

TEACHERS IN CONFLICT | PLASTIC MONEY | ALL THAT JAZZ | CIAA DOES IT AGAIN

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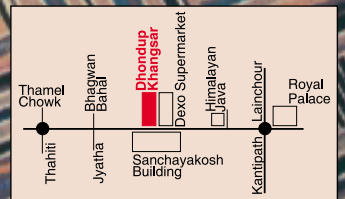
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Letters



“You are guilty of glorifying the violent Maoist movement”

NAVIN THAPA

Massage parlors

KUNAL LAMA'S PIECE READS LIKE A thinly-veiled argument for promoting Nepal as a sex tourist destination à la Thailand (“Massage Parlors,” No Laughing Matter, August 22). Note the dead giveaway: “The empty hours after college and the raging hormones?” As if massage puts out the fire in the loins, unless of course he means full-body massage Thai style.

I think Lama is simply doing his bit to revive the Nepali tourism industry. One need not be a rocket scientist to know that sex sells. Besides there is no dearth of Nepali girls who wish to marry tourists, and no dearth of impoverished parents who want to sell their daughters to the circus or sex industry. The climate for this has never been better: terror in the hinterland, increase in the number of orphans and the jobless, and the rise of consumerist society.

If Lama's idea is to turn Nepal into a brothel or a playground for the rich like Thailand, I have nothing to say. Money doesn't talk; it swears, said a wise man. Put the freshest and youngest girls at the service of 70-year-old foreigners. I have seen it all in South East Asia. Like he wrote: “When she is only 16 or 17, far away from home, skills and education limited, and jobs hard to come, hey, would you say ‘no’ if: the money is good; the hours are decent; all the clients demand only one thing which, more or less, comes so naturally to everyone....” “Charitrahin chelis” will love you for espousing this view.

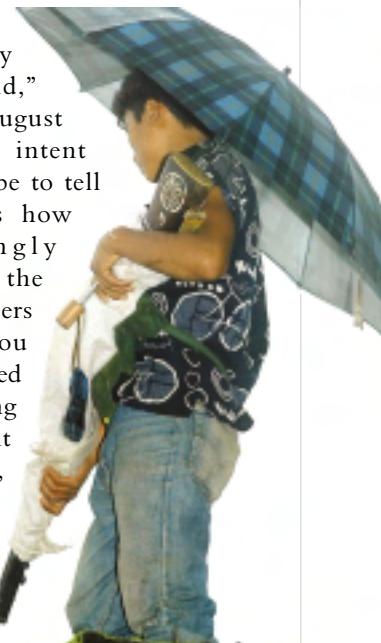
However, my only quailm with Lama's sex promotion is that it sounds like the last pistol shot of a dying man. By that I mean if Nepal consistently fails

to invest in education for all or put people at the center of development, it is going to be left with having to make desperate choices: promoting sex as a tourist industry, however obliquely; reducing poverty by actually exporting poverty to Gulf countries, and even Iraq; and having to forever treat guests like Gods even when they are here to get you and your country like all these smugglers (one Brit got away because even our Supreme Court judges apparently mistook him for God), bio-pirates, pedophiles and “honey eaters.” Is anybody listening?

HARI SHANKARADHIKARI
BALKHU

Media's Maoist menace

I AM SURPRISED THAT YOU WOULD use pictures of young Maoists in Makwanpur who, in fact, boast that they are out to “ring” the Valley (“Chokehold,” Conflict, August 22). Your intent could well be to tell the readers how disturbingly young the Maoist soldiers are. But you have also ended up glorifying their violent movement, which owes a large bit of its success to the un-



discerning media. Isn't it all clear what they are up to—the Kathmandu blockade, bombs left and right, school closures?

NAVIN THAPA
HATTIBAN

Proud Nepalis

IT IS VERY REFRESHING TO BE ABLE to read Nation Weekly here in Maryland. I read with relish Deepak Thapa's "Nothing to Say" on the recently held Miss Nepal pageant and quite agree with his views (A Little Word, August 22). Let's take pride in being Nepalis, speak the language with perfection—to the envy of those who can't speak it well and work on improving our English skills too. Your paper is getting better and the whole team deserves praise.

ROBIN SHARMA
PHILIP MERRILL COLLEGE OF JOURNALISM
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, U.S.

Contradictory arguments

ADITYA ADHIKARI'S PIECE ON CULTURE made for a very interesting reading ("Contours of Culture," The Essay, August 22). Well versed in both language and analysis, the writer makes some very pithy arguments.

I have reservations about some of the points he makes though. He says, "His education [with English education] has not even taught him appreciation of these works [the cultural artifacts in Kathmandu]; his soul has no need of them." However, a little further in the essay he affirms, "Both [the feeling of pride in one's country and one's religious beliefs] have at their roots the same instinct, of self-affirmation by connection to something larger than himself, a sense of participating in a larger whole...However, this feeling is momentary."

The two statements are contradictory. Doesn't "a sense of participating in a larger whole" have holistic connotations, and if so, and how can his soul refrain from appreciation of true beauty? He also points out that this feeling is momentary, but again, isn't that the case with most artifacts? However profound, or deep rooted in the culture, the appreciation of art, like

everything else, dwindles with familiarity, and gives rise to a palpable detachment. The "feeling," then, is invariably momentary.

Moreover, he says of the people of Patan. "...it is they who possess the deepest connection to traditional culture; it is they who have the most claim to the works on display." Agreed. But having established that fact, does the writer still think the same people with "the deepest connection to traditional culture" need placards to inform them of their most cherished possessions, if, indeed, they are the ones with genuine understanding of our culture, as the essayist points out.

Besides the tourists, it is the people like us, the ones educated in English medium that the placards are meant for. Though I agree with the writer that there should "also" be Nepali placards, if that is what he implies, but it will serve a very small audience. It is unwise to assume that the majority visiting the museum are deprived of basic English comprehension skills. And as he himself hints, it is the other minority who seek greater understanding of the museum artifacts. Even if the placards were in Nepali, I doubt if many Patan residents would venture into Patan Museum. Much like their routine lives, the museums too are taken for granted, the house next door, a part of their lives; so close, it needs no visiting.

English is second nature to many urbanites. The hurdles erected by deep cultural chasms in Nepali society include language barriers, also manifested in the reluctance of the young Nepalis to learn Nepali. Nepali language, though indispensable to our national identity, is increasingly being sidelined for the broader appeal of English. So it is for the representation of a part of Nepali culture, and not much more, that the placard should also be in Nepali.

The writer's insights are potent and thought provoking though, apt to the cultural discourse he has ventured upon. More such articles are expected of him.

BISWAS BARAL
RATOPUL

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pass on and come to

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in the highest forms of interaction

between people and

their beliefs

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colleges and schools —

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and private life.”

Walt Whitman

By the

People



People



People



THE NOTION
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EVERY MONDAY

Picture of the Week



PEACE: A nationwide signature campaign started in Kathmandu last week, calling on both the government and the Maoists to announce an immediate ceasefire and resolve their differences through talks

nation weekly/Sagar Shrestha

Catch Them Young

As young as the Maoist child-soldiers are, the way they have been mobilized makes them the best weapons anyone could have

BY BANDITA SIJAPATI

It was a long and hard walk of about eight hours along the riverbed off the Prithvi Highway from Malekhu. More than the physical exertion, it was the idea that I was in the middle of nowhere with two young Maoists—16 and 17-year-olds, carrying socket bombs in pouches—that was making my journey difficult. The reporter accompanying me had walked on ahead and was nowhere to be seen. All I could see around me was the rough trail, the river and the intimidating Mahabharat range. The only human souls: these two boys. I did not know whom I was meeting. The only information I had was that arrangements had been made for me to meet with a ranking Maoist leader.

When I finally reached my destination, I was escorted to a house where I saw four more of the “soldiers”—all of them terribly young. In the beginning, I thought they were children from the village. Only later did I realize that they were part of the militia. Then I was introduced to a bearded man, who was busy reading newspapers that we had picked up on our way and which the journalist with me had already handed over to him. He shook hands with me and introduced himself. I had set out with the aim of meeting someone senior in the Maoist-affiliated All Nepal National Independent Students’ Union-Revolutionary, the ANNISU-R, in connection with my research on student politics. I was quite taken aback to find Lekhnath Neupane, the president of the revolutionary outfit, in front of me.

There were two others with Neupane—Yubraj Ghimire, a central committee member of the ANNISU-R, and Surya Kiran, *Yuddha Sambadatta* (war reporter), for *Janaadesh*, the underground Maoist weekly. The first thing that struck me was that a senior leader like Lekhnath Neupane had only six kids to guard him—five with socket bombs carried in improvised pouches tied around their waists while the sixth was armed with a pistol. Using children as messengers is a widely used tactic in guerilla warfare because they can move around without raising suspicion. But in this case, the children were guarding a rather senior leader. They claimed to be between 14 and 18 years of age. To me, they looked no more than 12.

I had been trying desperately to find the Maoist students. Without getting their views, my research would be quite incomplete. But when I was face to face with Neupane I did wonder why he had agreed to meet me at all. As I found out later, the revolutionary students do not have direct access to the media and they thought the meeting would be mutually beneficial since I could act as a channel to reach out to the public.

One of my questions to Neupane was how he justified the Maoist strategy that only seems to hurt innocent civilians—closure of schools, destruction of school buildings and abduction of teachers and students. “We do not take these measures out of pleasure,” he said. “Rather, we are always left with no other option.” He insisted that it was only after their announcement of indefinite closure of schools that the government took back the label of terrorists slapped on the ANNISU-R students, who, I was told, never carry any weapons.

There may be a shortage of manpower or firepower among the Maoists, but they certainly have one element aplenty—commitment. Young Comrade Mausam, a 15-year-old school student who had joined the militia a few months ago, boasted, “We complete our training in five days while it would take the Army four months. And you know, *didi*, it is because we are committed to our cause.”

When I teased him that the gun he was carrying was probably longer than him, he said proudly, “If one does not have any courage then even a gun cannot do much. But if one has the courage then even a small child can cause immense damage.”

Comrade Sangharsh, 17, added, “It is necessary to have an ideology behind the weapon. In fact, both are equally important. If there is only ideology, one will be like CPN-UML or Nepali Congress. However, if there is only weapon and no ideology, one will be a terrorist.”

Young as these children may be, the way that they have been mobilized surely made me realize that they are the best weapons that anyone could have. The Army may claim to have demobilized the Maoists’ “ring” around the Valley, but the kind of dedication these children showed made it clear that it will take a lot more to subdue them completely.

The intent behind the present blockade of the Valley by the Maoists is to press the government to create a favorable environment for negotiations, as Neupane told me. The government and the Army may feel smug that the Maoists are desperate right now for some sort of breakthrough. But the irony is that it does not take much for the Maoists to demonstrate their reach. A couple

of bomb blasts at Soaltee Crowne Plaza, and the hotel along with a dozen businesses pull down their shutters in panic. It is no secret that neither side can completely overpower the other. But it is these points of weakness that should automatically provide an opportunity for successful negotiations. **N**

(Sijapati is a Ph.D. student at Syracuse University in the U.S. She is researching politics in Nepal’s higher education.)



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HOLY DAY: Devotees and revelers gather at Naag Pokhari, Naxal on the occasion of Naag Panchami

Blockade on Valley

The Kathmandu Valley has remained virtually cut off from the rest of the country since last Wednesday due to the indefinite highway blockade called by the Maoist-affiliated student organization and trade union. The Maoist-affiliated organizations have blocked the traffic from Naubise to Charaudi on the Prithivi Rajmarg and from Nagdhunga to Hetauda on the Tribhuvan Rajmarg. The Maoists have been demanding that the whereabouts of their missing student and trade union leaders be made known. The prices of fresh vegetables and groceries have gone up by more than 50 percent in Kathmandu. In a related development, the Indian National Security Adviser JN Dixit convened a meeting of top Indian defense officials to discuss a contingency plan on airdropping supplies to “besieged” Kathmandu. India has consulted Nepal on the issue of relief. Kathmandu reportedly has told New Delhi that its stock of essential commodities will last for 28 days and petroleum products for 15 days. The capital has enough wheat and rice to last till October, the Business Standard reported.

U.N. help

The assistant general secretary of the United Nations, Kul Chandra Gautam, has said that

Nepal should opt for international mediation, if the present crisis cannot be resolved internally. He argued that if Nepal can take help from the international community for development, in procuring weapons and training its armed forces to fight the Maoists, it can very well do so to restore peace in the country. The United Nations could be helpful not only in resolving the crisis but also in the aftermath, he said.

FNCCI request

Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry called on the pro-Maoist trade union to withdraw its call to close down 12 major businesses in Kathmandu. President of FNCCI Binod Bahadur

Shrestha said the closure would result in loss of employment for thousands of Nepalis, and a daily loss of Rs. 500 million for businesses and estimated loss of revenue of over Rs. 10 million for the government. The Maoist-aligned All Nepal Trade Union Federation-Revolutionary has called for an indefinite closure of the businesses.

Refugee issue

The UNHCR chief in Nepal, Abraham Abraham, has asked Nepal and Bhutan to find a quick solution to the refugee stalemate. The UNHCR expressed concern that many of the refugee families face separation as a result of the refugee categorization, which decides which of the refugees can head back home to Bhutan. Abraham ruled out rumors that UNHCR was withdrawing its support for the camps but confirmed that by the end of 2005, the U.N. refugee agency would cut down facilities for the refugees and train them to become self-reliant instead.

Lottery says SC

The Supreme Court ordered Lumbini Overseas to select employees for South Korea through lottery, as demanded by the government. The ruling came as a hollow victory for Minister of

Labor Raghuji Pant, who was earlier directed by the apex court to let the employment agency decide on the selection. The company had already sent hundreds of workers to Korea when the ruling came, according to a news report.

Border check

Nepal and India have started “joint search operations” along the border to check possible movement of Maoist rebels. The patrolling areas include parts of Rupandehi, Kapilvastu and Nawalparasi in Nepal, and Maharajgunj, Siddharthanagar and Balarampur in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. The joint operation will focus on preventing the smuggling of arms into Nepal.

Bus accidents

Six people died in a bus accident in the Mahendra Rajmarg at Gagankhola, Siraha. The bus was headed for Kathmandu from Ilam. Twenty-one others were injured. In a separate accident, at least seven people were killed and more than 24 injured when a bus leaving Kathmandu for Hetauda plunged into the Trishuli in Chitwan. There were 45 passengers on board and many of them were reported missing.

Brave face

The government put up a brave face before the media in admitting that the peace talks with Maoists hadn’t made much headway. The Cabinet spokesman Mohammed Mohsin said the government had established the high-level Peace Committee but no assurances had come from the Maoists that they would reciprocate the gesture. The government said it would investigate disappearances of trade union activists and students affiliated

with the Maoists. The government will also speed up payments that are due for vehicles damaged by the Maoists during bandas.

Mohsin said the government was working on a “white paper” that will provide details of Maoist damages since 1996.



Abductions in Iraq

Islamic militants in Iraq have kidnapped 12 Nepalis. The militants have accused Nepalis of helping the United States, AFP reported. The news, however, is yet to be verified independently. The captives were affiliated with a Nepali company, said a statement signed by the Army of Ansar al-Sunna. It did not say where the 12 were abducted from, but the group promised to publish their pictures shortly "so that they will serve as a lesson to others." A senior government official in Kathmandu told Nation Weekly that the government had no knowledge of the abduction. "As a matter of fact, we haven't issued visas to any Nepalis to travel to, or work in, Iraq," he said. That, however, hasn't stopped hundreds of Nepalis from entering into Iraq through Jordan, Oman and Kuwait. This is the second kidnapping incident in Iraq involving Nepalis, according to news reports. In April, a Nepali was released after four days in the custody of a militant group.

Koirala's refusal

Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala has rejected Prime Minister Deuba's request to join the Peace Committee. Koirala said that he would support the committee from outside. The government formed the high-level Peace Committee comprising top leaders of major political parties in the coalition government early this month.

Paper committee

The government formed a committee to review the problems faced by newspapers. The committee, led by Minister for Information and Communications Mohammed Mohsin will review the existing state of the Nepali media including the

government's advertisement policy. It will furnish its recommendations within a month. Minister Mohsin has refuted media reports that the government had granted permission to the Royal Nepal Army to open a commercial bank.

U.S. visas

The U.S. Embassy has introduced a new visa processing system that requires electronic scanning of fingerprints for visa applicants. The system took effect from July 15. The new system was brought into practice to help legitimate travel to the United States and to maintain the integrity and security of the United States and its borders, the embassy said. The embassy believes that the biometric processing will help identify genuine travelers and make it easier to replace travel documents when they are lost or stolen.

India visit

Prime Minister Deuba will discuss the growing crisis in Nepal with Indian authorities during his official five-day visit to New Delhi starting on September 8. The current political and security situation in Nepal and the problems posed by the insur-

gency is believed to be the prime agenda for the visit. Deuba will hold talks with his Indian counterpart Man Mohan Singh and meet President Abdul Kalam and leader of the ruling alliance, Sonia Gandhi. This is Deuba's first official visit to India since his appointment as prime minister on June 2. Deuba met his Indian counterpart in Thailand last month during the BIMSTEC summit.

Prospect of polls

Keshav Raj Rajbhandari, the chief election commissioner, said that the commission was ready to hold elections if the government guarantees security during polls. This he said in a meeting with leaders from 20 smaller parties registered in the Election Commission. The parties, on the other hand, have expressed doubts about the possibility of free and fair elections given the country's poor security situation.

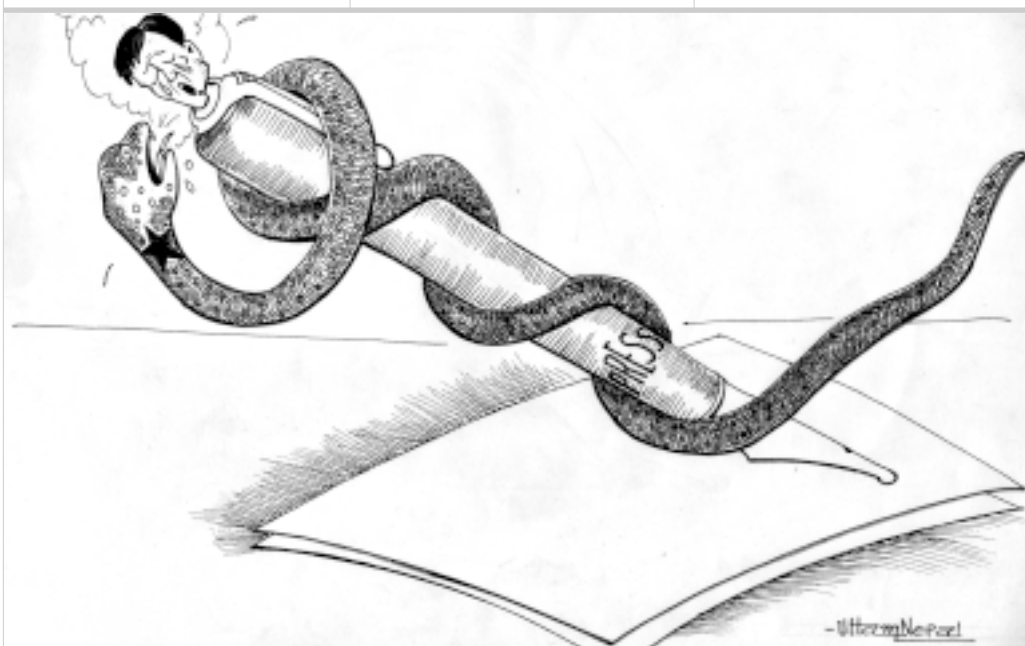
Nepali prisoners

Seventy Nepalis are reportedly stuck in Thai jails in the absence of an extradition treaty between Nepal and Thailand. According to The Rising Nepal, the Thai government had asked Nepal to finalize an extradition treaty in

2000. Nepal is said to be doing the necessary groundwork to finalize the treaty. Most Nepalis imprisoned in Thailand are charged with drug trafficking. The majority of them have been made scapegoats by drug dealers, the paper said. The inmates have requested the government of Nepal to transfer them to Nepali jails. Four Nepalis have died in Thai prisons in the last 18 years.

Soaltee blasts

Maoists hurled four bombs into the compounds of the Soaltee Crowne Plaza. All the bombs were hurled into the tennis court of the hotel. Still, the hotel management pulled down the shutters a day after the blasts. It said that the hotel would be closed for an indefinite period. The hotel, associated with Britain's Intercontinental Hotels Group, had until then defied Maoist calls for a shutdown. The blast has been widely condemned. The Industrial Security Group, comprising representatives of the embassies of Britain, France, Germany and the United States and their bilateral chambers of commerce, met the prime minister and demanded adequate security.



MARLBORO 10'S

Marlboro cigarettes are now available in a flip-top ten pack in Nepal. Marlboro 10's is available in two pack variations, Full Flavor and Lights, and is priced at Rs. 38. Marlboro is already available in Nepal in the Flip-top 20's pack format, priced at Rs. 75. Marlboro hopes that the introduction of the new pack in Nepal will offer greater choice and convenience to consumers in line with the wide availability of the 10's pack format in the Nepal market.



NIC BANK REPORTS PROFIT

In a repeat of last year's performance, Nepal Industrial and Commercial Bank recorded a 158 percent increase in net profit to Rs. 67 million based on a 51 percent growth in its operating profit to Rs. 152 million in fiscal year 2003-04. In the previous FY the bank had registered a 50 percent growth in its operating profit and 271 percent growth in net profit. NIC Bank had a Capital Adequacy Ratio of almost 14 percent at the year-end, as against 11 percent stipulated by Nepal Rastra Bank, signifying adequate safety and security. The Bank's gross non-performing loans rate is 3.9 percent, falling within international norms.

EBL OPENS AT BIRGUNJ DRY PORT

Everest Bank Limited has opened a branch at the Birgunj dry port, its fifteenth in the country. The bank has signed an accord with Nepal Rastra Bank that gives it the authority to collect customs duty and other government revenues at the dry port. It is also in the process of opening its extension counter at the customs point in Birgunj. The banks says that it is committed to providing most efficient and professional services to the importers and exporters at its branch at

both Birgunj outlets. The branch at dry port will be fully computerized and will offer the Anywhere Branch Banking System, linking it with all the branches of the Valley and also with other branches in major cities of the country.

QATAR AIRWAYS CARGO RECEIVES ISO CERTIFICATION

Qatar Airways cargo division has received the coveted certification of ISO 9001:2000 standards from International Organization for Standardization. The certificate was awarded for Qatar Airways Cargo's exceptional capacity and steady growth in the fields of airfreight space sales, reservation and handling, which includes transportation by air, as well as delivery to the consignee. According to Qatar Airways CEO Akbar Al Baker, the certificate "better equips the cargo division to offer its customers a focused service based on timely delivery of consignments."

The cargo section has seen an increase in revenue of more than 50 per cent for the last three years. For the financial year 2003/2004 the growth figures are exceeding 77 per cent, which categorizes Qatar Airways as one of the fastest growing cargo operations in the world.

BEAUTI & BOUTIKA 2004

Kathmandu Exhibitions is organizing an event called Beauti & Boutika 2004 from September 9 to 13 at the Birendra International Convention Center. The exhibition is aimed at creating awareness on the use of new cosmetic products. The event will help cosmetic goods businesses market their products. There will be 28 different stalls at the venue, and organizers are expecting over 25,000 visitors during the event.

TOURISM IN KOLKATA

The Royal Nepalese Consulate and the Nepal Tourism Board jointly organized a press conference in Kolkata to promote Nepali tourism in the Indian city on August 16. According to the Royal Nepalese Consulate-Kolkata, a large number of journalists and media persons were present during the press conference. Royal Nepalese Consul General Yubaraj Bhusal addressed the press conference and said that tourism holds special importance in Nepal. He highlighted the importance of Indian tourists to Nepali tourism. He also reminded media persons that Indian nationals don't need visas to enter Nepal; a voter ID or passport is enough to travel by air. The Nepal Tourism Board will participate in the Travel & Tourism Fair-Kolkata, which starts from August 19.

FREQUENT FLYER BY INDIAN AIRLINES

Indian Airlines recently announced the launching of a Frequent Flyer Program for the residents of Nepal. One of the features of being a frequent flyer will be the privilege of carrying 10 kilograms of excess baggage. In the program, passengers earn mileage points whenever they fly Indian Airlines, Alliance Air, Air India, Air France and other code sharing flights like Lufthansa, Thai Airways, Singapore Airlines, and Emirates. Mileage points could be earned both on International flights and IA Flights within India. After earning mileage points passengers can redeem their miles for free tickets to over 300 destinations across India and around the world. Services include tele-check in, separate counters at metro airports and priority confirmation on wait-list tickets, among others.



Murdered

Dekendra Raj Thapa, 34, a Radio Nepal reporter, was killed by the Maoists on August 11 in Dailekh. Thapa was in the Maoist custody since he was kidnapped on June 26. The Maoist "Jan Sarkar" had labeled 10 charges against Thapa, the prime one being that he was a government spy. None of the charges were well-founded. Thapa ran into trouble with the Maoists when he asked them to return construction materials gathered for a local drinking water project he was heading.

Thapa was also an active human rights activist. He was an advisor to the Human Rights and Peace Society. The Maoists began hounding Thapa since last year when he welcomed the King in Dailekh as a master of ceremony at a local function. The King was on a whirlwind tour of the Mid West, which has traditionally been a Maoist stronghold. News reports say Thapa's wife and three children—two daughters and a son, the eldest daughter being seven years of age—are still in a state of shock. Human rights organizations and the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) have condemned the killing. In a joint statement, FNJ, HURPES, INSEC, SAFMA, CEHURDES and HURON have called on the Maoists to issue a public apology and provide compensation to the victim's family. FNJ organized nationwide protests against the killing. Journalists, artists and other professional groups have held rallies in support of human rights and press freedom all over the country.

According to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), last year alone as many as 80 Nepali journalists were attacked, harassed, arrested, detained or kidnapped by the government and the Maoists. Some of them were killed. The Maoists have issued death threats against 10 other journalists.



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Proposed Revised Flight Schedule
(Covering remote sectors)
Effective from 25 JUN-15 SEP'04

From	To	Flight Nto.	Days of Operation	Dep. Time	Arr. Time	Rupee Tariff One way	Dollar Tariff One way	Remarks
Kathmandu	Lukla	YA 111	Daily	0630	0705	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA 101	Daily	0635	0710	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA107	Daily	0810	0845	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA113	1,2,3,4,5,7	0815	0850	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Rumjatar	YA 221	2,4,7	0950	1025	1245	61	DHC-6/300
	Phaplu	YA 181	1,3,5	0955	1030	1480	85	DHC-6/300
	Manang	YA 601	6	0815	0915	2995	122	DHC-6/300
	Simara	YA 147	Daily	1135	1200	970	55	DHC-6/300
	Simara	YA 141	Daily	1300	1325	970	55	DHC-6/300
	Simara	YA 143	Daily	1430	1455	970	55	DHC-6/300
	Bharatpur	YA 173	Daily	1115	1140	1160	61	DHC-6/300
	Bharatpur	YA 175	Daily	1400	1425	1160	61	DHC-6/300
	Biratnagar	YA 151	Daily	0700	0740	2585	85	SAAB 340B
	Biratnagar	YA 153	Daily	1040	1120	2585	85	SAAB 340B
	Biratnagar	YA 155	Daily	1620	1700	2585	85	SAAB 340B
	Pokhara	YA 131	Daily	0905	0930	1710	67	SAAB 340B
	Pokhara	YA 135	Daily	1530	1555	1710	67	SAAB 340B
	Bhadrapur	YA 121	Daily	1200	1250	2950	109	SAAB 340B
	Nepalgunj	YA 177	Daily	1245	1345	3500	109	SAAB 340B
	Bhairahawa	YA 163	Daily	1425	1500	2220	79	SAAB 340B
Biratnagar	Kathmandu	YA 152	Daily	0800	0840	2585	85	SAAB 340B
Biratnagar	Kathmandu	YA 154	Daily	1140	1220	2585	85	SAAB 340B
Biratnagar	Kathmandu	YA 156	Daily	1720	1800	2585	85	SAAB 340B
Pokhara	Kathmandu	YA 132	Daily	0950	1015	1710	67	SAAB 340B
Pokhara	Kathmandu	YA 136	Daily	1615	1640	1710	67	SAAB 340B
Bhadrapur	Kathmandu	YA 122	Daily	1310	1400	2950	109	SAAB 340B
Nepalgunj	Kathmandu	YA 178	Daily	1405	1505	3500	109	SAAB 340B
Bhairahawa	Kathmandu	YA 164	Daily	1520	1555	2220	79	SAAB 340B
Lukla	Kathmandu	YA 112	Daily	0720	0755	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 102	Daily	0725	0800	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 108	Daily	0900	0935	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 114	1,2,3,4,5,7	0905	0940	1665	91	DHC-6/300
Rumjatar	Kathmandu	YA 222	2,4,7	1040	1115	1245	79	DHC-6/300
Phaplu	Kathmandu	YA 182	1,3,5	1045	1120	1480	85	DHC-6/300
Manang	Kathmandu	YA 602	6	0930	1030	2995	122	DHC-6/300
Simara	Kathmandu	YA 148	Daily	1215	1240	970	55	DHC-6/300
Simara	Kathmandu	YA142	Daily	1340	1405	970	55	DHC-6/300
Simara	Kathmandu	YA144	Daily	1510	1535	970	55	DHC-6/300
Bharatpur	Kathmandu	YA 174	Daily	1155	1220	1160	61	DHC-6/300
Bharatpur	Kathmandu	YA 176	Daily	1440	1505	1160	61	DHC-6/300
Nepalgunj	Dolpa	YA 717	1	0630	0715	1315	85	DHC-6/300
	Simikot	YA 711	4	0630	0730	1800	96	DHC-6/300
Dolpa	Nepalgunj	YA 718	1	0730	0815	1315	85	DHC-6/300
Simikot	Nepalgunj	YA 712	4	0745	0845	1800	96	DHC-6/300
Surkhet	Jumla	YA 713	2	0705	0740	970	63	DHC-6/300
	Rara	YA 715	3	0705	0745	1800	96	DHC-6/300
Jumla	Surkhet	YA 714	2	0755	0830	970	63	DHC-6/300
Rara	Surkhet	YA 716	3	0800	0845	1800	96	DHC-6/300

Monday 1, Tuesday 2, Wednesday 3, Thursday 4, Friday 5, Saturday 6, Sunday 7

■ Subject to change without prior notice.

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GHOST TOWNS

Business has been bad for four straight days—ever since the Maoist blockade of the capital began on Wednesday

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI IN NAUBISE

NARHARI (IDENTIFIED BY ONE name), who runs Hira Hotel & Lodge in Naubise, used to sleep well when the highway was busy. The noise of screeching vehicles all night meant more people, safety and better business too. Now the silence in the nearest highway town from Kathmandu (25km away) haunts him, he said.

Business has been bad for a record four straight days—ever since the Maoist blockade of the capital began on

Wednesday. “It’s a rare sight to see kitchens in 30 odd hotels here so quiet,” he said. “They would be busy with steaming *dal bhat*.” But there are no hungry bus passengers who dropped in for a meal when buses to Kathmandu—either from the Tribhuvan or Pritivi Highway—stopped here before making an uphill journey through the hairpin bends to the capital.

“Hotels in Naubise would make up to Rs. 10,000-20,000 everyday,” said Narhari, who could offer us only soft drinks and biscuits. All his friends from

neighboring hotels and restaurants had gathered in his hotel. To make most of their free time, they were playing cards and watching television. His stall had nothing on display, not even the regular *chana*, *aalu* and *chiura* eateries like his instantly offered customers the moment they sat down with their baggage. “It gets scary around here when all you can now hear is dogs howling in the night,” he said. “Strange, never heard that noise before.”

The story of Binod Upreti who runs a telephone booth in Naubise is just



about the same. “Buses ran around through the night,” said Upreti, who too had closed his shop and joined us to see how we would photograph children playing in front of three oil tankers parked on the deserted highway. These tankers were among those few that had actually dared to defy the Maoist ban in a bid to make it to Kathmandu. A truck loaded with passengers, and not cargo, was charging up to Rs. 30 for a ride till Mahadevbesi, a short ride down the road. No bus was in sight.

“The number of incoming and outgoing vehicles have almost doubled over the last three days,” said a security officer in Thankot, the entry point to Kathmandu. “But the numbers are still far too negligible compared to normal days.” On a normal day, some 2,400 vehicles pass through the transit point—half of them incoming.

On Saturday, Thankot recorded 277 vehicles entering the Valley while some 500 departed between 6 a.m. to 5 p.m. On Thursday, only 82 vehicles came in and some 150 left the Valley.

“Our records show there has yet been no entry of vehicles bringing in food grains into Kathmandu,” said the security officer. It means Kathmandu could be suffering from a massive food shortage in the coming weeks—a thesis Minister of Supplies Ishwore Pokharel shrugged off during a press conference on Friday.

The government maintains it has made all “necessary arrangements” to keep supplies of essential commodities into the Valley smooth. On our drive from Kathmandu to Naubise, we noticed the heavy presence of security forces all along Prithivi Highway. Locals told us the situation was the same beyond Naubise and Dhading, the area that has been notorious for Maoist activities in the recent months.

But like most people in Kathmandu we talked to, locals in the highway towns like Naubise were hopeful the blockade wouldn’t last long.

“Something will happen in the next few days,” said Narhari, while we boarded our motorcycle and paid for the soft drinks. “Otherwise, we’ll have to survive by eating grass. We will run out of food if this blockade continues.” **N**



ANGRY PRESS

The Nepali press is finally angry about Maoist murders. Too bad it took a tragedy so close to home to finally wake them up.

BY AJIT BARAL

THE MAOISTS KILLED DAILEKH-based Radio Nepal reporter Dekendra Raj Thapa on August 11. Thapa had been summoned by the Maoists, supposedly to discuss a drinking water project that he was managing for the local community. The reason given for his death: Spying against the Maoists and speaking at a government-sponsored program organized to felicitate the King while he was on a visit to the Midwest last year.

Last Wednesday the Federation of Nepalese Journalists staged a rally at Ratna Park to protest the murder. More than 200 journalists, human rights activists and lawyers showed up. The president of the federation, Taranath Dahal, said, “This is the first time that professional groups have come together to formally protest against human rights violations by the Maoists.”

This certainly was not the first time that a journalist has been a victim. Last

year the Maoists killed six. The murder of Gyanendra Khadka in Sindhupalchowk in September did draw some protests, but they were not widespread. Significantly, the current protests have a different tone and tenor than before. The difference may signal an important shift in the way civil society now views the Maoists.

Until recently, many Nepalis were willing to give the Maoists the benefit of the doubt. The violence was distressing, but some of the rebels’ rhetoric struck a chord with ordinary people, and there were still calls, including from the mainstream media, to listen to the Maoists’ views. The media, at least, are singing a different tune now.

The day after the journalists’ protest in Ratna Park, an editorial in Rajdhani took pains to remind the Maoists that their movement would have gone unnoticed by the international community had it not been for the media. “India is also suffering from insurgencies of different sorts. But these insurgencies at

most get bite-sized space in Indian newspapers. In Nepal, however, Maoists have hogged big newspaper space,” said the editorial. The leftist writer Khagendra Sangroula thinks that Nepali journalists had gone a step beyond the Maoists, and have been publicizing the insurrection rather than just reporting it. He says, “Judging by the editorials now, the media seems to have made a volte-face in their treatment of the Maoists.”

The about-face is almost universal, though it remains to be seen whether it will be a lasting trend. Almost all newspapers have now directed their wrath at

tray themselves as a political force that stands in favor of talks, they should respect press freedom by seeking a public apology for the atrocity against a representative of the media.”

The massive coverage of the protest by the national dailies has rubbed off on human rights activists, lawyers and intellectuals outside the capital, and they have also picked up the protest. There have been demonstrations in various districts, and NGOs have joined forces with the media. The Collective Campaign for Peace and five other organizations issued a joint press statement on Wednesday, the day the news

Federation of Journalists, the largest umbrella organization, called for action to protect journalists in Nepal. “The continuing crisis facing journalists and media staff is a threat to democracy,” it said. In an open letter addressed to Maoist supremo Prachanda, Amnesty International expressed concern over abductions, killings and the blockade of Kathmandu by the Maoists. It appealed to the Maoist leadership “to uphold [its] previous commitments to abide by the fundamental human rights standards and the Geneva Convention.” This, they say, means complying with minimum humanitarian standards, including prohibitions on taking hostages and on summary executions.

Reporters Without Borders also expressed shock and outrage over the murder of Thapa. “We are revolted by this barbaric murder,” it said. The Paris-based organization has put Maoist leader Prachanda in its worldwide list of 37 “predators of press freedom.”

The Maoists may not be listening. They have gotten the media attention they wanted, enough to choke the capital with nothing more than a statement and to close major businesses with just a threat and a few small bangs. Why should they take advice from journalists who have, mostly unwittingly, done as the rebels wanted?

Media watchers say

Nepali editors are finally realizing the adverse effects their enthusiastic and sensationalized coverage of the violence and of the Maoists has had on people. “Civil society has always been openly opposed to Maoist atrocities,” says Arjun Karki, president of the NGO Federation of Nepal. “The current outrage is a sign of media solidarity.” It’s about time. **N**



AND MORE: Another government office is bombed

the Maoists’ killing spree. Kantipur and The Kathmandu Post carried front-page editorials last Thursday blasting the Maoists. Kantipur said that the attack on the media would harm people’s access to information, and that it shows that the Maoists are intent on destroying the achievements of the 1990 Jana Andolan. “If the Maoists want to por-

of Thapa’s death was splashed on the front pages. The statement condemned not just the killing but also death warrants issued by the Maoists to 10 journalists, including Harihar Singh Rathore and Bed Prakash Timsina of Kantipur.

The anger has been felt beyond the national borders. The International

GONE TO THE DOGS

Big increases in the number of tourists visiting Nepal in recent months had buoyed spirits in the industry. After the bomb attack at the Soaltee, all bets are off.

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

JUST AS NEPAL'S beleaguered tourism industry was feeling optimistic after posting modest growth last year, bad news has dimmed hopes of a revival. Maoists last week hurled socket bombs into the compound of the Soaltee Hotel, one of the country's best 5-star properties. All 435 high-end tourists who were staying at the hotel at the time were whisked to safety and put up in other hotels. The Soaltee closed its gates.

A high-profile international meet may have become a casualty. Soaltee was to play host to former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad in the first week of September. The Malaysian leader, ironically, was supposed to provide pointers on high economic growth. "We are not sure whether he will come and whether the meet will go ahead at all," says a member of the Confederation of Nepalese Industries, organizer of the two-day event.

Other would-be participants in the meet include Suchart Jaovisidha, the deputy prime minister of Thailand, and G. L. Peiris, former minister of Sri Lanka.

The Soaltee blasts have had no immediate effect on other hotels, say tourism entrepreneurs, and that no large-scale cancellations of bookings were reported. But the officials with Hotel Association of Nepal say it could affect tourist arrivals in the future. "The

Soaltee incident could have long-term negative impact on the tourism industry as a whole," says Narendra Bajracharya, president of Hotel Association of Nepal, better known as HAN. Government officials and tourism entrepreneurs are frantically trying to minimize the damage. "The Soaltee has gotten so much negative publicity that it will be difficult to fully undo the damage," says Yogendra Shakya, a leading industrialist and tourism entrepreneur. Even with the growth in tourist arrivals last year, the figures are barely half of 1999.

Nepal's losing streak began at the end of 1999, the year tourism peaked with close to half a million visitors. At the time, officials and tourism entrepreneurs were upbeat about doubling that figure in the years ahead. Then Islamic militants hijacked an Indian Airlines flight



from Kathmandu to Delhi on December 24, 1999, which eventually landed in Kandhar, Afghanistan. The coverage of Nepal by the Indian media altered Nepal's image in the Indian public from that of a regional tourist hub to a regional terrorist hub. Indian Airlines cancelled all flights to and from Kathmandu for some time, leading to a drastic drop in

the number of Indian tourists and others traveling via India.

In 2000 the Hrithik Roshan episode over the alleged anti-Nepal remarks by the Bollywood actor caused riots in the streets. Indian businesses were targeted which added insult to injury. The number of Indian tourists, more than 30 percent of total arrivals, fell again.

But the worst yet to come. The Royal Massacre in 2001 drew international attention to Nepal, and suddenly the insurrection, which had received very little foreign media coverage until then, became big news. With that increased exposure, tourists who had previously had little reason to care about the existence of Maoists rebels

BRAND LOYALTY: Some just keep coming back



in Nepal became fearful. For a time, the fact that tourists were not targeted seemed to reassure potential visitors. But the increasingly violent Maoist offensives after the massacre and the strong Army responses were all reported internationally. The chaos earned Nepal an image of a country battling with violent internal conflict.



'Tourists Are Still Coming'



Nepal's tourism industry is in crisis. **Yogendra Shakya**, a hotelier and leading tourism entrepreneur, is an outspoken figure in Nepal's business community. He told Nation Weekly why tourism experts have little to contribute at the moment.

As a tourism entrepreneur how do you see the present state of tourism in Nepal?

The state of tourism in Nepal is in no way better than the state of affairs [of the nation]. The number of tourists coming to Nepal has taken a nosedive. It's not in the hands of tourism entrepreneurs to revive the sinking industry. It's in the hands of other forces. All tourism experts are redundant at the moment.

What has been the reaction of your clients to the recent spate of violence targeting the tourism industry?

Tourists are enquiring about the incidents. Many are concerned. In spite of whatever is happening here in Nepal, there is a note of optimism that tourists are still coming. In spite of

so much negative publicity, we have a strong and devoted client base that loves Nepal and is prepared to come here.

There are conflicting claims about the number of tourist arrivals. The Nepal Tourism Board statistics show a positive reading. What is the truth?

It's up from the bad years but down from the good ones. In 1999 we had close to half a million tourists. By 2002 it fell down by more than 50 percent. Even during 1999 when we had the highest number of tourists, the occupancy rates in hotels were just 50-60 percent.

So what is the ideal number of tourists for Nepal?

We need at least one million tourists to get close to 100 percent occupancy in our all hotels. Hoteliers have two choices before them: increase tourists or decrease rooms.

Many say hoteliers are doing well...

There are few hotels that are doing well, but in totality it's not good. The average occu-

pancy rate is 20 percent. You can't generalize if a few hotels have 60-70 percent.

Do you think tourism would have gone up had we not had this insurgency and other setbacks?

I wonder if we could have been successful in taking the arrival numbers to one million. We could not have pushed up the figure. We are silently using insurgency as an excuse for our inefficiency.

Why is that we haven't been able to attract more high-end tourists?

It's just the niche market we are catering to. We don't have any attractions for kids, who are the major deciders in any family. People go to Disneyland because the kids want to go.

What should we do to attract more tourists?

If we want to attract family vacationers we have to honestly revamp our packages. We have to bring new excitement to our product. We must go for more mass-appeal packages if we want more visitors. **N**

nu/ss

nu/ss

Convincing tourists that Nepal was still safe despite the media footage of shuttered shops, baton-wielding riot cops, stone throwing protestors outside the Palace and plumes of smoke emanating from burning tires was not an easy task. "The year 2001 was the worst year in Nepal's tourism history," says Madhuja Acharya, executive secretary with the Travel Agents Association of Nepal. The figures show just how bad it was: In 2001 tourist arrival figures dropped by more than 50 percent, though Nepal wasn't alone.

The terrorist attacks in the United States in September 2001 and the bombing in Bali in 2002 created panic across the globe and caused a worldwide tourism slump. Tourist arrivals here slumped again in 2002, to about 216,000. By 2003 global tourism had recovered substantially, and despite continuing negative publicity, the country witnessed a healthy growth of 23 percent in arrivals, to about 265,000. The number of Indian tourists grew by 33 percent and arrivals from other countries close to 20 percent. Tourism entrepreneurs were encouraged by the growth, which came despite worsening internal conflict.

Then came a little turnaround. Tourists hotspots like Ghandruk, which had been unaffected by the insurgency previously, began to experience increasing incidence of Maoist extortions. Both businesses and tourists became the victims. Kathmandu too came under Maoist influence: Small bombs and assassinations were reported throughout the year. But still the tourists came. Arrivals during the first three months of this year grew by about half. The figures through July show a 45 percent increase in third country tourists and 12 percent in Indian tourists, compared to last year. "It's up from the bad years but still down from the good years," says Yogendra Shakya.

Nepal's tourism industry seemed to have survived its worst days. The reasons, say many observers, is that Nepal has a devoted client base who are prepared to come to Nepal no matter what. But the increasing numbers of arrivals disguise a serious problem: The visitors who are coming now are mostly budget travelers. "Independent travelers are coming, and that's good," says trekking agent AD Sherpa. "But the high-end trav-

elers and groups are shying away." Independent travelers spend far less, Sherpa says, and stay at budget guesthouses. They often go trekking without the services of a guide. The numbers of visitors are up, but few tourism businesses are showing substantial revenue growth. "We're not attracting the right kinds of visitors," says Sherpa.

Industry analysts agree that Nepali tourism entrepreneurs have failed to look beyond the niche market that is traditionally Nepal's "tourism vote-bank." Tourism entrepreneur Shakya says, "We haven't been able to attract the family vacationers, especially the kids who are major deciders in family purchasing." Even when there were half a million tourists holidaying in Nepal, tourism entrepreneurs were full of complaints about revenue and low occupancy rates. "We don't have enough infrastructure to cater to the high-end tourists," says Rabi Poudel, president of Nepal Association of Travel Agents (NATA). While travel agents and hoteliers agree that Nepal still lacks logistics to host high-end

tourists; they disagree sharply about hotel occupancy.

Experts say arrival rates and occupancy do not have a direct relationship. "The number of arrivals is not directly proportional to the occupancy," says Subhas Niroula, director at Nepal Tourism Board. Part of the problem maybe that the occupancy figures do not include all of the least-expensive accommodations, where budget travelers stay. But the spat over just how bad the hotel occupancy rate is and the widespread concern about failure to attract high-end travelers may be irrelevant if the insurgency worsens and the negative media coverage continues.

"We cannot take the Soaltee incident as an isolated case," says HAN's Bajracharya. "It could happen to any one of us." Such fears and pessimism run deep among tourism entrepreneurs. "All tourism experts are redundant at the moment," says hotelier Shakya. "Revival of tourism is in the hands of other forces—not tourism entrepreneurs." **N**

From The Horse's Mouth

The explosions in Soaltee last week may have shaken its management and eventually caused the closure of the industry's flagship hotel. But the tourists are unfazed and are seen walking carefree in and around Kathmandu. Even rumors about the blockade haven't deterred them from venturing out of town. Tourists who were in Kathmandu last week say that they didn't notice the explosions and that they blame the media for the negative publicity. David Halie, a British tourist who came to Nepal three weeks ago, says he heard about the



explosions in the news. "I would like to come to Nepal again," says Halie.

"I would tell my friends to come to Nepal," says Valentina Marimelli, an Italian tourist. "Don't worry. It is just the me-

dia hype." Both say many people back home had warned them not to come to Nepal because they perceived that the capital city was embroiled in a civil war. Marimelli says she read news on a web site that said that it was safer to go to Afghanistan than Nepal. "My parents were worried after the explosion," says Marimelli. Both are unconcerned about the situation in Nepal now that they are here. **N**

	2002	2003	INCREASE FROM 2002	2004 (1 ST 7 MONTHS)	INCREASE FROM 2003
Indian	65,629	87,066	33%	57,407	45%
Third Country	150,292	178,534	19%	110,006	12%
Total	215,922	265,600	23%	167,413	32%

Table: Tourist arrivals

LEAVE THE TEACHERS ALONE

161 teachers have been killed in the civil conflict. The state machinery has acted as irresponsibly as the rebels.

BY SUNIL POKHREL

JANA KUMARI KOIRALA, THE widow of a school principal, is miserable. The Maoists killed her husband, Nanda Lal Koirala, on March 16, 1998 in his office at Siddhartha Lower Secondary School in Showr Pani, Gorkha. His offense: The Maoists thought he was a government spy.

“They killed my husband because our family name is the same as Girija Prasad’s,” says Jana Kumari. She left the village soon after her husband’s death, following repeated threats against her own life. When she arrived in Kathmandu, she had two young sons and little else. Shunned by her own relatives, she now lives in absolute poverty.

Muktinath Adhikari was the widely respected principal of Padhini Sanskrit Secondary School and a member of Amnesty International in Lamjung. The Maoists killed him because he taught Sanskrit against their orders. They dragged him from the classroom where he was teaching mathematics. They tied him to a tree and shot him dead at a place that is five minutes’ walk away from the school where he taught for more than 20 years. Many of his students witnessed the murder.

The number of teachers killed in the conflict is chilling, and it continues to grow. The toll stands at 161 presently. The state machinery has acted as irresponsibly as the rebels.

Balaram Barayali, a teacher at Kalika Secondary School in Tandi, Morang, was arrested by security forces on Decem-

ber 4, 2003 while he was on his way to school. Villagers later discovered his body. No one in his village really knows why he was killed, but many say the security forces believed he was a Maoist sympathizer.

“Teachers in the rural areas have been easy targets for both the Maoists and security forces to vent their anger,” says Babu Ram Adhikari, general secretary of the Nepal National Teachers’ Association. “Unlike civil servants, teachers cannot run away to the district headquarters. The nature of their job keeps teachers in places where the government apparatus is nonexistent [due to the Maoists] and where they are the most vulnerable.”

The ground reality demands that teachers maintain an amicable

relationship with both sides. Just a hint of inclination towards one side can be intolerable to the other. Personal friction or minor suspicion results in sudden death. Human rights workers, civil society leaders and political parties, including the teachers’ associations, have failed to protect teachers, particularly in rural areas. “We as a community have failed to voice our anger against the killings of our colleagues loud enough to be heard,” admits Keshab Bhattra, president of the Nepal Teachers’ Association.

The killings of teachers have started to go unnoticed. Earlier, the brutal slaying of Muktinath Adhikari by the Maoists sparked wide anger and condemnation, which forced them to concede their mistake. Schoolteacher Yubaraj Moktan’s killing along with several others at Doramba last year incited a

furious reaction that forced the security forces to take responsibility for the incident. But many more killings never get any attention. The result: nothing but a grieving family and a school suddenly without a teacher.

After a long silence, associations representing the teachers have at least started to demand compensation for the victims, and government officials are forced on the back foot. Ironically, not a single family of those teachers killed by the security forces has received compensation or pension, even when the deceased had served for more than 20 years and qualified for retirement benefits.

The ones killed by the Maoists aren’t treated well by the state either. Jana Kumari Koirala hasn’t received any pension from the government, despite her husband’s 21 years of service. She was promised Rs. 100,000 as compensation by the then Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and received Rs. 50,000 in the first installment. She never saw another paisa. The District Administrative Office in Gorkha gave the money to an unidentified person, she says. “I regret that my husband served the government as a schoolteacher at all. He wouldn’t have died had he been a Maoist.”

“The government has failed to protect the lives of teachers, and its indifferent attitude towards the victims’ families deserves to be condemned,” says Tej Prasad Mishra, president of the Teach-

TEACHERS IN CONFLICT

Teachers killed	161
Teachers abducted	16+
Whereabouts unknown	5
Teachers in jail	8
Displaced teachers	700(approx)

Source: Nepal National Teachers’ Association

“The government has failed to protect the lives of teachers...”



SLAIN: Muktinath Adhikari of Gorkha was shot dead by the Maoists

ers' Association of Pyuthan. "The government should have a provision to grant pension to the families of the teachers killed, even if the teacher's status was temporary."

The continued assault against the teachers is beginning to take its toll: Their numbers in the worst affected areas are dwindling fast. Approximately 700 teachers have either fled or have been forced out.

In hopes of stemming the flow, the Ministry of Education and Sports announced plans in March to compen-

sate the families of the teachers killed in the conflict. Five months on, little has been done to honor the pledge. Adhikari expresses apprehension about the government's commitment. "If the government continues to shun its avowed responsibility," he says, "we will take to the streets again." Ministry officials claim they are collecting the necessary data. "Once the data collection is complete, we will ask the Home Ministry to compensate the victims' families," a senior official at the ministry told Nation Weekly. The transfer of

responsibility inevitably means that the families' miserable wait will drag on.

Educators fear that killing a teacher causes more than just the obvious harm. Young minds exposed to the horror may be inclined to seek vengeance against the killers. Experts fear that a vicious cycle of killing and counter-killing will continue if students who have witnessed the death of their teachers and the children of the victims are not properly counseled.

Is that too much to expect from a system that can't even pay compensation and pensions? **N**



Law And Order

Strengthening our legal and judicial institutions is essential to attract the Foreign Direct Investment necessary for rapid development

BY JOGENDRA GHIMIRE

Can Nepal achieve double-digit growth?" was the title of a daylong brainstorming session of economists, businessmen, administrators, journalists and civil society members last week. Organized as a stakeholders' session by the Confederation of Nepalese Industries in preparation for a meeting of luminaries from south and south-east Asia—including Dr. Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia—scheduled for the first week of September, the discussions provided some useful pointers to what Nepal should do to be on a high-growth path.

Realistically, most economists seem to believe that Nepal is unlikely to grow at anywhere near a double digit rate in the short run, even if fundamental departures are made in its economic focus. What is also lacking, as Ken Ohashi of the World Bank put it, is the kind of "national passion" for development present among the Japanese during the 1960s.

A key area that gets only tangential consideration when planners and industrialists talk of economic policy is the role of institutions—specifically, judicial institutions—in the development process. Even if institutions are touched upon, the discussion is unlikely to dig deeper into the role of law and judicial institutions in enhancing investments, although for a potential foreign investor, mitigating legal risks may be a principal consideration. For a country with a saving rate of around 15 percent of the GDP and where FDI will always remain an important contributor to national investments, legal institutions deserve greater attention while planning.

In a recent paper titled "Why India Can Grow at 7 Percent a Year or More," economists Dani Rodrik of Harvard and Arvind Subramanian of the IMF argue that during the 2005-2025 period, India should maintain a growth of 7 percent or higher. Their economic reasoning is based upon (a) India's total production possibility frontier, (b) economic reforms that should enhance it, (c) its pool of skilled human resource, and (d) the institutions in place that can steer growth.

Having already completed the difficult task of building key economic and political institutions during the last five decades, India's per capita income, according to them should be four to five times of where it stands. Comparing Indian institutions with China's, they argue the latter is headed for a difficult challenge. A country dominated by centralized planning for decades, it has yet to build institutions governed by law to make them market-friendly, and facilitate sustained growth through them.

It is tempting to feel good about the nice things being said about Indian institutions. Nepali institutions are—after all—similar to India's. Per-

haps Nepal also has the advantage of institutions that India seems to enjoy.

The literature on the workings of the market system normally makes references to the importance of rule of law, protection of private property and enforcement of contracts as preconditions to any successful market activity. They are equally important while attracting investment too.

Nepal's tryst with rule-based commerce is not very old, but we still have institutions that can assist, and have been helpful, in the process. The element of discretion (at times highhandedness) of the officials is still there, and that acts as a deterrent to a potential investor. But on the whole, commercial decisions in Nepal are taken increasingly based on rules than on an individual official's whims. That is not to say that there are no uncertainties caused by inconsistent and contradictory legal provisions or practices, and the failure to apply them in good faith.

Protection of private property and enforcement of contracts with the assistance of the state are generally assured in Nepal, although problems in practice remain. Private property is protected under the constitution, and there is an additional guarantee against expropriation in the Foreign Investment and Technology Transfer Act, 1992. Substantively, neither rule of law, nor property protection, nor contract enforcement should cause a major alarm for any investor. There have been no cases of nationalization in Nepal that should worry a foreign investor.

While substantive legal guarantees and an evolving culture of rule of law exist, the institution that suddenly becomes important in any commercial dispute involving property and contract enforcement is the court system, which is not suited to address the complex commercial questions at hand. Any development plan should therefore have measures to introduce reform within the institution and enable it to cope with the demands of open economic environment. Essentially, what our court system, especially the lower judiciary, lacks vis-à-vis the comfort level of investors are: (a) efficiency in the disposition of disputes, and (b) the ability to apply commercial legal acumen while disposing disputes.

Unfortunately, our planners, and our business community, tend to treat

the judiciary as an "unproductive" sector that does not add value to the system. Such shortsightedness does not help our objective of double-digit growth. After all, if Nepal expects to grow by the strength of enhanced foreign investment, business certainty and predictability that an efficient system of rule of law assures is going to be important. Making the court system capable to meet the needs of the modern commercial activities should be at the heart of any planning exercise that we may undertake at this stage. **N**



MORE BITE

The CIAA has become proactive, but it may need more legislative teeth to take a bite at targets close to the real centers of power

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

FORMER INSPECTOR GENERAL of Police Achyut Krishna Kharel must have felt the bitter irony of being booked this month by the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority. In April 2000, Kharel almost became the chief commissioner of the CIAA himself until his chances were scuttled by charges of corruption. Now the agency he once sought to lead has come after him.

On August 13, the CIAA filed cases against three successive former police chiefs—Kharel, Motilal Bohara and Pradip Shumsher JB Rana—at the Special Court. The CIAA's decision to try the top guns comes barely a fortnight after the anti-corruption watchdog scored its first big success with the conviction of former minister Chiranjivi Wagle. The

Special Court last month convicted Wagle on charges of corruption and sentenced him to two and a half years in prison and slapped Rs. 27.2 million in fines.

In the charge sheet, the CIAA has put Kharel's moveable and immovable property at Rs. 25.69 million. The CIAA claims that Kharel has "earned illegally" Rs. 16.33 million, more than 60 percent of his total assets.

Kharel has been at the center of controversy before, and he held the top office during turbulent times. He was known for his strong political affiliations with heavyweights in the Nepali Congress. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba promoted Kharel to the post of IGP on February 26, 1997, replacing Motilal Bohara. A blazing controversy followed.

Within weeks of the appointment, Deuba's government fell. The new

UML-RPP government transferred Kharel to the National Investigation Department after Kharel allegedly didn't cooperate with the then Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Bam Dev Gautam. He was later reinstated.

As much as controversies, allegations of corruption have doggedly followed Kharel. Many in the police force now welcome his prosecution. The CIAA has named Meena Kharel, his wife, and Ayush Kharel, his son, as co-defendants in the case. In the charge sheet, the commission has asked the Special Court to confiscate all his property and to penalize him with maximum imprisonment. Kharel reportedly fled to Bangkok after getting wind of the CIAA's impending action. "We haven't been able to trace them [Kharel, Bohara and Rana]," says an official with the CIAA. "It seems they have fled."

The Parliament's Public Account Committee had previously investigated Kharel for his alleged involvement in irregularities in operating petrol pumps owned by the police. The committee's investigation recommended action against him to the government as early as 2000. The committee's report has been gathering dust in the Parliament's secretariat for more than four years.

'Corruption Is Rampant'



If there is any constitutional body that enjoys popular support despite being unelected body, it is perhaps the CIAA. Since 2002 the watchdog agency has become proactive by prosecuting public officials which was long overdue. The chief commissioner of the CIAA, **Suryanath Upadhyay** is in the news again—after the Special Court con-

victed former minister Chiranjivi Wagle on July 22.

As the chief of the CIAA, how do you see the state of corruption in Nepal?

The state of corruption in Nepal, as in any country in South Asia, is rampant and endemic in nature. However, there have been improvements in recent years and an atmosphere against corruption is building up in the society.

Many of those involved in corruption enjoy impunity. Do you think the conviction of Chiranjivi Wagle has helped break that cycle of impunity?

Not only this particular case, there have been many convictions by the Special Court on corruption in recent years. Hope has grown in the society that impunity on corruption shall not be tolerated any

more. So far as the case of Chiranjivi Wagle is concerned, one must not forget that the decision of the Special Court is appealable in the Supreme Court.

The CIAA has been taking action against those indicated by the JIPC Report 2003, the recent high-profile case is Wagle's. Though, we understand that the Constitution doesn't give mandate to the CIAA to investigate cases against Army officers, don't you think the same report (JIPC) can be a basis to book if not serving Army offices, at least, the retired ones?

The JIPC report is relatively rich and is a special piece of information for the CIAA and it is being used by us in our investigation. However, it is neither exclusive nor the only source. The CIAA has many sources for information. Although there has



“We must take such steps as positive,” says Subhas Nembwang, a member of the parliamentary committee that investigated the charge against Kharel, referring to the CIAA’s recent move. Although Nembwang refused to comment on individual cases, he advocated empowering the CIAA.

The allegations against Kharel are serious, but the charges the CIAA makes against the other two ex-police chiefs are even more so. The commission accuses Motilal

Bohara of illegally earning Rs. 23.82 million out of his total assets of Rs. 43.84 million. It has asked the Special Court to confiscate all his property and slap a maximum possible jail term. The constitutional watchdog is also investigating the property owned by Bohara’s son, Gajendra Bohara.

After a four-month investigation, the CIAA has asked the Special Court to confiscate Pradip Shumsher JB Rana’s property. The commission accuses him of illegally amassing Rs. 37.78 out of his total property of Rs. 66.92 million. Rana served in the police force for 32 years and succeeded Kharel as the police chief in 2000.

Although many have hailed the actions of the CIAA, there are also critics who say the CIAA is biased and unwilling to go after people who have either royal or military connections. Some police officials are apparently not happy about the actions taken by the CIAA. They say the commission is selectively targeting the police. “Why only the police? Why not the Army, where the proportion of corruption is much bigger?” says a senior police official. “And why only those retired ones, why not those who are corrupt and are still in active duty?” he asks.

“Army! They are beyond our jurisdiction,” says a CIAA official. But the commission may have the right to proceed against retired Army officers, at least. “Although there has not been any interpretation of the Constitution,” says Suryanath Upadhayay, the CIAA chief, “so far on the issue of proceedings against Army personnel, we feel that those who come under the Army law are excluded from our jurisdiction.”

The CIAA prosecuted Wagle on the basis of the Judicial Inquiry Commission on Property report. And since the JIPC has also investigated cases of Army officers, the CIAA may be able to use the information collected. Although cases against big fish like Kharel may give reason to be optimistic, “It’s just the tip of an iceberg,” says Nembwang. He is critical of the small volume of cases filed by the watchdog.

The commission must not only increase the number of cases it refers to the court but also broaden the range of people it investigates. But if the commission is to investigate powerful people who seem to be enjoying immunity now, it may need more legislative teeth to have a big enough bite. **N**

not been any interpretation of the Constitution so far on the issue of proceedings against the Army personnel, we feel that those who come under the Army law are excluded from our jurisdiction.

Many in the police want the CIAA to investigate cases against those police officers that are still in office. Have you thought about it?

If you look at the cases filed in the court we have been charge sheeting even those police officers that are currently in office.

Does the CIAA need more powers to be able to investigate charges of corruption against both private individuals and those in the Army?

As a matter of fact, both taking and giving bribe are criminal activities and are punishable under the anti-cor-

ruption law. I will like to remind you of the famous cases related to advancement of loan to private firms where CIAA prosecuted both the bank officials and proprietors of those companies. There are hosts of cases where a private person or a firm found to be in complicity with any public official has been investigated by the CIAA and, when found guilty, has been prosecuted in the court. This sort of jurisdiction, however, may be termed as “indirect jurisdiction.” As regards “direct jurisdiction,” i.e., of the violation of the regulatory regime for personal gains or personal loss by a private individual or a firm, that could be dealt with by a regulatory body through regulatory regime under which such a regulatory body is mandated. Since CIAA is not a regulatory body, in that sense private firms and bodies per se do not come under our jurisdiction. My opinion is that if the

regulatory body becomes effective, the activities, which you call “corruption” by private firm and individual, may substantially be checked. As regards with Army personnel I think I have already answered your question.

During your tenure CIAA has become more proactive, why do you think CIAA was ineffective for so many years since its formation?

May be the anti-corruption climate was not ripe in the society.

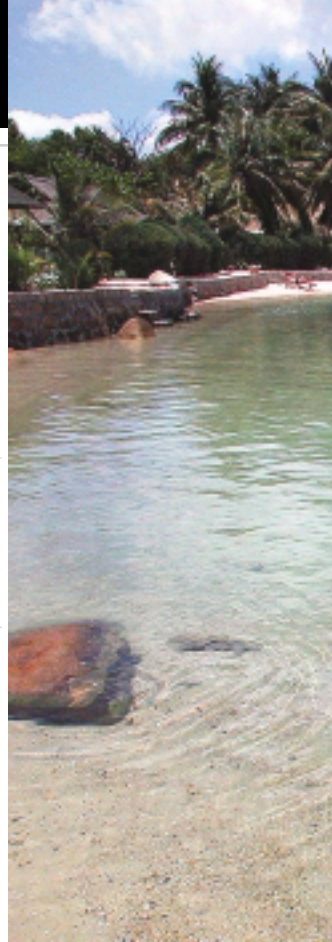
A lot of people are coming out on the streets and hailing CIAA’s action, does that help you in being more proactive?

We are not influenced either positively or negatively by such actions. We are adherents of strict neutrality and justice. We go by the tenets of the law. The support of the people helps in building non-tolerable at-

mosphere in the society so far as corruption is concerned, which ultimately helps in raising awareness and prevention of such activities.

How has CIAA changed over the years?

There have been remarkable changes in the CIAA. The institution has grown three-fold in terms of the manpower. It has achieved phenomenal growth in getting convictions from the Special Court. The conviction rate has risen to 85 percent, which otherwise used to be 45 percent in the past. We have been making many strides in the field of prevention. We work closely with the government and the civil society organizations to control the menace. I think, in all, one may conclude that in the last three years the CIAA has witnessed a sea change in its all-round growth. I advise you to make your own judgment on this. **N**



ON MIGRATION AND OMAR OF THE PACIFIC

K. N. Sharma, a.k.a., Omar, is a lonesome Nepali soul in the middle of nowhere in a communist republic, running a fantastic chain of Indian and Italian restaurants

BY SWARNIM WAGLÉ

IN THE LAND OF THE NAKED, even Gandhi in a translucent loincloth is well clad. We Nepalis thus deserve what little pride we take in our scant migrant and diasporic “successes”—saleswomen in multi-national companies, authors who sell, senior civil servants in international bureaucracies, tenured lecturers in decent universities, restaurateurs and shopkeepers, doctors and broadcasters, laborers, soldiers, and software whiz-kids here and there. It’s an uneven group, our diaspora, but this week in Nepal, we realized how important the group is becoming to people who reside within. When Kul Gautam, the UNICEF Number Two, walked out of his meeting with the prime minister on August 19, people wanted to know how he was going to fix the Maoist problem, even though he insisted that he had come to do something about Measles, not Maoists, the former being a relatively bigger killer, at 5000 lives per year. The storm over Minister Raghuj Pant’s regulatory intervention on the selection process of temporary migrants to Korea also highlighted the other facet of this phenomenon. Bringing in over US\$1 billion annually, an amount comparable to government expenditures for the year, Nepali workers are not merely a category in our national accounts, but are really our unsung heroes who, desperate for escape and hope themselves, sustain our economy in the process. For every recognizable name like Kul Gautam or Samrat Upadhyay, there are thousands of Nepalis toiling away in the heat of the Indian tea stalls and Gulf factories, gas stations and ethnic restaurants in the west. This column offers a tribute to this phenomenon of worldwide Nepali perseverance, by digressing to profile an unusual

example from an unlikely location: Omar of the South China Sea.

K. N. Sharma, a.k.a., Omar, calls himself the “only Indian chef in Nha Trang.” His modest restaurant overlooks the turquoise waters of the Pacific in a bay town of South-central Vietnam. Omar says his folks come from Parbat, but he left for India early to train as a chef. The nearest Nepali resides a few hundred miles away and he lives far from the main cities—Saigon is 450 kilometers away, and to southerners, Hanoi, the capital, would seem close to the North Pole. Omar is thus a lonesome Nepali soul in the middle of nowhere in a communist republic, running a fantastic chain of Indian and Italian restaurants. He draws his nickname from his restaurants that he named after Omar Khayyam, the 11th century Persian mathematician who authored the “Treatise on Demonstration of Problems of Algebra.”

AN UNLIKELY HOME

After early stints in Hong Kong, and even the Soaltee in Kathmandu, Omar decided to go to Cambodia. He said he just liked the idea of going to a place with an exotic name and interesting royalty. Aged 27 and clueless in his purpose for travel, the clerk at the Delhi embassy where he applied for a visa rightly told him that he was mad. After three decades of turmoil following the rise and collapse of the Maoist Khmer Rouge, Cambodia was just beginning its reconstruction, Hun Sen was the boss, and there were more guns around than cement or teachers. Phnom Penh was a dangerous place in the 90s, and Omar drifted further east to the calmer shores of Vietnam. He thinks the move was fated.

After six years in the socialist republic, there appears no looking back for Omar. As

“Director” of a chain of restaurants with a brand name of some value in a country where no one understands why he exists where he does, Omar is a minor celebrity. When I caught up with him recently, he had his news handy: “I was recently interviewed by Vietnamese Television.” Omar is married to a charming local lady from Khanh Hoa province and has bought property, possibly eyeing a settled household in his adopted country. He remits substantial amounts of dollars back to his folks in Nepal, but there’s no denying that Omar’s home is where his heart is, and his heart is where his love is.

And for a Nepali chef of Indian meals in Nowhere, Vietnam, Omar cuts a cosmopolitan figure wearing light pink shirts with the top buttons unbuttoned. He speaks Nepali or Hindi to his bemused Vietnamese waitresses if and when he feels like it. To a vagabond observer, Omar perhaps offers a 20th century parallel to the 19th century Naipauls of the Gangetic plains who in their quest for a better life, and romantic escape, ended up in the most unusual places on earth. The author V.S. Naipaul told the world in his Nobel acceptance speech in 2001 that there is a chance his father’s lineage is from Nepal: “I know nothing of the people on my father’s side; I know only that some of them came from Nepal. Two years ago a kind Nepali who liked my name sent me a copy of some pages from an 1872 gazetteer-like British work about India, “Hindu Castes and Tribes as Represented in Benares”; the pages listed...those groups of Nepalese in



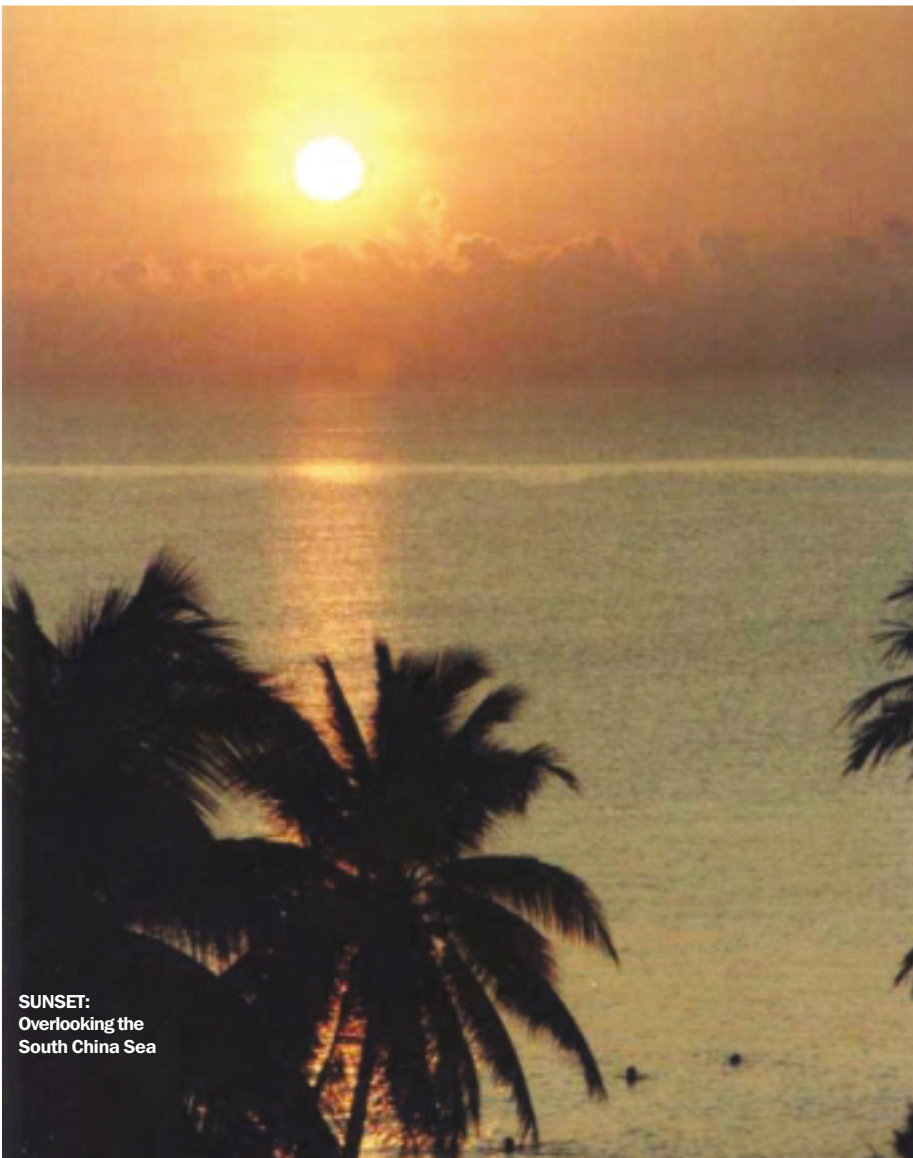
TOURIST DESTINATION:
Nha Trang is Vietnam's
premier seaside resort

the holy city of Benares who carried the name Naipal.” In the colonial age, there was an element of coercion involved, or false incentives to uproot people; in the age of freedom, Omar guided himself by free will, and found his peace and place in a communist country. Omar shares with the Naipauls the same longing for the new and the unknown. Those indentured laborers shipped by the British to plantations in the West Indies included people from the Maithili belt of the present-day Nepali Tarai. Economist Sukhdev Sah spoke once of his wish to open a radio station in the Caribbean where he knew his folk songs from Dhanusha would find a ready audience.

Omar’s courtesies and business sense ensure that in his restaurants, the posters of the Mecca stand next to that of Patan, Everest and the Taj, and that K. N. Sharma the Hindu is only amused at Muslim clients who enter his eateries assuming that a place called Omar’s must cater to their faith. It is rare that one runs into a Nepali on the shores of the South China Sea, a modestly educated man who expresses a Naipaulian sense of belonging to the whole wide world, not within borders. It would, of course, be unfair to excessively romanticize Omar’s lonely existence in Vietnam. He has his share of problems with the police, rival restaurants and arbitrary tax-tormentors. But he is a survivor with a lot of practical tips for entrepreneurs who want to bypass the red tape in a red state.

A STORM BREWS

This spring I flew a thousand miles to visit Omar’s town for the second time. He informed there were two Nepalis in town now. He had arranged for the other to come and cook at his fancier Indian joint at the posh Sailing Club. Soon after, Omar said with no bitterness, that his guest had plotted to overthrow Omar and run the place himself, in connivance with the Australian owners of the club. That was a silent coup d’etat in Nha Trang, a tiny storm over Naan and Paneer, but no one noticed. Mocking what he said was an incorrigible Nepali trait of pulling each other’s legs, “wherever, whenever,” Omar said he had no choice but to move on. On growth plans, he now wants to set up new restaurants in nearby provinces. Restaurants for tourists draw lucrative dollars, no doubt, but this time, Omar says he wants to open Vietnamese stalls for the locals, “their money is money too.” **N**



SUNSET:
Overlooking the
South China Sea

CHARGE IT!

More and more Nepalis are holding on to their plastic money

BY INDRA ADHIKARI

LAST AUGUST DHEERAJ LAMA'S sister was hospitalized at Hargan's Nursing Home in Jawalakhel with a broken leg. The accident happened at about 9 p.m. When the clinic demanded Rs. 10,000 immediately, Lama panicked: How was he going to get that kind of money at night? Then he remembered he had a credit card, which he had never used at such an odd hour.

"For a while, I was dumbstruck," Lama recalls. "My first instinct was to borrow from friends and relatives. Then it dawned on me: perhaps the credit card could work. Why not ask?"

Credit and debit cards are useful in daily life and can get very handy during

emergencies, as Lama found out. More and more Nepalis are holding on to their plastic money. Four banks—Himalayan Bank, Nabil Bank, Standard Chartered Bank Nepal and Nepal Investment Bank issue credit and debit cards. Introduced in the early 90s, banks say the number of cardholders shot up since 1997-98 after an advertising blitz aimed at the middleclass.

"Earlier, most Nepalis felt that the cards were meant only for the rich," says Sandeep Shrestha, assistant director at Nabil Bank's card division. "We were able to change that mindset over time through media campaigns. You just need Rs. 10,000 of monthly income to hold a card—either debit or credit." Strangely enough, when Nabil introduced its credit card in 1993 in collaboration with MasterCard, only the affluent would sign up, though the account holders only needed to have a monthly income of Rs. 10,000.

Now more than 38,000, most of them with middle-class incomes, have become regular users of these cards, thanks to three other banks that are now competing with Nabil in the card market. In all, the banks have made transactions worth Rs. 906 million in the last 10 years through the card holders. It is now the Standard Chartered Bank Nepal that has the highest number of card holders—more than 27,000, followed by Nabil with 5,400.

Cards are a double luxury: You don't need to



CARD BOOM: The majority of users are from Kathmandu

carry around money, which comes in especially handy when the bills are big and instead of standing in long lines at the cash counter, you can use an ATM anytime you choose. Indeed, say users, it is security and convenience that have fuelled the growth of the card industry in the country.

"I started using credit cards three years ago," says Dhiraj Lama, a front desk officer at British Airways in Kamaladi. His business requires frequent travels to Indian cities. "It's a lot of hassle carrying money and exchanging it from Nepali rupees into Indian currency." He never felt safe walking around with the bulky cash, recalling his difficulty in New Delhi where he saw a lot of travelers using credit cards.

With all the comfort it offers, it will be a long time before most Nepali middleclass families start having credit cards tucked in their wallets. The reasons are many: Banks say technology is a major constraint.

Birgunj and Pokhara are only cities outside Kathmandu to have ATMs. And very few businesses outside Kathmandu accept card payments. No surprise then that more than 90 percent of card users are in Kathmandu, the country's prime business hub.

Most banks outside Kathmandu don't offer cards simply because they don't



TREND-SETTER: Nabil Bank was the first to introduce credit cards

CHARGE IT!

More and more Nepalis are holding on to their plastic money

BY INDRA ADHIKARI

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Birgunj and Pokhara are only cities outside Kathmandu to have ATMs. And very few businesses outside Kathmandu accept card payments. No surprise then that more than 90 percent of card users are in Kathmandu, the country's prime business hub.

Most banks outside Kathmandu don't offer cards simply because they don't



TREND-SETTER: Nabil Bank was the first to introduce credit cards



PLASTIC MONEY: Amartya says cards have made his family expenditure flexible

And both have two categories: those valid in Nepal and India only and those that work worldwide. It's necessary to hold a dollar account to make the card work outside Nepal and India. More than 70 percent of Nepali cardholders use the former.

With cards, purchasing gets all too easy. Ramesh Karki, account officer at British Airways, says, "I can buy things even if I am in debt, and I don't have to pay interest on the sum I use for at least a month." He adds, "I can pay the bank back at the month end or in installments. This has increased my economic status." Card users also have the option of paying 10 percent of the amount due each month, rather than

long as he promptly informs his bank about the loss.

Debit cards are more popular than credit cards. They offer all the convenience and security features of credit cards, without getting the cardholders into unnecessary debt traps. "With debit cards, you only spend what you have," says Niraj Sharma of Himalayan Bank.

Amartya of Yeti Travels says he likes the debit card because there is no risk of overspending. "I have given cards to all three members of my family," says Amartya. "They can spend from my account even when I am not home. This has made my family expenditure flexible." Unlike credit cards, debit cards require no interest payments.

By contrast, not everyone can get a credit card. In addition to a bank account, only people over 18 years of age with a monthly income above Rs. 10,000 are eligible. Perhaps because of that, credit cards are not only for business: They are also becoming fashionable. "I felt uncomfortable when I saw everyone paying with credit cards while in India," says Dheeraj Lama.

Whether it be the utility factor or the status symbol that has fuelled demands for cards, the market has some serious problems that need immediate correction. With no authorities to keep track of the customer's credit history, the default rates are increasing: Some five percent of the 38,000 cardholders have defaulted and the defaulters can always switch from one bank to another. "The only way that we can find the economic status of a prospective customer is through a letter from the organization where he or she works," says Sharma of Himalayan Bank. Sharma tells a story of an unnamed customer who fled to the United States after charging Rs. 1.5 million on his card. The bank has lost track of him. More of such frauds are expected unless an oversight mechanism is quickly put in place.

The Nepal Card Member Forum was formed in 1999 to check frauds. It will keep track of the credit history of card users. The forum also plans to make ATM and credit card technology available all over the country. Both are big challenges. ■



HIMALAYAN BANK: One of four banks offering credit and debit cards in Nepal

have the ATMs there. Even in Kathmandu, ATMs are scarce, and places that accept cards for payment are mostly upscale, catering to foreigners and the well to do. Even so, more than 70 percent of Nepali cardholders use their cards both at ATMs and for purchasing goods in supermarkets and in hotels.

Almost all local businesses that have credit card facilities accept all cards issued by the four banks. There are two types of cards: Visa and MasterCard.

paying all of it at once. But the outstanding balance is charged a hefty 30 percent interest to encourage prompt repayments. For some people, the convenience of the card is worth the cost.

Bijay Amartya, managing director of Yeti Travels, has been using both credit and debit cards for five years. They come in handy, especially during his travels. He walks around with a comforting thought that he doesn't have to worry even if his cards get stolen, or lost—so

Voices Together

“Sathsath” is a radio magazine aired every Wednesday on Radio Sagarmatha FM 102.4. Its focus—street children

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

It is Wednesday, 6 p.m. A small group of children, almost a dozen, all in rags, are gathered at a two-story house in Sangam Chowk, Naya Baneshwore in front of the radio, instead of in the street. They are here to listen to their own voices on the half-hour radio magazine *Sathsath* (meaning together), on Radio Sagarmatha FM 102.4. Most of the participants in the radio program, including the reporters who gather the sound bites, are street children themselves.

“It is a medium to get the voice of these underprivileged street kids to the community,” says Bisio Bajracharya, chairman of Sathsath, a contact center for street children in Naya Baneshwore that produces the weekly program. “Our main focus groups are school-going children, their teachers and the community. We want to improve the image of the children who they call *khates*.”

“The response so far has been extremely encouraging,” adds Bajracharya. According to Suchita Shah, program manager at Sathsath, they have started receiving hundreds of letters answering the quiz that is a part of the weekly show. The program also includes a feature story with voices of the street children and comments from experts and a dramatic presentation, as well as the quiz. All of the issues discussed are focused on street children.

“Our top priority has always been the street kids themselves, and we even want to hand over full time production of the program once they are capable,” adds Bajracharya, who coordinates the program recording in a small make-shift studio on the ground floor at his contact center. Recording is done on Saturday mornings, and the final ready-made program is packaged on a CD and delivered to Radio Sagarmatha to be aired on Wednesday.

The British Embassy is supporting 20 episodes of the radio program that has been on air since July 7, and its eighth

episode is already recorded and stacked, ready to be aired.

Most of the issues for the program come from the street children themselves after rigorous group discussions. The experiences of Rajkumar and Santosh, former street children themselves, who run the contact center along with Bisio and Suchita are taken into consideration. Two more professionals have been hired for technical assistance. One street child has been trained and is now working with the radio team.



“If friends aren’t open to friends then who is?” says 13-year-old Sundar Bhujel, the budding



reporter. “When I talk to my other friends, they’re more open on many issues, though there are still none who want to become a reporter like me.”

Getting many street children to turn into reporters or take on any other skilled job will be hard for Sathsath, as it does not provide shelter to the kids. Most of the street children they work with still live on the street. “Most of the *bhais* return back to the streets though there are so many shelter homes. We decided the *bhais* needed assistance rather than free shelter that could turn them lazy when

they grow up,” says Shah, who calls all the street children *bhai*.

Sathsath is open to all *bhais*, who come there in the afternoons to learn new things, play computer games or read books. Educational workshops on issues such as health and earthquakes, team building games and making toys out of papier-mâché are occasionally offered. An average of 17 street children turn up each day, and Sathsath’s three-month data showed a total of 251 different kids. Most came from Kalimati, Kalanki, Balaju, Chabhil, Jadibuti, Ekantakuna and Jawalakhel.

The Sathsath team has a hotline mobile number for the street children to use when they require assistance on health matters or when they end up in jail. When a rickshaw operated by one of the street children, Rabi Maharjan, and his friend Arjun Thapa was run over by a microbus in July 2002, Maharjan died. Thapa recovered despite two fractures in his leg because Sathsath rushed them to the hospital after receiving a distress call.

The educational activities and moral support Sathsath offers has allowed Bhujel

and a few other street children to get jobs. One of them is already distributing publications for Bitarak.com after he learned the Roman alphabet. Other street children are becoming interested in work.

When we were about to leave the contact center, we asked young reporter Bhujel what he wanted to become when he grows up. “I still want to be just like you all,” he said, looking at this reporter before turning shyly towards the computer and the sound mixers in Sathsath’s studio. Now that’s encouragement to people like us. **N**



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It Pays To Learn Art

Until the early 90s, artists had limited choices. There were a few jobs but not many alternatives. Now lots of jobs are available to those with an art background.

BY AJIT BARAL

Not many artists in Nepal survive doing only “fine art.” Uttam Kharel, a senior artist himself, says only Kiran Manandhar and Uttam Nepali live on their art. Rajan Kafle, a product of Lalit Kala Campus, who survives doing odd jobs, concurs. Even so, more and more students have started to enroll at Lalit Kala Campus, the only government-owned art school. Over the last few years, the campus has seen a gradual increase in student enrollment, says Nagen Singh, vice president of the Free Students’ Union at Lalit Kala Campus. He adds, “About 600 students are studying in different levels at present.”

Even private art colleges have started to attract students. Sirjana College of Fine Arts started three years ago with only seven students. Now it has 56 students. Similarly, Kathmandu University offered a one-year diploma in art last year. Twelve students enrolled. This year the university is expecting 20 students and has added a three-year Bachelor of Fine Arts program.

Why are students increasingly opting for an arts education? Because commercial opportunities in the arts beckon, even if the fine arts are languishing. “Jobs come seeking those with an art background,” says Singh, who draws cartoons for different newspapers on a freelance basis. He adds, “Even those studying at the certificate level are doing one thing or the other.” That may be a bit of an exaggeration, but evidence shows that more and more art students are getting

some sort of paid work. Graduates are in high demand.

This is a big change from the past. Until the early 90s, artists had limited choices: They could devote themselves to their art even when it did not pay a penny or they could teach. There were a few jobs for illustrators but no other alternatives. Now lots of jobs are available to those with an art background. Bikrant Shrestha, a third-year student at Lalit Kala Campus, says, “Art students these days have lots of job opportunities to take to. They can do animation, illustrations, graphic design, cover design, layout and cartoons; make story-boards for films and television serials or even teach. It all depends on their aptitude.” Lured by these opportunities, many people with no art background are taking art classes

to brush up their drawing skills, says Kharel, who is currently teaching a group of people with no formal background in fine art at Sirjana College.

There are several reasons for the boom. Nepal has had unprecedented growth in the media since 1990. According to the Press Council, about 1,800 newspapers and magazines are in operation today. A national daily broadsheet newspaper needs six or seven layout artists and a cartoonist at minimum; a magazine needs two layout artists and a cartoonist. The book publishing industry is growing too, and it needs page setters and cover designers. Do the math: Our publishing industry requires lots of trained artists. Where will the manpower come from? Art colleges, of course.

Technological advancement has enabled people with aesthetic skills to do many things on or with the computer. Graphic design, animation and special effects for films are all commonly done digitally now. Technically oriented people with their eyes set on, let’s say, creating special effects or computer-generated animations have also started taking art courses, even though they rarely teach students about how technology can enrich and expand art.

The boom in boarding schools has also fuelled interest in art. Most boarding schools include drawing in their offerings, and they need art teachers. Shrestha says that schools like Little Angels recruit five or six art teachers each. Often they are paid more than other teachers. It’s possible to live by teaching art even without becoming a successful artist.

Purists may worry that commercialization threatens the purity of fine art. One talented artist and teacher at Kathmandu University, Sujana Chitrakar, disagrees. “One doesn’t have to do art full time after graduating in arts,” he says. The students swelling the rolls in Nepal’s art schools clearly believe that, and they seem quite willing to forgo a life of poverty pursuing art for art’s sake in favor of making a good living doing something they love. **N**



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A Sovereign Summer

A popular bumper sticker in America these days reads, "Someone Else For President"

BY SAMRAT UPADHYAY

In the murky waters of election-year American politics, August is the quiet month. Not this time. John Kerry and George W. Bush are scouring the country for votes, slings and counter-slugs have begun with gusto and political pundits tell us, ad nauseum, that it's going to be a tight election. I'm hoping nothing like the suffocating tightness of the 2000 elections, where the final battle was fought on the floors of the Supreme Court, which gave Bush his presidency.

So far this year the omens are good, especially for those like me in the "AnybodyButBush" camp. Although a recent poll suggests that Bush's job approval rating is still dangerously high, Democratic nominee John Kerry leads in electoral votes—votes that really count, as we learned from the last presidential election, when Al Gore had to throw in the towel despite receiving more popular votes than Bush. But things change quickly in this country, amply proven by the latest revelation by the New Jersey governor that he's gay and that he's had an extramarital affair.

Another attack on U.S. soil could quickly change the mood of the country, and voters could cling to Bush for reassurance. Conversely, they could turn against him for having failed to prevent such an attack. Or an unsavory revelation about either of the candidates could prove damaging, although at this point it seems nothing Bush does can get him into deep, Nixon-like trouble, except perhaps oust him from office by a narrow margin.

After it's become clear that a majority of Americans are (slightly) dissatisfied with the economy and (slightly) unhappy about the Iraq war, Bush is counting on his leadership on the so-called "war on terror," on which Americans still give him high marks. He, backed by Vice President Cheney, is still insisting that Iraq is a part of this war, although by all indications a new generation of terrorists is being nurtured on the very soil where Bush claimed his "mission accomplished." John Kerry, on the other hand, is hoping that dismal job growth and soaring budget deficit will make Americans reconsider Bush's term and oust him from office.

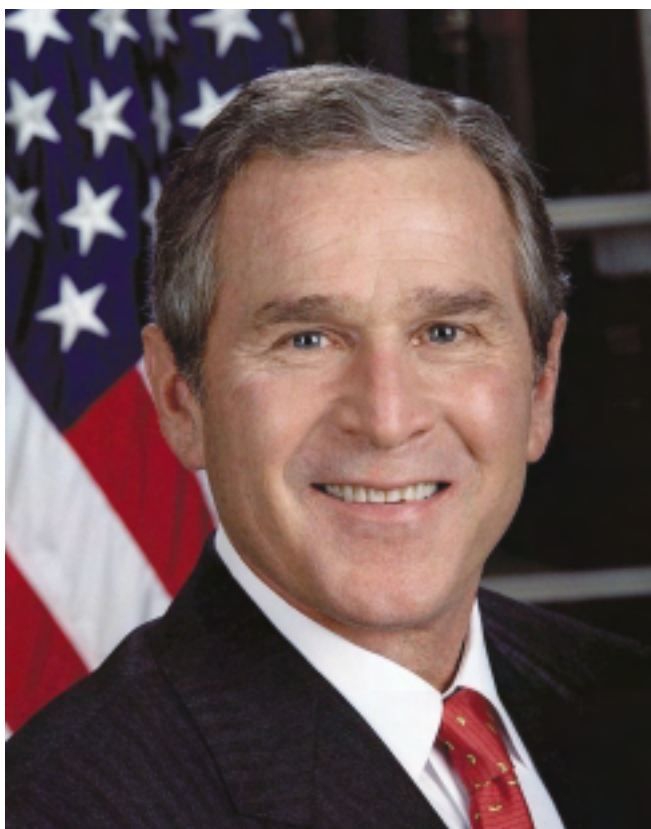
What to expect in the coming days?

The Republican National Convention: Scheduled to begin at the end of this month, the GOP convention will tout Bush's leadership in post-9/11 America. He will be presented as a "tough" leader who deserves another four years to defend the country from the evil of terrorism. It will be a made-for-TV affair, as the Democratic National Convention was, but

the Republicans do have a headache that the Democrats more or less didn't—a massive march and rally of 250,000 protestors with a clear theme: The World Says No to the Bush Agenda. United for Peace and Justice, the organizer of the demonstration, is "a coalition of more than 800 local and national groups throughout the United States who have joined together to oppose our government's policy of permanent warfare and empire-building." It'll be a thing to watch.

The Presidential Debates: George Bush's language skills will be severely tested during these televised debates, scheduled from late September to mid October, and considered quite important in swaying undecided voters. Bush and Kerry will battle it out three times in front of live audiences. John Kerry, although not a passion-arousing speaker, is fairly eloquent ("He reads," claims his wife Teresa Heinz-Kerry, in an implied barb at Bush, who's admitted he doesn't even read newspapers). How will Bush fare against Kerry's complex sentences? James Fallows of *The Atlantic Monthly* thinks that the Democrats underestimate Bush's language at their own peril. He points to Bush's strong

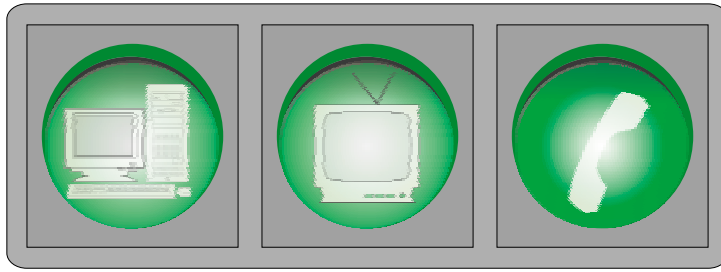
debating skills when he was the governor of Texas. But I'm hopeful because Bush continues to butcher the English language as well as show his lack of capacity for complex thoughts. (After all, wasn't the Iraq war sold to the American public with a simplistic good-versus-evil proposition?) The most telling of Bush's latest language gaffes—already being coded for history as "Bushisms"—occurred earlier this month, when the honorable president said, to the delight of those who think that this administration has hurt this country in more ways than one: "Our enemies are innovative and resourceful, and so are we. They never stop thinking about new ways to harm our country and our people, and neither do we." While this could be passed off as a mere linguistic blunder, what he said during the Unity Journalists of Color convention



points to fundamental lack of thinking skills. A Native-American journalist asked, "What do you think tribal sovereignty means in the 21st century?" The president answered, "Tribal sovereignty means that—it's sovereignty. I mean, you're a—you're a—you've been given sovereignty and you're viewed as a sovereign entity."

May the best man win. **N**

(Upadhyay teaches in the MFA writing program at Indiana University, U.S.)



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Mobile Wherever U R

There's no denying that the advent of cellphones has created a revolution in the lifestyles of many in Nepal

BY KUNAL LAMA

Nepal Telecom is a smug company. It's making megabucks in a nation renowned for its debt-ridden, loss-making public enterprises. With around 180,000 cellphone users, it has more than matched its present sales target. It also promises, gung-ho-ly, improvements and upgrades in its infrastructure and services to further increase the number of users. It has the money, but does it have a plan to do so properly? (The specter of a George Bush rising up from the ranks of the telecom administration is somewhat of an alarming thought, especially when we do not have a local documentarian of the caliber and tenacity of Michael Moore to humor us out in a peculiarly propagandist fashion.) User complaints are a mile-long and run the gamut from bad connection to their woefully ill-designed website. There's no denying, however, that the advent of cellphones has created a revolution in the lifestyles of many in Nepal. And it has given birth to a bewildering subspecies of *Homo sapiens nepalensis*!

moment, you expect him to belt out a bad version of Madonna, or infrared himself to Mars. No questions asked, this guy knows how to link his phone to his PC or laptop; is thoroughly conversant with every single feature available, from Bluetooth to WAP to Predictive text input. Useful to know when you want to send a business card across, but a frightful bore to have when the subject is not his cellphone.

You must be at the receiving end of many a serial joker, the ones who keep pinging you with countless jokes (and, sometimes, Ganesha good luck mantras, for a bit of thoughtful variation), throughout the day and, when you wake up in the morning, you realize that they have been at it throughout the night as well. Sardar-ji jokes can only be funny as long as you are lucky—or unlucky, depending on personal perspective—to have a Sardar-ji friend around to tease mercilessly.

There are also those who annoy you with their total and absolute refusal to let an SMS go unanswered. Whether deep into the merits and demerits of Koshi Multi-Purpose Project or the fitness of Dr. Mohammed Mohsin Khan—as a Royal Appointee—to be the official spokesperson

of the present government, the moment a text message is announced, these compulsive SMS-ers begin madly to let their distracted fingerpoints do the talking. If one is clever enough to convert adversity to advantage, it is best to keep the conversations abbreviated and simply SMS each other. The debates and discussions could, of course, go on pointlessly, with no dam or Deuba in sight.

My personal bêtes noires are the public loud speakers who simply carry on chatting about the state of their lives, no matter where or who they are with. They seem to believe that what they do with their mobiles is their personal right and refuse to turn them off. I would love these subspecies to be arrested by the authorities for public offensive acts and harassment and thrown in the slammer with no food or water until they learn to dress down their habit and go

about their business in private, not public. However, I have not quite figured out if I would be fingered by Sapana Pradhan Malla and other human rights activists and associations for subjecting minority communities to persecution, besides accused of being hand-in-hand with the brutal arms of law and injustice.

A tiny machine, weighing about 100g, all metal and chips and LCD and closed-up keys. It's a wonder what science and technology has wrought to give us this communication tool which, until 20 years ago, would have been completely at home in the latest James Bond installment as Q's yet another amazing invention. Keep it handy, folks, and carry on talking. **N**



Take, for example, the latest cell must-haver. With up-to-the-minute uplinks to all the green channel violators in the country, before a model is out of the factories in China, he already has them. Brand loyalty means nothing to him. Once possessed, he shows 'em, proud as the father of a newborn son. Except, this dad ditches his sons the moment another one arrives. Somewhere in his house, there's got to be a cellphone graveyard. I wonder if the pile of "dead" phones would be banned for exports to Australia?

Then there's the complete mobile man. Not content with just the phone, this dude goes all out with accessories: carrying case, desktop stand, wireless car kit, ears-a-dangling with wires and headsets. Any

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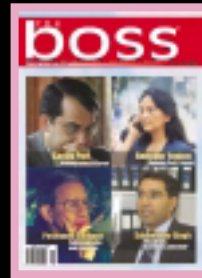
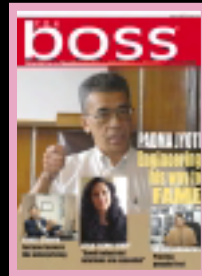
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The River Guide

From a rafting guide to being an anti-dam activist, it's been a long ride. "My life's been like the rapids, ups and downs," says Ale.

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

Forty-three-year-old tourism entrepreneur Megh Ale is an adventure buff who runs a rafting agency and a river resort. His work, which brings him close to the wilderness, has also taught him the value of nature conservation.

"I haven't studied environmental science," says Ale, who looks like an aging cowboy in western movies, minus the hat, with his long ponytail and a goatee. "My profession is river guiding, and I am only doing the things I have learned," he says. When we met him at his Lazimpat office last week, he had a huge jet-black Tibetan mastiff dog with him. "I have two more dogs in my Borderland Resort Hotel near Bhotekoshi. I am only taking care of this one until I can find its owner," he said.

Ale's care for a lost dog shows in a small way his concern for nature. His bigger projects are compelling and also popular. The Fourth Bagmati River Festival that Ale organized as founding president of Nepal River Conservation Trust came to an end last week after two and a half months. It has brought much more attention to the urgent steps needed to clean up the country's holiest, and perhaps dirtiest, river. "The Bagmati River Festival has established itself as a festival of the 21st Century. A new environmental festival has been created just like Dashain and Tihar but not celebrated only by playing cards and drinking *Jaad*," says Ale.

The festival started in 2001. This year, on June 5, it coincided with the World Environment Day, and ended on August 21, which happened to be a Saturday. The events included cleaning the riverbanks and planting trees along the Bagmati, an anti-plastic campaign, training on making compost fertilizer and rallies. The festival sponsored competitions for photography, essay writing and poetry, plus cycle races, kayaking and rafting.

"We want this festival to stand out in the national calendar," adds Ale. "It'll be a platform for all concerned civilians to work together for the betterment of our rivers as well as to promote new avenues for tourism." Ale hopes the festival will extend to other rivers in the Valley, such as the Bishnumati and the Manhara, in later years. This year the trust was able to involve about 70 organizations, including 21 media houses, for the cause of the Bagmati.





How the adventure buff turned into a conservationist is a very interesting story.

If it hadn't been for his engineer friend, Pranab Shah, Ale would probably have joined the army, much like his father. After completing school in Waling, Syangja, he went to study at the Indian Army Thaman Hostel in Dehradun and the Nina Thapa Hostel in Gorakhpur. He then returned to Waling, where he taught as a volunteer and gave football lessons to young students. In 1982, Shah convinced him to come to Kathmandu to study commerce at Shanker Dev Campus. It was then that Ale got into rafting. Whatever little free

time he had between studies went into supporting himself with odd jobs—playing football for local clubs and teaching at Himalayan Vidya Mandir. “My life’s been like the rapids, ups and down, challenges and lots of commitment to overcome with every single expedition. I have been a full time river guide since 1986 and am still enjoying it.”

One of the ups brought Ale to nature conservation, when he worked for Royal Bardia National Park from 1987 to 2000. In the recent years, Ale has become a vocal critic of government plans to develop huge dams on major rivers. Apart from conservation issues, the plans would adversely affect his rafting business.

“Nepal is still a Mecca for white water rafting,” says Ale, “but the government has only been thinking about hydro dollars that it can make from huge dams, which affect the natural habitat, along with rafting tourism. The higher the dam,” he says, “the higher the money, and there’s more *chal khel* of the politicians.” He adds, “The government officials haven’t realized that our natural resources should be saved for future generations. Development should be taking place at a balance with nature.”

Ale’s dream is to get the government to declare the Karnali River as a Himalayan River Heritage and then generate income by promoting tourism in the area. That would preserve many rare species in the river. The Karnali still has dolphins, *sahar* fish, *gharyals* where it runs along Royal Bardia National Park, which houses the biggest Asiatic elephant ever recorded. Nepal’s nomadic *Raute* tribe and fishermen tribe of *Rajis* also live along the river.

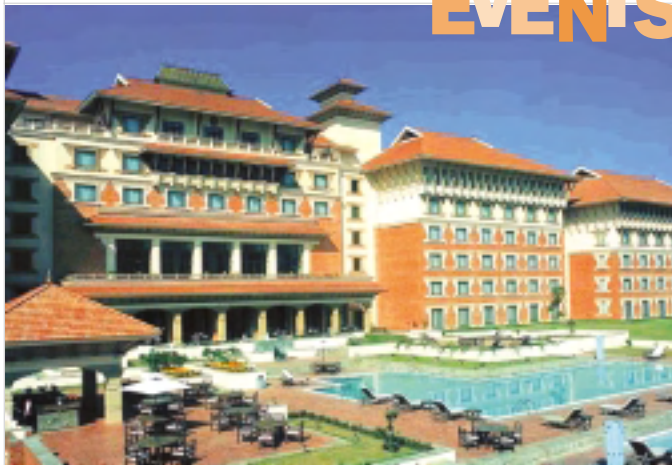
“Late King Birendra declared Bardia a ‘Gift to the Living Earth,’ but that has hardly been realized,” he says. “The Karnali is the only existing free-flowing river that is of significant cultural value, as it runs right from the Tibetan plateau along Kailash and Mansarovar and is a tributary of the Ganga. Building a dam along Karnali, which rates among the top five rafting rivers in the world, is like cutting the vein of the earth.”

“When I die, Karnali is where I want to be cremated,” says Ale. We hope that’s a long time in the future. Ale still has miles to go before he sleeps. **N**



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ART EXHIBITIONS



EXHIBITION @LOTUS

Lotus Gallery presents a joint exhibition by Lama Tenzing Norbu, Tsering Nyanduk and Ang Sang. Tenzing Norbu's stunning Dolpo landscapes were featured in the Academy award nominated film, "CARAVAN." Tsering Nyanduk, an innovative young Tibetan painter paints primarily in oils. His work is inspired by French impressionism as well as the culturally rich Tibet, where he lives and paints. Finally Ang Sang is a graduate of Fine Arts Tibet University and

won the first prize at the contemporary Tibetan Exhibition in Beijing. His unusual images are achieved by combining traditional wood block printmaking with brushwork. Honoring centuries old Tibetan tradition, he applies mineral pigments of turquoise, lapis, topaz and coral to his canvasses. With unique artistic charm in each of the three, these artists are fast gaining worldwide attention among art collectors.

At the Lotus Gallery, Thamel. Opening on August 22. Until September 15. For information: 4253646.

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ing on: August 28 (invitees only). Open for public from 29 August. Opening hours: 11:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. For information: 5521231.

Play @ Gurukul

Gurukul is showing "Anamaya," a play directed by Anup Baral. They play is based

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on a story, "Khuma" by Mohan Bikram Shah. Date: August 26 and 27. For information: 4466956

Martin Chautari

Open discussions at Martin Chautari, Prasuti Griha Marga 509, Thapathali. Participation is open to all. For information: 4256239, 4240059.

This Week at Martin Chautari

AUGUST 23

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION

Topic: Importance of writing in higher education. Pundit: Dr. Pramod Mishra, Augustana College, U.S.A. Time: 3 p.m.

AUGUST 24

MANGALBARE DISCUSSION

Topic: Junk food and food security. Pundit: Dr. Aruna Upreti. Time: 5 p.m.

AUGUST 26

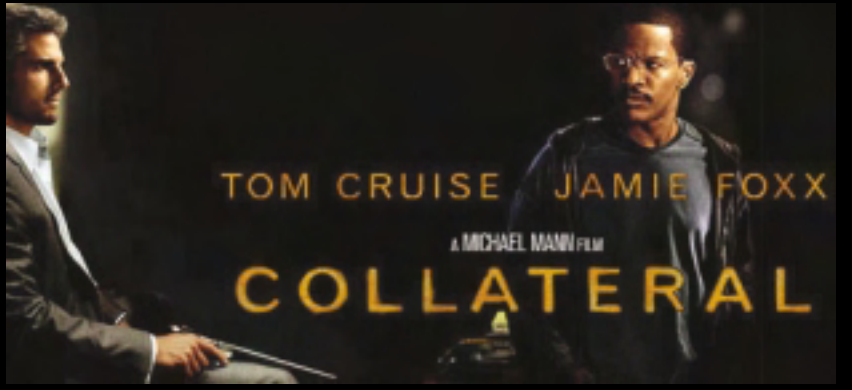
MEDIA DISCUSSION

Film@Chautari: 11'09"01 September 11- A collection of documentaries by 11 directors. Time: 3 p.m.

SHOWING AT THE JAI NEPAL CINEMA HALL

COLLATERAL

Starring: Tom Cruise, Jamie Foxx, Jada Pinkett Smith, Mark Ruffalo, Peter Berg. For information: 4442220



AUGUST 26

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION

Topic: Coca-cola or Mohi? Nepali roadmap to livelihood and peace. Pundit: Dr. Pramod Parajuli, Portland State University, USA. Time: 5:30 p.m.

Cine Club

Movie: "Les anges de la nuit" (1990). Starring: de Phil Joanou with Gary Oldman. At Alliance Francaise, Tripureshwore. Free admission. Date: August 29. Time: 2 p.m.

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ONGOING

Krishnarpan

The Nepali specialty restaurant at Dwarika's Hotel, serves from four to 16 course ceremonial meals. Open for lunch and dinner. Table reservations recommended. For information: 4479488.

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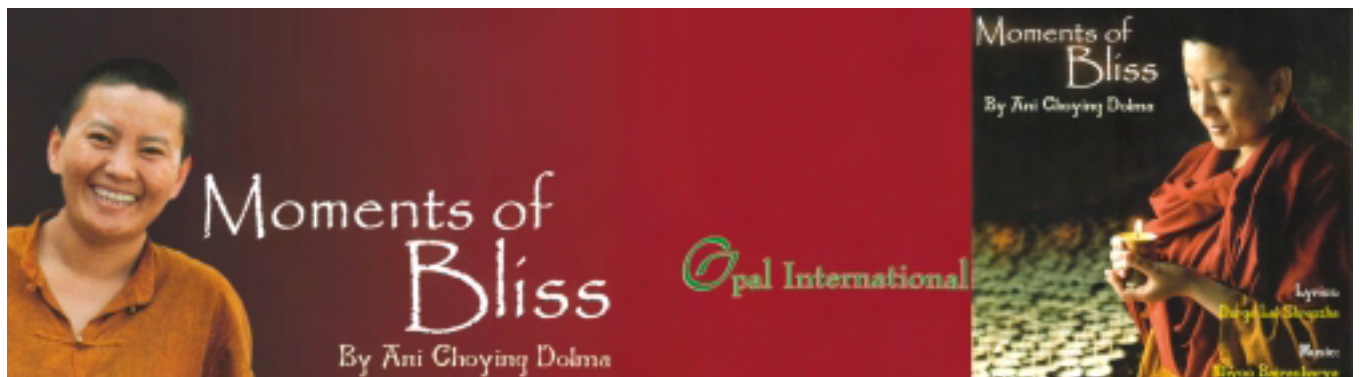
Chef's special. At Keyman Royal Siano Resturant, Durbar Marg. Everyday. Time: 12 - 3 p.m. For information: 4230890.

Summit BBQ

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Not many tourists come to Upstairs. This is natural, for it's discoverable only through word of mouth.

BY ADITYA ADHIKARI

It's not easy to find Jazz Upstairs, located in a small, ramshackle building, atop a shop in Lazimpat. There is a sign hanging on the side of the building, but, like the building itself, the sign is small and obscure. You have to walk up a narrow flight of stairs before finding a small, cozy den. The walls are covered with pictures of jazz greats, most of the tables are at floor level and traditional *mudas* serve as seats. Signs of a project to enlarge the room by demolishing a wall are still apparent, but even so the space is still small. Upstairs, as the bar is commonly known, has a makeshift feel about it, from the décor to the seats. This is part of its charm.

The place is run by Laxmi Raj Thapa, known by all as Chhi dai. He plays bass in the band that jams at Upstairs on Wednesday and Saturday evenings. In the past the enormously popular Cadenza used to play there. Since some of Cadenza's musicians left for abroad, Chhi and Jigme, the guitar player of the band, formed another group with Sagar, a drummer. They call themselves the JCS Trio, each letter standing for the first initial of a band member. In speaking of the differences between Cadenza and the JCS Trio Chhi says: "In Cadenza our focus was funk. Now we play more standard jazz tunes. Also, in our new band, as there are only three members, we get the opportunity to express ourselves through our instruments to a larger degree than we did when we were part of a larger band." Czech sax player Peter Kroutil often joins them. "We have learned a lot from each other and have introduced each other to different kinds of music," says Jigme, the guitarist.

"You should have come last Saturday," Chhi says. "We had our six year anniversary party. There were close to 200 people here." Two hundred people in such a small space is hard to imagine. "The whole place was packed. We opened up

JAZZ UPSTAIRS





the room where we store our musical instruments. That soon filled up as well. Pretty soon there were people jammed through the hall down to the bottom of the stairway.”

The regular patrons of the bar are mostly expatriates. They come with their families and friends. Upstairs is a particularly congenial place for them as it is small, has a laid back atmosphere and is conducive to meeting other people. Many claim to come there because they feel at home, as, after a few visits, one gets to know all

the regulars, at least by sight. “The first time I discovered this place I felt a thrill of having made a special discovery,” said Will Simmonds, referring to the obscure, out-of-the-way nature of the place. “This place is so much more interesting than the bars in Thamel.”

Not many tourists come to Upstairs. This is natural, as Upstairs is discoverable only through word of mouth; it is usually only foreigners who stay for a longer period of time who come to know about the place. In the evenings, locals

too are few and far between. There is a regular local crowd, friends of the band who spend much of their time there and look upon Upstairs as their home, but it is not very large. The Rs. 200 cover charge on days that the band plays is a deterrent for Nepalis. The music that the band plays also does not exactly suit the taste of young Nepalis, who prefer other, more popular kinds of music.

In the daytime the patrons are mostly high school and college students. Chhi says: “Many couples come here in the daytime. They like this place because of the privacy they can have. Because of our rule that all orders are to be made at the bar, nobody waits on the tables, and people like that. They feel they are not being intruded upon.”

On Wednesday evening the band starts playing at 8 p.m. The music contributes to the laid back feel; the band doesn’t intrude. The band members are content to jam with each other, to become submerged in the music they make. The regulars drift in, form groups, drift around the bar chatting with various people. **N**





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Star Attraction

As the first Nepali athlete to qualify for the medal rounds in the Olympics, Sangina has already done enough. Anything she can achieve here on will come as a bonus.

BY SUDESH SHRESTHA

The Olympic Games are into their second week. Many sports enthusiasts here, who stayed awake on the night of August 13 to watch the live telecast, are through with their appreciation for the glitzy opening ceremony. Others have savored the rivalry between two swimming stars, Michael Phelps of the United States and Australian Ian Thorpe.

Amid the hype surrounding the international stars, not many are aware that three Nepali athletes have quietly bowed out of the preliminary rounds. Two of them are swimmers—Nayana Shakya and Alice Shrestha. And a third one is a shooter—Tika Ram Shrestha.

There is one exception, though. Thanks to her being the first Nepali qualifier to the Olympic Games and the attendant media hype, Sangina Baidya is now a household name. She qualified for the Athens Games, when she finished third in the flyweight category (under 49kg) at the Asian taekwondo qualification tournament in Bangkok in February.

Now the whole country is looking at her for another milestone: an elusive Olympic win, though with guarded optimism. And the news that South Korea—the sport's granddad—had withdrawn its competitor from the under-49kg category has only sparked hope in Nepali hearts.

"A good draw coupled with her best form," a senior Nepali taekwondo instructor says, "and we stand a chance

to land that elusive medal." The final draw will be released on August 25 and the competition will be held from August 26 to 29. A total of 124 taekwondo players, 60 of them women, are competing in various weight divisions.

Though Korea boasts dozens of world-class fighters, the Athens Olympics could see their monopoly break. Each country can field only two men and two women in four weight divisions. This provision should go a long way in making taekwondo a global sport, much in keeping with the Olympic spirit.



GOING FOR GLORY:
Sangina Baidya

Taekwondo, the 2,000-year-old Korean martial art, first featured at the 1988 Seoul Olympics as a demonstration sport. It made its debut as a medal event in Sydney four years ago.

SAGINA'S CHANCES

Competing in her first Olympic Games, Sangina might be feeling the pressure of carrying the heavy burden of expectations. "Representing the country in the Olympics is in itself a dream come true. I'll try my best for a podium finish," says the 29-year-old. "Of course, it's going to be tough."

Days before the encounter, she was concentrating as much on improving her techniques as on gaining mental toughness in order not to be overawed by the strong field. While everyone else was in Athens, she was still undergoing a stringent training regimen in Kathmandu—six hours a day in two sessions—with South Korean coach Kwan Yong Dal.

Over the years, Sangina has proved her ability to rise to the occasion. In almost two dozen international championships, she has bagged 18 medals, including 15 golds and a silver. The gold came at the 12th Asian Taekwondo Championships held in Australia in 1996. In the South Asian region, she is the uncontested queen: She has golds in the last two SAF Games.

"Sangina is well exposed to big international competitions," says Kwan. He believes Sangina can do well if she maintains her usual composure and doesn't underestimate her competitors. Gone are the days when South Korean fighters only needed to step onto the mat to win, according to Kwan. "Assisted by a relentless drain of Korean coaches to distant shores, the rest of the world has rapidly caught up with them."

"There isn't much to choose between some Europeans, Asian athletes and Koreans," he adds. "It's just a matter of who trains better and more." Now Nepal's medal hopes depends on the duo—Sangina and Kwan. Should they fail, Nepalis can still take heart that India managed only its first individual silver medal since Independence in Athens.

Sangina has already done enough in being the first Nepali athlete to qualify for the Olympics. Anything she can achieve here on will come as a bonus. **N**

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The history of the Tibetan Muslims goes back to the time of the Great fifth Dalai Lama of 17th Cent. Tibet. Reaching beyond religious boundaries, he urged the Kashmiri traders to settle in Tibet. The migrants intermarried with the Tibetans and thus was born the Tibetan Muslim Community.

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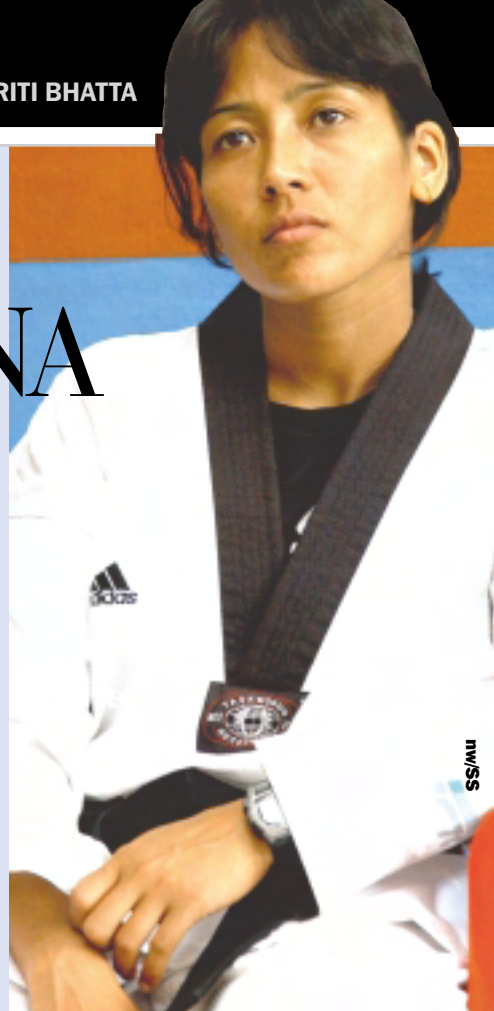


Snapshots

BY DHRITI BHATTA

Go Go, SANGINA

Wondering why **SANGINA BAIDYA** was not leading the Nepali contingent during the opening ceremony of the Olympics? Where could she have possibly been? Thousands of miles away from the venue: Sangina was still training back home in Nepal. "I am sad for not being able to attend the program [opening ceremony]," says Sangina. "But rather than wait for more than 10 days for my first match, I thought I would be better off doing some last-moment training here." A nagging knee problem was another reason for the delay. Sangina will hit the pavilion for the first time this week—on August 26. "I might retire after the Olympics, so I'll give my best shot for the medal," she says. Go, Sangina, go. She is, after all, our only hope.



MILES TO GO

CHITRA POUDEL, the 20-year-old, polio-stricken cyclist, is a man on a mission. After traversing 32 districts in 28 days on his bicycle last year, he set out on a South Asian tour. He now harbors hopes of doing a 110-country tour. "The major problems are funds and visas," says Poudel. "Once you are done with those, the rest depends on your strength and determination." Such a drive will surely take him a long way.



ALMOST FAMOUS

How often do you work hard to get something and when you have it, you get immediately embroiled in a controversy. Askai, "Mr. Hope," is **EKA RAM MAHARJAN'S** creation: a mascot that was expected to energize Kathmandu's indolent residents to do something about the waste piled all over the city. No sooner was Askai selected as the "model citizen," the Jyapu Mahaguthi accused Maharjan of playing up an ethnic stereotype. Askai is dressed in traditional *jyapu* wear—tucking a flower behind his ear. Maharjan is surprised at the controversy. "I did not mean to offend anyone," says Maharjan. "Asha Kaji is a Nepali representative and nothing more."

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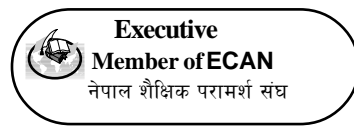
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Spinner Of Cricketing Yarns

Ramachandra Guha is an anthropologist, historian, and cricket writer—all rolled into one. He has written and edited many books on cricket. His book on the social history of Indian cricket, “A Corner of a Foreign Field,” is his most acclaimed cricket book. He writes extensively on environment, ecology and

personalities as well. The “The Unquiet Woods” and “Savaging the Civilized: Verrier Elwin, His Trials and India” are two of his notable scholarly books. He has also published two collections of essays: “The Anthropologist Among the Marxists” and “The Last Liberal.” Ajit Baral interviewed Guha, whom The New York Times Review of Books calls “perhaps the best of India’s non-fiction writers.”

How did you take up cricket writing?

I became a cricket writer after reading Ashis Nandy’s “The Tao of Cricket,” a solemn, sociological study of the sport, which wrote about cricket without any humor and without any passion either. I had grown up in a cricket-playing and cricket-loving family, and was steeped in the lore of the game. I am grateful to Nandy, whose book provoked me to place my knowledge and passion in the public domain.

In the introduction to your book of essays, “An Anthropologist Among the Marxists,” you have written, “Cricket liberates me.” Could you explain?

I meant, really, that writing about cricket furthered my interest in character over structure; that it helped me move away from arid sociology towards the human drama of history.

People have compared you with CLR James. Have his books—particularly his magnum opus “Beyond a Boundary”—influenced you?

James and his book are incomparable. I have read “Beyond a Boundary” at least 20 times, for education as well as entertainment. But I cannot say it “influ-

enced” me, for I tried to develop my own style, consistent with my own (more modest) talents and relevant to the Indian, rather than the West Indian, context.

Cricket has now become a legitimate field of academic studies. When did cricket start to be seen as a genuine area of scholarly study?

I am a little nervous about cricket becoming “a legitimate field of academic studies,” especially of it being caught in the dreary world of post-structuralist, post-colonialist and post-modernist studies.

Writing about cricket furthered my interest in character over structure

You, and some other writers, have explored racism in cricket. Has racism in other sports been as extensively written as in cricket?

Of course. There has been much good writing about racism in American sport, which includes biographies of such emblematic figures as the athlete Jim Thorpe and the baseball player Jackie Robinson.

While reviewing “Lagan” in an issue of “Himal South Asia,” a certain writer alleged the film to be racist? How did you see the film?

I did not see it as racist. I saw it as entertainment—a well-made, racy film that held one’s attention.

Some years back, you said cricket is religion in the subcontinent. Is it secular or fundamentalist?

Secular, for the most part, but sometimes prone to be fundamentalist, as when cricket becomes the vehicle of jingoistic nationalism.

You have mentioned in one of your essays that soccer hasn’t flourished in the United States because it’s the most socialist of games. Cricket isn’t played much in the United States either. Is it for the same reason?

No, cricket did not take off in the U.S. because time is money in that country—which American can spend eight hours away from work or the stock market?

How attractive a job is cricket writing?

I enjoy it, but I see it as secondary to my other writing, which is on more “serious” subjects.

Who will hold the record for the most number of wickets—Warne or Murlitharan? Will the record ever be broken?

Murali will end, as Warne says, with 700 wickets-plus. His record might stay for a very long time.

The controversy over Murlitharan’s doosra ball, is it an instant of racism in world cricket?

Only in part. The Australian prime minister and the Australian public have at times been racist in their treatment of Murali, but it must be remembered that great cricketers of integrity, such as Bishan Bedi, also have reservations about his action. **N**

Of Art And Imagination

A painting of an unknown girl fueled a writer's rich imagination. The resulting book was brought to the screen in a film that evokes the sensuality and romance of both works.

BY KARUNA CHETTRI

A painting, an artist and a writer with a rich imagination is all it takes to produce an exquisite novel like "Girl With A Pearl Earring." Set in 17th century Delft, Holland, Tracy Chevalier, the author of the novel, deftly weaves a romantic story around "Girl With A Pearl Earring," a masterpiece by a Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer. The story is about Griet, a young Dutch girl who is forced by circumstances to work as a maid in the artist's home. Trapped in the class society of master and servant, Griet has no choice but to succumb to the domestic drudgery mapped out for her at her master's house. Eventually, her quiet observation, quick perception and love for the aesthetic draws her to Vermeer's paintings and ultimately to his undivided attention. Chevalier moves the reader skillfully through the growing intimacy between Griet and Vermeer. As Delft buzzes with gossip, the scandal climaxes when Vermeer makes Griet pose for him in his wife's earring.

The scenes in the story are suffused with 17th century Dutch imagery accompanied by intricate details of pigment and paint-making. The romance between the two is implied by intense looks, touches and silence. While she contends with her jealous mistress, Vermeer's wife, her silent yearning

speaks louder than any love poem. Chevalier subtly leaves the reader wondering what might have happened had the two met under different circumstances. Indeed, together with the painting, Chevalier's intriguing narration evokes a myriad of emotions bordering on confusion, uncertain expectations and high-drama.

"It isn't a true story," explains Tracy Chevalier. "No one knows who the girl is, or in fact who any of the people in his paintings are." In fact, it was a poster of Vermeer's most celebrated painting hanging in her room that inspired

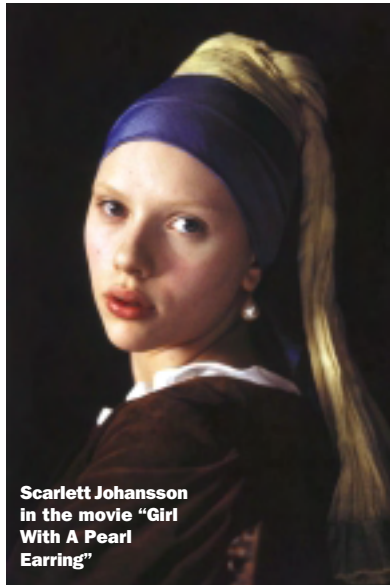
subjects into radiant and lively characters caught in mid-motion. Very little is known about him except the fact that he died steeped in debt and leaving a total of 35 breathtakingly luminous paintings.

Olivier Hertreed adapted the novel into "Girl With A Pearl Earring," a slow and yet sensuous movie with its vibrant colors and opalescent lighting to match Vermeer's painting and Chevalier's storyline. Starring Colin Firth and Scarlett Johansson and directed by Peter Webber, the movie hit the screens in 2003 and revived the sales of the novel with a bang. The beautiful Scarlett Johansson ("Lost in Translation" and "Ghost World") has a startling resemblance to the girl in the painting. While her flawless, peachy skin and full lips bring their own sensuality to the screen, the movie coaxes the viewer into a time warp to a luminous 17th century Delft that painstakingly mimics many of the Dutch paintings of the time. Although

the dialogue is sparse and much depends upon the body language of the actors, the visual exuberance of the movie holds an edge over the book. Vermeer's and Griet's romance—chaste and devoid of physical contact—speaks volumes in the silence of their interactions: Of an artist and his model, a master and his servant, and the upper class and the lower class. Caught within the boundaries of class and time, their passion can only be expressed in the pulsating colors of the painting of "Girl With A Pearl Earring." This film was justifiably nominated for an Academy Award in 2004 for its cinematography but lost to "Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World."



Painting by Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675)



Scarlett Johansson in the movie "Girl With A Pearl Earring"

BOOK
 Girl With A Pearl Earring:
 AUTHOR: Tracy Chevalier
 PAGES: 240
 first published by Dutton (New York)

MOVIE
 Starring Colin Firth, Scarlett Johansson, Tom Wilkinson, Essie Davis, Alakina Mann, Cillian Murphy, Judy Parfitt, Leslie Woodhall. Directed by Peter Webber, 2003

Chevalier to write a historical novel woven around the angelic young girl in the painting. Indeed, a perfect example of history and fiction merging effortlessly. Johannes Vermeer's paintings depict life and lifestyle in an intimate and yet mysterious way. His use of lights and shadows transforms his solitary

While romance seekers find the movie sensuously appealing, the less patient viewers find the pace excruciatingly slow. "Like watching paint dry!" expressed one disappointed reviewer. The movie, nevertheless, is a fervent melodrama brimming with suspense, scandal and wishful silences! **N**



Red Alert

The Maoist blockade of Kathmandu Valley will begin to bite at some point. If nothing else, the Maoists will still be happy that more than a million residents of Kathmandu are talking about the blockade every single moment. And about the impending disaster. The Maoist threats have already closed down 12 major businesses, including the country's most prestigious hotel, the Soaltee Crowne Plaza, and the biggest taxpayer, Surya Tobacco. The revenue loss runs into millions. Thousands of families once employed now face an uncertain future—not to mention the tens of thousands others who relied on the businesses for their livelihood one way or another. The Maoist plan seems clear: Unsettle the government and force it to declare a unilateral ceasefire.

The last time Kathmandu witnessed an impasse, in 1989-1990, the Panchayat regime collapsed. The pains of the 18-month-long transit blockade, caused by the non-renewal of the Indo-Nepal transit treaty, were great. Prices skyrocketed. There was an acute shortage of fuel, salt, cooking oil and food. The tourism industry went into a deep recession. Fourteen years on, it's a very different story. First and foremost, the current anti-regime movement is a violent one. The 1990 Jana Andolan was a popular movement, and many of its leaders were inspired by the movement for independence in India, which was led by Mahatma Gandhi.

When we went to press, the highways were still closed—for the fourth straight day. Kathmandu continued to be gripped by violence and uncertainty. A policeman was killed, and newspapers were filled with stories of the deaths of three innocent commoners in Rupandehi. All victims of Maoist atrocities, like Dekendra Thapa, a Dailekh-based reporter for Radio Nepal, charges against whom were never established. The Maoists believed he was a government spy.

The media is smarting about the summary execution. Deep down there is a feeling of betrayal that the Maoists should hurt the very people who have

bravely reported issues and incidents that the government and security officials didn't always appreciate. Last week journalists took out a protest rally in Kathmandu—a first against the Maoists by a professional group.

Interestingly, this comes at a time when the Maoists plan to "ring" the Valley, their most decisive offensive. We believe the blockade will alienate the people instead of bringing about the urban uprising the Maoists are hoping for. The longer the hardship, the more popular will be the thinking that the Maoists really don't care about legitimacy, which was what the 1990 Jana Andolan was all about. Civil society will continue to express its outrage against the blockade.

Indeed, it has been a blockade, of both the literal and the figurative kind. It's also been a blockade of minds. The government seems unwilling to relinquish the basic principles of the 1990 Constitution: multiparty democracy and constitutional monarchy. The Maoists have been as dogmatic: They want a constituent assembly and U.N. mediation.

Much as we detest the Maoist violence, we do see U.N. mediation as an option. It's better to invite the international community now, when we are still a functioning state, rather than have them come later anyway. The external force is bound to march in the moment we are perceived as a threat to international peace and security. We would like to quote Mr. Kul Chandra Gautam, the UNICEF No. 2 whom Nepalis hold in high esteem for his integrity and sense of purpose. "Wouldn't it be better for us to voluntarily seek support for making peace before the country becomes a completely lawless wasteland," Gautam wonders, "rather than face the consequences of a possible, unsolicited intervention later?" Many may dismiss this as a desperate plea for U.N. mediation from a senior U.N. official. We see more than that.

Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor

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