

Is Crown Prince Paras mending his ways?

He's writing poetry, so he must be.

KUNDA DIXIT
Depending on who you talk to, King Gyanendra's appointment of his son and heir apparent, Paras, as Crown Prince on Dasain Tika day was either a masterstroke or callous disregard for the sentiments of the Nepali people.

Five months after the 1 June royal massacre, most Nepalis had just started missing

to terms with the numbing reality of the killings. Even those still sceptical about Dipendra's involvement were getting on with their lives. King Gyanendra, who had the throne thrust on him, had been subtly trying to change public perception in his favour through carefully calibrated media exposure. This is why everyone thought he would wait before doing the inevitable: naming his unpopular son crown prince.

After all, Paras had been in the news for all the wrong reasons. Known as a royal brat, he had been involved in hit-and-run incidents, the latest on the night of 6 August 2000, when his Pajero allegedly ran down musician Praveen Gurung. There was a public outcry, angry editorials and street protests calling for the wayward prince to be stripped of his title. Praveen's family decided not to pursue the case, and there were reports that his widow was offered Rs 1 million.

Paras later earned some measure of public goodwill when the Keshari Upadhyay probe committee report detailed how he had saved the lives of several royal family members on the night of 1 June by shielding them from Dipendra. And lately, Paras has been seen more frequently on television, at official and religious functions. Many in Kathmandu were following the palace's efforts to rehabilitate Paras, but were surprised it happened so soon. Sources said even palace and government officials only heard it on Radio Nepal's morning news on 26 October.

It was a shrewd timing. The country was closed for Dasain, and most political parties were in hibernation. Immediate reaction was

mutated. Most surprising was Bani Dev Gautam of the Marxist-Leninists, the very party that staged anti-Paras demos outside Nirmal Niwas last August. Gautam said: "The declaration of the Crown Prince has happened according to royal traditions and constitutional provisions."

In a measured response, Naradhi Acharya of the ruling Nepali Congress: "Nepalis have the right to be assured of the character and behaviour of a person who will sit on the throne."

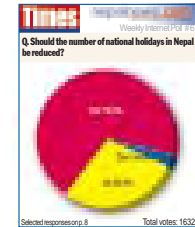
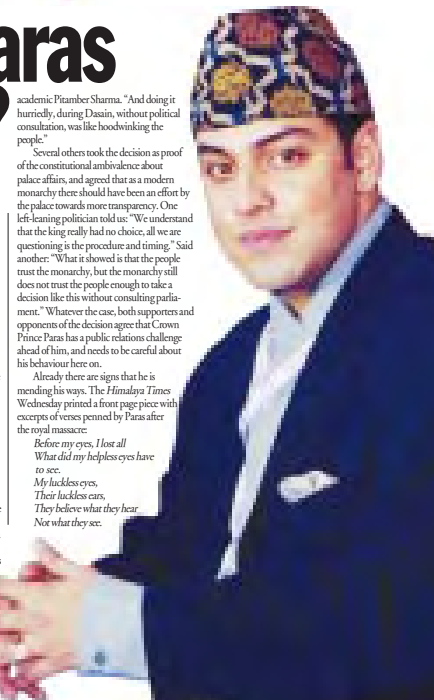
The main opposition UML's Madhav Nepal, who had no comment last week, did one of his rapid turnarounds: "The royal family should move with the times, the monarchy needs to be more transparent, especially in the post-massacre phase when it is insecure." Although he knows his son's reputation, King Gyanendra didn't have any other choice. He and his son are the only male members left in the royal family after the massacre, and the prolonged absence of a line of succession would have been highly unusual. Said one source close to the royal family: "There are so many procedures and traditional functions that need a crown prince to be present, and this is why there was a degree of urgency." One of these was the need to name a royal caretaker when the King and Queen Komal travel abroad, which could be soon for the Queen's health check-up in the UK. Even so, critics of the decision to name Paras crown prince are not satisfied. "Here is a man who at the very least owes the Nepali public an apology," says

academic Pitamber Sharma. "And doing it hurriedly, during Dasain, without political consultation, was like hoodwinking the people."

Several others took the decision as proof of the constitutional ambivalence about palace affairs, and agreed that as a modern monarchy there should have been an effort by the palace towards more transparency. One left-leaning politician told us: "We understand that the king really had no choice, all we are questioning is the procedure and timing." Said another: "What it showed is that the people trust the monarchy, but the monarchy still does not trust the people enough to take a decision like this without consulting parliament." Whatever the case, both supporters and opponents of the decision agree that Crown Prince Paras has a public relations challenge ahead of him, and needs to be careful about his behaviour here on.

Already there are signs that he is mending his ways. *The Himalayan Times* Wednesday printed a front page piece with excerpts of verses penned by Paras after the royal massacre:

Before my eyes, I lost all
What did my helpless eyes have to see.
My luckless eyes,
Their luckless ears,
They believe what they hear
Not what they see.



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Coming soon: *The Himalayan*

Just when you thought Kathmandu could take no more, another English daily newspaper is coming to town.

BINOD BHATARA

Ram Pradhan had just written a scathing editorial suggesting that sovereign Nepalis deserve an explanation for King Gyanendra's decision during Dasain to name his son crown prince.

But the public won't get to read the editorial. It went into the Tuesday edition of the dummy run of Kathmandu's newest English daily, tentatively called *The Himalayan*, set to hit the stands sometime in November.

"This is what we believe every Nepali is asking today," says Pradhan, a 25-year veteran editor. "We have a four-man, all-Nepali editorial team that decides our opinion, and it will remain that way as long as I am here." This last remark is to assuage critics who have lashed out at the new venture for its Indian links. Rival media groups, politicians and some journalists maintain that foreign ownership of media is detrimental to the

national interest and have recently stepped up their opposition. P Kharel, a former editor at *The Rising Nepal*, says: "Media is a very sensitive sector and that is why foreign investment should be rejected outright, including in radio and television." Kharel says even India with its tradition of free press does not allow foreign investment in media, so why should we? One of the staunchest critics of Indian entry into Nepali media is MP and former journalist, Raghuji Pant: "It will weaken Nepali independence, dilute our patriotism, give wrong information and confuse Nepalis."

Not everyone agrees. Academic Pradyumn Onta, writing in this paper in August ("What to do when Big Brother knocks", #55), argued that foreign competition would actually enhance professionalism in Nepali media. "What is really at work behind this bogey of nationalism is fear that the mediocrity of those who rule the Nepali media world will be further exposed," Onta wrote.

Editorial p 2
Times of Nepal
Puskar Bhusal
N Ram p 7

Go to p 9

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TIMES OF NEPAL

After the restoration of democracy in 1990, we have seen in Nepal an explosion of expression. In fact, if there is a single pillar of democracy that we can say is relatively robust, it is the media. The Panchayat-era taboos are gone, there are a very few holy cows left, and the freedom to publish and broadcast a wide spectrum of political opinion has bestowed on our adolescent democracy a remarkable resilience.

Freedom is a safety valve that makes our polity less brittle, socially itself more malleable. Outwardly, it is easy to mistake this freedom for a free-for-all, and the powerful who are in the media glare would prefer to get on with dealing in the shadows. But those who have personally profited from democracy and have in the process given the system a bad name must realise that it is, paradoxically, this same freedom that protects their interests.

It is only because all shades of opinion are allowed to be aired in public that tension and resentment do not fester. A free press allows Nepali society to let off steam. There are very few places in the world where an underground press is committed to a violent overthrow of the state is allowed to openly own and publish a slew of newspapers. Where else would guerrilla leaders also be columnists for mainstream papers?

A vibrant media has reinforced the public sphere, it has made the citizenry more alert, it has fostered awareness and cemented Nepali society with a collective consciousness. Production quality, values, content, and the sheer range of public opinion makes the Nepal media today unrecognisable from what it was pre-1990. The deregulation and corporatisation of the Nepal media in the past 12 years have been driven by a simple fact: professionalism and credibility sell better than bias and gossip.

All this should have meant that media should have grown on a healthy trajectory. Also, it hasn't. Traditional news values push the media to focus on confrontation and conflict, on the shallow and negative, the sensational and titillating. The media then sets off a self-perpetuating cycle of cynicism that hurts national morale and self-esteem.

There is now a bandwagon effect in the Nepali daily broadcast market with at least five papers scrambling for a share of the pie. The FM business in the Valley is saturated. Television is the next frontier, and the unseemly wheeling and dealing that has accompanied the rise of private cable TV shows that it must be very lucrative for all concerned. There is a similar fracas for licenses for terrestrial television.

The electro-magnetic spectrum is the property of the Nepali people, it does not belong to the minister of the day. It does not belong to private interests in perpetuity even if it is awarded by a passing politician. There must be anti-trust legislation to prevent the concentration of multi-media ownership in the hands of private monopolies.

The imminent arrival of a fourth English daily in Kathmandu as an Indian joint-venture has raised nationalistic hackles. Why should we allow Indians to enter our media market when India itself has banned foreign ownership of media, they ask. They will influence our public opinion and dictate our national policy, others fume. It is interesting to reflect on what this says about the Nepal media's own self-confidence, and how fragile we think our nationalism is. If this is how weak we are, then we probably deserve some solid competition.

Cmon, let's grow up. Why do we weaken ourselves with paranoia? Let's build instead on our strengths, and one of them is a media that is at the moment the freest in the region.

Media is traditionally too lazy for introspection. Besides, daily deadline pressures don't give us time to take a step back and look at ourselves in perspective. If we did, we'd see that journalism is much more than being a passive recorder of events. Our role goes beyond the ego fill of a byline in tomorrow morning's newspaper.

For their part, media owners have to see their products as something much more important than the bottom line. There is a responsibility here that comes from carrying out a public service: the service of informing, interpreting and explaining independently, objectively and without a hidden agenda. It is about creating outrage about injustice, blowing the whistle on wrongdoers. And this will not happen if we are so swamped with the immediate, with the over-riding desire to please political patrons or the market.

At a time when hopelessness and helplessness abound, when there is yearning for a vision that will unite the crushed fragments of our nation, we owe it to ourselves and the Nepal people to restore trust, find faith, and protect our freedom with its complete application.

There is a lot that is wrong with Nepal, but we are not doomed. In these jaded times, media is also in the business of replenishing hope.



STATE OF THE RESTAL by CK LAL

Memories of the future

The shame of the present political mess makes the pain of the past more intense.

Reading history is often depressing, because it's essentially a record of human failings—tales of those who could have changed the course of history for the better, but didn't. They let the opportunity pass, and allowed the society to fall into another morass.

Edward Gibbon says in his tome on the *Decline and Fall of Roman Empire*, "History...is indeed little more than the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind." But then, it is history again that shows that the survival instinct almost always triumphs—despite the setback that it has to suffer on its way to eternity, or apocalypse, depending upon the way you look at the destiny of humanity.

But hunting for the past does have its rewards for hard-core aficionados. Rummaging through the dustbins of history in contemporary memoirs of persons in public life, you occasionally stumble upon dry bones of nostalgia. You try to chew upon it until the throb of your cerebral vein threatens you weary. To be born in the 20th century, said the Apostle of Peace.

Turning the pages of Dr Jagdish Chandra Pokharel's *The Days of Shame and Pain* is excruciatingly painful for anyone who played even a small part in the thirty-year struggle against the tyranny that went by the name of Panchayat in this country. Remembering the agony is bad enough, but it's the sadness of what the leaders of those exciting times have turned out to be that makes the memory even more difficult to bear.

Back then, there was hope to help you endure the hardships. Grief was just a sacrifice for a higher cause. But with the faith in the infallibility of leadership all gone and dreams of building a new society almost dead, the struggles of the past look like days wasted in chasing a mirage. It's the shame of the present political mess that makes the pain of the past even more intense.

Dr Pokharel makes an attempt to return to those days of high hopes and

sharsh realities. In a language that will not please even a secondary school teacher of English language ("He had killed too many birds with one stroke" and "Their economy was not strong enough to support them"), but will be of immense delight to researchers looking for cultural variety in expression ("We had felt the real taste of sugarcane after having tasted the bitterness of neem"), Dr Pokharel remembers the days of suffering that he endured as a child in Tanahu and in exile in India.

For Dr Pokharel, it is a pleasant journey back in time. He has conquered the ghosts of his part and it is one of the more successful professionals to come out from families with a Nepali Congress background. He studied in India, went to Greece for a degree in architecture, and then got a doctoral degree from Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the United States. After that he spent time at Hawaii for post-doctoral research. Those are impressive credentials, and Dr Pokharel probably deserves the opportunity that the state has given him—he is an Honourable Member of the National Planning Commission.

It must be very tempting for Dr Pokharel to swivel his chair and reflect about his childhood while looking down at the view of Singha Durbar Gardens from the huge window that watches his room with winter sun. After all, his life is nothing but a remembrance of pain and shame in the times of glory and happiness. The satisfaction of having overcome fills you with pride, and achievement is a powerful aphrodisiac—it impels you to dig deeper to reach higher and higher.

In that sense, Dr Pokharel's book is not just a trip down memory lane, it is also his road map for a future career in politics or diplomacy. The book may not have a political agenda, but it is not difficult to spot traces of advocacy for Subarna Shumsher faction of Nepali Congress in it. When a learned person like Dr Pokharel makes an attempt to pursue an agenda, extra care is always taken to shroud the intention in the weeds of impartiality, sincerity and spontaneity.

Dr Pokharel will not take offence if I were to suggest that his experiences were of the less extreme kind compared to the children of many other Nepali Congress supporters all over the country. Subarna Shumsher had the reputation of being more generous to those who were personally loyal to him compared to the activists that were reckless enough to persist with their loyalty to BP Koirala. Memory is always selective, and Dr Pokharel refrains from remembering the way Subarna Shumsher loyalists were given led-glove treatment even when the missions of the Panchayat ruthlessly prosecuted Koirala supporters in the seventies.

What makes this book more important is the way it depicts the failure of armed struggle waged by the Nepal Congress. I think there is a lesson in it for Messrs Pathyapa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai. They need to ask themselves: isn't it history repeating itself in the Peoples' War, but this time as farce? Dr Pokharel and Dr Bhattarai were colleagues for a while at the Department of Architecture at Tribhuvan University's Institute of Engineering. Shouldn't they come together and prepare a blueprint for a new Nepal where Manasi, Dr Bhattarai's daughter, would not have to write of her days of shame and pain twenty years hence?

Warning for prospective readers: while it is rewarding to plough through the book, the language can be a little tiresome. Perseverance to pay. You realise the real worth of something when it is not there—Dr Pokharel's book demonstrates the importance of a good copy editor. Perhaps that is the other thing Dr Pokharel should have done: giving the draft to Dr Bhattarai to polish before sending it to the printers. I would have done both of them a load of good, and it would have been less of a strain on readers. ☐

BAHANS Kanak Mani Dixit in "Bahans and the Nepal State" (#65) seems to have completely overlooked the fact that a good majority of Bahans in remote parts of the country are living in poverty, are uneducated and unsophisticated—very much like the counterparts he has com-

ones who always get blamed for whatever goes wrong in the country, and people like Dr Babadur Bista (author of *Fatalism and Development*, another example of intellectual mediocrity) and Dixit fail to, or simply pretend not to, know this.

Dixit writes about his friend Tashi being summoned by this Bahun Chhetri looking gentleman. Why doesn't he write about the numerous incidents where Bahans are insulted by other ethnic groups? Dixit makes Bahans who have nothing to do with what goes on in the country unnecessarily guilty about their heritage. OK, I admit certain Bahun prime ministers have screwed up the country, but haven't there been prime ministers from other ethnic groups who have been equally unsuccessful? Is the Nepal Times brave enough to publish this letter? I suppose not.

Trailokya Raj Aryal *Kathmandu*

There is no system better than democracy. We cannot go back to an autocratic system. As Dixit points out, our country still remains an incomplete democracy. We should be able now to find gaps in each sector of our democratic system and correct it. Once the system functions well, there will not be any discrimination to Nepalis—Brahmin or otherwise. Dixit has also put forward the idea of proportional representation from each ethnic group. This may contradict the basic principle of the majority in a democracy.

BP Poudyal *Richmond, California*

I applaud your efforts in pointing out the sociological consequences of the Brahmin dominance in Nepal society and politics. Our society is still in the feudal-medieval age regardless whether we are in the 21st century or not. The Brahmin (priest) is the medium between god and humans. This medium of interpretation of the super-natural gives the Brahmin extreme power. It is natural for human beings to be inclined towards self-preservation according to social Darwinism. Some may suggest getting rid of the caste/class system, but this would merely take the branches off a tree, not the root. We must translate all Brahmin texts into vernacular languages so average Nepalis can evaluate and analyse the doctrines, concepts and values of the system. Then we will have a true Nepali renaissance, enlightenment and revolution in our thinking and culture.

Subarna Bhattacharya *USA*

Kanak Mani Dixit is neither a narcissist nor a masochist, so why does he take pleasure in blowing up a volatile issue in a society that is already ethnically fractured? There

have been lapses in the past, yes, but we cannot change the picture by simply condemning them or giving more opportunities to the so-called underprivileged. It is the attitude that needs to be changed—the attitude of the whole people, including those of the underprivileged. Is Kanak Mani Dixit who he is today because of the underprivileged, or simply because he is a Bahun?

Hari Sharma Dahal *Dharan*

Congratulations to Kanak Mani Dixit for being bold and honest on the issue of ethnic groups being under-represented in Nepal politics and government administrative jobs. With a long history of *natabad* and *knipabad*, Nepal was bound to have this unfair and unjust representation. For a long time, Bahans have had the upper hand in Nepal politics, and that grip has increased. As a boy in predominantly Newari community, I was advised to be a doctor, not a businessman when I grew up. But never a politician or a *jagire*. My elders gave me this advice not because they hated these professions but perhaps they tried and they were severely corrected. It was to be in such a field, I do not know whether Bahans are to be blamed exclusively for the sorry state of the country, but one thing is clear: this poor representation has to end and I am sure the dominance of Bahans will erode as education spreads. Some of my best friends are Bahans, they are no different than me. For me this question of Newar vs Bahun/Chhetri is not relevant. More relevant is a good level of representation from all ethnicities in our bureaucracy and politics.

"DBK" *New Jersey*

While I agree with Kanak Mani Dixit's argument that there is a need of greater participation from all ethnic groups, I don't believe in your approach. You present the data of the Public Service Commission job referrals showing the increasing participation of Bahun people. But this does not necessarily mean that the PSC is discriminating against other ethnic groups. Though there can be some loopholes, I believe the PSC exams are fair. If no one from a particular ethnic group does well, it is not discrimination by default—it is deficient and uneven education. In my student days I saw some Bahans (especially from Syangja) preparing hard for the PSC exam for years and eventually succeeded. They didn't get their jobs because they were Bahans, but because they worked hard. There is a need for greater participation

LETTERS

of the *dalits* and *janajatis* in national building, but this does not mean they should get an opportunity to replace well-trained and competent people just because of belonging to a particular ethnic group. The only way to ensure greater participation of non-Bahans is to give them access to good education.

Ram Limbu *Sydney*

Hats off to Kanak Mani Dixit for taking on such a controversial topic even though he himself belongs to the Bahun community. I am a girl of 18, and unfortunately I have felt the superior attitude among the *parbatias* about the *barbarians* that Dixit talks about. It is necessary to address these grievances and the oppressive psyche now so that it does not erupt into violence later. It is a long and difficult job, but it is important to tackle and reach out. I don't really matter whether we are Bahun, Chhetri, Rai or Gurung. We are all Nepalis.

F Nepal USA *Aacista Gurung Kathmandu*

TRUTH

As I cross my fingers and hope that my long awaited trip to Nepal scheduled for November is not cancelled due to recent events, I thought I would take a moment to browse the Internet for some information from your part of the world. I was quite interested to see your editorial ("Truth is the first casualty", #65). Do not jump to the conclusion that as an American, I am going to defend our national media. Indeed, as a former journalist, I have been appalled at the media's beating of the proverbial war drum which has been heard across the vast stretches of this land, from purple mountains, seas of grain... you know the rest. I could not agree with your editorial more. No. This is a response from an American who remains unheard in his own land. An American who feels the war in Afghanistan is wrong. Who feels the US has a history of its own terrorist actions that lie at the root of the tragic events of 11 September. The purpose of this letter is to let you know that not all Americans support our current war. Some of us know that if truth wasn't the first casualty, it was the first wounded, but there are those of us who are trying whatever methods we can to let our voices, and the truth, be heard.

NS Mather *Denver, Colorado*

CR Rai *UK*

The issues discussed by Kanak Mani Dixit are easily brushed aside with the standard argument about meritocracy. According to this

I am overwhelmed to find the short but true war analysis by Daniel Lak ("Collateral damage", #65) in your internet edition. I agree about the failure of diplomacy and politics by the United States and its allies as well as the approach taken by the global mass media in covering this crisis. Many are deviating from the basic norms of journalism, and this is a major test for the world's media. The promises expressed by leaders involved in this war are also going to be tested. Let us hope for a quick end of the war and peace in the world.

Shital Bhandary *Tijuana, Mexico*

TIKAPUR

Thanks to CK Lak for covering Tikaure in your column ("Nothing to do in Tikapur", #64). During my three years stay at the adjoining bazaar of Rajapur, Bardiya, my family of three were regular visitors of the Bangla garden. It is a well-known picnic spot for people from Nepalgunj, Mahendranagar and Surkhet. Mismanagement, over staffing and politicisation are the three legs of a dangerous tripod that protect the progress of the park. People of Tikapur are still recalling the dedication made by late Khadga Bahadur Singh. His untimely death was a tragedy. As indicated by Lak, Tikapur could be the nerve center of the hub of mid and Far-western Nepal because it has already a well developed infrastructure. Tikapur, like the rest of Nepal, needs sound management and depoliticisation. The road linking Tikapur garden from the Mahendra Highway at Lamki should be black-topped. The garden should be divided into different parts and a part should be developed as mini-zoo to attract domestic tourists.

Prakash Kafle *by email*

TAX

Why wouldn't mind paying taxes, if we knew where the tax money goes. And if it goes into someone else's pocket, why should we pay? (From the Nepali press, "UN salaries, tax", #65). Other workers in government pay taxes, but one should pay tax if it is being used for personal or political benefit—like adding more ministers and departments.

Dinesh Bhatta *Kathmandu*

The wealth beneath our feet



The gas plant at Pachali, Teku.

Some 300 metres below the surface, Kathmandu Valley's vast natural gas reserves are waiting to be tapped. What's holding things up?

RAMYATA LIMBU

Binita Sharma used to think that vegetables were all that grew on her tiny backyard on the banks of the Bagmati in Teku. Then she found out she was sitting on top of a huge deposit of natural gas.

For the past twenty years, Sharma's family hasn't used firewood, kerosene or cylinders, the household's entire energy requirement is met by a seemingly inexhaustible (and totally free) source of fuel: underground

natural gas.

"I have been using the gas to cook," says Sharma, who was at first reticent to talk to media about the bonanza below her feet because she thought the government might start taxing her. The Sharmas were drilling for water when they accidentally discovered gas—a careless plumber lit a cigarette and threw away the match. "The workmen had drilled to about 700 ft when a huge jet of water gushed out of the ground," recalls Sharma. "When the

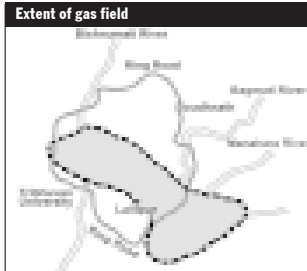
plumber's match touched the ground, it burst into flames."

Geologists have long known that there are huge reserves of natural gas below layers of sediments in Kathmandu Valley—remains of the vegetation and aquatic plants that thrived on the lake bed. They say there is enough gas trapped in zones called "facies" between 180 to 300 metres below the surface.

"The gas is composed chiefly of methane, carbon dioxide and nitrogen. It is highly combustible

and non-toxic, and can be utilised as a dependable alternative source of energy," says Ramesh Kumar Aryal, a geologist with the Ministry of Industry's Department of Mines and Geology.

Studies carried out by the department indicate the gas reserves, found mainly along the Bagmati and along the southern end of the valley, can fulfil the domestic energy needs of an estimated 21,000 households in Kathmandu Valley for 30 years. The gas itself is generated by



clayey sediments rich in organic materials, and the methane is dissolved in water under tremendous pressure.

The gas could be made commercially viable if a project floated in the private sector by the Department of Mines and Geology takes off. The Kathmandu Gas Project, initiated by the department with the help of the Japan International Cooperation Agency, JICA, and UNDP, concluded that a potential gas reserve of about 300 million cu m exists in central and southern Kathmandu as far back as 1978.

The department recently floated a tender, and the private Sussan Power Company says it has been virtually assured of the contract. It is waiting for the political situation to stabilise before investing in the infrastructure.

"It isn't a very good time for investment and, like most private investors in Nepal, we have to wait and see what happens with the talks between the Maoists

and the government," says executive director Gopal Krishna Gadula. The company's Chinese partners are wary about the investment scenario and also want to wait before they commit themselves to the project, which is estimated to cost nearly Rs 450 million.

"But with really high excavation costs, the total will probably be higher," says Gadula. Once they start, Sussan expects to work with the government on establishing parameters, including subsidies on electricity, income tax releases, and subsidies similar to those on imported Indian liquefied petroleum gas. Government officials told us negotiations on revenue and royalty would take place after it accepted the proposal of a private company it was in the final stages of approving.

For any company interested in implementing the project, much of the initial groundwork and infrastructure has already been done. Initial exploration

work by JICA in 1978 delineated a 26 sq km area in central Kathmandu as gas-rich area. JICA studied the surface and subsurface geology, as well as the geochemical characteristics of water and natural gas from existing water wells. Three gas wells drilled at Tripureswor indicated that there was a proven gas reserve of 47 million cu m within a 4 sq km zone of Teku-Tripureswor.

A model gas plant established by the Kathmandu Gas Project in Teku in 1983 stopped operating about three years ago, but there is still a Department of Mines and Geology security guard looking after the site. The experiment was to see if gas supply was consistent enough for commercial use. The gas collected in the plant was supplied to the Veterinary Hospital, the then Ministry of Industry, and the Nepal Telecommunication Corporation offices in the immediate vicinity of the model plant.

The gas was supplied to the institutions from a 500 cu m storage tank connected to three gas wells by an underground PVC pipeline. The Department of Mines stopped supplying the gas not because the gas ran out, but because it was spending up to Rs 2 million annually.

"The pipelines, the infrastructure, are still in place, so whoever takes on the project can actually start right away," says Aryal. He estimates 5,000 houses can start getting gas within a month, and the entire project could be implemented within a year. Once the project gets underway, the private company will be the sole distributor of the gas and its use by private consumers will be illegal.

"We do know that in some areas of Patan, Thapathali and Tripureswor the gas is being tapped by individual households. Once we implement the project, we will have to notify individual households that it is illegal to use this gas," says Gadula.

But that may be easier said than done. If the company decides to use the infrastructure that is already in place for gas collection and distribution, there would be opposition from the new residences that have come up

in the Teku area. "The plant was built nearly twenty years ago when there were hardly any houses in the area. Today, it is a heavily populated neighbourhood, and a plant like that could be a threat," says Krishna Bhakta, a local resident.

The Department of Mines and Geology has divided the Valley's gas prospective zones into three blocks: Block A, Teku-Tripureswor, has a

Cross section of Kathmandu Valley



proven gas reserve of 46 million cu m. Block B, Koteswor-Tinkune, shows a probable reserve of 170 million cu m, and Block C, Manahara-Imadol, shows a probable gas reserve of 100 million cu m.

The project plans to install gas gathering stations in Teku, which would supply gas to Soaltee and Thapathali through Tripureswor, in Bhrikuti Mandap, which would supply gas to Darbar Marg through Jamal, Rama Park, and the Tadhik area, another station in Sanhkhuma, which would supply gas to the Everest Hotel, along Arniko Highway towards Babar

Mahal and Tinkune, and one at Balkumari would supply gas to Pulchowk and to Tin Kune, through Koteswor and Gwarko. A detailed feasibility study in 1996 on the commercial utilisation of the Valley's gas resources ruled out the use of "biogenic" natural gas in the industrial sector, for power generation, or as compressed gas for transport, but said it was good for domestic purposes.

The project anticipates generating revenue out of two components, methane gas and water produced from the wells. "Of course we have to discharge some water forcibly back into the

ground since the gas is water-dissolved. The rest we hope to sell—if Melanchi hasn't taken off by then," says Aryal.

Department estimates indicate that the revenue from gas and water sales could amount to over Rs 120 million per year. Interestingly, although Sussan says it has been assured the license by the government, officials say it was good for domestic purposes.

All this is good news for Binita Sharma and others like her who can go on using the free gas from beneath their feet. □

Preparing for disaster

Nepal is almost synonymous with natural disasters. And UN agencies in the country are not taking chances. UN Nepal this week launched the UN Disaster Response Preparedness Plan on the occasion of 56th anniversary of the international body. The three-part plan seeks to ensure that in the event of a major disaster the UN and its partners will be able to provide effective and timely assistance to its staff and their dependants, and other affected people. The UN has also established an Emergency Operation Centre, designed to withstand earthquake tremors of up to 8.5 on the Richter scale. They have reasons to. Studies estimate that an earthquake on the magnitude of 8.3 could kill over 40,000, injure more than 90,000, and destroy about 60 percent of the buildings in the Valley. That's not all. It would leave about 700,000 people homeless, more than 50 percent of bridges impassable, damage more than 95 percent of water supply pipes, and leave 60 percent of telephone lines out of order. To get the message across to attending guests and dignitaries, including Prime Minister Deuba, the theatre group Aarohan put up a hilarious street play.

Festive occasion

Festivals are about family. And Revati Subedi has a big one. One of Bhaktapur's seven centenarians, Subedi recently celebrated Dasain with a host of grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The 114-year-old has outlived her two sons and has a daughter, six grandsons and 13 granddaughters, 10 great-grandsons, six great-granddaughters, and two great-great-granddaughters.

The rewards of fiction

Good times are here for Nepali novelists writing in English. While Manjushree Thapa's recently launched book *The Tutor of History*, published by Penguin India, is doing brisk sales in Valley bookstores, Ohio-based Nepali writer, Samrat Upadhyay, just bagged the 2001 Whiting Writers' Awards. Given annually to the best emerging writers, Upadhyay and four other fiction writers, two poets, two non-fiction writers, and a playwright, received \$35,000 each at a ceremony in New York on 27 October. Upadhyay's *Arresting God in Kathmandu* was released by Mariner Books/ Houghton Mifflin in July this year, the first fictional work by a Nepali author to be published in the west.

HERE AND THERE

Remembering rebabs in Rimche

In theory, a trek should make you forget the mundane, the pressing or the horrific. So my journey to Langtang, one of Nepal's most beautiful valleys, should have been a timely interlude free of worry and woe. But it wasn't.

Even in the literally breathtaking surroundings of Kyangjin Gumpa, the world kept intruding. Not just any old part of the world, but Afghanistan, now being bombed for the fourth straight week by the world's only superpower.

I know, I know. There he goes again, banging on about morality and murder, sitting on the sidelines deploring the war on the pitch, or in this case, the vividly American "field". No, I didn't set out this week to point out civilian casualties yet again, or to wonder in print how to stand against terrorism, while despising what's being done to stop it. That I'll leave to another time.

No one told me that that the sweaty journey up the Langtang Valley was so steep! It's not a valley, it's a vertical jungle. I'll admit to being slightly out of shape, or even slightly pear-shaped, but I could barely manage the hot, sultry, bamboo shaded paths through thick forest, and along mossy cliff faces. As your correspondent though, I persevered. Usually, to make the plodding go by less painfully, I hum tunes ("out of tune" according to my long-suffering fellow trekker and wife). Almost anything that comes to mind. But on this trek, I stayed silent.

I couldn't stop thinking about a house in Islamabad where we used to meet in the early 1990s to hear Afghan musicians play.

Usually they were strumming away on *rebabs*—stringed instruments that are to the more elaborate *saz* what a banjo is to a classical guitar. We would queue up their thin with rough Italian wine, poured into an earthenware jug and dispensed into cups made of glorious smoky glass from Herat. Our host made us sit on the floor, which after

Even on a trek up to Kyangjin Gumpa, memories of Afghanistan kept intruding.



a few cups of plonk became very comfortable indeed.

All this, you understand, came flooding back as I perspired my way up towards Ghoratabela, on the second day in Langtang. Back to Islamabad, one singer named Ali was a real favourite. He was a Kabul, and as such, a deeply cultured and passionate man. His fingers would literally fly over the strings, each one plucking madly. The music would be distorted, syncopated and utterly compelling. His eyes would close tightly as he strove for higher and higher notes. He

often sang a *nashena*, kind of a *gazzal* on steroids, and I swear I actually saw one person so moved that he crushed his wine glass and didn't notice the deep red blood flowing from a gashed hand.

Thoughts of Ali became thoughts of Afghans in general and what had happened to them over the past twenty-odd years. Ali, like, most of the musicians I knew in Islamabad, had fled Kabul when victorious mujahideen groups turned on each other and killed tens of thousands of civilians in the capital, fighting like vultures over a scrap of rotted flesh. The coming of the Taliban in 1996 ended the fighting, but sent a final wave of musicians, artists and actors into exile. No room for them in a country where shimmering nests of video and audio tape fluttered on every corner light standard as a reminder that music and television were now banned.

I quickly forgot about Ali and his entertaining Afghan companions as we sat down to lunch at Rimche. One good thing about trekking: it allows you to eat vast quantities and feel good about it. But no, not even the grunting board of the Summit Hotel and Restaurant, Rimche's finest, provided honest escape from the war. As I shovelled down my dal bhat, I started thinking about Kabul pulao, and the exquisite fried aubergines in yoghurt that the cook in Kabul used to assemble proudly, even as rockets exploded nearby and Kalashnikovs clattered from the roof.

Where is he these days? No foreigners to cook for, no hard currency to salt away in his Pakistani bank account, not much of a life, just American bombs raining down these days. I sincerely hope he is not part of the collateral damage.

Even Langtang or the amazing view from Tsering Ri, can't banish thoughts of the war against whatever. And I'm going back next week, to meet the newest wave of refugees to flee the slow and horrible death of a country. □

by DANIEL LAK



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Come to Kumrose



A do-it-yourself community in Chitwan has created a mini-national park, and is earning money from eco-tourism.

KISHOR PRADHAN
IN KUMROSE, CHITWAN

Fifteen years ago this place, north of the Rapti and east of the Royal Chitwan National Park, was 25 hectares of barren land. Once part of the vast Chitwan jungle, the forests had been cleared by loggers and a government resettlement camp.

Then, in the late 1980s, the community got together to plant trees and recreate the once-lush jungles of the area. Today the Kumrose Community Forest is a 1,050 hectare patch of jungle and generates Rs 1.5 million annually from tourists visiting the area for elephant rides and nature walks.

Kumrose does not rival the nearby Royal Chitwan National Park, but what it has shown is that human intervention can bring back the nature that human intervention destroyed—and it can work for the benefit of nearby villages and raise their standard of living. Park and

people need not be in conflict.

In the past the forest from the Rapti river used to break havoc in Kumrose and seven other villages. We started tree plantations on the barren banks of the river to prevent floods, now there are no floods, the trees hold the soil together and the farms are more fertile," says Hira Bahadur Gunung, who chairs the forest conservation group.

Today, nearly 1,200 households in the vicinity benefit directly from the Kumrose forest, which helps meet their firewood, timber, fodder and dhat needs.

With the restoration of the forests, wildlife from the Royal Chitwan National Park has also started meandering into the Kumrose villages," says Hira Bahadur. Biogas plants have been installed in many households as alternative source of energy and villagers are encouraged to use less firewood from the forest.

Curious visitors to the community forest have also encouraged

The Kumrose Community Forest is a remarkable success story of how community forestry and conservation can go together. The village collects fees from the riders and ploughs the money directly into further conservation work.

The village charges Rs 300 rupees per elephant to enter the Kumrose forest and generates about Rs 1.5 million a year. The money generated by levying entry fees to the tourists on elephants are used for conservation activities in the KCF.

The fences demarcating the forest area from the villages are maintained and repaired, rhino trenches are dug, and money is also invested in various development activities in Kumrose villages," says Hira Bahadur. Biogas plants have been installed in many households as alternative source of energy and villagers are encouraged to use less firewood from the forest.

Curious visitors to the community forest have also encouraged

local micro-entrepreneurship, and the success of preservation efforts has also encouraged the people to start community enterprises. The users' group of the Kumrose Community Forest, together with the Village Development Committee, recently constructed a machan (viewing tower) that can accommodate eight visitors at a time. The machan offers visitors a chance to experience jungle life at night, and in the daylight, the opportunity to observe animals and birds in a peaceful setting.

With the growth of the forest and resident wildlife in Kumrose, there has been a surge in the community's awareness of conservation. Villagers have realised they are the immediate beneficiaries of the revenue generated by visiting tourists. There is some nervousness about the wild animals their forest now attracts, especially since crops are damaged by rhinos and wild elephants and livestock killed by



The interior of the Kumrose community forest shows lush vegetation and undergrowth even in the dry season (left), and a young rhino pokes its head through the tall elephant grass to observe tourists observing him (above).

leopards. Initially, when faced with the reforestation plans, not everyone was so sanguine. "The local leadership was criticised by people when it was first decided that a reforestation programme was to be implemented in our village. People were afraid that wild animals from the nearby Royal Chitwan National Park would make this patch of forest their home and cause more trouble to local farmers," says the Kumrose Village Development Committee Chairman Krishna Lal Chaudhary.

Now there is none of the hostility here in Kumrose towards wildlife often seen in other conservation areas of Nepal. "We tolerate the loss from wild animals because we see the benefits they bring us," says Hira Bahadur. Sometimes the village seeks the help of the Royal Chitwan National Park to relocate troublesome rogue elephants or marauding leopards.

A recent rhino census conducted by the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation found 20 resident rhinos in Kumrose alone. Says Hira Bahadur, "Since the Royal Chitwan National Park is near Kumrose, wild animals from the park used to stray in and around the Kumrose forest, but with the eventual growth of Kumrose forest area, the grasslands and the natural water holes and canals, large wild animals like rhinos have become resident in the forest."

The Kumrose Community Forest started out 15 years ago as a Panchayat-protected forest, but in 1995 it was registered as a community forest and has been functioning according to the government's forestry regulations, which hand over decision-making on protection and management to the forest user groups set up by the village development committees.

The Kumrose Community Forest is shortly completing its terms under the jurisdiction of the district forest authority, and is in the process of being registered as a buffer zone of the Royal Chitwan National Park. Once it is declared a buffer, it will benefit from the park's conservation efforts, and in turn contribute grassroots support for the park.

This is a vital part of the modern approach to conservation, and will be the model for the Tani landscape (TAL), a new conservation approach being designed by the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) to join conservation efforts in the Nepal Tani and India.

TAL aims to connect community forests, protected forests, eleven protected areas and national parks in Nepal and India to facilitate migration of large mammals such as tigers, rhinos and Asian elephants. This would ensure their natural roaming patterns along jungle corridors and ensure their long-term survival. □

The foreign hand

Is Nepali sovereignty really so fickle that it is threatened by a new English newspaper?

With the Maoist militia on furlough and the government fidgeting its way towards uncertainty, the holiday season has given us an opportunity to reflect on what it really means to be a Nepali.

As some members of parliament were squabbling over their rank and/or portfolios in the newly expanded cabinet and others were enraged by the last-minute forfeiture of their Dasain kharcho, still others were warning us of how a new foreign-funded English daily was fast emerging as the greatest threat to national security since the 1814-16 war with the British. The Dasain-e-fraza on the (futility of foreign investment, ordinarily a welcome proposition for an economy in disrepair, has fortified our allegiance to nationalism.

Advocates of state protection of the media insist that the investor in question was coming to Nepal not to take away our money but to advance the bid her own country's hidden agenda. One MP detailed how opening the fourth estate's doors to foreign money would eventually turn Nepal into a truly paperless society. Others have asserted that no South Asian country has been so liberal with the cash and editorial judgement of non-resident aliens.

The arguments, genuinely patriotic as they may sound, are a little murky. Over the last 12 years, we have been told that our democracy is no less inclusive and resilient than that in Britain or in the United States. Implicit in such reasoning, one would have thought, is the freedom people like Rupert Murdoch have to buy minority shares in Nepal Television, mount a bid to take over Metro FM and fully own RCT football club. We never bothered about what other countries in South Asia were doing while we decided to modulate our FM bandwidth with a clutter of frequencies. Why are we suddenly being asked to take a regional perspective of the media now? Our constitution does not limit our right to be misinformed precisely because it presupposes we are capable of rational judgement in the voting booth and in front of newspaper vendors alike. Why are we worrying the white flag even before the dummy editions of the publication hit the pavement?

It is important not to forget the moral dimension of the discourse. Foreign media outlets kept aloft the torch of Nepal's burning desire for freedom from the early days of the Nepal Praja Parishad. Photographs of young revolutionaries in shackles smuggled out of a Rana prison showed to the world that Nepal was willing to pay any price and bear any burden for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. During the panchayat decades, foreign news media were considered the paragons of journalistic perfection. (Remember those colourful stories about how the panchas rigged the referendum by giving the ballot papers that changed from blue to yellow overnight?) Why are some of these same outlets now considered pernicious sources of disinformation? How could we become so uncivil to those who helped us rise our liberties?

The economic risks posed by the editorial venture seem more real. The argument that our limited readership base and meagre sources of advertising revenue cannot sustain a further fragmentation of the market would have been a more plausible one. The major dailies from down south available at Kathmandu newsstands are cheaper than our own. (Until several years ago, on some evenings in places like Biratnagar, you could choose between the train-delivered dark editions of Indian dailies and the jet-set late city editions routed via Kathmandu.) Moreover, they have more pages and, therefore, command a higher resale value among *kahadwallahs*. If opponents of the upcoming English daily can live with foreign publications continuing to penetrate Nepal's market as long as they keep their hands off the local advertisement pie, then all I have to say is that the current debate is fatally flawed.

As for fears of the propagation of ominous external agendas, do we honestly believe we need foreign investment and their official sponsors here and abroad—to bring out newspapers for that? Some of our indigenous publications have long shown adeptness in adapting stories conceived and vetted by innocuously named specialists representing foreign governments into cogent commentaries. I have compiled my own weekly list of must-read journals and think I have figured out with a reasonable degree of accuracy where I can find current specific perspectives on Nepal and international issues. The fairness doctrine works remarkably well, too. Within days, you can expect to read robust rebuttals and compelling counterclaims within the same pool of periodicals.

As a reader, I would want to hear more energetic arguments from both sides before officials come with a final decision on the future of the newspaper in question. The debate should be premised on the fact that the government is not entirely powerless. Officials can specify recruitment policies that neither conflict with the realities of the Nepali labour market nor contradict the Nepal mind-set. In terms of content control, didn't we winist not too long ago how the government could haul into the Hanuman Disha gao those who in its view failed to respect the outer bounds of freedom of expression?

Then there are other measures, ranging from a stiff surcharge on newsprint and a symbolic denial of government advertisements to encouraging extra scrutiny from the tax officers, which could work against potential mischief-makers. We wouldn't have to worry too much about an international outcry against official clampdown on press freedom after we recall how national-security considerations compelled the Voice of America to spike an interview with Taliban chief Mullah Mohammed Omar only a few weeks ago.

If our freedomist friend eventually were to be ordered to take the next flight out of the country along with his chequebook, that wouldn't leave me any more reassured about the security of Nepal's sovereignty. If, on the other hand, the liberal proclivities of the government were to allow the presses to start rolling, I still wouldn't stop my list of those revealing analyses in the publications on top reading. □

Read the fine print

N. RAM Over the greater part of the last decade, there has been considerable lobbying to bring about a major institutional change in India—reshaping the character of India's press or ownership by providing its wholly Indian character.

The demand is to reverse the strategic policy decision and allow the entry of foreign media and the interests and foreign investment into India's newspaper sector. This demand is made in the name of liberalisation and globalisation in India. It is not backed by any kind of sensible, logical or persuasive reasoning. It is a demand raised by those who do not care for our history, our politics, our constitutional—legal situation, the professional and economic realities of our media and its future.

There are two major media traditions in India—the older one of a diverse, pluralistic and relatively independent media and the younger one of the manipulated and misused broadcast media, state-controlled radio and television. The long-term Indian press experience suggests the following substantive functions performed, over many decades, by a large number of newspapers coming out in various languages: (a) credible-informational, (b) critical-adversarial-investigative, (c) educational, (d) agenda-building, and (e) propaganda roles.

Freedom of the press is derived from Article 19 of the Constitution. The Supreme Court has held that press freedom is a combination of two freedoms. Article 19(1) (g), subject, of course, to constitutionally-sanctioned "reasonable restrictions" (which to be effective need to be prescribed by law and also meet judicial standards of reasonableness). The constitutional protection and practical freedom India's newspapers enjoy are indeed the envy of the developing world.

But the Article 19 guarantee of the freedom of speech and expression, and therefore, of freedom of the press, is available only to Indian citizens—not to foreigners. The exclusivity of the application of all Article 19 fundamental rights to citizens is clearly no accident: this contrasts

Foreign entry into the Indian media spells trouble, says an Indian journalist.

with what is available to non-citizens in Articles 14 and 29 of the Constitution.

How on earth can the entry of foreign media interest into the press sector make constitutional sense when neither "freedom of speech and expression" nor "the freedom to practice any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business" is guaranteed to non-citizens by the Constitution of India?

After Independence, the question arose whether foreign ownership of daily and periodic newspapers was good for India and its press. Out of the First Press Commission's 1954 Report flowed the Cabinet decision announced in the Lok Sabha on 30 September, 1955, by the minister for information and broadcasting, BV Keskar.

The decision was that foreign newspapers and periodicals that dealt mainly with news and current affairs should not be allowed to bring out editions in India.

India's press has come a long way since. According to the National Readership Survey 2001 (NRS 2001), there are an estimated 17 million adult newspaper readers in India, even if women readers are not counted under-represented in this number.

Diversity, pluralism and relative independence remain in our media, although they have come under pressure from various quarters, are enviable by international standards.

Yet, for all this, the social reach of the press remains weak—some 45 copies of daily newspapers per 1,000 population, which compares poorly with the social dispersion of the press in developed and some developing countries. At best, the Indian press can be characterised as a quite developed press with underdeveloped characteristics. In other words, it is a developing press that needs careful nurturing and systemic protection from the free kind of market players who are concerned with it.

In the final analysis, the argument turns on politics—democratic politics. As eminent jurist AG Noorani emphasises, the Indian press is part of the Indian political system. In the same spirit, the media, the political system, the government and the public should reject as dangerous the demand to open up the Indian newspaper sector to foreign interests and foreign investment. □

Australia and some other countries have demonstrated the wisdom of restricting foreign ownership in their newspaper industry.

It is sometimes asserted that foreign players will be interested only in India's English-language press. This is a naive assumption. The pursuit of profit and power is unlikely to be stopped by linguistic barriers. If the 1955-56 policy decision is thrown out of the window in the name of globalisation, nothing can prevent a Rupert Murdoch from expanding and taking over, directly or indirectly, one or more of India's major newspaper groups.

Once allowed in, foreign capital will also launch new newspapers in collaboration with Indian parties, which can be active or passive partners. Nor is a minority equity holding stipulation for foreign investors likely to make any difference in favour of indigenous interests.

When the play is between unequals, the developed and more resourceful player is not going to be disadvantaged by a minority ownership stake.

What happens to the democratic values of the Mundochs, the Robert Maxwells and the Jean-Luc Lagarderes move in under the signboard of the "global village" is the subject of a growing body of literature. In its splendid book *The Media Monopoly* Ben Bagdikian, who is often hailed as "the conscience of American journalism," draws attention to the homogenising, stultifying and manipulative implications of fewer and fewer corporations owning "most" of the output of daily newspapers and most of the sales and audience in magazine broadcasting, books and movies in the US and constituting "a new private ministry of information and culture."

From an Indian national and democratic standpoint, Murdoch is not the only kind of market player who are concerned with it. If the 1955 policy decision is reversed, nothing will prevent American, German, British, Israeli, Iranian or Saudi or, for that matter, Pakistani businessmen from hiding behind the fronts and shell companies and operating within the Indian press sector, taking advantage of the sovereignty-minimal policy. When it comes to regulating foreign media entry, you cannot open the door selectively.

In the final analysis, the argument turns on politics—democratic politics. As eminent jurist AG Noorani emphasises, the Indian press is part of the Indian political system. In the same spirit, the media, the political system, the government and the public should reject as dangerous the demand to open up the Indian newspaper sector to foreign interests and foreign investment. □

(The Times of India)

(N. Ram is editor of Frontline and Businessline in India.)

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KATHMANDU	SURACHAR (CHITWAN)	DAILY	08:30	02:30	8.00
FROM	TO	SERVICES <td>DEP.TIME <td>ARR.TIME <td>FARE US\$</td> </td></td>	DEP.TIME <td>ARR.TIME <td>FARE US\$</td> </td>	ARR.TIME <td>FARE US\$</td>	FARE US\$
POKHARA	KATHMANDU	DAILY	07:30	02:30	10.00
POKHARA	KATHMANDU	DAILY	08:30	03:30	10.00
POKHARA	CHITRASAR (CHITWAN)	DAILY	08:30	02:30	8.00
POKHARA	SURACHAR (CHITWAN)	DAILY	08:30	02:30	8.00
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CHITRASAR (CHITWAN)	KATHMANDU	DAILY	10:00	03:30	8.00
CHITRASAR (CHITWAN)	POKHARA	DAILY	10:00	03:30	8.00
SURACHAR (CHITWAN)	KATHMANDU	DAILY	09:30	03:30	8.00
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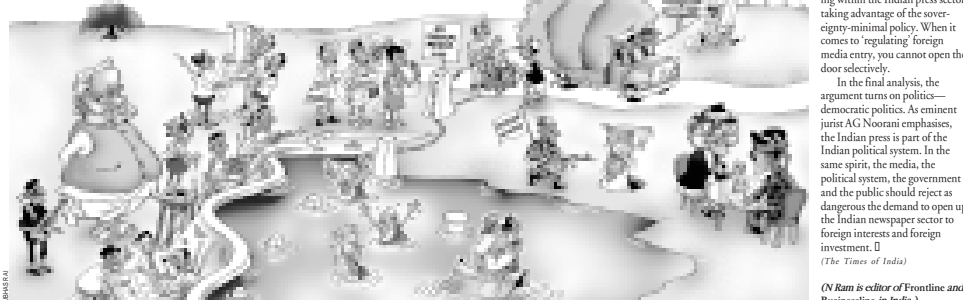
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BIZ NEWS

Deadlock

The last round of the Nepal-India trade talks at the secretary level on 25 and 26 October went nowhere, following India's proposal to revert to pre-treaty provisions on value addition and compulsory labour and material content of Nepal exports. The treaty, which expires 5 December, provided Nepal manufacturers unrestricted access to Indian markets. The problem is Indian concerns about "Rules of Origin" and "tariffs," and threatens a treaty that has seen a six-fold increase of Nepal exports to India and a doubling of imports from India. The agreement would have been renewed automatically, but India wants safeguards against the increase in live Nepal exports—vegetable ghee, acrylic yarn, copper wires, zinc oxide and steel pipes.

Text it

The Nepal Telecommunication Board will make its Short Messaging Service (SMS) a regular feature for mobile owners after Tihar. Users will have the service free until 16 November, after which they will have to pay for text messaging. Sources in the corporation told the NTC has recommended a reduction of tariffs, as part of the strategy to meet potential competition from a private operator expected to begin services later this year. The new tariffs would need government approval.

To text, customers go to the message menu on their mobiles and complete the set up, which involves dialling the SMS Service Centre (+9773810-28801). The procedure for sending and receiving text differs from set to set. The NTC presently has about 17,000 mobile subscribers, of whom about 15,500 are in Kathmandu Valley.

ADB assistance

The Asian Development Bank has announced \$300 million as a technical assistance grant for 2002-2004, or \$102 million each year. Much of the money is to be spent on poverty reduction projects, in line with the Poverty Reduction Partnership Agreement between the government and the Bank. The technical assistance is to be used to prepare projects that will be funded by the loans. The exact amount that will be disbursed will depend on the assessment of the performance of existing and new projects, according to the Bank. Nepal's annual borrowing from the Asian Development Fund between 1994-2000 was \$94 million.

Himalayan apples

Apples from Jumla and Mustang are once again in department stores and mobile kiosks in Kathmandu. In recent years, due to the liberalisation of domestic aviation and transport and packaging subsidies, cargo flights have brought the juicy fruit to major urban markets. Jumla alone has already sent 250 tons to Nepalgunj and Kathmandu. Under a subsidy program, the government pays Rs 7 for each kilogram of apples transported and Rs 58 for each box packed. Apples here cost about Rs 100 at department stores, and Rs 50-60 at the streets.

Necon and Shangrila

Necon Air has added two Beechcraft 1900C and two Twin Otters—flying Shangrila Air colours—to its fleet of two ATRs. Necon is now operating Shangrila's routes, which include Bhairahawa-Pokhara, Kathmandu-Simra and Pokhara-Jomsom. The fare for the Kathmandu-Simra sector is Rs 780 and that for the Bhairahawa-Pokhara hop is Rs 975. The two airlines are going through a complicated phased merger.

ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

Sikkimonomics



Sikkim may not be perfect, but it has some lessons for us in Nepal.

A trip outside Nepal is always refreshing and instructive. Consider for example, the transformations this Beed witnessed on a recent pre-festival trip to Sikkim. Few places are more fascinating for Nepal than Sikkim—an India-centric economy that was eventually annexed, and often Nepalis in Nepal fear their fate will follow that of this former Himalayan kingdom.

The border town of Rangpo presents an interesting phenomenon—the difference between the states of West Bengal and Sikkim. Cross a bridge and see the difference in standards of living. The change is something like that between Mahendragarh and Barbours/Tatopani and Khasa. There is a difference in the way shops are lined up, in the organisation of the markets and the tall buildings supposed to reflect 'development'.

There are signboards welcoming one to the kingdom of Sikkim, and those fickle beasts, tourists, are around. Sikkim's recent efforts at taking tourism seriously have some lessons for the travel trade set here.

Gangtok is just a few kilometres across, but they still care about making their traffic moves smoothly. As for the often negative impact tourism has, like on the environment and on pollution levels, Sikkim is doing all it can to tackle this too. Plastic bags are banned. People carry shopping bags and the more up-market stores provide fancy paper bags. There are prominent

notices warning those who litter about a Rs 5,000 fine. And guess what? Gangtok is clean. Such messages are not just dreary sermons that pass the average resident by. Everyone understands the importance of such moves, and most locals take



pride in how well they manage to implement their planners' suggestions.

While it was nice to be in Gangtok as a tourist, it wasn't so great from a Nepal perspective. Here was a one-horse town flooded with tourists, and poor old Kathmandu is just sort of limping along.

Worse, talking to some of the tourists in Sikkim, one had to contend with the fact that Nepal was simply not on their travel map. They tell many stories about insecurity and the state of the country, stories unheard of in Nepal.

From the now-ubiquitous security point of view, Nepal is the same as, oh, Asian or even Kashmir. Those who come and cross the border into India tell of being frisked, always odious, but somehow worse when all one wants to do is kick back and relax.

Even apart from tourism, Sikkim is doing quite all right. Hydropower, that we think so highly of here, is a matter of every when does Sikkim-style. Projects as large as 510 MW have been identified and are on the drawing board. If hydro can be a

leading industry in Sikkim and Bhutan, why not in Nepal. Sikkim also has the highest tea density in India, and the new focus on IT guarantees some pretty interesting developments here in the future.

This is a perfect place—the cocktail circuit is alive with who has 'made' what. The craft of graft is finely honed here, but it does not stop positive action. Most political parties have been committed to development, and it shows.

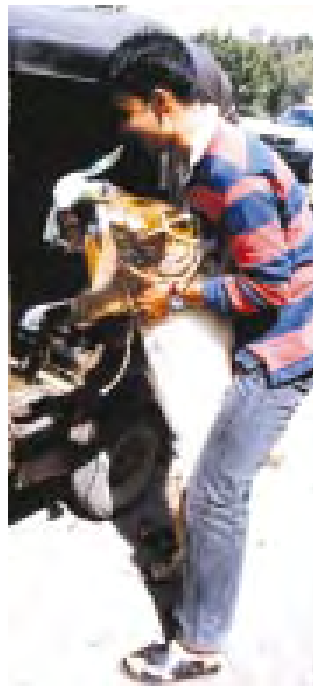
Sikkim isn't a one-off—plenty of good has come about in Bhutan, too, and for us in another Himalayan kingdom, this should be the cue to take some time out for introspection and setting some solid goals. □

(Readers can post their views at artheed@yahoo.com)

www.nepalnews.com

ECONOMY

Khasi online



Munchhouse.com, which functioned solely as a gift shop earlier, has been functioning as a department store for the last three weeks. The change was made to attract more local shoppers, and the site now has different modes of payment—you can pay Cash on Delivery, or deposit an amount with the shop in advance. But if you want to send someone a gift, you must still pay in dollars. And that's where the *hundi* is handy.

"E-shopping will catch up in Nepal soon, we want to be prepared to cater efficiently to clients when that happens," said Anirban Mani Tuladhar of munchhouse.com. The recent expansion in mode of payment is expected to encourage shoppers from outside the Valley in particular. Munchhouse.com charges Rs 100 for deliveries within the Valley, while for deliveries outside the Valley, the weight of the order determines the charge. Delivery is free if the value of the purchases exceeds Rs 2,500.

Others are less optimistic about the possibility of an Internet shopping boom in the foreseeable future in Nepal. Most business to consumer shops sites, critics point out, are still struggling to build a client base among the non-residential Nepalis or foreigners with Nepal connection. "E-shops are not doing great. The planning economy will not allow the boom just now," says Binaya Mohan Saha of nepalshop.com. Besides, the expensive Internet services and added telephone revenues make shopping on the Internet relatively unaffordable for many. Saha's client base is mostly Nepalis abroad (80 percent) and foreigners with friends in Nepal.

And, industry observers say, when shopping sites mushroom without proper marketing strategies, the number of potential clients starts to drop. During Dasain, nepalshop.com received only 10 orders, though its price points are lower than those of many retailers.

But despite the differences in pricing strategies, delivery models, and even the level of takes on the potential for such undertakings, all Nepal shopping sites have a move to pull consumers in—they play up the tradition, culture and values associated with products, to appeal to a diaspora that can afford to spend, but perhaps not come home as often as it would like.

Come Tihar, it will, we are told, be a little more of the same—there will be special offers on items related to traditional pujas, merry making and sentiments. Oh, and a good dose of nostalgia. □

“It is Nepalis who decide what goes into the paper.”

from □ p1

At his slick new office in Anamranga, Ram Pradhan braves aside the criticism: "We're not violating any law, as far as I am concerned, if people say there should be no foreign investment in media then it is their opinion." According to its registration papers, The Himalayan Times (as it is officially called) is published by International Media Network Nepal P Ltd, with Ujjwal Sharma as publisher. Sharma is also publisher of the Nepali daily Himalaya Times brought out by National Media P Ltd.

The new English paper has National Media's Sharma and Ravin Lama, formerly of Stimulus Advertising, as promoters, and start-up capital of Rs 50 million. "I Brod Gyawali and Kailash Sirohiya (of the rival Kantipur group) can publish a newspaper, why can't Ravin Lama and Ujjwal Sharma be publishers?" Lama asks. "We will go by every law in the book."

Kantipur and its English-language sister The Kathmandu Post last month launched a broadside against the venture, focusing largely on its perceived Indian backing and accusing it of bypassing Nepal law on foreign investment in media. The reports alleged links between International Media and Asia Pacific Communication Associates (APCA) Nepal. APCA India and SAMMA Printers, Lama is the common promoter in two (APCA and International Media) separate entities, and a minority shareholder in SAMMA, which is a separate Rs 30 million venture.

To make things more complicated, APCA Nepal is a joint venture between Lama and APCA India, and it has foreign direct investment (FDI) clearance to set up an advertising agency and a printing plant. SAMMA Printers is a venture between Lama, SP Singh (who used to be Executive Vice-President at the Kantipur Group until April 2000) and AN Sen, an Indian national. SAMMA has FDI clearance for running a commercial printing operation, which is now ready for trial runs. It is to print both Himalaya Times and The Himalayan and could take up other available print jobs.

APCA India is a venture of Times of India staffers chaired by Dilip Padgaonkar, and also has "persons of Indian origin"—now citizens of other countries including the US—and "non-resident Indians" as investors. APCA had been planning to invest in Nepal since early this year, when it approached other Nepali media companies including Kantipur and



Himalmedia for possible collaboration.

Independent media watchers in Kathmandu say the real issue is competition between advertising agencies, including Indian joint ventures. Nepal's advertising industry is growing at a phenomenal 24 percent a year, and competition is heating to get a greater share of that pie.

Nepal law is silent on foreign investment in media. The Industrial Enterprises Act, which defines industries, lists "printing" and "press" separately as service industries. The Foreign Investment and Technology Transfer Act allows FDI in all industries except those on the negative list—which does not include printing or the press. FDI, for example, is not permitted in real estate, trading or consularities. But because investors don't have to disclose the source of investment funds, it is difficult to say if the capital in even industries on the negative list is truly Nepali.

There's no law barring foreign investment in the media, says Satish Khara, a lawyer. "I'm not aware of it." The law, however, does require the editor of a newspaper to be a Nepali national. The Himalayan has already put together a team of about 40 journalists, mostly Nepali, a handful of Indian polishers to improve English copy, and a full-fledged marketing operation. "We will keep the foreigners until our staff are capable of taking over," says Pradhan, and hastens to add, "even with them around it is we Nepalis here who decide what goes into the paper."

Pradhan says The Himalayan will set up fully staffed news bureaux in live Nepali cities, and market the product in both India and other South Asian countries. The 12-page paper is to have an initial print run of 15,000 copies. □

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Should the number of national holidays in Nepal be reduced?

Of course, but it should be strictly applied throughout the country. No partialism between Kathmandu Valley and the rest of Nepal.

Bhawani Neupane, Mumbai

Yes. No more holidays. Nepalis are less efficient than other people, they are lazy, and still want holidays.

Amrit Dhungel

Let's not bother with holidays, but we should concentrate in effectiveness and efficiency of our system. It won't work if we have more holidays, but the same mentality.

Rojwal

What is the difference when there is nothing to do when you get to work? Cutting number of holidays does not increase work efficiency.

Prakash Shiwakoti, California

No, we shouldn't cut down holidays but definitely should concentrate more on utilising work hours and be more creative and dedicated to build our nation. Our country is beautiful, it just needs dedicated citizens to make it stronger.

Lekha

We have to cut holidays, but have to do it gradually. In Dasain, people have to go a long way home and most of our places are still not accessible. Still, instead of eight days, we can come to seven and then to six and keep it at five. Not less. Other holidays should be reduced as well.

Ramesh

My suggestion: let's work our butts off for one day per week and let's have national holidays for the remaining six days. In this way, in one year we will have 54 working days and the remaining time we can relax.

Dukhi

A country where people take days off to worship snakes, students barely go to school for six months in a year because of holidays, Dasain, Tihar, Maabadi and Prachanda vacations does not need more holidays. We are the poorest people in the world because we are lazy bums. The number of holidays should be slashed.

Leon Pun, Hong Kong

People should do doubly hard work on the king's birthday to fulfil his vision for a prosperous country, and not take part in processions,

drinking or playing cards. On special days, civil servants should finish pending jobs, instead of having wasteful holidays.

Badri

Of course, the number of unnecessary holidays should be reduced. Why do we need so many holidays? It is only for playing 'marriage' and drinking 'daru'. But the government is not serious about cutting holidays, rather it is trying to increase the number of ministers and may be the number of holidays. This is a time for cutting and not for rest.

Kumar Khatriwala, Philippines

It doesn't matter whether we have less holidays, it has to do with the peoples' sense of duty. Nowadays a lot of businesses remain open on our holidays. They realise that they need to work. If only other people in Nepal like politicians and government officials realise their duties, all would be fine. They are the ones that cause the most damage.

P Udip

Bureaucrats are as lazy as donkeys. All they want to do is rest, sleep and go to saasural in the office vehicle. So we must reduce the number of public holidays as soon as possible.

Thaggu Dhotane, Germany

The major question here is the objective of holidays, which no doubt is to give people a break. The rest and opportunity is to create a more efficient work force. But this is not the case in a multi-religious and multi-ethnic country, there is a limit. There should be allocated days for every government official for holidays, and then we can join hands for building a better Nepal.

Krishna Kaphle

The number of national holidays should not be reduced, but adjustments are very urgent for the better performance of government as well as the non-governmental sector. This will not only improve the efficiency of that office but also the nation will benefit ultimately.

Sujan Acharya

Don't reduce the religious holidays. It is the most deep part of Nepali culture and would be a sin to stop the festivals. But it is a good idea to close government offices on Saturday and Sunday, not much work gets done anyway.

Raajan Man Singh

I agree we need some relaxation but not too much. We have already relaxed too much and it's dragging us towards poverty. It's time to think

for our country, not more holidays.

T Lawoti

The two-day weekend in Kathmandu Valley is irrelevant. Other public holidays are to be modified taking the sentiments of minorities into consideration. Nepal needs more working hours than anybody else in the world so we can increase the speed of development.

VP Kayastha

If possible the number of holidays should be reduced by 50 percent immediately.

Ram Mani Baraula, Lancaster, UK

Yes. Only 15 days a year should be assigned for extra holidays besides Saturdays. Sunday holiday should be cancelled and offices should keep open.

Ram Raz Ghimire, USA

Nepal has the largest number of national holidays and some of these are not so important. Working days should be increased. A country develops by doing, not sleeping.

Pramad, Japan

It is tempting to be lazy and ask for more and more holidays, but are we willing to live with the outcome? One way we can start is by increasing production, and that translates to working more. As it is, we have so many holidays that we waste time doing unproductive things. It is one thing to have the desire for a better future, it is another thing to make that a reality. We need to start by making sacrifices, and one step in the right direction would be reducing the number of days off. We need to be fair in the allocation of holidays across religions and cultures. Let the holidays be a symbol of celebration of something great, not a symbol of our laziness and lack of work ethics.

Diwakar Thapa

A government office already has 365 days of holiday in a year. You don't find anybody, they are always at lunch. Waste of taxpayers money.

Anita

Most Nepali holidays are based on religion, culture and traditions of different communities. We should be sensitive before reducing national holidays. These holidays are meant for enriching, maintaining and promoting our cultures, values and traditions.

Atma Shrestha

Not so freaky anymore on Freak Street

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

Way back when the war was in Vietnam and not Afghanistan, when protest was in the air, and when people wore flowers in their hair, you came to Freak Street. That's Jhonen to us. The hippies, the Rastafaris, the flower children searching for happiness and nirvana, all arrived in the thousands, travelling overland in their Mercedes Benz buses, praising Krishna, Rama and other deities that surprised the local populace a little—the Bobs Dylan and Marley and the Beatles. They converted the pig alley to Pie Alley and Swamyambu to Monkey Temple.

The winds of change were sweeping through the world and by some curious chance they dumped everyone in Kathmandu, near Basantapur, from the infamous Charles Sobraj to your regular old Hare Krishna. And the locals looked on with amazement as they swooped down like locusts and consumed in days what might be the annual marijuana consumption of a small island population. *Veni vidi, vici*. This small, happy population changed the fate of not just the Valley, but the entire nation. Nepal was to remain a tourist destination forever after.

But that was a long time ago. You still come across the name every once in a while in guidebooks that try to write a summary of Nepal's modern history, but *Freak Street* is no more. It's been decades since the last hippie moved out of here. The few that remain are only figures lost somewhere in time, trying hard to recollect the days they spent in blissful oblivion in Kathmandu, or New Age yuppies in disguise trying to recreate an era they missed. When Nepal finally declared marijuana illegal in 1972 it was a blow to the heart of Kathmandu's original tourist hub. It had played its part, but was already giving way to the adventure-seekers on the lookout for high mountain treks, white water rafting and the Chitwan jungle safaris on



sale. Hippies were replaced by trekkies, and their world was in Thamel.

"Change is inevitable, we have to go along with the times. The hippie era is a thing of the past. Now we have to look towards the future," says Mohan K Mulepati, owner and managing director of the Himalaya's Guest House and Coffee Bar in Jhonchen. Mulepati ran the Himalayan Cold Drink Store in Jhonchen back in 1965. "The money I earned from the shop I put into the guest house," he says, recalling the glory days.

Indeed. Today when if you were to venture forth to Jhonceen (a Newari word meaning 'lane of Newars'), you get the sense that finally, reality has sunk in and people are finding ways to move on, while proudly clinging to the worldwide fame their little street still has. Even if you catch a faint whiff of pot from an old pipe someone chanced upon, be warned, drugs are a thing of the past here. "It is either a loner or the increasingly problematic—and misguided—Nepali publishers who think they can get a market here. We are trying hard to deal with this," says Uday Shrestha, a young Kathmanduithe who recently got



Is Freak Street getting gentrified? If not, why not?

order of experience altogether. But the place needs help for that. Right now, residents and entrepreneurs there are trying hard to share the gains from a fairly small number of visitors, so most do not believe they have the time, energy or resources to try and turn 'Freak Street' into Jhonchen.

"Thamel has money, and the advantage of being able to expand, but we cannot go beyond the limit," says Uday Shrestha, the owner of Restaurant Oasis established in 1985. Making matters worse is the Rs 200 entry fee, sometimes described as a service charge, that the Kathmandu Municipality now charges tourists visiting the World Heritage Site Basantapur-Hanuman Dhoka area.

Residents of the neighbourhood are furious. They claim that this more than anything in recent years has affected their business. "I had to cut

my staff from 32 to 12 because of revenue losses after they started collecting entry fees," complains Shrestha. Businesses say that since so many visitors to Basantapur are backpackers on tight budgets, when faced with the entry fee they spend less in restaurants and souvenir shops.

But Rashmila Prajapati, programme manager of the Hanuman Dhoka Darbar Square Conservation Program started by the Kathmandu Municipal Corporation (KMC) reasons, "UNESCO World Heritage sites all around the world have service fees, we are not the only ones. It takes a whole lot of money to preserve these sites and the bottom line is that neither the KMC nor the Department of Archaeology has this kind of money. We are only trying to help."

Whatever the justification, local entrepreneurs seem to neither

appreciate nor want this help. For the first time in Nepal something akin to a class-action suit is in the courts. The municipality's regulation is being challenged in a lawsuit filed by 507 people. What will happen in the courts is anybody's guess, but there is another side to the story—there is no sign that tourists are decreasing in Basantapur. When we visited Prajapati's office, the 74th day the fee was being charged, over Rs 5 million had been collected from close to 26,000 tourists.

The programme has many projects in the pipeline to improve Basanatapur. In addition to maintenance of the Heritage structures, these include building public toilets, installing street lights, putting on cultural shows in the square, and beefing up security. This last is aimed at keeping away hangers-on and souvenir vendors.

Jhonen's monetary concerns are understandable, but maybe we should begin by asking what kind of future is possible for it. The fame and fortune that hashish brought cannot be replaced and it is best to not even try. Thamel, where the money is as in-your-face as the tourists who throng it, is actually not doing so well—undercutting and oversupplying main business would be going steadily down, even if the tourists weren't. That is little consolation for Jhonen, which lacks both capital and confidence.

The average tourist—and Kathmanduite-about-town—would like an alternative to Thamel, with its excessive hassles, its claustrophobic sometimes racist environment and the sea of other tourists all doing much the same, or watching each other do it. As a pair of Dutch tourists put it, "Every tourist wants to make a special journey, but Thamel is just like any other tourist ghetto."

There will always be people who want another Thamel, another Pat Pong or King's Cross, Jhonen could step in for those who would have a somewhat quieter, more contemplative place to be that still has all the amenities they need. Instead of fifteen variations on the same bar, Jhonen could commit himself to being used creatively to have smaller, fewer, but altogether more individual places to hang out. You could step from a cosy pub to an imaginatively lit boutique at midnight, just to see how beautiful it looks. As for rooms, there would be fewer, but they could range from the relatively upscale to the fairly basic, and they could all be better designed. With the limited supply there would be no undercutting, so budgets would be healthier. Sources would be harder to find. Sourced and priced to be standardised. It is a small enough area, so Jhonen and its environs could conceivably be kept clean all year round.

What all of this needs is proper planning. If the municipality and the local business and residential communities could get together and agree on their vision for Jhonen, this little area could be a haven for tourists and Nepalis alike, a place to just go and relax, watch the beauty and let your guard down.

The entrepreneurs seem to be gearing up to bring the glory back. The young residents of the area have new ideas and hope for a better future, and they have slowly started shaking things up a little. Arun Manandhar, owner of a uniquely 'Freak Street' eatery called Café Culture thinks there is hope. He, for one, is willing to change.

And he thinks he knows just how to get other people involved as well—community action. "Locals were not involved as a community, and we lost out." Uden of Monumental Paradise echoes his sentiments: "We need to fuse the old and the new—we cannot just stick with the 'Freak' idea." The veteran Mulepat, who has seen so much, advises residents not to give up. "We have to be patient in this business. We have been really trying to get people to accept this," he says.

And it is remarkable, how the



entire Jhonen community seems to have a new, enthusiastic sense of ownership and desire to get their act together and do well for themselves. Like-minded residents and businesses have even formed a committee called the Darbar Square

Promotion Committee, which came out with a free tourist brochure that includes a small map of Kathmandu, a bigger one of the Darbar Square and Jhonchen, and information regarding the various deities in the area. The committee

is also trying to guard the region from drug pushers while adding streetlights and keeping dustbins on the road. "But this is not enough, we have much more to do and far to go," says a hopeful Uden. Modern—and well-designed—buildings

like the Basantapur Plaza with its very upmarket stores should be a sign for our times. Jhonchen doesn't need to be totally posh, but it could be a little edgier, a little more modern. Freak Street is no more, long live Jhonchen. □

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Global village idiots

The allegations and prophecies of doom circulating on email were ridiculous, but the social functions of rumour are often indistinguishable from "real news".

STEPHEN D O'LEARY

One of the favourite observations of journalists who feel threatened by the changing face of news on the Internet is that the net all too often becomes a breeding ground for rumours and conspiracy theories.

Any late-sale tragedy invites speculation on the story behind the story. Unsurprisingly, the recent terrorist attacks in the US have provided ample fodder for urban legends, crackpot conspiracies, and apocalyptic speculation. What is unusual about the rumours swirling over the Internet now is that they have an appeal far beyond the ordinary audience of fanatics and conspiracy theorists. As Janelle Brown observes in Salon.com's morning roundup, "The looks are coming out of the woodwork."

Brigitte Harrison of PageSix.com,

complains that her inbox is flooded with "doomday predictions, conspiracy theories and rant about religion and the future of the planet," and asks, "Where do they all come from? It's as if we're living in a medieval village where gossip and gossip pass for knowledge."

How far have we come from the medieval village to the global village? And, just how many "kooks"—global village idiots—are out there on the net? Stories that most regular email users have encountered recently include:

- a Nostradamus prophecy "anticipating" the WTC attack;
- a coded message predicting the attack in a Microsoft graphics font;
- 4,000 Jews told not to go to the WTC the day of the attack;
- footage of Palestinians celebrating in Jerusalem was ten-year-old CNN stock footage;

- photos of the burning buildings reveal Satan's face in the smoke;
- a man in the WTC node bits of the falling building down to safety;
- an unburned Bible was found in the wreckage of the Pentagon.

Aided by the Internet, these rumours (all subsequently proven false) proliferated at an astounding rate. The day after 11 September, over one hundred of the 120 students in my class at Annenberg had received e-mails containing the Nostradamus "prophecy." In York there will be a great collapse. Two twin brothers were apart by chasm, while the fortress falls the great leader will succumb. The third leg war begins when the big city is burning, Nostradamus, 1654"

Newspapers debunked the story, noting that Nostradamus died in 1566. About.com and other sites featured stories proving that the verses originated in a 1997 essay,

published on the web by a college student parodying the vague language and mystical obscurity of Nostradamus's writings. But this seems to have had little impact. On 15 September, the bestselling book on Amazon.com was *Nostradamus: The Complete Prophecies*.

Internet columnist Aaron Schutz, who surveys fluctuating requests for information on Lycos, reported that "Nostradamus scares increased, despite media outlets reporting on [the prophecy's] fallacy." It's difficult to impute significance to such data, but the implications are disturbing: it seems the experts who debunk the prophecy were not much for people's hunger to find supernatural significance, in forged verses from a famously obscure sixteenth-century mystic or in the arcane codings of software engineers. The rapidity with which

these stories have gained credibility among ordinary sensible folk indicates that the impact of the terrorist attacks is several orders of magnitude above any news story since the Internet.

To understand the credibility of these stories, we might think of them as modern folktales, generated by new technologies but serving an ancient function. Legends, rumours, and spurious prophecies are important: they help people come to grips with tragedy and historical change, bringing order out of chaos, giving meaning to apparently meaningless violence, and reassuring us with tales of survival.

It may be hard for journalists to understand that in crises, the social functions of rumour are virtually indistinguishable from those of "real news." People spread rumours for the same reason they read the papers or

watch CNN: they are trying to make sense of their world.

The Internet is ideal for the spawning and evolving of propaganda, disinformation, and collective mythology, which provide ideological support for religious fanatics and secular nationalists. Journalists may report on rumours to debunk them, but even the most sceptical reporters cannot avoid spreading false stories to credulous people. It hardly matters how strongly we resist being drawn into disseminating propaganda and rumour, in such an emotional context, our work inevitably contributes to the evolving of cultural myths. How will this kind of mythmaking in the global village respond to, and affect, the conflict?

(Online Journalism Review, Annenberg School of Communication, USC)



What not to do in the US

The US Congress last month passed the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (USA PATRIOT) Act crafted by the offices of Attorney General John Ashcroft, Laura Murphy, director of the American Civil Liberties Union in Washington DC says, "Included in the bill are provisions that would allow for the mistreatment of immigrants, the suppression of dissent and the investigation and surveillance of wholly innocent Americans." Civil libertarians worry that the new legislation:

- Permits the Attorney General to designate or detain non-citizens based on mere suspicion, and to deny re-admission to the US of non-citizens (including lawful permanent

residents) for engaging in speech protected by the First Amendment.

- Minimizes judicial supervision of telephone and Internet surveillance by law enforcement authorities in anti-terrorism investigations and in routine criminal investigations unrelated to terrorism.
- Expands the ability of the government to conduct secret searches in anti-terrorism investigations and in routine criminal investigations unrelated to terrorism.
- Allows the CIA and other intelligence agencies to enter and search an individual's home without presenting a warrant or informing the subject of the search.
- Gives the Attorney General and the Secretary of State the power to designate domestic groups as terrorist organizations and to block any non-citizen who belongs to them from

entering the country.

- Makes the payment of membership dues to political organizations a deportable offense.
- Grants the FBI broad access to sensitive medical, financial, mental health, and educational records about individuals without having to show evidence of a crime and without a court order.
- Will lead to use of intelligence authorities to by-pass probable cause requirements in criminal cases.
- Allow the CIA and other intelligence agencies to again spy on Americans by giving the director of Central Intelligence the authority to identify priority targets for intelligence surveillance in the US.
- Allows searches of highly personal financial records without a warrant and without judicial review based on a very

low standard that does not require probable cause of a crime or even relevance to an ongoing terrorism investigation.

- Allows student records to be searched based on a very low standard of relevancy to an investigation.
- Creates a broad new definition of "domestic terrorism" that could target people who engage in acts of political protest and subject them to wiretapping and enhanced penalties.

(Excerpted from an editorial in *The Nation*, New York)



The other victims

The irresponsibility of this conflict is breathtaking. It is not about terrorism at all.

JOHN PILGER

The war against terrorism is a fraud. After three weeks, bombing a single terrorist implicated in the attacks on America has been caught or killed in Afghanistan.

Instead, one of the poorest, most stricken nations has been terrorised by the most powerful—to the point where American pilots have run out of dubious "military" targets and are now destroying mud houses, a hospital, Red Cross warehouses, buses carrying refugees.

Unlike the endless pictures from New York, we are seeing almost nothing of this. Tony Blair has yet to tell us what the violent death of children—seven in one family—has to do with Osama bin Laden. And why are cluster bombs being used? The British public should know about these bombs, which the RAF also uses. They spray hundreds of bombs that have only one purpose—to kill and maim people. Those that do not explode lie on the ground like landmines, waiting for people to step on them.

If ever a weapon was designed specifically for acts of terrorism, this it is. I have seen the victims of American cluster weapons in other countries, such as the Laotian toddler who picked up and had her right leg and face blown off. Be assured this is now happening in Afghanistan, in your name.

None of those directly involved in the 11 September attacks was Afghan. Most were Saudis, who apparently did their planning and training in Germany and the United States. The camps which the Taliban allowed bin Laden to use were emptied weeks ago. Moreover, the Taliban itself is a creation of the Americans and the British. In the 1980s, the tribal army that produced them was funded by the CIA and trained by the SAS to fight the Russians. The hypocrisy does not stop there. When the Taliban took Kabul in 1996, Washington said nothing. Why? Because Taliban leaders were soon on their way to Houston, Texas, to be entertained by executives of the oil company, Unocal.

With secret US government approval, the company offered them a generous cut of the profits of the oil and gas pumped through a pipeline that the Americans wanted to build from Soviet central Asia through Afghanistan. A US diplomat said: "The Taliban will probably develop like the Saudis did." He explained that Afghanistan would become an American oil colony, there would be huge profits for the West, no democracy and the legal persecution of women. "We can live with that," he said.

Although the deal fell through, it remains an urgent priority of the administration of George W Bush, which is steeped in the oil industry. Bush's concealed agenda is to exploit the oil and gas reserves in the Caspian basin, the greatest source of untapped fossil fuel on earth and enough, according to one estimate, to meet America's voracious energy needs for a generation. Only if the pipeline runs through Afghanistan can the Americans hope to control it.

So, not surprisingly, US Secretary of State Colin Powell is now referring to "muckers" Taliban, who will join an American-sponsored "coalition" to run Afghanistan. The "war on terrorism" is a cover for this, a means of achieving American strategic aims that is behind the flag-waving facade of great power. The Royal Marines, who will do the real dirty work, will be little more than mercenaries for Washington's imperial ambitions, not to mention the extraordinary pretensions of Blair himself. Having made Britain a target for terrorism with his belittled "shoulder to shoulder" with Bush nonsense, he is now prepared to send troops to a battlefield where the odds are so uncertain that even the Chief of the Defence Staff says the conflict "could last 50 years". The irresponsibility of this is breathtaking: the pressure on Pakistan alone could ignite an unprecedented crisis across the Indian sub-continent. Having reported many times, I am always struck by the absurdity of elite politicians eager to wave farewell to young soldiers, who they themselves would not be so keen to take back to Taliban poses.

a plane into a building or order and collude with it from the Oval Office and Downing Street.

If Blair was really opposed to all forms of terrorism, he would get Britain out of the arms trade. On the day of the twin towers attack, an "armistice", selling weapons of terror (like cluster bombs and missiles) to assorted tyrants and human rights abusers, opened in London's Docklands with the full backing of the Blair government. Britain's biggest arms customer is the medieval Saudi regime, which beheads heretics and spawned the religious fanaticism of the Taliban.

The really wanted to demonstrate "the moral fibre of Britain", Blair would do everything in his power to lift the threat of violence in those parts of the world where there is great and justifiable grievance and anger. He would do more than make gestures; he would demand that Israel ends its illegal occupation of Palestine and withdraw to its borders prior to the 1967 war, as ordered by the Security Council, of which Britain is a permanent member. He would call for an end to the genocidal blockade which the UN—in reality, America and Britain—has imposed on the suffering people of Iraq for more than a decade, causing the deaths of half a million children under the age of five. That's more deaths of infants every month than the number killed in the World Trade Center.

There are signs that Washington is about to extend its current "war" to Iraq, yet unknown to most of us, almost every day RAF and American aircraft already bomb Iraq. There are no headlines. There is nothing on the TV news. This terror is the longest-running Anglo-American bombing campaign since World War Two. The Wall Street Journal reported that the US and Britain faced a "dilemma" in Iraq because "few targets remain". "We're down to the last outposts," said US officials. That was two years ago, and they're still bombing. The cost to the British taxpayer? £800million so far.

According to an internal UN report, covering a five-month period, 41 percent of the casualties are civilians. In northern Iraq, I met a woman whose husband and four children were among the deaths listed in the report. He was a shepherd, who was tending his sheep with his elderly father and his children when two planes attacked them, each making a sweep. It was an open valley, there were no military targets nearby. "I want to see the pilot who did this," said the widow at the graveside of her entire family. For them, there was no service in St Paul's Cathedral with the Queen in attendance, no rock concert with Paul McCartney.

The tragedy of the Iraqis, and the Palestinians, and the Afghans is a truth that is the very opposite of their caricatures in much of the Western media. Far from being the terrorists of the world, the overwhelming majority of the Islamic peoples of the Middle East and South Asia have been in victims—victims largely of the West's exploitation of precious natural resources in or near their countries.

There is no war on terrorism. If there was, the Royal Marines and the SAS would be storming the beaches of Florida, where more CIA-funded terrorists, ex-Latin American dictators and torturers, are given refuge than anywhere on earth.

There is, however, a continuing war of the powerful against the powerless, with new excuses, new hidden agendas, new lies. Before another child dies violently, or quietly from starvation, before new fanatics are created in both the east and the west, it is time for the people of Britain to make their voices heard and to stop this fraudulent war—and to demand the kind of bold, imaginative non-violent initiatives that require real political courage.

The other day, the parents of Greg Rodriguez, a young man who died in the World Trade Center, said this: "We read enough of the news to see that our government is heading in the direction of violent revenge, with the prospect of sons, daughters, parents, friends in distant lands dying, suffering, and nursing further grievances against us."

"It is not the way to go...not in our son's name." □ □ (The Mirror, UK)

Canada gets tough

OTTAWA—The Canadian government is pressing ahead with plans to enact a sweeping new anti-terrorism law this month, despite civil libertarians' warnings that the legislation poses a threat to legitimate dissent. Critics maintain the complex legislation would suspend several civil liberties including protection against self-incrimination and arrest without charges, and would give the government too much power not only to strip legal protection from anyone suspected of terrorism, but to define who terrorists are in the first place. Critics say this power is so sweeping, that anti-globalisation protesters and Native activists could be labelled "terrorists," but they also predict that precisely because the legislation is so broad, it faces an almost inevitable challenge in court under the country's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Says Clayton Ruby, Toronto civil rights lawyer, "The problem with these laws is that they come in as emergency measures, temporary measures that are only supposed to last for a short time. But they are never temporary."



You can never roll them back." Justice Minister Anne McLellan says the law is needed to give the police powers to suppress existing terror groups, provide them with new investigative tools and toughen prison sentence for terrorists. The bill defines acts of terrorism as those that threaten Canadian lives or property, kill or injure in society, damage the economy, or are targeted against political institutions and the welfare of the country. Three opposition parties support the bill in principle, and two conservative parties are demanding even sterner laws. Bill Blaikie, Member of Parliament from the social democratic New Democratic Party (NDP), the only legislative group that opposes important aspects of the bill, says the NDP wants to ensure that the right to peaceful dissent is not removed, or limited. (AP)



How to lose a war

The US is losing the ideological war it might have won if it had not taken the law into its own hands.

BANGKOK—It appears that in the war between the United States and Osama bin Laden, the latter is coming out ahead. Washington has achieved nothing of tactical or strategic value. The bombing, which has taken the lives of many civilians, has worsened the US strategic position in Southwest and South Asia by eroding the stability of pro-US Muslim regimes. A radical fundamentalist regime is now a real possibility in Islamabad, while Washington faces the unpleasant prospect of having to serve as a police force between an increasingly isolated Saudi elite and a restive youthful population that regards bin Laden as a hero.

Meanwhile in the rest of the developing world, the shock over the assault is giving way to disapproval of the US bombing and, even more worrisome to Washington, to the fact that bin Laden's emergence in the public consciousness as a fairly undeviating running circles around a big bully who knows one response: massive retaliation. Many writers have theorised that the attacks might have been intended to lure the US into a war of intervention in the Middle East that would inflame the Muslim world against it. Whether or not that was the case, the US bombing of Afghanistan has done precisely that. Moderate

leaders of Thailand's normally secular Muslim community now express support for bin Laden. In Indonesia, once regarded as a model of tolerant Islam, a recent survey revealed that half the respondents regard bin Laden as a fighter for justice and under 35 per cent as a real possibility in Islamabad, while Washington faces the

The global support President Bush has flouted is deceptive. A lot of governments would express their support for the UN Security Council's call for a global campaign against terrorism, but when it goes down to the decisive criterion of offering troops and weapons to fight, one is down to the hardcore western Cold War alliance. Washington and London are

losing the propaganda war. Their offer to point the military campaign as a conflict between civilisation and terrorism has come across as a crusade of the Anglo-Saxon brotherhood against the Islamic world. So joining has Tony Blair's public relations drive to make Britain an equal partner in the war effort become, that the foreign minister of Belgium, which currently holds the EU presidency, has felt compelled to criticise Blair for compromising the Union's interests.



by WALDEN BELLO

The attacks were heinous, but from one angle they were but a variant of Che Guevara's "foco" theory. For Guevara, the aim of dual guerrilla action is twofold: demoralise the enemy and empower your popular base by getting them to participate in an action which shows that the all-powerful government is vulnerable. The enemy is provoked into a military response that further saps its credibility in what is basically a political and ideological battle.

For bin Laden, terrorism is a means to an end. And that end is not something Bush's rhetoric about defending civilisation through revenge bombing can compete with a vision of Muslim Asia rid of the American economic and military power and corrupt surrogate elites, returned to justice and Islamic sanctity.

Yet Washington was not wyesical in this ideological war. It could have responded to 11 September by a way that might have blunted bin Laden's political and ideological appeal and opened up a new era in US-Arab relations. It could have forewarned unilateral military action and announced it would go the legal route in pursuing justice, combining public and private investigations, diplomacy, and the employment of accepted international mechanisms like the International Court of Justice. These methods take time but they work. Then the US could have initiated a broad campaign in Middle East policies withdrawing troops from Saudi Arabia, ending sanctions and military action against Iraq, decisively supporting the immediate abolition of a Palestinian state, and ordering Israel to refrain from attacks on Palestinian communities.

Had the US not taken the law in its own hands, it could have been an example of a Great Power showing restraint, paving the way to a new era of relations between the superpowers and the rest of the world.

Waldeen Bello is professor of sociology and public administration at the University of the Philippines.

No sedan chairs in the WTO

BEIJING—As China prepares for full membership to the WTO later this year, it must begin streamlining the world's largest and oldest bureaucracy to create a small, efficient government whose legal transparency and political openness meets international standards. In China, where 80 per cent of the population lives in rural areas and local cadres still rule like warlords—rural cadres can issue commands and regulations that have the power of law and they have unlimited power to enforce regulations such as those on rural taxes. Central government policy guidelines often from the lower levels of China's bureaucratic ladder and each level can interpret regulations to fit local conditions. When Premier Zhu Rongji was elected in 1998, he unveiled an aggressive three-year government restructuring plan, including laying off up to half of China's eight million government and party officials. But he failed to question the way the country was governed. Zhang Changfu of the State Development Research Centre explains: "For a few thousand years 'official' meant someone carried in a sedan chair. It is not easy to make Chinese officials get off their sedan chairs and become 'public servants'." The State Planning Commission (SPC) recently acknowledged "two serious challenges" the country must deal with under the WTO regime—the way government acts, and the impact of equal market access on Chinese enterprises. To resolve these problems, the country's central planning agency says, China must overhaul policies, regulations, and administrative and macro-economic control systems. The commission has also set a five-year deadline for Beijing to develop "an administrative system in line with market rules and WTO regulations." Regional protectionism and industrial monopoly are also listed as challenges in the evaluation—20 years after economic reforms began, the Chinese market remains fragmented and local governments frequently set and enforce rules to protect companies in their particular domains. (IPS)

Trading places

TOKYO—Japan's trade surplus, said to be the highest in the world, is shrinking fast. The ferocious export might soon become an importer, and Asia stands to benefit the most, say analysts. A recent Finance Ministry report showed that Japan's trade surplus in the first half of the current fiscal year fell from its year-ago level by 43.1 per cent to \$240 billion—the fifth straight half-year decline. The rate of decline is the steepest since 1978, the ministry says. Exports from April–September fell 6.1 per cent, mainly due to a substantial drop in exports of IT-related products and they will continue to drop given falling consumer spending and investment in the wake of 11 September. Imports since 1999 have risen 4.6 per cent to \$200 billion. The shrinking trade surplus is due to rising imports from Asia and falling Japanese exports of electronic products to the region. The Nomura Research Institute said that by 2003 Japan would have a trade deficit, as in the 1980s before the economic miracle. Kenichi Nagura of the Norinchukin Research Institute believes that in the next decade Japan will be like the US, where a bulk of the merchandise is produced in Asia, Latin America and Africa. This is because Japanese companies are investing heavily in Asia to remain globally competitive, exporting technology to countries with far lower labour prices. Direct investment by Japanese companies in China, the biggest recipient of Japanese capital, grew by 117 per cent in the first four months of the year, compared with the same period last year. Still, economists believe Japan could retain its competitive advantage. "Japan's new economy will focus on services, software such as electronic games which Japan leads in, and technology and digital developments," said CH Kwan, senior researcher at the Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry. (IPS)

Fighting terrorism—and civil liberties

NEW DELHI—The 11 September attacks have prompted India's ruling government to resurrect anti-terrorist legislation rejected by parliament five years ago as restrictive of civil liberties. When the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) lapsed in 1995, rights organisations worried because of its misuse in past wars and insurgency-hit areas such as Punjab, Kashmir and north-eastern states. Attempts to replace TADA with the Criminal Law Amendment Bill failed because of opposition by groups like the People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCIL) and even the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), a statutory body. The UN Human Rights Committee, expressed concern at proposals to reintroduce the act, parts of which contravened the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which India is a signatory. But on 16 October government promulgated the similarly-worded Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance, drawing protests from rights activists who say it is more restrictive of civil liberties than the old law. Rajinder Sachar, former Delhi High Court chief justice and PUCIL activist, says a detainee held under the new law will be at the mercy of executive officers and the police rather than a judicial body, as required by international human rights standards. Rights activists find other sections of the new law also objectionable. Prashant Bhushan, Supreme Court lawyer and human rights activist, believes existing laws are adequate to tackle terrorism. The new law gives "unbridled" powers to the executive and to a police force with a poor track record, he argues. But PN Ghosh of India's Law Commission who helped draft the bill says there are safeguards against abuse. In places like Kashmir, he adds, what is applicable are laws in effect during war rather than human rights laws. (IPS)



Arabs and Muslims now face the challenge of not claiming victimhood.

anti-American brew was passed on to previously marginal religious zealots. In 1979 it fused with anti-Shah sentiments to become one of the animating forces of the Iranian revolution. After that seminal event, it overwhelmed major sections of the Islamic movement from Algeria to Pakistan.

The Arab and Muslim worlds are today a basket case of collapsing economies and rampant unemployment by ever more repressive regimes. But in many ways the greatest failure in the Islamic world is intellectual, a failure of the intelligentsia who, with few exceptions, fail to challenge the region's most paranoid fantasies. They buttress them by refusing to break out of nationalist paradigms (for instance by forming solidarity with counterparts in Israel). Instead they are "reactionaries", critics, exhorting their rulers for being insufficiently anti-Zionist or anti-imperialist. Lost in all of this is the hard work of creating a modern, rights-based political order that could form the basis for prosperity. Without that alternative focus in the thick of endlessly self-pitying rhetoric, is any way deeper despair middle class individuals gravitate to radical and terrorist activities to unite the demoralised? Their behaviour is to be called forth ever more summary and violent responses, which reinforce the pervasive sense of victimhood, yielding other delusional myths.

So Muslims and Arabs—not Americans—must be on the frontlines of a new war waged for their own salvation, our own souls. That, as a-out-of-faith Muslim scholar will tell you, is the true meaning of "jihad". It means "to be liberated from those who oppress and oppressors". To exercise what they have done in our name is the civilisational challenge of Muslims and Muslims. (Project Syndicate)

Kanan Makiya was born in Baghdad and teaches at Brandeis University. His books include Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq, and Cruelty and Silence: War, Tyranny, Uprising and the Arab World.

KANAN MAKIYA

The Arab and Muslim worlds now face the civilisational challenge unlike any other since the Ottoman Empire fell. The terrorist attacks in the US cost thousands of innocent lives. Millions more will be wasted or lost if Muslims and Arabs respond to 11 September by wallowing in their sense of victimhood.

"Anti-Americanism" in the hands of Osama bin Laden is the latest, most violent form of an idea originally nurtured by secular, "progressive", nationalist Arab intellectuals under a variety of labels: anti-imperialism, anti-Zionism, Arab socialism, pan-Arabism. These took at their point of departure genuine grievances, among them the dispossession of millions of Palestinians that accompanied the birth of Israel in 1948.

In the hands of Arab nationalists and leftist "anti-imperialists" of my generation, however, this sense of grievance was not channelled into building civil societies based on hard-won expansions of civil liberties wrested from tyrannical regimes (as in Latin America in the 1980s). Our failure to pursue such goals left a vacuum that was filled by a conspiratorial view of history, reinforced by those tyrannies, which ascribed the world's ills to the great Satan, America, or the little Satan, Israel. The dangerous, unstated corollary was the notion that "we Arabs" had no, or only a tiny, power to change the unjust ways the world works in. Arabs, and Muslims more generally, began to see themselves as the "eternal" victims of the 20th century. Lost was a sense of ourselves as political agents aiming toward concrete political gains.

Arabs are not the only people who wrap themselves in victimhood—the modern Israeli identity was forged on Holocaust just as Palestinian nationalism was forged by Israel's treatment of Palestinians. Such symmetries (there are many) created a powerful concept of victimhood, applicable to some degree to all Middle Easterners (Palestinians, Israelis, Kurds, Armenians, Turkmen, Shi'a, and Sunnis). In the Arab world, especially after Israel's victory in the 1967 six-day war, this complex became the driving force of politics and culture. It became the foundation upon which murderous regimes—Sadat's Hussein of Iraq and Hafiz Assad's Syria—were built. From secular Arab nationalists, the

Modernise the monarchy

by Narahari Acharya

Rajdhani, 10 October

The 1 June incident that took place in the royal palace, a place where only the King and members of the royal family were present. Before 1 June the royal palace was considered to be the centre of power, respect and authority. The 1 June incident changed all that and serious questions have now been thrown up. The question of succession was one of them. Till now it was considered very safe for His Majesty to travel to all parts of the country and one never thought that royalty would be harmed in any way, but now it is not so any more because security could not be guaranteed even within the palace walls. The issue of respect and social values is another issue. We share a very special type of relation with our parents, siblings and other family members. There are differences in a family but there is a lot of respect too. After 1 June the notion no longer holds, especially the traditional social values. Such was the incident that it was not even thought to be a possibility by the issue of succession. The constitution gives the powers of nominating the heir to the throne to the King. The accession laws state that if the heir to the throne changes his religion, then he can no longer remain an heir. It would be the same if he does not follow tradition and marries someone considered not to be his royal lady. The laws are silent about anything of a more serious nature. Our elected representatives now have a problem on their hands—to ensure that the rights of the heir to the throne are properly safeguarded by the constitution. No one can disbar him nor take away his rights. The constitution clearly states that it is possible to remove a King if he is mentally or physically unfit to rule but the constitution is silent when it comes to the same issues relating to the heir. ... Therefore all rules and laws concerning the heir to the throne have to be carefully revised and changed. The existing laws seem incomplete on this issue, plus they have serious in-built flaws. Since the laws do not address the needs of the times, people are not taking them very seriously or do not understand the gravity of the situation. That 1 June incident was very unexpected but it has raised fundamental questions, which have to be answered if we do not want that same type of situation to be repeated.

Now because questions have been raised we have to act responsibly and make sure that the appropriate changes are made. Fundamental changes have to be brought about because the constitutional monarchy is here to stay, but we have to modernise it and move ahead with the times. It is stupid to even think about ending the institution of monarchy. We have to make sure that it is strengthened and is provided with full security. It is also important that the palace brings about changes in its behaviour and also works with the times.

A child who was six at the time of the restoration of democracy in 1990 is now a young man of 18. In the same way, a person who was 18 at that time is now 30. Let us for a moment study and analyse Nepalis who are now 30 years or less. Let us analyse their behaviour, their thinking, and their ways of life. Let us study the changes that have come about in their behaviour. We can ignore the inspirations of many that may have reached the twilight of their lives but can we silence people who are just 30 or below all the time? Do they not require answers to all the questions in their minds?

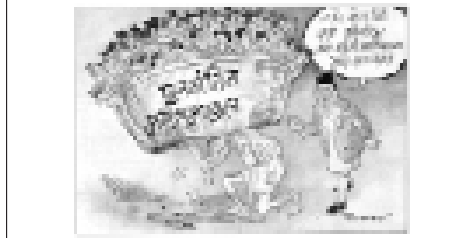
A lot of issues have to be properly dealt with for making constitutional monarchy stable and strong. The shortcomings in the laws, especially on issues concerning the heir, have to be dealt with properly. Therefore why should parliament not have an active role in bringing about changes that are required? Or else can anyone guarantee that the 1 June type of incident will not re-occur? We have to take precautions. And doing that is the responsibility of the representatives of the people. Only then can we have a monarchy that is cared for and respected by its people, and one which will last.

People wanting to bypass or postpone the issue raise questions such as, 'the people's representatives are not strong, are not mature, don't have political will, are not honest, are not responsible, etc.', and therefore cannot be trusted. While we must not forget that despite everything the solution lies with the people. Also the system of elections every five years allows the people to influence the decisions their representatives make. After the investigation commission presented its report, the Nepali Congress passed a resolution which attempted to encompass all the changes that it thought were needed to be brought about, which the government has to bring about by proper legislation and actions. Something else needs to be done to facilitate the monarchy to move along with the times. Elected officials were unable to get proper information on the 1 June incident because existing law and rules did not have the space for that to happen, or space for them to help find out what was going on. Our nation, instead of moving forward from such a state, seems trapped in a time warp going back in history. Therefore there are two important points that have to be taken care of: first parliament has to make laws and regulations concerning succession, and second the laws must give parliament the right to set down rules on the acceptable behaviour of the heir to the throne.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

Political parties, people who serve the country, intellectuals, and everybody else should try and give the current problems faced by the country by being sensitive and staying within the legal limits of the constitution.

—His Majesty King Gyanendra in *Nepal Samachar*, 29 October



Sher Bahadur Deuba: Okay, I have decreased the weight. Seven less than my former cabinet. *Kantiput, 21 October*

Too many bosses

Dehantur, 21 October

Sher Bahadur Deuba still thinks he can ensure a longer tenure by doing out perks, jobs and cash. Recently, the army wanted to buy a Super Puma helicopter. The government presented the required documents to Parliament's Public Accounts Committee, which refused to authorise the purchase. The prime minister personally met the chairman of the PAC, Subash Nembang and asked him to reconsider his decision. The jumbo 41-member cabinet is also in favour of the deal. The prime minister feels that he can ensure the long-lasting support of powerful institutions if he bribes them with jobs. This was one of the main reasons why he formed such a large cabinet. People who voted for Subash Koirala or otherwise supported him have not been made ministers. Was it necessary to form a 41-member cabinet to have the support of 57 Members of Parliament? Issues raised in the budget, as well as policies made public by the government have been overruled by the new cabinet. So, now controversy surrounds the working of the government. Can all MPs be capable enough to be ministers, the

Deuba: "Tell me, what should I talk about." Banja (pointing to the area around Rara lake): "The construction of the road around the lake." Deuba: "No! We should not build a road in this area." Banja: "The construction of the airport and the issue of food can be discussed." Deuba: "Please write it down for me." Banja: A UMJ party member, hurriedly scribbled some points on a piece of paper lying in front of him. At this very moment Member of Parliament Rajendra Pandey was addressing the meeting. He was facing the crowd on the banks of the lake, and he and Deuba and Banja were directly behind him. Pandey finished off his speech saying that the prime minister had to promise that the airport would be completed within six months.

Deuba then started speaking and said that if he lied, he would be called a fool and so could only say that the airport would be completed within a year. Pandey shouted from the dais, "Can you finish it within six months?" Deuba replied, "Not possible."

Bahadur Shah, former president of the Mugu DDC, was sitting with some reporters. He shouted, "We are the ones who have to carry out the construction, so don't worry." Shahi is the president of the airport construction committee. The Talcha airport has been under construction for the past 23 years.

Deuba then said that if the area were to be developed, then the UMJ, too, had to extend a helping hand. Pandey added that they (the UMJ) had helped to make Deuba prime minister. Deuba brought up the issue of the republic (debaught by the Maoists) and said he could not agree to that, saying that even after 28 years in exile, there was now talk of bringing back the former king of Afghanistan to rule the war-torn country.

The Prime Minister was there to inaugurate the Bara Festival, which was to have been opened by King Birendra, who was killed in June.

The police had arrested Yadav last year when he came to Kathmandu for medical treatment. He was caught in Bafal, imprisoned for a while in Makarajung and for some time in Bhairahpur. A special

court was then formed to deal with crimes related with the Maoists. It was this court, which was set by Yadav and other Maoist free. The Chief District Officer of Dhamu withdrew all cases against Yadav where he was then taken to Nakkhu jail and then released.

At the jail premises, Yadav told reporters he was being released from a small prison into a larger one. He added that at the present moment, the whole country felt like a prison. ...

PM stumbles

Jana Aastha, 17 October

At a public meeting at Rara, Prime Minister Deuba was in a fix, wondering what he ought to speak on. He turned to Mohan Baniya, president of the Mugu District Development Committee who was sitting next to him, and asked what would be an appropriate topic to talk about.

Baniya was stunned by the question, but recovered and said that Deuba should talk about the same old issues, the current situation of the country. This conversation went on for some time, it was something like this: Deuba: "Tell me, what should I talk about."

Baniya (pointing to the area around Rara lake): "The construction of the road around the lake."

Deuba: "No! We should not build a road in this area."

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Envoy overload

Jana Aastha, 17 October

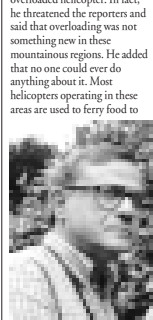
The Indian ambassador was in Mugu during the Rara Festival. A porter was walking right in front of him carrying his bag and the present people of Mugu had given him a wooden briefcase. He followed the porter and he was helped by the help, Kamal Kant Regmi, the Chief District Officer, and Mahendra Singh Rathore, the Deputy Superintendent of Police, stood on either side of the ambassador to be photographed with him. The DSP called out to an MP, who was already in the helicopter, and the MP also came running and had his photo taken, after which all of them got into the helicopter. The pilot asked whether 16 more people more could be accommodated. They then trooped in and sat on the floor. The ambassador was shocked.

The aircraft landed at Surkhet airport, and everyone there said that it was overloaded and this should not have happened. The ambassador told a reporter of Jana Aastha that this was illegal, and overloading should never be allowed.

The helicopter in question belonged to Asian Air, and had a Russian pilot. According to the rules, the helicopter is not allowed to carry more than 21 people at a time but this chopper had 32 people on board. The ambassador was so angry, he did not even speak to the Chief District Officer of Surkhet who was at the airport to welcome them. The CDO was actually there to receive Minister for Tourism Bal Bahadur KC and he was surprised to see the ambassador.

After the ambassador left for Nepalgunj, the CDO went back to what he was doing, preparing for KC's visit. The CDO requested the members of the press not to write about the overloaded helicopter. In fact, he threatened the reporters and said that overloading was not something new in these mountainous regions. He added that no one could ever do anything about it. Most helicopters operating in these areas are used to ferry food to

the hilly regions. The airline companies had agreed with the government to provide the Rara Festival that they would provide 20 flights. They also promised to slash fares by 20 percent and allow passengers to take 15 kg of luggage free of cost. The companies did nothing of the sort—they charged people for excess luggage, which was less than the 15 kg permitted, and they did not reduce fares.



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ABOUT TOWN

MOVIES

□ □ **Nepali and Hindi movies** online ticket booking at www.nepalshop.com

EXHIBITION

□ □ **Images from Bhaktapur** Solo photo exhibition by Kishore Kayastha. Until 21 October, 10AM-6PM. Park Gallery, Pulchowk. 522307

EVENTS

□ □ **Kathak dance performance** by Kumudini Lakshya and her group. Royal Nepal Academy Hall, 5 November. 6PM. Passes at Embassy of India, Lainchaur (413174). Nepal-Bharat Sanskrit Kendra, RNAC Building, New Road, (243497). Bhartiya Gorkha Sainik Niwas, Thamel (414283). Indian Airlines, Hattisar (429468). Chez Caroline. Babar Mahal Revisited (251647). NAFA, Babar Mahal (411729). Indigo Gallery, Naxal (413580) Indian Council for Cultural Relations and Embassy of India

□ □ **Action Asia Himalayan Mountain Bike Race Series 2001** Opening ceremony 9 November, 3.30PM, parade from Himalayan Bank through Thamel to Northfield Cafe. All welcome. Races on 10, 18 and 24 November. Open to all, five categories, great prizes. Himalayan Mountain Bike. Info@bikingnepal.com. 437437

□ □ **Nepali classical dance and folk music** at Hotel **Vajra** Dances of Hindu and Buddhist gods Tuesdays and Fridays, 7PM onwards, the Great Pagoda Hall. Tea and ticket Rs 400. Nepali folk tunes Wednesdays and Saturdays 6.30PM onwards, the hotel restaurant, 271545

□ □ **Friends of the Bagmati** 5 November, at 2PM. Darkroom Creations, Lazimpat. All welcome. 479488

□ □ **Contemporary Jazz dance classes** by Meghna Thapa. At Alliance Francaise Sundays and Tuesdays 4.30PM-6.30PM, 241163. At Banu's, Kamal Pokhari, Wednesdays 6.30PM-8PM, Saturdays 1.30PM. 434024, 434830

MUSIC

□ □ **Annual Jazz and Food Festival** Dine with music by the Japanese quintet Koro and the Jazz Connection. Rs 900. 2 November, Hotel Yak & Yeti, 248999

□ □ **Live music** Tuesday and Friday nights at the 40,000 1/2 ft Bar, Rum Doodle Restaurant. 414336

□ □ **Live acoustic music** Dinesh Rai and Deependra every Friday at the Himalaya Cafe. 7.30PM-10PM 262526

EATING OUT

□ □ **Le Cafe des Trekkers** New Tibetan and French restaurant. Special Spanish Paella on 2.3.4, 9.10.11 November. Jyatha, Thamel, opposite Hotel Blue Diamond. 225777

□ □ **Rox Restaurant** Traditional home-style European cuisine from a wood-fired oven. Steaks, trout, roasted vegetables, desserts. Hotel Hyatt Regency. 491234

□ □ **Peking Duck and Mandarin Music** Chinese chefs' mild and spicy delicacies from the far-east at the Imperial Pavilion every Sunday. Hotel Shangri-La. 412999

□ □ **Brunch and swimming** Pool-side BBQ, Rs 650 per head, weekend brunch with swimming. Rs 550 per head. Shangri-La Village, Pokhara.

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

□ □ **Sandwiches** over the Rainbow American Diner with Fifth Avenue sandwiches, full meals at backpacker prices. Opposite Pilgrims Book House, Thamel. 42651

□ □ **Juicy steaks, chilled beer**, Mexican cuisine, breakfasts, sports bar. All week long, live band Wednesday, Sunday 6.30PM-10PM. K-tool Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 433043

□ □ **Saturdays at the Malla** Swimming and French chef's barbecue lunch. 11AM-5PM. The Malla Hotel. 418385, 410966

□ □ **Splash Bar and Grill** New fifth-floor outlet with view of city and surrounding hills. Restaurant Hotel. 411818

GETAWAYS

□ □ **Escape to Jomsom** Two nights, three days, B&B package with tours and Pokhara-Jomsom return airfare. Expats \$250 per head. Valid until New Year. Jomsom Mountain Resort. 434870

□ □ **Dwarika's Escapes** Breathtaking Escape, two nights package with complimentary Sekuwa for Friday night check-in, Krishnarpan dinner, afternoon tea, cocktail, half-hour massage, breakfasts. Rs11,800 per couple. Or bid for the Anytime Escape, full overnight package in one of Dwarika's suites. Bidding starts at \$130 per night. Until 18 November. 479488

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

□ □ **Nagarkot Escape** Weekends in cottages, views of the Himalayas, valleys and forests. Special rates for Nepalis and resident expatriates. Hotel Keyman Chautan. keyman@vlink.com.np 436850

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

NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

This satellite image taken on Thursday morning shows pretty much clear skies, with a westerly disturbance over the horizon. The first of those disturbances from the west that will bring fresh snows to the high passes, and their arrival to the rest of the midhills will depend on the behaviour of the low pressure troughs to the north and south of the Himalaya early next week. Expect the first of the westerlies over Kathmandu this weekend with high altitude clouds and even some drizzles. When the weather clears again next week, the temperature will go down a notch, but still be in the double digits.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
26-11	24-12	24-11	25-10	25-10

YAK YETI YAK

by MIKU



BOOKWORM: TREKKING MAPS SPECIAL

Annapurna Base Camp Ghandrung, Ghorapani
Shangri-La Maps, Kathmandu, 2002
Rs 300
1:75,000 trekking map of Birechanti, Ghorapani, Ghandrung, Chomrong, Hinku, Machhapuchre base camp, Annapurna base camp, Tatopani, Beni and Pokhara.

Langtang, Helambu & Gosainkund
Shangri-La Maps, Kathmandu, 2002
Rs 800
1:100,000 trekking map of Trisuli Bazar, Dhunche, Syabru Besi, Langtang, Kyanjing gompas, Morimoto base camp, Tarkegyang, Gosainkund, Helambu, Ganja-La, Rasuwagadhi and Melamchiganga.

Everest Climbing Map
Shangri-La Maps, Kathmandu, 2002
Rs 800
The first ever climbing map for Everest with approach routes (1:50,000) and climbing routes (1:25,000). Covers Lukla, Namche Bazar, Tengboche, Pangboche, Phende, Lobuche, Kalapathar, Khumbu Glacier, Everest base camp, Cho-La, Gokyo, Island Peak.

Courtesy Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 227711, mandala@ccsl.com.np

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The way to Mexico is too far. Botega Restaurant and Tequila Bar is near Thamel Chowk. 266433. 15 percent off-season discount.

The Borderlands Resort For canyoning, rafting, trekking at Tibet borders, Professional Development Program, Leadership Courses and many more. 425836/425894, info@borderlandsresorts.com, www.borderlandsresorts.com.

Gourmet weekend for Nepalis and expatriates Naked Chef, Nagarkot, B&B, three-course

• international gourmet dinner, transport both ways—Rs 1100. 417386, 680115

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• **HMB Mountain Biking** Have your bike serviced or repaired by HMB's Professional Mechanics at the HMB Workshop. Riding gear, accessories and parts available. Second hand bikes bought/sold/hired. New and reconditioned mountain bikes for sale. Himalayan Mountain Bikes—Tours and Expeditions. 437437.

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ENVIRONMENT

Let the sun shine in



The greenhouse effect may be the way to keep trekking inns warm and toasty.



deadly and the winters here at 3,200 m are Siberian. So, how do you heat a trekking lodge?

Doverner and his Mustang family designed the Himali Inn to cleverly use a three-sided design to trap solar energy. As soon as the sun pops out from behind Thorung Peak to the east, it strikes one side of the house, during the mid-morning to noon period it bakes the middle portion, and again in the afternoon the slanting rays strike the other side.

The heat traps are set at the base of the building, jutting out into the porch like a greenhouse. The only difference is there are no plants underneath the glass, but piles of stones all painted mottled black. The greenhouse effect heats the stones throughout the day, and warms the entire house through convection.

During a recent autumn night, the temperature outside was minus 2 Celsius, while the rooms at the Himali Inn remained at 18 degrees.

"The beauty of it is that it costs almost nothing, and it is virtually maintenance free," says Norbu Thakuri, whose family owns the inn. "The only maintenance we have done in the past 25 years is to replace glass panes broken by a drunk and when a block of ice fell from the roof."

Once a year, the inn opens up the glass panes, gives the stones a new coat of black made from the inside of dry cattle, and dusts the air passages. That is all it takes.

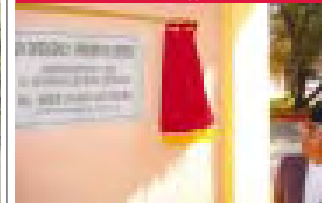
Even when the Himali Inn prototype, there is room for improvement. For instance, metal

frames encasing the glass would be more permanent and airtight than wood, double-glazing would improve insulation, stones can be selected for better heat retention, and arrays of increased surface area. Then, of course, there is the need to make the windows and doors in the house more airtight and to reduce heat loss through the roof and walls. All this would make the system cost slightly more, but would make it even more efficient.

What is surprising is not how well passive solar space heating works, but why it hasn't caught on along the trekking trails in the rest of Nepal. Given Nepal's success story in designing and marketing solar water heaters, it would have been a logical extension to sell home space heaters. Maybe some day it will happen, and when it does, it will help save millions in kerosene and firewood.

Says Norbu's elder brother, Rajendra: "It's a great idea, but the challenge is to get the younger generation fired up about the concept, especially since it makes so much business sense, while at the same time being environment friendly."

HAPPENINGS



DEUBA AND DISASTER PREPAREDNESS: The prime minister inaugurates the Emergency Operations Centre at the UN Complex in Pulchowk on 31 October.



NEW UNIFORMS: IGP Krishna Mohan Shrestha with three colleagues in the brand new uniforms of the newly-formed Armed Police Force at the UML. Disain party on 31 October.



SAVE THE BAGMATI: Participants at the Friends of Bagmati Workshop on 13 October at the Ram Mandir Temple to strategies on rejuvenating the river.

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

More ministers the merrier

We agree with critics of the government who have serious misgivings about the size of our new jumbo jet cabinet. They are right: with 41 ministers, it's just not big enough.

How does the Primordial Minister think he is going to go about ushering in a new era of peace and development in this country if his cabinet is so seriously understaffed? For national construction and reconstruction to go on a war footing, we need an army of ministers, not just the pathetic platoon we have now.

We understand that the Premium Minister had a real

problem on his hands to provide every new minister with the accompaniments of ministerhood, viz. and to wit: bodyguard, peon, cook, driver, wife, personal assistant, hangers-on, etc. But he must realise that aside from personal staff, every minister provides valuable jobs in his ministry for at least 300 constituents within the first month of taking office. We should look at the jumbo cabinet as a jumbo job creation opportunity that will bring down our national unemployment rate by several percentage points and make it unnecessary for Nepalis to migrate to work in Qatar anymore.

An expanded cabinet has a multiplier effect on the economy. This is why the Prime Minister should ignore critics, and just go ahead and enlarge his cabinet some more: it is in the national interest.

But we would be remiss in our whistle-blowing duties if we did not bring to the attention of higher-up authorities that we are a nation running seriously short of ministerial portfolios. This is why the Commission on Commissions and Kickbacks held a three-day workshop seminar at the Yak, Yak & Yak Hotel recently to brainstorm on the

theme "Ministries for all by 2002". Here are some of the excellent ideas:

Ministry of Distortion and Extortion: this new ministry will counter anti-government propaganda and will be a one-window office for party fund-raising activities

Ministry of Illegitimate Affairs: in the spirit of transparency, accountability and non-duplication, all covert and underhand deals will be referred to this ministry

Ministry of Adultery: dilution of petrol and diesel with kerosene is a national crisis and this ministry will punish adulterers by stoning them in public places during which

those without sin will be asked to cast the first stone

Ministry of Tourism and Maoism: given the monetary contributions

made by the tourism sector to the people's war effort, it was thought prudent that the two ministries be rolled

into one

Ministry of Physical Therapy and No Work: prolonged inaction leads to

atrophy; this ministry will ensure ministers burn a daily minimum of calories with simple stretching exercises under the table

Ministry of Home: this is the most coveted ministry mainly because you can work out of home

Ministry of Junkets and Aviation: in stark contrast this minister is never home, but amassing air miles

Ministry of Ministerial Administration: with the new 185-member cabinet there is a need for a ministry just to take the roll call during cabinet meetings and ensure

enough pakoras to go around

Ministries without Portfolios: these are cunningly left vacant to accommodate disgruntled party members who did not get ministerial berths and are threatening to defect to the dissident faction



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