

## STUDY 10,11,12

## Nepal's domestic airlines are on the verge of collapse.

**See p. 9** ➡

**See p. 17** ➡

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to Bergamo	08:00	08:00	08:00	to Bergamo	18:00	18:00

\*Seasonal flights to Bergamo Airport



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## JUST PEACE

An insurgency does not have a clear beginning or a neat end. Like monsoon floods, it arrives, it devastates, and departs, leaving destruction in its wake. But just as floods teach people how to cope with another one next time round, there are lessons to be learnt from insurgencies too. There are signs that the Maoist insurgency has begun to realise that, for now, the armed struggle is a dead end. There could be many factors that have led to this, and we tried to list some of them in previous issues. Comrade Prachanda has apologised for the excesses his cadre have committed in the name of revolution, although he is silent about what he is going to do about them. The "students" of the ANNFUSU (Revolutionary) have publicly promised to mend their ways. Government has softened its criticism of the Maoists. Trade unions, and peace seems within reach. But this will not be a lasting peace unless the government addresses the root causes of the insurgency.

Despite the havoc Maoists have created, the revolt has exposed the hollowness of Nepal's political leaders who have discredited and squandered our hard-won democracy. It has also shown the depth of frustration of a neglected people whose basic needs have been ignored for too long. More than a decade after the promulgation of a constitution that made the people sovereign, rural Nepal is still waiting to see what it actually means to be the true rulers of this country. Call them ignorant or illiterate, but they have yet to see and feel the supposed advantages of democracy. And, mark this, they know exactly who the crooks are. The Maoists had felt the pulse of the people and they knew the anger, frustration and hopelessness in the hinterland. They let the people down by fighting a futile, wasteful war in their name, that is another matter. They lived with the people—in many cases they were the people. Like Mao said, they were like fish in water. After the rebels lay down their guns, that is the kind of intimacy that political parties and their activists should be aiming for. Much of this is happening in many parts of Nepal as local self-governance takes root. Such successful examples of grassroots democracy in action must be replicated nationwide if we are to prevent an even more desperate insurgency replacing the present one.

Nepalis know the limitations of their country's resources only too well. It is the experts and the populist leaders who want to transform Nepal into Singapore or Switzerland. The people themselves would be quite happy even if the process of building a more just and tolerant society were to begin—if there were a glint of hope at the end of the long dark tunnel. Despite the utopia that the Maoists have promised, all the people really want is to be left to live in peace. The government therefore has to re-establish the rule of law. National highways can't be blocked by five hoodlums protesting a traffic accident to extort money from travellers. There must be equality before the law for elected leaders who misuse their mandate and plunder the people.

That done, people must be made to feel free. This can only happen by creating an environment where every individual's right to security, dignity and identity is respected. It goes beyond law and order; it includes jobs, education for all, and health services. In the past 12 years social inequities have grown, the gap between rich and poor has grown. Democracy must mean equal opportunity. The dignity of every individual in a larger collective is what democracy is all about. Every person needs to be respected; caste, community, class and gender differences should not be obstacles for an individual's progress. That is the government's role beyond the peace talks. To do what it was supposed to be doing all along, but now with added commitment and urgency to make up for lost time. Otherwise just peace will be just a mirage.

## STATE OF THE STATE

# Nothing to do in Tikapur

**TIKAPUR**—If you have nothing to do, you can do all that you want to do here in the middle of nowhere. With no mountains to gaze at and no monuments to explore, there are no pressures of anticipation in this town set amidst a forest. Towns often evolve around a central function—administration, trade, industry, or even education. But this town is different. Tikapur has been designed as a town with the sole purpose of creating a town. Leisure is the central feature of this settlement that was created to commemorate a royal visit.

In 1968, the area where the town stands today was a dense forest with a few scattered Tharu huts in the clearings. King Mahendra was on a hunt in Suddhapur when he had a heart attack. Royal physicians advised against flying the king to Kathmandu, so a patch of forest was cleared on the western bank of the Karmali to land a plane, and a hunting lodge was erected in double-quick time. And King Mahendra started to rule from his makeshift sanatorium here in the western area, the seeds of Tikapur town were sown when some of his minions decided to stay back even after the king had left for his palace in Farway Kathmandu. They needed a patron who could help them colonise the new clearing, and Khadga Bahadur Singh turned out to be just the man.

A mere also-ran, Khadga recognised the chance to leap into the big time. He transformed himself into a political sponsor of an emotionally insecure ruler and begged the king to grant him the land he had stepped on to build a memorial park and a beautiful city. Those were the days of royal whims and fancies, and the wish of a flunkie was gladly granted.

Tikapur is a new here place on the map. It lies 14 km south of the East-West Highway and 15 km north of the border with India. Flanked by the Karmali on the east and several of its branches on the west, the town has no rural hinterland. Supply lines from India are better connected with Dhangadhi in the west and the feeder road to Achham in the mountains branches off

from Chisapani in the east. In the middle of it all, Tikapur flickers in splendid isolation—an urban dream of a royal local conceived as a statement of supreme supremacy.

As long as the town establishment had hardwood trees left to fell and sell, it didn't lack the revenue to finance its follies. But now that the royal grants have run out, decay seems to have set in. Gardens of the sprawling Bangla (Bungalow) Park have not been paid for the last three months, and weeds have started taking over the floors of the two holiday homes built for visiting royalty.

Renowned engineer-architect Shankar Nath Rimal prepared the physical plan of the town, and it shows. Thatched huts sit on extensive plots meant to accommodate bungalows with double-garages, but there are no vehicles on the four-lane roads, save a few cycles. With no economic

Achhami settlers from the hills (with their ox-drawn milk-cows) can provide sufficient stimulation to even the most jaded culture-vulture. Tikapur could become a tourism destination if talent, time and money were to be intelligently invested in its promotion.

But it is so the lonely—and the lost—that Tikapur provides scant comfort. It is a new town—nobody belongs here. Ergo, everyone is like everyone else—a little lost, and searching for something all the time. Could the collective search be for peace? Even a stray visitor forms a bond with the locals that seekers strike over a long time along the trails of pilgrimages. In Tikapur, if all you want to do is count stars in the azure sky on a balmy October evening, people understand. They don't ask you why. In fact, some of them may even say that it is the most natural thing to do. Shops down shifts by six, streetslights go

out by six, and by eight most of the town is fast asleep. The town is officially dry, so only the very rich can afford to drink in the safety of their homes. There aren't many rich people here anyway.

Away from the pollution of commercial media, the topic of discussion with some of the local youth was not the war of vengeance being waged against a country that is already in ruins. We

did not talk about Nepal's Maoists either, even though we did agree that the scourge of the countryside appeared to be on the way. Instead, we chatted about the possibility of putting up a "Water Kingdom" type of recreation centre in Tikapur and attracting domestic tourists. We prattled about turning the abandoned airport into a couple of sports stadiums and luring cricket lovers into this remote corner by staging India-Pakistan matches.

The idea of holding lion-flying competitions on the windy shores of the Karmali was explored without a touch of irony. And when we climbed down from the roof to go to sleep, the half moon mocked us with a barely suppressed smile.

If you haven't been here, come before the Tourism Board discovers it, and decide to stage one of their garish *madefest* at Bangla Park. ♦

by CK LAL



CK Lal has lost his perspective on world terror. He speaks lofty things, but can't get close to seeing and feeling what has really happened. If you could stop the killing in Nepal you would do it. Right now unfortu-

nately, you cannot. We can stop the killing here by the terrorists. Watch, it will stop. The murderers will be caught and killed. A less savage death than the people they killed. Then the needy people of Afghanistan will be helped and left to live in any way they please. Our fight is not with the common people of Afghanistan, it is with a small group of ignorant men. Come to New York and see where death has left its scar. Then you will write differently.

Steve Simpson  
New York

TOTAL AGONY  
I totally agree with Artha Beed (#59) that the Nepali rupee must not be pegged to the Indian Rupee, I believe there are two (wrong) reasons the government has not moved away from it.

1. In the current bleak economic and political situation the Nepali Rupee will only depreciate against the US dollar as soon as they remove the

pegging, and no government wants to deal with this on top of all the political chaos.

2. A lot of the Nepali businesses are still controlled by people who have strong ties to India so they would like to see this stable exchange rate between the two countries.

They are powerful, and their voices will be heard. Just my two cents....

Shourav Udas  
by email

LAND AHOY  
Re: "The government's great land grab" by Kabindra Pradhan (#61) In Nepal's feudal past, the major basis of revenue for the state was land. The state promoted forest clearances for agriculture to generate more tax income from the peasantry. The state also awarded land grants which was a symbol of power and status for the elite. Some Nepalis depended on land for survival, and some for status and power. Now,

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## INTERVIEW

# "There is willingness at the top, and at the grassroots... something in between doesn't work"

**It's been two and a half years since Norway opened its embassy in Nepal. How have things gone? What is special about Nepal-Norway cooperation is that it started with people-to-people collaboration, between NGOs and continued as private sector partnership like the Khimti hydroelectric plant. All this happened before aid came in. It is aid building on the peoples' relationship and private investment and not the other way round, which is usually the case. The reason for establishing the embassy was to strengthen government to government relationship and to widen the cooperation. We came with the interest to collaborate in the social sector. Our support was channelled to education because it was where the government took a more active role.**

**Do you see some positive signs?**

I see positive signs. Because one of the problems with aid is that donors are also not giving the government the right backing, and are taking too much more control themselves. For the government to be responsible we have to be responsible as well. The education project (Basic and Primary Education Project) shows that it is possible for the government to take on that responsibility if it is given the chance. We are all concerned about results, and if results are not coming it is difficult to continue supporting the program.

**How effective has the support been?**

It's too early to judge, but things aren't moving as fast as we would like. You don't see substantial changes when it comes to primary education in this country. There is a

strong move towards decentralisation, which I think is the key. But what is missing is the local ownership of schools, the relationship between the school and the local community.

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**You are also getting involved in supporting privatisation.**

DIID (the British Department for International Development) has been supporting the privatisation project. But it has not been very successful. So we have come in as a partner for the second phase. The government, DIID and the government of Norway want it to be different than what it is now.

There are people who want privatisation at the top government level, but there are also many that are against privatisation, and these forces are very strong. Privatisation itself is not a goal, the aim is to get industry running more efficiently. The government subsidises the companies and there are huge losses for the country. Privatisation is a highly political issue and it has to be resolved politically and by the involved partners. You have to get a consensus from parliament.

**Does the saga of**

**the BPC's (Batal Power Company) have any lessons?**

It is very tragic it has taken such a long time. Neither the Norwegian, nor English investors are as interested anymore. I just hope they will finalise it and not go for a new round of bidding. There is nothing to be gained from that. If you want to privatise you have to make the private sector feel welcome, if they don't feel welcome they go somewhere else, to another country. One can question the policy will when it takes such a long time. Norway is a small country and it does not put political pressure. But that does not mean a company with Norwegian link can be rejected twice, without being given a fair chance.

**Is linking Norwegian investment with projects a strategy, or did it just happen?**

It is extremely important that Nepal gets out of donor dependency. Nepal cannot keep on with receiving donor funds for a very long time. It is a part of Norwegian policy to finance some projects now financed with development money through commercial investments especially in large infrastructures. For the social sectors, it is the government's responsibility.

**Are there security issues mainly relating to the Maoist insurgency?**

I am not sure about how much it affects play in this. It is a bit difficult to say because there are areas of conflict in the world where we have private investments. But it may be more important for the poverty reduction work in the country. The conflict is not do-linked from private investment, but it is also important to see how conducive government policy is towards the private sector—how bureaucratic and corrupt it is in handling investments. The security situation is a part of that, but our investments are of a long term nature and

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**Muna Pandey via email**

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**D Hillary by email**

## Norwegian ambassador to Nepal, INGRID OFSTAD speaks to Nepali Times on the slow pace of development, Norwegian investments in Nepal and on the peace talks.

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**D Hillary by email**

**only in hydro-power. Security may be an issue for other industries.**

**How has your experience with Khimti been, especially with the debate for changing power purchase arrangements?**

Khimti was the first large private investment in Nepal and it is always difficult to be the first one, both for the company and for the government. It was quite hard to get the systems moving and to put the things in place. It was also more costly because it was the first project. There was an extra risk to it, it was an investment in a fairly remote area and it is possible to make upcoming investments cheaper. It is very difficult to renegotiate a PPA (Power Purchase Agreement). Because this is the first major project, everybody is looking at what happens, to see if you can trust the government.

**Is there possibility of more Norwegian investment in hydro?**

I think there is. The same company has a license for Khimti-II. But future projects would depend on if it is possible to sell power, either locally or to India. No company will invest if it cannot sell.

**What is delaying the Melanchi water supply project?**

The difficult part is not technical, the issue is about how you manage it and the price of water in Kathmandu Valley. It is not fair for Nepalis if the government puts too much money into water supply for the people of Kathmandu. The government should not fall into a populist trap, but ensure that people who are able to start paying for water. Unfortunately the project is expensive, it should be done in the cheapest way, which is why we are putting grant money into it. I hope the pricing will be such that also poor people have access to the water, the distribution system should also be improved.

**Where do you see Norway's aid**

**to those for standing up to the Maoists (aka extortionists, mobsters, robbers). Nepalis who want nothing but a hard-day's work and an honest living should revolt against these scoundrels and fight for their right to property, freedom, and justice.**

**"Desh Bhakta" by email**

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**D Hillary by email**



# Heart to heart

This Dasain, go easy on the grease, cigarettes and alcohol.

## RAMYATA LIMBU

The heart of the matter

The terrible fear of dying of a heart attack doesn't accompany Dr Krishna Jung Rana to bed anymore.

"Until five or six years ago, before I went to sleep, there was always this fear I would die," says the retired public health expert. "Being a doctor, I knew it was irrational. But I couldn't help myself," says Rana.

Such fears and anxieties are common among people with heart disease. The survivor of two bypass heart surgeries in 1983 and 1984 and a recent angioplasty, Dr Rana is president of the Heart Club. Members—people with heart trouble, laymen, doctors—meet on the last Saturday of every Nepali month at 9 am at Narayani Hotel to have a heart to heart discussion about prevention, cure, and care of heart conditions.

A major goal of the club is to raise awareness and educate people about heart disease, which experts say will still be the leading cause of mortality and disability by 2020. As heart disease becomes one of the leading causes of death in the world, it is now on the priority list of the WHO.

Yet there is the common perception that heart disease is not a South Asian phenomenon. Completely untrue, says Dr RK



Kaswal, a senior consultant cardiologist in India. In fact, the doctor says, there is plenty of research to prove that South Asian genes put one at a higher risk for heart disease—four times more than American and 20 times more than Japanese people. In addition, South Asians generally eat richer food and

lead more sedentary lives, at least in cities, both of which contribute to the risk of heart disease. Men above 35 and women above 40 should watch their weight and lifestyle, and health experts advise "intelligent living" and regular comprehensive check-ups. Ten percent of the population is at

risk any given time, and anyone could fall under that ten percent, but the risks are higher for people with bulging bellies, cautions Dr Kaswal. "There are risk factors specific to this population—the presence of triglycerides (which can lead to a hardening of the arteries), ineffective insulin and weight

concentrated in the belly," explains Dr DB Karki, cardiologist and vice chairman of the Nepal Heart Foundation. "Dr Rana has a bible for all this: *Reversal of Heart Disease without Operation* by American cardiologist Dean Ornitz. He swears that a change in lifestyle as recommended

by Dr Ornitz has allowed him to lead a happier and healthier life. He doesn't have to live with the dread of expecting a heart attack. The 69-year-old has turned vegetarian, quit drinking, taken to walking briskly for 30-40 minutes

everyday, and started going through a low-fat, low-salt diet. That's not all. He's started taking an interest in the world and in himself. "I was a taciturn man," explains Dr Rana. "I never talked much. I was just interested in work. Today I'm involved with various clubs in my neighbourhood. And, on the other hand, I meditate. I can't explain enough what a change there's been in my life."

Dr Karki, cardiologist and vice chairman of the Nepal Heart Foundation, says "Regulating one's lifestyle helps patients avoid prohibitive medical costs and undergoing expensive operations." Although there are no comprehensive studies on heart disease in Nepal, Dr Karki says the number of patients visiting private clinics and government hospitals is increasing. Other statistics are also telling: approximately 20 percent of the patients at Teaching Hospital and 15 percent of patients admitted to Bir Hospital suffer from some kind of heart disease.

**Rough guide to heart disease and cure**  
There's a surprising amount that can go wrong with the heart. Sometimes heart disease is congenital—a child is born with a

defect in the heart, most commonly a 'hole' in the heart.

There's also a disorder that may or may not be congenital, called arrhythmia. In this relatively uncommon ailment, the heart has an abnormal electrical rhythm. Patients have palpitations, feel like their heart has skipped a beat and sometimes feel giddy.

Valvular heart disease, where one or more of the four valves in the heart gets narrow or starts leaking, is often due to a bout of rheumatic fever, but could also be an infection of heart valves or due to a degenerative condition seen in the elderly, or due to syphilis.

But the most common form of heart trouble is coronary heart disease, when one or more arteries supplying blood to the heart is blocked. Partial blockage results in an angina while a complete blockage results in a heart attack.

"Heart disease is not a rich man's disease anymore, but

coronary heart disease may be more prevalent in urban populations leading a sedentary lifestyle," says Dr Bhagwan Koirala, executive director of the Shahid Gangalal National Heart Centre.

Dr Koirala, a cardiac surgeon, estimates that some 100,000 people in Nepal require some kind of surgery on the heart. But the sad—and accepted—medical fact is that only 50 percent of them will even see a doctor. The centre has one hundred beds and plans to make arrangements for 200 more soon. After initial setbacks, Nepal's only heart centre providing coronary care and cardiac surgery was set up by the government in 1995 on the initiative of a group of doctors who sorely felt the need for a hospital that would exclusively treat people with heart trouble. About 60-90 patients visit the

centre daily. The hospital, which cost around Rs 210 million, was built mostly with money collected from health taxes.

There are plans to add facilities like a catheterisation laboratory for which patients presently have to go to India. Catheterisation is a relatively common procedure similar to angiography, in which catheters (hollow tubes) are placed into the heart to evaluate the anatomy and function of the heart and surrounding blood vessels. So much useful information can be obtained from these tests that they are performed in virtually all patients being considered for cardiac surgery or angioplasty.

How long it will take the hospital to become a fully functioning heart centre will depend on the commitment and quality of care, but Koirala is optimistic that it will happen in

time. "Once started, the increment will not be important. What's important is instilling confidence, faith, and reassurance among patients." Since the first open-heart surgery in Nepal was carried out by Dr Koirala in 1997, facilities have been available at Teaching Hospital and Bir Hospital. But people are watching to see the success rates of the operations. And until they are convinced that these facilities work well, Nepalis will prefer to fly to India for treatment and operations.

"But surgery is not the remedy," stresses Dr Rana who, upon reverting to his old lifestyle after his first bypass, soon had to undergo another operation. The heart club advocates a change in lifestyle to prevent the disease that is a leading cause of death worldwide. Says Rana, echoing Dean Ornitz's words, "If you live like an American, you'll die like an American."

## Better living through chemistry

Genetics plays a part in determining whether one will develop heart disease, but there are some measures everyone can take to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease. As risk factors for heart disease include high blood pressure or hypertension, high cholesterol levels and blood circulation problems, a good place to start is cutting down on grease, cigarettes, salt, caffeine and, surprisingly, anything that exacerbates diabetes.

South Asians like to believe that a vegetarian diet reduces the risk of heart disease because unlike meat and eggs, the ingredients of a veggie diet are cholesterol-free. But this is not strictly true, because South Asian vegetarians often lay on the ghee, butter, cream and coconut oil, all of which contain unsaturated fats. A degree of physical labour may use up all that fat, but a sedentary lifestyle in the urban areas simply does not.

Smoking is an absolute no-no if there is any reason you might be at risk for coronary heart disease. Nicotine increases the heart rate and blood pressure, and damages the inner lining of the blood vessels—and increases clotting of blood inside the arteries, which affects circulation, which, of course, goes right back to the basic function of the heart. Some studies suggest that every cigarette you smoke can shorten your life by five and a half minutes.

Hypertension, commonly called high blood pressure also affects the circulation of blood and the functioning of the heart. People with high blood pressure know they must cut down on salt. But what most of us do not know is that even if you aren't hypertensive, salt can precipitate heart attack by increasing the reactivity of platelets, the tiny blood elements that help blood to clot.

Coffee is the other addictive substance to avoid. Like too much salt, it increases the chances of hypertension. And it doesn't just make you excitable—some compounds in coffee are also suspected to increase cholesterol levels. So if you need a bit of a jolt, drink juice, or even tea.

## Path of Blood Through Heart



Now for the surprising part—be extra careful if you are diabetic. Not too many of us know this, but heart disease is the leading cause of death among diabetics. Even on a tightly-controlled diet, diabetics have higher blood sugar levels than non-diabetics, and that extra sugar contributes to clogged arteries that reduce the heart's blood supply.

And sugar brings us to: alcohol. It's getting to be a dangerously common little bit of information that a drink or two a day keeps heart attacks at bay. Not strictly true. In younger men (under 40) and premenopausal women, excessive alcohol use can cause high blood pressure, irregular heart rhythms, and weakness of the heart muscle, in addition to a host of other problems. If you are older, say, over 60, the benefits of moderate alcohol consumption outweigh the ill-effects, and you can have a peg or two a day without too much harm being done. If it seems like excessive warning, given that the holiday season is around the corner, remember that other cardinal rule of avoiding heart disease: stay happy, take it easy, and talk to your friends. I

## HERE AND THERE

**QUETTA, PAKISTAN**—*Day one of the 'war'.* In the dead of night, death rains from the sky. American military technology, some of it lent to the British, pours down on one of the world's poorest countries. That such a land apparently harboured terror, evil, violence aimed outward is no surprise. It is a truism of human history that the worst places often breed nastiness.

Yet there was a hope—futile, fleeting—that for once, America would not be tempted to use its high tech advantage, that ancient skills of diplomacy and politics might achieve the aims of a bereaved and rightfully angry people. Afghan history is littered with deals made and deals broken, a canvas painted in blood, treachery and the forgotten lives of the innocent. The deal-making and breaking might have taken time, but it might also have worked. The Taliban toppled, at least some of the men accused of the horrors of 11 September killed, brought to book, deprived of safe havens where they can repeat their actions of alluring menace.

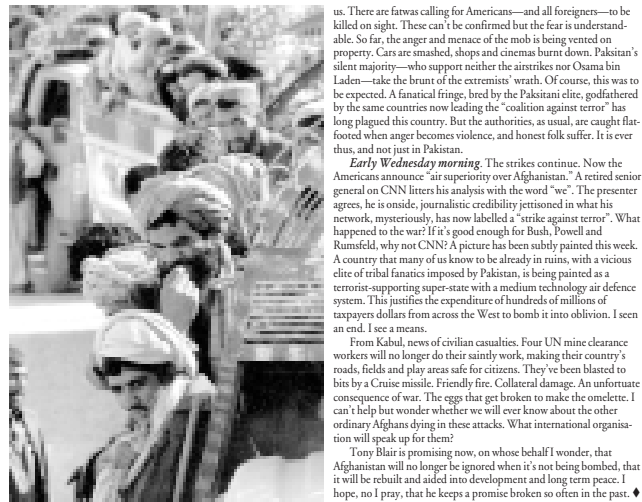
But no. The temptation to press buttons, to soar on silver wings above a blasted landscape, and blast it some more, this triumphed in the early days of the war. Why not? Why shouldn't high-tech, low casualty options be pursued to the utmost? Countless "experts" are trotted out to tell us those answers. I can't help wonder about the cheques from arms manufacturers protruding from back pockets, or at least from the bulging coffers of the think tanks they represent. No matter. These are side issues. Afghans are fleeing in fear out there, taking to battered roads between minefields laid a generation ago, heading for countries that don't want them. Of course, that's only the able bodied, the men and young women who can trudge the distance. Behind them, they leave the sickly, the starving, the widows—Afghanistan has more per capita than most—and those the Taliban retain as human fodder for their defence strategy.

Were there no other choices? Did the magnificent and already decimated land of Afghanistan really deserve a high altitude pounding? Will it work? All that's certain is that we're heading into a time of anxiety, fear and uncertainty.

**Later the same day.** I awake to a whiff of ter gar. No, more than a whiff, my eyes are streaming in my hotel bedroom. Outside, there's shouting, gunfire and panic. My fellow foreign journalists, trapped here in the luxurious Serena Hotel, wonder what's going on and assume the worst. Rumours fly. The mad mullahs are coming to get

# War diary

On the ground zero of world journalism, too many of us are not up to the task.



us. There are fatwas calling for Americans—and all foreigners—to be killed on sight. These can't be confirmed but the fear is understandable. So far, the anger and menace of the mob is being vented on property. Cars are smashed, shops and cinemas burnt down. Pakistan's silent majority—who support neither the airstrikes nor Osama bin Laden—take the brunt of the extremists' wrath. Of course, this was to be expected. A fanatical fringe, bred by the Pakistani elite, godfathered by the same countries now leading the "coalition against terror" has long plagued this country. But the authorities, as usual, are caught flat-footed when anger becomes violence, and honest folk suffer. It is ever thus, and not just in Pakistan.

**Early Wednesday morning.** The strikes continue. Now the Americans announce "air superiority over Afghanistan." A retired senior general on CNN litters his analysis with the word "we". The presenter agrees, he is inside, journalistic credibility jeffersoned in what his network, mysteriously, has now labelled a "strike against terror". What happened to the war? It's a good enough for Bush, Powell and Rumsfeld, why not CNN? A picture has been subtly painted this week. A country that many of us know to be almost in ruins, with a vicious elite of tribal fanatics imposed by Pakistan, is being painted as a terrorist-supporting super-state with a medium technology air defence system. This justifies the expenditure of hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars from across the West to bomb it into oblivion. I see an end. I see a means.

From Kabul, news of civilian casualties. Into UN mine clearance workers will no longer do their saintly work, making their country's roads, fields and play areas safe for citizens. They've been blasted to bits by a Cruise missile. Friendly fire. Collateral damage. An unfortunate consequence of war. The eggs that get broken to make the omelette. I can't help but wonder whether we will ever know about the other ordinary Afghans dying in these attacks. What international organisation will speak up for them?

Tony Blair is promising now, on whose behalf I wonder, that Afghanistan will no longer be ignored when it's not being bombed, that it will be rebuilt and aided into development and long term peace. I hope, no I pray, that he keeps a promise broken so often in the past. ♦

by DANIEL LAK



## Winning to lose

Women activists are furious. The 11th Muluki Ain (Civil Code) Amendment Bill, popularly called the Property Rights Bill, was approved by the Lower House of Parliament on Tuesday amidst a boycott by the CPN (UML). The main opposition argued that the Bill undermines the equality guaranteed by the constitution. If the Bill becomes law in its present form, it will allow women to inherit equal property once they are 16, but they will have to return it if they marry. Currently women can inherit parental property—if they have reached 35 and are unmarried. The government decision to go ahead with the Bill as it is signals a reversal of an earlier decision of parliament's Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Committee to allow women to retain parental property even after they get married. A study carried out by the Committee around the country earlier this year indicated that more than 90 percent of the people surveyed demanded an amendment to the present system of division of parental property.

## Relief to farmers

The government this week announced a relief package for farmers in the Eastern Development Region who were affected by a prolonged drought during the monsoon in June/July and by heavy rains last week. Around 74,000 ha of land across 16 districts of the region remained uncultivated during the recent rainy season, when much of the area went dry. Worse, the paddy crop was planted late and recently inundated by torrential rains. The drought, which, according to government statistics, has affected about 62,000 farmers, is expected to reduce paddy production by about 230,000 metric tonnes. Relief measures include free seeds for vegetables and a 50 percent subsidy on wheat, lentil and oil seeds. The Rs 156 million relief package is to be footed by the Agriculture and Co-operative Ministry with assistance from the Water Resources Ministry and the Agriculture Development Bank.

## Education Act

The Lower House approved the Seventh Amendment to the Education Act last week. The new law is expected to bring about far-reaching changes in school education. It will require teachers to acquire licences, a move aimed at ensuring there is some sort of quality control among those in the teaching profession—one that is said to be made up largely of those that have failed in party politics and also in their academics. Many teachers are also said to have fake academic certificates. New entrants to the profession, both in public and private schools, will need a teaching licence before joining the school system. Government teachers, estimated to number around 150,000, will be issued temporary teaching licences within six months of the law being enacted, but they will be required to obtain a permanent one within five years. Failure to do so will lead to compulsory retirement, although if the teachers in question are in permanent positions, they will receive benefits through normal retirement procedures.

The law also seeks to give school authorities more power. It will allow schools to expel teachers for failing to fulfil basic duties; being involved in politics; coming to work intoxicated and taking unreported leave for more than 15 days.

Another major change will be that public schools, that are henceforth to be called "community schools", will be allowed to levy fees at the middle and higher secondary levels. In effect this means that only primary education will be free. Private schools will now be called "institutional schools" and be brought under the tax net, registered either as trusts or as companies. Private schools will lose all privileges—like tax concessions. These schools will also have to comply with a ceiling on fees.

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## BALDING?



# Labour pain



HEMLATA RAI

October usually means good business for Nepal's garment industry. Not this year. Domestic labour disputes (sometimes with Maoist undertones), clients abroad losing confidence in the sector's performance, and the economic downturn in most major markets are killing the 15-year-old industry.

Last year, the garment industry, which provides some 50,000 jobs, was the highest foreign exchange earner in the manufacturing segment with exports worth \$164 million (up from \$126 million the previous year). This year, the picture is gloomy. The first six months saw an 8 percent drop in garment exports, and with

Dasain approaching, workers are worried about getting laid off.

Garments, carpets and tourism are Nepal's highest foreign exchange earners and generate the most jobs for semi-skilled and unskilled workers. But all three sectors are also prone to labour disputes.

Workers in these industries are mainly youth with generic skills who probably sense the lack of job security and advancement possibilities as they can be easily replaced. That makes them a volatile workforce. The final blow could come from their trade unions tie up with the Maoists. "These sectors are economically strategic to bringing the government to its knees," said Narayan Manandhar of the Industrial Relations

Forum at the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI).

If the Maoist strategy is to bring the country to economic ruin, it appears to be working better than they could have expected. For their part, the carpet and garment industries are shutting shop since they feel that fulfilling Maoist demands for cash will destroy the price advantage that cheap labour gives them in the international market. "Fearing more unrest and disputes, many enterprises are not renewing orders from international customers," said Vinod Kumar Nepal of the Central Carpet Industries Association (CCIA).

In June, the Maoist-affiliated trade unions in the garment and

carpet industries submitted a charter of demands to the government that included doing away with the piece-rate system of payment, in which wages are paid according to how much and how fast workers work. The unions wanted to fix a minimum wage of Rs 3000, a dearness allowance of Rs 1000 and a rent allowance of Rs 1000. They also demanded a reduction in total weekly working hours to 40, and an increase in compensation awards for accidents by 50 percent.

The management in many factories signed the agreements but at the same time also started shutting down to avoid complying with them. In September alone, 10 garment manufacturers that employed between 300 and 700 workers pulled down their shutters.

'We are told to contact them in November, but there is no guarantee that the factory will re-open and there will be work', said Tulsī Ram Karki, who was laid off from Cotton Comfort Pvt Ltd, one of the largest readymade garment manufacturers in Kathmandu.

From all indications, Cotton Comfort and its six sub-contractors, like others in the business, have closed down temporarily in the hope the situation will improve as the government-Maoist dialogue advances to Round Three. But other factors have now come into play. According to Puskha

Dev Panta, vice-president of the Garment Association-



**Carpets and garments until recently meant jobs and foreign exchange. Now the two industries are in big trouble.**

Nepal, until two weeks ago less than 15 percent of the garment factories were operating, and now more of them are heading for closure. "Earlier, we ourselves were hesitant in taking new orders because of the aggressive campaigning by the workers supported by the Maoists. Now, our clients (the Americans) are holding back on orders fearing recession following the 11 September bombing," he said.

The outlook is even bleaker for the carpet industry. Exports were already down to 2.2 million square metres in 2000/2001, compared to 2.5 million square metres in 1999/2000. The sector had been through its spate of troubles – it couldn't diversify production fast enough to cement its market reach and had also felt the effects of bad publicity about child labour and the use of environment-unfriendly chemicals. After child worker-free labelling was introduced, the market had started to revive, but was then hit hard by the Maoists' demands

The FNCCI says that all wool product exports, including pashmina, were down by 50 percent last year compared to the year before. Given the economic downturn globally, business is unlikely to pick up, which means more job cuts. In 1993/1994, when carpets were "hot", the sector employed about 300,000 weavers. Now, less than half of that—about 120,000—have jobs weaving carpets.

"If the employers had agreed to the demands of the legally recognised labour unions (which themselves comply with the Labour Act and Regulations) they could have saved both their business and our jobs," said Hari Dutta Joshi of the Independent Textile and Garment Workers' Union of Nepal.

But that may only be wishful thinking now. Tougher times are ahead post-11 September. About 80 percent of the garment exports from Nepal

were to the US, and even carpet manufacturers were hoping to expand into the American market to get by. The Central Carpet Industries Association (CCIA) says that 24 export manufacturers in the Valley had closed down within 15 days last month after the Maoist trade unions pressed their demands. Almost 30,000 labourers, including weavers, spinners and carding workers, are left without jobs. If the situation does not improve in the next six months, about 100 more factories will shut down.

It is not just individual workers and investors who will be affected if these two industries grind to a halt. The majority of the labourers laid off are usually breadwinners in their families. A 1998 survey by the Centre for Governance and Development Studies says that 86 percent of garment workers support six or more family members—large-scale lay-offs will mean entire families will have to find new means of supporting their members.

The trouble is, these workers hardly have other alternatives. Around 90 percent of garment workers have only a School Leaving Certificate or less. A 1998 survey by the CCIA found that displaced carpet workers had gone back to agriculture or opted for employment in India or West Asia. But the agriculture sector does not expand fast enough to absorb a growing workforce and so young people are being compelled to leave the country—often to work in unsavory conditions.

Even the threat of war in the Gulf has not slowed down the flow of Nepali workers there. Last month alone more than 8,500 workers obtained permission to go the Gulf countries. They will continue to go to India, South Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia if they cannot find employment at home. And given the present state of Nepali industry, there seems no way to reverse the trend. ♦

\_\_\_\_\_

## NATION

## SOMEWHERE IN NEPAL

## What Kathmandu can learn from Kabul

It is reassuring to be reminded that Nepal still has a foreign policy and that some people actually care about it. Moments after Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba offered Nepal's airspace and facilities to the United States in the global war on terrorism, words like non-alignment, *panchshil* and peaceful co-existence made their way back to the political lexicon.

For most of the past 12 years, Nepali leaders have ensured that our international posture remained an extension of the country's overriding domestic priority: the acquisition and preservation of political power at all costs. From the seeds of the restoration of multiparty democracy sown at the Chaksbati conclave to the Silguri conference on the course of the Maoist insurgency, every domestic political move has received the imprimatur of the region's behemoth. The popularity of phrases like "All roads lead to Delhi" in the political discourse sums up the urgency with which we hold the external dynamics of Nepal's internal balance of power. To be sure, criticism of the south has proved a winnable electoral strategy for all political parties. Patriotism is measured in the power of the adjectives used against the domi-

neering attitudes of *babus* and *bibijis*. Once in power, however, the survival of every party or coalition has been inextricably linked with the strength of the sanctification granted by South

Block. If Nepal's domestic and foreign policies have often looked like identical twins, it is because of the special relations carefully forged in 1950 and reinforced four decades later.

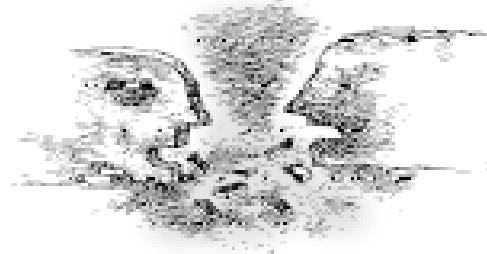
But things may be about to change. The left is incensed by the audacity of our right honourable prime minister to abandon Nepal's traditional foreign policy tenets perfected during the most vilified three decades of the country's modern history. Even if Deuba was so determined to commit this sacrilege, how dare he not have consulted the people? Foreign policy is not something like, say, paying off your marriage debts. The government asserts that it is dead focused on the global challenges of the future. In a worded world, there and challenges will come in entirely different forms and shapes. Most of the time they won't even have attributes. The war against shadowy terror forces cannot, therefore, be premised on traditional notions of the sovereignty of nation-states. (Even in traditional terms, when the British invaded Nepal, they were not on the same side, who do our comrades want to do remain non-aligned between Al Qaeda and the 'civilised world'?)

There is growing concern that Deuba's hasty hospitality may have unwittingly pushed Nepal to the brink of becoming another Afghanistan. If the Americans wanted our airspace, land or even

Phewa Tal, the argument from the left goes, they would have asked for it. What the comrades miss is the fact that the rules of the cold war do not apply here. President George W. Bush has been preparing Americans—and the rest of the world—for a long struggle against terrorism, one that will include diplomatic and economic measures as well as military operations, and probably take years. Some battles will be won in the full public glare, other successes will remain secret until they pass the CIA's declassification deadline. With the stealth of the battle plans laid out so clearly, you wouldn't expect Deuba to tell the opposition what the Americans did or didn't ask for.

The left continues to spew vitriol that the United States brought all this upon itself by creating the World's bin Laden, to make sure the Soviets bled to death in Afghanistan. But doesn't this provide all the more reason for the Americans to clean up the mess they created? The CIA tried to do that by buying back some of the Stinger missiles it had donated to the mujahideen during the Reagan administration, but it didn't work. Since the scourge has spread across the world in the years since the collapse of the Soviet empire, isn't it vital for all governments to join hands? As the retribution-versus-root cause debate continues, the construction of a broad coalition against terrorism

**This monumental reconfiguration of international architecture will affect Nepal.**



has allowed countries to readjust their foreign and domestic policies in very convenient, if often brazen ways. The Russians have an eye on Chechnya. The Turks have theirs on the Kurds. Sections of our mainstream parties already have drawn up the outlines of a counter-offensive against the Maoists. How swiftly the strategic equations in South Asia have changed can be discerned by the way India and Pakistan find themselves on the same side against international terrorism while still accusing each other of fomenting it.

Nepal cannot expect to remain untouched by this monumental

reconfiguration of the international architecture. Even if our intelligence apparatus were the dumbest in the world, that still wouldn't deprive us of our rightful role in the international arena. Granted we may not be able to teach other governments how to run effective operations to penetrate terrorist cells. But we sure can learn a lesson or two for our good. Afghanistan, a multiethnic, multilingual, landlocked and mountainous country, may be a good place to begin with. With Mohammed Zahir Shah, out of the throne, and the country, for

more than three decades, playing a prominent role in Afghan national reconciliation, we should know how to straighten out our national priorities. For a country that has more *janjatis* than *jillas*, Nepal could find in an Afghan-style *loya jirga* a useful way of evolving the national consensus we have been resolving to reach all these years. And the best part is that our tribal elders can continue squabbling over the direction our foreign policy should or shouldn't take without being restrained by the party whip. ♦



## German Agency for Technical Co-operation

### Rural Development Programme



The starting of the Rural Development Programme (RDP), implemented by GTZ and supported by the German Government (BMZ), is intended to stimulate the rural population to improve their socio-economic situation. RDP's main areas of activity are the promotion of self-help groups, rural transport infrastructure development, strengthening NGOs and local government bodies as well as economic and employment promotion.

RDP invites applications from qualified Nigerian candidates for the following posts:

**Rural Transport Infrastructure Development Policy Advisor and Business Process**

**Major responsibilities of the post:**

- Promote "Green/Road Concept" at national level.
- Acquisition of new investments (especially INDO/NGO) from private sector and facilitating of existing contracts at policy level.

**Required qualification and experience:**

Essential	Desirable
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bachelor of Engineering (B.Sc. Eng.) or Civil/Designated by Rural Engineering Council with/without in Engineering or Economics or post graduate studies in development planning field or recognised certificate/diploma/degree in transport planning/management/INDO/NGO years/practical experience in planning and implementation of rural road projects.</li> <li>- Practical experience in government procedures and contract regulations.</li> <li>- Proven ability to prepare convincing technical and financial proposals, respective grant contract documents and project proposals.</li> <li>- Good communication and policy dialogue skills.</li> <li>- Marketing communication and negotiation skills.</li> <li>- Fluency in both English and Nigerian</li> <li>- Good economic skills to consider applications for common office practice.</li> <li>- Age between 30-45.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sound overview and in-depth knowledge of the national and regional road transport sector and ongoing activities in road.</li> <li>- Knowledge of "Green/Road Concept".</li> <li>- Good knowledge in German language.</li> </ul>

The post will be filled in line with best skills principle.

The salary and social benefits will correspond to the GTZ rate applicable to national staff.

Interested candidates are requested to send their application and CV (including passport size photograph, contact information and contact addresses of three referees) enclosed with copy of their certificates in an envelope marked with the post applied for latest by 1 November 2010 to:

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## BIZ NEWS

## Tourist count

Tourist count in September was another bad month for tourism, all arrivals were down by almost 29 percent, and that of Indian visitors by a whopping 44 percent. What is more worrying is that the Nepal Tourism Board's numbers compare the changes with the year before (2000), when tourism numbers had dropped by about nine percent. Nepal's tourism averaged at around 350,000 until the Visit Nepal Year (1998), when the numbers had reached 463,684. The growth spilled over into 1999—there was a six percent increase in overall arrivals. But the industry took a downturn since the hijacking of the IC814 flight in December 1999, and recovery has been very slow.

There was some hope in the first three months of 2001, when overall arrivals grew by about 15 percent. April arrivals were more than last year, but there were some signs of recovery in May. The numbers nose-dived after the 1 June massacre. This season, there has been a similar story—it looked good and then came the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. The resulting cancellations in travel plans worldwide, and South and East Asia in particular, has reduced the number of tourists to Nepal to a trickle. With the arrival arrivals (from January to September) already down by about 10 percent, and Indian arrivals are down by 26 percent, a total recovery looks almost impossible. It may only be a matter of time before the travel industry begins to downsize.

## Indrawati hydro to go public

The promoters of the Indrawati hydro-project are planning to issue Rs 140 million worth of shares to the general public. Preliminary work for the issue is underway and company sources say a formal announcement is imminent. The 7.5 MW project is expected to begin power production later this year. The project, estimated to cost \$19 million upon completion, has power selling agreements with the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA). It will sell electricity at Rs 3 per unit during the monsoon and Rs 4.26 in the dry season. The NEA will pay for 70 percent of the power purchase amount in convertible currency for 10 years and in Nepali Rupees thereafter. The company has a 25-year power selling agreement with the NEA.

## Temple Tiger

Temple Tiger Jungle Lodge has been awarded the Tourism for Tomorrow Award 2001 award by British Airways in recognition of its contribution to protecting wildlife and conservation areas. The prize is given to activities and projects that promote sustainable tourism. Temple Tiger was one of 141 applicants for the award from 59 countries. Temple Tiger is one of seven companies that run camps within the Royal Chitwan National Park, and was awarded for its support of anti-poaching activities, treatment of wastewater and other sustainable tourism activities.

## Beauty &amp; compassion

Under a unique sales drive underway since January this year, Johnson & Johnson Nepal gives Rs 2 from the sale of every pH 5.5 beauty care product—facial wash and shampoos—to support the upkeep of orphans at Bal Mandir. The company handed over the second instalment of Rs 85,000 last week.

## San tro

Hyundai has a special deal for Dassin shoppers—a gold coin with every San tro you buy. Avco International says the new Santros come with a face-lift and more bells and whistles: brake lamps, clear lens fog lamp, body coloured door handles, new tail gate and Euro II specifications.



Weekly Internet Poll #4

## Should the government lift restrictions on Nepali women going to the Gulf to work?

There should be strict scrutiny on the nature of work they are going for, unlike their male counterparts. We do not want our chelis to be abused, killed or tortured. We can take the example of the Philippine government, which is very protective about its citizens working abroad. Women working should not be discouraged, but the nature of the job and their safety should be the major concern.

Dr Krishna Kaphle

I feel sad and somewhat guilty when I hear about sufferings of our brothers and sisters in the Gulf. They don't respect women there, that's obvious. It is also our responsibility especially government. Why can't the government punish manpower agencies that exploit Nepalis?

Tilak Raj Limbu

Parallel to lifting the restrictions, the government and the private sector should create more employment opportunities for both women and men right here in Nepal. Women and men should be able to go anywhere as per their free will, restricting someone's freedom to do so is not the job of the government, neither is it an answer to the underlying problems of this country. Besides, do we really trust the government to protect women's interests in this country while scores of women are being sold to the brothels in India right under the watchful eyes of our government?

Manish Pandey

If we want to treat women as equals, let us. Of course, there must have been a few experiences were women working

abroad have been sexually abused or exploited but this must be made clear to whoever is wanting to go to work there. It is up to the women, but government and private sector should also be involved to make the whole environment safe.

Manjit Rai

Nepali women going to the Gulf countries to work and to earn money is not a good idea. Especially those who go on a housemaid visa. The intention of bringing women to their country is mainly for sex. It does not matter whether they are married or not. It is hard even for men, working hard under the scorching sun and ruining their health. Working in the Gulf is not a good idea.

Limbu, Taplejung

Government should not lift the restriction on Nepali women going to the Gulf. Do you know Nepali boys are also doing there? But yet lots of Nepalis are still going there to work. Most don't know what they have to do, and what is the working environment.

JP Rijal

No. Sending our women to work in the gulf is like sending them to brothels. If the government is responsible for the national identity and self-respect, this ban should not be lifted, but more restricted. Find jobs for Nepali women in Nepal.

"Swabhimani Nepal"

Women must be free to go, but no trouble or expense should be spared to prepare them for what they will face there, and

frankly in most cases it will be miserable. Let them know beyond any doubt, that it is not just hard work they face, but quite likely some sort of sexual assault as well.

Capt Lama

It doesn't matter whether or not the government lifts the restriction. Government and the public, both are going their own way. Restriction for what purpose? Our women are well enough. A weak woman cannot think about crossing the border. Not even women, a weak man also fears going abroad. Let the river flow. Everyone can take care of themselves.

Elvina, Tokyo

I have worked in the Gulf for past six years. I know the condition of Gulf countries very well. There is a lot of forced sex with the women, otherwise they are punished or threatened. Please don't let your country's women go to the Gulf. I have seen a lot of Nepali women suffering. Send them to European countries instead, conditions are much better here.

Wang Lee, Sweden

Why can't the woman who is going to a Gulf country decide what is right or wrong for herself? Everyone has equal right to freedom to do anything he/she wishes.

Pradyumna Khadka

It is quite clear that one cannot make 21st century women kitchen-bound.

## ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

## On the tourist trail



Perhaps we need to hand tourism over to people who know what they are doing.

In the last couple of weeks this Beed has received a number of requests to write about the future of Nepal's tourism. More than a few people think it might now look as bleak as it did twelve years ago, during the Indian trade embargo. The problem with Nepal's tourism is this: we have a great product, but have never had a government that could formulate visionary policies, or a private sector that understood how the industry ideally works. Like water resources, we keep talking about the potential of tourism, but don't do so openly enough to think of long-term strategies.

The industry is facing a crisis—operations could be shut, banks could be foreclosed, and hundreds of people could be laid off in hotels or travel agencies. The grand old years of tourism—1992-1994 were extremely profitable for operators in the industry because of limited supply and high demand. Nepal had the capacity to take in about half-a-million tourists and received 350,000. Around this time the first wave of reforms was on and the country and the economy were suitably euphoric. All came together in the form of high earnings per tourist. And then, in 1995, the slide began with capacity enhancement. Now we are in a position to service nearly 1.5 million tourists, while demand is just one-third of that. Naturally, prices tumble and with them, profitability. Returns on investment in the industry have slipped to about one percent. One percent—it does not require a financial whiz to know that something is very wrong.

Enough has been said by all, including your Beed, about the government's failure on all fronts, whether handling tourism or the policy level or the flying debacle that is RNAC. Now it is time to say something no one likes to hear—the private sector needs to get its act together. The larger investments in tourism have been in either operating airlines or hotels. Domestic airlines have been working on a lease-and-operate strategy, so if something goes wrong, shareholders don't really feel the impact. If one were to examine the shareholders' funds and compare those figures with the value of assets the airline firm is operating, it becomes clear that the financing agency bears most of the losses. The same goes for hotels, where investments are more often borrowings rather than promoters' funds. With public issues and creative financing mechanisms, core promoters recoup their initial



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## ECONOMY



from p. 1

There are just too many reasons for the problems nagging the industry. First is overcapacity of seats, especially to the main hubs and the tourist routes, which has triggered steep undercutting in the already low fares.

Necon's latest rates, sent to travel agents two weeks ago, offer a mountain flight in an ATR plane for as low as \$1400. In a full-occupancy scenario this translates into a ride to Mount Everest and back for as little as \$32, almost 60 percent below the government-approved rates. It is a different matter that passengers may not actually get tickets that cheap because the travel agents pocket the difference.

The problem with all operators is that they are already deep in debt and commitments that it is almost impossible to close shop and walk out. If low tourism is one reason for the downturn the other—larger—problem is government, and the incomplete liberalisation of domestic aviation. By law, the government fixes the fares, which have not been revised

since 1993 while prices of everything from spares, insurance and fuel, and parking and landing fees have increased several times. The insurance premiums have also doubled since the last fare revision—not to mention the new coverage airlines have to seek to protect themselves from possible terrorist attacks.

Some of the existing domestic fares are just unbelievably low and operators say they don't cover the costs even at 100 percent occupancy. One example is the rate from Biratnagar to Tumlingtar, which costs Rs 400 for a 20-minute flight. Because the rates, especially to the remote destinations are so unrealistic, most private operators stay away from them, forcing the government-run Royal Nepal to service the routes—and dig deeper into its losses.

Government fixes the fares and airlines have freedom to manoeuvre rates within a 30-percent range above and below the approved rates. Now, even that does not seem to matter because the companies are desperate to pay for anything as long as it ensures a sustained cash flow. "The rates and the

undercutting now underway is not doing any good to anyone but when survival is at stake and cash flows are low many don't have a choice," says Upendra Karki of Cosmic Air. "Essentially private airlines make money by flying tourists, now there are not many of them to fly."

The increasing losses and the rush to keep cash boxes ringing could be a recipe for potential disaster the moment cost cutting concerns override security and safety spending. The government does not seem aware of the impending crisis. The spokesman at the Tourism Ministry did not know if the government was doing anything to avert the situation. "There has been no decision on revising the fares yet and I can't tell you if the Ministry is working on it," he said.

"We will operate as long as the direct costs are met," said Birendra Baner of Buddha Air. He added that his smaller aircraft have given him more operational flexibility but increases in running costs threaten to be back-breaking. "Tourism collapses, then we'll be the next to go because whatever we can today comes

## Tailspin

from tourists."

The overall tourism situation looks bleak. Pre-WTC attacks arrivals in September were down by 29 percent; the Indian share had gone down even further—by almost 44 percent. Large tour operators and hotels had their first round of cancellations after the attacks in New York and Washington. Now with the outbreak of war, more bad news may be coming their way. "We don't know

how bad things could get, it's wait and see for now," a hotel operator said. Flying in Nepal is hardly a luxury; only 58 of the country's 75 districts have road connections and many of them are motorable only in the dry seasons. It is more of a daily necessity and the one reason the government justifies its grip on the fares and why there are such cheap rates for flights to remote destinations. "It's all right to have low fares but

that should not be at the expense of the private investors," a private operator told us. "The one way that can work is to subsidise the fares but pay the difference between our operational cost and revenues given us a fair return at pricing in sectors where people can pay."

Old habits die hard in the bureaucracy, which can sit on vital commercial decisions for years such as the issue of fare revision. Billionaires are also less interested to push such a decision, unlike, say, one for leasing a jet for Royal Nepal.

"They tell us they are aware of the problems we're facing but just don't decide," says Pun, who has already injected about over Rs 70 million into Necon. "But there is a limit to how far an investor can go."

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WORLDWIDE EXPRESS

# College comes to Dhulikhel—and the country



ALL PHOTOS: ALOK TUMBHAHANGPHEY

**ALOK TUMBHAHANGPHEY**  
When Nepal's first university was established in 1959 it heralded a new chapter in Nepal's history. Within years Tribhuvan University was plagued by the ill legions in government-controlled institutions. By now, TU is not a total failure, but it is a measure of students' discontent that in five short years another institution has earned more respect from academics, students and parents than TU was able to garner in its four decades of existence.

It was in 1985 when Dr Suresh Raj Sharma helped found the Kathmandu Valley Campus in

Pulchowk. As it turned out it was just the first rung of the ladder he intended to climb. "The education scenario was terrible," says Dr Sharma. "There were only a few good colleges that provided quality education. Whatever few resources educational establishments had at their disposal were not being used properly. We felt we had to do something about it or the generations to come would blame us for not providing them with quality education."

The Kathmandu Valley Campus was initially affiliated to the Tribhuvan University and offered Intermediate in Science courses, but

unlike other colleges in the Valley, it was very selective and wanted only the best. Dr Sharma says that the aim was to eventually establish a university. Five years later, in November 1991, Kathmandu University was chartered by an Act of Parliament. A 28-member University Senate was formed to lay down the policies that would govern KU, with the then Prime Minister Gijya Prasad Koirala as Chancellor and Dr Suresh Raj Sharma as Vice-Chancellor. "What we had in mind was academic autonomy, but in a completely public property that would not be for profit," says Dr Sharma.

KU began its own Intermediate

in Science course in July 1992, when the School of Science was opened in Tangal. After that, faculties were added swiftly and easily. In 1993, the School of Management started functioning in Baneswore offering an MBA programme. The following year, the academic council decided to introduce three-year degree programmes for BA and BSc and honours, the BE, and the BPharm.

That same year the School of Engineering was established at the university's new grounds in Dhulikhel. And this is where the story gets really interesting for it

**Kathmandu University may be the answer to Nepal's educational needs, and a whole host of other problems as well.**



provides a perfect example of a symbiotic partnership between an outside institution and a local community.

About 30 km southwest of Kathmandu on the outskirts of the Valley lies the picturesque Dhulikhel municipality. Dhulikhel is not just another municipality. What sets it apart is the commitment its citizens have shown in taking their area forward in the field of education. Until 1990 there was only one high school in the municipality and a huge portion of the students were failing the School Leaving Certificate exams. "The Nagar Panchayat in the pre-

democracy days and the municipality after 1991 always prioritized education. We were enthusiastic but lacked the resources. We desperately wanted to do something about it," says Brij Prasad Shrestha, mayor of Dhulikhel. Shrestha, an independent candidate, is serving his third term as mayor of the municipality and is also on the KU Senate.

At the same time, KU's founders were looking for land in a place that would suit their goals and ambitions. They looked around and found a perfect match in Dhulikhel. The municipality was so happy at the prospect of having an

institution of higher education, that they did more than just give KU their approval. "We made a commitment to the university that we would not only provide the land it needed, but also build the basic infrastructure—roads, water supply, and electricity," says Mayor Shrestha. The university received over 3.5 ha of land and 50 percent of the municipality's annual budget, a little over Rs 3 million.

In return KU reserves a certain number of seats for students from the area. But the university's real impact has been much more than just that. Students from Dhulikhel got into the KU but the course was so difficult, it was impossible for them to do well. Realising the problem wasn't with the students but with the education system, the Dhulikhel municipality and KU

also committed to maintaining high standards and making students aware of the value and aims of a good education. Today, KU graduates are all over the Valley, working as nurses and teachers, and in market research organisations, consulting firms and in IT. Many even start their own firms.

And Shrestha joined the MBA programme in 1998 and was surprised by the amount of work he had to put in and by how much the teaching-learning process excited him. "It was all so interactive and practical that later when I started working I felt confident and ready to take on the world," he says.

Shrestha recently founded a consulting firm which offers

management, engineering, arts (which even offers a BA in music), education, and medical science. Its affiliates offer bachelor's degrees in social work, medicine, management, environment and development studies. KU's MBA and BBA programs are reputed to be the best in the country and 12 colleges in Pokhara, Bhairahawa, Nepalgunj and Kathmandu have been granted affiliation. Tribhuvan University had been mandated to modernise the nation, but 80 percent of the students it trained were in the humanities, and the technical manpower all had to be trained outside the country for more than two decades. KU seems to be taking on this role now, with its diverse course offerings.

While expanding faculties, KU is also committed to maintaining high standards and making students aware of the value and aims of a good education. Today, KU graduates are all over the Valley, working as nurses and teachers, and in market research organisations, consulting firms and in IT. Many even start their own firms.

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Shrestha recently founded a consulting firm which offers



managerial and IT advice.

Ayush Karki, a third-year computer science student at KU, says he knows why the university is doing so well. Apart from the teaching style, he attributes its success to the absence of political unions, which he believes, allows students there to focus on learning, unlike what often happens at Tribhuvan University.

The KU campus is well equipped in terms of infrastructure, grounds, hostels for boys and girls,

and staff quarters. Resources for students are improving every year—over 300 of the university's 1,850 students are on scholarship. There is not much the teachers can complain about. They are given ample opportunities to go abroad, and come back better prepared in their subjects.

All this costs money and certainly KU is much more expensive than Tribhuvan University, but officials say it is all accounted for and put back into the



school. "Every paiza students pay goes exclusively into their education, and the government funds go for physical development. We have to keep a certain standard so that the market can judge us," says the vice-chancellor.

The other major advantage is in numbers. Unlike TU, which has over 190,000 students, KU says it will never enrol more than 2,500 at a time, to maintain the high 1:10 teacher-student ratio.

What is most encouraging is

that almost all the KU alumni we spoke to seemed determined not to leave the country. Having got a good university education here, they say, makes them more optimistic about the future of the country. So they stay here and utilise their skills. Whether they are computer engineers or environmental engineers, managers or musicians, KU's students form a small but growing workforce of homegrown talent that Nepal urgently needs.



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# Engineering success

**Pulchowk's Institute of Engineering may not look it, but it has achieved enough to crow about.**

receiving their degree.

Despite its success, the IOE has to fight many odds. The government established the institute to produce technical manpower trained in the country. Students here pay subsidised fees, but given the tiny annual grant, extracurricular activities are a dream. In recent years, the institute has received Rs 40 million annually from the government, 93 percent of which went to faculty and administration salaries. There are 270 faculty members in the departments of architecture, civil, electrical, electronics, computer, and mechanical engineering, the pure sciences, and the social sciences. The remaining Rs 3 million or so had to be stretched to cover everything else. And it was stretched pretty thin. As a result, students who, a few years ago, would happily attend the IOE, decided to go to other, better-equipped—but not necessarily better—colleges in Nepal and abroad.

Worried, the Pulchowk Campus started its own fund-raising activities. Half the students now pay Rs 30,000 per semester, and those who can prove they need support pay the old subsidised fee of Rs 985 per term. As a result, the campus has raised its annual budget to over Rs 50 million. The IOE also receives support from donors under the Engineering Education Project sponsored by the World Bank, and the Canadian and Swiss governments.

The college, which will celebrate its 30th anniversary next year, has bucked the trend of increasing unemployment among engineering graduates in the country, with talent scouts from the USA, India, Thailand, and Malaysia queuing up to hire its students even before they have graduated. IOE graduates don't all go abroad. Dr Pradhan is quick to point out that even those who stay in Nepal find jobs within a year of

income is still spent on non-academic areas. Now, salaries account for 55 percent of the annual budget, and there is more allocation of funds to pay faculty overtime in an attempt to motivate, cajole, and sometimes bribe them to provide light and focus more on providing the students at IOE quality education.

The IOE requires teachers to take fewer classes per week than the

Tribhuvan University and pays a lot more for extra classes taught. The Institute also allows its employees to try their hand at engineering consultancy and research projects off-campus. It has seven research and consultancy centres that offer technical services to national and international clients. Teachers routed to such work through the IOE get to keep 65 percent of the fee, and the rest goes to the campus' kitty. ♦

## IT at the Institute

IOE watchers say there is no telling how good the school could become if it had more resources. They point to the success of the campus' computing and networking centre as a clever way of making use of limited resources. The campus has 70 laboratories and workshops, all networked through the campus' Computer Centre. The centre, which is open every day 8am-8pm, did not go through an Internet Service Provider, but instead invested in its own V-SAT (Very Small Aperture Terminal) to provide broadband Internet access to students, faculty and administrative staff and charging them a minimal fee of Rs 250 per month.

Everyone at the Institute benefits from this, but one programme in particular is really only possible because of the computing facilities available here—the Department of Electronics and Computer Engineering began offering a four-year undergraduate programme in computer engineering in 1998. There's plenty of demand for something like this—close to 90 percent of all applicants say computer science is their first academic preference. Most are disappointed, as there are only 48 places in the programme every year, half of them reserved for government scholarships. But even the lucky full fee-paying students who get in get a relatively good deal. Standard fees for the degree are Rs 122,000 in the year of admission and a two-yearly semester fee of Rs 36,000. About 60 percent of the students enrolled for the computer science degree are from outside the Valley, which is encouraging, although less than 10 percent are women.

The department has a 25-strong faculty, which makes the student-teacher ratio extremely favourable. Among the teachers are two PhDs and 15 Masters of Computer Science.

It is not a huge start, but it is important that the country's premier engineering school now trains students in the technology of the future. There are job opportunities for graduates now, but since so many institutes are producing computer science graduates, accommodating all of them in the not-so-developed IT industry is difficult, says Dr Subarna Shukla, deputy head of the Department of Electronics and Computer Engineering. A computer graduate starting out with the government starts at about Rs 9,000, but can also work part-time in the private sector.

The first batch of computer engineering graduates from Pulchowk Campus will enter the job market this year. From December this year the department will also offer a two-year Masters of Science in Information and Communication Engineering, for 16 students per year. Graduates in electronic, computer or electrical engineering will be eligible to apply for the course.

## HEMLATA RAI

Nepal's newspapers and magazines are laden with attractive offers from engineering colleges, scholarships, discounts, flashy course names and big promises of quality education. Through all this, Nepal's oldest engineering school, the Institute of Engineering (IOE), popularly known as Pulchowk Campus, maintains its composure. In 1998, Thailand's Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) ranked Asian technical schools on the basis of the performance of their alumni at AIT. Pulchowk campus came in eighth. The following year, the IOE came in fifth and last year it was ranked third among all the engineering colleges that send their graduates to AIT for higher studies.

It isn't surprising that this is one

of the most popular institutes of higher education in Nepal. Competition to enrol here is stiff—over seven students take the entrance exam for each of the 370 seats at the college. Those who perform best at the exams go to Pulchowk, the others go to its three associate campuses in Dharan, Pokhara and Kathmandu's Thapathali Campus, and six affiliated private campuses in the Valley. Those who do not make the grade pursue their engineering dreams at other private schools.

"The high position of this campus in AIT's survey means I have greater responsibility to maintain the quality of education here," said a proud Dr Mukund PS Pradhan, who runs the IOE. Among the first changes Dr Pradhan instituted was ensuring that classes were conducted—he introduced

a regulation that would enable the administration to ask for a written explanation if a teacher failed to conduct a class. It worked—from only 70 percent of classes actually taking place in 1998, last year more than 95 percent of classes were held. Once it was established that the teachers meant business, students, too, found it worth their while to attend.

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# Redefining the West

**It is time for "East" and "West" to become morally neutral terms again.**

What does the term "the West" mean? First, it is a geographically delimited territory that can be described as the Euro-Atlantic or Euro-American region. However, it is of equal, if not greater, importance to define the West in terms of its values and culture. The West has had, in essence, a shared political

and economic history emanating from a common set of spiritual sources. For many centuries the character of its civilisation and its inner ethos equipped it to exert a major influence on other regions and eventually to determine disproportionately the

current shape of our global order.

To be sure, it is now recognised that the West exported to the rest of the world many wonderful accomplishments but also less praiseworthy values, resulting

in the forcible liquidation of other cultures, suppression of other religions, and fetishism of incessant economic expansion regardless of its qualitative effects. However, the key factor in the present circumstances—particularly for us in what was until recently considered the East—is that the West has also deepened and propagated fundamental principles such as the rule of law, respect for human rights, a democratic political system, and economic freedom. Many other countries now also profess these values, but they belong to other geographical areas and so—if only for this purely external reason—cannot be considered part of the West.

Yet, as a citizen of a European postcommunist country, I must admit that when I listen to the mantra-like claims about our Western affiliation, the Western direction of our policies, and the obligation of Western organisations, such as NATO and the EU, to offer us speedy admission, I feel somewhat uncomfortable. There is an implied one underlying this rhetoric that I find disturbing.

My unease lies in an unacknowledged judgement that partly defines the terms "West" and "East"—at least in our postcommunist environment. Soviet rule, in the USSR and its European satellites, was characterised by spiritual and physical oppression, callousness, ignorance, empty monumentalism and a general state of backwardness, boastfully presented as progress. These traits contrasted so manifestly with the culture and prosperity of the democratic West that it inevitably led us to perceive the West as good and the East as evil. The term "West" thus became, both unwittingly and knowingly, a synonym for advancement, culture, freedom and decency. "East," on the other hand, was reduced to a synonym for underdevelopment, authoritarianism and omnipresent nonsense.

Needless to say, the end of the bipolar division of the world and the progress of our civilisation along the course we call globalisation urge us to engage in a radically new way of thinking about the future world order. The implicit perception of Western superiority and Eastern inferiority is untenable in the long run. No single geographical and cultural

principle can be considered a *priori* better than any other one and for all, or as a matter of principle.

Indeed, I believe that "West" should become a morally neutral word again. In the future, it should mean no more and no less than a clearly defined region of the contemporary world, one of the spheres of civilisation that is characterised by a shared history, culture, scale of values, type of responsibility, as well as by its very own specific concerns. The same should also be true of the "East," despite all the problems, obviously deep-seated, that afflict it at present.

As long as the word "East" evokes a pejorative connotation, and the word "West" an affirmative one, it will be immensely difficult to build a new world order based on equality among the various regions. There is nothing wrong in being part of the West, nor is there any reason not to profess this affiliation. On the one hand, being a Westerner or a Western country does not mean being a *priori* superior. The same should apply for all the other entities of today's world, and there is no reason to feel ashamed because of an affiliation to any of them. Respect for other identities, and a certainty that all are equal, must be concomitants of the effort to forge a world order based on genuine peace and partnership, an order emanating from a universally shared commitment to certain absolutely fundamental moral and political principles.

The time of the domination of the white man, the European, the American or the Christian over the entire globe is over. We are entering a new era. It is our duty to respect one another and to work together for the benefit of all. ♦ (Project Syndicate)

Vaclav Havel is President of the Czech Republic.

# Intolerant liberalism

## MADELEINE BUNTING

The bombs have hit Kabul, the special forces are on standby, allies have been cajoled, bullied and bribed into position. That is not all that was carefully prepared ahead of last week's launch of the attacks. Crucially for a modern war, public opinion formers at home have been prepared and marshalled into line with a striking degree of unanimity. The voices of dissent can barely be heard over the chorus of approval and self-righteous enthusiasm.

The latter is a sign of how quickly the logic of war distorts and manipulates our understanding. War propaganda requires moral clarity—what else can justify the suffering and brutality?—so the conflict is being cast as a battle between good and evil. Bin Laden and the Taliban are being demonised into absurd Bond-style villains, while halos are hung over our heads by the moral net wide: we are not just fighting to protect ourselves, but for a new moral order in which the Afghans will be the first beneficiaries.

The extent to which this is being uncritically accepted is astonishing. Few gave a damn about the suffering of women under the Taliban on 10 September—now we are supposedly fighting a war for them. Even fewer knew (let alone cared) that Afghanistan was suffering from famine. Now the west is promising to solve the humanitarian crisis it has hugely exacerbated with its threats and then with its military action. Incredible is not just the belief that you can end terrorism by taking on the Taliban, but that doing so can be elevated into a grand moral purpose—rather than it incubating a host of evils from Chechnya to Pakistan.

Is this gullibility? Naivety? Wishful thinking? There may be elements of these, but also lurking here is the outline of a form of western fundamentalism which, at its worst, echoes the characteristics it finds so repulsive in its enemy, bin Laden: first, a sense of unquestioned superiority; second, an assertion of the universal applicability of values; and third, a lack of will to understand what is profoundly different from itself.

This is the shadow side of liberalism, and it has periodically wreaked havoc around the globe for over 150 years. It is detectable in the writings of great liberal thinkers such as John Stuart Mill, and emerged in the complacency of mid-Victorian Britain. But its roots go back further to its inheritance of Christianity's claim to be the one true faith. The US founding recipe of puritanism and enlightenment has bequeathed a profound sense of being morally good. This superiority, once allied to economic and technological power, underpinned the worst excesses of colonialism, as it now underpins the activities of multinational corporations and the IMF's structural adjustment programmes.

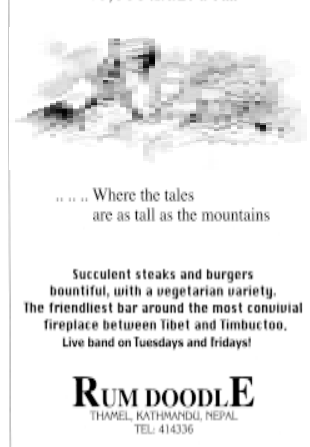
The west's arrogant assumption of its superiority is as dangerous as any other form of fundamentalism.

Recognising this need not be the prelude to an onslaught on liberalism—just the crucial imperative of recognising that, like all systems of human thought, liberalism has weaknesses as well as strengths. In the heat of battle and panic-fueled fear of terrorism, liberal strengths such as tolerance, humility and a capacity for self-criticism are often the first victims.

In all systems of human thought, there are contradictions. One of the most acute in liberalism is between its claim to tolerance and its hubristic claim to universality, which Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's comments on the superiority of western civilisation brought embarrassingly to the fore two weeks ago. An aggressive reassertion and a thoughtful re-examination of our culture and its values will have a lasting impact on our relations with the non-western world, not just Muslim world. Aggressive reassertion can smack of fundamentalism, a point obliquely made by Harold Evans recently: "What do we set against the medieval hatreds of the fundamentalists? We have our fundamentals too: the values of western civilisation. When they are menaced, we need a ringing affirmation of what they mean." The only problem is that "ringing" can block out all other sound and produce nothing but tinny.

There is a compelling alternative for how we can coexist. Political philosopher Bhikhu Parekh starts from the premise that "the grandeur and depth of human life is too great to be captured in one culture." Because "we are all prisoners of our subjectivity," argues Parekh, progress will always come from dialogue between cultures. Parekh argues that liberalism is right to assert there are universal moral principles (such as the rights of women, free speech and the right to life), but wrong to insist there is only one interpretation of those principles and that that is its own. Rights come into conflict and every culture negotiates different trade-offs between them. Understanding those trade-offs is sometimes difficult. But no one honest has cracked the perfect trade-off, as western liberalism in its more honest moments is the first to admit. There is a huge amount we can learn from Islam in its social solidarity, its appreciation of the collective good and the generosity and strength of human relationships. Islamic societies are grappling with exactly the same challenge as the west—how to balance freedom and responsibility—and we need each other's help, not each other's brands of fundamentalism. If we are asking Islam to stamp out their fundamentalism, we have no lesser duty to do the same. ♦ (The Guardian)

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## Asia's war economy

BANGKOK - For hungry and poor Asians, things are about to get worse: the region will see a rise in the number of people deprived of daily meals in coming months, due to the changed global political and economic landscape since the attacks in the US. The numbers of hungry people could be in the millions, says Rhg Singh, regional representative for Asia and the Pacific at the FAO here. Asia is home to two-thirds of the world's 500 million hungry people, with the bulk of them living in South Asian countries.

Singh's is one of the number of dismal predictions being made by experts here due to the economic downturn following 11 September. "Asia-Pacific countries will be hit hard," says Kim Hak-Su, executive secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). "The economic downturn in the US will impact many Asian countries, particularly those with manufacturing and export sectors that depend on the US market." Kim expects a rise in unemployment as companies close down to lowered demand for their products in the US market.

Meanwhile, Dr Bjorn Melgaard, head of the Thailand WHO office, says the region's health systems will come under pressure due to a rise in the number of poor people, with children and women especially vulnerable. And, he adds, hospitals may have difficulty coping due to lack of drugs and decrease in the number of medical and nursing staff.

The troubles ahead come on the heels of an already lacklustre picture in parts of Asia. Economies from Taiwan and Singapore to Malaysia and the Philippines, some just recovering from the 1997 Asian crisis, have cut growth rates due to a global slowdown in electronic goods in the past year, and many have seen export growth rates fall this year.

The dire economic scenario many foresee has already come true in an important foreign exchange earner for Thailand—tourism. Government plans to boost tourism, which last year brought \$6.5 billion to the country, are shattered. Many tourists have cancelled their trips and the Tourism Authority of Thailand says tourist arrivals during the peak period from October to November could drop by as much as 30 percent this year compared with the same period last year. Other Asian countries are equally affected, particularly those who, like Thailand, depend on tourism for foreign exchange. In Nepal authorities have spoken of 50 percent of hotel bookings being cancelled.

The World Bank last week in a preliminary assessment of the economic fallout from the attacks in the US, wrote, "In the countries that stall or fall into recession as a result of decline in exports, tourism, commodity prices, or foreign investment, the number of people living below one dollar a day will rise." New concerns arising from the attack, like security, are raising costs and retarding economic activity. It added, "Insurance and security costs and delays at customs clearance are among the main factors pushing up trade costs. Major shipping lines, for example, have increased freight rates to India by 10 to 15 percent."

This is in stark contrast to the Asian Development Bank's assessment of the region's economic prospects prior to September. In its report Growth and Change in the Asia-Pacific Region, indicators for the ADB said the Asia-Pacific region had "notched up the highest growth in the world, expanding by over six percent per annum, except in 1998, the first year of the Asian crisis." It even predicted that Asia was on course to achieving the international Development Goals targets by 2015. They include halving the number of the very poor, increasing universal primary education and reducing infant and maternal mortality rates. (PNS)

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## ANALYSIS

by MARWAAN MACAN-MARKAR

# Islam's angry young men

BANGKOK - Islam's angry young men are on the move again. Over the past week, thousands of them from religious schools in northern Pakistan have been heading to neighbouring Afghanistan.

This journey is not secret. Heads of religious schools, *madrasahs*, have been forthcoming with information—their charges will swell the ranks of fighting a *jihad*, they say. Many of them have been steered in guerrilla warfare and received training to use weapons such as anti-aircraft guns. This made up a small part of their curriculum, apart from hours spent studying a narrow interpretation of Islam.

But there is a sense of déjà vu in this like-thinking men have been down this road before and with similar purpose, after Afghanistan was invaded by the Soviet Union in 1979. Then, Muslims from varying nationalities, Arab and non-Arab, were drawn to Afghanistan with the same zeal. Calling themselves mujahideen (Islamic fighters), thousands pledged to fight a "jihad" to defend a Muslim country, and their campaign led to the Soviet Union's retreat after a decade-long occupation. Among the Arab fighters, one was identified with this *jihad* was the

late Osama bin Laden. But there is a sense of déjà vu in this like-thinking men have been down this road before and with similar purpose, after Afghanistan was invaded by the Soviet Union in 1979. Then, Muslims from varying nationalities, Arab and non-Arab, were drawn to Afghanistan with the same zeal. Calling themselves mujahideen (Islamic fighters), thousands pledged to fight a "jihad" to defend a Muslim country, and their campaign led to the Soviet Union's retreat after a decade-long occupation. Among the Arab fighters, one was identified with this *jihad* was the



late Osama bin Laden himself (point 63) is not going to cut much ice in Saudi Arabia or other Gulf states.

In Riyadh, the US Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, admitted the Saudi government had the "secondary effect" of "a war on terrorism" shorthand for the fear of the House of Saud that their regime may be overthrown if America bombs Afghanistan and kills bin Laden. Rumsfeld's remarks show how frightened the Saudis are of associating themselves with President Bush's war. "We had a very substantive and interesting and thoughtful discussion about the nature of the problem and the complexities of the problem, and the importance of dealing with it in a way that recognises secondary effects that could occur," he said after his talks with King Fahd and Crown Prince Abdullah. Which doesn't sound like wholesale support for the US.

Events are now moving at such speed that for many Arab nations, the details, or lack of details, of bin Laden's involvement in the 11 September hijackings may appear almost irrelevant. Most Arab leaders regard bin Laden as a threat to their own stability, let alone America's, and would be happy to accept our "evidence" of his guilt. But they are unlikely to convince the people of this. Newspapers in the Gulf and in Egypt, where Rumsfeld went next, are almost uniformly anti-American, repeatedly demanding an end to the "double standards" of the US, its unconditional support for Israel and its refusal to understand the Arab struggle against "Israeli terrorism." Editorial writers are likely to be less than enthusiastic about a document which uses evidence of bin Laden's involvement in earlier bombings to imply his guilt for the crimes

## The international pan-Islamist Sunni jihad movement spawned in Afghanistan is likely to grow.

Saudi-born Osama bin Laden.

On that occasion, the mujahideen had the United States to thank. Besides the assistance given to them by the US and its allies—estimated to be around \$10 billion worth of arms and aid—something more significant was offered: legitimacy. Former US President Ronald Reagan delivered this famous line when members of the mujahideen visited the White House: They are the "most equivalent of our founding fathers." This time around, that is hardly the case. Those heading to Afghanistan are raging against the US. This time, too, legitimacy is one of the question, at least from the United States.

But while the US offensive in Afghanistan provides Islam's angry young men with a boost, propelling their significance in the Muslim world: Will it give their cities a fresh airing? Afghanistan has played a central role in their lives, as have the pan-Islamic nations outside it, which have become international jihad-organisations. These men have been schooled in the notion that Islam is a warrior religion. Especially important is the stance taken by governments in the Muslim world toward such activity.

Since the 80s, a passage through Afghanistan has acquired the stature of a rite. From countries as distant as Sudan and Algeria to nearby Uzbekistan, Muslim men came to train, often with the

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Taliban. They became members of this international *jihad*, and fought battles in Kashmir, Chechnya and Afghanistan. There are hardly any 20-year-old examples of *jihad* violence assuming so "pronounced an Islamic and international character," writes Eghal Ahmad in a critique of the movement titled *Jihad International Incorporated*. "The *jihad* pan-Islamic dimension was a historic new phenomenon," he adds. "With the Afghanistan war, pan-Islamism grew on a significant scale as a financial, cultural, political and military phenomenon with a worldwide network of exchange and collaboration."

With Afghanistan under siege the pan-Islamic message is gaining currency. The landlocked country has become a magnet for Islam's angry young men—from Africa, Asia and the Arab world. Once again, calling themselves mujahideen, Muslim men from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Bangladesh have pledged to participate in the *jihad*, says IslamOnline, an electronic magazine based in Doha, Qatar. Mauritians and other Africans are also listed as having been recruited to the *jihad*. Talibani, it notes, adding that they are a "pan-global Islamic force formed to defend any Muslim country under attack by 'enemies of Islam'."

Afghanistan's attraction also stems from it being a predominantly Sunni Muslim country, says a specialist on Asian Islam, who requested anonymity. Sunnis are the

majority of the world's one billion Muslims. Shi'ites are the minority. "The Taliban have been projecting themselves as practitioners of a pure Sunni Islamic country," she added. "Sunni Muslims will be able to relate to such rhetoric easily, without the qualms that arise with countries like Iran, which is Shi'ite, and Iraq or Syria, which are more secular and socialist than Islamic."

Such growing fervor is making governments in Muslim countries edgy. Beyond asking the US to direct its assault against terrorism rather than Islam, they can do little, given the policies—or lack thereof—they have pursued as regards the *jihad* conceived in Afghanistan. Most have done little to question or stop their nationals travelling abroad to fight in wars of another country. If crackdowns have occurred, as in Egypt, they have been piecemeal and ineffective, functioning locally. Some, like Saudi Arabia, openly encouraged such activities. Besides funding such activities, the Saudis have also made use of it to push through the fundamentalist version of Sunni Islam in a force prepared to take over the country.

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US action against the Taliban is seen as a rallying cry for the *jihad* to increase in numbers from the world's Sunni Muslims, ensuring its radical creed lives on. (PNS)

## The rhetoric of anxiety

The UK believes it has "proved" bin Laden's guilt. Saudis, who also fear him, probably read the "evidence" differently.

against humanity on 11 September.

Arabs studying the British document may be amused to learn that bin Laden runs a holding company called Wadi Al-Aqiq, which translates as "Valley of the Broken Gem," and Al-Thamar Al-Mushtak, "The Blessed Fruit," and intrigued by the information that an American warship was attacked by apparent suicide bombers several months before the bombing of the US Consulate in Nairobi. They will be less impressed by the statement that "on 3 and 4 October, operatives of al-Qa'ida participated in the attack on US military personnel serving in Somalia as part of the operation 'Restore Hope'." The Americans were in fact attacking the presumed base of a Somali warlord when their helicopters were shot down by gunmen, including some of bin Laden's men.

But as usual in the Arab world, what the people think and what the kings and presidents believe are not necessarily the same thing. Any Gulf leader reading bin Laden's words about "cleansing" the Gulf of American influence will realise that the kings and sultans who invited the Americans are among those bin Laden wants "cleansed." The British Government may feel that bin Laden's remark about "Satan's US troops and the devil's supporters allying with them" refers "unquestionably" to the United Kingdom, but the Saudi royal family knows that the "devil's supporters" undoubtedly alludes to them.

America has meanwhile been expressing its anger at the only free Arab television station, al-Jazeera channel transmitting from Qatar. The State Department, which only a year ago was praising the station as a bastion of free speech in the Middle East, has now asked the Qatari government to "rein in" al-Jazeera because it is allegedly inciting anti-American sentiments. Al-Jazeera, which interviewed the US Secretary of State Colin Powell only the previous week, just happens to be the only Arab station with correspondents in Afghanistan.

Muzzling Qatari television is not going to change the bleak prospects of Arab co-operation in Bush's war. With the Gulf largely unhelpful and Egypt anxious to avoid its own social explosion, the Americans appear to be looking north, to the former Soviet Muslim republics, for real military assistance. ♦ (The Independent)

## "Our goal is to capture the centre"

Top Bahadur Rayamajhi, one of the three negotiators named by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoinist) to talk to the government, in Janajathana, 4 October 2001

The formation of a republic is a minor demand for communists. Our aim is to establish Janabhad (people's democracy), then socialism and finally communism. You analyse the present situation, the decadence of the reactionaries, the state of the political parties and the aspirations of the common people, if you can organise all these forces a republic can be formed this very day. The sacrifice of the people and their aspirations will all go to waste if we move away from the idea of a republic. We have to gain the maximum benefit from the dialogue. The republic is just the stepping stone, forgetting the larger goal will be insulting the peoples' revolution. Since dialogue was the main agenda of the Deuba government, we decided to go in for talks. We felt that if we moved forward with a minimum agenda, all forces, be they democratic or left, would support us. Then we could combine all these forces and move forward. We came for a dialogue on their advice. Despite that, they have not accepted the minimum point in the agenda and are in fact trying to push back the country. This is bankruptcy of the so-called democratic and some left forces. This is proof of their lack of vision and philosophy, they are not moving forward but stepping back in time. Instead of giving people their freedom, they are instead interested in keeping them in shackles.

There are two types of government in the country. The Maoist-led revolution is on the move and we will be victorious. We are trying to provide leadership in all spheres of life. We are trying to organise the people and then educate them. In fact we have not been able to provide leadership as per the aspirations of the people. It is clear that there are fundamental differences between the reactionary forces and us. We want to form the government and take it to great heights. We will be able to do this. At present, these forces in power, are suppressing and suppressing the majority. When we come to power, the poor, the oppressed and the suppressed majority will run the government. The people's governments that we have formed in many districts is the forerunner of our central government that will be formed in the near future. Planned economic, social and political changes can only be brought about after we have captured the centre. Since this is a war situation, we cannot have a very planned form of development. But, as far as possible, we are building up the infrastructure, carrying out public relations and providing justice as and when required.

We have come to the realisation that everything except power at the centre is a dream. Therefore till we capture power at the centre we will continue destroying the elements that make up the existing system. In places where we have formed the local people's governments, we have done a lot of work. In fact, we have brought about more development than the reactionary forces had ever done. We can only fulfil the aspirations of the people once we form a government at the centre. Till that time, we must change the view of society to such an extent that they become one with our thinking and the revolution. We have started many programmes, political, social and economic at the local level and although people realise that this is a war situation, they have fully supported us and are working with us. We have accepted them too. Therefore the people are with us both mentally and physically.

We have said that we will rise to great heights, much higher than the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Coming from the Paris Commune to the Cultural Revolution we have realised that Maoism alone will not be able to solve the problems of the 21st century. Therefore a new model was required and this is Prachanda Path. The central government must be formed under the directives of the people and the people's struggle must always be an on-going process. We have to make sure that the people will be able to handle a counter-revolution if it breaks out tomorrow.

We demand compensation because the state discriminated against us...and because that we suffer in every aspect. It made (care) rules to deprive us of economic and social opportunities. Lal Bahadur Biswakarma, Member of Parliament, UML, *Jana Awaaz*, 10 October 2001

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It is possible, but the UML must be willing to rectify its past mistakes. The unification of the two parties must be on the basis of equality and respect. They are not prepared to do this and so unification is not possible in the near future.

More on unification

Dr. D. 2 October

Excerpts from an interview with Bharat Mohan Adhikari, UML

What is the status of the reunification process with the ML? Both parties have put forward their views. We want both parties to

## Unification and reunification

Samadristi, 30 September

Excerpts from an interview with Bin Dev Gautam, General Secretary, Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist) The Maoists are suggesting a republic. Will it make a difference if the ML supports this idea?

Do you think the Maoists really have been establishing a republic? They have been going on about it more than we have. We still believe in the present constitution. We have asked for constitutional amendments, but we still function within the parameters of this constitution. Our final aim is a republic but as we abide by the present constitution, we are not publicising this. The Maoists do not believe in the present constitutional process, they do not believe in a constitutional or judicial struggle. This is why they are being so vocal about a republic.

The UML and the ML have been discussing possible reunification. What is the status of the talks?

We had one meeting. The Maoists also met with our representatives. In the course of the meeting we realised that we could not reach an agreement on uniting with them. We have agreed to work together where possible.

If the situation arises, will the ML pick up weapons? If it will, they will not really make a difference whether or not the party unites with the Maoists?

There are many differences between the Maoists and us. We differ on principles—we have major philosophical differences. We believe in the philosophy of Marx, Lenin, Mao and Prachanda. We believe in the philosophy of Marx and Lenin only. There is no need for them to follow Mao's philosophy. As for the Prachanda Path, that is not a philosophy at all. Given this, how can our parties unite?

Second, the Maoists use weapons and are conducting a closed struggle. This is not the right time to do such a thing. We believe everything can be achieved through peaceful struggle and that is what we are working towards. The Maoists say there are no socialists left in the world—but there are, in Cuba, China, Korea, Vietnam and Laos, and they are getting stronger. The Maoists say they want to form a South Asian confederation. We are fighting to free the country and not to integrate it with others. We cannot join hands with such a force. What is the possibility of the UML and ML uniting?

It is possible, but the UML must be willing to rectify its past mistakes. The unification of the two parties must be on the basis of equality and respect. They are not prepared to do this and so unification is not possible in the near future.

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What is the status of the reunification process with the ML? Both parties have put forward their views. We want both parties to

accept the recommendations of the Sixth Convention. Issues that we do not agree on can be set aside for the moment. The Seventh Convention will be held 15 months from now and we can work through those matters then. We are flexible on other issues. The ML wants the issues on which no agreement had been reached to be dealt with immediately. The Sixth Convention seems to be the stumbling block. Both parties have placed all the issues at hand before their central committees. The central committees have given new directives and based on these the dialogue is being carried forward. Unification will take some time. In the meantime we must work towards finding common ground with other political parties. A common working agenda can be formed.

It is said foreign investment in power is driving up the cost of electricity used by households. Is it true?

Load-shedding became a compulsion after they scrapped the Independent power producers moved in at this time. Bhote Kosi happened because of independent producers, and load-shedding was reduced. In a sense this was the right move, but you had to pay in dollars under the Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) for electricity that was generated in this country. Our load factor right now is 50-55 percent. We cannot ask our consumers to waste electricity. But since we have PPA with IPPs, we have to pay them. Our peak load is between 5 PM to 11 PM or midnight. The load is almost nil after this, so we have installed "time of day" meters—which means that after 11 PM, the cost of electricity goes down by almost 50 percent.

When was such a self-destructive agreement signed? By whom?

The Khimti agreement was reached during the tenure of Laxman Ghimire—in 1993/94. The project was completed when the UML was in power. Later, Prachanda Samsher became the water resources minister and did a review of the PPA and approved it. The Bhote Kosi was approved by the UML government when Hari Pandey was minister.

Why is the price of electricity rising so fast?

It is mainly because we have to buy our own production and pay in dollars. When the Khimti and Bhote Kosi agreements were signed, the exchange rate was about \$1:Rs 49. Now it is around \$1:Rs 73 (it is more now)—the rupee is depreciating against the dollar every year. We have to pay in dollars and we also have to pay royalties for Khimti—around \$8.50 per unit. Add to all this, loss in distribution and transactions, and the end result is a unit of electricity costs almost Rs 7.50.

It is said the Kali Gandaki is likely to overshoot its budget and won't be completed on time.

The media has written a lot about the possibility. It is better to go out there and see for yourself. Kali Gandaki is the biggest project in the country, it will generate 144 megawatts. The main factors causing the delay are geological. An entire mountain had to be removed, expenditure increased by Rs 1 billion. Still, Kali Gandaki is a feasible, cheap project. It was estimated to cost \$428 million, but we contracted it for only \$300 million. We have spent \$360 million so far, which is still lower than the estimated costs.

Optimising hydropower

Janadharana, 4 October

Excerpts from an interview with Bindev Malla, Managing Director, Nepal Electricity Authority

You say the government has to introduce policy changes to develop hydropower in Nepal. What are these?

We cannot use all the power generated by ourselves. To maximise the power consumption, the government should make sure that industrialisation takes place on a large scale, and excess electricity can also be sold to other countries. India produces 100,000 megawatts of electricity, Bangladesh produces 6,000 megawatts. We produce only 300-400 megawatts. We should think of producing 20-22,000

Excerpts from an interview with Bindev Malla, Managing Director, Nepal Electricity Authority

What is the status of the reunification process with the ML?

Both parties have put forward their views. We want both parties to



# On bike seats

**Do men who bicycle a lot have performance problems in other areas?**

who are impotent and those who will be. Even a single ride on the wrong seat can do major and permanent damage, he says, and the only safe way to cycle is on a recumbent bike.

Anxious to quell fears raised by these remarks, manufacturers rushed to produce anatomically contoured bike seats for both sexes. (Goldstein says women cyclists do face reproductive health concerns.) These presumably safer seats are now sold widely, but consumers still worry.

And aside from the self-assured Goldstein, no one seems to know what to believe. Four years after Goldstein's bombshell, many experts enter grave doubts about the evidence on which it rests. Goldstein's findings have never been reviewed and assessed by his peers, published in an academic journal or tested and replicated by other researchers. And while other studies suggesting a link between

cycling and genital numbness or impotence have been published in scholarly journals, experts say these reports are flawed. Blaming on a narrow, rock-hard seat—or any ill-fitting or uncomfortable saddle—may numb your privates, but there's no clear proof that temporary discomfort or lack of feeling is linked to impotence.

Contacted for this article, four well-regarded urologists said that while it is possible for male cyclists to damage the sexual apparatus in an accident—especially by smashing the crotch against the top tube, the horizontal bar between the seat and the handlebars—the chances of doing lingering damage by just sitting right and pedalling are very low. "It's safe to bicycle," says William D Steers, chairman of the urology department at the University of Virginia School of Medicine in Charlottesville. "That can say one. This whole [impotence-cycling] thing is really out of proportion. In China 90 percent of the male population cycles, and they don't seem to have a problem maintaining the population."

Goldstein says he became convinced of cycling's ill-effects after noticing in the mid-1980s that many of his male patients with complaints of sexual dysfunction were cyclists. He wondered if some of these problems stemmed from sitting on a narrow saddle for prolonged periods. His

theory was that the saddle pushed into the perineum—the soft tissue between the sit bones of the pelvis. Routed between those bones are the major blood vessels that feed the penis. Compressing soft tissue between a hard saddle and a hard bone, he suggested, was courting disaster.

According to the magazine article, Goldstein assembled a test group of 100 bike-riding men who had come to him for treatment of impotence. He measured blood flow to the penis while they lay flat on their backs and he applied pressure to the perineum with one of two cycling saddles or a chair. Goldstein says he found a 66 percent average reduction in blood flow from a narrow saddle, a 25 percent reduction from a wide saddle and no reduction from a chair. From this, he concluded that repeated compression of the penile artery would cause it to flatten or become blocked, which would eventually result in impotence.

Arthur Burnett, associate professor of urology at the Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions in Baltimore, calls this study, based on questionnaires to members of a running club and a cycling club, "terribly flawed." "I think the premise was inflated, to presume that [cycling] is a major cause of erectile dysfunction in America is not correct," says Burnett. Goldstein's hypothesis, he says, "needs to be corroborated by other studies that

show how real it is."

Goldstein says he's been too busy to submit his studies for publication in a peer-reviewed journal and that it is hard to find sponsors to pay for corroborating research. But from where he sits—with a professorship at the Boston University School of Medicine, bonuses from his professional colleagues and a practice where he treats as many as six patients a week for impotence that he believes is related to cycling—Goldstein says he needs no further convincing. "If you sit in my chair," it would be clear. The impotent come in here, and I am the advocate for them."

While advocacy may not foster dispassionate research, it sells in the free market. Former emergency physician and inventor Roger Minkow used Goldstein's data to design a saddle with a channel cut to reduce pressure on the perineum. The specialised Body Geometry saddle has sold 1.3 million units and sparked a design revolution. Minkow says his seat—if it is properly fitted to the rider—is as easy on the perineum as a chair. He also says his research—unpublished—no back-up this claim.

While the hazardous-saddle question remains unresolved, some riders just like having a choice of seat configurations. ♦ (The Washington Post)

## ROY FURCHGOTT

or a fitness story with legs—and real bicycling impact—it's hard to top the one that ran in a 1997 issue of *Bicycling* magazine. The article cited an unpublished study by nationally prominent urologist Irwin Goldstein suggesting that bike seats crush the main artery to the penis, causing permanent impotence.

Soon the story was picked up by television programme "20/20" and

impotence warning was appearing in just about every article about biking and injury. Goldstein, whose comments in the initial article were somewhat guarded—"I cannot say that sitting on a bicycle seat causes impotence," he told the magazine, and "I can't claim that long-term compression causes impotence, but I kind of think it does in a very small percentage of cases"—was soon dispensing in-situ quotes, such as, "There are two kinds of cyclists: those

## Campaign Head

ELIMU-INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

ActionAid works in more than 30 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean to listen to, learn from and work in partnership with 5 million poor people to help them realise their potential and secure their basic rights of food, water, education, healthcare and the chance to earn a living.

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Closing date: 30 October 2001. Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted. Previous applicants need not apply.

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# "The evocativeness of literature is very difficult to produce in cinema"



from p.1

**What precisely was the impact and reach, then, of what you sought to convey in your film—specially *Manthan*?**  
*Manthan* was commercially successful not only in India, but all over the world. But *Manthan* was a unique film in more than one respect. In the 1970s, the movement to establish milk cooperatives had begun in Gujarat spearheaded by Dr Verghese Kurien of the Indian National Dairy Development Board and involving about half-a-million dairy farmers. I had already made a documentary on the subject and gathered a great deal of research material. I discussed with Dr Kurien the possibility of making a commercially viable fiction film which would also have an important real story to tell. Dr Kurien agreed and suggested that the dairy farmers

themselves be the producers—in the financiers—of the film. Each member of the milk cooperative, half a million of them, contributed two rupees each. The funny thing is that not only was the film, therefore, produced by the farmers themselves, it was also popularised by them. Farmers travelled in lorries and buses from all over to see the film at the nearest town. It had a second usage as well. There were no video players then but with Super 8 and 16 mm portable projectors, spearhead teams went to villages in milk producing areas to engage them in dialogues as to how they could increase milk production, maximise their earnings and improve the breed of their cattle. The film was, therefore, very important to stimulate discussions. The film was seen by more people than any single film made in India. It was shown in over 150,000 villages in addition to the cinema circuits. It was a springboard to develop new cooperatives all over India. Today, twenty years later, the film is still being used.

*Suman*, made in 1986, dealt with what is the second largest trained human resource in India—the handloom and textile workers. However, the film did not have the same popularity and spread as *Manthan* but helped to bring to the surface an issue which involved such a large section of the population and a cottage industry, and an art that was threatened.

*Samar* (1998) was a comedy on caste prejudice that could make a lot of people uncomfortable and unhappy. Its commercial release has been held up and I have been agitating for its release.



*Autumn*, made in 1999, is a film based on the teachings of Parwan Shastri, who lectured on interpretations of the *Gita*. According to Shastri, the real cause of the vicious cycle of under-development was a lack of self-esteem among marginalised people which inhibits the emergence of their latent talent and capabilities. Thousands of village communities in Gujarat and Maharashtra were transformed by the *Swadhyaya* concept, which shuns charity hand-outs. Philanthropy is not their idea. The basic concept is that you create wealth by sharing—not by giving or selling your surplus, but by sharing what you have.

More recently, *Hari Bhairav* (year which started Shakti Arani and Nandini Das) took up the controversial issue of fertility and family planning. *Autumn* and *Hari Bhairav* had successful commercial runs.

**Given your reputation for making films which take on challenging larger social and political themes, have you attempted films which are personal and introspective, and which probe deeply into the individual psyche?**

Deep psychological enquiry is, to some extent, a middle-class luxury as far as cinema is concerned. This is particularly so for India where there are so many larger, more pressing concerns around. I would not say the same is true of literature which is more personal and inwardly probing. Take my film *Sung Ka Saman Ghode* (1992). It is based on a Hindi literary classic of Dharambhar Bhatnari with many interesting aspects in it. A young man tells three stories to define what love is. They are about three different women with whom he has had relationships, first as a pre-pubescent, then as an adolescent and thirdly as a mature adult. But all these relationships are happening at the same time, simultaneously. There is no time difference. He knows the three girls at the same time. As human beings, we have this inner psychology and a way of creating self-image and behaviour with people at certain moments of that relationship. This behaviour freezes in that position. For example, you sometimes behave with your father even in your adulthood as though you were still 12 years old.

That film was a difficult exercise. Literature has the ability to deal with time and space in a way that cinema finds difficult to do. Cinema concretises the image. Symbols and emblems become very definite and concrete in film unlike in literature. Words are abstract, but when put together in literature, they have an associational context. Spaces between



words are filled up by the reader in whom things are evoked through his own associations and imagination. Cinema does not always have that associational capability. The evocativeness of literature is very difficult to produce in cinema. In cinema, you see everything through the director's eye and that becomes totally subjective.

**You have made both documentary and feature films. How different is one from the other?**

The documentary film attracts filmmakers who have something to say—more than the feature film. Documentaries by and large tend to deal with the real life of life, reality directly observed. Much of what you do in documentaries is not necessarily within your control. When you make a documentary "about" something, you are not in the real thick of it. In fiction films, you can get into characters, into their motivation and innovations, things, even though you are subjective. You bring an interactivity into the subject and to be able to do so gives you in fact a greater sense of reality than when you merely observe and reproduce reality. Film fictionalised from real life tends to give you great opportunities to present such a greater reality.

**Who are the film directors you like the most?**  
My tastes are very catholic. Among the older American directors, I like John Ford. Among contemporary US directors, Martin Scorsese and Coppola. In Japan, the great directors Kurosawa and Ozu. In Italy, Fellini and Pasolini. In India, Satyajit Ray, of course, and in the popular cinema, Ritwik Ghatak. I like also in the popular Hindi cinema, Mehboob and Guru Dutt in the popular Tamil cinema, Mani Ratnam. Also, Advaita Gopalakrishnan and Ranganatha Ghosh is a marvelous Bengali director. With all these directors, you can hear their voice in their films.

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## Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

# Fried goat guts for all by Dasain

**T**he news that Nepal has denied transit visas to 10,000 mountain goats and sheep from Tibet to enter the kingdom for Dasain this year has been greeted with utter dismay in some quarters. This is understandable, because it could be an irreversible setback for national efforts to stockpile sautéed goat guts for Kathmandu's *puplo* and *kanada* class this festival season.

As we all know, deep-fried goat innards washed down with beer are an important guarantee of inertness, and without adequate supplies Nepal's may actually end up doing something useful and important in the national interest while preparing to celebrate Nepal's national *chard*. This is why the semi-government National Institute for Lethargy and Inertia has moved swiftly to identify alternate sources of goat protein so that there is sufficient indolence and lassitude to go around this Dasain. (Special *khair* reinforcements are being rushed to Kathmandu from Syangja, highly-placed sources told us on condition of anonymity.) Vigilance squads have already been deputed by most ministries, and they are carrying out spot checks at various departments, corporations, public sector enterprises, and our embassies abroad to make sure that no civil servants are sneaking into their offices to actually get some work done in the run-up to Dasain.

Even senior ministers and secretaries are not exempt from this crackdown. It has come to our notice, for instance, that the Home-away-from-Home Minister and the Health Hazard Minister have escaped to Australia under the pretext of attending an international conference, and at the moment of going to press, are both busy catching up with a backlog of pending work that they brought from home. They were spotted during their flights out poring over piles of files and

adding *toks*. They are both expected to get a severe reprimand from the Crime Minister when they return for spoiling party unity during the Dasain go-slow. Unless all members of the cabinet show strict discipline and consensus, the Chief Whip will be compelled to give them all a tongue-lashing when they get back. And it will not just be lip service, you can be sure of that.

There are workaholics among us who will insist on going to work in the coming week to push paper. Woe on such spoilsports, they need help. It's not that we are less lazy the rest of the year. But Dasain is the time that we can really let ourselves go by wallowing in sloth. Even though we know this, we sometimes lapse into exertion and toil. Vigilance, that is what is required. Vigilance against hard work. Just look at all the



benefits of sloth: we have always underestimated the role laziness plays in non-violence and in ending wars. Making people too lazy to fight should be the aim of all peace-making endeavours. There is nothing like a sense of time having stopped to bring warring sides to lay down their arms.

Having said that, it has just come to my notice that I am now too lazy to complete this column. May you all attain nirvana this Dasain: that state of perfect immobility and bliss. ♦

## NEPALI SOCIETY

# Man with a movie camera



**S**unday evening was a blur for Dinesh Deokota, director of *A Rough Cut on the Life and Times of Lachuman Magar*, a candid profile of a naughty old Magar man.

Now, a few days after his film came in second and won a cash prize of \$ 1000 at the biennial festival of South Asian documentaries, Film South Asia, Deokota is letting his victory sink in and acknowledging the accolades.

"Now, I truly feel like a documentary filmmaker," says the visibly happy Deokota. Competing against 44 other impressive entries, Deokota's film only goes to prove that the genre of documentary and short filmmaking is coming into its own in Nepal.

"I've been in the audio-visual production line for five or six years and produced nothing

significant. This is the one that has been recognised," says Deokota, who quit a promising career in hotel management to make films.

When the 27-year-old came across Lachuman Magar in a Bardiya hotel in west Nepal, where the former Indian Gorkha cleans toilets and makes up tourists' beds for a living, Deokota just knew he had to film him.

"Lachuman is everyman," says Deokota. "I don't think his story is uncommon. It reflects our society. A simple man, no pretences."

Lachuman's character (still feisty despite the many blows life has dealt him, he has no regrets and finds much to laugh about) and Deokota's skilful piecing together of his varied and colourful life, obviously impressed the jury, that included noted Indian director Shyam Benegal.

"A picaresque account of an ordinary man—made extraordinary by his appetite for life and love. This film is a fine example of ciné

vente," reads the jury's citation.

It's no wonder Deokota can't stop smiling. The filmmaker plans to return to Bardiya soon to show Lachuman the film and to build his family a tube well. In the meantime, he'll continue filming bungee jumps—his bread-and-butter—to fund more films.

On hold is Deokota's ethnography on *jharkris* (shamans)—one of the protagonists died and another is working in Saudi Arabia, and Deokota is trying to raise money. But he's also playing with the possibility of doing an anti-poaching film in west Nepal.

So has he got some funding? "No, no. I'm not even looking for any. I don't think it's a good idea," he says. "The whole dynamics change. You lose control. It's not your film anymore. It becomes a mere mouthpiece."

Now that's a rare breed—a truly independent filmmaker. ♦

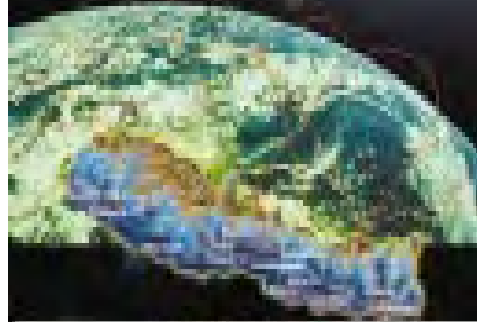


Deokota receiving certificate and cash prize for Second Best Film from member of the Jury at Film South Asia, Professor Firdous Azim.

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