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CYBER KHASIS AND VIRTUAL BOKAS FOR DASAIN p6

EXCLUSIVE

Unhappy donors

The latest trend is to troop over to hand over memos to the government. Even the donors are joining the procession. They are worried about the vacuum at the grassroots with bureaucrats running local bodies, and have written to the government again to hint that the current situation will only help the Maoists. The 10 September letter also warns that donors who had suspended funding to local bodies will wait until local elections to start writing cheques again. Signatories to the letter are the World Bank, DfID, GTZ, SNV, SDC, NORAD and UNDP who together control over 70 percent of foreign aid to Nepal.

Combing operation

Our politicians still think elections can be held. Or, they pretend it can.

There are 47 days to go for polls. But minus ten days of Dasain, three days of Tihar, three days of the Maoist strike and it is clear there isn't much time left for campaigning. Even if there was, candidates cannot venture outside the capital or district headquarters. Many local activists have been abducted and brutally murdered by Maoists, who have vowed not to let people vote.



So, there must be a reason why the politicians are not worried. Do they have a "Plan B"? Is the fallback option asking the King to use Article 127 to reinstate parliament and open the way for a multipartisan caretaker administration?

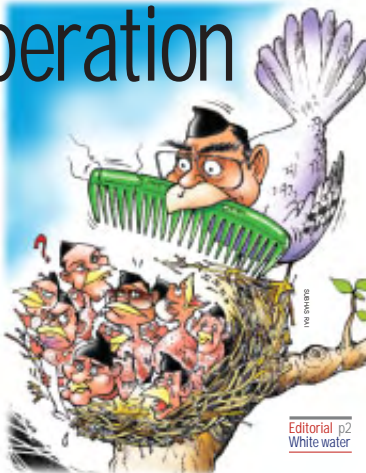
The prime minister's latest argument is that if elections can be held in war-torn Kashmir, why not in Nepal? His press adviser, Achyut Wagle told us: "To announce that we can't hold elections now would mean giving the Maoists the moral and political victory they are trying to extract." The prime minister is expected to call an all party meeting early next week, but is said to be luke-warm to an all-party problem-solving approach.

Subhas Chandra Nemwang of the UML told us: "The first option is elections and the expectation is that the government will make it possible to have it. If that isn't possible, then other alternatives may be explored." Nemwang was part of the ten party group that handed over a memorandum to prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba on Thursday (see picture).

In all this confusion, only the Maoists seem to know exactly what they want: no elections, period. They have declared a three-day general strike on 11-13 November, and announced a build-up of actions before that, threatening to headhunt candidates, declaring "election-free districts", and breaking the legs of anyone who dares help in campaigning.

Deuba needs to put on a brave face and project elections as a "constitutional compulsion" which can give continuity to multi-party democracy. But he is cornered, as parliamentary parties array themselves against him. King Gyanendra is said to be displeased with the government's inability to restore confidence.

The seven-point memorandum handed to Deuba Thursday is said to contain a list of options: among others convincing the Maoists not to disrupt elections, an all-party consensus on reforming the constitution, asking the king to reinstate



Editorial p2
White water

parliament invoking Article 127, and forming an all-party government to try and talk peace with the Maoists. For his part, Deuba still has survival instincts intact, and will do anything to cling on to office. It would suit him to get some kind of multi-phase elections going, however flawed. ♦

Times Weekly Internet Poll # 52

Q. Are conditions right for meaningful elections in November?

Total votes 814

Weekly Internet Poll # 53. To vote go to: www.nepalimes.com

Q. If elections were held tomorrow, which faction of the Nepali Congress would you vote for?

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If we want tourists, scrap visa fees

Forcing visitors to stand in three different queues to fleece them is no way to boost tourism.

JANAKI GURUNG
As if it wasn't bad enough getting tourists to visit Nepal, the way we treat them on arrival at Kathmandu airport is so disgraceful that it is surprise they still come. Maybe that is why they call them "adventure tourists".



Touts outnumber tourists at airport.

After overcoming fear of air travel, fear of nuclear war in the subcontinent, fear of the insurgency and bandhs they finally land in Kathmandu. They enter the arrival area to be greeted by a chaos of queues: lines for the Nepali-Indian counter, lines for visitors with visas, lines for visitors without visas, lines to apply for visa, lines to pay visa fees.

And there are no helpful hints about where to go first. "Do I pay the fee first and then apply for the visa, or do I apply for the visa and pay the fee?" one perplexed Swedish tourist was overheard asking an equally puzzled bystander on Monday.

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The trouble with TU

Tribhuvan University has infrastructure it can be proud of. If only students and faculty would give up politics for academics.



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HEMELATARA
Political slogans welcome you to the main entrance of Tribhuvan University. Different student unions, teacher associations and employee unions inclined towards various political ideologies vie for your attention, claiming to protect the rights of one group or another, and saying that they alone can safeguard university interests. The high-sounding claims are the most obvious indicator of what underlies any discussion amongst TU functionaries about the development of the university, its academic obligations, and achievement—there's too much politics on campus.

Under the partyless Panchayat regime, TU served as a forum for intellectual and ideological debate. The student unions camouflaged a political movement that surmounted ideological restrictions and made possible Nepal's first referendum in 1979, which allowed the Nepali populace to choose between a multi-party system and the Panchayat. Today, well after the restoration of democracy, propaganda and politics are still as much part of TU's offerings as coursework and degrees. 1990. Political parties still find TU fertile ground to train young people as their ideological wings, while students use it as a launch pad for their budding political careers. The recent success stories, such as that of former MP Jagadhara Khadivada, and former state minister NP Saud, who cut their political teeth in TU, have encouraged other students to use student unions as political platforms. "There is no harm in having a political ideology. One elected, we concentrate on student rights and

the well-being of the university," claims Dipendra Acharya, who was elected vice-president of the Nepal Student Union from a Nepali Congress-affiliated union. The professors and bureaucrats at TU are not much better. Equally involved in politics and divided along ideological lines, they contest their own elections under the auspices of established political entities. As for the administrative employees, in the last elections to their professional union, the main fight was between the familiar symbols of the tree and the sun—the Nepal Congress and the CPN-UMIL. As a result, says Madhav Koirala, a TU administrator, "all

administrative decisions are politicized, and chances are slim that all decisions serve the best interests of TU." TU was established in 1959 as Nepal's first university under the Tribhuvan University Act with royal patronage. It was first part of the larger drive to modernise education in Nepal. The physical infrastructure was constructed at the present location in Kirtipur only in 1966. Three years later, in 1972, both public and private colleges across the country were declared constituent campuses of TU under the National Education System Plan. Only much later, in the early 1990s, did Nepal hit upon the idea of

multiple universities. Separate National Education Commissions in 1993 and 1998 recommended the establishment of four regional universities in the eastern, western, mid-western and far western development regions by integrating TU constituent campuses and private affiliated colleges. And they specified what exactly it meant by the regional and multi-university concept. "Today, there are five full-fledged universities in Nepal, and efforts are on to create technical universities. But TU continues to have the problems that the multi-university concept was supposed to deal with. The Purbanchula University and

Pokhara University were established in 1995 and 1997 to be developed as regional universities in the eastern and mid-western regions. The governing acts clearly specify that the TU constituency and affiliated campuses in the respective regions should gradually be made part of the new institutions. The importance of this process was again emphasised in the 1999/2000 budget policy. The concept however never really took off mostly due to resentment at TU over the perceived diminishing of the authority of the institution due to redistribution of its powers. Since

TU's charter states that it is an autonomous, self-administered institution, the university felt that the committees formed by the government with the National Planning Commission to facilitate the handing over of its regional satellites to the new universities was interference.

As a result, TU continues to be overburdened with students and mired in administrative complications. This academic year, approximately 143,000 students—90 percent of all tertiary education students—study at TU campuses. Each year approximately 48,000 graduate from high school, and an estimated 80 percent of them opt for



Clockwise from above: Class in progress in the Department of Rural Development Studies, the Tribhuvan University Central Library, TU Vice-Chancellor Naveen Prakash Jung Shah, TU's main administrative building.

administrative costs. "We have continued the intermediate levels on humanitarian grounds, as the private Plus Two schools are unaffordable for most school graduates," explains Naveen Prakash Jung Shah, vice-chancellor of TU. But, he adds, "Political commitment is needed to phase out intermediate levels, unless affordable government funded Plus Two schools are established, it is not possible."

The government had planned to gradually phase out intermediate levels by 2001. The private sector responded enthusiastically and by the fiscal year 2001/02, 775 Plus Two schools were running, but students especially from rural areas continue to throng TU campuses for intermediate levels mostly for economic reasons—a student in TU campuses can complete the intermediate level courses for about Rs 4,000, while the average expense for the Plus Two years is about Rs

60,000. In addition, these private colleges are concentrated only in urban areas. "Add to this a drop in quality. Teachers at the Plus Two level—like teachers at TU—are required to have Masters' degrees, as a result of which a large number of teachers are moving to better-paying private school jobs. The recent move to expand two-year Bachelor's courses in the last academic year students appeared for the exams with only about 100 hours of lectures. "There are no mechanisms to recognise the contributions of devoted teachers, or, conversely, check that university rules are being followed," says Professor Trin Rai Manandhar a TU dean. On average, less than 25 percent of students who appear for

university exams pass. Shortage of funds and misallocation of what is available is another reason for TU's troubles and the declining quality of education there. TU generates only 15 percent of its expenditure from its own sources, 85 percent is covered with government subsidy and foreign aid, though this has been dropping of late. This academic year TU needs an estimated Rs. 2.24 billion to run the 27 different degree offerings, but the government has announced a grant of only Rs 1.56

million. Under pressure from the student unions TU has not been able to revise its rock-bottom fee structure. Recently, Kathmandu's Padma Kanya College was shut down by the Nepal Student Union when it tried to raise fees. Presently, a TU Master's student pays only Rs 70 a month for tuition fees.

Complicating matters is the fact that the performance of departments and the demand for a particular discipline is not taken into account when allocating funding. As a result, for instance, the history faculty has 21 teachers for the seven students of the 35 enrolled who actually attend classes on a regular basis. The Hindi and Sanskrit departments only admitted five students each, of which only two attend, but their budget has not been significantly changed in recent years.

"We don't know yet how well we manage the fund gap created by the cut in the government subsidy," says Yogendra Shukya, chief of the TU's Economic Administration Division. Two years ago the division recommended a 100 to 150 percent increase in tuition fees, but nobody within the TU machinery is hopeful that anything like this will happen anytime soon. The unions, as they know, are too powerful. ♦

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Shutdown

The country appears to be in for some more bands. Following their announcement to hold a three-day bandh on the eve of the general elections in November, the All Nepal National Independent Students' Union (Revolutionary), the ANNSU (R), has made public a list of demands they want met. Otherwise, they've threatened to force all educational institutions to close on 1 and 2 October. That is besides the three-day strike preceding elections 11-13 November. ANNSU (R) wants to reduce the security budget by 75 percent and increase the education budget, and "privatisation and commercialisation of education," provide free education for all until high school. The Maoist student body has also demanded the immediate release of 13 student cadres who have been missing and the punishment of those guilty of arresting and killing nine Maoist workers, including Krishna Sen, former central committee coordinator of the ANNSU.

Bhandari's gaffe

Leftist leader Brijendra Bhandari has put her foot in her mouth. Bhandari, who is a member of the All Nepal Women's Organisation, is being taken to task for criticising the worship of Kathmandu's virgin goddess the Kumari. Of course, she's a progressive woman, so at first glance her stance seems admirable. But not when she reasons like this: men who marry former's kumaras are fated to die early. It's no wonder that Kathmandu's rate Kumari worshippers are up in arms, and the Association of Vedic Realisation is demanding action against Bhandari.

Risky jobs

Has the job market shrunk so drastically that people are willing to take any risk? Certainly seems so. The government recently called for applicants to fill 700 teaching positions in Maoist-affected districts to temporarily substitute permanent teachers displaced due to the threats and other fallouts of the insurgency. It received more than 20,000 applications. These teaching vacancies were removed from their positions as soon as the security situation improves and the permanent teachers can return to their designated workplace. What's more, they will be paid only half of what the permanent teachers are paid. The insurgents have already killed about 100 teachers and thousands have fled to their home villages to farm, which has resulted in their being transferred to safer areas by the government, creating a shortage of teachers in insurgency-affected districts.

Patan's sterile dogs

Cruelty to Animals to smile: The Lalitpur Sub Metropolitan City, with the help of a number of Rotary Clubs, has taken upon itself the task of controlling the canine population in southern Kathmandu in a humane fashion. There are to be no more cruel killings or poisonings. Instead, stray dogs are caught and neutered in a 15-20 minute operation that leaves them free to continue their amorous activities without adding to the dramatically growing population, due to which rabies has become a significant public threat. An estimated 1,000 stray dogs live in Lalitpur, and the number could be 10 times more in Kathmandu. The Spay and Neuter program, initiated two months ago, has already attended to nearly 200 canines. The target is over 500.

Clean-up act

Fifty Nepali and French mountaineering enthusiasts have got together to clean up Mt Dhaulagiri. It is estimated that Dhaulagiri is littered with about two tonnes of garbage piled up since the 1960s, when the region was first opened for mountaineering. The four-week long clean-up campaign, starting 23 September, is expected to collect 1,700 kg of waste. The less harmful items such as clothes will be burnt, recyclable metals will be sold within Nepal, and highly toxic batteries will be taken to France to be recycled. Dhaulagiri is the world's seventh highest mountain, and considered one of Nepal's most difficult trek routes.

Dasain discount

The government has announced festive discounts on essential commodities such as rice, vegetable ghus and soybean oil, and salt on the festive occasions of Dasain and Thar. The price of essential items distributed through the trading houses owned by the government will be reduced as usual," says a press release issued by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce and Supplies. There will also be a five percent discount on clothes. District officers have been asked to see that the prices are maintained, and a 19-member coordination committee has been appointed to ensure that the process goes smoothly. It will be interesting to see what, if any, impact this has in places like Karanli or Mugu, where there's not enough food on a good day anyway.

HERE AND THERE

Journalism, war, and peace

by DANIEL LAK



There are few people in my ink-stained line of work who are true originals. One of them is Tiziano Terzani. For decades, he has roamed Asia and the world on behalf of Germany's *Der Spiegel* and a few Italian newspapers. Always dressed in crisp white linen, Terzani brought his humanist, European perspective to almost every crisis that has gripped this continent, from the Vietnam war to the killing fields of Cambodia, from the Babri Mosque riots in India to—most recently—the American assault on the Taliban and the search for Osama bin Laden. I dare say Nepal has seen him a time or two as well.

Now a German organisation follows the rules of employment laid down by the government back home, so when Terzani's 65th birthday was approaching last September, he knew that it would soon be time for him to retire. Then came 11 September. 2001. Terzani retired on schedule but moved by the horror of the terrorist atrocities in America, and later the American response to them, he packed his pen and started travelling again. This time though, the great man of Asian journalism wasn't recording events and the thoughts of kings and warlords for *Der Spiegel*. He was writing front-page letters in Italy's largest newspaper, *Corriere della Sera*, letters of anguish, fear, anger and eventually hope. Tiziano Terzani has collected those letters in his latest book, *Letters Against the War*.

On the back cover, a short sentence says it all. "After 30 years as a war correspondent for a major European magazine, Tiziano Terzani turns into a correspondent against all wars." This is not one of those spurious bits of praise known in the trade as a "blurb," the sort of thing you ask a friend to write before even showing him the book. No, I dare say Terzani, never shy of the theatrical



gesture, has given himself the title of "correspondent against all wars." At first, I fought shy of the concept. The tenets of objectivity are engrained in my soul. I may hold opinions, and willingly disseminate them at the drop of a hat, but not as a journalist, and never in my newspapering.

Terzani was much the same in the long course of his career. His reporting—sharp, incisive, interesting—was no parade of politics. But in the evening of his life, the late night of his career, this distinguished fellow has dropped all pretence of journalism and is now a pamphleteer, a campaigner for a worthy cause, and that cause is peace. Some time ago in the pages of this newspaper, an earnest fellow from some earnest country argued in a somewhat earnest manner that we needed fewer war correspondents in international journalism, and more "peace correspondents."

I snorted with slightly weary cynicism at the time and pointed out to whoever would listen that such a notion could hardly be journalistic. You weren't getting all available sides to a story, then printing them without

An old South Asia hand turns to peace journalism.

comment. You were commenting by choosing your sides.

Having read the first book of "peace correspondence," I remain sceptical. *Letters Against the War* is not a bad read, not at all. Terzani writes with passion and precision; his arguments are worth listening to; his sincerity unquestioned. The anecdotes from the well-trodden trails of post-11 September journalism—in Jharkhand in Peshawar, the reconstruction and development gray train in Kabul, the civilian casualties of American bombing in Afghanistan—are familiar ones, and they serve Terzani's main thesis well. War is hell, the innocent suffer, and we rarely learn a damn thing from the bloodstains and failures of history. He suffers a little from the instinctive anti-Americanism of the European, the failure to see just how flexible American culture and politics can be. But this isn't why I am not yet convinced by his notion of a "peace correspondent."

This is a book that should be read by people on all sides of political opinion about the "war against terror." It is literate, humane and convincing. If logic be hind decision to make war, then arguments like this would most certainly bring us peace. But I fear we are violent, territorial beasts, afraid of the dark and apt to lash out at the midst of provocation. We are lavish with revenge, and ration forgiveness. Most of all, we ignore the wisdom of experience and age. Still, Terzani may be onto something here and I could be wrong. And for once, I hope I am. ♦

(*Letters Against the War*, India Research Press, New Delhi, 2002.)

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Cybergoats and virtual bokas

The way to the diaspora's wallet is through its collective, nostalgic heart.



families in Nepal," says Joshi. Thamel.com recently upgraded its site to include Dasain specials on more than just bokas and khasis. You can now order juhu dahi, sweetsmeats, and even clothing.

What began with bouquets of flowers and boxes of chocolates has extended to a wide range of goodies that the Nepali diaspora in places like UK, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Australia, the US can pick up online to send to dear ones in Nepal. Like the gift, the payoff is pretty timely too—senders are emailed a digital picture of the recipient with the gift.

The deliveries are made in Bhaktapur, Kathmandu, Kirtipur, and Patan. "We're always getting asked why we didn't start earlier," says Suresh Tuladhar, CEO of netnepal.com, another online shopping site. "There are so many Nepalis abroad who would like to send gifts home but didn't have a medium that was quick, efficient and cost effective."

Tuladhar advertises his site in community newspapers abroad and on popular Nepali websites. "Things can only get better," he says.

Tuladhar is so optimistic, he's thinking of extending deliveries to other Nepali cities like Pokhara and Biratnagar. "Of course we can't include perishable items like cakes but maybe gifts like CDs and so on would be possible."

Anything goes, really, so long as it tells senders that a Nepali life is only a click away.

By a khasi for your family: \$89.99. If that's a bit steep, you can buy a boka for half that amount at \$49.99. With Nepal's biggest festival just around the corner, Nepali online shopping sites are putting up their best bargains. Last year, Thamel.com, one of Nepal's pioneer e-commerce sites, did brisk business selling khasis online. "It was great, seeing the expressions of surprise and delight on the faces of people while we made the deliveries," says Rajesh Joshi, CEO of Thamel.com. "Some even thought the goat had flown all the way to Kathmandu. They would ask after their family in the US."

What an online shop needs to do to be a hit is play on the hold of tradition and add a judicious amount of sentimentality to the essentially prosaic process of online shopping on the Internet. The idea of selling khasis online was suggested by a regular customer of Thamel.com who wanted to surprise his family in Nepal with a khasi delivery. And so Nepalis residing abroad were offered a chance to feel close to their families back in Nepal and involved in Dasain celebra-

tions—by purchasing a khasi or boka online and having it delivered to their loved ones here. They the relatives, not the goats seemed to like the idea.

Thamel.com sold 69 khasis online. Recipients of gifts could even go along with someone from the site to touch, prod and otherwise examine a number of khasis in the price range specified by the sender, and about it from the khasi bazar.

The growth of e-shopping sites that focus on Nepal—there are probably half-a-dozen gift sites—has made it convenient for the Nepali diaspora living overseas not to miss out on festive occasions like Dasain, Thir, and just about anything else with a more-than-Halmark potential.

Father's Day websites saw brisk sales of gifts such as suits and shirts, liquor, cakes and sweets, while Teej saw specials on saris, jewellery, and perfume. "But Dasain is definitely the busiest time. That's when most of our 2,200 registered customers send gifts to their



like Pokhara and Biratnagar. "Of course we can't include perishable items like cakes but maybe gifts like CDs and so on would be possible."

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Unopposed, unbeaten

Re-electing the entire MP line-up unopposed would have a therapeutic effect on the body politic.



smaller outfits to make the resolution truly representative. The UML would have the most gain. How many parties in the world can take satisfaction in having sacrificed an imminent majority for the sake of the system? This solution would also help prevent Bam Dev Gauttam from spearheading the Maoist Nepal-Khadga Oil squabbles over ticket distribution.

The Nepal Congress could get one last chance to put its house in order before the parliamentary party formally splits. The RPP might have a problem, since some leaders have just started pepping up supporters with visions of their own majority.

Until a few weeks ago, the party seemed set to improve its tally in the dissolved legislature. You can't make such predictions based on the three-way split over whether to tie up with Koirala, Deuba or the RPP. For many former panthers, preserving what they had might not be an entirely fatalistic proposition.

The radical communist groups, which are part of the parliamentary process to expose its fraudulence, should have the least objection. Parties hoping to make their debut in the lower House will have enough time to improve their chances in the next polls. Independents could make gains in a normal election, but it would be difficult for them to stay "sober."

So here's a better idea. Let's re-elect the entire 205-line-up unopposed. The UML and RPP seem ready to re-nominate prominent MPs anyway. An across-the-board re-election would have a therapeutic effect on the body politic. The deceased and those who decline a second consecutive term can be succeeded by runners-up in the 1999 election. That way we'll preserve faith in ourselves as well as our unflinching pre-election cease-fire. Since we're pressed for time, we must impress upon the rebels that free and fair elections are crucial to completing a new constitution.

As for the one we have, Article 127 has prompted too many questions of propriety and legitimacy. We might be best off with the restoration of the House of Representatives. We can't afford, however, to

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In the October Himal Making sense of BIJAYANMAR



Plus: Tracking down dolphins in the Indus and Ganges

General attitudes, Aung San Suu Kyi and the future of South Asia's east

• RAMACHANDRA GUHA ON SOUTH ASIAN BIOGRAPHY •
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PLUS MORE — ON NEWS STANDS THIS WEEK

The Maoists have threatened to disenfranchise voters unless something resembling a constituent assembly figures on the ballot paper. It wasn't supposed to be like this. "Politics is war without bloodshed while war is politics with bloodshed," the Great Helmsman once said. The political and military wings of our revolutionaries often have been working at cross purposes, ever since Prachanda blazed his trail two years ago. It wouldn't be prudent to count too much on any unilateral pre-election cease-fire. Since we're pressed for time, we must impress upon the rebels that free and fair elections are crucial to completing a new constitution.

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News Rs 10 notes will be plastic

The filthy, tattered notes you get from taxi drivers and vegetable vendors are unpleasant, but that's not the only thing wrong with paper money. It is easy to counterfeit—97 percent of fake banknotes are paper—and has a circulation life of about eight months at most. Worn notes also cause more errors in ATMs and high-speed note validators. The high cost of replacing high-circulating, low-denomination paper currency often takes the lion's share of any reserve bank's budget—Rs 100 million in the case of the Nepal Rastra Bank.

There's an alternative to the highly absorbent virgin cotton paper money. Polymer. This Dasain Nepal will be the 21st country to make the move to polymer, joining the ranks of Canada, Brazil, Romania, Thailand, Mexico, and China. In May this year, Note Printing Australia (NPA), a subsidiary of the Reserve Bank of Australia, won a tender worth \$1.64 million to produce 50 million Rs 10 notes for the Rastra Bank. Nepal's first batch of Rs 10 polymer banknotes, which come into circulation this Dasain, closely resemble the original, retaining the black buck and the garuda images, and are the first legal tender with the image of King Gyanendra. The note features a security window with a vignette of the crown.

In 1966 a rash of counterfeiting in Australia led to research and development of a more secure currency. By 1996, Australia was the first country with a full series of circulating polymer banknotes. Polymer banknotes are expensive to make—they cost almost twice as much as paper—but their longer circulation life directly translates into huge savings for national banks. The Reserve Bank of New Zealand announced a saving of \$7.2 million over three years in printing costs after switching to polymer banknotes.

The polymer substrate incorporates the polymer currency's trademark transparent window. This security feature, in itself, and design elements can be incorporated to make use of its unique properties. The creative Design Department at NPA say their designs are aimed at being aesthetically pleasing and also incorporating cutting edge technology that makes counterfeiting almost impossible. These features are immediately recognizable, making verification easier. (Trishina Gurung in Sydney)

ACNielsen Nepal
ORG-MARG in Nepal has had a formal name change to become ACNielsen Nepal. The changeover includes the reorganisation of the holdings of the Dutch group VNU that owned ORG-MARG offices in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Earlier this year, the group took over ACNielsen, one of the world's largest market researchers best known for its television ratings scheme in the US.

NEA power sales
The Nepal Electricity Authority says it is now capable of selling Rs 1 billion worth of electricity to India, thanks to the 140 MW Gandak project that came on line over this year. A committee formed by the NEA to assess the export potential of the utility reports that the NEA can supply about 40 MW throughout the year, during the monsoon as well as dry months. Nepal and India are expected to sit down next month to discuss the purchase prices, and the NEA says that the necessary transmission systems needed for the power transfer are already being built. Nepal and India already have a 150 MW power exchange agreement, but because they "exchange" power, the two countries have not yet had to agree on a price for actual selling.

Nepal SBI bank branches
Nepal SBI Bank Limited has opened its 12th branch in Janakpur. Fifty percent of the bank, set up in 1993, is held by the State Bank of India, 15 percent by the Employees Provident Fund, five percent by the Agricultural Development Bank Nepal and 30 percent by the general public. Nepal SBI bank's paid up capital is Rs 429.9 million. The bank says it has Rs 5.57 billion in deposits and Rs 4.58 billion investments.

New Hyundais
Avco International, authorised distributors of Hyundai vehicles in Nepal, have introduced four new models in Nepal. The company says that it expects two additional models to arrive soon. The newly launched models are the Santa Fe Zeta Plus, which comes with a 1,700 cc engine, the 1,500 cc Accent, the 2,350 cc Santa Fe, and the 1,600 cc Matrix. The diesel versions of the Accent and the Santa Fe are expected to arrive soon. Hyundai's plant in India will shortly begin manufacturing two other models, the 2,500 cc Terracan and a super compact model called the Getz, which will also be available in Nepal. Avco says that it plans to have sold a total of 600 Hyundai vehicles in Nepal this year.

New IT horizons
The Nepal Education Computer Learning and Development Centres began offering training courses in Nepal last week. The company offers different technical and application packages aimed at students as well as corporate clients. The company has over 280 centres in 48 countries. New Horizons offers classroom coaching, online training and also targeted self training programs to meet different needs.

RID heist
Revenue Investigation Officials uncovered what they said was a scam involving raw materials import when they discovered a container supposed to contain copper scrap actually made up of construction aggregates. Biratnagar's Hulas Wire Industries ordered the Rs 6 million consignment from the Philippines which arrived in Nepal via Calcutta. The government questioned Mahendra Golchha about the consignment and fined a Rs 18.3 million bail for his release. On Monday Golchha denied any wrongdoing and said that it would be more useful to invest in the international suppliers. His group had actually sold the government as soon as it found out about the anomaly. Golchha said. Business delegations meet Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to protest Golchha's arrest, and insiders said one-sided media coverage after the incident showed business rivalry could be behind the incident.

Show us the money

Another election, another column on campaign finance.

Whether you believe the elections will take place or not, in phases or one-go, with participation of you-know-who or not, one question remains constant: The BeeD vendors won, in this current crippling economic scenario, political parties will fund their bids. The split in the Nepali Congress means that we have still another party that needs to be funded, and what with the Commissioner for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority giving our local experts in plumbing and giphoning hell, someone else's feet the feeling that the rules of engagement that funders and parties will follow this time around will be different from the previous elections.

The market's confusion in Nepal—which is a different matter from the motivations for being corrupt—are enabled by one simple fact: The central problem stems from the fact that political parties are not solicited funds, and business or individuals cannot turn fund parties legally. This, combined with the somewhat over-the-top, but stringently norms laid down by the Election Commission to cap expenses, has meant that political parties as well as people and institutions who have a stake in them—and we should accept that this kind of forwarding of self-interest is part of most democracies—find ingenious new ways of getting money into their hands.

The United States, which as all realise on an almost daily basis, is the world's most powerful democracy, has been able to legislate campaign finance by legitimising contributions to political parties. To be sure, the rhetoric of politics may be about

selflessness and austerity, but its practice, even when perfectly honest, remains profoundly dependent on cash. Corporations and individuals should be allowed to create trust funds to fund elections, with a cap set to match a portion of that individual wealth's net turnover. And tax laws should allow such expenditure to be claimed as legitimate expenses.

In such a scenario, transparency can be demanded of political parties through such moves as requiring them to make public the names of donors to exceed a certain amount, or making their financial statements a matter of public record. Political parties can then be audited, and if they do not comply, the Election Commission could be empowered to open their books from contesting elections. The government is trying to expand the net anyway, why shouldn't politicians be held to the same? Maybe they don't need to be actually funded, but why shouldn't they be publicly not keep an open eye on them? Not to snitch, but given how even all political parties are on transparency and good governance, why shouldn't these twin blessings begin at home? The legitimisation of election funding would do something similar to business, and place them all on the same footing. Solving the grey-and-black take in the business/managerial/political nexus is not at least partially clarified, there's no hope of anyone but insiders ever understanding the nuts and bolts of how things get done. If the expenses of political parties can be met within the stipulated guidelines, they will not be compelled to bow towards an special interest group.

The BeeD is a way of getting things done. The rhetoric of politics may be about

Airport hassles

Things are not much better on the Indian line: Nepalis and Indians coming from Delhi or Calcutta have to wait behind those arriving from other destinations even though they don't need to show and stamp their passports. And usually there is only one immigration officer to process a queue of arriving passengers that stretches right out the door.

"We are hassled everywhere in the world, but it is nothing compared to the hassle in our own country," said one overwrought Nepali in the queue.

There is a purpose to this madness: \$9 million. That is the amount Nepal earns every year from visa fees, and it is easy cash at a time when the country is flat broke. But wouldn't scrapping visa fees altogether bring more tourists, and more jobs and income to the country?

"I don't know whether free visas are the answer," says Yogendra Sakya of CIM Himalaya. "I think it is the inconvenience, harassment and even extortion at the airport that dissuades visitors. There is nothing preventing immigration authorities from providing a better first impression to visitors. Yet, the airport's motto seems to be being as unhelpful, and making the visa process as cumbersome as possible."

Immigration changed its rules so that visitors can pay \$30 on arrival for a three-month visa, but they scrapped the multiple entry provision at the airport. Tourists still have to fill out a lengthy visa form, with a line to present it at the counter, move on to another line to pay the fee, and wait again to have the passport stamped. On average they are lucky if this takes only one hour.

"The subject of streamlining airport procedures has come up repeatedly at the NTB (Nepal Tourism Board), but nothing is ever done," says Sakya, who is on the NTB board as are the directors of the Civil Aviation Department and the Immigration Department.

NTB chief Pradeep Raj Pandey says there have been proposals to scrap fees for SAARC countries, and to reduce visa fees during the present period of low arrivals.

"Reducing visa fees and making it easier to get the visa at the airport would do the trick," he told us. But unless the immigration chief at the airport takes this as a personal mission, most agree, things won't change.

Despite fears of unrest, NTB reports higher arrival figures for Indians and Japanese for the season so far, and says most inbound flights are full. Still, it is no consolation to the hundreds of hotel agents, taxi and trekking reps waiting outside the airport vying for the trickle of business from an industry that is seeing half the number of visitors Nepal had in 1997.

Khukuri



Nepalis wield one distinguished knife.

The Gurkha knife

"The Gurkha is worthy of notice, if only for the remarkable weapon which they use in preference to any other. It is called the 'Kukri' and is of a very peculiar shape."

Before passing to the mode in which the kukri is used, it should be mentioned that it is not employed for domestic purposes, being too highly valued by the owner. For such purposes two smaller knives are used, of very similar form, but apparently of inferior metal. These are kept in little cases attached to the side of the kukri sheath, just as in the case with the knives attached to a Highlander's dirk.

In the hands of an experienced wielder this knife is about as formidable a weapon as can be conceived. Like all really good weapons, its efficiency depends much more upon the skill than the strength of the wielder, and thus it happens that the little Gurkha, a mere boy in point of stature, will cut to pieces a gigantic adversary who does not understand his mode of onset. The Gurkha generally strikes upwards with the kukri, possibly in order to avoid wounding himself should his blow fail, and possibly because an upward cut is just the one that can be least guarded against.

When we were engaged in the many wars in India the Gurkha proved themselves our most formidable enemies, as since they have proved themselves most invulnerable allies. Brave as lions, active as monkeys, and fierce as tigers, the like very little men came leaping over the ground to the attack, moving so quickly, and keeping so far apart from each other, that musketry was no use against them. When they came near the soldiers, they suddenly crouched to the ground, dived under the bayonets, struck upwards at the men with their kukris, ripping them open with a single blow, and then, after having done all the mischief in their power, darting off as rapidly as they had come. Until our men learned this mode of attack, they were greatly discomfited by their little opponents, who got under their weapons, cutting or slashing with knives as sharp as razors, and often escaping unhurt from the midst of bayonets. They would also dash under the bellies of the officers' horses, rip them open with one blow of the kukri, and aim another at the leg of the officer as he and his horse fell together."

(From Travels in India and Nepal by the Reverend Wood, 1836)



RAMYATA LIMBU

It's time to forget about the machete, the scimitar and the silletto. More than any other weapon that has made a name for itself on the battlefield and off, the khukuri looms large in the annals of war.

But over a century after Reverend Wood wrote his observations of the Gurkhas and their fearsome khukuri (see box) the Royal Nepal Army is amassing AK 47s and SLRs to fight the Maoists.

The khukuri, which terrorised the enemy during Nepal's battle with the British in 1814, and then again during both the World Wars, figures nowhere in a collection of modern weaponry. Even in the Imperial War Museum, there is only a small khukuri in a glass case to remind visitors of this remarkable weapon.

"There is little use for the khukuri in modern warfare," says Lalit Kumar Lama, an ex-British Gurkha officer now a dealer in Gurkha



World War II khukuris on display at a shop in Balkumari, Asan.

knives. "But it remains a symbol synonymous with the Gurkhas and with Nepal."

The Khukuri House, Lama's showrooms at Ekantakuna and Thamel, offer a range of 22 khukuris, the largest being the buff-head khukuri, that boasts a 53" long blade, and the smallest a paper knife measuring about 6". Prices for these khukuris, some of which are not very different from the standard issue military knives, range from Rs 150 - Rs 4,000.

After retiring from the British Gurkhas in 1987, Lama, a former warrant officer got together with ex-armour sergeant Til Bahadur BK to set up a factory in Dharan to produce khukuris. Before that Lama used to buy khukuris made by more than 4,000 small khukuri producers in Dharan and sold them abroad. Since its establishment in 1991, the Khukuri House has been the official supplier of khukuris to British Gurkha units, the Gurkha Contingent in Singapore, the Gurkha reserve unit in Brunei and the British Museum.

The drop in British Gurkha recruitments since Hong Kong was handed over to China in 1997 doesn't worry Lama. About 95 percent of his customers—including those who purchase the Dharan-made knives online—are tourists. "They're moved by the history, the romance and the legends of bravery that surround the khukuri.

Everyone who comes to the store takes back a souvenir," says Lama. In South Africa, it's even been put to practical purposes—to cut billion, the dry meat favoured by South Africans. Lama has named this particular khukuri, which has a 5" long blade and a 3" handle, the biting khukuri.

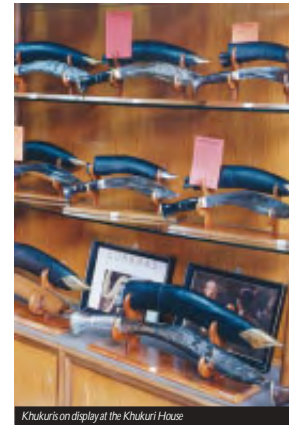
Although khukuris have traditionally been made by Kamis with

little more than an open forge and a handful of tools, Lama's factory in Dharan has sought to modernise and mainstream their expertise. Some 300 artisans work here, building on the Kami community's hundreds of years of experience. The variety of khukuris they produce is astonishing—the Sirupate, named after the slim Siru leaf it resembles, the Dhankute from Dhankuta, which has a wooden scabbard and a wooden or aluminium handle, the Kothimara, a khukuri specially made for the retiring British or Gurkha officer as a memento from his regiment, and the Dehradune.

Gurkhas, it is said, feel bare without their blade, and even though as a warrant officer Lama never wielded a khukuri against the enemy, he did use one to hack down branches to build a basha or shelter during jungle exercises, and learnt enough about the different kinds of military khukuris. The Jungle, an unpolished full-size khukuri, used for tactical jungle warfare, is 15" long, with a 10.5" blade. It weighs 600 grams and has a buffalo horn handle and leather case, and the sheath is camouflaged by green cotton cloth or camouflage.

The Service No 1, probably the most famous khukuri, is issued to every Gurkha on enlistment and is retained throughout their army career. It measures 15" and weighs 700 grams. The sheath is buffalo leather and the handle, buffalo horn. The khukuri is inscribed with the year of enlistment, a detail which helped some young Gurkha soldiers training in Malaysia identify an old Gurkha soldier who had been living in the forests since World War II, rather out of his mind.

"At first they thought he was a bandit, but later they were able to identify him—because of his khukuri—as a Gurkha soldier who had fought in the world war and been left behind," says Lama.



Khukuris on display at the Khukuri House

Made from reinforced steel, mostly salvaged from railway track construction, the Dehradune or World War Khukuri, originated in Nepal and was later emulated by the Indian Gurkha Army in Dehradun during World War II. This was the only khukuri used in the war, and Nepal was unable to keep up with the demand, which was when Dehradun started to produce these on a massive scale. The Dehradune has a 12" long blade with a 5" handle mostly of Indian rosewood or horn, and a scabbard is of buffalo leather.

Since railway tracks, and the materials to build them, are hard to come by in Dharan, Lama's factory uses the spring sheets of cars and trucks. Kamis generally heat the metal in a fire and temper it in a tea kettle. This may not sound very impressive, but tests show that khukuri steel is just the right hardness to cut through almost anything, including bone, with relative ease, while still remaining soft enough to

take this kind of abuse and keep a decent edge. This is why khukuris function more like extremely good quality high-grade carbon steel kitchen tools than one might imagine.

Little is known of the khukuris' origin or its unusual shape. Some compare it to the Afghan knife, and others believe the blade form descended from the Greek kopis which is about 2,500 years old, thus making the khukuri one of the oldest blade forms in the history of the world, if not the oldest. The shape is believed to have been carried to the sub-continent by the troops of Alexander the Great and then copied by local workmen.

There are khukuris hanging on the walls of the National Museum in Chhauri that are 500 years old, dating from the time of King Dravya Shah (1559-1570). Along with the *kabar* (a kind of spear), the *khada* (a blunt sword), and the *khuda* (a curved broad sword), the khukuri has been present in every collection of weapons of Nepal's famous fighting men including Amar Singh Thapa, Bal Bhadra Kunwar, Kaku Pandey, and Bhimsen Thapa.

Khukuris may differ in size, but vary little in shape. Most are named after the places they come from. The famous Bhojपुर khukuri originates from east Nepal. Slightly bigger and heavier than the standard blade, it is not a military issue, but is found in many Nepal homes, especially in east Nepal. "The 11" blade, is mounted on a wooden handle that is often engraved with dragons that reflect the craftsmanship of the Bhojपुर people," says Lama.

Almost every bit of a khukuri has a name. The two-part notch at the end of the blade is called the *kaudi*, which is translated somewhat glibly as "blood dripper" and is meant to prevent any liquid—such as blood—from dripping back on to the handle so the user can hold on to the knife. Although there are many models of blades, most khukuris come with what look like two mini khukuris—the *chakmak*, which is used to sharpen the knife, and the *karda*, a utility mini-knife.

There are plenty of explanations that attribute spiritual and religious significance to the khukuri. The *kaudi*, for instance, is said to symbolise Shiva's trident, or the Nepali sun and the moon. The buttup of the knife, called the *chapo*, is said to resemble the eye of god, and the very shape of the blade, the *croissant*, is supposed to be an invocation of the Nepali moon. Among the other beliefs associated with the khukuri is the belief that Newar artisans should never touch one.

Right now, a different kind of aura surrounds the khukuri, one that is significantly less pleasant than mythological stories, and much more in tune with the times. Lama's factory in Dharan is now focusing more on taking good care of the stock it has—in its godown. "Since the emergency was first imposed, and a strict watch was mad mandatory over the transport of weapons, including the khukuri, by military forces who fear it may fall into the wrong hands, business has been slow," says Lama. That, and even the few tourists that do amble past his shop in Thamel are not sure they can take a khukuri in their luggage in the post-September 11 security airports around the world. You still can buy a souvenir khukuri, but you need to put it in your checked-in bags. ♦

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Referendum?

Narashni Acharya, NC, in *Kantipur*, 18 September

...The visible forces who want to stop the elections are the Maoists. They consider the 13 November elections to be meaningless and have promised to disrupt voting. They have already launched several activities to this end. And yet, they continue to say in their statements that they will not oppose elections if they were to see them as fruitful. However, let it also be clear that there has been very little consistency between what the Maoists have been saying and what they have been doing, as a result of which, their credibility has been questioned by all political parties, and also the people at large...

...Ten of the main political parties in the country are saying that the constitution needs to be improved through changes in order to safeguard the gains of the 1990 People's Movement for democracy. The Maoists, who began their struggle aiming to dismantle the existing state and replace it with a communist regime, also say that they are willing to agree on multiparty competition and protect the gains of 1990. Even the parties that champion parliamentary democracy have begun to believe this. The Maoists now need to clearly explain what they mean by what they have been saying, especially whether they are only articulating the compulsions of the present, or whether they are basing their assessment on the historical balances. In the same manner political parties need to explain what they mean by the gains of the 1990 movement. What are the issues they want protected? What are the limits to the constitutional reforms they are talking about?

...It is also necessary for both government and the Maoists to learn lessons from the last negotiations. The Maoists are to be blamed for the breakdown because they made certain the suspicion that they were not serious about talks by just walking away. But the government was also to blame—despite everything. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba was unclear about the direction of the talks, as well as the limits on what was negotiable. The Prime Minister believed that the Maoists could be satisfied by social and economic reforms alone, he did not want to analyse seriously the political issues raised by the Maoists...

...We're talking about talks again, and it is now necessary to try to take the negotiations in the right spirit. It is not enough to talk about talks or create pressure for talks. The first necessity is to have clarity on the basic principles we are talking on or for. Also there is a need for honesty on both sides if the talks are to yield a solution. What the Maoists, who want a communist republic, have to be aware of, is that not only the Nepali Congress and the UML, even the other communist parties are opposed to ending Nepal's monarchy. Also not just the Congress and the Rastriya Prajantanka Party, even His Majesty may have no reservations about making the legal and necessary constitutional changes to give continuity to the institution of monarchy...

...It is not that the Maoists don't understand this, which is why they have to acknowledge the reality of politics of Nepal. Otherwise both the nation and the people will lose. The political agenda now is to find a peaceful resolution. Lately the Maoists have also been talking about a peaceful political resolution. Now the establishment (the government and the political parties) need to be ready to associate with the Maoist campaign and their statements. The Maoists can also test the seriousness of the establishment by declaring a unilateral ceasefire. For this, the political parties need to propose the inclusion of a provision in the constitution that would allow a referendum if a two-thirds majority of parliament wants to seek a vote of the people on any matter of national interest. For this, the ten political parties that have come together must make commitments to include the issue of a referendum in their election manifestos, and also collectively get the prime minister to agree on the idea.

Bankrupt Corp.

Deshantar, 22 September

Hari Prasad Shrestha, director general of the Nepal Timber Corporation, has pocketed a large sum of money by selling off the corporation's land in Bhaktapur. He sold much more than was actually sanctioned for sale by the government. The corporation owns 132,000 mu of land in Bhaktapur. The government approved the sale of seven parcels (0.36 hectares), following which tenders were invited, and it was decided to sell that land at Rs 1.18 million per parcel. But the director general cancelled the tender and arranged for a notice to be published on 25 May this year. He then published a notice for the sale of land that the government had not decided to sell. The second tender fixed a price of Rs 1.6 million per parcel. The corporation lost Rs 200,000 per parcel—more than Rs 3.5 million total.

Ram Chandra Bhatta, director of the corporation's Supply Department, is close to Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and was also involved in a contract concerning the sale of timber at the corporation's branch office in Hetauda. A central order regarding the sale of timber in Hetauda 5 September. Raising the competition, Bhatta got into contact with businessmen and cohorts to the best interests of the corporation, decided not to sanction the 55 tender notices sold on the website and issued 28 notices sold by the corporation's branch in Hetauda.

The management committee of the corporation decided on 3 May this year to sell 55 parcels of land in a meeting on 23 August decided to reverse its decision and publish the lot numbers and sell land so could pay workers' salaries. This was Director General Shrestha doing. But Shrestha had also challenged the management committee's earlier decision by cancelling the files of 100 lots involving 6,000 cubic feet of timber on 27 August. Bursarars are arrested by suspending actions. On 22 September, the corporation called for a tender to sell 6,000 cubic feet of timber at the corporation's Bardham office. Since there was no competition, the branch had recommended that the central office cancel the call. But seeing a chance to earn commissions, Shrestha and Bhatta are threatening that the branch had fructify the note, says source in the timber industry.

...This joint action of the six parties, which were all represented in the dissolved House of Representatives, was initiated by the CPN-UML about three weeks ago. After a meeting, the parties decided to jointly submit the memorandum to the prime minister. The parties are hopeful that their action will create pressure within the government to create a positive environment and eliminate any doubts regarding the November elections. The parties have alleged that the government is being indecisive about holding the elections, and has not initiated a discussion with other political parties.

The parties have also alleged that the government's attitude to the Maoist problem is irresponsible and dubious. They have appealed for considered and intent deliberations to handle the issues thrown up by the insurgency. It is expected that the joint action will help give direction to the demoralized government, which has basically acted tentatively and hesitantly. The parties have alleged that the attitude of the government has created confusion and disorientation among the people.

These were the conclusions reached at a meeting held at the residence of former prime minister and Rastriya Prajantanka Party leader Surjo Bahadur Thapa on 23 September to demand that the government be more decisive about pressing issues and initiate actions to ensure security.

The parties have also agreed to form a coordination committee, on which will sit Suben Newmag of the CPN-UML, Krishna Shukla of Nepal Congress, Kamal Thapa of the RPP, Rajendra Mahato of the Sadr Bahawana Party, Nav Raj Subedi of the United People's Front, and Gunda Subedi of the Nepal Peasant Workers' Party.

60 percent of the people who enter the services are mediocre, and the rest are every capable. This year quite a few people from western Nepal applied, and altogether 761 people from the western region entered government service after passing the exams. The breakdown of the others who have passed the entrance and entered the service is as follows: 576 people from the eastern region, 521 from the central region, 161 from the mid-western region and 91 from the far-west.

Group of Six

Bhaktapur, 25 September

Six major political parties that are concerned about the present situation of the country are joining to initiate actions to address the present situation of the country. The six parties submitted a memorandum to the government expressing their distrust and suspicion of the government's reluctance (to move on important matters) and irresponsibility.

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QUOTE OF THE WEEK
The immediate Maoist problem can be solved by reinstating parliament or by forming an interim government. But the core problem will never be solved, no matter how many elections are held.
—Chakra Prasad Bastola, Central member, Nepali Congress in *Deshantar*, 22 September.



Books: Election Manifesto 1999
"Can you please change the year into 2002, and photocopy the document?"
चक्रवर्तन प्रकाश *Spectime Daily*, 22 September

SHANKAR LAMCHHARE

Considered one of Nepal's foremost essayists of all times, Shankar Lamchhara wrote with a lyrical, musical tempo, unstrained by the ponderous language that often marks the essays of his elders, peers or followers. He died an untimely death at the age of 48, but had stopped writing before that, discouraged by an anonymous accusation of plagiarism, an accusation he accepted, but which is still deliberated over by critics. That Lamchhara's fresh, playful style greatly enriched Nepali literature is, however, indisputable. The essay below, translated from his collection *Adapted Chintan*: Pzav, shows off his light touch in dealing with both intimate and metaphysical subjects.

GOD'S WORK

"What work does your father do, dear?"

"He does god's work."
My five-year-old daughter gives a simple answer to the question her teacher puts to her. Those who don't have any knowledge about my personal life or who don't know me through my writings would immediately envision a priest. My daughter has seen, in truth, a variety of statues of many gods in my shop. How could she know the vast difference between doing god's work and selling statues of the gods?

Childhood is astonishing; our feelings at that age are as pure as flowing water. Age and our experiences block this flow. I remember, at my daughter's age I took my mother's money from her storage box, and poured it all into the offering plate at the singing of devotional hymns. How could it be that everyone would always put money in the offering plate, warm their hands on the sacred flame and place their hands on their eyes, but I would never get permission to offer money, or find a chance? Am I alone not a person? I'm going to take all the money in my mother's box and pour it onto the offering plate....

The sudden explosion of silence amid the singing of devotional hymns was just as piercing as my voice became later on at home, as I remembered. And probably, an even more piercing wall echoed in my mother's heart for a long time, at least until the bills and coins I had poured onto the offering plate were recouped. Today, isn't the age-age faith that is displayed towards god recouped by my occupation of looking after the well-known profit earned from god's statues?

Now that I have crossed my mother's age at that time I can try to feel her seriousness or upset at the matter. She was a school-teacher who had lost a husband and was suffering from tuberculosis. From the money she saved by teaching at a middle school she bought food, clothes, curatives and medicines for herself and her son, and when all these assets that she had saved from all exigencies were offered away at all once...! What a huge problem presented itself before her! At a time when an invitation to her own death came with each cough, her heart must have been pierced by anxiety about how her five-year-old son would cross the vast ocean of being. (In the same way that I sometimes feel a pinch now.)

I know, in my daughter's words lies the truth as she knows it. And truth, Daughter, is what you are capable of knowing.

The first time my mother did not allow me to go from her plate I was very hurt. The first time my mother made a separate bed for me I cried and cried. Today I know how good goodwill and affection those acts contained: would I be alone now if I read that? Another thing, Daughter, the truth is something that keeps developing, that keeps changing. (Somewhere I met that rough each snowflake has a hexagonal shape, none of its designs have ever been the same until today.) Even though the truth is the same each time, it separates. When I offered him money, god was useless to me. Today, each time I sell a statue, god takes on a form. Before selling him, I buy him. I try to discover which period his style belongs to. I measure his Buddha, I describe him. And I weigh him in the profits received. For me, Buddha does not remain just Buddha, the Buddha who brought a religion that said that there was God, and who was himself transformed into a god, who created the five panacheesha perceptions and who got trapped in shila stones. I recognize Buddha only in the form of the inch-and-a-half Buddha and the nine-inch Buddha and the sixteen-inch Buddha and the twenty-four-inch Buddha and the bronze Buddha and the crowned Buddha. I recognize Buddha only in the buying price of fourteen and selling price of twenty. There is no falsehood, now, in what I am claiming.

I don't know what kind of truth it will be, the truth that you will discover twenty, twenty-five years from now, when you will be finished and you will reach the age I am now. You may, may not think back to your own life's events when your child does anything, just as I suddenly remember my life's events. You may, may not remember your father now and then, the way that I remember my mother. But this much is certain—a part of me will live in you even after my end, just as my ancestors are asleep in me, and I sometimes nudge them awake, and they sometimes nudge me awake... I remember when my mother's diary got into mine, ten or twelve years after her death. Each sentence and each word in it awoke with a start, and carrying the memento of my mother's ailments and pains from years ago, they came to shelter inside me. And probably they spawned in me the same intensity that she had suffered. I cannot remember whether there was, was not any other style or technique or artistry in her writing, but there was one quality that I remember till today—there was an intensity of experience in it. She did not write the diary for others, and so there was no unnecessary description. Neither did she write it for me, because there was no advice. (Why she wrote it I cannot understand. It could be that the diary was a complaint about the injustice she had made, made out to a formless future. If that is the case, it is a grand, successful literary composition. Otherwise what is the value of literature?)

I burned that diary. There was no better reader for it than I, and I was afraid that it would be denigrated at the hands of others. Sometimes I think that I should not have burned the diary. That matter is as if...let's say I sometimes come to mind all of a sudden: what if I had never come to Kabhramda from Kaski? There are many possibilities in the world that what if... What if I didn't write? My feelings would certainly not die, but their expression would not become pointed. And I probably wouldn't measure many things that I had done or that others have done. Life would be a wholesale market, and small, delicate events would not appear before my eyes, suddenly taking on meaning. I would take out a balance sheet of successes and failures and my life would be different in each fiscal year.

It's just that none of this happened. It's just that I didn't (or couldn't) do that. Today even nonsensical things touch me. Even questions placed to others, and answers given to others, touch me. And... Because I get touched so easily, I feel hopeful that at least I experience tremors here and there. Somewhere there is a heartbeat that, and perhaps this being is god's work that has remained dead in me? The heartbeat of true desire towards life....

The answer to this will be given by the future, perhaps....

From Maam, with love

I enjoyed my two-year stint teaching at Budanikantha School. I went, I slept and I kept my memories of one of them no more: Nirajan. His Royal Highness, who came to me as a shy, untidy boy, his shirt hanging out, tugging buckets of water.

The boys had to do their share of house duties, and he had to fill all the fillers at Annapurna House. Curled up in his bunk, with a sore throat, his hair shadowing a pale face. This was the quality of the school, no class distinction, boys from the remotest villages hobnobbed with royalty and the elite. I wonder how many of the scholarship programs in other institutions were able to inculcate this sense of fair play and camaraderie among students.



They were not my pupils, I was the learner. I learnt to present, even though I had three children of my own. They were my mentors. I learnt from their, sorrow, their confusion. The confusion was mainly the result of our social norm of lack of parent-child communication. Each must be in his/her place and there is no scope for easy laughter. Children of the nouveau riche whose parents had no love for them. Daddies too busy making money or pollicking, mummies engrossed in the social circuit.

They would sometimes call me to talk to them. We would sit on the freezing steps, under the stars and they would unwind, nodding knowingly when they came up with problems of pubescent metamorphosis. Many, I did not know how to handle, but I listened nevertheless. And they just needed someone to talk to.

They were love stories, heartbreak tales, especially when the school allowed girls to be enrolled for the first time after 20 years. They hated them at first, would not sit at the same desk, would not even look at them, resented them because the girls got printed salwar kamis to wear after school, while they had to make do with the blue and grey uniforms all the time.

The school had a beautiful costume room that the boys had been ruling roost for for the last twenty years, preening and dressing up, and they certainly did not let it be that the girls' new hair was over the wings, satin veiled. But when the girls won the shooting championship, all that changed.

What is touching now is when you are remembered even so long. I have met them from Nuwakot to New York. On a slippery slope near Trisuli, trying to avoid the leeches, I notice a young bearded man following me. Maybe some NGO guy, I think. Suddenly this apparition speaks: "Megha Maam, what are you doing here? Don't you know me?" I roll around.... "Those roll numbers, they never leave you."

At the Rox trying out my salsa steps, this young man sidles up. I ignore him. My gaze fixed 40 degrees off his right shoulder. He bends forward: "Maam, don't you remember? You taught me to dance." How can I connect that shy-eyed 12-year-old to this Latino hunk sashaying his way across the floor?

Then there were the girls. The scholarship girls from the villages were transformed, they learnt fast. There was informal peer support from older girls who were big sisters, mother protectors, aspirants to all the bathinis. One who helped the smaller boys and girls, and who always had a smile on her face is now a stockbroker. The intelligent all-rounders, the shy quiet ones, all weaving their laughter and success into the pattern of my own life.

There is no greater happiness, let me tell you, than being remembered by someone you taught long ago. All decent youngsters now, doing well for themselves, and keeping the torch alive. ♦



ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITION

- Seasons of the Kunwinjku Paintings from West Arnhem Land, Australia. Until 3 October, Sidhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, 11AM-6PM, 41122. Australian Embassy Kathmandu, Sidhartha Art Gallery and Baber Mahal Revisited.
- Three women artists Paintings by Erina Tamrakar, Pramila Bajracharya and Sunila Bayracharya, until 9 October, Lazimpat Gallery Café, 429590
- Symphony of Colours Paintings by Madan Chitrakar. Until 28 September, 11AM-6PM, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal, 27866



EVENTS

- Lazimpat Poetry and Prose Group For writers, readers and listeners, 5.30 PM, October 4, Lazimpat Gallery Café, 429590
- Hi hao ma? Practice spoken Chinese with other volunteers, beginners welcome, Chinese Language Conversation Table at Himalayan Java Coffee House, Thamel, 3 October, 6PM. For details ring Trilokya Aryal 437624.

SEMINAR

- ELD interactive seminars Professional writing for development staff report writing 26-29 September, 9.30 AM-4.30 PM, Rs 9,000 (standard), Rs 6,750 (concessionary). Presentation skills and public speaking, 5-7 October, 10AM-4PM, Rs 5,000/Rs 4,000. Developing project proposals, 27-31 October, 10AM-4PM, Rs 9,000/Rs 6,750. ELD 541 613

MUSIC

- 1974 AD live at Jatra restaurant & bar. 27 September, 6PM on. Tickets, Rs 500 with welcome drink and dinner, 211010 after 6PM.
- Prism live Musical night with food at Hotel Shahenshan International, Dhapasi, 28 September, 7PM on.
- Jazz at Patan Cadenzia and Friends play fusion jazz, and launch their CD Celebrating 100 Years of Jazz. Rs 600, 4 October, 6.30 PM, Patan Museum, cadanzajazz@hotmail.com.
- The Jazz Communion with Vidhea Fridays, 7PM on at Fusion, the bar at Dwarika's Hotel, Happy Hour 6.30 PM - 7.30 PM, buy one get one free, 479488

DRINK

- Ladies night at The Rox Bar Wednesdays. Women get a drink on the house, and after 8PM Teesta band plays. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 491234
- Meter of Malts Single malt tastings, 12 varieties, the Piano Lounge, Hotel Yak & Yeti, Rs 999, 248999

FOOD

- Momo Festival Momo eating and making competitions, 18 varieties of momos, door prizes, live music. Bakery Café members Rs 300 for adults, Rs 150 for children under 4 1/2 ft, non-members Rs 350 and Rs 200. Bakery Café, Teku, 12 noon-4PM, 5PM-9PM, 28 September.
- Lunch or brunch Nepali set meal at Rs 325, also a carte, The Tea House Inn, Nagarkot.
- Taste of Beijing Roast duck and other Chinese meat, fish and vegetarian delicacies. Beijing Roast Duck Restaurant, Birendra International Convention Centre, 486589
- Fresh claws Fresh crabs all September, with lunch buffet, Cajun crab cakes with mesclun, baked crab with mustard and fontina and more. The Sunrise Café, Hotel Yak & Yeti, 248999
- Weekend lunch with swimming Rs 700 for adults, Rs 500 for children, Dwarika's Hotel, 479488
- Special weekend lunch at Bukhara, vegetarian at Rs 350 plus tax and non-vegetarian at Rs 450 plus tax. Hotel Soaltee Crownie Plaza, 27399
- Autumn menu and Priti Bhoj Stupa View Vegetarian Restaurant, Boudha, 480262
- Wood fired pizzas at the new Roadhouse Café. Completely redesigned with separate bar seating and coffee bar. The Roadhouse Café, Thamel.

GETAWAYS

- Monsoon mists Horseshoe Resort, Mude two-and-half hours from Kathmandu. Nature walks, birdwatching, drizzle walks, Finnish sauna. resort@horseshoe.wink.com.np
- Monsoon in Shivapuri Birdwatching, short hikes, writing, 30 minutes from Kathmandu, on the edge of the Shivapuri National Park. Rs 1,850 per person with dinner and breakfast. Rs 925 per child 5-14 years. Shivapuri Heights Cottage. info@escape2nepal.com
- The Great Godavari Getaway Special weekend packages including room with breakfast and dinner, 25 percent discount on health club facilities. Godavari Village Resort, 560675

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

BOOKWORM

Himalayan Drawings Robert Powell, Michael Oppitz, ed. VMZ, Zurich, 2002. Rs 6,000
This retrospective presents 140 works representing over 25 years of Powell as a draughtsman of vernacular architecture, meticulous ethnographic illustrator, imaginative documentarist, and visionary of the real. Examining his oeuvre are eight essays by specialists in art and architecture, social anthropology and ethnography, Tibetan, Islamic, Indian and Nepali studies, as well as general history of the Himalayan region.

Diplomacy Henry Kissinger Touchstone, New York, 1994. Rs 1,000 special price
Moving from a sweeping overview of history to blow-by-blow accounts of his negotiations with world leaders, Henry Kissinger describes how the art of diplomacy has created the world in which we live, and how America's approach to foreign affairs has always differed vastly from that of other nations. Especially interesting are the sections on the idea of 'Western unity', détente, and diplomacy as geopolitics.

Human Development Report 2002: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002. Rs 760
This HDR examines political participation as a dimension of human development. In developing countries, democracy's strategic importance to security and stability puts political participation high on the development agenda, though the links between democratic governance and social and economic development are not automatic. The report also calls for more democratic principles in global institutions and negotiations.

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

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- Foot - Reflexology**: stressed or tired? UPLIFT YOUR SPIRIT FROM YOUR TOES UP! email: sudhakar@yahoo.com or ring 425931
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- Lazimpat Book Club**: We choose a novel and meet one evening a week for discussion and conversation. Join us! tel 429590

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A thriller, *Road* is about Arvind (Vivek Oberoi) and Lakmi (Antra Mia), lovers who flee their homes when their parents expose their relationship. On their way escaping, they come across Babu (Manu Bajpai), who asks for a lift. What happens next catches the viewer unaware. *Road* turns out to be about just these three, but about four principal characters, Arvind, Lakmi, Babu and the Road. Produced by Ramgopal Varma, *Road* is directed by Rajat Mukherjee, who also directed Varma's *Fardeen-Urmila-Sonali* starring Pyare Tya Kya Kiya. Sandesh Shandilya's music compliments the script beautifully.

Road

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NEPALI WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

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Late season low pressure systems over the Bay of Bengal still dominate the weather over eastern India, and the combined circulation from these are giving the southwest monsoon second wind. The more-than-average precipitation has compensated for the deficit in June. Though they are normally supposed to suck the clouds from this region and transfer them to southeast Asia, this time westerlies from the Arabian Sea deflected the winds and filled the gap. The satellite image shows this low pressure system over the Himalaya clearly. Strong possibility of localised rains all the weekend, after that we should have fine Dasain-like weather with morning mist, cooler afternoon breeze and short bursts of isolated night rain.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
27-17	27-16	28-17	28-17	29-18

Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Article 127

active guidance of Radio Nepal and the Sports Council.

Many of us have fond memories of those years when there was iron discipline and obedience throughout the land. The Jaynagar-Jankpur train ran on time, all toothpaste was still strictly non-veg, the Japanese had not yet installed solar-powered red lights so traffic actually flowed on Putali Sadak, and we still had six-day weeks.

Some of you will find it hard to remember those days because as a matter of fact and for all intents and purposes your birth may not actually taken place yet, but corruption then was carefully centralised and was not as all-pervasive as it is today. In fact, so much gold passed through Nepal in transit from Hong Kong to Haryana then, that the time is still remembered nostalgically as The Golden Age of Nepal.

This is why, when the runway got damaged this week and Nepal was turned into a temporary no-fly zone, some of us rejoiced because we took it as a sign that there would soon be a regime change here as well. But, alas, no such luck. Saddam is still on the saddle, and here a jumbo cabinet still rules.

It is now too late for more talk, we need action. Your excellencies, dishonoured ministers, underground and semi-overground leaders, the inebriate speaker of the dissolved house, locked up tax officials, friends and foes, gentlemen and the lady at the back who is getting ready to aim a rotten tomato in the general direction of the podium.

It is my pleasure to offer you some more unolicited advice during yet another interaction programme on "The Present Situation and How to Get Out of It". The way we get out of this is to follow emergency procedures, get up slowly without anyone noticing, walk calmly up the aisle towards the doors marked "Exit" of which there are two in the front and two at the back. Don't panic. And when you are outside, run like hell. Thank you for your attention, and see you all outside. ♦

NEPALI SOCIETY

Raaj, the tea man

"You can recognise a good Darjeeling by its colour, its fragrance, and flavour. It looks like fine scotch whisky," says Raaj Waiba slurping a mouthful of Darjeeling First Flush and rolling it around his tongue noisily and then swallowing, since this is just a cuppa, not a tea tasting.

Raaj gave up a tea planter's life four years ago and moved to Kathmandu to set up 'Tea World in Thamel, but still adheres to the lessons he learnt in his sixteen years on plantations in Assam and Darjeeling. The Manufacture of Tea, a manual he's had since he started in tea, remains his bible. "It has everything a planter needs to know, like the exact number of nails a tea case needs," says Raaj. "You can get reprimanded, even fired, if you get that wrong."

Raaj, whose father was also a planter, is today happy to be a retailer, wholesaler and exporter of premium Nepali and Indian teas. First Flush, Kanyam, Ilam, organic, Assam, green tea, and his own blends line the shop. Customers can be very particular. "They'll ask for tea from a specific garden in Darjeeling," says Raaj, who blends his own tea to suit his mood.

When he's not at the shop or guiding clients through a tasting, Raaj helps the 14 gardens in the Himalayan Orthodox Tea Planters Association (HOTPA) conduct workshops for small growers. Hotels like the Hyatt and the Radisson engage Raaj to train their staff to blend and recognise teas, and also prepare for them tea cocktails and tea menus.

Raaj believes tea is the next big thing for Nepal. With the right infrastructure and government support, he says, Nepal could be growing excellent tea comparable to Darjeeling, within fifteen years—

as long as Nepali businessmen remember that "tea planting requires consistent and committed care, patience, and money." ♦



MOHITDHARA PANI



Someone who has been keeping careful count has just drawn my attention to the fact that there have been 126 articles in this space in the past two years. I don't know how that happened, it wasn't intentional. But what it means is that this could actually be Article 127.

It is therefore incumbent upon yours sincerely to mark this milestone and not to waste this week's column beating around the burning bush indulging in the usual idle banter. Frivolous chitchat, witty repartees, innuendoes about the Ministry of Interior Decoration, and allegedly humorous asides about the posterior body parts of those currently holding high office.

No, today we shall tackle deadly serious national issues so that we can roll up our sleeves and grind our sleeves to remove all obstacles that stand before us in the task of nation-building. This is so that we can doubly redouble our efforts to once more devote ourselves to a political process that suits the Nepali mind. So that there can once more be four-directional development towards Asian Standards and the declaring of Nepal a Zone of Peace. And so that, just like in the good old days, we can exhort Nepalis to move their hands and not their tongues under the

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