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Womanpower

As pressure from activists, labour recruiters and the public mounts, the government is running out of reasons for keeping the ban on Nepali women working in the Gulf. Last week, the Social Justice Committee of the Upper House agreed that restricting women from employment abroad was a violation of their human rights.

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Jaun hai Pokhara

Pokhara is beautiful, warm and hospitable. And the scenic lakeside town is laying out the red carpet for tourists from other parts of Nepal. It's the best time to visit: prices are low and it's not crowded. And at 800 m above sea level it is warmer than anywhere else!

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BHAGIRATH YOGI

You have to make an urgent call on your mobile during peak hour. After dialling six out of ten times you get: a) "network busy" b) "subscriber you are dialling is not responding or is out of range" c) no ring, no response, no recorded message, d) after connecting you are cut off for no reason e) voice at the other end keeps cutting out.

In most of all these cases, you end up paying for the call even if you couldn't get through. At a time when mobile phone rates are plummeting everywhere else, Nepal's cell phone subscribers are paying more for a much shoddier and limited service.

"We are working on improving the quality of the reception with the Chinese contractor, these are teething problems because we are expanding the network to deal with congestion," explains a Nepal Telecommunications Corporation (NTC) official.

After suspending new mobile connections for two months, NTC started accepted new subscribers since Sunday. Its Jawalakhel office has been swamped with applicants all week. It costs Rs 14,450 deposit and Rs 5,500 for NTC's Nortel handset.

NTC recently slashed its rates to Rs 2 for an incoming call and Rs 4 for an outgoing call, but it is still high by regional standards. It is set to extend mobile reach along the highways from Bharatpur to Kakarvitta. "The expanded network in the east should be operational in the next five months," Subash Bajracharya of the New Services Department of NTC told us. Soon, there will be 40,000 new subscribers, bringing the total to 67,000.

But the chances of the price of a call going down as it has in India are slim. The only other private sector investor in mobile

telephony is the Indo-Nepal joint venture between Modi Corp and Nepal's Khetan group called Spice Cell. But this venture is already a year overdue.

Spice first got bogged down in a legal tangle after NTC employees unsuccessfully went to the Supreme Court to challenge the entry of private players. Then, there were political tangles when Spice applied to the Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) for frequency allocation. The Ministry of Information and Communications (MoIC) sat on the file for months.

"It is costing us heavily, we have lined up many people to work on the project, all are waiting for the green signal," Rajendra Khetan a Nepali partner of Spice Cell told us. According to the contract, Spice has to pay Rs 63 million as license fee and Rs 160 million in bank guarantees, and has to start services in ten metros (except Kathmandu) in the next three years.

NTA rejects Spice's allegations, saying the company was putting pressure not to have to pay the bank guarantee. "They haven't got back in touch with us for the past month," said NTA spokesman, Kailash Neupane.

The Khetan Group is reportedly considering pulling out citing interference by Indian officials on behalf of the state-owned Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited (VSNL) and Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL). The Indians are said to prefer state-owned companies for "security" reasons, although officials here denied this.

Immobile phones

Sloppy service, high cost and a private joint venture that is stuck. But subscribers are still flocking to buy mobiles.

The two had also applied for the license in 2000, but Spice outbid them both. VSNL and MTNL are now involved with a consortium of Nepali businesses to offer wireless local loops in Kathmandu Valley for cheap fixed phones without wires.

"We are not brokers, we are investors," Mohan Gopal Khetan, chairman of the Khetan group told *New Business Age* magazine recently. "The minister (J P Gupta) was bothering us because he had made a commitment to award the project to somebody else. So we decided not to pursue the project."

The Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) has filed a case against Gupta over another license for a private television channel, but this cell phone deal is also said to be under scrutiny.

Meanwhile, the delay has not just affected Nepali customers it has also

sent the wrong signal to prospective investors who are already wary of Nepal because of political instability. ♦



WIN BAJRACHARYA

Times

nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 67

Q.Will privatizing Royal Nepal Airlines help improve the national flag carrier?

Yes 75.4%

No 20.6%

Don't Know 3.0%

Total votes: 1,244

Weekly Internet Poll # 68. To vote go to: [www.nepaltimes.com](http://www.nepaltimes.com)

Q. Is the rule requiring helmets for pillion riders a good idea?

The plight of the 100,000 Bhutanese living in camps in eastern Nepal for the past 10 years is

one of the world's least-known refugee problems. But in terms of the proportion of the original population displaced, this is by far the most serious refugee crisis.

And yet, the Bhutanese have been eclipsed by Nepal's Maoist insurgency, a distracted and bungling Nepali officialdom, disinterest in New Delhi, and a Bhutanese establishment that has over the years cleverly deflected international criticism and bought time as it resettles people in the areas vacated by Lhotsampas.

But, as the consortium of Bhutan's donors gets ready to meet in Geneva in February, the issue has flared up again. Bhutan's New Delhi-based ambassador, Lyonpo Dago Tsering, was in Kathmandu this week bearing a conciliatory message. Nepali foreign ministry officials told the press they were impressed with the flexibility that the Bhutanese are showing.

But in the camps nothing has changed. In fact, after the verification process began in 2001 raising hopes, refugees have once more been left high and dry. The desperation has forced them to take part in an indefinite relay hunger strike at the Khudunabari camp in Jhapa this week.

The previous meeting of Bhutan's donors in 2000 had asked Thimpu to expedite the

repatriation process of refugees, and that was when Bhutan agreed to set up a Joint Verification Team with Nepal. The team completed verification at Khudunabari more than a year ago, but no refugee has yet gone back.

"Dago Tsering's meetings in Kathmandu are nothing but a ploy to hoodwink western donors," says Rakesh Chhetri, a Kathmandu-based Bhutanese refugee academic. "Bhutan always talks positive at times like this." There have been 11 ministerial-level meetings between Nepal and Bhutan since home minister Sher Bahadur Deuba in 1993 agreed to divide refugees into four categories. Many refugees say that decision played right into the hands of the Bhutanese.

Khudunabari is one of seven refugee camps in eastern Nepal, and the hunger strikers there are demanding the immediate release of results of the verification process.

A delegation of Kathmandu-based envoys of the European Union that visited refugee camps last year, reported that the refugees, especially the youth, were getting restless. They also urged both Himalayan kingdoms to find an early solution to the problem.

But Chhetri is sceptical: "Nowhere in the world has the refugee issue been resolved through bilateral talks. From Kosovo to Afghanistan, the repatriation of the refugees has been made possible only through international intervention."



Refugees go on hunger strike, as Thimpu goes on charm offensive ahead of donor meet.

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# Why can't "manpower" agencies



Nepali women workers in Hong Kong on Sunday afternoon at the Star Ferry. But women workers are banned from going to the Gulf.

DEENDRA BHATTARAKANTIPUR

## HEMLATA RAI

Ever since the tragic death five years ago of Kani Sherpa, who committed suicide after being sexually abused by her employer in Qatar, Nepali women have been banned from going to the Gulf countries for employment.

But an unlikely alliance of women's rights activists and "manpower" agencies have been trying to get that ban lifted. Last week, finally, the Social Justice Committee of the Upper House agreed that restricting women from employment abroad was a violation of their basic rights.

"Stopping women from finding jobs abroad is a serious violation of freedom of mobility, livelihood and self-determination rights," says Ambika Pant-Chapagain who chairs the committee.

However, the ban stays in place because of a cabinet decision taken five years ago that restricts women from seeking jobs abroad. Ironically, the anti-trafficking activist, Anuradha Koirala of Maiti Nepal who lobbied for that ban is now the Assistant Minister of Women and Social Welfare. Her ministry's stance has reportedly not changed, and officials at the Labour Department said there

was no move to lift the ban.

"Our view is that there aren't enough safeguards to prevent women from abuse and exploitation when they go to the Gulf countries to work as domestics," the director general of the Department of Labour, Lalit Bahadur Thapa, told us. Nepali women are, however, not banned from going to Hong Kong and other east Asian countries.

But labour activists say the law is arbitrary and implemented haphazardly at Kathmandu airport. Women travelling alone are unnecessarily harassed even if they are not going to the Gulf, and others

going to the Gulf to work, for example, as stewaresses are allowed, but domestics are not.

Activists say that the government has taken the easy way out by slapping a ban, rather than amending shortcomings in its labour migration policy. However, fewer and fewer people seem convinced that the ban serves any purpose anymore. In fact, there is a growing consensus that the provision affects not only employment opportunities for women, but has also stigmatised them unnecessarily. We found that even those women who had returned from legal employment abroad hesitate to admit it openly.

## There is less and less justification for keeping the ban on Nepali women going to work in the Gulf.

"This ban has denied Nepali women from lots of opportunities for work in the Gulf countries," says a Nepali woman who is just back working as a nurse in Bahrain. "It also means they can't get pre-departure training and orientation, and they have to lie and cheat to get out." Because they have to do so clandestinely, Nepali women workers in the Gulf have no insurance, no training, there are no official records of how many they are, and this also makes them vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous middlemen and employers.

The official ban has not stopped the flow of Nepali women to the Gulf. Instead of flying directly out of Kathmandu airport, many travel overland to India from where they are sent by Indian middlemen to the Gulf. Others fly via Bangladesh where an active labour mafia controls the

traffic of women to the Gulf. This means there are no reliable records and no one in government has even an approximate figure for the number of women currently in the Gulf. (See box.)

The Far East Overseas Nepali Association (FEONA) says 95 percent of the legal cases it handles relate to lower wages, early termination from employment and physical and verbal abuse.

The ban on employment in Gulf has also curtailed opportunities for Nepali women in other countries due to lack of knowledge among those wishing to go abroad for work, or even in the bureaucracy.

A former labour minister is said to have cancelled a large contract for women workers in Israel because he thought Israel was a gulf country.

Besides, legal hassles in obtaining permission from families and

## Ganga

Ganga, 23, has fond memories of working as a domestic in Dubai. Her employers were parents with jobs, they had three teenage children. They treated her with respect, she was paid on time and was given Fridays off. "They looked after me like a daughter—they used to buy everything I needed so I could save money to send home," she says. Back in Pokhara now, Ganga takes care of her elderly father and three small brothers. She is the only breadwinner of the family.

She returned because her father was sick, and her employers gave her three month's pay and assured her a job if she returned. Her father is all right now, but she can't go back to Dubai because of the ban on women workers going to the Gulf. Ganga told us: "I am confident and able to work, I need to earn for my family, it just doesn't make sense to have a rule like that."

by DANIEL LAK



## HERE AND THERE

# Love thy neighbourhood superpower

A dangerous tide is washing on the shores of public opinion around the world, a growing and visceral anti-Americanism that is every bit as threatening and fundamentalist as religious zealotry. A poll by a respected international organization finds that America is identified as a negative force in world affairs by substantial numbers of people in 35 different countries (See World Paper, Nepali Times, #126). You don't need to be a psychic or skilled political pundit to realise that the war in Iraq is not going to make things any better.

There are very good reasons for people to oppose this, not least that anti-American feeling is akin to racism or communalism. Wait, I can hear many of you saying, America brings all this on herself. The arrogance that occasionally flows forth from Washington is breathtaking, and the long record of botched and occasionally malevolent bungling in other countries' affairs speaks for itself, you say. From Cuba and the Philippines at the turn of the 20th century to Afghanistan at the beginning of the 21st, America abroad has put its interests before all others'.

The mass culture industry propagated by Hollywood and the Internet spreads emptiness and eclipses local tradition, draining away uniqueness and maximising profit. Guns, drugs, consumption and vacuous missionary-driven Christianity all pour forth in abundance, per-capita foreign aid spending is the lowest among wealthy countries. And so on.

All of these points are either valid or worth debating, but none of them justify the rise in anti-Americanism. The United States—a republic founded on basic notions of freedom and fairness—has been an imperial power for more than 100 years but it has long wrestled with that role. Each time America has gone to war in that time, a significant body of public opinion has been opposed, and the best efforts of governments and those in authority to stifle dissent have failed. Even



now, as tens of thousands of soldiers muster in the Gulf, and the drums of war beat loudly, many, many Americans express unease or outright anger at their country's actions. The task for those outside of the USA who feel the same is not to give way to virulent anti-Americanism. It's to find common ground with those in America who feel the same way. It's to recognise that America has within it the potential to do great good, not just great harm.

Britain has long held a version of this point of view. Some Europeans, despite decades of prosperity under American protection, look down on the close ties between Washington and London. "A lapdog" was how one French commentator described the British Prime Minister recently. This misses the point entirely. The British use their friendship with America to their advantage. "It lets us punch above our

## Anti-India feeling in Nepal, like anti-Americanism everywhere, plays into the hands of extremists.

weight in international diplomacy," was the pithy phrase used by former foreign secretary Douglas Hurd. And it allows a nation with a slightly more sophisticated approach to global affairs to influence the brash young superpower to behave with a little more circumspection and subtlety. America's other closest friends—Canada and Mexico—take much the same approach, even though the gut feeling of many of their citizens tends to anti-Americanism from time to time.

There are parallels here in Nepal to the relationship with India. This country has a giant neighbour whose national interests can periodically seem overwhelming to regional harmony or prosperity. Yet the way to handle such a neighbour is not with shrill denunciation or pointless outbursts of violence and virulent hatred. It's to work subtly, from the inside, pushing forward Nepal's case and to support—when viable—India's legitimate concerns.

Individual Indians look upon Nepal largely with benevolence. Harnessing that goodwill to further Nepal's interests is the task of diplomats and governments, a task usually neglected or spurned it must be said. India's democratic system and basic openness are strengths to be emulated and encouraged. Anti-India feeling here, like anti-Americanism everywhere, plays into the hands of extremists and the ill-intentioned and does little to help those most in need. Love thy neighborhood superpower. For your own good. ♦

# find jobs for women?



## No one keeps count

The 2001 Census showed that 83,000 women were absent during the time that enumerators went from village to village, which was about 11 percent of the total absent population. If only half of them had gone abroad for employment, then there should be 42,000 Nepali women working.

Ask the Labour Department and officials only have records of 121 Nepali women working abroad. There are some 2,000 Nepali women are working as domestics in Hong Kong alone, but officially the number is only 700. One estimate is that of the 500 Nepalis who fly out daily from Kathmandu airport to countries other than India, 20 percent are women.

government as required in the Labour Act means employment agencies are reluctant to send women workers even to countries where it is legal. "It takes four times more time and money to send women out. We prefer not to deal with women workers," says a labour agent in Kathmandu.

Dan Bahadur Tamang Nepal United Association of Foreign Employment Agencies (NUAFA) estimates that of the 500 or so migrant workers who fly out every day from Kathmandu airport, 20 percent are women. This would mean that there could already be anywhere up to 100,000 Nepali women working in countries other than India. The figures for Nepali women in India is even more unreliable, but collating various estimates by NGOs gives us a figure of up to 300,000 Nepali women across the southern border at any given time.

Since female migrant workers are invisible, their contribution to the country's economy is also not recorded. Nepali researcher Ganesh Gurung estimates that about 11 percent of the estimated total of Rs 74 billion Nepal received in remittance from its overseas workers this fiscal year were contributed by women workers.

NUAFA president Bharat Singh Thapa believes the volume of remittance can be easily doubled if women are encouraged and assisted in finding meaningful work abroad. The experiences of other labour exporting Asian countries show that women are better savers, and are more regular in sending money home while male workers generally splurge. When they do spend, men tend to buy electronic consumer goods or other items from the airport duty free.

The women who do go abroad to

work in Hong Kong acquired the jobs through contacts or their own effort. They depend on friends and relatives for information and social safety when in an alien country. Families benefiting from earnings of female relatives mostly belong to communities with a tradition of their men working abroad.

"It is about changing perspectives, women should be allowed to develop as a factor in the economy," says Sharu Joshi Shrestha of UNIFEM's Nepal office.

About 300,000 Nepali young adults enter the job market annually, but the Nepali job market is unable to absorb them. A third of the graduates are women, and if women are not allowed to go for foreign employment the official target of reducing unemployment to 12 percent from 17 percent in five years

is simply not going to happen.

"It is the government's obligation to guarantee safety of its citizens. Preventing women from foreign employment is violating women's basic human rights to conceal its own weakness," says Binda Pandey of the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT). "Instead of a protective role the government is playing a prohibiting role by preventing women from going abroad."

The proposed amendment to the Labour Regulation can be the starting point. After that, the government needs to follow-up with effective training and pre-departure orientation, about social safety measures, workers' rights, labour standards and also equip Nepali embassies abroad to help when they get into trouble. ♦

## DOMESTIC BRIEFS

### Serving poor patients

Even a new and little known organisation can set an example. Established only six months ago, the Poor Patients Aid Association Nepal (PPAAN) has provided full health checks to 146 street children in Kathmandu. The children were selected from Bal Bhajan program at Indra Chowk and Children Home from Thamel. Similarly, with the financial assistance from Medicisence Nepal, the association provided a heart valve to Bindu Rana Magar which was successfully implanted after an operation at the Martyr Gangalal Memorial Heart Center at a cost of Rs 60,000. PPAAN has provided free health care to over 3,000 patients so far.

### UML for status quo

The all-powerful central committee of the CPN (UML) has rejected the proposal to change the structure of the party's top leadership to a "presidential" model from the present "general secretary" model. Senior UML leader, K P Oli, had made the proposal. He later registered his "note of dissent" in the minutes of the meeting. Oli is likely to take up the issue during the seventh general convention of the party in Janakpur 1-5 February. The central committee also rejected changing the party's hammer-and-sickle flag and dropping the "UML" tag from the party name. The party is going to elect a new leadership during the forthcoming convention.

### Corruption Index

Half the people who visit the police in Nepal are victims of corruption, a Transparency International (TI) report said. "People's Experiences in Corruption" prepared by TI Nepal said 48 percent of the people were forced to pay a bribe in the courts while 25 percent each in education, electricity and tax offices. The survey was conducted in 3,600 households in 10 cities and 51 VDCs. The report says government officials were generally irresponsible, ambiguous and arbitrary. Nothing new, is there?

### ADB assistance

Nepal and the Manila-based Asian Development Bank (ADB) have signed an agreement for the proposed Commercial Agriculture Development Project (CADP). ADB country director Richard Vokes said the proposed project, supported under the Japan Special Fund, would support the Nepal government's efforts to improve income and employment opportunities for marginal and small farmers and women. The project would promote high-value crop production, processing and marketing through sustainable commercialisation of agriculture in 11 districts of the Eastern Development Region.

### Rs 199,349 for Rabina and Rabin Regmi

A cheque for nearly Rs 200,000 representing donations for Rabina and Rabin Regmi was handed over to the children's father, Bhakta Bahadur Regmi by Subodh Raj Pyakurel of the human rights organisation, INSECE, at Sankhu on Monday. (See pic, Bhakta Bahadur at left.)

The plight of the children, who were badly burnt after Maoists petrol-bombed their bus near Malangwa on 4 November (see: "Why the children?"), #121 and "Rabin and Rabina in hospital", #124) elicited an overwhelming response from readers all over Nepal and abroad. Bhakta Bahadur's eyes were moist as he received the cheque on behalf of his children, all he could say was "Thank you, everyone for being so kind, thanks to you my children have a future." His wife, Anju, and three other passengers died in the attack.

Dr Andreas Settle of the Sushma Koirala Memorial Hospital offered to treat Rabina and Rabin for free after reading about their injuries, and says that the children are recovering well. "We are waiting for the wounds to get dry before we start skin grafts and surgery," he told us. "We expect them to recover fully in three or four months." Rabin has serious burns on his head and will need "expanders" on his head to enlarge the skin on his skull.

Bhakta Bahadur will be depositing the amount collected in an account in his children's name and use the interest for their upkeep until they turn 16. He is already looking ahead, trying to get a transfer to Kathmandu from his office in Simara and plans to send his children to a good school in Kathmandu. "We haven't told them about their mother yet," he says. "But sooner or later, after we return home and they start asking, I'll have to tell them."



List of donors till Jan 1 (some couldn't be identified from bank transfer slips, others preferred to be anonymous): Suraj Mehta, Sundar Kandel, Bikash Mishra, Bishnu Acharya, Kapil Sharma, Prabin chhetri, Binaya Regmi, Raju Malla Kanhaya Lal Rajwar, Binod Sharma, Mahendra Pradhan Purna Ranjit, Bikash Poudel, Dinesh Poudel, Deepak Shrestha, Deepak Chhetri, Pradeep Baral, Bhuvan Dahal, Niva Shrestha, Prabha Shrestha Pramila Shrestha, Puspa Tamang, Sory Shrestha, Laxman Joshi, Anni Shrestha, Mani Pradhan, BR Bajracharya, Samjana Shrestha, Neeraj Amatya (Nabil Bank staff) 11,363, Hannah Battisti and Thomas Bennekler Rs 1,000, Shangrila Freight 2,000, Toran Shah Rs 100, Sudharan Shahi, Mayadi Rs 1,000, Anonymous Rs 2,000, Sri Mary's School Rs 5,000, Rita Bhandary Rs 5,000, Anonymous Rs 5,000, Shola and Julie Kamshma Rs 10,000, Titika Kimala Rs 500, Nepal Bangladesh Bank Janakpur Rs 2,500, Anonymous Rs 500, Rakchya Shrestha Rs 500, Nabil Staff Donation Rs 2,475, Sunila Divakar Shrestha and family Rs 8,000, Puskar Dangol Rs 500, Shishir Magar Rs 1,300, Anonymous Rs 1,023, Meena Shrestha Rs 2,000, Anne Erpelding Rs 3,000, Anonymous Rs 3,000, Nabil Card Division Rs 1,906, Industrial Business Development Academy Rs 10,250, INFOCOM Rs 750, Cecile Houdier Rs 36,000, Prasanna Banskota Rs 3,000, Beverly J Thomson Rs 2,000, Sandesh Singh Hamaal Rs 1,000, Sharda Bangladesh Rs 200, Santa Lim Rs 500, Saleeta Moza, Bangladesh Embassy Rs 310, British SC Rs 6,800, Basundha Bhattacharya Rs 3,000, Sandhya Regmi Rs 1,000, Dr Pushottam Mudhary Rs 2,000, Eelco Baan van Dooren Rs 3,000, Sai Sewak Rs 2,000, Lal Gurans English School, Okhathunga Rs 3,325, Philip H Pierce Rs 7,775, Anonymous 3,000, Janakpur Rs 24,772, MA Henery, JR Pummer Rs 5,000, Varasathi Rs 9,000, Lincoln School Community Service Rs 10,000, TOTAL collected till 1 January 2003: 199,349.

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# All for the people

**If the monarchy, the political parties and the Maoists are all so steadfastly on the peoples' side, how come we feel so abandoned?**

enough as a slogan for the French revolutionaries and their immediate adherents. In an era that prizes 20-second sound bites and instant remedies, leaders have a hard time catching up with followers. You can't expect creativity and quickness to flow comfortably from careerists languishing in low morale.

Let's try to probe the malaise from the politicians' perspective. The Koirala family's claim that nearly two dozen members of the clan were either jailed or exiled during Nepal's two campaigns for democracy doesn't entitle them to any special treatment. Nor does the UML leaders' insistence that they are prepared to enter Nakku Jail every time they exit Singha Durbar. Their plea for some public empathy is fair, though. How many people on the extreme right and left, after all, are prepared to serve prison time for their political beliefs? (Which, if you ask me, sounds a lot harder than to kill or die for them.)

Someone said the reason there are so few female politicians is that it is too much trouble to be two-faced. Behind this slimy facade, however, are people who have convictions. A lot of politicians have done their own thinking and some blame the people for our plight. This sweeping indictment

may sound harsh, but is not entirely unfounded. Candidates who have a hard time believing what they say during elections can only be flustered by the way constituents take them at face value. How fair is it, moreover, for voters who can't remould themselves to expect their leaders to be entirely to their liking?

With democracy once again on trial the world over, speaking disrespectfully of the political class has acquired a new appeal. In the post-9/11 environment, we no longer have the luxury of saying that only those who can't join the club are its most vocal critics.

Granted, there is much to complain about. Governments resting on the consent of the governed are supposed to be more immune from revolutionary disturbances than those in which the people have no right of participation. Nepal has failed the test.

In terms of accomplishing the primary tasks for which they were elected, the post-1990 leadership has fared miserably. The discord, depravity and destitution threatening us today, however, have existed for ages. They have come to the surface now because the carpet they used be swept under was discarded 12 years ago. When Chiranjibi Wagle, Khum Bahadur Khadka and Jaya Prakash Prasad Gupta became the first targets of the stringent anti-corruption laws they shepherded through parliament, the radiance of democracy transcends its intrinsic excellence.

Considering the social and civic effects the post-1990 political class has produced among those it has governed, we may have little reason for despair. The political enfranchisement of the masses has had an invigorating impact on our collective consciousness.

The fact that 73 percent of Nepalis recently surveyed in six Maoist-affected districts by the Centre for Economic and Social Development stood in favour of multiparty democracy is hardly surprising. The real news is that more people said they preferred a partyless system (11 percent) to one-party communist rule (nine percent). Those old enough to recall how a few Kangresis and comrades managed to get into the Rastriya Panchayat through the graduates' constituency and adult-franchise balloting can perhaps grasp better the substance of that sentiment.

In the end, democracy is what the people think it is and will remain that way. One way of bridging the gap between idealism and realism may be for politicians to raise their efficiency and the people to lower their expectations. ♦



Amid the political turmoil of the last three months, each force has been busy asserting how the good of the people is its overriding concern. The palace professes that the monarchy and democracy are committed to ensuring a prosperous future for all Nepalis. The mainstream parties insist they are wedded to preserving the gains of the people's movement of 1990.

The Maoists affirm they want to develop a new model of democracy in which the people's right to dissent and rebel in an organised form would be institutionalised.

If everyone is so steadfastly on our side, why do we feel so abandoned? Perhaps we're not really sure of who we are and what we want. The triad of liberty, equality and fraternity was trendy

# From Afghanistan, a glimpse of Nepal

**"It's all about getting quicker to Year Zero."**



ARUNA UPRETI in KABUL

On the streets of Kabul below hulks of bombed out houses, there are boys playing. Not a single girl. Where are the girls? "The girls only play inside the house," explains my colleague, Regina.

In the market, there are more women than usual, but they are covered from head-to-toe in burqas. Some things change slowly, even if the Taliban are gone. Regina, who doesn't wear a burqa, tries to explain: "In our culture we have to wear it."

The Afghans are happy they have been liberated from the Taliban, and their fanatic interpretation of Islam which banned music, and girls from going to school. And right there on the streets my thoughts turn to Nepal, where neither boys nor girls can go to school because of threats by the Maoists. What will our future be? Is it all going to end up like these cratered streets and buildings hollowed out by bombs and rockets from two decades of war? And when our own country is completely destroyed, will we also emerge from it like the Afghans have to realise how utterly senseless it all was?

Our children are our future leaders, our lawyers, our doctors, nurses and social activists. They are our future journalists. The Taliban did not want girls to go to school because, they said, their scriptures said so. Is that any different from what our own fundamentalist Maoists are doing? Marx, Lenin, and especially Mao himself would never have condoned such a wanton assault on schools, and the future of children. Even in the worst years of war in Sri Lanka, both the Tamil Tigers and the army had a ceasefire at exam time.

We have to ask: who is most hurt by this nationwide attack on schools? Not the rich kids, whose parents have already pulled them out and sent off to boarding schools in India. No, it is the rural folks who have saved all to be able to afford an education for their children and have invested in their future. If the Maoists really want to reform the school system, there are do-able things to address the government school system. This leads me to conclude: maybe the closure of schools is not about reforming education at all, but about getting faster to Year Zero.

I call home from Afghanistan, and my daughter answers the phone. Why aren't you in school, I ask. "It's a bandh," she answers on the line, and I can sense she is secretly glad not to have to go to school on a cold morning.

Walking the ruined streets of Kabul, past the wreckage of an armoured personnel carrier and a brick wall scarred by bullet holes, I watch a girl about the same age as my daughter carrying water home in a large jug. And I get a sudden glimpse of our own future.

## Now, private airports

The government is preparing to not just privatise the national airlines, but also to privatise airports in Nepal. A draft regulation allowing the private sector to construct and operate airports within the country on a BOT basis is under consideration.

If successful, private entrepreneurs could develop new tourist destinations and operate flights with their own investment, much in the way some islands in Thailand have private airports. The Ministry of Physical Planning and Works is presently consulting with the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN), Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Ministry of Law and the Contractors Association Nepal.

The private sector can propose airports anywhere in the country, complete it in five years and transfer the facility to the government after operating it for a maximum of 35 years. The government has already conducted feasibility studies to construct international airport in Biratnagar, Janakpur, Pokhara, Simara and Lumbini but only one company has so far expressed interest to undertake construction. The government had granted permission to Paris-based Alpa Construction Company to construct an international airport at Lumbini two years back. But the private sector company is yet to submit a detailed feasibility study to the government. CAAN operates 42 airports, but increase in air traffic means there is a need to expand the network.

## The beat goes on

Nearly 30,000 music lovers, most of them youngsters, cheered, stamped their feet and swayed in the stands at the Dasarath Stadium 4-5 January as Nepali bands played their favourite songs. Nebha, the only pop band with a woman vocalist, bagged the first place by winning a cash award of Rs 75,000 in the Shikhar Beat Contest. The Preirana Samuha and Panam band won the second and third place with cash prizes of Rs 35,000 and Rs 20,000 respectively. A total of 20 musical bands presented their numbers using a 120,000-watt sound system for the first time in Nepal. No wonder you could hear the music all the way in Pulchok! The event was sponsored by Surya Nepal and organised by Vogue Advertisement and Event Management. "We are very encouraged to see the success of the program and it has also encouraged us to organise more such events in the future," said Bal Kishen Gurung, Surya Nepal brand manager.

## Lalupate in Helsinki

Lalupate Ltd has opened a showroom "Studio Himalaya" at a new location in Helsinki nine years after starting operations in the Finnish capital. Lalupate deals in Nepali products throughout Scandinavia and the Baltic countries. The new showroom is operating near the famous Nepali restaurant, Everest, and in close co-operation with Nepal Tourism Board representative in Finland and the Himalayan Culture Association.

Lalupate director, Riitta Reinila-Strommer, says ecological and ethical considerations are of the utmost importance in her company's operations. Nepali producers have to be able to meet these production standards. A "Fair Trade" chain, Studio Himalaya guarantees producers from poor countries a fair minimum price plus an additional fair trade premium to be used for social programmes. Typical Fair Trade products include tea and coffee. Child labour is forbidden and environmental issues are taken into account. "It is important to us that the Nepali environment is conserved for the following generations, too," Riitta said.

## INTERVIEW

# "There is enough money to finance development..."

**A day after King Gyanendra issued three ordinances, including the Finance Ordinance 2003, Finance Minister Dr Badri Prasad Shrestha explained the provisions as they relate to revenue, taxation, investment, exports and tourism. Excerpts:**

### On the objective of the ordinance:

The main objective of the ordinance is to maintain macro-economic stability by ensuring financial balance and encourage domestic industries through the extension of maximum possible facilities, particularly the export-oriented ones.

### On new measures:

The government will issue bonds to those industries that are yet to get duty drawback amounts from the government. Provisions have been made to import raw materials for export-oriented industries upon the submission of the bank guarantee for claiming excise duty. Earlier there was the practice of submitting cash guarantee.

### On exports:

The government will provide bonded warehouse facilities for the export of readymade garment products to India also. Earlier, such facilities were available to cent percent export-based industries only that exported their products to third countries.

### On tourism:

The government will provide maximum possible facilities to hotels and other tourism industries to bail them out. The committee formed under the chairmanship of the finance minister to recommend measures to rehabilitate sick units will be activated.

### On revenue administration:

ASYCUDA, the computerised customs network, currently functional in five major customs points, would be expanded to other three customs points. Measures would be taken to make the revenue administration more effective. In order to check the under valuation of the imported goods, the implementation of post clearance audit system would be made more effective. A track will be kept on all transactions of under-valued goods and they will be brought under the tax net. The provision of reference price of major imports has been reintroduced to check under valuation.

# Made in Nepal



**We should build a brand name that sells itself.**

There couldn't be a better time to talk about Nepal's sagging exports than now, when the government has declared 2003 as "Export Year", and business is trying to figure out what to do next. Falling export is nothing new, after the record year 1993/94 Nepal's exports have been steadily going down. But better late than never.

The success or failure of Export Year 2003 will depend on whether we learn from our past mistakes and experiences.

The failure of the Nepali export sector does not solely lie on government. Exporters, especially the fly-by-nights have done more harm to trade than anyone else. People took garments and carpet exports as a card game of "marriage", and everyone lost. However, the Beed is convinced that if we learn from this mistake then we can look forward to healthy growth. But will we?

While Nepal examines the export sector, it currently needs to position as a country that can either manufacture a product for another brand or build its own brand. The fact that if one has to manufacture for others definitely means that we ought to have strong competitive advantages. If we have Export Processing Zones will our production costs beat the



economies of scale in China or India? Can we offer GAP or Wall Mart better prices?

Large players that source from countries all over the world and sell under their own brand are dominating the wholesale market today and the trend will continue. Wall Mart's annual turnover of \$220 billion (more than the GDP of Switzerland) gives an indication of which direction the world is headed. We have to be able to beat many other vendors in countries that supply to these big giants.



Nepal also needs to explore whether it can take advantage of building a brand image of its own for its products that can fetch strong brand equity in the long-

run. If Eric Valli's film Caravan can do well in the United States under the name Himalaya, there are potentials we can explore. Can the government and business get together to spend money in countries that empathise with Nepal in understanding what Nepali brands can do wonders in their country? Is there a potential for cashing on the 'Made in Nepal' sticker? Is there a Swiss chocolate or Cuban cigar equivalent?

For Nepal, exports within the region can perhaps build a strong base especially in the agricultural sector. Our potential for value-added herbal products or processed food could take on the region. This is one industry where we have our own raw materials.

The government needs to deliver a conducive policy for exports that should at the beginning ensure a good labour law and fast-track utilities. For business, the challenge would be to demonstrate that businesses should earn reasonable profits legitimately and not to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. But, first, let's get off our butts. ♦

(Readers can post their views or comments at arthabeed@yahoo.com)

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NIN BAIKACHARYA



# Drop in to shop...

The mall culture arrives in Nepal, for those who can afford it. As tourists drop, supermarkets are trying to entice locals with low prices and flashy incentives.

# ...shop till you drop.



## SRADDHA BASNYAT

"Metro Mall - Why pay more?" "Smile! The lowest price all day, all night." "More value for money @ Metro." Bright and colourful signs plastered over the windows and walls of Metro Mall, announce the newest addition to Kathmandu's shopping paradise, and only 24-hour shopping centre, great brand names and tempting deals.

Despite a drop in consumer purchasing power and the current economic scenario, Bijen Jhonnche, managing director of the new mall is upbeat and all-business. He wants to create an ambience that is bound to draw customers to shop in comfortable surroundings. But he is determined to keep prices competitive. "Just because I give you this ambience, why should you have to pay more?" says Bijen. "We offer branded goods for the lowest prices in Nepal, and even South Asia." On average, goods at Metro are cheaper than in town, but it could just be a promo, so hurry!

Spread over 5000 sq ft of space with plush red carpeting, Metro Mall is situated right next to Fun World at Soaltee. The display of high



quality pashmina, electronic goods, chocolates, liquor, baby goods, children's clothes, luggage, perfumes, cosmetics, cameras, and CD-mans is designed to attract tourists, expatriates, and locals, who want to shop in a safe environment while their children are engaged in Fun World. Unlike many shopping complexes, parking here is not a problem. It is also designed to draw teenagers who just want to hang out. Expansion plans include a food court and a theatre, and, more immediately, a grocery store.

As Kathmandu steadily gets steeped in a consumer culture, there's been a growth in friendly neighbourhood outlets like Gemini, Namaste and Akuj which largely sell consumer items and groceries. The bigger shopping complexes like Bhat Bhateni, Kasthamandap off Durbar Marg, Bluebird at Thapthali and Lazimpat, sell a wider range of goods from toys, crockery, luggage, clothing, electrical appliances, and even Nepali produce like pickles and *tittara*.

But with tough competition in retail sales - almost every second shop in Kathmandu is a grocery or retail shop with a shutter, they have

From top, left: The liquor section of Kasthamandap Bazaar off Durbar Marg, the check-out counter at Gemini Supermarket in Jawalakhel, cardigans galore at Namaste in Jawalakhel, branded items at Metro Mall in Tahachal, fitness equipment at Bluebird Department Store..



## Bluebird Specials

To attract Indian and other foreigners, Bluebird has coupons in *Shagri-La* magazine. A Rs 2,000 purchase will get a free gift and a Rs 12,000 purchase will give a free night at the Bluebird Hotel in Pokhara.

## Metro Mall Specials

Cashmere by Himalayan Pashmina, suppliers of Donna Karan, New York Delsey - Luggage made in France Omega watches Hugo Boss Deep Red perfume

## Akuj Supermarket, Japanese Food Store

Fresh salmon from Norway Japanese edibles miso, sticky rice

## Bluebird Department Store

New wing selling branded sports items, casuals, formals, and footwear. Added a floor at Lazimpat with garments, toys and luggage.

their work cut out. Bijen wants to encourage volume by taking a revolutionary step as far as shopping is concerned. "We have an edge in two ways first, we source from the right supplier. What we save, I give directly to the customer. Second, I have cut down on overheads so they are comparatively low." He says Metro Mall works on half the usual margin.

But with a downturn in the economy and a drop in purchasing power, stores have had to introduce special schemes to stay ahead. "In the past three years sales have not increased so we had a lot of incentive schemes to survive in the market," says Binod Tuladhar of Bluebird Department Store which will celebrate its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year. "In the last three years 98% of our customers were locals. Although we managed to maintain last year's sales, the profit margins have dropped. People go for consumer items and less luxury items and the margin is in the luxury goods. For example, where people used to buy 6-7 pairs of dasain clothes, this year they only bought 1-2 pairs. Their purchasing power is dropping drastically."

Despite this, Bluebird has recently added an outlet for branded items: sports, casuals, formalwear and footwear at Thapthali while its branch at Lazimpat has also received a facelift: one more floor with garments, toys, and luggage.

During festival season, the department store promoted the Bluebird scratch n' win card during which a purchase of at least Rs 1,000 could win customers a TV, hi-fi, electronics, and other small items. For local shoppers, an accumulated purchase of Rs 15,000 will win them a one-night stay at the Bluebird Hotel in Pokhara. Then, there are the winter and summer sales. "We have family privilege cards for about 1000 of our regular shopping families. There are free gifts for those who purchase the most items, for instance a TV," says Tuladhar.

At Kasthamandap Bazaar, situated strategically just off Durbar Marg with a comfortable parking lot, finance director Ramesh M Shrestha doesn't have reason to complain. Since he started four years ago sales have been steady mainly because of the prime location. Regular consumer items and groceries vie for space on shelves stocked



Clockwise from top, left: Bluebird Supermarket at Thapthali, knick knacks on display at Bhat Bhateni, Namaste Supermarket in Maharaajgunj and the parking lot of Bhat Bhateni Department Store.



with luxury items, electronics, clothing, fashion and footwear. "We opened at a time when the economy was being hit by various events, a drop in tourism, tension in South Asia, Nepal's political problems, so we've never really experienced a drastic drop in sales. It was only during the emergency when we felt it was wiser to close early that there was a slight drop. But now we are operating our usual hours 9 AM-9 PM," says Ramesh.

Kasthamandap Bazaar's garments boast a higher quality and while consumer items and groceries are sold at competitive prices, clothing is on the higher side. While local Nepali clientele have steadily replaced tourists, expatriates and the Indian clientele that Kathmandu's department stores depended on for business, owing to security reasons, and more attractions abroad, entrepreneurs still want the Indian market.

"This is a big market and we are not creating businesses to capture it," says Bijen. "Ten years ago, Nepal was a popular destination for Indians to tour, vacation and shop. Now they would rather go to Singapore, Dubai, Malaysia, Hong Kong because it is so cheap to fly there and shop. Also, shopping here is no longer attractive. The government tax and duty structure is difficult to work with. On electronics, for example, it is higher than in India."

If the government relaxes its duty structures, then Nepal can earn through tourism and trading, and become a shopping paradise, just like Singapore, he adds.

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**2** NO ANNUAL

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## Angry start to 2003 in Serbia

**BELGRADE**—Several cases of racial and religious violence in the first week of the new year has convinced many that Serbia remains an intolerant society where little has changed despite the fall of the xenophobic regime of Slobodan Milosevic two years ago.

"Ours is a society where the lack of goodwill and a good heart remains visible," says Ljubivoje Stojanovic, professor at the theology faculty of Belgrade University. "We are paying the price of being non-believers turned into superficial believers, without getting the right idea what religion is all about."

Religion was pushed aside in the years of communist rule following the end of the second world war. But through the decade of wars in the nineties, Serbs came to see themselves as firm believers in the Serbian Orthodox Church. Serbs were told during the days of Milosevic that they are very different from Catholic Croats or Muslims. The Serbian Orthodox Church became a prime symbol in this sense of separation.

Most Serbs still show no sympathy for victims of the wars of the nineties, such as the 5,000 Muslims killed in Srebrenica by the Bosnian Serb army in 1995, or the Albanian families massacred in Kosovo in 1998 and 1999 by Serbian security forces.

A recent opinion poll showed that 76 per cent think homosexuals are "sick" and should be "treated medically". Almost half would refuse any contact with a homosexual. Another 26.2 percent would "try to convince him or her that it is wrong". (IPS)

## Africa's brain drain

**DAKAR**—The effects of Africa's long-standing "brain drain" are becoming more apparent in Senegal, as more university lecturers leave for greener pastures overseas.

In less than two decades Africa has lost a third of its skilled professionals and had to replace them with over 100,000 expatriates at a cost of \$4 billion a year, according to the Ethiopia-based UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The primary cause of external brain drain is the unreasonably low wages aid to African professionals. In Senegal, more than 105 lecturers and researchers have emigrated, mainly to American and French universities, in the past few years. The University of Dakar has 1022 lecturers, while the University of Saint-Louis, located some 260 kilometres north of the capital Dakar, has 97 academics. Once in Europe or North America, a professor from here earn three to five times more.

Madior Diouf, a professor in modern literature and a former minister of higher education in Senegal, says "lecturers who have emigrated should be replaced immediately". Some 23,000 lecturers from African universities continue to migrate each year. "The biggest migratory flows are from Egypt, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya and Ghana in that order," according to the ECA. Ghanaian universities lose 100 lecturers per year. (IPS)

## Silicon valleys in Jordan

**AMMAN**—This country of five million is located astride West Asia's conflict hot-spots: Iraq, Syria, Israel and Saudi Arabia. For the past three years Jordan has tried to carve out its own non-oil niche, and that is an ambitious campaign to turn to high technology.

Heading the effort is Jordan's young King Abdullah bin Al-Hussein. "I'm not a politician, and I'm not an economist," he says. But for three years he has worked to rewire the economy into the next high-growth technology market. The successes and failures of the effort underscore the kinds of challenges facing development in the Middle East.

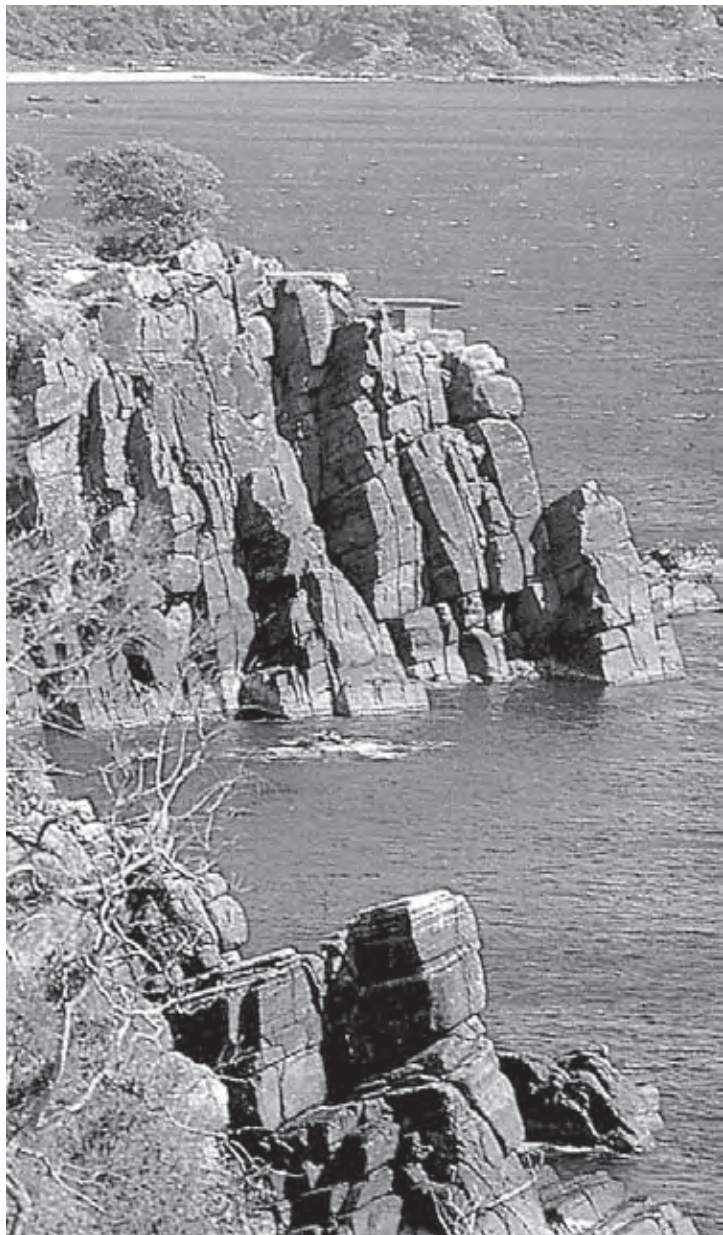
"When we talk about IT, it's not a slogan but a vision for the long term," King Abdullah told an audience of technology entrepreneurs. "If we don't get our act together, we're going to miss this boat." Abdullah's boat is the software revolution that has taken many nations into high-growth waters. With a high literacy rate and strong mathematics and analytical backgrounds, much of Jordan's workforce is well suited to the IT business. "Our goal basically is to leapfrog into the knowledge economy," says Bassem Awadallah, Jordan's minister of planning, and a key architect of the effort.

Nobody expects Jordan to become a new Silicon Valley or even a technology centre as big as neighbouring Israel with its \$3.2 billion IT industry. Jordan's economy grew only to \$17.3 billion in 2001, and annual growth averages 4 percent. Annual per capita income is less than \$1,700 dollars.

The IT industry comprises more than 80 startups that add up to a \$120 million industry. Compared to finance and business services which account for 20 percent of the economy, and trade and tourism which add up to 12 percent, technology barely shows on the economic landscape. But the IT industry growth is attracting the most attention. IT exports have continued to double over the past several years, by 2004 Jordan hopes for \$550 million of IT exports, creating some 30,000 jobs.

### COMMENTARY

# Indian Ocean not "Indian"



**NEW DELHI** - The United States is looking to India, its newfound strategic ally, to covertly expand its vital naval influence in South Asia to bolster its growing military presence in the region.

The United States also seems to want India's help in containing China's proliferating sway in the Indian Ocean region.

To achieve these twin aims, Washington is said to be eyeing Sri Lanka's Trincomalee port as a staging point for its naval assets stationed in and around its Diego Garcia base in the Indian Ocean. To gain access to the "strategic jewel" that is Trincomalee, one of the world's biggest natural deep-sea harbours, it has persuaded India to

## The United States is working with India and Sri Lanka to turn Trincomalee (left) into a strategic naval base.

step in as Washington's proxy to extend its influence over the port without overtly arousing suspicion of superpower hegemony.

To make this move possible, the United States, as part of establishing its long-term presence in Asia, has successfully pressured the Tamil Tigers rebels—who have been fighting for nearly two decades for an independent homeland—to persevere in their peace talks with the Sri Lankan government.

Located on the busy East-West shipping route stretching from the Suez Canal to the Malacca Straits, Trincomalee's location in controlling Indian Ocean traffic is vital. Through a combination of diplomacy, bullying and astute bargaining, a paranoid India has for several decades managed to prevent outside powers—especially the United States—from having access to Trincomalee.

But "with the United States now India's most coveted ally, Delhi is unlikely to object to Washington neatly tying up various strategic bonds to fully dominate the Asian region," a senior Indian security officer said. "Delhi is hoping to profit from its growing defence relations with the United States," he added.

During the Cold War years, the United States had wanted to station a Voice of America transmitter in the area as a precursor to using its warships using the harbour, but India

had steadfastly opposed any such move. One of the key clauses of the 1987 accord that led to the deployment of the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka to disarm the Tigers declared that Trincomalee—particularly its oil storage tanks, located around 20 km from the Indian coast—would not be controlled by any foreign power "inimical" to India.

But all that has now changed. After Sep. 11, Indo-U.S. defence relations are confined not only to strategic cooperation through dialogue, periodic policy reviews and reciprocal visits by senior officials and service commanders. They extend to joint military manoeuvres and the inflow of U.S. military hardware.

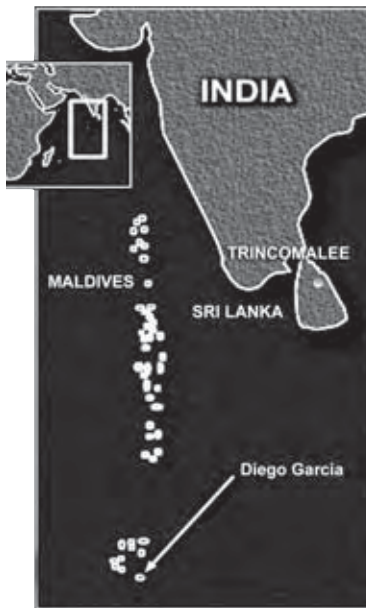
Expanding bilateral strategic cooperation led to the reactivation of the Indo-U.S. Defence Policy Group (DPG), the apex military coordination body to further negotiations between the Pentagon and India's ministry of defence that were stalled after sanctions following New Delhi's 1998 nuclear tests.

In a quiet, 35-year deal recently clinched with Sri Lanka—with US approval—the state-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) has hammered out a \$4.16 million agreement to refurbish the oil storage facility at Trincomalee.

This refurbishing is happening for the first time after World War II, when British warships used them to refuel.

Currently, Ceylon Petroleum Corp operates only 15 of Trincomalee's 99 storage tanks,

# anymore?



limiting sales to 25 tonnes per vessel and making the fuel expensive. But once IOC activates the tanks and brings in petroleum products from its nearby Madras refinery on the Indian mainland, supplies will be augmented to 12,250 kilolitres, making fuel not only cheaper but increased to 200 tonnes per ship.

To further cement its presence across the island, the IOC is also planning on taking over 100 retail petroleum outlets. The two sides are also considering an offshoot of the proposed pipeline between the southern Indian cities of Madras and Madurai to the Sri Lankan capital, Colombo.

Providing the entire operation protection at Trincomalee will be US-trained Sri Lankan soldiers. Under Operation Balanced Style, US SEALs have begun training Sri Lankan army and navy personnel in security techniques to protect Trincomalee. Sri Lankan police teams are being sent to the United States for anti-terrorism courses

with emphasis on bomb disposal. US military cooperation has also been extended to the island's air force that operates a wide range of Israeli-made combat aircraft.

The US Navy has long been looking for access to a strategically located South Asian port for its Fifth Fleet, established in 1996 for permanent deployment in the Indian Ocean to bolster the US Middle East Force.

US missile strikes during the war in Afghanistan were executed, among others, by Fifth Fleet warships, demonstrating America's ability to exercise military power against littoral states deep inland. But security sources said in a recent reassessment that Washington realised that to successfully maintain its sustained forward deployment posture in the Indian Ocean region and to counter growing Chinese ambitions in the area, it needed access to strategically located bases like Trincomalee.

The United States has acknowledged the Indian Navy as a "stabilising force" in the Indian Ocean and wants a closer working relationship with it that includes arrangements to patrol the sea lanes from the North Arabian Sea to the Malacca straits off the Singapore coast.

Since October 2001, Indian Navy ships, along with the U.S. Navy, have been patrolling the China-controlled and piracy-ridden Malacca Straits, through which pass over 80 percent of Japan's oil supplies from the Middle East. The Trincomalee connection will further tighten the US security network. ♦ (IPS)

(Rahul Bedi is a correspondent for *Janes' Defence Weekly* in New Delhi.)

by RAHUL BEDI

# HIV comeback in Thailand



A patient who died of AIDS is being buried in northern Thailand.

**BANGKOK** - A lack of regular condom use by sexually active youth in Thailand has triggered a rise in HIV infection rates among teenagers. Studies have shown that the infection rate among sexually active Thai teens rose to 17 percent in 2002 compared to 11 percent in the previous year.

Health officials say this six percent increase is the result of teenagers not practising safe sex. "Less than half of the country's sexually active teenagers used condoms," Charan Treunwuthipong, of the communicable disease control department said. It is a figure that alarms health officials, given the country's successful public campaigns over the years to promote safe sex practices through condom use to stem the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Evidence of this successful campaign is borne out by what public health investigators have unearthed about the women working in Thailand's thriving sex industry. Some 97 percent of the sex workers said "they refused to have sex without a condom".

But this success also reflects part of the problem - the safe sex campaigns appear to have made more headway in groups like sex workers than among the general population and young Thais.

The HIV cases among the youth — HIV/AIDS was the second leading cause of death among Thais aged 15 to 24 last year - have in fact driven health officials to produce a similar change of behaviour among the youth.

But these efforts are running into strong opposition from the ministries of education and the interior. This week, the two ministries objected to a move to place condom vending machines in public places. (IPS)

by RIITTA HARI



# Evolution has turned us all into copycats

Imitation, as the saying goes, is the sincerest form of flattery. But it even seems to form the heart of our humanity. Indeed, imitation appears to be a vital key to understanding human development, from behaviour and language to empathy and social skills.

Compared with most other species, human beings are so immature at birth that they require an exceptionally long period of nursing and shelter. We spend our long infancy and childhood adapting to the widely varying and complex sociocultural environment that surrounds us. This allows us to interact and operate successfully within our environment throughout our lives.

From the outset, even before we develop the ability to use spoken language, nonverbal communication drastically shapes our personality and sense of self. Children learn by watching adults and other children, developing important skills under continuous social feedback. This feedback enables proper production and, later, understanding, of emotion-related facial expressions that the subject herself cannot see.

Fortunately for human development, healthy children find imitation enormously gratifying. They enjoy both imitating and being imitated. Imitation is so essential to mastering basic social skills and transferring cultural knowledge that it is likely to have an organic basis in the brain. Mirror neurons, first discovered in monkeys, may serve such a function, providing a common code between the sender and receiver of a nonverbal message. A monkey's mirror neurons are activated both when he himself is acting, say, taking a raisin from a tray, and when he is viewing another monkey (or the human experimenter) performing the same act.

Brain imaging studies have now shown that the human brain contains a similar mirror-neuron system (MNS). For example, merely viewing another person's movements activates our own motor cortex,

## Imitation is so essential to mastering basic social skills and transferring cultural knowledge that it is likely to have an organic basis in the brain.



which we normally use for precise control of our actual movements. As sports fans, musicians, and students of body language know, watching other people's movements and postures may facilitate the viewer's own motor schemes, sometimes resulting in unintended imitation.

One can copy movements and motor acts without understanding their meaning. This happens when a flock of geese suddenly takes flight from a lake, "blindly" following the flock's first frightened member. For humans, the MNS may provide a more sophisticated copying mechanism that helps us to understand the intentions of other

people—in a sense, to read their minds. Humans compute other people's intentions and emotions continuously, constantly observing their movements, postures, and gaze. These mind-reading skills are essential for successful social interaction.

Researchers have found that a key part of the human MNS is Broca's region, an area of the brain that, when damaged, prevents the patient from speaking. Broca's region is the human counterpart of the monkey mirror-neuron area. As both human and monkey mirror neurons code hand manipulation and facial gestures, some interesting hypotheses have emerged. For example, the presence of mirror neurons in Broca's region suggests that human language co-evolved with hand and facial gestures rather than arising directly from vocalisations.

In humans, Broca's region is found in the left brain hemisphere, whose dominance for speech is well known. But the corresponding area is larger also in the left brain of great apes, further indicating that the Broca's region evolved first for gestural communication and only later for speech.

Behavioural studies, too, have shown that gesturing is closely related to speech production. To take a familiar example, we gesture even while speaking on the telephone, when others cannot see us. Indeed, congenitally blind persons gesture—even while speaking with people they know to be blind as well!

The existence of the human MNS means that the same brain areas may be activated when we perform a motor act and when we merely observe another person perform a similar act. This leads to an obvious question: how do we know that we actually performed a motor act rather than only seeing it? For most people, physical feedback provided by muscle and tendon sensors helps in resolving this, as does proper communication between brain areas. But misattribution of one's own

acts does, in fact, occur in some psychiatric disorders.

Other disorders are associated with defective imitation skills. For example, autistic individuals imitate others less and in a different manner than healthy subjects. They also have poor mind-reading skills. Some patients, by contrast, suffer at the opposite extreme of dysfunction. They "echo," imitating almost all movements of other people.

Perhaps most intriguing, the MNS could provide a platform for mental simulation of future actions—one's own and those of others. It might also be part of a larger mechanism that allows intentions, emotions, and even the intensity of pain to be matched by gestures and communicated between individuals.

New imaging tools enable us to study these and other questions about human brain function more productively than ever before. We can now accurately follow in both time and space the brain's processing routes, which are determined not only by genes, but also by all the experience that an individual has gained during her entire lifetime.

In these studies, neurologists, psychiatrists, geneticists, and behavioural researchers all contribute to realising their common interest in discovering how the human brain operates. Brain imaging, combined with the new conceptual framework implied by research on the mirror-neuron system, promises to uncover a more holistic "social" brain. This brain's functions and dysfunctions—its very structure—will broaden dramatically our understanding of the relationship between the self and others. (© Project Syndicate)

(Riitta Hari is Academy Professor at the Academy of Finland and Head of the Brain Research Unit of the Low Temperature Laboratory, Helsinki University of Technology.)

## Suicide rate up in Pakistan

**ISLAMABAD** - Driven by gloom and despair, more Pakistanis are killing themselves, according to statistics who are keeping track of statistics. More than 1,500 Pakistanis killed themselves in 2002. According to the Lahore-based organisation Maddadgar (Helper), 900 people committed suicide only in the first six months of 2002.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan says the main factor responsible for increasing suicidal trends in society are the economic problems coupled with domestic and social disputes. Social disparities, injustice, unemployment and the resulting economic stress, domestic and family disputes are the top most reasons that drive people to take this extreme action.

In the past three years the prices of basic commodities rise by between 20 to 300 percent, which many economists blame on tough conditionalities of the international financial institutions that the Musharraf government agreed to as part of its economic reforms. (IPS)

## Indian TV pulls out condom ad

**BHUBANESHWAR, India** — Protests by some legislators have forced the regional channel of state-run television network Doordarshan in Orissa to stop telecasting a condom advertisement. Twenty-one legislators from various political parties, including the ruling Biju Janata Dal, last month complained to Information and Broadcasting Minister Sushma Swaraj against the advertisement, calling it vulgar. "Although we need to create awareness about sexually transmitted diseases, we should not allow pornography," said Santosh Singh Saluja. "Some of the advertisements carried by TV, radio and newspapers are in bad taste."

"We were instructed to discontinue the (offending) condom ad," Orissa Doordarshan director Baikuntha Panigrahi said. "We stopped showing the ad about 10 days ago." (IPS)

## Trans-Asian gas

**ISLAMABAD** - By 2005, a long-delayed gas pipeline linking the oil fields of Central Asia to South Asia will finally be completed. During their leadership summit in Ashgabad on 26 December, the leaders of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan signed an agreement for a \$3 billion US dollar gas pipeline from Turkmenistan's gas fields to Pakistan through Afghanistan.

Iranian President Mohammad Khatami's visit to Pakistan also signalled movement in a second ambitious project: an Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline project that Tehran calls a "pipeline of peace". The pipeline project will originate in Turkmenistan's Daulatabad gas fields, which have proven gas reserves of 23 trillion cubic feet, pass through Afghanistan, then end at the Pakistani seaport of Gwadar.

There, gas will be converted into liquefied natural gas (LNG) for export to Japan and other Asian countries—and possibly even to India if New Delhi and Islamabad could somehow look beyond their political differences. Turkmenistan's deputy prime minister, Yolly Gurbanmuradov, says construction is planned to be completed in 2005. Parallel developments are occurring on the Iran-Indian pipeline traversing Pakistan. Iranian Foreign Minister Dr Kamal Kharrazi said in Pakistan last month that Iran was trying to find the most economical route to transport gas from Iran to India through Pakistan. Feasibility studies, he said, would be completed in a few months.

Ahmed Rashid, author of bestseller *Taliban- Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia*, says the Turkmenistan-Pakistan pipeline is feasible with political will, but "I can't see it happening until central government in Afghanistan extends its writ." (IPS)

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## “Restore peace first”



MIN. BAIRACHARYA

Excerpts of an interview with economist, Prof Biswombar Pyakuryal. *Prakash*, 6 January

प्रकाश

**Which way do you think the country's economy is heading?**

The economy is in the state of collapse. Whether in terms of national savings or revenue generation, all trends are negative. People are not in a position to pay taxes and there is no credible source of funding available except foreign aid. But in the present circumstances the donor agencies are least likely to increase their aid. As we lose

our capacity to pay back, they will not provide us even loans. Most of the industries are in dire straits. Our exports have declined by 25 percent. In such a situation we can't manage our economy by even printing more money.

**So, who is to blame for this?**

We have been trying to justify our position referring to the post 11 September developments in the US. In fact, our economic fundamentals are weak. Our macro-economic policies were good that led to the growth of up to 10 percent in the urban centers only. This shows that the policy of economic liberalisation has had impact on limited areas only. So, our country's economic structure has collapsed due to internal as well as external factors.

**You said the donors are still willing to help.**

Privatisation in itself is not bad. But in our case it has been used as a political tool. That is why it has turned out the way it has. The government should have invested the proceeds of privatisation of state-owned enterprises into the social sector. But I don't know where all that money has gone. We really have to ask questions about the honesty of the government.

**How do you see on-going privatisation program?**

Privatisation in itself is not bad. But in our case it has been used as a political tool. That is why it has turned out the way it has. The government should have invested the proceeds of privatisation of state-owned enterprises into the social sector. But I don't know where all that money has gone. We really have to ask questions about the honesty of the government.

**Looks like things are hopeless, can the country's economy be managed?**

The foremost priority is for the Maoists, palace and political parties to find a political way out through dialogue so that peace is restored. If that happens we can see a turnaround in the economy within one year.

## Sri Panchayat

Gunaraj Luitel in *Kantipur*, 7 January

कान्तिपुर

Standing before the crowd at the stadium in Biratnagar, King Gyanendra looked like a political leader. After every sentence, he paused and looked at the crowd—as if expecting applause. The king should not think that he has the support of the people only if he stands up before them and receives applause. Wonder who, and for what selfish reason, made the king stand up in front of the crowd to give the royal address? An interesting explanation could be the decoration and facelift on the Panchayat 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary memorial on a road junction in Biratnagar. Why was there a need to polish up this commemorative pillar marking the “achievements” of the Panchayat years 1962-1987? Could it be that the organisers of this jamboree were expecting the king to ban political parties again so that they could go back to their old reactionary ways?

## Neighbours

Foreign Minister Shailendra K Upadhyay *Saanghu*, 6 January

साङ्गु

“If the state of anarchy goes on our neighbours would certainly intervene for their own security. We can't rule out such a possibility. Recently, the Indian envoy in Kathmandu talked about Indian extremists entering Nepal for training. This doesn't mean that India is openly involved. If the situation in our country remains the same and India feels threatened, it won't sit idly by. The only way out of the present crisis is a “round table conference. Now, there are only two major forces in the country, the King and Maoists. The Maoists are much more powerful than Nepali Congress and UML. So, the King should deal with the Maoists accordingly.”

## Kingship

Former Justice of the Supreme Court, Krishna Jung Rayamajhi *Deshanter*, 5 January

देशान्तर



BNKD RATHI

“Former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's recommendation in October last year to postpone parliamentary elections by nearly fourteen months was a flagrant violation of the constitution. Now, it is the responsibility of the king not to protect the constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy.

Technically, the constitution is not dead. But the king should seek cooperation from all the political parties to bring the constitution back on track without further delay.

The present crisis won't be resolved unless there is an elected parliament. At a time when the parliament remains dissolved and the cabinet has been dismissed, there is no other way than to seek fresh mandate from the people. We have seen elections taking place in Kashmir and Sri Lanka. So, why not here? But if the present situation where there is no parliament is allowed to continue this system will also collapse.

All sides have violated the constitution. The king has committed to the Nepali people and the international community that he will protect parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy. If the King doesn't fulfil his promises, he will lose face. I don't see any reason not to trust him.”

## Fruits of labour

Rajdhanī, 6 January

राजधानी

When youths from all over the country are heading abroad to find employment, farmers in Shankhu VDC of Kavre district have an alternative. Every year, farmers here produce oranges worth millions of rupees. Come mid-October, the

whole village turns orange with the glowing colour of ripe fruit. Farmers here suddenly feel the end of deprivation and scarcity. Local orange trader Bhimlal Shrestha says juicy Kavre oranges are popular across the country for their taste. Local farmer Prem Lama says every household owns an orchard, and sells orange worth up to Rs 50,000. The bigger farmers earn up to Rs 1 million annually from oranges alone. Bishnu Bahadur Thapa is among those big farmers—he earns millions annually on oranges.

He started commercial orange farming 30 years ago. But he is unhappy with the price he gets for his fruits. Kavre oranges last longer, they are easier to store, juicier and taste better than oranges produced in other parts of the country, and traders should pay a better price for his produce. Local Rajan Humagain estimates that everyday some 25 to 30 metric tons of Kavre oranges exchange hands at Kathmandu fresh fruit markets and the district produces oranges worth Rs 70 million. However, the Kavre District Agriculture Development Office data shows that only half of them are traded out of the district. Since the district lacks fruit storage facilities, farmers are compelled to sell their produce at a lower price during the harvest season when there is a glut in the market.

Deputy Planning Officer at Kavre District Agriculture Development Office (KDADO) Durga Prasad Upreti says that his office has identified pockets where orange cultivation can be done. The government provides a 50 percent subsidy on agriculture inputs and improved plants for farmers. KDADO data shows Kavre farmers produced 5,750 metric tons of oranges last year, this year the total hit 6,750 metric tons.

## We men

Manju Thapa in *Kantipur*, 30 December

कान्तिपुर

Women are encouraged to rise at forums but in practice they are expected to be housewives and servants at home. There are men who talk about women's empowerment to be politically correct. These include leaders, social workers, and writers. A second type of male accepts that women should move ahead—in principle. But this is not obvious from their behaviour. They talk about women's empowerment but have never made a cup of tea for themselves. They do not realise that change begins from oneself. They talk about policies the state must adopt but do not try to change themselves. A third kind of male talks about women's rights and actually help in

whatever they can. There are few males who encourage women in their family to work and simultaneously help them with household chores. However, a closer look reveals differences in the work load, social acceptance, and opportunities that male and females enjoy. Many individuals who talk about equality for women have double standards—there are a few that actually support women's empowerment and are equal partners.

This is clearly reflected at the family, social and state levels. As a result, the number of people who talk about women's empowerment may be increasing but the expected changes in women's lives have yet to take place. It's not only men who fall into these three categories. Women fall into them, too. The behaviour of one woman towards another within the same family, the behaviour towards a woman who is moving ahead in society, and the views of the few women at the decision-making level, have effected the whole process of women's empowerment. But as the views and behaviour of men have more impact on all aspects of society, the impediments created by women are negligible.

There has been talk about providing protection for women, appointing women to various posts to raise their status. A few attempts have been made to make policies and regulations along these lines. But judging by the speed with which these policies are effecting changes in the lives of the majority of women and their results, it will take centuries to create a world where men and women are equal.

Let's take a moment to dream of a world where women are in all the top decision making positions, where they are the breadwinners, the technocrats, politicians, professionals, where there are hundreds of organisations and projects for the welfare of men. The exercise is not to belittle the position of men but to make them aware of the status of women. Some may ridicule the idea. But if men were honestly to introspect and put themselves in the position of women that would be the beginning of change.



## Killing widows, making orphans

Dipendra Baduwal in *Kantipur*, 7 January

कान्तिपुर

Maoists have killed a homeless Dalit widow in Bardiya leaving two young orphans. Humadevi Sunar of Patabhar VDC-9 Bardiya was brutally murdered on 29 December, ostensibly for being an informer. Following the death of her husband two years ago, Humadevi was living in a shack built on a plot of land given to her by her parents in Shantinagar. Her five and two-year-old children are living with their uncle. Jeevan, the older child, witnessed his mother's murder. “They said they were army men. When mother opened the door, they kicked her. When she fell, they took her to the verandah and beat her. After they left, grandfather carried mother in but she couldn't make her sit up.” The children and their grandparents are terrified. They have taken shelter with relatives in Gulariya, the district headquarters.

The army had been conducting operations against Maoists in Rajapur two weeks previously and had stayed at Humadevi's shop in Shantinagar. According to Humadevi's father, the security men then killed six of eight Maoists who were living in Narbir Bishwakarma, Humadevi's uncle's home. Following the killings, both Humadevi's uncles, Narbir and Maniram Bishwakarma, were arrested by the security forces on the grounds of sheltering Maoists. The Maoists have also threatened Humadevi's family that they will kill the deceased's two uncles and an aunt for being police informers.

Humadevi's elderly parents are now worried about the future of their grandchildren. How can they raise and educate two small children when they themselves are finding it difficult to make ends meet?

Back at Sundarrijal >25

## “Spring has set in”



## 28 February, 1977

Sundarrijal

I am all right today—only a slight cough persists which I hope will disappear by day after. I had a very bad time in the last 3 days. Today I bathed thoroughly with soap in the afternoon sun in the bathroom itself. I am taking this kind of bath after over 2 months—perhaps in Patna on the 29<sup>th</sup> of December 1976. I have been a little emaciated and the colour of my skin is a little...I don't think I am harbouring any serious disease—I am only suffering from mental anxiety—which too is becoming progressively less...the element of desperateness is no more. Perhaps one gets used to the situation in course of time, how even unbearable it might appear in the beginning otherwise the world would have gone raving mad making people a mental wreck.

A new quartermaster has taken charge of the management of

**Spring has come to Sundarrijal, BP is feeling better. But these lines in English from his prison diary show he is still haunted by forebodings about his health, and homesickness.**

the kitchen and the store and the supplies. The outgoing one gave an a/c of the expenditure to us. We have overspent more than Rs 200 during the last fortnight from our monthly allowance. We will have to be very economical and stringent in making our requisitions.

A new major—a smart young chap—has replaced the old one. This change of camp commander has been abrupt because the term of the tour of duty of the old one had 15 days more to go.

The change takes place on the 1<sup>st</sup> of every Nepali month. In the current month of Phagun only 15 days old when the new major took over. We started guessing why. The demeanour of the new major is confident. Is he purposefully brought in? Is he directly from the palace? Anyway, the young chap is of pleasing manners, although he is not inclined to talk to us any more than his three predecessors. The spring has set in, the full bath that I took today and

## FICTION

# Life Left Lifeless

## Tied for third place in the British Council Short Story Competition (15-18)

downstairs to greet them.

I heard laughter before I got to the room, and as I entered; a hush fell in the room. With my eyes glued to the floor, I put down the tray of tea and stood silently without raising my eyes from the floor. Then I realized that the silence was still too still to be natural. My heart throbbed at realizing what the consequences would later be for my own silent resolution not to put the sari above my head. I could see my father clutching the edge of the chair so hard, that his knuckles had turned white. The tears threatened to pour, but I held them back.

The pain is unbearable; my throat is parched, the room swimming around me. I try to remember what else happened that day. But I only remember my fear, and my father's hands against the wooden chair. What happened then? What happened today? I force myself to remember but I cannot. I fear the unknown, as I drift into my hazy past...one more time...or one last time...

I was on the window seat of the bus, looking out the window, staring out at the endless green and blue sights that passed in a haze. My back hurt, probably because it was going to be “that time of the month” but today the pain seemed exacerbated. And my eyes couldn't stop watering, or my fingers quivering. I think I was running away, but from what, I did not know. I will become an actress I stubbornly thought, and I will never marry.

As I turned my head, I saw a man staring at me, from the corner of my eyes. He looked about 20 years old, with jet-black hair, a square jaw and an aquiline nose that suited his face. He looked like a younger version of one of those clean-shaved Brahmins who performed *pujas* at our house.

At the next stop I got out of the bus and threw up. When I got on to the bus again, I had to sit next to the man. I did not look at him, but I could feel that he was still staring at me from the corner of his eyes. As I almost opened my mouth to tell him to stop, he said, “You run away from home?” in English. I was thrown off-guard at his question, and understood his discretion, since there were other people on the bus. Not knowing what to do or say, I merely nodded at the stranger.

“Ma pani,” he said. This knowledge made me curious about why he had run away- but he said with a smile, “I wanted to become an actor.” I hadn't heard of boys not being allowed to go to Kathmandu before, and I wasn't sure how to react to his confession- a reason so similar to my own. I turned away from him, merely to feel a prick.

My throat is scratchy, my eyes getting sandier. My arms and legs numb from the tightly bound rope. The memory of being pricked makes my left arm burn. What happened after meeting the man? What happened... why did this happen? Is this my punishment for running away, for following my only dream? Why do I have to face this nightmare? I can hear the door creaking open, and a shaft of light enters the room. I hear a girl say, “It isn't her fault, she couldn't please him because she was drugged too heavily.”

My throat catches itself. I should have known. The stories of “Bombay girls”- it is true after all. But why...how me? Do I deserve this hellish punishment? My only desire was to gain some independence- to be me. The shadows lengthen, and the shaft of light near the door gets brighter, too bright. Nonetheless shadows still lurk near me. I don't know where I went wrong...while following my only dream.



## QUOTE OF THE WEEK

If civil society and all political parties move forward in the direction of progressive change then the palace has no option but to accept this direction.

- CP Mainali, Coordinator, NCP (ML) in *Jana Aastha*, 8 January, 2003.



Title: Camaraderie  
Newspaper: 15 crores worth of helmet sales.

आस्था

*Jana Aastha*, 8 January, 2003.



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## ABOUT TOWN

## FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Paintings by Stina Haldorsen** at Siddhartha Art Gallery. 11AM-6PM from 10-19 January. 411122
- ❖ **Snow and other adventures:** "Poems in Frames" by Mark Wyatt at Lazimpat Gallery Café, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Woodturning in Kathmandu** by Dan Hogan, and **Unspoken Words:** new Tibetan Calligraphy by Dhumakhang at Indigo Gallery, Kathmandu. 8AM-6PM till 14 January. 413580

## EVENTS

- ❖ **Winter Day Camp** ECCA for students (Class 4-9) 29 December-14 January. ECCA, Thapathali, Kathmandu. 268297, 268328 email: [ecca@mos.com.np](mailto:ecca@mos.com.np)
- ❖ **Poussiere d' Ange** Showing at Alliance Francaise, 2 PM Sunday 12 January. Free. Molire Auditorium, Alliance Francaise, Thapathali. 241163
- ❖ **Razzmatazz A** combination of music, dance and fashion at the Hyatt Regency on 24 January, presented by PATA Nepal Chapter.

## MUSIC

- ❖ **1974 AD** live at Jatra Restaurant & Bar, Thamel, 6 PM on Saturday 11 January. Rs. 750 singles, Rs. 1300 couples (tickets include snack, dinner and a drink). 211010
- ❖ **Live music** by Catch 22, Friday nights at the 40,000 ½ ft Bar, Rum Doodle Restaurant, Thamel. 414336
- ❖ **Rusty Nails** presents their blues, jazz and beyond, 7.30 PM every Friday at The Fusion, Dwarika's Hotel, Battispatali. 479488.
- ❖ **Sur Sudha and friends** perform "Shukrabar" at Patan Museum, Patan Durbar Square, 5 PM onwards 17 January. Rs. 350 (Rs. 600 with "Shukrabar" CD)

## DRINKS

- ❖ **Friday Indulgence** Irish music from An Fainne, tasting with 12 Scottish single malts, Rs 999. The Piano Lounge, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 248999
- ❖ **Paddy Foley's Irish Pub** A wide range of drinks and food. Live music on Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday nights. 416096.
- ❖ **Rang Mahal** Buy one drink and get one free from the house of Seagrams and Carlsberg Beer. Dinner and performances by Kathmandu's top dancers. 7PM-10PM, Hotel Vaishali. 413968/ 423878

## FOOD

- ❖ **The greenest patch** Weekend lunches in the oldest and largest garden in Nagarkot at The Fort Resort, fort@mos.com.np. 226799
- ❖ **Rox Restaurant** Enjoy Italian cuisine with friends, family or business associates for lunch on Sundays with a wide selection of antipasti, main course, varieties of pizzas and a dessert buffet at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 491234
- ❖ **Patan Museum Café** Mixed menu, garden seating. Lunch only, 11AM-2PM. 25 percent off with Summit Card. 526271
- ❖ **Vegetarian specialties and clay oven pizza** at Stupa View Restaurant & Terrace, Boudha. 480262
- ❖ **Taste of Beijing** Roast duck and other Chinese meat, fish and vegetarian delicacies. Beijing Roast Duck Restaurant, Birendra International Convention Centre. 468589
- ❖ **Newari Bhoj** Traditional snacks, drinks and meals, outdoors or indoor, in a restaurant designed by Bhaktapur artisans. Lajana Restaurant, Lazimpat. 413874
- ❖ **Traditional Newari and Nepali Cuisine** 6 to 20 course meals at Krishnarpan Restaurant. Lunch and dinner. Reservations recommended. 479488 extn: 230
- ❖ **Tukche Thakali Kitchen** Buckwheat, barley, bean, and dried meat specialties. Also brunch with porridge and pancakes, all raw material from Tukche village. Darbar Marg.
- ❖ **Wood fired pizzas, cocktails and coffee** at the Roadhouse Café, Thamel.

## GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Tea House Combo** Room, breakfast, Nepali thali dinner, swimming, jacuzzi. Rs 700 per head on twin sharing for Nepalis and expats, Tea House Inn, Nagarkot. 410432
- ❖ **Birdwatching, short hikes at Bandipur.** Rs 1,850 per person with dinner and breakfast, Rs 925 per child 5-14 years Shivapuri Heights Cottage, [info@escapes2nepal.com](mailto:info@escapes2nepal.com), 370616
- ❖ **TGIF Package** Friday Sekuwa, overnight stay & breakfast for local residents. US\$111.00 plus tax double, US\$85.00 plus tax single, Dwarika's Hotel. 479488
- ❖ **The Great Godavari Getaway Special** weekend packages including room with breakfast and dinner, 25 percent discount on health club facilities. Godavari Village Resort. 560675
- ❖ **Writing Retreat** Full board package. Aesthetic living, innovative thinking, creative writing and nature at Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha. 375280
- ❖ **Bardia Bonkers** Freshwater dolphins, giant tigers, elephants, safaris, rafting, evening cocktails, traditional food, junglebasecamp@yahoo.com.
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** Rs 2750 per person per night (Tax included) for accommodation, meals, arrival and departure transfers from Bijaypur, walks, bar snacks and swimming. 01-361500

For inclusion in the listing send information to [editors@nepalitimes.com](mailto:editors@nepalitimes.com)

**NEPALI WEATHER** by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

VIS -08-01-2003 04:00 GMT

If you live in the hills of Nepal above 1,000 m you will realise how lucky you are if you take a look at this satellite picture of the fog-bound Indo-Gangetic plains on Wednesday morning. The Nepal tarai is completely enveloped in the fog which didn't lift all day. No one seems to be sure why the fog is getting worse every winter, but everyone agrees it is getting worse. A high pressure zone over the western Himalaya over the weekend will mean stable but cold weather over Nepal, which will make the tarai fog persist. Kathmandu will see frost and warm and sunny afternoons. No westerlies forecast till mid-week next week.

**KATHMANDU VALLEY**

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
18-02	17-01	18-01	18-01	18-00

## BOOKWORM



**Aspects of Migration and Mobility in Nepal** Editors Susanne von der Heide and Thomas Hoffmann Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 2001  
Rs 495

These studies deal principally with features of socio-economic and socio-cultural change brought about by migration and mobility, and take into account such factors as traditionalism, status, adaptation, assimilation and integration as characteristics. They reflect, to a certain extent, regional and local developments that occurred during the last ten years of the twentieth century.



**A Handbook of Trees of Nepal** Baban P. Kayastha  
Laligurans Printing Press, 2002  
Rs 250

Trees play an important role in shaping our lifestyle and landscape. They not only fulfil some of our daily necessities, but also serve to maintain natural balance. This handbook has been prepared to provide scientific information on trees that grow in Nepal including exotic species. This handbook has been compiled primarily for practising foresters and agriculturists as well as for teachers and students.

**The Legends of Nepal** Jnan Kaji Manandhar  
Indreni Offset Press, 2002  
Rs 125

The author describes different divine characters, their different roles and how demons like villains of the modern world cause much suffering to gods and goddesses and how different temples at different places came to be built. This book consists of nine legends, each preceded by an introduction, which explains the historical and mythical background, making the legends more understandable.

Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 227711, [mandala@ccsl.com.np](mailto:mandala@ccsl.com.np)

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Rahul Khanna, Lisa Ray, Moushami Chatterjee, Dina Pathak, Ranjit Chowdhary star in Deepa Mehta's comedy debut. The movie follows the "clash of civilisations" genre of which this year's low-budget hit, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* is one. When people from a culture largely defined by Bollywood find themselves in an environment that is saturated with Hollywood, the result is a state of mind that celebrates these two seemingly disparate worlds. A "Bollywood/Hollywood" state of mind. The film *Bollywood/Hollywood* is a madcap love-song to both East and West with Bollywood music, Hollywood choreography, North American locations. And the Actors? Bollywood's best!

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## TOURISM

**Let's go to Pokhara**

**All of Nepal is invited!**

## SRADDHA BASNYAT

So what if the rest of the world isn't coming to Nepal?

Pokhara's tourist trade has decided to drum up domestic business by enticing Nepalis to visit Nepal. The newly-launched "Jaun Hai Pokhara" promotes Pokhara as an adventure tourist destination. And Pokhara is not just selling its stupendous scenery: it is also promoting the lake-side town as a health and education destination.

"Pokhara has clean air, good water and a delightful climate. Many visitors come to Pokhara and feel better immediately," says Biplab Paudel of the Regional Hotel Association of Nepal. Pokhara is turning out to be an education and health centre in its own right with the Manipal Hospital, an eye hospital, a leprosy hospital, and good private hospitals.

Quality education is available at the various science, engineering and hotel management campuses. In addition to being a haven where Kathmanduites can escape the bustle of their polluted capital, Pokhara now has well equipped health and education facilities for all Nepalis. Pokhara is slightly less than 1,000m above sea level, giving it a tropical climate, but is much closer to the mountains than Kathmandu is.

December was a good month for Pokhara. Promotion efforts for the festival reached the eastern towns of Birgunj, Biratnagar, Dharan, Kakaivita, and Janakpur. Pokhara's promoters are also going further afield to lure Indian Nepalis from Darjeeling, Siliguri and Sikkim.

In fact, the only silver lining in Pokhara has been that Indian

arrivals showed a slight upturn compared to last year.

The bigger picture, however, remains stark. Charlie Gallart operates the only rental shop specialising in kayaks. He has already closed his trekking shop and now considers downsizing Ganesh Kayak Shop. In a last ditch effort, Dhaka Ram Sharma converted his bookshop of five years into Shangri-La Music Shop. He manages on Rs 4,000 in sales, but how long will he survive? The drone in Bharat Malla's voice at Seven Peaks Tours and Travels as he chants, "Business is not good," reflects the general gloom and doom.

"Nobody can tell what next week will bring," says Ailsa Colston of the cosy fourteen-room Hotel Nirvana.

Prospects for the upscale market are equally bleak. At the Shangri-La Village, resident manager Vijay Subba bemoans a 70 percent cancellation from the Japanese market and a whopping 90 percent cancellations by Americans. "Nepal has been given a second chance by the international market. If the situation remains bad, we could vanish from the international itinerary," Subba fears.

Two years ago, Bistro Caroline opened at the Lakeside with its affordable but classy eatery. Bilal Joo hoped the business of his dreams would set a modest standard: "Pokhara just needed a place like this. There is nothing else like it here. That's why it can work." But to the lonely traveller sipping Arabica coffee at the edge of the handsomely cultivated garden, it is apparent that the Bistro is struggling to sustain itself.

The numbers say it all: Nepal's tourism is down 27 percent from last year. "It would be unwise to



compare this past year with the year before it," cautions Robin Marston, executive director of Fulbari Express Travel and Tours. But the arrival figures for 2002 are 50 percent down on even 2000 figures.

Pokhara is an adventure tourist destination with not just trekking but also ultra-light flying, paragliding, rafting and maybe soon hot-air ballooning. Avia Club Nepal is in its seventh year of operating ultralights from Pokhara airport, and sales manager Deepti Gurung says there has been a big spurt in Nepalis who want to be airborne in the open-canopy crafts for a one-hour sightseeing flight. Avia Club is offering a special discount for Nepalis this year and is eager to welcome Kathmandu's young-at-heart for a different kind of thrill.

Pokhara's topography and consistent weather are excellent for producing thermals harnessed by the experts of Sun Rise Paragliding. "We have been fortunate," says Adam Hill, co-owner of the Nepali-British venture. "There has been a massive drop in tourists in Pokhara but this year has been our best year." In December Sun Rise saw more Nepalis and Indians. "It is excellent. We want more Nepalis to come and fly." ♦



## Mustang monks make mandala

Student monks from the Tsechen Shedrub-Ling Mon Gon Lodbra (Great Compassion Monastic School) in Lo Manthang are preparing to construct and then destroy a sacred Kuenrig Kiyikhor Sand Mandala in Kathmandu 17-19 January.

Sand mandalas are made of coloured sand and used to alleviate suffering, lessen bad karma and accumulate merit. The effect of sand mandalas is supposed to be spiritually therapeutic, and its destruction symbolises the impermanence of worldly existence.

Sand mandalas are believed to bring benefits not only to the makers, but also to the donors and viewers, irrespective of whether the viewer is Buddhist or not. Normally these mandalas are created in seven days, but with permission from their Khempo, the students and senior monks are planning to complete this one over a three day period. On the final day, following the ritual prayers and blessings the mandala, in keeping with the Buddhist tenet of impermanence, will be carefully gathered up and kept, to be thrown into a river when the monks return to Upper Mustang in spring.

The Venerable Khempo Tashi Tenzin, Abbot of Lo Manthang will be available for an explanation of the mandala during the afternoon of the second day of the creation. He will also grant a special audience to visitors on the final day, immediately prior to the mandala's destruction.

Venue: Hotel Ambassador, Lazimpat.  
No admission charge, donations for a winter school for monks will be accepted.



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## Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

# The old and the beautiful

Before any of you get carried away and start sending me unsolicited birthday cakes, let me give you a few useful tips that I snatched from the latest issue of the New England Journal of Medicine on how to age gracefully. If you need to develop a double jawl to get some respect around here, then so be it.

The trouble is that with advances in science and technology, we as a species have become so good at keeping our youthful good looks that we can fool most of the people most of the time even as we approach five-oh. Like tourists, older people in our country are regarded as gods. But how can you actually tell that you are in the presence of an elderly gentleman if he still looks like Brad Pitt? How can disgustingly young whippersnappers barely out of their diapers and recently weaned from mama's mammaries accord senior citizens like us the reverence that we deserve in the autumn of our lives?



As I was saying, Wait a minute, what was I saying? Right, without any further ado around the bush I'll let you in on some tricks old fogeys like me use to look disgustingly younger.

**1. Hair.** With recent advances in Follicular Transplantation Techniques and the development of the Community Forestry Programme, it is difficult to tell that a guy is old just by inspecting his or her hair.

Hair can be deceptive. For one thing, a person may have a full head of hair, but it may not be his or her. To test this, give the senior citizen a playful pat on the head, clutch a handful of hair in your fingers and yank it suddenly. If older guy yelps out in pain, then Aha! he's not that old. Older chaps tend to lose hair from where it is supposed to grow (head, chin, chest and armpits) and gain hair where it is not supposed to (ear canal, eye brows, nostrils, bath tub outlet). That is why one peek into the ear canal of a supposedly-young senior citizen which reveals

the tangled undergrowth of a tropical rainforest with bottom feeders crawling about is sufficient proof that you are indeed in the presence of a venerable old gentleman.

**2. Teeth.** Take it from me: the older we get, the fewer of these we have. That is the general rule. But some of us wily geezers try to fool society by donning a mouthful of 32 artificial manmade teeth. It takes an expert to tell whether the ivories are the genuine article. This you do by carefully observing subject as he takes a bite at a guava slice. If teeth attach themselves to guava instead of the other way around, then subject is in the autumn of his or her life, and you should accord him and her all necessary respect and assistance.

**3. Belly.** According to Newton's Third Law of Thermodynamics and the Archimedes Principle, a body floating in space attracts another body floating in space with a force equal to the square root of the acceleration of both bodies. This is why my lower abdomen has of late started moving in general direction of the Centre of the Earth. There are several ways that us older people try to get our tummies to defy gravity. One is to wear wired undies that give our soft underbellies some cantilever support, but the trouble with this bit of engineering is that it thrusts forward our innards thus making them even more prominent. When you hear young passersby say: "Geez, that one's got guts" don't take it as a compliment.

**4. Clothes.** One way to fool people that you are not as old as you look is to take tips from teenage magazines and dress like younger people. In this day and age, this means wearing jeans that begin in the general vicinity of your appendectomy scar and expose to all and sundry the bales of lint that have gathered in your belly button, and end several fathoms beneath your feet. Your trouser should actually be a hand-me-down from Michael Jordan so they are easy to get in and out of. And never, and I mean never, tie your shoe laces. That's like so uncool.

**5. Speech.** Clothes aren't everything, bro, and it is important to learn, like, to speak like other young dudes and liberally sprinkle your conversation with the word "cool" (pronounced "cuawf") so no one can tell that you're actually just another old dork. Speaking of sprinkling, I don't even know whether I should tell you this, but when you get to ripe old age like me, "toilet training" takes on a whole new meaning. We need a GPS to keep track of all urinals and arsenals in our immediate vicinity.

Good thing I'm wearing Michael Jordan's trousers these days.

## NEPALI SOCIETY



# Angel time

In the tradition of her favourite musicians, radio jockey Angelina Gurung, Angel to her listeners, has broken her share of rules. Her latest protest in a social climate that molly coddles pregnant women, was working well into her third trimester. A week overdue and seven days into her maternity leave, she was still live on air everyday on HITS FM, 91.2. In fact, she worked overtime in her ninth month to pre-record shows that will air through January while she is on leave.

This 25-year-old brushes off any attempts to turn her into a symbol for The New Nepali Woman. "I wasn't sick, just pregnant," she laughs. "It may seem amazing that I worked till my due date, but if women do it in the hills and plains, so can city women."

It helps that Angel loves her job and her audience, for whom she spins classic hits from the 50s to the 80s six days a week during Kathmandu's nerve-

wracking morning commute hours. What soothes her soul is the Beatles, who make a regular appearance on her programme, as do Bob Dylan and Janis Joplin, musicians that inspired their generation to stand up against war and neo-colonialism and for women's rights.

Although they are aware of her on-air persona, most of Angel's listeners don't know she is married, much less that she worked right through her pregnancy. Her strong practical nature makes Angel a rebel with a

cause. Angel and her husband eloped to Singapore instead of burdening their parents with footing the bill of a lavish and protracted wedding ceremony. The parental resistance has all but melted away with the arrival of the baby.

Trust Angel to be back in the studio after a 30-day maternity leave. "It's going to be tough, but my career is very important to me," she says. "Running home for afternoon feeds are not going to last forever, so I'll go with the flow. Besides, even mothers need independence!"

And, as Aretha Franklin, another of Angel's favourites, spelled out: R-E-S-P-E-C-T.



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