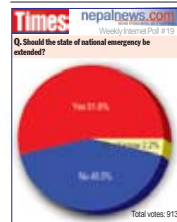




Music of the gods 8-9

DANIEL LAK
ICE SKATING in LADAKH 4

- NDF QUOTES**
- "The root of the violence is in the villages, that is where we should focus on finding solutions."
- CP Mainali, M-L leader
 - "Heaven is what it is because three women are in charge of three important ministries. Mahaswam manages money, Mahasaraswati is in charge of education and Mahakali looks after defence. We can also turn Nepal into heaven, why not?"
- Chitralekha Yadav, Deputy Speaker
 - "There are good explanations why reforms did not advance as intended."
- Lawrence Dellinger, IIF representative
 - "Painless talking of good governance: we don't even have governance."
- Tirtha Man Shakya, Chief Secretary
 - "What have we accomplished in the last 12 years? We have produced 11 prime ministers. How will we move ahead without changing this?"
- Jhala Nath Khanal, UML
 - "If it took 50 years to get here, how many more years will it take to eradicate poverty? The models we use have not worked."
- Chakra Bastola, Nepali Congress
 - "If NGOs have done good work they need to be given due recognition, if not they should be scrapped."
- Gauri Pradhan, NGO Federation
 - "NGOs would like to see the One Window Policy placed within a powerful, well-resourced and respected ministry, or within the National Planning Commission."
- Robin Neoham, CARE Nepal



Emergency urgency

Which should come first: peace, or development? Both.

KUNDA DIXIT
Next week, donors from 11 countries and six multilateral agencies will gather in Kathmandu and Pokhara to hear Nepal's request for additional aid to make up for resources diverted to fight the insurgency. This meeting of the donor consortium (called the Nepal Development Forum, NDF) is taking place for the first time in Nepal, and during an unprecedented national crisis: a costly counter-insurgency war is on, development is at a standstill, and the economy is in shambles. In the run-up to the NDF last week, the government held pre-consultation meetings to fine tune its plans, objectives and expectations. It mastered impressive paperwork, but the committees failed to dazzle donors or Nepali participants. "There was a worrying lack of consensus among Nepali politicians and planners about which way the country should go," said one donor rep. Sure, there is plenty to be critical about. But there are also achievements, like Nepal's home-grown successes in areas like community forestry, decentralisation and the work of grassroots self-help groups to raise income. Bhanu Krishna Shrestha, a 32-year veteran of development planning, out of government now, says we know what to do, we just need to get on with the job. "Everything that worked was domestically-innovated," he told us. "The most valuable service a donor agency can give at this time of crisis would be to help devolve authority to grassroots stakeholders." "Decentralisation" is in danger of turning

into just another buzzword, but experts agree that handing decision-making to local bodies is the only way to begin addressing the causes fueling the insurgency: lack of basic services due to gut-wrenching Kathmandu-centric control. Development expenditure has taken a direct hit. The government urgently needs to multitask: stave off an insurgency, accelerate development, and put its economic house in order with fiscal reforms, re-prioritisation and bureaucratic efficiency—all at once. The Finance Ministry and the Nepal Rastra Bank know better than anyone else just how serious the country's economic crisis is, and are racing against time to raise revenue, reform banking and privatise sick corporations. But reforms are politically painful. Does the leadership have the political will and transparency to wage war on poverty and implement genuine reform? That is the big "if" donors will look at next week. The Asian Development Bank's Richard Vokes told us: "If the government is aggressive in pursuing these reform efforts, particularly improving governance and reducing corruption, and takes rigorous steps to prioritise expenditure, the donors will be more open to requests for support." Politicians like populist subsidies, but the seriousness of the country's fiscal crisis doesn't seem to have sunk in, Vokes adds. Ironically, a cash-strapped government is unable to spend the little it had set aside for development, and is diverting this unspent money to security. Given the near-collapse of statecraft, these



would be serious challenges at any time. But the insurgency has made everything much harder. Security costs are soaring, there are indications the military may need more time and an extension of the emergency to force the Maoists back to the negotiating table. The longer the war drags on, the longer it will take for investment, tourism and commerce to return to normal. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba risks out-essing talks until the Maoists lay down their arms, and says there can be no develop-

ment without peace (see interview). But there is a consensus that the military campaign must go hand-in-hand with urgent and effective delivery of basic services and jobs in rural areas. Krishna Sapkota, chairman of the Kaveri DDC summed it up last week: "Without peace there will be no development, and without development, no peace. The underlying reason for violence is our inability to improve peoples' lives." ♦

Editorial Caught in the middle..

"If the Maoists surrender their arms, we will talk again..."

With less than a month to go before the state of national emergency must be renewed by parliament, we spoke to Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba about the counter-insurgency campaign, the cost of the war, the governance

crisis, the standstill in development, and corruption in high places. Deuba explains why he can't reduce the size of his cabinet, and speaks about his rapport with King Gyanendra.

Nepal Times: How long will the emergency last?
Sher Bahadur Deuba: I cannot say. Terrorism can't be solved overnight. People are scared to give information, they are killing suspected informants. It could take longer to control terrorism, but an emergency cannot be stretched beyond one year. But the campaign is going well despite the difficult terrain and the lack of information. Things are improving.

Is a military solution possible?
I have always been for negotiations. I am a simple

person. I believed (the Maoists) fully when they said they were for a negotiated solution. They wanted a constituent assembly, I told them I could not give that, but could organise a meeting to discuss it. I told them let's hold independent elections, you have a chance to win. Even if you don't, you will have some votes, which would favour a constituent assembly. But they betrayed me. In hindsight, it appears they were playing for time to regroup. But if they surrender their arms, I have no problems talking again.



Go to p3

The Nepal Netherlands Society congratulates

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS WILLEM-ALEXANDER CLAUS GEORGE FERDINAND, PRINCE OF ORANGE & MAXIMA ZORREGUETA

On the Happy Occasion of their wedding.

Sangeeta Thapa - President, Gyani Bade - Secretary, Yogendra Shakya, Subodh Rana - Executive Committee Members



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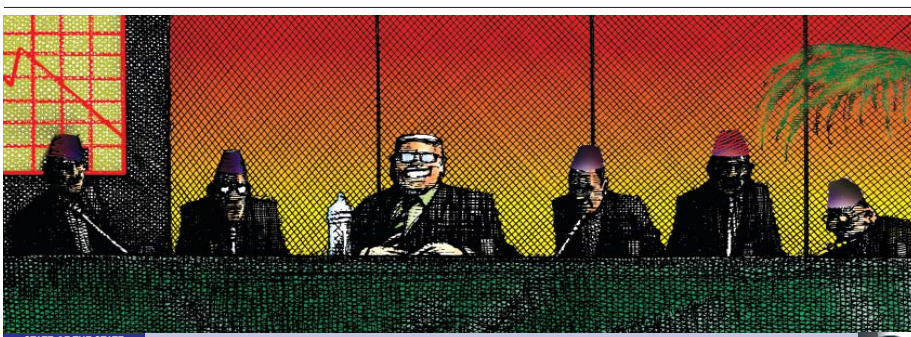
CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE IN MADHYAGAUN

Madhyagaun is not this town's real name. But it is a sign of the times that we can't even identify the town here. It is situated in Nepal's mid-hills, and it is caught in the crossfire between the security forces and the Maoists. It is like a lot of other settlements across the hills: divided into an upper and lower town, with a river running below.

Maoists scrawled anti-monarchy graffiti on the village school in Madhyagaun two weeks ago, they threatened the school teacher and students with dire consequences if they revealed their whereabouts. The soldiers came the next day, forced the villagers to erase the slogans and took away the teacher because he was too afraid to disclose who wrote them.



in this village." With that, they walked over the hill and vanished. The fight against the Maoists clearly has far to go, at least in Madhyagaun. But this incident should also gladden the hearts of the Maoists' opponents. Mao described a people's army as moving through the people and countryside like a fish through water. Nepal's "fish" seemed reduced to threatening their "water" with death. The Great Helmsman might have reminded them what happens to a fish out of water.



STATE OF THE STATE by CK LAL

Guns and roses in Delhi Nepal is not land-locked, it is India-locked. And our challenges are too big for just our limited means.

NEW DELHI—India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru designed the Republic Day parade to be a national mood-lifter when citizens would come out on streets and join spontaneously to celebrate the dreams of the young nation. Under his daughter Indira Gandhi, the parade became an imperial display of military prowess modelled after the grand march of Roman cavalry.

few meters, frisking at every point, and sharpshooters looking menacing from every balcony and window of the national school. When I called a Dilliwala for an appointment in the afternoon after the parade, her answer was that she was not going to step out of her home as long as the Republic Day razzmatazz wasn't over. That is what it has come down to: a tamasha.

themes of "bravery, patriotism and sacrifice". There were no calls for peace, tolerance and harmony. Fifty-three years after its independence, how does such a martial spectacle sit with a nation that still regards Mahatma Gandhi as a national icon? Had he been alive, the Mahatma would have gone on a satyagraha to stop this public glorification of violence on a day that celebrates the creation of a new republic. Even Nehru would have been uneasy. His vision of India was of a nation that would be a land of peace, tolerance and harmony. Fifty-three years after its independence, how does such a martial spectacle sit with a nation that still regards Mahatma Gandhi as a national icon?

"I am determined to devolve power to the grassroots"

Can the insurgency be solved without taking development to the people? Development is needed, but without peace you can't begin development programs. It seems to be a Catch-22. Without development there won't be peace, and there will be no peace without development. I cannot say there will be peace if we have development, but what I can say now is that without peace we cannot have development. We are looking at a security shield so we can introduce poverty alleviation and employment generation, something like the SDDP.

allowed the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) to visit jails. But what can we do, the jails are crowded and we don't have money to build bigger jails and detention camps. Money seems to be a major issue. What do you plan to tell donors at the Nepal Development Forum meeting next week? Our main agenda at the meeting is poverty alleviation. We hope donors will make some pledges. The meeting is taking place in Nepal for the first time, and we are doing it so we can assure donors that we are serious about tackling poverty head-on. Nepal is in deep crisis, and that is a fact. We have to control terrorists, and at the same time we have to eliminate poverty and unemployment, which are breeding grounds for terrorists. We need education, health care, drinking water, roads, we need to modernise agriculture.

We know what has worked. We know decentralisation is the most direct way of doing that. I believe fully in decentralisation, and I had in the past tried to give as much power as possible to local units, but my government was applied. This time, I am determined to devolve powers to local government units. But you have just slashed the VDC and DDC allocations by a quarter. We had no choice. Besides, very little development activity is possible in the villages now because of Maoist activities. But couldn't you have saved money trimming your cabinet instead of taking money meant for the grassroots? Yes, that is also a possibility. I am holding consultations. So you're cutting cabinet size? I cannot say for sure. Let me first consult the party.

What about investor confidence and efforts to check capital flight? I have told the business community I will not do anything to help. For investment, I will bring a law that will enable us to give infrastructure projects to the private sector under BOT (build-operate-transfer) contracts. This time we will produce some good, new laws. It is painful, but we are also trying to set off sick public enterprises. How will you tackle the unemployment that will result from that? We will give employees a golden handshake, we won't have a choice. We have been suffering huge annual losses. Two major banks are in trouble and have been unable to recover billions from defaulters. We are handing them over on management contracts. Royal Nepal Airlines is in the red. I have asked the RNAC to come with a viable proposal if they need government support. Otherwise there is no point paying good money after bad. Couldn't you have waited for parliament to raise taxes, why an ordinance? We needed spending money, under the law we cannot divert expenses from other budget lines. We needed money immediately and had no choice. You invited King Gyanendra to dinner in Bhanuwar last week. How is your rapport with His Majesty? We have a good rapport. We had a very frank, heart-to-heart talk. He spoke about corruption control, good governance, and economic, social and political reforms. His Majesty wants things to improve, he wants to see the country moving forward. I am trying to take some decisions to make sure that things move faster, you'll see some decisions soon. If only we could ensure greater efficiency, but in every government office that is idly-dallying.



What if the party instructs you to downsize the cabinet? Look, I cannot tell anything to the press now because there is a chance that I may be misquoted as has happened some time back. The cabinet size is a political question. You have to keep them in the cabinet so they won't rebel? I don't want to comment on that now. But I am ready to do our core government business. You also raised taxes that you say for security. I didn't have a choice. If we either fight them, or surrender. There is reluctance among donors to bankroll security. How are you going to pay for it? We have been discussing support and I have been assured of help. Donors cannot directly give money to the army but they can help in other ways. Our cases are also being presented to the US Congress. The United States has promised non-letal support, training, and communication equipment.

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Why not start with senior ministers who are said to be corrupt? Anything can be said about ministers. I hear some of them have taken money on civil service transfers. But we have not had any big contracts, so there has not been an opportunity for major corruption. But when the project contracts come, I will be watching closely. I will not let anyone take money on long contracts. Does that mean small-time pickings are okay? I cannot believe that my ministers have taken money on transfers. It could be just allegations. It is difficult to believe whatever appears in the papers. What I am saying is that if there have been payoffs on transfers then it's not major. I am strengthening the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority. I am also watching, you in the media should also keep a close watch. I won't let anyone get away with complicity.

LETTERS

DIASPORA Rajendra Khadka's "Diaspora in dilemma" (77) seems to be an outlier stemming from his failure in the United States. His article is an act of frustration. He pinpoints only the negative aspects of life in the US, forgetting what a great and free country this is. Khadka's sentiments seem to be similar to those of Tara Nath Sharma who wrote the book 'Patal Prabas' after he couldn't settle down here. Khadka shows the same jealousy, frustration and despair by writing about how bad the life of the Nepali community is. I wish I could and come serve my country, but been there, done that.

SURKHAS Rajendra Rai in his letter (478) says the Gurkhas fought two world wars for "freedom". This is laughable, what utter nonsense. The Gurkhas have been exploited internally as well as externally for their valour, loyalty, kindness and simplicity—in the time of Prithvi Narayan Shah's unifying venture, as Prem Limbu in the other letter points out.

TH CHISING (Tanang) Congratulations to Rajendra Khadka for his provocative and thought-provoking piece on the diaspora. One thing that distinguishes the FORN is their complete cynicism as to negativity about their homeland. Things are bad in Nepal, yes, but what are they doing about it besides complaining? I wonder if this is because they need to justify their unwillingness to return.

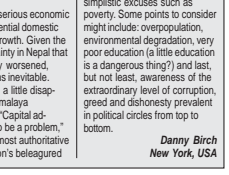
NO WINNERS From your recent stories on the emergence of there seems to be no end in sight to the so-called People's War. But does that mean Nepal must continue to suffer from the economic disaster of the state of national emergency? This time last year, even with the Maoবাদ activities, tourists were arriving for the beginning of the trekking season. This year, streets, shops, hotels, and other businesses are near collapse. The Maoবাদ seem no more ready to lay down their weapons and negotiate than the government. My question is this: what is the role of the winners and who are the losers? My opinion is that there will be no winners.

Suman Pokhrel by email

Nanda Bahadur Rai UK

TH CHISING (Tanang) by email

D. Michael Van De Veer Hanalei, Hawaii



For victims of trafficking, hope may be unconventional



"Rescued" Nepali women being repatriated, Gorkhpur Railway Station.

HEMLATA RAJ
When she was a ten-year-old in New Delhi, Jamuna was married off to a 60-year-old man as repayment for a Rs 600 loan her father had taken from him. She still vividly remembers her midnight "marriage"—her hands were tied behind her and she was gagged to stop her from raising an alarm. Her mother was pushed down the stairs where she lay unconscious throughout the "marriage". Jamuna's groom and his friends forcefully conducted. Jamuna's drunken father slept through everything.

To prevent her from going back to her parents, Jamuna's husband brought her to Nawalparasi in Nepal three days later. Once in Nepal, she was regularly abused physically and sexually by her husband. "He wanted to have children. How could I produce one, I hadn't even started menstruating. I didn't even realise what the old man was doing to me," she says. If this weren't enough, she was raped several times by her own uncle. And then it seemed as if Jamuna had a way out. A village "uncle" said he could help her find a job in Mumbai that paid

enough for Jamuna to support herself and her parents. "That man looked like a saint to me, and I was happy to go back to India with him," she told us. The "uncle" sold her to a brothel, for how much, she never found out. She worked there for a year, until Indian police rescued her in a routine raid. Women like Jamuna were the centre of concern when the 11th SAARC summit adopted the Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution. Non-governmental bodies estimate that approximately 200,000 Nepali women are

working in Indian brothels. But nobody knows for sure whether this number is increasing annually, or decreasing. The International Labour Organisation in Nepal says that 12,000 girls are trafficked out of Nepal every year. But this is an estimate, not a fact—the ILO's recent rapid assessment report on Trafficking in Girls with Special Reference to Prostitution came up with this figure assuming that every month five girls each are trafficked from the 26 most trafficking-prone districts identified by the government, and 2.5 from 11 additional districts the assessment team

assistance to prevent human trafficking, whether to conduct investigations, inquiries or trials. For someone like Jamuna, who was first trafficked from India to Nepal and then back to India, the return might feel like it is now harder to get away just by simply hiding in a neighbouring country. This is a gain that will be difficult to reverse—Article VII of the convention requires that in addition to existing treaties, all future extradition treaties signed between any SAARC countries must automatically include trafficking in persons as an extraditable crime. The convention also tries to address the common charge that political and bureaucratic patronage helps offenders and makes any real crackdown difficult, if not impossible. It clearly identifies as an "aggravating circumstance" the direct and indirect involvement of public office holders, and the abuse of authority to protect or assist traffickers. They also identify other aggravating circumstances—the involvement of an organised group, the use of violence or arms and victimisation of underage children. All that and what's more, but there are already rumours of discontent. "The convention overlooks recent international developments in approaching and addressing the problem of trafficking in persons," says advocate Sapana Malla-Pradhan. She and other legal experts point

SAARC has a tough new convention on trafficking of women and children. What exactly does it mean for Nepal?

found were prone to trafficking. Activists here see the SAARC convention as a "great step forward" in regional co-operation to curb trafficking in persons—the adoption of the convention, they say, means political commitment and state-level initiatives to combat crime, and this is the first time South Asian governments have said combating transnational crime is a priority.

"This is a resolution among the South Asian countries that blaming each other is leading us nowhere, and that regional co-ordination is needed," said Binjal Rawal, the regional co-ordinator for the ILO's South Asian Sub-Regional Programme to Combat Trafficking in Children.

For Nepal, the immediate benefit of this convention is the automatic acquisition of its extradition treaty with India, the country identified as the biggest recipient of Nepali women in the commercial sex industry. The extradition treaty signed between the two countries enlists offences for which criminals can be extradited. The new convention means that trafficking in persons is automatically added to the treaty. The new regulation makes it more likely that justice is done, because the countries of both origin and destination, for instance Nepal and India, will now both have extra-territorial jurisdiction, and be responsible for providing legal assistance to the victims. States are now required to grant the widest possible measures for legal

assistance to prevent human trafficking, whether to conduct investigations, inquiries or trials. For someone like Jamuna, who was first trafficked from India to Nepal and then back to India, the return might feel like it is now harder to get away just by simply hiding in a neighbouring country. This is a gain that will be difficult to reverse—Article VII of the convention requires that in addition to existing treaties, all future extradition treaties signed between any SAARC countries must automatically include trafficking in persons as an extraditable crime. The convention also tries to address the common charge that political and bureaucratic patronage helps offenders and makes any real crackdown difficult, if not impossible. It clearly identifies as an "aggravating circumstance" the direct and indirect involvement of public office holders, and the abuse of authority to protect or assist traffickers. They also identify other aggravating circumstances—the involvement of an organised group, the use of violence or arms and victimisation of underage children. All that and what's more, but there are already rumours of discontent. "The convention overlooks recent international developments in approaching and addressing the problem of trafficking in persons," says advocate Sapana Malla-Pradhan. She and other legal experts point

out that the SAARC convention totally ignores the rights-based approach recommended by the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons 2000. The UN protocol emphasises that the human rights of the victims should be upheld by the countries of origin, destination and transit, but under the SAARC convention, the liability of countries involved in trafficking is slight. The second World Conference on Trafficking in Persons held in Japan last month concluded that the most basic tool to control trafficking in humans is discouraging demand for them. The SAARC convention totally ignores this.

It is also silent about compensation, if any, and services victims are entitled to from the destination country. Apart from providing a temporary "protective home" for people rescued from traffickers, the recipient country has no moral or legal obligation to provide any other services or support for their rehabilitation. Under the new convention, victims of trafficking have little say in their future. What, for example, are the obligations of the recipient country should a woman or child not want to return to the country of her origin? Durga Ghimire, a women's rights activist, believes that repatriation should be voluntary. "Only 5-10 percent of the girls trafficked from Nepal to India want to come back, mainly because they anticipate social problems," she says. In 1996, for

be unconventional



An NGO activist (seated) and a policewoman talking to "potential victims" at the Nepal-India border, Birnagar.

instance, 128 Nepali women, mostly minors, were rescued from Bombay brothels. But less than half of them returned to Nepal, and that with the help of Nepali NGOs. The convention does not hold states responsible for the reintegration of victims into their families and society. "Rescued victims need to be psychologically and socially prepared to reintegrate into society. Unless they are well trained in income generating skills, educated about their legal rights and assured that there is some place they can go in case of an emergency, there is high chance they will either be trafficked again or end up as commercial sex workers," says Nirmla, who spent five years in an NGO transit home before she could start a new life with her family. The convention recognises "prostitution" as the sole reason for trafficking in women and children—a definition which does not recognise that people are trafficked for cheap and forced labour, and domestic work. The definition of offenders is broader, citing "a person who keeps, maintains or manages, or knowingly finances or takes part in the financing of a place used for the purpose of trafficking, and knowingly lets or rents a building or other place." ♦

(Names of trafficked women have been changed.)

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The Indians are coming

Nepal's downcast tourism industry is looking forward to a secretarial-level meet between India and Nepal next week, and an eagerly-awaited decision to roll back the passport rule for Indians visiting Nepal. The Nepali travel trade has blamed the rule, instituted after the hijacking of IC814 from Kathmandu in December 1999, as one of the main reasons for the decline in the arrival of Indian tourists to Nepal.



Indians used to make up 30 percent of arrivals, and numbers have plummeted after the rule went into effect. Political instability and the royal massacre, further hurt tourism from India. A decision on 4 February is expected to make it permissible for Indians flying into Nepal to use IDs other than passports. "Making Passports mandatory is one of the reasons why less Indians are visiting the country," says a Nepal Tourism Board NTB official. "We're hoping that other forms of ID, like ration cards, will be recognised."

The NTB is launching a major push for tourists from South India, and hopes that the decision will be timed for the promotional campaign. It hopes to be able to announce the new ruling when the campaign kicks off in Bangalore on 13 February. Visit Nepal drives will be held in five South Indian cities: Kumarakom, Thiruvananthapuram, Bangalore, Chennai, and Cochin till 13-20 February. NTB is also trying to bring together the Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN) and Royal Nepal Airlines to offer attractive rates for package tours from India. Royal Nepal has bi-weekly direct flights from Bangalore to Kathmandu.

Bench boycott

The Nepal Bar Association, an organisation of professional lawyers, and the Judicial Council, a regulatory body of senior judges, have launched a campaign to check corruption in the courts. At a recent meeting senior officials of the NBA and the Council agreed to help one another collect information on allegations of corruption, share the information, and work jointly to build public pressure against corrupt practices—even to publicise names of corrupt judges. Says Sashi Krishna Kharel, NBA Secretary, "It was decided that the NBA would chalk up a long and short-term policy, which the Council would help implement." But if Chief Justice Keshav Prasad Upadhyaya is to be taken at his word—he maintains that the Council should have the final say—we may have to wait a while before we see any tangible results of the initiative.

Another test

We'll soon know a little more about the state of our public schools. The government recently launched a school evaluation process in the public schools of Dang district under the Education Standard Enhancement and Evaluation Program (ESEEP). A survey team put together by the District Education Office will conduct studies in 64 schools and submit a report within ten days. The outcome of the studies would be used to modify and revise the ESEEP. Apart from Dang, Baraha and Surkhet have been selected for the implementation of the program in the Mid-Western Development Region. All four districts performed very poorly in the annual School Leaving Certificate exams—last year, not a single student from Dang passed. The evaluation process is also expected to single out incompetent teachers, which will aid the government's endeavour to investigate the use of fake academic certificates for employment by teachers in these districts. The program will eventually be implemented in 33 districts altogether across the country.

HERE AND THERE

LEH, Ladakh—Once long ago, starvation and boredom were the hallmarks of winter in this remote, altitudinous place. A bad barley crop in summer meant that hunger stalked the cold months. The long, frigid nights drove people to bed early, after much chhang and rakhi. The days were to be endured, women's fingers freezing in the still open streams as they washed cloths, warmed up later preparing food. Men headed for the boozier. Now Ladakh is a model of how to cope with the cold. For centuries, the winters have been the time for festivals. Before Buddhists, people languished in idleness. Afterward, they celebrated and partied and worshipped in a warming frenzy of faith and alcohol. As for food, the lowly potato has transformed life here in untold ways. No longer is roasted barley flour—the tsampa so beloved by Sherpas and Tibetans—a winter staple. Countless potato dishes grace the dining boards of Ladakhi kitchens. For those who can afford it, theoretically daily flights from Delhi and elsewhere enliven the culinary experience with imports from the rest of the country. And then there's ice hockey.

That's right, ice hockey. The Canadians amongst you will not knowingly at the allure of this antidote for freezing boredom, but the rest will need some explanation. Leh, the capital of Ladakh, is also the centre of Indian ice hockey. What better place for the beautiful game played on skates and frozen water than a high altitude desert region where the temperature rarely rises above 0 degrees Celsius between November and March. Invented in Canada—probably by British soldiers driven mad by the cold months—the game has spread to the chilly bits of Europe, Russia, Japan and even to warm places like Kuala Lumpur, and now India. The third Annual India Ice Hockey Championships of India have just ended and it doesn't matter who won. In Leh, a good time was had by all.

Inspiration on ice

India's Third Annual National Ice Hockey Championships have just ended and it doesn't matter who won.



I travelled on one of those theoretical flights (cancelled twice, made it just in time for the first game last Saturday) with a team of Canadians from Delhi. Two token Americans were also graciously allowed to join the squad, so long as they could endure the communal abuse and frequent jokes about George W. hurled their way. They bore the burden well, perhaps because neither thought highly of President Bush and both were hockey

players for America's northern reaches along the Canadian border. Almost Canadian, they were assured more than once. Ladakh pulled out all the stops to welcome the men from where the game began. Ladakhi hospitality and warmth were almost legendary, but the shock of stepping off a flight from Delhi into minus 16 degrees—the spectacular scenery notwithstanding—took a lot of overcoming. The Ladakhis succeeded. They also exacted their price. After tea and biscuits, the Canadians took the ice of frozen pond in the centre of Leh to play a friendly game against a local squad. With an average of around 40, and newly arrived from 250 metres above sea level to around 3,500, the North Americans were at somewhat of a disadvantage. But Ladakhis have played this game for just two years, whereas it's in the visitors' blood. Despite some huffing and puffing, the Canadians won. And each game brought rouses of approval from a crowd that slowly built to 6,000 by the final day of the tournament. There were serious matches between local teams, and in the intervals everyone cheered on the Canadians, laughing if they fell and exclaiming at the innate prowess of unfit, ageing hockey players who'd known the game since childhood. "An inspiration," one man told me. "Great fun to watch and next year, we'll beat them," said the coach of the eventual champs, the Ladakh Scouts regiment of the Indian Army. But all that really mattered was the camaraderie, the fun and the constructive whiling away of wintry days that might otherwise be spent in boredom and bars. Between festivals, winter Ladakh still has time on its hands. It's an inspiration to see how sport—played for fun, not profit or national pride—can inspire such warmth and humanity. Now, if only we could build ice skating rinks in Namche or Jomsom. I know a team that's ready, willing and raring to come. ♦

by DANIEL LAK



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Music of the gods

Nepali minstrels want to move with the times, but keeping their identity intact.

was decided that all the other humans would give a small share of their meal to the Gandharbas.

And that is how it has been for centuries.

Gandharbas, the minstrels of Nepal, have been singing for their supper as long as anyone can remember. Music is not just their profession, it is their culture, their life, their reason for being. Unfortunately, while they have earned much fame from it, the money has been significantly slower to come. And in these rapidly changing times, the challenge facing the Gandharbas is not just how to keep their culture alive, but how to keep their community itself going.

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

On a cold and rainy day this week in Thamel, and Gandharbas are not to be seen, nor their sarangi heard. But if you enter the alley beside the Jump Club and walk up to the two-room office of the Gandharba Art and Culture Organisation, you'll always find someone here—laughing, teaching, chatting and, naturally, singing.

To any visitor they will offer a kind smile and a cup of tea from the Gorkha Restaurant below. This, they say, is where their strength lies, in unity, the same kind they say with a little smile, they have helped bring about in Nepal with their songs. There is a great dissertation for some ethnomusicologist or anthropologist out there in exploring the significance of Gandharbas songs in nation building.

A long, long time ago, it is told, before the gods populated the earth with humans, there were musicians that entertained the divinities. The Gandharbas fled away on their arbaz, the original version of the sarangi, and the *apsaras* danced to their tunes.

This idyllic state of affairs continued until the powers that decided that humans had outlived their usefulness in the higher realms, and so would be divided into castes and sent down to earth. The banishing of the unsuspecting humans from the heavens was obviously an occasion for great celebration and all were invited to a grand feast. Each caste was seated in its assigned place and served food and wine by *apsaras*. Everyone arrived on time, except the Gandharbas. They came after all the food had been apportioned to all the castes. They could not be turned away, hungry, and it

No one knows where the Gandharbas were originally from but most come from the western development region districts of Tanahun, Chitwan, Lamjung, and Gorkha. For centuries they have been Nepal's mass media, travelling through the thousands of villages singing oral histories of gods, kings, and commoners. Their more memorable songs tell of King Prithvi Narayan Shah's feats that led to the unification of Nepal, of the fire that ravaged Sogha Darbar 30 years ago, and of Jung Bahadur hunting tigers in the tarai. But the allure of Gandharba music for most Nepalis lies in the songs they sing of loves lost and won, of the pain and suffering of the common person, such as *Amal le sodhin ni kholi chhara bhanlin* ("Mother may ask where her son is." See box for translation), of a man who goes to battle and is wounded. Knowing that he is about to die, he sends a poignant letter to his family.

Unfortunately, the changing musical tastes of Nepal are posing quite a challenge to the Gandharba's music. The minstrels who wandered have already given up travelling through the villages, and most of them prefer to come to cities such as Kathmandu and Pokhara. More than just the disappearance of an art form, the decline of the Gandharba's traditional livelihood also signals the loss of a vital source of



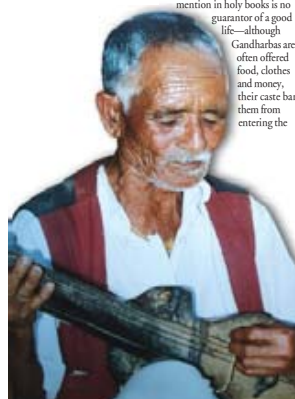
Nepal's folk history.

Sadly, even those Nepalis who understand the significance of the musical tradition of the Gandharbas community do not seem to associate the art form with the people, an irony not lost on the musicians. "Nepalis love the sarangi but not the man behind the instrument," he tells us.

Gandharba, laments Sanu Kancha Gandharba president of the Gandharba Art and Culture Organisation. At a recent meeting, the intellectuals of the capital talked about the role of the sarangi but not the man behind the instrument, he tells us.

At another human rights

meeting, virtually every other dalit community was mentioned but not a word about the Gandharba. And that was why Sanu Kancha didn't attend the second meeting. "I was heart broken. Why should we go there again? We will survive on our own," he says. The name Gandharba is found in numerous Hindu holy texts such as the Puranas and the Swasthani, but mention in holy books is no guarantor of a good life—although Gandharbas are often offered food, clothes and money, their caste bars them from entering the



Clockwise from far left: A special edition carved sarangi worth Rs 5000; the cover of the soon-to-be-released Gandharba ko Mutu; Mohan Gandharba, the only surviving Gandharba who can play the arbaz, the original version of the sarangi; and Sanu Kancha Gandharba, president of GACO.

houses of other Nepalis. And though singing is how they would like to continue making their living, they are forced to take on odd jobs simply to survive. Few have land they can call their own, and many are heavily in debt.

Sanu Kancha himself has had a difficult, not untypical life. Nearly two decades ago, at the age of 13, he started "running" the streets, first of Basantapur and then Thamel. "During the early days I just sang and walked the streets, hoping for a kind ear to listen to us and maybe praise us and give us a few rupees. But one day I found that there were some real admirers, especially tourists who wanted to buy the sarangi. And that was how everything started for us." The Gandharba Art and Culture Organisation was established in 1995 on the advice of a kind-hearted American. It is the only organisation of its kind in Nepal and has 110 members and a branch in Pokhara. The organisation is entirely self-sustaining—members make the four-stringed sarangi and sell them to tourists, and donate a quarter of the proceeds to the organisation.

"It isn't a very dependable or constant source of income, given the current trends in tourism, but even at times when there are plenty of tourists on the streets, it is difficult to earn more than Rs 2,000-Rs 3,000 per week," says Sanu Kancha. Other than singing and selling sarangi, *madal* (Nepali double sided drum), and *bassari* (flute), some Gandharbas have started teaching folk dance classes to curious tourists, or music to the odd Nepali music lover. Bikas Yogi, a musician, pays Rs 2,000 a

month for a daily hour-long course in playing sarangi. Yogi is enthusiastic about the four-stringed Nepali violin. "I have always loved the music of the Gandharbas, but never had time to learn it. I finally took time out and it has been worth it."

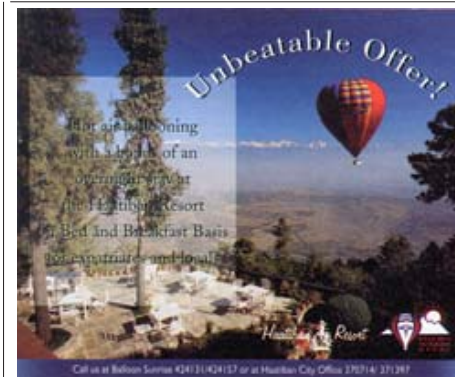
People like Yogi fulfil an important role. As the GACO works to preserve the community's heritage, its members find it heartening when others, especially other Nepalis, take an active interest in it. Right now the organisation is working to save as many old lyrics and songs and record them for posterity. GACO has got together the oldest and

most talented of the community to cut an album called *Gandharba ko Mutu* (The Heart of the Gandharba), which will have 15 original Gandharba songs. It is expensive, says Sanu Kancha, but the community is doing its best to make sure that it works out.

Many younger members of the community say that preservation of culture alone is not enough. Education is their long-term goal, and 23-year-old Raj Kumar Gandharba says he acutely feels the lack of a basic education. "People call us *gainsi*, it hurts. We cannot answer back because we are simple people. If we were educated, things might have been

different," he says. The community is increasingly concerned about ensuring its future generations do not labour under this handicap. Sanu Kancha, for instance, is sending his two sons to an English school, even if it means having to get by on only one meal a day.

GACO, for its part, is sponsoring two children in Tanahun district and is planning to institute more such scholarships in the future. Says Sanu Kancha: "I hope education will help them become better human beings, and we hope they never forget that they are Gandharbas even if they become doctors or engineers." ♦



Mother may ask where her son is

House to house, door to door

They came to recruit

Asking whether we would like to have a job

Our hearts concurred

The major saab in the corner, he checked

The squint-eyed and the deaf, they went out

The healthy went to the hospital and were taken in

Six months from that day

We paraded barefoot

Many are wounded in the chest, and many more in the head

When I remember the wound in the head, my heart shakes

Mother may ask where her son is

Tell her I'll come later

Father might ask where his son is

Tell him I am still fighting in the battlefields

Elder brother might ask where his brother is

Tell him his share of property has increased

Younger brother might ask where his brother is

Tell him the family has decreased

Elder sister might ask where her brother is

Tell her to return the gift she brought from her house

Younger sister might ask where her brother is

Tell her there is no gift for her this time

Sister-in-law might ask where her brother-in-law is

Tell her to cut a goat and have a feast

My son might ask where his father is

Tell him to remove his cap

My daughter might ask where her father is

Tell her to save her honour

Brothers will talk of me at the family meetings

Father will talk of me for six months, a year

Mother will talk of me forever

My beloved wife might ask where I am

Tell her to break her bangles and her necklace

Wipe her sinder, and that her path is now open

Childhood was spent in play

My youth in the service of the government

I wanted to come, the enemy stopped me

I didn't come, death met me

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Can Nepal do IT?

When and how did IT become so central to the business and private lives of Nepalis? And where is it going?



Binod Bhattarai

Imagine a scenario in which all land ownership records are on a nationally networked computer database. And just picture all applications for passports being processed online. Now think of the IT parking bank in Banepa, and the government IT policy that will, in principle, result in thousands more computer professionals in Nepal, growing by over 2,000 every year.

For most of us, the former seems fantastic—the government wants these records and seems unwilling to make them more systematic and accessible—and the latter, pointless. Nepal lacks an IT success story that people on the ground can relate to, which is perhaps why people outside the industry can't understand the hoopla surrounding the government's new IT policy and the repeated pleas from the sector to please implement it, fast.

But a little-known fact about Information Technology in Nepal is that it had enthusiasts—even in government—as long as two decades ago. But it was the private sector pioneers who have managed to join the industry a viable one. Today, though, the government has a ministry to oversee IT and is even planning an IT park in Banepa, the industry remains largely by

the private sector. In fact, many IT entrepreneurs have never been able to get off the ground without the additional baggage of under-performing bureaucracy that they are now saddled with.

The first computer machine arrived in Nepal during the 1971 census, a second generation IBM 1401 that used tape drives for storage and punch cards for data entry. After the census was done with, the government retained the gargantuan machine in a permanent home and that was the National Computer Centre, whose mandate was to provide data processing services to government agencies.

Another census, another new machine, this one a British-made ICL 2950. It was state-of-the-art back then: one megabyte of RAM and a 640 MB hard drive in addition to 800 ggydies of storage drives, which came in four units. People who know their computers are probably wondering at the admittedly limited capabilities of the ICL. But it did what it was supposed to do in its day, and helped to do the NCC's job in business for another decade or so.

"That was the pace at which the industry was developing at the time," says Suresh Regmi, an electrical engineer, who was one of about 12 engineering graduates who joined the NCC in 1971. Regmi now runs his own software house, Professional Computer Services, which has written and administered some large national programs—VAT collection by Inland Revenue Office,

maintaining electoral rolls and the computer election results at the Election Commission and software for share market record keeping.

At about the time Regmi was learning the basics of COBOL on the ICL, Sarjish Rajbhandari (CHK) of Mercantile Communications had purchased his first computer, an Apple II-plus. Rajbhandari took some programming classes at a local training centre, which he tells today, did not even have one machine to actually work on—in those days, TV screens served as monitors and cassette tapes were used to record programs.

In 1983 Sarjish started a computer division as part of his family's software automation business. For five computers were different than those that turned into a business," says Rajbhandari. "In his early years he was a handful of people groping in the dark, not knowing too well what we were getting into." Today Mercantile is the largest Internet Service Provider in Nepal and also the largest employer in the country's IT sector. Its government department often pushing policy or doing background industry work for the government, which had no institution that could take charge of the fledgling industry. "CAN became the IT NGO, doing all the promotion and lobbying needed," says Shrestha.

Ironically, Shrestha's own firm, Beltronics, does not have a major computer division or any related business even today, despite the

grew, so did the general public's awareness for new gadgets. About a decade ago, everyone started assembling PCs—this was, after all, a time when you did not need authorised distributors of branded names to sell you machines that worked, even high-school graduates in the neighbourhood could cannibalise old machines to build new ones had become far more.

At about this time, an initially disinterested electronics engineer arrived on the IT scene. Bijay Krishna Shrestha, who had been selling power-backs and storage systems, took over the leadership of the Computer Association of Nepal (CAN) in 1995. His job was lobbying to put IT on the national agenda—"CAN was always talking about having 100,000 Nepalis using email and the Internet by 2000, at a time when government was shutting down the NCC and there was no ministry of department to carry the torch," says Shrestha. "That goal has become reality today."

"CAN Shrestha spent a good deal of time running between the government department often pushing policy or doing background industry work for the government, which had no institution that could take charge of the fledgling industry. "CAN became the IT NGO, doing all the promotion and lobbying needed," says Shrestha.

Ironically, Shrestha's own firm, Beltronics, does not have a major computer division or any related business even today, despite the



four years he spent marketing IT in Nepal. "I was busy at CAN all the time, my own business suffered, and I could not start the same IT business I was promoting," he says. Even though he personally missed the boom he was in part responsible for, Shrestha remains a passionate believer in the potential of IT in Nepal. He has moved on to different new businesses—from SAFA Tempus to banking—after his stint with CAN. And yet he remains convinced about the importance of the computing industry. "One job in IT is worth 10 in traditional business," says Shrestha. "With one computer you can add value from Rs 5,000-Rs 15,000 per person, with little or no investment."

Nepal's IT and IT-related industry already has over 500 companies—from small neighbourhood computer assembly operations to larger companies that employ over 500 people. There are over 100 training institutes, from the small, one-classroom set-up to those providing internationally recognised courses. Nepal has more than 10 companies that specialise only in software development, not to mention the freelance workers who sit at home and

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The old New World Order

Historians have a keen sense of déjà vu about globalisation.

Dates and protests about globalisation, muted since last September's terrorist attacks, are likely to return with normalcy. When they do, our understanding of the process will be greater if we look back at history. Among historians, globalisation provokes a keen sense of déjà vu: we were here a century ago.

Great achievements—material progress, dizzying new technologies like the typewriter, the telephone, the automobile—existed then, but so did protests against a world that seemed out of the control of traditional political institutions. Then, as now, the backlash came chiefly from rich industrial countries, rather than poor peripheral countries often seen as the object of capitalist exploitation. Advanced countries imposed tariffs against "unfair" competition from abroad, central banks were instituted to manage disorderly capital flows, major industrial policy became more restrictive, as some recipients of immigration began to demand selectivity in hiring foreign immigrants. The process of globalisation was reversed after WWI and a series of vicissitudes: tariff protection,



Harold James is professor of history at Brunel University and author of The End of Globalization: Lessons from the Great Depression.

Balancing rights with might

Human rights watchdogs must never lower their guard, permissiveness is a slippery slope.

Did September 11 mark the end of a period of the expansion of the human rights idea and the beginning of a period of retrenchment? Leading human rights organisations—Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the International Commission of Justice—fear that might be the case, and they have been steeled themselves to oppose any attempt to push back their hard-won conquests. Ever since its inception in the early sixties, the international human rights movement has been steadily gaining ground. It campaigned with increasing effectiveness against public killings, torture and arbitrary imprisonments. It mobilised public opinion against the abuse of State power; in the process, it got the sympathetic attention of the international media and enlisted the support of democratic governments. In the years since the end of the Cold War, the movement gathered further impetus. The global agenda began to be dominated by novel initiatives for the advancement of international justice and for the protection of human rights: international criminal courts, new forms of universal jurisdiction, humanitarian intervention.

Yet in the wake of September 11, the focus of the debate has shifted suddenly, and now revolves around the extent to which it may be justified to suspend or restrict certain rights—starting with immigration rights and the rights to due process, freedom of expression and privacy—so as to fight the so-called "War on Terror" more effectively. Many opinion makers, especially in the United States, have begun to argue openly that unorthodox ways like the hunt against Al Qaeda cannot be won by adhering to the fine-print of human rights laws on the laws of armed conflict.

In the face of this trend, human rights veterans can hardly be blamed for going on the alert. They sense that they have been through this before. They can well imagine how someone in distant China, for example, a candidate of retired proctor associations are meeting to themselves that the rights they are being violated by history. "We always say that you cannot fight a bandy war without drying your hands".

Yes, human rights activists have seen enough of that. Invoking a supreme emergency—the need to fight a common threat, the defence of a social order, the protection of vital national or global interests or the upholding of God's will—is the time-honoured excuse for the indefinite imposition of tyrannical

The middle path

UNITED NATIONS - Rich and poor countries remain polarised on key issues including debt relief, aid and the role of international financial institutions in the run-up to a development finance conference. Two-week preparatory talks for the International Conference on Financing for Development (FID) concluded two days behind schedule, with a consensus declaration to be adopted at the conference, slated for March in Monterrey, Mexico. The talks were fractious and diplomats considered consensus an accomplishment in itself, but many were uneasy with the 14-page document. Developing country delegates said the FID process has yet to reach its goal of giving them a bigger say in managing the global economy. The preparatory committee again highlighted the obvious, they said privately—that beggars can't be choosers. Swedish Ambassador Ruth Jacoby, co-chair of the preparatory committee, said negotiations on development assistance have been the most time-consuming. Only five countries—Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden—kept their promises to set aside 0.7 percent of GNP to aid developing countries; she said, and insisted set time frame to meet the target. "One major donor has never accepted the target," she said, taking an obvious swipe at the United States, which refused to commit to an increase from its current 0.22 percent of GNP and argued against firm targets and deadlines in the Monterrey document—prescriptions that found their way into the draft. NGOs say other developing country concerns played down or sidestepped include the need to rein in hedge funds, the destabilising effects of which were a prime culprit in the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis. (WS)

Burning bras in Burma

Triumph International, a leading European luxury lingerie firm, is pulling out of Burma after coming under sustained pressure from about 1,000 workers and exiled Burmese women over working conditions. It says it will close its factory there within the next four months and lay off about 1,000 workers. Campaigners accused Triumph of using forced labour and said they had proof that child workers were used to upgrade the facilities on the site. They also accused the company of supporting the military government. Burma has one of the worst human rights records in the world and its working practices have been condemned by the International Labour Organisation. In November 2000, the ILO called on its members—governments, unions and employers—to reconsider their ties to Burma because of the persistence of forced labour. Triumph, which has been operating in Burma since 1996, has denied that any of its facilities make use of forced labour, insisting that conditions for its employees there are much better than the norm. Activists stepped up their activities two months ago with the launch of a high-profile campaign in Great Britain, with the catchphrase "Support Burmese, Not Doctors". A statement from the company blamed the increasingly emotional tenor of the debate. But a spokesman added that a further reason for the pullout was that the company saw no prospect of democratic change within Burma in the near future. He said Triumph was working on a social plan to help employees in Burma who would lose their jobs, and this would consist of some form of compensation.

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Jose Zalaquetti is a human rights activist and Professor of International Law at the University of Chile.



Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

As time goes by

Now that the clouds have cleared, any laymen among you gazing up at the night sky lately will have noticed that the moon is passing into the seventh house, Jupiter is aligned with Mars, and we are living in the Age of Aquarius. This is irrefutable proof, if proof is still needed, that another mating season is soon going to be upon us. It is therefore incumbent upon every Nepali of reproductive age and above to prepare to go forth boldly where many Nepalis have gone before, and begin preparing to tie the nuptial knot of holy matrimony as fast as it is physically possible. On your mark, get set, go! And they're off!

There is, however, a slight problem. As we know from the observations of Frank Sinatra: woman needs man, and man must have his mate—that no one can deny. But how on earth will they know that they are made for each other if (as we know from the observations of the astronomer Copernicus) women are from Venus and men are from Mars? Won't they miss each other in the vast rocky maze of the Asteroid Belt?

This is a question that has bedevilled Man from the end of the last ice age when our hunter-killer forbears emerged from their prehistoric caves in the vicinity of the Tora Bora mountains wearing nothing but prehistoric thermal underwear made from the chest hair of baby woolly mammoths, and were quickly apprehended at the Khyber Pass for trying to smuggle shatoosh hidden in their prehistoric crevices.

I guess what I am trying to say here is: when does she know he is Mr Right? How does she figure out that, in the first place, he is the right species? OK, say for the sake argument he is the right species, how does

she, in this day and age, know he is the right gender? Or have the right girls, the right length, the right chemistry? How can she be sure he will pass the Lifting-the-toilet-seat Test on wedding night? How does she know he does not snore, or conduct navel manoeuvres while sleeping bed-side? How does she know he does not practice animal husbandry?

Since there are so many things that can go wrong in an arranged marriage, the selection criteria are very important. This is where the newly-set up "Browse 'n' Wed" cyber-matrimonials come in very handy with their thumbnails of partner-to-be. Some helpful recent entries:

SCION of well-reputed, nationalistic mafia don who has been in the smuggling business for generations, father drawing six-figure income from fuel adulteration, eight-figure income from illegal brick kilns, and ten-figure income from encroaching on public land seeks latest-model, homely, innocent, tall, slim, fair, clean, boarding-educated, broad-minded girl for immediate induction into household. Women are encouraged to apply.

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कपाल बजाज

संसारको अज्ञानको
जडको कटावको

NEPALI SOCIETY

Language no bar for Suruchi

Suruchi Maya Tamang never went to school. But even as a child she had a yearning for learning. When a local group ran adult education classes, they didn't allow her to—saying she was not an adult. So, Suruchi got her mother to enrol and followed her there. You could say Suruchi is (literally) self-taught. She is now at college in Bhaktapur Campus. But in her free time she has started giving girls in her home village of Khoriya Caun and surrounding districts the chance that she did not have to learn to

read and write. Learning from her own difficulty in grasping the woolly and boring development concepts built into reading materials in her adult-literacy classes, Suruchi Maya realised language was the principle barrier. So, she is conducting her classes in Tamang language. This is a unique approach, and Suruchi's experience so far shows that it works. "We speak Tamang at home, so learning new things in Nepali was tough. Most of my friends lost interest because they were intimidated by the language," she says.

When she first went to school, she felt left out, as her knowledge of Nepali was limited. "The whole classroom felt dark—it seemed

impossible to communicate with people and nothing the teacher said made sense," she recalls. Now reasonably well-educated, Suruchi feels it is her duty to make learning easier for her Tamang community. "It is much easier for beginners to learn to read and write in their own language. After they know the alphabet, they can move on to Nepali," she says. "Learning can be fun, and not a chore that is forced on you."

Suruchi took this idea to the Bagmati Integrated Watershed Management Programme which works in Kavre, Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Makwanpur, Sindhuli and Bhaktapur districts. Half the population in these areas is Tamang, so it made sense to try out Suruchi's idea. Today, thousands of girls and women in these districts who would perhaps otherwise not be literate have learnt to read and write.

For Suruchi it was just a hunch, but she is delighted that it turned out well. She told us proudly: "There is no greater satisfaction than helping my sisters overcome the hurdles that I overcame."



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