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## THREE MONTHS LATER

It has been three months since the nightmare of the royal massacre traumatised Nepalis with the unthinkable horror of an unimaginable crime. Our nation has not come to terms with it. Time is a slow healer when the truth is too shocking to contemplate. It is still much easier to fall back on explanations of geopolitical intrigue and tangled conspiracies.

With quintessentially Nepali survival instincts we have moved on, disbelieving and storing away troubled thoughts in some deep recess of our minds pretending that out of mind will mean out of sight. But every time we pass the western gates of Naryanhiti, every time we see the family portrait of the deceased royal family being sold by sidewalk hawkers, we are reminded of the truth that lies locked up in a vault inside.

To be sure, there are good reasons to try to move on. And we have. Not everyone is convinced about the "who", but there is little doubt now. We are not entirely sure of the "why". Maybe it will not serve any purpose to know the why, maybe the why is so scandalous for the royal family, so bewildering for the nation, so monstrously disturbing for human nature itself that it should be allowed to rest. But there is a national sense that someone somewhere still owes the Nepali people an explanation.

Despite this calamitous crisis, and the efforts by extremists to foment and cash in on the panic and chaos, the ship of state is still afloat although it took a lot of water. The royal succession, however flawed, went by the book. The resignation of the prime minister was messy, but no messier than in democracies elsewhere. The army is still trying to sort out the ambiguity of command, but after Rolpa showed that it erred on the side of caution. The new head of government has shown he is keen to take the Maoist bull by the horns, and is going about it purposefully with precisely sequenced interventions. It may appear that he is giving away too much, it may seem like he is pinning too much hope on the talks, he may have foolishly opened a can of worms with land reform and his inability to assuage jittery business and investors.

But you have hand it to Sher Bahadur Deuba: he has his eyes firmly on the prize. This is a man who wants to go down in the history books as someone who slayed the dragon and allowed a grateful nation to live happily ever after. Whoever his advisers are, there is direction and there is movement. For the first time in more than a year, you get the sense that there is someone in the driver's seat. OK, the bus is still lurching from side to side and it does teeter perilously on the edge sometimes, but at least there is someone up in front struggling to keep this runaway jalyop on the road.

King Gyanendra is smart enough to know that he has to win the trust of the people before all else. And in the past weeks we have seen the palace discretely stepping up its public relations moves: photo-ops of the smiling king and queen at temples and festivals, Prince Paras offering puja at Dakshinkali, and getting non-sense statements attributed to King Gyanendra into the press. One memorable quote on how he is not going sit idly by (unlike his elder brother) while the country goes down the tubes has stood out. It has made politicians jittery, while the business elite which depends on political stability is pinning its hopes on a more assertive monarch to set things right. Even Kathmandu-based donors and diplomats who have met the king are most impressed, and are privately voicing the unthinkable: a Musharraf-type way out of the impasse.

That would be a mistake. For one thing, we tried absolutism for 30 years (12 years of that under Gyanendra's autocratic-minded father, Mahendra) and that didn't work. Besides, Nepali democracy is finally beginning to find its feet. Despite the bungling, disarray and mis-management, this is a polity that has the potential of delivering the goods. Some would argue these are the very characteristics that provide the safety valves that gives Nepal the resilience that it shows in times of trouble. No one doubts that our elected leaders have so far abjectly misused their mandate and squandered the freedoms of the new constitution. But the system is working itself out.

So far, King Gyanendra has steadfastly maintained that he is willing to go as far as he can, but only within the parameters laid down by the constitution for the role of monarch. He does not seem unduly concerned about the Maoist sloganeering on turning Nepal into a republic, and has said it is ultimately up to the people whether they want a monarchy or not.

Prime minister Deuba for his part has cobbled together an unlikely alliance of parliamentary parties and won the grudging support of his own Nepali Congress for talks with the Maoists which began Thursday. Even if the talks lead nowhere, and this is quite likely, the fact that he has brought us this far is a good sign. You must give the man his due.



STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL

# The power of one

## King Gyanendra may not have as easy a time with absolutism as his father and elder brother did.

Something seems to have gone horribly wrong with our destiny. Like ordinary people everywhere, common Nepalis crave peace. But our country has rarely seen peace in its two and half centuries of existence.

Treaty of Sugauli in 1816 put a stop to the expansionist dreams of Shah kings. But court intrigues and internal conflicts became even more routine. Generations of Nepalis have suffered the agonies of anticipation of peace, but our rulers always let us down. All wars ultimately come to an end, but the torment of waiting for the peace to break out has been excruciating.

After the Kot Massacre of 14 September 1846, Nepal was rent for a century by a feud between feudal cousins: the Shahs and Ranas. Just when the democratic experiment of replacing the bullet by the ballot has started taking root after the political upheavals of 1950, King Mahendra hijacked the popular will in the winter of 1960. He put the prime minister behind bars, suspended the constitution, dissolved parliament, and became an absolute ruler. For 30 years, there was a tense ceasefire between the people and their king.

Peoples' power made a triumphant comeback, riding the wave of the Popular Movement in 1990. Forces of tradition symbolised by the king and agents of change, and modernity represented by political parties reached an understanding. For once, it appeared that Nepal

would cease to be at war with itself.

But peace it was not to be. The gods of war created Maoists in Nepal even when the world, including Mao's own country, had come to the conclusion that the Great Helmsman's revolutionary ways were too cruel for contemporary civilisation.

In a conflict

between countries, a nation rises or falls with its victory or loss. But when a country is at war with itself, it is the sole loser. If the ongoing talks between Maoists and the government fail, we will once again fall into the inferno of unending conflict. A war without direction and purpose. The possibility of breakdown of peace talks between the government and the Maoists is frightening enough, but it's the threat of a re-assertive monarchy that makes the resumption of conflict even more menacing.

King Gyanendra told *Nepal Samacharpatra* last week that he could not remain a mute spectator to the sufferings of Nepali people like his elder brother. The king reportedly said, "The popular grievance is that people have been made butt of ridicule, and continue to be exploited in the name of democracy. That shows the gravity of the situation. People are unable to live quietly in the absence of peace and security." The king went on to add: "At the plight of the people, I can not keep quite like my elder brother."

Drenched in the poignancy of lost opportunity and exuding remarkable confidence, the king's statement was cleverly crafted. Some of the Nepali original is so complex that capturing its nuance in English is next to impossible. But the warning that the king seems to have given to the political class (including the Maoists) is clear and unambiguous: *behave, or else*. It is this tone that has set alarm bells ringing, and the corridors of Singha Durbar continue to reverberate even a week after the statement appeared in print.

*Nepal Samacharpatra* said that it had the king's consent in publishing his views. Since the inordinately observant hawks of Narayanhiti haven't contested that claim, it appears that the statement was intended for the effect that it had. Suddenly politicians are cultivating restraint, and their public utterances have become guarded.

After his stint as the head of coalition government five years ago, Sher Bahadur Deuba has acquired the reputation of being more accommodative to the demands of every one other than his own party. If King Gyanendra means what he says, then he has an

unusually pliant Prime Minister to do his bidding.

The Holeri fiasco has also morally disarmed the Maoists. For someone so shrill in his criticism of the new king in the wake of 1 June massacre, Dr Baburam Bhattarai's present silence on King Gyanendra is deafening. Will the Maoists assist the king if he decides not to be a "mute spectator" like his elder brother and take things in his own hands?

But a repetition of the 1960 royal take-over is fraught with unpredictable dangers. Even if the Maoists and a section of political parties in the country were to support such a move, King Gyanendra will not have as easy a time with absolutism as his father and elder brother had.

Even if one were to dismiss the conspiracy theories doing the rounds of middle-class drawing rooms of Kathmandu, there is no denying the fact that King Gyanendra's ascension to the Shah throne has not been in the normal course of the right of male primogeniture. It was a nightmarish catastrophe of history that activated Sub-Clause 6 of Clause 34 of the Constitution of Kingdom of Nepal 1990. King Gyanendra became what he is by the provisions of a constitution that is based on the conviction that "the source of sovereign authority of the independent and sovereign Nepal is inherent in its people".

Nothing stops the king from acting for and on behalf of the people according to the letter and spirit of the constitution. But a constitutional monarch cannot even exercise authority, let alone wield control. Since a symbolic head of state can do no wrong, it's not for him to decide what is right. All he can do is exert his moral influence in the decisions to be made according to the provisions of the constitution.

Girija Prasad Koirala bemoaning the erosion in the respect of the institution of monarchy, and King Gyanendra laying the blame on the doors of politicians for all ills besetting the nation will not lead us anywhere.

Maoist-government confrontations are bad for the prospect of peace in the country. A monarchy waiting in the wings to assert itself will needlessly complicate an already messy situation. ☐

# Narayanhi whodunit. Who cares?

When Nepal never really mourned the passing of King Birendra. Which is why we still get a jolt when we see

King Gyanendra carrying out his late brother's functions, like addressing parliament or visiting temples on Krishna Astami. We all felt the shock, watched with horror the ritual of multiple cremations. But we skipped the part of mourning because before the news of the massacre had even sunk in, we were instantaneously carried away by the titillation of whodunit, the circumstances of the royal massacre being such that everyone was deathly curious about the identity of the murderer. Amidst the swirling rumours, the very belief in the identity of the killer became politicised—incongruously, you were considered a royalist if you stated that on the basis of available evidence (primarily the accounts of the witnesses before the inquiry commission) that Dipendra was the likely killer. In the midst of this, there wasn't much time for the sorrow of bereavement. And thus as a nation we lost the therapeutic advantages of mourning.

So, here we are today a country and populace still in denial: of the identity of the killer, and deep down, the very fact of the death of the King Birendra and his family. Under any other circumstance, and in any country other than this one, we would have reached that point of belief because seeking it was the next logical thing to do. Not so in the Himalayan kingdom—for even as we tried to surface from the death and ashes, there was the Maoist challenge staring us in the face. With comrades Baburam and Prachanda trying to turn the royal deaths to their 'republican' advantage, the mental waters got muddled once again, and public attention got engaged with tackling the political future.

Does this look and feel like a country that has lost a king whose reign lasted nearly thirty years? No. Which brings up the question: what kind of a people are we? The fact is, however, that there is nothing wrong with the people of Nepal. It is just that we are still in incredible confusion which feeds the denial. The shattered national psyche is not in the process of healing. Everything has been put on hold, a

kind of mass suspension of belief, and Nepalis hope for a day when we can finally begin to believe again.

There is a national state of depression, if we would recognise it. Friends who land at Tribhuvan International Airport report a listlessness, an unsmiling reception, an air of preoccupation. Perhaps there is some exaggeration there, but we have certainly not bounced back as a people. This affects our plans, our economy, our development, our national energy. And the main reason is that the demon of death has not yet been put to rest. The people who matter, in politics, in academia, in media, are intent on looking the other way. They have not lived up to their responsibility of looking deeper into the royal palace massacre so that there is a departure from it into the future. Sure, there are enough members of this intelligentsia who profess not to believe that "Dipendra did it", but neither have they gone any deeper themselves or shown a commitment to their conviction to do their investigations and analyses, and come up with plausible alternative explanations.

These Kathmandu educated, who bear some responsibility, in trying to put an end to the mass confusion, have not done much in the last three months to probe deeper into the issue. Instead, like children who wet their beds and continue to sleep in the momentary warmth (*moot ko nyano*), they are willing to accept the comfort of half-explanations. It takes much too much commitment, intellect, courage and analytical skill to do otherwise. They are willing to wallow in the half-light of ambiguity, and they do not have the honesty of purpose to speak out openly on what they do and do not believe—a cynical reliance on rumour-mongered suggestions that "Dipendra did not do it" is considered sufficient.

They are willing to believe the worst of the present king, Gyanendra, but they wouldn't lay the killings on him completely. They want to believe that "India did it", but do not seek explanations and evidence that will take us further in that direction. They insist that Paras was the culprit, but prefer not to give any credence to his testimony before the commission, and that



Whether to absolve Dipendra or to indict him posthumously, it was important that everyone (conspiratorialist, rationalist, or royalist) who cared for the country demand that parliament hold hearings on the royal massacre.

of eight others, who testified to the fact that Dipendra had let loose.

But the biggest failure of all has been that of our parliamentarians, those guardians of the public interest, who should have called a hearing before a special commission (in fact, they should have called a *special session*, no less), to delve further into the matters raised and left unanswered by the commission of the Chief Justice and the Speaker. That commission took in evidence which pointed at Dipendra, without passing judgement. As for motive, that issue was left unaddressed.

Our parliament is sovereign, and it is still in session. If our lawmakers knew how to govern rather than to fake it with such absolute sincerity, then the opportunity is still open to them—to establish a hearing to look into the royal palace killings. A hearing which would evaluate once again all the evidence taken by the commission, the videotapes of the testimony given, forensic studies as required, and call in witnesses including—all the royal and un-royal witnesses at the site of the massacre, all the civilian and military staff nearby, Devayani

Rana and her parents, the medical team at the Army Hospital, the chief of the army's Narayanhiti detail, the Commander-in-Chief, the friends of Dipendra and Devayani, and anyone else who could provide any kind of background as to Dipendra's love of the gun, his impulses, his relationship with his parents, siblings and larger family, and the extent to which the love affair's progression to marriage may have been stymied.

Any and every person who truly believes there has been a conspiracy leading to the Narayanhiti massacre must call for such a hearing. Only then will things become clearer. If such a hearing brings questions to the fore that cast doubt on the testimony of the witnesses who point their fingers squarely at Dipendra, then at least the way will be clear for us to believe in a conspiracy. On the other hand, if the hearing tends to re-establish Dipendra's hand in the killings, then the public will have confirmed for it a point-of-view that still remains restricted to only a few in Kathmandu.

Whether to absolve Dipendra or to indict him posthumously, it was important that everyone (conspiratorialist, rationalist,

or royalist) who cared for the country demand that parliament hold hearings on the royal massacre. But other than a few weak voices that quickly went silent, there was no such demand. That is because where it matters at the top we are still a feudal society, where those in power as well as those who have the responsibility of leading public opinion prefer to let sleeping dogs lie and rumours fly—do nothing yourself other than pontificate. This ultimately weakens parliamentary democracy because it weakens the position of King Gyanendra, whose responsibility and duty it is to use all that is vested in him as constitutional monarch to protect this system of government.

Our mentality is still stuck at the level of the Kathmandu nobility at the time of the Kot Massacre: know which way the wind is blowing, raise a hullabaloo as long as it does not matter, and go quiet when it does. And maybe, rather than have a history, a century later someone will write a "historical novel" about the *Narayanhiti Kanda*.

Modern-day Nepal and Nepalis deserve better than that. ☐

## LETTERS

### LAST ORDERS

Daniel Lak's "Last orders, please" (# 57) presents a narrow view of the threatened ban on alcohol. I agree with him that banning alcohol is doomed to failure, but before commenting that the teetotal mission may be misplaced shouldn't we ask why women resort to alcohol bans in the first place? Millions of women, girls and boys the world over (including untold numbers in Nepal), are victims of alcohol-fuelled domestic violence. In a patriarchal society like Nepal the majority of women have no control over domestic resources, including cash income, purse strings are firmly held by men. Many poor men spend some of the little cash income earned on booze and cigarettes, instead of putting it towards much needed food, clothing and schooling for their families. Is it any wonder that women are collectively driven by desperation to drastic measures such as alcohol bans?

Michelle Moffatt  
Sanepa

### INDIAN CONNECTION

Thank you CK Lal for calling a spade a spade in drawing attention to the Maoists' India connection in "The chicken neck" (#57). I am a student and am always reading about the Indian government saying Nepal is used by the ISI for anti-India activities. Then why are Nepali terrorists operating out of Indian territory? If Prachanda is operating openly out of Siliquri, why isn't the Indian government taking him

in? The Maoists are against the monarchy which is a symbol of national unity and integrity. They are anti-nationalists and should be dealt with once and for all.

Rita KC  
by email

### MORE CEILINGS

Why stop at a land ceiling? "Capital fright" (#57). Why not have a house ceiling? People only need one house to live in, confiscate extra houses and give them to the poor. And money. Confiscate money from the rich and give it to the poor. Sher Bahadurji, don't promise the people what you can't deliver.

"Desh Bhakta"  
United States

### OUTRAGED

I live in the United States and

read with amazement and disgust that a country with some of the best soldiers in the world cannot protect our own women and children from being trafficked for prostitution to India at the rate of 100,000 a year. With the joint effort of Nepal and India, this criminal activity can be curbed. I am outraged by the lack of outrage in Nepal over this issue.

Tanaraso Kupusamy  
United States

Thank you for "Silent state violence" (#55) by Dr Aruna Uprety on unsafe abortions in Nepal. Poor Nepali women do not currently have access to safe abortions, and many women suffer as a result of the illegal abortions performed on them. But the article does not mention any of the other options Nepalis have: contraception and adoption. Why did the man not have a vasectomy? Or could they not have given their child to one of the many infertile couples in Nepal? It is doubtful whether legalising abortion will change the availability of

safe abortions for poor women in Nepal. The inability of most rural hospitals and clinics, both private and government, to perform currently legal minor surgery, suggests that they will not be able to perform abortions either, if and when they become legal. Legalisation will likely only help to assuage the guilty conscience of the rich women having abortions at urban private clinics, and make it easier for enterprising doctors to make larger amounts of money providing abortion services. Besides, the safety of even "safe" abortions is not certain. As Dr Uprety is committed to helping the helpless, there is another helpless person we are discussing here: the baby. Let us preserve the lives of both women and children in Nepal by encouraging the use of contraception and adoption, which are legal, free, and safe for both women and children. Legalising abortion will not solve anything.

Dr Les Dornon  
Tansen, Palpa

### RAJBANSHI

Pramod Mishra's idea about utilising the late King Birendra's assets "King Birendra's legacy" (#56) is undoubtedly thought provoking. How about a significant proportion of it being specifically for the education and upliftment of people like Rajbanshis? Like Mr Mishra, I grew up with them reading *Mahendra Mala*. Sadly, many indigenous peoples like *koches* have been not only displaced over the years, but made landless tenants and servants.

KR Rai  
UK

### CORRECTION

In Navin Singh Khadka's "Dolpo's endangered species are in danger again" (#57) an editing error on page 7 gave the impression that 50 snow leopards have been killed by poachers. The relevant sentence should read: "Snow leopards have killed 50 blue sheep in the Shey area". -Ed



# Wild for beauty and health,

The global craze for exotic, natural, herbal products has come to Nepal.

materials.

"Plants are the flavour of the month," says Carroll Dunham, who carries out research and development in herbal products for Wild Earth, a small private company she runs with partner, Laiku Lama. The company, which started in a single room seven years ago, today supplies products to The Body Shop and retails its own range of herbal products. Dunham learnt the business the hard way, struggling with unreliable transport, lack of technical know-how, and processing problems.

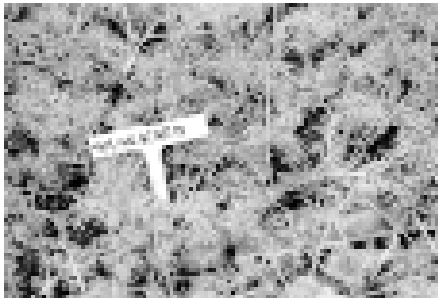
Today, Wild Earth, which works with some women's income-generation organisations, runs relatively smoothly, and targets upper middle-class, female customers, selling them scented pillows, amulets, herbal soap, and elixirs—all well-packaged, complete with a story. "You've got to know your market—it's mainly an alternative, New Age crowd," says the anthropologist-turned-entrepreneur. The company's products for The Body Shop, fittingly, include amulets called Love, Dream, Tranquillity and Energy, and necklaces named after the Ayurvedic humours. All their products, explains Wild Earth's promotional material, are made with "Himalayan herbs," and inspired by "ancient healing recipes of the Orient." Dunham also runs an experimental farm in Nagarkot, growing herbs and some high altitude mountain plants. "Sustainability is a priority for us," she says.

It is ironic, but not surprising, that most large retailers in

Europe and the US of herbal, feel good, "down-to-earth", "back-to-basics" products are in fact the end points of complicated and growing networks of collection, supply and processing that stretch around the world. The Body Shop, for instance, has another source in Nepal of its more traditional merchandise, herbal bath and body care products. Alternative Herbal Industries, a wing of the School of Ecology, Agriculture and Community Works, supplies The Body Shop manufacturing unit in India with raw materials collected by the underprivileged Praja community in Chitwan. The manufacturing unit then ships the semi-finished product to England to be packaged and distributed to outlets worldwide.

Such initiatives are easy to understand—they fit our perception of small-scale cottage industries, even when they feed into the supply chains of multinationals like The Body Shop. But what about a company like Dabur, which leases vast areas, introduces new plant and herb varieties and works with massive volumes?

Dr Tsampa Ngawang, an *amchi* (practitioner of traditional Tibetan medicine), appreciates the joint venture between Marpha residents and the Ayurvedic remedy giant. At least, he says, they are methodical and concerned about the sustainability of their project, if only for commercial reasons. "Ignorance, over harvesting, and increase in commercial trade has threatened some species in forest



areas. Cultivation of these species is important," says Dr Ngawang.

He, and many like him, believe that the global herb business in Nepal, if regulated starting now, could be a long-term pillar of the country's economy, generating lucrative opportunities for local income generation and foreign investment, one more incentive for conservation efforts. But, says the *amchi*, cultivation needs to be linked to conservation efforts in a meaningful way. "Regulatory government policies made by planners who don't have an idea about the reality on the ground only make matters worse, and encourage illegal trade, like that in *yarchagumba*," he says.

After the government set revenue for *yarchagumba*, at Rs 500 per piece, the official price for the fungus is a staggering Rs 80,000 a kilo. The price on the black market—a mere Rs 30 or so per piece, no more than Rs 5,000 per kg. The initiative has been disastrous, for even as official revenues fall far short of the



expected levels, the black market is thriving and there is increasing ecological disturbance as people hunt high, low and indiscriminately for the fungus. Government officials say the Ministry for Environment realises its mistake and plans to revise the tariff on *yarchagumba*, which is used as a tonic in Chinese herbal medicine and considered an aphrodisiac by many.

Dabur officials say they want to avoid just such a situation, and keep things above board and, yes, sustainable. Some of the herbs yet endangered, but rare and fragile. For these, Dabur has collection

# naturally

permits. Critics say this does not a guarantee companies will keep collection within sustainable limits, and that the efficacy of permits in this case can only be gauged over time. Most analysts we spoke with were more concerned about over-harvesting than the introduction of foreign species.

The multinational seems to have picked up on this, and since 1995 has been trying another way to secure long-term supply of medicinal plants, particularly those whose harvesting in the wild is now banned or likely to be banned, and whose price and availability are unstable. At its Banepa nursery—the only greenhouse in Asia for medicinal plants—Dabur is cultivating 20 species, eight of which are listed as endangered.

The company sells seedlings at cost price to encourage farmers to cultivate the plants, which the company buys back. The Rs 100 million nursery, where moisture, temperature and humidity are regulated by computers, produces three-and-a-half million seedlings every year. The endless rows of pampered plants are shifted to a shade house, where they are "hardened" before being transported to Dabur's satellite nurseries in eleven districts in Nepal.

Around 470,000 households in Nepal are involved in collecting medicinal plants whose annual export value is anywhere between \$25-70 million. They don't just collect plants they have traditionally used for therapeutic purposes, they are learning about the importance of other species in different parts of the world. Chhalka Bahadur Lama, former Humla MP and director of the Humla Conservation and Development Association, says this can get complicated. "Brokers are our friends and foes," he says. "They give us commercial value for our plants, but they also introduce us to new species that are in demand. Collecting these plants without adequate knowledge, may affect conservation."

In 1994, the Association decided it was important to educate people about resource management of non-timber forest products (NTFP), largely medicinal plants which for centuries have been a source of income for Humla. Community forest user groups identify areas to harvest plants according to season and species, allowing time for regeneration and growth. They also control raw material prices and manage the revenue that plant collection and harvesting bring in.

District Forest Offices records say over 15,000 metric tons of medicinal plants were harvested in Nepal in 1997/98, contributing Rs 25 million to a total revenue of Rs 55 million from NTFP. The figures, however, are derived from official collection and trade permits—they do not take into account the illegal herb trade, especially with India and China.

Most medicinal plants—legally and illegally obtained—are exported via the tarai to wholesalers who re-export a large volume of these plants to other countries in crude form or after primary processing. Officials estimate that 65-90 percent of total collection in Nepal is exported to India, the rest to Germany, the UK,

strengthen regulation of the trade in common and rare herbs.

But lack of technical know-how, high capital investment, unclear regulations and often investor-unfriendly circumstances, have affected such initiatives. Herbs Production and Processing, a government undertaking producing aromatic oils like Sancho, Himalayan Massage Oil, and Silajit, is finding it hard to meet the demands—and standards—of international companies. There is talk of privatising the company, which reportedly loses Rs 2.2 million a year. Medium-scale private companies like Gordha Ayurved are in trouble, or like Shambhala, have already shut down.

Dabur Nepal is the only large firm in Nepal manufacturing herbal and plant-based products now—the

company had a sales turnover of close to Rs 2 billion 1999/00. Dabur and industry watchers say there is plenty of room for growth. Dabur, for one, could potentially invest a lot more capital, from its processing plant in Birgunj to its collection centres. But the company says before it expands, it wants more incentives and clear-cut policies with regard to customs, trade, collection and royalty. □

MIN. BARACHANA

**RAMYATA LIMBU** . . . . . High in the mountain village of old Marpha, in an apple orchard overlooking the Kali Gandaki, the *akarkara* (Anacyclus Pyrethrum), a medicinal plant indigenous to the temperate desert of Morocco, appears to be adapting well to Mustang's dry, cool climate.

Pratap Singh Rana gets down on his knees to survey a row of nondescript looking plants. He fingers the flowers and leaves, inspects the roots, and gives a satisfied nod. Next year Rana, who supervises Dabur Nepal's agri-enterprise centre in Jhong, old Marpha, hopes to harvest a healthy crop of *akarkara* roots—one of 49 herbs used in Dabur Chaiwanprash, a popular Ayurvedic health tonic.

If the experiment proves successful, the company plans to

go for larger-scale cultivation that would save it tens of thousands in importing raw material, and give local farmers an additional source of income. Marpha villagers have leased about 50 hectares of land to Dabur to cultivate a variety of endangered medicinal plants used in Ayurvedic and Tibetan medicine. About seven species—*padmchal*/Medicinal Rhubarb (Rheum Emodi), *kutki* (Picrorrhiza), *jatamansi* (Nardostachys jatamansi), *kuth* (Saussurea Lappa), and *lauth salla* /Himalayan Yew (Taxus Baccata)—are inter-cropped with apple and peach trees.

The trade in Himalayan herbs has increased rapidly, as Indian pharmaceutical and aromatic industries, and international companies producing natural products grow and demand more—and more exotic—raw

## HERE AND THERE

# Tale-ban.com

The latest assertion of medieval rights by the Taleban movement in Afghanistan seems absurd, but it is yet another Great Leap Backward in a land beset by tragedy. The Internet is now forbidden territory to anyone on Afghan soil. It's a decree that mostly affects government offices and international NGOs, given the scarcity of home computers, electricity and phone connections.

The Taleban have decreed that just a single Internet connection will be allowed in Kabul, at an undisclosed location and under the supervision of "a reliable person". Even as this announcement was made, the opposition to the Taleban, the Northern Alliance declared that browsing, surfing and downloading were still perfectly legal in the small sliver of Afghanistan not controlled by the mullahs from Kandahar. That is, as soon as the Internet connection was up and running in the town of Faizabad. And, er, there's still a slight problem of non-existent electricity supply, and the generator's been on the blink for a week now, but soon. It's a propaganda move at best, with no benefits for ninety percent of the country.

Afghanistan—like most places in the grip of intractable disputes—has a lively and fractious presence on the World Wide Web. Since the early days of the Internet, Afghans in exile have posted opinions, poetry and polemic about the tragedy of their homeland. Royalists, Islamists, republicans and culture vultures swap insults and e-mail addresses in chat rooms. After 22 years of war, people fight dirty and the Web is no exception. A quick look at the official site of the Taleban, [www.taleban.com](http://www.taleban.com), may just provide an explanation for the ban.

The site has been hacked into and crudely defaced. The Anglo Saxon word that begins with "f" and ends with "k" appears no less than twelve times on the home page. A picture of America's most

## Another great leap backward in Afghanistan.



wanted man, Osama Bin Laden, appears over a caption accusing him of a sexual act that is both illegal and decidedly unwise. There are odd references to "drinking blood" and "hating Islam". It's rather ugly and extremely provocative.

But there must be more. Perhaps it's the fact that most traffic on the Internet, excluding e-mail, involves pornography or gambling. The Taleban are notoriously techy about both. To investigate, I went to my favourite search engine and tapped in the words "afghan"

and "sex". Quite a few pages came up. The lead entry was a long script about two people named Brad and Kathy making love on a knitted wool blanket, an item that my mother would call an "afghan". Next came a long dissertation from the Westminster Kennel Club of Great Britain, telling me far more than I ever wanted to know about the diet, grooming and sex life of the "Afghan hound".

I thought I'd struck gold with a chat room for Afghans in Persian that is supposed to be a place for couples to meet, but it's been closed for three years. A few headlines promising "Kabuli girls" turn out to be from India-based porn sites, offering a cornucopia of Asian ethnic bliss to lonely late night browsers in Delhi. (Hint: they're not in Kabul, and they may not even be girls). So in the end, I found little to offend even the Taleban, assuming they regularly troop into cyber cafes, prop their Kalashnikovs by the door and train their marksmen's eyes on the monitor.

No, the Taleban are forcing their country off-line for classic authoritarian reasons. They want complete social control, and the web is amorphous, beyond the strictures of religion or national law. A dissident, a satirist, even an ordinary mortal living abroad can—through the Internet—slip unnoticed into a home in Kabul, perhaps even talk to a woman. Now that they're no longer allowed to venture out in public, those few Afghan women with computers at home were indeed using technology to shed some light on otherwise dreary lives. The loss of that opportunity is a tragedy on a tiny scale, given everything else that Afghanistan endures. But it's yet another step towards the Dark Ages in a land that has hardly been allowed to experience the twentieth century. □

by DANIEL LAK



**SURF SOUTH & WEST ASIA**  
 Sub-Regional Resource Facility

**VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT**

<b>Post Title:</b>	Information Analyst	<b>Duty Station:</b>	Kathmandu
<b>Grade of Post:</b>	NO-A / NO-B	<b>Post Status:</b>	Service Contract

**BACKGROUND**

The South & West Asia Sub-Regional Resource Facility (SURF), in Kathmandu supports nine country offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the sub-region (Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Nepal) through various services including (i) **policy support services** for programme identification, design, evaluation and review; (ii) expert **referrals** and access to technical and programme-related information; (iii) **promotion of networking** and information-sharing between staff and with development partners; and (iv) **identification, documentation, and dissemination of best practices** in UNDP focus areas (poverty reduction, environment and sustainable energy, democratic governance, information and communication technology, HIV/AIDS and crisis prevention and recovery).

**scope of the position**

Working under the direction of the chief and deputy chief of the SURF coordination unit, the incumbent will be responsible for supporting the knowledge information, networking and reporting systems required by the unit and policy advisors at the Bureau for Development Policy (BDP) located in the SURF.

- Information searches.** Supports referral requests through information searches on the Internet and the corporate Knowledge Base in close collaboration with the staff of the SURF.
- Information archiving and indexing.** Ensures that network referrals and supporting information are archived in the corporate Knowledge Base; indexes information with the relevant keywords to ensure easy retrieval.
- Support to corporate knowledge systems development.** Contributes to the development and testing of corporate knowledge management systems from a user's perspective.
- Content Management of SURF Website.** In collaboration with a webmaster, maintains content on the SURF website; ensures conformance with corporate standards; ensures that links and information are up to date; reports on website use.
- Participation in Knowledge Networks.** Monitors UNDP's existing knowledge networks and liaises with network facilitators and policy advisors in providing timely responses to information queries. Assists in establishing regional and sub-regional networks initiated by the coordination unit and the BDP policy advisors; moderates network traffic under the guidance of the relevant advisor.
- Timesheet monitoring.** Monitors assistance provided to the nine countries and maintains the system of time sheets; compiles timesheet information on a monthly basis.

**QUALIFICATIONS**

- Master's degree and relevant work experience in a development related area.
- Excellent analytical skills and ability to summarize issues covering a broad range of development related subjects.
- Proficient in web-searching and in extracting relevant information.
- Skilled at organizing information in an intuitive manner.
- Excellent communication, administrative and organizational skills.
- Ability to work in a multicultural environment.
- Familiarity with tools for website management and list-serve administration, network moderation, database and information systems development from a users perspective.
- Dynamic personality, self-motivation, enthusiasm and flexibility are a must.

**HOW TO APPLY**

Please send application along with Curriculum Vitae to the following address:

Chief, South & West Asia SURF  
 C/o UNDP Nepal, Post Box 107  
 Pulchowk, Kathmandu  
 Fax: (077-1) 546 597  
 E-mail: [sa.fdr@undp.org](mailto:sa.fdr@undp.org)

Telephone inquiries will not be entertained.

Applications should be received by SURF no later than 14 September 2001

*Women are strongly encouraged to apply.*

## Violence against women

There are a shocking number of instances of sexual violence against Nepali women. Not that we did not know but the study by SATHI, a not-for-profit, on rape, incest and polygamy shows just how bad the situation is. The survey, which had one hundred respondents in most categories, reveals that a majority of rape victims (39 percent) are under the age of 19. Victims of incest, however, belong to all age groups, with 32 percent belonging to 30-39 age group, 29 percent in the 10-19 age group, and 24 percent in the 20-29 age group. Seventeen percent are above 40.

SATHI says economic dependency and ignorance about their legal rights makes women vulnerable to such violence, which reinforces their disadvantaged position in society. Seventy-one percent of the rape victims SATHI surveyed said they had no independent source of income. Ironically, 69 percent of women in polygamous marriages are under 40—in most awareness programs and action plans, however, they are taken to have greater access to information that would tell them that this practice, for instance, is punishable by law. Most victims of incest came from well-off families.

Victims of sexual violence in Nepal come from all ethnic groups and economic strata, but 42 percent of rape victims belong to disadvantaged communities, while 48 percent of incest victims and 39 percent in polygamous marriages are Bahun, Chhetri or Newar, the so-called high caste/class groups.

## Employment site

There's some good news for Nepali workers headed abroad. The Employment Promotion Commission, under the chairmanship of the prime minister, has set up a website to facilitate employment within and outside the country. The site [www.roigarayog.gov.np](http://www.roigarayog.gov.np) includes a help line where workers can file grievances that will be forwarded to the concerned ministry. Complaints and queries can be filed in English or in Nepali—but you have to be computer literate, and of course, have Internet access.

The site also offers useful information for foreign investors and prospective employers of Nepali workers. Detailed information about Nepal's employment policies and laws, and the labour market situation is available on the website. The Commission is also set to launch a Labour Market Information System to enhance foreign employment opportunities for Nepali youths and help prospective employers find suitable workers. The Commission will promote its site through Nepali embassies and other diplomatic establishments, associations of Nepalis working abroad, manpower agencies and employers of Nepali workers.



## Off the air

Nepal's Ministry of Health has just pulled one of its advertisements for contraceptives off the air. The jingle, in which a young girl encourages "driver *da*" to use a condom, is mainly targeted at bus drivers and truckers on the highway. The ministry may have been criticised for reinforcing stereotypes or may be developing a sensitive strain, but it needs to find a replacement—fast.

## HRC in action

The National Human Rights Commission (HRC) has been keeping itself busy—but doing what? Of 528 cases filed at the commission until mid-July this year, it has finished investigating 150. Of the cases filed, 255 concern civil and political rights, 15 are related to financial, social and cultural rights, seven to employee and service sector rights, while 81 complaints are related to a variety of other issues. The HRC is presently investigating issues like public access to health services provided by government and private hospitals and nursing homes in Kathmandu, and the social boycott of Chamar people in Siraha and Saptari districts—when not making speeches at public forums. The commission is also looking into whether the government is providing scholarships to school children of "lower castes" in keeping with its policies, and court appeals regarding untouchability.

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MIN. BAHADUR DEUBA

It looks like the country will continue to lionise Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba as an accomplished consensus builder past the 100-day honeymoon few expected him to get. The compromises Deuba contrived and thrived on for 18 months during Nepal's experiment with a hung parliament will remain a defining feature of our post-1990 political history.

But how quickly things change. Many who blamed Deuba for contaminating our institutions and institutionalising corruption with Pajeros and pensions for MPs now seem to believe that Nepal's

salvation lies in his doctrine of perpetual deal making.

As prime minister of a majority government, Deuba this time has the space to apply his proven skills to hold the nation—not just his rambunctious cabinet—together. By delivering an eight-point speech in parliament while key opposition leaders were away on a pilgrimage to Comrade Prachanda's abode across the eastern border, Deuba crafted a package everyone could claim some credit for. Although parts of the programme have landed him in political and legal trouble, the prime minister tipped the balance in his

# Deuba's debut

Deuba has convinced even his critics that salvation lies in the doctrine of perpetual deal making.

favour by drawing the loudest applause from UML legislators.

(Lesson: To get things done in this country, give the opposition the prime minister it wants.)

Members of the main opposition party can't stop gloating over how they forced the conceited *kangresis* to implement the UML's Badal Commission recommendations on radical land reforms. Maoist leaders for their part are using the premier's "revolutionary" programme to persuade their perplexed rank and file that they could expect a better deal once they began negotiating with the government.

In a gesture of goodwill, Deuba is no longer adamantly insisting his vision of land reform is grounded exclusively in BP Koirala's the-meek-shall-inherit-the-earth outlook.

BP's favourite niece, Shailaja Acharya, fiercely maintains that the first democratically elected prime minister never intended to undermine the territorial integrity of middle-class households that form the party's electoral base. Probably not. In view of how political and personal interests are intertwined in Nepali Congress deliberations, however, it looks like Shailaja's outbursts are equally rooted

in her worries about the future of her holdings and the prospects of a sharp rise in Deuba's popularity graph.

Despite the crackles of criticism from smaller opposition parties, a spirit of camaraderie has pervaded parliament, manifesting itself in weird ways. The UML, which blocked the entire winter session of the legislature to protest against, among other things, the Armed Police and Regional Administration ordinances, reversed course and actually helped the government pass legislation formalising those initiatives. To top it off, our feuding comrades took out their traditional rally across the heart of Kathmandu in support of the prime minister's agenda, dismissing as feudals everyone who dared oppose it. Now can we really blame Girija Prasad Koirala for shuttling between Kathmandu and Biratnagar so impatiently without advance notice, muttering all those morose state-ments?

The official line is that Deuba's land reform programme is a continuation of the 17-point understanding reached between the Nepali Congress and the UML during Koirala's last-ditch effort to barricade himself inside Baluwatar. But how can Deuba's package be a continuation of something nobody can recall ever having been implemented? Or did Nepalis miss something during the military-Maoist encounter at Rolpa that, as it turned

out, was staged to hasten Koirala's departure? When a bitterly divided RPP and regionally clustered Nepal Sadbhavana Party manage to stall the house with their hollers, something must be amiss.

It's not as if the only two non-communist opposition parties in parliament lack valid arguments. They may be exaggerating a little when they say some political parvenus have amassed enough assets in Kathmandu to buy entire tarai districts. But you can understand why they are shouting from the roof for ceilings on all property—solid and liquid.

Sadbhavana chief Gajendra Narayan Singh, however, made a monumental mistake in offering to exchange his tarai expanse with UML general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal's possessions in the capital. On the surface, property prices are skewed in Kathmandu's favour. But when that 8.3 Richter-scale earthquake foreign seismologists have been predicting finally hits us, there is a strong chance that Madhavji's house, like most of those in Kathmandu, would cave in, with brick and concrete spilling across his boundary walls.

Gajubabu's fields might see some deep cracks if ground zero is close enough, but it would escape nature's wrath largely unscathed. In the chaos most likely to follow, the value of real estate in the tarai might

even shoot up.

Deuba has his feet on the ground. When he became prime minister this time, he had acquired enough experience to understand that his real problem would be to keep his flock together and contend with rivals within his party. The eight-point programme has evidently come in handy for the new dissidents in the Congress itching for a fight. After he ran out of arguments to persuade holdouts, who were actually testing the waters for another leadership contest, Deuba began assuring them privately that the new land ceilings would never be implemented because hordes of litigious attorneys with ambition would almost certainly throng the Supreme Court registrar's office.

But class divisions within the ruling party seem to run too deep for Deuba's candour to stand a chance.

While he plots his way out of this tangle, here's some down-to-earth advice for Deuba: don't tell anyone what your land-reform package is really based on, even if it's halfway between BP and Badal. We deserve this national feel-good mood to last a little longer. □

by PUSKAR BHUSAL

# Rebel with a cause

BINOD BHATTARAI

Ram Prit Paswan's life has been harder than that of the average Nepali. He was not only born a poor *madhesi*, but also an "untouchable." The soft-spoken new vice-chairman of the Rastriya Sabha, the Upper House, survived the worst of discrimination in Nepal to reach a position from which he can spotlight untouchability and other forms of social injustice, and influence change.

Paswan is not the only Dalit to have held a high political position. Hiralal Biswokarma, for example, served several terms as minister in the Panchayat era. Paswan's story is slightly different: he rose in his party's ranks through sheer determination, fueled by a desire to change his experience. He says modestly: "I felt it was just not right. The more I was discriminated against, the more I felt the urge to revolt."

The 48-year-old vice chairman "learnt" that he was different when he was just seven years old. The second-grader used to take private tuitions from a "touchable" teacher. One warm January

Paswan says he's not the token Dalit in the House

afternoon Paswan was sitting outside the teacher's house when the lady of the house brought food for her child and placed it near him. The son had just returned to the village after completing his Bachelor's degree. Suddenly, the educated youth began making a fuss saying the food had been defiled because Paswan had touched it. The lady of the house tried to convince her son arguing that because Paswan

was a child, the food could be eaten, but in vain.

"The incident was like an arrow piercing the heart," says Paswan. "I cannot forget it even today." Life from then on was a constant struggle against the pain within, when not battling the other odds that come with being poor. He took his School Leaving Certificate exams from the village high school, then graduated from the intermediate level and became a teacher. "Every village I went to teach in, the first question I was asked was if I was 'touchable'." By then, Paswan, who was also a Marxist cadre when not teaching, had even begun firing back fitting answers.

When Paswan was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, he met others who, like him, wanted to dismantle the discriminatory social order. Around this time, he also met up with people belonging to Subarna Sumshere's faction of the Nepali Congress. He spent some time with a pro-Congress youth group, until he realised he was in the wrong camp. "It dawned on me that I was with the people of the party that had most of the feudal landlords, people who prayed at the temples, put on tikas and then discriminated against us." It was all happening in the Nepal of the early 1960s.

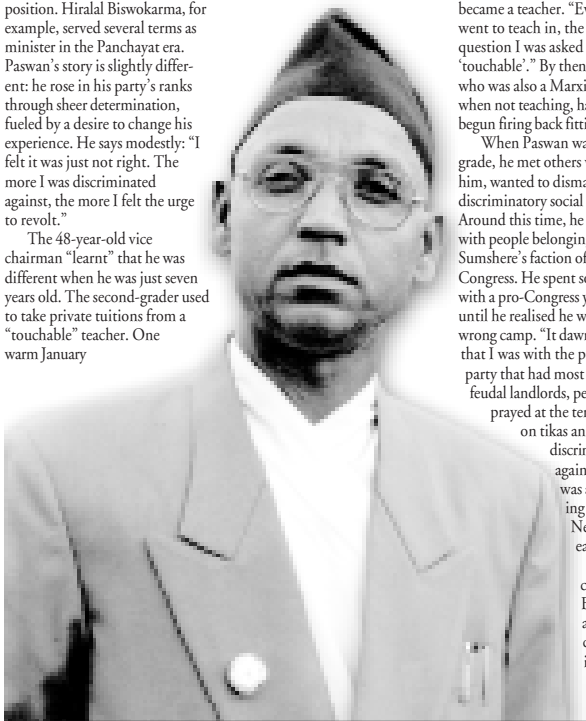
Then, he came across Bhim Sedai, a follower of communist ideologue Puspahal

Shrestha, then in exile in Varanasi. Sedai convinced Paswan, who was already a fiery rebel, that the kind of society he wanted to build was possible only through communism. The young Paswan liked what he heard and soon became part of a budding communist network that relied on clandestinely circulated books by Marx and Mao for solace and motivation. "In the beginning I did not understand what Comrade Mao wrote," says Paswan. "Marx was actually able to influence me."

Paswan contested the Lower House election on a UML ticket in 1999 and lost to a Nepal Sadbhavana Party candidate. "I intended to try and contest a second time, because I had been working in an area where there are 18,000 Dalit voters," he told us. "I did not expect to get the party ticket to the Upper House, even less, to be put forward as a candidate for vice-chairman."

Paswan's election as vice-chair of the Upper House came some weeks before Sher Bahadur Deuba outlawed caste-based discrimination and promised to make it punishable. "It is a good beginning," he says. But he also warns that Dalits should be careful about believing that legislation alone will change something that has been practised for centuries.

His prescription: time bound affirmative action to give Dalits a fair chance to compete against people from higher castes who have had the best opportunities in education and development. He says: "For that to happen we Dalits must unite and keep the pressure on." □



## CAREER OPPORTUNITY

The British Embassy in Kathmandu is looking for a Political Officer.

### Job Responsibilities

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You will be responsible for analysing political events in Nepal, and providing policy guidance and advice on current affairs and political developments in the country. You will work in the Political Section of the British Embassy, reporting to the Third Secretary (Political). You will monitor local print, electronic and vernacular media. You will brief senior officers on political events. And you will write reports in English offering analysis, background and guidance on key issues. You will develop a range of contacts, and will represent the Embassy at meetings and receptions.

You will also co-ordinate the Embassy's public relations work, and will work closely with the media sector, drafting and placing press releases and articles, preparing information briefings, translating important documents, and managing the Embassy's external flow of information.

### Minimum Qualifications and Experience

You will be a graduate with a good degree. You will have experience of Nepal's political environment. You will be intelligent and industrious. You will have sound intellectual and analytical skills, combined with an ability to process information quickly and concisely. You will be a good communicator. You will have first class writing skills in English, and will have a working knowledge of IT systems.

### Salary and Benefits

The starting salary will be between in the range NPRs 340,000 — 424,000 per annum. Following successful probation, you will qualify for the Embassy's benefits package.

### Application

If you are interested, you should apply in writing. Your application should include a short written piece of analysis of a current political event, which you have authored. Your application should also include a curriculum vitae, a recent passport sized photograph and a copy of your Nepalese Citizenship Certificate. The application should be sent to:

Andrew Mitchell  
Deputy Head of Mission  
British Embassy  
PO Box 106

Applications should arrive by **21 September 2001**. Only short listed candidates will be contacted.

## Women beware women

A pyramid scheme promising participants £24,000 each is sweeping Britain

"We are literally creating a new economic experience," says the blurb. In fact, Britain's women are being seduced into the oldest economic experience of all: being conned. "Women Empowering Women" is a pyramid scheme, which requires people to hand over money in the hope of seeing their cash multiply when new suckers are recruited. All such pyramids eventually crumble.

"Women Empowering Women" relies on each participant finding eight new participants, each of whom has to stump up £3,000, which is then passed up the (strictly female) hierarchy. It seems to have originated in America and to have appeared on the Isle of Wight in March. Thousands of women there lost their money after the supply of recruits dried up. Roughly two months later it resurfaced on the mainland. Since then, according to the Trading Standards Institute, it has appeared in 15 towns and cities across Britain, as far afield as London and Glasgow.

The Department of says that pyramid sual in Britain, and one seems a novelty. But a sponsored review says National Lottery, Britain than it used to be with help explain this Officials don't nothing they can do pyramid selling improbably high rates are financed by the next against the law, nobody Empowering Women" is either buying or selling. Publicising the scheme's dangers is difficult, too. Those in it are anxious to extol its merits to their friends, according to Allan Charlesworth, who heads the TSI, but those who have lost out "keep quiet and put it down to experience." Such gifting schemes can grow and collapse very quickly, and "Women Empowering Women" may well have run its course already. If so, those on the lower levels of the pyramid are about to lose their money. That may not be the end of it, though. On the Isle of Wight, a group of women who lost money in Women Empowering Women have started a "community investment club" whose structure, the blurb explains, is much better than the previous scheme. Participants are asked to hand over £100 and are promised £88,300 in return. (*The Economist*)



Trade and Industry schemes are unaimed at women recent government—that, thanks to the is more comfortable gambling. That may scheme's success. like it, but there is about it. Although schemes, in which of return on bonds lot of sales, are involved in "Women

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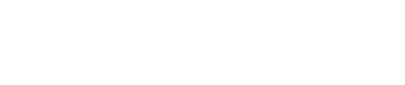
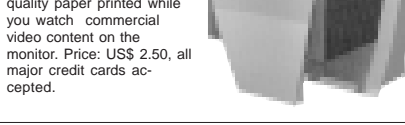
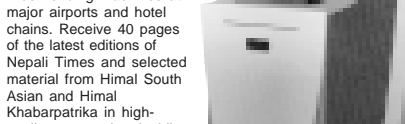
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## BIZ NEWS

## Gold rush

Rumours that the government would fix a ceiling on wealth after it initiated its "revolutionary" land reform plan triggered withdrawals in some banks last week. The new rush is to buy gold. Depositors still unwilling to believe government assurances that no ceiling on deposits is on the cards, have begun buying the yellow metal. Gold sales doubled from an average of 30 kilos to about 60 kilos per day. The rush has also pushed prices marginally—from Rs 7,110 on 17 August to Rs 7,200 on 28 August. The price of 10 grams of gold at the central bank's outlet was Rs 7,310. The uncertainty over the government's decision and continued protests by opposition parties demanding a ceiling on wealth have also dried up the supply of US dollars on the black market. The going rate of the dollar against the rupee in the *hundi* had reached Rs 80: \$1 late last week.

## Storm in a teacup

Nepali tea sellers say prices have slumped, but they cannot comply with demands of growers to raise prices. The Nepal Tea Association says a packet of tea that sold for Rs 220 a year ago does not fetch more than Rs 160 now, due mainly to overproduction. The dealers and processors used to pay Rs16-17 per kg of green tea, this is now down to Rs 10.50 per kg. Growers are demanding the purchase price of green tea be fixed at Rs 13 per kg. Nepal produces about eight million kilos of tea annually, and consumption is around seven million kilos. Nepal imports about 1.5 million kilos from India and sells some 450,000 kilos in India's West Bengal state. Nepal raised the import duty on tea from 10 to 25 percent this fiscal year and West Bengal has recently imposed a retaliatory 20 percent "luxury tax" on Nepali exports.

## e-album

The Rainbow Group has launched a new electronic venture that allows customers to build up e-albums for use in everything from making e-friends to business promotions. Here's how e-albums work: [www.rainbownepal.com](http://www.rainbownepal.com) gives you password-protected access to the album it prepares for you with electronic pictures. The idea is you provide passwords to those you want to view your collection. The Rainbow Group has been testing its scheme for the past two months and says many exporters of carpets, readymade garments, handicrafts and pashmina are already using the service. Individuals and families wanting to exchange pictures electronically also use the service. The group says over 3,000 individuals and companies have signed up for its electronic services and the Internet site it maintains has already been visited by over 10,000 visitors.

## Radisson shares

The Nepal Stock Exchange has decided to list shares of Oriental Hotels for trading, almost nine months after the hotel applied for the privilege. The decision, however, is conditional—the hotel would have to make public facts on its finances before trading will be permitted. The issue of Oriental Hotels Limited became controversial after the stock exchange discovered differences in the information in its issue prospectus and the audited statements submitted with the company's application to be listed on the bourse. ("Buyers Beware", #15) Oriental Hotels has over 32,000 shareholders who have subscribed to Rs 150 million worth of stock.

## Manakamana Darshan

Manakamana Darshan has suspended its cable car operations indefinitely after locals led by Village Development Committee (VDC) officials disturbed its operations. The villagers and the company disagree over the provision of special concessions to locals and the dispute flared up when the two sides failed to reach an agreement on the VDC's 15-point demands. The sticking point was the issue of a privilege card that gave residents of the area cheaper access to the services. The company suspects the VDC has been issuing the cards to people who do not qualify for it, at the recommendation of villagers. The VDC wants to retain the authority to hand out the cards. The company says it will resume services only after the dispute is resolved. A trip to the Manakamana Temple on the cable car costs about Rs 283, including taxes, and residents of the nearby village could until now make the trip for Rs 100. The VDC's demands of the company include, among others, further reducing this to Rs 57, providing employment to villagers, and operating the cars in emergency situations, even at night.

## Vacancy Announcement

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Lazimpat, Kathmandu, Nepal

## ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

## Freezing frenzy



## Whose business is it to protect business?

The Beed received many requests from readers of last week's column to write about the prospects for business scenario in Nepal, to bring some perspective to a fortnight in which some bizarre decisions have been made. As the Beed suggested when discussing the land transaction freeze, we have got to the point where we must question whether business can at all exist in Nepal. The wave of socialist rhetoric spewed by all our various political parties, including the ruling party, gives the scary impression that our luminary lawmakers don't think it is important to keep business in Nepal, as a tool of individual and social development.

Yes, business is a capitalist concept. The state cannot, after all, do every imaginable business that a developing society throws up. Yes, it is profit-driven, but that is the essential nature of business. How can one turn a capitalist concept to socialist ends without destroying the very features that make it what it is, and make it effective in providing better goods and services. The mess at the Manakamana cable car site has once again shown that Nepal simply cannot deal with industries that pioneer concepts to bring in revenue to the government, and employment to the unemployed.

The confusion relating to the



land issue continues. Utopian scenarios are being bandied around in which Nepal's 24 million stand in line to receive their share of the pie, down to the paisa. We are now so scared that in its freezing frenzy, the government might decide to disallow securities trading or put a ceiling on bank deposits, that we are rushing to send our wealth outside Nepal, and to buy gold. The gold rush is reminiscent of the time before war broke out. Consumers spending invariably falls, and the ugly hoarding of cash begins. Does the government realise people are preparing for a war economy?

As the faux, instant socialism spreads, there is the fear of nationalisation, and a heightened awareness of the total lack of security, even when businesses pay so-called "security taxes". This Beed, for one, does not see much hope for domestic investors. As for foreign investors, the sooner we accept that they live only in the realm of our wildest dreams, the better. Or in those innumerable seminars that

are the roaches of the economic realm—after a nuclear attack, they will still be there, feasting on the debris.

Why has no one agitated against these incomprehensible decisions, why has no one even publicly criticised them?

Where are all the "apex bodies" of trade, industry and business that are so vocal when all is well, or at least, better? Is it that some businesses are seeing opportunity in this time of crisis? Do they think that somehow this means there will be a sort of unofficial protectionism? Doing business peacefully is a fundamental human right? What is happening now violates the letter and spirit of contract between the government and its people, multilateral agencies and friendly nations.

Democracy guarantees equal rights, not equal wealth. Yes, reforms are essential, but the goings-on of hundreds of years cannot be wiped out with one government dictate. What is happening now is, in its own way, as insane as what happened earlier. □

Readers can post their views at [arthabeed@yahoo.com](mailto:arthabeed@yahoo.com)

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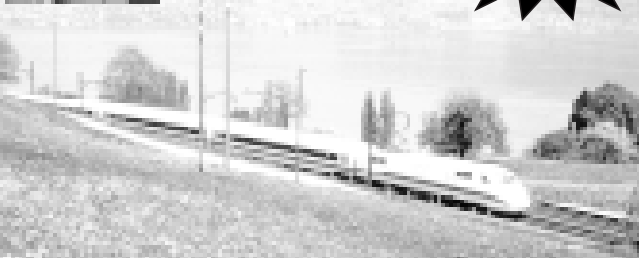
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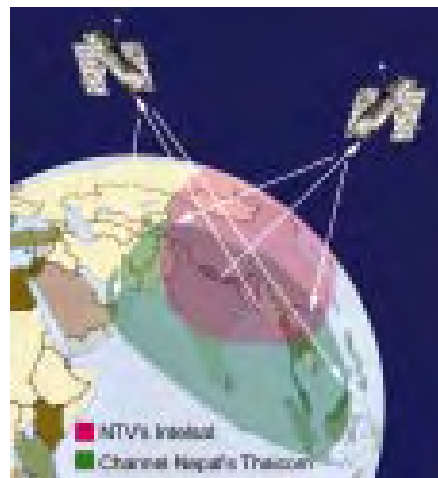
## Satellites link Nepali diaspora

## For the first time since Prithvi Naryan Shah unified the country, Nepal's "footprint" spans half of Asia.

system, and its viewers require huge 18-ft dish antennae to receive its signals, which is impracticable for household use.

NTV says using Intelsat was the only way it could have gone satellite quickly, cheaply and without having to build its own earth station. Besides, NTV's priority is getting signals to more parts of Nepal rather than other parts of Asia. Says Durga Nath Sharma, NTV's general manager: "The existing reception has improved, especially in regions where we have terrestrial re-transmitting stations." In terms of coverage, that would be about 55 percent of the population. NTV would need 30 such re-transmitting stations to get its signals to households nationwide. At present it has just 14.

NTV accelerated its plans to go satellite after the negative publicity in Indian channels in the aftermath



## BINOD BHATTARAI

Nepal was one of the last countries in Asia to get television in 1985. And it has become one of the last to beam its television signals via satellite. But to make up for lost time, a private broadcaster and the state-owned Nepal Television have both gone satellite in recent months, extending the reach of their signal beyond Nepal's territorial boundary to west, south and southeast Asia.

Theoretically, the Nepali diaspora from Dubai to Darwin can now access the Nepali television stations with the help of satellite dishes. For the homeseek migrant worker in Kuwait to those nostalgic for Nepal in Bunei, there is suddenly a new window on Nepal.

The first to go into orbit in July was Jamim Shah's Space Time Network, Nepal's main cable operator. Shah applied for a satellite broadcast license as far back as 1993. Before anyone knew what was going on, the Ministry of Information and Communication (MOIC), under current minister Bijaya Gachchedar, had licensed three private television operators: Space Time Network and Business India TV to uplink from Nepal while Shangri-la Channel was allowed to run pay TV. BiTV pulled out after India de-regulated uplinking licensing.

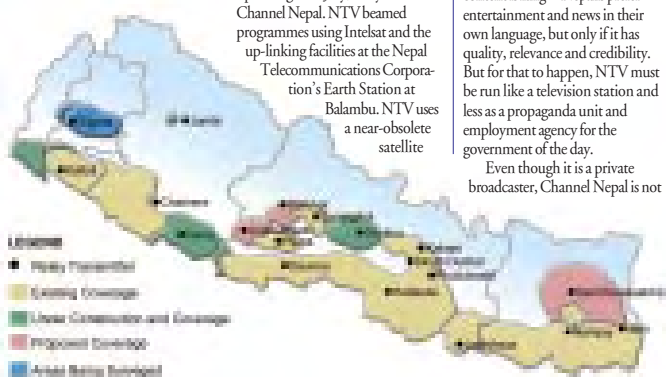
Few at the time believed Space Time would actually uplink from Nepal because of the logistics involved. Even today, after what has turned out to be a never ending tug-of-war with the MOIC, the network sends canned material



every day to Bangkok to be uplinked via the Thaicom satellite. Shah has been in the business long enough to know what is needed to make his venture actually payoff: "I know what the market is like. If you have good programming you can sell it."

But that is a big "if". The quality of programming is the biggest bottleneck for satellite transmission to make business sense. Without quality there is no viewership, and without viewership there are no advertisers. Besides, it is more difficult to convince Nepal-based manufacturers and advertisers to buy time on satellite since the signals are received in areas where there are no immediate consumers. For instance, why should a Nepali noodle brand send signals to Malaysia? The future is in re-broadcasting satellite signals via terrestrial transmitters to broaden reach within Nepal.

Nepal Television began uplinking on 4 July, a day after Channel Nepal. NTV beamed programmes using Intelsat and the up-linking facilities at the Nepal Telecommunications Corporation's Earth Station at Balambu. NTV uses a near-obsolete satellite



doing much better. Its news, current affairs and timeless features are canned, they are repeated frequently and lack freshness. Most of the daily six hours of programming is entertainment—which in Nepal has become synonymous with hurriedly produced music videos, movie roundups and archive films.

Channel Nepal's Shah is aware of the problem, but says he can only begin to solve it when he is allowed to uplink from Nepal. "So far, I think I have put in 38 applications asking MOIC to inspect my equipment and allow me to uplink," he told us. "I am just waiting to press the switch. Everything is ready." Shah plans to invest as much as Rs 100 million each year to produce eight hours of programming.

Channel Nepal had planned to begin broadcasting from Nepal New Year on 14 April this year, but was stopped from by a last-minute MOIC order. The excuse: not paying its dues and squatting on the licence. A cabinet reshuffle that came after the decision saw a change in ministers and Shah was back with his licence—after petitioning the prime minister's office and getting it to override the MOIC decision.

The dramatic revocation of licence and the re-licensing attracted the attention of the Committee for the Investigation for

the Abuse of Authority, which is now investigating the decisions. Jaya Prakash Prasad Gupta, who revoked Channel Nepal's licence and resigned when the station was re-licensed, is back as Minister of Information and Communication. It is no secret that Shah and Gupta, once close allies, have had a falling out. Shah has figured in a controversial Indian intelligence list of Pakistani ISI agents in Nepal, and there has been behind-the-scenes Indian lobbying against Shah

getting an uplinking license.

Despite all this, Nepalis abroad are delighted that they can now watch music videos, news and features from their home country. Even Nepalis in Burma tune in regularly. Thakur Prasad Guragain, the Burmese writer in Nepali, says: "We are happy to get programmes in Nepali. Channel Nepal, zindabad." His only gripe is that Nepalis in Mandalay cannot get NTV because they don't have a large-enough antenna. □

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# A day in the life of a Living Goddess

**On Saturday, when a new Kumari receives a new King, the Hanuman Dhoka Palace will see the enactment of a ritual that is as old as Nepal itself.**

gular Newari structure bearing the most exotic of all wood carvings in the area, is a 1757 construction from the regime of King Jaya Prakash Malla—the last of the Malla kings, who was actually deposed by the invading army of King Prithivi Narayan Shah during Indra Jatra festival itself.

History books tell us that Jaya Prakash Malla was pulling the Kumari chariot himself and enjoying every bit of it. But by the time the chariot had reached Lagan, Prithivi Narayan Shah had already captured the throne at Hanuman Dhoka. Jaya Prakash then fled across the swollen Bagmati river to seek refuge in the neighbouring kingdom of Patan.

Belief is that if she laughs or cries while one is vowing at her, the person will face bad omen. Photographing the Kumari is forbidden anywhere inside the courtyard. But it is possible to get an audience with her and for non-Nepalis get a glimpse of her, before 12 noon or after 3pm, she is brought to the window by one of the priestesses. "Ladies and gentlemen. She is the goddess Kumari. Please clap..." and there is a clatter of applause. Many guide books say the Kumari herself comes around to playfully romp in the courtyard, but this is

not so. Her caretakers have full authority over who meets the Kumari and when. "She has to do puja, eat, sleep and play," says one of the caretaker's family members while waiting for the Kumari to be brought in to the visiting room.

Tour guides often mention of having to strike a deal with the caretakers to let their foreign guest have a glimpse of Kumari. There's a rumour around that fees are charged in dollars. It is true that the caretakers family openly asks visitors in the courtyard for donations.

All offerings go to the caretakers, and there is some disgruntlement on the part of the parents and families of the Kumaris about this.

"Kumaris are small children. They wouldn't know the value of money and offerings made. So they are least bothered about the offerings," says Amrit Shakya, father of the previous Kumari. Amrit says there should be more guarantees in place for the welfare of ex-Kumaris. "After all," he says, "even Kumaris have rights. And their welfare is the nation's welfare."

Amrit's daughter is a shy, quiet girl who likes science in school. "What can we say. Our daughter was away from us for nine long years. And she comes home, barely knowing us," says

marry their husband will die after vomiting blood. There are seven recorded cases of husbands of ex-Kumaris from Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Patan dying. But there is nothing to prove that they did not die of natural causes.

On Saturday, after the king and queen flag off the *rath yatra* from the Gaddi Baithak, the three chariots take an ancient route which on the first day will go to the southern part of Kathmandu, the "tallo tol" – Chikamugala, Gofala Tol, Bharmala Tol, Hyumat, Jaissi Degal, Kohiti, Bhimsenthana. On the full moon, Sunday, the 'maphillo tol' people will get to see the chariot being pulled north through Pyafal, Yethika, Nardevi, Raktakali, Pyangal, Nyokha, Bangemuda, Ason, Bolkumar, Macchenbaha baba, Indrachowk, Makhkhan and back.

The chariot pullers and other revellers, when they arrive near the Akash Bhairab statue near Hanuman Dhoka, drink the Newari holy liquor streaming from the deity's mouth in the belief that it will wash away all sins. The *thhon* rice brew flows freely, there is feasting and general merriment.

On Thursday, 6 September, there is the brief *Nanichya* Rath Yatra when the Kumari chariot is taken up to Nardevi and turns east through Kilagal and then towards Bhedasingh and back to Darbar Square. This route has significance because it is said to have been started by Malla king Jaya Prakash Malla, to let his girlfriend, named Nanichya, see the jatra from the comfort of her own home in Kilagal.

By this time, the novelty of being pulled all around town begins to wear off. And young new Kumaris usually doze off as the throngs shout and dance and pull the chariots through the narrow streets.

The Kumari house, a quadran-

the transfer of the power Lord Vishnu to the reigning monarch so he can protect his citizens. The king, for his part will offer a gold coin, an *asafli*, to the goddess.

In the courtyard of the Kumari house this week, we were taken to the living goddess. We offered her a basket of fruits and Newari sweets. The Kumari's nanny told us she had gone inside to take a nap, but she went in to get her anyway. The nanny carried her out, and put her on her cushion. Almost as a reflex action, the Kumari put forward her little legs so we could touch her feet. She pushed away the fruits, and looked sleepy.

The Kumari's parents are discouraged from visiting their daughter, and only come by a couple of times a week. But she has enough amusement, playing video games with the other children of the caretakers of the Kumari House.

Despite her young age, the present Kumari is alert and mature. When she was taken to the Taleju temple last week for her ritual visit, she admonished her caretakers: "*Sabai almal almal... ke ko almal?*" (Why all this confusion?) Laxmi Prasad Rijal, the Hakim of the Kausi Tosh Khana who heard her say those words sensed deep symbolism. "She was speaking about the state of the nation," he whispered to us sagely. Rijal's office is where the existing and past Kumaris of Kathmandu get their monthly allowances from.

The previous Kumari, Amita Shakyia, reached puberty earlier this year and had to give way to her successor. She is now back home with her parents and is attending grade six at a local school. The present Kumari will also reign until she gets her first period. Contrary to myth, ex-Kumaris are not prohibited from remarrying but there is a superstition that if they

everything. She can see through every individual's mind, and fathom the dimensions beyond a common being's understanding.

When she rides the main chariot, she will be followed by two of her friendly deities—Bhairab and Ganesh, who are also chosen and made god the same way as the Kumari herself. But these incarnates have it slightly easier, they can stay in their parent's house. They can go out, and play, but the Kumari can't.

On Saturday, the three will tour the city in their chariots and the streets come alive with the mask *lakhe* dance, music, and feasting.

Indra Jatra actually lasts a whole week, and it will be a whirlwind time for the new Kumari as she takes part in the rituals, with drums and dancing every day from the setting up of the Indradwaja pole at Basantapur on Thursday.

This is the annual festival dedicated to Indra, the god of rain. But it is also dedicated to Taleju Bhawani, the powerful goddess and protector of Kathmandu who will manifest herself in the Kumari to empower the king and his citizens with divine power. Interestingly, Taleju is supposed to be the family deity of Ravana, the demon king of mythic Lanka, and the Taleju of Kathmandu is said to have been brought from India in ancient times. King Gyanendra, accompanied by invited dignitaries, high officials and diplomats will observe the commencement of the Kumari Rath Yatra from the balcony of the Rana Victorian-style stucco Gaddi Baitakh. The following Thursday the king will return to Basantapur to pay his respects to the Kumari at her own residence. He will take an auspicious tika on his forehead from the little Kumari who will also bless him by touching both his shoulders with the magic sword of Taleju. This action marks the end of the Indra Jatra festival and symbolises

Kumari, there is also a new king.  
The Kumari will be dressed in resplendent red and gold, bedecked in a golden tiara and Sesh Naag around her neck as she rides her *rath* for the very first time. One her forehead is painted a vermillion third eye on a black backdrop of mustard oil and soot—which is the mythical divine eye which sees

from among hundreds of little girls according to an age-old criterion that stipulates a perfect and fearless girl to be the virgin goddess.

Saturday is the beginning of the week-long festival Indra Jatra, the annual Newari carnival when the king of Nepal comes officially to pay his respects to the living goddess. This time it is not just a new

**SALIL SUBEDI**  
**P**reeti Shakya is a precocious looking four-year-old girl who is adjusting to life as Kathmandu's newest living goddess. Taken away from her parents, she still has to get used to living with the staff of the Kumari residence. She succeeded her predecessor on 10 July, chosen

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*From far left: Kathmandu's new Kumari, Preeti Shakya, being taken around town for the very first time in a palanquin; from the balcony of the Gaddi Baithak, King Birendra and Queen Aiswarya observing the Kumari Rath Yatra, 1999; the Kumari Rath Yatra in Tallo Tole. Preeti Shakya's predecessor Amrita Shakya at her home in Swoyambhu, and, right, while she was Kumari of Kathmandu.*

Says Amrit: "At least that has given that the Kumaris to come will have a better future."

There are at present nine living ex-Kumaris from Kathmandu, and more from Patan and

Bhaktapur. The Kumari of Kathamandu is selected from the 11 *toles* or communities of the Shakya gold and silversmiths, Newari Buddhists. The procedure in Patan is

almost the same, with the Kumari being chosen from Shaky and Maharjan families. In Bhaktapur, the Kumari stays with her own parents is brought out in public only for the nine days of Dasain. □



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# Kyoto to Kathmandu



Satellite picture of the Annapurna trekking circuit. Snow and ice are blue, vegetation green, rocks are red, and clouds are white. In the inset, the top yellow square marks Jomsom and the lower, Pokhara.

HETAUDA - Rising industrial emissions of carbon dioxide are heating the world and accelerating natural climatic warming. This global warming is threatening to

melt ice caps, flood low-lying areas, and cause increasing disruption to global weather systems. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find scientists or politicians who

**There may be some bullying through environmental "tools of diplomacy", but Nepal has a shot at avoiding development's "dirty" phase.**

dispute this. At the Kyoto environment summit four years ago, the industrialised nations agreed, in principle, to reduce carbon dioxide emissions to a figure seven percent below their 1990 output.

But, when the world community convened in Germany last month to adopt the Kyoto protocol and ratify its environmental treaty, they discovered one notable nation which does not take global warming seriously. Who was it? The USA, the most polluting nation on earth.

What then, are we to make of the Kyoto treaty? Will it avert the threat of global warming and a global environmental crisis? What are the immediate implications for Nepal?

Firstly, the so-called environmental crisis needs explanation. History is littered with cities and regions that rose to power on the abuse of the environment and consequently fell into decline.

There is nothing new in this, but the current pace of economic and technological expansion in the industrialised Western world has

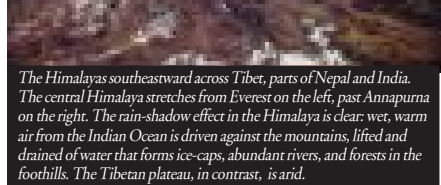
brought about an unprecedented scale and intensity to this cycle, resulting in the first global economy. Transnational corporations and national governments have created a new dimension to the location of labour, where whole regions and communities have become dispensable components in a universal economic system. The fate of an individual, community, region, or even state, can be decided by decisions taken thousands of miles away—Japan's recent whaling controversy is a case in point.

At the same time, modern economic thought promotes the "no limits" view of economic growth. An approach to life that seeks fulfilment in the single-minded pursuit of wealth, and a wealth that has been primarily gained through a particular attitude to the environment. Industrialists mine the land and make a personal profit, whilst releasing pollutants into the public sphere of the environment, relieving themselves of any costs involved in cleaning up after their operations. The Industrial Revolution of Great Britain for example, was built on a devastating record of environmental abuse. It released a torrent of pollutants that contaminated its people, its land, its sky and its rivers; the Bagmati is nothing compared to some of this. But it also produced marvels such as ships that could navigate the world's oceans, and in so doing, made Great Britain the strongest power in the world for well over a century.

But, as environmental intangibles have increasingly forced themselves into economists' considerations, they, too, have seen that the environment is increasingly showing signs of stress. In Kathmandu, the burden of solid waste disposal and exhaust emissions in particular is clearly beyond the current carrying capacity of the Valley. This is our everyday reality, and it is evidence of the so-called environmental crisis, which indicates that the activities of human beings are reaching a point where we will no longer be able to maintain our present patterns of behaviour and continue to support our current global population.

So what are we to make of the Kyoto treaty? On the positive side, it has been ratified, and gives hope that there will be more international environmental co-operation. The rest of the world managed to unite despite—and almost because of—the actions of the USA, which shows we need not always bow down to its superior economic strength.

On the negative side, despite a growing body of scientists calling for reductions in carbon dioxide emissions of up to 60 percent, the compromises that have been made in order to save the treaty from collapse have meant that for the 30 most industrialised nations, the seven percent cut put forward in the Kyoto protocol has in fact been reduced to approximately two



The Himalayas southeastward across Tibet, parts of Nepal and India. The central Himalaya stretches from Everest on the left, past Annapurna on the right. The rain-shadow effect in the Himalaya is clear: wet, warm air from the Indian Ocean is driven against the mountains, lifted and drained of water that forms ice-caps, abundant rivers, and forests in the foothills. The Tibetan plateau, in contrast, is arid.

percent. The major reason for this is that Australia and Canada, among others, have been able to count forests and farmland as carbon sinks (trees and plant that soak up carbon dioxide). By doing this, they have reduced their requirement to curb actual emissions, though the science on carbon sinks is far from conclusive. Ultimately, the treaty's success and the future of the planet's environmental systems still strongly depend upon whether it can eventually get the US involved. At present the US remains firmly on its own, obsessed with the idea that it can use the dollar to buy itself out of trouble. In the Kyoto negotiations it has consistently argued for the concept of buying "carbon credits" from countries such as Russia and Ukraine, whose industrial collapse over the past decade means they have accidentally passed their Kyoto reduction targets. The USA wants to grant these economies a credit equivalent to the extent to which they have exceeded the reduction set by the treaty. It then wants to buy these credits and put them towards any target of its own. In so doing, it does nothing to improve the state of the environment, but merely buys non-existent "saved" emissions. For the moment, it will not do anything to not curb its gluttonous ways.

What are the immediate implications of the Kyoto treaty for Nepal? While the signing of the Kyoto treaty is a momentous event, for countries like Nepal heading out into the arena of international development, the USA is unfortunately not on its own when it comes to bullying tactics. At the recent International Whaling Commission

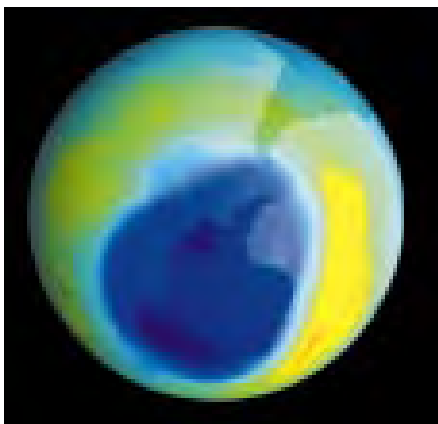
(IWC) meeting in London, Japan engaged in a campaign to buy votes in support of commercial whaling from many of the world's poorest countries with offers of development aid. Masayuki Komatsu, head of Japan's fishing agency said, "We see nothing wrong in using Japan's vast economic power to persuade other countries to vote against restrictions on hunting whales. It is only natural that Japan should use the tools of diplomacy and overseas development aid to influence members of the whaling commission." As these American and Japanese "tools of diplomacy" testify, the path for Nepal is strewn with obstacles and will often involve compromises.

But what the Kyoto treaty states clearly is that we have finally accepted that global warming exists, that it is of utmost concern to us all, and that curbing emissions is the only approach that will definitely halt the process. There will, as a result, be increasing opportunities for developing nations to invest in solar and other renewable energy sources.

Nepal can avoid the industrialised nations addiction to burning fossil fuels, and in the process be able to bypass development's "dirty" phase by avoiding a number of the heavy polluting process this stage involves. The lesson is clear, keep it small and get the energy to the people who need it, keep it clean and invest in alternative energy sources such as wind, water and solar power.

In anticipation, anyone fancy a raft-ride down the Bagmati? □

Dr Jovan Ilic is a freelance writer currently living in Hetauda.



The blue in this satellite picture indicates the ozone hole above Antarctica.

# The Euro Zone

## March of the euro



### ALEX WHITING IN LONDON

A newly-minted euro notes and coins roll into banks from 1 September, to be released on 1 January 2002, European citizens—except the British, the Danes and the Swedes—aren't the only ones who will have to make adjustments. Europe's trading partners in the developing world are wondering how they will be affected. While uncertain about short-term effects, economists are positive about the future.

"A single market makes life great for developing countries whose goods previously got stuck due to cross-border blocks," says Dr Chris Stevens

of Britain's Institute for Development Studies. Dr VR Panchamukhi, of the Research and Information System (RIS), a New Delhi-based economic think-tank, agrees: "After the transition period, transaction costs will lower, making things easier for exporters."

Before the euro's 1999 paper launch, moving goods between European countries involved transport costs and the cost of converting between European currencies—risky when trading in weaker European currencies like the Italian lira or Greek drachma. "The euro removes costly exchange-rate risks in one of the world's biggest

## What will the new currency do?

export markets for commodities," says Andreas Woergoetter, senior economist at the Paris-based OECD. Most of the world's least developed countries rely heavily on commodity exports for foreign exchange earnings, but commodities prices fluctuate hugely in the world market. And if exporting countries are also exposed to fluctuations in exchange rates, their economies have to cope with more uncertainties. Euro supporters add that companies exporting to several countries in the Euro Zone won't have to formulate different pricing strategies for each country—the zone, as a trading bloc, will have one price.

But not everyone is so sure. A 1999 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) report says wiping out currency trading within the Euro Zone will stimulate internal trade "at the expense of international trade, making Europe a more closed economy."

Some exporters will also be hit by the euro. Almost half of all global trade is in dollars and most commodities are traded in dollars. The exchange rate between the dollar and the euro is crucial for exports to the Euro Zone. But the euro has steadily weakened against the dollar since its 1999 introduction as a trading currency.

Developing countries who export to Europe, but whose currencies are pegged to the dollar, now find it difficult to compete with countries whose currencies are pegged to the euro. "One reason for Argentina's mess is because the peso is pegged to an increasingly valuable dollar, while its main export market is the EU,"

says Joaquim Oliveira Martins at the OECD's South American desk. Argentina has decided that when the exchange rate between the dollar and euro is 1:1, Argentina's peso will be pegged half to the dollar, half to the euro. The devaluation has also hurt agricultural producers. With the dollar worth so much more than the euro, they lose out by buying expensive inputs in dollars, but having to sell their produce in euros.

But if the euro becomes stronger, more transactions will be in euros, helping "break the dollar's monopoly" over international trade and currency reserves, says Panchamukhi.

Some developing countries considering a common currency, like Mercosur, South America's trading bloc, are closely following the euro. A developing country in crisis devalues its currency, staying competitive by recovering its export market and encouraging home consumers to buy cheaper domestic goods and services. In the more integrated EU, workers from such a country move to other parts of the EU to find jobs. This increases labour demand, helping the country recover. "A single currency area makes sense if capital and labour can freely migrate across borders within this area," says OECD's Woergoetter. Fixing the exchange rate between neighbours—as in the Euro Zone—removes an important coping mechanism, while integration is a slow and complicated process. □ (Gemini)

### ANALYSIS

by ANDRES VELASCO



# Fix THE ROAD

**Argentina's financial crisis points to a deeper malaise in emerging markets.**

dramatically lengthening the average maturity of its public debt. Next, the Asian crisis hit, and Argentina suffered contagion. In Asia local banks had over-borrowed and lent imprudently. Strengthening banks will reduce vulnerability, judged the gurus. Argentina raised reserve requirements, recapitalised banks and encouraged them to contract emergency credit lines abroad. Russia's crisis followed, and Brazil's. Emerging market interest rate spreads went through the roof. Argentina's economy began contracting. The gurus said fiscal policy must be planned over the medium term for credibility. Argentina adopted a fiscal convertibility law to which it has generally adhered. Then dot.coms imploded, Nasdaq plummeted, capital flows to Latin America dried up. Argentina's recession deepened. The gurus had no counsel.

The underlying problem is simple. Middle-income countries lack capital. Despite the bromides about domestic savings, it makes sense for them to borrow abroad. But they are hostage to the whims of international capital markets. If country X causes concern, traders dump its bonds and bet against its currency. Interest rates rise in country X, the economy slows, the fiscal situation worsens. Servicing debt and defending the currency is difficult. From there to a self-fulfilling prophecy is a short step. The IMF is too small and slow to offset the tens of billions of dollars traders pull out.

After the Asian crisis Washington wits said if one car crashes on a road, it is the driver's fault; but if most cars crash, it is the road's. The US and other G7 countries could have tried rebuilding the road, but didn't. □ (Project Syndicate)

Andres Velasco is professor of economics at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.



## Unhealthy prospects for the malnourished

WASHINGTON - Progress against child malnutrition is likely to slow over the next two decades. In the absence of bold new initiatives, the number of malnourished children in sub-Saharan Africa will increase by 18 percent in the next 20 years, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) warns. India will remain home to one-third of all malnourished children, the institute said in a report, 2020 Global Food Outlook: Trends, Alternatives, and Choices. Latin America will virtually eliminate the scourge and China will cut it in half. Still, some 132 million children worldwide will be malnourished in 2020. In 1997, some 166 million children were malnourished. Mark Rosengrant, IFPRI senior research fellow and lead author of the report, says a 42 percent reduction in child malnutrition worldwide could be achieved "with only an additional \$10 billion in annual investments. That's equal to less than one week of global military spending." Increased investments are needed in food production, especially of high-yield basic crops, because new agricultural land will be scarce. In the developing world, particularly Asia, cereal productivity growth has slowed because of water shortages, slowing public investment in crop research and irrigation infrastructure, and heavy use of fertilisers. There will thus be an increased global reliance on cereals produced in North America and Europe. Further, if meat demand in wealthy countries falls by half, the prices of maize and other coarse grains used for feed could fall by as much as 11 percent by 2020. The IFPRI says, "less demand for animal feed would translate directly into more food available for people." IFPRI says industrialised countries discriminate against poor countries' exports through tariffs and quotas, they also put the developing world at a further disadvantage by subsidising their own farmers. (IPS)



## Proud to be on TV

OTTAWA - PrideVision TV, scheduled to begin broadcasting in Canada 7 September, is being billed as the world's first television channel for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people and as a market-entry foray into one of Canada's most lucrative and creative demographics, "GLBT". PrideVision was licensed last summer by the Canadian Radio Television and Telecomm-unications Commission (CRTC), the federal agency that regulates broadcasting here. All cable networks in Canada are required to offer the channel to their customers, but some cable operators, especially in rural Canada, want to be exempted. But PrideVision is believed by media analysts to have a solid future. Anna McCusker, PrideVision's vice president for marketing, says, "If there's a backlash, we're not seeing it. We will be available in two million homes, advertisers appreciate this audience." Much of the rest of Canadian media has been chasing the GLBT market for the past decade. "It's urban, affluent, and has a large amount of disposable income. Capturing that market means more than just a percentage of the population—it's a large percentage of the most affluent, creative and educated market in the country, politically aware people who vote with their pocketbooks," he added. (IPS)

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# Let the talks begin



MIN. BASHACHARYA

The long-awaited dialogue between a government panel and negotiators from the Maoist side started Thursday—just over one month after Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba assumed office and declared a truce with the rebels.

The talks are being described as “preliminary” by both sides and began Thursday morning at an undisclosed location on the outskirts of Kathmandu. As expected, the first round was a getting-to-know-each-other session which also agreed on housekeeping rules like security for negotiators and disclosure of details of talks to the press. The Maoists are said to want the talks to be open, while the government wants a certain degree of confidentiality.

On Wednesday, Maoist negotiators came above ground amidst a high-profile function in Panga village near Kirtipur where they addressed a gathering of about 2,000 largely supportive people. Chief Maoist negotiator Krishna Bahadur Mahara in a headline speech said his group was not going to compromise on the basic demands: abolishing the constitutional monarchy, setting up an interim government and passing a new constitution.

Speaking from a stage festooned with Maoist banners, Mahara said: “We are never going to work under

this decrepit constitution, the government is dreaming. They shouldn’t treat us like another parliamentary party, these talks are between two governments.”

Mahara and two other Maoist negotiators, Top Bahadur Rayamajhi and Agni Sapkota were covered in vermilion and flanked by unarmed Maoist militia in camouflage fatigues (see picture).

Earlier this week, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba had said that these three points were precisely the non-negotiables in any future talks with the Maoists. And at a public function on Wednesday he said flatly that a republic was out of the question. “There will be no compromise on the constitutional monarchy,” he said. The seemingly-intransigent positions of the two sides could be posturing ahead of talks. Even so, given their rigidity, it appears unlikely that the talks will yield dramatic results anytime soon.

The three Maoist negotiators are believed to be second and third-echelon leaders and probably don’t have the party’s mandate to take major decisions on their own. While all this is going on, Home Minister Khum Bahadur Khadka has made a mysterious dash to New Delhi.

Although officials said it was ostensibly for “health reasons,” there is

speculation that the real talks are taking place in India while the Kathmandu talks are a decoy. One possibility is that Khadka may even be meeting Maoist supremo Prachanda somewhere in north India.

The Maoist leadership seems to have everything planned down to the last detail. Prachanda who was in Siliguri, India when we last heard from him, has also suggested new dates for the next two rounds, one in Rolpa, a Maoist stronghold, and another in Kathmandu. The strategy is to organise as many public meetings as possible using the truce, get mileage in the media and project rebel strength. The reasoning seems to be: even if the talks fail the Maoists will have built up a popular base and placed themselves firmly in the public mind. This is already working: the pictures in the newspapers and the visibility of red flags give the general public the impression that the Maoists are in the capital and about to declare a peoples’ republic.

The government’s negotiating panel consists of Deuba-loyalist Chiranjibi Wagle, Narahari Acharya and members of other parties, whose names have not been made public.

The three Maoist leaders left the capital Thursday to address pre-

## Posturing has gone into high gear as the government and Maoists sit at the table.

planned mass meetings in Janakpur, Nepalgunj and Butwal with the same message Mahara delivered in Kirtipur. The Maoists have been staging a series of mass meetings nationwide as a show of strength and are scheduled to hold a big meeting at the open air theatre in Kathmandu on 21 September.

Prachanda has demanded that the second round of talks be held

in Libang of Rolpa district to coincide with a major gathering of Maoists in their stronghold. However, the government is opposed to Rolpa as a venue.

Now that the talks are underway, Deuba has fulfilled a promise he made after ousting Girija Koirala on 21 August after a bitter and long-drawn intra-party fight. The Maoists have had a chance to regroup and re-

analyse the situation after the royal massacre when, they have admitted, they miscalculated the public mood against the monarchy. Both the government and the Maoists have also realised that public opinion is strongly in favour of peace talks, and neither would want to be seen to be throwing a spanner in the peace talks.

Sources close to both the government and the Maoists told us if there is a chance of a compromise it will have to be about the constituent assembly and interim government. For this, the Maoists will make a symbolic climb-down on their demand for a republic and the government may consider far-reaching constitutional reforms without actually scrapping the 1990 statute. □

## VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

**SPW** is a youth focused international charity based in the UK with programme offices in Africa and Asia.

**SPW** is in search of a target oriented, committed, Nepali or Expatriate to establish a Fundraising Unit in Nepal. The successful candidate will have at least 3 years of relevant work experience, a relevant degree, preferably to Masters level and experience of working in the I/NGO community. She/he will need to demonstrate the following skills and attributes:

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### Contact Details:

Post: Country Director, SPW Nepal, P O.Box 4892, Kathmandu Nepal

Email: spwnepal@mos.com.np

**Female candidates are strongly encouraged to apply**

## TRANSCENDENCE IN PHYSICALITY: An Interview with Samrat Upadhyay

*English literature from Nepal has, by and large, been scattered, hard to find, and altogether easy to overlook—until now, with the publication, by US-based Mariner Books/Houghton Mifflin Company, of Samrat Upadhyay’s short story collection, Arresting God in Kathmandu. Released in July as the first fictional work by a Nepali author to be published in the west, the book is finding its way to the front shelves of major American bookstores, and into the homes of avid fiction readers across the country.*

*Arresting God in Kathmandu focuses on familial, romantic and cultural entanglements in modern Kathmandu. It is praised by a reviewer in the following terms: “In an assured and subtle manner, Upadhyay anchors small yet potent epiphanies in a place called Kathmandu, and quietly calls it home.” The book can be ordered by Nepal-based readers through amazon.com or other internet bookshops.*

*Samrat Upadhyay is known to me only through our email correspondences as we co-edited Secret Places, the Manoa literary journal’s special issue on Nepali literature, due out this upcoming winter. He studied at St Xavier’s and later worked at The Kathmandu Post, going to the US at the age of 21. One of his stories was included in the Best American Short Stories anthology of 1999. He currently teaches at Balwin-Wallace College in Ohio, where he lives with his wife Babita and daughter Shahzadi.*

*The interview below was conducted over email.*

### Tell us what it’s been like to have your book come out.

The book is a result of ten years of writing short stories. One story in here, “The Man with Long Hair,” was the first story I wrote as a master’s student. I was lucky to find a publisher for a story collection at a time when many are unwilling to touch short stories from first-time authors. The manuscript went through extensive revision, with excellent guidance from my editor Heidi Pitlor, before it even resembled a book, carrying the kind of thematic resonance we expect even in a story collection.

I’m still amazed that people all across the US are walking into Borders and Barnes & Noble and discovering my book. I’ve begun to receive emails from readers across the country. Reviews are appearing in major newspapers. I’ll be starting my book tour soon. It’s a happy time for me, coinciding well with the birth of my daughter, who is arresting in her own ways.

### Tell us about the themes that you’re exploring as a writer.

I am interested in the intimate moments of Nepali people’s lives, especially of middle-class Kathmandu, as that’s the world I know well, the world that lives with me even in my long sojourn abroad. At some level, I suppose I am deconstructing some common stereotypes of what Nepali people are supposed to be like, especially those in mainstream travel narratives. You know, the “happily spiritual” people with that winning smile even in the face of intense poverty. My characters are spiritual all right, but their spiritual self reveals itself concretely in their everyday struggle with love and desire. I am especially fascinated by the question of how we find transcendence in the tangible physicality of life—in small objects, or in movements of emotions, or in the tenor of someone’s voice. Amorous love, and the sexual intensity that accompanies it, especially seems to be an excellent conduit for transcendence, for in it we attempt to dissolve ourselves into another being without fear of losing our ego. That’s the “place” I’m exploring in *Arresting God in Kathmandu*.

### There is a gap between the language of your characters and the language you write in. How do you approach this problem? What are your thoughts on writing in English about Nepal?

When I first started writing, I had to stop and think about what a character would say in Nepali, then methodically translate, in my own mind, how that would come across well in English. These days I’m able to simultaneously translate as I write, although at times I do run into interesting difficulties.

Using English to write about folks who don’t speak English isn’t a politically loaded issue for me, as it is for some people who claim that writers in English are one step removed from reality. This not only presupposes that there’s one reality for a culture, but also prematurely discounts any fresh perspective that such writing can bring to the richness of a literature. Once we begin to prescribe our own version of Nepali-ness for Nepali writers, we become didactic and moralistic—bad stuff for writers.

### In the past few decades American literature has made greater space for minority writers and writers from other cultures. Do you place yourself in this vibrant multicultural American literary tradition? Or do you see yourself emerging from a Nepali tradition? Where do you place yourself (if you place yourself at all)?

I haven’t thought of my placement at all. I do read with interest works by writers of colour and from different cultures. But I also enjoy tremendously works by Anglo-Saxon writers. I’ve recently discovered, for example, Louisiana writer Tim Gautreaux, who writes very funny stories with characters I can certainly identify with. While I don’t know how much I emerge from a Nepali literary tradition—I’m an American-educated, creative-writing-school product—I am very much a Nepali writer who writes in English, whose physical and emotional geography is Nepal.

### Are you working on anything new?

After writing two novels that I’ve decided are no good, I’m working on a new one that has a Nepali schoolteacher getting into all kinds of trouble. The novel, I’m discovering, is a beast dramatically different from the short story. But there’s also fun in this discovery.



# In Nepal, too, desire defies modern times

## Samrat Upadhyay’s stories make Kathmandu almost local, understandable to a Western reader.

### RICHARD BERNSTEIN

The Kathmandu of Samrat Upadhyay, a Nepali writer who lives in the United States, is very different from the locale of foreigners’ imaginations, an exotically primitive place steeped in custom, dust and religiosity (and most recently in the murders of most of the royal family by a discontempted prince). In *Arresting God in Kathmandu*, Upadhyay’s first collection of stories, this city is an awkwardly modern place where temples, painted with the eyes of the gods, are on the periphery of ordinary life, peering into consciences but imposing no obedience.

Kathmandu seems almost local in Upadhyay’s stories, full of middle-class people worried about what their neighbours will think, dreaming about sex, getting tired of their wives or husbands, struggling against illicit desire. This book reminds us that there is truly no place to hide from the temptations of cosmopolitanism, from globalised culture or from the universal human condition, not even in faraway Nepal.

At least that is my interpretation of the meaning of Upadhyay’s title, *Arresting God in Kathmandu*. There is no story of that title in this collection, although the last one, “A Great Man’s House,” would seem to be the best candidate. In it a wealthy hotel owner and admired Hindu guru named Kailash—who preaches about the renunciation of desire to a circle of friends—takes on a much younger wife, Nani, whereupon his faith, his health and his authority crumble.

Told in the voice of Kailash’s cook, who nurtures his own secret desire for Nani, this story could be read as metaphor: Kailash as God, whose commands regarding renunciation and a higher level of spiritual awareness are rudely challenged by his young wife.

“It’s very easy for you to sit up there on that cushion and preach on the illusions that our desires create,” Nani tells him during one of his sessions with his followers.

“But the truth is this, that most ordinary heavy drinking will want to learn how to live and fulfil our desires, not treat them as if they were stepchildren.” At the heart of this story, subtle and spiritually complex like Upadhyay’s

others, is the ambivalence the reader feels toward Nani. We tend to want to share the conviction of Kailash’s friends that she is brazen and coarse, a bearer of trouble, like all uncontrolled women. Rumours begin to circulate—rumours being a big part of Upadhyay’s Kathmandu—that she is bringing lovers to the house while Kailash lies in bed sick. Mohan Ram, the cook, sees her with older men, and he waxes nostalgic for the old days when Kailash, whom he calls “my master,” was surrounded by adoring relatives, conducting his spiritual sessions. At the same time the cook senses in himself a perverse arousal for the vixenish, calculating Nani.

In Upadhyay’s stories interior events occur like tumblers falling in a lock, so quietly and inconspicuously that we almost don’t notice them. In “The Cooking Poet,” a young political rebel with a great poetic talent becomes a

date, Rukmini, but he rejects her as soon as he discovers her limp. Yet while outwardly a picture of demure, melancholy passivity, Rukmini is possessed of a sly worldliness that puts her in command of father and husband, each of whom, in his own way, is seeking a kind of reincarnation of Hiralal’s dead wife.

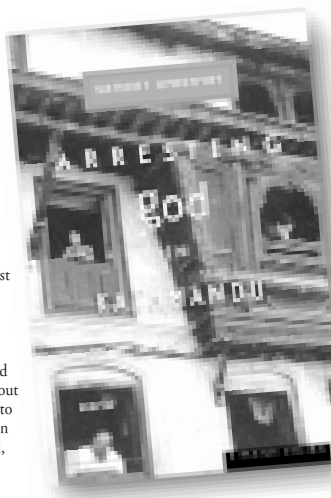
There is a deceptive simplicity to all of these stories, just as there is a deceptive simplicity to Kathmandu, whose appearance of traditional piety is, like Rukmini’s, a mask behind which all manner of complications flourish.

The tradition exists most notably in the ceremonies of arranged marriages and the perfunctory visits some of Upadhyay’s characters pay to the city’s temples. Mostly, in Upadhyay’s version of it, the city is filled with ordinary people who, in the words of Rani, are seeking ways to fulfil their desires, even

furtive ones. There is, for example, the case of the modest teacher named Aditya in “The Man With Long Hair,” whose homoerotic infatuation with an itinerant actor leads him to rekindle his faded passion for his wife. Or there is American-educated Kanti in the story “The World” who rejects a perfectly suitable arranged marriage with a Kathmandu doctor because of an unhealthy attraction to an aristocratic, womanising rake named Jaya, who is

himself a sign of the disappearance of old ways and old values. “Kanti slid down and sat on the floor,” after her final meeting with the rejected doctor, who has himself returned to Kathmandu from England, where he loved a woman just as unsuitable for him as Jaya is for Kanti. “She wondered where Jaya was right now—probably in bed with some awful woman in a hotel. But, then, Kanti herself had been such a woman for a while.”

Subtle, tinged with the melancholy of modest, materially constricted lives, Upadhyay’s stories bring us into contact with a world that is somehow both very far away and very familiar. □ (New York Times)



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## ABOUT TOWN

## MOVIES

□ □ **Nepali and Hindi movies** online ticket booking at [www.nepalshop.com](http://www.nepalshop.com)

## EATING OUT

□ □ **Juicy steaks, chilled beer**, Mexican cuisine, great breakfasts, sports bar. All week long. Live band Wednesday, Sunday evenings 6.30-10.00. K-too! Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 433043

□ □ **International buffet lunch** Main courses, on-site cooking, six varieties each of desserts, salads, dressing. Rs 700 per head plus tax. Daily from 12 noon, The Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 273999 ext 6152.

□ □ **Friday Night Sekuwa (BBQ)** Appetisers, momos, salad, main courses and desserts, one complimentary beer. Rs 699 per head. Throughout the monsoon at Dwarika's Hotel. 479488

□ □ **Saturday lunch** at Restaurant Kantipur, Club Himalaya, Nagarkot. BBQ buffet Rs 500 per head. 410432, 414432

□ □ **Wet and Wild Summer** Swimming and buffet lunch. Saturdays, Sundays at Godavari Village Resort. Adults Rs 600, children Rs 350 plus taxes. 560675

□ □ **Autumn Moon Chinese Festival** Chinese Gourmet spread, folk dancing, vegetable carving, Lunch and dinner at the Amiko Room. From 31 August, 12noon-3pm, 7pm-10pm. Hotel De l'Annapurna. 221711

□ □ **Saturdays at the Malla** Swimming and French chef's barbecue lunch. 11am—5pm. The Malla Hotel. 418385, 410966

□ □ **Full moon at Boudhanath Stupa** Specialties and ice-cream delights. Stupa View Restaurant, next to the Stupa. For reservations ring 480262.

## MUSIC

□ □ **African music and dance** by Emile Hassan Dyer, aka Jambo. Friday, 31 August, 7pm onwards. K2 Bar, Baber Mahal Revisited. Free entry, special cocktails, K2 snacks and mini meals.

□ □ **Jammin Hell!** DJ Tangri every Saturday, all August. 2pm. The Arch Room, Hotel De L' Annapurna. Rs 500 per couple, includes welcome drink. Tickets at Hotel De L' Annapurna, The Club—Bhatbhateni, Nanglo, Bakery Café outlets, and Kathmandu Guest House.

□ □ **Bugles and Tigers** Drinks and all-time favourites from Ram Shrestha on guitar. 6.30-9.30pm, except Mondays, Saturdays. The Everest Hotel. 488100

□ □ **DJ Neil/ Live Bands** Every Friday and weekends. Daily happy hour. Rox Bar. Hyatt Regency. 6pm—9pm. 491234

□ □ **Happy hours at Galaxy Club** Tap away to the latest chart busters played by DJ Ankit Koshar from Kolkata. Attractive drink offer, buy one get one free. 9pm—11pm. Galaxy Club, Hotel Everest

□ □ **Cadenza** Saturday evening live jazz at Upstairs, Lazimpat. 7.30pm—10pm. Rs 200

## GETAWAYS

□ □ **Chiso Chiso Hawama** Summer B&B package for Nepalis and expats. Rs 1,250 per head. Club Himalaya Nagarkot Resort. 410432, 414432

□ □ **Stress Free Weekends** Overnight stay at the Hyatt, dinner for two at the Rox Restaurant, use of pool, health club, spa and outdoor jacuzzi, ayurvedic massage for two, weekend brunch, late check out Sunday. Rs 9000 plus tax. Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 491234

□ □ **Nagarkot Escape** Weekends in cottages, views of the Himalayas, valleys and forests. Special rates for Nepalis and resident expats. Hotel Keyman Chautari. [keyman@wink.com.np](mailto:keyman@wink.com.np) 436850

## EXHIBITION

□ □ **Life and Times of BP Koirala** Photo exhibition to celebrate the 88<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of BP Koirala. 7-9 September, 10am-5pm. Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikuti Mandap, Rs 10.

□ □ **From the Bodhi Tree** Meditative paintings by Prakash Chandwadkar. Until 10 September, 11am-6pm except Saturdays. Autumn Exhibition Series, Siddhartha Art Gallery.

□ □ **Kathmandu: the City and the Valley** Exhibition of photos by French photographer Teddy Seguin. Last day 31 August, 9am-6pm. Alliance Française, Thapathali. 241163, 242 832.

## MARTIN CHAUTARI

□ □ **Social Responsibility of the Private Sector** Talk by Sujeev Shakya, General Manager Business Development, Soaltee Group. 4 September, 5.30pm. Martin Chautari, Thapathali. For directions ring or email 256239, [chautari@mos.com.np](mailto:chautari@mos.com.np). Open to all. Unless otherwise noted, presentations are in Nepali.

## FESTIVAL

□ □ **Indrajatra**. Festival to celebrate the king of heaven, god of rain and fertility – Indra. Streets of Kathmandu come alive with the Living Goddess Kumari's Raath Yatra. Begins 1 September.

For inclusion in the listing send information to [editors@nepalitimes.com](mailto:editors@nepalitimes.com)



## BOOKWORM



**Secret of the Vajra World: The Tantric Buddhism of Tibet** Reginald A Ray  
Shambhala Publications, Boston, 2001  
Rs 2,380

Using non-technical language, engaging stories and personal anecdotes, Ray explains how the practice of tantra opens up an appreciation of ordinary life as the place where the ultimate revelation occurs. Ray explains the unique visualisations, liturgies, initiations and "inner yogis" as practiced in the colourful world of tantric Buddhism.

**The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment**  
Lamrim Chenmo Translation Committee  
Snow Lion Publications, Ithaca, NY, 2000  
Rs 2,370

The author of this work, Tsong-kha-pa (1357-1419), founded the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism and Gaden Monastery. In this, his most famous work, he bases his insights on classical Indian Buddhist literature and condenses all the esoteric sutra scriptures into a meditation manual. Indispensable reading for anyone who wishes to understand and practice Tibetan Buddhism.



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## ARTS



When Steve McCurry first visited Nepal in 1979 as an extension of his trip to India, his mind's eye was immediately taken in by the sights. The subcontinent was a vast, exotic land that overwhelmed the senses of this 26-year-old photographer. But Nepal presented its visual delights in small doses: in the play of light and shadow, the mountains, the rains, the peoples' faces.

"People often ask me what my favourite place is," mused Steve during a visit to Nepal this month. "Nepal is right at the top of my list. I am drawn to the mountains, the people, everything in it. That is why I keep coming back."

Nepal is also where Steve got his big break as a photographer. From Nepal he travelled often to Afghanistan in the early 1980s when Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan, and the mujahideen war began. Suddenly, this unknown photographer was in great demand at the *New York Times*, *Time* and other international publications. Steve had fresh and captivating pictures of a land that was plunging headlong into war and tragedy. The pictures won him the Magazine Photographer of the Year Award

in 1984.

Steve's first trip to Kabul from Kathmandu was overland, flying to Patna, taking the train to Amritsar, walking across the border at Wagah, travelling up to Peshawar and then slipping into Afghanistan through the Khyber Pass. Steve has kept coming back to Nepal, and taking pictures here on his treks to the Langtang, Helambu and Annapurna regions. He became more and more enamoured by the monsoons as they lashed the Himalaya, and the paradox of too much and too little water. How the monsoon brought life, but also death and destruction. The idea germinated into a cover story for National Geographic in 1984 and then into the picture book, *Monsoon*, which has gone into several editions in the past 15 years. Steve travelled across Nepal, Bangladesh, India and even to northern Australia, Indonesia and the Philippines chasing the monsoon. The book is a tribute to human adaptability, survival, and hope.



"What always fascinated me

# "I was inspired by Nepal..."

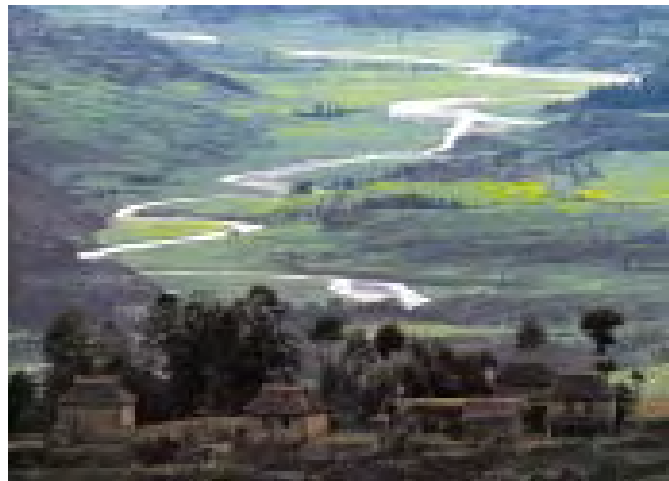
**Photographer Steve McCurry recalls his time in Nepal before he became a celebrity.**



about Nepal is the experience that surrounds a picture," says Steve. "I remember waiting on the banks of this river near Trisuli which was swollen with monsoon rain. A family began crossing the torrent. A small slip, and they would all have been washed away. I was transfixed." Or, there are quiet gentle images that bring out the moods of the rains like the picture of a boy walking his water buffalo to pasture while shielding himself from the rain with a banana leaf. "The joy of the whole thing, the rewarding part of it is the experience that surrounds the picture, recognising the moment that captures the magic and the essence of a place."

Steve's newest picture book is *South South East*, a major collection of images from south and south-east Asia that captures the atmosphere and spirit of the region, its myriad cultures and religions, and how it has come face to face with a globalised world. He says: "This is the only part of the world that rally grabs me, you have this fascinating link with the past." Steve has also amassed a rich collection of portraits from all over the world, and *Portraits* was published in 1999 by Phaidon.

With assignments back-to-back from National Geographic, life has now got very



## HAPPENINGS



**ABOVE GROUND:** Supporters sprinkle vermilion on Maoist leaders Top Bahadur Rayamajhi, Krishna Mahara and Agni Sapkota. They came aboveground on 29 August, a day before they began peace negotiations with the government.



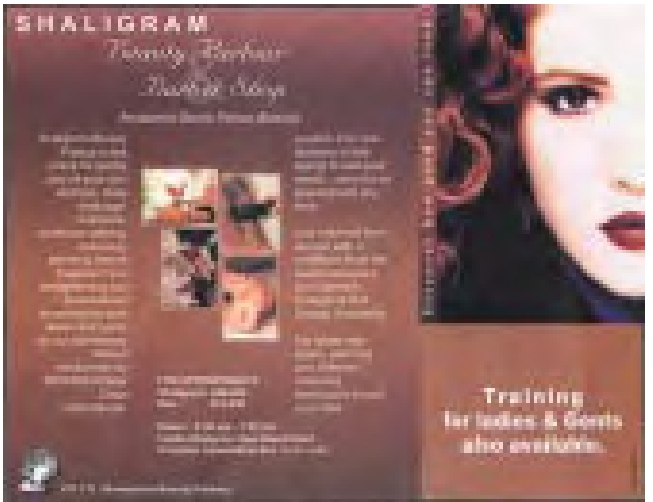
**MODERATE LEFT:** UML stalwarts march through Kathmandu streets in support of the government's "revolutionary" land reform proposal as a French TV cameraman catches the action.



**DEUBA DOING THE DEUDA:** Prime Minister Deuba dancing the deuda at the open air theatre with colleagues from the far west, 26 August.



**BOOK LAUNCH:** Arzu Deuba launching a book on violence against women in the presence of Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and diplomats at the Radisson Hotel on 24 August.







Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

No laughing matter

Just as we had suspected all along, the Nepal Tourism Boar has shown that it takes itself very seriously. A member has taken strong umbrage to a recent column in this space. Rarely do we get a glimpse of the inner workings of a private-public stakeholder, so in the national interest and to respect the public's right to know, we are reprinting herewith the said missive:

Letter to the Editor

It is always interesting to go through Nepali Times which covers the news in threadbare focussing on the contemporary issues of our nation. As a regular subscriber, most of our staff at Nepal Tourism Board go through this paper regularly. However the issue of 17-23 August 2001 on the "Under My Hat" column "The Valley of the Dogs" has some "derogatory" remarks about the Nepal Tourism Board's concerted, novel and serious campaign Festival of Life... It is an India focussed campaign launched with major support of the private-public stakeholder. We appreciate democracy and it provides all of us with the fundamental right of expression, but is it always healthy to be sarcastic and cynical even about genuine efforts?

Thanking you,  
Aditya Baral  
Manager PR and Publicity  
Nepal Tourism Board

It is indeed with deep sorrow and heartfelt regret that this scribe has come to the realisation of the profound wrong that he has committed. He has inadvertently let down this great nation, and deliberately insulted the very individuals whose job it is to be our best friends. How, after all the trust that they have

bestowed upon human beings since the dawn of civilisation, will he ever make up for the incalculable and irreversible shame he has brought down on the entire animal kingdom by being so callously cynical and sarcastic?

This week's column is an act of contrition to offer profuse apologies to all canines great and not-so-great who felt alluded to in the said column. There is nothing to do but beg for forgiveness in lieu of the affronts real or imagined that were knowingly or unknowingly perpetrated against dogdom. It must have been a momentary lapse of reason that made me pen such derogatory and demeaning remarks about man's best friends. After all, they are the guardians of our garbage dumps: those great scavengers of water buffalo femurs without whose hard work and sharp teeth femurs from the early Lichhavi Period would still be lying around on our street corners.

How thoughtless of me to make light of the infinite contribution made by the Valley's dogs to this nation's long-term development by steadfastly refusing to wag their tails at passers-by, snarling at strangers, and guarding our territorial imperatives by never shirking in their duties to conduct regular patrols to water the perimeter of our domain. What an affront it must have been to feed the hand that bites us, especially since their bite is much worse than their bark.

Jokes aside, this is no laughing matter. The sooner we take this country's problems dead seriously the better it will be for all and sundry, especially the concerned authorities. Only then can visitors from India who can't wait to visit Nepal's concerted, serious and novel Festival of Life be guaranteed that they don't have to read any threadbare and dog-eared columns about canines while they are here. □

NEPALI SOCIETY

Madan Krishna turns IQ into cash

In which city is the Red Square: a) Moscow b) Beijing c) Pyongyang d) Hanoi.

Famous Nepali comedian Madan Krishna Shrestha is sensitive to criticism that his new show, *Nagad Panch Lakh* (500,000 Cash) is a poor copy of *Kaun Banega Crorepati* which is in turn patterned after *Who Wants To be a Millionaire?* And the thing that really gets him is when people say he does not look like Amitabh Bachchan. "Of course I don't look like Amitabh Bachchan, I

don't want to look like Amitabh Bachchan," he bristles.

Despite his initial reluctance, Madan Krishna took the plunge anyway and decided to think globally and act locally. The education and information content of his programme, he reasoned, would go a long way in making young Nepalis more knowledgeable about their own country and world—especially given the present mediocre entertainment on television.

"We are having teething problems, there are lots of things to sort out, the questions, the answers, the participants. But we are getting the hang of it," says Madan Krishna. "We are learning as we go along."

The show is aired at weekend prime time on Nepal Television: Saturday at 8:25 after the news. One episode of *paanch lakh* costs two lakhs to shoot, and five episodes are already in the pipeline. Audience

feedback so far is mixed, but there is a lot of interest in taking part. Potential participants have to fill out a postcard questionnaire and mail it to the producers, 25 are chosen from a lucky draw for interviews where they are evaluated for their on-stage presence, their IQ and spontaneity. Eight are shortlisted and join the programme. So far no one has won Rs 500,000 although one brain bagged Rs 125,000 last week.

Madan Krishna and comedy partner Hari Bansha Acharya who have made hit films and comedy shows are now pursuing individual careers in entertainment. And the pull of television is definitely there. Madan Krishna adds a light touch to the general knowledge quiz, and sets his studio audience and participants at ease with his banter and self-deprecating humour. But with us he suddenly turns serious: "I have often wondered, what is the best way to serve the country through television. This is quite effective: you raise the IQ of your participants and viewers while entertaining them with a contest."

Oh yes, the Red Square is in Moscow. □



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"नयाँ लक्ष, कुनै अन्ध।"