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Times

#16724 - 30 October 200320 pagesRs 25

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RANYATA LIMBU

Which way?

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

In theory, the outcome of the Nepal-Bhutan 15th ministerial meeting on Bhutani refugees this week was a major breakthrough. It marked the first time in 10 years that Thimpu agreed to repatriate refugees under three categories—bonafide Bhutanis, Bhutanis who have emigrated and Bhutanis who have committed crimes. The fourth, non-Bhutan category, will not be Bhutan's concern.

But will Bhutan commit to action what it has inked on paper? Based on the Bhutani "nod" this time, Ambassador-at-large, Bhek Bahadur Thapa believes that the first trucks carrying refugees will start moving from eastern Nepal to the Dragon Kingdom by mid-February 2004. "We asked them to include all three categories in each lot they take back, and they agreed," Thapa clarified.

That won't be an easy task. Consider the crux of the 15th ministerial agreement: "the people in the three categories who voluntarily apply to return to Bhutan will be repatriated as per the harmonised position on these categories." That position, decided at the 14th round of ministerial meetings in May this year, centres on the second category of those who have emigrated—a majority of the around 100,000 refugees.

Voluntary immigrants will have to reapply for citizenship and stay in Bhutan for a two-year probationary period. It won't come with guarantees because Bhutan's law denies citizenship to those who emigrated without prior approval of the government. "Remember, the repatriation has to be voluntary and the Druk government will interpret the legal provisions liberally as agreed between Bhutan and Nepal," Khandu Wangchuk, the Bhutani Foreign Minister told *Nepali Times*. Should the refugees choose to return home, Thimpu can deny them citizenship based on their laws. Given the provision in the 14th round of talks that refugees unwilling to leave can apply for Nepali citizenship, the Bhutani government has a loophole.

Bureaucratic hurdles are one thing, there are added fears about the kind of reception the refugees could receive once they reach home. "Do you think the refugees are fools to tread the minefield back home when they have an option to be safe in Nepal?" asks Rakesh Chhetri, a Bhutani human rights leader in exile. NGOs have reported that people from northern Bhutan have been resettled in the homesteads the refugees left.

There are no simple solutions, and diplomatese has too many ifs and buts. The fate of the refugees languishing in the camps still hangs in the balance. ♦

A hurdle in the much-lauded breakthrough.

Keep kids out of it

"Our children are being robbed of their childhood, we can't steal their future as well."

NARESH NEWAR

Reshma Singkhawal was studying in her room when she heard gunshots. Family members started screaming. When she got there, the 16-year-old found her father lying in a pool of blood. Two Maoist assassins had killed Hari Ratna Singkhawal, a police officer at Gahiti Tol in Bhaktapur two weeks ago. Hari Ratna, 38, was the sole supporter of a 15-member clan, including his wife and six children.

Maoist leader Prachanda's statement this week that the group will no longer target 'low-ranking' security personnel may bring a halt to killings like these, but it is already too late for many. There are thousands of Nepali children who have witnessed horrific murders of their loved ones, forced to watch torture, survived gun battles inside their classrooms or suffered bereavement. If the conflict does not wind down, these numbers will grow, and child rights activists say there is almost nothing being done to address the psychological trauma the children continue to suffer.

Reshma went into post-traumatic



NARESH NEWAR

Children performing at a Maoist cultural program in Rukum.

shock after witnessing her father's murder and for a week her mind segued into temporary amnesia, unable to recognise even close family. Her four younger sisters don't sleep well, and are plagued by nightmares. Nilu, 14, once the most soft-spoken among her sisters, now talks

of revenge. "When I grow up, I will avenge my father's death," she says. Her younger sister Nilima, 12, is more controlled. "I want to be a police officer like my father and serve my country," she says.


continued ➡ p5

Times

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Weekly Internet Poll # 107

Q. Should overseas Nepalis be given extra incentives to invest in Nepal?



Yes 80.2%
No 18.2%
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Avco International, the sole distributor for Hyundai vehicles in Nepal have imported almost 2,000 vehicles so far since



December 1999. Other popular Hyundai models in Nepal include the Accent, Matrix, Sonata, Santa Fe and Terracan and the H100 micro bus. Recognizing the fact that service is the major differentiating factor in their success, Avco Service centre has recently launched a 5 years free service program for all Santro Xing purchased in the new future. ●

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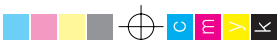
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Enough is enough

It is easy to see where the problems of our national crisis lie: in the three power centres unwilling to give an inch. We know what needs to be done: we need a triangular negotiating table so the three can sit together till they find a way out. The riddle wrapped in an enigma is: how do we do it?

Such is the mistrust, the lack of political will, the refusal to compromise, that even if we got the three political forces to sit around a table it will not guarantee a solution. In fact, what we may get is a full-fledged fistfight. Each of the three power centres is bent on enforcing its wish through brute force or agitational tactics. The people of Nepal are left out of a tussle that everyone is fighting in their name. The long-suffering citizens of this country are bearing the brunt of the mayhem and murder, the displacement, the joblessness and dislocation caused by a collapsed economy.

No one believes there is a military solution, yet they fight. Everyone knows political disagreements are taking the country down, yet they refuse to agree on anything. They know what needs to be done, and don't even take the first step towards it. Even though rationality doesn't seem to work anymore, here are some logical points all three parties need to bear in mind:

How to stop a war that no one wants before no one can stop it.



The Maoists

- Parts of Nepal may be feudal, but the Nepali people are now alert citizens of a democratic country who are used to their freedoms. This is the 21st century and political power doesn't come out from the barrel of a gun anymore. You don't pit citizens against each other to reduce economic, ethnic, caste or religious disparity.
- True longterm revolution will only come by emancipating the

masses through peace, understanding and cooperation. Coercion, threats and violence may look like they are a shortcut, but they breed an all-consuming counterviolence.

- Nepal's geopolitical reality is that sustained governance is only possible by taking up an unbiased, neutral and peaceful path. Our giant neighbours will not tolerate instability beyond a certain point.
- Destruction of national infrastructure or private property

doesn't help the Maoist cause. Social disruption, instead of hastening the revolution, will complicate matters beyond control.

- An armed struggle may have been justified if there was a totalitarian regime. Democracy has been sidelined, but it's not dead. Changes in the constitution, even the preamble, can be done through future referendums. You don't have to kill Nepalis and destroy Nepal to achieve that goal.

declare a timetable for general and local elections.

- The king must now take the major political parties into confidence before nominating an interim government, and not expect everyone to join the government once he nominates the prime minister. Such a government should then be given authority to induce peace, and hold elections within a timeframe.
- The king should agree on a referendum on some of the main demands like the constitutional monarchy, and the crown's powers over the army.
- Appointing ministers, key constitutional posts and local body administrators make a mockery of multiparty democracy. It is spreading distrust, and it should stop. The Nepali people know their fundamental rights and want to decide who is going to rule over them and how.
- Tempting as it may be in such turbulent times, the king must keep himself above politics and power and let the forces elected by the people play the game of politics.
- The government must urgently create conditions for the Maoists to lay down their arms and disband their militia in exchange for the army returning to the barracks. This would be the first step in the process of restarting the electoral process.

responsible nor accountable. Their mal-governance has pushed many Nepalis to blame not just the parties, but democracy itself. The parties need to earn back the peoples' trust.

- All political parties advocating constitutional monarchy must unite with the king to form a united front to draw the Maoists to the negotiating table as quickly as possible, ensuring lasting peace.
- The unity of the five-party alliance must not be allowed to collapse at the first sign of a tussle for ministerial positions. It has gone beyond cabinet positions, now it is about the survival of the nation. Once the country comes back on track, they can go back to playing petty politics, but, please, this time without paralysing the whole country.

Part of the reason there isn't enough pressure on these three forces to patch up is because civil society in Nepal has been so dormant and has been divided along partisan lines. That is why there is no one on behalf of the people saying: enough is enough.

In times of war, armed belligerents tend to ignore the voice of civil society. Here too, neither the army nor the Maoists want to hear the calls for peace. But if civil society unites and genuinely speaks on behalf of the overwhelming majority of Nepalis who want to have no part in this war, that voice will be hard to ignore.

And there will be enough people who have the courage to stand up and be heard. ♦

Dhawal Shumshere JB Rana is the former UML mayor of Nepalganj.

The king

- We need to see more evidence that the palace and the government are honest about upholding democracy. Make a genuine effort to bring the Maoists to the ~~mainstream~~ ^{mainstream}, an offer the parties can't refuse, and

Political parties

- The major political parties must own up that they are partly responsible for the mess this nation is in, and undertake a commitment to the people that they will mend their ways. During the last 12 years, the parties have neither been

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A crying need



From l-r: Reshma Singkhawal (front row, second from right) at home with her family in Bhaktapur. Four-year old Shanti waits for her father (a porter killed in an encounter) to come home in Rukum. A grieving widow of a policeman with her children, also in Rukum.

ALL PICS: NARESH NEWAR

from p1

In the last seven years of the ‘people’s war’, more than 7,000 children have been affected. Human rights groups have kept track of the statistics—numbers of children killed, abducted and tortured—but little is reported or done about the most serious problem facing young survivors: their trauma. Despite the crying need, no organisation has investigated the psycho-social effect of the conflict on children. Some groups are working with orphans, internally displaced children, but the need is far greater than these isolated and uncoordinated efforts. Child psychologists have noted two traits in children suffering post-traumatic shock: intense fear or obsession with revenge. Four-year-old Rabina Regmi, who survived a firebomb attack on a bus last year in which her mother died (‘Why the children?’), *Nepali Times*, # 121) still talks of killing Maoists.

“If such children do not get enough support or counselling, the level of trauma will get severe and impede their mental development,” says Gauri Pradhan of CWIN (Child Workers In Nepal). This Tihar, many children are cowering in fear when they hear firecrackers going off—it reminds them of gun battles they have witnessed.

Even away from the war-zone, children who watch gory images on television of corpses piled high after bloody battles are psychologically affected. “Images such as these not only re-traumatise children who lost parents, but also increase the psychological stress levels of children living in non-combat areas,” says Pradhan. It makes children distracted,

moody, not interested in studies, or sometimes more prone to violence.

A seven-year-old student of St Xavier’s School was so traumatised by the images he saw of a row of Maoist dead on television, he stopped going for classes. When he finally mustered the courage to go back to school, he would cry in fear. It took long sessions of counselling from his teachers and constant support from friends and family before he felt secure again.

The Maoist targetting of schools, attacks on school teachers, closing down of schools all over the country have also given children the impression that schools are war zones. This has spread fear and panic among young children who see themselves as targets of violence. It remains to be seen if Prachanda’s promise will mean that the schools will reopen and the children will get a chance to study normally. Bhola Mahat, a human rights activist based in Nepalgunj says children in the rural mid-west are especially badly affected. “I have met many children who live in constant fear that they might get killed at anytime, while walking to school or playing outside,” he says.

The Maoists threaten and use abusive language on children when they come to force them to join mass meetings or take adolescents away for forced recruitment and training. On the other hand, the security forces patrols are unnecessarily rough with children and teachers who refuse to tell them where the Maoists are. They keep quiet out of fear of reprisal from the Maoists, but the security forces take the silence to mean sympathy or support for the rebels. “The children are caught in the middle,” adds Mahat.

Dipak, a 17-year-old boy from Salyan was taken in for interrogation by the security forces. He was tortured for almost two days and was finally let go after his interrogators decided he really didn’t know why his father was missing from the village.

Perhaps the most traumatised are Maoist child soldiers who are subjected to propaganda, physical hardships and the horror of surviving when so many of their young friends die in battle. “Even if they want to escape, they can’t,” says Hima Pradhan, a psychologist at the anti-torture group, CVICT. The children are trapped: they fear getting arrested or being killed by security forces as much as the communal stigma should they desert and go home. Child soldier Rabi and his friend joined the Maoists out of curiosity. After helping the rebels attack some villagers, Rabi started having doubts. When he tried to quit, his own friend threatened to kill him. Now, even if he tries to escape, he feels his community will not accept him back.

Child psychologists say that although there have been no studies, they don’t want to rush into the subject because they fear it will end up making too many generalised assumptions. “It could stigmatise an entire age-group or population as being psychologically damaged,” says Marc Jordan of CVICT, who is preparing a training manual for psychosocial counselling for children affected by armed conflict. He and his fellow psychologists believe that before anything else, it’s critical to mobilise the community first.

“When the problem goes straight up to the psychologists, it might end up over-medicalised and too psychologised,” Jordan told us.

CVICT says the most important way to deal with children’s trauma is to allow them to continue with their regular routine like going to school, playing with friends and providing care.

The most tragic case in recent months has been the gunbattle at Sharada Higher Secondary School in Mudbhara in Doti two weeks ago. The school is now closed because no one dares to move the rotting bodies of Maoists from the classrooms. Many children have moved to Silgadi or to the tarai to escape.

Psychologists say if the school continues to be closed, the parents, children and teachers will not get a chance to collectively come to terms with the tragedy and it will worsen the psychological risk for those who saw their friends being killed and injured. “If the school and community give enough emotional support and care, it will help the students,” says Jordan.

But such emotional support from the community is exactly what is missing in many parts of the country. Village schools are closing down, children are estranged from parents who are on the run from the Maoists and the army, and many are migrating to cities where they end up on the streets, to begin another cycle as street children or day labourers. CWIN is sounding alarm bells. Says Gauri Pradhan: “This is an urgent crisis. Our children are being robbed of their childhood, we can’t steal their future as well.”

Some names of children in this piece have been changed to protect their identity.

CWIN: 4278064

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COMMENT

Vis-à-vis life

A young Nepali ruminates on why he may have been refused a US visa.

I did not realise being considered a potential threat to the US national security and a possible illegal alien would be so thrilling, especially since most of my family, friends and colleagues think of me as goody-two-shoes. I no longer am a boring young man, at least not according to Uncle Sam.

Unlike the Buddha, who was initially unsure of his path to nirvana, I was absolutely confident of my (temporary) path to the US. Armed with an invitation letter from a Washington DC-based global financial agency, a support letter from my current employer (another global agency) plus confidence from visiting multiple countries, including a past visit to the US, I had surveyed other visa applicants at the US Embassy with some pity. I walked into that interview with a swagger I didn’t know I possessed.

After a brief interview, the white gentleman behind the glass window said politely and firmly, “I cannot issue you a visa”. He explained that I had not adequately proven my “ties to Nepal”. He advised me to apply after a month with full details of property owned, bank statements etc.

“Ties to Nepal”? That began my mini-angst. What defines my tied-ness to Nepal? My legal tie as a citizen and as an employee in a “legal” Nepali institution were clearly stated in that application. Obviously both were inadequate for the US government.

Material ownership (house, land, money) was a major threat to this answer. Marriage was, apparently, another criterion of tied-ness according to a colleague. I was clearly very, very un-tied-y. My colleague’s pragmatic suggestions were, “Buy a house and marry someone with two kids immediately”. Other explanations ranged from a global geo-politico-economic situation analysis to a critical observation of my personal self. “They just do it to make you reapply and get more money,” a friend said. So that’s how the US economy and the Iraq war are being funded.



MIN BAIRACHARYA

An American friend emailed her government’s attitude dismissively: “They view all brown skinned single men as a threat”. That explains why my cousin got a visa, he is naturally lighter skinned than I, although he, too, is single. Perhaps my recent trips to Malaysia and Sri Lanka looked suspicious. Lesson: all travel should be planned keeping in mind one may need to get a US visa some day, ie avoid all other countries. My least liked hypothesis came from a conflict expert, who said, “Sometimes they refuse a visa because they don’t like the way a person looks”. Visually challenged applicants should use a veil or opt for plastic surgery.

That fateful evening, charged with anti-American sentiment, I consoled myself by watching *Bad Boys II* at Jai Nepal Cinema first, followed by *Friends* on TV, comforted by burgers and Coke for dinner. I plan to boycott CNN, C-span and all American horror movies in protest next.

Name withheld on request. The author may reapply for a US visa.

Nepali Times

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SRADDHA BASNYAT

Big city nights are not what lures 60-year-old Sonam Tshering to Bangkok regularly. He is a patient at the Thai capital's Bumrungrad Hospital where he checks-in for his annual check-up. "Here in Nepal it's difficult to even make an appointment with a doctor, and when I do, I get shoddy treatment. I won't accept anything mediocre when it comes to my health," says the businessman. And although he knows Nepal has many good doctors, Sonam distrusts the calibre of Nepal's medical facilities.

Sonam's lack of faith in Nepal's medical system is neither new nor unique. For decades, Nepalis with even simple medical conditions have gone abroad for treatment. It used to be the missionary hospitals across the border in Bihar, or in Vellore in the south, or AIIMS in New Delhi. Lately, it is Thailand's unique brand of 'medical tourism'. Fed with horror stories of misdiagnosis and malpractice back home, the exodus of patients abroad has slowed but not abated.

But things are changing. There are even indications that Indians are coming to Nepal for treatment in Nepali facilities: especially for eye problems, heart or cancer. As the quality of Nepali hospitals grow, and specialist doctors return to Nepal from abroad, Nepalis are finding that a lot of the operations that used to require medical evacuation to India or Thailand can now be



done locally. Although medical treatment in Nepal is not cheap, it is still less expensive than roundtrip air tickets and a lengthy stay at hospitals in New Delhi or Bangkok.

At A&M Marketing, Amod Pyakuryal represents Bangkok's Bumrungrad Hospital in Kathmandu, and says it offers world class care for costs that are "not much higher" than Delhi or Bombay. A standard coronary artery by-pass with an eight night stay at Bumrungrad costs \$5,763. Bumrungrad gets 200,000 international patients a year, and there has been criticism in the past that it is too big to give individualised care. Still, approximately 500 referrals were made from Nepal last year for everything from gastro-enteritis to cardiac surgery.

Procedurally, a doctor makes a medical referral after consulting the patient and family, and concluding the required facility or procedure is not available in Nepal. Sometimes things don't even get that far. Buddha Basnyat, medical director at The Nepal International Clinic, which treats mainly expats, says: "There are two things patients consider: whether they get a definitive diagnosis and the treatment prescribed. But reliability of lab testing in Kathmandu often poses a limiting factor. Without proper diagnosis, treatment becomes difficult."

While the trend of medical referrals abroad by doctors is now limited to special cases, the good news is there has also been a recent decline in Nepalis going abroad for treatment. Nepal now

has exceptional doctors and facilities, especially in cardiology, neurology and ophthalmology. Cardiac care has improved significantly both in the public and private spheres.

At Shahid Gangalal National Heart Centre, executive director Bhagawan Koirala (*pic top, at the operating table*) has provided quality care for the past two years, and recently, the government hospital began charging subsidised rates. "We've made cardiac care accessible, so Nepalis don't have to go to India or Thailand for treatment anymore," says Koirala. The hospital in Bansbari already sees 25,000 cardiac patients come through every year, and many of them get subsidised care. But Koirala is open to referring patients to facilities abroad if they are high-

As medicare improves in Nepal, the haemorrhage of referrals abroad is abating.

risk cases, or if the family prefers.

Lab facilities are generally not Nepali medical care's strongest suit, although places like Manipal Teaching Hospital in Pokhara guarantee a reliable diagnosis.

Since the private educational facility opened in 1994, Suresh Ramachandran, medical superintendent at Manipal, estimates the number of patients going to India has decreased by 20 percent, especially with concessions for poor patients.

Up to 40 percent, depending on the case, are given free beds and fulltime residential doctors regularly waive fees. Ramachandran told us, "As a teaching hospital, Manipal's already very competent staff will only improve as post graduate students stay to develop more departments and our South Indian nurses are replaced with Nepali nurses trained here."

Manipal has modern laboratories with a total analyser. It can run 100-150 tests automatically from a small sample of blood. The lab also produces accurate investigations of thyroid hormone levels, goitres, HIV through the Western Blot test, cervical cancer using Pap Smears, skin biopsies to detect leprosy, all of which meet international standards.

The lack of proper facilities

is the only justifiable reason for referrals according to Bharat Rawat, Executive Director at Norvic in Kathmandu. But he admits it is an uphill battle to convince patients they can trust local treatment. He refers less than five percent of his cases, and only those that entail risky procedures. Other than updating facilities and skills, Rawat believes Nepal's medical profession could do with a communication skills makeover: "Talk to patients, give them respect, let them call you on your phone and don't hide the truth from them." He has noted a turn in the tide of Nepali heart patients going abroad and estimates it's down to 25 percent from 80 percent three years ago. "I try and convince Nepalis that we can provide services that are as good, if not better, than some hospitals abroad. The next step is to convince insurance companies that travellers and expats living in Nepal can get quality care at cheaper rates, avoiding the risk of transportation," says Rawat. "Someday, I'd even like to see foreigners considering Nepal as a medical destination."

That may take some time, but oncologist Sudip Shrestha at the Bhaktapur Cancer Care Centre says, "We must improve the diagnostic capabilities of facilities in Nepal, which is the major reason for referrals abroad." ♦

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



Plainspeaking

There are many questions to be answered in these troubling, mysterious days. Prime among them is whether the government and the security forces are trying to win the war against the Maoists by military means? If not win, then put increasing pressure on the rebels to abandon the path of violence and return to the peace process that collapsed in August. An examination of what ministers and occasionally, members of the forces are saying points to this whatever might be said to visiting dignitaries and diplomats about being ready for negotiations at any time.

If so, then it's time for someone in authority to say it plainly. The Nepali people deserve no less than to know that their country is going to become more violent, that soldiers and the police will be fighting more, not less, in the weeks to come. Yes of course, the Maoists too should make their intentions plain but to be fair, they have long rejected the existing order, and are fighting for its overthrow. Their web sites and press releases over the years have said no less. I think we know where they are coming from. 'Peoples' War' is pretty plain speaking.

No, it's the government, the monarchy and the security forces who need to come clean about their intentions. There are hints galore, and not just from Nepali sources. The *New York Times* quotes US officials as saying the Maoists must be "bent back to the bargaining table". This from the country that is supplying the security forces with weapons and counterinsurgency training. Government ministers who negotiated with the Maoists in the last round of the peace talks are frank: they didn't like the tone or substance of their interlocutors' submissions to the process, didn't believe that they only wanted peace and democracy and now think that they must disarm if there is to be a meaningful peace process in the country.

That last point makes some sense. Looking at Northern Ireland, where the British government and the IRA have been doing a *danse macabre* for years around the notion of peace and autonomy. A peace process acclaimed



by the world sits suspended because IRA hardliners won't give up arms and explosives. "Decommissioning" it's called, in an attempt to make disarmament seem less than surrender. International players from America, Canada and Europe are quietly trying to put the two sides back on track, and find forms of words that ease them into peaceful conflict resolution, rather than angry rhetoric and more violence. So far, that, at least has been the case.

Here in Nepal, there's a sense of limbo at the moment. While the level of violence has been alarming in recent weeks, there's not been the steady stream of body count press releases from the Defence Ministry that there was before the ceasefire earlier this year. Perhaps that's because, as one Nepali newspaper reported a ministry spokesman as saying, the army doesn't tell the Ministry what it's doing anymore. Or perhaps it's a deliberate strategy of keeping public expectations low. Or perhaps, more ominously, it's an attempt to minimise the impact of civilian casualties or

What's more important: peace or supremacy of arms?

even human rights problems as the recent incidents in Doramba and Doti seem to indicate.

This, in the end, is why the Nepali state, in whatever form it chooses to present itself, should now be honest with the Nepali people about its military aims in the fight against the Maoists. Because if this is all out war, as it seems to be, then war has rules and those rules must be respected. Even more, those who investigate the conduct of war need respect and support from both sides, but especially from the government and the security forces. War cannot be won by those who treat civilian security and rights as disposable quantities. This is the international standard to which conflicts are now held, especially if international support is to be proffered to one side over the other, as is the case right now in Nepal. Donor governments, those accused of interfering in the country's internal affairs, are increasingly uneasy about the potential for a spiral of violence here that could turn the place into another Afghanistan, another Cambodia.

If this is not war, then what is it? Is there a strategy other than fighting the Maoists? Is anyone out there winning hearts and minds, or even trying to develop the country beyond the Kathmandu Valley and the richer sections of the tarai? Is there a role for the political parties and other parts of civil society in any of this? Will proven human rights abuses ever be properly and publicly handled, to the satisfaction of survivors, victims and others? What's more important? Peace? Or supremacy of arms? Tough questions, but the answers are probably even tougher. ♦

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Case closed

Long before the Supreme Court of Japan sentenced Govinda P Mainali to life imprisonment this week, his case was already making headlines in Japan and here in *Nepali Times* ('Here comes the story of Govinda Mainali,' #39, 'Radha visits Govinda in jail,' #77). In 2000, Mainali was acquitted by Tokyo District Court but the verdict was reversed eight months later by Tokyo High Court. His retrial and unnecessary detention sparked protests from human rights groups. After a protracted battle in court and several attempts at extradition to Nepal, Mainali was found guilty of murdering a Japanese woman from Tokyo Electric Power Co in 1997. "Unless Govinda Prasad Mainali lodges another appeal, the Tokyo High Court's ruling that he be imprisoned for life will be final," reports Japan's Mainichi News.



drive for the British Gurkha regiments when he was abducted by the Maoists last Sunday. The first foreign national to have this dubious honour, Griffith was taken hostage with four Nepali officials in a village near Baglung. Forty hours after their ordeal, the entire team was released. Griffith is now back in Kathmandu and the British Embassy has stated it is investigating the matter.

Fellowship

Lily Thapa and Mandira Sharma have been selected for this year's prestigious Ashoka fellowship. The Washington-based fellowship comes with monthly stipend to support individuals working for social changes in their country. The fellowship is run by the Ashoka Foundation in 44 countries. Since 1987, the fellowship has selected more than 31 fellows working in various social issues. Thapa, a women's activist, is involved in empowering the widows to become economically independent and fight social stigma. Mandira Sharma is actively involved in making Nepal's justice system more accountable.

Abductee

British Army Lieutenant Colonel Adrian Griffith was with his team on a regular recruitment

Dipankara comes home



Due to the rare quality of the image, the museum staff was immediately suspicious, and scholars in Nepal identified the gilded copper image as one of the 108 Buddhas that are paraded through Patan at the annual Samyak festival.

The art dealer relinquished claim to the figure, allowing the Austrian government to secure the Buddha in police custody. It was kept in the lobby of the Vienna museum, where it was worshipped regularly by Austrian Buddhists (see pic), while legal wranglings between the Austrian and German authorities delayed repatriation.

Experts say the Dipankara case illustrates the global trend that stolen artifacts are no longer acceptable for sale on the international art market. Still, less than ten of the countless religious objects stolen from Nepal have ever been returned.

"What upsets me most was that this image was stolen out of a living tradition," says Buddhist scholar, Alexander Rospatt. "It shouldn't go back to a museum here, that would defeat the whole purpose of the exercise." At Nag Bahal this week, local *guthiyas* said their Buddha had gone on a 'little vacation' and they heard rumours that he was coming back soon. ♦

SUMNIMA UDAS, NATALI SANDERSON

A Dipankara Buddha stolen from Patan's Nag Bahal nearly two years ago finally flew home from Vienna on Thursday night just in time for the Newari New Year. The Buddha's odyssey began when a German art dealer tried to sell it for \$180,000 to the Ethnographic Museum in Vienna three months after it was stolen (See *Nepali Times*, 'Lost-and-found Buddha', #94).



V a c a n c y

Programme Officer

Rato Bangala Partnership in Outreach Programme has been set up with the support of parents in order to help bring quality education to a significant number of Nepal's children. An experienced Programme Officer is sought to help run this local initiative. This Officer will report to the RBPOP Committee and should be able to bring energy and quality into the programme. Job description and requirements are listed below.

Job Description

- Maintain communication with parents teacher associations, school management committees, teachers and students of government schools, as well as with District Education Offices in project districts.
- Work under the Rato Bangala Partnership in Outreach Programme Committee and maintain links with the committee members as well as involved students and parents.
- Assess requests for assistance and monitor the progress of projects in assisted schools.
- Maintain and review working files, as well as all related financial and administrative matters.
- Assist in the planning for and provision of training of teachers as a core activity of the Partnership in Outreach Programme.
- Prepare reports on a regular basis and update work plans and budgets.
- Be the primary source of public information regarding the Partnership in Outreach Programme.

Qualifications and Experience

- A minimum qualification of a Bachelors degree in the social sciences or equivalent with at least three years of practical experience in development work.
- Sound knowledge of project management and training
- Good communication and interpersonal skills, as well as significant team-work experience.
- Ability to work independently, determine work priorities and be creative in solving problems.
- Competence in computer use and sound administrative skills.
- Experience networking with civil society/ community based organizations.

The position is based in Kathmandu Valley but the Programme Officer will spend approximately 60% of his/her time in the project districts. Interested individuals should send their application with CV and two references by November 10 to the following address:

Rato Bangala Partnership in Outreach Programme

P.O. Box 202, Lalitpur, Nepal Fax: 5-536390

e-mail: rbs@mos.com.np (attention Partnership in Outreach Programme)

Female candidates are encouraged to apply.



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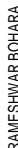
For further details contact: Ms. Bishnu Thakali (Project Co-ordinator), WEPCO Kupondole, Lalitpur, Phone # 5520617, e-mail: wepco@ntc.net.np



This happens all the time. Do American businessmen know how the World Bank works? No, they don't. Yes, very often businessmen go through their politicians to pressurise us. This is the real world, let's face it. We take each of these interventions as an opportunity to sit with ignorant people to explain how we are and what we do. Once they understand, they go away.

Britain must act to stop all-out war in Nepal

Ian Porter is a pseudonym for an official working with an international development organisation in Nepal.



Royal Nepali Army ML-17 of the type donated by Britain landing troops at Bhawang in Rolpa recently.

ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

LONDON TO KATHMANDU: Pepe Jeans, London, are now available at Mark Clothing, Kathmandu. This new readymade outlet has opened at Dharmapath and stocks a wide range of shirts, t-shirts and pants, that are also available at Roots

MAKEOVER: This week, Johnnie Walker Red Label revealed a stunning new 21st century incarnation of the world famous Scottish whisky. The main label has a radiant red 'hot-spot' in the centre and the Striding Man figure has been 'liberated' from the label at the bottom. The bottle is much more open and less cluttered too. Happily, the company hasn't tampered with the g that while our old friend may look goes down easy.

It isn't the Beed's intention to target banks. In Nepal, good policy intentions of punishing

This time the Central Bank faces the challenge of proving it will take action on real defaulters. It will also be interesting to see what the other banks will do, as they have defaults on the same account or the same promoter group(s). Needless to say, proper policing of banks and their portfolios by the Central Bank as well as other regulatory authorities are indispensable, but their processes must be acceptable, have public support and result in action. Otherwise it just becomes fodder for the cocktail circuit. ♦

arthabeed@yahoo.com.





Despite a tourism slump, the people of Manang are upbeat about the future.



MILAP DIXIT

KUNDA DIXIT in MANANG

This time of year, the Manang valley is a patchwork quilt of yellow and brown. The village elders have met to inspect the ripening buckwheat and millet, and decreed that harvests will begin tomorrow.

The scenic autumn colours hide a serious social dislocation. Decades of depopulation, the migration of Manangis to Kathmandu and beyond, has taken its toll. Many of the fields are fallow, there just isn't enough manpower for the harvest, so hundreds of villagers have moved up from Barpak in Upper Gorkha for the harvest season. Even before the sun rises from behind Pisang's towering cone, the workers are on the terraces. The fields rise up like a staircase from the frothing Marsyangdi up to the base of the cliffs that form the northern ramparts of the Annapurnas.

It is back-breaking work and they are at it all day, cutting, gathering, threshing with no time to admire some of the most spectacular scenery on earth. Thick forests of fir and spruce serrate the ridges, with the trees clinging to the steep slopes right up to the

snowline. High above all this are the knife-edge ridges, fluted crests and teetering blue seracs of the hanging glaciers on Annapurna.

Along the flat and wide trail from Humde airfield to Manang, there are a few trekkers this season to take in this view. On a normal October, there would be 300 tourists a day, walking up towards Thorung La and Jomsom. This season, there haven't been more than 80 daily doing the traverse. The end of the ceasefire on 27 August and the security situation down valley in Lamjung discouraged many. The adventurous came nevertheless, but were blocked by the Marsyangdi bridge below Dharapani that was damaged by a rockfall in mid-September.

Information and rumours travel quickly up and down the trails, and now reports are rife of rampant Maoist extortion in Ghorepani at the other end of the Annapurna circuit. Many who can afford it are planning to fly out from Jomsom instead of walking to Pokhara. In the lodges at night over dinner, trekkers exchange experiences of their encounters with Maoists: the courteous requests to donate to the revolution with a grenade peeking

from below the shirt. Receipts for Rs 1,000 bearing portraits of Marx, Lenin and Mao and denouncing American imperialism have become the new take-home souvenirs of a trek in Nepal. Most take the encounters in their stride, it is the *khaobadi* they are more worried about.

Many Manangis who returned to their home villages after the trekking bonanza of the 1990s are now in gloom. "We struggled a lot to make tourism work here, if it goes on like this all our investment will be wasted," says the ex-DDC chairman Michung Gurung (*pic, below*). "And if tourism goes down, we go down."



Even though what happens in Kathmandu has such direct impact on the economy and development of Manang, its politics and horse-trading feels remote here. Even the Nepali Congress chairman of Manang DDC, Phunjo Gurung, says there are no partisan causes

here. "People are least concerned about politics, they just want things to get back to normal so the tourists start coming again," says Phunjo, who runs one of Manang's classiest restaurants, specialising in Mexican and Italian cuisine.

Phunjo is impatient to get back to the work the people elected him for, but says his party bosses in Kathmandu wouldn't understand this. When he was DDC chairman, Phunjo worked closely with the Annapurna Area Conservation Project to upgrade the trekking trails, build and repair bridges. Today, every VDC in Manang is connected by new suspension bridges, trekkers who want to go on side trips have safe and well-marked trails and the community forestry program has revived much of woods around Pisang.

Revival of tourism would also reverse the trend for outmigration as more Manangis come back. "There is a perception in Kathmandu that Manangis are all rich," says Phunjo, "but the reality is different. Here you have to struggle, but if you work hard it has rewards."

Karma Tsering (*pic, below*) started the first bakery in Manang in Braga, and says he and his family can survive from farming even if tourism completely dries up. "You don't need as much money here as you do in Kathmandu, you have to work hard, but you can make a living from the land," says Karma. But even he admits that he doesn't have to get up at three every morning to start baking bread like he used to five years ago.

Sonam Tapkey is rushing off to his field on the slopes above Braga, carrying lunch for his Barpak harvesters. He has time to do this



because there are few tourists in his Hotel New Yak. With his John Lennon spectacles and film-star good looks, Sonam has no regrets about leaving Kathmandu. "Why live anywhere else when your home village is so beautiful, the air and water is clean?" he asks with a wide grin.

For Sonam, tourism has been the impetus to farm vegetables, sell a tasty health drink made from high-altitude wild seabuckthorn berries, and run roadside shops. All this will suffer if the tourism slump continues. "We have cabbages here that are 10 kg, carrots of three kg, if there are no trekkers we have to feed them to the horses," says 75-year-old Tashi Tsering.

Manang returnees like Tashi say the real problem is that city Manangis are not helping their village, and they don't want to come back. Michung Gurung, who returned to Manang in 1977 after trading between Bangkok, Penang and Singapore, agrees that the Manang diaspora only donates to monasteries and rites. "With the money they give gompas, we could upgrade schools and healthposts in all VDCs here," Michung tells us.

Most of those who have returned to Manang have had to leave behind their children in expensive boarding schools in Kathmandu or India. They are worried their children are alienated from Managi culture, language and festivals and act like foreigners when they come home for holidays. Because of the tourist slump, it is also getting difficult to pay the school fees.

With an average per capita income four times the national average, there seems to be no reason why quality schools can't be set up in Manang. But that may have to wait for the return for the next generation of wealthy international Manangis who want to get back to their roots.



Michung has also served as DDC chairman and has long stopped expecting anything from Kathmandu. "They don't care for us, whatever needs to be done we must do ourselves," he says. Indeed, most recent development in Manang has been because of local initiative. The airfield at Humde was carved out from a hillside by local people 15 years ago, the two power plants that supply electricity were set up locally but demand has outstripped supply and the turbines need repairs so there is power in Manang only on alternate nights.

Tripple Gurung (*pic, below*) is a Manangi who flies for Yeti Airlines, and has been trying to promote tourism to his home valley. He flies regularly into Humde from Kathmandu, and agrees that visitor numbers would grow if the flights could be made more regular. He has set up the



Manang Youth Club to carry out conservation work, and is the prime mover behind the Destination Manang Year 2004 campaign.

He sums it all up: "People don't know that 30 minutes from Kathmandu you have this unspoilt mountain paradise, and it is income from tourism that will ultimately help us preserve our culture and our way of life." ♦



Annapurna III seen from Kecho Lake (*top*) and the Marsyangdi flows past Pisang with Swarga Dwar rockface as backdrop (*above*).

Meet me in Manang

The Destination Manang 2004 campaign is trying to bring in tourists to this trans-Himalayan valley with the slogan: 'See you in Manang'. It has a calendar of festivals throughout next year, and is promoting the valley's accessibility, its superb scenery and its comfortable lodges.

For most trekkers, Manang is just a transit point for acclimatisation before climbing up to Thorung La on the Annapurna Circuit. They rush through Manang and have no time to take in the serene ambience of this uniquely picturesque region. The Destination Manang Campaign is out to change all that. "We want to show that Manang is worth going to even if you aren't doing Thorung La, there is enough to see and do in Manang itself," says Tripple Gurung, an airline pilot.

Humde airport is only 30 minutes from Kathmandu, and Yeti Airlines currently operates a scheduled flight every Saturday, with charter roundtrips during the week. Royal Nepal is set to resume its Pokhara-Manang flights soon, but don't bet on it. The flight skirts Himalchuli, flies up the narrow gorge of the Marsyangdi before the valley opens out in Upper Manang. The airfield at 3,200m is an ideal place to start a week-long trans-Himalayan holiday.

It is a pleasant two-hour walk down to Pisang along meadows and pine forests. There are great views of the north face of Annapurna II which is directly above the village, and is a good place to acclimatise if you have just flown in. There is a grandstand view of Swarga Dwar (literally: 'door to heaven') a geological oddity that has turned a 1,300m high mountain into a near-perfect hemisphere. Swarga Dwar would probably work very well as a parabolic antenna to scan the universe for radio transmission from extraterrestrials.

Next day, walk to the monastery in Upper Pisang, have lunch at one of the numerous restaurants facing Annapurna II, and then on to a



cluster of houses that is Ghyaru at 3,800m. The trek from Ghyaru via Ngawal to Manang is the high road that offers a grand panorama of the entire north wall of the Annapurnas. Take side trips to the numerous pastures on the north side of the valley, including the holy Kecho Lake at 4,800 m where the Annapurnas are reflected on the waters.

Descend into Manang and Braga, and eat at the numerous restaurants, bakeries, just lie in the sun, or go see a movie at the video parlour (currently showing: *Into Thin Air* and *Caravan*). Another day trek from Braga is to climb as far as you can up a spur of Annapurna III to Mila Repa's cave and see if you can spot the bow that the Buddhist saint is said to have left behind. The road up from Manang, past the bulldozed remains of the lateral moraine of the Gangapurna Glacier, has spectacular views of a turquoise green lake.

All this will acclimatise you for the tough trek to Tilicho, one of the world's highest lakes at 5,100m. It is a three-day roundtrip from Manang via Kangshar, and only for the well-acclimatised. We have it on good authority that the view of the lake and the Grand Barrier on a full-moon night is a spiritual experience that will cleanse your soul for the rest of your life. Tilicho Lake has become a pilgrimage spot for Indians who regard it as the famous body of water mentioned in the Ramayana where the crow gave Garuda a piece of his mind.

The Destination Manang 2004 campaign hopes to capitalise on the variety of pilgrimage, trekking, nature and festival attractions of Manang to bring in at least 20,000 visitors to the valley next year. Manang can be a destination not just for overseas visitors, but also Kathmandu-based expats and Nepali tourists for whom this can be an ideal quick and scenic one-week getaway. There is something for every season: archery contests, harvest festivals, monsoon pilgrimages, trekking and mountaineering all year round, and even heli-skiing in winter.

After this, if you still want to go to Thorung La, be our guest. ♦

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The ancestors of the Himalaya

TUSCON, Arizona, USA - The Himalaya were, till now, thought to have been formed 55 million years ago when the Indian subcontinent ploughed into the Asian landmass, but new discoveries show that the mountain range is part of a 500 million-year-old mountain system

American geologists say the Himalayan mountains reached their present heights by piggybacking on another mountain system even older than the range that includes Mt Everest and eight of the world's peaks more than 8,000m high.

A group of University of Arizona geoscientists made the discovery after field visits to Nepal and Indian Himalaya. The findings are published in the September issue of *GSA Today*, a scientific journal of the Geological Society of America.

(www.geosociety.org)

"Not only are the Himalaya Mountains atop another range, they are still moving up," said George Gehrels, a geosciences professor studying the phenomenon. "But erosion keeps the peaks from getting much higher."

The findings of the UA scientists fly in the face of conventional theories and force scientists to revise ideas on the region's tectonic history. The revised geologic history also challenges Earth scientists to rethink ideas on global climate change and the global shift in seawater chemistry of about 55

The Himalaya sits on top of another mountain range that is 10 times older.



LUIS PAULO FERRAZ

million years ago, Gehrels said.

It's important to the scientific community to understand the link between mountain building, which causes carbon dioxide loss and changes in climate, to changes in seawater chemistry, which is believed to be caused by erosion from the mountains spewing into the sea.

"We live on a very dynamic planet," Gehrels said. "And it's not only dynamic now, but it's always been dynamic." There are 12 major tectonic plates on Earth and many smaller plates. India, a tectonic plate itself, collided with Asia 55 million years

ago. The plates move as a result of a convection current in the 10,000-degree magma deep within the Earth.

The mountains on which the Himalaya piggyback were formed some 500 million years ago when the India Plate collided with an yet-unknown land mass, said Gehrels, who has been working on the project for 10 years. The age of the rock is determined by plotting the decay of uranium into lead.

"Our model is based on observations that, between 450-500 million years ago, rocks in the Himalaya were pushed down to great

depth and metamorphosed," Gehrels said. V-shaped patterns on boulders along river beds in the higher Himalaya suggest that they are 460 million years old. The material contained garnets and zircon crystals that Gehrels dated to around 500 million years using the uranium-lead technique.

The scientists studied conglomerates and sandstones found in these "ancestral Himalaya" sediments in different areas of the Annapurnas which is an ideal place for geological studies because it has the world's deepest gorge: the Kali

Gandaki Valley. The Himalaya are considered the best place on the planet for studying what happens when Earth's continents collide, but more research is needed to determine the relative proportions of faulting, burial, metamorphism, generation of granites, uplift and erosion that occurred during mountain-building.

"This really leads to the question of what the world looked like 500 million years ago," says Gehrels, who thinks that rocks in the Himalaya were pushed down below Earth's crust 500 million years ago and were changed by the heat and pressure. The deeply imbedded rocks were brought back to the surface by processes such as erosion caused from weathering and the formation of fault lines.

"What we are seeing is the roots of this earlier mountain formation," says Gehrels' colleague, Peter DeCelles. "The new mountain range is still being pushed up even today."

The ancient findings are significant not only because of their age, but also because it causes scientists to rethink the global climate change and the shift in seawater composition. The Himalaya Mountains shed enormous amounts of sediment that flow from the river systems into the oceans, which causes carbon dioxide loss in the atmosphere and in return cools Earth's climate.

"Taking away carbon dioxide is

like taking a blanket off of the Earth," Gehrels said. "It causes the entire Earth to get a whole lot cooler." Though it may not feel cool, the fact is that during most of Earth's history there were no polar ice caps. The eroded sediment that is swept away by systems like the Indus and Ganga flows into the ocean, changing its composition.

"This definitely may have played a role into what is in the ocean," Gehrels said. "We might have found the answer for why earth's climate and sea composition changed drastically at this point in time."

The bewildered scientists pieced together the mystery of these aged rocks when results from samples began coming in last year, showing that the mountains were in fact a part of an older mountain chain. Samples were gathered over the years and then tested at the University of Arizona's one-of-a-kind mass spectrometer.

UA scientists would like to return to the site to gather more evidence to determine if the old mountain range is still largely present or isolated. "There are still a lot of unanswered questions because we are looking at half a mountain range right now and we would love to find the other half," Gehrels said. "There are two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle and our goal is to put this together." ♦

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REPORT

APEC agenda

From trade talks to terrorism.

MARWAANMACANMARKAR in BANGKOK—Leaders of 21 Pacific Rim economies succeeded in salvaging some relevance in their gathering, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, by coming to the rescue of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and by laying out a blueprint to take on “transnational terrorist groups”.

At the end of the two-day summit at Bangkok on Tuesday, the leaders affirmed that they wanted to breathe life into the WTO, after its last round of ministerial talks collapsed in Cancun last month. The declaration also cemented APEC becoming another launching pad to back the US-led ‘war against terror’.

In fact, the language in the four-page declaration revealed how marked this shift has been. The Asia-Pacific leaders’ commitments on the security front were more detailed and entailed concrete measures, while the pledges about the WTO were rich in rhetoric but short on specifics. To combat transnational terrorism, for instance, the Bangkok Declaration stated that the APEC member economies had agreed to adopt strict domestic export controls, to secure stockpiles and to take domestic action to “regulate the production, transfer and brokering” of man-portable missiles, such as shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles (known as SAMs).

The leaders also agreed to “dismantle, fully and without delay, transnational terrorist groups that

threaten the APEC economies”. They committed to establishing “a regional trade and financial security initiative with the Asian Development Bank, to support projects that enhance port security, combat terrorist finance, and achieve other counter-terrorism objectives”.

In keeping with the focus on security, the APEC members also expressed concern, although implicitly, about security threats to the region posed by North Korea. They committed to “eliminate the severe and growing danger posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction”. Such an overwhelming stress on security meant a continuation of a trend that first occurred at the 2001 APEC forum hosted by China, followed by last year’s meeting in Mexico.

This pattern, which emerged in the wake of the 11 September terrorist attacks in the United States, indicates a further shift away from the free-trade vision of APEC, affirmed in Bogor, Indonesia, in 1994. At that summit, the developed member economies committed to opening up to free trade and investment by 2010, while the developing economies were given until 2020 to achieve this goal.

On the WTO, the declaration stated that APEC “reaffirmed the primacy of the multilateral trading system” and agreed to support free-trade talks shaped by the Doha Development Agenda, which was supposed to enable developing



countries to gain a secure foothold in the world economy.

That included APEC backing attempts to abolish “all forms of agricultural export subsidies, unjustifiable export prohibitions and restrictions, and commit ourselves to work in the negotiating group on rules in accordance with the Doha mandate”.

The significance of APEC’s views on the WTO was not lost on the leaders of Thailand and Chile in the wake of the fact that this week’s meeting was the first major international gathering after the WTO’s dramatic failure in Mexico. “The message from us is important: that the WTO talks should continue,” Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra told a press conference at the close of the APEC summit.

“All of us are committed to free trade. We feel there is some room to open the doors that were closed in Cancun,” Chilean President Ricardo

Lagos Escobar told the media.

However, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad was more circumspect, stressing a point he has come to be known for—that what the world needs is more fair trade, not free trade. “Free trade may not be fair but fair trade can be free,” he told the press. “We need to insist on an equitable system.”

Among APEC’s members are developing countries, such as China, and developed countries, such as the United States, who lined up on either side of the bitter debate in Cancun that led to the WTO talks’ collapse.

The fact that the animosity from Cancun is not reflected in APEC’s declaration “has to be welcomed,” says Asvin Dayal of the British development agency Oxfam. “If there is a commitment to support the multilateral trading arrangement that genuinely addresses developing country concerns, it is good.” ♦

(IPS)

Exorbitant Rx

HO CHI MINH CITY—Vietnam is finding out that there is no easy cure for the problem of rising drug prices. On 1 October, the health ministry was to implement a circular requiring all medicine products, whether local or imported, carry stickers showing their retail prices. But the implementation of this new rule has been moved to 1 January 2004, after eminent doctors and drug experts voiced their concerns about whether the health ministry’s scheme was pragmatic and feasible.

The circular was aimed at addressing a situation where “prices have increased by 17.4 percent so far this year, 10 times the rate of most goods,” said Vu Cong Chinh, a member of the group of health ministry experts in charge of drafting the circular on medicine price management. It also classifies medicines into three categories: drugs for national programs, essential medicine and popular drugs. The government will put a cap the prices of essential drugs and leave the prices of those in the final category to the drug vendors. However, leading pharmacists and doctors say a wider program is needed to address the problem, and that controlling prices is only part of this effort. (IPS)

Dwindling females

NEW DELHI—Indian families, trapped between the traditional bias toward male offspring and the need to limit family size, end up aborting female foetuses after getting illegal sex-determination tests. The Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostics Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act came into force on 14 February this year, but doctors and private clinics still disclose the sex of an unborn child for a fat fee. At present, anyone who seeks help for sex selection faces conviction and imprisonment for a three-year period. The state-level medical council can debar the medical practitioner, if convicted.

According to “Mapping the Adverse Sex Ratio in India”, the new UNFPA booklet, India’s child sex ratio—the number of girls per 1,000 boys in 0-6 years of age group—declined from 945 per 1,000 in the 1991 census to 927 per 1,000 in the 2001 census in a downward trend continuing since 1961. In an attempt to strike a balance, last week Haryana’s Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala announced a new family planning scheme. Couples get paid \$10 a month to support one female child and half that amount to support a male child if they opt for sterilisation afterwards. (IPS)



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FRIDAY, 31st OCTOBER

“We will continue.”

Sushil Koirala, Nepali Congress general secretary in *Saptahik Janasatta*, 18-24 October

साप्ताहिक जनसत्ता

People may have the impression that the political parties of the dissolved parliament have slowed down their movement. We have not. We chose not publicise our protest program during the Dasai and Tihar festivals. We will finalise the future direction of our movement before Tihar. We will continue.

We toned down our protest because of several reasons: Maoist rebels returned to jungles and resumed violence just when our movement was gaining momentum. The government imposed curfews in many districts and prevented people from arriving in the capital. Since there were restrictions on travel, people could not participate in the movement. Despite that, tens of thousands of people turned up on the streets during our week-long protest. We did it peacefully and in a disciplined way.

Have the two governments directly formed by the king been able to solve problems in the country? They couldn't even establish their legitimacy. In the meantime, the security situation has deteriorated. There are no signs of peace anywhere. I see no positive results from this government.

As long as there is violence, murder and terrorism, we cannot imagine going to the ballot. How can the government say it can hold elections? One must understand that the government had to make nominations for leaders at local bodies because it could not hold elections, and furthermore, they won't be able to if the present situation persists. If that's the case with local elections, how can we think about general elections?

The arrest of our co-general secretary Govinda Raj Joshi by the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) has everything to do with political vendetta. The Supreme Court is going through the writ petition Joshi filed, challenging the commission's move and we are continuing our movement. Under such circumstances, the arrest of Joshi by the commission can be viewed in no other way.

We would like to hold talks with Maoist rebels but we know the situation is just not favourable. The rebels have been killing our activists mercilessly in different districts. They have abducted senior leader and former home minister Mahendra Ray Yadav and our political workers like Ram Mani Gyawali. We condemn their activities. If the rebels are real patriots, they must give up arms and sit down for talks.

If they carry on their campaign of terror with the help of guns, the people will suffer because the rebels will use them as shields. How can the people believe them when they have been killing on the scale of Hitler and the Nazis?

Under the present circumstances, the House of Representatives has to be restored so that all the parties will have a forum to initiate a dialogue process with the rebels. The Maoists have been seesawing on their demands. Sometimes they say they want a republican state, but we also hear of their support for a constituent assembly with the king. They need to be clear about their stand.

The present crisis in the country is already a threat to our existence. The more careless we become in handling this situation, the more foreign hands will be at play here. The only way out is the restoration of the House where we can discuss viable solutions.

Since its inception, the Nepali Congress has been committed to the monarchy. The regression will continue unabated as long as the king fails to understand that even parties who believe in the republican system have come under the democratic umbrella that subscribes to monarchy. Problems cannot be solved by suppressing the people.



MIN. BALACHARYA

No threat

Yumesh Sherpa, *Rajdhani*, 19 October

राजधानी

Rumors of Maoist extortion and search operations by security forces forcing trekkers to return from the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) are unfounded. Neither trekking operators nor trekkers have faced such difficulties on the Annapurna trails.

Locals at Ghandruk and Birethanti say tourists are carrying on with their treks. They confirmed Maoist rebels in the region have dispersed after the army arrived. The locals also added that the Maoists did not terrorise tourists while collecting donations. Most rebels are satisfied with what they receive. There are, however, cases of opportunists posing as Maoists who harass tourists for donations. These people have reportedly manhandled locals, and they have fled the area. The Trekking Agents Association of Nepal (TAAN) said a Spanish tourist confirmed security forces had indeed conducted search operations at Pun Hill, but only for a day. The association's regional chapter in Pokhara says no tourists have returned from the Annapurna region because of the army or the Maoists.

Room for more

Charcha, 20 Oct

Dalits make up the lowest number of students in Nepal's biggest university. Out of 7,086 students admitted to Tribhuban University in 2002-2003, there are only 36 dalits, out which only 10 attend regular classes. The rest come to the university only during examinations. Out of this number, there is only a single female dalit student. Durga Sob who graduated recently says things are improving for her community although "the low turnout of students paints a dismal picture".

Khagendra Bareilli, a dalit student, attends classes regularly. He says poverty keeps most people from his community out of

university. Other factors that play an important part are social discrimination and lack of confidence. At Iswori Kanya, an all-girl hostel, there is only one dalit in the 250-strong student body. Rita Ghimire (Biswokarma) managed to get a spot only after a bitter struggle and help from a student union leader.

Student union leaders explain that unlike India, Nepal does not have a quota system for students from low castes. "The problem can be solved if the government introduces reservations for dalits," says Anjan Lama, a member of the Independent Student's Union. He says the university already has a quota for athletes and the physically disabled. Lama's union is working towards something similar for dalits as well. Meanwhile, Krishna Prasad Acharya, the university's management committee rector, says a seat reservation system will be possible to implement if the union and the dalit students raise the issue.

Stench in Doti

Dil Bahadur Chhanyal, *Kantipur*, 20 October

कान्तिपुर

More than a week has passed since 11 Maoists were gunned down in a school at Mudbhara village in Doti. Their bodies haven't been removed and locals are subjected to the foul smell of decomposing bodies. "We could have buried the dead, but the Maoists may come back and question us," says a Mudbhara resident. Everyone avoids the school and people fear the bodies could spread disease. They do their best to keep their cattle from drinking from the pond near the school but they can't control stray dogs that are scavenging on the dead bodies, sometimes carrying body parts into the village. The health post that used to treat an average of 50 people a day has also been shut down because of its proximity to the school. Patients have nowhere to go.

"Some dead bodies are in my paddy field," says Sharada Joshi. "But I daren't go there." All the

men in the village have either left or they don't come out of their houses. Senior students from the school have either reached the district headquarters at Silgadi and other towns like Dipayal and Dhangadi. The rest have dispersed to other villages.

Doors of homes are locked by sundown. Children are encouraged to get indoors when they see any strangers. Those who witnessed their friends die when security forces opened fire on a Maoist-held cultural program last week are showing symptoms of extreme psychological and emotional trauma. They neither eat nor speak properly. "When I speak to anyone, I feel I will be hit by a bullet," says seventh grader Madan Bhandari. "When I was hiding in one of the classes, I felt I was shot every time there were gunshots." Madan survived, but four of his fellow students died in that incident.

The rot

Abdullah Miya, *Rajdhani*, 21 October

राजधानी

Hunting trophies confiscated from different places in the country are decaying in a government store at Tikauli in Chitwan. The reason: bad management. All of them have been tucked into two rooms of a training camp at the forestry department's office. Even the staff are ignorant about the treasures inside. Visitors are discouraged, specifically because things are in absolute shambles.

Most of the contraband has fallen to pieces, many have been smuggled out. The hides of tigers, leopards, elephants, antelopes, rhinos lie in tatters. Officials say rhino horns were handed over to security agencies. The office does not even have an inventory of the confiscated contraband. In keeping with the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES), the government had made provisions for storage in a special museum. No one knows what happened to that plan.



Balloon: Election
Prime Minister: Wow!

कान्तिपुर Kantipur, 19 October

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

The ambassadors seem to lead our leaders.

-Industrialist Basanta Chaudhary in *Jandharana*, 23 October

Out of control

Sanghu, 20 October

साँघु

The Maoists have gained notoriety around the world for their violent activities in non-military zones—destroying infrastructure, forcing children to attend cultural programs, burning Red Cross ambulances, attacking social workers, looting banks and extorting from even poor people. These activities have been going on for a long time, since their 'people's war' began, and worsened after they broke the truce with the Deuba government.

After series of protests from the international community and human rights activists, the Maoist leaders announced they would abstain from excessive extortion and killing. But the militants remain virtually uncontrollable, saying change is not possible without destroying the old regime. They sidestep responsibility by saying all they do is follow orders.

This begs the question whether Prachanda was just pretending when he talked of peace. He could have easily controlled his people by categorically stating his commitment to a peaceful resolution. The Maoists, who always talk about achieving their dreams about a perfect Nepal, are set on destroying the nation and its citizens.

Initially the Maoists did have popular support, but the people are dominated, not motivated by the Maoist guns. Once they are disarmed, the public will pour out into the streets against them. How long will the Maoists intimidate us? If their leaders do not rein in their cadre, the Maoist party will self-desruct.



Back at Sundarijal >46

“I am fighting for the dignity of Nepalis”



Four months after his detention and a month in solitary confinement, BP Koirala is summoned before a specially constituted court at Singha Darbar. His lawyer, Ganesh Raj Sharma tells him he has filed a habeus corpus writ in the Supreme Court. On his return to Sundarijal, BP finds that he is no longer under detention under the Security Act, the army has been replaced by police. BP is too excited to sleep, and takes a sedative.

Tuesday 26 April, 1977

Sundarijal
After all, they took me to a specially constituted court set up specifically to try my case on camera. In the morning immediately after breakfast the Major came inside to inform me that as I had been arranged to be taken to the court the lunch would be served before 11AM. I was in the bathroom doing laundry work when the information was conveyed to me. I had very little time to arrange my things and thoughts. But they came after 2PM, which I thought was time past for myself to be taken to the court + hence I was preparing to press my washed clothes. Ass. Anchaladhish 1st came along with the Major + told me that his order of my detention under the Security Act had been withdrawn and asked me to certify the withdrawal. When I asked him for a written order of withdrawal, he said his verbal statement was enough. I signed the typed certification, tho I was not wholly satisfied by his statement. I agreed with him that since a written order of detention had been served, its withdrawal order should also be in writing. But he wouldn't listen. Immediately after I signed the certification of withdrawal I was taken out of the camp + brought to the court (at Singha Durbar) in a police jeep escorted by another jeepload of armed police. My 1st outing in 4 months. The outside of the camp appeared to be a small fort with sinister looking tangle of barbed wires, which reminded me of ... Camp of war prisoners (Italians). The jeep was wholly covered so that I couldn't see much of the roadside views + scenes—whatever I could see was through the small openings in the flaps of the covering and the keep was being driven at 80km speed. They didn't take me through the main road which is the direct route—but adopted a circuitous route to avoid notice by the people. Everything in the court seemed to be improvised and hurriedly put up. The court is constituted of one judge, with two office clerks—the judge is the district judge of the Narayani Zone—seemed to be a little nervous and self-conscious also and anxious to be judicially fair. On the whole a good normal person, but lacks personality + may not be legally clever—and softspoken, but may not be strong enough to withstand the pressure from the govt. When the court sat, at the very outset I told it that I was unable to particiapte in the legal proceedings as long as I didn't get the services of a lawyer. He promptly said that I would get all legal facilities provided by the constitution—and a man was immediately dispatched to fetch Ganeshrajji. In the meantime I pleaded with the court that I should get all the normal facilities of an undertrial, including regular interviews with members of my family + also pleaded for the permission to them to attend this court. As regards interviews he said that he could see what he could do about it afterwards, but as far as their attendance in the court was concerned the special court by govt order had to hold its sessions in secret, so outsiders wouldn't be permitted according to the very order of the constitution (See 21.4.77)

[entry on page for 21 April]

(from 26.4.77)
of the court. On this my argument was that family members were not outsiders and the secret session was not meant to be a session in purdah. The intention was to avoid press and the public. I further argued that since there was no specific order preventing the attendance of family members, the judge was free to interpret the order of the govt in such a liberal manner as per my interpretation of the order. The judge said nothing clearly on this point. As we were waiting the arrival of my lawyer the judge went to his chamber, permitting some kind of recess. In the meantime Ganeshrajji came. He told me that he had moved the Supreme Court for habeus corpus on my behalf starting that I was in military detention, that I

was being interrogated by the police on charges that had already been submitted to the court + that too when I was a prisoner under the Security Act—malafide detention, etc etc. He was expecting Supreme Court's ruling on this writ application today itself. He also told me that foreign legal experts, including Palkiwala, were interested in my case + might attend the court as observers.
All this had an effect: because when I was brought back to the detention camp the Major told me that he had just received order to hand over the camp to the police and that the police party was expected any moment to take charge of me. The sudden withdrawal of detention order under Security Act, the withdrawal of the army as my jailer, my presentation to the court – all were suddenly decided with a view of the writ petition and the realisation on the part of the govt that what they had been doing with me was not legal + was definitely high-handed. If the court were as concerned as they should be for the citizens' rights under law it should take this development too in consideration. After all, the compliance of the letters of law without meeting the demand of it in spirit is typically known as *jalphareb* and *jali phataha*. A *jaliphataha* keeps his legal document in order but violates the law in spirit.
I was given a glass of lemon tea in the court room when the court was not in session. The court atmosphere was relaxed. I told the judge in the very beginning that when I am brought here, I became (see 24.3.77)

[entry on page for 24 March]

(From 21.4.77)
relaxed and relieved, that I had been kept in solitary confinement under Security Act detention order, etc etc.
I was brought back to the detention camp at 6:15 PM. This outing had been too exciting and I felt a little tired. I was hungry also. Immediately after food at 7PM I wanted to go to bed but I was too excited to sleep. At about 9:30 the Major came with DIG Chemjong and bade goodbye to me. At dinnertime the Capt + Subedar + others had come to say goodbye. I told them that they had been good to me + I thanked them all. I thanked the army cook + told him that I would always remember his solicitous care of us + for the good food he served. To the major I said—"Major, I am very glad as I hope you will also be that the army is being relieved from police duty. The army is always used by the govt against their political opponent, and is made to perform the police duty—which is not what the army is for." I further told him—"I am fighting for the dignity of the people of Nepal, for you, Major, for your brothers + for the future generation too. I wish you the best of luck. Goodbye, Major." He brought a writing table for me and said—"I know you had been wanting a writing table, and the army HQ was preparing to send one. But now that the police has taken over, I don't know how long they will take to get a table. This is my table which I had been using here. It is a field table. I hope it will serve your purpose." I thanked him. I saw Subedar was tearful. I also felt sad when they left. I seem to have grown a fondness for the men of the army.
The DIG who has taken over charge also seems to be a good man—bespectacled, thin, totally devoid of a personality which is associated with a police officer—an atmosphere of cold authority is lacking in his demeanor.
The atmosphere of the camp has suddenly changed. I took a tablet of valium 5 + went to bed, a little overwhelmed with the events of the day and a little sad at the departure of the army from the establishment. I had started liking them, and they too had developed a regard for me + an understanding of our cause.



Domain
Night after night searching
among eye-sockets and whispers
Persisting, invoking a kingdom
from rabid stares and shattered
bones,
they say... in this the capital,
this the country...
As the city sinks into its grave,
(across the low roofs of Kathmandu
the view from Sundhara blurs) into
sleep,
seeps the stink of death. Those
who set themselves
above it all, speak (from their
spangled crypts)
with spurned lips and stolen
phrases,
of domain reclaimed. From fertile
valley,
not seasonal bounty, but bricks
stacked and counted
Beyond field and river, not sky vast,
but a fist closing upon itself.
Somewhere,
strung between ruins of the past
and the future in ruins, this place
without a present
stands: 108 excuses & lies, fate
trolled by ministering hands. In
Pashupati,
one no longer mistakes the moving
river
for the murmur of prayer
Zone of Peace
The crowd, as it shivers, draws itself
in
like a single clenched fist
In full gear, against a busted wall,
police lean on each other
and hold hands
Rain. A welcome gesture
The cement where Shoba spent the
night through
seems as clean as wounds tended to
Though all vehicles that enter and
leave the valley
pass through a zone of peace,
there are no seats to be found
No tickets to be had
Those that depart tend to their
crimes
Those that remain...
to the punishment that comes

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The 15 best films of the just-concluded Film South Asia '03 in

Travelling Film South Asia

Friday, 31 October-2 Sunday, November 2003, at Baggikhana, Patan Dhoka

Friday, 31 st October 2003	The Unconscious (19)	Naata (The Bond) (45)
Shei Rater Kotha Bolte Eshechi (Tale of the Darkest Night) (43') 3:00 pm Pakistani army begins attack on East Pakistan	A different kind of sexual identity	Crisis of identity in modern India
Vikas Bandoor Ki Naal Se (Development Flows from the Barrel of the Gun) (54') 3:45 pm For the sake of a larger good	Resilient Rhythms (64') 3:00 pm Dalits and the odds	Godhra Tak: The Terror Trail (60') 5:00 pm Reconstruction of the train incident
A Night of Prophecy (77') 4:40 pm Poets in times and places of conflict	Sand and Water (105') 4:15 pm Life along the Jamuna	The 18th Elephant – 3 Monologues (62') 6:00 pm Elephants speak up against human atrocities
Itihass Jitneharuka Laagi (History for Winners) (47') 6:00 pm A singer who refuses to fight	Bhedha Ko Oon Jasto – In Search of a Song ... (55') 6:00 pm Following a tune to the mountains	Tickets (Rs 20 per screening) are available at Himal Association Patan Dhoka (5537408) from Monday, 28 October, 2003
Saturday, 1 st November 2003	Sunday, 2 nd November 2003	
Swara – A Bridge over Troubled Water (40') 2:00 pm 'Girl sacrifice' in tribal Pakistan	Hunting Down Water (32') 2:00 pm The shortage and surplus of water	
	Made in India (39') Visual culture in contemporary India	
	Buru Sengal (The Fire Within) (57') 3:15 pm Extracting coal, but at what cost?	

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Personal Encounters on the Journey of Life** Paintings by Prakaash Chandwadkar till 31 October at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. 4218048
- ❖ **Exploration of the Magical Realm** Etchings by Seema Sharma at Café Mitra, Thamel. 4259015
- ❖ **Lalit Deepawali Utsav 2060** at Jawalakhel Football Maidan, 23-25 October.
- ❖ **Tihar**: 23 October: *Kaag Tihar*, 24 October: *Kukur Tihar*, 25 October: *Laxmi Puja*, 26 October: *Gobardhan Puja*, 27 October: *Bhai Tika*.

EVENTS

- ❖ **The God's Dance of Kathmandu Valley** 7PM on Tuesdays. Tea+Ticket: Rs 400 at Hotel Vajra.
- ❖ **Lazimpat Film Shows**: *Land and Freedom* (Ken Loach) 28 October; *Brazil* (Terry Gilliam) 30 October. 7.30 PM at Lazimpat Gallery Cafe. 4428549
- ❖ **House of Cards** with McDowells at Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. Blind Faith, Jems Pradhan and Sanjeev Pradhan. 4491234
- ❖ **Social Science Baha Library** at the Patan Dhoka, opens 31 October. 5548142

MUSIC

- ❖ **Catch 22** back at the Rum Doodle.
- ❖ **Cadenza live** 7.30PM Wednesday, Saturday at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Abhaya & The Steam Injuns** every Friday at Fusion, Dwarika's. 4479488
- ❖ **Fusion music** by Bobbin and friends at Jatra restaurant & bar. 6PM onwards, 17 October.
- ❖ **Latino night** Tequila promo, special cocktails 7PM, 24 October at Via Via Café, Paknajol.

DRINK

- ❖ **Winter Warmers** at the Sumeru Bar with 25 percent discount between 6-8PM at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Festival of tropical black rum drinks** and great steaks at K-too! Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 4433043
- ❖ **Cosmic Cocktails** and chic home furnishings at Mitra Lounge Bar and Mausam homestyle boutique. Above Cafe Mitra, Thamel. 4259015

FOOD

- ❖ **The Grand Dosa Festival** at The Café, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 28 October-6 November. 4491234
- ❖ **BBQ in the Shambala Garden** everyday at 7PM. 4412999
- ❖ **Sekuwa Saanjh** Friday BBQ from 7:30PM at Rs 555 at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Café U** Japanese home-cooking, cakes and coffee. Opp British School, Sanepa. 5523263
- ❖ **Roadhouse Cafe** for wood fired pizzas and more. Opp St Mary's School, Pulchowk. 5521755
- ❖ **Traditional Nepali Thali lunch** at Patan Museum Café inside Patan Museum. 11AM-2.30 PM. Cocktails and snacks 2-7.30 PM. 5526271
- ❖ **Saturday BBQ Lunch** at Club Himalaya Nagarkot. Rs 500 per person. 468008
- ❖ **Traditional Newari Thali** at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4431632
- ❖ **Weekend Ban Bhoj** at the Godavari Village Resort. Reservation recommended. 5560675.
- ❖ **Krishnarpan** ceremonial Nepali cuisine fit for a king. Reservation recommended. 4479488
- ❖ **Smoked salmon soufflé**, Crispy Duck Breast, Shrimp Newburg and fine wines at Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Thamel. 4250440

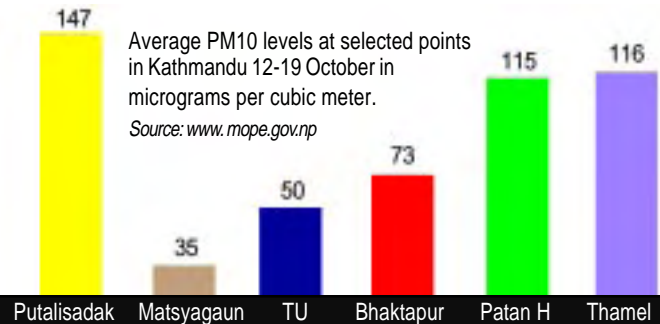
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- ❖ **Microlight flying adventures** with the Avia Club, Pokhara.
- ❖ **Shivapuri Heights Cottage** 30 minutes from Kathmandu, at the edge of the Shivapuri Reserve. Email: info@escape2nepal.com
- ❖ **Weekend Special** for Rs 3,000 per couple, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha. 4375280
- ❖ **TGIF overnight package** at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
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- ❖ **Back to Nature** overnight package for resident expatriates at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
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KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

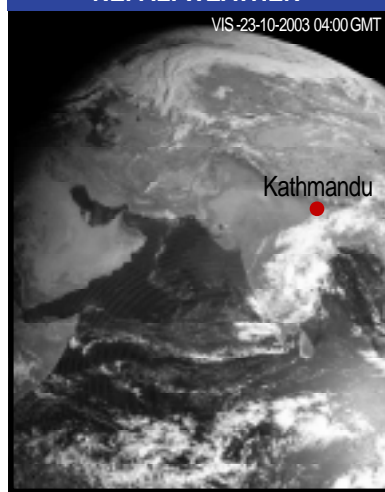


Kathmandu's air quality has now started to take on winter qualities with the end of the rains. Putali Sadak, one of the most polluted areas in Kathmandu, recorded the concentration of PM 10 (particulate matter having diameter less than 10 microns) way above 120 micrograms per cubic meter every day last week. These are particles are so small they can remain in the lungs and cause damage, and are derived mainly from vehicle emissions. Air quality in residential areas is better, but even Thamel is starting to get close to the national standard.



NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



One of the tentacles of moisture from the south Indian low pressure system that is destroying cricket in Chennai will pass swiftly across our skies, but shouldn't cause untoward problems. High pressure and clear skies will dominate, although we are already beginning to see early effects of the Indo-Gangetic winter haze brought our way by the westerlies. So, expect glorious Tihar weather, misty mornings with sunny afternoons and chillier nights with the mercury even dropping into the single digit next week.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



BOOKWORM



Himalayan Echoes: a Septuagenarian's Traverse of Mustang and Inner Dolpo
Phillip Sturgeon with Judith Forrestal
Book Faith India, 1998
Rs 480

Known as the "Oldest Old Man in Trekking", Sturgeon gives an interesting account of his adventures through the remote Inner Dolpo, an inner sanctum of the Himalaya that was opened to Westerners only in 1992. The septuagenarian reveals the pleasures and pains of traversing this difficult terrain in an appealing easy and conversational style.

Kingdom Beyond the Clouds: Journeys in Search of the Himalayan Kings
Jonathan Gregson
Pan Books, 2000
Rs 490

This is a travel narrative that both transports its readers to little-visited places and demystifies what they find there. Gregson journeys through Bhutan, Nepal, Sikkim, Mustang and Dharamsala in search of the region's often elusive leaders. Through his interviews, he learns that while there is a world of difference between their rules, they face many of the same challenges.



Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 4227711, mandala@ccsl.com.np



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Chutki (Antara Mali) wants to be Madhuri Dixit, Raja (Rajpal Yadav) wants to be with Chutki. This is not a formula triangle, but a bitter-sweet tale of Bollywood clichés. It's a no-frills story told without any gimmicks. First-time director, Chandan Arora, tells it like it is, without much song and dance. Short and slick, the film has a simple narrative and very convincing reality about it. Anjana does a decent job of a Madhuri hopeful, but Rajpal as the artless villager, sparkles. Star-maker and producer, Ram Gopal Varma, has just made his latest hero—the editor-turned-director Chandan Arora. His hero, Rajpal Yadav, is already a star.



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Sikkim

State of Prosperity

More than any other state in India, Sikkim has taken the quest of sustainable human development seriously. The concept is not a buzzword here, it means building on traditions, rich cultural heritage and natural resources. Landlocked Sikkim also knows that development is

not possible without integration into the broader development process of the northeast states and the rest of India. Since coming to power, the Sikkim Democratic Front government has turned the negative economic growth rate into a positive and vibrant growth regime.


Today, Sikkim is geared to develop its rich potential in the agro-industry, horticulture, medicinal plants, food processing, tea, animal husbandry, handlooms and textiles, forest resources, ecotourism, information technology and education.



An enthusiastic crowd watches a helicopter lift off from a new helipad at Dodak, west Sikkim.

“Almost 85 percent of the population of Sikkim lives in rural areas and only an improvement in agriculture can better their lot.”

Chief Minister Pawan Chamling



Ready to take-off

As a land-locked, mountainous state, Sikkim has to focus on developing high-value, low-volume products. The development of handloom and textiles has significant potential for preserving its rich cultural legacy. Sikkim has turned itself into an ‘investor-friendly state’ and attracted investments from both within and outside. For this the Sikkim government has made a number of far reaching policy changes including liberal investment climate and diverse fiscal incentives.

Sikkim’s geographical location in the eastern Himalaya has endowed it with great bio-diversity, this is why it is researching medicinal uses of plant varieties within the state. Besides generating knowledge and employment, this helps increase livelihood patterns and aid conservation. The organic production of medicinal plants, oranges, lime, ginger, large cardamoms and other agriculture produce have increased agricultural production and enhanced income. Floriculture and the non-timber sector offer strong possibilities for providing alternative sources of income and employment. Sikkim is now reemphasising the more efficient use of cane and bamboo resources that can be used for low-cost, earthquake resistant housing and a host of other products.

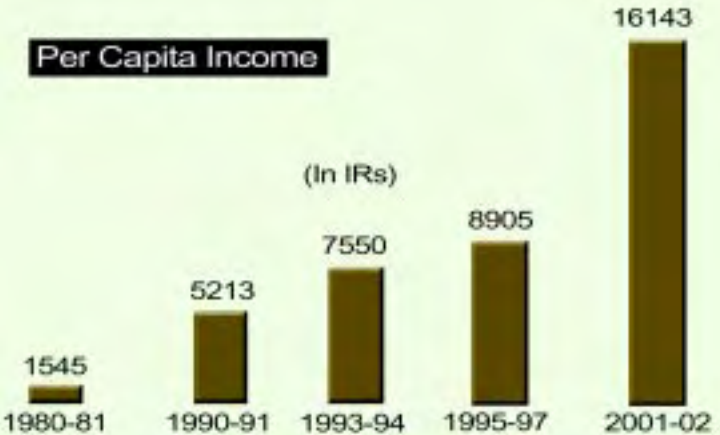
The unparalleled beauty and friendly, hospitable people are this Indian state’s competitive and comparative advantages. These factors are especially conducive for ecotourism. Sikkim is systematically promoting ecotourism as its core competence with a new concept of ‘village tourism’ where tourists and trekkers stay in the rural homes of Sikkimese who have been trained in tourism services. To promote village tourism, 30 model villages with modern facilities are being constructed in different parts of Sikkim. The government ensures these model villages are in every tourist itinerary. It also proposes to support at least one tourist centre in each Gram Panchayat Unit because ecotourism can promote handicrafts, textiles, carpets and timber products, and the conservation of both natural and cultural heritage.

Spreading well-being

After 1995-96, both the net state domestic product (NSDP) and per capita income have recorded a steady growth. Sikkim’s per capita almost doubled from IRs 8,905 to IRs 16,143 during the same period, a commendable 13.55 percent growth per year. The state also recorded the highest economic growth rate in India during the Ninth Plan. In the 10th Five Year Plan (2002-2007) draft document, Sikkim’s economic growth rate of 8.3 percent is second only to Pondicherry, Chandigarh and Delhi. The state has the 10th highest per capita income among Indian states, and the 5th highest growth rate in the per capita net state domestic product during 1993-2000.

Per Capita Income

(In IRs)



Period	Per Capita Income (In IRs)
1980-81	1545
1990-91	5213
1993-94	7550
1995-97	8905
2001-02	16143

A part of the reason for this is the structural shift in the Sikkimese economy with the service industry (transport, communications, banking, trade, insurance and tourism) contributing the largest share to the state domestic coffers. This shows Sikkim is moving from a ‘developing’ to ‘developed’ status. The primary sector consists of agriculture, mining and forests, the secondary sector mainly consists of manufacturing, construction and electricity.

At the national level, close cooperation with the union government has led to positive results in Sikkim’s economic development. Internationally, the state has been identified and actively considered for development projects by multilateral and other donor organisations.

Farming roots

Sikkim has only 64,000 hectares of arable land, yet total food production has increased steadily from over 58,560 tons in 1981 to 103,000 tons in 2001.

To enhance productivity of farmers and to regulate purchase and sale of farmer’s products, the government has established a regulated market in the state. It has also provided facilities for sale of farmer’s produce within the state at regulated prices. Sikkim has also been declared an Agricultural Export Zone enabling it to sell cardamom, ginger and flowers in national and international markets.

The state has paid attention to plant protection measures through available organic alternatives in policies adopted by the Departments of Agriculture and Horticulture. Chief Minister Pawan Chamling is deeply committed to environmental protection and feels that Sikkim’s mixed farming system and low consumption of chemical fertilisers could make an easy transition to organic farming. Whether it’s commercial large cardamom, exquisite orchids, sweet orange or trenchant cherry pepper, typical buckwheat or unique pulses, they all are 100 percent organic Sikkimese produce. And with the initiative made by the chief minister, the state became among the first in India to encourage organic farming. Dairy production is also going up, thanks to help from the Swiss Development Agency.

Agriculture is the backbone of the Sikkimese economy, and it has shown a robust performance. The SDF government is now aiming for a much higher growth rate in all areas of agricultural production in the next few years with the aid of technological and marketing intervention.





Sikkim



Investor friendly

Today, Sikkim is looking forward to a gradual but steady dose of investment from both within and outside the state. This is based on the introduction of various longterm policy interventions including fiscal concessions, promotion of private investment, attracting new investment, entrepreneurship development and disinvestment-privatisation of existing public sector units.

The Union Government has extended its new industrial policy for Sikkim on the lines of the existing North-East Industrial Policy. This includes excise and income tax exemption to all new industries as well as expansion of existing units for a period of ten years from the date of commencement of commercial production.

In addition, the policy also entails granting financial concessions to 12 identified thrust areas in industries irrespective of where they are located in the state. They include ecotourism, handicraft and handloom, floriculture, mineral based industry, agrobased industry and pharmaceutical products. However, cigarette, manufactured tobacco and its substitute, and brewing of alcoholic drinks and manufacture of branded soft drink and its concentrate have been excluded from these concessions.

A survey carried out by *Business Today* showed various parameters like the quality of electric power, social infrastructure and state government support in Sikkim have improved in the perception of investors after 1995. Sikkim has set up a Board of Investment under the chairmanship of the chief minister to implement a Single Window Policy, an apex body that examines investment proposals and give clearance at the highest level. The objective is to provide efficient services to the prospective investors by providing speedy project approvals, grant of facilities and coordination among government agencies. In addition, some areas have been declared Industrial Belts to facilitate the single window system.

Strength of learning

The state government aims to make Sikkim totally literate by 2015. The progress made in the arena of literacy so far has made the goal of zero illiteracy plausible. The literacy rate, which stood at 17.7 percent in 1971 is now already over 70 percent.

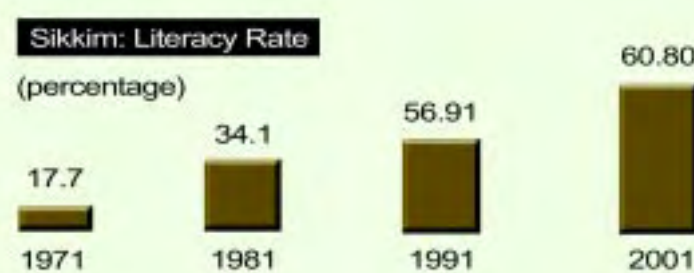
Literate population

In the crucial arena of education, primary school enrolment has dramatically increased due to a range of moral and physical support and incentives extended by the state. These include awareness campaigns, free schooling, textbooks and school lunches. Higher education and technical training opportunities are also being developed.

There has been a steady increase in the numbers of educational institutions, teachers, pupils in primary schools, students in secondary schools and trainees in technical institutes. Today Sikkim has possibly the best teacher-student ratio at all levels in the schools. The number of girls at schools has gone up significantly too.

Some educational milestones:

- A midday meal program for school children.
- Three state languages—Lepcha, Limbu and Bhutia—are now being taught at the University level.
- Adoption of the "Smart School" concept that emphasises quality education.
- Sikkim State Assembly passed a bill in March 2003 for the first university.
- Sikkim had only one college when the SDF government assumed office. Now there are more than half a dozen, including Advanced Technical Training Centre at Bardang (East Sikkim) and Centre of Computers and Communication Technology at Chisopani (South Sikkim).
- Computer education is being made compulsory in all schools from secondary level.
- School-going children are given stipends to encourage academics.



For the people

Impressive strides have also been made in health, women's welfare, cultural and intellectual spheres under the SDF government. Women have been assisted in training for employment or self-employment. They are given special loans for small ventures, old age pensions and widow remarriage schemes among others. In health, the emphasis is on prevention rather than cure. There are health clinics in every village. Physically challenged persons receive subsistence allowance from the government.

The religious, cultural and intellectual dimensions of Sikkimese society are promoted with secularism at its core. Sikkim's culture has found new expression in its literature, folklore, music, dance and drama, and a range of national honours have been bestowed on eminent Sikkimese.

Affirmative action

After persistent demands made by the present government, the Limbu and Tamang communities have been included in the national List of Scheduled Tribes. Concerted efforts are being made to include all those left out in the list of OBCs and provide them with facilities. A decision has also been taken to grant a quota of seats for students belonging to communities other than OBCs for higher education and the government has expanded its reservation policy.

Tech-savvy

Chief Minister Pawan Chamling believes that limitations imposed by Sikkim's topographical and geographical location can be changed by technology. Appropriate technological interventions will not only inject a major shift in the efficiency and productivity performance, but could also bring about a visible transformation in the quality of life. The SDF government has zeroed in on information technology with the creation of a new Information Technology Department and has prepared extensive projects to give highest priority to this field. The new department is now aiming for e-governance to make use of information tools for improved administration.



The Tashiling Secretariat in Gangtok is already computerised and the rest are being connected on a Wide Area Network. Government personnel are being trained to make them computer literate within three years. The Centre for Research and Training in Informatics (CRTI), an autonomous body under the Department of IT, also conducts career-oriented Computer Multimedia courses. The website 'CM-on-line' was designed and launched for people to communicate directly with the chief minister (<http://sikkim.nic.in/cmonline/>).

Fourty CICs have been set up across the remotest of regions of Sikkim to take IT to the grassroots where training programs are conducted. The department aims at evolving CIC's into a single window delivery facility for citizens to pay taxes, electricity and water bills, and even get births and deaths registered online.



In line with the government's decision to devolve powers to the Panchayati Raj Institution, IT has handed over day to day running of the CIC to local committees since November last year. A Software Cell has been setup to assist other departments in computerisation. Sikkim will soon have its own software technology park.



SUBHAS RAI

SRADDHA BASNYAT

Ascent two weeks after Dasai winds down, Nepalis are gathering second wind for the next big festival: Tihar. This harvest festival is a celebration of life—animals are worshipped instead of slaughtered. Though many of the rituals remain intact, the origins of Tihar are murky. Theories abound that it is most likely rooted in animism associated with ancient harvest festivals.

As the story goes, there was once a king whose demise had been foretold. Following the advice of court astrologers, the king lit oil lamps through the night. Death, arriving in the form of a venomous snake, extinguished the flickering light. When the queen went out to appease the snake, he was so flattered, he decided to grant the king a longer life. Humbled, the king decreed an annual festival of lights. Today, the festivities are an elaborate five-day affair.

Yama Panchak, as Tihar is also called, began with *Kag Tihar* on Thursday when crows, who are considered pesky scavengers 364 days a

Tihar

year are worshipped as the vehicle of the God of Death. If unplaced, these messengers of Yama Raj are believed to be harbingers of bad news.

Friday, Kathmandu's dogs have their day. It is *Kukur Tihar*, the day dogs are gods. Even street mongrels sport elaborate marigold necklaces and vermilion on their heads. As Yama Raj's gatekeepers, they ensure the soul's journey to judgement.

Goddess Laxmi, guardian of wealth, is venerated on Saturday. Cows, worshipped as her earthly manifestation, are bathed, blessed and the sacred thread of protection is tied to the tail. "On our farms, a cow that gives milk and manure brings wealth, which is probably why they became symbols for Laxmi," explains Saraswati Jirel a self-proclaimed expert on Tihar. Women devote *Laxmi Puj*a to cleaning house and replastering walls and floors with a mixture of *rato mato* and *gobar*. Tradition has it that the goddess deigns to visit only the cleanest homes and come evening, its time for oil lamps and leaving the doors open for the goddess and wealth to glide in.

Saturday is also the night of women's *bhailo* songs for blessings, money and sweets. The men have their *deosi* on Sunday. In the old days perfect strangers would call in at all the big, well-known families but in these troubled times, both *bhailo* and *deosi* are restricted to families and close friends. Word has it that groups have to formally register with the police and send out notices to the houses that they intend to visit.

Sunday is celebrated by various communities in their own way.

Shining a little light on Nepal's unique celebration of life.

Farmers worship their tools and their bull to keep the working animal healthy and safe. Most households perform *gobardhan puja* on a mound of cow dung which symbolises the mountains, and farmers pray for rain, fertile fields and an abundant harvest.

Sunday is also the Newari New Year, which began in 880AD, and the day of *Mha Puja* when we worship ourselves because each individual is believed to be an embodiment of the divine. Bhaktapur resident Janak Kakshyapati describes the scene in at home on *Mha Puja*. "My immediate family members sit in a room, each with their individual *mandap* in front of them for a ceremony which can last for hours. We offer auspicious foods like boiled eggs and fish, fruit and decorations, first to the *mandap*, then to ourselves." This ritual of self-purification is performed in the same room as other family members, becoming a ritual that celebrates individualism, while strengthening kinship within families.

On Monday is *Bhai Tika*, the day sisters and brothers bless each other with long life and happiness symbolised by long multicolour tikas and chrysanthemum garlands. It is also a time for siblings to offer each other presents.

In the past decade or so, Nepali Tihars have begun to take on shades of India's Dipawali. While purists frown on the old ways not remaining sacrosanct, the kernel will survive and continue because Nepalis are resilient and hopeful. This Tihar, all over the country, the lamps that are lit will also be for peace. ♦

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Tihar-2003



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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

First, the main points

It has been a slow news day: there have been no major outbreaks of mysterious diseases, not a whole lot of people have been killed, the Egyptian conjoined twins are sitting up, and Dear Leader Kim Jong Il looks like he is having another bad hair day. Sorry folks, there isn't much to report from the world-at-large today, we're scraping the bottom of the barrel here. Still, a newspaper has to come out, and a newspaper, by its very definition, has to contain news. So, as a filler, we present below what is not happening, as far as we know:

No Peace Without End To Violence: Minister
KATHMANDU (RSS) – The government is of the firm opinion that there can be no peace without an end to violence and vice versa, a senior minister has said. Speaking at an interactive program organised on the suspicious occasion of *Kaag Tihar* in Kathmandu yesterday, the Minister for What is Left Of The Physical Infrastructure And Social Welfare said His Majesty's Government will present a conceptual whitepaper on whether or not we will ever get out of the current mess (fingers crossed) by early next year.

Envoys To Interfere Again
BY A CORRESPONDENT WHO REQUESTS ANONYMITY
KAKANI – Kathmandu-based ambassadors met Thursday to formulate a concrete plan of action on how to interfere some more in Nepal's internal affairs. The British have decided to increase the Nepali prime minister's take-home salary after taxes, and bring it at par with a retired Gurkha soldier. Political party leaders immediately denounced the move as a gross interference in Nepal's territorial imperative. "How about us?" asked one disgruntled politico. News of more interference by foreign powers are pouring in. The Thais say they want to have another go at filling Kathmandu's pot holes, China wants to build another Concentric Road and the Japanese will set up synchronised traffic lights in Lukla to ease congestion on the trekking trail.



No Shobraj News Today
BY OUR CHARLES WATCHER
KATHMANDU – Notorious international alleged criminal, Charles Shobraj, was not sighted today, raising speculation that he may have again escaped from jail in Tihar. This is the first time in a month-and-half since the alleged Shobraj was allegedly apprehended after undercover detective

footwork by Kathmandu-based newshounds that there is nothing to add on the case. "We've even sent in some fresh handkerchiefs, but he refuses to come out wearing them," said a distraught international photojournalist keeping vigil outside the jailhouse. "What will I tell my editor in Paris?"

Mayor Unveils Plans
FROM THE SUB-METROPOLITAN DESK
Kathmandu's new mayor, Keshab Sthapit, unveiled the First Phase of his plan to turn Nepal's capital into a Garden of Eden with his Zero Investment Concept. "I will open a Peace University, an IT University, an Art Village in Kirtipur, Homes for the Homeless, Voice for the Voiceless, a Cricket Stadium, a 24-Hour Bar for Journalists, a Bullet Train Service to Hetauda through a 50km Tunnel, a Cement Factory in Tundikhel and turn Bhugol Park into a National Park," he said, adding, "nothing is impossible if I have my way." However, on the question of the city's growing garbage problem, the mayor admitted defeat. Raising both hands, he said: "On garbage, I give up."

Ministers Come and Go
BY A TRAVEL WRITER
The Minister for Industry, Commerce and Supplies and Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs will, on the recommendation of the prime minister, will also look after the Ministry of Population, Environment, Physical Planning and Works and General Administration in the absence of the Minister for Population and Environment, and Physical Planning and World and General Administration who today left for Dhaka to attend an international conference on water and sanitation. The Minister will also take over the portfolio of the Ministry of Water Resources, Defence, Finance, Foreign Affairs, and Social Welfare and Family Planning, according to a statement from the principal press secretariat since other ministers will be on holiday. "It is understandable that during Tihar they want to put all their cards on the table," the statement said.

NEPALI SOCIETY



Here is an NRN story with a difference. Ram Sharma was a top student in his school in a small village in Gulmi. But his father died, and his mother could no longer take care of him. So, like a lot of other underprivileged children in that poverty-stricken part of Nepal, 11-year-old Ram left for Bombay to find work. "There were no opportunities, I had to go where fate took me," Ram recalls, tracing the extraordinary drama of his life. He worked as a child domestic for a Sindhi family. Luckily, unlike many other Nepali children, they treated him well and encouraged him to study. He earned Rs 50 a month cooking, cleaning and selling newspapers, but sent all his savings home to his mother. Nine years later, at 20, Ram took up an offer to go to the Philippines to work as a cook for an Indian businessman. That is when his luck ran out. His new employers had promised Rs 1,000 a month, but after five nightmarish years in Manila, not only did he not get any money, he was beaten, locked up and treated like a slave. "I thought of suicide, but I thought of my mother, and decided against it," Ram says. Unable to take the torture any longer, he escaped on new year's day 1990 with just five pesos (Rs 10) in his pocket. He struggled another few years at odd jobs, and found out that to regularise his immigration papers he needs to marry a Filipina. He went to the only woman he knew well who worked for the International Committee of the Red Cross, and asked: "I don't have any money, you are the only friend I have, will you marry me?" She was taken aback, but moved by his sincerity, she agreed. Together, Ram began a new

The life of Ram

life managing an Indian restaurant on the Philippine resort island of Boracay. Today, Ram is part owner and executive chef at a fancy Indian restaurant called Rama Mahal at the former US naval base at Subic Bay, his wife is the manager at the

restaurant and his 16-year-old son helps out. The restaurant is popular among politicians, actors and Fedex pilots from the nearby airport. Ram has even trained a Filipino cook to do subcontinental food, and for the first time in 15

years this has made it possible for him to come home to Nepal to have a tearful reunion with his mother in Gulmi. Ram is sad to see the violence and killings in his motherland, but thinks the country will come out of it. "It is just like the story of my life," says Ram, his eyes glistening with emotion. "Just when things look hopeless and dark, a tiny light shines through." ♦

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Lunch Break 1:00PM - 2:00PM, Saturday 9:00AM - 1:00PM, Sunday and Public Holidays Closed

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सबै सुखी, सबै खुशी आखिर यो सब सम्भव हुन्छ, कसरी ?

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