

EXCLUSIVE

Free editor

There are growing demands from domestic and international human rights groups for the release of detained journalists, including Shyam Shrestha, editor of *Majjankari*, who was taken in at Kathmandu airport last Saturday. More than 70 journalists have been arrested since November, 28 remain in detention and have not been produced in court. Amnesty International said this week: "It is clear there is a grave law and order threat to the country, however in such a climate human rights must be protected with extra vigilance and army and police action must keep to international human rights standards." (See also p5)



New NIBL

Nepal Rastriya Bank has cleared the sale of Nepal Indusuez Bank Limited to a consortium of Nepali buyers. The new company will have the same acronym, NIBL, but will stand for Nepal Investment Bank Limited. The clearance of the sale of Credit Agricole stock came after rival bidders played out their dispute in the media last week. This week the NRB issued its 10th Directive on prudential banking and ownership, then sacked the board of Lumbini Bank. (See also p7)

PACMAN

The parliament's anti-corruption Public Accounts Committee is back in action after a reshuffle of its UML members. There seems to be no shortage of irregularities for PAC to probe: bank defaulters, inflated costs in road projects, digging into forest ministry files and looking at the satellite licensing row at Space Time Network.

HARI ROKA IN NEW DELHI

We can choose our friends, but we can't choose our neighbours. Nepal and India are stuck with each other, so we might as well learn to get along.

This week, the Chaudhary government's about-face in New Delhi is festooned with Nepali double-triangles flapping alongside the Indian tricolour. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's visit to India offers another opportunity to mend fences, show statesmanship and take bilateral ties to a new level of accommodation and understanding.

But the question on everyone's mind is: why Kolkata? The West Bengal capital is neither a cybercity nor a Sai Baba centre. New Delhi appears to be hesitant about the central government taking the lead in any future mediation on the Maoist problem, and is passing the buck to the Marxists in West Bengal.

After all, Kolkata has been the training and ideological base for Nepali Maoists. West Bengal also has experience in dealing with and crushing the Naxalites, and the comrades in 'Workers' Building may have a few pointers for Deuba. It was Siliguri where Maoist leaders gave audiences to a procession of Nepali leftists during the ceasefire in October, so it is not inconceivable that a secret face-to-face meeting is on the cards over the weekend.

Deuba's India visit comes at a time of unparalleled crisis in Nepal. There is an emerging consensus among Nepal's political parties, academics and even sections of the public that if India is not a part of the solution to the Maoist problem, then it is a part of the problem. And if the two neighbours aren't careful, Nepal's problem may soon become India's too.

The precedent for Indian involvement in Nepal's domestic politics was set way back with the overthrow of the Rana regime and King Tribhuvan's triumphant return to Nepal from Delhi in 1950. When King Mahendra dissolved parliament and banned political parties ten years later, the Nepal Congress

launched its armed insurrection from Indian soil. It is not surprising therefore that Nepal's Maoists have used the open border and India's vast "strategic depth" for training, arming and logistics.

Nepal's leadership now realises that it may not be able to guarantee the survival of parliamentary democracy without some degree of Indian help, and Deuba may be hoping to convince his interlocutors in New Delhi and Kolkata about this.

There are episodes from recent history that spook Nepal's leaders. In Punjab, in Sri Lanka and vis-à-vis the Bhutanese refugees, India has shown a propensity to build up fiction, get spooks flying, and then let the fires rage. In Sri Lanka the fire got so fierce, it had to beat a hasty retreat.

Today, India has joined the United States' "war on terror", and it cannot give the impression of ignoring this new brand of red terror in its own backyard in the Himalaya. So, Sher Bahadur Deuba will be trying to convince the Indian leadership that curbing Maoist activities on Indian soil is in its own long-term interest. He will also try to assuage the army Indians about the western military hardware the Royal Nepal Army urgently requires for its counter-insurgency operations.

The Indian response to this may be a cool "yes", but New Delhi will draw the line at more intensive foreign military involvement in training and supplying the Royal Nepal Army. At the same time, India may use the opportunity to push forward its own mediation role, or even propose unilateral political or military action to end the insurgency.

The Maoists are in the mood to use their



new-found stature, gained from having bloodied the army in Mangalore, to wrest political concessions. Deuba was deeply insulted by the Maoists' betrayal in November, but is under pressure to smoke the peace pipe again. The military campaign is also racing against time: it needs to register dramatic victories before the monsoon sets in.

If the Indians do put forward a mediation proposal, Deuba will have to think hard about the repercussions back home. Greater Indian involvement in resolving the crisis either through mediation or military means will increase Indian influence in Kathmandu. Which may be what New Delhi has always wanted, but there will be a backlash within Nepal and fuel further public mistrust of Indian intentions.

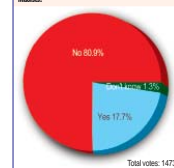
(Hari Roka is an independent leftist analyst and a research fellow at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi.)

Editorial p2 Open border, closed minds

How genuinely helpful India is in response to Deuba's request for help will determine the future of not only bilateral relations, but also the course of the Maoist insurgency. The open border between Nepal and India doesn't just facilitate free movement of people and trade. It may also make it easier for the spooks of Nepal's Maoist war to spill over into the tinder-dry farms of Bihar, Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh. ♦

Times nepalnews.com

Weekly internet PkD P.20
Q. Do you support the five-day strike called by the Maoists?



News item PkD 121. To see go to www.nepalnews.com
Q. Is it a good idea for Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to visit India?

The murderous middle-ground

The Maoist insurgency has now been reduced to a body count. But behind every death is the loss of a loved one, a loss to society, and a family tragedy.

SAGAR PANDIT IN DHAKA

Ram Mani Gyawali would have been alive today if he wasn't so concerned about the electrification of his home village of Kenungra in Arghakhanchi. Ram Mani had been threatened many times, knew he was on the Maoists' hit-list and had been living in Kathmandu for the past three months. But last week he had to go to Butwal to take delivery of a transformer so he could fit it in Kenungra. The family, including his wife, four children and grandchildren were settling down for the night when there was a knock on the door. "Ram Dai", someone called.

He was overpowered by Maoists with pistols and khukuris. There was a quick trial. Others overpowered his wife and son upstairs, and looted their belongings. Ram Mani's body was found later, his head was nearly severed



Ram Mani Gyawali

from his body, and there were signs of torture: long half-inch deep khukuri gashes all over his body.

"The body was completely mutilated, he had been hit and slashed," Ram Mani's younger brother Laxman says. "He was killed because he loved his village and wanted to improve it."

Laxman, his wife Sita who was also beaten up, and Ram Mani's family are in Kathmandu's cremation site at Aryaghat this week for the 13-day mourning period. Ram Mani was targeted because he was honest, plain-speaking and a popular VDC chairman. Last year, the Maoists had asked for a Rs 200,000 "donation". The brothers not only refused to pay, but also held a press conference to say why they were not giving in to extortion.

Go to p5

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OPEN BORDER, CLOSED MINDS

Whenever a new Nepal leader travels to India to pay his mandatory homage to the Delhi Darbar, the main question at home is always: what is he selling off this time? It is no different this time. Even before Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba left on Wednesday for Delhi, parliamentarians were vociferously demanding that the veil of secrecy over the visit be lifted. This is understandable, because historically our leaders haven't brought back much from India. It is often then that we end up giving something away. Usually a never.

The level of Indian aid for infrastructure and other projects in Nepal is now the lowest it has ever been. And Deuba's present visit comes at a time of unprecedented national crisis. The Nepali state has never been this feeble, hence the treaty suspicion in Kathmandu that Delhi will use this weakness to exact secret deals.

Our distrust of Big Brother is nothing new, and it pre-dates the independence of the Republic of India. The unified Nepal nation was a young and xenophobic entity, and we didn't trust the British East India Company in Calcutta. In fact the two belligerents collided and went to war in 1814.

With the Ranas, Nepal turned anglophile and in doing so, antagonised the native Indian public. Generations later, there is still residual historical memory among north Indians of Nepali soldiers coming to the rescue of the British in Lucknow in 1857, and of the involvement of Gurkha soldiers under General Dwyer in the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre.

After independence, the love-hate relationship between us got more acute. And every new episode—from the 1950 treaty through the Kosi agreement, the blunder of Rajiv Gandhi's

blockade of our border, to Tanakpur and Laxmapur, the Hritih Roshan riots and the torturous talks to renew the treaty—confirmed Nepalis' worst fears about India's "grand design".

In the messy post-democracy period, it didn't help that our knee-jerk politicians milked tainted anti-Indian sentiment for all it was worth at election time. One ex-prime minister (who shall remain nameless) even tried to assure Indian leaders during a visit to Delhi—after being elected on a vigorous anti-Indian platform—not to take his rabble-rousing seriously because "aap samajhe hain, elections mein kya kya karna padta hai".

Keeping relations tense and primed to be chronically at breaking point doesn't do the people of either of our countries any good. It is time we realised that the futures of Nepal and India are intertwined. The Nepali people and this country's governments must show pragmatism and look for ways we can take advantage of India's vastness, rather than working ourselves up into an insecure frenzy about it.

Indian leaders and business leaders, for their part, must realise that a prosperous and stable Nepal of 24 million potential consumers is in its own national interest. Petty-mindedness does not benefit a nation of India's stature. Destabilising Nepal, and keeping it poor by harassing it on trade will help neither country.

It is hard to remember any time in the modern history of our nations when relations were actually cordial and

constructive. The nearest we got to such a state was probably during the premiership of IK Gupta when the doctrine that went by his name took hold. The 1996 treaty dramatically boosted bilateral trade. Unfortunately, we never took full advantage of the treaty to put our own house in order by identifying products for a manufacturing and industrial base. The reversal of the treaty last month was two steps forward and three steps back, and signified, finally, the demise of the Gupta Doctrine. But, our business elite must realise that greater value addition on exports is actually in our own long-term interests, not India's.

The list of festering problems with India is long: embankments along the border, Kalapani, Pancheshwor, the cancellation of PIA overflights which penalises Nepal for the inability of India and Pakistan to get along, restrictions on Nepal's exports, delays in getting the Birgunj port going, and the state-instigated propaganda about ISI activities which has helped decimate Indian tourism to Nepal.

The latest thorn is the widespread perception in Nepal that the Maoists receive support from across the border. To be sure, the Indian foreign minister did hastily declare the Maoists "terrorists" in November. But Delhi hasn't moved much beyond that. The Indian government may not be supporting the Maoists, but it is not doing much to curb their activities on its soil either.

The lesson from all this is that bilateral relations between Nepal and India need to be addressed at the highest political level. We can no longer leave it to the babus on both sides. We can no longer try to solve the problems piecemeal as when they crop up. As long as there is no political understanding between India and Nepal, there will always be some crisis or other threatening ties.



STATE OF THE STATE

The sigh of the tarai

It is getting increasingly difficult to tell the difference between the president of the Nepali Congress Girija Prasad Koirala and UML Secretary General Madhav Nepal. At every public platform these days they are sporting the same script: that a constitutional amendment rushed through the present session of the parliament will magically solve all the country's problems. They say like itinerant salesmen that tarai intellectuals last Saturday, Raju, Bhayji, hay and apply Jalim Lonji, it is guaranteed to cure all your ailments."

At a colloquium organised by tarai intellectuals last Saturday, Koirala and Nepal were once again doing their dirt insisting that the amendments they propose in the constitution will somehow address all the concerns of tarai people in addition to solving the Maoist problem.

It was difficult to find how the cry of tarai can be reconciled with the desire of the two main political parties to share power at the centre. The question of resolving the issue of citizenship of Nepalis of tarai origin was the one

The manufactured consent of mainstream Nepali monoculture must be replaced with an inclusive pluralism.

that concerned the audience. But, sadly, even though both leaders represent tarai constituencies, they are selling the same script: that a constitutional amendment rushed through the present session of the parliament will magically solve all the country's problems.

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or tolerated, but they were never accepted as equal partners in society. King Mahendra introduced an innovation to replace hegemony by shifting from punitive to remunerative methods. The threat of punishment for a non-conforming population was coupled with rewards and benefits for those who agreed to be co-opted. This was the period when middle-class madhevis began to discard their dharti in mass.

This elitist tactic of creating and exercising hegemony through a carrot and stick approach, however, had limited effect as it involved only those who had a direct stake in the state apparatus. The toilers of the tarai were left alone to shoulder the burden of cultural diversity as long as they didn't pose a threat to the ruling elite. It was the Nar-Ranas of King Birendra's court that introduced a much more subtle, but sinister, method of creating a Nepali monoculture. Through the use of language and symbols, a

consensus was sought to be manufactured around the identity of the country's cultural elite. And it was peddled as a desirable Nepali identity through the use of religious practices, controlled education system and organised media.

This was the ideology method of creating hegemony. Symbols were manipulated to persuade the victims that it was in their best interest to obey authority. Perhaps the main purpose of the project of Nepalism was to establish the unquestionable supremacy of the crown in Nepali society. But the temple built to house the deity has acquired its own sanctity over a period of time, and a cult of the tarai were left alone to shoulder the burden of cultural diversity as long as they didn't pose a threat to the ruling elite. It was the Nar-Ranas of King Birendra's court that introduced a much more subtle, but sinister, method of creating a Nepali monoculture. Through the use of language and symbols, a

In this manufactured consent, ancient Nepal was marginalised and survival, species Sanskritised Nepalis with a barren accent, pays to 33 crore Hindu deities, looks down upon the female of the species as

lesser creatures, and treats every one else as the "other" that needs to be retrained in order to preserve the purity of the self.

If this description reads like a caricature, just ask any proud Nepali what it means to be one. It is this mind-set that needs immediate attention if serious Koirala and Nepal are Measur about "the problem of citizenship of tarai people." And it can be resolved by a hurried constitutional amendment.

A very large section of Nepalis of tarai origin face hassles getting citizenship certificates. And it is almost impossible to address the problem of fundamental rights without rationalising citizenship-related constitutional provisions first. But the core issue is the very concept of Nepalism itself. It's the definition of this term that will determine the fate of plurality and democracy in Nepal.

Citizenship is a right that can't be denied to any Nepali, and the Kathmandu elite is not bestowing any favours on tarai people by raising this vexing issue with a sense of urgency. It's the moral obligation

of all political parties to keep the promise they made to the electorate through their election manifestos. But the political class are equally urgent, and perhaps even more important.

People of the tarai need equal and just opportunities to engage themselves in building a pluralistic Nepali identity. The languages of the tarai have to be saved from extinction. There has to be a change in the attitude of the cultural elite that makes the tarai attire—dhoti-kurta, lungi-garhi or pajama-kurta—the butt of poor jokes. Above all, madhes needs to be accorded the respect that is due to every Nepali in a democracy. The Nepal Congress and the UML can initiate this process without waiting for a constitutional amendment.

More than the problems of the past or difficulties of the present, the constitution has to make allowances for the challenges that a society may have to face in the future. Any changes envisaged must give the disadvantaged—including madhes—a greater say. It can't just be an alibi for leading political parties to share the spoils of office. ■

by CK LAL



With barely ten days to go before his threatened five-day "Nepal shutdown", Maoist leader Prachanda issued a statement saying his group is willing to announce unilateral ceasefire, cancel the bandhs and resume the negotiations broken off in November. His colleague Baburam Bhattarai sent out a fax on 13 March addressed to "Dear Foreign Tourists" saying they will not be harmed, but that they should avoid travelling to Nepal during the 2-6 April shutdown.

Then comes news that top Nepali Congress leadership has secretly met a Maoist central committee member. Even though we cannot say for sure what all these overtures mean, we can try to predict what the Maoist strategy is, based on these developments.

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba still feels personally betrayed by the Maoists for breaking off talks and attacking the army in November. He is no mood to talk, but even he seems to be under pressure to hold out a tenuous olive branch. This he may do in the state that gave birth to the Nasalite movement, and where Indian Maoists were ruthlessly crushed by Indian Gauris.

Our own Maoists may be out of touch with international reality, but they have no qualms about using objective domestic conditions to suit their needs. Even while the Prachanda statement was being fed to media, the Maoists ambushed an army truck at Kerabari on the Mugling-Narayanganthar highway and at Sangachow on the Chauraha road, killing 10 policemen and soldiers.

These attacks may have larger significance, since they occurred on main highways and relatively close to the capital. It is possible that the rebel leadership thinks the time has now come to employ the Maoist doctrine of "surround and strangle". It would be overwrought to take these two attacks as only build-up to the forthcoming bandh. The Maoists by the book, and may be trying to function within the declared game plan of inciting a simultaneous mass uprising and insurgency.

But these very actions point also to a certain deservency. The Royal Nepal Army and the Armed Police, after initial



PHOTO BY

The Maoists are under pressure to strike a better balance between their armed struggle and legitimate political protest.

defeats, have made dramatic raids recently on rebel training camps and hideouts—an indication of better intelligence and strike capability. All this could be contributing to widening the internal fissures within the Maoist leadership.

If the surprise attacks on the military barracks in Dang and Salleri signified the beginning of the internal disagreement, then the recent overtures for unilateral ceasefire could signal its end. The Maoists may still think they are winning the war, otherwise there is no rationale for offering a unilateral ceasefire now. It could also be that the earlier opponent of the ceasefire, war strategist Gunda Bahadur, is out of action for one reason or other.

Even if they were never admit it publicly, the Maoists have a credibility and image problem. Their political hold is slipping, there is anarchy in the ranks, and they have

been damaged by the perception that the leadership depends on support from India. The same international factors that forced the Tamil Tigers to sue for peace in Sri Lanka may be pushing the Maoists to negotiate. Prachanda and Baburam are now branded terrorists a la bin Laden. Some of the more brutal murders of prominent social activists and teachers in recent months have tarnished their revolutionary image and early populism. The comrades now need to try and restore their political credibility.

This could be why the Maoists are being forced by public opinion to resort to more democratic means of protest such as bandhs and dialogue. And to get there, they will even hold hands with their arch enemy, Girija Koirala. In this game of power, the end justifies any means and no alliance is unbreakable to either side.

The Maoists had anticipated that the army would be deployed against them, but they had not expected that the government would also declare a state of emergency. This complicated their plans to gain propaganda mileage to discredit the army. They now have two choices if they want to reclaim their standing as a political force and also get the government to withdraw the army: continue fighting or talk.

There is a discernible trend in the Maoists' overtures for talks—they have done it either before or after every major attack. But the Kathmandu intelligentsia is seemingly unaware of this. The rebel fully know that if there are talks they can regroup and reassess their position. But they have little to lose with fighting on, since they can continue making trouble for the security forces with ambushes.

LETTERS

unique. Thank you Nepali Times and Himal Khabarpatrika for introducing this bilingual writer to a large Nepali and foreign readership. **Nick Sharma** by email

A more useful way than CK Lal's concept of concentricity ("Fatal attraction," #84) to describe the organisation of the Maoist outfit is that of the net. In a network, small, mobile, self-contained cells operate independently to

infiltrate maximum damage on the opposition. You neutralise a cell at Lathuram in east Nepal and they come back with a devastating rejoinder in the western part of the country. In a network, you know not where the next blow is going to come from.

To rephrase an ancient metaphor, the Maoist centre is everywhere and nowhere. The government's counterinsurgency strategy must incorporate the concept of network and launch a multi-fronted offensive that aims to deliver not only a crushing blow to the Maoists but also social and economic justice to the rest of the population. Salutations to CK Lal for his courage in articulating his thoughts boldly in the face of obvious Maoist threats.

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To rephrase an ancient metaphor, the Maoist centre is everywhere and nowhere. The government's counterinsurgency strategy must incorporate the concept of network and launch a multi-fronted offensive that aims to deliver not only a crushing blow to the Maoists but also social and economic justice to the rest of the population. Salutations to CK Lal for his courage in articulating his thoughts boldly in the face of obvious Maoist threats.

2100 kg migrant", #85). Rhino conservation is a success story, but this is threatened by a surge in poaching. If this rate of poaching persists it could wipe out Nepal's achievements in saving the rhino from extinction. **M Devkota** Austria

SHAKESPEARE Who does Kunda Dixit think he is, Sir Richard Burton? His leader Mr Heti ("Much ado about nothing" #77, #85) has convinced me that our country is a Shakespearean tragedy in the making. I liked the last poignant bit: "Each new day, a gash is added to her wounds." Nice, subtle touch. **Rina Subba** by email

I was enthralled to read Mr D's "Much ado about nothing" #77. I hope that once the "Temporary" passing, we will be able to say "All's Well That Ends Well" and

move on and make Nepal great and peaceful again, "Measure by Measure." However, currently, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark," so what do we do? "As you like it," Mr. D, you can either say "Something wicked this way comes" and satirise the situation or attempt to improve it by saying that this is a stage where every man must play a part."

Bhaskar Tripathy by email

"What fools these mortals be," Snark. Snark. **Cecile Balgos Mexico City**

Thanks to Kunda Dixit's bardic bonanza we now know not only the hitherto unknown fact that Will Shakespeare once travelled overland to Nepal to hone his literary skills, but also the reason behind so many "whores and rascals" pecking his play.

Saradhanchandra Sharma Bazar

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Saradhanchandra Sharma Bazar

A tale of two hospitals

To take health care to the people, take it away from the government.

HEMLATA RAI IN LAMJUNG
The Lamjung Hospital is, by Nepali standards, sophisticated for such a rural setting. But even more surprising is that this 25-bed hospital is managed entirely by the community it serves. While the rhetoric of 'community-participation' has become a development cliché in Nepal, this hospital is anything but. Here is a hospital for the locals, by the locals and of the locals.

This new concept of community hospitals in Lamjung and Dhulikhel might be the beginning of a quiet revolution in health care in rural Nepal. Organizations involved in these two hospitals are beginning similar projects in Bukum, Dhading, Kavre and Sindhupalchok. "Delivering health care is easier than it looks—so long as decisions are allowed to be made by local people where the hospitals are being built," says Dr Ram Kanta Makaju, director of Dhulikhel Hospital. The trick is to take the locals into confidence, and let them run it.

Even so, the larger public health picture in Nepal is pretty disastrous. There is on average only one doctor for every 20,000 people. In remote areas—where trained health practitioners rarely work—this ratio is down to one doctor for 100,000.

A 2000 World Bank Study shows that public sector spending on health care, including donor expenditure, is a mere \$3.10 per person per year—far less than the \$12 needed to provide a minimum health care package. The result, the report says, is inadequate hospitals, doctors and service delivery. One high-ranking official at the Department of Health Services told us there is a new problem: "Political instability and interference are destroying the health sector in Nepal. Political patronage make the



Lamjung Hospital's maternity ward, still under construction.

government employees unaccountable and irresponsible, making the delivery impossible."

The only way to keep health care out of reach of politicians in Kathmandu and to make it affordable is to mobilise local resources to set up and run rural hospitals. So, in 1991, the new National Health Policy was formulated to decentralize health care systems and make them more regionally grounded. Finally, there was a chance that the slogan "Health for all" would not just remain a slogan.

The first step was to hand over basic health posts, the most basic health care units in nearly every one of Nepal's 14,000 village official (VOCs), to community management. That process is still underway. But bigger initiatives are already coming. The new hospitals in Lamjung and Dhulikhel are two

exemplary, and different, models of community hospitals. Both aim to deliver inexpensive services and be self-sustaining. And though they are more expensive than government-run hospitals, they are cheaper than the private clinics and hospitals in Kathmandu Valley and other cities that residents of these areas would have to come down to.

Dhulikhel Hospital is already supporting itself, and offered free or heavily-subsidised treatment worth Rs 3 million last year. And in its four months of operation, the new management of Lamjung Hospital generated 70 percent of the centre's running cost from services and sale of medicine, despite the 30 percent subsidy on all hospital services and drugs.

That process is still underway. But bigger initiatives are already coming. The new hospitals in Lamjung and Dhulikhel are two

The handover of Lamjung District Hospital to the community was in keeping with official policy to make local level health care units more autonomous, and give them a more prominent role in the planning and management of curative and preventive health services.

Presently, Human Development and Community Service (HDSCS), a national NGO, is managing a local non-governmental hospital, the Lamjung Integrated Community Health Centre. This will be fully responsible for the hospital. This model holds hope for people at the village and district levels, and the HDSCS has received requests to help revitalize existing health facilities in six other districts. A year from now, the organisation hopes to begin work on the Chaurjharhi Hospital in Bukum.



Dhulikhel Hospital plans to expand to 130 beds in two years.

Since it is a government health institution, the Lamjung Hospital is entitled to receive Rs 1.5 million and three health personnel including a doctor, and the community itself plans to start a kitchen to raise money for an endowment fund. The maternity and children's wards are under construction, and the general ward is already operational. Soon, the administration hope to double the hospital's capacity to 50.

"We are here to serve the people and share the burden of health services with the government. Our policy is to complement and improve what is already here rather than funding new infrastructure," says Dr Tirtha Thapa, executive director of HDSCS.

In five years the HDSCS will bow out and the Lamjung Integrated Community Health Centre will be fully responsible for the hospital. This model holds hope for people at the village and district levels, and the HDSCS has received requests to help revitalize existing health facilities in six other districts. A year from now, the organisation hopes to begin work on the Chaurjharhi Hospital in Bukum.

The Dhulikhel Hospital in

Kavre is a little different—it was started by local residents in 1996. Twenty-four Dhulikhel families donated 2.2 hectares of land, and the hospital itself was set up with support from the Dhulikhel Municipality, a consortium of European donors called Nepal Made, and the Dhulikhel Health Service Association. Locals contributed Rs 6 million, matched by a municipality grant, to create an endowment fund.

Since the Dhulikhel Hospital is a non-governmental initiative, it does not receive government grants, although it is given customs breaks on the import of equipment. It wouldn't work in a less prosperous district either—it is far too expensive—but the Dhulikhel Hospital is successful enough that it runs four satellite hospitals in Bukum, Dhading and Sindhupalchok.

To be sure, neither of these hospitals is entirely problem-free. For one, both rely on assistance from international donors, which doesn't make them completely self-sustaining. Dhulikhel Hospital is lucky because it has a high proportion of local staff and does not encourage foreign doctors for health workers to stay long. This puts it in a position to develop the human resources it

by DANIEL LAK

Afraid of the dark

Fear stalks Nepal's dark and deserted highways at night.

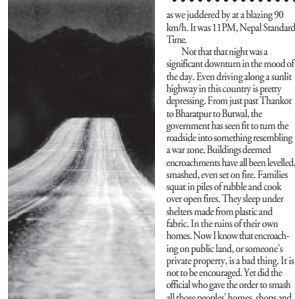
Hunting along the Mahendra Highway between Narayangarh and Nepaling, I wondered about the wisdom of my journey. Once darkness fell, the trees and towns lined a road empty of all but ghosts. And I don't believe in ghosts.

Not even a cigarette glowed at roadside tea stalls as the real pitch dark of late night took hold. Feral pumps sat untended. Houses were shuttered. If we drove on, intent on arriving alive and laughing at our fate. For just what were we afraid of? Normally a long drive on a South Asian road at night is a series of narrow escapes and horrific encounters, not with armed men or bandits but with night buses and trucks driven by drunken maniacs.

In India, I once counted 16 major road accidents along a 100 km stretch in Rajasthan. The recent spate of bus plunging off cliffs in Nepal is another facet of regional road terrorism. But no, we weren't afraid of our fellow drivers.

On the odd occasion when a set of glowing headlights popped out of the murky gloom ahead, often flickered and laughing at the fate. Apparently, other drivers felt the same. High beams were dipped almost from the moment we drove into a valley, a far cry from the usual practice of blinding the oncoming traffic out of their idiot gle. We slowed down as we approached each other, flicked night turn indicators on and even honked horns as we rounded past each other. The fear would postpone the jet-propelled into fresh darkness, alone again, or so we hoped.

I suppose we were worried about Maoists or nervous members of the security forces. But not, in fact, we saw neither. There was one army checkpoint just Narayangarh and the few soldiers were no busier to spare us a second glance. No police guards were manned and the place where I have always got the most rigorous third degree: the Armed Police Force camp just before Kuluapur, had turned its lights off. The sandbagged sentry posts were empty, no gun barrels pointed at us



as we juddered by at a blazing 90 km/h. It was 11PM, Nepal Standard Time.

Near that night was a significant downturn in the mood of the day. Even driving along a snail highway in this country is pretty depressing. From just past Thakot to Bhurapuri Bazaar, the government has seen fit to turn the roadside into something resembling a war zone. Buildings deemed overgrown have all been levelled, smashed, even set on fire. Families squat in piles of rubble and cook over open fires. They sleep under shelters made from plastic and fabric. In the ruins of their own homes. Now I know that encroaching on public land, or someone's private property, is a bad thing. It is not to be encouraged. Yet did the official who gave the order to smash all those peoples' homes, shops and

business wonder about the timing of the night? Conventional wisdom in times of national crisis is that people—not combatants, civilians, potential victims of violence, budding recruits to revolution—need encouragement, reassurance, perhaps even bread and circus. They don't need their lives devastated. I dare say more than a few people signed Maoist membership cards sometime after they watched their homes demolished.

In Nepal, at the end of the journey, we drove through streets that are usually gridlocked with traffic, vehicles, human and animal. It was cold and the orange glow from the streetlights illuminated little. Shadowy figures at the edge of the pools of light turned out to be policemen, sticks tucked under their arms as they watched us drive by. A desk clerk jerked awake as we walked into our hotel.

Apparently, we weren't expected as there is a 'curfew' along the Mahendra Highway. No traffic after 9PM or some such rule. If that's true, no one enforces it. Perhaps they don't have to. Fear patrols the countryside. The next morning dawned with the usual cacophony of border town life. Creaking cycle rickshaws headed out and from the frontier. Businesses raised shutters and sweepers swept. In a cloud of dust, another day began. And I was still hot to go home to Kathmandu. This time, the checkpoints functioned and we wrote our vehicle details at least 12 times. The Armed Police checked our current gear, our radios, our guns, our papers, our money, our identity. It felt a lot more like a state of emergency. Not that there was any check in that. Fear doesn't sleep in the daytime. It just lurks out of sight and waits for a chance to wreak havoc once again. Just like it does every night. ♦



Washing and peeling for a sick child in Lamjung Hospital.

will need when it expands from 70 beds to 130 in 2004. Since it is the brainchild of one man, Dr Ram Kanta Makaju, there may be questions about its long-term survival.

His Christian identity may be an obstacle for Lamjung Hospital

in establishing the sense of local ownership required for any successful community enterprise. Its dependence on foreign doctors is another drawback—when we visited the hospital it was being run by four foreign doctors, without any

Nepali doctors. Sharad Ojha of the Public Health Concern Trust (PHCT) wants of other problems. "Handing over the management to local institutions and communities without training to enhance their abilities might mean there is a bigger public health disaster." This is a potential pitfall when local communities are not consulted right at the start. But government officials dismiss Ojha's concerns. "We are not forcing them to take over the management of sub health posts, but we will allow them to when they feel they are ready for the responsibility," counters Dr DB Chataut, director general of the Department of Health Services.

An analysis of the health sector done by the department in 1999 showed that equitable access to healthcare remained elusive for most Nepals. The main obstacles were management of public health facilities and institutions, inadequate compliance with existing guidelines, a near absence of quality care practices and poorly defined roles and responsibilities for health authorities.

Chataut says the Lamjung and Dhulikhel models offer new hope. He says: "We hope to involve local communities in management and encourage them to monitor care." ♦

from p1



"He was the type that didn't tolerate any nonsense," Laxman says. He was even jailed during the panchayat for telling King Birendra that the system was corrupt and unrepresentative. Ram Mani was killed, but there are hundreds of others who are caught between threats from the Maoists and the counter-insurgency campaign of the security forces. According to the tally of the human rights organisation INSEC, over 500 of the 1,700 people killed since 23 November were non-combatants. The line between who is a Maoist and who is not gets blurred when ordinary villagers are forced to join the rebel force.

Urmila Oil of Parundhara VDC in Dang is an inmate at the military camp in Ghorahi. She was the appointed head of the 'people's government' in her village by the Maoists after her husband Bin Bahadur Oil joined the rebels about two years ago. "I am

not a Maoist, they made me one," she said as before breaking down. Seeing his mother sobbing, Urmila's two-year-old son started crying as well. There are many other 'accidental Maoists' in Ghorahi. Jan Bahadur Pun, 16, took part in the battle of Kapokurt in December and was forced by the Maoists to be a porter, ferrying fallen rebels out in a doko. "With them I had to walk long distances without food or rest," says Pun. "I was in school when they came and took me in."

Many of those in detention told us they were enlisted as militia after training to use a musket for seven days. Pun's camp mate, 17-year-old Khadga Bahadur Buta of Rolpa, has a different story. He signed up because he had to fulfil a family duty. "They came and told my father to send a family member to join the militia," says Buta. "They would have killed him otherwise."

Detained editors

Shyam Shrestha, editor of the monthly magazine *Mujgan*, is the latest to join the lengthening list of persons detained by the security forces. Shrestha, who was on his way to Delhi to attend a conference last Saturday, was picked up at the Tribhuvan International Airport along with two human rights activists. The editor of the left-leaning paper was detained nearly three weeks after Gopal Budathoki, editor/publisher of the vernacular weekly *Sanghu* was detained by security forces. The whereabouts of all four are still unknown. In a special editorial this week, *Sanghu* criticised the government for wrongly accusing Budathoki of being a Maoist supporter and of printing news that undermines the efforts of security forces. In the case of Budathoki's abduction, says the editorial, the security forces have undermined the law instead of maintaining it. *Mujgan* sources have criticised the government for targeting Shrestha, who has distanced himself from the armed 'People's War' and was instrumental in organising the three rounds of talks between the government and the Maoists last year.

Problematic poster

A classic case of good intentions gone bad: an award-winning poster designed for the Family Planning Association of Nepal and published in a major daily on the occasion of International Women's Day has come in for criticism. A number of women rang the paper to complain that the poster, which depicts a woman as an egg-laying hen, is offensive and slights the dignity of women. Poster designer Balamani Jana doesn't agree. "The poster title 'Am I a man's wife or a rooster's hen?' speaks for itself," he says. "A woman is not a baby-making machine that she has to suffer through the births of dozens of babies just to ensure the continuity of the family line. In my capacity as a man, I was presenting before society the suffering of a mother and seeking a response. I was supporting women, offering sympathy towards the suffering they endure in childbirth." The poster's sub-title reads: "A husband plays a major role in ensuring the reproductive health of his wife." FPAN says the poster draws society's attention to women's reproductive health. "Individuals may interpret the poster differently, but in no way, does it debase women," says one FPAN official. OK, but what about good taste?

"Visit Nepal," Baburam tells tourists

Baburam Bhattarai, in a letter addressed "Dear Foreign Tourists" says his Maoist party has written against the tourists industry in Nepal. "Foreign tourists are most welcome in the country and will be so in future as well," he writes, and goes on to invite tourists to visit Maoist "base areas." He also bashes globalisation and Nepal's "hereditary autocracy", warning tourists not to patronise airlines and hotels owned by them. Baburam says "honoured guests from neighbouring India" need not be overly perturbed about visiting. But western ambassadors in Kathmandu feel this is the first time the Maoists have made a direct threat against tourists, by telling them to stay away during the five-day bandh next week, and travel advisories are being updated. Baburam ends his letter by saying: "In view of the five-day long Nepal bandh (i.e. general shutdown) from April 2 to April 6, 2002, and the subsequent surcharged atmosphere in the aftermath, the foreign tourists are well advised to skip the tour itinerary, if any, for the said period. We deeply regret the inconveniences likely to cause to you all." If you say so, comrade.

Gains for women

The year 2002 has begun well for Nepal women. First, the formation of a National Commission was announced on International Women's Day, 8 March. Nearly a week later, the House passed the much-debated Women's Bill with an overwhelming majority. And this week, leaders of major political parties signed a declaration committing themselves to developing political leadership among women. Well-kept word, says Sahana Pradhan, leader of the Women's Pressure Group and Standing Committee member of the CPN (UML). But the senior politician cautions against being too optimistic—she says the Bill still fails to recognise women as independent individuals, rather than simply a man's daughter or wife. Also, there's no point in reserving seats for women in politics, says Pradhan, whether it's 33 or 40 percent, men stand in their stead. She also stressed the need for women to be represented in any process to amend the constitution.

Tengboche just did it

Good news on the tourism front. The Tengboche Development Project in the Everest region, has just won the TO DO 2001 award, announced on the occasion of the 36th International Tourism Exchange in Berlin. Rather than just serving as a picturesque backdrop for tourists, the Tengboche Monastery, the spiritual centre of Sherpa culture, has played a proactive role in promoting sustainable tourism. The 1995 Tengboche Development Plan, initiated by the Tengboche Rinpoché (right) and Nepal-based architect and town planner Michael Schmitz, has actively promoted the monastery (at 4,000 m) and the habitat of the Sherpa people. The monastery is serving to attract 30,000 visitors annually, so the surrounding villages benefit, and has built the necessary tourism infrastructure such as toilets, drinking water facilities, hydropower-generated electricity, and a telephone connection. An eco-centre built in spring 2000 teaches visitors about Sherpa culture and sells locally-made souvenirs. The income generated here is used to train monks to spread the message in their communities of environmental protection and conservation.



The Tengboche Rinpoché



With tourist arrivals during Shivaratri having fallen woefully short of expectations, the dependency that has descended on the hospitality industry is bound to deepen. If a dancer Bagmati, pre-festival road shows in India and even festival-tube committees couldn't draw too many devotees, it means we can't afford to sit on that bed of four operators the Chinese have been reminding us to avoid.

There are encouraging signs, though, in one category of pilgrims. Hermits converged on the Pashupati area in hordes, by up to three times the usual acreage, according to one estimate. Legions of half-railed fakirs have always been an integral part of Shivaratri festivities. But you have to consider this year's arrivals in the context of the run-up to the Vaidya Hindu Paribad's soil-sanctification ceremony in Ayodhya. It would be safe to believe that the

hype surrounding the Ram temple ceremony held back many Shiva followers already on their way to Kathmandu.

In the relative sparseness of the Pashupati premises last year, the bareness of the nanga baba was particularly conspicuous. This led some locals to suspect impending quantitative restrictions on this band of believers from next year. Those still complaining about the concessions Nepal had to make in the new trade treaty with India may be tempted to slap retaliatory quotas immediately. But prudence dictates against punishing devotees who probably don't know where their zinc oxide and acrylic yarn come from.

To be sure, the surge in the number of pilgrims didn't mean much for the likes of Daryatan's nakula sellers. Instead of creaking the details of retail receipts and the central bank's Indian currency reserves, however, we

should try to remain focused on the broader picture. What inspired so many aunts to come marching in when staying away from Nepal has become the best travel decision of the year? Having severed their ties with the world as we know it, those sages that followed the new veneration of the Shiva deity were deterred by the tight security arrangements or the prospect of a diminished circulation of loose change. No crisis can stop followers who really want to see their overlord. The 1970s Bollywood number, "Let's go to Kathmandu, where we'll meet Shambhu," remains the Shivaratri anthem for many across the southern border.

These hermits may have abandoned their families and friends in the pursuit of the eternal truth, but they are worldly enough to understand the utility of trying to convert the goddess. If the Maasots and their fellow travellers consider

Bands of believers

Ask not what your politicians can do for you, ask what you can do to help them feel more comfortable in their seats.

religion to be the epitome of the masses, our sages have long convinced themselves that things and when staying away from Nepal has become the best travel decision of the year? Having severed their ties with the world as we know it, those sages that followed the new veneration of the Shiva deity were deterred by the tight security arrangements or the prospect of a diminished circulation of loose change. No crisis can stop followers who really want to see their overlord. The 1970s Bollywood number, "Let's go to Kathmandu, where we'll meet Shambhu," remains the Shivaratri anthem for many across the southern border.

loosely on the saddle of life keep you half-prepared for the fall. Ask not what your politicians can do for you, ask what you can do to help them feel more comfortable in their seats. If they believe they have a secure tenure, they just might start doing nice things to accumulate good deeds. Even if they don't, it's no big deal. It's not as if we'll be around forever to regret our moment of complacency.

To find a rustic-wide spirit of hereditary existence, religion should be able to leave its footprints in all walks of life. A gentleman's suggestion that Nepal promote deep tourism as a economic stimulant may have been way ahead of its time. But in such sagacity what steamship is all about? Our tourism officials could work on bringing out a concept paper in time for the 12th Plan. We should, however, grant fast-track

approval to faith-based links abroad in order to raise the quality of governance. One former vice-chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy has proposed banning our feeding Karghar participants to the contemporary climate of Kathmandu as a way of cleansing the body politic. With Girija Prasad Koirala and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai out of the way, the torch can be passed to the third generation of Congress leaders. That could inspire the young and restless in the other parties to bear the burden of leadership. By returning to the Durga and Dasaasmedh ghosts of their younger days.

Koirala and Bhattarai would also be restoring a glorious tradition. Every Rana prime minister who didn't die in office went on to seek solace on Indian soil. In fact, one prime minister of the staunchly awadhi Panchayat days broke his self-imposed vow of political exile in Bangalore last year to explain why Nepal's cases and crises were more comfortable than Afghanistan's.

Admittedly, it would require supernatural determination to live eternally in the spiritual realm amid all the acts of commission and omission around you. Rest assured, though, a desire to have the best of both worlds has ceased to be a symptom of a serious personality disorder. The next time you're in Kathmandu, ask the first sage you see how long he thinks the prime minister would continue in office. If the release reflects to you again what you're seeing, you could just look around. You'll find enough lay people in the hallowed premises ready to offer their omis.



"We need peace."



Joy Dewan, president of the Nepal Association of Travel Agents (NATA), is also the General Sales Agent for Qatar Airlines. Qatar flies daily to the Doha and is the only airline that provides daily connections from Kathmandu to Europe. He also runs Zenith Travels and is the GSA for Dragon Air and Air Lanka.

How's business?

Everybody is aware that tourist arrivals were down by about 20.7 per cent last year, this year the number has been falling faster every month. Qatar was fortunate; it did very well and brought in quite a good number of adventure tourists last year. Also Royal Nepal Airlines pulled out of the European sector last year and we could get that traffic. We did a load factor of over 80 per cent, which is very, very good in aviation.

Are you expecting to repeat that this year too? Comparing the situation right after what happened in the US last September and now, I say people have begun to travel again. Other countries are getting many tourists and we are also hopeful.

How has the state of emergency affected tourism?

We were initially telling tourists it was safer to travel to Nepal after the emergency. Unfortunately, many incidents have taken place since. This has sent out negative signals and affected us a lot. All airlines did well in October-November, flying in adventure tourists. But we lost much of the white collar, high yield traffic, which has affected us very badly.

Has the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) done enough to counter that?

They are trying their best to spread the word. Together we met different resident ambassadors and requested them to soften their travel advisories. They said they understood our situation, but also had their limitations and had to repeat what was happening. As far as safety is concerned, the whole world is unsafe. Nobody expected the Twin Towers to be hit. The Indian traffic was almost nil last season. The NTB is trying to revive it. Indians are still wary about travelling to Nepal, but because they don't go beyond the Valley or Pokhara, we need to tell them more effectively that it is safe to come. The NTB has a major problem, which is money. You cannot do marketing with a limited budget.

What have you done to restore confidence among travellers?

We tell prospective visitors that with the emergency in place the government has better arrangements for security in many parts of the country. We also tell them that we do have a Maoist problem but not all over Nepal, there are areas where we still have peace.

Some Nepal workers headed the Gulf complain that Qatar discriminates against them on the service front. What do you have to say about this? We also get complaints from time to time. As an

airline for us everyone is the same and we provide them similar services. There is no discrimination because the bottom line is the fare and workers pay the same fares as white-collar travellers.

But you do have different check-in counters for the workers?

Yes, that is to expedite the check-in process. Because most of the Nepal workers travelling are going abroad for the first time, we have to almost shepherd them, we are there to help and guide them. If they were checked in with other passengers, there could be delays. The separate counter has been set up for their convenience.

Do you think the governments plan to bail out hotels is good enough?

Yes, that is to expedite the check-in process. Because most of the Nepal workers travelling are going abroad for the first time, we have to almost shepherd them, we are there to help and guide them. If they were checked in with other passengers, there could be delays. The separate counter has been set up for their convenience.

How have travel agencies been affected?

As bad as hotels. NATA has asked for government help, because they are helping the hotels, they haven't responded officially and we are still lobbying.

We have an oversupply of tourism service providers. Isn't this slowdown a chance for consolidation rather than total bailout?

Unlike garments or carpets the tourism industry has remained good over the long term and there is scope to make more money. We cannot blame the hotels and related travel industries. As regards consolidation, I agree there should be some policy on control and we're working on one with the ministry.

What else can be done to help the industry today?

We want the situation to return to normal. We want peace. The government has to get out the problem with the Maoists. I've already said that in most countries the situation has come back to normal after 11 September. But it hasn't here, because of the Maoist problem. The government needs to find a solution by means of negotiations or whatever. On our part, as businesses we remain optimistic about our ability to sell Nepal for as long as we have our natural beauty.

BINOD BHATTARAI

Last week, the Nepal Rastri Bank pulled the plug on Nepal Bank Limited (NBL) by dissolving the board of directors and replacing it with a three-man management team. Now comes phase two of the plan: being in a management contract to turn the ailing bank around.

But, even if everything goes according to plan, it may be early June before the Irish ICC Bank may actually land here to take over the NBL's restructuring. A 21 February Rastri Bank letter blamed NBL directors of failing to run the bank, and challenged it to prove otherwise.

The NBL's proposed reforms may have begun, but the entire exercise is fraught with accusations of insider lending and counter-allegations of political interference by the outgoing directors. There are dozens of litigations, and if that happens the reforms may not be clear-cut as many had hoped.

Rajendra Khatri, who controls about nine per cent of NBL's assets, wants a thorough judicial probe on the bank's failure and has also been knocking on the doors of the parliament's Public Account Committee.

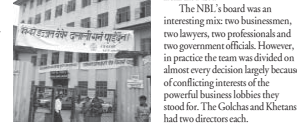
He asks, "Does dissolving the board mean those who wrecked the bank before we came on board are absolved? He squarely blames decisions taken when government still controlled majority stock as responsible for the mess the bank is in today.

Another former director, Lok Bhakta Rana had sent a 6-page clarification to the central bank before the board was dissolved, which not only names names of top government and NBL officials, but also links it to a lawsuit.

"The litigation is ready," Rana told us. "I am weighing the options before

Loans unlimited

Nepal Bank Limited has amassed Rs 3.3 billion in bad loans.



going to court, I will sue if I see developments that take place now are against the interests of the bank."

Former shareholders told us the bank's downward slide began in 1996/97 when politically-tinged loans were approved at a phenomenal rate. The record was the approval of 20% loans on a single day when Sher Bahadur Thapa (now being probed by the anti-corruption body) headed its main Kathmandu office, and the directors were Bhawant Singh, Bishwanath Paudyal, Mukunda Aryal, Pradip Kulkarni, Jharesha S Rana.

Two diagnoses with the Rastri Bank decision on NBL, some former directors even say it should have been taken last year after KPMG auditors found a Rs 5.6 billion hole in the NBL's net worth. Since things have not improved since then, it is a good guess that the bank is still deeply in the red.

Despite this, some former directors think the bank is still viable, especially if the government were to help crack the whip of delinquency. Says Khatri: "I am certain that the parties can pay but the

government would have to make them." An earlier central bank report had charged Khatri with attempting loan swapping, he denies borrowing from the NBL.

The NBL's board was an interesting mix of two businessmen, two lawyers, two professionals and two government officials. However, in practice the team was divided on almost every decision largely because of conflicting interests of the powerful business lobbies they stood for. The Gokhale and Khatri had two directors each.

A list of Top Ten NBL borrowers which was published by Doshantar last week, and confirmed by our banking sources, reads like a Who's Who of Nepal Big Business: the Ananya Group and the Gokhale Organisation lead the list in terms of loan size and unpaid interest. Others include Anur Chaudhary (Bansinga Sugar Mills), B.K. Man and B. Shrestha (Radison Hotel), the Hyatt Hotel, the Chaudhary Group (Mukunda Sugar Mills), Sahakara Agrawal and the Gokhale Group (Reliance Spinning), Sahakara Agrawal and Sany Group (Rover Sugar Mills), Gokhale's Rubber Industries and the Jasti Group.

Their dues added up to over Rs 3.3 billion.

Over at the Kariyapa Banjara Bank, Doshantar's Tohmalatnu (DTT) has just taken over the management on hold pending a security assessment. Nepal's first audit sector reform is funded with a \$25 million World Bank loan, and another \$10 million grant will come from Britain's DFID.

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SACRED VALLEY

Spiritual tourists are flocking to Nepal. And they aren't all old dharma bums.

ALEXANDRA ALTER

In the eighth century, the Indian Buddhist saint Padmasambhava uttered the following prophecy predicting the spread of Buddhism to the west: "When the iron bird flies and horse run on wheels, the Tibetan people will be scattered across the face of the earth, and the dharma will come to the land of the red men." True to his words, Buddhism has become increasingly popular in Western countries over the last few decades, due in large part to the Tibetan diaspora, which has made Tibetan Buddhist teachings and practices widely available.

Yet, accurate as his insight was, Padmasambhava's prediction was incomplete. Not only has Buddhism taken root in the west, a growing number of Westerners are also journeying east to study Buddhism. With its diverse religious landscape, Nepal has long attracted spiritual sojourners enchanted by its unique blend of Buddhism, Hinduism, tantra, animism and Shamanism. And in recent decades, increasing numbers of visitors have come not just to observe the varieties of religious experience here, but also to learn something about these spiritual practices.

Mainstream tourism in Nepal may be experiencing a drought, but foreigners intent on studying Buddhism are still coming in surprisingly healthy numbers. The Tashi Jane Guest House in Buddha told us that he usually houses all the students in Kathmandu on the Naropa program. This spring the program was cancelled, but this hasn't affected business, he says. With 40 rooms full of foreigners who want to get deeper into Buddhism, he gets nearly 100 percent occupancy. Other guest houses in Thamel also say that though Thamel might be fading badly, they're doing quite all right. At a time when tourists are more often either closing or laying off staff on a daily basis due to a scarcity of travellers, the idea of a temple hall crammed with enthusiastic westerners may seem slightly incongruous. But go to Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche's famous Saturday



morning teaching a few minutes late, and you'll be lucky to find an empty cushion. Rinpoche's Saturday dharma talks have become a tradition over the last 20 years, and they represent just one of the ways in which he embraces western Buddhist practitioners. In 1981, Rinpoche established the Narajung Yeshe Institute, a school for international students, and more recently, the Sheda program, which is modelled after a traditional Buddhist college.

Chokyi Nyima says he has seen a surge and diversity in foreigners interested in Buddhism in recent years. "Before, we used to get only hippies. Now we get hippies, yuppies, doctors, scientists. People of all nationalities. Teaching westerners is easier now. Westerners are studying comparative religion and in the end, this makes it easier for them to pick up the Buddhist teachings." As home to 15,000 of the 110,000 Tibetans in exile, Nepal has become an important centre for the study of Tibetan Buddhism, second only perhaps to Dharamsala.

With about 25 monasteries, Buddhahat attracts not just curious cultural interlopers, but serious spiritual seekers. What separates spiritual tourists from your average vacationers visiting Pashupatinath to gawk at the cremation sites is their sincere intent to practice the tradition.

Distinguishing spiritual tourists from other travellers is not difficult—rather than cameras, they carry beads and prayer wheels. A typical scene at Double Dorje, a popular tourist restaurant in Buddhahat, includes a group of foreigners gathered around a table, spinning prayer wheels throughout their meal. Besides the number of Westerners one often sees engaged in rituals around Buddhahat, evidence of the burgeoning popularity of Nepal as a haven for the spiritually fatigued also lies in the growing number of Tibetan masters teaching in English or using a translator. Just eight years ago, only two lamas taught foreigners. Now, there are innumerable dharma talks for westerners, and a wide array of programs of

Buddhist study, from classical monastic-style education to more creative approaches, such as "about mandala painting."

Though many Valley residents tend to summarily categorise all western Buddhists as residual hippies looking to revive the pharmacological mysticism of the 1960's, today there is a gradation of approaches among these seekers of peace and truth, and Kathmandu is a particularly attractive destination because it provides something for aspiring Buddhists of every inclination.

Many people, for instance, are collective energy junkies. Just witnessing life in Nepal, when many spiritually-minded tourists believe religion infuses all activity, inspires them to delve deeper into an interest they already have, or even take time off from the usual tourist tread and adopt a religious practice. "You see the charisma of the people. Their religion speaks through their faces," says Miriam Rubenstein, who is in Nepal from Switzerland to study Buddhism. Other tourists are drawn in by the openness of the Buddhist tradition. "Buddhists tolerate all

western students.

One of the Sheda program's marks of distinction is the authentic Buddhist education it offers, which hasn't been available to western lay practitioners in the past. The course of study, taught by erudite Tibetan Buddhist scholars, emphasises internalising Buddhist teachings rather than merely regarding them as abstract philosophy. "We don't want to be like a western scholastic institution, where you often find a very dry approach to Buddhist philosophy," says Kevin McMillin, administrator of the Sheda program. "Our classes are taught by learned khempas (scholars and religious teachers, often heads of monasteries) who have studied with great masters and have some realisations themselves. This adds to the richness of the material."

Chokyi Nyima's Sheda program, which is unique in offering an authentic Buddhist education to lay practitioners, is but one of the numerous programs of Buddhist study available to westerners in Nepal. A less traditional atmosphere is provided by the Naropa program for Buddhist Studies, which, as it enters its seventeenth year, is the oldest program of its kind. "Naropa's expertise is translating Buddhist traditions into a western context," explains Clarke Warren, a Buddhist scholar and program director of Naropa. "Unless they've had a few years of practice, it's difficult for western students to appreciate the traditional shodra style." Naropa also buses its program at Buddhahat, but unlike the Sheda it is not affiliated with a particular monastery.

Rather, it is a branch of Naropa University, a non-sectarian Buddhist institution founded by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche in the United States in 1974. Chogyam Trungpa, a Tibetan master from the Kham region, studied at Oxford University and, steeped in western traditions himself, taught essential Buddhism in a way easy for the western mind to grasp. Rinpoche discouraged his students from becoming overly intrigued with Tibetan rituals because adopting such colourful practices might give rise to what he famously termed "spiritual materialism."

Honoring Chogyam Trungpa's



Students at the Sheda program run by the Ka-Nying Shedra Ling monastery in Buddha (left and above).

Studying Buddhism in Nepal

- Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre. 221875 <http://dharmaatours.com/hbmc>
- Rangjung Yeshe Institute for Buddhist Studies. 483575 <http://www.dzsh.edu.np>
- Kopan Monastery. 481268 <http://www.kopanmonastery.com>
- Gaden Wiga Chozen Center, Pokhara. pokharacenter@yahoo.com
- Naropa University <http://www.naropa.edu/studyabroad/nepal/program.html>

minimalist and somewhat austere prescriptions for spiritual practice, Naropa encourages its students to "do away with any fantasy and fascination with regard to Buddhism." According to Warren, who has lived in Nepal for eight years and been a Buddhist practitioner for over 30 years, studying Buddhism in Nepal allows students to "see what is universal and essential about Buddhism and what is dependent on its cultural environment. The Tibetan Buddhist ritual isn't fascinating for the monks who practice them, they are

grounding them in reality." The Naropa program was cancelled this spring after two students were evacuated from their field study locations in Sulu Khumbu last November because of Maoist activity in the region. One gets the sense, however, that Naropa's long history with Nepal won't be permanently interrupted by the country's current problems—students are already applying for the program in autumn this year.

While the Sheda and Naropa programs epitomise respectively the classical and westernised ap-

proaches to Buddhist practice, for those seeking something in between, a blend of traditional and western teaching styles is available at the Kopan Monastery and the Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre. Founded by Lama Yeshe in 1970 at the request of his western students, Kopan offers meditation courses throughout the year. Their month-long November course is usually the biggest draw, and had 180 international participants last year.

The courses at Kopan are taught by Ani Karin, a western nun who articulates the Lam-rim teachings, or the stages on the path to enlightenment, in a unique and highly accessible manner. Equally adept at distilling difficult concepts into clear English is Ani Silana, an Italian nun who runs the three-day meditation courses at the HBMC.

Both she and Ani Karin explicate Buddhist principles clearly and precisely to encapsulate the flavour of the teachings as well as compensate for unavoidable cultural differences.

Lama Yeshe wanted westerners explaining Buddhist meditation to other westerners, Silana explained. "I may just have an intellectual understanding of the teachings without the actual realisation, but because of my background maybe some people can relate to Buddhism more easily when I explain it."

Rather than providing a temporary respite from reality, the meditation courses at Kopan and the HBMC help westerners to establish an enduring practice when they leave Nepal. "People say it's easier to practice in the east, but I think it's more essential to practice

in the west—to look at the mind when it's bombarded by stress and other factors," Silana said.

Though some may dismiss Buddhism's widespread popularity abroad in recent decades as a passing trend, western Buddhism is already the subject of scholarly attention. Citing the numerous forms Indian Buddhism gave birth to as it spread throughout Asia, scholars and practitioners alike are speculating as to whether western Buddhism might be in an incubation stage in places like Kathmandu and at meditation centres in the west. "Tibetan Buddhism is going global and it is transforming into non-Tibetan Buddhism," believes Warren. Browse through the religion section of any large bookstore in the US today, and you will see works with such titles as *Buddhism Without Beliefs*, *Buddhism in Plain English*, *Blue Jean Buddhism*, and *Darry of a Western Buddhist Nun*, which seem to indicate the effect of an incipient religious movement to define itself according

to its own cultural precepts. But will Himalayan Buddhism lose its attraction for westerners once their own traditions are in place? Warren believes that any attempt to divorce Buddhism from its origins will prove futile. "There needs to be a balance. On the one hand, westerners are developing their own approaches, but they're also dependent on the sources of Buddhism." Sightseeing may be on a



downturn, even trekking and adventure tourism may be thriving twice about Nepal, but for Kathmandu, its monasteries and lamas, it looks like few things will deter the seekers of truth, not now, not in five years' time.

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The Ultimate Computer

The personal computer on my desk is hundreds of times as fast, and has thousands of times as much memory as the mainframe computer that served my entire university when I was a student. Such advances in the processing speed and storage capacity of computers are expected to continue until the laws of physics impose certain limits. After all, we cannot shrink atoms or increase the speed of light.

Now, imagine a computer technology that eventually approaches these limits. Imagine further that every star in every galaxy in the observable universe could somehow be fashioned into computers of this "ultimate" type. That would be a lot of very fast computers. Or if they were connected together we could think of them as a single, massively parallel computer: call it the "Universe Computer."

Admittedly, there are tasks—word processing, for example—at which this imaginary computer would be no more useful than any one of its constituent computers operating independently. But for large, repetitive trial-and-error tasks, such as code-breaking, the speed and power of this integrated "Universe Computer" would be vastly superior to anything we

could ever hope to build, right? Hold that thought.

Quantum theory—the branch of physics that deals with elementary particles and the microscopic properties of matter—has produced some of our deepest insights into nature, and describes some startlingly counter-intuitive phenomena. For example, it implies that elementary particles, rather than being located at one position at a time, travel on several trajectories simultaneously.

No one disputes that quantum phenomena, if they could be harnessed, would revolutionize information processing, enabling ways of computing that no existing computer, even in principle, would be capable of duplicating. Among the tasks for which quantum computing would be ideally suited are "algorithmic searches." Put simply, algorithmic searches are what computer programmers use as a last resort when looking for a mathematical needle in a haystack: they make the computer try every possible answer in turn until it finds the right one.

Obviously, the resources required for such searches are proportional to the number of possible answers; common sense tells us that trying a thousand possibilities requires a thousand

"Almost anything becomes a computer if you shine the right kind of light on it."

times as many operations as trying one. Trying a million possibilities requires a million times as many operations.

But our ordinary common sense does not apply in fundamental physics. In 1996, the computer scientist Lov Grover discovered a quantum algorithm—a way to program a quantum computer—that could try out a million possibilities in only a thousand times the time needed to try one, and a million possibilities in only a million times the time of one, and so on, without limit.

What would happen inside a quantum computer when it performs an algorithmic search? The seemingly trite fact that most physicists are perplexed and embarrassed by this question. Many explain a quantum phenomena with weird words, or worse, they simply eschew explanation altogether. True, quantum phenomena cannot be observed directly. But we can deduce their existence and attributes by measuring the effects on things that are directly observable. We have never observed live dinosaurs, either, but we know they existed—

and quite a lot about how they worked—from fossil records.

Growing minority of physicists, myself included, accept the "many universes" interpretation of quantum mechanics. We concluded that what we observe as a single particle is really one of countless similar entities in different universes, subtly affecting each other through a process called "quantum interference." To us, no mystery exists in quantum computing, only wonder.

Quantum computing, according to this view, is possible because a quantum computer performs vast numbers of separate computations in different universes and then shares the results through quantum interference. The equations of quantum theory describe this phenomenon step by step. But because such information sharing is achievable only through quantum interference, these same equations also drastically limit the types of task that quantum computation should be able to perform, or speed up. Direct communication between universes is, for example, ruled out.

In fact, only a handful of potentially useful quantum algorithms are known at present. Grover's algorithm is one. Other known quantum algorithms will only be able to crack the most widely used secure cryptographic systems of today. Coincidentally, cryptographic systems which themselves use quantum computation are already commonplace in laboratories, heralding the development of communication that is both perfectly secure—even against quantum attacks—and immune to future advances in mathematics or technology.

Quantum cryptography happens to be relatively easy to implement. Unfortunately, we have no computers powerful enough to try any other useful quantum algorithm, building powerful quantum computers is a major scientific and technological challenge for the coming decades. But theoretical physics already know how many different types of components are required to make a quantum computer, and how complicated these components must be. The astonishing reality is that virtually any interaction between two information-carrying entities, including atoms or elementary particles, will do. As the physicist Seth Lloyd commented, "almost anything becomes a computer if you shine the right

kind of light on it."

It has long been assumed that a single type of machine, given time and memory, could simulate the behaviour of any other state of matter. It turns out that existing computers, or even the imaginary "Universe Computer," are not the ones. But a general-purpose quantum computer would be. In quantum physics, this "computational universality" is part of the essence of all matter—and thus of the comprehensibility of nature. No other branch of physics involves such wide-ranging interaction between theory, experiment, technology, and philosophy. No other field of scientific research holds more promising implications for our understanding of the universe. ♦

(David Deutsch is visiting professor of physics and a founder member of the Centre for Quantum Computation at The Clarendon Laboratory, Oxford University, and author of *The Fabric of Reality*.)



War paint



Some Pakistanis decorate cars and shops with images of their "Islamic Bomb", but many fear an all-out battle with India.

Modern science exemplifies the dialectic of good and evil: the shining represents evil so clearly as the research, design and production of nuclear weapons of mass destruction. In the bomb lies the spirit that came into existence, or even the imaginary "Universe Computer," are not the ones.

The failure of the West to inaugurate a process of nuclear disarmament has led states elsewhere to acquire plutonium and manufacture their own bombs. Nowhere is the process more frightening than in South Asia. Neither India nor Pakistan can afford this weaponry. Both countries would benefit enormously if the billions spent on nuclear weapons were used to build schools, hospitals and provide clean water in the villages. Rationality, alas, is the first victim when these two countries quarrel.

A few years ago, during the military skirmishes in the snow deserts of Kargil, nuclear threats were exchanged by both countries on 15 separate occasions. The recent war in Afghanistan has further destabilised the region. On 13 December last year, armed Muslim fundamentalists

attacked the Indian parliament, hoping to provoke a conflict between India and Pakistan. They have the country's leader, General Musharraf, by bearing the Muslim cause and siding with Washington. And they have the Hindu fundamentalist party that came into India. The tragedy is that they came close to inciting a war.

The Indians argued that if the US could bomb a country and change its government while searching for the terrorists who ordered the hit on the Pentagon, why shouldn't India be able to do the same? The logic is impeccable, but the outcome could be a catastrophe of massive proportions. Pakistan's rulers responded with a nuclear threat: if their country's sovereignty was ever challenged they would use nuclear weapons.

Under US pressure, Islamabad shifted rapidly into reverse gear. On 12 January the General made a landmark speech. Pervez Musharraf offered India a no-war pact, a declaration of South Asia, closure of the jihadi training camps in Pakistan and a total transformation of Indo-Pak relations.

While hard-line fundamentalist newspapers attacked him, the country remained calm. Not a bird pootered, not a dog barked. So much for the view that ordinary Pakistanis are obsessed with the "Islamic Bomb".

There is, however, a small minority for whom the bomb makes up for the lack of everything else. It's a substitute for lost pride, basic amenities, a nation's economy and a fractured culture. The Koran plus a nuclear missile equals a strong Muslim state. The fact that Pakistan is the only Muslim state to possess these weapons becomes, for some, a substitute for all. Our bomb, boast the nuclear nationalists, will defend Islam against all its enemies. And so they parade nuclear missiles and display the potent emblem on bus and school canisters. Ad-then they realise it could lead to disaster and they look upwards and mutter: "Everything is in the hands of Allah. He will decide." The primitive belief in predestination could wreck the entire subcontinent if the weapons ever fall into the wrong hands.

Keeping their word

Rich countries have made many promises. Monterrey is the time to make good on them.

The market-based economic growth, could end extreme poverty. Rich countries are committed to working with the poorest countries to meet these objectives. But as with many promises, America and other donor countries have so far failed to live up to their pledges. At the UN's Millennium Summit in September 2000, world leaders issued a declaration calling for action now, so extreme poverty can be dramatically reduced by 2015. They even pledged to mobilise financial assistance.

Within the broad Millennium Declaration is a set of specific targets, and explicit, detailed commitments for reducing poverty, disease, hunger, illiteracy, and environmental degradation. For example, rich and poor countries agreed to commit to reducing infant mortality rates by two-thirds by 2015, compared with 1990 levels. For dozens of countries that target is not being met, because too little money is invested in health. Many studies, including those I did for the WHO, show that for a modest amount of money—perhaps as little as \$100 billion per year in aid from rich countries—the Millennium Development Goals can be achieved. That may seem like a lot of money, but not in comparison with the \$25 trillion income each year earned by rich countries, or the roughly \$500 billion spent annually on their military armaments.

Much of the world looks at the US and other rich countries with resentment, feeling that they don't keep their commitments to help less fortunate countries. The rich world can redeem itself and promote its interests in global peace and prosperity by proving that the Millennium Development Goals are not empty words. The key test of those commitments will be at this week's UN Conference in Monterrey, Mexico on Finance for Development. The conference's bottom line where the money for poverty and disease? Will the rich follow promises with actions? (Paper Synopsis)

(Jeffrey D Sachs is professor of economics and director of the Center for International Development, Harvard University.)

Rewarding cooperation

TOKYO - Pakistan is still reaping the economic and diplomatic dividends of siding with the United States and its crackdown on religious extremism. Tokyo has eased Islamabad's debt burden and lifted economic sanctions in place after Pakistan and India conducted nuclear tests. Japan will collaborate closely with Pakistan in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Koizumi said last Thursday. Senior officials of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party assured Musharraf that Tokyo "would not hesitate to cooperate" to help Pakistan's stable development. Musharraf also appealed for more Japanese investments in Pakistan, and called upon Japanese entrepreneurs to consider investment in the gas pipeline from Turkmenistan. (IPS)

Follow the money

WASHINGTON - President George W. Bush said Thursday that his administration will contribute \$5 billion over the next three budget years to help developing countries, the single largest aid increase in US history. The United States has been under fire as Washington's level of donations has fallen over the last 15 years to about 0.1 percent of GDP, the lowest level of all industrialised countries. But Bush had one caveat: assistance would be directly linked to private investment and the policy reforms needed to stimulate it. Some activists assailed the announcement. Sameer Dossani, programme coordinator with Globalisation Challenge Initiative, said, "It sounds like a new way to subsidise US companies working in the developing world." Much of the money, he predicted, would seep into infrastructure projects. (IPS)

If the US nukes China

BEIJING - After expressing its "deep shock" at Washington's contingency plans to use nuclear weapons against China in emergency situations, Beijing has called on the army to be ready for military struggle. President Jiang Zemin, chairman of the powerful Central Military Commission, urged China's armed forces last week to make "solid preparations" for combat and "follow closely the latest developments of military strength in the world." The Los Angeles Times reports that a Pentagon scenario envisioning a US nuclear strike against Beijing was the case of war between China and Taiwan. The countries in the Pentagon's other scenarios included Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Russia and Syria. (IPS)

Back to Afghanistan

PESHAWAR - After a sluggish start early this month, last week the UNHCR's first repatriation centre at Taktikhan in Khyber, 36 km south of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, registered as many as 350 vehicles carrying 9,000 Afghans in a single day. Since then, the number of returnees crossing the Torikhan border post has been increasing day by day. The UNHCR plans to repatriate 400,000 refugees this year, with six more centres around the country. Each returning family gets \$100 as transportation expenses, an assistance package of 150 kg of wheat, five kg of soap, plastic sheeting, bedding, quilts and a kitchen set. The majority of those going back are Uzbeks, Tajiks, Hazarans and Pashtuns. Pashtuns are reluctant to return fearing hostility from other ethnic groups. Meanwhile in many places in Afghanistan, particularly in the north, thousands of displaced people live in camps in squalid conditions after they fled drought conditions elsewhere. Aid agencies are encouraging them to return to their homes, to make it easier to deliver assistance. (IPS)

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITION

- ◆ **The Wild Tribes of Ethiopia** American photographer Robert Studzinski. Park Gallery, Pulchowk, until 31 March. 10AM-6PM, except Saturdays. 5223037
- ◆ **Lives and Work of Nepalese Children** Exhibition of the work of Nepali child photographers. 28 March-13 April, Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal. 220735
- ◆ **Prints by Noriko Saito**, Japan. On show at the Siddharth Art Gallery, Baber Mahal. 28 March-31 March, 11AM-6PM except Saturdays.

EVENTS

- ◆ **Shakespeare in the Valley** Royal Bangla School presents A Midsummer Night's Dream. 28, 29 and 31 March, Russian Cultural Centre, 5.15PM. 534318, 542045
- ◆ **Festival of War** based on episodes from the Mahabharata. Annual drama production of Studio 7. 19/20/21/26/27/28 April and 2/4/5 May at The Naga Theatre, Hotel Yatra. 271545
- ◆ **The Warring Shaktis: A Paradigm for Gupta Conquests** Presentation with slides by Professor Katherine Anne Harper, Loyola Marymount University, LA. 25 March, 4PM, Royal Nepal Academy, Kamalad, Royal Nepal Academy and the South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University.
- ◆ **Francophone Party** for French speakers. Songs and a play. Rs 500, members and students Rs 350 only, both with wine and cheese. 22 March, 6PM, Alliance Française, Thapathali. 241163
- ◆ **Peace rally** Show your commitment to a peaceful Nepal. Start from Patan Mangal Bazar, in front of Krishna Mandir. Walk from Mangal Bazar - Laganekhel - Kumaripati - Jawalakhel, ending in front of Lalitpur Municipality. 22 March, 3.45PM-5PM

MUSIC

- ◆ **Sounds of Spring** Everything from rock, classical, jazz, funk, fusion, blues, Latin jazz, big band, R&B, Nepali folk, salsa, and contemporary Nepali music. Rs 1,500 per head including drinker, 30 March. 6PM, Hotel Sotheby's Crown Plaza. 278999
- ◆ **Kathmandu Jazz Festival** Don Burrows and the festival all-stars backed by Cadenza, with a five-course meal. 22 March, Shangri-La Shambala Garden Cafe, Kathmandu. Tickets Rs 1,980 at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Shangri-La Hotel and Gokarna Forest Golf Resort.

FOOD

- ◆ **Holi Hangama** Special Holi sekewa and fusion music. Rs 555 per person, Rs1,010 per couple. 28 March, Dwarika's Hotel. 479488
- ◆ **Tempting Treat** Special menu with a wide variety of fresh trout dishes. Until 31 March, Alfresco, Hotel Sotheby's Crown Plaza. 273999
- ◆ **The Best of Ghar-E-Kabab** Celebrating 20 years: 50 percent off FBG during lunch, dinner 20 percent off, two tables pay for price from 20 years ago. Until 4 March, Hotel de l'Annapurna. 221771
- ◆ **The new Roadhouse Café** Completely redesigned with separate bar seating and coffee bar. Original Mediterranean specialties and wood-fired pizzas. The Roadhouse Café, Thamel.
- ◆ **Taste of Beijing** Roast duck and other Chinese meat, fish and vegetarian delicacies. Beijing Roast Duck Restaurant, Birendra International Convention Centre. 468589
- ◆ **Newari Bhaj** Traditional snacks, drinks and meals, outdoors or indoor, in a restaurant designed by Bhaktapur artisans. Lajuna Restaurant, Lazimpat. 413874
- ◆ **Complete dining experience** Seasonal greens, meats from the wood fired oven with specialty sauces and fresh herbs. Premium wines, special desserts. 5.30PM onwards daily, Rox Restaurant, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 491234
- ◆ **Charcoal Grilled delicacies** from around the world, glass of lager, live music, strawberries with cream. Non-vegetarian Rs 595 and vegetarian Rs 495, tax included. Postcode, Yak & Yeti. 246999
- ◆ **Singaporean and Malaysian food** Satay, rice, sorym, dishes, curry puffs and more. Near St Mary's School, Sing Ma, the Food Court, Foodcourt @ Wink.com. 520004
- ◆ **Variable chef special lunches** Especially for office goers with fine wines. 12-3PM, Dwarika's Hotel. 479488
- ◆ **Lunch, tea and dinner** European and American cuisine at special rates. La'Soon Restaurant and Vintnoque, Pulchowk. 535290
- ◆ **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

- ◆ **Stress busters** Day at the spa with meditation session, talk on stress management, and have a poolside meal at the Terrace. Rs 1,200 per head. The Club At The Hyatt. 491234
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- ◆ **March Madness** Special daily rate with set meals, luxury on stilts' cottage and pickup. \$10 a day. Park activities extra. Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia National Park. 61-31691, 251400
- ◆ **Want a break?** Short breaks and special offers at Dwarika's Hotel. 479488
- ◆ **Rhododendron Getaway** at the Horseshoe Estate in Nauda, three hours from Kathmandu. Two days of rhododendron walks in forests, package tours at \$30 per day, all meals and sauna included. Email resort@horseshoe.wink.com.np
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NEPALI WEATHER

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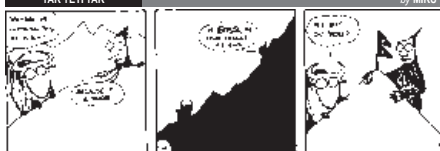
by GYAMINDRA DAHAL

This satellite image of the subcontinent taken on Wednesday morning shows a band of clouds stretching across from the Arabian Sea to the Pamirs which is a part of a low pressure circulation over Iran. The front is moving in a north-easterly direction and is expected to bring overcast skies and a hazy outlook over central Nepal over the weekend. The system lacks moisture however, and will not bring more than drizzles. A recurrence of contact between cold winds from the Tibetan plateau with warm moisture-laden convection over the southern Himalaya which caused Sunday afternoon's hailstorm is not expected to recur till midweek.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

| Fr | Sa | Su | Mo | Tu |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 27-10 | 26-11 | 27-10 | 26-11 | 27-10 |

YAK YETI YAK



by MIKU

BOOKWORM



Mother Sister Daughter: Nepal's Press on Women
Sanchika Samuha, Kathmandu, 2002
Rs.325

This collection of newspaper articles from English-language newspapers and translated from Nepali-language newspapers focus on how society sanctions inequality and cultural control, on women's health, discrimination and violence. It also focuses on stories of women empowering themselves, and on first-person accounts and opinion pieces on gender issues.

Dangerous Wives and Sacred Sisters: Social and Symbolic Roles of High-Caste Women in Nepal Lynn Bennett
Mandala Book Point and Columbia University Press, Kathmandu, 1983/2002
Rs.800

Bennett, a developmental anthropologist, examines the social construction of gender among Bahun and Chhetri Hindus in rural Nepal. Through a detailed examination of the social, mythical and ritual structures that shape the interaction between men and women, this study reveals the symbolic roles of women's power and the complex social institutions, norms and beliefs that seek to contain that power and direct it to perpetuate the patrilineal group.



The Eastern Stories Joseph Conrad, ed. Ran Kah Choon
Penguin Books India, New Delhi, 2000
Rs.472

Conrad travelled around south-east Asia as a young sailor from 1883-1889. This collection brings together his most representative stories from the area, set in Java, Borneo, Singapore and Sumatra. They portray life during a period of rapid colonial expansion when life was changing dramatically. Characters are captured in moments of confrontation, often tragic, between differing ways of life, as European culture comes into conflict with indigenous Malay traditions.

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

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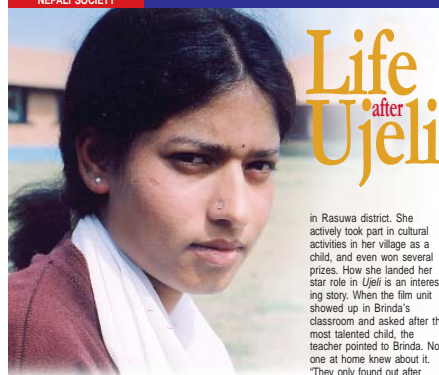


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ARTS

NEPALI SOCIETY



Life after Ujeli

When Dipendra Gauchan cast Brinda Adhikari in the award-winning docu-drama *Ujeli* nine years ago, the eight-year-old girl had no idea what was awaiting her. *Ujeli* was broadcast on more than 20 television channels all over the world, and with it, Brinda also became well-known. Today, she is preparing to take her School Leaving Certificate exams and wants to study science if she does well.

But life after *Ujeli* wasn't easy. Rasuwa's traditional society wasn't willing to rest easy about the fact that such a young girl had played the role of a married woman. The people in our village didn't understand then that this was a film, a story, and I was really hassled," she says. A local newspaper took up Brinda's cause in 1996 and a group of people petitioned the SOS Hermann School to provide her free education. Although

the school only took in orphans under six years, Brinda's was an exception and the school consented.

The school expected a lot from Brinda, but the trauma of her early life, and the often unfriendly attention of her village had left its mark on the young girl, and she turned inward, shunning the leadership role the school would have liked her to take. Says Shankargrassa Poudel, principal of the SOS Hermann's School, "Perhaps due to the psychological impact of the whole episode, she only adjusted two or three years later. But now she takes part in the different school activities, even plays and other traditional productions. We are convinced that she has outstanding talent, and if she gets the opportunity she can do very well."

Brinda is the youngest daughter of Chintamani Adhikari, a farmer from Betini

in Rasuwa district. She actively took part in cultural activities in her village as a child, and even won several prizes. How she landed her star role in *Ujeli* is an interesting story. When the film unit showed up in Brinda's classroom and asked after the most talented child, the teacher pointed to Brinda. No one at home knew about it. "They only found out after almost half the shooting was complete. But no one said anything, they all liked it," smiles Brinda. She has fond memories of the time, despite the difficulties that followed.

Today Brinda lives in the SOS Children's Village, only going home over Dasain. And she still loves to act. She also wants to learn dance, but hasn't had the chance. Always up for a good story, Brinda loves reading Nepali and English novels, as well as watching Nepali and Hindi films, and the news and other world events on television.

The school is willing to help fund acting lessons for Brinda if she decides she wants them, and can handle the pressure. "She is national property, and everyone should support her. We too will help her," says principal Poudel. Today when Brinda goes back home, the villagers treat her with respect, a far cry from their earlier jibes. ♦



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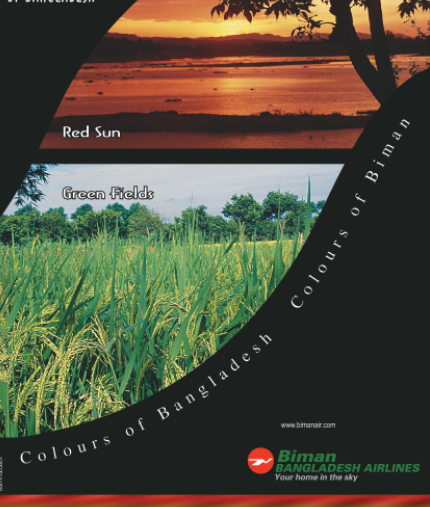


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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Dry days are here again

After gooseberry wine, the most overrated liquid in the world is probably water. Cosmologists tell us that life on other planets is impossible unless water is present. However, I know from personal experience in my own tale that semi-intelligent life can flourish despite not a drop of water having flowed out of our taps since the reign of King Anuravarma. This is proof that we don't really need water at all to keep body and soul together. We can carry on in this trajectory through our current incarnation, as well as future cycles of life and re-birth, with no water at all. We don't need any H₂O, thank you. So very kind of you, sir.

Generations of Kathmandu have grown up in total absence of water, and our bodies have evolved gradually through a process of natural selection to adapt to this waterless world. The trick is to replace water with other vital liquids whenever possible, and recycle every drop. There are households in our neighbourhood, for instance, that have completely done away with washing. To clean solid Y-fronts they have been wearing every day since the commencement of the current state of national emergency, they use a process called "dry cleaning", which means spreading said undergarment on an ironing board and sprinkling liberal amounts scented talcum powder on it. Voil ! Undies look and smell as good as new.

Brushing teeth is a very water-intensive exercise. But many of us have totally obviated the need for water and toothpaste after discovering that one can brush one's teeth with great efficacy if one gargles with a bottle of beer ("Probably the Best Mouthwash in the World.") and then using the ensuing froth to vigorously brush all nooks and crannies within our oral cavities. Whiter, healthier teeth, no plaque, no need for water, and a great way to start a new day.

There must have been a huge shortage of water in ancient Egypt, because we know from historical parchment records that Cleopatra bathed in asses' milk. The historical records don't tell us what Mark Antony thought of this practice, or if he in fact joined her in the tub to do asinine things, but it did save Egypt a lot of water since we are told that Cleopatra was in the habit of bathing quite often.

Now, we are acquainted with quite a lot of asses in our own little neighbourhood, but none of them are presently lactating. This rules out bathing in asses' milk for us for the time being, but where there is a will there is a way. Those desperately in need of a bath can join the entire city at the Dasarath Stadium Swimming Pool which has recently been converted into a giant communal bathtub where the entire Valley comes to take a dip and clean the black stuff that gathers in the gap between their toes. All we have to do is enforce a mandatory bath at the Dasarath Stadium for politicians and bureaucrats so they can wash their greasy palms and ensure a squeaky clean administration.

In their efforts to conserve water, the Kathmandu Metropolitan City has banned sprinkling in public and private places. Studies have shown that an average city dweller spits several dozen times an hour. All added up, this represents a grievous loss of moisture from the body and could lead to serious dehydration. Now that we are aware of this, all we have to do is to swallow copious quantities of saliva during the day to quench our thirst. In this way we no longer need to buy mineral water Thirst-Pee (Registered Trademark, Patent Pending).

Water also used to be needed for irrigation, but not any more. Many of us have perfected innovative ways to keep our gardens moist. Dogs are trained to look at the rose bush and yodel loudly when the petioles of their domain, which they then approach at regular intervals during the day, lift their hind leg and turn on the sprinkler. For more water-intensive plants like the Delphinium belladonna, you can employ the services of the zoro elephant, Gajraj, which will not only irrigate your garden, but also replenish the flowerbeds with valuable phosphorus and nitrogen-rich nutrients.

At this rate of water conservation, it is highly probable that we will not need the Melanchi project at all, and can use the 24 km tunnel to run a high-speed train to connect Sundarjal with Tarkeghyang so that the people of Upper Helambu can commute to and from Dasarath Stadium to clean their toes on a daily basis. ♦



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