NEPALI Times
NEPAL'S TOP NEWSPAPER

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Paras does it again

When Paras Shah handed out prizes to children at the Friends of the Zoo function last week, many thought the royal brat had mended his ways.

But on Sunday night Paras carried out another hit-and-run, allegedly killing promising musician Praveen Gurung outside the Royal Palace gates. There was no official comment from Nirmal Niwas, the residence of Prince Gyanendra, the King's younger brother, and Paras' father. Paras was driving a blue Pajero belonging to the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC) of which Prince Gyanendra is chairman. Gurung, 38, was going home on a motorcycle.

Although Paras is royalty, judicial experts said there is no declared legal immunity in cases like these. The real question, however, is what Prince Gyanendra is going to do about his wayward son.

Khum makes his move

Long-time Koirala loyalist Khum Bahadur Khadka is leading a group within the Congress party to give the prime minister an ultimatum: be party president or prime minister, not both.

Khadka helped Koirala topple his predecessor Krishna Prasad Bhattarai in March and wanted to be rewarded with the home minister's job. Koirala gave him two mega-ministries: Water Resources, and Infrastructure and Works—which make up half the development budget. But Khadka, right, wanted power, not only money. He never pretended he was happy with what he had and warned Koirala several times. The sacking of Aftab Alam—a Khadka protege—was the last straw.

Chinese buses for Sajha

Having cannibalised its Japanese-gifted blue buses, the down-and-out public sector Sajha Yatayat may be getting ready to acquire 200 new buses. The plan is to procure the Tibet-Han buses from an obscure Chinese manufacturer called Tibetan Industry Co. Ltd.

The buses will cost $48,230 (Rs 3.45 million) each, including spares and tools. The total deal would be just under $ 10 million (Rs 684.9 million). Tibetan Industry has offered the buses to Sajha on credit and wants the government to guarantee repayment. The Chinese company is said to have verbally assured to loan Sajha working capital to run the buses within fifteen days after the government decides on the purchase. The only thing that seems to be holding up the purchase is the government's reluctance to guarantee the loan.

What India wants from Nepal

India's bureaucracy always talks tough, but once again politicians bring relations back on track

RAJENDRA DAHAL IN NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala went to New Delhi, not hoping for much. His only worry was that bilateral relations should not get worse due to his visit, and that it would not stir a hornet's nest back home. On that score, he was successful.

Girija and Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee are about the same age and as usual they hit it off in Hindi. But after the formality of the banquets were over last week, the bureaucracies took over and got down to brass tacks. What does Nepal's sovereignty entail, how much can Nepal assert its independence vis-a-vis India? Very fundamental questions.

This time India had done its homework well on trade, security, and the 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship. Days before the visit, academics, ex-diplomats who had served in Kathmandu, and Indian-Nepali political figures from Sikkim, Assam, Darjeeling and Dehra Dun were brought to New Delhi to analyse the implications of the treaty.

The meeting and visit coincided with a realisation here that India had gone too far in exaggerating the ISI threat from across the open border in Nepal. Indian public opinion was manipulated so effectively in the aftermath of the hijacking to portray Nepal's open border as a backdoor for terrorists, that New Delhi now had to show it was doing something about it.

India was caught in its own trap. For despite security concerns, there are major geopolitical and trade benefits for India from the open border. Hence the pre-visit meeting of Indian-Nepalis to discuss the treaty and the open border.

Participants at the meeting, which included Sikkim's Chief Minister Pawan Chamling and a representative of Subhas Ghising from Darjeeling, analysed what would happen if either side gave the mandated one-year notice to abrogate the treaty. Chamling didn't seem to think much would happen, an open border with Nepal would not affect his state. Ghising's group, on the other hand, predictably wanted the treaty scrapped because it allows Nepalis to live in India which goes against Ghising's project to designate Indian-Nepalis as "Gorkhali".

For India, there are several disadvantages of closing the border:

- It will put Nepal at a geopolitical equidistance between India and China, since the Himalaya is no longer the physical obstacle it traditionally has been
- Since Indian business profits vastly from having Nepal as an extension of its own market, closing the border would allow cheaper Chinese products to flood Nepal
- Nepalis of Indian origin dominate the Nepal economy, a closed border would hamper their business
- Even with a closed border, there is no guarantee that ISI activities in Nepal will cease.

In an interview with *The Times of India* just before his visit, Prime Minister Koirala let it drop that India could go ahead and close the border if it wanted to. "It is impossible for Nepal to close the border, but if India wants the border fenced, we have no objection. It will also serve Nepal's interest," he told the paper. The supposedly chance remark pre-empted the conclusions of the New Delhi meeting on the 1950 treaty.

The first sentence the Indian prime minister spoke as he greeted Koirala at the steps of Rashtrapati Bhavan were: "The open border is the foundation of India-Nepal friendship." In Nepal, however, there is much more ambivalence about the open border: it is an economic safety valve allowing the free flow of Nepalis to work in India (at least 1.5 million people at any given time). There is two-way traffic at the open border: cheap manpower from northern Bihar and even Orissa move in for seasonal work in Nepal.

But it is this same border that has distorted the Nepali economy by fostering smuggling as a national past-time over the years, harming healthy industrial growth. The open border has also fostered an almost complete economic dependence on India, which New Delhi can use to put the squeeze, as it did in the 1988-89 blockade.

Koirala's visit was low key in the Indian media, and overshadowed by the Kashmir massacres and the kidnapping of a famous film actor in Bangalore. But relations have stopped sliding, new channels of communication have been opened so that things don't reach similar crisis points again.

Koirala with Prime Minister Vajpayee and Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh: "The open border is the foundation of our relations."

BASANTA CHITRAKAR

One lesson learnt from this year's deterioration in Nepal-India relations was the role played by an ill-informed section of the Indian media that willingly used planted material calculated to wreck ties. The 'Nepal Gameplan' leak was rejected by most professional journalists, and only *India Today* carried it verbatim, but that was enough to cause damage.

On issues like hydropower exports, it is clear that India's priorities are not the same as Nepal's. On Kalapani, Nepal's leadership is still not sure whether there was a secret deal or not in 1961 to allow India to place troops in Kalapani.

The Indo-Nepal joint communiqué was delayed by 24 hours not because of security issues, or the ISI, or even by Kalapani, but by Indian bureaucratic reluctance to admit that there had been submergence in Nepal. In the end, it was Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh and Foreign Secretary Lalit Man Singh who leaned on the Indian negotiators to accept inundation had taken place.

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At last count, there were more than 35 bilateral committees looking at all aspects of Nepal-India ties. No one knows what these committees do, whether they meet or not, or if they do, what they resolve. No wonder, then, that small tiffs get magnified into hysteria. Now, India and Nepal have set up a "super commission" headed by foreign ministers.

The visit made both India and Nepal realise that the ground reality is totally transformed since 1950. India is no longer newly free, and Nepal is no longer an oligarchy. The visit rebuilt a crumbling foundation for two mature neighbouring democracies to treat each other with dignity, equity and justice. ♦

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Times

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LABOUR PAINS

It is well known that the first thing a Nepali politician does when he becomes a minister is he starts running his office like an employment agency. Relatives, hangers-on, nephews of cronies and other favour-seekers from the home constituency suddenly find job security. But then, the government falls. The minister is changed, and a new set of favourites is added to an already bloated state machinery. This is effectively a system of keeping the unemployed on dole.

The recent government decision to streamline the civil service is thus a welcome step, though it is fraught with political uncertainties. There are also widespread fears that temporary staff are getting the axe because the government wants to fill the vacated positions with its own people. If that were to happen, the whole exercise would be nothing but a sham.

Compared to government departments, the situation is much worse in public enterprises (PEs). Since they are considered to be autonomous, PEs are theoretically free to hire and fire, and determine the salaries of their employees as well. Though there is not much difference in the basic salary scales of PE and government employees, take-home emoluments of the former are considerably higher.

If public enterprises were run efficiently, few would begrudge the generous pay packets they offer. But most parastatals have continuously posted huge losses. Even those that have managed to remain solvent, usually due to their monopoly status, have failed to provide an adequate rate of return on the huge investments made by the exchequer.

PE employees are over-paid, under-worked, hugely pampered, and are heavily unionised. And the government has just given the powerful unions an excuse to flex muscles. It hiked the pay of its own employees, and asked PEs to do away with perks if they wanted the new salary scales. In addition, it told them to sack temporary employees.

The incensed unions began agitating, demanding that temporary employees be made permanent and salaries hiked in line with government scales even as they retained all the perks. In short, they want to have their samosas and eat it too.

But the take-home pay of PE employees is already higher than what the new government levels offer. Bowing to the unions, the government agreed that their pay packet would not be reduced but the resources would have to be sought by the PEs themselves. That seems to have rankled the unions, and a further series of protests is planned.

The upcoming strikes may be aimed at the government, but these will hurt the ordinary consumer more. Collective bargaining is an accepted way of dealing in disputes between management and workers. But here both the managers and workers are commoners, there are no greedy capitalists here.

The PEs are already seriously sick, and increasing the financial burden will only send them into intensive care. It is much more urgent to streamline some of these enterprises, privatise others and even put the really sad cases out of their misery. Squabbling over wages is just running away from the real issue.

LIVING WITH MONSOONS

It's that time of the year again. The land is drenched, the soil is soaked and there is more rain. This is when the annual flood season really gets going. Landslides block highways, bury villages, mud-brown rivers thunder down to the plains and spread out over the flat land into India. During really bad years, glacial outburst floods wash away entire sections of roads, and damage power plants and there are catastrophic *beshiaris*, gigantic flash floods caused by natural damming of rivers by landslides.

This is nothing new for the Himalaya. For millions of years these mountains have served as a rain-trap: forcing moist air from the Bay of Bengal to condense and fall. And it falls in torrents, dumping upwards of 3,500 mm a year in places like Pokhara, Ilam, or the hills on the southern rim of the Kathmandu Valley. What is different now is that the rains are more localised and the storms more intense because of global climate change. Also different is population pressure, driving more and more Nepalis to settle in vulnerable areas and to farm floodplains.

Being young and fragile, the mountains have crumbled under this relentless annual rain. Nepalis know better than to be surprised by floods and landslides. Yet it is amazing that we do so little to minimise the hazards through effective risk-mapping and making use of the findings. Instead, we repeat the mistake of blocking natural drainage paths and building flood-control embankments that only make floods worse. It's time to treat rivers with the respect they deserve, and be prepared for their wrath when we mistreat them.

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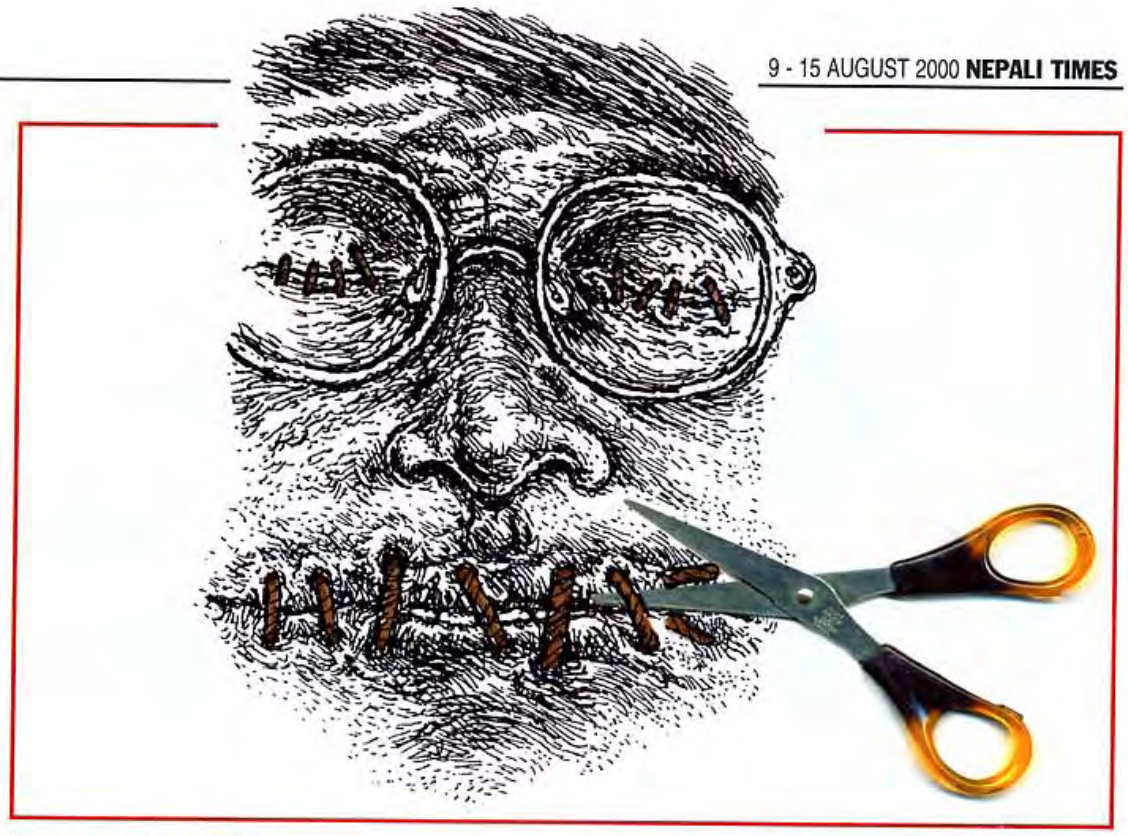


STATE OF THE STATE

by C.K.LAL

Are we becoming another Bihar?

If the press is not accountable and vigilant, Nepal could go the Bihar way

Nepalis like to bemoan the fact we border India's poorest and most lawless state. And we see Nepal going Bihar's way. So, if we don't want to end up as another Bihar, it may be useful to study the reasons why one of India's richest states became its most destitute.

In an age when the only news to come out of Bihar is of chief ministers who feast on fodder, or of the slaughter of low-caste peasants by landlord armies, it is difficult to believe that till the late 1960s Bihar was one of the most progressive states in India. Then the unstoppable slide downhill to the present: the state exists, it's on the map, elections are held, institutions are there, but nothing works. Even New Delhi calls its administration "Jungle Raj".

Finding a fancy reason for Bihar's entropy used to be the favourite pastime of ivory tower intellectuals at Delhi's India International Centre. These days, even they seem to have given up on Bihar as a lost cause.

There are obvious reasons for Bihar's sorrow: entrenched caste politics, low literacy and heavily skewed land ownership. But one major reason for Bihar's non-functioning anarchy was the media's decline, and the way it paralleled the decay of the state.

Bihar once had at least three quality dailies published from Patna: *Aryabarta* and *Pradip* in Hindi, and *Searchlight* in English, all highly respected journals that were fair and factual. Rapacious politicians not schooled in the liberal traditions of the independence struggle didn't appreciate the media's adversarial role. The newspapers survived for a while, but Indira Gandhi's Emergency drove the final nail in the media's coffin. The conscience of Bihar was sent to sleep.

Today, Patna does have local editions of big national newspapers like *The Times of India*, *Hindustan* and *Aaaj*, but these are business enterprises first. What they practise can best be called a kind of 'corporate journalism,' a style that teaches one to remain on the right side of the powers-that-be, with an occasional scoop to keep circulations up. The result is for all to see: you couldn't tell by reading the Patna papers that the corruption every citizen of the state experiences first hand is endemic. Their body-bag headlines are from Kashmir, not an investigation into the latest massacres by the Ranvir Sena or the Maoists.

Nepali editors are sanguine that we will not meet Bihar's fate because our post-democracy media is vibrant and alert. It is true, despite the preponderance of pamphleteers, a section of the Nepali media is indeed doing its job remarkably well.

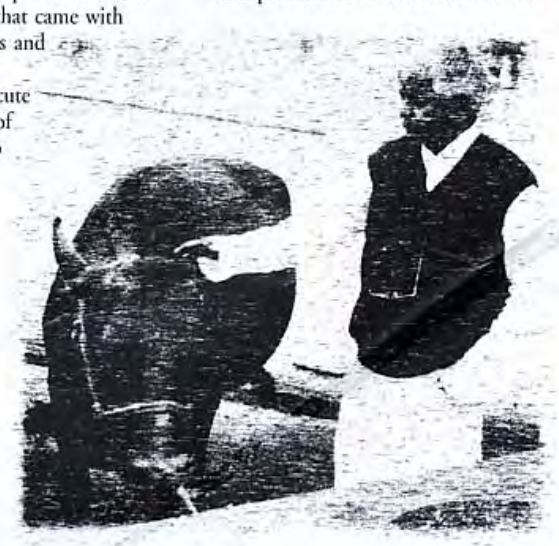
However, the Nepali media has to grow out of its herd mentality, to question what appears to be self-evident, and not to be manipulated and motivated. For instance, many in the media rubbished the citizenship bill without even examining the contents carefully. The fact that the proposed act was a bipartisan exercise that came with stringent procedures and contained ample provisions to prosecute those found guilty of granting citizenship certificates illegally has been all but ignored.

Then there was the reporting over the Laxmanpur Barrage. The barrage has been under construction for quite some time, but the issue was raked up just when the Prime Minister was packing to leave for New Delhi. The press reports appeared investigative but in the end played right into the hands of those who wanted to poison the atmosphere before the visit. The prompt and tough rebuttal from the Indian Embassy proved just that. To give due credit, some in media ridiculed one lawmaker's suggestion that the barrage be demolished. But others failed to see through such populist bluster.

By being unprofessional, by not protecting its independence, by not safeguarding its adversarial role, the Nepali media will contribute to democracy's slow demise. The Nepali press has to ask 'why' every time a vested interest group offers a facile answer to 'what'. It must question every planted half-truth.

Former chief justice of the Supreme Court, Vishwanath Upadhyaya, holds that much of the Nepali press is sub-standard. He has a point, but can he show us one section of Kathmandu society, that can be held up as a model for the press to emulate? A society gets the media it deserves, I suppose. But an accountable and committed media can also mould a society in its own image.

There are other safeguards against degenerating into another Bihar, but for Nepal, an energetic and independent press is the most obvious one. ♦



How Nepalis and Indians see each other

Arina Singh Pradhan
student
Kathmandu

India and Nepal have a lot in common. Because India is a lot bigger it sometimes misuses its power. The Indian media has tremendous impact in Nepal. The quality of entertainment that they provide is very good. But when it comes to Nepal it doesn't allow the Nepali market to grow. We should work towards limiting the Indian media presence in Nepal and give the Nepali media a chance to grow.

Our prime minister doesn't have enough bargaining power and this the Indians know. They are pushing us because we are smaller than them.

It all boils down to communication but we should be realistic too. Maybe trying to understand each other will lead to better relations.

India is afraid. Things like hijacks happen everywhere. The security has certainly improved after the incident, which is good. It wasn't Nepal's fault in the first place.

Suresh Kumar
graphic designer
Delhi

The Nepalis are very friendly and helpful. I have been here for just three months and I already love this beautiful country. Everything moves at a slow and steady pace, which is so wonderful because in the rest of the world it's all hustle and bustle.

In the past, our relations may have come under a lot of stress but now I think we're back to normal. Incidents like the hijack case are insignificant compared comes to our centuries-old relations. We shouldn't let such things strain our relations and both the Indian and the Nepali masses should realise this.

The media in both nations should also try and minimise the tensions instead of trying to increase it. We are like brothers and there is no problem that cannot be solved through discussion.

Dheeraj Jung Gurung
bank employee
Kathmandu

The Indians are our closest friends and we are dependent on them in many ways. Even Hindi movies have gained so much popularity in Nepal that people seldom watch Nepali movies.

But the way India treats us is not good. The Indian Airlines hijack was given so much coverage even though something like that could have happened anywhere in the world. Look at the way they treated us after the incident. We had to virtually go down on our knees to have them resume their flights. If they had re-started the flights taking it to be a minor issue, a lot of tension would have been reduced.

Vajpayee and Koirala are good friends but that doesn't mean we should agree with whatever they say. If they don't reach an understanding there are plenty of other nations that will willingly help us. The problem is that India has understood Nepali politics and politicians very well and they take advantage of that. We do not do our homework properly. Issues crucial to the nation are treated like topics that deserve mere formal discussion in the parliament, so how can we expect the prime minister to bring back what we want?

Malabika Talukdar
teacher
Calcutta

I don't think we have any tensions. I have been here for the past six years and I have always felt very free. If there are incidents that are of worry to both the nations then I am sure the PM's visit will solve it.

Yes, theoretically what the Indian media writes about ISI activities in Nepal is not impossible, and after the IA hijack it has become even clear that Nepal is not safe from being dragged into what is essentially not her problem.

The media should be careful when informing the people. The mistake that Zee TV made during the hijacking clearly caused a lot of worry on both sides.

But then the media is not the government. So the government in both the nations should make sure that the media does not cause a lot of unnecessary tensions.

Pappu Kandoi
shopkeeper
Rajasthan

I've been staying in Nepal for the last 11 years. I was never bullied or hassled until 5 years back. I've sensed a growing hatred against Indian people and others from the tarai who look similar to Indians. And it is not because of any natural instinct or cultural differences between the people. I still live in the heart of Kathmandu and my neighbours have always been good to me but the propaganda by both our governments has slowly been making it difficult for me to live as a non-Nepali.

People are not well informed of true facts. In fact the government's policies are very confusing and are meant to be good only for big businesses.

My relatives are all in business though but I might move back to Rajasthan if the situation grows bitter. I love the culture here because I find it very unique but then things are turning sour. And it is all because of the reckless and insensitive people in power.

Nilendra Mali
travel agent
Kathmandu

One thing I don't like about India is that very often it intervenes in the affairs of the small neighbouring countries. It only cares for its self-interest. Fine, we accept that India has advanced much in terms of the economy and technology. But as a South Asian partner, if it helps us, it would also be helping itself.

I don't have anything against Indians. I have travelled several times to India and have never been mistreated there. There is easy communication and since we have the same culture and share the same angst (created by our selfish leaders), I feel just like the Indians do.

Indian tourists are also a very good asset for the Nepali tourism industry. Scaring them away does no good. The people are not doing that but the government is. After the Indian Airlines hijack, Indian tourists are still coming to Nepal. The bad relations is just hype by the government and the media.

There are no big problems between the two countries as such. Sensible table talk would help solve everything. But the leaders are not well educated and cannot be trusted.

Gayas Din-un
carpet-seller
Kashmir

What I like best about Nepal is the weather and the people. Nepalis are similar to Kashmiris in feature and habits. They are very good. I think nobody is better than them in the respect they show guests and foreigners.There are disputes at the high level of politics but if you look at the social life of people from both the countries, it is always they who suffer.

I've lived in Nepal for eight years and not once have I faced any difficulties or problems from my Nepali *dosts*. Everybody is nice. People come to buy carpets and other items from my shop with recommendations from other Nepalis.

Whenever I have the time, I go and watch Nepali movies also. My best one is *Crorepati*. During the festivals also it is nice to go and see people celebrating. Living here, I don't feel like I'm staying in a foreign country.

Shova Wagley
artist
Kathmandu

We have very strong cultural ties which also means we have very good relations with India. A lot of cultural and social exchanges take place.

I'm an artist and am not concerned with political issues although I do feel that India does bully us around sometimes.

There could be some truth to reports in the Indian media but not to the extent they claim. On our side we must be able to do what we can, provide security and ensure that no such activities take place.

Ram Chandra Gami
fishmonger
Janakpur

Nationality is just a label that has been forced on us. People from all over come and buy fish from me. How can I charge someone more because he is an Indian? Everybody is the same as long as they are good human beings. Of course there are people who rob, kill and suppress others. But don't tell me it doesn't happen in rich countries as well.

Most of my fish supplies come from India. If Indians were bad, why would they still send us good fish? Everything is okay among people. We think in the same way and we see the same movies.

I come from Janakpur in the tarai. Whenever I visit my home, I go across the border to meet friends and relatives. And I don't feel anything has happened there. They don't chase me for being a Nepali. But sometimes, I do hear derogatory remarks like '*dhoti*' in Nepal itself.

The leaders in both countries need to be taught a lesson. They have become very pampered.

Minati Roy
retired teacher
Calcutta

Nepalis are very honest. Given proper guidance, they can bring about great change in the country. But the leaders are not making it possible to do that. I have met many Nepalis during my several visits here.

I love to come to Nepal because there is no agitation, people are safe even outside their home. Just now I went shopping and am very happy with the way people behave with an outsider. In fact, I don't feel at all that I am an Indian national travelling in some other land. This is because of the kindness that people here have.

I haven't seen a strong leader to guide people well in our countries. But I am very positive about the young generation in both countries. They are coming together in terms of education, music and the arts.

Interviews by
SALIL SUBEDI
ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

LETTERS

TOLERANCE

Do you actually think that English is a more rational language? (Why English? #1) I can cite numerous examples of bigotry, intolerance, jingoism, even fascism, expressed every day in the English language all over the world, and not always by those for whom it is a first language. For that matter, you find the same in German, French, Dutch or Russian.

Saying that intemperate, emotional language is only possible in your mother tongue is like saying you have a monopoly on chauvinism and narrow-mindedness. Virulent prejudice can be written and spoken in any language, it is not a specialty of Nepali. Stop bragging.

A. Simpson
Cardiff, Wales

GREED

Your story "Breeding ground for greed" (#1) came as a shock to many of us. People working for the United Nations are among the best paid in the country, and their greed is reprehensible.

What I fail to understand is why the Ministry of Health approved the official's candidacy in the first place and gave him an extension after his first term. It seems to me that this is just the tip of the iceberg, and we have reasons to believe that senior officials, including ministers, were hand in glove with UNFPA staff.

The real sufferers are Nepalis living in the periphery. Will the anti-corruption body follow up, or will everything be hushed up?

Sagar Chandra Rai
Kathmandu

NEPALI TIMES

Congratulations on bringing out a paper that is informative, professional and above all, suited to the Nepali ethos. I am sure your weekly will provide a useful service. As our nation is going through trying times, there can be no alternative to dialogue and debate in order to keep the cogs in the wheel of democracy moving.

Shyamal K. Shrestha
Kathmandu

I've been reading the internet version of your weekly newspaper ever since its inception. Your articles have caught my attention like nothing before, choked me with emotion, driven me to nostalgia, entertained me and, foremost, informed me.

I enjoy and admire your well-thought-out and well-written articles. So what I do is go through an article a day, rationing out the articles over the week although the temptation to read them all at once is great.

My hope is to be able to buy a copy of your paper at the local newsstand, but I would be content subscribing to it. If only I knew how. Is there a button on the web page that is eluding me?

Uday Lama
Springfield VA, USA

I would personally thank you for your new venture in print journalism. Nepal really lacked a truly international English paper. But what I am really happy about is that you decided to use selection from Desmond Doig's *In the Kingdom of Gods*.

Writer, traveller and photographer, Desmond was an ardent admirer of Kathmandu. In fact it was he who first really put Nepal on the international map much before the hippy era.

I am really grateful to Nepali Times for using his writings. Keep up the good work.

Anand Gurung
Kathmandu

It is encouraging to see that someone is still there with the courage and energy to bring up the "real story" of Nepali social life.

Bhagwan Koirala
Toronto

It was most pleasant to get a copy of Nepali Times. My wife, and our school-going children began to read it, and couldn't stop. Nepali Times stands out from other papers. It is cognitively comfortable, the write-up flows smoothly, the selection of topics is relevant and stimulating. We are satisfied and enthusiastic readers.

Rajeeb L. Satyal
Kathmandu

With 1300 competitors, it is no small feat to have produced the best newspaper in Nepal. Congratulations!

I look forward to many happy hours of listening to Nepal talk to itself.

Updating Ralph Deakin, it will soon be said that nothing is news until it has appeared in Nepali Times.

William Fisher
New York

SAUL SUSEDI

Into the valley

Its not just truck drivers, sex workers or drug users who are at risk anymore, all Nepalis are vulnerable.

A NEPALI TIMES INVESTIGATION

There was a time when HIV-AIDS was regarded as a donor precoccupation. It was considered the prerogative of perverts and outsiders. Most of us blamed Nepali girls in Bombay or drug addicts, and considered ourselves risk-free. No more.

Today, alarm bells are ringing loudly. Public health experts are shocked by the frightening speed at which the disease is spreading in Nepal, and especially in Kathmandu Valley. They are also dismayed at the lack of political will and the prevailing official confusion over preventive measures.

There is growing recognition of the serious economic consequences of an Africa-type nationwide epidemic, but Nepali officialdom is still largely in denial.

"We are sitting on top of a volcano," says Michael Hahn, of the UNAIDS office in Kathmandu. "Nepal has entered a concentrated epidemic, and there is a window of opportunity to prevent a generalised epidemic if steps are taken immediately."

The latest Family Health International survey shows the following figures:

- **17.3% of sex workers in Kathmandu are HIV positive, up from 2.7% four years ago**
- **Half of all injecting drug users in Kathmandu Valley are infected**
- **More than 80% of injecting drug users are sexually active, and 40% are married**
- **Nepal's nationwide estimates for HIV/AIDS cases is now crossing 35,000.**

HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, is spread mainly by unprotected sex and direct blood contact like sharing injection needles or blood transfusions.

A survey of 19 urban areas in Nepal showed very high infection rates for HIV, hepatitis C and B and other sexually transmitted infections among injecting drug users. (See graph below.) "The findings suggest there is a potential for rapid spread of HIV and there is a need for urgent prevention and care. If it is not taken, the infection can spread to the general population," says Dr B B Karki, chief of Policy Planning at the Ministry of Health.

The risk for drug users, and the section of the population that visits sex workers or has multiple sex partners, needs to be reduced.

Reducing vulnerability means ensuring not only that brothel clients and intra-venous (IV) drug users know about the dangers of infection, but that they also take preventive measures.

It also means giving the drug users alternatives like safe needles and less harmful drugs while they work towards kicking the habit—a process known as "harm reduction".

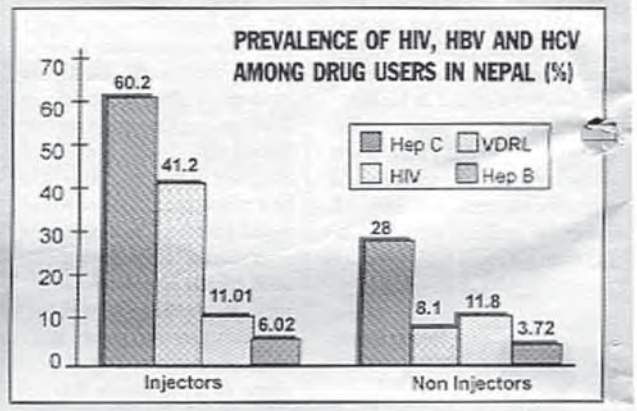
"The most effective way to stop the spread of HIV and hepatitis among injecting drug users is ensuring that needles are not shared," says Sambhu Dhital, a community health worker at the Live Giving and Life Saving (LALS) organisation in Kathmandu.

LALS has been working on harm reduction with counselling, family meetings, rehabilitation, and needle exchange programmes for drug users in Kathmandu. But LALS reaches less than five percent of the estimated 30,000 injecting drug users in Kathmandu.

Most IV drug users in Kathmandu don't use hard drugs like heroin, but cheaper "pharmaceutical drugs" like tidigesic, a sedative containing morphine, synthetic morphine, codeine, or benzodizapom. LALS estimates that drug users in Kathmandu spend an Rs 5 million a day.

Figures for the number of sex workers in Kathmandu Valley vary wildly: from 5,000-25,000. One survey in 1996 showed that 15 percent of them never used condoms, 21 percent did, and 56 percent "sometimes did and sometimes didn't".

Even if sex workers had heard about AIDS and condoms, and knew how to



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Resunga: The Mountain of the Horned Sage
edited by Philippe Ramirez
(2000, pp. x+304)

Everything you wanted to know about the two central Nepal districts of Gulmi and Arghakhanchi. This book is history, geography, enthnography and cultural studies all rolled into one. The result of a nine-year-long research by a team of French social scientists—perhaps the first study of its kind in Nepal.

A Bibliotheca Himalayica book

Tourism as Development: Case Studies from the Himalaya
edited by Pitamber Sharma
(2000, pp. xiii+179)

Rs 275/-

Ever wondered why Pokhara's Phewa Lake area has become such an eyesore? Or, how the opening of Upper Mustang has benefitted the locals there? This book has the answers, and more, as it looks at three other tourist destinations in the Himalaya and highlights the essential interrelationship between tourism and local progress.

Rs 1945/- (hardback)

Faces of Nepal
by Jan Salter and Harka Gurung
(1999, pp. vi+99)

The second and completely revised edition of this acclaimed picture book-cum-ethnography study by a British artist and a Nepali scholar. The new edition deals with three additional population groups and comes with more colour plates and sketches, and an additional linguistic map of Nepal.

Toni Hagen's
Nepal: The Kingdom in the Himalaya
revised and updated with Deepak Thapa
(1999, pp. xvii+251)

Rs 3800/- (hardback)

When Toni Hagen first set foot in Nepal in 1950, he came as a development expert. Over the nine years that he walked 14,000 km across the length and breadth of Nepal, conducting its first reconnaissance survey, he grew to become a valued friend of the country.
This is the original book that introduced Nepal, both to Nepalis and outsiders. This fourth edition of this classic includes the original reports and photographs even as it brings the reader up-to-date with the changes Hagen has seen over the course of a half-century.

Sani and Maili in their little tenement in Jaisidewal.

PRAGRITI K.C.

Maili, Sani and Zina

Maili and Sani have both ended up in the streets of Kathmandu with many things in common: poverty, illiteracy, drug use, commercial sex work. And HIV. Yet, they come from very different backgrounds.

Maili had a comfortable childhood. Her father worked as a driver, and her mother took good care of her. But they were illiterate and did not think it was important for Maili to go to school. So she played on the streets. By the time she was ten, she had learnt to smoke and soon moved on to drugs. Maili was always short of money, so she started sleeping around with the boys. She quickly and happily discovered that the money she earned gave her freedom. The day she turned 13, Maili ran away from her home in Gokarna and began a life in the streets of Kathmandu.

Sani's mother died when she was one year old. Her father brought her to Kathmandu from their village in Kabhrepalanchowk district. She grew up with him, begging around the Pashupati temple. When Sani was nine, her father also died. She sought shelter at the home of one of the older men around Pashupati. He made her beg, sell and use drugs, and sleep with him. Both were soon spending all their money on drugs, leaving nothing for food and clothing. So he forced Sani to sleep with other men, and worked as her pimp. He found clients for her, pocketed the money, and gave her food and drugs. If Sani demanded anything more, he beat her up.

One day Sani was arrested for prostitution and imprisoned for six months. Ironically, Sani felt a sense of liberation in prison. After she was released, she met women like Maili and many others.

# of AIDS

protect themselves, they were often forced by clients who didn't want to use condoms. An average Kathmandu sex worker services three clients a day—making the 30,000 men who liaise with them every day the key vectors of this epidemic. Many clients are themselves male migrant workers who have returned from India with HIV.

Most clients are married, or have other partners, and the chances of infections spreading into the general population are very high. This is why public health experts warn: everyone is now at risk.

With half the injecting drug users HIV positive, this group is another important target group if the epidemic is to be controlled.

We know what does not work: the police approach. Cracking down on IV drug users, putting them in jail hasn't worked anywhere in the world. Just criminalises drug use and drives addicts underground.

One place in the region with a similar problem to Kathmandu Valley is the eastern Indian state of Manipur, bordering Burma. Up to 70 percent of injecting drug users in Manipur are HIV positive.

At a recent AIDS conference, Manipur's minister of health, Morung Makunga sounded a warning for Nepal: "I appeal to you, don't make the mistake we made of arresting drug addicts and punishing them to control HIV/AIDS. In countries like Nepal, the epidemic among injecting drug users is just taking off, you have plenty of opportunities to think of new strategies."

It was only after Manipur became the only state in India to adopt the three-pronged approach of counselling, drug maintenance therapy and needle exchange that the epidemic there started showing signs of slowing.

And this could only happen because of political will at the highest level, and a coordinated approach among government departments, the police and activists.

Health experts say a similar "Harm Reduction" strategy is required for Kathmandu Valley that will go step by step to:

- **Persuade drug users to stop injecting**
- **Get injecting drug users to switch to other less harmful drugs**
- **Persuade them to stop sharing needles if they can't stop injecting**
- **Get them to clean needles if they have to share**
- **Stop using drugs**

Vijay Kumar is an Indian activist from Manipur who is now with Save the Children (UK) in Kathmandu. He says, "The biggest problem in Nepal is that at the government level there is a clash between those who favour harm reduction, and those who want to use the police model," he says.

Unfortunately, drug users are often seen as deviants, law enforcers are known to get a cut from street transactions, and there is low tolerance for needle exchange because of the public perception that it encourages addicts.

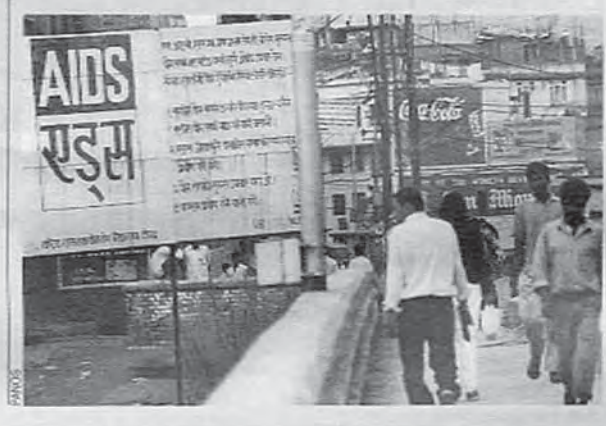
Kumar's other experience from Manipur is the serious implication of the epidemic on women and children as the men start dying at a productive age. "We have seen what a crisis this can be for widows and orphans, many of whom are also infected, and are then stigmatised by society and have no support."

There is no doubt that to come to grips with the epidemic the government and activists must urgently reach a critical mass of sex workers, their clients and injecting drug users.

Hahn of UNAIDS says a piecemeal approach will have no impact: "We have to get to at least 80 percent of those who need access to protection if we are going to make a dent on this epidemic."

In the end it boils down to resources. In India, the unit cost of getting an injecting drug user rehabilitated is $30 per person per year. With 30,000 drug users, less than a million dollars would be enough for Kathmandu Valley.

The cost of doing nothing would run into hundreds of millions in the years ahead for the Nepali economy. ♦



For nearly ten years now, Sani and Maili have been working the streets of Kathmandu. They hang around the footpaths of Ratna Park, Jamal, Old Bus Park and Thamel. One thing there is no shortage of in Kathmandu: men looking to buy sex. There are clients everywhere, on the streets, in the parks, in bistos and in dance restaurants. Sani, Maili and three other friends work exclusively in the Ratna Park area. They don't encroach upon other sex workers' territory. Sani is not considered good-looking and finds it more difficult to get clients and spends most of the time baby-sitting for her friends while they work.

Maili finds her work risky. She often encounters clients who abuse her. They avoid policemen, who do not sleep with the drug-using sex workers but demand bribes instead. Many clients refuse to wear condoms, endangering themselves and often making the girls pregnant. Maili is not sure who the father of her son is, but it doesn't matter to her since she really loves her little boy.

The girls are "on call" at all times of day or night. There are clients early in the morning, at mid-afternoon, midnight and beyond. Usually they are *tarkariwalas* (vegetable vendors), garment workers, local shop owners and students. Their daily income varies (from Rs 300-1500) depending on the nature and number of clients.

Occasionally tourists pick them up, and this can be very opportune. Some tourists like to take two or three girls at a time. Even Sani sometimes gets to join in and make some money.

It is difficult to please the foreigners because they force the women to perform unusual sexual acts. However, they pay very well, as much as Rs 2,000 an hour. But the "real" money is made by stealing.

Maili and Sani were picked up by a Japanese man two months ago and were taken to a lodge in Bagh Bazar where he was staying. While Maili distracted him, Sani grabbed his bag and both fled. Later, they shared Rs 5,000 and about $100 between them. They threw away the travel cheques because they "looked like bank drafts".

There are about 10,000 sex workers in Kathmandu. More than 17 percent of them are HIV positive. They service an average of three clients a day, mostly Kathmandu men in their 20s and 30s who are married or have other partners, but refuse to wear condoms.

For Maili and Sani, life is a daily struggle to feed themselves and the children. With HIV and medical bills, it is getting more and more difficult to earn enough to live. ♦

Zina is 16 years old. She likes to talk and laugh, listen to music and dance. Now and again, when she is alone, Zina is riddled with fear and guilt and she breaks down and weeps.

She was barely eight and living in a rented room in Narayanghat when she was sold by one of her stepmother's relatives. A man whom her mother called "mama" (maternal uncle) often visited their place. One evening she was asked to travel to Nepalgunj with 'mama' to supposedly take care of an infant. Instead she landed up in Bombay.

"I was left with a fat woman we called Didi, who asked me to bathe and wear nice clothes. I was told that I'd been bought for fifty thousand rupees," says Zina.

She worked 14 hours a day, along with 15 other girls kept in an old house with five rooms. Other girls at the brothel could go to the movies but she was too young, so the madam, Nitu Tamang, would hide her under a bed.

She spent three miserable years with Nitu Tamang before being sold again to Tara Tamang from a brothel known as 'Pila House'. By then, she was weak and sick and became sicker at the second brothel. She stayed there for a year and was eventually rescued along with nine other girls by an activist group called Deunar.They were kept at a shelter in Bombay where she developed severe fever and pain on one side of her body. She had to be hospitalised for a month. A doctor told her that she was HIV positive. She didn't know much about this disease, and she didn't care either.

Zina remembers she had two brothers, but doesn't know where they are. The Nepali activist group, Maiti Nepal, sent letters to her stepmother but received no response. So she has chosen to spend the rest of her days at the Maiti hospice in Kakarbhitta in eastern Nepal.

The centre is near the India-Nepal border. Zina and her friends grow rice and other crops in the nearby fields. "I don't like to go to anywhere and I don't want to meet my stepmother and the others, but I miss my brothers. I will stay here till I die," says Zina who has witnessed the death of one of her friends at close quarters. ♦

(All names have been altered.)

PRAKRITI K.C. AND **SANGEETA LAMA**

New Deadlines

Nepal and India have agreed on a deadline to end the border delineation project that has been underway since 1981.

The joint statement issued by the prime ministers of Nepal and India at the end of PM Koirala's two-day stopover in New Delhi agreed to instruct the Joint Technical Level Boundary Committee to complete the field survey by 2001-02 and prepare strip maps of the 1780 km border by 2003.

The prime ministers also directed the Committee to "expeditiously complete its examination of facts relating to the alignment of the boundary in the western sector, including the Kalapani area, and in other pockets, where there were differences in perceptions of the two sides."

The statement also said that the foreign secretaries of the two countries will review the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship within six months.

Jumla, Lukla airports to reopen

Two STOL airports that were closed for black-topping are being opened to air traffic.

Starting 9 August, Jumla will allow flights to land and take off between 10:00 to 12:00 hours. According to the Jumla Civil Aviation Authority office, planes will be allowed to use those sections of the airport where construction has been completed.

Similarly, Lukla airport is also to be re-opened for the autumn tourist season beginning in September. The airstrip will, however, be in operation for only a few months and will close once again in December to complete the work.

Information bill

Lawmakers and journalists have criticised a draft bill designed to ensure the right to information arguing that some of its provisions can be interpreted by a government seeking to deny access to information.

The bill was drafted by the Federation of Nepalese Journalists and handed over to the Ministry of Information and Communications in June. The bill is now being locked into by the ministry's legal department, and is likely to be presented in parliament during the ongoing session.

Most worried was UML lawmaker Raghuji Pant who warned that Clause 7 (1) in the draft could restrict information flow instead of serving the purpose for which the bill was being prepared.

The said provision says that information related to "national security criminal investigation and those which can have adverse effects on Nepal's sovereignty and national integrity should not necessarily be provided".

"The clause has to be changed," said Pant. "Governments can interpret this clause to their purpose."

The bill proposes, among other things, the appointment of public information officers at all government departments for channelling information.

110 women dead in "People's War"

Since the beginning of the Maoist "People's War" in 1996, 110 women have been killed, says a report by GRINSO Nepal, a Kathmandu-based human rights organisation. It claims this is more than all the women killed during the 30-year Panchayat period.

GRINSO says six women were killed as a result of their political beliefs in the Panchayat days and another six were killed during protests for the restoration of democracy in 1990. The group also charges the government of being responsible for the disappearance of 15 women allegedly fighting for the "People's War".

Of those that have died, 99 were killed by the police and eight by the Maoists, says the report. Of the 99 who lost their lives in the hands of the police, 65 were political activists, 26 farmers and seven students. The report does not name those allegedly killed by the police.

Corporations on warpath

The National Protest Programme Co-ordination Committee of the striking employees of public corporations has threatened to take tough measures if the government does not respond to its demands soon.

The workers have threatened to stop all work at public corporations, other than those providing essential services on 10 and 11 August as their next step.

The NPPCC is a group representing different trade unions and employee organisations. They are protesting the recent government decision to do away with their special allowances and bring their salary level down to that of government employees.

The NPPCC is also opposing the downsizing and privatisation plans of public corporations and is demanding union representation in the board of directors of the corporations.

Koirala in the firing line

Deshantar, 6 August, A conspiracy is on to deny Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala re-election as party president during the upcoming 10th party convention scheduled for November in Pokhara. The first attack is likely to come from the parliamentary party itself rather than from within the Nepali Congress. Leading the campaign against Koirala is Khum Bahadur Khadka, a senior minister in his cabinet, who is trying to engineer a no-confidence motion against Koirala. Members in Koirala's kitchen cabinet say that the prime minister could make changes in the cabinet to try to avoid a showdown.

Khadka switched camps to join Koirala's opponents two weeks ago when, while reviewing the performance of different ministries, the prime minister had remarked that Khadka had not been able to run the water resources ministry well. That meant the minister could lose the ministry in the next cabinet reshuffle. Khadka has since camped with his opponents where he has been discussing bringing a possible no-confidence vote against Koirala.

Sources said that Khadka has also convinced former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba on the need for a no-confidence motion against the PM. Then word was sent to former prime minister Bhattarai telling him that time was ripe for such a move. A Congress MP had been assigned to get Bhattarai's approval, but the latter did not agree. It is now said there is divided opinion about challenging Koirala in the parliamentary party. One camp, comprising Chiranjibi Wagle and Purna Bahadur Khadka, feel that challenging Koirala without the necessary strength would only make Koirala stronger and even help strengthen his position in the upcoming party meet.

Others like Khadka and Bal Bahadur K.C. feel that even with two to four votes more on Deuba's side it would consolidate the latter's position at the convention. This group plans to use the no-confidence motion to corner Koirala and use Bhattarai's support to pressure the prime minister not to contest in the party election. They want to force Koirala to say "I won't contest," which would be a moral victory. Should that happen, then Deuba could easily take over leadership of both party and government.

If this does not work, Deuba and his team could try to force postponement of the party convention saying that the district and local bodies have not been able to prepare for the same, because of the poor law-and-order situation. But the Nepali Congress spokesman Narahari Acharya says that would not be enough to postpone the meeting. The Congress has already postponed the convention twice. The Deuba camp thinks it can get public opinion in its favour if it can get an extension.

On 22 July, Koirala held one-on-one meetings with Khadka, Home Minister Govinda Raj Joshi, Foreign Minister Tarani Dutt Chataut, Industry Commerce and Supply Minister Ram Krishna Tamrakar and Communication Minister Jaya Prakash Prasad Gupta, at his residence in Baluwatar and expressed dissatisfaction over their conduct of business. ♦

What will happen after the Prime Minister returns?

UML Spokesman Pradip Nepal in *Chhalphal*, 6 August

It has been proven that the Prime Minister's visit was ill timed. In no way can the visit be looked upon as one that will boost the image of an independent country. He failed politically. India managed to cheat Nepal on Kalapani and Laxmanpur barrage, underscoring its anti-Nepal character. I think the Prime Minister had said he would not visit India until Indian troops were withdrawn from Kalapani. His promise has vanished into thin air. If he had managed to include Kalapani in the agenda for the talks, half his prestige could have been salvaged. That did not happen.

Pradip Nepal

Not only politics, even areas outside politics did not benefit from the India visit. Industry groups have openly expressed their dissatisfaction. They feel that this trip was not very productive. The journalists visiting with the Prime Minister could also not appreciate the visit. Those journalists that had Indian "friends" went there to meet them and have fun. Those without friends spent their time relaxing in the hotel. They were saddened by the way the Indian media ignored the Nepali Prime Minister's visit.

The Prime Minister visited India for nothing. If he had casually met the Indian Prime Minister and President while on pilgrimage to Tirupati or Kashi one would not have sought the political implication of the visit and the Nepali Prime Minister would not now be in this difficult situation. Instead the visit would have been looked upon as a pilgrimage in his old age and sympathy would have been generated by his visit.

Poor Prime Minister. Why is all this happening in his old age?

The Prime Minister is returning today (Sunday) on schedule, but something else awaits him here. Someone in the know says this time Khum Bahadur will do something. Using the Aftab Alam case as an excuse, it is hoped that Khum Bahadur will stab Girija Prasad on his chest.

Why the haste?

Deputy Leader of Opposition, K.P. Oli in *Drishti*, 1 August

Estimates show that the Citizenship Bill will affect a large percentage of the population. At present 30 percent of Nepalis have a difficult time getting citizenship papers. In other words, around four million people of Nepal are affected.

The problem is more acute in the tarai region. The young and smart, rich and the powerful, and those with money to spend can get citizenships through improper means, and even foreigners with purchasing power can get the papers immediately. The problem is only for poor Nepalis.

The objective of the bill was to solve the problem of citizenship. But now the Parliament is at the crossroads. The House of Representatives passed it once, but was rejected by the National Assembly. And it has now evolved as a source of friction between the two Houses of Parliament.

The National Assembly sent it back to the Lower House. The National Assembly cannot be taken so lightly. It is also a place where bills can be introduced. The National Assembly it is taken as the place where solutions to problems faced by the House of Representatives can be found. In such a situation, we must think of a creative role for the Assembly. But how can this be done? This issue (of the citizenship bill) should not be taken as an ego problem. In other words, the issue is not just about disagreement. Instead of conflict, the issue should be taken as consent since the rejection of the bill proves that there is as much difference between the two Houses as there is between political parties.

Microbuses in the Capital

Yugambad, 1 August

Microbuses are making their appearance in the capital. The buses, alternatives to the Vikram Tempos, were imported under a special provision of paying only a one-percent tax.

His Majesty's Government has tried to solve the problem of public transport by allowing the import of Japanese, Chinese and Indian microbuses. This will lead to various problems like pollution.

The Valley Traffic Police Office has forecast that microbuses will heighten the already existing traffic congestion. Instead of lessening, the number vehicles is increasing day by day. Some solution has to be found to tackle the growing problem.

The problem of parking buses, the routes they follow, their stops, parking at night, all these are problems that have to be tackled.Within a month 127 Toyota, 31 Nissan, 33 Japanese and 90 Chinese microbuses have entered Kathmandu. Another 300 Indonesian petrol microbuses are being converted to LPG gas ones before coming to Kathmandu.

Army wants Spanish plane

Punarjagaran, 1 August

His Majesty's Government has begun moves to purchase a CASA 212-400 aircraft for the Army. The Royal Nepalese Army decided to buy the Spanish made CASA 212-400 after the Public Account Committee of Parliament forbade the purchase of RJ-100, a BAe Systems aircraft.

The Army decided to buy CASA because it would cost less than the RJ-100. CASA 212-400 is priced at Rs 1.2 billion while the RJ-100 would have cost Rs 2.34 billion.

The decision to purchase an RJ-100 was taken by the caretaker government of Girija Prasad Koirala, with Bharat Mohan Adhikari (of the UML) as the finance minister. Krishna Prasad Bhattarai became prime minister after the general elections and he vetoed the purchase citing that it was not appropriate for Nepal. The process was brought forward one more time after Koirala became prime minister.

CASA of Spain has not identified any local agent in Nepal. But Rohini Thapaliya, the same person involved in the RJ-100 purchase case, is said to be the main person behind CASA also.

Rising Christian population

Khabarpatrika, 1 August

The number of Christians in Nepal is growing by the day. In Pokhara alone there are almost 10,000 Christians. There are almost a million Christians in Nepal at present. Altogether there are more than 500 churches in Nepal.

Especially people of low-income groups are attracted to Christianity. People are attracted to the religion mainly because it is thought that one can get money, a house, and opportunities to visit various places.

The desire to convert to Christianity is high among the disadvantaged groups. Even though there is a law against people changing their religion and also to punish those that convert, Nepalis are converting into Christianity overnight.

The President of World Federation of Hindus, Pandit Narayan Prasad Pokhrel says 0.7 million Hindus have converted to other religions. According to data, 82 percent of Nepalis are Hindus, 12 percent Buddhists, 3 percent Muslims and Christians and others.

Prachanda as Anand Jain

Khabarpatrika, 1 August

The Royal Nepalese Army has found out the names used by Prachanda, General Secretary NCP (Maoist) and chief of party's foreign division, Gaurav (C.P. Gajurel), in their fake passports when they travelled to England in April. The two had gone there to attend a meeting of RIM (Revolutionary International Movement), an association of radical communists.

According to reliable sources, Prachanda travelled under the name of Anand Jain and Gaurav travelled as Vivek Jain, both residents of Lucknow. The Indian Army informed the Nepali army that the two had pasted their pictures over that of the two Lucknow residents to obtain visas.

Suspect Indian in Nepal-Britain Chamber

Tarun, 31 July

In a bid to enhance foreign investment and commerce in Nepal, the Nepal-Britain Chamber of Commerce (NBCC) was established during Robin Cook's official visit earlier this year. But the post of office secretary seems to have been given to an Indian national, Charan Gupta.

Reliable sources say, Gupta has been advising British investors to invest in India and not in Nepal as it is safer and has sure returns. Gupta was appointed to the post by Rajendra Khetan, son of Mohan Gopal Khetan. Rajendra Khetan not only appointed Gupta to the post but has also given him other responsibilities like making him the chief of the loan department in Himalayan Securities and Finance Ltd (HISEF). ♦

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"Borders between two countries should not be open; it should be controlled. There is no border between Nepal and India. Even the line drawn by the British has disappeared."

—*Harka Gurung in* Prakash, *7 August*

Khabarkagaj weekly, 3 August 2000

National wrestling competition "Hit him"... "Thrash him"...

JANA FORTIER

End of the road for Rautes?

Man Bahadur, Raute leader

Nepal's last hunter-gatherer forest nomads face extinction in the name of development

JANA FORTIER

The fact that the Raute, the last hunter-gatherers of Nepal, have survived into this century is truly remarkable in our current age of diminishing cultural diversity.

Today, only a handful of societies around the world still practise full-time hunting-gathering. The Raute are even more special because they hunt with nets and axes rather than guns or bows and arrows. Based on this communal hunting technique, Raute share all of their food and other property equally among each other. Politically, they have created the most democratic sub-culture in Nepal. Those of us living in highly stratified societies could learn much from one of them.

For this reason alone, Raute society should be protected and regarded as a precious national treasure of Nepal. Sadly, without any understanding or appreciation for the basic social rules of the Raute's nomadic foraging society, international development agencies and the Nepali government continue to assimilate the Raute in the name of social improvement.

In March the World Health Organisation (WHO) announced that it would provide aid for the "upliftment of the nomadic Raute tribe". Even though the Raute have repeatedly said that they do not "stick to one place", WHO plans to settle the Raute in Surkhet District.

Since the Raute will then be unable to hunt monkeys, their main protein source they hunt several times a week, or gather food from the jungle they will need unsustainable food rations. And since the Raute will be unable to collect the forest materials necessary to build and maintain their traditional tents, pine needles for flooring, softwood for tent poles, special leaves for wind screens and tent covering, Raute will have to be "provided" tenting material.

There have been news reports that the Raute have refused to let their children take the polio vaccine, saying that it runs counter to their beliefs. One Raute was quoted as stating: "There is no need for us to live like you."

Yet the Raute are no match against the wishes of international agencies. WHO's goal is to eradicate polio throughout the world by the year 2003. And in order to accomplish this, WHO will have to 'domesticate' the Raute before vaccinating them.

Another international agency, CARE-Nepal, lumps the Raute into a grab bag of cultural groups it calls "Disadvantaged Groups (DAG)". CARE-Nepal has determined that DAGs are disadvantaged because of "extreme poverty and illiteracy". While CARE's assumptions about illiteracy are accurate for people living in writing-literate societies, this assumption is highly inappropriate for "orally literate" societies such as the Raute.

Knowledge of how to live successfully in Raute society is passed on through stories and oral histories. If the Raute were to attend school they would have to give up their continual foraging and hunting that is the core of their social life.

A sedentary lifestyle represents an abomination to Raute cultural life, as voice to me by Man Bahadur Raskoti, a Raute elder: "We can't marry in the village. We can't own land. We shouldn't marry with people in the village. I can't marry you (speaking to a Nepali woman). If I married you I'd have to go to Kathmandu. I would have to begin farming. Then we'd have to be landowners. My elder son should therefore get married within our group. Otherwise, we'd have to cut grass (for livestock), we'd have to give service (to the government and others), we'd have to study in schools. We love our own people."

Raute must maintain their hunting-gathering lifestyle and any change in their nomadic life, which would come about by attending schools or settling into villages, would mean the cultural collapse of their society.

The carrying capacity of Nepali forests can only support the Raute for about one month which is exactly why the Raute are continuous nomads. Nomadic foraging societies such as the Raute rely on continual movement to successfully exploit—but not overexploit—their forest resources.

If the Raute are forcibly settled, within less than a year they will have exhausted all nearby forest resources. This could lead to tensions with nearby villagers who also make use of the forest.

Also within less than a year, they will have bartered their woodenware with every possible household in the vicinity. With the market thus "saturated" for the only commodity they have to offer a market society, the only option left will be to join the poorest, the most exploited underclass of Nepali society.

Around the world, there have been tragic outcomes of forcibly settling hunter-gatherers. Native Americans and Australian Aborigines are now fighting poverty, alcoholism, and other social problems as a result of being coerced into assimilation. The Raute too is not likely to successfully adapt to a farming lifestyle. As Raute youth said, "We would kill ourselves than take up farming."

Like their neighbouring relatives the Raji-Raute and the Chepang who are now part-time foragers/part-time farmers, the Raute too will become part of Nepal's landless *sukumbasi*. ♦

(Jana Fortier is a visiting scholar at Dartmouth College in the US and is working on the book *Hunter-Gatherers at the Harvest: Asian Foragers in*

COLUMN

by RUPA JOSHI

Looking grey-t

I feel like screaming, "Let it be ..."

It's two years old now, this salt-and-pepper hair. It took me two years to give up henna and go completely 'natural' and let the white hair outgrow its tint. Two years for me to appear in my true colours.

Grey hair is no stranger to my family. My parents and then my brothers went prematurely grey, and at 40 I was considered a late bloomer. When a few odd strands of grey started appearing about five years ago, I camouflaged them under a sheen of mehndi. When the strands started gathering force, using mehndi still made sense. In fact, the henna added trendy streaks of red—highlights that young girls would pay fortunes to have. But two years ago white hair started sprouting up from all over: white hair with an attitude, fierce and adamant, spearheading their way out of my scalp, refusing to lie supple and silky like the rest of their dark colleagues. "We're here to stay," they seemed to declare.

I heard them loud and clear, and called a truce. It was quite a headache trying to cover up: if I didn't use henna for three weeks the white roots would start teasing me. So one New Year's Day, more than two years ago, I made a resolution to go natural.

Two torturously slow years spent with tri-colour hair—black, white and red. There was not much I could do to hasten the transformation, with the white hair creeping from under the roots. I tried to do away with as much of the dyed portions as possible by cutting my hair short. Now it's all gone.

Accepting grey hair at 40 when my grandmother-in-law has less white hair than me was not easy. But once the decision was made, I felt a sense of liberation. Freedom from the unseen, unwritten rules of "have to dos." I made up my mind that I would accept the dictates of my body and present myself as I was: whether society liked it or not. It was their problem, not mine. In my mind I'm still young as ever.

Hennaing hair is an elaborate ritual. Every fortnight I had to plan 24 hours ahead to prepare the henna mix. The schedule went something like this:

1. Take an iron pot, the rustier, the better.
2. Take six heaped tablespoons of henna, add a whipped egg and some mustard oil in enough cold tea and coffee brew to mix to a thick consistency. Stir from time to time to ensure all of the mix gets into contact with the sides of the iron pot and borrows the resulting black oxidised colour.
3. Next day when the hair marinade is ready, with a crust of healthy black on the top and sides, search for a pair of rubber gloves without holes (blow them to find out). This is important so that the fingers don't end up with orange spots that linger for a week.
4. Plop the gooey henna on your hair, ensuring that every root is trapped in the greenish-brown paste.
5. Wrap your hair in cellophane to "keep the moisture in". Hide the ugly mess under a fancy scarf so as not to scare away unsuspecting guests. Keep yards of tissue handy in order to blot away henna seepage.
6. Two to three hours later... when the body heat has gently steam-cooked the henna and when the outside of the glob begins to feel like a pie crust it's time to wash the thing off.
7. Get under the tap real low so as not to let the brown slime splash and splotch your shower curtains, tiles and tub.
8. Rinse with water and apply hot mustard oil to 'fasten' the colour.

And so it was, every fortnight, after spending a couple of hours with a headful of cow-dung look-alike, I was forced to spend another night with a head reeking of *wasabe*. My husband and children gave me looks that were a combination of awe and disgust.

Two henna-free years later, the sense of being me, just the way I am is deeply satisfying. No pretences, no deception, no showing what's not there. Looking grey't is feeling great. Those who know my family and their greying tendency are surprised at the strength of the hoary genes. Friends who have not seen me for sometime do double takes. Many male acquaintances and young females appreciate the 'bold' and 'smart' look. Then there are the slightly older females, and most often those who colour their hair, who seem uncomfortable and vehemently oppose my decision to go 'prematurely' grey.

These days when I see men and women strutting around with outlandish henna hair, I feel like screaming: "Let it be, don't hide behind the dye, don't live in a lie, let it be." ♦

BIZ NEWS

SAD story is over

In what is being viewed as Prime Minister Koirala's biggest achievement of his visit to India, a tax which was imposed barely months earlier was used to bargain with Nepal to introduce new provisions for the import of Indian vehicles into the country.

India's April decision to levy the Special Additional Duty (SAD) on Nepali goods entering India had seriously affected exports. But nothing by Nepali officials and businesses to get it scrapped could budge the Indians.

Nepal's contention was that SAD was against Protocol V of the 1996 trade treaty that allows zero-customs entry for Nepali products—except alcohol, tobacco and cosmetics—in Indian markets. "We've always said that there was no legal basis for the duty," says a Nepali official. "But none of the exporters dared to challenge the duty in Indian courts, which is why it remained."

Wai Wai again has a bright future in the Indian market.

SAD was levied on items that attracted Indian excise—yarns and manufactures such as toothpaste, soaps, biscuits and noodles. Most affected by SAD were the larger Indian joint ventures such as Dabur, Nepal Lever and Colgate-Palmolive. And Lever's General Manager Sandip Ghosh was exultant on the lifting of SAD. "All who have worked for it need to be congratulated," he says.

Both the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) and the Nepal Chamber of Commerce have welcomed India's decision to do away with SAD. "This is a very big relief for those selling items that attracted the SAD," says Badri Ojha, secretary general of FNCCI. SAD was levied on goods that qualified for Indian excise duty.

As the quid pro quo for scrapping SAD Nepal will allow Indian vehicle imports on the basis of "self certification" by manufacturers to comply with Nepal's Euro-1 Emission standard, a provision that already stands for Japanese vehicles.

Defining manufacturing

During Koirala's India tour, the governments of Nepal and India also tried to reach an understanding on the definition of "manufacturing" for the purpose of the 1996 treaty though no agreement was reached.

In December 1999 India proposed a Four-Digit Harmonised Coding system to determine if items using raw materials from countries other than Nepal and India were to be considered for duty-free export to India.

The proposal in now official and may be discussed and finalised by the inter-governmental committee of commerce secretaries. The proposal is said to exclude processes such as splitting, slicing, cutting, repackaging, etc, as manufacturing.

These are precisely the terms that can be used to describe the process used by Kodak Nepal. The Eastman Kodak and Kodak India venture set up in Hetauda has not been able to export to India as it has not been able to get the origin certification needed to be able to export duty free.

India has also agreed to make food testing easier by setting up laboratories near the border, at Gorakhpur and Raxaul. It also agreed to help Nepal upgrade its own food-testing laboratories.

Nepal and India also decided to conclude a Bilateral Investment Protection and Promotion Agreement (BIPA) as soon as possible. At present there are 170 operational Indian joint ventures in Nepal.

Safas cost 30,000 less

There is good news for the prospective electric three-wheeler (safa tempo) buyers who have been threatened by the arrival of microbuses. The price of electric tempos may come down by 30,000 because of the reduction in cost of locally-manufactured chassis.

According to a Martin Chautari bulletin, Indian-made chassis currently in use cost Rs 150,000, and locally made ones will cost Rs 120,000. Safa tempos cost Rs 530,000, and this price has remained the same since they went into production in 1995.

The Biratnagar-based Hulas Motor Company is now manufacturing the three-wheeler chassis, making it unnecessary to import them from Scooters India. Kangchenjunga Auto Industry has also begun making chassis locally.

Electric Vehicle Company (EVCO) has already produced two electric tempos using the Hulas chassis, and Pushpa Pokharel of EVCO says the Hulas chassis is as good as Indian chassis.

Safa tempo assembly is becoming more and more indigenised, with chassis, electric vehicle battery charger and forward-reverse switch all manufactured locally. Electric vehicle manufacturers claim that even DC-DC converter and the "Pot box" can now be manufactured locally.

More bad news on RNAC

The national flag carrier has yet to collect over Rs 400 million due from past ticket sales from its sales agents both within Nepal and abroad.

RNAC chairman Hari Bhakta Shrestha told parliament's Public Affairs Committee that this could be because of litigation or because the defaulters refused to pay.

The PAC, suspecting that the amount could be as high as Rs 1 billion, has asked RNAC to provide a detailed report on unpaid dues within a week.

Radisson over-subscribed

Shares of Oriental Hotels Limited (authorised capital Rs 500 million)—managed by Radisson International—was oversubscribed by at least seven times within a week of going public with 125 million equity shares. By the end of the week of 25 July, there were over 75,000 applicants for the shares worth about Rs 860 million.

ECONOMIC SENSE by ARTHA BEED

Microbuses and the macroeconomy

The big happening on the streets of Kathmandu recently was not the bandh, but the arrival of micro-buses as public transport. Purely from the aesthetic point of view the vans do look better than the smoke-belching Vikrams they replaced although not quite as safa as the electric three-wheelers.

The micros were delayed due to the government's characteristic non-decision, and in the interim, many more tempos (propelled by batteries and cooking gas) were also allowed.

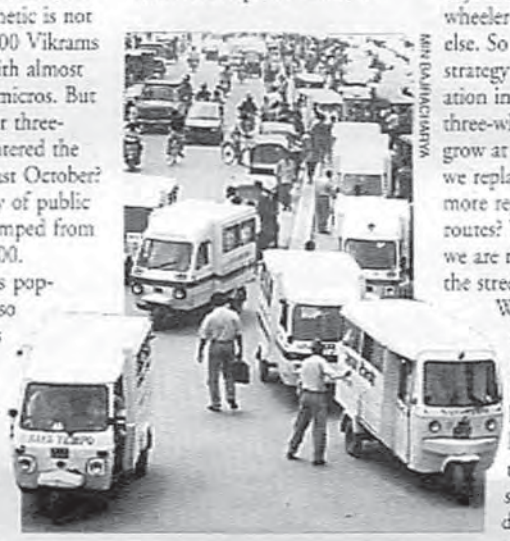
The traffic arithmetic is not looking good. The 600 Vikrams are being replaced with almost an equal number of micros. But what of the 800 other three-wheelers that have entered the traffic stream since last October? The carrying capacity of public transport has now jumped from 6,500 to nearly 20,000.

Has Kathmandu's population increased by so much that these seats can be filled, or are new routes being serviced? The answer to both questions, sadly, is "No". The rate race is already on: you can see micros whizzing past the purring Safas on the Pulchowk or Tundikhel incline.

Nepal's public transport is in the hands of powerful "associations" that are actually pampered monopolies that pay for route permits. Licences cost up to Rs 300,000 on paper, but the real price is hush-hush.

Permits are issued indiscriminately without even understanding the impact of excessive supply. Since the money is paid upfront, associations aren't bothered about whether a business survives. New routes are not allowed, the commuter's welfare is the least of their worries, and variable pricing is unheard of.

So, if a new company wants to run air-conditioned buses from Bhaktapur to Baudha


MIN DAJI HACHARYA

changing slightly higher prices which the commuter is ready to pay, it can't. The associations will not allow it. Economic reforms have not been able to touch these monopolies, and political protection allows survival of the permit-mafia.

The initial success of the electric and gas three-wheelers attracted a lot of investment. In the absence of other investment opportunities, money poured into them. The herd mentality of Nepali entrepreneurship was well supported by finance companies and co-operatives. Now, the operators are feeling the pinch. Creditors are calling for installments just as the micros arrive on the scene. The front pages of newspapers these days are full of notices to three wheeler operators to pay up, or else. So what is the long-term strategy for public transportation in the valley? Do we allow three-wheeler and micros to grow at the present rate, or do we replace them with bigger more regular buses on trunk routes? The Safas are clean, but we are running out of space on the streets for them.

What is our response to carrying capacity? What do we do with the old buses that are the worst belchers? Shouldn't we look at price differentiation for local and express services? And how do we defang the powerful bus associations so that some of these problems can be addressed.

Anybody listening? ♦

Readers can post their views and discuss issues at arthabeed@yahoo.com

INTERNATIONAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES FOR NEPALI TIMES

	6 months	1 year
SAARC countries	US$25	US$48
Other countries	US$40	US$75

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Grindlays Gazette

INTEREST RATE UPDATE

NEPALI RUPEE	CURRENT%	PREVIOUS%
Call Money Avg.	5.25	5.30
84 Days t/bill	5.22	5.20
91 Days t/bill	5.45	5.43
365 Days t/bill	6.18	6.16
Repo rate	5.95	5.93

Due to sluggish demand, NSBs worth NPR 800m floated a month ago by the Central Bank remained under subscribed. Average rate of 91 days T/bills moved slightly upward due to bidding at higher rate by most banks. Liquidity is expected to remain excessive in coming weeks with maturity of secondary market T.Bills. Expected range of next week's average rate of 91 day T/bill - 5.35 to 5.50 pct.

FOREIGN CURRENCY

	USD	EUR	GBP	JPY	CHF
LENDING	9.50	6.25	6.00	1.37	5.12
LIBOR (1m)	6.62	4.41	6.08	0.11	3.21

The Fed Chairman reiterated that the economy was moving toward more balanced growth but has left the door open to another interest rate hike next month. New figures on jobs, inflation and second-quarter growth and wage costs are due before the August 22 meeting and will help the Fed to clarify the rate stance.

BANK RATES(DEPO/LENDING)	Mkt Hi/Lo	Mkt Avg
S/A NPR	6.0/4.0	5.37
F/D 1 YR	7.5/6.0	6.81
OVERDRAFT	15.5/12.5	13.59
TERM LOAN	14.5/13.0	13.53
IMPORT LN	13.0/10.5	11.56
EXPORT LN	13.0/10.0	11.00
MISC LOAN	16.5/14.0	15.17

CURRENCY UPDATE

AG/USD	CURRENT *	WK/AGO	%CHG
GOLD(Ounce)	277.50	280.00	- 0.89
OIL(Barrel)	28.10	28.50	- 1.40
EUR	0.9239	0.9342	- 1.10
GBP	1.4997	1.5194	- 1.30
JPY	109.48	108.87	+ 0.56
CHF	1.6765	1.6645	+ 0.72
AUD	0.5815	0.5871	- 0.95
INR	45.00	44.74	+ 0.58

*Currency bid prices at 1.30 p.m. on 31/7 - Source Reuters

The US dollar made broad gains against major currencies after strong US economic growth data bucked expectation for a slowdown, leading investors to bet more US interest rate hikes may be in store. The Euro had been hurt after weaker than expected Euro zone money supply data sparked speculation that the European Central Bank may leave rate on hold for now. The Yen's woes were compounded by the political problems facing Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, whose popularity is crumbling as he struggles to recover from the fallout of a financial scandal involving Japan's top financial regulator.

INDIAN RUPEE OUTLOOK :

Indian rupee traded in a slighty weaker range last week and is expected to remain under pressure amid sustained dollar demand from banks and importers. The events of the previous week had rattled the market when the rupee had quickly weakened despite the rate hikes and liquidity tightening measures announced by the Reserve Bank of India. The market is keeping a close eye on the moves of institutional investors and activities of corporates and state run banks for further direction of the Indian rupee.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

Kathmandu's super-shoppers

MUKUL HUMAGAIN

The Valley's middle class is increasingly shopping in supermarkets instead of the neighbourhood pasal

Gone are the shopping days that took you on the Bhotahiti-Asan-Indrachowk-New Road circuit. For a Kathmandu middle class with a visibly increasing purchasing power, there is nothing more convenient than to walk into a department store and buy anything from after-shave to cooking pans, masala to vanity cases, French wine to swimming trunks, all under the same roof.

All the department stores claim that there is not much difference in their pricing. Consumers, however, tell a different story and insist that Bhatbhateni's prices are the lowest.

The consumer is king, so far as the choices go. And all because of the department stores that have cropped up all over town.

The first in the scene was Bluebird Departmental Stores, which was opened in 1985. Bluebird, a subsidiary of Hotel Blue Star, has not looked back since and now even has a branch at Lazimpat.

But it was only after the arrival of Bhatbhateni Supermarket in the early 1990s that the middle class discovered the convenience of shopping at departmental stores.

Bhatbhateni was different because shoppers who generally felt overwhelmed to walk into the imposing Bluebird did not have the same diffidence when it came to shopping there. This was primarily because Bhatbhateni started as an unassuming single-storey general store which priced its goods very reasonably. The prices were often lower than what the neighbourhood shop would charge.

No wonder that although Bhatbhateni has grown into a multi-storeyed complex now, the consumer profile remains more or less the same, comfortable middle class. More than 700 people visit the store daily to sample its wide range of goods, which include fresh fruit, jewellery and electronic appliances. "I've been coming here for the last two years. One can buy everything here," says shopper Jyotika Shrestha.

Selling brand names like Marks and Spencer, Bluebird's clientele is still significantly the well-heeled. The crown prince and other members of the royalty are regulars, as are expatriates and Indian tourists. But customers at this huge store are no longer the super rich only. "Earlier, there were very few middle class Nepalis who to come here for shopping," says Ram Kazi Shrestha of Bluebird. "These days both our businesses in Tripureshwor and Lazimpat rely heavily on the middle class Nepalis."

There are three other department stores that have branched out—Namaste, Gemini and Park 'n' Shop.

Namaste Supermarket from Pulchowk has been in business for the last 10 years. It initially started out with grocery items, and gradually came into it's present status of a department store. Its second outlet is at Maharajgunj.

Grocery tops the list of items sold at both the Jawalakhel and Baudha outlets of Gemimi Grocers. Thamel's Sales Mart started three years ago, and services the foreign tourists. Its Khichapokhari branch Park 'n' Shop is a big hit with women who go there for cosmetics.

All the department stores claim that there is not much difference in their pricing. Consumers, however, tell a different story and insist that Bhatbhateni's prices are the lowest.

Operating up to 12 hours a day, the peak hours at these stores is from 4 pm onwards. Competition between them is stiff. Various schemes have been launched to draw the customer. Bluebird has a gift voucher offer, besides the weekly in-house promotion during which they give special attention to two items. Similarly, Park 'n' Shop has a 10 percent discount on garments.

Not all the stores have fared well though. Most noteworthy was the closure last year of Anand Departmental Store at Lazimpat which was geared to serve the foreign expats living in the Maharajgunj area.

The success of these department stores lie not only in their offering a wide variety of goods but also has a lot to do with their marketing strategy, that is targetting the middle class. And for the growing number of professionals who have even less time to do their shopping, the opportunity to buy everything at one place is proving quite a blessing.

Department Store	Location	Opening Hours	Phone
Bhatbhateni Supermarket	Bhatbhateni	7.30am-8.30pm	419181, 413316
Bluebird Departmental Store	Tripureshwor	10am-8pm	228833, 245705
Bluebird Departmental Store	Lazimpat	10am-8pm	415181, 415334
Blue Heaven Departmental Store	Bhatbhateni	9.30am-8pm	420689, 423576
Central Departmental Store	Khichapokhari	10am-8pm	223595, 222028
Dillibazaar Supermarket	Dillibazaar	7am-8.30pm	410115
Gemini Grocers	Jawalakhel	8am-8pm	524177
Gemini Grocers	Baudha	8am-8pm	471370
Namaste Supermarket	Pulchowk	9am-8pm	520026, 529792
Namaste Supermarket	Maharajgunj	9am-8pm	427287
Park 'n' Shop	Khichapokhari	9am-8pm	220498
Sales Mart	Thamel	7am-10.30pm	430283
Sincere Departmental Store	Kumaripati	8am-8.30pm	533463, 533468

The Pill

A miracle of birth control, a facilitator of women's independence, a vast medical experiment carried out by men on women, a saviour, a killer, an economic liberator. The Pill is 40.

TANIA UNSWORTH

The Pill—a device that some think is the single most defining invention of the 20th century, and others see as nothing more than a four-letter word. No other drug in the history of medicine has been so examined, caused more enthusiasm, fright and fury. The name itself seems loaded with significance. Singular, mysteriously capitalised: of all the tablets and potions we take, this is the Pill.

Of the 11 million women of reproductive age in the UK, an estimated three million are on the Pill. To users of the drug, the little rattling packet is as familiar as their toothbrush. Familiar as the Pill is, an uneasiness with it remains, a lurking fear that it must carry with it some dangerous catch. But the Pill a woman takes today is not the same as the one her mother took. It is far safer. It also has the power to protect against certain deadly diseases. In ways that the drug's inventors could not have anticipated, the Pill has benefits that go far beyond simple birth control. Put simply, it can save your life. And the reason it can do this is perhaps one of the greatest medical ironies of the 20th century.

From the start, the very idea of the Pill was troublesome. To give a drug every single day for years to a large, perfectly healthy population of young women seemed to go against most people's notions of how—and why—drugs should be used. The majority of women do not take the Pill to ward off life-threatening disorders, or to alleviate pain, or to control unpleasant symptoms caused by unavoidable disease. Most women take the Pill because they wish to have sex. Sex without worry, without the fuss and uncertainty of condoms and diaphragms.

The concept of sex without worry took a serious blow with the arrival of Aids, but women in monogamous

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Why the P

It is mostly the Nepali male who makes the choice about contraceptives, and he can't be bothered to buy pills for his wife every month.

HEMLATA RAI

When family planning services were first introduced in Nepal more than 30 years ago, the Americans who were then supporting population control strongly pushed contraceptive pills for women.

But the Pill never really took off in Nepal, and it was later superseded by the condom, injectible contraceptives, sterilisation and intra-uterine devices. Today, only two percent of Nepali women using contraceptives take the Pill.

Shyam Thapa, a demography expert with Family Health International (FHI), attributes this to social factors. "All over Asia it is found that people have greater faith in injectibles and liquid medications than in tablets. This also affects their choice of contraceptives."

In the early 1970s, reports of serious side effects of the Pill had not yet reached Nepal. Even so, Nepalis women found it cumbersome to keep track of the tablets, and preferred sterilisations or injectibles—actually it was the men who decided and they preferred their wives sterilised.

In a country with serious gender disparities, the ease of the Pill could theoretically have given Nepali women greater freedom and choice over reproduction. However, research showed that it was actually the men in many cases who made the decision about the

relationships still take the Pill so that they can enjoy a sexual freedom unknown to previous generations. It's hardly surprising that the drug has always inspired a mixture of love and loathing. Carl Djerassi, the chemist who first synthesis-ed a steroid oral contraceptive in 1951 and who is sometimes described as "the father" of the Pill, also links our ambivalence towards the drug to the era in which it was first introduced to society: " Till the late 60s, the three most important social movements were the women's movement, the rise of environmental protectionism and consumer advocacy. All were immensely beneficial, but all were, to some extent, suspicious of technology, almost anti-science."

But although the Pill became one of the symbols of the 60s, its creation was influenced far more by the cultural concerns of the previous decade. When it was invented, the Pill was designed to be taken in a cycle consisting of three pill-taking weeks, followed by seven "free" days to allow a woman an episode of bleeding that corresponded to normal menstruation. This is still the method used today. But few Pill-users know that there is no real medical justification for taking it this way.

In theory, the drug might have been designed to free women from the obligation of having a period every single month. The decision to create a method of birth control that mimicked women's normal menstrual cycles was based on a patronising assumption—that women wanted to continue having periods every single month. That it was comforting to them. That there was, in short, a need to bleed.

The Pill was developed by a team of scientists, of whom the leading figures were Carl Djerassi, biologist Gregory Pincus, who demonstrated the drug's efficacy on animals, and Harvard-based gynaecologist John Rock, who conducted the clinical trials on humans. The journalist Malcolm Gladwell, writing in the *New Yorker*, suggests that the form the Pill took, right from the start, was influenced, to a large degree, by Rock's belief that the drug was a "natural" form of birth control. The Pill contains synthetic versions of two naturally occurring hormones, progesterone and oestrogen. In normal circumstances, the levels of these hormones fluctuate throughout a woman's menstrual cycle, resulting in the release of an egg from the ovary and the growth of the uterine lining in preparation for the fertilised egg. On the Pill, however, the hormones are given in a steady dose, preventing ovulation from occurring.

To Rock, what was natural about the Pill was that it did not introduce anything into a woman's body that didn't already exist there, albeit in a more intermittent fashion. The great irony is that, in the years since the Pill was invented, what used to seem normal and "natural" is revealing itself to be just the opposite. John Rock thought he was maintaining a status quo by allowing women their monthly period. What he did not know was that later research would fundamentally challenge this status quo. For while it is true that modern women are used to menstruating once a month, the same cannot be said of their ancestors. It now appears that far from being natural, constant menstruation is an abnormality in evolutionary terms.

During the 80s, scientist Beverly Strassmann studied the reproductive life of women in the Dogon, an African tribe whose lifestyle had remained largely unchanged since antiquity. She wanted to form a picture of what women's biological patterns might have been like before the advent of modernity. What she discovered was that Dogon women spent most of their fertile years either pregnant or breastfeeding, both of which suppressed their ovulation for long periods of time. As a result, they only experienced, on average, 100 menstrual periods before they reached menopause. By contrast, the average contemporary woman in the West has between 300 and 400 periods.

The division and reproduction of cells necessitated by ovulation and the growth of a woman's uterine lining increases the risk of ovarian and womb cancers. By lessening the frequency of that cell activity, the Pill increases a woman's chances of avoiding these diseases. The advantages are significant. A woman who takes the Pill for 10 years reduces her risk of getting cancer of the womb by about 60 percent, and her risk of ovarian cancer by around 70 percent. These benefits of the Pill have been known about for decades, but they remain among the most unsung of the drug's side-effects.

Meanwhile, health scares surrounding the Pill continue to make headlines. When the drug first came out, concerns over its safety proved justified. Serious and even fatal complications occurred among users, prompting more research. Since then, hormone doses in the Pill have been drastically reduced. Today, there is only one hundredth the amount of oestrogen that was in the original. Other modifications have added to its safety. During the 80s, a triphasic version of the drug was introduced, providing three different levels of hormone to be taken over the course of a month and corresponding more closely to a woman's natural cycle. Despite the safety of the new Pill, however, fears persist.

In the mid-90s a link was suggested between the third-generation Pill and deep-vein thrombosis. Much was made of the fact that women taking this version had double the chances of death over users of the second-generation Pill.

"Anybody who drives on the roads for a single hour per year increases their risk of death to one in a million," claims John Guillebaud, professor of family planning and reproductive health at University College, London, and author of *The Pill* (OUP, fifth ed 1997). "The difference in risk between the two brands of Pill is the same as going from two hours of driving per year to four."

Recently, a suggested link between the Pill and breast cancer has been causing debate, and here the risks appear less clear-cut. At the moment, there's no hard evidence that the drug definitely increases a woman's chances of developing the disease.

Why, after four decades of its use, is the Pill still demonised? Why do the fears persist out of all proportion to actual risk? "When I'm counselling women about whether they should take the Pill," says Sheila Hancock, a nurse with Britain's Marie Stopes clinics who has been working in family planning since 1977, "my goal is to give them all the information to date and let them decide. But most of the women I see have far more knowledge about the negative aspects of the drug. Very few know about the cancer benefits. I do wonder sometimes about why we go on having these terrible scares. Perhaps society as a whole is saying, 'Oh no, the Pill, that's naughty...'"

"It's to do with sex," agrees Guillebaud. "People still have hang-ups. They can't believe nature won't bite back in some way." ♦

(The Guardian)

ill didn't have a chance in Nepal

kind of contraceptive that their wives could use, and the men preferred to have their wives strerilised.

In the 1980s, the injectible depo-provera gained popularity as the birth spacing method of choice. In the 1990s, injections and implants became the mainstay of Nepal's family planning programme after sterilisation.

When family planning was introduced in the late 1960s, Nepal's population of 10 million was growing at 2.7 percent a year. But these early efforts took 20 years to begin slowing down growth and lowering the fertility rate.

Statistics show that in just five years between 1981 and 1986, the percentage of contraceptive users among married couples in Nepal almost doubled from 8 to 15 percent. Presently, almost 35 percent couples belonging to the reproductive age-group practise one or the other kind of contraceptive method. Nepal's population is now 23 million and is growing at 2.3 percent a year.

Nepal's uniqueness lies in the popularity of modern contraceptive methods for limiting the number of children rather than spacing birth, and since the Pill is more suitable for the latter this could also be why it has not proved popular here.

"The contraceptive career of Nepali couples is short. For the majority of them it begins and ends with sterilisation," says Thapa.

Studies show that early marriage, and the subsequent social pressure on newly-weds, leave them with little choice but to produce a baby as soon as possible.

FHI surveys show that 88 percent of the married women in Nepal have a child by the age of 21, with an average interval between marriage and the first baby of only 27 months. Hence, by the age of 30 to 35, a woman would have given birth to four to five children.

Sterilisation was then a logical choice for couples who did not want any more children. Eighty percent of Nepali couples who practise family planning go for sterilisation. Interestingly, in the hills 75 percent sterilisations are male while in the tarai 75 percent are female.

The real factor retarding Pill-use was the effectiveness of mobile sterilisation camps first introduced in the 1970s. As laparoscopy became easier and safer, its popularity grew among Nepali women.

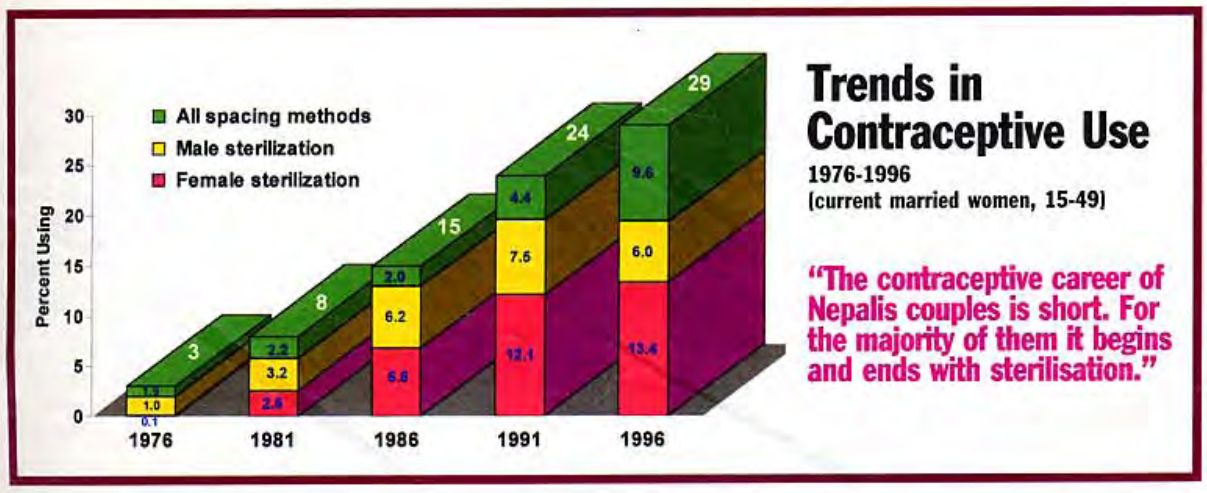
The mobile camps emphasised sterilisation rather than temporary spacing methods.

The use of pills increased after private sector and non-government organisations were allowed to deliver family planning services. The availability of the Pill in urban areas improved vastly and new users easily identified it as an easy alternative. But because of the cost involved, the Pill could still not make major inroads in rural areas.

Increase in availability alone is unlikely to increase the use of the Pill in Nepal. Nepali couples have displayed a loyalty to their contraceptive of choice. Surveys show that 86 percent of current users have stuck to the same method they accepted for the first time. Moreover, the most common switching is from the Pill to other methods.

"Many women find the routine of using the Pill impractical," says Laxmi Raj Pathak, the director of the government's Family Health Division. The theoretical effectiveness of pills in preventing pregnancy is estimated at 99 percent, but in Nepal reliability is only 80 percent, mainly because women do not follow instructions properly. Figures for Egypt and Thailand are 85 percent.

Pathak says that in some cases men are found to have forced their wives to accept family planning decisions. He says, "Men have great faith in sterilisation. They think the pill is less reliable. Also, if the wife is taking pills it is the man who will have to go to the store and buy it. Whereas if his wife has a laparoscopy he doesn't have to worry about it anymore." ♦



Trends in Contraceptive Use

1976-1996
(current married women, 15-49)

"The contraceptive career of Nepalis couples is short. For the majority of them it begins and ends with sterilisation."

Who owns your domain ?

How about sukulgunda.com or yokeho.com? Sorry, both taken.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

Diwakar Kanel denies he is a cybersquatter he prefers to be called an enterpreneur.

GAURAB RAJ UPADHAYA

Kathmandu Valley is fast emerging as the cybersquatting hub of the Himalaya. Some of the most prolific Internet subletters in the region live within a 3 km radius of Jyatha Tole.

Several Nepali companies and numerous individuals have made a living out of squatting on popular brand names, or thinking up possible future domains they hope will become hot-sellers. They pay out thousands of dollars a year to renew annual domain registrations, but all they need to hit one big jackpot a year to recoup everything and more.

One of the more successful is Himalayan Dot (www.himalayandot.com) which has already been offered $100,000 for its domain, antihiv.com, But it's not selling, hoping for bigger money.

The director of Himalayan Dot, Diwakar Kanel, in his early 20s, is typical of the new breed of aggressive cyber-entrepreneurs. It doesn't seem to bother Kanel that many would call him a modern-day pirate, or even blackmailer.

"A whole new area of business has now started. People now see money to be made on the Internet, and that will bring a great change," predicts Kanel.

Kanel has been doing a booming business registering just about any name anyone can think of for a dot com company and then selling it for a fat profit such as availabledomain.com—which has already been offered $15,000—and visitmoon.com.

These and other names are available from the bidding-site greatdomains.com. Himalayan Dot has so far registered 250 domains and is planning to create a global portal—"The Fetch Network" with fetchfetch-.com, hotelfetch.com, holidayfetch.com, anythingfetch.com already registered. Himalayan Dot also registers domains for others. Their most memorable client was an 80-year-old who registered 100 domains at one go.

Kanel claims that he will sell Nepali domains like himalayanbank.com to the rightful owner for the hundred dollars or so that it has cost him to maintain the site over the years. "It is better that a Nepali company owns the domain rather than an unknown American who will sell it only for tons of money," he says.

But Himalayan Bank sources said that when they sought to acquire the domain through indirect channels, they were told it would cost Rs 500,000. Himalayan Bank now uses hbl.com.np

Kanel says he got the idea of registering Nepali domains when an Indian company, Iris Design, snapped up daburnepal.com when he let its registration lapse. He claims he's not in it for the money, at least so far as Nepali domains are concerned: "Our objective is awareness. We will keep these names for Nepali companies and then we will sell them to their rightful owners. But we will not ask for a paisa more than what we paid to reserve the site."

The price of domain name registration has come down nowadays. What used to cost $70 for two years, is now available for $10 for a year. Some sites will even register any domain name for free.

Where Himalayan Dot makes its money is by registering a slew of generic domain names, which can fetch a good price from international bidders who send offers through greatdomains.com.

Another Kathmandu company, OBCI, is sitting on names such as nepallever.com, suryatobacco.com, icimod.org.

The Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) is now considering taking OBCI to court over icimod.org. OBCI's response has been to come up with "Internet Communication and Information Management of Development Issues" as a cover for its domain. The original ICIMOD has dashed off a letter to Computer Associaton of Nepal and Network Solutions, Inc, claiming the domain. One ICIMOD insider told Nepali Times: "We might be forced to take legal action against the squatter if they do not comply with the request."

There are many other unknown cybersquatters in Nepal who have ownership of names like yahoonepal.com, newnepal.com, bbcnepal.com, amazonnepal.com, itnepal.com, biznepal.com, kantipur.com, computernepal.com, and even nepal.com.

There seems to be nothing beginning with "Nepal" that has not already been registered. Even legitimate private names have not been spared. Domains like grindlaysbank.com, rnac.com, bishalbazar.com, nepalyellow-pages.com have all been taken. Even suryatobaco.com (with one 'c') has been reserved.

Taking the cue from chic *desi* names in India, domains with Nepali language words are also fast disappearing. Names such as pasal.com, yokeho.com, lahai.com, chautari.com, gundruk.com have already been taken. The latest to go is sukul- gunda.com.

Since Internet domain names are registered on a first-come-first-served basis, there is little others can do after a name has been registered *(see box)*. However, under new regulations adopted by the ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers), domain names are considered intellectual property and squatters could be prevented from registering names that are trademarks of some other company.

But in Nepal there are many companies with the same first name, and when a generic name like Sagarmatha, Himal, Kathmandu, Kantipur, or Nepal are involved squatters can't be sued. The best antidote is to register quickly and also reserve all derivatives of the same name.

Registration of names ending with Nepal's own domain 'np' is also on rise. So far 1066 'np' domains have been registered by Mercantile Communications, but you cannot register someone else's brand. For instance nobody other than Coke can register cocacola.com.np, colacola.org.np, coke.com.np, coke.net.np. Mercantile also will not register names like nabilbank, yakandyeti, necon, nepalitimes to anyone else but those companies.

"This arrangement is quite unique to Nepal. This is one reason why we do not have as many names registered under the np domain," says Sanjib Raj Bhandari of Mercantile.

There are now even edu.np, and gov.np domains (representing educational establishments or the government). There are already 68 edu.np domains and 26 gov.np sites.

There is even a domain called yourmum.com.np. ♦

Both suryatobacco.com and suryatobaco.com are held by squatters

Domain wars

mcdonalds.com was registered by a journalist in 1994, and the fast-food giant was able to get it only after agreeing to donate computers to a primary school. When a domain is registered, it is not necessary to give reasons for choosing a particular name. But when a third party comes along and claims proprietary rights to it, the registrar requires both sides to provide documents to back their respective claims. And if the matter cannot be settled, it is taken to court.

Rules for generic names are not clear cut. Nepali apple farmers from Mustang have a perfect right to register apple.com.np. Apple Inc can, however, raise objections although it is by no means certain that a court will rule in favour of the latter.

The classic case of a domain war was over windows95.com, which had been registered by a student in Utah. By the time Windows 95 became popular, the website was already highly visible. Microsoft sued the student, and an out-of-court settlement was reached for an undisclosed sum. The student's contention was that he was providing Windows 95-related information on the website—and not making any profit out of it. ♦

Bangladesh NGOs under fire

TABIBUL ISLAM IN DHAKA

Bangladesh's large non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are coming under fire from critics who charge that they are no longer fighting poverty, but turning into businesses.

Bangladesh has big nationwide NGOs some of which have budgets larger than some government ministries. In recent weeks, the biggest NGOs in Bangladesh has been accused by a section of business and political leaders and academics of doing more to help themselves than the needy.

Some big NGOs admit taking up large-scale business ventures, but say these are linked to their goal of raising money locally to fund their programmes and reduce dependence on foreign donors. Some NGOs have set up banks, shopping complexes, telephone networks and printing presses.

There are more than 23,000 NGOs registered in Bangladesh and another 146 foreign non-governmental groups also working in the country. Together, NGOs receive $200 million worth of assistance from foreign donors who believe they are more effective in delivering basic services than the government machinery.

Now, the NGOs are feeling a backlash. Bangladesh Finance Minister Shah A.M.S. Kibria says that while NGOs have played a significant role in promoting development, they need "discipline in their financial matters."

Speaking at a recent meeting in Dhaka on the role of NGOs, Kibria said the groups were getting big sums of money from government institutions and foreign donors for their microcredit schemes. But this was being disbursed to the poor at high rates. "If the trend of charging high interest rate continues, these NGOs will ultimately turn into rent-seeking institutions," he cautioned.

Grandeur of the BRAC headquarters soaring into the Dhaka sky.

Non-government groups are going into business, and some don't like it

Agriculture Minister Begum Motia Chowdhury has accused the country's biggest NGO, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), of selling hybrid maize seed to small farmers at a high price.

Some business leaders complain that big NGOs are taking advantage of their special position to give unfair competition to business by setting up banks, housing companies and even mobile telephone networks. The chief of the country's biggest business chamber, the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Aftabul Islam, says NGOs have become major industrial players.

The businesses run by the NGOs get tax exemptions and capital at low rates, he said. Organisations like BRAC have set up holding companies which are into real estate, printing presses and other businesses to raise money for their charity work.

BRAC denies it is using soft loans and grants for its business and industrial enterprises. "Donor countries and lending agencies never allow soft loans and grants to be invested in any kind of business. Those who are levelling such charges are doing so due to their ignorance," said Aminul Alam, Deputy Executive Director of BRAC.

Alam says his organisation pays $500,000 every month as interest for loans taken from different banks in the country for its various business ventures. "Like any other businessmen, we are paying duties, taxes and many other charges," he said.

An official in the government's NGO Affairs Bureau, who did not want to be identified, says there might be a few groups whose actions are questionable. "(But) it is not proper to make sweeping comments and blame all for the mischief committed by some," he said.Replying to the charge that NGOs levy high interest for their microcredit schemes, BRAC's Alam says the distribution of small loans, some as low as 50 dollars, among so many borrowers, involves huge operative costs.

BRAC has 2.7 million borrowers and charges them 15 percent interest on the loans. It goes up to 25 percent for defaulters. ♦ *(IPS)*

Maldives declines graduation from poorest to poor

THALIF DEEN IN NEW YORK

The Maldives, which has been threatened with extinction due to a potential sea level rise, has fought back a United Nations attempt to remove it from the list of least developed countries (LDCs).

Challenging a ruling by the UN's Committee for Development Policy (CDP)—which decides on the eligibility of UN member states to be included among the 48 LDCs–the Maldives said that it had been made to look more affluent and less vulnerable than it really is.

"The decision was totally unfair and unreasonable," says Maldivian Ambassador Hussain Shihab. "We have one of the world's most vulnerable economies. We have coral bleaching which has reached catastrophic proportions. And our development efforts have been severely constrained by low level of human resource development," he said.

The decision to remove the Maldives from the list of LDCs, he said, was based on a CDP economic profile which did not conform to reality.

Following an appeal made by the Maldives, the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) last week deferred its graduation until July next year in order to further review the status of the island nation.

With a population of a little over 250,000 people scattered across 700 small islands, the Maldives depends heavily on tourism and fishing for its export earnings. Both sectors are considered unsustainable over a long period of time.

Male atoll, capital of the Maldives.

Additionally, the Maldives faces the threat of a sea level rise, which according to environmentalists, could submerge the country in the next 20 to 30 years.

Of the 44 LDCs, 33 are in sub-Saharan Africa, nine in Asia, one in the Caribbean and five in the Pacific region. Although the number of LDCs has virtually doubled over the years, only one country, Botswana, has graduated from the poorest to the poor, namely from an LDC to a developing nation.

Last week, the CDP recommended that three other countries, the Congo, Ghana and Senegal, were eligible to be included in the list of LDCs because their economies have continued to deteriorate.

Any country that is removed from the list is deprived of concessionary loans, debt relief and tariff concessions, among other economic privileges granted by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and other international financial institutions.

President of the Maldives Maumoon Abdul Gayoom said in a letter that the loss of preferential access to markets is likely to lead to the collapse of the country's tuna industry which, given the inability to exploit economies of scale, is largely dependent on tariff concessions for competitiveness. ♦ *(IPS)*

Protests greet SL's new constitution

COLOMBO - Sri Lankan president Chandrika Kumaratunga has unveiled plans for a new constitution offering what she says is the best hope of ending the civil war which has claimed 60,000 lives in 17 years.

"Today is...arguably one of the most important days in the history of this country," she told parliament on Friday.

Much of her speech was drowned by the noisy protests of the opposition United National Party. Its leader, Ranil Wickremesinghe, walked out soon after she rose to speak, and many of his MPs tore up their order papers in protest. One even set fire to his.

The government hopes that the new constitution, which gives more autonomy to the provinces, may eventually persuade the Tamil Tiger rebels to abandon their fight for an independent homeland in the north and east. So far the Tigers have insisted that they want nothing less than outright independence.

"I believe that this package offers the best hope to enduring peace in our country and the best chance of saving ourselves from more calamity," Chandrika said.

The UNP has accused her of rushing the reforms through parliament without consulting the Buddhist clergy sufficiently. The reforms need a two-thirds majority in parliament followed by approval in a referendum, which will not be held before the general election expected around October. *(The Guardian)*

Pakistan to export nuclear material

ISLAMABAD - The Pakistan has denied it wants to export radioactive material and equipment for nuclear reactors, but its Commerce Ministry has advertised the sale.

The move would be in breach of recently drafted guidelines, and reports have confused US officials, who said it appeared to undermine much of the recent progress made in talks on introducing greater controls on nuclear materials.

In a full-page newspaper advertisement the Pakistani commerce ministry has published an application form for the export of 11 radioactive substances, including depleted uranium, enriched uranium, plutonium and tritium, and 17 types of equipment, including nuclear power reactors, nuclear research reactors and reactor control systems.

It is the first time Pakistan has openly authorised the sale of nuclear materials since it became the world's newest acknowledged nuclear power in May 1998, when it conducted six bomb tests in direct response to tests in India.

Would-be exporters, who have to pay up to $2,100 in application fees, must declare that the sale is for peaceful purposes only and the material will not be re-exported. They must reveal the source of the material or equipment, supply an end-user certificate, and obtain a "no-objection certificate" from the government. Although almost all nuclear material is held by the government, there are some private contractors.

"This is a fulfilment of our commitment to transparency," Javed Jabbar, the information minister, said last week. "There is absolutely no scope left for any kind of misuse or pilferage or illegal export of any substance. We are doing it only in order to be a good nuclear citizen."

He said Pakistan had exported no nuclear material in the past and had no immediate plans for exports now. Ishfaq Ahmed, the head of the Pakistani atomic energy commission, said the export of fissionable material, including enriched uranium and plutonium, was banned but other nuclear material exports would be considered. His statement contradicted the advertisement's suggestion that enriched uranium and plutonium could be exported. *(The Guardian)*

China gets tough on corruption

BEIJING – China has sentenced a senior official to death in a grim effort to convince the country that its government is serious about tackling chronic corruption. A court in Beijing last week found Cheng Kejie, a former deputy chairman of parliament, guilty of accepting nearly $5 million dollars in kickbacks in collusion with his mistress Li Ping.

Li has been portrayed as the seductress who accompanied Cheng down the path to ruin, and will be tried at a later date. A communist party spokesman has blamed Cheng's downfall on "the temptations of women and money".

State television showed pictures of the gold, diamond rings and expensive watches the couple acquired. They are also said to have been caught on closed-circuit television blithely gambling away their loot in casinos in Macau.

Cheng climbed the ladder of the Communist party in the relatively remote southern province of Guangxi from 1986 until he became the top party boss two years later.

He used his patronage to sell lucrative contracts and management posts to the highest bidder. He took kickbacks for allocating state land for building projects, granting illegal loans out of government funds and selling public offices. Public opinion in Guangxi regards Cheng as a crook who fully deserves exemplary punishment.

He will be the most senior Chinese leader to be executed for corruption. Cheng has been given 10 days to appeal, but sentences are almost never overturned. *(IPS)*

COLUMN

by EMMA BONINO

A year later, little progress in Kosovo

More than a year after the end of the armed conflict, there is no progress in the political process in Kosovo.

BRUSSELS - More than a year after the end of t he armed conflict, the situation in Kosovo remains explosive and there appears to be no progress whatsoever in the political process.

While it is clear that true reconciliation is possible only in the long term, the Serbs and Kosovars should already be able to demonstrate that they are capable of living together. But they haven't, and the future of the region remains up in the air.

Every peace process has its obstacles, but in Kosovo they tend to obscure any movement forward and become the only reality. For example, despite the more than 30,000 members of the uniformed security force stationed in the region, Kosovo still registers an average of two killings a day.

Even if you take into account the less-than-optimal coordination of the security forces—each contingent obeys its own national command, there is still no justification for this level of open hatred. The political process seems to have stopped in its tracks and the main challenge in the short term is this October's elections, in which the Serb majority has refused to participate.

The United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) is a completely new structure. Kosovo, unlike Bosnia, has no legitimate government; nor is it a protectorate, like Namibia. Kosovo is not an independent country but a Serb province whose status has not been clearly defined. UN Security Council Resolution 1244 describes its status as a "substantial autonomy", but this term could be interpreted in any number of ways.

There is a multitude of actors intervening in Kosovo: the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is in charge of human rights; KFOR, the UN peacekeeping mission, is in charge of military operations; and the European Agency for Reconstruction coordinates the forces engaged in the process of rebuilding the area. At the top of all these organisations is UNMIK and its director Bernard Kouchner.

UNMIK must act as a government and reorganise the entire society and its institutions, from the judicial system to the public administration. It also has to administer resources like a government, and once the phase of reconstruction is underway it will run into gigantic problems of financing.

One of the major challenges in Kosovo is the policing system. The governments participating in the peacekeeping mission have committed to sending contingents of police officers, which are slowly trickling into Kosovo. It has not yet been determined what they will be paid or even where the money will come from to pay them—or pay the employees of the international organisations, for that matter.

Each step of progress raises new problems and challenges. The schools, for example, have already been rebuilt. Now the problem is deciding how the students should be taught, what language instruction should be conducted in, what teaching materials should be used, how the teachers should be trained, and how they will be paid.

I was recently in Kosovo as part of a mission of the European Parliament with the goal of evaluating the financial needs of Kosovo for the year 2001. This task was complicated by the divisions within the European Parliament, the European Commission, and the Council of Europe regarding financing for the Balkans.

The European Commission plans to grant 5.5 billion euros to the entire region, including Serbia, for the period 2001-2005. The Council of Europe, however, disagrees with this plan and certain of its members think that Kosovo in incapable of absorbing this quantity of funds.

While this may be true for Serbia it is not for Kosovo, where the reconstruction and reorganisation of the society require very large amounts of financing.

International aid for the reconstruction of Kosovo has its own particularities and those who compare it to the Marshall Plan make a mistake. The Marshall Plan was part of a clearly-defined political programme, the reconstruction of Europe, that was recognised by all involved. In Kosovo, on the other hand, each side has its own political project and its own foreign allies, with the result that Kosovo has become a centre of regional and international tensions.

The short-term evolution of Kosovo depends to a large extent on whether the international community finally decides to make it a priority on its agenda. Since the designation of Bernard Kouchner as director of UNMIK last year, there has been a tendency to think that the situation was under control, and attention to the region has in certain ways diminished.

The recent French proposal to hold a summit meeting on Kosovo and the Balkans in Zagreb next October is thus good news, since it implies that the international community still considers the issue of Kosovo and the region to be one of its priorities. It certainly should. ♦ (© IPS)

(Emma Bonino is a member of the European Parliament and leader of the Italian Radical Party.)

UNIFIL moves into Israeli pullout area

Beirut - The UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which includes a contingent from the Royal Nepalese Army, will deploy in border areas recently vacated by Israel after the Lebanese government gave the sanction this week.

The peacekeepers were deployed starting the weekend along the Lebanese-Israeli border. The operation is expected to last two days. Last week, Lebanese Prime Minister Selim Hoss said the verification process of Israel's post-withdrawal border violations had been completed.

The go-ahead for deployment of the peacekeepers had been delayed several times because of new Israeli encroachments discovered during border inspections, Hoss said. "We have been notified that the encroachment that was existing in Yaroun hill has been terminated," Hoss said.

Besides Nepali troops, the 1,000-strong UNIFIL battalion consists of Irish, Finnish, Ukrainian, Ghanaian and Fijian contingents. The move would complete UNIFIL's deployment along the entire Blue Line from the Mediterranean town of Naqoura some 100 km inland to Hasbaya and Kfar Shouba near the foothills of Mount Hermon. (dpa)

US smokers may cough up $5/pack

New York - Smokers are starting to notice the effects of the compensation claims which have been made against the US tobacco industry over the last few years. Companies such as Philip Morris and R.J. Reynolds are passing the extra costs on to the consumers by hiking their prices.

The case heard recently in Miami resulted in the jury ordering Philip Morris, the country's largest tobacco producer, to pay out a total of $146 billion. However, stock market analysts now say tobacco firms simply intend to raise their prices by up to 10 cents per pack. This would mean that a smoker in New York, for example, would have to pay almost five dollars for a packet of Marlboro cigarettes.

The increases are a reflection—once again—of the higher production costs in the US, according to Carole Crosslin of the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. The second largest tobacco producer also plans to raise the price of its product by almost 10 cents. (Die Welt)

Japan takes on US domination of Internet

Tokyo - SONY and NTT DoCoMo, the two front runners in Japan's race to conquer the internet, joined forces this week to develop a service that combines their two hit products: the PlayStation console and the i-mode cell phone.

The combination of these leading products is expected to strengthen the companies' global position in the fast-growing and converging sectors of video game entertainment and mobile telecommunications. Both fields are seen as doorways into the internet, which has until now been largely dominated by American computer and software companies.

Sony and DoCoMo agreed to create a new entertainment network from this winter that will allow consumers to play PlayStation2 games on i-mode mobile phones. This will entail the development of a new cable to link the two pieces of hardware and encourage software designers to develop new products that can be used on the PlayStation2—which is primarily intended for connection with a television—and the far smaller screen of an i-mode phone.

The range of the new service is likely to be limited at first by the slow connection speed and weak graphics power of the narrowband i-mode, but the partners predict that technological developments will create new opportunities. Sony and DoCoMo already dominate their respective markets in Japan and are looking to expand globally. (dpa)

New alluring face wipe

London - A UK biotechnology firm last week launched a brand of moist tissues soaked in the scent of 50 human pheromones—the sweat molecules responsible for sex appeal. Kiotech claims the Xcite! facial wipes make people appear more attractive to the opposite sex within a three-foot radius for up to 12 hours.

George Dodd, a biochemist and "smell scientist", developed the wipes from 30 years of pheromone research. He said: "Our studies in nightclubs show that this pheromone combination dabbed across the wrist and neck makes people appear more confident. Users were described as 'friendlier, warmer and more inviting' with a more attractive smile."

The wipes could make a person more influential in business meetings, he said. For people in their 50s and 60s, they could also save relationships. "The Viagra pill gets the machinery working but does nothing to get you interested. Pheromones actually increase sexual attraction," he said. (dpa)

A 737-200 leased from Malaysia by Air Nepal sat on the tarmac for ten days last year. But Air Nepal was never airborne.

Private airlines eye international routes

After many false starts, private airlines are again getting serious about flying regional destinations

BINOD BHATTARAI

The government is getting ready to renew its call for private operators to apply for international routes. And learning from past experience, it is tightening procedures and enforcing stricter licensing terms.

Nepali private airlines will henceforth be required to pay royalties to fly the various routes on offer, and only airlines that plan to use jet aircraft will be allowed to bid.

But at the same time, airlines which were earlier required to begin services within six months of getting a licence will now be given a year to commence operations.

Alpine Air and Air Nepal International, the two Nepali airlines that had been squatting on permits to operate international routes out of Kathmandu for five years, had their licences scrapped in May 1999 after the expiry of the final extension. The two had received licences to operate flights to India and Europe, but were woefully unprepared to start operations.

Of the five airlines that were licensed for international routes in 1996, only one (Necon Air) is operating flights to India today. Everest Air forfeited its Rs 4 million security deposit when it failed to start flights, although it was later able to get the decision reversed through the courts. Alpine Air and Air Nepal were given several extensions, and even had their status changed from Class A (to Europe) to Class B (regional). Yet they could not take off.

The fifth airline, Trans Continental Air Cargo, was licensed to carry international freight, and it actually brought over a cargo plane and carried out a few flights. But because the aircraft did not have a Traffic Collision Avoidance System (TCAS), it was not allowed to fly to India. The plane flew off to get the system installed, and never returned.

Air Nepal also brought in a Malaysia-registered Boeing 737-200 on the very day its licence was due to expire for the last time. It was probably timed to get an extension, but as the rules state that airlines have to actually begin services to qualify, the plane sat on the tarmac for ten days before heading back home.

Analysts say the government was too ambitious in hoping that new companies would be able to begin operations within six months. Also the fact that licence extensions were for short periods showed a lack of understanding of the aviation industry.

The government's latest policy looks really tough, especially since it had granted "squatters" like Alpine Air and Air Nepal several extensions. But there is a catch; the final decision on granting licences is decided by the cabinet. And given their political connections—Alpine has Pradip Man Singh, son of the late Ganesh Man Singh as promoter, and Air Nepal has Pradip Rana, an in-law of former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba—the revival of their licences cannot be ruled out.

Several thousand seats a month on Nepal's international routes remain wasted or under-utilised, mainly because flag carrier Royal Nepal Airlines is unable to fly many routes *(see table)*. The airline is foolishly over-extended, flying long-distance routes to Japan and Europe with medium-range, narrow-body Boeing 757s, instead of concentrating on ferrying passengers to Kathmandu from regional hubs like Singapore and Dubai.

For those who think Nepali private operators will make international routes more efficient, the performance of Alpine Air and Air Nepal over the past five years is a sobering reminder that things will not be much different. Nevertheless, Alpine Air is now trying to get back its licence. Said a source: "We are trying to revive our licence because we've now found external partners and can now operate. We are now at the stage of launching the airline and are negotiating with the government."

Alpine Air promoters claim they understand the needs of Nepali tourism, and also deny rumours of a rift between partners. According to the company, the reason it switched its licence category was that more established airlines (Qatar, Transavia) began operating from Europe soon after it received permission. Now with its Category B status, it can fly to India, Thailand, Bangladesh and Burma.

Air Nepal is still said to be around even though its listed telephone numbers don't work anymore. Industry sources say a group of hoteliers is exploring the possibility of reviving its licence.

Not everyone can get a foreign route licence. The companies that acquired them in the first round were either moneyed or had political connections, or both. But what they all had in common was a total lack of experience in running an international airline.

Necon Air has had the most professional approach—taking one step at a time and building up its experience through its routes to Calcutta, Patna and Varanasi. With an annual turnover of Rs 700m, Necon will probably be the first Nepali private airline to acquire a jet. The airline is now well placed to expand its turboprop fleet and make the leap to jets for the Calcutta and New Delhi trunk routes for which it has already received permission.

"We're studying the feasibility of starting those connections," says Radhesh Pant, adviser at Necon. "Lucknow could be the next one."

Even so, Necon is using only half its allocated 600 seats a week to India. It hopes to make the Varanasi connection daily after it acquires a second ATR-42 later this year.

Necon competes with Indian Airlines, which uses the bigger and faster Airbus 320s in its Kathmandu-Varanasi sector. Necon is not allowed to charge less than IA, and passengers prefer the jets. Still, Pant is confident that Varanasi will work when the tourist season starts: "We are doing well, with about 60 percent occupancy. Our advantage is our punctuality and the easy embarking and disembarking."

Another Nepali airline that wants to fly to India is Buddha Air. It has done well on domestic tourist routes with its brand new aircraft, but its 18-seater B1900Ds are too small for even Indian operations, and would need bigger planes if it is serious about flying to neighbouring countries like India or Bhutan. Birendra Basnet of Buddha Air says they want to use their B1900D for short Indian hops, and move into longer routes with jets after gaining the necessary experience.

Basnet blames the government for delays. "The government had said it would not licence new airlines for five years to give the private international airlines operating room. But at the same time it allowed them to sit on their licences. This has kept new players out." ♦

Seats out of Kathmandu allowed by bilateral agreements*

Country	Seats/week
India	6000
Bahrain	2800
Thailand	2600
Germany	1800
Singapore	1750
UAE	1600
Austria	1400
Brunei	1400
Holland	1400
Luxembourg	1400
Macau	1400
Maldives	1400
Oman	1400
Qatar	1400
Hong Kong	900
China	800
Pakistan	800
Sri Lanka	800
South Korea	800
Bangladesh	769
Egypt	600
Burma	600
Italy	400
Japan	400
Kuwait	400
Saudi Arabia	400
UK	400
Bhutan	200
France	200
Russia	164
Total	36,383

*As of December 1999

Royal Nepal Airlines is foolishly over-extended, flying long-distance routes to Japan and Europe with medium-range, narrow-body Boeing 757s like this one leased from China Southwest Airlines.

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A month of action

CHHITU ARUN

Gold medallist Sanjeet Pradhan, extreme left, in action at the 2nd SAARC Bodybuilding Championship.

MUKUL HUMAGAIN

Ever since the annual budget was announced a couple of months back, the National Sports Council (NSC) has been whining that the Rs 100 million allocation is too meagre to meet even administrative costs, let alone organise sporting events. However, thanks to organisations outside the NSC, the sporting calendar looks pretty full for the next month. Coming up are the South Asian Wushu Championship, the Dhramashree Bodybuilding Championship and the national basket tournament.

As the country that pioneered the development of martial arts in the region, it is only appropriate that Nepal host the 1st South Asian Wushu Championship. Players from Nepal, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka will be contesting for 28 golds in the competition which is being organised by the Nepal Wushu Association (NWA).

According to NWA chairman, Prasiddha Pandey, 20 players from each nation will be competing in eight different categories. Nepal will field 6 male and 6 female players in *thaila* (routine event) and 8 males in *sanseu* (weight category). All of them are in closed camp being trained by five coaches. On test will be Nepal's domination of martial arts in the South Asian scene as emphasised once again at the SAF Games last year.

The 7th Dharmashree Bodybuilding Championship comes soon after the success of the 2nd Saarc Bodybuilding Championship in May. Organised by Nepal Byayam Mandir, a local bodybuilding club, this championship is a coveted one, not least because of the prize money on offer. This year, the overall champion will walk away with Rs 35,000 out of the total Rs 99,000 on offer.

Dharmashree was begun back in 1985 as an inter-club bodybuilding championship. Initially, it was meant only as a platform for Kathmandu's aspiring bodybuilders and there were no cash prizes. The money came only in 1993. Around 100 bodybuilders will be competing this time in six categories in the contest to be held at the Royal Nepal Academy.

The muscle-flexing should be quite a treat to the many bodybuilding aficionados in Kathmandu. Since the mid-90s a bodybuilding craze has swept the Valley and the number of weightlifting clubs has really gone up. Though the arrival of pool and snooker has diminished its popularity to some extent there are still more than 70 bodybuilding gyms in Kathmandu alone. It should be remembered that Nepal had won the team championship at the 2nd Saarc meet, with Sanjeet Pradhan taking gold in the 55kg category.

Basketball has not really been such a popular sport in Nepal. But because of the growing interest among school kids and teenagers, and partly because of satellite television, the game is gaining ground in Nepal. Beginning 3 September, Nepali basketball fans will get a chance to see home-grown Michael Jordans and Shaquille O'Neals in action at the 2nd Nation-wide Open NBA Basketball Tourney. The Nepal Basketball Association (NBA) will evaluate players at the competition to select the Nepali squad for the South Asian Basketball Tourney to be held in Guwahati in end-October.

It bodes well for Nepali sports that even with an inactive NSC these events are being organised. (Apart from providing technical support, NSC has no role in these events.) Also encouraging is the enthusiastic response of the private sector to act as sponsors. That can only be good news to Nepali sports lovers. ♦

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Olympic TV rights row rumbles on

SYDNEY - Organisers of the Sydney Olympics have insisted once again that foreign media without exclusive broadcast rights who are unhappy with the arrangements for coverage of the Games should shut up or put up.

Organisers are refusing to consider altering a regimen intended to protect the $ 705-million investment US broadcaster NBC has made to gain exclusive broadcasting rights for next month's sporting extravaganza.

The arrangements mean that around 150 foreign television organisations will have to compete in a daily ballot for eight passes to Olympic Park to cover news events at the main stadium and other principal venues.

Organisers insist that only NBC and rights-holding Australian broadcasters have guaranteed access to Olympic Park. CNN, Reuters TV, ESPN, Fox and other non-rights holders have threatened to downgrade their coverage unless the rules are relaxed.

The European Union has weighed into the dispute, warning Canberra that it risks an action in the World Trade Organisation if the dispute is not settled soon. EU Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy has written to Australian Trade Minister Mark Vaille that favouring some broadcasters represents a breach of WTO obligations.

While Vaille has yet to reply to that letter, organisers have said that the International Olympic Committee, not the Australian government, is the appropriate focus of any complaint.

Earlier this year, US Olympic Committee spokesman Mike Moran said organisers should not be interfering in media rights issues. "This is absolutely daunting for them if this isn't solved. ESPN CNN, Fox and some others simply may not come to the Games," he warned.

But a spokesman for the organisers said NBC must have their sponsorship investment protected and that the present arrangements were fair to all concerned. (dpa)

Sydney's Olympic network clicks on

SYDNEY - Australia's biggest phone company on Sunday switched on the Sydney Olympic telecommunications network that provides voice, data, video, mobile and trunk mobile radio services for next month's Games.

Telstra Corp, also responsible for beaming the Olympics to the world, said its Millennium Network would service 35 competition venues, three Olympic villages, the International Broadcast Centre, the Main Press Centre and more than 50 non-competition venues.

Building the network required 4,800 km of optical fibre, 30,000 new phone and fax lines, 3,200 audio links, 280 video links, 60 private cable TV channels and reception for 15,000 mobile phones.

In Atlanta in 1996 five companies were responsible for providing the telecommunications infrastructure. (dpa)

FIFA rejects South African appeal

ZURICH - The world football body FIFA rejected an appeal by South Africa against the 6 July vote for the 2006 World Cup host which they lost to Germany. But the FIFA executive body agreed in principle to rotate World Cup tournaments among their six confederations from 2010 on.

Many football officials have called for such a rotation system, which first has to be approved by FIFA's strategy committee made up of FIFA boss Joseph Blatter and the presidents and deputies of the confederations.

Pressure increased after the controversial 6 July vote by the executive board where Germany was awarded the 2006 event with a 12-11 margin at the expense of South Africa.

South Africa lodged an appeal a week before claiming irregularities during the voting process, but that was rejected on 3 August. Blatter said the vote had taken place according to the rules and called the South African protest "inappropriate".

On the same day, the executive board selected Spain to host the second world club championship 2001 with 12 teams, four more than at the inaugural event in January in Brazil. The 2000 Confederations Cup is set to take place in South Korea and Japan as a test run for the 2002 World Cup which takes place in the two Asian countries.

Qualified for this eight-team event are the two hosts, title holders Mexico and the confederation champions France, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada and Australia. (dpa)

Iranian footballer accuses club of slavery

TEHERAN - Iranian footballer Sirus Dinmohammadi has said he returned to play in his home country because his former German second division club Mainz 05 treated non-German players like "slaves."

"German clubs, especially in the second division, treat non-German players like slaves and offer contracts which are just unacceptable," Dinmohammadi told the Teheran daily Javan, while rejecting reports that his return was due to integration problems in Germany and because he was home-sick. (dpa)

SAVING FAITH

by DESMOND DOIG

Festival of death and satire

Yama Raj, the God of Death, sits in judgement on all souls, deciding which are to be admitted to the gates of *patal*

The monsoon is all but spent. The clouds no longer squat dark and unmoving on the Kathmandu valley, raining with a determined intensity. Now they hang softly about, are often swept from a dazzling sky, or sometimes gather suddenly to pour at random. Thousands of gossamer dragonflies sail on golden wings in the sunlight. The bamboo orchids bloom mauve and purple. There is a feel of autumn—the Nepalese will say winter—in the early morning air. And autumn means festivals. They line up out there in the near future like eagerly expected visitors, so near one can almost hear their chatter and see the gleam of their fine clothes.

One has just arrived, and gone, though its celebration has been prolonged in places where it seems the people are reluctant to let it go. These symptoms of reluctance are hardly peculiar to Nepal: I remember how every year in Calcutta an excuse was found to delay the departure of the goddess Durga, so that one came upon pandals still occupied like late lamps attracting ever-eager moths, or saw small, enthusiastic immersions long after the splendidly riotous night of Bijaya Dashami. Here it is the festival of Gai Jatra, the procession of sacred cows, that honours the recently dead which may appear a strange reason for celebration, but then again, what a charming way to be remembered. There is lamentation and consoling prayer, mostly among the elderly and old, and the seriousness of ritual, but the mood of Gai Jatra is predominantly festive, as if in frolic the finality of death itself is being mocked, while living is celebrated. For who doesn't know that Yama Raj, the God of Death, sits in judgement on all souls, deciding which are to be admitted to the gates of *patal*, the underworld, and which are to find rebirth? The gates of *patal* are open only once a year and it often requires the assistance of a holy cow to push them open with its horns, just as departed souls require the guidance of a cow to show them the way. For, the journey through the underworld is fraught with the most terrifying of obstacles: rivers of fire, great valleys of ice, endless seas, deserts, enchanted forests infested with demons and spirits, blinding lights and temptations that can turn souls from salvation. The holy cow, by allowing souls to clasp its tail, guides them unerringly to the palace of Yama Raj.

So families bereaved during the past year send their children fancifully dressed as cows and sadhus, together with the family priest, musicians and often a real cow, in procession through the streets of Kathmandu. Depending on wealth and status, some of these family processions are large and splendidly attired. Others are as small as a couple of small, bemused children can be. All must follow a route dictated by tradition and all must pass below the windows of audience in the old royal palace; windows at which the Malla kings and their queens sat to watch the revelry. It is believed that the processions provided palace observers with a convenient census of deaths, but I know of no similar festival the indicates the number of births in the city.

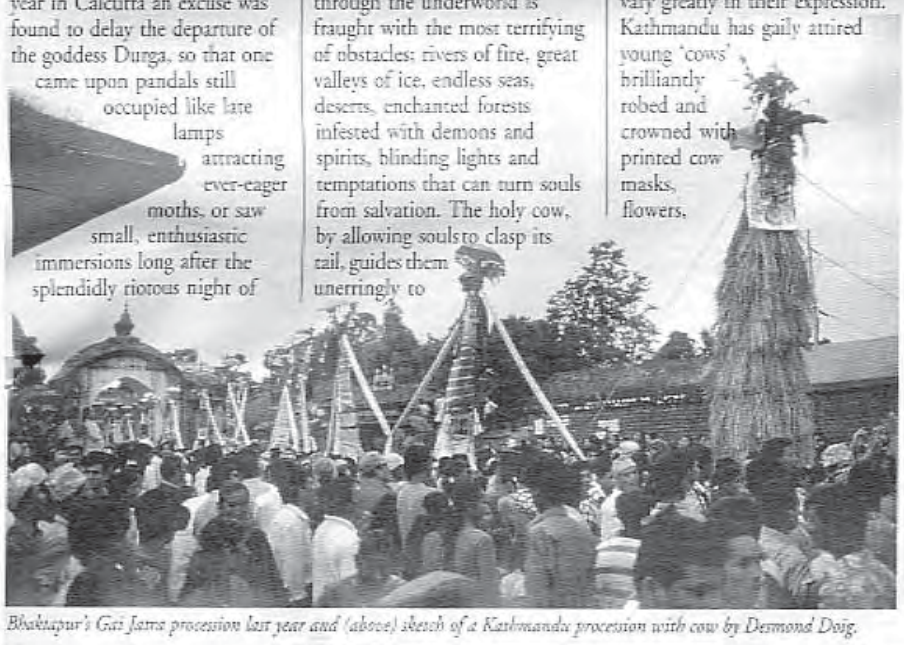
Though every city and village in the Kathmandu valley has its Gai Jatra festival, they vary greatly in their expression. Kathmandu has gaily attired young 'cows' brilliantly robed and crowned with printed cow masks, flowers, tinsel and horns decorated with brightly coloured rosettes and flags. Their eyes are enlarged with *kajal*, their rouged cheeks daubed with yellow and most of them effect a painted moustache. They are garlanded with flowers and trail white cloth tails behind them which, after the ceremony, are cut into strips and worn by members of the family as amulets. Women, from almost every house they pass, make offerings to the 'cows': fruit, sweets, flowers, parched rice or simply a mouthful of water from a brass pot. In Bhaktapur, the 'cows' are towering constructions of bamboo wound about with cloth, usually sarees, topped with printed cow masks, horns of straws, and modern touch, brightly coloured parasols. According to their size, these impressive contraptions are either worn by a single person or carried on a litter by four or more men. Portraits of the dead are displayed, and the processions after winding through the streets of the city, gather in a square towered over by the great temple of five stages, to await the coming of Bhairab. The fierce god is represented by a tall decorated pyramid of straw, and about him wheel the 'cows', their attendant baids and groups of dancers: amazing finale to the morning's devotions.

Patan, the city of artists, has processions featuring boys gorgeously dressed as Krishna, Rukmini, Radha and Prahlad, and dozens of girls as Krishna's devotees. What exactly they have to do with the hereafter, I'm not sure. Whereas in Kathmandu and Bhaktapur the family processions move separately, in Patan they gather together and move as one, stopping every now and again to receive the prayers and offerings of the devout along the way. There are bands, a few brightly attired human 'cows', real cows, at least one masked dancer, and great copper and brass drums filled with stones that are pulled at the head of the procession. The idea seems to be to make as much of a din as possible to drive both evil and reluctant spirits away. For, many are the souls of the dead that hang about their old homes in the hope of returning to life. All they do is haunt the living. The noise of Gai Jatra exorcises them.

A splendid old man who claimed to be over ninety years old, introduced himself and sat by me as the procession went by, saying a little ruefully that the celebrations now are a shadow of what they used to be. In his time, great pageants of dance, music and drama were staged by the rich and the processions were as elaborate and glittering as offerings to the gods should be. Did I know the secret of his age and strength? He had married several times. 'Never sleep alone,' he said to the delight of the people crowding about us. But now, he -remarked matter-of-factly, he had only a couple of years left. Then it would be his turn. He waved his walking stick at the passing 'deities' under their silk and brocaded umbrellas, the bands, the wildly leaping dancer, and the great barrels of sound. 'Next year, perhaps.'

I wondered aloud to some Nepali friends how long the tradition of Gai Jatra would last. Would it not fall prey to modern advancement? In answer, one pointed to a rich procession of 'cows' under gold umbrellas, accompanied by two uniformed bands approaching us. They represented the royal family, he said, paying tribute to the memory of the late junior royal grand queen mother. And almost simultaneously, the widely travelled proprietor of one of Kathmandu's leading hotels came to ask if his son had passed by in procession. The boy had recently lost his grandfather. ♦

(Excerpted with permission from *In the Kingdom of the Gods*, HarperCollins, 1999)



Bhaktapur's Gai Jatra procession last year and (above) sketch of a Kathmandu procession with cow by Desmond Doig.

Bestseller in Braille

MANESH SHRESTHA

Bhaktaprasad Bhagyuto, the inimitable amphibian, will now enthral the blind with his adventures. The by-now-classic *Dhumdhamko Ghumgham* by Kanak Mani Dixit, has just been translated into Devnagari Braille for the benefit of an estimated 40,000 Nepali blind children of school going age.

"I am thrilled that the book is going to be available for Nepali blind children. Because this book is descriptive of the people, its geography and culture it will probably be more useful for the blind," says Dixit.

The award-winning *Dhumdhamko Ghumgham* (the Nepali translation of the English original, *Adventures of a Nepali Frog*) is the first children's book to be translated into the Braille. "We decided to translate *Dhumdhamko Ghumgham* into Braille because it is an interesting book and introduces different parts of Nepal to readers in a fun way," says Kamal Ruphakheti, chairman of Nepal Association for the Welfare of the Blind, the book's publisher.

"Interesting" is an understatement. Since its publication in 1996 by Rato Bangala Kitab, the book has acquired a cult following and is enjoyed by anyone between eight and eighty. The original English version of the book has gone into its fourth printing, making it arguably the highest selling children's book in Nepal. Besides Nepali, *Adventures of a Nepali Frog* has been translated into Newar Bhasa, Urdu and German and will soon be published in Bengali, Hindi, Dutch and Spanish.

Dhumdhamko Ghumgham is the story of Bhaktaprasad Bhyaguto, a tadpole just out of his teens thirsting for adventure. He decides to leave home because he wants to "experience life" beyond the fields on the outskirts of Kathmandu Valley in which his ancestors have always lived. Using any and every means of transport he comes across, from a tin can to a taciturn yak, a contemplative bullock and a Twin Otter pilot's pocket, he embarks on a journey that takes him to many parts of Nepal.

During his travels he meets all sorts of friendly and welcoming creatures. Among them are Jagat Bahadur, carrying loads for Kathmandu merchants; Royal Bengal, the wise and elderly cat who feels claustrophobic in the Chitwan jungle that has been left for animals; Fulmaya, the first woman truck driver of Nepal; and Prajapati Pokhreli, the know-all frog from Pokhara's Lakeside. Further north his companions are Saligram Shumshere, the mule ferrying goods for traders up the Kali Gandaki valley; Dzo Dzopa, "the most talkative bovine this side of Mongolia"; and Pemba Musa, a wrongly named marmot from the Nepal-Tibet border. In Dolpo, Bhaktaprasad even chances to catch a glimpse of the elusive snow leopard.

The book sets new standards in Nepali children's literature as it moves away from texts that are generally didactic and uninteresting. Full of informative conversations the book shows that descriptive stories need not necessarily be dull. It's greatest worth is that it makes the reader feel for this beautiful and varied land.

This children's book is also probably one of the best introductions to Nepal, and is a favourite among tourists too. Probably recognising this, the Pakistani government has prescribed it for its schools. And now the book will take Nepali blind children (and adults) on a delightful tour of their country. ♦

ABOUT TOWN

Films

❖ **Foreign**

The Talented Mr. Ripley -Kath-mandu Mini Vision (226169, ext 512)

❖ **Nepali**

Sukumbasi - Ranjana (221191), Hira Ratna

Dharmaputra - Bishwo Jyoti (221837), Ganga

❖ **Hindi**

Josh - Nava Durga

Har Dil Jo Pyar Karega - Manakamana (225284)

Khukhaar Darinde - Kumari (414932)

Kunwara - Gopi, Tara (476092)

Jungle - Goori (520668)

Refugee – Krishna (470090)

Events

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SHOWS

❖ ***Chakravyuha***, a play based on the Mahabharata by Ratan Thiyam's Chorus Repertory Theatre, Manipur, India. 14-15 Aug. Passes for the 14 Aug show can be collected 8-11 Aug from: Embassy of India (423006); Nepal-India Cultural Centre, RNAC Building (243497); Indian Airlines, Hattisar (429468); Himal Association, Patan Dhoka (542544); Royal Nepal Academy, Kamaladi (221283).

❖ **Earth, Wind and Fire**

An evening of Ethnic fusion. Designer show of Dhaka weaves, Chahaat Boutique, Silver Jewellery with semi-classical musical performance by Mahayantra, followed by dinner and dance at Hotel Sahenshah International, Dhapasi. Painting exhibition of David Douglas follows. Rs 1,777 for couple, Rs 999 for single. Tel: 355487, 353411 (Prema Dewan)

ART

❖ **Live Poubha Painting** Observe the walls of a medieval Newari Buddhist monastery being painted in the style of the Poubha, a traditional spiritual art based on the Vajrayana philosophy by a team of Newari artists headed by renowned Poubha artist Lok Chitrakar. Every week day from 7pm to 10pm at *Kwa Baha* (Golden Temple) in Patan. This is a community initiative not meant for the public. Special permission is required. Contact 528810

Festival

❖ **Gunhi Punhi/Janai Purnima, 15 August**-Hindu priests and male devotees flock the holy river banks from early morning, performing pujas and taking ritual dips in the river before changing their holy thread, the janai. Both men and women also put yellow threads on their wrists for good fortune.

❖ **At Kumbeshwor** (Kwonti) Temple in Patan, a richly decorated lingam, the phallic symbol of Lord Shiva, is placed in the middle of the pond whose waters is considered to flow through ancient underground canals from the holy Gosaikund Lake in the Langtang region.

❖ **The ancient town of Bhaktapur** in the evening is packed with people celebrating Jujuya Ghintangishi (King's Carnival), a colourful procession that goes around town with traditional musical instruments. Known as Gunhi Punhi in Kathmandu, the specialty prepared in many Kathmandu homes that day is *kwanti*, a soup made from nine kinds of beans.

❖ **Gaijatra (Saparu)**, The Cow Festival, 16 August

Children and young people clad in yellow and white clothes and decorated as cow or ascetics, remember relatives who died in the past year by taking part in the procession that goes around town. The street scene is very lively as some dressed like clowns make the kids laugh. The procession is offered foods, juices and milk by local communities. This is also the day the local language press goes wacky with satire, as they let lampoon Nepali society, politics and culture.

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

MIN BAJRACHARYA

The Tinkune mess

Kathmandu's most visible eyesore is hopelessly bogged down in litigation. It will remain that way unless someone rescues it immediately in the name of national interest.

HEMLATA RAI

Anyone travelling from the airport to the Kathmandu city centre will have noticed the eyesore that sits smack in the middle of three busy roads that meet to form a triangle just before the Bagmati bridge. Tinkune (from the Nepali word for "triangle") could easily have been used for anything but the wild jumble of tin shacks and dilapidated trucks and buses that stand all over the place.

Why has the government not done anything to get rid of this blight? Or, for those who remember the wildly lush green at that very spot till a few years ago, why was the degradation allowed at all? But, as the history of this place shows, it was precisely government action that is responsible for the mess.

Back in 1974, when the Arniko Highway to Tibet was ready and the then proposed Ring Road was going to turn this stretch into the main access road to the airport, the government decided to construct a Panchayat memorial park at Tinkune. Given its prime location, it is easy to understand why the government chose the place.

Accordingly, the land was appropriated. Those were the heydays of the autocratic Panchayat regime and the rights of the eleven individuals who had been farming there were given short shrift. And neither did they dare protest.

It took two decades and the collapse of the Panchayat system before a government notice in June 1994 acknowledged that compensation had not been paid and that matters would now be taken care according to legal procedure.

However, as nothing of that sort happened, in May 1996, the 11 owners filed petitions at the Supreme Court, demanding annulment of the government's appropriation their land for public utility. They claimed that the government action was illegal since it had not followed the rules prescribed by the Land Acquisition Act. "Since the government failed to complete the legal procedure to acquire the land and pay due compensations, the government decision should be annulled and ownership of the land be reverted to the previous owners," says the petition filed by Indra Kumari Gautam, one of the landowners.

The final decision of the Court has not been made public yet. However, according to the spokesperson of the Court, Kashi Raj Dahal, "The full bench on 2 May 2000 found that the Tinkune land has not been registered under the government's ownership and the petitioners were not found to have been compensated. Therefore the decision of the Land Reforms and Management Ministry of 3 July 1995 to register the land under government ownership will be annulled." According to Dahal, the Court will issue a mandamus to the government to complete the legal procedure required for acquisition of the land. That is, if the government is still serious about a park at Tinkune. Which, in fact, would be a great idea. ♦

HAPPENINGS

MIN BAJRACHARYA

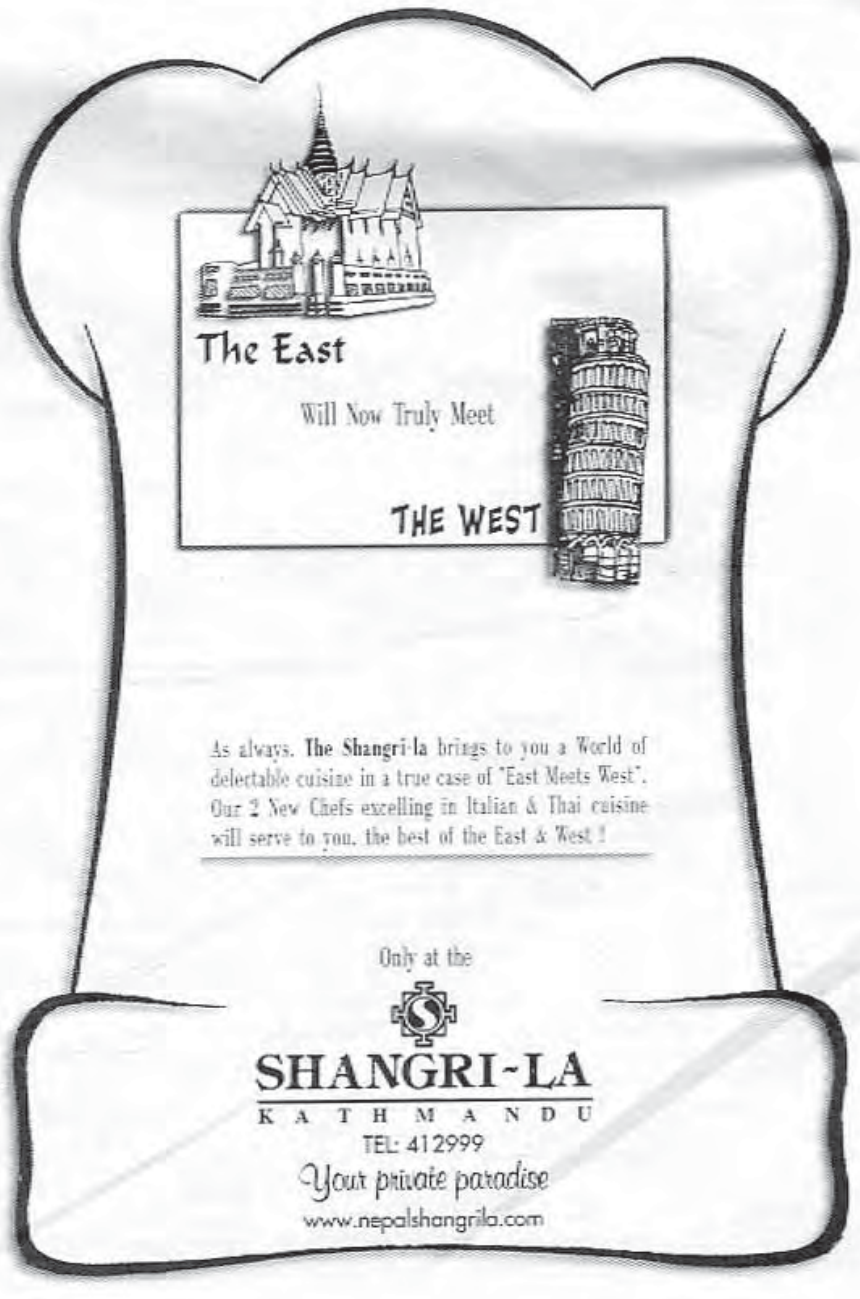
CPN (ML) supporters squatting on a traffic island at Ratna Park on the occasion of the valley-wide strike on 2 August, destroying flowers and landscaping carried out ironically by fellow-ML Mayor Keshav Sthapit's metropolitan office.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

Ringside view of the Bhoto Jatra on Aug 1 for (l to r) ministers Ram Baran Yadav (Health), Tarani Dutt Chataut (Tourism), Govinda Raj Joshi (Home), Ram Krishna Tamrakar (Industry & Commerce) talking to leader of opposition Madhav Kumar Nepal.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

Former minister Mahanta Thakur, former speaker Damodarah Dhungana, and advocate Bishwokanta Mainali at a Forum for Protection of Human Rights organized by the Federation of Nepalese Journalists.



YOUR WEEK

by KARUNA MAYA

ARIES 21 March-19 April
New decisions you have made about life need to accompanied by a positive frame of mind. Don't expect much from friends this week. You are at a very fragile stage of life. Don't be hasty.

TAURUS 20 April-20 May
Your ability to control your financial and emotional situation will help you a lot. Money may come your way early next week. Rely on your spiritual side. Family might expect more attention.

GEMINI 21 May-21 June
You are on your own this week. You need to be more contemplative. Seek out meditative practices. The financial state will remain normal. Respond to your creative thoughts with action.

CANCER 22 June-22 July
Be careful about your ego. Your confident attitude might turn things sour for others. Remain sensitive to others' feeling as well. Good moments are coming your way. There's a pocketful of laughter to share with close associates.

LEO 23 July-22 August
Drift back to normal life, gently. You now have to commit yourself to work and study. Believe in what you've explored within you. Try expressing them either through arts, music or words. You will receive good news late in the week.

VIRGO 23 August-22 Sept
You will be exposed to different circumstances. Avoid entanglement with things irrelevant to you. You still need to work on your past mistakes. This week will lead to revitalisation.

LIBRA 23 Sept-23 Oct
The week will come with new surprises. It is time to get together with family members. Music is the key element to transferring emotions and feelings. Flow with the confidence you have gathered.

SCORPIO 24 Oct-21 Nov
Your misjudgement of people earlier might hinder public relations early in the week. A clash of egos is likely at the workplace. Remain patient and flexible to compromise. Fun is in the offing.

SAGITTARIUS 22Nov-21 Dec
You will be flooded with frivolous feelings. Don't judge yourself too much. Use your ability to the fullest at work. Friends are there to share joys with. Watch out for a hole in your pocket.

CAPRICORN 22 Dec-19 Jan
Problems related to domestic life will persist. Look for a soothing atmosphere around where you live but away from home. Don't let personal problems mix with your professional work. Remain relaxed.

AQUARIUS 20 Jan-18 Feb
Don't give in to illusions. Insecure feelings in relationships may arise from your failure to tackle them with your intellect. Be more than careful when dealing with your partner.

PISCES 19 Feb-20 March
Monetary situation is very tight this week. Health is to be taken care of. Close friends will count on you for comfort. Make use of your creative energy.

NEPALI WEATHER

An unseasonal westerly circulation blew away the monsoon trough that had formed over central Nepal last week, bringing in four days of relatively dry weather with uncharacteristic thunderstorms. But the monsoon clouds quickly regrouped to send a strong moisture pulse our way again. This low-pressure area will be moving across Nepal during the coming week, bringing heavy rain in parts. In August, watch out for late monsoon phenomenon of cloudbursts that dump hundreds of millimetres of rain in a few hours.

KATHMANDU

Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
29-19	30-20	31-19	30-19	30-20	30-20	30-19

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OFF THE BEATEN TREK

by PADAM GHALEY

Looking beyond Lukla

The trek from Lukla to Namche can be boring after the first two times. Even the dogs recognise you as you trudge up past Phakding and Monjo. To Namche there is just one way in and one way out.

But there is always the side trip you can make from Phaplu up the Hinku valley. On the flight from Kathmandu the Twin Otter just about grazes the tops of pine on Lamjura and turns sharply down for the landing. You wonder what that pleasant smell is, and of course it is the smell of fresh air. Who said oxygen has no odour?

Just out of Phaplu, you see why this trip is different. The trail to Pangkhongma is what the Namche trek was like before the tourists got there. No elaborate tea shops selling San Miguel, no fading posters of Brooke Shields. The forests through to Chereme are alive with wildlife, the rustle on the top branches is a family of Himalayan red panda. Choughs soar high in the updraft of the moist and warm breeze blowing up the valley. The beauty of trekking in the monsoon is that the green goes right up to the snowline. The sound of falling water is everywhere, day and night: rain dripping from trees, gurgle of brooks in the forest, splash of water falling from a rock face, sighs of long white tendrils slanting downwards, the roar of an unseen river deep in the valley below.

In Chereme, Gambu Sherpa shows you a renovated 150-year-old gompa *(above)*. The monastery now looks spick-and-span with its elegant cupola. Prayer flags flutter noisily emphasising the serenity of the place. Up the valley, the afternoon clouds are already massing up against the eastern faces of familiar peaks you see from around Namche: Thamserku, Kangtega, Ama Dablam. They are mirror images, the only difference is that the eastern sides are less steep, there is more snow and the glaciers are fuller.

The air gets thinner, you pass the last few clumps of juniper bushes and enter the moraines. Our destination is Mera Peak, at 6,600 m one of the highest trekking peaks in Nepal. You can get to the top from highcamp and down to Khahare in one day. But why would you want to hurry with such superb views of Chamlang, Lhotse South Face, Everest, Makalu? Anywhere else in the world Mera would be a major peak, here it is just one of the little sisters of Thamserku.

The climb itself is not technical, some French school kids even skied down from the top in 1998. On the way back, you can walk over Chhataro and descend to Lukla instead of going back to Phaplu. ♦

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Funny Side Up

by Kunda Dixit

With only a little bit more training our Honourable Peoples' Representatives could join the Nepali martial arts contingent heading out to Sydney. An intensive karate clinic to teach them deep breathing skills, exhalation and sudden shouts would ready them to battle with the best *dans* in the world.

I know talent when I see it. And looking down at the floor of the August House last week, I could tell that the honourable representatives of the Unified Marxist-Leninists are born *sen seis*. And for the first time in the history of this sports-loving nation, Parliament for half a day was turned into a *dojo*. The Representatives showed mastery of the three elements that every great karate expert needs: an instinct for speed, strength and technique.

The August House

During the first round, the UML's Resident Black Belt made a lunge from his seat, carried out two impressive triple flips down the aisle, and emitting a blood-curdling "NEEYAHAAHH!", pirouetted in the air to land a perfectly placed knuckle punch on the solar plexus of a rather astonished Honourable Member from the Nepali Congress.

That day, the Unified Marxist-Leninists showed why their forebears of the Great Proletarian October Revolution rocked the world in ten days. Following Lenin's famous advice to "take one step forward and two steps back" the Honourable Member from the UML then turned quickly around and placed an accurate reverse jump kick on another unsuspecting member of the ruling party, following it up quickly with a finger jab into his (the ruling party member's) eye socket.

If these were actual blows, these karate movements could have been fatal. It is a tribute to the non-violent nature of the Nepali people that all punches were pulled, tremendous restraint was shown. Some honourable nose cartilage got mashed, a groin or two needed first aid, a couple of earlobes were missing but in the spirit of this great sport, all participants showed supremacy in the *kata* movement routines.

By noon, the tournament was in full swing with the quarter-finals and semi-finals being waged in various parts of the August House. A particularly interesting bout was going on near the exit where an exasperated marshal was trying to untangle two MPs who, it seems, had mistaken the ongoing National Karate Championship Cup for the World Wrestling Federation-Nepal (WWF/N) Tournament.

While the Nepal Peasants' and Workers' Party cheered, the Unified Marxist Leninist MP had got the Nepali Congress MP in a firm half-nelson. The desperate Nepali Congress MP then stuck his fingers up the nose of his opponent, briefly easing the vice-like grip. The marshal, who was trying to play referee, himself got embroiled in this exciting match. After that it became a three-way fight, leading to an electrifying finish in which the judges pronounced the marshal winner.

Another interesting match was taking place under the Royal Sceptre. Two MPs had abandoned karate rules and had got involved in a Thai-style kickboxing match which was now in its final round. Two Honourable Members were using each other's heads as punching sandbags.

By the time the final bell rang, everyone present agreed that a good time was had by all and that such tournaments should be held regularly in future. If the August House was so much fun, I can't wait for the September House. ♦

NEPALI SOCIETY

Kumari

Nine-year-old Chandra Shila Bajracharya is just like any other Patan girl. She plays *gotti* by herself in the Gabahal courtyard. Her entire family had gone off for the Machhendranath Chariot *jatra* and Chandra Shila was home alone.

You would never guess that Chandra Shila is actually Patan's Kumari, the living goddess. She does not go to school, a tutor comes home every day to teach her English, Nepali, Mathematics and Science.

But last week, Chandra Shila had to make the annual obligatory trip to the Bhoto Jatra festival where King Birendra came to pay homage according to a tradition dating back to the Malla Dynasty. Her face painted with the third eye on her forehead and gajal on both eyes, Chandra Shila dressed up in her traditional finery: gold-brocaded *cholo*, a profusion of silver bangles and necklaces including an intricately carved snake, and a garland of skulls. She sat confidently in her special throne, protected by the multi-headed Karkot Nag.

It is the Kathmandu Kumari who gets most media coverage at the annual Indra Jatra fesitval. Thousands of tourists visit her official residence at Hanuman Dhoka. In contrast, Chandra Shila is out of the limelight, and she seems to prefer it that way. She was declared the Kumari when she was only one-and-half years old, and she will remain goddess until she reaches puberty.

The selection of the Kumari is an elaborate tantric rite, during which the candidate has to spend a dark night in a temple courtyard surrounded by decapitated heads of water buffalos. Scary, masked men scream and shout: If she shows no fear then she is declared a Kumari. Even touching a Kumari's feet, it is believed, will cleanse the souls of the devout. ♦

MIN BAJRACHARYA

Grindlays DAL BHAT INDEX

In US$	Dal-Lentil 1 kg	Bhat-Rice 1 kg	Petrol 1 Litre	Diesel 1 Litre	Kerosene 1 Litre	Electricity 1 Unit	$ Rate
Bangladesh	0.79	0.39	0.43	0.23	0.39	0.04	50.85
Bhutan	0.65	0.31	0.56	0.33	0.18	0.02	44.46
India	0.66	0.37	0.58	0.29	0.14	0.06	45.44
Maldives	0.25	0.28	0.40	0.30	0.42	0.21	11.82
Pakistan	0.45	0.47	0.56	0.24	0.13	0.04	53.20
Sri Lanka	0.76	0.38	0.64	0.25	0.20	0.03	78.46
Nepal	0.67	0.39	0.56	0.34	0.18	0.08	71.60

All prices are are in US dollars, collected from informal sources, and are only indicative.

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