

JAZZ 8-9



Children of a Blue God 15



EXCLUSIVE

Foreign aid policy

For once, a deadline in Nepal has been met. On 4 March, the government and a team of donors actually agreed on and finalised the Foreign Aid Policy, which still needs the endorsement of the Cabinet to be an official document. On 7 February the government promised to have the policy ready within a month. A government source told us the most contentious section governing aid from INGOs and NGOs has now been "fine-tuned" to everybody's liking. Donor representatives from the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and UNDP, and major bilaterals participated in the two meetings held to finalise the document.

Cosmopolitan capital

Musicians, culture vultures, businesses and even the Nepal Tourism Board are coming together to make Nepal an even more attractive tourist destination. On Tuesday, 12 March, the first-ever Kathmandu Jazz Festival kicks off with a 12-hour-long show at the Gokarna Forest Golf Reserve. Sponsors of the 10-day long festival tell us they're investing despite the recession, hoping this will be an annual event that can draw more high-spending tourists to Nepal.

See also *The hills are alive!* p 8-9.

Times nepalnews.com Weekly Internet Poll #22

Q. Does the constitution need tinkering, or should it be left alone?

Total votes: 701

Q. Do you think the government was right to agree to Indian demands on export quotas and value addition?

HEMLATA RAI IN LAMJUNG

Even at noon, Besiabar, Lamjung's dusty district headquarters, wears a deserted look. By evening, there are a few people hurrying home before the seven o'clock curfew.

After the Maoists booby-trapped an army convoy two months ago, all vehicles are stopped at the district border after 5.30 PM. There is an undercurrent of fear bordering on panic here. The locals hesitate to talk to strangers, and if they do, there are no smiles, no welcomes. Besiabar's traditional hospitality and friendliness is gone. There is fear here of the Maoists and the security forces. Too many have had friends and relatives taken in by both sides.

Not surprisingly, business is badly hurt. As the gateway to Manang, the town used to get 100 trekkers a day moving up the Mananggi valley. These days there are hardly ten. The town's only colour lab used to process 30 rolls of films every day, these days it gets a third of that. Bal Prasad Parajuli lost his business because his lodge is situated at the northern end of Besiabar, away from the protective range of the barracks. Saraswati Khanja's clients don't come anymore for just the opposite reason—her tea stall is too close to the army post.

Lekhnath Adhikari, president of the Besiabar Town Development Committee, says the present calm is deceptive. "Unless an environment is created for people's representatives to return to the district, the people's desire for development will not be restored, and there will be no peace," he told us. So far, the Maoists have not attacked hotels, but lodge owners are victims of Maoist extortion. "You can call it protection money," said a hotelier who did not want to be named. "If the situation does not improve this season I'll just pack up my bags and leave." A lot of Lamjungis

Lull in Lamjung But is it a calm before the storm?



are doing just that. A villager from Nalma told us there is hardly anyone left in his village except children and women.

This isn't new for Lamjung, people from here have traditionally migrated to work in India. But this exodus is on a much bigger scale. Lamjung's young left in the thousands when the Maoists started forced recruitment after the declaration of the *jilla jana surkha* ("district people's government") last August. Many of those who stayed joined the militia during the three-month ceasefire. Those who resisted, or quit the insurgency disillusioned, are vulnerable to the Maoists and the security forces. Security sources in Lamjung told us that most of the Maoists put in the district jail are teenagers, or in their early 20s. Lamjung Chief District Officer Shiva Prasad Nepal admits the youth feel trapped. "Maoist dissidents are secretly migrating to Kathmandu and other towns.

They are afraid of being taken in by both sides," Nepal told us.

The local people are of little help—they're so afraid of Maoist retribution, they do not disclose the identity or whereabouts of Maoists who have extorted money from them. "Even the elected representatives are reluctant to inform the police about the whereabouts and identities of the Maoists," said Pitamber Adhikari, who heads the Lamjung District Police Office.

The main casualty of this atmosphere of fear and panic is development. Lamjung's development budget was Rs 5 million. This was slashed by ten percent after the government diverted money for security. The Middle Mananggi hydropower project will bring a Rs 20 million bonanza, but not for another five years. "Development work in this district has come to a halt," says Janindra Man Ghale, DDC chairman. Nearly three-quarters of

Lamjung's population is literate, much better than the national average. But education has been badly affected by the Maoist threats against schools. Some 10,000 students in 30 private schools, including the Himalchuli Boarding School, which has a record for best SLC results, have nowhere to go. Work on the German-funded 39 km Karaputar-Samle Bhanjung-Singdi road is suspended.

Security sources say about 100 suspected Maoists have been interrogated, and both the army and the local administration claim the Maoists are on the run. But even DSP Adhikari admits the peace can't last unless there is rehabilitation and development. He says: "We have to step in and fill the vacuum after the Maoists are chased away." ♦

Editorial Learning From Afghanistan and Sri Lanka p2

Target: Development

BINOD BHATTARAI

Two days after the Maoists hit Achham on 16 February, a helicopter flew into Mangalsen with a special mission: evacuate 25 development workers who had survived the night of carnage. In another far-western district, development moved out last week after the rebels locked up the District Development Committee chairman in his office and threatened to attack the headquarters. Said one NGO worker from the far-west: "Everyone is scared about what could happen next."

In Kathmandu, project personnel and donors are worried who, if anyone, is in charge. Most are involved in grassroots development building drinking water projects, mobilising communities for forestry and sanitation, or setting up savings schemes. And now they are caught in the crossfire and development work is grinding to a halt.

Many of them have fled the fighting (some temporarily) and are in Kathmandu. In interviews, they told us that three months ago the Maoists used to shake their hands, saying: "We both want to help the poor, so you needn't worry." Those doing genuine work thought they were safe.

But after Mangalsen no one is sure that agreement holds anymore. Rural

road building has been badly hit. Immunisation has been affected by overall uncertainty, and every time a rural powerhouse is hit, vaccines are ruined. "It's getting more and more difficult to help people when they need it the most," one donor representative in Kathmandu told us.

Development agencies are now exchanging notes and trying to find new, effective ways of delivering services to people who need them the most, while ensuring safety of staff. Rebels used to ask aid agency workers for "donations", but let them do their work. Now even those lines of communication are cut.

The only way may be to communicate directly with the people. When Maoists looted development supplies in a mid-western district, they were opposed by locals. In another district in the east, a micro-finance NGO threatened by Maoists was asked to return by villagers. "We don't want to pull out completely because we know we have people's support," one worker said. "But it is getting difficult to even retain a minimal presence."

Early this week rebel supporters forced schools to shut down for two days, and the Maoists have called for another five-day strike next month. If the last strike was any indication, most Nepalis will stay home, not because they support Maoists but because the government can't protect them.

Another exasperated donor rep told us: "At times like these I wonder where Nepal's real leaders are. We can do little unless Nepalis decide to help themselves." ♦

Not your usual Jazz...

Thursday brings you Maha Shivaratri and the Kathmandu Jazz Festival. Surround yourself with music and nature within Gokarna Forest. 12th March 2002 - from 12 noon till late night.

Not your usual jazz act.

Gokarna Forest Golf Reserve

More Breweries & Beers (Brew), More Street Art (Illustration), More's London Jazz Ensemble (Jazz), Green House (India), Royal Quartet (Jazz), Cadence, Nepal Classical Musicians, Goodharth, Prasad Bhandari (Nepal)

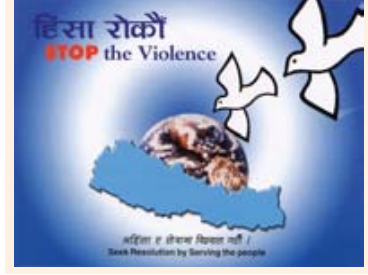
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LEARNING FROM SRI LANKA AND AFGHANISTAN

Peace is breaking out all over the region. A shaky calm has returned to Afghanistan after 30 years, the deaths of 500,000 people, and the displacement of an entire generation of five million Afghans. Out in Sri Lanka, 20 years and 65,000 lives later, there is an indefinite ceasefire and hopes of peace at last. This may be a good time to ask what the wars in Sri Lanka and Afghanistan actually achieved. What was the sense in all that carnage? Did the freedom fighters achieve what they set out to? What ever the case, mass misery on such a scale for such a long time over to justify what? Is an acceptable price to pay for freedom and self-determination? Who really benefited besides the arms merchants? We ask these questions as Nepal itself lunges towards a similar abyss. Even in Jaffna or the Panjshir Valley, it would be rare to see the kind of casualty levels we saw last month in Achham and Salyan. If this is the prevalent kill rate at the beginning of our own conflict, we shudder to think how it will all end. Have the architects of this revolution pondered where this is taking us? Who gave them the right to determine our destiny? Is violence really the shortcut to power that they think it is? After 65,000 people are killed, Prabhakaran is willing to compromise on a single most important goal of his struggle: an independent Tamil homeland. Will it take twenty years and 100,000 dead Nepalis for our comrades to say, oops, it looks like armed struggle was a dead-end street, now let's talk. It may be safe to say that by that time there may be no Nepal, and nothing left to talk about. It is so much easier to wallow in cynicism and despair, and to look erudite while taking on a hopeless pose. It is hard to sound confident and harder still to be credible standing amid the carnage to say: 'I am not lost, we must pull ourselves together. To take an existentialist perspective amidst all this, we remind ourselves that in the end there is no choice but to assert our humanity amid so much inhumanity. What is worrisome is the desperation of those who will benefit from the coming anarchy. And there is a danger of society becoming irreversibly brutalised, our instinctive humanity smothered by blind anger and bad blood. It gets debilitating writing and thinking about these things day after day. There is a sense that we are collectively dragging each other down, and we will all end up in the muck of violence, corruption and greed. Every day, good people are being brought down by the wealth, audacity and sheer persistence of those who benefit from a system that has lost morality and purpose.

VALUING VALUES

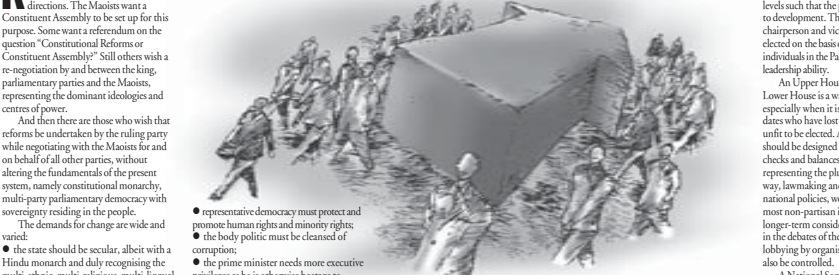
It looks bad, but maybe the country needs to be brought to the brink to peer into the chasm before it can pull back. This is why sober voices are needed, voices that rise above the din, statesmanship that keeps these voices clear and pure. That is the only way we can pull through, by not allowing events to overwhelm us as individuals and as a society. The lesson of Sri Lanka is never to let the grievances of minority communities and the disenfranchised pile up. And if they already exist, to begin to redress them. The oppressed have nothing to lose, and if their aspirations are subdued for long enough they will rise up, with or without an ideology. And they will not need to call themselves Maoists, or Zapatistas, or Naxalites. The lesson of Afghanistan is that it is bad enough addressing the concerns of domestic militancy, but interference from regional and global superpowers takes the war to a whole new dimension. One power's freedom fighter then becomes another power's terrorist as they all just become proxies in the great games of outsiders. Defusing uprisings necessarily means taking away the reason for revolt: providing health care, education and jobs to those in desperate need of them, giving hope to those without it. In post-1990 Nepal we saw that just giving an impatient people freedom and a right to elect their leaders is not enough. Democracy must deliver development so people can value freedom.



COMMENTARY

Why do we need constitutional reforms?

Reform not for reform's sake, but for the nation's.



- representative democracy must protect and promote human rights and minority rights
the body politic must be cleaned of corruption;
the prime minister needs more executive privileges as he is otherwise hostage to parliamentarian politics;
electoral democracy has been weakened by muscle-power, money-power and the invisible hand of the mafia.

In addition to the core principles laid down by the constitution, there are others that need to be enunciated: that Nepal is 'nations-within-the-state' and not just a 'nation-state'. This means that our structure of government must be unitary, with federal features. Our constitution is based on the Westminster model, giving rise to the phenomenon of majority, minority and coalition governments, with the attendant political instability that contributed to the rise of the Maoists. There is also a proposal for a 'national government' to collectively deal with the demands of the state of emergency and its prolongation. The Anglo-Saxon winner-take-all system of voting has not gone down well, as the parties in opposition resort to bandhs and walkouts to exact compliance or concessions from the executive. Then there is the unique phenomenon of party factionalism where, for want of a common ideology parliamentarians, rally around personalities and have no qualms about splitting parties, hence the

STANDING UP...

On 1 March, my college was attacked by Maoist students. The so-called revolutionaries burnt down several computers and destroyed many more. Police arrived but not in time. The comrades were gone. The officers were left evaluating the destruction and we were witnessing the utter failure of law and order in this country. The leaders of the Maoist should understand that though there are thousands who are afraid of their guns and bombs, there are a few who are not. And they can stand up against their terror and unjust actions. Bharati Ghimire Maharajung

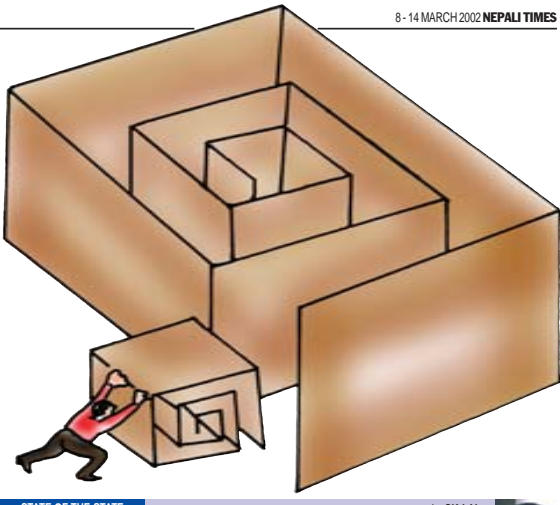
LETTERS

other Indian paper, but does not give the name of the paper. I do not understand why. If the newspapers were identified, any interested person could read the basis of Mr Nepal's article himself and make his own decision. Sambhu Pant USA
Pradeep Nepal's piece was a translation featured in our From the Nepal Press section. Ed
CK LAL I read your paper every week but try to avoid reading Mr Lal's column. I can't figure out what he is writing or for whom, and it is impossible to reach any conclusions from his writing. In his last column ("No time for games," #83) he makes the vague statement: "An army that had

virtually no experience in fighting an insurgency was doing so in a terrain designed to favour guerrillas." Who did he expect to bring to fight—Indians? Americans? Most of our army's training is done in such terrain. A less informed person might imagine from Mr Lal's article that the Nepali army trains in farmlands in the tarai. Mr Lal seems to be the one expecting quick results. Does Mr Lal try to please all political parties by repeating in every column that the elite have hindered democracy? Twelve years of multi-party democracy, and we haven't yet seen development. How many more years before we have land, liberty and the right to choose? Mr Lal may not be aware but time is the one thing our country does not have. Democracy has failed us

terribly. We need a newer system devised by our people and for our people. If that doesn't work, we shouldn't hesitate to throw it out. That for me is the definition of democracy. Arun Khadka By email
NARAYAN GOPAL With regard to Mrs Pemla Gururwacharya's letter (Letters, #82), I am sure Narayan Gopal's having once been a taxi driver does not detract from his greatness as a crooner. Quite the contrary, if our good old CK Lal's memory is to be trusted, Narayan Gopal is a shining example of a person rising above adverse circumstances to fashion a magnificent life. Mrs. Gururwacharya should not try to cloak her late lamented spouse in the false garb of Babu Sahebs and deny his greatness in the process. Is driving a taxi shameful? Saradachandika Sharma PK Campus, Kathmandu I thoroughly enjoy Mr Lal's columns. However, instead of insisting that the late singer

was a taxi driver, I think a writer of his stature, intelligence and standard should have closed the issue by apologising for hurting the feelings of Pemla Gururwacharya, instead of adamantly insisting that he is right. A bit of humility and sympathy, Mr Lal, instead of arrogance. After all, taxi drivers don't like to be called taxi drivers, sweepers don't like to be called sweepers, madhesis don't like to be called madhesis, etc. The list is never-ending. Dr Amrit KC Bishalnagar This matter is now closed. -Ed
COURAGE TO STAND Reading 'Back at Bardiajarj', #82, recently, it took our great leader 12 days to decide to have a bath because "mostly the operation involves a courageous decision and action." No wonder Nepal politics stinks today. Leaders of today, take a bath. Be courageous. Sonny Saradsha By email



STATE OF THE STATE by CK LAL

Fatal attraction

The inner Maobadi circle needs to be penetrated, and dramatically.

The evening news bulletin of Radio Nepal begins these days with the latest body count of 'terrorists', a deadpan voice reading out a press release detailing the authenticity of encounters between the Maoabadi and the defence forces. Occasionally, there is a separate press release from the Home Ministry adding more impersonal numbers. These announcements are now so customary that we mentally switch off when they begin. We hear the news of death and devastation without actually listening. There is an analogy with the so-called credibility gap of the Vietnam-era five-odd dollic rocks by the COMUSMACV, the Commander of the US Military Assistance Command. The underlying assumptions of all such spin are similar: those killed on the other side must have been terrorists, everyone held is inevitably a suspect, human error is considered too insignificant to matter. But unimportant it is not. The death of even one innocent is morally reprehensible as well as strategically disastrous. Just as every day's blood from the body of the demon Rakabeey gave birth to hundreds of other demons in the story of Durga in Hindu mythology, every innocent victim breeds many more recruits for the insurgents. Unlike in conventional war, inflicting maximum casualty is not a desirable goal in fighting insurgency, mainly because it's almost impossible to differentiate between a friend and a foe while fighting an elusive enemy. Insurgents have a tactical advantage—they can create terror by targeting practically anyone. Security forces can't, because even one misfired shot can alienate the entire population of an area and irreparably damage their credibility. In every insurgency, security forces have to fight with one hand tied behind their back, unable to distinguish between insurgents and the people. This is an unfortunate but inevitable part of fighting a section of one's own population. As with the Vietcong or the Khmer Rouge, Nepali Maoists are also composed of cadres that form three concentric circles. The outer ring consists of the people who have perfectly legitimate occupations by day, but turn into deadly fighters by night. In the day, your friendly neighbour could be a simple peasant doing out a living on his unproductive paddy land. He could be a teacher, a shopkeeper, or an NGO worker. He could even be a village council member representing a legitimate



members of this hardcore group are said to be skilled organisers and dogmatic fighters. Like Maoist guerrillas elsewhere, they do not expose themselves easily, and do not fight the security forces unless they have an apparent advantage and are fairly certain of winning. Since the long run insurgents acquire legitimacy from their victories, rather than ideology or votes, this group needs to be smashed to deter insurgency. Unfortunately, these people are never invisible and the intelligence network of security forces has proven fatally flawed, unable to penetrate the movement to this level. They have acquired an image of invincibility because not one has been apprehended till date. It is hard to gauge their strength—there is an impenetrable veil of secrecy over their training camps—but educated guesses put the strength of this group at over 2,000, and their weapons are only as advanced as those they looted from army barracks of Dang and Mangelsen. Many of their camps could well exist on Indian soil, but there have to be at least some in Nepal. What is most glaring is the complete failure of security forces in exposing such centres. Nepali Maoabadi have been mercilessly feeding the outer ring to security forces, selectively using their middle ring to create confusion and inflict damage in places as far away as Salleri and Sidalpani, and successfully employing their innermost ring for decisive victories like Duna, Dang and Mangelsen. In how to propagate, the Maoabadi sure know how to wage one with skill and determination. In comparison, the technically superior forces of the state come across as bungling novices, seized, explosives found, or Maoabadi literature confiscated fail to ensure an edge population exposed to more direct threats like the forced closure of educational institutions. When even the daily body count has apparently little impact, the security forces risk losing their credibility even further in a drawn-out conflict. In the long run, feeding the news-worshippers with fixed news releases may turn out to be counter-productive. The info-war against insurgency badly needs something dramatic, something like the guarding of the Nepali counterparts of Gonzalo, Padmanabhan or Chuan Mazumdar in front of television cameras. The illusion of invincibility among these elusive leaders needs to be shattered. Only then will the insurgency cease to exert its fatal attraction on desperate people. The innermost circle is the toughest. Consisting of romantics with suicidal instincts,

Governing counsel



What proportion of democracy and decency should a polity deliver? Post 11-September this is changing, but that's nothing new for Nepal.

The national clamour for good government, buttressed by endorsements from a bevy of important foreign visitors, has brought Nepalis closer to some unconventional role models. Consider the following three leaders: international development organisations like to cite as exemplars of excellence today: Museveni, Mahathir, Musharraf. These politicians, who invariably used to be in the news for their authoritarian proclivities, have now edged out the likes of Yeltsin, Walesa and Havel as credible agents of political change as well.

Uganda's transformation from an emblem of state-sanctioned pando-

nium to a beacon of national rebirth is attributed to the leadership of President Yoweri Museveni. Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who kept Malaysia out of the hottest moment of the 1997 Asian financial meltdown, has exemplified how criticism and emulation of Western capitalism need not be mutually exclusive pursuits. In Pakistan, Gen Pervez Musharraf has shown how an army chief could become president without imposing martial law, muzzling the press or maddening the middle class.

This alteration in the perception of what proportion of democracy and decency a polity should be able to

deliver has been accentuated in the aftermath of the 11 September terrorist attacks. But its foundation goes back to the monumental misreading of what the beheading of the Berlin Wall signified. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and dissolution of the Soviet Union provided an opportunity for architects of all models to craft a new world order in their own image. Since modern-day mercenaries hunted far ahead of everybody else, they used their audacity and candour to redirect the new wave of democracy towards expanding the global marketplace.

The traditional political assumptions that a league of liberal democracies would advance peace and progress, create a middle class capable of defending society from the depredations of fanaticism, and

encourage national checks and balances in a way that would ultimately advance international security held true for a while. But when micronationalism fuelled by ancient grievances stepped into the political space freed by liberal democracy, the peace dividend the former cold warriors were expected to lavish on the world's neediest was spent on confronting a new set of challenges.

Multinational corporations, too, saw much of their optimism go up in smoke. Big Tobacco discovered that overseas markets weren't expanding fast enough to make up for the decline in sales in the West and rise of defence action suits. The checks and balances that came to the forefront were ones that had purely conglomerate connotations in corporate conglomerates and

the criminal underworld. As Third World debt, the AIDS pandemic, and environmental degradation widened the fault lines between North and South, voters in donor nations became more interested in how the foreign-aid programmes their taxes funded were faring abroad. In a global atmosphere where political discussions came packaged in such terms as the "clash of civilisations", "liberal democracy" and "cultural relativism", the ability of Yugoslavia's Josip Broz Tito and Indonesia's Suharto to hold their countries together became more than a subject of academic inquiry.

To be sure, those marginalised by globalisation weren't part of the anti-capitalist protests in Seattle and Genoa, but they did provide the fuses that cause. The post-11 September state into the root causes of terrorism has identified good governance as an instrument of clearing the deadly swamps of desperation in the developing world. The economic and political imperatives of building national institutions that work have crystallised into today's global philosophy.

This recapitulation of post-cold war history is central to recognising how demands for good government in Nepal are rooted in the domestic compulsion of donor governments as well. Nepal's multiparty crusaders didn't expect to gain power within 60 days of launching their "people's movement". For politicians once willing to settle for a waiver of the class-empowerment-affiliation problem that was their in-state Nepalis, we might even start enjoying the plunge into this reservoir of self-discovery. But there is an equal risk of being caught in a botchless pit. Many Nepalis, after all, have spent a lifetime contemplating how each polity has turned out to be worse than the one it replaced. ♦

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Nepal-India treaty

Nepal and India have agreed to renew the preferential trade treaty, but it now comes with new definitions for manufacturing, as well as quantitative restrictions on the four problem products which there is said to have been a "surge" in exports to India to the detriment of industry there—vegetable ghee, acrylic yarn, copper wires and zinc oxide. In general, Nepali industry is happy that the treaty row is over and it can get back to business without worrying for another five years. But it is unhappy that it took so long, when it was already clear last August last year that India wanted specific rules of origin and other safeguards in place before it would sign the extension. Sensing that, the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) and its Indian counterpart the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) had proposed a way out months before India actually sought the changes on 14 August. But the government sat on the FNCCI idea, rather than acting on the proposal.

Under the new provisions, Nepali ghee makers will now only be able to sell 100,000 tons of the product in India duty-free. (Last fiscal year Nepal exported roughly 125,000 tons of ghee.) Any sales over this new limit will take place under the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) regime. Likewise, the quota fixed for duty free acrylic yarn export is 10,000 tons (against the roughly 11,000 exported last year), copper wires 7,500 tons and zinc oxide 2,500 tons. This could mean short-term problems for all four industries—which involve a total investment of over Rs 10 billion—but industry sources say that the decision could be helpful to Nepal in the long-run, since it would direct investment into other industries that involve more value addition. This could be a problem because it is uncertain who would issue and monitor the quotas.

"The new protocol is more restrictive but we knew it was coming," said Rajendra Khatiwala, vice president and spokesman of FNCCI. "We now have to be more competitive and not rely only on duty differentials and prepare better for joining the World Trade Organisation."

Under the new agreement, which came into effect 6 March, Nepali products seeking duty-free access to Indian markets—except tobacco, alcohol and cosmetics—will be required to have at least 25 percent value addition this year. From 2003, the foreign content in finished products crossing the border should not be over 70 percent. The updated protocol also requires that exports be accompanied by origin certificates in a new format, but Nepal has a "transition period" for this until mid-April. The revised protocol requires that the ex-factory price of the export product be stated, as well as the CIF (cost cost, freight and insurance at the customs point) value of the imported raw materials and services value added in Nepal. In addition, the treaty now specifies what cannot be considered sufficient to pass as "manufacturing" or "processing"—for example, sort of operations to ensure safe storage of materials, breaking up and assembly, slicing, cutting, slitting, re-packaging and labelling etc.

Finally, there are very stringent safeguards: the affected country can take unilateral action where exports cause "injury" to local production if joint consultations between the two countries do not yield a result within 60 days. Should this clause be activated then the entire industry, and not only the erring producer, could be penalised. The agreement was signed in New Delhi on 2 March. Nepal's exports to India have grown five-fold after the December 1996 treaty, from Rs 5.2 billion in 1996/97 to Rs 27 billion in 2000/01. Imports from India have also doubled, from about Rs 25 billion to Rs 47 billion during the same period.

Glen chimneys

The B&B Trading Concern has begun marketing a new range of household appliances manufactured by Glen India Limited. The company says the chimney hoods it markets bring to Nepal the Italian way of keeping kitchens free of cooking smells and fumes. It also says it has chimneys to fit any kitchen space.

INDIAN

The licence issued to producers com-

At it again

The renewed trade treaty will only make sense if you look at the larger picture.

The Beeb's writers plenty about the Nepal and India trade treaty, and would like to linger awhile on the future of the trade relationship, now that the trade agreement has been renewed. The renewal of the treaty was, cynical as it may sound, at the behest of geopolitics rather than socio-economics. More to the point for our common future, if we are willing to share one, will be analysing the Indian federal budget recently tabled in parliament, and asking what the 0-to-subtle unveiling of Reforms II in India means for us.

But on that subject, your existential odyssey of all things economic is willing to get the streets of Chandra Chowk and Annapurna alive in whatever dingy South Block room the negotiations were taking place in. And that both parties walked away simply satisfied with their fagging deals, with questions of value addition, the main feature of the new, dubiously improved treaty, resolved through that age-old tool of economic policy-making.

The re-statement of the famous five—sanatpitha, copper wire, acrylic yarn, zinc oxide and steel pipes—have been used as a shield and the option of calling foul using the export surge catch-all phrase has been institutionalised. The wording of the treaty was agreed upon, but have the modalities been set out to define "export surge", and is there a quantitative mechanism to cap exports? Will the licenses issued to producers com-

with quantitative restrictions? And if that is done, who will be responsible for the licensing procedure and for enforcing the restrictions? Is there a chance that the creative import documentation so commonly used to understate quantity and rates will be matched by similarly creative export documentation? Without someone to enforce all these restrictions, the treaty is worth less than the paper it is written on. And given the demagogues of the border customs police already in evidence, it is hard to imagine how they will deal with the various provisions in place or if they will make more than a halfhearted effort at enforcement.

The little coverage in the Indian press on the treaty comes as a surprise—where is all the news about how India's protected domestic industries are reacting to the treaty? It would be nice—and forewarned—to know whether they are angry, or still lobbying their government to have their way in the implementation phase. On the Indian budget, going by what

the Finance Minister says, it doesn't seem to have anything that would especially affect Nepal. The unstated intention to continue with reforms by rolling back subsidies and tax steps to middle income taxpayers will have to be first agreed upon by the political parties in the ruling alliance. The cur in customs duty indicates that the right moves are being made to comply with the WTO on tariff rationalisation, but from the Nepali perspective, the lowering of customs duties in India means fewer opportunities of informal trade. The impact of higher LDC and other petroleum product prices will, of course go through a 1.6 per cent on reaching Nepal.

This is why the renewal of the trade treaty should also be viewed from the perspective of the changes that the Indian economy is adopting. A fair way budget and now a rational tariff schedule has been adopted against which import-export as well as a monetary policy will follow. What the altered treaty does is bring an element of the notion that Nepal and India might now be on the same page, a definite step past from the impression the earlier treaty gave of one partner given blanket benefits. For Nepal, this is a chance to revisit the critical issue of core competencies, and what industries and businesses these can sustain. The Beeb challenges the powers that be to do so.

Readers can post their views at artba@beeb@yahoo.com

"We need trade, not aid."

paddle machines. India still does manual sewing except in some large cities, but manages to get business because they have skilled, cheap, readily-available labour, and fewer work and supply disruptions compared to us, and their workers are more disciplined. So they can go for labour-intensive items such as embroidery etc, and also high-quantity fabrics. They also have very good cotton and fabrics.

In Nepal our governments have failed to realise that this is an industry that could have employed thousands of people—with the right incentives. Even good policies are rarely implemented. Investors have lost confidence in government promises. Our competitors get new facilities almost every two months. Bangladesh does not allow strikes, here even political parties and educated people encourage striking.

Chandi Raj Dhakal, Third Vice-president of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) also runs Memento Garments, one of Nepal's largest exporters of readymade garments. Memento supplies to famous international brands such as Gap and large US retail outlets such as Walmart and JC Penney. Dhakal discussed his business with the Nepali Times.

Nepali Times: We're told you are running a sinking business, just how bad are things?

The industry is going through the worst times, not only because of internal problems. 11 September was a major setback, but we had problems even before—our competitive edge was gone when the US allowed duty-free, and quota free garment imports from sub-Saharan and Caribbean countries. Besides, our inefficiencies, production and transport costs always made our goods more expensive by 25-30 percent. This is a sensitive industry, but we've never received recognition from the government and political parties.

What kind of recognition?

Look how Bangladesh treats its garment industry. We began in garments at almost the same time, the late 1970s. Bangladesh took the industry very seriously from day one, attracting Korean and Japanese investors and setting up assembly lines. In Nepal the Indians came with their old

How much do you employ? How much have you invested?

The garment industry is Nepal's largest, in terms of foreign currency earnings and employment. I have been the highest exporter for the past four years running. My initial investment was \$5 million; with upgrades to produce customised new stitching and finishing, the total investment is about \$6 million. There are 2,000-3,000 people working there, 99 percent Nepalis, 90 percent women. We use the assembly-line approach and have strict quality controls to meet international standards. My turnover in 2001 was \$13.9 million.

How can we do business after the quotas are gone?

Nepalis are losing interest in garments because of the recession and the upcoming WTO regime. Other countries are taking measures to adapt—Bangladesh has reduced interest rates, India and China have raised incentives. In Nepal we don't expect cash incentives, but we want appropriate policies and their implementation. In our case, export industries are supposed to be tax-free. But we pay 0.75 percent tax, and 0.5 percent service charge, above the disadvantages we already face being landlocked and having high industrial factor costs. Meanwhile China has been dumping its goods, which is something which it can do because its production is efficient and there's a climate where people can work undisturbed day and night. In this industry if you don't meet deadlines you're gone. Our strikes prevent us from meeting the vessels sailing from Calcutta, but politicians don't realise that.

How bad will the situation be after the WTO rules take effect?

We will have more competition, our survival will depend on our ability to enhance productivity, quality and the overall business environment. We lie between two giants, India and China, which have everything business need, from production to shipping lines. Without commensurate facilities here we can do little at the industry end. We work with quotas, which will not be there after WTO. There are possibilities within the WTO so least developed countries can get customs exemptions. The government should be working on that now, before the trading rules take effect. With those things in place, some industries may stay around, and they'll be able to help Nepal by generating employment and earning foreign currency.



The hills are alive...

Faith doesn't move mountains. Jazz does.



Cadenza jams at the Palmer Street Jazz Festival, Australia, 2000



Australian jazz great Don Burrows

A few years from now it will be hard to remember a time when Kathmandu and Nepal weren't magnets for jazz aficionados. Starting next Tuesday, Maha Shivaratri, entertainment and culture take on a whole new meaning in Nepal, at the first Kathmandu Jazz Festival.

Already there are people buying tickets for every show,

obsessive about its music. Says Chit Thapa, bass guitarist of Cadenza, the band that inspired all this, "It's been a long journey for me, this introduction to jazz. This festival will give the younger generation a quicker avenue to this genre of music." In addition to the international acts, there will be performances by well-established Nepali classical and folk musicians, as well as younger artists, and a few sessions of jamming that shall happen as and where the fancy takes the performers. "My hope is," says Cadenza's Pavin Chhetri, "that the festival will expose fresh talent in Nepal. In these troubled times I can't think of a better way to promote harmony than making music."

He could've added confidence to that—confidence in the country as a tourist destination as well as a place to promote business. It is difficult to overstate the potential of the coming two weeks to alter international perception of Nepal. As the events of the last 18 months have shown, suddenly it isn't enough to have only mountains, or architecture, or Buddhism, every tourist destination needs more and better things to offer. What Nepal offers needs to be upgraded every so often, and no one will deny that right now the tourism industry badly needs an overhaul.

Should the festival go well—and preliminary enthusiasm and reactions suggest it will—then

as the same time next year there will be another one, and the year after, and so on, until it is an annual fixture not just on Nepal's tourism calendar, but on the Asian music schedule. There's no telling how many people will come here specifically for it, or stay on longer to attend, or simply come to explore the modern, cosmopolitan environment that nurtures such efforts.

Businesses set to recognize the long-term possibilities and goodwill an initiative like this generates, and the display of support that has inundated festival promoters, Chhedup

Borman, Cadenza's manager and owner of Upstairs Jazz Bar, and Susan Sellers, assistant coordinator of the Palmer Street Jazz Festival, is astonishing given the general decline in industry confidence and spending. Sponsors have put up offers of air tickets (Singapore Airlines are flying in seven musicians from Australia), hotel rooms (Shangri-La Hotel are putting up 18 musicians in Kathmandu and Pokhara), media support (including this newspaper), and everything else musicians might require, from alcohol and tobacco to sightseeing, T-shirts and even insurance.

Who's playing

From 12 to 23 March, Jazzmandu will feature bands and soloists from the UK, Australia, Dubai and India, along with Nepali's own jazz quartet and co-organisers, Cadenza.

The Brisbane-based Afro Dizzi Act, almost every member of which has formal, university-level music training, meld in their performances their wide range of musical interests—funk, orchestral set-pieces, the gamut of jazz styles, electronic dance music, hip hop, soul and traditions of music from around the globe. With their expertise in jazz piano, saxophone, bass, percussion and new music-making machines, Afro Dizzi Act is among the most interesting outfits in Australia today, and every one of its five members is in demand for performances with other artists as well.

Another musician peers and listeners alike are "glad to have in any group" is Kevin Hunt, one of Australia's top jazz pianists. Acknowledged as a splendid and skilful live performer with a nuanced grasp of technique and order, and an unabashed sense of fun, Hunt has been known to play around with the sounds of the synthesiser and belt out innovative and imaginative solos.

If you've ever imagined making the rounds of the jazz bars of London or the international festival, Bernie's London Jazz Groove is the outfit to watch out for. Every name in it has a long history—Mike Cotton, a trumpeter forty years into the game who's played with The Kinks as well as jazz legends Aker Bilk, Bud Freeman and Harry Allen, among many others; Mike Hogg, a trombone veteran who founded the London Jazz Big Band and has played mainstream jazz with the likes of Max Kaminski, Bill Coleman, and the Charlie Watts Orchestra; Bernie Holden, clarinetist and saxophonist who is a regular fixture on the London and New York jazz scenes and the international festival circuit; Max Brittain, a guitarist who's played at every major UK concert venue and toured extensively throughout Europe, Scandinavia, the Middle East, Australia, and New Zealand, and worked with such diverse musical talents as George Fame, Marian Montgomery, Terry Lightfoot, Ronnie Scott, and Charlie Byrd; and Peter Goodwin, a bass guitarist and veteran of London jazz since the 1970s who has a long-time association with, among others, the Soweto township jazz band.

The biggest draw of the festival for those who know their jazz history will be Australian Don Burrows. A multi-instrumentalist who plays flute, clarinet and all saxophones from alto to baritone, Burrows is a household name in Australia and has performed and recorded cuts with everyone from Oscar Peterson, Dizzy Gillespie, Nat King Cole, Mel Torme and Stephane Grappelli to Tony Bennett, Frank Sinatra, Kate Ceberano and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Burrows ran into Cadenza at the Palmer Street Jazz Festival in 2000, and was so impressed with them that he agreed to come and play here for nothing more than a nominal fee and airfare.

Closer home, a combination that promises progressive and virtuosic jazz includes South African jazz pianist and composer for theater Donovan Rossouw, who is influenced by jazz, blues, southern African music and "Cape-style" goema. British saxophonist Carl Clements whose heroes include Charlie Parker and John Coltrane, and renowned Goan drummer Giles Perry, who graduated from the Berkeley School of Music, and after a stint in the Hindi film music industry, moved on to play professionally in the United States.

Mumbai-based Grove Supra has its own collection of talented pros. Shyam Raj, who plays tenor and soprano sax and flute, has played with Louis Banks, among others, and toured Europe and the US. Drummer Lindsay Danello is a regular session player and is behind Bombay Beat and bands such as Indigo and Crosswinds. Benay Rai, originally from Darjeeling, is a session guitarist influenced by the blues and Hindustani classical music.

Nationalists will be pleased to note that Kathmandu's musicians are also well represented. The now-legendary tabla player Homnath Upadaya will play with Cadenza and other Nepali classical musicians,

demonstrating his versatility, and his commitment to convincing a wider audience that classical needn't be stuffy. A group of Gandharbas will play the arhai and sarangi to add a stunning new sound to jazz paradigms, mainly to reinforce their belief that music needs both traditions and the space to be innovative. The Elite's Co-Ed School Marching Band adds a light-hearted and youthful touch, bagpipes and all.



Bernie Holden blows his horn

Where to hear what

Gokama Forest Golf Resort, 12 March, Rs 880. From 12 noon to midnight all the bands except Don Burrows and Kevin Hunt take turns playing at a Woodstock-style show. A free shuttle bus runs every half hour between Gokama and Thamel.



The Shangri-La Jazz Bar will host the All-Stars Supper Club

Jazz by the Lake, Shangri-La Village, Pokhara, 15 March, Rs 900. Dinner and jazz under the stars at the Shangri-La Village.

Jazz by the Lake, Lakeside, Pokhara, 16 March, ticket prices not confirmed. Jams in small bars around Lakeside.

Jazz Fusion, Patan Museum Square, 20 March, Rs 990. Jazz fused with Nepali wind, strings and skins, a follow-up to Cadenza's sold-out show in October 2001.

Jazzmandu Shangri-La All-Stars Supper Club, 22 March, Rs 1,980. Don Burrows and the all-stars of the festival backed by Cadenza, with a five-course meal at the Shangri-La Shambhala Garden.

* The Shangri-La Village, Pokhara has a package offer for both nights. For details, ring 412999.

"Music is the message."

Though the band itself needs no introduction, here they are, the men who gave Nepal its first taste of high-altitude jazz:

Navin Chhetri, vocalist and drummer.

Navin started early, singing at four and starting guitar at six. In college in Darjeeling, under the influence of heavy metal, he started the band that played acid rock, classic rock and reggae—and eventually metamorphosed into Cadenza. After arriving in Kathmandu, Navin turned to the drums, and Cadenza began to explore the more complex chord structures associated with jazz. In 2000, Navin and his brother Pravin were invited to Australia's Palmer Street Jazz Festival, which spurred Navin's determination to bring jazz to Kathmandu to encourage cultural exchange, musical inventiveness and to give other musicians the chance to share the sheer excitement of playing at a jazz festival. "I love playing jazz and fusion, the immediate exuberance of creating and improvising. I chose this path, this is what I want to do the rest of my life, make music."

Pravin Chhetri, guitar.

Pravin, also influenced by heavy metal when younger, got into jazz after moving to Kathmandu in the mid-1990s. Pravin learnt to experiment with the genre and now switches from rhythm to lead to bass with equal dexterity. The 24-year-old also worked at a recording studio learning to record and mix.

Laxmi Raj (Chit) Thapa, bass guitar.

At 32, Chit is the oldest band member. Chit grew up on the classic rock staple, and in Pokhara his first band at 14. Then came a seven-year stint living and making music, blues and soul, in Fremont, California. In 2000, seven years after he got hooked on jazz, Chit joined Cadenza.

Jigme Sherpa, guitar.

The baby of the band, 23-year-old Jigme started playing guitar in his early teens, focusing on, again, heavy metal. He too met the brothers in 2000 while doing studio work in Darjeeling. "It's been an amazing road. I had to travel back to listen to and play earlier rock before progressing to jazz," he laughs. In the last year he has moved from playing rhythm guitar in the background to producing some pretty sweet sounds on lead. "I feel privileged to have the opportunity to play with international musicians. I think it's a plus for tourism in Nepal. Music is the message."



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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITION
 Inside out Selection of images portraying life on the streets of Nepal, its hardships and pleasures, taken by ten Pokhara street youths. Presented by the Child Welfare Scheme Nepal at the Fewa Park Restaurant, Lakeside, Pokhara until end-March. 61-20793

EVENTS
 ♦ **Voices for Peace** A live music & multi-media experience featuring Australian show Julie & T'Yrie on both days and Robin 'n' Lozza on 9 March. Includes screenings of Dinesh Dookota's film A Rough Cut on the Life & Times of Lachuman Magar, and Nomads of the Himalayas. Rs 200 per show, dinner and show Rs 400, available at the Bamboo Club and The Last Resort. 8 and 9 March, 5PM on at the new Hot Pot Restaurant & Bar, Thamel. 425111
 ♦ **Shangri-La Open Golf Tournament** 150 golfers from every walk of life play for prizes including round trip tickets for two to Vienna and Mumbai. 9 March 2002, Gokarna Forest Golf Resort.
 ♦ **Nepali classical dance and folk music** at Hotel Vajra. Dances of Hindu and Buddhist gods Tuesdays and Fridays, 7PM onwards. The Great Pagoda Hall. Ticket and tea Rs 400. Nepal folk tunes Wednesdays and Saturdays, 6.30PM onwards, hotel restaurant. Hotel Vajra. 271545

MUSIC
 ♦ **Live music** by Catch 22, Tuesday and Friday nights at the 40,000 1/2 ft Bar, Rum Doodle Restaurant, Thamel. 414336

DRINK
 ♦ **Hit the Roof** Live band at the Splash Bar & Grill every Friday, Radisson Hotel.
 ♦ **Tantra Nile** Tincture cocktails and live music, prizes for psychedelic costumes. 11 March, 6 PM onwards, Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 491234
 ♦ **Classic teas** Thirty teas including all Dimah Tea's herbs, greens, blacks and Oolongs. Also Iltan, Darjeeling, Makabari and more. The Coffee Shop, Hotel of Annapurna.

FOOD
 ♦ **Celebrating women** with guitar tunes and 50 percent discount for women. Stupa View Restaurant & Terrace. Boudha. 480232
 ♦ **Swims, Salads & Siesta** Includes lavish buffet, complimentary shuttle to lakeside, free use of jacuzzi, swimming pool, pool table, table tennis, big screen movies. Saturdays and Sunday, Rs 550 per person, 50 percent off for children at the Shangri-La Village. 61-2212/23700.
 ♦ **Charcoal** Buffet with grilled delicacies from around the world, glass of lager, live music and strawberries with cream. Non-vegetarians Rs 555 and vegetarians Rs 495, tax included. Poilside, Yak & Yeti. 248999
 ♦ **Singaporean and Malaysian food** Satay, rice, soy milk dishes, curry puffs and more. Between Jawalkhai fire station and St Mary's School. Sing Ma, the Food Court. Foodcourt@wink.com.np. 520034
 ♦ **San Miguel Brunch** Launch Saturday buffet at The Fun Café, Radisson Hotel. 411818
 ♦ **Oriental Lunchtime** Special lunch menu, Rs 350 per head everyday 12 noon-3PM, China Garden, Hotel Soaltee Crown Plaza. 273999
 ♦ **International Women's Day** Women get 30 percent off on all a la carte menus only on 8 March. Dwarika's Hotel Call 479488
 ♦ **Thai festival** 11AM onwards at the Summit Hotel 11AM-4.30PM at the Patan Museum Café. Until 10 March. 521810
 ♦ **The Big Breakfast** A hearty farmer's breakfast, plain, nutritious food, all-time favourites. Daily until 11AM, the Café, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 491234
 ♦ **Lunch, tea and dinner** European and American cuisine with fine wines. La Soon Restaurant and Vinomage, Pulchowk. 535293
 ♦ **Newari Bhoj** Traditional snacks, drinks and meals, outdoors or indoors, in a restaurant designed by Bhakpatri artisans. Lajana Restaurant, Lazimpat. 413874
 ♦ **Authentic Thai food** Everyday at Yin Yang Restaurant. 425510
 ♦ **Tukche Thakali Kitchen** Buckwheat, barley, bean, and dried meat specialties. Also brunch with porridge and pancakes, all raw material from Tukche village. Darbar Marg.
 ♦ **Barbecue lunch** with complementary wine or beer for adults, soft drink for children. Saturdays at the Godavari Village Resort, Rs 650 per head. 560675

GETAWAYS
 ♦ **Shivaratri Package** Overnight on 12 February at Dwarika's Hotel, right by the celebrations. \$125 per couple, includes dinner and a guided tour of Pashupatinath. 479488
 ♦ **Rhododendron Getaway** at the Horseshoe Resort in Mude, three hours from Kathmandu. Two days of rhododendron walks in forests, package tours at \$30 per day, all meals and sauna included. Email resort@horoeshoe.wink.com.np
 ♦ **Destination Bardia** All-inclusive package to Jungle Base Camp, Royal Bardia National Park, with four days and three nights, one-way to Bardia. \$195 per head. Email junglbasecamp@yahoo.com or ring Going Places Travels, 251400. www.geocities.com/junglbasecamp
 ♦ **Mukhtin Darshan** Two nights/three days on B&B basis with Pokhara/Jomsom/Pokhara flights and airport, resort transfers. Indian nationals Rs 6,999 per head, expats \$250 per head. Jomsom Mountain Resort, sales@jomsom.com.np or jrm@sm.wink.com.np. 496110
 ♦ **Taste the difference** Cozy Nepali-style house on an organic farm in Gamcha, south of Thimi. Up to Rs 1,200 per person per night including meals. aas@wink.com.np.

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

NEPALI WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Spring really is here. The satellite image shows a moderately strong high-pressure system over the Himalaya and the north Ganga plain, but it will disappear early next week giving way to the westerly fronts over Iran and Afghanistan. This will mean a few instances of light rain including on Shivaratri day, in keeping with tradition. The afternoons will be warm, breezy and sunny, and finally the night time temperatures will move into the double digits.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fr	Sa	Su	Mon	Tue
26-08	25-09	25-10	25-11	24-11

YAK YETI YAK by MIKU



BOOKWORM

An Unexpected Light: Travels in Afghanistan Jason Elliot (Penguin, London, 1999) Rs 600
 Winner of the Thomas Cook/Daily Telegraph travel Book Award, this already classic book is a tour de force of travel and memory: vividly evocative, courageous, empathetic and self-aware. Elliot, who has been compared to T.E. Lawrence, travelled in some of the world's most extreme circumstances and writes about it by deconstructing arranging history, politics, his own experiences and intelligent analysis.

Reflections on Exile and other literary and cultural essays Edward W. Said (Penguin Books India, New Delhi, 2001) Rs 792
 Written over three decades, these essays give rare insight into the formation of a critic and development of an intellectual worldview. They cover a wide range of topics—from the genesis of Tzvetan and the machismo of Ernest Hemingway to the shades of difference that divide Alexandria and Cairo. Said also reconsiders writers and artists such as Giambattista Vico, Raymond Williams, Antonio Gramsci and Herman Melville.

Why Men Don't Listen & Women Can't Read Maps Allan and Barbara Pease (Manjil Publishing House, Bhopal, 2001) Rs 312

The controversial book that suggests that though of the same species, men and women live in different worlds, in part because their brains perceive things in different ways and their chemical make-up is radically different. The authors say they focus on different things, talk and listen differently and have very varied abilities with understanding space—all of which has an impact on love, sexuality and relationships.

Friends Colony: A Modern Fable from the Himalayan Kingdom Mani Dixit (Rupa & Co, New Delhi, 2002) Rs 130

A tale of animals living with humans who, with their petty foibles and political culture, are on a path to destruction. The animals in their turn show that taking turns to be the king of the jungle can be beneficial to all. The seven-year cycle in which the elephant, hare, monkey, bear, stag, rhino and tiger are lords of the jungle—one after the other leads to an eco-friendly world.

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Children of Shiva



Be careful what crosses your mind at Santaneswor Mahadev.

ALOK TUMBHAHNGPHEY
 It is hard to keep up with a half-man, half-woman protector, destroyer, and a manifestation of the energy that rules the world. Given that there are 108 important Shiva shrines (and probably half-a-million secondary ones), it's no surprise that people often miss out on one of the most interesting of them, right here in the Valley. It might be the bumpy half-hour ride, followed by the steep 15-minute climb that sends people from visiting the Santaneswor Mahadev, which is second in importance only to Pashupatinath, the official protector of the nation. But those who make the effort to get to the tiny red-drenched temple in Jhaurwasi, near Thaula Lalitpur come away feeling peaceful and truly blessed. Of course, you have to watch the thoughts that cross your mind when you're there, because Santaneswor is the deity that watches over people who cannot have children. So if you aren't ready yet for a small, squalling, prune-faced human in your life, go strictly as a tourist. On a clear day, this is Nepal



at its best. Why go trekking, when from this vantage point you can one moment look up to views of mountains from the Annapurna to the Jugal, and the next, direct your gaze down to the little villages and terraces dotting this idyllic part of the Valley. And perhaps this is another person couples anxious about their future without children find that coming here gives them some measure of solace. For as long back as the oldest Valley residents can remember, this pilgrimage has been made by people from near and far, usually twice. Until a few years ago, a major draw was the Santaneswor Baba,

whose blessings were sometimes rumored to take rather carnal forms. People came regardless, and they continue to do so, even though he isn't around anymore to act as the go-between between them and the good lord. "I have seen hundreds of couples coming and asking for a child in my lifetime. They always come back with their six month child for the *pasani*, the rice-feeding ceremony, because it is important that they thank Santaneswor," says 67-year-old Shiva Shrestha, the *dhajam* master of the temple, who, after he recorded his devotional songs, now spends his entire day in the temple.

The stories explaining how the temple came into being are as numerous as the names of Shiva himself. Hindu texts such as the *Svasthani* talk of how Shiva was carrying the body of his dear, dead wife Sati around the world, when parts of her started to fall on

different places. Just as Gubyeswari in Kathmandu and Kamakhya in Assam, India, are said to be formed from rather more intimate parts of Sati, Santaneswor Mahadev is the temple that arose when her upper lip fell to the ground here. When talk of how Kamadhenu, the cow that fulfills all wishes, made Jhaurwasi and Godavari her regular haunts to dispense free milk—after all, the supreme lord can only bathe in pure milk. The eternal milk source is represented here by a small stream of water below the boulder in the sanctum sanctorum. Locals swear the cow is responsible for the little rivulet that never dries up. Santaneswor sits atop a hillock flanked by two similar, smaller hills and the entire area is the stuff of legends, temples and pilgrimage. The name of the place, Jhaurwasi, for instance, comes from the story of the Thara people who once lived here. No one knows where they went, or if the present-day locals are their descendants. Some disagree with this version, saying that the mighty Pandava Bhishm, followed by his army, was chasing the evil Kichak. Given Bhishm's enormous appetite and incredible strength, his army was more an army of porters carrying food, some of which they lost along the way. The grain they split here gave rise to the three hillocks. There are many stories about the numerous temples near by, from the Nandara, the shrine of the goddess Pulchowki in Godavari, to Bajrabarhi in Chapaguan to the west, and Nawadurga in Thecho. But this homage to the God of Ubbens Children is more charming than most, for the stories and the vistas it offers. Sure, it is hard to get to, but the pure and pious locals are doing all they can to make the pilgrimage

HAPPENINGS



BIR GANESH MAN: A movie about the life and times of late Congress leader Ganesh Man Singh being shot in Basantpur on Monday, 25 February.

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

There is nothing like an all-expenses paid holiday to get to know your fellow travellers in the great journey of life. I am, of course, referring to people who sit next to you on planes. This is one of the aspects of our ongoing sojourn here on Planet Earth that passengers have absolutely no control over. It is fated.

You can request a window seat on the left side so you catch a view of Mt Everest, you can book a bulkhead aisle seat a month before your flight so you can slip unnoticed into the First Class toilet to splash some cologne, but you can't tell the airline that you don't want to sit next to anyone whose armpit can be detected from the cockpit.

In fact body odour on airlines is emerging in recent years as the single most hazardous aspect of air travel to and from Tribhuvan International Aerodrome (Mission Statement: "Taking of the photography in, above, or under TIA is strictly prohibited Monday-Friday from 10AM-5PM and national holidays"). There are now stern security measures in force at TIA which require about 670 passengers to stand in a room measuring 3 m x 4 m for two hours while waiting for flights so that only the most determined travellers will get to board.

As a result of all this beefed up security, an average of 3,500



Fellow travellers

incendiary devices like lighters and 26,800 sharp objects like toothpicks are confiscated daily from potential terrorists just before they get on the plane. However, it is my duty to draw to the attention of the Ministry of Civil Aviation that no one is keeping track of malodorous passengers wearing socks in advanced stages of fermentation posing a hazard to sensitive on-board avionics. (Flight Attendant: "Ladies and gentlemen, the use of laptop computers, mobile phones, CD players and taking off one's shoes during takeoff and landing is strictly prohibited. Anyone found violating this rule will be defenestrated after the plane reaches its cruising altitude of 35,000 ft).

People sitting next to you on planes can be divided into several taxonomical categories:

- **Heavy-weight lifters.** These passengers have more carry-on luggage than checked-in luggage and will occupy the over-head lockers (known in some airlines as "oval-head rockers") all the way from seat 31-38 so that there is absolutely no room for your orchids (known in some airlines as "all kids"). The thing to remember if you are seated next to a Heavy-weight lifter is to wear a helmet while seated so that an item dropping out of the oval-head rocker doesn't give you a skull fracture.
- **Recliners.** This is a passenger sitting in the seat in front of you who will insist on reclining his seat so that his head lies on your lap for the duration of the flight. An effective antidote to recliners is to carry out a flanking manoeuvre by carefully pouring some Bloody Mary into his ear canal.
- **Movers and Shakers.** You are on the aisle and the mover and shaker next to you begins to display symptoms of what at first glance looks like an advanced case of dropsy. But all is not lost, sitting next to this guy all you have to do is lean on him to get a free thigh massage.
- **Alcoholics Synonymous.** Also known in some airline circles as "imbibers" they will guzzle beer, singing gazals on the morning shurtle to Delhi after taking two straight ones with their breakfast.
- **Babes.** No such luck. No one even remotely eligible for being shortlisted as Miss Photogenic will ever sit next to me. Babes are miniature versions of Movers and Shakers whose sole purpose on the flight is to wall non-stop while over the Indo-Gangetic Plain.
- **Yakkers.** That's me. Never sit next to me on a flight. I'll talk to you nonstop until you ask the flight attendant to give you another seat. Which was the idea, anyway. ♦

HIMAL **LAGAAN**

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NEPALI SOCIETY

On some Saturdays in a Kathmandu bar that shall remain unnamed, a tall, glamorous woman sings heart-stopping jazz like she's been doing it all her life. She hasn't. After a 25-year sabbatical, Vidhea Shrestha returned to her lifelong passion in 2000, when she sang in a local music festival on the prodding of Kathmandu jazzman Chris Masand. Vidhea says she got involved because "this is such a unique musical genre, I felt it could contribute to Kathmandu's culture."

Pop rock already has a large following here," she explains. "Jazz is new. It's more akin to eastern classical music, with its improvisational quality." Improvisation is Vidhea's forte. While performing, she bursts

into frenetic dance and often throws Nepali words in.

At a time most female singers aspire to Mariah Carey-style diva-hood, Vidhea is refreshing for taking on a musical form that may not have instant appeal. But then, jazz is in her blood, as she grew up under the influence of a grandfather who loved the old school performers. Vidhea herself will listen to any period, any composer or singer, but she does have her favourites and most days wakes up to John Coltrane's tenor sax and going on to Miles Davis' trumpet. As for who her vocal influences are,



Jazz singer

that question is easier. And if you've heard her perform, it is also not surprising: "Two women—though I sing nothing like them," she laughs modestly. She's talking about the late, great Billie Holiday, and contemporary vocalist Cassandra Wilson. Vidhea's best rendition is always of Strange Fruit, the Lady Day classic that Cassandra Wilson brought back to life a decade ago.

While she brings a Western musical tradition to Kathmandu through her sizzling performances, Vidhea is also committed to introducing Nepali culture to westerners through her work at Sojourn Nepal, an experiential program designed to immerse young Western students in Nepali life. Students live with a Nepali family, take language classes, and delve into the possibilities Kathmandu holds through apprenticeships or volunteer work. There couldn't be a more suitable person to be someone's first introduction to Nepal. Vidhea

has travelled extensively not only in Nepal and Tibet, but also Europe and the United States, which makes it easy for her to relate to the perspectives of her western students. And it shows—a number of Sojourn students decide to stay on longer, come back, or devote themselves to research in Nepal.

Vidhea calls herself an "incorrigible optimist" who wants to get the most out of life—she's also a bookworm, intrepid trekker, art and photography enthusiast, and has, to top it all, an encyclopaedic knowledge of the culture, architecture and religion of the region. Her optimism doesn't hurt either. Although the Sojourn Nepal program was suspended last year due to the royal massacre and the increasingly devastating Maoist attacks, Vidhea is still helping individual students come to Nepal. "Now more than ever cross-cultural and experiential learning is essential," she says. And she's still singing, bringing east and west a little bit closer. ♦

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