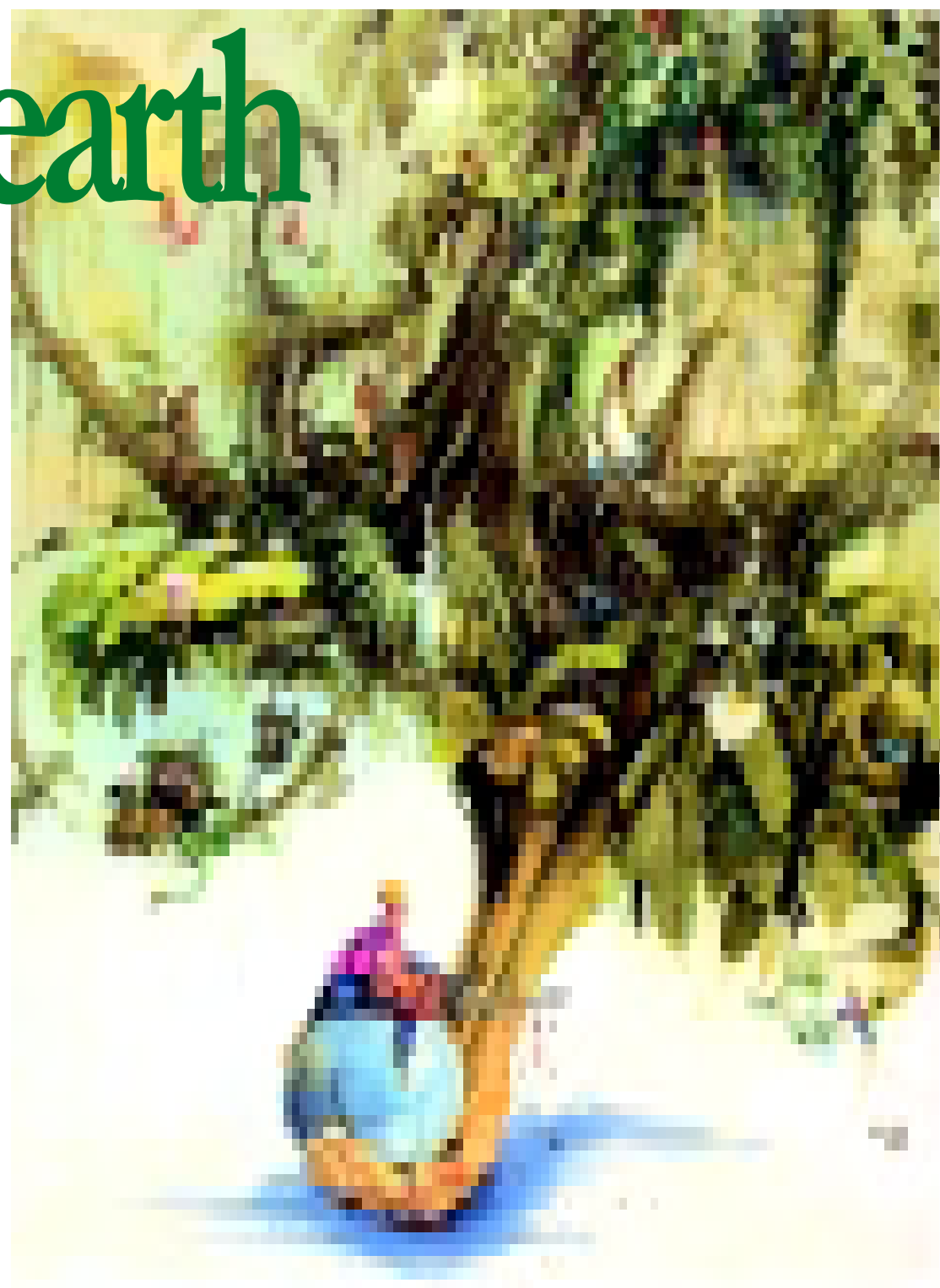
conservation," says Lubbers. To this end, WWF has supported conservation education programmes in the world's environmental hot spots. WWF's lobbying with government and local partners has also brought about policy changes and impacts like the doubling of Nepal's rhino population to above 600 in the

greener policies. At the WWF annual meeting in Kathmandu, Martin presented the case study of how WWF worked with the US oil company Chevron to ensure that its oil prospecting work in Papua New Guinea would not irreversibly damage the fragile environment of the island which has 1,200 species of trees and 2,000 types of fern.

"We got very worried because Chevron didn't have a very good track record, and oil exploration opens up areas for logging and other things. So we got in touch with them to start an integrated development programme for the Kikori Basin. There was a policy change in Chevron."

WWF also carefully tracks "greenwashing" by transnational companies that try to project a nature-friendly image while continuing their ecologically-harmful policies and practices. Martin says it is a good trend that companies like Shell and BP are now starting to take climate change seriously, and they are in the process of changing from oil companies to energy companies. Adds Lubbers: "Transnational companies have now realised that they are being scrutinised, so even when they come to developing countries they have to use their best practices."

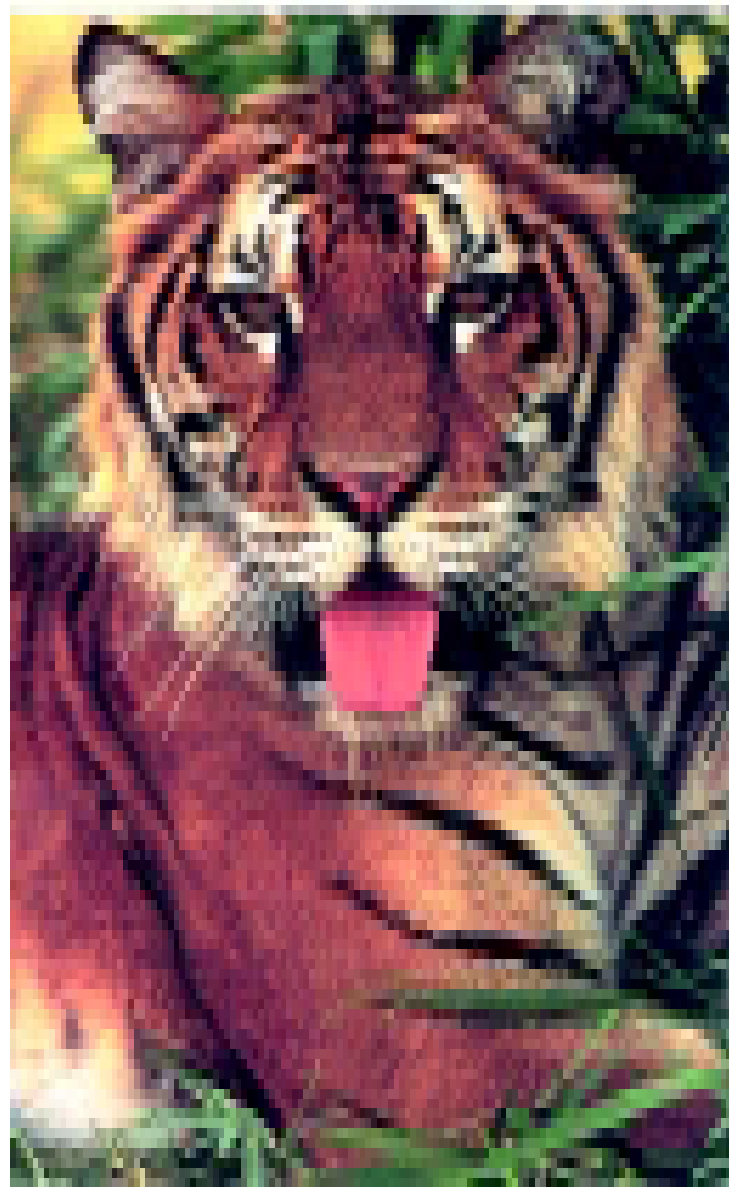
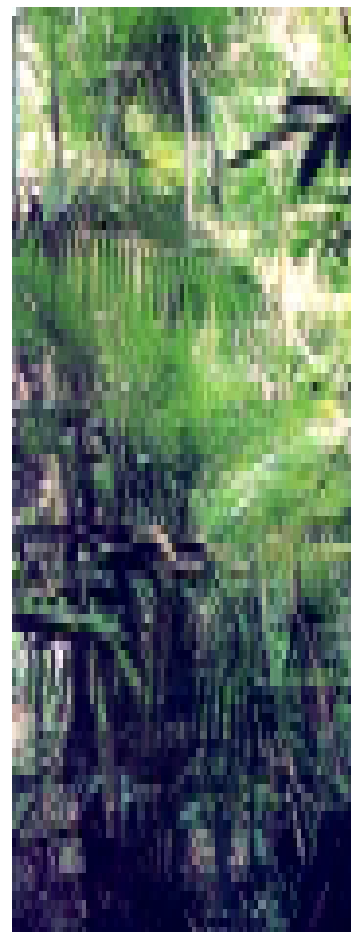
One of the more exciting partnerships that WWF has struck is the one with the inter-denominational Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) which tries to get faiths around the world to "gift" a conservation project to planet earth. Twenty-six of these gifts were presented to Britain's Prince Philip who officially received them as



President Emeritus of WWF amidst a glittering ceremony in Bhaktapur on Wednesday. Says Martin: "With these gifts we reached out to up to five billion people represented by these faiths." Some of the gifts were: a ban on hunting of snow leopards in Mongolia by local Buddhists, the establishment of a National Biosphere Reserve in the heart of the Arabian peninsula, the Tengboche Monastery in Nepal playing a role in reviving traditional forest management practices, India's Jains reducing the use of toxic substances by getting Jain businessmen to be more ecologically-conscious, China's Taoists want to get their followers to stop using endangered species in traditional medicine. Other leaders at the Bhaktapur event were Jewish, Shinto, Sikh, Zoroastrian, Baha'i, and Christian.

Martin Palmer of ARC says: "All faiths have environmental teachings, what we saw in Bhaktapur with the 26 sacred gifts were these teachings becoming real." ARC was set up in 1986 in the Italian town of Assisi where

WWF invited the world's various religions to take part in nature conservation. The Bhaktapur gathering was the first major meeting of ARC, and Palmer hopes the tradition of religious bodies giving sacred gifts to Earth will grow. For Nepal itself, this is a proud moment. Not only because Bhaktapur was chosen for the ceremony, but also because it is recognition by the world's foremost conservation organisation of this country's achievements in environmental protection. ♦



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“The WWF Kathmandu Meeting will long be remembered for forging a spirit of partnership...”

- Prince Gyanendra

On the occasion of the WWF Annual Meeting this week, Prince Gyanendra spoke to Nepali Times on a wide range of issues dealing with environmental protection in Nepal. The Prince is the chairman of the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation, and has for the past 25 years been actively involved in natural and cultural heritage conservation. Prince Gyanendra has been closely involved with the international conservation movement, and is a strong advocate of a people-oriented approach to environmental protection.

Q How important was it to have the WWF Annual Meeting in Kathmandu?

Prince Gyanendra: The fact that WWF has chosen Nepal as the venue for its conference speaks volumes of the successfully implemented conservation activities in Nepal. It also highlights the efforts of the Nepali people in pioneering innovative schemes in this particular field. The added sweetener was that the conference also brought together the world of religion with that of the environment. Besides an in-depth discussion on the role of religious establishments in strengthening conservation, the Kathmandu Meet will be long remembered for forging a spirit of partnership. Care and compassion must take precedence while devising strategies for the sustainable management of natural resources.

Q What specifically are some of these successful conservation success stories in Nepal?

Prince Gyanendra: Conservation cannot be successful, much less sustainable, unless it embraces the long-term interest and welfare of the people who are to benefit from it. The King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation has increasingly taken an integrated approach in the formulation and implementation of its conservation programmes. The Trust was a catalyst of these programmes, but more importantly the communities for whom they were intended accepted them and

made them their own. The Annapurna Conservation Area Project, the Kumrose and Baghmara projects have been successful in addressing and highlighting this very philosophy. In the Manaslu Conservation Area, programmes are built around the economic upliftment of the people blended with an eco-friendly sustainable management of tourism.

Q Learning from these projects, what are the major challenges facing biodiversity conservation in the Nepal Himalaya, and how does KMTNC plan to address them?

Prince Gyanendra: Nepal is ecologically very fragile. But we are also gifted with the bounties of nature, bestowed by rich biodiversity. Nepal is also subjected to various ills faced by many developing countries. An uncommitted leadership, abject poverty, rising population and a lack of will to see things to their logical and fruitful conclusion are challenges. If left unattended, these will have grave and serious consequences. Conservation is a multidisciplinary approach, requiring the cooperation of various sectors in society. KMTNC will continue its efforts in partnership with all concerned for the conservation of the unique biodiversity of the Himalaya.

Q How exactly does the KMTNC plan to do this: to go beyond the successes of the past?

Prince Gyanendra: Your question at least accepts the fact that KMTNC has not wasted its resources in idle matters. Reaching and striving to improve the quality of life of people is easier said than done. If people do not want conservation, no amount of effort will succeed. Care must be taken to inject the human element to all conservation efforts, and the Trust intends to give importance to such areas where conservation will have a long-term impact. That is why, while we recognise the need for habitat and species conservation, we will expand to identify issues related to the environment with more of an eco-regional perspective.

Q Does this mean there will be less of an emphasis on celebrity mammals like rhinos, tigers and elephants and more on conservation of habitats and ecosystems?

Prince Gyanendra: You are right: many conservation organisations have directed their activities to flagship species. I believe this was done because it was easier to project and fundraise for a cuddly panda. The tiger, with all its majesty, lies at the apex of the food chain, as a premier predator. The tiger's well-being provides vital information on the health of its entire home range. So, it is important to realise that things cannot be compartmentalised, especially when you are dealing with the environment and conservation. Without addressing the whole (ecosystem) you would only be solving half the problem. I think this message will also come out loud and clear from the present Kathmandu conference of the WWF-International.

Q What in your opinion are Nepal's conservation priorities?

Prince Gyanendra: Nepal's conservation priorities, and the strategies to achieve them are well defined in numerous HMG policy papers. The fact that they have not been implemented is another thing. Clearly, the conservation of biodiversity coupled with sustainable management of natural resources has received utmost priority. However, we are also beginning to witness the problems of "brown issues". Unplanned urbanisation, increasing migration to towns and cities, excessive use of chemicals, and industrial activities resulting in water and air pollution are creating dangerous consequences. The time has come for Nepal to give due attention to these issues, sooner rather than later. ♦



MIN. BAIKACHARYA

Nepal showcases environmental success stories

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

The gala World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) annual meeting that ends Friday in Kathmandu provided a unique opportunity for Nepal to showcase some of its conservation success stories. On display here for the world to see were:

- the rescue of Nepal's one-horned rhinoceros from the brink of extinction
- the dramatic comeback of the tiger in Chitwan
- research into the elusive snow leopard
- conversion of nearly a quarter of Nepal's geographical area into nature reserves and parks
- success of eco-tourism models like the Annapurna project.

Not all of these were WWF projects, but it was a chance for Nepal to draw attention to the successes of other organisations like the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC), and Nepal's Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation.

Back in the 1960s when tigers and rhinos in Chitwan had been nearly hunted to extinction, and habitat destruction was threatening the remaining animals, it was WWF that stepped in with its first project in Nepal. The Rhino Conservation Programme in 1967 and eventually the creation of the Royal Chitwan National Park in 1971 were a direct result of lobbying by conservation groups, including WWF. It is a mark of

the success of this programme that WWF delegates this week flew down to Chitwan to see another translocation of rhinos from Chitwan to Bardia—made possible by the successful revival of the rhino population in Chitwan.

WWF's early support went to the Annapurna Conservation Area Project when it was started in 1985. ACAP was based on a unique model of integrated conservation development programme that takes tourism income and injects it



directly into the village economy to ensure that locals benefit from tourism and protect nature—the ultimate reason that brings tourists there. Eco-tourism has now become a buzzword, but nowhere has it been as spectacularly successful as in Annapurna. So much so that eco-tourism projects modeled after ACAP are springing up all over the world: from Malaysia to Costa Rica.

WWF also stepped in with support for the Bardiya Integrated Conservation Project, Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee, the Northern Mountains Conservation Project, and the Kangchendzonga Conservation Area. Most recently, WWF is helping start the Pulchowki-Chandragiri Corridor along the southern rim of Kathmandu valley.

WWF Nepal today has a budget of \$2.5 million and a large presence but it was only in 1993 that the WWF Nepal Programme formally established an office in Kathmandu. Till then it had operated through local organisations like the KMTNC or the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation. Trends in nature conservation have also shifted from fencing off nature reserves and having the army guarding wildlife to greater

community participation. Terms like "buffer zone", "agro-forestry", and "integrated conservation development" have become more prevalent. Since nature does not recognise man-made boundaries, the other trend is towards trans-boundary conservation, by integrating national parks in Nepal with conservation areas in China or India. Says Chandra Gurung, the country representative of WWF's Nepal Programme: "All of this would never have been possible without the support we have received from the government and local communities as well."



MIN. BAIKACHARYA

Successive governments, which have often been at the receiving end of criticism for inertia and confusion, have shown there is political will to see conservation efforts through. Local initiatives have also been vital. Two of four WWF Conservation Merit awards given to persons from around the world for their conservation efforts have been awarded to Nepalis: The Rimpoche of Tengboche monastery, Nawang Tenzing Jangpo, for his role in the preservation of the Sagarmatha region, and Min Bahadur Gurung of Ghandruk for grassroots conservation efforts in the Annapurnas. "We have learnt a lot in the

process and achieved a lot as well. But we still have a long way to go," says Ukesh Raj Bhujju, Director of Communications. In the future, WWF Nepal is looking at lobbying hard for trans-boundary conservation efforts like the Tri-National Peace Park in the Kangchendzonga area where the borders of China, India and Nepal meet. WWF is also trying to get the Tarai Arc project off the ground to link national parks along Nepal's southern border with those in northern India. Nepal's future conservation challenges are difficult: arresting the decline of the tarai forest, protecting Nepal's Himalayan forest cover from timber poachers from across the border in Tibet, safeguarding the success of the community forest programmes, and continued vigilance against increasingly well-armed rhino and tiger poachers from across the southern border. With the rapid reduction of forest cover in the tarai, Nepal's nature reserves also need jungle corridors for migrating species, and tarai parks also need to keep their natural contiguity with the Mahabharat forests.

Says Chandra Gurung: "What gives me hope is that we have come so far with such hard work and commitment over the years. That commitment is still there: in government, in the communities and in the staff of environmental organisations." ♦



WWW.NEPALPROGRAM

Briefs and the man

ANJA KREISEL IN FRANKFURT

When it comes to their choice of underwear, men, rather predictably, fall into two distinct categories: those who like close-fitting jocks and those who prefer a loose fit. According to a recent survey carried out by the German industry magazine *TextilWirtschaft*, most men prefer snug shorts, with the Y-front style a hands-down winner over the roomier boxer short variety.

Much to the dismay of the majority of women, 42 percent of men still choose the white, ribbed classic with the convenient slot to the fore. Y, or fly-front briefs, either white or patterned, are most popular with mature consumers. It is mostly younger men who prefer the slightly scantier variety that shows off more of their legs.

Embellishments such as buttons and other frivolities are generally frowned upon. The reason? While support is important, men don't like anything too constraining under their jeans, says one 40-year-old from Frankfurt. With boxers and Y-fronts such clear favourites, plain, closed

To the dismay of women, men aren't very adventurous about their underwear.

thongs do no better than ninth place in the survey. Even worse off was the all-in-one which caught the eye of a mere four percent.

Given men's insistence on comfort, it is no surprise that women's demands for erotic styling go mostly unanswered. Two German female accountants show little sympathy for the male of the species. Real cheek is what they called the 'rent effect'—briefs that are ten years old and "bulge in all the wrong places".

The magazine reveals that it is above all young women who long for the thrill of crisp mini-briefs, thongs and tight-fitting boxers, as opposed to humdrum Y-fronts. Neither are all-in-one experiments to be laughed at, although only one in four women has a soft spot for loose-cut boxer shorts. Men in colourful underwear can likewise expect to be turned down. One factor weighing in favour of the fairer sex in the underwear war

is men's apparent dislike of shopping for undergarments, with less than half prepared to take matters into their own hands. The number of married men who actually shop for briefs sinks to 28 percent, for the rest moms or wives buy it for them.

A quarter of all European men own only ten pairs of underwear, while the average male can boast of a collection of 18. Underwear can expect to see service for four years before making way for a replacement, mostly in the shape of a fives-pack—buying in bulk puts off shopping for at least another year. The survey reveals other things as well—men do not expect to pay more than \$5 for their nearest and dearest, with a mere one in five is willing to splash out more than \$15 on a single pair. ♦ (dpa)



surya ad

The necessary stage

MOHAN SRILAL IN SINGAPORE

Singapore's new-found commitment to artistic freedom is being tested in a battle between a Singaporean playwright and the government over the staging of a play on Muslim women and divorce.

This debate over creative licence and social responsibility is rocking a country whose history makes it especially sensitive to issues of race and religion. The row also comes at an embarrassing time for the Singapore government. In the last two years it has invested millions of dollars and started moving away from its tradition of strict censorship and control of the arts to portray itself as Asia's Renaissance arts city.

At the centre of this controversy is *Talaq*, a play based on the true story of a Muslim Singaporean-Indian woman. It deals with rape within marriage, a taboo subject especially among the local Muslim community. *Talaq* was first performed in 1998 in Tamil. In that version, the woman whose life it portrays played herself. Though the play was critically acclaimed, Muslim religious bodies criticised it sharply and the playwright, Elangovan, claims he received death threats. He now wants to stage *Talaq* in English and Malay to reach a wider audience, but the Public Entertainment Licensing Unit (PELU) has refused to grant the company a performing license due to protests.

Elangovan, however, is unbending. "An artist must understand the politics of existence, learn to walk in the inferno first, get prepared to have stones thrown at you." Among those who protested vehemently against the play's Tamil performance was the Muslim religious group South Indian Jamiathul Ulama (SIJU), which has no female members. The secretary Haji Ebrahim Marican says *Talaq* does not depict Islamic law accurately. Under Islamic law a husband need not ask his wife's permission to have sexual intercourse, Marican clarifies. "Even if she is angry or not in the mood, he has the right to it."

S Thenmoli, president of the theatre group Agni Kootthu which is performing *Talaq*, says the play has attracted interest from women of all races. "They believe the play is not about religious issues. It's a women's issue." The play was to have been staged over two days in late October, but Agni Kootthu was denied its performing licence after it refused to stage a preview for the National Arts Council (NAC). The NAC, the government's arts funding and administration body, demanded the review to judge the play's social sensitivity. Thenmoli refused because the review panel included two members of SIJU.

The National Arts Council said the panel members were chosen "as their sensitivities were relevant to the evaluation process," but Thenmoli insists that SIJU "has nothing to do with theatre". Thenmoli was arrested later when she tried to stage a public "dress rehearsal" at the NAC's Drama Centre. The police claimed it was a public performance without a permit.

International media coverage of Thenmoli's arrest has embarrassed the government and triggered debate about artistic freedom and social responsibility. In an editorial last week the *Straits Times* was critical of the rancour and "bad handling" which has dogged *Talaq* at a time when Singapore is trying to promote the arts and mass culture. "It is a timely reminder that artistic experimentation ends where race and religious sensitivities begin," it said, arguing that this setback should not discourage playwrights from exploring serious social issues. "Otherwise home-grown drama can never develop an audience base, and that would be a shame," it added.

Most of the 4 million Singaporeans are either Buddhist or Christian. Muslims, mainly of Malay descent, are a small segment of the population that is three-quarters of Chinese descent. Religion is a sensitive issue on the island due to a bitter experience in the 1960s when media coverage of a religious conversion triggered race riots. Since then, discussion of religious issues in the media has been prohibited.

In a speech last month, Singapore's Arts Minister David Lim argued that the measure of great art is not how much attention it gets, but how faithfully it captures the spirit of society. "Social responsibility and artistic integrity are merely two sides of the same coin," he said.

Theatre artist J.P. Nathan disagrees, "The function of the artist is to criticise, evaluate, question social norms." The debate will continue, as Elangovan and Thenmoli have vowed to continue the battle to get a permit to stage the play in Malay and English. ♦ (IPS)

A play concerning Muslim women and divorce ignites controversy and tests the Singapore government's resolve to guarantee artistic freedom.



Times

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Can nuclear power save the planet?

TIM RADFORD IN LONDON . . .

Life is not just a force for good, it is a force for its own good. Life has a way of managing things in favour of more life. And in the course of doing so, life manages a whole planet. It makes an atmosphere to breathe, and water to drink, and food to eat and then it recycles its own detritus. It hijacks sunlight and passes it around to the next user in digestible, shrink-wrapped form. Having done that, it disposes off itself; directly as nutrient for some other creature, or indirectly as a strata of phosphate or a layer of chalk or fossil limestone, or as energy to burn 1 billion years later.

Might things have got a little hot when carbon dioxide levels built up dangerously at the dawn of the Eocene, 55 million years ago? Fear not. The rapid response team was on hand. Plankton bloomed, the oceans became a garden and greedily mopped up the excess carbon, cooling the greenhouse world to acceptable levels. Not for the first time, nor the last, the biosphere had risen to the challenge, and adjusted itself.

It is more than 30 years since James Lovelock formed the idea of the biosphere as a self-regulating entity, of life and the planet as a kind of sensitive organism, not sensitive to any particular form of life, just to the principle of life. He called it the Gaia hypothesis. The novelist William Golding, a friend and neighbour, suggested the name. Gaia was the Earth goddess, the Greeks' Mother Nature. The Earth maintained an equilibrium, homeostasis, in key life-preserving areas such as temperature and the salinity of the sea. This equilibrium was the result of the activities of life itself, which created



Yes, says Gaia creator James Lovelock who thinks this may be the only way to stop the greenhouse effect from making the earth uninhabitable.

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vast feedback mechanisms that ensured its own survival. The Earth could be regarded as a single living organism, a self-sustaining whole.

The idea of Gaia caught the imagination of people everywhere. Gaia is a kind of metaphor for a very subtle lesson in the physiology of a planet. But Gaia became a reality, too, for the Greens, particularly those inclined to mysticism. Lovelock is fond of individual Greens, but he doesn't have much patience for the Green attitude to nuclear power. Fossil fuels are literally beginning to cost the earth and meanwhile Green campaigners are rejecting at least one easy answer to the great problem of how to power an economy without shutting down the biosphere with polluting greenhouse gases.

This answer, Lovelock says, is ecologically clean and tidy and has a very bad press. It is nuclear power. "I can envisage somewhere about 2050, when the greenhouse really begins to bite, when people will start looking back and saying: whose fault was all this? And they will settle on the Greens and say: 'If those damn people hadn't stopped us building nuclear power stations we wouldn't be in this mess'. And I think it is true. The real dangers to humanity and the ecosystems of the earth from nuclear power are almost negligible."

No surprise that Lovelock regards himself as an eccentric, and a radical, and he enjoys being a member of the awkward squad. The Gaia hypothesis was a huge delight to some, but it was a huge provocation to others.

Lovelock is now 81. He and his wife Sandy—his first wife, Helen, the mother of his children, died after a long illness—have completed the 960 km coastal walk in southern England. He has pursued a long career as a kind of freelance scientist and he says big corporations are not for him, although he is happy to sell them his inventions. He doesn't care for science run by bureaucracies. He lives in an idyllic corner of Devon, on a 14-hectare farm, on which he has planted 25,000 trees.

He takes the long view of eco-hazards. He isn't bothered by the menace of industrial chemicals like PCBs or agricultural fertilisers in the way that Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth are. A chemist from the start, he points out that according to a Royal Society of Chemistry survey, chemists live longer than most scientists. The big threat to the planet, he says, is people—there are too many, doing too well economically and burning too much oil. His new book is a hymn to science, and to Gaia and to the other makers of his great idea, and to the forces that made him choose to swim upstream, to stay independent, to be free to follow his nose. He takes, as he has done all his life, the long view. "Two years without a harvest? It would probably bust civilisation. People would survive all right. It really would cut us back, and that is the sort of thing nobody really prepares for. It's not some ecological poison or GM foods or nuclear that is going to get us, it is going to be some perfectly ordinary natural event." ♦ *(The Guardian)*

COMMENTARY by **ANTHONY BROWNE AND ROBIN MCKIE**

Custom made babies

LONDON - Dr Paul Serhal, a fertilisation expert at University College Hospital, London, will soon attempt a historic operation to eradicate an inherited cancer that has blighted a British family for generations. The disease, a form of bowel cancer known as familial polyposis, kills half those afflicted by it, mostly when in their forties or fifties.

Serhal will use 'pre-implantation genetic diagnosis'. Embryos are grown outside the womb with in-vitro fertilisation (IVF), tested to see they don't carry the gene and healthy embryos are implanted. It will be the first use of IVF technology in Britain to produce children without a specific cancer-causing gene.

This is not an isolated instance. The case of Molly Nash provoked much debate recently. Finding their daughter afflicted by inherited Fanconi anaemia, the Colorado-based Nashes used genetic diagnoses of embryos to have a healthy second child whose umbilical cord provided life-saving transplant material for Molly. The Mastertons from Scotland triggered controversy by invoking human rights legislation to legally employ similar techniques to have a daughter rather than a son, to replace their baby girl who died in a fire.

People are talking about 'designer babies'. Critics fear parents may now use the slightest excuse to discard 'tainted' embryos, or genetically select offspring as 'organ factories'. Serhal's work supports this fear. Familial polyposis does not kill if carriers of the gene have their colons removed before the disease manifests itself. Discarding affected embryos is unnecessary, say opponents. Serhal says he's giving families peace of mind.

Genetic testing of embryos is taking centre stage in debates over medical ethics. Only five hospitals in the UK are licensed to carry out such tests for conditions including spinal muscular atrophy, cystic fibrosis and muscular dystrophy, and they have only resulted in about 20 'pure' babies. As science and acceptance advance, numbers are expected to grow rapidly. While British doctors are comfortable about screening out the most severe genetic diseases, they're uncertain about dilemmas like the Nashes'. A key factor in the resolution of such issues will be the exact nature of the transplant involved. In the Nashes' case it involved using cells from the new baby's umbilical cord, not any of its own tissue. "This seems an ideal use of technology for humane purposes," says Alastair Kent, director of the Genetic Interest Group, an organisation for people with genetic diseases. Sara Nathan, on the ethics committee of the British Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA), also has few concerns in this case.

But what if the person requiring help is not the new baby's sibling but its parent? Serhal plans to conduct a similar procedure for thalassaemia, where the child's umbilical cord could help cure the father. The ethics get trickier if blood, bone marrow, or even entire organs, not just disposable umbilical cells, are sought to save a relative. Kent agrees that babies shouldn't principally provide

Scientists argue the case for genetic manipulation of embryos.

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spare parts, but says, "If that's a by-product of a baby who is wanted and loved anyway, it may not be a problem." He further suggests that low-risk invasive procedures with potentially great benefit might be acceptable. Nathan is not so sure. "I have greater reservations about things that harm or hurt the child. Kidneys, I would find that hard to deal with." Serhal agrees. "You don't have a second child if you will operate on it." But parents are emotionally involved. If the choice is between watching one child die of kidney disease and having another to donate a kidney, there's no choice for Tim Hedgley, chairman of the fertility charity Issue. "In the circumstances, parents would have to choose between two children or none. I would go for two children."

As science evolves, so will ethics. What is shocking now may be acceptable in the future. Hedgley gives the example of heart transplants and believes people will be comfortable with harvesting blood and bone marrow products, and eventually even organs like kidneys. By invoking the Human Rights Act to break the ban on sex-selection, the Mastertons set a precedent that forces ethics to keep pace with science. Jonathan Montgomery, healthcare lawyer at the University of Southampton, says the Human Rights Act could be used to break other bans, such as on choosing the appearance of babies. "The HFEA would have to prove its right to infringe on people's choice and justify why it was interfering in terms of public health or morals," he says. The range of diseases being tested for will certainly expand. Tests for Down's syndrome, Huntington's disease, breast cancer and Alzheimer's are being considered. The HFEA now has to ask whether doctors should be allowed to test for 'late onset disorders' that may not affect people till their fifties or later.

The controversy doesn't end here. As IVF gets easier and more accepted, fertile 'responsible' parents without family histories of genetic disease may pre-diagnose their embryos, just as it is routine now to test new-borns for certain conditions. Infectious diseases like polio have been virtually eradicated in developed countries by vaccinations. Widespread genetic testing might do the same to genetic diseases.

The HFEA's Nathan is sceptical. "I don't see a day when women routinely screen for genetic disorders." Kent disagrees, "I wouldn't have a problem with widespread testing, as long as it isn't done with coercion." In such a future, thousands would have the chance to be free of afflictions that have dogged their families for generations. For them, that truly would be a Brave New World. ♦ (Observer)

The Milosevic papers

The Serbian strongman may be gone, but terrible truths lie hidden in secret service files.

VESNA PERIC ZIMONJIC IN BELGRADE

After Slobodan Milosevic lost power in the September elections and the October popular uprising, efforts are now on to remove vestiges of the former regime. The most complicated of these battles will be the one against the State Security Service (SDB).

For two years now, Rade Markovic, one of the closest aides of Milosevic and his once-powerful wife, has headed SDB. Markovic, 54, now refuses to resign. In one of his rare interviews with non-government media, he explained that he would "abide by the law". "I'll submit my resignation after the December 23 elections, to the new parliament and government of Serbia," he said. His superior, interior minister Vojko Stojiljkovic, resigned 9 October after massive public protests.

"Markovic is stalling for time in order to destroy evidence of abuse of power by the SDB in the past," says Belgrade lawyer Svetislav Djurdjevic, head of Belgrade police in the early 90s. "No one knows how much evidence on illegal acts of the SDB have to be destroyed. The best guess is that there are numerous documents on clandestine operations or dossiers on opposition politicians who came to power in the September elections," he adds. Sources within the ministry say that the tapping of phones and interception of letters or email of Milosevic opponents was part of the illegal operations of SDB. Dossiers were kept on opposition politicians, their sympathisers, non-government media journalists, and Serb journalists working for foreign media.

DOS leaders say that they will open up the dossiers after the December elections. "People have every right to know what was done to them here," says Zoran Zivkovic, a DOS leader. "The work of state security should not be a taboo subject ever again," he added. SDB only recently turned to Serbs in Serbia. In the early 90s, SDB was involved in the creation of various paramilitary units that took part in wars in former Yugoslavia. Some of the units are believed to be responsible for major war crimes against non-Serbs in Croatia, Bosnia or Kosovo.

"That is the evidence that is probably being destroyed," said Nataša Kandic, the head of the respected Humanitarian Law Centre (HLC). "For years we felt that murky things were happening within SDB. The time has come to start revealing those secrets."

HLC recently received a document, sent to it by an SDB employee, which showed SDB involvement in the surveillance of prominent journalist Slavko Curuvija on the



They want the files. Revellers celebrate the fall of Milosevic.

day of his death. Curuvija was killed in broad daylight by unknown assailants, at the height of the NATO air campaign against Serbia in April 1999. He was highly critical of Milosevic and his wife, Mira. SDB is also blamed for a mysterious car crash in October 1999, in which four aides of prominent opposition leader Vuk Draskovic were killed. The investigation established the fact that the truck involved into the accident belonged to the SDB, but the name of the driver who disappeared from the scene was never revealed.

The disappearance of Ivan Stambolic last August is still unsolved. Toppled by Milosevic from the presidency of Serbia in 1987 through typical communist party intrigue, Stambolic turned to private business. He re-emerged in the independent media ahead of the September elections, and was highly critical of Milosevic. On August 25, he was abducted and his whereabouts remain unknown.

According to Slobodan Vucetic, former Supreme Court judge who was sacked earlier this year by the Milosevic regime, once the rule of law is established in Serbia "things will come into their right place". Says Vucetic: "It is not a surprise that SDB was a non-transparent, clandestine service. SDB is the legacy of a single-party, communist state that has existed here since 1945."

Until the September elections, Yugoslavia was the only country in the region where communism continued after the Berlin Wall fell in 1989. According to DOS law expert Dragor Hiber, the state system that existed unchanged since 1945 should be dismantled. Only then can SDB work become more transparent, he adds. (IPS)

A new axis

WASHINGTON - In Asia's changed security environment, Japan is searching for its right role: It wants to be a stronger, more independent regional power, but at times seems to prefer avoiding tough international issues. In some respects, it yearns to be the 'Switzerland of the Far East', respected by all, removed from the fray. Yet the end of the Cold War has heralded a fresh onslaught of security threats in the region, threats too overwhelming for Japan to ignore or handle alone—North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, China's rising military power and growing influence, and potential conflict in the Taiwan Strait. Fearing abandonment, Japan clings ambiguously to its bilateral security alliance with the US since the end of World War II. Ironically, Japan is just as concerned that it will be dragged into conflict by American involvement in the Asia-Pacific, as it is worried about its own defence without US military presence.

For many years, the US-Japan alliance has been plagued by internal friction. Unresolved jealousies quickly make their way onto a diplomatic seesaw. "Japan has done its best to stabilise the global economic picture," claimed Masayuki Tadokoro of the National Defence Academy University in Yokosuka, Japan, speaking at the Sasakawa Foundation for Peace here last week. "It pumped money into the American economy in the late 1980s." Apart from this flood of Japanese investment, however, the alliance flagged. Freed from the strategic



Parting shots, US servicemen pose at a beach in Okinawa.

Japan and America are to redefine their roles in northeast Asia.

constraints of containing the Soviet Union in the post-Cold War years, the two countries allowed their relationship to languish in its earlier incarnation, without benefit of revival or revision.

Even in its "rickety" financial situation, "Japan's position is to support American primacy; the kind of order where American power excels," contended political analyst Tadokoro. He suggested that Japan's slow economy may in fact be the "political logic" that sustains the historical dynamics of the alliance. Not all agree that this is a good thing, and want a change from this traditional alliance, but for different reasons.

Japan's domestic political structure is in turmoil. A series of scandals and diplomatic missteps by leaders of the ruling party has distracted politicians, who in a wild

scramble to resolve short-term internal issues are neglecting long-term international ones. Their detachment perpetuates the American opinion that the risk-averse Japanese are so steeped in "status-quoism" that they must be forced to be pro-active in regional affairs.

In light of Washington declaring China a "strategic partner," a good case can be made for Japan's attempts to establish its own international connections. Meanwhile, some say growing public opinion in Japan for a more assertive security and foreign policy is but natural for a country of its size and clout, despite fears by some of a reversion to a militaristic past. Japan's pursuit of advanced arms purchases, reconnaissance satellites and ballistic missile defence is significant evidence of the country's desire to establish a more assertive and autonomous security posture. A

Japanese revision commission is examining Article 9, the post-World War II 'Peace Constitution' which allows the country to maintain armed forces for self-defence only. Removing that self-imposed barrier is a triple-edged sword. Without Article 9 restrictions, the Japanese would have less reason to host US military presence, and have to take on more responsibility for their own security.

The Article 9 debate outcome will have an undeniable impact on future ties. In addition, Japan's Theatre Missile Defence (TMD) is under much discussion by both parties, as much for its cost as for its need. According to Michael Green, senior fellow for Asian Security at the Council for Foreign Relations, "The Japanese want a lot of redundancy in their system: their own sensors and cueing, the complete (system). But with a cost of \$5-10 billion, they may have to rely on the US to provide that part of it." One Japanese analyst cynically remarked that TMD stood for *totemo miachigatte-iru defence*, or "absolutely unbelievable defence".

The "threat of peace"—if a reunification of Korea occurs—throws more uncertainty into already complex US-Japan ties. Reconciliation on the Korean peninsula would undercut the rationale for large US military presence there, affecting what has been for five decades a security pillar for Tokyo. Japan's recession may also affect how far it can go in forging its own security profile. Some here say its political structure is incapable of creating strategies for change, but Washington must learn to co-operate with Tokyo without condescension if it hopes to revitalise the alliance effectively. ♦ (IPS)

China readies for WTO

GENEVA - Multilateral negotiations for including China in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) made progress during sessions this week due to Beijing's greater "flexibility" said the trade official in charge of following that country's accession process.

Talks are to reconvene, also in Geneva, in early December, but it is unlikely the parties involved will reach an agreement by the end of this year. The admission of new members into the WTO requires the signing of bilateral accords with each of the organisation's members and also multilateral approval in the working party created specifically for each country requesting admission. The number of countries and customs territories included in the WTO reached 139 this week. Another 30 countries, including Russia and Saudi Arabia, have presented admission requests. Negotiations for China's entry into the WTO, which have extended over 14 years, are of significant interest due to the magnitude of the country's market and the productive potential the nation has demonstrated in recent years of continued growth. (IPS)

Sri Lanka's cuppa woe

COLOMBO - Cheap tea imports are threatening the livelihood of thousands of small tea farmers in Sri Lanka, home to the famous Ceylon Tea. Nearly 60 percent of Sri Lankan tea is produced on small farms in the central highlands. The rest of the production is on large estates owned by big business houses. Nearly 20,000 Sri Lankan tea farmers and tea factory owners are reportedly hit by imports of foreign tea over the past two years.

The government says it has allowed the import of only a small quantity of special, high-grade tea for blending purposes and re-export. Sri Lankan tea farmers and factory owners say they do not object to the import of high quality tea for blending with local tea. But they complain that the permission is being misused to import large quantities of cheaper grade tea, which is hurting local producers.

The beverage is now being imported from China, Vietnam, Indonesia, India and Papua New Guinea. Local tea industry leader Ratna Gamage says the imports have driven his business to bankruptcy. "We have been bankrupt for the past few years," says Gamage, chairman of the CTC Tea Factories Association. Gamage, who is leading a two-year-old campaign by the local tea industry against cheap tea imports, is now taking the protest outside the country.

Inert after Kyoto

TOKYO - Japan is headed for this week's talks on global warming at the climate change convention in The Hague with few proposals to reduce its greenhouse gas production, and little genuine initiatives for progress on the issue. Critics say Japan, host of the United Nations negotiations on climate change convention in 1997 in Kyoto, remains far from the target it then agreed upon—to reduce its production of greenhouse gases by 6 percent of the 1990 level.

Much to the horror of environmentalists, Japan is also banking on a proposal that supports a scheme that would allow emissions trading with developing countries. Tokyo supports proposals at this week's conference for industrial countries to give financial and technical support to developing nations for tackling global warming—and then earn "credits" that can be used to "trade" emissions to meet their own reduction targets.

Impeaching Erap

MANILA - The stage is set for the impeachment trial in December of Philippine President Joseph Estrada, the first time an incumbent president will face such proceedings on corruption charges in this country.

The House of Representatives sent the impeachment complaint to the Senate so that it can prepare for the trial. "The single most important act has been accomplished and the impeachment rap has been transmitted," said the House Speaker, Manuel Villar, who had been an Estrada supporter until accusations last month that the President received more than \$10 million in kickbacks from illegal gambling.

A provincial governor who used to be a friend and once gambling partner of Estrada made the charges in early October. The accusations threw the southeast Asian country into a political crisis and rattled the economy, sending the peso to record lows against the dollar. It has shaken confidence in Estrada's two-year-old government, prompted calls among businessmen, workers and critics for him to step down, and triggered defections by supporters.

Senators said they aim to finish drawing up the rules of impeachment this month, and start the trial itself in December. But far from just being routine legal procedure, the general strikes this week will mean the pressure is now on the 23-member Senate to determine Estrada's guilt or innocence. Estrada, who denies the bribery charges and has turned down calls for him to resign, will now work on getting enough numbers in the Senate to win. A two-thirds vote is needed for impeachment to be carried out by the Senate. (IPS)

CORY MEACHAM IN LONDON

The Chinese government is strengthening relations with Western scientists to learn more about tigers still roaming the country's jungles and forests. This is vital, as the species is one of the most endangered on earth.

Until now, communist China has largely frustrated attempts by Western environmental scientists to analyse and evaluate tiger data collected by Chinese researchers, creating what environmentalists call a 'silk curtain' around the country.

Last month, representatives from China's environmental ministries travelled from Beijing to attend the launch of a new UK-based environmental charity at the Chinese embassy in London. Following negotiations during and after the launch, key tiger information and samples of evidence are changing hands, and plans to facilitate joint tiger-research efforts that will place more Western scientists on the ground in China are taking shape.

The charity, Save China's Tigers, is the brainchild of Li Quan, a UK resident whose blend of Eastern and Western backgrounds has helped facilitate co-operation between the hemispheres. "There have been a lot of cultural misunderstandings between China and the West," she says. "Save China's Tigers could be a bridge in the conservation world between East and West."

Li Quan is uniquely suited to build just such a bridge. Born and raised in China, she graduated from Beijing University and then moved to America to take degrees at the Wharton School of Business and the Lauder Institute. She pursued a career in fashion-trademark licensing that took her to Belgium and Italy, capping her career as the head of world-wide licensing for Gucci, after which she settled in London to pursue her altruistic interests full-time.

"I was deeply saddened when I learned that the indigenous Chinese tiger, the South China tiger, is on the verge of extinction," she says. "I would feel personally responsible if I did not try to make a small contribution to the survival of the South China tiger."

But her contribution must confront controversy on several fronts. Of the four tiger subspecies found in the wild in China, the South China subspecies is so profoundly endangered that no more than three dozen of the animals survive in the wild; only 52 are alive in captivity, all in Chinese zoos. Many scientists feel the South China tiger is doomed no matter how carefully it is managed.

And yet it is upon precisely this subspecies that much of China's attention is focused. The other three subspecies of tiger represented in China survive also in neighbouring countries, and so are not seen as exclusively 'Chinese'. So it is that the South China tiger inspires a fervent and protective nationalistic pride not enjoyed by the other animals. The

Beijing wants to save the endangered South China tiger from extinction.

fear among Western scientists is that by focusing on the evidently irretrievable South China tiger, the country will squander valuable energy, resources, and time better devoted to other subspecies.

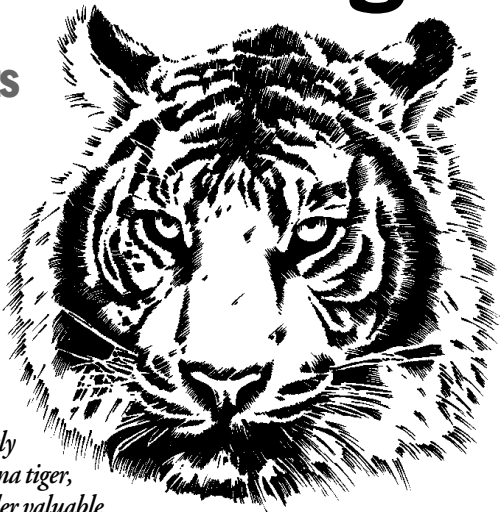
"But if we do not give the South China tigers this last chance," says Li Quan, "they will most certainly perish. The Chinese conservationists believe this tiger can be saved. That is why they have quietly taken the first steps and are now seeking help and support from the West."

That support might not be quick in arriving. Distrust of Chinese science and administration remains strong among Western environmental researchers, spawned and nurtured by the difficulties encountered in previous efforts to save endangered animals. Prime among these was the giant panda, Chinese conservation management of which has been regarded in the West as a fiasco.

The distrust is mutual. China is quick to point out that since neither pandas nor tigers are found naturally in the West, the West is hardly the authority on such creatures. Western conservation debacles with animals such as the bison also supply plenty of ammunition for the East when defending its environmental track record. Even at the launch of Save China's Tigers, the Chinese contingent bristled when asked to supply samples for DNA re-analysis by Western scientists—the Chinese have already meticulously performed and documented such analysis in laboratories back home.

"There will definitely be obstacles arising from differences in culture, social structure, and political systems," says Li Quan. "The task is huge and success is not guaranteed. But even if this effort fails to save the South China Tiger, the ecosystem in the tiger range area will benefit and be better positioned to provide shelter for the incredible variety of fauna and flora there." ♦ (Observer)

Cory Meacham is an environmental journalist and the author of *How the Tiger Lost Its Stripes* (Harcourt, 1997).



“Why is the noose around Padma Ratna’s neck again?”

Govinda Raj Joshi is *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 8 November

Immediately after the release of Dinesh Sharma, both the government and the Maoists are at each other’s throat. Everyone who watched the release of Sharma could vouch for the fact that Sharma did not look like a person who was made to sign documents under pressure and will not believe it even if he says so. Reporters did not ask Sharma to read a written statement. People could see and feel that there was not even an iota of pressure at the time Sharma was presented to the press. If there was any kind of pressure he could have stated it at that time. Therefore it is difficult to believe that he was under great pressure to make that statement. People watching television could easily guess that he was under no pressure at all. Sharma is lying, that is my conclusion.



The government’s mistake lies in making the Maoists sign documents. That is wrong. Time and again I used to tell home ministry officials, “Do not trust a Maoist who agrees to sign documents. Even if a Congressman says that he will stand surety, do not believe him and do not release him. Partly believe a Maoist who says that he is going to join the Jana Morcha, because that is their point of origin. After that if he says that he is going to join the CPN-ML, believe him to a certain extent. Then if he says he is going to join the RPP (Chand) believe him a bit more. After this if he says he is going to join the UML or the RPP, then you have to believe him completely. If he says that he is going to the Congress do not believe him at all and do not release him.” Maoists should not be made to sign documents. They will sign anything. This has been my experience. If you want proof of this, put Bhakta Bahadur Shrestha behind bars for 24 hours, and say that you will only release him after he signs a document. Without even looking at the document, he will sign it. People who do not realise this cannot understand the present situation.

Ram Chandra Poudel himself stayed in prison for a long time and refused to sign any documents while he was there. Therefore the fact that he made someone sign papers under pressure is a statement that I do not trust and I doubt if anyone in this country believes it too. Someone is playing games and he got caught in that game. The realisation that the government was going to make public the names of all the arrested Maoists and that the Maoists were coming in for a dialogue scared a lot of people and it is these people who started playing these games. It might be that while the government was thinking of releasing Sharma, someone might have told the deputy prime minister that Sharma had stated that he was ready to leave the Maoists. He must have been doubly pleased; here he was ready to release a Maoist and he was ready to quit his party. Nothing could have been better. He might have said yes. Herein lies the fault. If the DPM analyses this, he will realise where he went wrong.

There are people who accept their mistakes. The Panchayat system is now the talk of the town. There were many who did not sign the papers during the Panchayat system and rotted in prison. Some signed under tremendous pressure, while some others signed of their own will and later denounced it. Then, too, different parties had different policies. Some were prepared to do anything and some hoped they would be freed without signing any documents. But you cannot compare those times and the situation now. If someone says that he has now forsaken violence, there is no reason to lock him up. If Baburam and Prachanda forsake violence, then the home ministry cannot lock them up. The difference in this case was that the DPM and Sharma could not meet. I have heard that they met only after the press conference. Who took this proposal to the DPM? A conspiracy took place there but he should not have believed it. This is where the trouble surfaced. Does Sharma have a hand in this or not? Why would he sacrifice his ego and prestige to surrender? The Maoists declare that the environment for a dialogue has been destroyed and that they will not negotiate with Koirala’s government. Then, after all the drama, they point fingers and say that the government is not sticking to its word. This is dishonesty.

If the DPM still uses Padma Ratna to talk to the Maoists, it will not cause any harm. I know him very well. He took part in a meeting in Calcutta at which the Maoists were present too. He gave a speech and a photograph of that is at the police headquarters. After the DPM read that speech of his, he might have thought this person would be able to get the Maoists to the negotiating table, not as a Maoist but as a human rights activist. He is active in many ways and therefore can be called a Maoist, a human rights activist, a person close to the Maoists, but it is best to call him a Maoist. ♦
(The author is a former home minister.)

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

Even after all the “drivers” have taken turns to steer this “car” it does not move, and when it does, overturns soon after. In such a situation is it right to blame the driver all the time and absolve the old car any fault?
—Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai commenting on Nepal’s Constitution
Janadesh, 14 November



Clockwise from top left: 1. One man one post: PM Girija, President Koirala. 2. One man two posts: PM and president Koirala. 3. One man three posts: PM Girija, President Prasad, and Koirala.
—Drishti, 14 November

Deuba preparing for battle

Chhalpaul, 12 November

The district- and village-level conventions of the Nepali Congress started from 9 November. With tough mental and physical battles being fought by both the camps, doubts are being raised as to whether or not the entire process will be completed by the 15 November deadline. Yesterday, elections took place in different parts of the Valley. In many places, the prime minister’s camp had already declared people elected without even holding the elections and is preparing to get some district representatives nominated the same way. Meanwhile, the Deuba camp has got wind of this and is now preparing a counter-move. The Deuba camp has alleged that election officials were only sent to places where the PM’s camp is strong and not to those places where the camps were perceived to be weak.

Despite the fact that the issue of active party membership has yet to be solved, the Deuba camp has agreed to participate in the elections. It has, however, not yet indicated whether it will accept the results or not. Deuba has indicated that he and other members of his camp from the central committee might resign if circumstances so demand.

With conspiracies, horse-trading, threats and force being used by both parties, it seems like both camps are participating in the elections in full force. Consequently, the election process is causing a lot of violence with incidents of people being physically assaulted. The day before yesterday, Narendra Jha, president of the Saptari district committee, and Gopal Kattel, a central observer, were physically assaulted and injured. In Kathmandu, two people were injured in Baudha.

Future of KMTNC bleak

Deshaunter, 12 November

Despite the palace’s direct involvement in the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC), the future of that organisation does not seem to be secure. King Birendra is the patron and his brother the chairman of that organisation. At present, the financial state of the organisation is very weak, many high-ranking officials have resigned to join other institutions, the management is weak, and realising this many international organisations that were earlier helping the KMTNC have started to back out.

According to sources in the KMTNC, among those who have resigned sensing that their future there is not secure are project director Siddharth Bajracharya, chief officer Mahesh Pudasaini, administrative officer Anil Ranjit and engineer Bijay Gurung. Other officials too, are beginning to think about their future and are waiting for the right moment to put in their papers.

Almost eight months ago, the chief of the UK chapter of KMTNC, John Chappel, had asked the chairman, Prince Gyanendra to intervene since the management was proving to be inefficient.

International organisations that have been supporting the KMTNC have raised many questions but have not received satisfactory answers. SNV, the Dutch aid agency, which has funded the KMTNC for the past ten years, has indicated that it is

pulling out in two years’ time. Its annual contribution amounted to more than Rs 10 million. NORAD, too, has stated that it will not be able to help a couple of years from now. The WWF, which till now gave almost \$100,000 per year, has also stated that it will be reduce that amount to \$20-30,000.

The KMTNC, established in 1982, does not have its own sources of income, beside the entrance fees charged of tourists entering the ACAP area. The management of ACAP was handed to the KMTNC for ten years in 1991/92 and the lease period ends next year. That means even this small trickle of funds is going to dry up. No one knows how KMTNC will function after this. This is one reason why many employees are quitting.

“Our movement will continue”

Jwala, 12 November

(Excerpts from an interview with Bishnu Lamsal, member secretary, United Central Struggle Committee [of hotel employees])

Q It is said your demands are against the law?

A The Labour Act, 2048, states that within 21 days of a petition being filed, a ruling must be given. We presented our demands to the government on 6 September and it was to provide a ruling within 21 days but did not. The laws allow for the ruling to be postponed for another 21 days, and this again can be extended by another 15 days. Nothing happened all along. The employees can go on a strike after 66 days. We only followed the above-mentioned Act.

Q After the talks with the government, you have ended your agitation, why?

A We have not stopped our agitation. We have only postponed it.

Q Your agitation has taken a long time. You are prolonging it further. Why?

A The concerned authorities should act. The tourism industry is going to be affected. We know that. We, too, don’t want to go in for an agitation, but despite all this, the authorities are not acting in a responsible manner. The government had asked for some time. They asked us to give them a few days more. “If you could wait for 20 years then why can’t you wait for another 4 or 5 days,” was what the government told us. But that is not why we have stopped our agitation. Other programmes that are part of the protest are being carried out. We have postponed our strike and black armbands day. We have not run away from our movement.

Q Who should fulfil your demands: the hotels or the government?

A Both have agreed to implement it many times. At the time of collective bargaining, which takes place every two years, the hotels had stated that if the government gives them permission then they would implement it. But the government has to make the appropriate laws. The owner does not have to pay, it is the tourist who is going to pay and this is the system the world over. The government and HAN [Hotel Association of Nepal] have both agreed many times to enforce this, but now except for HAN everyone is agreeable to it. That is because most hotels maintain two accounts and if they agree to what we want they will be exposed. It is because of this that HAN does not want to meet our demand.

Q Is your demand limited to the one for the ten percent service charge, or do you have others?

A That is our only demand, and that too can be negotiated upon.

Who has Created More Leaders: Koirala or Bhattarai?

Kedar Subedi in Saptahik Bimarsa, 10 November

Koirala
Koirala has helped the Nepali Congress to create many youth leaders. In most cases he has given the No 2 position to people from the younger generation. Among the current generation of secondary leaders, Sher Bahadur Deuba, Ramchandra Poudel, Sushil Koirala, Sailaja Acharya, Taranath Ranabhat, Khum Bahadur Khadka, Dr Ram Sharan Mahat, and Bijay Gachchedar, all became prominent because of Koirala.

Koirala made Deuba the leader of the Nepali Congress in parliament. At Koirala’s request, Acharya and Khadka withdrew and Deuba became the NC leader in parliament. It was Koirala who proposed that Poudel be made the speaker of the house. Ranabhat, the present speaker, too became speaker because of Koirala.

After Koirala became the president of the party, Ranabhat was made secretary of the party twice. Sushil Koirala was made vice-president once and secretary twice. Ranabhat was earlier in Bhattarai’s camp and a vocal opponent of Koirala. This shows that Koirala does not discriminate between the two camps. Both Gachchedar and Khadka were ministers under him for a long time. Mahat, too, was in the cabinet earlier. Now, when Koirala is once again contesting as candidate for party president younger leaders are in high positions. Sushil Koirala is secretary, Poudel is deputy prime minister, and Ranabhat is speaker.

Under Koirala’s presidentship, second generation leaders have always received prominence. Till now almost 85 percent of working committee seats have been given to young leaders. Every time a new committee is formed, Koirala has made it a point to increase the number of young leaders and decrease the number of old leaders.

Bhattarai
Bhattarai has always reserved the No 2 position for one of the leaders of his age group. It was always the late Mahendra Narayan Nidhi, Yog Prasad Upadhyaya, Basu Risal or Ram Babu Prasai.

When he became prime minister for the first time, he made Nidhi his number two and Upadhyaya number three. When he became PM for the second time Upadhyaya became number two even though Upadhyaya was not a member of any house of parliament. When he realised that he may have to go, Bhattarai made Poudel the deputy prime minister and gave Upadhyaya a valid excuse to resign from the cabinet.

After the advent of democracy in 1990, Bhattarai became party president. He made Nidhi the secretary and Upadhyaya and Risal deputy secretaries. Ram Babu Prasad was made treasurer. Bhattarai was party president for 20 years and almost 80 percent of the central committee members were people of his age, and every time the committees were dissolved and new ones formed, the ratio of old people grew at the expense of the younger ones.

PROFILE

by ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

Nepal’s squash champ

courts in the valley, provided him with the perfect opportunity to learn the nuances of the game. Eventually Hira partnered with single players, worked on his game and created a niche for himself in the small world of Nepali squash players.

Hira arrived in the national scene when he stood third at the 1992 Annual Mercantile Squash Tournament. Two years down the line, in 1994, he would win his first tournament, the Mercantile Tournament, and continue doing so for four more years. The club assistant had succeeded in beating even those who had played the game for years, and from then on it has been merely a matter of routinely winning all the games.

“The only formal training I have received in the game was when the Nepal Squash Racket Association sent me to Peshawar to train for a month under the guidance of Fakkar Jaman, a renowned Pakistani coach,” he says. Hira has won every squash tournament played in the valley—from the Mercantile Cup to the Crown Prince Cup—although he hasn’t benefited a great deal economically. “It’s hard to make a living as a sportsman in Nepal,” he says, “The average cash prize in the tournaments isn’t very high, and even if you win all of them it is still tough.”

But for Hira Bahadur Thapa there is no greater passion than the game, and though age has started



MIN BAIKACHARYA

The boy from Bakrang started off as caretaker of the squash club, and ended up as national champion.

telling on him (he is in his early 30s), he believes that he can still beat any Nepali challenger. What about the prospects of going international we ask him? “The international players are physically and technically better than us. It will take us a lot of time to get to that level,” he says.

Hira may not ever play at the international level but he hopes to

see the younger generation do so. He is organising a training camp for younger kids who are interested in the sport. While it may still be a few years before we see international level players from Nepal, we may yet see Hira compete at the next SAF Games where the game is likely to be included. ♦



The fact that professional sportspersons in Nepal don’t earn a decent living is fairly well established. But even this common truth has a heartrending ring to it when it concerns a promising player like Hira Bahadur Thapa, the undisputed squash champion of Nepal since 1994.

Hira hails from the hills of Bakrang in Gorkha, from an average Nepali farming family like most others. He has not had any formal education nor has he received much formal training in the game he loves so much. But there is no doubting his love and dedication for the game.

If there is one man in this city who came from the hills with a singular intention in mind, and not only achieved but excelled at it, it is Hira Bahadur. When he came to Kathmandu in 1985, under the guardianship of his first cousin, Hira had only heard of the game but his curiosity was getting him. His cousin had been entrusted the task of finding someone who could look after the Battispatali Squash Club and he asked Hira if he would come along.

Hira didn’t know the game, but was willing to learn. His job as caretaker of this single court squash club, one of the few wooden floor

The Eastern Open

MUKUL HUMAGAIN
After the Surya Nepal Western Open, Nepali golfers are all set to tee off at the Dharan Country Club. The Surya Nepal Eastern Open to be held 17-18 November will attract 50 golfers (both professional and amateur) from Nepal. For the first time, Dharan is hosting a national level golf tournament. Top Nepali professional golfers will be in the fray for the prize money of Rs 50,000, with the winner taking home a purse of Rs 8,300.

Deepak Thapa Magar, after a splendid show at the Surya Nepal Western Open, is the favourite to win here. Thirty-three-year old Magar shot a course record of three under 70 at the Himalayan Golf Course on 12 November to win his second Surya Nepal Western Open title. But the likes of Pashupati Sharma, Deoraj Pakhrin, Deepak Acharya, Radhey Shyam Thapa, Toran Shahi and Sabin Sapkota will be there to challenge Deepak at Dharan. For Deoraj Pakhrin and Sabin Sapkota, this tourney will be a special one—both of them will be playing in their home turf.

Dharan’s 18-hole golf course was established in 1960 at the British Gurkha Camp for the officers of the British Army. Now, expatriate workers, ex-army men and businessmen from Dharan are regular players at the club.

Organised just before the



Surya Masters, this tourney will provide an ideal platform for Nepali golfers to prepare themselves for the big one. It

will also provide an opportunity for aspiring golfers to show off their skills and make their presence felt nationally scene. ♦

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HEM BAHADUR BISTA IN HUMLA . . .
There is a threat of snow, but Chho Kyong Lama is undeterred. Hoping that the blizzards will not begin in the next few days, he prepares for another trading trip to Taklakot on the Nepal-Tibet border. His merchandise: timber from the alpine forests around his village.

It is not just Chho Kyong who is in the business; every family from Kermi village in Humla district would like to make that “last” trip up north before they are forced indoors by the snow. The villagers say they have no choice but to cut down the trees. “Last year I went to Simikot to buy rice. I had to stay at the district headquarters for five days just to get the coupons for five kilos of rice. Including the time I spent on travelling, it took me seven days altogether. The expenses are something else,” says Chho Kyong Lama.

This time he decided to do something else to feed himself and his family. Instead of heading to Simikot for rice coupons like everyone else, Chho Kyong decided to cut down trees and sell them at Taklakot and buy food from the market. A mature nine-foot log fetches around 25 kilos of wheat flour at Taklakot and all it takes is seven days to fell, shear and transport two such logs to the border.

It certainly is an effective way of thumbing a collective nose at the central government in Kathmandu that has remained indifferent to the food shortage that hits Humla every year, but for the fact that the forests may not last very many years. Trees have almost vanished in most of Humla district and what Chho Kyong and his neighbours are selling could be the last ones standing. Villages like Kermi, Muchu, Yari and Yangar along the border with Tibet still have patches of green but with the scale of illegal logging now taking place, even these will not last for long.

The high-altitude villages of Humla district are covered in snow for up to six months each year. At this altitude trees take very long to grow and mature. The Himalayan forests we see today are something that have taken thousand of years to mature, which is why the rate at which they are being decimated is so alarming.



Nepalis are chopping down priceless trees that took centuries to grow, loading them on yaks and hauling them to Tibet. Pretty soon, there won’t be any trees left in Humla.

Statistics show that 13 percent of Humla is under forest cover. Forty-nine percent comprises coniferous or softwood species, and roughly five percent is hardwood. But these are official figures and do not take into account the plunder that has taken place in recent years. All the same the District Forest Office thinks there is no cause for alarm. “Illegal logging is not very threatening,” was an official’s bland response.

Most of the timber headed for Tibet passes through the villages of Muchu, Khagalgaum, Hepka, and Dandafya. The forest office has four rangers looking after forests in Humla, and on paper there is even a range post at Muchu. But when we asked the people of Muchu to show us where the post was, they didn’t have a clue. That could be why the acting chief of the District Forest Office did not know what he was saying when he asserted that “because transportation is difficult very little timber is smuggled”.

When we reached the Humla Karnali at Hilsa, we found only an unmanned bridge over the river separating Nepal and the Tibet autonomous region of China. On the Nepal side are five small ‘hotels’. Bahadur Lama runs one of them. Pointing towards a yak-and-mule train on the bridge, he said: “It’s hard to tell how much timber is taken across every day. They do it night and day. Those caravans are not going to stop until it begins to snow.”

Across the river on the Tibetan side lies the small village of Ser. Traders who don’t want to carry their timber to Taklakot, 35 km away, sell their logs at Ser. Almost every house in this settlement of 20-25 households stocks timber brought from Nepal. “The progress of the Tibetan society and economy has increased the demand for modern houses,” explained Tshering Lama, whom we met in Hilsa.

“More and more modern houses are being built in the Tibetan villages of Ser, Khochar, and Taklakot. This demand is because of the retirement benefits the government gave to officials for building houses,” he added.

The more houses are built in Tibet the more will be the demand for Nepali timber since that part of the arid high plateau just does not have the forest cover to meet its timber requirements.

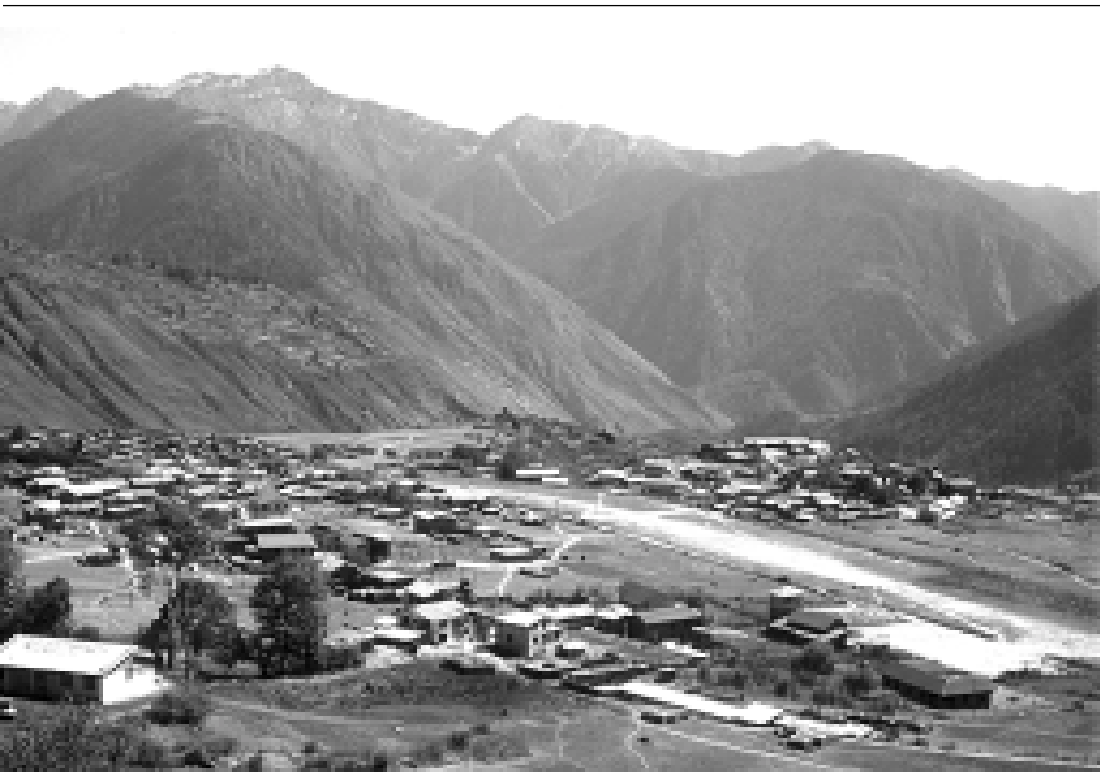
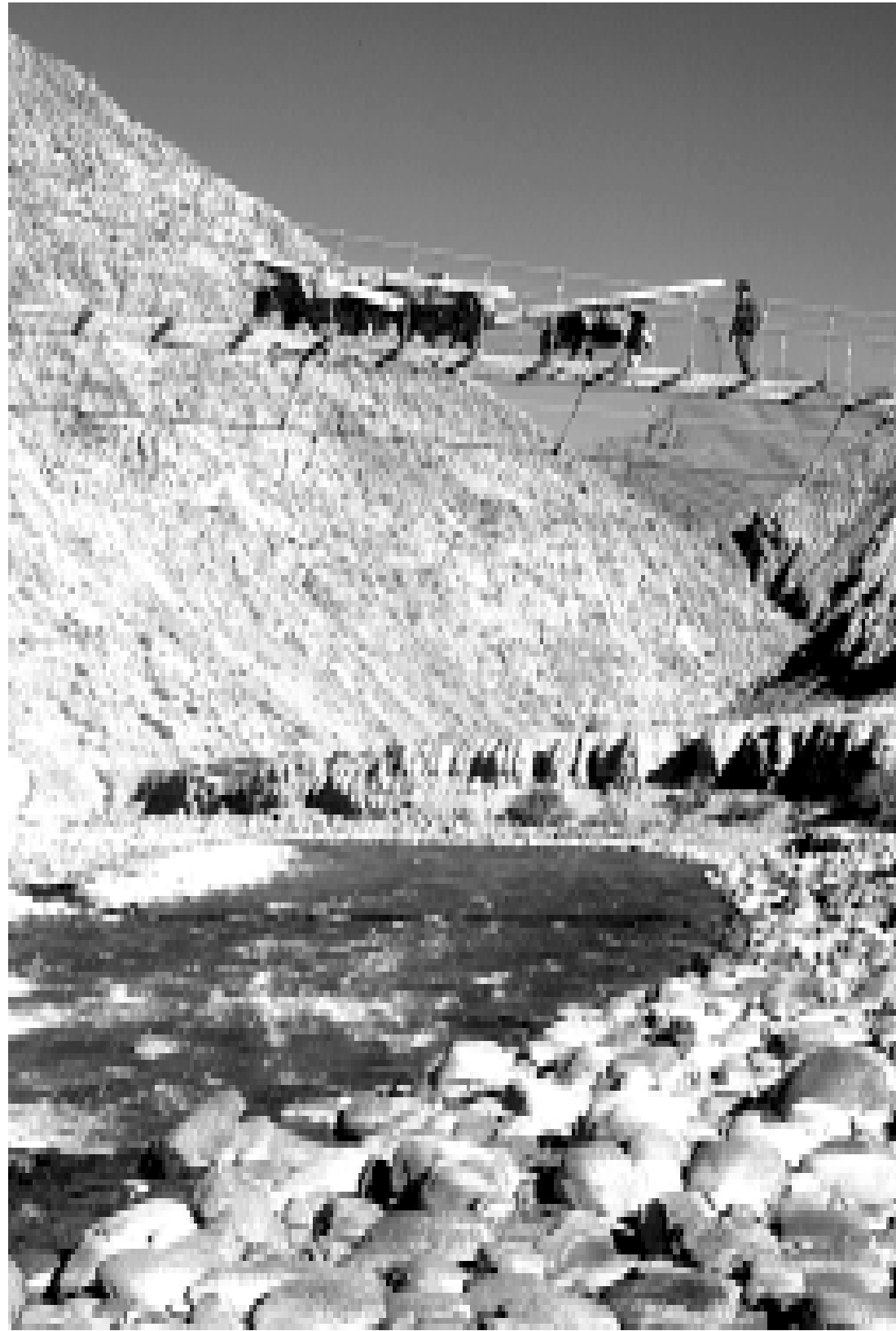
Namda Lama, another Nepali from Yalwang who visits Taklakot every month to buy supplies for her hotel, observed a still more worrying trend—over-supply. “The demand for timber is growing but the price is also coming down.” Last year a yak-load of timber fetched around 70 yuan (known as Sukar locally) (Rs 750) in Ser but this year it’s hard to get even 50 yuan, she told us. “One small plank could fetch at least 22 measures of flour last year, now we only get 12 measures.”

Tibetan traders dictate the prices. The villagers usually obtain supplies on credit from dealers in Taklakot and Ser promising payment in timber. However, when they do bring in the wood, they are forced to accept any price the Tibetans offer. The Nepalis have no choice since they cannot take the wood back. Yet, such unfair practices haven’t stopped the timber trade.

We asked Chabilal Lama, a member of the District Development Committee, why no one seemed bothered about the deforestation and illegal timber trade. “What should we do, save the forest or save ourselves?” he shot back, and added, “I myself am a thief and cannot survive without selling timber in Taklakot. How can I ask others not to cut down the forests?”

There is a popular saying in Humla: “*Rajako ain bhauda kbola ko chain thulo.*” This roughly translates as: state laws are applicable only in Kathmandu, here it is nature that determines how people live. The people also seemed to care less about the laws and more about doing things that would make it possible to survive the next day and the next year.

Assistant Sub-Inspector at the Muchu Police Check Post, Tej Bahadur Sharma, gave us the regular police official’s refrain: “We don’t allow anyone to smuggle wood from this post. I cannot tell you about what happens else-



where.” This police post is 40 km away from the Hilsa bridge—a distance that locals manage to cover in a full day while a laden yak train takes three days.

All the top district officials we met—District Development Committee Chairman Jiwan Bahadur Shahi, Chief District Officer Chetra Bahadur Bhandari and Deputy Superintendent of Police Jiwan Shrestha—agreed that timber smuggling is not new to the border villages. They spoke in one voice about the reasons and

even the inability of the administration to do much: “There’s little we can do when people have no other means of feeding themselves and their families.”

There’s another side to the timber story. Every yak, mule, donkey, sheep and goat caravan returning from Tibet brings back not only flour but also liquor. Some people bring back a few bottles for their own consumption, but more often the animals are loaded with cartons of brandy, whisky and

Clockwise from top left: Deforested hillsides near Yari; Yak train carries Nepali timber across the Hilsa bridge with the barren hills of Tibet across the Humla-Karnali river in the background; Simikot airstrip at 3200 m; and yaks return with supplies.

the like. A bottle of liquor that costs Rs 40 in Tibet can fetch up to Rs 100 in Simikot. It makes good trading sense and provides the villagers with much-needed income. Only if it had not been at the cost of the trees. ♦

ALL PHOTOS RK MANANDHAR

ABOUT TOWN

FILMS

❖ Nepali

Aago – Ganga Chalchitra, Goon (Kha), Padma, Ranjana Basanti – Plaza 2

Dhukdhuki – Goon (Ga), Radha

Dodhar – Biswajyoti, Plaza 1, Prithvi

❖ Hindi

Dhai Akshar Prem Ke – Shri Nava Durga

Do Shikari & Sabse Bada Shaitan – Ashok

Har Dil Jo Pyar Karega – Kumari

Kaho Na Pyar Hai – Krishna

Kurukshetra – Shivadarshan, Goon (Ka)

Mission Kashmir – Tara, Metro, Manakamana, Gopi

❖ Foreign

Beshkempir: Growing up in Kirghizistan.

After understanding his adoption, life changes for young Azate. A film of pure poetry. Directed by Aktan Abdikalikow. An Inter-Cultural Film Society presentation, Saturday 18 November. 4.30 pm. Russian Cultural Centre. English sub-titles.

Cyrano de Bergerac, 1989. An army officer and a swordsman, Cyrano de Bergerac is a romantic poet who longs for a love that eludes him. The object of his passion is his cousin, the beautiful Roxanne, and the object of his torment comes in the shape of his very long nose. Directed by Jean-Paul Rappeneau, starring Gerard Depardieu, Anne Brochet and Bincenc Perez. Sunday 19 November. 2 pm, Alliance Francaise auditorium, Thapathali. French with English subtitles. Entry Free.

EXHIBITIONS

❖ Art

Wood'n Motion. An exhibition of sculptures and paintings by German artist Beate Neumann showcasing an array of 20 wooden sculptures. Accompanying them are 16 paintings using elaborate batik techniques on Lokta paper which produces the illusion of wood-print. The show will be supported by a video that shows the artist at work. 18–26 November, 10.30 am–4.30 pm. Patan Museum.

❖ Photography

Voices with Vision. Exhibition of photographs, art and writings done by Bhutanese refugee students from Jhapa camp. Seven volunteers and two teachers guide you and provide an overview on the completed work and the process. Baggikhana, Patan Dhoka. Take the right turn as you enter Patan Dhoka and enter through the big brown gate (Rato Bangala School Gate) on the right. 15–22 November. Open all day. info@photovoice.org

❖ Dance

Anokha – Dance of Gods and Men. A unique fusion of Kathak and hip-hop presented by renowned French group Accorrap Kader Attou.

Saturday 25 November. 6:30 pm. Royal Nepal Academy. Rs1000, 500, 250, 100. The group will also conduct a **Hip Hop Dance Workshop**, a day before their show on Friday 24 November at the Alliance Francaise, Thapathali. 9.30 am–12.30 pm for dancers and 2.30–5.30 pm for dance aficionados.

Nominal participation fee Rs 1000. Limited seats. 241163, 242832

❖ Architecture

Architect and Farmer. An exhibition of wood and stone carving with demonstration and a 2-metre high model of a temple to give insight to the visitors on the interior of a temple accompanied by continued film projection in French, Nepali and English. Exhibition jointly presented by the Kavre Integrated Project, the Alliance Francaise and the French Embassy. Aims to present aspects of French cooperation in Nepal and work done by Nepali artists. 14–23 November, Alliance Francaise, Thapathali.

FUN AND FROLIC

❖ Eating out

Barbecue. Lavish barbecue nights for the season with a Thai theme in Kathmandu. Shangri-La Hotel's prize-winning Shamabala Garden. Lazimpat, 7 minutes ride north from Thamel. 412999

MUSIC'N DANCE

❖ Fusion

UK band Network of Sparks live in concert with Prem Autari of Sur Sudha. Birendra International Convention Centre, New Baneshwor, 6 pm. 24–25 November. Free tickets available at The British Council (next to British Embassy) Lainchour. 410798

Classical Nepali Dances based on Buddhist and Hindu epics and the Tantric pantheon showcasing the most sacred and hidden arts of the ancient Kathmandu valley. Tuesday at The Great Pagoda, Hotel Vajra (near Swoyambhunath Stupa). 10 minutes ride west of Thamel. 7 pm. Rs 400. 271545

Ballads and Dances of Old Tibet performed in typical Tibetan ancient style along with traditional instruments by the Tibetan duo Tshering Gurmey and Tshering Paljor. Every Thursday, Naga Theater, Hotel Vajra (near Swoyambhunath Stupa). 10 minutes ride west of Thamel. 7 pm, Rs 400. 271545

❖ Book Release

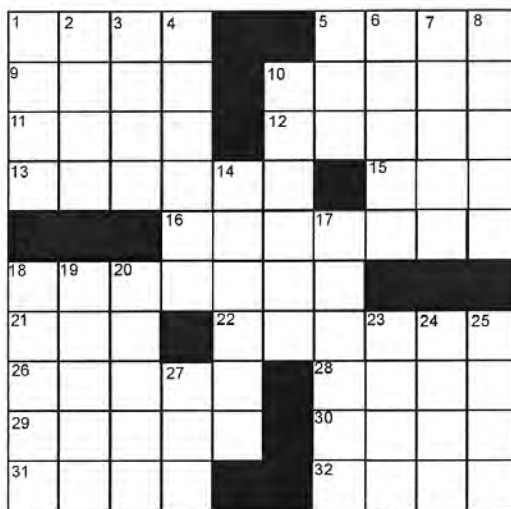
"Bringing up Children in a Changing World. Who's Right? Whose Rights?" book release followed by sharing of key findings. Organised by Save the Children, UNICEF, Seto Gurans, National Child Development Services and Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development. Keynote Speaker: Hon Tirthaman Shakya, Chief Secretary, HMG. Rato Baithak, Hotel Himalaya. 14 November, 4.30 pm. Call Reena Bal: 412598

❖ Meeting

The All Nepal Rotary Inter City Meeting with the theme "Rotary Foundation". District officials from Calcutta and members from all the Rotary Clubs of Nepal will be attending. Hosted by the Rotary Club of Kathmandu Mid-town. 22 November, Narayani Hotel, 5 pm.

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

QUICKWORD 7



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- 3 Entries have to reach Himalmedia, by 5 pm, 22 Nov, 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. Please come with an ID.



Across

- 1 Bark up the wrong one (4)
- 5 Staple... thee well (4)
- 9 Near to making the moolah (4)
- 10 Communicate with former flame, electronically (5)
- 11 Neutralise with base (4)
- 12 Adios says the Gaul (5)
- 13 Public space for orators and musicians (6)
- 15 Between heaven and a dropped glottal (3)
- 16 Opposed to, like Baluwater and Bhaishapati (7)
- 18 Serendip went by other an precious name (7)
- 21 Swear at the mutt (3)
- 22 Ended with an e-wanting (6)
- 26 Insurance agent fell out with Andrew (5)
- 28 Sol works on the ozone hole (4)
- 29 Bewildered, out sailing (2,3)
- 30 Florence, give me a

light (4)

- 31 The bonds that choke in the tropics (4)
- 32 What Buffy did to the vampire (4)

Down

- 1 This little duck whistles (4)
- 2 Characteristic of F1 stories (4)
- 3 Little mermaid's love (4)
- 4 Cause to be beloved (6)
- 5 The American agent stuffed himself (3)
- 6 Foreign to (5)
- 7 Dizzy from pulling in the trout (5)
- 8 Former guerrilla is jubilant at (5)
- 10 Bitter pint in Thamel? (6)
- 14 Idi chased the Indians out of here (6)
- 17 Making deals with ideas (6)
- 18 French approval for the showy display (5)
- 19 Many, faceted like Ravan? (5)

- 20 Jagged, Greek god sat on a pin (5)
- 23 Lead to an agreement (4)
- 24 Bomb the writer, what the 'eck! (4)
- 25 The blown dwarf's demeanour (4)
- 27 Aye mineral water! (3)

QUICKWORD ANSWER 6



Out of 5 entries, there were no correct answers.

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

Name.....

Ph.....email.....

Britain in Nepal week

The British Council is celebrating Britain in Nepal Week from 24-30

November to mark the opening of the new British Council premises at Lainchour. The celebrations aim to highlight the links that connect Nepal and the United Kingdom and has a host of activities such as a fusion music concert with music reflecting eastern and western influences, a pick of British films, and a Human Rights Film and Cartoon Festival.

The music festival will have a mix of western and eastern music, featuring the Network of Sparks in concert with Prem Autari of Sur Sudha at the Birendra International Convention Hall. Audiences will be rocking to the rhythm as the band takes you on a journey through the world of

percussions that range from the Indian tabla to African drumbeats, the Japanese taiko to hard beats of the modern drumset. The concert is scheduled for 24-25 November and is open to all.

British film lovers too have not been left out of the celebrations. The Council will be showing some of the best of British films produced such as Sense and Sensibility, Sliding Doors, Chicken Run, Baby Mother, and Fever Pitch. Chicken Run is the latest film from Nick Park, Oscar winning director of Wallace and Gromit while Fever Pitch is a romantic comedy about a man and a football team. Sliding Doors is another romantic comedy that makes one contemplate on the if question. Baby Mother is the story of a young black woman trying to earn her name in the

world of reggae music. Sense and Sensibility is the much-celebrated film by the Merchant-Ivory duo. The movie is set in the early 1800's in England and traces the career of the two Dashwood sisters and their widowed mother. A must see. All the movies are



being shown free of charge at the Russian Cultural Centre from 5:30 pm onward, 26-30 November.

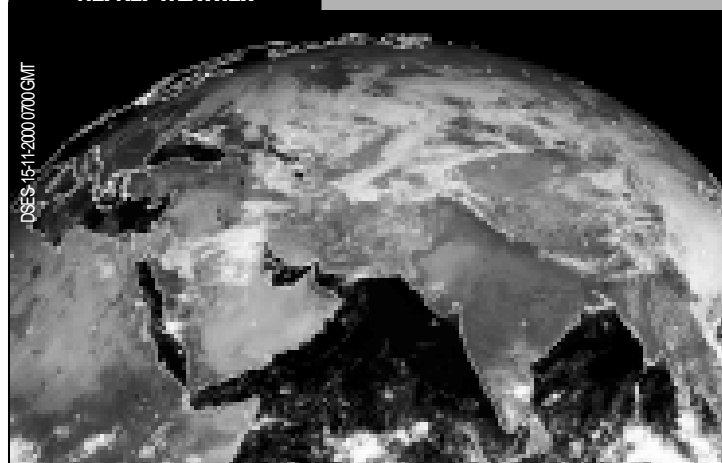
For the like minded there is the Human Rights film and Cartoon Festival at the Himalaya Hotel, 28-30 November. Open only by invitation, this is the first ever human rights film festival taking place in Nepal. Films such

Ujeli, the Meena cartoons, Abodh Bandhbiharu and Chameli will be screened and discussed. The goal of the festival is to provide examples of good practice in the use of cinema and video to disseminate human rights ideas and information and to enhance debate on human rights issues amongst young educated Nepalis.

A panel discussion will follow each screening. The panel will comprise of human rights experts as well as film industry professionals. These will be followed by an open public discussion on the films.

There will also be a Human Rights Exhibition parallel to the screening and discussion sessions during the three-day festival. Organizations active in the human rights sector will exhibit their literature and posters to audiences invited to attend the festival. ♦

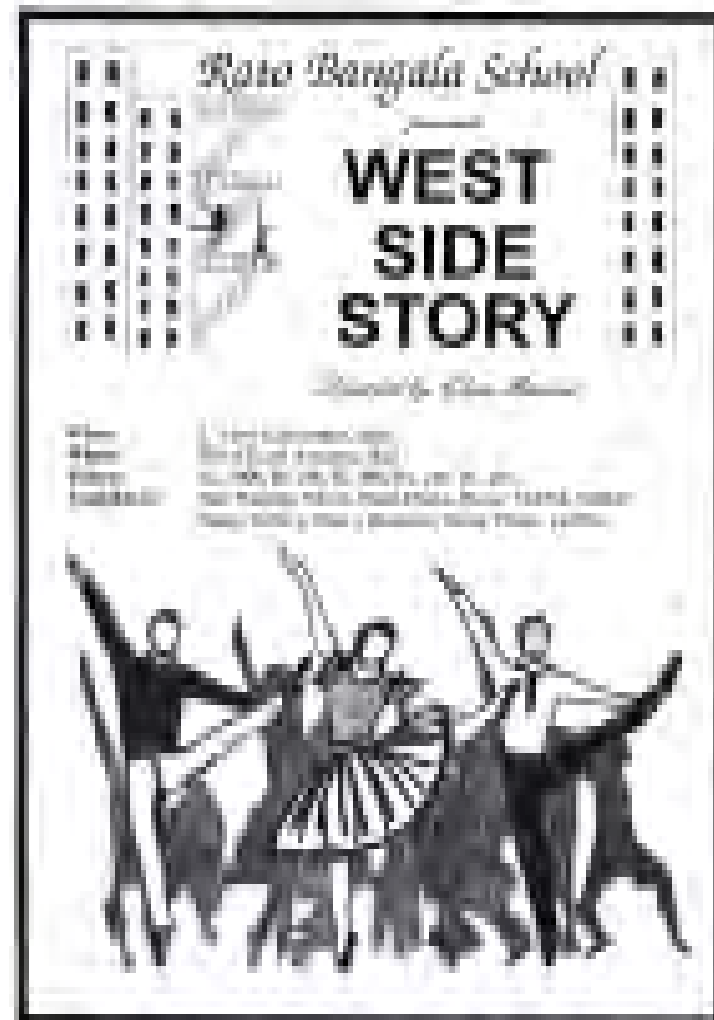
NEPALI WEATHER



A moisture laden front, which was moving eastward from west Asia last week, dispersed en route over the western Himalaya. Southwesterly winds from the Arabian Sea took it over the Pamirs, and also brought us this opaque haze that has enveloped the whole of North India the past week. The haze brought down maximum temperatures but capped the minimum. All this will change with another weather front that should be upon us by Friday, bringing a sprinkling of snow to higher altitudes as far as central Nepal, even rain in places. Visibility will improve, and temperature fall further.

KATHMANDU

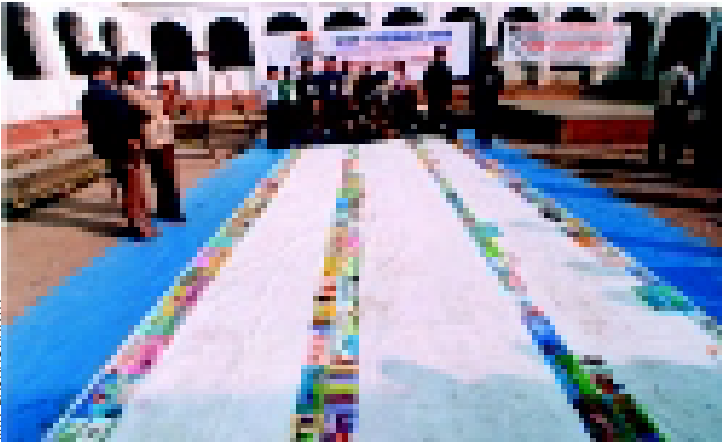
Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
24-09	23-08	22-08	24-07	23-07



HAPPENINGS



From right, WWF President Ruud Lubbers, Prince Gyanendra and U Barsbols, Mongolia's minister for nature and environment, at the opening of the WWF annual conference.



Mural dedicated to world peace prepared by four Kathmandu school students to be exhibited at Tundikhel in December.



Secretary General of Amnesty International, Pierre Sane (speaking into mike) at the press conference organised to highlight AI's campaign against torture.

SALIL SUBEDI

Cadenza sounds like a car, but actually they're Nepal's best jazz band. If you missed them in the autumn, the boys are back in the house Saturday nights at Upstairs Lazimpat.

"We were in Townsville, Australia, jammin' the beat," says Nabin Chettri, drummer and vocalist, referring to the Palmer Street Jazz Festival held annually in Townsville the last weekend of July.

The band, then comprising Nabin Chettri (percussion, vocals), brother Pravin (bass) and Tony Zorbas (sax), played experimental and straight-ahead jazz solo and with the Afro-Dizzy Act from Brisbane, an Aussie-Bermudan outfit AllStars and the Stephen Newcombe Trio.

Despite only a four-year run, the festival has a reputation for attracting great musicians from around the world. This year Cadenza enhanced that reputation, and also made a statement about Nepal ("How did you hear jazz in Nepal?") and the potential of Nepali musicians ("Big voice for a little man," of Nabin's stellar vocals). Nick, the festival director and a musician himself, remarked, "They played brilliantly and inspirationally as a trio and in combination with other musicians. This was scintillating jazz by a cohesive group. I had earlier been impressed by their musicianship and unique approach to jazz on a sample CD they sent me. Their playing at the Palmer Street Jazz

"Scintillating jazz by a cohesive group." Nepal's premier jazz band finds takers as far afield as Australia.

Festival more than confirmed this judgement."

It took the band a while to cut through all the red tape and get there, though. But once there, they went great guns. On their first day they played three gigs, starting out with a sidewalk jam, and many faces in the audience were familiar by the end of the festival. It seemed as if people couldn't get enough of them. All their venues were packed and they were invited down to Brisbane to play at a couple of bars.

"We arrived in Townsville late and stressed out, but the excitement of playing there was overwhelming. We simply took off with a couple of jams and a good sleep," laughs Nabin.

This energy and spirit has helped the band stay alive and evolve. When Nabin started out in 1991 with a rock 'n' roll band, Broken Wings, in his hometown Darjeeling, he was happy doing covers. By '94, though, Nabin and two friends, Harish and Arun, had founded Cadenza to explore their interest in jazz. The name comes from 'cadence', the movement of sound, an improvisation, the end of a musical passage. It became Cadenza because, "It looked jazzier with the 'z' of jazz in the band's name."

Nabin's voice, one of the strongest aspects of the band, has been described as similar to George Benson's, though just last Saturday we heard him do a brilliant Louis Armstrong cover. He's nothing if not versatile. Nabin started out on vocals and guitar, but he's since moved from guitar to percussion. "I



The Cadenza boys are back in town

didn't know how to play the drums five years back, when we lost our drummer. Sitting on the bed and beating tin cans and zaa! was kind of funny, but then one fine day, it took off when Dev Rana and Mahendra Lama let them play their band's drums," he recalls.

The band has seen many shake-ups, most recently the departure of British-Jamaican Tony Zorbas. They've lost the horn, central to their new fascination with Coltrane, but they've got two new guitarists and are working with a female vocalist who's a perfect counterpart to Nabin's deep, mellow sound. They're even considering a third album with the help of the other constant through the years, Upstairs' owner Chhedyup Dojo. He's helped Cadenza find new members, provided them with a venue since 1998 and also managed their Australian venture.

Shake-up or not, they sound really good, and ripe for an album.

Their 1993 debut album 'Confessions', recorded on a home recording system in Darjeeling by Vikram Subba, remains popular among their Darjeeling fans. And if the crowd at Upstairs is anything to go by, a new album will be snapped off the shelves. In just one evening there recently, I heard people invite Cadenza to play in California, Colorado and Melbourne. The vibe during a gig is electric, and even folks who don't ordinarily care much for jazz really get into the music.

The band says it best. "Your technical skill has to be sharp. But it's more about soul and mind. The head's got to be focused. The energy exchange has to be positive. You never know who will play what notes next, so there's always got to be a strong confidence and the passion to play. Then whatever heights you reach, there won't be that fear of falling down. Jazz is the best of all..." ♦

OFF THE BEATEN TREK

by PADAM GHALEY

Also runs

I don't know if this qualifies for the off the beaten trek column, but shouldn't any out-of-the-ordinary hike be eligible? And running instead of walking across the Nepali countryside, is certainly offbeat. Earlier this month, the trails around Kathmandu Valley, Nagarkot, Chitwan and Pokhara were full of French marathoners running hither and thither. Where were they going in such a hurry? Were they hash house harriers? The local villagers just looked on indulgently, as if asking: "What will these crazy foreigners do next?"

The group of 80 French marathoners, some professional runners and others running just for the heck of it, invaded Nepal 27 October to 2 November, raced around for a week and flew right back. We caught up with Dr Jean Pourche, the leader and organiser of the trek marathon. "It went very well, we want to do it again," he said huffing-and-puffing on Sarangkot, against a spectacular backdrop of Machhapuchhare.

The marathoners got right down to it with a warm-up near Thecho in the Kathmandu Valley, and then ran a two hour marathon every day to different places. In Pokhara, they ran from Naudamda to Sarangkot, a horizontal distance of 12 km and a vertical of 1,450 m to 1,700 m and down to 1592 m in two hours or so. Then they were off to the Shangrila Hotel for some serious relaxing. Alain Fayolle, followed by Yanique Camusat took the overall first and second positions. Also running was Nepali



French runners leave Machhapuchhare and the dogs behind.

Marathons treks are a rage in Nepal.

marathoner Ratna Tuladhar. The group is planning a Kathmandu Valley-Bhaktapur Durbar Square-Kathmandu Durbar Square marathon next year. Interested runners needn't worry about pollution—the run will take the back lanes through Old Thimi, the Pashupati jungle and into the city through Thamel.

Pourche is all praise for the Nepalis who cheered them on along the way, but he warns future runners about dogs. Village dogs, it seems, don't take too kindly to white legs and like to go after them, for the thrill of the chase or the fun of sinking their canines into well-toned calves.

The French had it easy compared

to the annual Everest Marathon which is going on even as we go to press. This run is not for the faint-hearted: it starts at Gorak Shep below Mt Everest at 5184 m down to Namche Bazar at 3446 m—a horizontal distance of 42 km. Nepalis have been doing very well in these runs: in 1997 they bagged six of the top ten positions out of a pack of 88 runners.

But the mother of all marathons in the Himalaya was the great round-Annapurna run organised in March this year when 17 sprinting trekkers ran all the way from Besisabar to Pokhara in eight days—a journey that usually takes two weeks. ♦

The new improved Wave in shops now!

Wave magazine advertisement featuring a woman on the cover. Text includes: "No. 59 November 2000", "Mongkur / Poush 2057 NPR 30", "BMR 25 in India", "wbtp results", "western music", "eminem", "faces: bob dylan", "cadenza all that jazz", "on poster joheb manandhar", "what do you know about SEX", "cover story THE FAST LANE", "travel namche", "www.wavemag.com.np", "U.F.O. THE CHUCKING STONE", "CHUCKING STONE AND OTHER STORIES".



Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

There is still a trick or two we can teach the Americans about how to make a vibrant democracy work more vibrantly. But even we have to grudgingly admit that Americans are quick learners, and after 200 years they're finally getting the hang of it. Both the Donkey Party and the Elephant Party are following all the cardinal rules that have been perfected in Nepal for post-election hoo-hah.

US can learn from us

Cardinal Rule #1: Never accept an election result if you are losing.

Cardinal Rule #2: Accuse the incumbent of rigging, ballot-tampering, booth capturing so you can order hand recounts.

Cardinal Rule #3: Immediately pronounce elections free and fair if you are winning.

Cardinal Rule #4: Have ready a list of epithets to hurl at opponents in hastily arranged press conferences.

Cardinal Rule #5: Vote counting should last at least three weeks after election day.

It is good to see that just as in Nepal, democracy is alive and kicking in America. But there are still things in our democratic arsenal that the Americans have yet to master. And we will waive our intellectual property rights over these great ways to enforce democracy on reluctant citizens:

- The freedom to burn tyres at corner

meetings. Not only are these rubber bonfires great ways to keep warm in winter, they also incinerate trash that would otherwise clog up our landfills.

- The freedom to block roads. Nepal's have perfected ingenious ways to use national highways as an imaginative fund-raising tool. Pro-democracy supporters have now extended this to activities such as blocking the runway in Jomsom.

- Choosing large international wildlife gatherings and biotechnology conferences to showcase democracy in action to our distinguished foreign visitors.

- Chukka jams. Notwithstanding the fact that

our chukkas are stuck in traffic jams most days anyway, our freedom fighters have found ways to enforce spontaneous ways to gridlock traffic so that we can burn the greatly more expensive fuel in even greater quantities to protest the fuel price hike.

- Valley bandh. This is something the Americans can pick up from us right away: have a strike in Silicon Valley and block the information superhighway.

- One-day Nepal bandh. This is when the whole country is forced to voluntarily enjoy a national holiday and a car-free day so that our distinguished foreign visitors can breathe clean air while they are in Nepal.

- Two-day Nepal bandh. If one day is not enough to clean up the air, we close the country down for two days.
- One-week Nepal bandh.

We haven't tried this one yet, but the

Gore and Bush campaigns can leapfrog all the intermediary steps and declare a one-week bandh from sea to shining sea. After all, no price is too great to protect our democratic way of life. ♦



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