

## EXCLUSIVE Disastrous monsoon

A day after 41 villagers were buried in a landslide in northern Ramechhap, a Twin Otter on a flight from Jomsom crashed near Pokhara, killing 15 tourists and three Nepali crew. Four hours later, 45 people were feared dead when a bus from Kathmandu to Baglung fell into the Trisuli River near Mugling. It has been a season of disasters, as the country lurches from one accident to the next. Landslides and floods have ravaged central and eastern Nepal, killing at least 500 and affecting more than 300,000 people in the past month.



Thursday's Shangri-la accident (file photo above) was the fourth air crash in three months. A helicopter carrying 10 trekking guides from Makalu Base Camp to Lukla that disappeared on 29 May has still not been located. Meanwhile, the insurgency rages on, and aside from the daily toll, 30 Maoists were killed in a fierce firefight in Rolpa Tuesday.

## Times

Weekly Internet Poll # 47



Weekly Internet Poll # 48: To vote go to [www.nepalstimes.com](http://www.nepalstimes.com)

Q. Is it now time for the government to agree to the Maoists' offer of talks?

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## BINOD BHATTARAI

The cities of north India are now at their summer peak demand for power. Nepal's monsoon-gorged rivers are at peak supply. Common sense would see a possibility of trade there. Yet, Nepal-India power exchange agreements remain mired in mis-management, bureaucracy, and geo-politics.

When all three turbines of Nepal's largest and newest hydropower plan at Kali Gandaki-A (see picture) went on stream last week, they added 144 megawatts, taking Nepal's total installed capacity to 585 megawatts. This gave the national grid an unprecedented summer surplus of 140 megawatts.

But here is the paradox: although the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) has surplus power some of this has to be bought at such a high tariff that one third of its revenue is used up paying just two private power producers for flood energy: Bhote Kosi and Khimti.

Some of this loss could be recouped by expanding the domestic market and exporting to India. But there are many hurdles like transmission bottlenecks, the lack of an agreement with India's inefficient and cash-starved state electricity boards, and New Delhi's unspoken desire to use hydropower as part of wider bilateral bargaining with Kathmandu.

We have to trade the surplus that has started to accrue in the system, admits NEA chief, Janki Lal Karmacharya. That would be mutually beneficial to India and Nepal, and even at seven cents per unit, buying Nepal's surplus flood energy would be cheaper for India than the long-term cost of thermal generation. Selling power to India is Nepal's best chance of reducing its whopping Rs 19 billion trade deficit with India.

If there is political will, there would be a way. We don't have to wait for compatible grids, but sell to contiguous tarai towns across the border where some power exchange is already taking place.

Chances about why Nepal and India are stuck lie in Nepal's only project designed specifically for export to India—the 750MW West Seti dam, a Nepali joint venture with Australia's Snowy Mountain Engineering Corporation (SMEC). The \$1 billion project has been stuck since 1997 because a power purchase agreement with India got caught up in domestic Nepali politics, and has been stalled in India's Ministry of External Affairs.

Analysts told us New Delhi seems to want hydropower to be part of wider bilateral grand-take with Nepal that would include border and trade disputes, and security issues.

Meanwhile, Nepal loses potential export revenue and royalties. Indian consumers suffer power cuts, and the villages of Uttar Pradesh do not benefit from West Seti's irrigation and flood mitigation effect on the Kamali River.

# Trading power

**Northern India is starved for energy. Nepal now has surplus supply. And yet the two can't agree. Why not?**



Kali Gandaki A

It is clear where the main obstacle to Indo-Nepal hydro trade lies in the lack of political trust. Says hydropower expert Rana Sansar Shrestha: "India's security concerns seem to override all economic arguments. How can you talk business without that changing?"

The Australians are not waiting for the India-Nepal power trade agreement to go into force, and appear to be giving the project one last chance. SMEC and India's PTC have even discussed tariff and are haggling in the 5 cents per unit range. But both know that in the end it will depend on a nod from South Block.

Nepali experts see an anomaly if West Seti sells cheaper power to India than the price at which NEA has to buy it from private generators here. "Why should we even think of selling cheap when Nepalis are paying one of the highest electricity tariffs in the world?" asks Dipak Gyalwai of the Nepal Water Conservation Foundation. "It's cheaper for

NEA to buy West Seti Power which is high quality peaking energy when it is already paying six cents for low quality flood energy."

But officialdom has not lost hope. At the National Planning Commission, Minendra Rijal says it is an issue of demand and supply and could be easily resolved. "Logically they stand to win by buying from us."

But what if economic logic is not the only factor at work here? Much of that hope hinges on recent private sector initiatives which may help overcome political and bureaucratic hurdles.

During King Gyanendra's India visit in June, the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCCI) agreed with its Indian counterpart, FICCI, to explore joint hydro-ventures in Nepal.

"We're trying to see if the Indian private sector can help untangle the knots," says FNCCCI's Rajendra Khetan. And a large Indian business house is said to be shopping for a project in west Nepal.

# In Vienna museum, Nepal's worship stolen Buddha

**When will Nepal officially request the Austrian government to return a stolen Buddha?**

**ERWIN MELCHART** IN VIENNA

Nepali and Tibetan Buddhists in Austria are carrying out regular pujas at the Ethnographic Museum in Vienna in front of a 17th-century Dipankar stolen from Patan in January.

The Buddha was confiscated in April after a German art dealer tried to sell it to the museum. The gilded copper mask is being displayed at the entrance hall of the museum while the Austrian authorities wait for the Nepal government to

make an official request for the return of the image.

Among the devotees worshipping the Buddha recently was Nono Bieta, the niece of the Raja of Mustang seen here laying a *khata* at the altar. "It is sad. This Buddha is of such great religious significance to us," she said. "I am grateful for the museum's intervention, and pray that the image can be returned to Nepal soon." Butter lamps and offerings adorn the base of the stand on which the Buddha is kept in the museum's foyer.



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# In the Kingdom of Anaemia

Two in three Nepali women are anaemic. That means very unhealthy children, and lower GDP.

HEMILATA RAI

According to the World Health Organisation, anaemia should be considered a 'significant public health problem' if one-fifth of the population suffers from it. The rate of iron deficiency in blood among Nepali women and children is four times higher than that.

Two out of three Nepali women are anaemic. This number goes up among pregnant women to three in four. And anaemia in Nepal is no longer only women's problem. An alarming 90 percent of infants under the age of one are anaemic, according to the Nepal Micronutrient Status Survey 1998. Kyoko Okamura of UNICEF Kathmandu's Nutrition Section is emphatic about the consequences: "We are producing a whole generation of Nepalis who are less competent mentally." Iron deficiency anaemia can cause adverse health consequences including impaired growth, slowed learning and cognitive development, and decreased physical activity in children below 12 months of age.

Simply put, most anaemia results from an iron deficiency. Iron, a micronutrient required in small, but critical, quantities, is essential for the production of haemoglobin, which from the all-important red blood cells. Since haemoglobin is essential for the delivery of oxygen from the lungs to body tissues, and the synthesis of iron enzymes that are required for

oxygen utilisation and energy metabolism, if you don't have enough red blood cells, you breathe less efficiently, which means you're constantly short of breath and your energy levels are nowhere near what they should be.

"This is a serious public health crisis," says Mr Mahajan of The Micronutrient Initiative (MI). More than most other illnesses, the economic impact of Iron Deficiency Anaemia is significant, as it causes a sharp reduction in physical activity and work output in adults—between 20 and 40 percent. An MI study claims that Bangladesh and India lose 1.9 and 1.3 percent of their GDP respectively to anaemia every year. There haven't been any studies in Nepal, but public health experts and epidemiologists estimate that the figures would be just as dramatic. Here, anaemia increases the risk of maternal, prenatally and perinatal mortality. Nepal has the fourth highest maternal mortality rate in the world—539 in each 100,000 pregnant women—and UNICEF says it can be reduced significantly, 20 percent of these deaths could be prevented.

"Our food habits are problematic—anaemia is more visible among high-caste Hindus who eat ritually prescribed vegetarian food, and less among meat-eating janajati communities like Gurungs and Newars," says Sharada Pandey, chief of Nutrition Section at the Health Ministry's Child Health Division. Only 15 percent of the Nepali

population eat enough meat-based food rich in naturally available iron. The remaining 85 percent depend on vegetarian diet for cultural and religious reasons, or because they simply can't afford meat. Women, whose iron needs are more significant anyway, suffer doubly because of their lower social and nutritional status. Not getting enough food already accounts for chronic energy deficiency in one in four women in Nepal. According to WHO standards more than 20 percent of women with chronic energy deficiency indicates a serious public health problem.

Eating right is only one part of the story. The scale of anaemia in this country is an indicator of many more problems than just food habits: it points to the low socio-economic status of women, poor, sometimes non-existent sanitation that spreads and exacerbates the prevalence of parasitic diseases, and the inadequate decentralisation of health services.

In 1999/2001, some 45 million iron tablets were procured for free distribution for across the country. Less than half, about 20 million, were given out. "The iron tablet supplies are more than sufficient, but the system to distribute them doesn't work," says Okamura of UNICEF's Nutrition Section, which provides community support to the government for its universal iron tablet distribution programme for pregnant women.

The sub-health posts are the

by DANIEL LAK



MIA BAI, KATHMANDU

low-level health care institutions that are allowed to distribute iron tablets, had an average of 8,000 tablets at any given time.

But most of the time sub-health posts are out of reach of the people who need supplementary iron the most. It takes an average of two to three hours for most women to reach the sub-health post nearest to their homes. When so many women don't have the power to make decisions or control over their own earnings, let alone the family income, taking time out from an already packed day to even get adequate prenatal care, let alone iron tablets, is a tough proposition.

Women who manage to receive antenatal care are five times more likely to take supplementary iron, but less than half of Nepali women ever receive antenatal care from a medical professional in the first place. Complicating this, two-thirds of the health care workers at sub-health posts are they are simply too overburdened to dispense the

and Mahottari districts by the end of this year.

But distribution of iron tablets, while it has uses, is hardly a foolproof way of tackling anaemia. For one, community health workers are uncertain about when they should give out the tablets, because anaemia has stark symptoms, such as breathlessness, so few fail to see the iron needs after six months, and the iron stores that the infant is born with start to get depleted. After that age, the complementary diet is often too low in bioavailable iron to fuel the rapid tissue growth that takes place.

Despite the shortcomings of the supplementary iron regimen, food-based intervention against iron deficiency is difficult in Nepal because most families are too poor to diversify their diet, and even those that have a varied diet don't use the best cooking methods, with less water and a shorter cooking time. It is possible to fortify some food items, and the MI hopes to bring fortification of wheat with five micronutrients, including iron, as soon as the Finance Ministry agrees to it. The cost of fortification will be passed on to consumers, but the MI's Mahajan says that it is almost unnoticeably low—around 10 paise per kg, even lower than the cost of iodising salt.

MI studies show that 30 percent of Nepali household consume flour-based food everyday, and that the figure goes up to 50 percent in urban areas. Monitoring the 20 large-scale flour mills that produce more than 40 metric tonnes per day would be relatively easy, but addressing the 445-effects—monach camps and dark stools—won't them.

Iron deficiency in mothers means severe anaemia among children. WHO reports say that one in seven Nepali women is considered to be at nutritional risk, which means a direct impact on the nutrition levels of her child, and there is a stark lack of programmes that target at correcting anaemia among the adolescent girls of childbearing age. Studies show that two-thirds of all non-pregnant women are

anaemic, which means that they enter a pregnancy with already-depleted stores of iron. The Nepal Micronutrient Status Survey 1998 shows that 90 percent of Nepali babies between six and 11 months old are anaemic, about three percent of them severely so. This age group is particularly vulnerable, as breastmilk does not fulfil an infant's iron needs after six months, and the iron stores that the infant is born with start to get depleted.

After that age, the complementary diet is often too low in bioavailable iron to fuel the rapid tissue growth that takes place.

For those wondering whose hand is behind the increasing number of upside-down, curly red question marks appearing on city walls, electricity poles and the like, the answer is Dr Yogi Bikanandan. The youthful philosopher saw the symbol in a dream six months ago, and the question mark is an essential tool in his campaign to transform Nepal, though. He says visualising the symbol as a third eye every morning and evening while meditating creates in a person a powerful kind of energy. He tells us that classical (Hindu) knowledge says that the symbol means "There's no need for questions, accept life as it is." Residents of the capital will certainly sleep better at night for knowing what that twirly red thing is.

## DOMESTIC BRIEFS

### Editor killed by Maoists

Narayan Sharma, the editor of Kamal Sanbhad, the first weekly newspaper to be published from Nepal's far-west Karnali Zone, has been killed by suspected Maoist rebels. Sharma was abducted two months ago and his mutilated body was found by the banks of a river near Kalikot this week. Reports said he had been tortured, mutilated, and his eyes gouged, before being shot.

### Disabled Nepalis

In developed countries, the number of people with disabilities is 5 percent of the population or higher. In Nepal, it is 1.63. Good news? Not really. The reason the figure is so low is because in Nepal, disabled people tend to just die. This tragic bit of data is just one revealing piece of information contained in A Situation Analysis of Disability in Nepal, prepared by the New Era research group and brought out jointly by UNICEF and the National Planning Commission Tuesday. The report estimates that nearly 400,000 people are living with disability in Nepal, with the prevalence highest in the west and in the mountains. Nearly one-third of these people live with multiple disabilities.

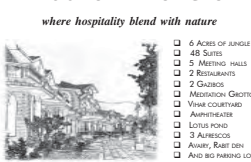
Fourteen percent of Nepal's disabled are eyesight handicapped, two percent are hard of hearing, 0.6 percent cannot speak, 32 percent are not mobile (due to spinal injury, etc), 20 percent have problems with manipulation, and 19 percent suffer from epilepsy. The survey also shows how far the country lags behind in providing basic support to those who are handicapped, either since birth, or through disease and injury.

### Don't worry 3

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## HERE AND THERE

# Fatland

Notes from North America, the land of excess.

empty carbohydrates, fats and vast quantities of sugar knows no boundaries. The well-off have their own form of obesity—a mindless, status-driven spending habit that keeps them busy, stressed, tired and disengaged while further laying waste to the planet's natural resources. Sound a little extreme? Perhaps, but I don't think so. The United Nations has just released a report warning that 30 years of environmental gains in North America are being rapidly reversed by the burgeoning

They, I'm not making any claims to be a seer here. I carry a few extra kilos around my middle-aged middle, so I too am on the risk list for various fat-related diseases. But there's no escaping the conclusion that North Americans—the most prosperous people in the long history of mankind—are digging their way into early graves with their jaws. The other sad fact is that fat is a class issue here. People from lower economic strata don't go to fitness centres or take up mountain-biking. They eat junk food, not health food.

But the culture of consumption that North Americans and bellies with

consumer spending habits of the continent's people. In short, we are driving our cars more often, burning far more petrol, living in sprawling, energy-inefficient houses, and taking long-holidays on passenger jets that spread air pollutants more effectively than any of Saddam Hussein's putative weapons of mass destruction.

North America, with less than five percent of the world's population, consumes 25 percent of its energy—most of that generated from non-renewable sources. Family size here has fallen—the best natural form of birth control being affluence—by 18 percent in the past three decades. The vastness of our homes has grown by nearly fifty per cent. The notion of the New Left parties, such as Tony Blair's Labour and Bill Clinton's Democrats, that we can have it all—social justice and prosperity, redistributive policies and wealth—is being sorely challenged. That is one reason I welcome a right-winger in the White House. George W. Bush and Co are nakedly pro-business, anti-labour, pro-consumption, anti-environment, and they make no secret of it. It restores political pulpits that got lost in the muddle of the middle of the road.

But even our politics seem an irrelevance in the face of mounting evidence that our consumption habits are killing us. More criminally, they are damaging everyone else's chances at development. We dig our graves with our appetites, and drag you into them. We have it. We spend it. We consume it. You sniff our exhaust as we speed on by. Oh yes, we may throw a few pennies out of the window. Use them wisely. Don't be consumed greedily now. Do as we say. Not as we do. ♦

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# Press counsel

Prime Minister Deuba may be called a "press predator", but he isn't in completely bad company.

discontent emerged as private-sector scribblers discovered how the emergency turned out to grant their counterparts in the official media the finest moments of their professional lives.

From the official onslaught to all those blank editorial columns in the tabloids, carried in press against state-imposed restrictions, you're forced to wonder whether the prime minister and his men consider the media Public Enemy No. 2 in the anti-Maoist campaign. (Although, it's probably safe to assume that most of our ministers wouldn't have read anything in that space anyway.)

What this internationalisation of Nepal's struggle to preserve press freedom culminates in remains in the domain of news analysts. In two cogent sentences, the RSF has traced Deuba's transformation over the last 12 years. "An unrelenting opponent of the absolute monarchy prior to the start of the 1990s, Deuba has thrown in his lot with those who have opted for all-out war against the Maoists," the RSF says. "To this end, he has decided to renounce all his democratic convictions and has turned Nepal into the world's biggest prison for journalists."

What is Deuba complaining that the people don't appreciate how he's the only person who has tried both peace and war with the Maoists, he has a point. But the people who are supposed to explain that to the rest of the country are angry with him. And he's not doing anything about that.

It's not too late to befriended the press. Here's a tip: We deal with apologetics, corrections and retractions all the time but rarely are the recipients.

While we're still in a conciliatory mood, let's face it: The RSF list is not as repulsive as it looks. Consider some of the other people on it: Fidel Castro, Adlai Stevenson, Mahatma Mohammad and Vladimir Putin. Have these issue-Bancklands been that corrosive for their countries? It depends on how, as we like to say, you put together your story. ♦



Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba entered the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) hall of press predators the day we found out Interpol had issued red corner notices against senior Maoist leaders. Our prime minister and premier rebels have become international badboys daily certified by organisations headquartered in France.

Prachanda and his seven comrades face arrest, at least theoretically, in the 179 member states of the international criminal police organisation. Deuba is in deeper trouble. The updated RSF roster comes at a time when he's facing the intensifying fury of Nepal's fourth caste: Reporters and editors are outraged not just because a collage happened to vanish from state custody. Or because

many of the more than 100 journalists arrested since the emergency was imposed last November are still behind bars. Their wrath has more to do with what amounts to breach of contract. When the government imposed the emergency, insisting that the restrictions were aimed only at those who encourage and support the rebels, the press believed it and stood squarely behind the prime minister.

That was no small risk, considering the prevailing perception that the mainstream press had become the agent of government and elite propaganda. Self-censorship became a prized editorial skill in deference to the suspicion of the people's fundamental rights. To keep the national morale high, questions of immorality were largely ignored. The first stirrings of

and Algeria would defy the imagination of the most creative police artist. The security forces in the southern Philippines become more amorphous if you take away their camouflage and jackboots. Then there's the thing that should offend Deuba the most. More than 150 journalists have been arrested or threatened in Bangladesh since October 2001. But the country's minister and his men consider the media Public Enemy No. 2 in the anti-Maoist campaign. (Although, it's probably safe to assume that most of our ministers wouldn't have read anything in that space anyway.)

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## No rail pact

Contrary to expectations, when the Nepali and Indian secretaries of commerce met over the weekend in New Delhi, they could not reach an agreement on one of the most pressing problems addressed during the renewal of the trade treaty. The Inland Container Depot at Birganj will continue to remain unused, as it has for the past year, until the rail link can be made operational. There was some movement on other Nepal concerns. Finally a deadline was agreed on to set up quarantine posts at Sunauli, Jogbani and Banbassa by 1 November, and the Indians have also agreed to lower the quarantine fees. India also agreed to raise the quotas for copper exports from the 7,500 MT agreed on in March to 10,000 MT. Nepali officials at the meeting said that the Indians agreed to waive the Special Additional Duty (SAD) announced in its budget early this year and also remove the luxury tax West Bengal state had slapped on Nepali ghu and tea. There were also assurances that anti-dumping duties on acrylic yarn and zinc oxide would be lifted.

But it will take time before India actually stops levying the duties, given the complex procedures involved. The Inter-Governmental Committee has agreed, however, to meet again next month to discuss in more detail two matters: the modalities for trans-border movement of motor vehicles, and the rail agreement. Rail transport to the ICD is expected to lower transport cost of goods to and from the Calcutta port by as much as 40 percent.

## Expos

The 12<sup>th</sup> Himalayan Expo which opened Wednesday showcases products and services offered by 125-150 companies from Nepal, the USA, the UK, Germany, France, China, India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Japan and Singapore. The Shree Distillery, Radisson Hotel, Mount Everest Brewery, Kasky Ice-creams, Qatar Airways, Bhatkar, Transavia Airlines, Indian Airlines and the Standard Nursery are major sponsors of the expo.

About the same time next month—16-22 September there will be another exposition, the Agro-Expo 2002 (September 16-22), organised by the Agriculture Enterprise Centre, the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Floriculture Association of Nepal.

## A feather for Fulbari

The Fulbari Resort, which opened Wednesday, is an exclusive club of the world's great hotels placing it alongside international names such as The Ritz Carlton, The Grand Hyatt, The Oberoi and the Banyan Tree and The Royal Meridian Yacht Club in Phuket, Thailand. A company press release says that selection was based on a number of criteria including architectural design, natural setting, interiors, ambience and guest satisfaction. The exclusive collection of the world's select hotel properties is operated by the Great Hotels of the World organisation, which is based in London.

## Ace profits

Acad Finance and Limited says it had an operating profit of Rs 20 million last year, a continuation of the trend a year before. The company with an authorised capital of Rs 90 million says it has deposits in the tune of Rs 675 million and investments totalling to 546 million.

# In praise of watchdogs

Sometimes it is better not to give.

Before departing for a long subaltern—from one's day job, not this space—the Beed on Sunday only had time to hurriedly sign the headlines. And there were good. The boundaries of one of the many unattainables in this country seem to have been breached—the Commission for the Investigation of the Abuse of Authority has belted the cat. Sure, the exact size of the cat may not yet be known, but good lord, at least something is happening, and for that hats off and thank you.

This is just one sign of just how much the government is scrambling to regain some of its credibility. Their extensive press campaigns asking the people to declare their income or face dire consequences were fruitless. The headlines faded away, and no action was taken. Hence, taxpayer as well as the not-to-lose-one who actually declared their wealth, later regretted having given up their cash to pay for Pajeros, the adulterated fat they run on, and completely pointless junkies.

White-collar crime and graft are under close scrutiny would over. And what is gaining increasing emphasis is the notion that in such transactions the giver is a gully as the taker. In the days of the cat it will be interesting to see how the government of Nepal, how events unfold in the US corporate—and political—world. The thing about graft is, that it remains in all models of economy—capitalist, socialist and all-the-world-over. What matters is how far it spreads, and whether there are constraints—and admittedly somewhat Sanyasin—efforts to curtail it.



In Nepal, unfortunately the restoration of democracy has made graft rampant, it is more and more blatant, and can across all segments of government, politics and even business. The democratisation of the process has meant that more people bid for coveted posts in the revenue department and other departments that have the potential to earn revenue. The price of the positions were high, and the politicians were happy to keep the market expanding, eventually resulting in little commissions that have an uncanny resemblance to auctions. Of course, none of our watchdog agencies, and they are amazingly numerous given the ever-expanding nature of graft—could take all of this on, as the would mean, that the police or the agencies would have to fight their own political masters. The CIAA and its current boss have been

leagous. Maybe this will be a lesson to others well-intentioned but ill-learned overwrought appointees to get out and do something.

The business community should not be spared in this discussion of corruption. After defecating and pseudo reforms, many businesspeople found it easier to do business by bribing officials and politicians. If members of the business community did not encourage this kind of giving, and compete with each other to give more, things would have been significantly different. That said, when the government cannot ensure proper statutory compliance like audits and rates in companies that owns, how can it hope to have any control over the actions of private companies? Simply put, the government's reluctance to enforce proper fiscal and other controls in State-Owned Enterprises give private business plenty of latitude to not complain, and then outside the SOEs in malfeasance.

Your columnist promises to keep a keen, ready eye on the CIAA's efforts and the reaction of the business community, and report back to you. And just think: if the names of takers are out in the press, maybe the names of all those who got not just cash, but computers, furniture and appliances, are not so deeply buried in the shadows.

The only worry that one has is that this might well be a one-off exercise, bringing about a pleasant surprise for the public—right before those worrisome decisions. The regulators need to put the fear of the game in themselves, and government, and politicians, and business. ♦

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Now on the news stands

# "Very few people understand the value of brand building."

Nine years since it got here, Thompson Nepal handles some of the country's largest commercial accounts, and a major chunk of government advertising. We talked to Managing Director Joydeb Chakravarty about his take on the state of the industry in Nepal.

**What is the role of advertising given this growing, aware educated class?**  
I won't say the educated look at advertising to get information. Advertising is just one, quite different, communication vehicle. Advertising is more about brand building. To that extent, even local companies have changed the way they look at their brands.

**How fast has Nepalis advertising pie grown?**  
It didn't grow very fast until about 1995/97. After 1997/98 to about 2000 it grew about 20-25 percent. It has stagnated of late owing to local and global factors. When your GDP growth plunges to less than one percent, you can imagine what happens to advertising, which is related to the business and economic situation. The overall situation today is not very good.

**How is it doing business in Nepal?**  
When Thompson was set up in 1993, advertising was not listed as an industry where you needed a licence to enter. We made a presentation at the Ministry of Industry saying foreign investors will be looking at the infrastructure—insurance, solicitors, auditors and advertising companies of international quality. They took the point, and we became the first advertising joint venture. As far as dealing with the government is concerned, it is one of our largest clients.

**You say advertising has flattened, but at least three new TV companies plan to begin broadcasting in the next six months. How will that change the market?**  
It would sort of increase. If you look at the spread of the market, Kathmandu contributes 60-70 percent of the

**business. Look at what FM did to Kathmandu. After the FM came, you had a host of new advertisers and brands that were retail advertising came in. That may be the case for metro TV stations. As far as national TV is concerned, they would have to compete with Nepal TV, and they can be in business with better programming. To a certain extent TV would expand the pie, but not as much as some say and not overnight. It will be tough for the new channels, radios, newspapers and magazines unless the market expands, and with that the purchasing capacity. Unless people can buy, there is a limit about how much advertising can do.**

**How has the arrival of other multinationals been?**  
The Advertising Agencies Association of Nepal has been saying that we have a huge market. Obviously many multinational companies see this as a country where you can set up a presence and take a chunk of that business. But this is a very difficult place to survive. Advertising is not seen as an investment, but as a cost. Very few people understand the value of brand building. We've been very lucky and had clients who know what marketing is all about. We've helped companies with small budgets build their brands. Manpower is a very serious issue. You don't get art directors, visualisers and writers. People who go out to study and come back here to set up their own little shops. They are happy doing letterheads, visiting cards, brochures, a few ads sometimes.

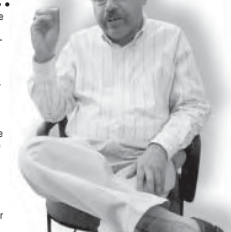
**How have multinationals helped build Nepal's capacity?**  
I can speak for Thompson. We have regular training programmes and have sent many people for training, seminars and advertising award functions in India as well as South East Asia. We also have regular in-house training. J Walter Thompson has always been called the university of advertising. Working here is a very big learning experience for people. When they leave, they

**take that knowledge and experience and spread it. We help local colleges and universities for conducting communication programmes, and I have been associated with Kathmandu University for three years now.**

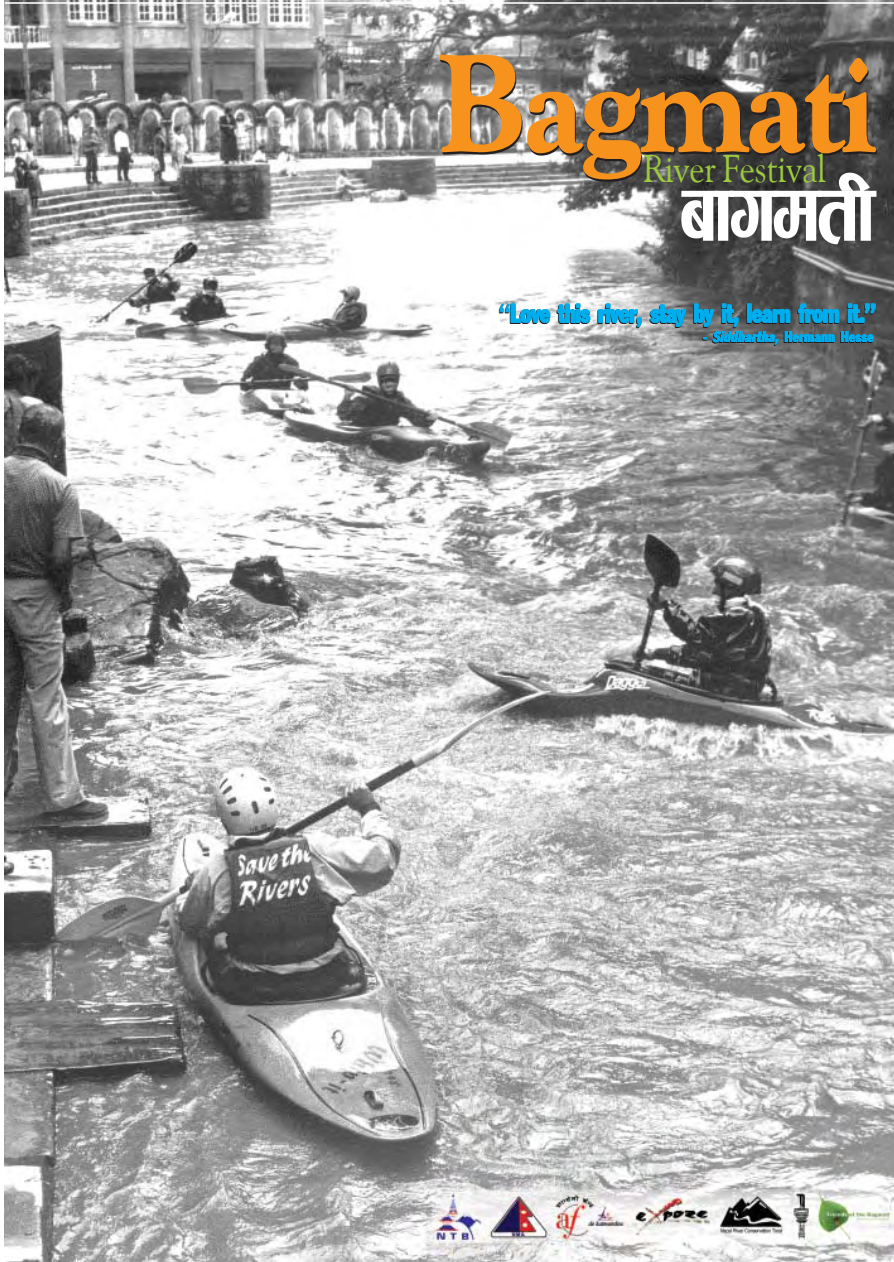
**You handle some of the largest commercial accounts, and say that the government is one of your largest clients. Are you number one?**  
There are official listings here as no one wants to disclose the size of their operations. We know that, as far as the advertising industry is concerned, we are the largest taxpayer in this country. The amount of tax we pay is more than the revenues of most agencies in Nepal. Another basis would be the annual billings of organised media, which agencies disclose. If you add them up, Thompson is number one. There are other fees and incomes that agencies can earn through as events, promotions, etc, but in terms of, say billings or taxes, we are the largest.

**How would you say firms can have the maximum reach to enable them to do serious brand building?**  
Radio is the widest reach, followed by TV and print. Radio is the most cost-effective medium. We have data that indicates that it has been growing, especially after FM. Television will hopefully grow with the new stations that are coming up. But the real challenge is the advertising itself. It expands its low power transmitters. This must go together with electrification.

**Today newspapers offer colour, which wasn't there 10 years ago. The newspapers and magazines survive, which means people read them. Kathmandu has the highest reach across media, so this is the only place people are consolidating. If the media were to consolidate in the 15 other urban areas, the advertising situation would change. We've advised media houses to increase distribution. The moment they do that, their readership will increase. There's a limit on how much Kathmandu can absorb, media has to go out.**







# Bagmati

## River Festival

### बागमती

"Love this river, stay by it, learn from it."

SANUBHARTHA, Hermann Hesse



The Bagmati raging below Chovar Gorge during last month's flood left the Bagmati bridge built by Chandra Sunshere in 1903 and a Rana elephant procession crossing over to Fatan (above); the Bagmati at Patuakhola is now much cleaner because of a treatment plant upstream (right).

The monsoon-heavy brown waters of the Bagmati will Friday host a unique flotilla of kayakers and rafts. The Second Bagmati River Festival will bring together environmentalists, school children, the tourism industry, and concerned citizens in a day-long celebration along the river from its headwaters in Sundarjal to Sankhamul.

The Bagmati River is the source of the Kathmandu Valley civilisation, the waters that nourish its culture and religion. And it is the main element of Kathmandu's environmental regeneration. But it is now choking with waste, and has become a symbol of our negligence of the environment.

The Bagmati River Festival is jointly organised by the Nepal River Conservation Trust (NRCT) and the Friends of the Bagmati. Says veteran river guide and NRCT founder, Megh Ale: "We can clean this river, but to do that we have to look at the

# It's not too late to save the river.



problems from the Bagmati's perspective. That is why we want to raft down the river."

Twenty professional river guides will kick off the festival at 8AM on Friday, 23 August, with a kayak race from Sundarjal to Tilganga. Next, ten rafts holding VIPs, school children and representatives of local communities will leave Tilganga for Sankhamul. There, starting noon, will be music and an exhibition with the Bagmati as backdrop. Popular actors Niruta Singh and Dilip Rayamajhi will be guest stars, and Himalayan Feelings will be behind our music.

atending will be Om Bikram Bista, Yogeshwor Amatya, Nalina Chitrakar, Tantric and others. And, since Friday is also Gai

Jatra, present will be famous Nepali comedian duo Madan Krishna and Hanubansa, and infamously Nepali satire poet, Charyang Master. Several Kathmandu Valley schools will put on an exhibition of photographs, Bagmati debris and water sample analyses. Also on display will be a container showing the residue from a distillation of Bagmati water. Other schools will have poster exhibitions and clay models of Kathmandu Valley, and will stage plays and skits. Friends of the Bagmati, which is a pressure group that aims to restore the Bagmati to its traditional glory, says that the river festival is a unique partnership between like-minded conservation groups. Dr. Suresh Raj Sharma, chairman of Friends of the Bagmati says: "The Bagmati River is in a terrible state, ecologically and culturally. It is the responsibility of each and every one of us to help restore the river to its original pristine state, and conserve the cultural, religious and architectural heritage of Kathmandu Valley."

For further information: Friends of the Bagmati [friends@thebagmatiriver.org.np](mailto:friends@thebagmatiriver.org.np) Nepal River Conservation Trust [nrc@nrc.org.np](mailto:nrc@nrc.org.np)

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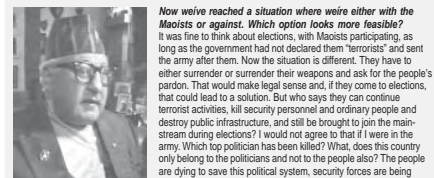






# Which top politician has been killed?

Deashanter, 18 August  
Excerpts of an interview with General (Retd) Bharat Keshar Simha



bring those who want to destroy this political system into electoral politics. You're worried more about those who want to destroy the system, rather than about those who are fighting to save it? The day we agree to bring them into the election process, we have to live all the murderers and dacoits from the prisons. How can the state function when all criminals are freed? At one time they [the Maoists] were given the benefit of doubt...

**So you don't see a peaceful resolution of the Maoist problem? They need to be crushed?**  
Absolutely. I think justice needs to be done. There must be rule of law in the country. Today if you give them a little space and pardon them, then tomorrow new Maoists will be born. If the government keeps yielding to force that continues to murder and spread violence, the present problem may be resolved, but what stops another group from doing the same thing tomorrow? They will again force the government to yield. For the sake of stability, we must not create a situation where the government would be forced to yield [to such attacks] repeatedly...

**One way to neutralise the Maoists is by assimilating them into the political mainstream, yet you are talking about elimination?**  
You don't eliminate them or make them ineffective through the use of weapons only. Once you remove its teeth and claws, a tiger becomes harmless, as do snakes whose venom is extracted. [How can] you talk about bringing into the political mainstream those that want to change what has been said to be unchangeable in the constitution, those who want a secular state, those who want an end to the monarchy, those who want a constituent assembly, those who do not want multiparty democracy? Let them fight—forever—that is what happens in wars. Otherwise we would not have world wars; this is a small conflict. The army has not used half of its arsenal. In all those world wars, peace agreements were signed only after defeat or victory. What is the need to give up the rule of law and bring them into the mainstream? That cannot be. No government must do that. Why should we allow in a snake that could eat us in future?

**So the state of emergency and military operations must continue. For how long?**  
We cannot say how long it will take. An internal rebellion is one of the most difficult operations for an army, because the enemy cannot be identified. External enemies can be identified easily. What has been brought under control after the Royal Nepal Army went out into the field. Now we don't have to hear of attacks like those in Dang and Mangalset. The army has spoken about being in control and having broken into the intelligence networks of the Maoists. At this rate, if the Maoists don't get the support of foreign countries, the problem will be resolved soon.

**Have we reached a situation that demands direct rule of the king for a certain period?**  
Yes, we need direct rule now. Not only me, even people living in the US say that the constitution should be handed over to the king—let him rule. The constitution provides that space, only it has to be ratified by parliament within six months. If parliament adds that timeframe, it could continue for as long as five years. If that is done and the right things happen, it is impossible that the king's rule will not be ratified. Many intellectuals have also been thinking along these lines...

## QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"If they do so [disrupt elections as threatened] they will not disrupt the elections, but destroy ourselves."

—KP Oli, UML standing committee member in Dharai on 20 August.



Newspaper Headline: 28 Thapara Arrested for Corruption

"Oh hello... Mr Dhuranta, Mr Bhutta, Mr Regmi, Mr Pant, Mr Tiwari... But how come Mr Nepal, Mr Pokharel, Mr Koirala, Mr Khadka, Mr Wagle, Mr Anand and Mr Gachhadar are missing...?"

Jana Aashu, 21 August

# Television drama

Durga Nath Sharma in Rajdhani, 18 August  
Durga Nath Sharma, former general manager, Nepal Television in Nepal Samacharpatra, 17 August

It is commonly accepted that once the election date is announced, it is illegal to appoint, retire, promote, or transfer people. I was aware that the Election Commission had made an inquiry, but whether it permitted the act [Sharma's dismissal from NTV] is not clear. What does this country only belong to the politicians and not to the people also? The people are dying to save this political system, security forces are being killed, but our society does not seem to recognise that, and wants to bring those who want to destroy this political system into electoral politics. You're worried more about those who want to destroy the system, rather than about those who are fighting to save it? The day we agree to bring them into the election process, we have to live all the murderers and dacoits from the prisons. How can the state function when all criminals are freed? At one time they [the Maoists] were given the benefit of doubt...

Until today, I have done nothing illegal. At this point in my life, I don't want to do anything illegal. I don't feel it was ethical to play with NTV's future by employing incapable people because they had connections. I refuse to know to those who feel that the Communications Minister belongs to them. Today, it is important to make corporations independent. No one trusts the government media. What little trust is there will be lost if we start employing people on the basis of connections they have. No one should fall prey to government pressure.

**was all a drama to try to remove me.**  
A while ago, Minister Gupta pressured me to get people who was backing into NTV. They'd done badly even in the written test. I didn't want to add points to ensure that incapable people get jobs, and so I lost my job.

Durga Nath Sharma: "But Mr Minister, the code of conduct..."

Minister for Information and Communication Jaya Prakash Cuper: "But we up the raised to control the Election Commission, not the government, got it? Or shall I take you to court?"



Deashanter, 18 August

## Nepalis in India

Nepal Samacharpatra, 18 August

Ever since the state of emergency was declared in Nepal, the number of Nepalis in India has increased rapidly, especially in the bordering states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal. According to Nepali residents in India, the Nepal Eutas Samaj—headed by the Indian government—continues to function. Residents complain that they are harassed by both Maoist activists and Indian security forces. More pressure to harassment are Nepali migrant workers. Bhakra Lal Hirachand who runs a lodge in Gorakhpur district, India, says, "Previously, thousands of Nepali migrant workers would come seeking jobs. Today, the numbers have dwindled."

Immediately after the visit to India of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, Hirachand's lodge, patronised by a large number of people from Nepal, was raided twice in the middle of the night. Many Nepali residents like Hirachand told Samacharpatra that the Maoists had created an environment in which normal people trying to make a living were constantly under the suspicion of Indian security forces. While Nepalis living in India for a long period have experienced relatively fewer problems, Nepalis entering India in order to escape the fear of murder and violence in Nepal are getting caught between the security forces and the Maoists. Many have been leaving the bordering Indian states and going inland. As the Maoists work hard in Nepal and then seek refuge in India, the Indian public is beginning to suspect any Nepali of being a Maoist. Children of resident Nepalis being enrolled in schools in India are often

looked on with suspicion by the school administration. According to residents, earlier, members of the Nepal Eutas Samaj, an organisation closely affiliated with the Maoists and currently banned, would trouble people for donations. Recently, their activities have decreased. Takk Kaka, a high-ranking Indian security official from Uttar Pradesh, told Samacharpatra that Indian security officials were prepared to help Nepali residents who suffered any injustice. But like other Indian security officials, he said, "Where are the Maoists in India? The Maoists are in Nepal. If they come here, we can only send them back." Despite this assurance, Nepali residents stress that the Maoists, including leaders and cadres, are seeking refuge in bordering Indian states.

## Troubled Maoists

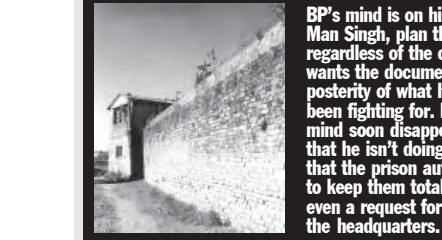
Ghatna Ra Bichar, 21 August

Maoists in India: In India are having a tough time after the Maoist security was beefed up in New Delhi, Uttaranchal, Bihar, West Bengal and Sikkim. And they have been alienated from their supporters in India.

Among the high Maoist commands Rishi Babu Khadka, Ajah Lal Yadav, Van Prasad Gautam and Krishna Sen Likhak have been killed, while Krishna Dhoj Khadka, youth leader Rishi Sharma, and women leaders Shiva Dangi, Tara Bhandari and Shashi Shrestha, etc have been arrested. The Maoist information network has also been assaulted. On the other hand, the Maoist central command is virtually split. Our sources say that the Maoist central committee and politburo members

# Back at Sundarjal >17

Back at Sundarjal >17



## 6th February

Sundarjal: I discussed with GM the line of defence in our case. I read out a portion of the defence arguments that I have prepared—it is not a defence of our case against the specific charges brought by the government against us—it is a formal statement of our line of action in pursuance of our political ideology and conviction. I am not satisfied with what I've already written, because I am not yet clear what line we have to adopt—whether it should be such a one which shouldn't totally kill the chances of possible dialogue with the King or we should go in for a categorical statement of our policy, line, and proposals regardless of the consequence of such a stand. GM doesn't seem to see the difference. He thinks that the King is himself in need of a dialogue he will open it, whatever we may say in the court, and if he is not interested then any opening that we may leave in our statement for negotiation wouldn't be taken advantage of by him. I am not so convinced of his argument. After all a statement purporting to express an attitude of reconciliation or compromise or even at the minimum level hint towards a dialogue would definitely be differently worded than one that has no such intention. In any event the King is not going to open a dialogue with us, whatever we state before the court, then it is better that we should also state our political [ideology] as clearly—addressing it not to the King, but to the people in general. A soft statement in the present context is fruitful only when a corresponding response is expected from the other side. If that is not forthcoming, then a soft statement is worse than useless. It will definitely not be polite or in accordance with the revolutionary ethics. The palace is obviously silent and we are totally cut off from the outside world. We don't know what developments are taking place outside. Hence my dilemma as to the nature of the statement we have to make. Perhaps

# "We are totally cut off from the outside world."

Back at Sundarjal >17

**BP's mind is on his trial and he, with Ganesh Man Singh, plan their defence. BP says that regardless of the outcome of the trial, he wants the document to be a testament for posterity of what he and his colleagues have been fighting for. But this energetic frame of mind soon disappears when BP acknowledges that he isn't doing too well physically, and that the prison authorities are doing their best to keep them totally cut off from the world—even a request for writing paper must go to the headquarters.**

## 8th February 1977

A very sinister tendency on the part of the jail authority—whatever they were—was evident today when I was told that we couldn't get writing materials without specific authorisation from the HQ. I had asked for some plain sheets of paper; they brought 6 sheets. I said I needed 6 sheets (I mean 6 x 24 sheets) whereupon the captain gave me the whole information—that the matter has been referred to the higher authorities. I am agghast at this attitude. If I don't get writing paper, my life here will be extremely unbearable. GM suggests that we should make use of the newspapers to write on. We should cut them to exercise book size and write our notes or our ideas on the blank spaces available on the printed pages. Now we will have to do that most likely. It passes my comprehension as to the motive of this restriction. I have been asking for a doctor to examine my nose which has been bleeding for some time. The doctor too is not sent. Is it a design to victimise us or is it a precaution against our possible effort to contact people outside though the doctor or to smuggle our notes and messages through pipes or the cook or the sweeper. Anyway I am greatly disturbed. I have been homesick the whole day and was depressed and a little ill also; on top of this the captain informs us in the evening that we won't get writing paper without specific sanction from the HQ. It is a very awful. We are in such a helpless condition. Sometimes the thought to go on hunger strike occurs to me, but such action would be nothing short of suicide and would be absurd. In view of our total segregation from the outside world, the King would be happy to let me die without the world knowing that I died as a result of hunger strike. I therefore rule out hunger strike. What else can I do here in this stark isolation?

Sometimes—mostly immediately after lunch—I feel extremely helpless. My intellect, my analysis says that we are on the right path and that we will ultimately win. But my psychology—my emotional reaction—is unaffected by my reasoning. I remain psychologically disturbed. How can I get over this psychological weakness? If only I could still this psychological agitation!



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# Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

## Guy Jatra

There is one day in the year when Nepali guys can make even bigger asses of themselves than they do the other days in the year, and that day is today. (And gals, I've just been informed, can make jenny asses of themselves.)

But the question troubling all able-bodied Nepali males of reproductive age is this: are we really prepared for this year's Guy Jatra? Can we in our heart of hearts, say with full self-assurance that our level of idiosyncrasy meets international standards? Unfortunately, the answer to both questions is 'What's that question again?'

It is only now becoming clear that we have been seriously lax on the irreverence front in the last fiscal year, and to make up for this deficit the government has formed a 127-member All-Nepal Guy Jatra Celebration Standing Committee led by the Prime Minister to mark this year's Cowdung Day with wider abandon than ever before. All government offices will be required to eliminate with colourful lights their buildings for three nights, national flags will be sent to the dry cleaners, and Nepali missions abroad will be using this opportunity to apprise the leaders of their host nations of the rapid strides taken by Nepal in the field of farce and buffoonery after the restoration of democracy.

Back home, all of us in the press are required to mark Guy Jatra by mandatorily publishing the following recent news items from the national press:

### Politics No Laughing Matter: Minister

KATHMANDU (RSS) - The Minister of Pandy and Satire has said that he fails to see the joke in the ongoing political crisis in the country, and has cautioned all citizens to refrain from laughing out loud in public since it would hurt the morale of the armed forces.

The minister made the remark after inaugurating a three-day interaction programme on the theme "Are Our Politicians Clowns?" in Sat Dobato Thursday during which participants could barely suppress their laughter and fell into the aisles clutching their bellies.

Answering questions from journo in a post-interaction ambush, the minister warned: "How can they expect politicians to be serious about their jobs when they keep poking funny things at us? Don't they know it tickles?"

### CIA sues CIAA

LANGLEY, VA. (Reuters) - The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has decided to take Nepal's Commission

for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) to the International Court of Justice in The Hague for infringement of copyright by adopting an acronym that could "create confusion among customers".

"We've been around for a lot longer, and the Nepali watchdog should have known better than to have a brand name so similar to ours," spokesman Stan Spooksky told a press conference at CIA headquarters at Langley Thursday.

Spooksky said that the CIA switchboards had "lit up like a fourth of July sky" after the CIAA watchdog announced a sweep of corrupt tax officials in Nepal. "A

lot of people thought we were involved in the raids, and of course we are nowhere near that theatre of operations, we have our hands full here at home."

In Kathmandu, CIAA officials said they had received the court summons, but were not backing down. "If they don't like our acronym, tough," said a CIAA operative, but conceded, "We wouldn't mind dropping the last 'A', and negotiating a merger."

### Nepal Has World's Largest Ass

KATHMANDU (Animal Planet) - The Guinness Book of World Records has added new entries from Nepal in its coming edition which includes a young Nepali scientist who has designed the world's fastest clock.

"It's a marvel of engineering, you just wind it up, and it will race against time to be ahead of clocks in any other part of the world," said Dr Baidyanath Upadhyay of the Royal Nepal Academy of Scientific Technology. "This is another feather in Nepal's cap, since we already have the world's tallest dwarf."

In a separate development, a recent survey of wild asses in the trans-Himalaya have proved beyond doubt that Nepali asses are on average the biggest asses in the world. "Donkeys are usually small and stocky, but the hind quarters we measured had stature, and they made perfect asses of themselves," said veteran zoologist, Dr Roger Schmid.

Meanwhile, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) has been declared Nepal's most rightwing party, while the present government has been found to be the most-partisan partyless system in the world at the present time.

# "Never before had I seen anything quite so beautiful..."

- Dr Christian Schickgruber, curator at Vienna's Ethnographic Museum

from p1

The Dipankar Buddha was stolen from a family custodian in Nag Bahal in Patan on the night of 17 January this year (see "Lost and Found Buddha", *Nepali Times* #94). It resurfaced when the German dealer tried to sell it to the Vienna Ethnographic Museum in April. But the Museum's curator for the Himalaya and South Asia, Dr Christian Schickgruber suspected that the image may have been stolen.

The art dealer called me and offered to sell me a golden Buddha head from Nepal," recalls Schickgruber. "On 29 April, he came to Vienna and showed us his object. We were quite surprised. Never before had I seen anything quite so beautiful."

The Buddha's head turned out to be a rare, and larger-than-life size Dipankar Buddha mask from the 17th century which is venerated in the annual Samyak procession in Patan. The head is about one meter high, made of copper and bronze, fire-gilded and painted. It is richly adorned with cut crystals, turquoise and other precious stones.

The art dealer wanted 200,000 Euros for it, a price which in international comparison didn't appear unreasonable high to me, in view of the rarity, age and quality of the object," Schickgruber said. "We asked for a week of consideration. The dealer agreed and left the Buddha with us in our depot."

Now things had to move quickly. It had to be determined how the Buddha came to be in Europe, and whether it was stolen. Schickgruber contacted a Nepal expert at the Department of Tibetology and Buddhism at Vienna University who in turn emailed a photo and description of the Buddha to a



colleague in Kathmandu.

The answer came promptly the next day: yes, this was the very Dipankar Buddha stolen from Nag Bahal. A Nepal police report of the theft was also sent.

Austrian police and Interpol were then notified, and the Buddha was confiscated by court order to be stored at the museum until it could be legally repatriated to Nepal.

The Austrian state prosecutor began investigation, and lawyers in Vienna, Germany, and the Royal Nepal Embassy in Berlin have been looking at the legal implications. The Buddha consists of five components (head, crown, necklace and ear pendants) and all five bear the seal of Nepal's Department of Archaeology, which could be genuine or fake. The seal is required to take any religious

object out of Nepal. The department was reportedly informed about the theft only on 15 March.

Did the five parts get their export-approval seals from the department before that day? And there are other questions: who were the thieves, was bribery involved, who were the middlemen, can the German dealer prove that he was acting in "good faith"?

But these questions don't trouble Schickgruber. He only wants to find out the fastest way to get the Buddha back to Nepal. He says, "This image plays an important role in the living, religious culture of Nepal, in particular the Buddhists of Patan."

Erwin Melchert is a journalist with the Vienna paper, Kronen Zeitung.

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