



Spreading east

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY in OLANGCHUNGOLA
 This is a part of Nepal where, in the old days, you knew you were approaching a village when children on a ridge would sing or yell "Namaste" to any passing stranger. Nowadays, all you get are silent, suspicious stares.

Like many Nepalis caught up in this pointless war, Pasang Bhutia, the 55-year-old former chairman of Yamphudin VDC just wanted to be left alone by both sides. He lived with his wife, and his four daughters and one son went to school in Taplejung. Pasang allegedly used to be a Maoist sympathiser, but wasn't anymore.

On the night of 8 November, a group of 10 armed Maoists came to his house seeking shelter. Pasang and his wife couldn't say no. In the morning, word reached the village that an army patrol was approaching. The Maoists ran off, leaving their weapons behind. The soldiers went house-to-house and when they saw the weapons, they opened fire killing Pasang on the spot. His wife waited all day and the following night beside her husband's dead body, unable to do anything but grieve.

The next day, the villagers finally mustered the courage to help her carry out the last rites. That evening, they heard Radio Nepal announce that a Maoist, Pasang Bhutia, had been shot dead by security forces in Taplejung. Pasang has become another statistic. But for his family, his community and his country, he is yet another Nepali who was caught in this vicious and senseless conflict.

continued →
 p 6

Now there are echoes of Rukum and Rolpa in Taplejung.



Maoist party flags flutter in front of Saraswati High School in Lelep with Jannu in the background.

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

Sudha's Creations The Boutique

Please visit us for:

- Dress Designing
- Tailoring
- Embroidery
- Dyeing

We assure you quality service at reasonable price

Special Discount on Christmas and New Year

Manal of Geniel Subcamped
 4th floor, Jyoti Building, Jangnara, Lalitpur
 Mobile: 9441219180 Tel: 55249208
 E-mail: sudhascreations@yahoo.com

Now open/available

Bring your plain Pashmina Shawls. Go back with sparkling metal prints of your choice.

STATION
 Kapada, Lalitpur, Nepal
 Tel: 5512496, 508, 680

Park Village at Budhanil-kantha

Aesthetic Living in Pure Nature

Special Holiday Package

- 48 Suites □ 7 Conference hall
- Amphitheatre □ 8 acre garden
- Swimming pool, Health Club, Mini Cinema hall & Recreation center

Tel: + 977 200 pvtg@vlink.com.np

Statesman

Why Thapa smiles.

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

"I am a happy man," said Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa, deplanning last Tuesday after his visit to Bhutan, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in preparation for the upcoming SAARC summit in Islamabad.

And well he might be, having been saved by the regional association when national politics was demanding his departure from the top job at Singha Durbar.

Thapa inherited the chairmanship of SAARC from Sher Bahadur Deuba, who had ruled the roost when the summit happened last in Kathmandu in January 2002. He left for his subcontinental whirlwind just as his party, RPP, exploded with demands for him to step down and make way for an all-party government. Meanwhile, the other political parties were gearing up for renewed protests against the king and his government. Madhab Kumar Nepal's Lucknow dash to meet Messrs Prachanda and Baburam seemed also to have the capacity to show Thapa the door.

And ironically, the most significant outcome of Thapa's confab with Atal Behari Vajpayee on 24 November was South Block's suggestion via press release that the king and the parties consider sorting out their differences so as better to tackle the insurgents at the door.

continued → p5



MIN. BAJRACHARYA

Summit Hotel

More growth markets.

ENJOY Every Friday

The Sumptuous Barbecue Dinner at our illuminated Courtyard and Garden

For Vegetarians Special Sish Kebabs and many more.

For Reservation: 552 1810

Summit Hotel
 We make you feel better

Times nepalnews.com
 Weekly Internet Poll # 113

Q. How do you rate Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa's performance?

Great	28.2%
Satisfactory	17.3%
Not Satisfactory	38.1%
Don't Know	16.4%

Total votes: 1,463

Weekly Internet Poll # 114. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. If the king were to form an all-party government, who would you like to see as the new prime minister?

Summit Hotel
 We make you feel better



Nepali Times is published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd,
 Chief Editor: Kunda Dixit
 Desk Editor: Trishna Gurung. Design: Kiran Maharjan
 Webmaster: Bhushan Shilpakar
 editors@nepalitimes.com, www.nepalitimes.com
 Advertising: Sunaina Shah advertising@himalmedia.com
 Subscription: Anil Karki subscription@himalmedia.com
 Sales: Sudan Bista sales@himalmedia.com
 Sanchaya Kosh Building, Block A-4th Floor, Lalitpur
 GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal
 Tel: 01-5543333/5523845 Fax: 01-5521013
 Printed at Jagadamba Press, Hattiban: 01-5547018/17

STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



Doing what is right

Human rights and democracy are two sides of the same coin.

LET'S DO IT

Wonders never cease in the kingdom of the absurd. Last year, the king fired an elected prime minister, saying in effect: "I'll do it my way." Since then, the leaders of the political parties who ruined the country with their greed and ineptitude, haven't given the people a convincing argument why the same venal and vision-challenged chieftains should be put back in the saddle. We see no signs that they have mended their ways: just look at how they are jostling again for advantage in the race to occupy choice berths in the next national government.

UML boss Madhab Nepal slipped out of his house in Nepalganj at three in the morning last month to cross the border to meet the Maoist troika. There was bitter irony in the ensuing confusion of his security detail—a political leader ditches his armed police bodyguards to head off for a secret meeting with the leaders of a group that they are supposed to guard him against! Nepal doesn't even tell his own party colleagues what he is up to, whereas just about everyone knows through media leaks that the meeting is in Hotel Kapur at Lucknow, located (we might add) in a country that has actually labelled the group 'terrorists'.

We give up trying to make sense of all this. Maybe British special envoy Sir Jeffrey James, back in town this week, will have better luck figuring things out. He probably delivered more unsolicited advice to the people who heed it least—the Royal Nepali Army, followed by rounds of meetings with political party bosses, waving carrots and sticks. He may even try to mend fences with the king. Sir Jeffrey seems to have his work cut out, but we wonder if he shouldn't have his office closer to his line of duty, New Delhi for instance?

What have we brought on ourselves that we have handed over the destiny and decision-making in this country to outsiders? Human rights violations have become so serious they have set off international alarm bells. The palace and parties are so stubborn that foreign envoys have to step in to get them to patch up. We have made this crisis so intractable that Nepal is now being spoken in the same breath as Sierra Leone or Rwanda, a new disaster zone needing an outside fix. It is pointless blaming outsiders when we have utterly failed to solve our problems. The Maoists started us on this downhill slide and the parliamentary party leadership exacerbated it by playing with the fire of rebellion to settle political scores. An impatient king decided to solve things by throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

It may seem like it is too late, but we can still seize the initiative. The correction must begin with a step-by-step reversal of the process that brought us here, by relearning how genuine democracy works. After all, if the Nepali people have a say, no outsider will be able



The Geneva-based World Organisation Against Torture, better known by its acronym OMCT, reported last week that two boys were arbitrarily arrested and tortured by police. Raju Lama, a 22-year-old garment labourer from Kathmandu and Manoj Rai, a 17-year-old student of the Nandi Night School at Naxal, were reportedly arrested and severely tortured at the Hanuman Dhoka district police office in Kathmandu.

Until two years ago, an allegation of this nature from an international organisation would have been a serious matter. It would have been raised on the floor of the house by raucous parliamentarians and street protests may have been triggered calling for the resignation of the home minister. There may have been outraged editorials and human rights groups would have taken up the cause with janjati activists perhaps launching a signature campaign.

None of this happened when the OMCT statement about Lama and Rai was released. The deafening silence is an indictment of our sagging morality, and a sad commentary as to how brutality has numbed us as a society about rights and wrongs. Nepal has begun to accept that national institutions

have very little respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the name of fighting the Maoist insurgency, the state has now become a law unto itself. It took the direct presence of three very conspicuous European diplomats in dark suits to deter soldiers outside Singha Darbar from re-arresting leftist poet Purnabiram last month. Many others haven't been as lucky, an unaccounted number of victims continue to be in illegal detention and several have died in captivity without even being acknowledged by the detaining authority.

These days, if a youth is spotted in the countryside for five consecutive days, people automatically assume that he has been a) killed in a staged encounter, b) 'taken away' by the Unified Command, c) abducted by Maoists, d) is hiding from the fear of both forces or e) has fled down south. The erosion of the rule of law began when Sher Bahadur Deuba was prevailed upon by the army to declare a state of emergency. Even at that time, many legal experts pointed out that there were enough provisions in the law and there was no need to sacrifice fundamental rights to protect the people from insurrectionists.

Deuba was later persuaded that putting the constitution in virtual suspension (by declaring a mid-term election, which couldn't be held for the same reason that warranted the imposition and continuation of the state of emergency in the first place) was the easiest way to get out of the scrutiny of rights activists. The slide gained further momentum in the wake of the October Fourth royal takeover. One of Deuba's favourite quips used to be that activists never failed to condemn government excesses while much more outrageous violations of human rights by the insurgents went uncensored. There was more than a

grain of truth in his allegations. In the initial stages of the insurgency, civil society not only failed to denounce Maoist killings and abductions, it went to the extent of condoning their tyranny by blaming the government for everything.

This is the reason civil society's voice of reason has very few takers even when violations these days are overwhelmingly by the forces of the state. Civil society leaders like Padma Ratna Tuladhar, Daman Nath Dhungana, Sindhu Nath Pyakurel and Birendra Keshari Pokharel failed then to recognise that a faulty democracy was a better guarantee of human rights than the most benevolent of dictatorships. After countless experiments with controlled regimes all over the world, it is clear that human rights and democracy are two sides of the same coin. One can't exist in the absence of the other. Democratic societies are less likely to violate human rights because abusive leaders can be removed by their own party, opposition parties can check, and even unseat, a ruling party that is reckless enough to permit violations. And civil liberties allow the media to be a tool in preventing and stopping repression. The challenge before international organisations in these times isn't limited to ensuring that the human rights situation in the country is better monitored.

Coercive forces must be made answerable to the people's representatives if they are to be made accountable for their excesses. As long as armed men remain under the control of a palace or a politburo, no amount of monitoring can make them exercise restraint. All universal values—gender equity, human rights, equalisation of opportunity, environmental concerns—spring from an abiding faith in the people. As long as the people remain marginalised, no other prescription is going to work. t

LETTERS

AIDWAGONS

Lak is right on track about these Aidwagons (Here and there, #172). It is an irony that people who drive SUVs to shop in Bluebird also preach about clean air and poverty alleviation. SUVs not only encroach the narrow streets of our cities and towns but also increase the administrative cost of Nepal's Foreign Aid/Grant that sustains our moribund economy!

Manishi KC,
email

I want to thank Daniel Lak for bringing up the subject of the ubiquitous "aidwagon". Although there are many more important



issues to be faced in Nepal at the current time, I feel that you do raise some valid points that both INGO/ diplomatic workers and Nepali politicians would do well to consider. When I lived in Nepal as a student, the antics of the Pajero classes never ceased to amaze me. The very fact that such vehicles have been the subject of political corruption scandals in the past, should have been warning enough for Kathmandu's wealthier residents to be a little less ostentatious.

In 2002, I lived in a block immediately behind the British embassy and could see into their compound from our roof. Water was supplied to our building twice, at 4AM and 4PM. After two months, the water supply to Lainchour was cut off altogether. It took people 10 minutes to carry water from the communal pump in the neighbourhood. On the other side of the wall, we could see the entire embassy fleet of Land Rovers being liberally cleaned with pressure hoses (they were never even that dirty).

As a British citizen, I felt rather embarrassed by my attempts to explain this to my landlords: something about how the ambassador had to make a good impression and the vital importance of spotless vehicles to that end. At one point, I gave up trying and griped with them instead.

I know all these things are minor in comparison to what goes on in Nepal, but it is important that foreign communities consider more carefully the effects of living like kings in Nepal and the longterm effect that this will have on how Nepali people view us.

Edward Bowman,
RCA South Asia

MONKEYS

Friends of SPCAN (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Nepal) is extremely concerned about the apparent decision of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation to allow biomedical research on monkeys in Nepal, and to actually provide researchers with monkeys from national parks managed by the department ('Monkey business', #171). The department is now

supporting the work of the Nepal Natural Society, an NGO that cooperates with the Washington Primate Center. Monkeys are considered sacred and an important part of Nepal's heritage for a number of reasons. Monkeys are highly intelligent animals and maintain intricate social structures. They have complex emotional lives, caring for one another and showing love to their babies as we humans do to our children. Ethically, using monkeys in experiments that inflict mental and physical pain is unacceptable and unconscionable. Research illustrates that primate experimentation is no longer the 'gold standard' for study design. Past experience has demonstrated that animal-modelled biomedical research yields results that cannot be safely applied to humans.

Nepal will not get credit for providing monkeys for biomedical research by maintaining outdated, unreliable and unethical methods for conducting studies. We are living in an era when ethics as well as state-of-the-art study design are important

considerations when doing research. England maintains a complete ban on great ape experimentation. Recently, large-scale public and professional protests in France halted plans for a breeding facility for experimental animals. India, after realising that its monkeys were misused for gruesome radiation experiments in the US, banned all primate exports in 1977. Global trends indicate a strong movement towards the abolition of experiments on primates. This is one of the reasons why it is increasingly difficult for American research centres to find sufficient research primates. The Washington Centre tries to find loopholes in the world's legal animal rights provisions and in Nepal (one of the few countries in the world still largely without such legislation) it has found ideal working ground. We strongly request the department and the Nepali government at large to demonstrate its commitment to enlightened and ethical research practices by halting commercial, biomedical research on Nepali monkeys.

Friends of SPCAN,
Kathmandu

WAR AND PEACE

First it was the EU representative, then it was the UN bosses in Nepal, followed by the German ambassador, and now we have the envoy from the Court of St James ('Interview', #171) joining the Euro chorus demanding democracy, human rights, ceasefire and peace. It should not be that hard to see that it is not the Nepali government which is obstructing the exercise of democracy and human rights in Nepal: it is Maoist terror.

The Maoists have slaughtered thousands of people in the most gruesome manner for their beliefs, thousands of people have been abducted and tortured, hundreds of thousands have been extorted and robbed, just as many have been forced to flee their homes and those unable to leave are cowering under Maoist terror outside Kathmandu city limits. It is the Maoists who systematically destroyed the VDCs and DDCs. They made it impossible for political leaders to visit their constituencies and it is the Maoists who are preventing the holding of democratic elections. And in the areas that they control, the Maoists don't allow free press, civil society



Humpty dumpty had a great fall

The constitutional forces are still in disarray, the Maoists are not in the mood for concessions and, like his predecessor, Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa has failed to persuade opposition leaders to join an all-party government. He says he wants to militarily soften the Maoists, and has vowed to hold elections.

Some are skeptical and fear their freedoms are endangered, but others see him as a skilled administrator and a source of stability. The question for this divided nation is: where do we go from here? Most people seem to agree that we should be headed towards multi-party democracy and not a return to partyless authoritarianism or a totalitarian communist republic. But they can't agree on how to get there. In the year after the king took over, the Nepali people showed remarkable tolerance towards two Panchayat-era prime ministers.

The fact that the country's transition towards democracy coincided with the rise of the insurgency raises some fundamental questions. The Maoists saw Nepal's feudal social structure as the singular source of chronic poverty and injustices, and an armed revolution as the only way out. To others, greedy politicians and their short-sighted vision (not the multi-party system) was the source of the problem. The Maoists exploited the people's apathy toward democracy. Pre-ceasefire data show that what started out as a small rebellion in the mid-western districts in 1996-1997 had by 2002 engulfed the entire country, with much of the rapid expansion taking place in the hills (see figure).

By being ready to sacrifice thousands of Nepali lives and dismantling national infrastructure, destruction dominated the revolutionary strategy. An extreme ideology and forcing the population to pay any price to further the cause began to



overshadow the Maoists' initial genuine social concerns for the suppressed masses. An escalation of violence due to state counter-violence was inevitable, and ordinary Nepalis were caught in the crossfire—seen in the dramatic increase in the state's kill-ratio.

Of the more than 8,000 Nepalis killed so far by both sides, almost half have been non-combatants: farmers, teachers, students, businessmen, journalists. Human rights has become such a concern that foreign assistance is jeopardised. With two failed negotiations and two royalist prime ministers, and parliamentary parties sidelined, the prospects look bleak.

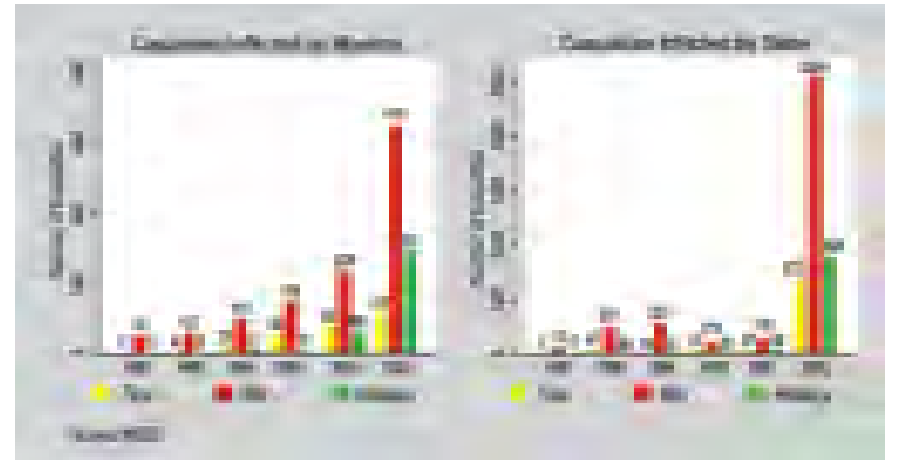
Since it was King Gyanendra who took the dramatic move in October last year to sack the prime minister, it is now up to him to find a way to extricate the country from this rut. It is also now clear that the leadership of the constitutional forces must be at the helm of such efforts. To that end, the revival of parliament may turn out to be a lot less costly proposition than conducting an election. High-profile killings of military and security officers are a reminder that any move towards election without first

forging an understanding with the Maoists may turn out to be a huge mistake. Does it really matter at this stage, therefore, what mechanism we use to choose our leaders? Do we really care, given the crisis of state? The rationale for the least-expensive and least dangerous option is overwhelming. Especially since either way, the king will have adopted a device to transfer power where it belongs: to the people's representatives.

Any attempt to subvert democracy permanently in the name of security will actually have far-reaching consequences. Democracy, no matter how messy, is essential in inhibiting conflict.

An analysis of the empirical data from Nepal's 75 districts over the last seven years and a behavioural link with socio-economic factors reveal interesting results. Communities with a higher level of trust and civic participation, as measured by an index of social capital, have been found to be less vulnerable to Maoist violence and the killings have been less pervasive. Similar results are found for the democracy index that was measured by the voters' participation rate and the level of successes of the smaller parties in garnering votes. The

Communities with a higher level of civic participation are less vulnerable to Maoist violence.



implication is that the current winner-takes-all system, where one or two parties dominate the political spectrum, is not particularly conducive to peace. Single-party dominated communities are likely to produce resentment and less communal harmony, making them vulnerable to social strife and conflict.

Similarly, communities which received a higher level of government grants on a per capita basis are less vulnerable to violence. Neglected areas with chronic poverty are more susceptible to Maoist violence. For example, of the 25 least developed districts, 17 are hotbeds of Maoist insurgency. Only one of these is in the east, and it is interesting that during the last 12 years the country was ruled for almost 10 years by elected easterners.

Reforms to bring about regional balance must therefore form the backbone of a future resolution by devolving fiscal and political power to regional governments. These could be given financial incentives to develop, for example, hydropower in their regions, and allowed to retain half the proceeds to create a trust fund to spend on local development.

The bottom line is that all the constitutional forces must unite to assess their last 12 years and work towards more genuine democracy with better safeguards for the rule of law, good governance, economic freedom, free speech and social justice. Internal democracy and financial transparency within the party is as important. Liberal democracy will require the monarch to make concessions and stay inside the constitutional boundary and remain a symbol of unity. The political leadership, for its part, should show a new commitment to the national interest and accept reforms to devolve political and economic power to the grassroots.

This is the middle ground that the parties need to push to counter the extremism espoused by the revolutionaries as we work towards a new peace process, perhaps this time with the help of the United Nations and other international bodies. t

Alok Bohara, PhD is professor of economics, University of New Mexico, and this article is extracted from a paper to be presented at the International Studies Association Convention in Montreal next March. bohara@unm.edu

or human rights—they rule by instilling fear. However, none of the self-serving votaries of democracy and human rights have ever felt it necessary to censure the Maoists in clear and unambiguous terms for their deeds. If it is their policy to treat the Maoist rebellion and the government's measure to contain it as moral equivalents, shouldn't the Europeans at least call on the rebels to lay down their arms even as they threaten, harangue and demoralise the government? Should or should not the Nepali government seek to defeat the Maoists so that killings can stop, democratic elections can be held, and people can live without fear and exercise their fundamental rights to life and liberty?

On the one hand Bloomfield says, "Maoists must not be allowed to win through violent means" and in the same breath adds, "The cost of trying to achieve a military victory or even forcing the Maoists back to the negotiating table" as inadvisable. The UK emissary goes on to make a grandiose claim: "We are attached to the observation of human rights and the British are knowledgeable

about how wars of this nature can be successfully won...we do have a lot of experience around the world." In the process of creating the empire where the sun never set, the British sure learnt a lot about fighting and winning. But to imply that those conquests were somehow for the love of human rights is rather preposterous. Hopefully the people in Ireland will not read this.

As far as military operations in a complex guerrilla war go, the Royal Nepali Army has done a commendable job in respecting the rights of non-combatants. Although there have been thousands of civilian casualties (some of that very wilful) in Iraq and Afghanistan, none of the British, American or any European soldiers have been brought to justice. The Royal Nepali Army, on the other hand, has taken legal action against a number of officers and soldiers for their misconduct against civilians. Perhaps the European emissaries ought to try their human rights prescriptions on their own and the US military before they try peddling it in Nepal.

Jack Shaw, by email

Getting out of grinding poverty

... NARESH NEWAR in MAKWANPUR ...

Traditional water mills survive the test of time.

Two years ago, when flashfloods devastated his fields near Hetauda, Ram Sharma thought he had lost all. The 60-year-old farmer had no food, no land and no hope of supporting his wife, sons and grandchildren.

Suddenly, Ram hit upon an idea: why not use the same water that destroyed his farm to set up a ghatta waterwheel to grind maize and produce flour? All he needed was a tree trunk for the runner, some timber to craft the turbine wheel, a stone grinder and a convenient stream. Soon, his water mill was ready and villagers found it easier to grind their corn and wheat nearby instead of travelling miles to reach a diesel mill in town. His business boomed and today Ram makes Rs 2,000 a month from his ghatta. Says the ever-cheerful farmer: "Good thing I had the idea when I did, and there was this traditional knowledge that was passed down from our ancestors."

Across Nepal, this simple but effective water-powered technology is being rapidly

replaced by diesel and electric mills. Wherever roads have reached remote areas, traditional ghatta owners have lost their jobs to the march of time. But as Ram Sharma's experience shows, small is still beautiful. The ghatta is still the simplest, cheapest and most convenient way for farmers to earn a living.

"The start-up investment is very small and the technology is indigenous," says Nakul Debkota, a student of the nearby Basamari village. "If there is money for motor-driven mills, there is no reason why we should not revive ghattas." Fellow-student, Sunil Lamichhane agrees: "This ancient tradition has not just survived in modern times, but it is still useful and provides a living."

You would expect young college students like Nakul and Sunil to be infatuated with modern technology, but they seem to think it is their community's duty to preserve ghattas. "Just because we are in a hurry to keep up with these fast times, there is no reason to

abandon what our ancestors left us. If we don't preserve what we have, future generations will see ghattas only on television," says college student Dhruba Debkota. They are not saying this for effect, the students seem to genuinely believe what they say.

There are four ghattas in Basamari, all of them do a good trade. Competition has improved services and brought prices down for ordinary villagers. Despite having their ghattas washed away by the Rapti during the monsoon, the owners rebuild them annually. Demand for flour is high and the owners make a regular income. We saw school children carry sacks of maize to the mills before school. The flour is ready to take home in the evenings.

Water mills often raise the problem of sharing water between mill owners and farmers but at Basamari the villagers managed to sort their disputes amicably. The ghattas are allowed to channel water since, the farmers reasoned, the mills don't actually expend the resource as much as use its energy. "We also managed to convince the villagers that ghattas wouldn't affect farming as long as we make them upstream from their farms," says ghatta-owner Hari Sharan Karki.

Creeping urbanisation from nearby Hetauda and the proliferation of diesel and electric mills has meant that many busy villagers are going to town take their grain to town. "People are busy on the



farm or in the office and don't have the patience to wait so they choose to take their grain to electric mills," says Rajesh Upreti, owner of an electric mill. Although charges for the traditional ghattas are cheap, they are time consuming. What takes an electric mill a few hours is often a full days work on the old water mills.

In time, villages like Basamari could become like Handhikhola where ghattas are being replaced by the offerings of urbanisations. But all is not lost. Traditional ghattas can now be made more efficient by upgrading the turbines. One of the organisations specialising in ghattas is the Centre for Rural Technology (CRT) that has designed ghattas with Improved Water Mill technology. The main upgrade is changing the traditional wooden runner with a

hydraulically-designed penstock pipe and replacing the wooden paddles with cup shaped blades. This increases its operational efficiency and makes it useful with additional tasks like hulling, electricity generation and oil-expelling.

Dil Maya Tamang has been running her ghatta for the past 18 years and is the only one with an improved water mill in Basamari. For the last two years her income has improved and the efficiency of her mill has more than doubled. "I used to grind only three pathis in one day. Now I can finish seven pathis," says Dil Maya, who is helping other women try out the new mill. "I'm not greedy, I want other women to benefit and become more independent too."

But for Ram Sharma, even an old ghatta is still good

her improved water mill with her husband. A traditional water mill in Basamari.

enough. Despite his age, he walks for hours with a 50kg sack of flour on his back to sell at Hetauda for a Rs 50 profit. "I wish the sahus paid me more, but at least there is some cash," he says.

Shop owner, Kedar Shrestha is a regular buyer and is very impressed with the quality of flour from traditional mills. "Make sure you bring more and early in the morning," Kedar tells Ram. His customers all prefer ghatta flour. "It's clean and keeps better." t



ALL PICS: NARESH NEWAR

HERE AND THERE

ne of the techniques for belittling the horror of war is to measure it by casualty count, the toll of dead and wounded. Thus we have, almost as a mantra, the notion that Nepal's civil war has left around 8,000 people dead in the past seven and a half years. Several thousand Iraqis are said to have died in the Anglo-American lead invasion of their country earlier this year. A similar number of Afghans died in bombing by the US after the 9/11 attacks in New York City. About 2,800 were killed in that outrageous bit of terrorism. And so on.

Horror then, is quantified. It's a number, something we can easily deal with. Yes it's appalling to ponder that number itself. Eight thousand Nepalis who might otherwise be leading productive lives, raising families, having fun. Iraqi civilians who probably hated Saddam Hussein more than any American, now reduced to cinders and dust in the crater of a "bunker buster bomb". Nameless Afghan farmers and bazar merchants forgotten by all save their families. But numbers are easily forgotten.

An exception of course, is the World Trade Centre, Pentagon and Pennsylvania plane crash victims—thanks to the American media, we know a lot about these people. That crisis was deliberately personalised because everyone in North America, and in many other parts of the world, felt that the al-Qaeda attacks were personal, they were aimed at the innocent, and that includes all of us.

But I'd like to suggest that all violence is aimed at everyone, no matter how righteous its perpetrators, so we should know more about victims than the number of them. Who are these 8,000 Nepalis who were killed since the Maoists started their 'people's war' in February of 1996? We know of some of them, the higher ranking among them, and those who were killed in Kathmandu. They got their names in the papers. Occasionally a local stringer

Horror quantified



in Dadeldhura or someplace else will add detail to an otherwise sparse report of someone shot by Maoists or army. Those names are soon forgotten.

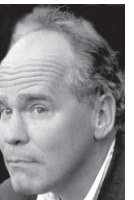
What we don't know anything about is the vast number of people in this country who have died. Ninety-five percent or more of this death toll of 8,000 are faceless, nameless, to most of the country. We are told on a daily basis that 22 Maoists were killed here, 17 there, a dozen or so in separate incidents in the east, west, north, middle hills and tarai. But we never, ever find out who these people are. We never get to ask crucial questions that could determine the outcome of this war. So let's draw up a list in the interests of peace, a series of questions that civil society should ask the security forces every time they announce so many rebels killed and leave it at that.

We should know more about victims than their numbers.

- 1) Who are the dead? Their names, ages, places of birth and residence.
- 2) What were the exact circumstances of their deaths?
- 3) What do their families say about them? Were they known to be Maoists?
- 4) If so, how did they come to be rebels? This is a key question.
- 5) What has been the impact of their deaths on family, community, perception of the rebels, government and situation as a whole.
- 6) Could this situation have been resolved without violence and if so, why wasn't it?

All fairly simple questions to answer, really. But I have doubts that they'll be addressed in the current climate of confusion, fear and militarisation. The world is getting worse, along with Nepal. We're losing our humanity, reducing conflict to an accountant's ledger and leaving morals in the hands of men with guns. The media is losing its ability to see past the press release or the offer to "embed" in the latest bit of state sponsored violence. But a few simple questions answered truthfully could just start to change things for the better. t

by DANIEL LAK



Upgrading the old

The improved water mill is an upgraded version of a traditional water mill (TWM) that converts hydro-power from water into mechanical power. The two upgraded versions are the improved *ghatta* (IG) and Multi Purpose Power Unit (MPPU). The mechanical power generated by the IG and MPPU is used mainly to process local agricultural produce, generate micro-level electricity and pump water. Twenty kilograms of cereals like maize, wheat and millet are ground in an hour by a IWM and 65-90kg per hour with a MPPU compared to just 15kg in a TWM. The power output can range from 2 to 5 kilowatts and machines like a rice huller, oil expeller and dynamo can be fitted easily. The small-scale cottage industry can run a wood saw, planer and looms.

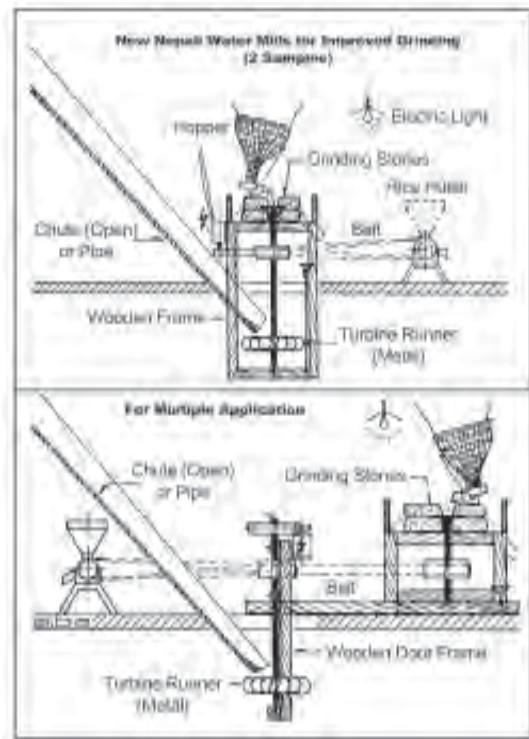
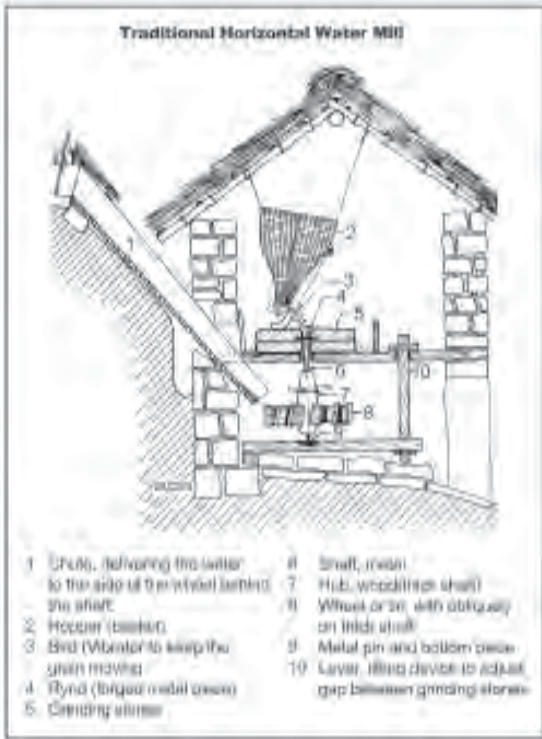


In upgraded mills, metals replace all wooden parts like paddles, shaft, chute or penstock pipe and the hopper. A wooden vibrator is replaced with a metal-gated regulator. The grinding stones are replaced with artificial cast-stones. These improvements make the water wheels last longer.

A traditional water mill can be upgraded to the improved *ghatta* by two workers in a couple of days. It can be made with the same set of tools used for making the traditional style. Iron parts can be fitted with regular hand tools. MPPUs can be manufactured in an urban workshop in 15 days and installed on site in a week by two people.

Efforts to improve traditional *ghattas* was started nearly 36 years ago by Swiss engineer Andreas Bachmann who worked with Nepali small-hydro pioneer Akal Man Nakarmi. Several organisations and manufacturers like Centre for Rural Technology, Kathmandu Metal Industries (KMI) and Nepal Yantra Shala (NYS) Energy have followed up on the technology and improved around 400 *ghattas* so far all over the country.

The improvement has brought about positive economic and social benefits: increase in income, employment opportunities and better time management. With its capability to generate electricity in rural areas, establishing small-scale cottage industries has become possible. More time is saved, helping to serve more customers during seasonal peak periods and last longer than traditional *ghattas*.



Courtesy: Mini Technology by BR Saubolle and Andreas Bachmann, 1978 Sahayogi Press and New Himalayan Water Wheels by Andreas Bachmann and Akal Man Nakarmi, 1983

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Ignorance is death

Nepali women's ignorance about their right to a safe abortion is contributing to at least half of all pregnancy-related deaths in Nepal where the maternal mortality rate is one of the highest in the world. The Centre for Research on Environment Health and Population Activities (CREHPA) says in their new report that a large number of Nepali women are still unaware of their right to terminate a pregnancy although the bill to legalise abortion was passed by parliament in March 2002. It also said fewer women than men were aware of the abortion bill but a greater number of those surveyed supported abortion.

The law permits women to abort a foetus during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy if her life or health is in danger and in cases of rape, incest and foetal impairment. Before abortion became legal, conviction on abortion charges meant long years of incarceration since abortion was considered the same as infanticide. Most women were sentenced to 20 years, denied legal representation and accused of other violations. CREHPA said lack of awareness has dire consequences for women who, fearing arrest, opt for unsafe but anonymous abortions that lead to health complications and often, death.

The opinion poll conducted by CREHPA in 10 major cities from all over Nepal interviewed about 50,000 people in the 18-30 age group.

Religious allies

"Religion plays an important role in fighting the social stigma attached to people who have HIV/AIDS," says college student, Rita Shrestha, who believes that activism should take a new direction against the epidemic. Public awareness should not be limited to just street campaigns but can be more effectively used by religious leaders to reach out to their communities. "Our priests should be involved in educating the community about the disease as people take them very seriously," says Shrestha, who represented Nepali youth at a conference, South Asia Inter-faith Consultation: Young People and HIV/AIDS, held here in Kathmandu.

A delegation of 140 youth, religious leaders and religious groups from Buddhist, Muslim, Christian and Baha'i communities around South Asia met in the city to discuss their response to the HIV epidemic in the region. "Religious leaders are in a unique position. They are listened to. This is an important anti-AIDS initiative that could have significant results in combating the epidemic," says Sadig Rasheed, regional director of Unicef South Asia. It is



South Asian youths lighting a lamp of hope at Swayambhunath.

estimated that South Asia is home to 5 million people living with HIV/AIDS and the disease is spreading widely in all eight countries due to the lack of knowledge, denial and stigma, an uneven health infrastructure and social behaviour.

One of the serious concerns raised was the cultural and social pressures that prevents the afflicted from seeking treatment. "Stigma and prejudice ostracises those in need of compassion," says Rasheed. With 1.25 million children and young people living with HIV, Unicef is encouraging youth to work as activists by raising awareness and reaching out directly to communities, both adult and young. "When I return home, I want to organise awareness programs in the villages and towns with the help of my friends," says 16-year-old Raviraj Dugar from India. Prabudha Dayama, a schoolboy from Mumbai, wants to see religious leaders shaking hands and counseling their communities. "They can help to moderate the inner conscience of their people. They can help to talk about AIDS in public, which can reduce social stigma," says Dugar. In the Indian state of Maharashtra, 200 schools have introduced AIDS Prevention Awareness Program (APAP) for senior students as a compulsory extra-curricular course. "I'm sure that youth in Nepal will make a difference and bring a new kind of activism by encouraging religious leaders to work with us," concludes Shrestha.

For the girls

The Indian government has sanctioned Rs 8.20 million for the construction of a girls' hostel, the Nepal Bharat Maitri Kanya Chhatrabas, at Panchthar Multiple Campus at Phidim. The Indian Ambassador Shyam Saran laid the foundation stone for what is hoped will become "an enduring symbol of the friendship between the two countries" according to an embassy press release. The need for a girls' hostel has long been felt by the local community and its construction will go a long way in improving the educational infrastructure for the people of this district.

The next royal move

from p1

For all these pressures, Thapa said he was happy when he came down the ramp at Tribhuvan International Airport. Does the prime minister know something the rest of the polity does not, which may explain his hilarity?

It could be the inability of the political parties to generate momentum amongst themselves or among the public for their agitation against 'pratigaman', more directed against Narayanhi than Singha Durbar. A meeting to consider the future course of the agitation could not happen Thursday. Actually, the parties were supposed to finalise the 10th round of their agitation two months ago.

"The parties are quite undecided," concedes senior and maverick Congressman Narhari Acharya. "We have only been reacting. We do not have any concrete plan to move ahead united."

The parties remain befuddled

because the Maoists are still the larger enemy and a decisive showdown with the king may simply benefit the rebels. They do not like the army's increasing presence in national affairs but they fear the Maoists' unchecked spread across the hills and plains even less.

For thus having shown considerable flexibility, the parties would certainly like to see some reciprocity from the palace. But King Gyanendra has kept his cards close to his chest. No one knows whether his continuing aloofness from the political parties is a calculated move or whether he, too, is hemmed in by having granted executive powers when he appointed Surya Bahadur prime minister, a facility apparently not available to his predecessor Lokendra Bahadur Chand.

Some top politicians even believed that the RPP's move, led by president Pashupati SJB Rana, would have helped bridge the gap between the parties and

the monarch. After all, the demand of the RPP was an all-party government, which is what the UML and the Congress have been demanding of the king.

But nothing happened. The palace remained inscrutable, while Thapa thumbed his nose at his party president and added an uncouth remark (about Pashupati's lineage) to boot. And then he went on his SAARC jaunt.

So, almost appearing to be enjoying himself, Thapa seems to believe he is secure and that the Sword of Damocles that others see dangling is just not there.

Perhaps feeling equally out of the loop with the army, king and Thapa arrayed on one side, the Maoists have begun sending feelers out to the political parties. Rebel ideologue Baburam Bhattarai has spoken of a strategy to forge an alliance

with the parties to oppose "the regression". He admitted the meeting with UML's Nepal had the same agenda.

The choice between reconciliation with the king or an alliance with the rebels may be no choice at all. But they are reduced to waiting at the gate of the palace for the next royal move.

And so, as usual, all eyes are on Narayanhi. A source close to the palace conceded, speaking to us, "Even His Majesty is under increasing pressure from donors and foreign powers to take initiative for an all-party government."

But if the smile remains on Thapa's face in the days to come, it would be fair to say that even the palace has been checkmated by the wily man from Muga*. For the moment that is. t

* Muga, village in Dhankuta District overlooking the Arun river, from where the prime minister hails.

KATHMANDU INTERNATIONAL STUDY CENTRE



TEACHERS WANTED

We are looking for a full-time or part-time teachers of:

- German** (11-18 Yrs old) including IGCSE and AS level
- Art** (11-18 Yrs old) including IGCSE and AS level
- Physics** (16-18 Yrs old) AS level
- Mathematics** (11-13 Yrs old)

These posts are available from **August 2004**

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

- Appropriate teaching qualification
- Experience of teaching in English medium to an International curriculum

Please send C.V. and letter of application by **9 January 2004** to:

The Principal
Kathmandu International Study Centre
PO Box 126, Kathmandu, Buddha Nagar, Naya Baneshwor
Email: admin@kisc.edu.np

ONLY SHORT LISTED CANDIDATES WILL BE CALLED FOR AN INTERVIEW DURING THE WEEK OF 19-23 JANUARY 2004

Yoke of terror

from p1

Three years ago, Taplejung was untouched by the insurgency and had a bright future ahead. The infusion of remittances from soldiers and workers abroad was making a visible difference to living standards, and local elected officials had started improving health and education.

Farmers were farming cardamom, and the cash crop was bringing in up to Rs 450 per kg. The Kanchenjunga Conservation Area Project (KCAP) initiated by the World Wide Fund was promoting ecotourism as a way to raise living standards and conserve the region's biodiversity around the world's third highest mountain.

It was just when the future was getting rosy that the Maoists arrived with their alternative vision of a free, classless society. The Rai, Limbu, Sherpa and Gurung villagers were far too busy making a living in this rugged land to understand. First, the Maoists started taxing cardamom farmers, and took

away 5kg of every 100kg harvested as 'donation'. A few farmers were threatened and punished for their reluctance to pay this new tax.

As Maoist activity spread and after the ceasefire broke down in August, things worsened. The Maoists are active outside the district headquarters, and people like Pasang pay with their lives. Navin used to own a shop in his village of Sanwa. Three years ago the police came looking for him. When they didn't find him, Navin tells us, they beat up his wife so badly she nearly died. "I had no other choice," Navin tells us simply. "I joined." Several villagers standing around nod their heads as they listen. This is just one of many stories of brutality perpetrated by security personnel in these remote mountains.

Later, in the privacy of their homes, people in these remote villages speak in hushed tones of the 'Junglis', the name they use for the Maoists who descend into the village in the cover of darkness

and force subsistence farmers to give them food and shelter. The Maoist leadership, wherever they are, may give directives to its cadre, but up here in the northeastern corner of Nepal there are other rules.

When 79-year-old Prabhang Kedem of Thinglabu refused to give Maoists the 'donations' they asked for, they tortured the old man and slit his throat. His nephew was forced to watch the execution. A week later, the party leadership denied involvement in Kedem's execution. Many villagers can't imagine who else could have carried out such a brutal act.

The Maoists officially claim to raise only minimal donations from trekkers and insist it is totally voluntary. Even though receipts are given, tourists on the Kanchenjunga trail told us extortion is arbitrary. In Yamphudin a group of 14 British trekkers were looted of everything including clothes, tents and money. They were

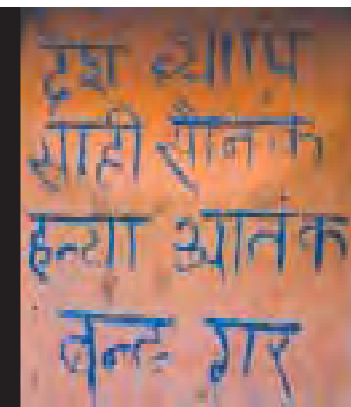
helped back to Taplejung headquarters by locals. The incident here was so serious that it warranted a statement from Maoist spokesman Krishna Bahadur Mahara denying party involvement and promising an investigation.

As it is, the Kanchenjunga region which gets fewer trekkers than other regions, was just beginning to reap the benefits of being declared a "Gift to the Earth" by the government under WWF's Living Planet campaign. But incidents like these will affect next spring's tourist season unless there is a dramatic improvement in security. Senior KCAP staff have been unable to go to the field. Villagers along the trail who were hoping that the income from trekkers would see them through the bad times are getting desperate.

They have a saying in these parts that when two bulls fight it is the calf that gets trampled. The Maoists come by night and force



From l-r: All quiet in the village of Sinwa where two Maoists who had come to exchange their recently purchased shoes were shot dead by security forces on 7 November. Members of the 32-strong Sattelung Mothers Group in Hellok. A Maoist slogan on a wall in Sinwa reads, "End the nationwide murder and terror by the Royal Nepali Army."



ALL PICS: ALOK TUMBHANGPHEY

villagers to provide food and shelter and the security forces come by day and punish anyone who help the Maoists. Most villagers have learnt to live with the Maoists. They are willing to give food and shelter in exchange for what little measure of peace they can get. But they are always scared when the soldiers come because then they find themselves trapped in the middle.

Locals told us the soldiers suspect everyone of being a Maoist and beat them up if information is not given. "When we know the army is heading our way, we know we're in trouble," one resident of Hellok village told us. "The Maoists came here when we were away during Dasai and wrote a few slogans on the school walls and raised their flag in the village, but they have not threatened us," says the headmaster of Saraswati High School in Lelep.

From what villagers tell us, it looks like indiscriminate harassment of locals could drive them to the Maoist fold. One villager talks of how the soldiers came and emptied the granary of an entire village, another woman's sewing machine was broken and a group of KCAP staff nearly got shot at by jittery soldiers on patrol.

But this does not mean the people are willingly joining the Maoists. There is a deep-seated resentment of their methods, and despite efforts by the cadres to set up their local peoples' government, there has been little success. "So far, we have given them one excuse or another, but I don't know how long this can go on," says one village elder, who did not want to be identified for fear of reprisal.

Lelep's population consists mostly of Sherpas and the Maoists have tried hard to gain their confidence. But the activities of their own militia has weakened the political work. They have tried to make up by maintaining trails, repairing bridges, banning alcohol (except the warm millet drink, *tongba*), and petty thieves and criminals are severely punished. In Tapethok a thief who stole from offerings meant for Pathibhara Debi, Taplejung's protector deity, was publicly punished. But this is

still not enough.

Rebel recruits are either those who have suffered from atrocities at the hand of the security forces or teenagers brainwashed by the glamour of a gun. "We don't force them to join us," says a Maoist in Chiruwa who calls himself Sandip. "We give them lessons on politics and tell them about the feudal system we have lived under for the last 250 years. It's up to them to join or not." Some cadre in Sandip's group don't look older than 13. Most don't know what 'feudalism' means when we talked to them. We ask Sandip about the future of these underage recruits. "The party will take care of them," he says without hesitation.

In villages people listen to the weekly army program on Radio Nepal that usually features interviews with Maoist defectors and how the army is helping locals. Most villagers we met found it hard to believe that this is the same army they see on the trails. "Who are they trying to fool?" asks a villager finishing his dinner at 7PM by the dying embers of a fire. He is used to going sleeping early, there is no telling who might turn up at the door if a light is still on.

Taplejung is settling down for another winter. It's too cold for the Maoists and they are coming down from villages up higher. The police post at Olangchunggola was burnt down two years ago, and the old customs post is abandoned. The border is only a day away and trade goes on. A kilogram of rice brought from Taplejung costs Rs 290 here, while rice from Tibet costs Rs 90. The irony is the latter is actually from Hetauda and was exported to Tibet via Khasa.

There is one bright spot in the horizon: a hydropower plant brought here nearly a decade ago has finally started working. Only a few houses in Olangchunggola have electricity because the army doesn't allow electric wire to be brought here. As darkness falls, the people lock their doors and hope the Maoists won't come calling. Day will bring little relief. t



BIZ NEWS

Going up

If the numbers are any indication, tourism is definitely on the upswing. Arrivals by air are up by 45 percent this November compared to last year, totalling 29,011 visitors, according to the Department of Immigration. Indian and third country visitors both increased by 26 and 51 percent respectively. In a bid to lure more Chinese visitors, the government recently began a visa on arrival policy for our increasingly well-travelled neighbours to the north. According to Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), Nepal's image as a safe destination for tourists has improved due to NTB sales and promotional missions conducted in tandem with airlines and the private sector.

Pioneer awarded

Perhaps because of the great digital divide, it's always more heartening when one of ours wins an award in the field. Last Saturday, Sanjib Raj Bhandari, the CEO of Mercantile, was awarded the ASOCIO ICT Award of Excellence by Asian-Oceania Computing Industry Organisation, ASOCIO, at Hanoi in Vietnam. ASOCIO is the largest and the most prestigious ICT



body in Asia that comprises premier ICT organisations from most Asian countries and Australia. ASOCIO lauded him for "his pioneering work in the introduction of the IT and the Internet to Nepal" and also recognised him as the "founding pillar of the Nepali ICT sector and for blending business and development work in Nepal". The award was presented by Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai.

Winner takes all

Come Sunday and we'll know the winners of the Boss top 10 Business Excellence Awards organised by The Boss Magazine. A panel of 50 will decide the best in the fields of top chief executive officers, best entrepreneur, best women entrepreneur and best financial institution among others. Sonal Poli, the event manager, said five nominees under each category were short-listed before the finalists were

NEW PRODUCTS

CHINESE PICK UP :

The new all-weather Changhe Pick up CH 1012Lei is tailor-made for Nepal's small roads and tight spaces. Designed by a collaboration between Japan's Suzuki and Chinese Changhe Aircraft Industries, the Euro II emission standard compatible five cylinder, 797cc truck comes with three free servicings. Imported by Kedia International, Changhe costs Rs 535,400.



PLANT BOOST: A notch higher than plain old fertiliser, HB-101 is Japanese company Flora's 'plant energiser' that acts as insecticide, promotes growth, boosts harvests by upto 30 percent, strengthens plants against frost and wind and does not pollute soil like other chemicals. Made from extracts of cedar, cypress, pine and plantain, importer Triveni Health Foundation says HB-101 is very cost effective because it is still potent even when diluted 1:10,000.



RETAIL MADE EASY: If you don't have time to shop, then Subidha Home Shopping will get the shop to you. All members of the new dial-in shopping service are issued a monthly rate card and a product catalogue of thousands of branded items every month. The rest is as easy as making a call or ordering online at www.subidhahome.com.np.

Products are sourced from wholesalers or manufacturers, making shopping with Subidha not only more convenient, but cheaper too!

AT A BAR NEAR YOU: Mc Dowell's No.1 certainly picked a good season to launch their whisky festival till 21 December at various bars in the Valley. The manufacturers have stirred up new whisky cocktails to give the tippie an urbane edge and also designed games like 'noose and tame a wild horse', 'draw a dart and aim for the bullseye' and much more to lasso in more customers. We doubt anyone will put up much of a fight!



ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

Royal Nuisance Always Cancels



The Beed suggests a shake-up of national proportions.

The last month has been a nightmare for anyone travelling with Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation (RNAC). A schedule marred by cancellations is more than just a pesky nuisance, but one has to agree with this snide remark overheard in an international airport: "What can you expect of an airline with one-and-a-half aircraft?" So while Nepal Tourism Board and private tourism entrepreneurs do the hard sell of Destination Nepal through promos and sales blitzes in India and abroad, the national carrier is spending more time grounded than in the air.

The RNAC has long been dogged by controversy and corruption ('Royal Nepal and Corruption', #22) and the Beed sees distinct parallels between the parastatal entity and the state of the nation. There are whispers that the cancellations were 'created' to support the case for a new aircraft, but the problem does not lie in merely having new planes—though it would be nice for longhaul RNAC flights to have personal entertainment centres à la better international fleets.

Wonder what went wrong with governance and flourishing institutions post-democracy? Look no further than RNAC. Once a profitable airline that made enough

money to pay the foreign exchange lease rentals on their Boeings, today its fleet is less than half of what it boasted 15 years ago. The politicians milked the cash cow, bureaucrats and employees had their share too and of course monetary subsidies in the form of jobs-for-life bloated expenditures. Financial discipline became a foreign notion with audits that never took place in time. And the game of musical CEO chairs at Royal Nepal was rivalled only by that of the prime ministerial *kursi* race.

Perhaps setting RNAC in order will send the right signals to the people ruining the country, irrespective of who is in power or what system should be ruling. They both need a good shake up, the former not the least because 1,000 employees per jet is ridiculous!

A strategic partner that knows how to run an airline must be roped in. Political appointees who are hardwired to hand cuts to their masters will not do. While they're at it, a core group should look at revenue potentials that already exist. More than 70,000 seats are available in terms of agreements that we have with various countries—a plus for any investor. The airline should opt out of the domestic routes



and leave that to private operators. However, regulations must be put in place for private airlines to fly low-margin, non-commercial routes. It's not strange that several businessmen who boast about the imminent arrival of their fleet of Boeings and Airbuses never seem to lift their plans out of the cocktail circuit. What they are not able to admit is that perhaps Nepal hasn't produced the potential to start a private international airline. The financial commitment is too much given the risks.

The solution is simple enough. Let in a strategic partner. Give RNAC enough finances and smart people at the helm. It will succeed. So what if bigger international players are not interested? We will be content with formidable regional players. We have always tried to find a perfect solution, let us start with a good one. t

arthabeed@yahoo.com.

MERCANTILE OFFICE SYSTEMS
 Computer & Office Systems
 100/101/102/103/104/105/106/107/108/109/110/111/112/113/114/115/116/117/118/119/120/121/122/123/124/125/126/127/128/129/130/131/132/133/134/135/136/137/138/139/140/141/142/143/144/145/146/147/148/149/150/151/152/153/154/155/156/157/158/159/160/161/162/163/164/165/166/167/168/169/170/171/172/173/174/175/176/177/178/179/180/181/182/183/184/185/186/187/188/189/190/191/192/193/194/195/196/197/198/199/200

**BUCKLE UP
 SADDLE UP
 AND GALLOP**
 Travel & Tourism
 100/101/102/103/104/105/106/107/108/109/110/111/112/113/114/115/116/117/118/119/120/121/122/123/124/125/126/127/128/129/130/131/132/133/134/135/136/137/138/139/140/141/142/143/144/145/146/147/148/149/150/151/152/153/154/155/156/157/158/159/160/161/162/163/164/165/166/167/168/169/170/171/172/173/174/175/176/177/178/179/180/181/182/183/184/185/186/187/188/189/190/191/192/193/194/195/196/197/198/199/200



A lot of hot air

Ballooning gives Nepal's tourism a lift.

ALL PICS: PHILLIPE BOEGLIN



Clockwise from bottom l-r: A balloon casts its shadow on a Bhaktapur field. Ready to fly in Pokhara. Ariel view of the misty Valley. Phillipe Boeglin of the French team. Hot air balloons ascending on a cold Kathmandu morning. Organiser Wolfgang Nairz gets the lay of the land.



TRISHNA GURUNG

It was a misty dawn as the group of five hot air balloons from the Nepal Ballooning 2003 expedition ascended to 1,100m above Bharatpur. The view made the ballooners, some of them veteran Himalayan mountaineers, gasp.

"You could see nearly 500km of the Himalaya—from

Dhaulagiri to Everest," said Austrian mountaineer, Wolfgang Nairz. "It was one of my best flights."

You'd think that after visiting Nepal 56 times Nairz would have run out of things to see and do, but no. Nairz first came to Nepal in 1970 and then as team leader of the expedition that put the first

men (Reinhold Messner and Peter Habeler) on the top of Mt Everest without using bottled oxygen. Since then, he just kept coming back.

An author and a ballooning buff, Nairz first took off on a gondola over Nepal in 1994 and produced the bestseller in Europe, *Ballonfahren zwischen Alpen und*

Himalaya. And later, on his lecture tours, the most asked question was: "When are you organising your next balloon tour to Nepal?" It would take another nine years, four of which went in planning and two in postponements because of political instability in Nepal.

"The media reports were

negative, but our local partners kept us updated and I was here for the Everest Golden Jubilee celebrations and knew that things would be okay," Nairz told us.

Finally, five teams from Austria, France and Switzerland braved the bad press and the cautionary advisories from their embassies and decided to come.



DEXO @ nagarkot

DEKO HOTEL

DEKO BOATERS DEKO MUSIC CENTER

Woolen

KALINTA

Picture Framing

Level 5, Prakash Plaza, imported & manufactured by KALINTA



BALLOONFAHREN ZWISCHEN ALPEN UND HIMALAYA



And they are all glad they did. The 17-member team brought their private balloons for the fortnight of ballooning, making three flights from Pokhara, three in Kathmandu Valley and for the first time in ballooning history, were airborne over Chitwan. The teams also did two charity flights at the SOS Village and Mount Kailash School in Kathmandu.

"It was completely different from 1994," says Nairz. "At that time, we had several problems with air traffic control, the airport was not equipped with radar and members of the local support team didn't know how to handle balloons." The second time round it was smoother sailing. Devendra Gurung, the managing director of Lamjung Treks & Expeditions even went to Austria and Germany to learn a bit of ballooning himself. "I had to know what I was doing if I was expected to talk with civil aviation and show my boys the right way to set up the equipment," says Gurung.

And it was smooth sailing all the way with glorious weather. Except a hairy situation in Pokhara when a French balloon drifted over an army base and the crew was taken in for questioning. Hot air balloons are at the mercy of the wind direction, and can only control their up and down movements. "We were just having a good time up there playing the trumpet, and a few soldiers even waved at us," says Phillippe Boeglin. But the friendliness seems to have evaporated when the balloon landed just across from the base.

"I know what the problem was," jokes Boeglin. "They don't

like French jazz." It took Gurung a harrowing few hours till the army reviewed the video footage and a Frenchman dramatically exposed his camera film to show their goodwill before the balloonists were deemed not to be a security threat.

For the French team, Bhaktapur was the best flight. Boeglin was tooting his trumpet, and families watching the aerial parade from their rooftops gave them well-deserved applause. The balloonists showered presents as they made low passes near Nyatapola and skimmed over the rooftops. The irrepressible Boeglin left Kathmandu with a Tibetan *gyalin*, and its sonorous sound will soon be echoing from balloons in the French Alps.

It was Swiss banker Peter R Schmid's sixth visit to Nepal but this time it was pleasure, not business. He describes the moment with reverence: "We were 4,000m over Pokhara with Annapurna looming ahead. It was a childhood dream coming true, but till I saw it, I never imagined the Himalaya was so overwhelming!"

Walter Mattenberger, a pilot of one of the Swiss balloons, was more impressed with the Nepalis. "I received more smiles, especially from women, than I have in my entire life. The beauty of the country and the friendliness of the people is not a cliché." Thousands of awestruck children and adults rushed to meet the balloonists wherever they landed. "We felt safe all the time," says Schmid.

The real nightmare for Nepal Ballooning's 2003 ground team was logistics. Each balloon weighs approximately 300kg, nearly half of which are the gas cylinders. It took four strong men, one flatbed truck and at least two mobile phones per team before anything got off the ground. And once they were up, up and away, it was anybody's guess where it would set down. Nairz is already planning his next ballooning trip for 2005. He's delighted to see that many locals and expatriates are taking an interest. t



Times

Available worldwide in hard copy.

WORLDWIDE DELIVERY

Espresso Making **IN ONE** Refreshment

...the most convenient and easiest way to make a perfect cup of espresso coffee at home or in the office. The machine is compact, easy to use and requires no special skills. It is the perfect solution for those who want to enjoy a great cup of coffee without the hassle of a traditional espresso machine.

ESPRRESSO MAKING IN ONE

COMMENT

by JEFFREY D SACHS



Declaration of Independence



George W Bush is obsessed with the war on terrorism, especially with the military response to terrorism. American foreign policy reflects that obsession.

This year, the US will spend around \$450 billion for the military, including the costs of the Iraq War, while it will spend no more than \$15 billion to overcome global poverty, global environmental degradation and global diseases. In other words, US foreign policy spending is thirty times more focused on the military than on building global prosperity, global public health and a sustainable environment.

Throughout 2003, the world lived with Bush's obsession. Debate over Iraq dominated international diplomacy, and took up almost the entire UN agenda. The war in Iraq cost countless innocent lives, such as when the UN headquarters in Baghdad was bombed. At the same time, Bush's emphasis on a one-dimensional, militarized approach to global problems has fueled unrest and instability throughout the Islamic world, leading to increased terrorism in Turkey, North Africa, Saudi Arabia and Southeast Asia.

The nature of suffering around the world hardly justifies this narrow strategy. Focusing on terrorism to the exclusion of other issues, and emphasising the military response to it, will not bring prosperity and peace, or even a significant reduction in the number of attacks. While 3,000 innocent people died in the US on September 11, 2001, in Africa 8,000 innocent children die every day from malaria.

Yet malaria is preventable and treatable. The problem is that most of Africa is too poor to mobilise the methods of prevention (bed nets) and treatments (anti-malarial medicines) that could save millions of children every year. The US spends more on Iraq each day than it does on Africa's malaria in a year.

As 2003 draws to a close, it is time for world leaders to help guide the world away from the obsessive, failing approach of America's government. President

Bush should be made to understand that the US will find no true international support if America speaks incessantly about terrorism while doing almost nothing about the problems that really affect most of the world: poverty, lack of access to safe water and sanitation, vulnerability to disease and climate change.

Ironically, President Bush claims that the UN does not follow through on its word. He declared in London recently that "the credibility of the UN depends on a willingness to keep its word and to act when action is required." Yet the US repeatedly violates its own UN pledges.

For example, at the International Conference on Financing for Development, in Monterrey, Mexico in March 2002, America signed the Monterrey Consensus, which includes a promise by rich countries to raise their development assistance towards 0.7 percent of national income. That would bring an additional

from struggling African economies.

The list goes on and on. At the Millennium Assembly in 2000, the US promised to pursue reduction of global poverty, yet it has taken few steps in that direction. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, America committed itself to protect global ecosystems, yet little has been seen or heard from US policy makers on this issue since then.

America is certainly not alone in failing to promote the international goals adopted in the UN. But because the US is the richest, most powerful country in the world, its neglect is devastating. If the US really wants to undercut terrorism, it must recognize the interconnectedness of extremism, poverty and environmental degradation, and it will need to understand the struggles for survival that are underway among the poor everywhere.

But the world should not wait for America to come to its senses. The US represents just 5 percent of the world's population, and just one vote of 191 countries in the

It is time for world leaders to help guide the world away from the obsessive, failing approach of America's government.

\$60 billion per year in foreign assistance from the US—approximately what it spent on Iraq this year. Yet President Bush has simply ignored this promise.

There are many other similar commitments that the US has made in recent years to the UN that remain utterly unfulfilled. The US promised action to fight man-made climate change as a signatory to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992. It has so far failed to act. America also promised—in the Doha Declaration in 2001—to open its markets to the world's poorest countries. Yet at Cancun, Mexico earlier this summer, it refused to open its markets even to exports

UN General Assembly. Poor countries, especially the democracies of the developing world—Brazil, South Africa, India, Mexico, Ghana, the Philippines—should say, "We need to act on the issues that concern us, not just on the issues that concern the US." What the world needs most in 2004 is a declaration of independence from American willfulness. t (© Project Syndicate)

Jeffrey D Sachs is Professor of Economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

“No real strategic interest”

The United States has been appearing more often in the political radar screen of the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, but experts both in and out of the South Asian island nation do not see Washington taking up a major role in efforts to reach a settlement in its ethnic conflict.

In recent months, up until the prime minister's rival, President Chandrika Kumaratunga, fired three of his Cabinet members and declared a state of emergency early this month, Wickremasinghe has gone out of his way to ensure that US support for his government does not diminish.

Perhaps the clearest signal of this was Wickremasinghe's comment upon his return from the United States after Kumaratunga's moves—he said that he had the full support of the US government and that Washington backed the Sri Lankan government's 22-month-old ceasefire with the Tamil Tiger rebels.

Indeed, compared to past peace negotiations to end a rebellion aimed at having a homeland for minority Tamils, the US government has played an active role in the current peace process. “A lot of international pressure is there, that is what I think is keeping them (the government and the Tigers) from firing at each other, that's the only difference between this peace process and the previous ones,” said Muttukrishna Sarvananthan, an economist at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Colombo.

Washington was one of the co-chairs at the Tokyo donor conference in June that raised \$4.5 billion. It has also kept the pressure on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), as the

Tigers are formally called, by continuing to list it as a foreign terrorist organisation. Earlier in April, Washington hosted a conference of donors but did not invite the LTTE because of its terrorist classification. This helped drive the Tigers to suspend its participation in the peace process—although the ceasefire has since held.

During an address to the UN General Assembly in October, Wickremasinghe expressed support for US foreign policies, including the invasion of Iraq. At world trade negotiations the same month in Mexico, instead of joining the walkout by other developing nations, Sri Lankan Commerce Minister Ravi Kamanayake held talks with U.S. counterparts on bilateral trade.

But despite the US government's more conspicuous role and Sri Lankan officials' welcoming it, some believe that Washington would never directly intervene in Sri Lanka.

The US involvement in Sri Lanka is an unimportant yet unavoidable element of the larger global war on terror, they argue. “The post 11 September crackdown on international financing of the LTTE and other terrorist groups might have helped to bring the LTTE to the table,” says Arun Swamy, a research fellow at the East-West Centre in Honolulu.

“There is no way that the United States will be able to solve the Tamil Tiger problem,” Dale Watson, former FBI assistant director of counter-terrorism and counter-intelligence, said during a forum at the University of California Berkeley recently. But there are others who say that the United States will continue to play a major role, if subtly.

“The United States will not get involved



militarily but will support with logistics,” said Lasantha Wickrematunge, editor of the Colombo-based *The Sunday Leader* newspaper, who was with Wickremasinghe in Washington. He cites the loose agreement on cooperation on equipment and the gift to the Sri Lankan navy of a surveillance craft by the United States as examples of the change in attitude by Washington. Twenty members of the US navy are also due to train with their Sri Lankan counterparts.

Announcing the training sessions, the US Embassy in Colombo said that it “exemplifies the strong relationship between the two nations” and that it was one of many such ongoing programs. There has also been a string of visits by high-level U.S. officials, including Deputy Secretary of State

Richard Armitage, to Sri Lanka. Armitage visited the front lines in the north, the region most affected by the ethnic conflict.

Wickrematunge observed that significantly, the government also has the guarantee of US support in case the peace process breaks down. “The United States is throwing its diplomatic muscle behind the government. It will strangle the LTTE's international operations and use its strength with other countries in the event of war.”

The extent of US involvement may however also be determined by India, the military and economic power in South Asia that has a history of engagement in the Sri Lankan conflict. “It is unlikely given what they are dealing with in Afghanistan and Iraq that this administration would risk the political capital of

trying to broker a deal and (it is) inconceivable that they would risk any forces. The latter would largely take care of India's security apprehensions,” Swamy observed.

During the initial months of peace talks, which began in September 2002, there were signs of disgruntlement both in New Delhi and in Colombo over the Wickremasinghe government's pro-US stance. In fact, the two main opposition parties—the People's Alliance and the People's Liberation Front—both called for more Indian involvement in the process. Wickremasinghe moved quickly and entered into a defence cooperation pact with India.

India's role is further emphasised since Sri Lanka does not hold much value for the US financially and politically. According to 2002 figures, US exports to Sri Lanka were a mere \$172 million, while to India they were \$4 billion. On the other hand, Sri Lanka's textile trade is heavily dependent on exports to the United States. “Sri Lanka has no real strategic interest for the United States,” Wickrematunge said.

Its only political value, if any, would be as an ally in a volatile region with forces facing down each other armed with nuclear weapons. Said Swamy: “Their main concern in South Asia... will be to ensure that nothing blows up between India and Pakistan.” (IPS)

Outsiders

Japan is stepping up its vigilance on foreigners.

SUVENDRINI KAKUCHI in TOKYO

The Japanese government's wariness of foreigners has been rising, despite calls by activists for greater integration of immigrants and local businesses' demand for foreign migrant labour. In recent months Tokyo has stepped up its vigilance on foreigners, playing into traditional xenophobia against outsiders in Japan, which has long touted its national homogeneity as its uniqueness in the world.

The negative perceptions of foreigners as ‘outsiders’ was heightened by sensationalised media reports after the September arrests of two Chinese men, both had student visas, for the gruesome murder of a Japanese family in June.

Meanwhile, Japan's top business people have spoken out for the need to accept the reality—and value—of foreigners in the world's second largest economy and favour the easing of restrictions on immigration as means of augmenting an ageing local workforce. Nippon Keidanren, Japan's powerful business lobby, describes immigration as the “reinvigoration of the Japanese economy” in its policy documents.

It estimates that if Japan accepts 6.1 million workers from overseas before 2025, it will be possible to control the rise of the consumption tax to finance skyrocketing costs of social welfare. Foreigners working in Japan account for only 0.2 percent of all

workers in the country at the beginning of 2000, compared to 11.7 percent in the United States and 8.8 percent in Germany during the same time. The Justice Ministry reports there are around 200,000 non-Japanese people who have overstayed their visas, mostly from Asian countries, such as China, South Korea, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

As a sign of the recent backlash, a government poll taken at the beginning of November shows that a high 32.4 percent of people do not want more foreign tourists visiting Japan. Ninety-two percent cited rising crime committed by foreigners as the most pressing reason for this sentiment. This week, the justice ministry reported it has declined 400 applications made by Chinese seeking university entrance in Japan.

Last week, the ministry said that starting the new fiscal year in April 2004, it would toughen checks on foreign students—particularly from countries with high numbers of overstayers who are seeking admission to colleges and Japanese language schools. Ministry officials say this stems from an increase in the number and severity of crimes



committed by those overstaying their visas, resulting in the “deterioration of safety” in the nation. The new measures will hurt Japan's longterm goal of hosting more than 100,000 foreign students to ensure friendly relations with Asian countries.

Ironically, the education ministry has been encouraging more overseas students, resulting in the sudden increase of Chinese students—from 14,519 to 58,533 students last year—who now top the list of foreign students studying in Japan. But reports of increasing crime rates do not help the situation. Local media has reported, for instance, that statistics compiled by the National Police Agency show that 34 percent of Chinese arrested this year were on current or expired student visas. Last year, the Chinese comprised 47.2 percent of foreigners arrested for crimes in Japan, official figures show. The total number of alleged offences reached a high of 7,690. Asians accounted for 72.5 percent of that number.

But focusing on this is not productive and misleading, critics say, adding that it reflects not just crime itself but a bigger problem of lack of acceptance and space to live and work legally and in an integrated manner in the country. They are critical of the government's policy, which they say has double standards. It turned a blind eye on low-paid foreign workers when they were needed during the economic-bubble years when labour was scarce, but changed its position when the unemployment rate shot up. (IPS)



Bullseye

Baburam Bhattarai in *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 30 November

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

It is quite natural that the recent meeting held in India between the top leaders from the Maoists and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) raised so much discussion and speculation within the country and internationally. It is normal for state and global power centres to interpret what took place within their frame of interest and on their level of comprehension.

But it needs to be clarified that the dialogue between the leaders of the two parties was planned and deliberate. There is no need to give it a mysterious spin. Our party has always admitted that there has to be tripartite power equilibrium among the Maoists, parliamentary parties and the monarchists. This is why we have been proposing a dialogue among these three forces to work towards a permanent solution.

During the last ceasefire and peace talks period, we regularly met supporters of the old regime and the monarchy, and the parliamentarians who are at present between the old and the new regimes. The current return to conflict is thanks to a militarily intoxicated group who were instigated by some foreign powers with vested interests, and that led to the collapse of the peace negotiations.

We have kept our channels of discussion open with the parliamentary parties agitating against the royal regression. The politburo meeting of our party last month analysed that the struggle among the three forces in the country was gradually changing, melding into a tussle between two factions. In line with that analysis, it also concluded that a new type of dialogue had to be initiated with the parliamentary parties. Hence, the kind of meeting between top Maoist and UML leaders.

We are not surprised at the royal fascist elements' concern at our meeting. Bullseye! We feel good about it. The only surprise we have is the way these elements, who cannot survive even for one day without alms from foreigners, have been shedding crocodile tears just because we chose to meet on foreign soil. They are also harping on about how the Indian state has protected the Maoists. Moreover, some people are demonstrating their intellectual bankruptcy when they say that the meeting between Maoist and UML leaders in Siliguri two years ago and the latest one in Lucknow justifies their argument that India has been the base of the entire 'people's war'. They also made a foolish argument that the Maoist problem will not be solved until our party leaders are arrested and extradited by the Indian government.

As for the issue regarding meeting in India, one must understand that we have a problem and an enmity with the Indian reactionary ruling class, not with India and the people. Secondly, everyone must remember that there are more than 10 million poor Nepalis who earn their livelihood in India. We are trying to organise them and under their protection we plan to hold talks with different quarters. There is nothing wrong about it. It is rather a big revolutionary responsibility. Thirdly, this is the time when the Maoists have already occupied more than 80 percent of the total land area of Nepal, so we are under no compulsion to hold meetings in foreign lands. The people should also know that many national and foreign political powers have lined up to hold talks with our party.

We would like to urge some genuine patriots who are misguided by Goebbelian-styled propaganda of the old regime. They should not just see the outer part of an object or an incident. They must consider the internal and summary aspects to have a clear picture.



MIN BAIRACHARYA



Viagra barter
Bhimsen Sapkota in
Nepal Samacharpatra, 1
December

Around 1,000kg of yarchagumba, widely known as the Himalayan Viagra, was illegally exported from Upper Dolpa to China before winter settled in this year. Chinese businessmen had arrived in huge numbers at the border area near Tinje village to buy the 'insect-turned-plant' believed to be a sexual stimulant in traditional oriental medicine in South-east Asia and even here in Nepal. "There were lots of people this time," says Chandra Shahi of Dunai. "We could not get more than one and a half kilogram." Many locals said even Maoists came to the highlands to gather yarchagumba.

This time trade was different: the Chinese came with food and clothes to barter for yarchagumba and prices varied widely between Rs 60,000 and 150,000 per kilogram, depending on the quality. It was market time and everyone wanted to turn a profit, and most of the transactions took place with the government getting only a meagre Rs 60,000 revenue of only three kilograms. The reason is simple: the government's revenue rate of Rs 20,000 per kilogram is exorbitant for yarchagumba collectors who prefer to sell their collection illegally to Chinese traders.

"We know there have been illegal transactions of yarchagumba in Upper Dolpo," says CDO Gyan Prasad Dhakal. "But we can't help it until security is tightened on the northern border." Dolpo adjoins Tibet and has no security personnel at all. Hostile terrain and the Maoist insurgency has confined both the police and the army to the district headquarters. "If only there were proper

security arrangements, we could collect millions of rupees as royalties from the yarchagumba collectors," says Dhakal. Projects halted
Space Time, 30 November

DHANGADI – The Maoists in Kailali district are putting a halt to development activities funded by the Germans and the British. They have been distributing leaflets saying their action is necessary to put an end to "Western influence". The rebels say that the recent visit by German ambassador Rüdiger Lemp accompanied by GTZ staff to western Nepal indicates growing foreign interference even in villages. The Maoists accuse NGOs and government agencies for misusing funds in the name of rehabilitating and resettling the liberated kamaiyas (bonded labourers). There are an estimated 30,000 kamaiyas in the district. The rebels sent a message to the District Development Committee not to run its RCIW program without their permission. Two days ago, the Maoists confiscated a motorcycle and gave a last warning to the engineer and overseer of RCIW when they entered Urma VDC without any 'permission papers'. Engineer Birendra Kumar says that the Maoists started taking action after they learnt that some NGO workers and government staff started using foreign funds to politically influence the kamaiyas, dalits and other displaced populations.

Demand and supply
Bimarsha, 21-27 November

That Nepali traders have been helping Maoists buy pistols, rifles, combat uniforms, medicines and food materials through the Khasa border has

been reported time and again, but the government has turned a deaf ear and a blind eye to the matter. The clandestine arms trade was not reported by businessmen or security sources but by porters.

The dealers are allegedly working closely with key Maoist leaders around Tatopani. Even personnel from the immigration department and the police force have been implicated. Khasa has remained a trade route not only for the Maoists but for Indians as well. Security sources say that Islamic militant organisations use the area to get new AK47 rifles. Sources say that while the Maoists used high altitude villages in Dolakha and Sindhupalchok to bring in Chinese munitions, they have been using local dealers to smuggle in other supplies through different entry points on the Arniko highway.

Besides villages like Panchkhal and Barabise, police offices have been removed from Dolalghat, Balefi and Kharichaur. The market places in these towns are completely under Maoist control, making it easy for the rebels to contact traders and financial supporters. After the Chinese border security forces arrested a group of arms smugglers, Nepal's district security force in Sindhupalchok showed interest in nabbing traders and financial supporters.

One of the smugglers arrested recently is a known Maoist worker, Hiralal Shrestha from Sindhupalchok. Shrestha is just an ordinary committee member of the Maoist party in Sindhu-Dolakha but the mafia, in a bid to protect the bigger players, has made Shrestha a scapegoat. Dozens of businessmen and political leaders of Sindhupalchok and top Maoist leaders are major suspects in the case. Vigilance by the security forces has tightened along the route and a close eye is being kept on transactions of traders of Tibetan origin from Chetrapati and New Road in the Valley.

Radio Mao
Rajdhani, 3 December

The Maoists had been using FM radio very effectively for propaganda purposes in western Nepal till the army recently began an active search operation for their station bases. Three Maoist FM stations broadcasting 'Republic Radio Nepal' are already closed and many more have been forced to move with their equipment, making regular broadcasts difficult. Sources say the offensive against the Maoists in Bhawang and Korchawang in Rolpa made it especially difficult for the rebels.



Constitutional Council
Monkeys (in order): Prime Minister,
Chief Justice, Assembly Speaker
Red Book: Constitution

हिमाल

Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 2-15 December

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"The Indian government expressed worry over the Lucknow meeting between the leaders of the Maoists and the UML party."

Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa in *Kantipur*, 2

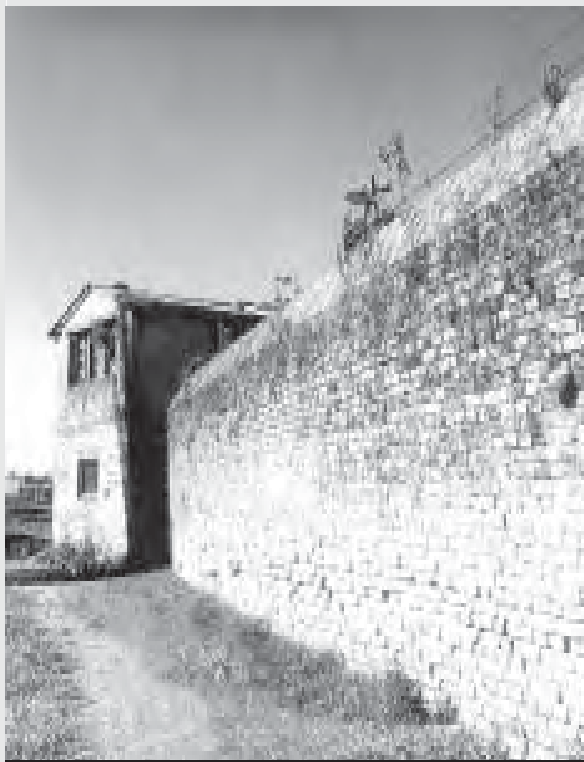
Robotics

Himal Khabarpatrika, 2-15 December

With absolutely no training or outside guidance, 15-year-old Prasant Kumar Gupta surprised everyone by making a robot, assembling electronic and video game parts packaged in a plywood box. Gupta was so inspired by a robot made by college student Diwakar Jha that he decided to make his own. So with Rs 2,000 to buy all the parts, Gupta made his robot in just 30 days. His robot can shake its thumb, move its eyes, rotate its head and walk backwards and forwards. The robot, which operates on both battery and electricity, can also count people visiting Gupta's home, switch lights on and can even launch its rocket when someone enters the house. "I can build a more efficient and sophisticated robot if I had more money," says Gupta who comes from a middle-class family in Kadamchok of Janakpur. "Ever since he was a child, he was always interested in making something or the other," says his father Suresh Kumar Gupta, who assembles projectors, torches, alarms and other electronic goods for a living. A grade 10 student, Gupta wants to

Back at Sundarijal >49

“The king is a well-meaning person...”



Transferred from Sundarijal to the Police Training Centre in Kathmandu, BP Koirala gets a visit from the king's emissary. He argues why it is important for him to meet the king, and the things he would like to discuss with him. But it doesn't look like a meeting is imminent.

27 May-28 May

[No entries]

Sunday, 29 May

Police Training Centre (Detention Camp)

Dr Mrigendra Raj Pandey examined me. He took almost one hour to do so. He seems to suspect heart trouble. He doesn't tell the patient what he suffers from, perhaps not to alarm him. But by the kind of advice he gave me—not to do any physical exercise, not to bathe in cold water, to avoid anything that promotes weakness, etc, to avoid fat in food, to eat a little at a time but frequently, and by the nature of the questions that he asked me, I could gather in his opinion my heart condition is not OK. He said that he would consult some of his colleagues and determine the kind of investigation before he would prescribe treatment. He has taken my case seriously. As he was departing he told me by the way that he himself was not perfectly all right and had given up hectic schedule of work, and a very limited no. of patients, like me etc. I inquired about his wife + asked him to remember me to her. I am a little worried as a result of his demeanor, altho he told me to take things easy. An hour before he came, I had a further attack of blackout in my left eye. My vision from the left eye was gone for about 15 minutes after which it again started reappearing slowly. This is the 3rd attack since the last two months. Fortunately Dr Mrigendra Raj came after that, so I could tell him about this attack also.

In the evening immediately after dinner at about 7:45 pm General Malla (of Royal Guards) visited me on behalf of the king with a message that since a meeting between the king and myself at the juncture wouldn't be good to either party, the proper channel would be Malla through whom I could communicate whatever I have in mind to the king in full trust. I told Malla that I would like to discuss things with the king face to face without any intermediary. Malla's points of talk: (i) He is king's envoy, (ii) I therefore could trust him fully (iii) A direct meeting between us would be harmful for both of us because interested parties could make capital out of it. (iv) Any abrupt change in the present system would create more problems than solve them (v) That this visit to me should be kept strictly private, nobody, not even my family members, should get an inkling of it. (see 28.5.77)

(from 29.5.77)

My points: (i) There are interested parties in the seat of authority which don't want any understanding between us. There are foreign powers, too, interested in keeping us apart. Hence I don't want to conduct talks through anybody. I know most of them who are in the king's favour wouldn't take long to betray the nation if it suits them. So far as the king is concerned he has vested interest in the nation's progress, because his survival depends upon it. Therefore I can be frank with him, but I don't trust others to always keep the interest of the country at heart. I don't mean to suggest that I don't even trust Malla. I do trust

him. But the question is not whether I have specific message to convey to him—I want to discuss various issues with the king (ii) My regret has been that the late king and myself couldn't meet as a result of machination of foreign powers (ie India) and the then PM who was India's man (iii) Even today in the cabinet there are people who can't be depended on, some of them are members of our party (iv) The king's primary responsibility is to forge a national unity and I can be of help to him (v) The king is a well-meaning person + is dedicated to the idea of national economic development but in spite of this the development is heart-breaking today—no general mass enthusiasm has been generated for it. We could do it. (vi) The king needs real support—the support of his courtiers is no support, we can provide real help to him (vii) India's designs are not good but to meet this challenge we have 1st to be really united (viii) We can't afford to antagonise India, we can more than anybody perform a role here nationalistic but friendly with India (ix) I don't suggest that the king take a reverse gear and abruptly introduce a new political system—democratisation should be a kind of process which could take couple of years to complete—i.e. reversal through imperceptible stages—phasing out + phasing in. I have pol. plan for this purpose, but I will discuss it only with the king. (x) The king has emphasized even in his latest direction of *gau pharka* that the system could absorb new ideas and is amendable. This is an escape clause—which will be helpful when the process of democratization starts (xi) I want that there shouldn't be an unnecessary delay in our meeting because situation is likely to develop which may make it more and more difficult for us to meet + evolve united national formula for the solution of various problems (xii) As it is by my trial + the response to it by my (see 27.5.77)

(from 28.5.77)

friends + reaction to it here has created an unfavourable atmosphere—which would go on worsening (xii) The trial itself has created a situation—I had to defend myself in terms which are not conducive or a favourable atmosphere for talks. I did take a stand in my defence which I wouldn't have otherwise taken in the interest of a proactive meeting with the king.

Malla was with me for about half-an-hour. Malla stressed that this meeting must be kept secret. When I told him that IG (Police) himself had brought Malla to me, he said that IG knew how to keep his mouth shut. About ½ an hour before Malla came the sentry posted at the gate of my camp had been withdrawn. He came back ½ hour after Malla left me. When I asked him if he would see me again he said unless I had anything specific to convey to the king he wouldn't be coming. In case I wanted to see I him I should send word to him through the IG.

My 1st reaction after he was gone was of frustration. The king perhaps doesn't want to do anything soon + later the situation may not so develop as to necessitate a meeting between us. Therefore I have to be prepared to be in prison for a long long time – considering my health it may be too long.

Great Scots!

A Nepali dance master is teaching them how to shimmy and shake in Edinburgh.

Charan Pradhan is at the Bongo Club in Edinburgh, teaching exotic Bollywood dances to a mixed crowd of Asians and Scots, all of whom want a bit of *desi* style. Pradhan, 40, looks the part, dressed in a silver tunic and an orange turban. When he lived in Nepal, Pradhan did some choreography for Bollywood films and even acted in a few. He also choreographed Bollywood moves for television shows, but this is the first Bollywood class he ever held.

Bollywood is becoming more mainstream in Scotland. It's used to sell everything from banks to lager. "A lot of the people who have come along to my dance classes say they are doing it because they saw a Bollywood movie," says Pradhan, who has a degree in dance from the University of Coventry. Now, fans of the world's most popular films can learn to move like their favourite stars. Pradhan takes enthusiasts through dance routines from blockbuster films and his classes have started drawing crowds to this club near the Scottish Parliament. The Bongo Club decided to host the classes after receiving requests from film fans.

Pradhan first came to the attention of the Bongo Club when he performed at the grand opening of their new Holyrood Road venue. Manager Ally



Hill said: "Charan performed at our opening night and was just sensational. It really is quite something to see. It looks amazing and it is a dancing style that is so full of life. I think there could be quite a big market for it, given the reaction we have had so far, at our first few classes."

Bollywood is the world's most successful film industry in terms of global ticket sales. Long and elaborate song-and-dance routines are a staple of most Bollywood classics. The popularity of the films in Scotland was highlighted by last year's visit of megastar Shah Rukh Khan, dubbed 'the Indian Tom Cruise', who was mobbed at the Edinburgh film festival.

The Bollywood industry produces up to 1,000 movies a year, a quarter of the world's films, in about 20 languages. It exports its films to 95 countries, with the biggest percentage going to the United States, Britain and Canada. India's 13,000 cinema halls have a daily audience of around 15 million. The popularity of Bollywood films in Scotland has encouraged producers to record movies here. One of Shah Rukh

Khan's biggest hit movies, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, was shot in Scotland in 1999 at Loch Lomond, Glencoe and Tantallon Castle, in East Lothian.

The popularity of the genre has also influenced Western cinema, with hits such as *The Guru*, incorporating colourful Bollywood-style dance routines. Dana MacLeod, who works for Out of the Blue Arts & Education Trust and the Bongo Club, said the classes were another sign that Bollywood was becoming part of mainstream Scottish culture.

"Bollywood is so huge in India and it is the modern dance style for all the children out there, but it's very different to Western styles. That is why Charan is so good, in that he manages to make it accessible to anyone who comes along to his class. I think it has taken a while for the Indian culture to really come through here, but now it is everywhere. There are Bollywood movies on the television, and Bollywood imagery is used in everything from the Bank of Scotland to Tennents lager [adverts], which I think

gives you some idea of how far it can go." t

(Source: Evening News)

The Best Pizza in Town

also try our Chinese, Continental and Indian dishes
(Free delivery to selected areas)

Harihar Bhawan, Lalitpur (Next to Himalayan Bank Ltd.) Call 5541-592

af WELCOMES YOU IN ITS NEW FRENCH LANGUAGE SESSION

ADMISSION OPEN

8th Dec. 2003 to 17th Feb. 2004

Courses: Regular, Crash, Oral, French Civilization & Conversation

Come and register **Contact**

From 27th November to 7th December 2003 from 9 am to 6 pm

Alliance Française
Thapathali (opposite Rotary Club) Tel: 4241 163, 4242 832

EASY TIMES

It's never been easier to subscribe to Nepali Times

Just dial this number and leave your address.

5543333

Mandala House
APARTMENT HOTEL

Service of a Hotel
Feeling of a Home

Baluwatar, Kathmandu
Tel: 4412412 (9:00 am - 5:00 pm)
98412-24635 (after 5:00 pm & Saturdays)
E-mail: mandala@wlink.com.np
Web site: www.mandala.com.np

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- My devotion Poubha paintings by Japanese artist Kazuko Asano, till 12 December at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. 4428694
- Reflections of Colour Paintings by Susan Gillerman Boggs till 9 January at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. 4218048
- Abstracts, expressionistic oil paintings, watercolours, etchings and unique modern bronze sculptures, photographs and floral art till 13 December at Park Gallery, Lazimpat 4419353 and Pulchowk. 5522307
- Sofa so good Paintings by Kripa Joshi at Dhokaima Café at Patan Dhoka. 5543017
- The Last Picture Show: Faces of Chitwan Photographs by Susal Stebbins, till December 21 at Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549



EVENTS

- Teesta Socials 2003: Reunion of schools from Darjeeling district. Meet old friends, make new memories. 8PM onwards 12 December at 1905, Kantipath. Tickets: Rs 250. Details: Dee (981057570), Trish (981020164), Bin (981053724).
- Christmas Bazaar AWON's annual bazaar 10AM-4PM on 6 December, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. Handicrafts, jewellery, food stalls and children's activities corner. Entry Rs 50, under 12's free. Details: awonchristmas@yahoo.com
- A musical afternoon with Kuber Rai 3PM on 7 December at Yala Maya Kendra. Tickets: Rs 300 available at Dhokaima Café, 5543017.
- How to develop peace Public talk by Lama Zopa Rinpoche at 3PM on 14 December. Siddhartha Hall, Blue Star Hotel, Tripureshwor. Open to all. Details: Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre. 4249270
- Summit Hotel's Xmas Night Market Followed by Summit's Famous Friday BBQ. 3-9PM 12 December. Free entry. 5521810

MUSIC

- Lucky Ali Live in Kathmandu also featuring Deepak Bajracharya 2PM on 6 December at Dasharath Rangasala Ticket: Rs 200. 6PM on 7 December at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. Ticket: Rs 2,999 per person (dinner and drinks). Tickets available at Gemini Grocery, Hot Breads, Alina's Bakery Café, Suwal Music and Station Pub.

DRINK

- 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
- Fusion at Dwarika's for over 100 cocktails, happy hour and Abhaya & The Steam Injuns every Friday. 4479488

FOOD

- Sunday brunch: Buckwheat pancakes, scrambled eggs with smoked salmon, roast duck with orange sauce and more, Sundays 10AM-3PM at Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka. 5543017
- Bring your wine along every Thursday and Sunday and buy our dinner. Himalatte Café, Thamel.
- Momos & More the finest momos in town also at Dhobighat. 5520692
- Bhaktapur Night BBQ dinner in the Shambala Garden every Friday. Rs 600 per person (welcome drink and dinner). 4412999
- Roadhouse Café for speciality coffees. Opp St Mary's School, Pulchowk. 5521755
- Authentic Chinese food at Tian Rui Chinese Restaurant, Thapathali. 4243078
- 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
- Vegetarian specialities at Stupa View Restaurant & Terrace, Boudha Stupa. 4480262

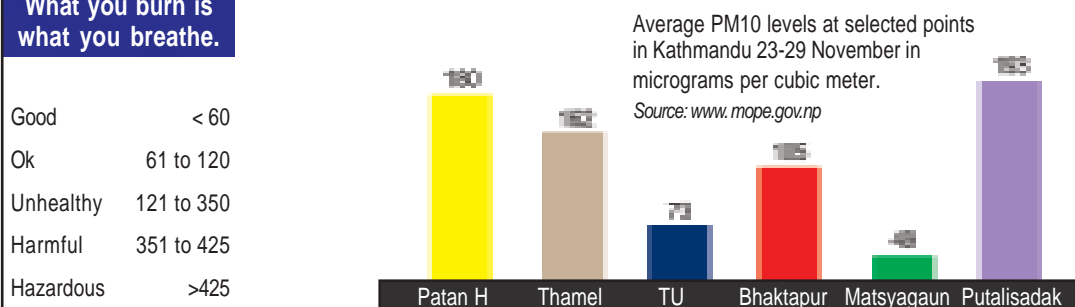
GETAWAYS

- TGIF Dwarika's Friday overnight package includes the Friday BBQ, deluxe room and breakfast. 4479488
- Spend time in Kathmandu Valley's last pristine forest just past Boudhanath. Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa 4451212
- Microflight 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
- Shivapuri Cottage, Dadagaon Nature, peace and luxury. 4354331
- Magnificent mountains and deluxe tents at Adventure Tented Camp & Country Kitchen. 4418992
- Escape to Godavari Special holiday package on half board for the entire family at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675

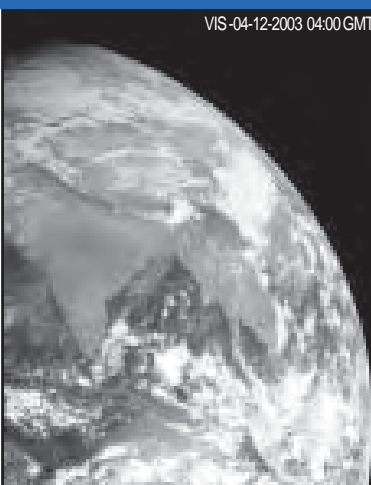
KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY



As the cold intensifies, the pollution level in Kathmandu continues to edge up. The concentration of particles that are small enough to enter the human body (PM10) in urban areas such as Putali Sadak, Thamel and Patan Hospital was once again significantly higher than the national standards throughout the week, and higher than the previous week. Even in non-urban areas like Tribhuban University, Kirtipur, the PM10 increased by 15 percent compared to last week.



NEPALI WEATHER



There is a significant development of westerly fronts that are advancing eastward. It could bring light rains to central Nepal including Kathmandu this weekend to end a drought in the Valley that has stretched for over a month and a half. The northern Himalaya, however, will have to wait for its next fresh snowfall, despite temperatures in most high valleys falling to below freezing, because the frontal track is directing clouds towards the western Gangetic plain. Winter will truly arrive with these fresh westerly fronts: nights get colder and days will hover around the 20-degree mark.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



BOOKWORM

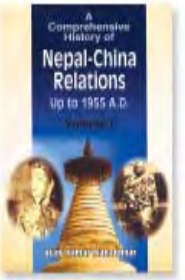


Lumbini: A Haven of Sacred Refuge Basanta Bidari
Hill Side Press, 2002
Rs 800

This second edition is a comprehensive publication containing a detail history and archaeology of Lumbini since the seventh century BC, including the life of Buddha. The author, an archaeologist, has many years of experience working in Lumbini. He provides a general background on the site and points of special interest for pilgrims and visitors.

A Comprehensive History of Nepal-China Relations Up to 1955 AD Vol I&II Vijay Kumar Manadhar
Adroit Publishers, 2004
Rs 2,000

A revised version of the author's doctoral dissertation, these volumes provide a comprehensive history of Nepal-China relations up to 1955, focussing on the Nepal-China War 1791-1972, Nepal's diplomatic relations with China, their mutual interests in each other and the resumption of diplomatic relations in 1955. The author offers a detailed history of Nepal-China relations and a reference for history students.
Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 4227711, mandala@ccsl.com.np



Rise and shine

Get ready for a brand new day with BBC World Today.

Every morning on 102.4 FM from 5:45-6:15 AM

Daily 2045-2115 BBC नेपाली सेवा
Daily 2245-2300 BBC नेपाली सेवा



Radio Sagarmatha
P.O. Box 6958, Bakhundole, Lalitpur, Nepal
Tel: ++977-1-545680, 545681,
Fax: ++ 977-1- 530227
E-mail: radio@radiosagarmatha.org,
www.radiosagarmatha.org



Grab your tissues, Karan Johar is back with all his legion. His mission is to make *Kal Ho Naa Ho* the biggest tearjerker of 2003. Directed by Nikhil Advani, scripted and produced by Karan Johar, the film has music by Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy and lyrics by Javed Akhtar. The script trudges the tried and tested path of yesteryear's hit *Anand*, but with the contemporary look. Set in a New York neighbourhood, *Kal Ho Naa Ho* takes a look at the life of the Kapurs, a half-Punjabi, half-Catholic family. Naina Catherine Kapur (Priety Zinta) shoulders the responsibility of her family which includes her mother Jennifer Kapur (Jaya Bachchan) and great grandmother. Enter Aman Mathur (Shah Rukh Khan), an incorrigible optimist even in the face of his ailment, who decides to make a few changes in Naina's life. To accomplish this task, he ropes in his friend Rohit (Saif Ali Khan). Weighing heavily on its emotional quotient, *Kal Ho Naa Ho* is guaranteed to get your popcorn soggy.



JAI NEPAL CINEMA

Call 4442220 for bookings.
www.jainepal.com
11.45 AM, 3.15 PM, 6.30 PM

CLASSIFIED

Visit Ground Zero Fine wines, designer candles, cards, gifts, stationery, wooden items, perfumes and more. Darbar Marg, opposite Hotel de l'Annapurna

Visit Femelines, the Exclusive Lingerie Store for ladies undergarments, nightwear, bathrobes and more. Ladies staff. Opposite Sajha Yatayat, Harihar Bhawan, Pulchowk. Tel: 547428

To Let: Rabibhawan area two storey house 4 bedrooms 2 bathrooms large kitchen dining living terrace lobby and porch and telephone. Contact: **Roshani** 4275180

LIVE IN STYLE! Arcadia Apartments in the heart of Thamel. Centrally located, fully furnished apartments at unbelievable rates. For details: 981026903, 4260187

Renting made easy: www.21etonline.com- Looking for a place to stay- Log on to find the perfect house, apartment or even a retail space that meets all your needs. Make an easy 1000 bucks by reporting a vacant property to us. Find out how- www.21etonline.com

To Let: Pleasant room (with private, ensuite bathroom) in a quiet bungalow in Lazimpat. Share kitchen and large lounge. Perhaps suitable for visiting professional or volunteer. Tel 4428549

Get 10 % exclusive discount on the normal subscription rate of Himalmedia's publication namely; Himal Khabarpatrika, Nepali Times and Wave magazine. Only at the Grihini Department Store limited, Baluwatar, Phone: 4415186

To Let: Flat in Jawalakhel Opp. Mahila Kendra.2 bedrooms,2 baths, living-dining, terrace with wooden floors. Contact: 5524389

Wanted: Nepali pilot, interested person should have experience for ultra light aircraft with Rotax 582 engine. Apply with cv, photo and contact address within 7 days to Avia Club Nepal Pvt. Ltd., P.O. Box 13680.

For Rent: One Bed Sitting Room completely furnished with hot water and attached Bathroom. Everything New. Suitable for single person but two people is possible and Free Laundry provided. Contact Ram at Chabahill, Kapaen Tel: 2071019.

For insertions ring NT Marketing at 5543333-36.

Complete Solution Of T-Shirts Screen Printing with International Standard Export Quality.

HARATI MATA UDHYOG
Specialized in T-Shirt Screen Printing
Photo, New Ideas, Customized Design
P.O. Box: 442888-442890, P.O. Box: 442890
Tel: 442888-442890, Fax: 442888-442890

Printed in Nepal.

JAGADAMBA PRESS
jagadamba.com.np
Tel: 2111 542317, 542048
Fax: 977-1-542048

Patan: thinking outside the square.

SRADDHA BASNYAT
By the 18th century the splendour of Patan rivalled that of any great civilisation. Today, anyone who visits that ancient city square has to visually edit out the rising number of tall cement buildings to imagine what it must have been like when the Malla kings commissioned this remarkable legacy to Nepali architecture. Residents are beginning to realise what they have is irreplaceable and are taking an active interest in preserving and renovating what most people consider the jewel among Kathmandu's seven World Heritage Sites.

Historically, temples and monuments were safeguarded by the traditional *guthi* system within the mainly Newari communities that inhabited Patan. *Guthis* were given land from which the edifices were maintained. But the *guthi* system soon fell into misuse with *guthiyars* selling off the land and siphoning money. The monuments they were supposed to safeguard fell into disrepair, with barely enough funds to conduct daily pujas, let alone any renovation work. Still, for the most part, we are not at risk of losing the major temples or the palace itself to neglect or the modernisation drive. There is enough local and international interest to keep these public monuments safe.

Private homes, however, are at greater risk. Kulal Dangol of Jyapu Samaj, an organisation that concentrates on preserving Newari culture, pinpoints the problem succinctly, "Patan residents feel homes must be preserved, but it's hard to support growing families in a small structure, let alone think about restoring it. They need to

Residents are pitching in to conserve their collective heritage.



earn some kind of return from their homes."

Dilendra Raj Shrestha has always lived in Patan and owns the Third World Restaurant just behind Krishna Mandir. Growing up, he saw the Patan of his youth change as new buildings replaced traditional homes. No one had thought of preserving private structures or even renovating them with traditional elements, so Shrestha decided to do something about it.

Shrestha set up Patan Tourism Development Organisation (PTDO), initially with help from GTZ. Realizing that people must benefit economically from traditional homes if they are to maintain them, Shrestha suggested converting their homes into quality tourist accommodations. A home in Kulimba is nearly finished with UNESCO support and two others are in the pipeline. Shrestha completely restored his own home using traditional materials

and reusing all the timber used to build the house in 1936. PTDO funded the restoration with a soft loan scheme with a 3 percent service charge that will be used to promote restored homes. The rest goes back into the revolving fund for restoring more homes. Shrestha's home is now open to all as a source of inspiration.

An investment of Rs 1.5 million is not within everyone's reach and PTDO has limitations. Shrestha says the government should be more supportive through subsidies like that on timber and show greater leniency on their strict restoration specifications. "A concrete structure with a traditional facade will at least look nice from the outside," he says.

At Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT), Rohit Ranjitkar disagrees: he would rather see homes preserved than reconstructed. KVPT focuses on raising funds to preserve public monuments. Since 1991 they

have restored 19 buildings, mostly in Patan, and see a bright future for similar work. For Ranjitkar it's a question of awareness—residents must realise they are part of a collective heritage.

A 115-page document issued by the government through Kathmandu Valley Town Development Committee has building bylaws complete with definitions, diagrams and maps for Kathmandu and Lalitpur. The cities are classified into inner city area and residential zones, both further divided into sub-zones. Guidelines are set for everything from damp proofing building sites to specifications for floor height in a traditional Nepali style structure in each subzone.

With modern buildings replacing traditional homes, we're all edging towards a mass homogeneity. People want hassle-free buildings and easy maintenance. But Ranjitkar points out that the new structures have an average lifespan of eight decades. "Traditional mud mortar timber houses last longer—timber can be replaced, the walls, which are natural insulators, are not difficult to redo and reinforce." It's more expensive, but to Ranjitkar, it is worth every rupee to preserve centuries of Nepal's heritage. While KVPT offers technical solutions to private homeowners, it's difficult to get outside funding for the latter.

Meanwhile, Shrestha dreams of a time when the Patan skyline will once again resemble the glory of old because, "In the future, no one will come to Patan to see just four temples and a darbar. If we are to survive, heritage conservation is crucial." t

NEPALI SOCIETY



MIN BAJRAHARYA

All they need is love

Street educator Rajkumar Tripathi wants to deconstruct the myth that poverty drives children to the street. "It's lack of love that makes them run away from home, they are not homeless and they are not always poor," he says. Rajkumar should know, he is 22 years old, and became a street child himself.

He was only four when his mother left him after a row with her husband and in-laws. "I always wanted my mother to love me but she was never there," he says. Rajkumar was neglected by his father, and wasn't sent to school. One day, he ended up in front of Panch Kanya secondary school in his village Ratomati (30km from Banepa), where he was lying on the floor crying, with a book in hand. After hearing his story, the school principal took pity and sponsored his education.

Four years later, his mother returned but showed no love for her son. Rajkumar was so heartbroken he left home and ended up on the streets of Kathmandu alone and cold. Thus began his street life: begging in Thamel, sleeping in the cold, exploited by carpet factories and small hotels, getting beaten up by employers. The children's organisation Bal Kendra, took him off the street and gave Rajkumar and several others like him food, shelter and most importantly love and care.

"Some of us decided that instead of going back to the streets, we should be helping each other," says Rajkumar who set up Bal Chetna Samuha when he was 14. Just when he started getting bored, Rajkumar met Sunil Pokharel, the street theatre director of Parivartan, and started organising street plays.

Today, Rajkumar is back on the streets—this time with the group Saath Saath to counsel children on the streets, helping to find sponsors for their education and medical aid. He started his own theatre called Andhero Bato (Dark Road) and says the negative connotation is deliberate. "Life on the streets is still bleak and the children there are living in trauma everyday," he says.

Rajkumar is married and has a two-year-old daughter, and his main message to the children on the streets is to hope and aspire for something better. But for Rajkumar, personally, there is still a hole in his heart that his mother's love should have filled. He hopes he will get it one day. ♦ (Naresh Newar)

Healthy & Beautiful Start

Clinic Plus

www.clinicplus.com



Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Man bites hotdog

The news that there are over 800 cannibals in Germany means our news values must adapt to the relentless march of time and reflect the evolution of societal feeding habits. So, let's say, a dog bites man. That is not news unless the canine in question is a female perpetrator in which case the headline would read: 'Bitch bites man'. On the other hand, as has been known to happen in the heat of the moment, if some men do end up biting dogs, then the story deserves a banner headline:

Man Bit Me, Alleges Mongrel

BY OUR MEDIA WATCHDOG

Lalitpur - Police took a Patan resident into custody Friday night after a neighbourhood dog lodged an FIR that he (the man) had chewed off part of his (the dog's) ear during a fracas at the garbage pile at Ekanta Kuna.

"I wasn't trying to grab headlines," the man said in an exclusive interview from his jail cell, "I was just rummaging through the rubbish, and this mongrel dared me to bite him. So I did." The dog, which was reported in critical but stable condition at B&B Hospital, did not return calls and could not be reached for comment.

But his lawyer told journalists at a Meet the Press function (chaired by Rishi Dhamala) yesterday that the dog was only trying to liven things up on a slow news day. "If my client had bitten the man, it wouldn't be news would it?" he asked rhetorically.

Honest Taxman Felicitated

FROM THE DUTY FREE DESK

Kathmandu - Nepal's only honest tax collector was

awarded the country's highest civilian honour at a public ceremony here today and given a commemorative plaque which he refused to take and a *dosalla* which he returned to the organisers. "What are you trying to do, bribe me?" Mr VAT Man 2003 asked.

Mock Emergency Declared

BY ANOTHER ONE OF OUR ANALLY RETENTIVE ANALYSTS

The government Tuesday re-imposed a state of national emergency, but said later it was just only a mock exercise to test the public's reaction. This came the day after HMG conducted a pretend emergency at the BICC with pretend dead and wounded to gauge the response time of pretend ambulances and fire trucks. There was also an anti-aircraft battery test-firing exercise in Jawalakhel at midnight Thursday to measure the panic level of the capital's residents. "Most people just snored right through it," said the director of the National Emergency Monitoring Unit. "If you want my frank opinion, I think people in Kathmandu have all fainted with boredom."

No English Speeches: Minister

In a cabinet decision, the government instructed government officials Tuesday to henceforth deliver all keynote addresses in Nepali. The move was generally welcomed by Kathmandu-based diplomats who said they would now no longer have to pretend to be asleep during ministerial speeches. They would be able to really fall asleep.

