

US ELECTIONS | SMUGGLERS' HAVEN | CITIZENSHIP WOES | REFUGEES IN LIMBO

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# nation

WEEKLY

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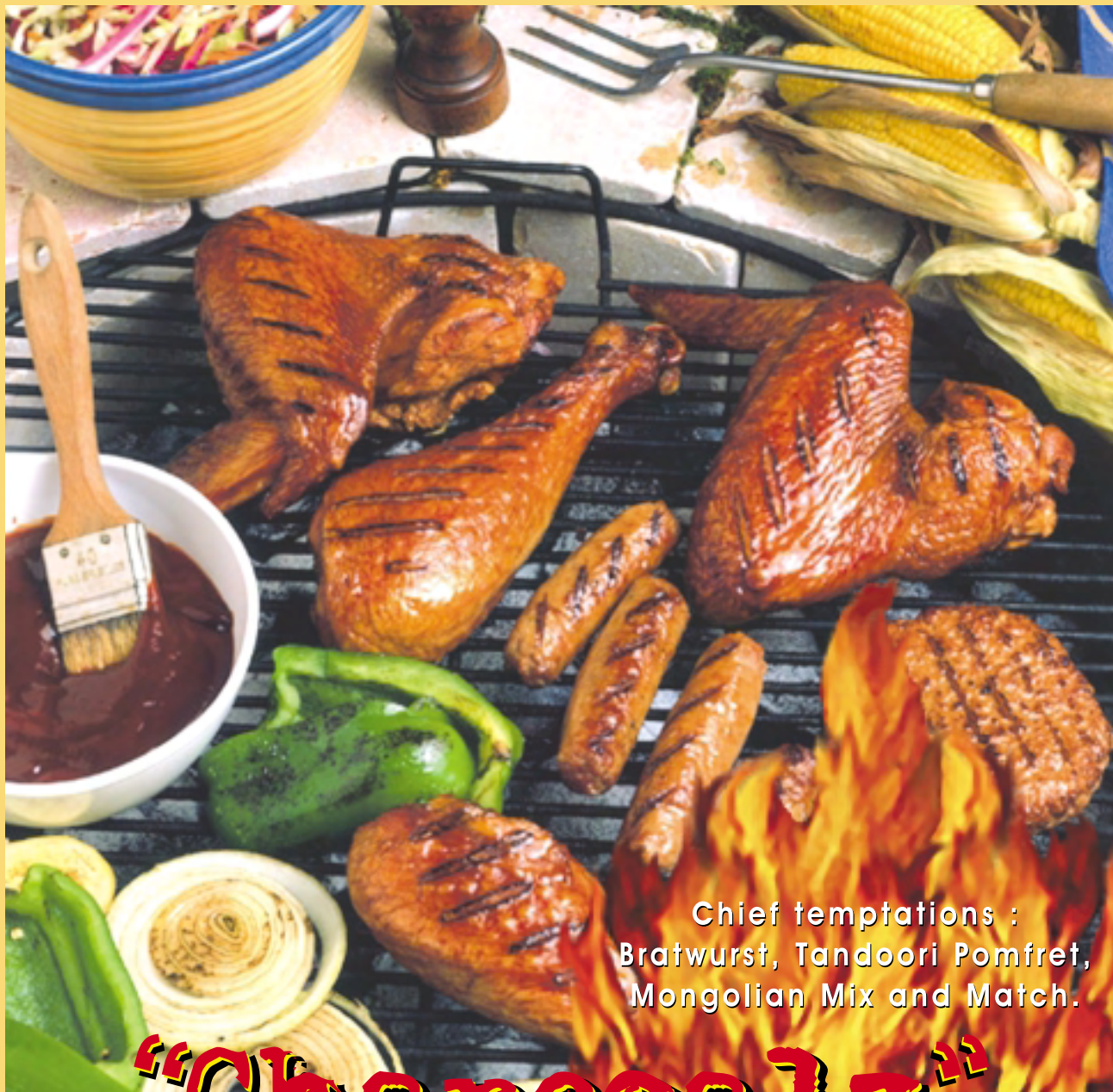


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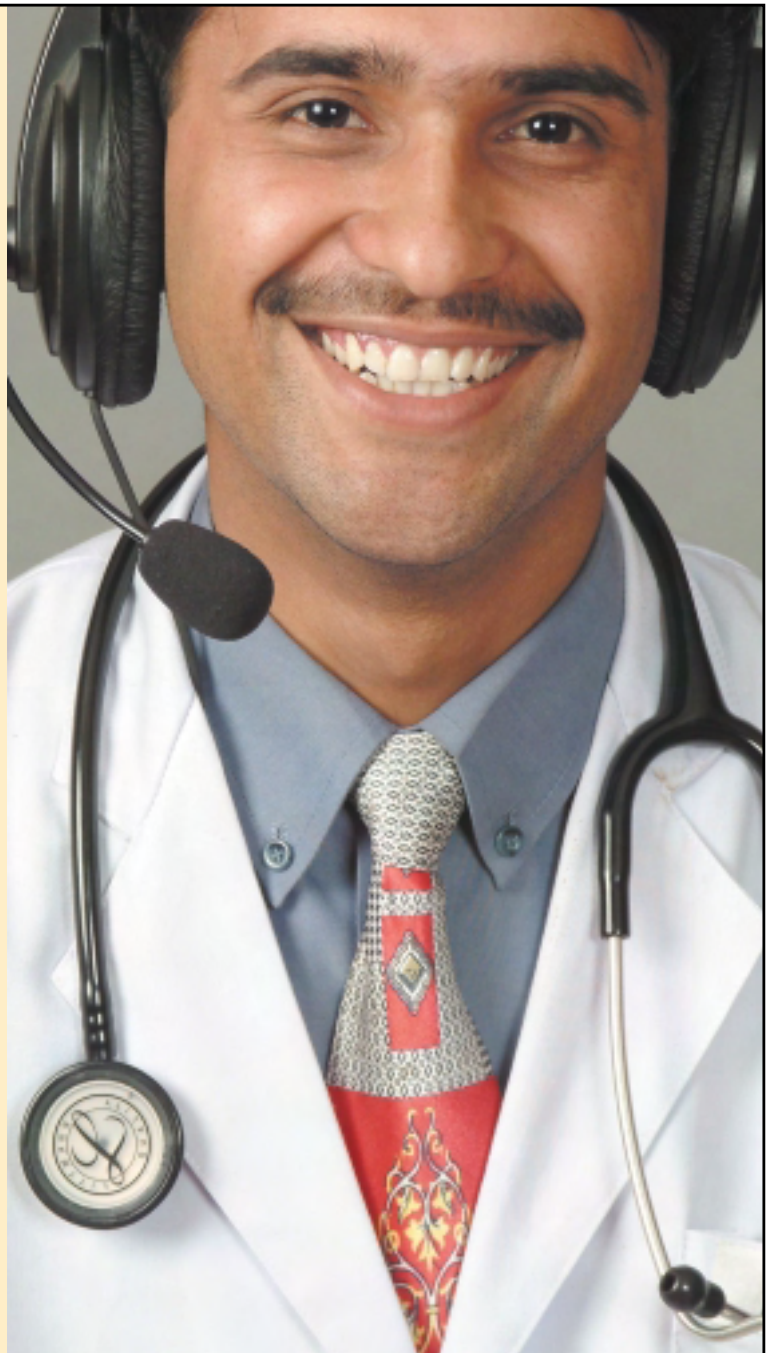
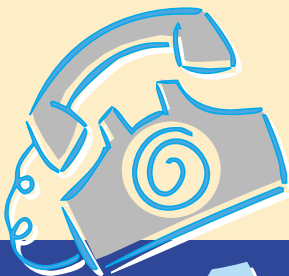
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## Letters



“ [The diaspora] has its own way of celebrating Dashain and that...should be celebrated ”

RINA

### Diaspora Dashain

I ENJOYED YOUR COVER STORY ON Dashain very much, especially Akshay Adhikari's hilarious piece from Brussels ("Necessary Nostalgia," October 31). As a Nepali who has been living abroad for a number of years, I could easily relate to his disappointment at not getting the Dashain invitation from the Nepali Embassy. Trust me, I have over the years heard a lot of those sad stories from young Nepalis in New York and Washington D.C., two U.S. cities that has Nepali missions and sizeable Nepali populations. Though the number of Nepalis in the United States has grown substantially in the last 10 years or so, those of us living in the far-flung ghost towns have no choice but to huddle together and make most of the small crowd during Dashain. Never mind, Akshay, come join us in the American Midwest the next time they cross you out from the Dashain list.

PRASANNA SHRESTHA  
AKRON, OHIO

YOUR DASHAIN ARTICLES WERE brilliant. They read very differently from typical newspaper articles. That said, I failed to get a sense of how Dashain is celebrated by the Nepali communities—in India, China, Europe and the United States—that you covered. Don't you think a much smarter idea would have been to accompany those first-person pieces with broader trend articles? Maybe next Dashain.

SURAVRIJAL  
KATHMANDU

THANK YOU KARUNA CHHETRI FOR speaking for people like me for whom Dashain away from home is an intensely private affair ("The Vagaries of Dashain," Cover Story, October 31). We have our own ways of celebrating the festival and that, more than anything else, should be celebrated.

RINA  
VIA EMAIL

### Rightist slant

BY MAKING PRAKASH SHARAN Mahat his whipping boy, Dipta Shah tries to make a case for inconsistencies in our current diplomacy ("Inadequacies In Diplomacy," October 31). Shah, however, gives away something that I always suspected: His writing has an insidious rightist slant. To claim that Bhekh Bahadur Thapa made a better case for the government's anti-Maoist campaign than Prakash Sharan Mahat is lame. Thapa was no better—or worse—than Mahat. Both had the tough task of defending their respective government's poor human rights record and neither succeeded. Shah misses some vital points—no matter what he says to cover up Thapa's own inadequacies at Columbia University last year. Thapa was not able to defend the charges of human rights abuses by his government. If anything, with all this diplomatic élan and composure, Thapa kept on repeating the obvious: that the government had no choice and that it was doing its best to improve its human rights record. What kind of record? The highest cases of "disappearances" in the world? The record is there for everyone to see—the international community is up in arms

about the state of affairs in Nepal and our press freedom is ranked among the lowest in the world. While people like Thapa, and Shah, may now argue that these things were not happening under the governments of Lokendra Bahadur Chand and Surya Bahadur Thapa, the fact of the matter is that the Royal Nepal Army is one constant that hasn't changed. And so long as that remains unchanged, diplomatic dabbles—either by Thapa or Mahat—make no difference.

NIRAJ JOSHI  
NEWYORK

## Not funny

KUNAL LAMA'S COLUMN IN YOUR October 31 issue was far from funny ("If I Should Be So Lucky," No Laughing Matter). He indeed sounded like his article was No Laughing Matter. As a regular reader of his column, I was hugely disappointed.

SUBARNA LIMBU  
BHAISEPATI

## Cricket confusion

GIVEN THAT THE GOAL OF OUR cricket team right now is to take part in the 2007 World Cup, the focus should be on playing the shorter version of the game, not quasi-Test cricket ("Pushed To The Back Foot," by Sudesh Shrestha). The U.A.E. performed better than Nepal because it has ample experience playing the top teams in One Day Internationals. It will be years before Nepal will be playing Test cricket, and most probably, the current players won't be part of that team. This team should be focusing solely on playing ODIs. Young, aspiring kids should be taught the skills needed to play Test cricket because they are the ones who will be representing Nepal when that day finally arrives.

KUMAR GURUNG  
VIA EMAIL

## Eco-conscious

WE WERE INSPIRED BY SATISH JUNG Shahi's "Fertilizer At Home" (October 31). We contacted the Solid Waste Management Section in the Kathmandu Municipality. Rajesh Manandhar, the sec-

tion chief, should be congratulated for this innovation. I am happy that people are not stealing street bins in Kathmandu and that people are now willing to pay to dispose their garbage. Come to think of it neither was possible only 10 years ago.

RAJESH KHANAL  
SITA PAILA

## Note:

As per the requests of our readers looking for more information on compost bins, the contact address is: Environment Department, Kathmandu Metropolitan City. Phone number: 4231719, 4227240.

## Yonzon mania?

I WAS PLEASED TO NOTE THAT YOU had presented Shrijana Singh Yonjan, beauty-queen-turned-journalist, in your profile section ("Thinking Out Of The Box," by Yashas Vaidya). But I still thought that the article lacked the oomph you had in my favorite profile—of Sumi Devkota, the woman who went for artificial insemination outside the wedlock. Half way into Yonjan's profile, I began to wonder why you were writing about this woman. Perhaps you didn't do enough justice to her. Many like me would still get the impression that Shrijana got the space because she is Gopal Yonjan's daughter.

SUSHMA SHRESTHA  
NEWROAD

## Wither Wagle?

WHERE IS SWARNIM WAGLE AND HIS "Writing on the Wall"? I have missed his scholarly musings.

PRASHANT  
VIA EMAIL

## CORRECTION

The photos in "No Alternative To Peace" (Business, October 31) have been wrongly attributed to Sagar Shrestha of Nation Weekly. The photos belong to Keshav Lamichane.

The photo of Prince Paras in Capsules (October 31) belongs to Navaraj Wagle.

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	Simara	YA 143	Daily	1500	1525	970	55	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	Kathmandu	YA 301	Daily	0700	0800	4800	109
Kathmandu		YA 302	Daily	0705	0805	4800	109	SAAB 340B
Kathmandu		YA 303	Daily	0820	0920	4800	109	SAAB 340B
Biratnagar		YA 151	Daily	0945	1025	2585	85	SAAB 340B
Biratnagar		YA 153	Daily	1430	1510	2585	85	SAAB 340B
Biratnagar		YA 155	Daily	1640	1720	2585	85	SAAB 340B
Pokhara		YA 131	Daily	0815	0840	1710	67	SAAB 340B
Pokhara		YA 137	Daily	0955	1020	1710	67	SAAB 340B
Pokhara		YA 135	Daily	1415	1440	1710	67	SAAB 340B
Bhairahawa		YA 163	Daily	1555	1630	2220	79	SAAB 340B
Bhadrapur		YA 121	Daily	1135	1225	2950	109	SAAB 340B
Nepalgunj		YA 177	Daily	1155	1250	3500	109	SAAB 340B
Biratnagar		Kathmandu	YA 152	Daily	1050	1130	2585	85
Biratnagar	Kathmandu	YA 154	Daily	1535	1615	2585	85	SAAB 340B
Biratnagar	Kathmandu	YA 156	Daily	1745	1825	2585	85	SAAB 340B
Pokhara	Kathmandu	YA 132	Daily	0905	0930	1710	67	SAAB 340B
Pokhara	Kathmandu	YA 138	Daily	1045	1110	1710	67	SAAB 340B
Pokhara	Kathmandu	YA 136	Daily	1505	1530	1710	67	SAAB 340B
Bhairahawa	Kathmandu	YA 164	Daily	1655	1730	2220	79	SAAB 340B
Bhadrapur	Kathmandu	YA 122	Daily	1250	1340	2950	109	SAAB 340B
Nepalgunj	Kathmandu	YA 178	Daily	1315	1405	3500	109	SAAB 340B
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	Kathmandu	YA 106	Daily	0805	0840	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 108	Daily	0930	1005	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 114	Daily	0935	1010	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 110	Daily	0940	1020	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 116	Daily	0945	1025	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 118	Daily	1110	1145	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 120	1,2,4,5,6,7	1115	1150	1665	91	DHC-6/300
Phaplu	Kathmandu	YA182	1,3,5	1120	1155	1480	85	DHC-6/300
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# Picture of the Week



DASHAIN FOR ALL: Street children receive tika at the Khulamunch. The program was organized by Rotary Club of Himalaya Patan.

nation weekly/Sagar Shrestha



# America The Confused

U.S. travel warnings for Nepal are much more about politics than safety

BY JOHN CHILD

U.S. law requires the Department of State, America's foreign ministry, to inform Americans traveling abroad of potential hazards. For months now America has classified Nepal with Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel and Columbia as a country so dangerous that Americans should "defer non-essential travel." It's easy to see why most of the countries on the list (see box) are considered dangerous. Nepal's inclusion makes little sense.

The impressive list of hazards that the U.S. consular warning for Nepal cites is quite creative: being caught up in a landmine explosion; being hurt in an attack on a tourist facility; being hurt in a political demonstration. Many of the hazards are theoretical: They have never happened. Indeed, nine months into 2004, no American citizen had reported any problem involving the Maoists or political instability to the U.S. Embassy. Not one. When asked about the actual incidence of problems, senior U.S. officials change the subject and assert vigorously that there is a major risk.

Given a record of zero-incidence this year and of nine years of insurrection without any foreigner having been seriously hurt, why does the State Department think Nepal is dangerous? Is it perhaps because it is very conservative about all countries? No. On September 29 in Peru four tourists were attacked and robbed. Three were hurt seriously and one was killed. No mention of that appears in the U.S. consular information sheet for Peru; Americans are not cautioned away from the South American nation well known for a decades-long Maoist insurrection.

On October 8, about 40 people were killed in bombings at tourist sites in Egypt. Curiously, Egypt isn't on the U.S. list of countries to avoid. In fact, the American consular information sheet for Egypt hasn't even been updated to include information about that attack; it says that no tourists have been hurt since the 1997 machine-gun killings of more than 50 tourists at Luxor.

In the Philippines, al-Qaeda-linked terrorist organizations have kidnapped dozens of tourists, including Americans, and murdered at least two in recent years. The consular information sheet for the Philippines says, "The terrorist threat to American citizens in the Philippines remains high." Even so, the U.S. Embassy merely advises visitors to exercise caution, maintain security awareness and avoid certain parts of the country. The Philippines is not on the American "no-go" list.

State Department information for such prime tourist destinations as Italy and Mexico have pages and pages describing how tourists are robbed, assaulted, kidnapped, raped and murdered each year in those countries. It's estimated that some 600 American tourists die overseas each year and thousands are the victims of major crimes. Not in Nepal.

What then makes Nepal so "dangerous"? The answer is to be found in politics. The Bush administration sees all foreign policy worldwide through terrorism-tinted glasses. The last Clinton-

appointed American ambassador to Nepal, Ralph Frank, said publicly that if the Maoists would renounce violence, the United States could support much of their 40-point manifesto. Bush-appointed ambassadors have subsequently referred to the Maoists as Nazis, communist exporters of revolution and terrorists equivalent to the Taliban. The very language the embassy uses shows that they equate Nepal with Afghanistan and Iraq—the small bombs detonated in early September at the back of the American center are described as "IEDs," improvised explosive devices.

Granted: The September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States and the increasing violence in Nepal have changed the picture since the last Clinton-appointed ambassador left Nepal. Perhaps no administration's ambassador today would suggest that America could support the Maoists. But it's unlikely that a less rigid, less ideological administration could claim with a straight face that Nepal's Maoists represent a grave threat to America's national security.

Last week, the State Department lifted the order allowing non-essential personnel and families to leave. The announcement was made quietly and without explanation. If circumstances on the ground have changed between September 14 and October 26, the change is not obvious to anyone outside the American compound at Pani Pokhari. Could the change be related to the imminent American presidential election? The Bush administration is being roundly criticized by its opponents for having confused Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda—for having been sidetracked from the war on terrorism by the war on Iraq. As one wag put it, "Osama would definitely be a Bush voter, just out of gratitude that America has spent the last two years looking for him in Iraq instead of Afghanistan."

If the U.S. State Department can conflate Saddam (whom al-Qaeda despised until the American invasion of Iraq provided them with a rallying point) with Osama, then it's entirely believable that they have confused Nepal's non-Muslim, domestic political struggle with the worldwide battle against terrorism. It's convenient too: The Bush administration is already geared up for that battle. They can just sweep Nepal into the same net.

My grandfather would have quoted the old proverb: "To a man with only a hammer, everything looks like a nail."

Nepal is distinctly not Afghanistan or Iraq, but the Bush administration has painted policy toward Nepal with the same terrorism brush; the prophecy implied in their shortsighted policy has begun to come true. Since America started supplying millions of dollars of weapons, military advisors and cash directly to the Royal Nepal Army, anti-American rhetoric from the Maoists has intensified. The Army is now the Royal American Army in Maoist graffiti. American NGOs that operated freely for years have now been threatened.

If there's any danger in Nepal for Americans and other foreigners other than bad water and bus accidents, misguided American meddling and fear-mongering are primarily responsible. Nepal is far, far safer than the United States, with or without consular warnings. **N**

## COUNTRIES THE UNITED STATES RECOMMENDS AGAINST VISITING

Afghanistan	Algeria
Bosnia-Herzegovina	Burundi
Cayman Islands	Central African Republic
Colombia	Congo-Kinshasa
Côte d'Ivoire	Grenada
Haiti	Indonesia
Iran	Iraq
Israel, the West Bank and Gaza	
Kenya	Lebanon
Liberia	Libya
Nepal	Nigeria
Pakistan	Saudi Arabia
Somalia	Sudan
Yemen	Zimbabwe

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*'Thinker'*  
by Auguste Rodin



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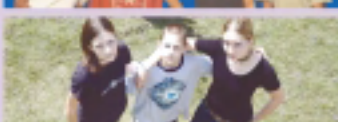
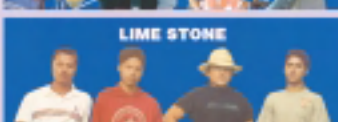
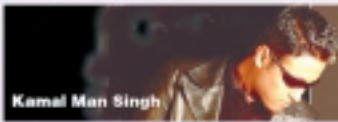
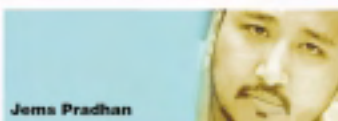
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**CLEAN UP:** An Austrian team brought garbage from Annapurna IV to Kathmandu

## Water woes

The government has embarked on a strategy to improve water services in Kathmandu Valley with support from various donor agencies, including the Asian Development Bank, Japan, Norway and Sweden. The two-pronged strategy consists of infrastructure development and institutional reforms. The first one will make additional bulk water available to the residents of the Valley by around 2010 and improve water distribution networks. The reforms will entail establishing an institutional framework and operational environment to provide efficient, affordable water supply and wastewater services in the immediate future. The strategy, the planners hope, will help alleviate the severe water stress, which has been exacerbated by rapid urban growth. It is also expected to address the problems of low service coverage, poor service quality and high leakage rates.

## Nepali deaths

Five Nepalis including the undersecretary at the Health Ministry, Bishwanath Dhakal, were killed in a road accident in the Indian city of Kolkata. They were on their way to the Kali temple in the city. The accident occurred when a truck smashed into a jeep that was carrying 10 Nepalis. The injured have been admitted at the Kolkata

Research Center, the Kathmandu Post reported.

## Peace or else polls

The government has said that if talks with the Maoists do not get under way within the next two months then it would start preparing groundwork for elections. This was one of the mandates the current government received from the King when Prime Minister Deuba was appointed in June. The prime minister made the remarks at the tea party organized by the CPN-UML last week. CPN-UML General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal, however, stressed that elections can only be held after peace has been restored.

## Pakistani premier

Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz will be visiting Nepal on a two-day official visit from November 1. He will call on Prime Minister Deuba to discuss the 13<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit slated for January 2005 in Dhaka. He will leave for Bhutan on November 2 and will also visit Bangladesh, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and India.

## Road enquiry

The government formed a commission to investigate road accidents and suggest measures to prevent them. It has also decided to blacklist the Krishnabhir sec-

tion of the Prithivi Highway, where many accidents occur during the rainy season. Transport entrepreneurs blame the government for not showing concern about growing traffic hazards, especially during the festival season, which comes right after the monsoon. They have also lamented the poorly organized security checks along the highways that delay traffic for hours. The entrepreneurs claim that the drivers speed up to compensate for the lost time and the higher speeds increase the risk of accidents. About 900 people die in road accidents each year, and over 4,000 sustain injuries.

## New ambassador

Ambassador designate of Japan to Nepal, Tsutomu Hiraoka, arrived in Kathmandu to take up his assignment. Hiraoka succeeds Ambassador Zenji Kaminaga. Hiraoka had served as consul-general of Japan in Edinburgh, Scotland.

## Maoist arrest

The West Bengal police arrested senior Maoist leader Amir Sundas in Siliguri. Sundas is believed to have close links with the Maoist leader Mohan Vaidya, alias Kiran, who was arrested by the Siliguri police in

March. Police have termed the arrest a big catch. The Kolkata newspaper the Statesman quoted the Jalpaiguri Superintendent of Police Ajay Nanda as saying that the police had been looking for Sundas ever since Vaidya was arrested. Reports say that police have recovered a large number of weapons from Sundas's residence.

## Criminal list

Interpol officers from India and Nepal are to prepare a list of criminals or suspects who frequent, operate or reside in the two countries. As a pilot project, the list would be first prepared and shared for human trafficking and vehicle theft, the Press Trust of India reported. The list will be maintained for all organized crimes eventually.

## Internet browsing

Nepal Telecom will provide Internet browsing, email and data and photo exchange through mobile sets within a year. Nepal Telecom says the new facilities would be available after it upgrades its 2.5G wireless technology. The company has called a global tender for the necessary equipment.

# Jet in the sky

For the first time, the domestic routes are served by jet planes. Cosmic Air's new 105-seat Fokker flies three major destinations—Nepalgunj, Biratnagar and Bhairahawa. Cosmic Air started its operation in 1997 with two Dornier aircraft. The airline is acquiring another Fokker aircraft for its international operations, which will cover Dhaka and New Delhi. That will make Cosmic the first Nepali private airliner to fly beyond India. The airline also has plans to fly to Bhutan, Thailand and Sri Lanka.



### No press freedom

The French INGO Reporters Without Borders said that more journalists were arrested in Nepal in 2003 than in any other country in the world. The Paris-based organization said that the security forces had arrested, detained, tortured or threatened about 100 Nepali journalists last year. The Maoists also murdered one journalist and threatened dozens for allegedly spying for the Army. The report also said that it took the launch of two private television channels as a positive development in the field of press freedom. Out of the 167 countries covered by the survey, Nepal ranked 160<sup>th</sup> in terms of press freedom.

### British honor

Professor Surya Prasad Subedi, a lawyer specializing in international law, has been awarded with an honorary Order of the British Empire, the OBE. The British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw presented Subedi with the badge of the order. The OBE is the juniormost of the British orders of chivalry. Straw said that the award was in recognition both of Subedi's distinction as a lawyer and of his great contribution to the friendship and partnership between nations, especially between Britain and Nepal. Subedi is currently a professor of international law at the University of Leeds, and has previously worked at other British universities and institutions in the United States, Sweden and the Netherlands. Subedi obtained his doctorate in international law from the Oxford University.

### Rights concern

The New York-based Human Rights Watch has expressed concern over the revised anti-

terrorism law in Nepal. It suggested that the law was likely to worsen the problem of disappearances in the country. The revised Terrorism and Disruptive Activities (Control and Punishment) Ordinance provides greater powers to the security forces, the human rights organization said, adding that the security forces have been responsible for systematic human rights abuses, including extra-judicial killings, disappearances, arbitrary arrests and torture during the last few years. Nepal already leads the world in the number of persons who have disappeared under the custody of security forces, it said. The main concern is the extended period of time the amended law allows the security forces to keep people in secret custody without access to the courts. This period has been extended up to a year as opposed to 90 days in the first version of the ordinance. The government-formed committee investigating such disappearances has made public the whereabouts of over 200 people so far.

### New RPP force

Former Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa has publicly announced that he could be opening a "new democratic force." The "new force" is to include leaders from his present party, the RPP, as well as those from outside. Thapa had stepped down from the post of prime minister earlier this year in May after intense pressure from within his own party. The announcement by Thapa came after months of rifts between Thapa and the RPP party president, Pashupati Shumsher Rana. The RPP is one of the four parties in the ruling coalition. It is said, that some RPP leaders, including



those close to Thapa, are not satisfied with the power sharing arrangement in the current government. RPP President Rana termed Thapa's move as being "odd." The RPP has called on its central committee members to resolve their differences, but Thapa's faction has decided that it will not attend any more central committee meetings.

### Power resumption

Construction work on the Mid-Marsyangdi Hydropower Project has resumed. Work had been on hold for the last two months after the civil works contractor, Dywidag Dragados-CWE, a German company, said that the security situation was precarious. Earlier reports said that the Maoists had asked the project to close

down because of the deployment of security forces at the project site in Lamjung. They had also asked for clarification from project officials about allegations of irregularities in the project. The Nepal Electricity Authority said that it was incurring a loss of Rs. 2 million each day due to the closure of the project. The construction of the 70-megawatt project started in 2001 and is scheduled for completion in 2006. Only 45 percent of the work has been completed so far.

### Open jails

The government has made arrangements for a system of "open jails," where inmates can now continue to live normal lives while doing community service. These inmates will have to stay with their family and report to the jail administration on a regular basis. The community service they will do with a social organization is also compulsory and will be without pay. The new system will be implemented in Kathmandu and Chitwan soon. Initially 25 inmates each from the two districts will be eligible for the program. Only those prisoners who have less than three years of jail terms remaining will be allowed to participate.



**MORE OPEN AFFAIR:** The 10<sup>th</sup> Condom Day was celebrated on November 10 throughout the country with much fanfare

# Golden Jubilee



**T**wo weeks ago, Kathmandu witnessed three days of celebrations marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ascent of Cho Oyu, the sixth highest mountain in the world. Cho Oyu, which means “turquoise goddess” in Tibetan, lies on the Nepal-Tibet border, 20 kilometers west of Everest. Herbert Tichy, Joseph Joechler and Pasang Dawa Lama, part of an Austrian expedition, were the first to reach the summit on October 19, 1954. Heuberge Helmut, the only living member of the 1954 Austrian expedition, was in Nepal as part of the celebrations. Prime Minister Deuba felicitated Helmut in a function organized to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

One among those in town for the celebrations was Reinhold Messner. His successful ascent of Cho Oyu came on his fourth attempt, in 1983. Messner is perhaps the most accomplished mountaineer of all time. Among his many achievements: the first solo ascent of not only Everest but also the technically difficult Nanga Parbat; the first successful ascent of all the 14 eight-thousanders; and also the first solo crossing of Antarctica. He has written several books about his experience and today is a mountaineering entrepreneur.

The Cho Oyu celebration comes hot on the heels of the golden jubilee celebrations last year of the first successful ascent of Everest. Despite the insurgency, mountain tourism, at least, seems unaffected, according to industry insiders.

## IA ANNOUNCES WINTER SCHEDULE

Indian Airlines has announced its winter schedule for Delhi-Kathmandu-Delhi, Varanasi-Kathmandu-Varanasi and Kolkata-Kathmandu-Kolkata flights, effective from October 31 to March 26, 2005. According to the new schedule, Indian Airlines’ flights will arrive at 1:20 p.m. from Delhi and depart at 2:20 p.m. Likewise, flights from Varanasi will arrive at 12:55 p.m. and depart at 1:55 p.m. The IA flight from Kolkata will arrive at 3:10 p.m. and depart at 4:10 p.m.

## NT TO BUY ONE MILLION MOBILE LINES

Because of increasing demand from customers, Nepal Telecom is planning to purchase one million mobile telephones lines through a global tender expected by the end of October. “One million mobile phones will come into operation in one year,” said Madan K. Shakya, director of Nepal Telecom. At present there are 150,000 mobile phone users, including both pre- and post-paid customers. He also said that the telecom company was expanding its base-stations for mobile phones to strengthen its capacity.

## IMF APPROVES \$10.6 MILLION LOAN

The International Monetary Fund has approved \$10.6 million for Nepal under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility. The decision was made by the meeting of the executive board of the IMF upon completion of the first review of Nepal’s economic performance under the three-year poverty reduction program.

Following the executive board’s decision, Takatoshi Kato, deputy managing director and

the acting chair said, “Nepal’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper continues to provide a sound basis for achieving higher growth and poverty alleviation.” He cautioned that the nation’s energies could only be fully focused on its developmental and poverty reduction objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals, with a durable peace. The loan carries an annual interest rate of 0.5 per cent and is repayable over 10 years with a five-and-a-half-year grace period on principal payments. Disbursements under the program so far have been \$21.2 million; the total amount approved for the three-year program is \$73.9 million.

## AIR SAHARA INTRODUCES LOWER FARES

Air Sahara has introduced lower fares on the Kathmandu-Delhi-Kathmandu air-route during the holiday season. The one-way fare between Delhi and Kathmandu is Rs. 5,000, excluding taxes, while a return ticket costs Rs. 9,600, excluding taxes. The offer is open to both Indian and Nepali citizens. Air Sahara has daily flights on the Kathmandu-Delhi route.

## SURYA NEPAL LAUNCHES MEN’S FASHION WEAR

Surya Nepal has launched a range of men’s apparel under the brand name John Players. The company has for the last two years been successfully exporting John Players clothing made at its facility in Biratnagar. The fabrics for John Players are imported from Indonesia, Thailand, China and India. John Players is targeted at the quality-conscious male consumers and offers the latest in formal and casual wear shirts and trousers, trendy t-shirts and denims. John



**IN TOWN:** John Players, the men’s wear brand, makes Nepal debut



Players clothing costs from Rs. 600 to Rs. 1,500.

### MILK FALLS CHOCOLATE WAFER

Sujal Foods recently launched Milk Falls, white chocolate wafers, in the market. Other products by Sujal Foods are Love Birds, Choco Fun, Lacto Fun, Crave, Mango Tart and Smart Lolipop. Milk Falls is available for Rs. 5.



### NTB, RNAC LAUNCH PROMOTIONAL CAMPAIGN

As a part of a regional tourism promotion campaign, the Nepal Tourism Board and Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation have jointly launched a special two-and-a-half month promotional campaign in India. The campaign started from October 15 and will end on December 31. The promotional offer includes free roundtrip air tickets chosen by draw every week for a couple to Bangkok, Singapore or Kuala Lumpur from Delhi, Mumbai or Bangalore via Kathmandu, with three nights complimentary stay in Kathmandu. The offer is applicable to Indian nationals traveling by RNAC from India.

### DRUK PLANS AIRBUS SERVICE

Druk Air, which has been flying between Paro and Kathmandu since 1988, is adding a 114-seat Airbus A319 aircraft to its fleet. According to the station manager of Druk Air, Chencho Dorje, the aircraft will make its first flight to Kathmandu on October 31, 2004. Druk Air flights will operate on Sunday, Monday and Thursday. The airline also plans to bring into operation a fourth aircraft in the month of December. Malla Treks is the GSA for Druk Air in Nepal.

### NEW INCENSE

Dreamz Incense Creations-the new name in agarbatti with two young entrepreneurs, Abhisekh Man Singh and Yashna Tamrakar, an industrial engineer at the helm-have launched three brands in the market. The brands are Vaastu, Dewa and Bodhi targeted for all segments of the society and are priced at Rs.5, Rs.10 and Rs.20. The raw materials used in the creations are all of the highest quality with unique fragrances, the company says in a statement.

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# IN GOD'S OWN COUNTRY

If only the world could vote, John Kerry would win hands down. Why is half of America beholden to Bush, who has alienated rest of the world?

**BY SUMAN PRADHAN**  
IN NEW YORK

**W**ITH ONLY ONE DAY TO GO before the U.S. presidential elections, the race between President and Republican party candidate George W. Bush and his Democratic party challenger John Kerry is still too close to call. The flurry of opinion polls over the past week have put both the candidates in the high 40s and, more importantly, within the margin of error—a statistical dead heat, as they say here.

While America and the world will soon find out who will be the next occupant of the White House, it is no secret where the world's hopes lie. A recent poll conducted by leading newspapers in Europe, Latin America and Asia found that most people in those countries preferred Kerry to Bush by large margins.

That is not surprising. Bush's tenure as U.S. president has been characterized by radical shifts in everything from environmental policies to international rela-

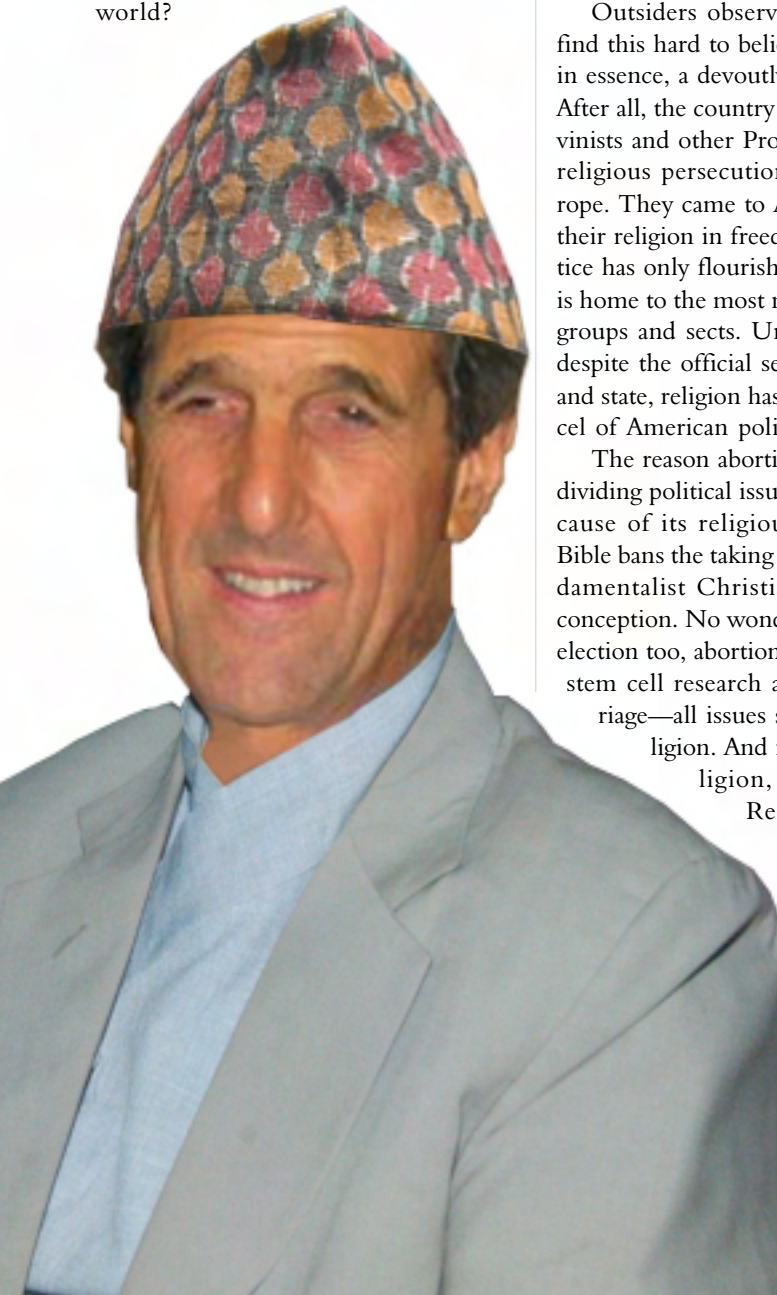
**WHO'S BETTER FOR US:** For the rest of the world, Kerry is a faraway winner

(see Last Word, page 58)

Graphics by Ajit Sharma

tions. The administration's dumping of the Kyoto protocol designed to curb global warming, its reluctance to support the International Criminal Court, its zealous pursuit of the war on terror and its bumbling prosecution of the war in Iraq have antagonized world opinion like never before. If only the world could vote, Kerry would win hands down.

But it's not the world that will elect the next U.S. president. American voters will. And President Bush stands a real chance of being re-elected on November 2. Indeed, in most of the recent polls, he leads his challenger by one or two points. Why is half of America beholden to a man who has alienated rest of the world?



The answer mostly lies in the factors that underpin American society. To us South Asians, America appears as that far-away beacon of freedom, a capitalist liberal society whose defining characteristics are freedom, money and sex. All of that is true, of course. But this image of America comes from its coastal cities and states. America is much more than the coasts, however. It is also the Southern and Midwestern states—the heartland—and the values that find resonance there, values like religion and patriotism, which are intertwined in everyday Midwestern lives, for example. This explains why Bush is so popular, much to the chagrin of his liberal countrymen and most of the world.

Outsiders observing from afar may find this hard to believe but America is, in essence, a devoutly religious country. After all, the country was settled by Calvinists and other Protestants fleeing the religious persecution in medieval Europe. They came to America to practice their religion in freedom, and that practice has only flourished. Today, America is home to the most number of religious groups and sects. Unsurprisingly, then, despite the official separation of church and state, religion has been part and parcel of American politics.

The reason abortion has been such a dividing political issue for decades is because of its religious overtones. The Bible bans the taking of life, and for fundamentalist Christians, life begins at conception. No wonder then that in this election too, abortion is a top issue, as is stem cell research and same-sex marriage—all issues stemming from religion. And in all matters of religion, President Bush's Republican party trumps the Democrats.

The Republican lock on the religious vote started in the 1980s with the rise of what is called the religious right. These were largely southern Protestant groups

angered by the “excesses” of the 1960s and 70s—the civil rights movement, desegregation, the Vietnam war and the loosening of social mores wrought by the sexual revolution. Until then, Southerners had largely voted for the Democrats (it was a Republican president, Lincoln, who defeated the South in the Civil War). But the civil rights movement and Vietnam divided the American South and provided the opening for the Republicans to capitalize. President Bush, as a born-again Christian and a Republican, happens to benefit from this tradition.

The other major issue of this election is terrorism. This is where patriotism factors in. The United States is a country that has fought plenty of wars, but all those wars were fought in the land of others. Death and destruction by an invading force has rarely visited U.S. soil, except on two previous occasions—in 1812 when the British briefly invaded Washington D.C. and burned down the White House and in 1942 when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 therefore came as a huge shock to a country insulated from the vagaries of the outside world.

By tradition, Democratic administrations have been more internationalist and Republicans more insular. September 11 turned that dynamic on its head. It is ironic to see that today it is the Republicans calling for an interventionist foreign policy, and the Democrats advocating a more nuanced approach.

September 11 is seen as a defining moment in U.S. history precisely because it led Bush to pursue unilateral policies in the conduct of foreign policy. But Bush had shown such tendencies right from the beginning. His unilateral decision to pull out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty that had been the cornerstone of transatlantic security for 30 years, the dumping of Kyoto protocol, the reluctance to support the International Criminal Court and the foisting of his abortion beliefs on aid policies all occurred before September 11. What September 11 did, however, was sharpen that tendency and take it to a much larger scale. The story of how the United States alienated rest of the world, including its traditional European allies, need not be

recounted here. The schism wrought by unilateralism is most evident in Iraq.

But how much of this really matters to the U.S. electorate? It does, and it doesn't. It matters to those Americans who are uncomfortable with Bush's policy of pre-emption, who yearn for a return to the more stable days of international obligations, and checks and balances. For these voters, Bush has been a lost cause from day one of his presidency. They have always seen the president as an illegitimate product of a split Supreme Court verdict. Bush merely compounded that hate by going it alone on the world stage and by curbing civil liberties at home in the name of homeland security.

But there is the other half of America that believes in Bush like it believes in God. Bush's frequent calls to Americans' sense of patriotism in the defense of the homeland against terrorists plays well among this group. It is safe to say that these two groups would have remained in their respective camps with or without 9/11.

With the opposing bases well within their party folds, the election literally boils down to the small percentage of undecided voters in swing states—the states where the race is tightest. The two campaigns therefore have spent more time and resources in these swing states, where the pollsters tell us the election will be decided. In most of these swing states, the overriding issues, along with foreign policy, are domestic concerns like health care, job losses, outsourcing and education. The Democrats traditionally hold an edge on these issues, but that edge has largely been eclipsed by issues of terror and security.

In the end, all re-election campaigns are a referendum on the incumbent. This election therefore is about George W. Bush. It's not about John Kerry. If Bush is re-elected, he will take it as a mandate to continue with the same policies for four more years, and the world can expect little change. If he loses, we could see a gradual shift in foreign policy, though not as dramatic as the world would like. Because at heart, what Kerry proposes is not all that different from Bush. What could change is the style of diplomacy rather

than its substance. Kerry is not going to cut and run from Iraq and Afghanistan, and the war on terror will continue just as relentlessly as Bush has waged. The only tangible shift could come in North Korea where Kerry advocates a U.S.-North Korea dia-

logue rather than the six-party talks Bush has been holding out for.

Because in the end, Kerry will be looking at his own re-election in four years, and he will have to play to the religious, patriotic and economic votes—the perennial deciders of American elections. **N**

## Dude, Where's My Elections?

This is election time in the United States. But one of the first things an outsider notices is how unelection-like it can be in arguably the world's most vibrant democracy. There are no political rallies and winding *julus* like in our part of the world. No blaring loudspeakers mounted on jeeps, no pamphleteering or political slogans sprayed on the walls. No singing and dancing either. In fact there is nothing. Except, of course, on television and in newspapers.

If you happen to be one of those who get by without reading a newspaper or watching the telly, then you probably will not know that this country is electing "the leader of the free world" on November 2. A political junkie hoping to catch some of the election fever by trudging the streets of New York, Washington D.C. and Los Angeles will most likely come away disappointed.

It's different in the swing states though, those handful of

states where the race is too tight to call. There you have rallies, *bhashans* and house-to-house canvassing, just like in Nepal. But for all those who are in the "unswinging" states, all the electioneering is compressed into the living room. "All the action is on TV," as one American friend helpfully pointed out. "Watch the TV."

So you flick on the TV and...boom. You are suddenly bombarded by this curious bit of developed-world election device called political ads. Political advertising is not much different from, say, commercials for toothpaste except that instead of toothpaste they push a particular point of view or a particular candidate. And it works.

A typical one runs like this: A pack of wolves is shown ready to leap at the camera. In the background, a voice intones "George Bush, a strong president for a strong country." Bush appears towards the end and says, "I am George Bush and I approve of this

ad." A pro-Kerry ad says: "Who will protect the middle class? Who will work to ensure health insurance for all Americans? Who will work with our allies for a safer world? John Kerry." And Kerry appears dutifully and intones, "I am John Kerry and I approve of this ad."

What's this about confirming your identity and asserting your approval for this or that ad? It has probably got something to do with arcane campaign laws (if you haven't noticed, the freest country in the world is also the most regulated country).

It goes without saying that a lot of money is needed to make and air these ads. No wonder then that President Bush and his challenger John Kerry have both raised tens of millions of dollars to finance these ads while at the same time calling for better campaign finance laws. Doesn't make sense, right? But there's little that does to an outsider. **N**

Prof. Dr. Ram Krishna Poudel  
Dean

OUT बाहिर

प्र. प्रह्लाद राज पन्त  
Prof. Prahlad Raj Pant  
Dean

OUT बाहिर

Notice  
The Dean's Office is locked as the Dean is out of the office. For any urgent work, please contact the Dean's Office at 01-4222222.

EYE OF THE STORM:  
Angry students locked  
the dean's office at the  
Institute of Engineering

Sagar Shrestha

# DIVIDED CLASSES

Should access to higher education be based purely on merit or should certain groups have preferential access? The court has ruled for now, but the controversy is far from over.

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI



**CALM BEFORE THE STORM:** The court verdict struck down the quota system for now but some student groups at the IOE have threatened further agitations

nw/ss

**T**HE OLD RANA BUILDING in Pulchowk where the office of the Institute of Engineering is located was quiet after the Dashain vacation last week, except for a few staffers and hostel students who chose to stay put despite the festivities. There is no hint that the country's most prestigious engineering school is

mired in fresh admission controversies.

On the first floor of the administrative building, the door to Dean Ram Krishna Poudel's office is locked. An angry notice posted on the door by the Nepal Adivasi Janjati Vidyarthi Mahasangh, the federation for indigenous students says, "We would like to bring to your notice that the college administration has twisted the decision of

the Tribhuvan University Executive Council as per a government decision to grant education quotas of 10 percent to dalits, 15 percent to janjatis and 20 percent to women."

The government decision mentioned in the notice is an arrangement made by Surya Bahadur Thapa's government on September 1, 2003 to grant at least 45 percent reservations for women,



and for socially oppressed and indigenous students—dalits and janjatis—in higher education. Tribhuvan University, going by the order of the Thapa government, came up with new rules this year, on August 21, to govern the admission of students for the upcoming term at the Institute of Engineering and Institute of Medicine. The university's action, almost a year after the government order,

was late: Over 4,000 students had already sat for entrance examinations for 220 seats at the engineering institute, and over 3,500 students had appeared for entrance examinations for 42 seats available at the medical institute.

A student group, the Nepal Tarai Vidyarthi Sangh, immediately filed a case at the Supreme Court, saying reservations should be made by law rather

than by administrative decisions, and that if quotas for disadvantaged students are necessary, they should not bar qualified students from competitive admission.

Two other student groups, the Nepal Adivasi Janjati Vidyarthi Mahasangh and the Nepal Swatantra Dalit Vidyarthi Sangathan, filed a joint case, in rebuttal, for the Tarai students' case to be annulled. They appealed that the college administration be asked to abide by the university's decision. The controversy has left admission processes in limbo: Entrance results are still not out, and students and teachers are in a state of confusion.

"I have already started attending SAT classes to apply to universities in the United States," says Prativa Pandey, who had completed her intermediate in science from St. Xavier's Campus and had sat for the entrance exams at the Institute of Medicine. Another student, Guinness Shrestha, who completed his 10+2 from White House International College and sat for the entrance at the Institute of Engineering, told Nation Weekly he had heard that the entire batch for this academic session could be cancelled. He said he had already started applying for universities abroad. He didn't want to lose "valuable" time.

Entrance results were to be out within a week after the exams, which took place on August 21. Traditionally the new academic session starts in mid-November. Even without the new problems, "my sisters suggest," says Shrestha, "that I should join another college or study abroad rather than get stuck, waiting for admission here."

The controversy over quotas is deep and divisive, just as the issue is in India: Should there be affirmative action for disadvantaged students in such critical and highly competitive fields as medicine and engineering, or should these schools admit the best students with the highest test scores and secondary school marks? In August 1990 the Indian government ordered 27 percent reservation in jobs in the government services and public undertakings for those candidates from "backward castes." This brought the total reservations to 50 percent as 22.5 percent had already been reserved for "scheduled castes," or dalits, and "scheduled tribes." The move caused wide-

# 'Quotas Should Be Time-Bound'

**L**axmi Sharan Ghimire, undersecretary at the National Dalit Commission, talked to Nation Weekly prior to the Supreme Court decision on October 29.

## Has the commission formed an opinion on the current quota controversy in higher education?

The new officials for the National Dalit Commission haven't been appointed yet, and I have been looking after current administrative procedures on behalf of the government. We have received complaints saying that the university hasn't admitted dalits yet [according to the quota provisions]. The quota system is always good to encourage a small community, to turn it into a larger one, particularly in education. At the end of the day, we'll be producing doctors and engineers, with or without the quotas for dalits. It is normal human behavior to help out those who are in distress.

## What is the commission's viewpoint?

The government definition of "dalits" includes those who have faced caste discrimination and those who have been left out without opportunities. It does not necessarily include castes [as such], but also the poor who have been cornered by the rich and those who have been treated as untouchables. The Muluki Ain, Nepal's underlying legal code, bars any kind of discrimination, but it has already been 40 years [since the law has been enacted] and we still hear of social discrimination. In my opinion, reservation is not good for the long term, but it is certainly helpful if a timeline of five to 10 years is quoted to end such discrimination by uplifting dalits. Long-term support would definitely bring ill behavior in the long run and will make dalits lazy without any zeal to compete. However, there has been a trend of declaring quotas for dalits in recent years in sectors such as

health, education, employment, and civil and military services. That is all welcome.

## Can all dalits benefit from a quota system?

The Department of Statistics says around 13 percent of the total population are dalits, but I would place that figure at 15 percent, as many dalits have changed their surnames to avoid social discrimination. Dalits should be provided at least basic necessities such as food and shelter. I suggest the government provide credit and even implement quotas in certain sectors as appropriate and necessary—education, health, government service, job opportunities and political representation.

## Could you explain?

Dalits such as Bishwokormas are well-known ironmongers. They should be given top priority in jobs related to specialized ironwork. Creating a separate basket though



nw/ss

a quota system for the time being would mean they would be competing among themselves rather than against other castes supposedly considered superior than them. But we have to make sure that the basket opportunity is well spread to all dalits across the country. I would not like to see only dalits from Kathmandu qualifying for the 2.5 percent foreign employment quota.

## There is a court battle over granting reservations to dalits in higher education.

Certain people who feel they have not benefited from the quotas have filed the case. I do not think a quota provision for dalits should be removed. Reservations mean a lot to the entire dalit community. It is one of the constitutional rights the country should grant them.

## But the other party is saying that quotas will reduce their educational opportunity.

I am not saying their claim is wrong either. But everybody has to share equally whatever is left to eat. Dalits have suffered a lot of injustice, and one has to have sympathy for them at this point of time. Otherwise, we could suffer from more disputes in the future. **N**



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spread protests; some protestors even set themselves on fire to protest the move. The controversy contributed to the fall of the V. P. Singh government. The Supreme Court later struck down the decision amid uproar.

“Reservations should not be based on caste alone but also on socio-economic background and geography,” says Dr. Shishir Lakhey, an orthopedic surgeon at the Kathmandu Medical College in Sinamangal. Lakhey did his M.B.B.S. from Chengalpattu Medical College in Tamil Nadu and his master’s in surgery in orthopedics from AIIMS, New Delhi. He has seen it all up close. In India many of his classmates from the scheduled castes and groups were, in fact, far well off compared to those from the upper castes.

“In India the quota system has become so bad,” says Dr. Lakhey, “that only 25-30 percent of seats at premier institutions are available for free competition. Leaders have, over time, pandered to certain caste and social groups because they are their vote banks.”

The Tarai students’ group that initially filed the suit against the government and university action agrees: “The quotas will never go to the intended oppressed group if implemented as planned now,” says Mukesh Kumar Dubey, former president of the group. “Anyone in their right mind would understand that a quota system, without clear criteria describing who the oppressed are, would mean that the best of the seats would go to those who are not at all competent.” And not all of them need help from the state, as Dr. Lakhey explains from his experience in India.

“If the university [the TU] ever wants to grant quotas,” Dubey adds, “it should instead add additional seats and not cut down on whatever are presently available for free competition. Otherwise, granting quotas is just plain noise created by those at the top level in the government.”

But there is another side to the story.

Resham Tamu, the general secretary of the indigenous students’ group that brought the counter case and has locked the dean’s office at the Institute of Engineering, says Dubey’s group has mistakenly overlooked the available seats for free competition as “another quota” for general students.

“The university doesn’t have the capacity to add another 100 seats. We



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should be sharing whatever is available among ourselves,” he suggests. “After all, this decision has been long overdue for people like us who have been ignored by the society.”

Tamu’s group is also demanding that the Institute of Engineering allow dalits, janjatis and women to participate in free competition for the “unreserved” seats along with the others, just as they make most of the quotas available to them. They say the college administration barred them from doing so. “That is why we are saying the administration has twisted the university and government decisions,” he explains. The controversy has left students confused.

“All my friends have already applied to other private engineering colleges,” says Riju Shrestha, who completed her intermediate in science from St. Xavier’s Campus and appeared for entrance at the Institute of Engineering after months of extra preparation at Progress Educational Academy in Kupondole. “Granting quotas to promote equity is good, but the majority will have to compete for a mere 55 percent of the seats, if the rest of the seats go to dalits, janjatis and women.”

Pandey, who appeared for entrance at the Institute of Medicine, adds the quota for women in medical studies was welcome as “only two or three women” out of a total of 60 students are accepted for medical studies for bachelor’s degrees at the Institute of Medicine each year. “Medicine is a competitive field; the quota may prove to be a boon to women who come from outside the Valley and are capable of pursuing higher studies.” Over 120 students out of a total of 150 students who

specialized in biology at the intermediate level from St. Xavier’s, Pandey’s college, had appeared for the entrance examinations at the Institute of Medicine.

On October 29, Friday, the division bench of the Supreme Court gave its decision in favor of the case filed by the Nepal Tarai Vidyarthi Sangh, and ruled that the quota system be implemented only after the passage of a law. The protesting parties reacted immediately.

The Supreme Court decision has barred over 70 percent of the population—dalits, janjatis and women—from enjoying the privilege given by the government, said a statement issued by Tamu and Padam Bishwokorma, the coordinator of the agitation committee. The statement ended with a usual threat: “We declare we will not be held responsible for any circumstance if the court decision is not annulled and the government decision to provide quotas is not implemented.”

“The dean’s office [at the Institute of Engineering] will remain locked and we are planning further agitation,” Ramesh Tamu told Nation Weekly later Friday, after the court had gone against them. He termed the court action “a conspiracy to bar us from social justice and to exclude us from the mainstream.”

Ram Krishna Poudel, the dean at the Institute of Engineering, said the institute would abide by the court decision. The results of the entrance examinations would be out soon and the new academic session would begin right after Tihar. But with the expected student protests, Poudel could face more problems before the doors to his office—or the classrooms—are opened again. **N**

# ROLLER COASTER RIDE

Another high-profile visit to the refugee camps has raised the hopes of Bhutanese yearning to return home. Similar high hopes in the past have been dashed.

**BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI  
IN BELDANGI**

**B**HIM PRASAD TAMANG WAS not exactly thrilled by the high-profile visit of U.S. official Arthur E. Gene Dewey last month to his dilapidated hut in the Beldangi II refugee camp. He's been through it before. In the last 14 years, a number of foreign dignitaries have come to the camp and raised his hopes for early repatriation, and that was that. The story never had a happy ending.

"Do you want to go to Bhutan?" Tamang quotes Dewey, the assistant secretary of state for the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, as having asked him. "Of course I want to go home," he says. "But what are the conditions?"

Like Tamang, more than 100,000 refugees in seven camps in eastern Nepal now feel that their desire to go home may not come to fruition. That they are doomed to a life of a refugee. Over the years, many high-profile comings and goings have raised expectations, but have amounted to nothing. In 2000, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata told them, "Bhutan is ready to welcome you back. You all will be going home soon." But her assurance turned out to be hollow, say refugees. After cycles of hope and bitter disappointment their expectations are now tempered with realism.

"We are optimistic," says Prem Khanal, a refugee teacher. "But we are also keenly aware of how optimistic we

should be about these visits." As Dewey took stock of the miserable conditions in the camps, he told the refugees that he was visiting them to learn what they think is the best solution for them. This is the first high-profile visit since Bhutan's disengagement from the bilat-

eral process on December 22, 2003. The process of repatriating refugees verified by the Nepal-Bhutan Joint Verification Team at the Khudunabari camp was to begin from February 15 this year, but following a scuffle between the refugees and Bhutanese officials, Bhutan pulled out of the process, citing poor security as the reason. After almost a year, the United States seems to be keen to revive the stalled process.

"I didn't come just to visit this part of the world," said Dewey to a group of refugees, "but with a serious purpose: to bring a solution." The urgency in U.S. efforts to find a solution comes in part from reports that the Maoists are oper-

**DEWEYSPEAK**

- My hope is when we come here a year from now, we won't have the same situation
- We will support the refugees to have a future that they think is in their best interest
- The United States doesn't take sides with one country or the other in any refugee situation, but it takes the side of the victims, of the refugees
- I will discuss the situation with the Secretary of State Collin Powell, who has a strong interest in finding a solution to the refugee problem



Kamal Dhital



SEEN IT ALL: For Bhim Tamang, Dewey's was just another visit



U.S. CONCERN: Dewey said he wants to find a solution

ating in the refugee camps. The United States wants to resolve the refugee impasse quickly to deny the Maoists another fertile breeding ground. Dewey warned New Delhi and Thimphu that "time is running out." During his discussions in New Delhi he also sought Indian help in "getting Bhutan to agree on steps for repatriating at least some refugees." Dewey is learned to have explicitly conveyed Washington's concern about the growing Maoist influence in the refugee camps and the dangers this could pose for India and Bhutan, just as well as to Nepal.

Apart from underscoring the urgency for an immediate solution, his visit has also triggered discussion on other options apart from repatriation; local integration or third-country resettlement are high on the list. "We have to look into all options," Dewey told reporters in Kathmandu. "Sometimes there is not just one solution." There are indications that the United States has given up hope that a complete repatriation will ever take place. "Our hope is that Bhutan at least accepts this segment," Dewey said in Delhi, referring to the 2.5 percent of the refugees in the Khudunabari refugee camp who were classified as "bona fide Bhutanese." Although Nepal is keen on the repatriation process, the refugee community is, at best, divided over the remaining two alternatives—local integration and third-country resettlement.

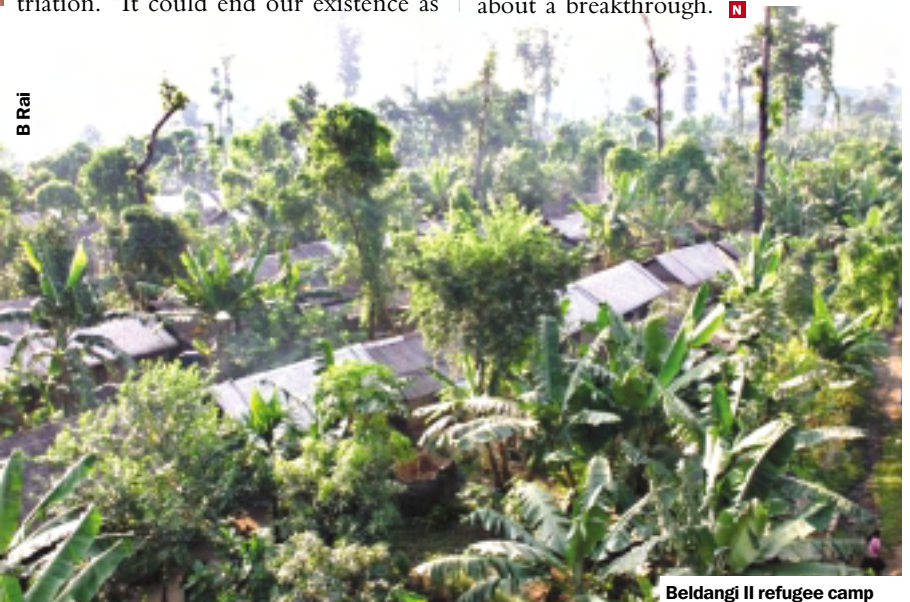
Some fear that agreeing to either of the options, even in principle, could diminish their cause for a dignified repatriation. "It could end our existence as

Bhutanese refugees," says a young refugee Dadiram Neupane, "and hence our right to return to Bhutan."

But others insist that any solution is better than none at all. "It's fine if they want to give us citizenship here or take us to a different country," says Bhim Prasad Tamang. Refugees like Tamang feel that the two options are, if not adequate, at least a dignified escape from the confinement of camp life. And there are others who want to work towards all three options simultaneously. They say no single option will be practical for all refugees: Not all will be repatriated, if ever Bhutan decides to do so; not all can be locally integrated given their sheer numbers; and not all will be deemed fit by the host country for a third-country resettlement. Most refugees are encouraged that the American representative at least seemed open to all solutions.

Dewey's visit to the camps and the three capitals has renewed hopes, as refugee leaders believe that American pressure was instrumental in pushing forward the bilateral process in 2000, when Julia Taft and Karl Inderfurth convinced both Nepal and Bhutan to agree on a verification process. U.S. President Bill Clinton's letter to the Nepali and Bhutanese prime ministers in late 2000 was credited with getting the process started.

Four years on, hopes for similar progress are now tempered by the memory of past disappointments. Little wonder, no one in the camps is talking about a breakthrough. **N**



Beldangi II refugee camp



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# UNDOCUMENTED

Citizenship is still difficult to acquire for women and marginalized communities, and this is a violation of our international obligations

BY SUSHMA JOSHI IN HETAUDA

**G**OING TO HETAUDA IS A full-day trip for Harimaya Praja. The only path to get down to the town is by walking next to the river edge, and the narrow mountain trail is often washed away in places by the rain. Holding her one-and-a-half-year-old son, Sanubabu Praja, she fords raging monsoon waters and emerges soaking wet in her only set of clothes before reaching Manohari, where she pays Rs. 25 as bus fare to get to the district headquarters in Hetauda. Although she has come down three times—in March, May and again in October—she has been unable to fulfill her mission to get her citizenship papers.

Citizenship papers are remarkably difficult to get for bona fide citizens, especially for indigenous groups far away from state bureaucracy. According to estimates, 85 percent of Prajas (the Chepang ethnic group) do not have citizenship. Chepangs have been called a “backward” group, but the highly orga-

nized national Chepang conference held in early October in Hetauda disproved myths about Chepang backwardness. As with other ethnic groups, the upper strata of the Chepang society have at least benefited from the uneven flow of democratization and are informed of contemporary issues. But for many people eking out a living in the hills, information and access to state agencies are still out of reach. They face numerous hurdles.

The first hurdle is the requirements: In order to get the citizenship certificate, a person needs to prove that a male relative had citizenship. Failing this, a letter from the ward chairman is often taken as proof of residence when the application is registered at a CDO’s office. But women and children living in marginalized communities often have difficulty getting these letters. Harimaya’s husband, a *dhami* (shaman) died after a three-day illness, vomiting blood. None of her male relatives are alive. The VDC chairman has been helpful but ineffective in assisting in her quest for citizenship.

On her first trip, she was merely given a second date to come into town. On her second appointment, the VDC chairman told her he was working hard on her case; that he could not really do anything to help her at that moment, but that she should come again. On her third visit, Harimaya met with some people from local NGOs who could potentially advocate on her behalf. Many of the suggestions they gave were unfamiliar to her.

With seven children in the house, however, Harimaya could not stay in town even for one night. She was soon back on the road home so that her 13-year-old daughter, who had been left to cook for her siblings, would not have to do all the work herself.

Krishnaprasad Koirala, a neighbor who accompanied Harimaya on her trip, says, “State teams would come to give citizenship certificates until 1998. They no longer come.” The police post in the area has been withdrawn, giving the Maoists a free rein over the area. The Maoists, up to 40 of them, come and demand food from relatively wealthy households. Harimaya is poor, and the Maoists do not ask her to feed them, but she is affected by their presence in other ways. There is a Maoist ban on cutting big trees, and she has left her

leaky roof unattended for fear of reprisals.

Rumors of a Maoist draft that would take a man from each household prompted her eldest son to flee to Kathmandu. The 22-year-old was stopped at the checkpoint in Thankot and asked for “proof” of his identity. Unable to show his *nagarikta*, the proof of citizenship, he was not allowed to enter Kathmandu. Wealthier families, however, do have sons working in construction jobs in Kathmandu. Caught between two malevolent forces, young Chepang men await the time when they can escape the land that has become their prison.

Harimaya, because she does not have citizenship papers, is unable to register her land, buy and sell property or pass on her nationality to her children. “Citizenship gives you many rights,” says Sapana Malla of the Forum for Women, Law and Development. “But citizenship is difficult to get.”

Citizenship in Nepal is handed down through a patrilineal line of descent. Unlike men, women cannot pass

on their nationality to their children. This anachronistic provision, which passes citizenship only through the father exists in few places, including the most conservative of Muslim countries. The fact that women cannot pass on their nationality is a breach of Nepal’s international obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

Given the precedence of the convention over Nepal’s domestic legislation, there is no reason why some very significant steps cannot be taken to eliminate blatantly discriminatory legislation against women. “Some specific changes can be ensured, even in the absence of Parliament,” said Ayse Feride Acar, the chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, in her closing statement at the committee meeting in January 2004. “The citizenship law, in particular, requires serious attention.” The fact that Nepal did not give the same rights to women as it did to its men to pass on citizenship to their offspring “flew in

the face” of the convention: Urgent action was required, she said.

The current discriminatory citizenship law causes difficulties for women who have married foreign citizens or who are single mothers abandoned by their husbands. This has been an issue especially for women in Tarai who marry Indian citizens across the border. In cases where women have divorced or been abandoned by their husbands, they return to Nepal to find that their children are not eligible for citizenship.

Citizenship is also difficult to acquire for marginalized groups like the Badi, where traditional prostitution makes paternity difficult to establish. The former Kamaiya have also repeatedly asked for easier access to citizenship, without which they cannot process the land that the Parliament had allocated for each Kamaiya family. People internally displaced by floods, whose lands have been washed away and who are now squatting on public land, also face special difficulties.

The history of discrimination in citizenship rights in other countries, espe-

**TORCHBEARERS:** Citizenship is handed down through the men



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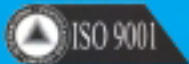
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cially the United States, is an interesting contrast. Women were discriminated against till the 19<sup>th</sup> and earlier part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Not only were women unable to transmit their U.S. citizenship to children born abroad, they even risked losing their own citizenship when marrying a foreigner.

By mid-century, however, legal changes granted equal rights to women. The country's citizenship laws did not discriminate against women; instead, in one area at least, they discriminated against men. Operating under the stereotype that U.S. servicemen were promiscuous with women, the Nationality Act of 1940, for the first time, decreed that unmarried fathers of children born overseas faced prerequisites for transmitting citizenship, prerequisites that women did not encounter. These rules became stricter in later versions of the country's immigration and naturalization law. The U.S. law's bias against unmarried fathers means that children born outside of marriage to foreign women are subject to deportation. Indeed, if an American man and a Nepali woman had a child out of wedlock in Nepal, the child would not be eligible for citizenship from either country and would be stateless.

Nepal's recent courting of non-resident Nepalis, in which proposals for dual citizenship were floated, is ironic in light of the discrimination that most residents of the country face in acquiring their citizenship. Activists worry that the Nepali state may soon start distributing citizenship rights to non-residents for their investment capabilities but exclude its most marginalized citizens.

Bribery and corruption is rampant in the process of acquiring citizenship, observers have noted. The process of getting the bureaucracy to move can often be greased with money. And there may lie the clue to why many of Nepal's poorest citizens remain excluded from their citizenship rights.

The current shutdown of state agencies has left a void in most parts of the country. A peaceful negotiation with the Maoists is necessary before state teams start going out and distributing citizenship papers in remote areas. Unsurprisingly, even when the state sent out teams to grant citizenship before 1998, the process was not user-friendly. Children had to reach a certain age before they could be registered as citizens. The teams would bump up children's ages in order to register them, since the state teams were unlikely to visit remote mountainous regions frequently. These problems would still have to be tackled seriously.

A few cosmetic amendments have been made to ease the process of acquiring citizenship, including a clause that allows non-governmental organizations to recommend an individual for citizenship. Legal observers say this right granted to civil organizations is unprecedented in other parts of the world. While it may work as a short-term remedy, civil society cannot permanently take on the responsibilities of the state.

Only changing the citizenship act and the Constitution will solve the problem of exclusionary citizenship, say legal experts and rights activists. Future changes in the Constitution, of course, are contingent on the restoration of the suspended Parliament. ■

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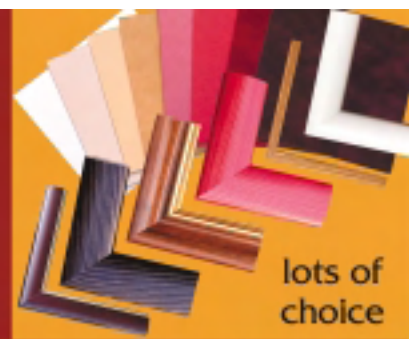
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# HOME GROWN REFORMS

The new company legislation will discourage the collusive tendencies of businesses. Unfortunately, there has been little public debate on these reform measures, thanks to ad hoc, top-down and donor-driven approach to policy making.

BY BIPUL NARAYAN

**D** YOU KNOW MUCH ABOUT the slew of key economic bills—the insolvency bill, the securities bill, the secured transactions bill, the competition bill, and the company’s bill—recently approved by the Cabinet?

The new securities legislation will establish the Nepal Securities Board (SEBO) as an independent statutory body and provide for a le-

gal and regulatory framework for registration and issuance of securities, licensing and regulation of stock exchanges and those engaged in securities business, and curbing of malpractices including insider trading.

The new company legislation will strengthen disclosure requirements for companies. It will introduce provisions to regulate self-dealing by directors and controlling shareholders and strengthen minority shareholders’ rights, allowing

representative actions by minority shareholders to enforce good corporate governance. The company law will also

include the examination of the role of the various agencies and offices involved in implementing the company law, includ-

ECONOMIC FOCUS





ing the CRO, the Company Law Board (CLB), the SEBO and the courts, so as to rationalize the institutional arrangements for administering and enforcing the company law.

The insolvency and secured transaction legislation will ensure an orderly process for exit or restructuring of companies in financial difficulties and strengthen the collateralization process for movable assets. This will contribute to good corporate governance, as the potential use of efficient insolvency and debt enforcement procedures will discipline firms to only contract debts that they can service.

The competition legislation will help curb the monopolistic and collusive tendencies of businesses and help establish competitive markets in Nepal. The pas-

sage of this law is also one of Nepal's WTO commitments.

Don't be surprised if you didn't know much about these laws. Not many people do. And that's thanks to the ad hoc, top-down and donor-driven approach to policy making. These laws are of vital importance to our economy. Yet there has been little by the way of independent analysis or commentary on these reform measures, and the government has done little to initiate public consultations on these laws.

Policy reform almost always creates both winners and losers. The winners while large in number are usually poorly organized and unaware of their gains. They have little capacity to support the reform. On the other hand potential losers stand to lose a lot individually and are usually small in number so they are well placed to oppose reform and have a strong incentive to do so.

To prevent the economic reform process from being hijacked by vested interests, the government should ensure sound analysis of the full economy-wide effects of policy. In most countries such analysis is carried out by independent research agencies and academic institutions, which provide policy advice to the government. Thus, we have agencies such as the Brookings Foundation in the United States, the BIDS in Bangladesh and the RIS in India. In most of these countries, academic institutions are also actively involved in dissecting and commenting on policy. Moreover, such analysis is open for public scrutiny and suggestions. For instance in Australia, public hearings are conducted on all proposed policy actions allowing widespread public participation. These processes ensure that reasoning triumphs over special interests and that the government truly acts in public interest.

Unfortunately, such processes and institutions are quite weak in Nepal. The policy reform process is characterized by an ad hoc, top-down, and donor-driven approach, which often does not fully meet the needs of the country and does not get adequate buy-in from stakeholders. Nepal has very few research agencies and academic institutions giving independent policy advice to the government. The processes followed in policy formulation are not transparent and do not encourage wide public participation. Since the public at large is unaware of the advantages and disadvantages of different policy options available to the country, interest groups are able to pursue policies, which benefit them at the cost of the country.

There is a need to improve the economic policy formulation process in Nepal to increase the effectiveness of policy reforms. The government should commission studies on its own initiative on all proposed policy reform measures. This will help improve government ownership of policy measures and reduce dependence on donors, who currently drive the reform agenda of the government. The government should also make increased efforts to encourage public participation in the policy making process. Over the medium term, the government should support the development of more research agencies and think tanks where economists can work in a critical mass sufficiently large enough to make informed and authoritative comments on policy reform measures of the government.

The need of the hour is for a bottom-up and home-grown approach to policy reforms. Perhaps, then we will have a say in the policies being adopted in our country and also know about them well before the Cabinet has approved them. **N**



All photos mw/SS

## Afternoon Tea With History

Patan Museum has been praised as one of the finest restoration efforts in South Asia

BY VENEETA SINGHA

**I**t is a soft afternoon. Rain clouds are gathering in the sky. There is solitary figure perched on a wooden seat. She is drinking afternoon tea with history!

In the middle of the courtyard stands the temple, the Keshav Narayan Temple—the lamp of light that illuminates the surrounding buildings. Religious symbols and symbolism are plentiful; in fact, they dominate. Wooden windows look down and the gods carved in them shower the visitors with their blessings. At the entrance are a few stone slabs—*shilapatra*. Once inside, you are greeted by a smiling bronze figure, hands joined together in a namaste—the traditional gesture of welcome and hospitality. So begins the journey with history.

The Patan Museum was the residential court, the Patan Durbar, one of the royal palaces of the Malla Kings of the Kathmandu Valley. The exhibits are

strewn under dimly lit lights and the ambience is warm, welcoming. The museum dates back to the Lichavi Period (circa 3<sup>rd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century). As it stands now, it is the result of a thorough restoration effort of the governments of Nepal and Austria. It opened in 1997. The Times of India described it as “the best museum in the subcontinent with plenty of lessons for us in India.” It has also been praised as one of the finest restoration efforts in South Asia.

The majority of the exhibits are sculptures of Hindu and Buddhist deities, which were made in the Kathmandu Valley, some in the workshops of Patan and others originating in India, Tibet and the western Himalaya. They breathe with the living culture that lies beyond the museum walls.

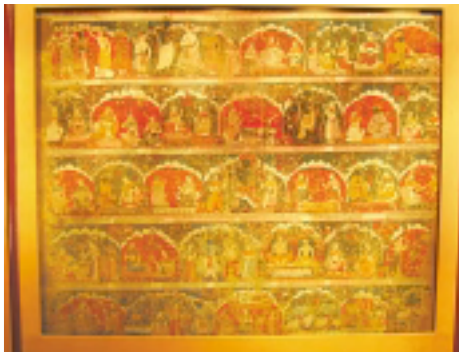
Aside from the galleries, the facilities include seminar rooms for workshops and lectures, guest studios for foreign scholars and artists, an open court-



yard for cultural events, a museum shop, purchase guidance for cultural objects, and non-commercial photography and video. At the end of the museum stands the Patan Museum Café, frequented by travellers from around the world.

Traditional wooden stairs lead to the first gallery. Wood predominates in the interiors as well as the architecture. The objects are mainly cast bronzes and gilt copper repousse work, traditional crafts for which Patan is famous. As in the exteriors, religion is the primary exhibit. There are eight galleries in all, each fuse with the other in a unique manner. The first presents Hindu and Buddhist deities, rich in ornaments and dress. The *sukunda* stands bright—the oil lamp with the Sun God—providing sacred illumination for all. The next features an introduction of Hinduism, Lord Shiva, his consort Parvati and Ganesha. As you walk on, there are striking figures of Vishnu in the next. Krishna is also playing with his *gopinis* in a large frame.

Vedic gods and tantric deities are presented in Gallery D with a resounding note—the assimilated forces of nature. Buddha and the development of various schools of Buddhism come next and, then, there are depictions of the *chaitya* and the *stupa*, the sacred mound that carries the mortal remains of Buddha.



For the tired and weary, there is a window seat outside which the city bustles. In this gallery, the art of metallurgy is represented in stages moving from an initial pencil drawing through to the finished, gilded Bhairava face. Patan is the traditional center of the metallurgical arts. In the last of the galleries are photographs from 1899, discovered at the Volkerkundemuseum in Vienna, representing historic views of Nepal and wood engravings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There are also other photographs from local sources in this gallery. The museum now opens into the café and courtyard. In the middle, there sits a huge traditional well, symbolizing water for the weary, perhaps?

Now you can join that solitary figure and drink some afternoon tea. Once called the “oasis” in the bustle of Patan City, the Patan Museum Café greets the hungry and the parched. You can order Nepali *masala* tea among other delicacies. It feels like a soft balmy oasis where one can sit and gather one’s thoughts and savour the meeting with the deities. The oasis is delicately created with a hint of sunlight and ample room for ruminations. At the far end of the café, there is a mound of bamboo, resplendent in yellow. The aromas of the fresh food cooking in the open kitchen waft around. One has seen, and now one can think and get refreshed. The afternoon is complete. You drank afternoon tea with history. **N**



Customs avoidance means big bucks for fat cats and the police, but it's a marginal and risky business for the small-scale trader

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI  
AT THE INDO-NEPAL BORDER

FOR RUPA TIWARI, A RESIDENT of Mechi Dada Basti, Dashain this year was filled with misery. She lost sugar worth Rs. 3,650 to the police and customs officials at the Kakarbhitta border crossing, where the East-West Highway meets the Indian state of West Bengal. Tiwari had saved some of the money over a period of five months and had borrowed the rest. It took just moments for the police to confiscate the sugar. Tiwari wanted a little extra money for the holidays. "I thought I could spend a little more during Dashain for my family," she says. "But now creditors are knocking at my door when I barely have money to buy food for my family."

Tiwari is among the hundreds of people, especially women, who try to eke out a living through small-scale cross-border smuggling along these border points. Just about everyone involved in the cross-border trade says it's not as easy as it may sound. Even the word itself is stigmatizing. "We feel insecure," says Tiwari, "because this is like stealing." Smuggling may look lucrative from the outside, but it is not always so.

People evade customs duties with the full knowledge of the police and customs officials. They say officials take bribes to overlook crimes, but sometimes these small-scale smugglers end up paying more than the legal duties. Every policeman demands a price; the bribes often total more than the profit possible on the transaction.

Mechi Dada Basti, a small hill overlooking the Mechi River, which serves as the natural boundary between India and Nepal in this part of the country, is home to nearly 200 families. The majority of people here in this *basti*, or settlement, depend on smuggling for their livelihood. "At least one member of each family does this business," says Kaji Luitel, a resident of the village. "When

USELESS FENCES:  
Mechi Dada Basti  
is a smuggling hub



## SMUGGLER'S HAVEN

you don't have other opportunities, you don't have a choice." Luitel lost a consignment of plastic *chappals* for a trader in Birtamod. The consignment was confiscated before he could deliver it. He lost his commission and was without work for several days. But setbacks such as these haven't deterred Luitel or others from the *basti*. Mechi Dada Basti is perfectly situated for smuggling. Perched

on a high ground above the Mechi River and the long, unguarded riverbank, it is close to the no-man's land. Blessed with numerous "pirate routes," there can be no better place to call home for people who have taken up cross-border trade, sans customs duties, as a profession.

Perhaps this is the reason why so many people have moved to live in this shanty suburb of Mechinagar municipality over



abuses committed by law enforcement officials. If you complain, you lose your livelihood.

“There are two types of evaders,” says Kisan Sharma, a resident of Kakarbhitta. “One type earns big bucks with few hassles. The others have a hard time keeping body and soul together. They evade less and face more harassment.” The big earners can afford to lose their illegal goods from time to time, but small-scale evaders can’t.

With Tihar approaching, more people will find it tempting to take the plunge: They hope to earn a few quick bucks for the family and to bring some light into their lives during the festival of lights and colors. The Kakarbhitta crossing has already started to get crowded. A long caravan of cycles can be seen along the sandy Mechi River, all loaded with sacks and bags containing sugar and other essentials for the festival. Many will get lucky and reap a profit from their illegal business. A few will suffer like Tiwari, but this won’t deter them from trying their luck again. **N**

the years—Nepalis from all over the country and others from as far as Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Manipur. The would-be smugglers are not alone. This is also a desirable and lucrative post for officials. Customs and police officers on both sides of the border make little effort to stop the illegal trade; instead they collect fees to look the other way.

Outside a grocery shop in Panitanki, India, a 10-minute walk from the Nepali border, Devi Chawan (name changed) buys 150 kilograms of sugar. A Nepali, who she says is a policeman, stretches out his hand. She hands him Rs. 50. The man shakes his head in disapproval; there is some bargaining. She finally gives him Rs. 100. She says she knows the police now, and not just the Nepalis. Even the Indian police extract their share. There are many palms to be greased: “The one who took Rs. 100 is only one, more will be at the border, stretching out their hands,” she says. Even then, there is no guarantee that

her goods won’t be confiscated by the Army, who, she says, don’t take bribes.

After the bribes, and if she gets the sugar safely across the border, Chawan will earn about Rs. 375 on the deal. “Many times they take bribes and the goods too,” she complains. But being on the wrong side of the law means there’s no way to redress

**POROUS BORDER:** The Kakarbhitta border point





# Non-interrogating Journalists

One of the self-preservation myths that journalists in this country like to reproduce is that they are ‘watchdogs’ of various interests on behalf of the Nepali people

BY PRATYOUSH ONTA

**O**n June 8, 2004 I sent the following note to a friend who edits a Kathmandu publication:

“As you know I have been coordinating the media research group of Martin Chautari and the Centre for Social Research and Development since 2000. In the last four years we have put out 11 books, nine of which have dealt with various aspects of the media in Nepal and the remaining two were reference readers to journalists (and others) regarding the dalit and janjati movements. Out of the nine media books, seven were products of our own research while the remaining two were books prepared by a practicing media person or analyst. By the end of 2004, we will have produced at least three more books... You might recall that I gave you some of our books... last year and later you emailed me to say that we were doing something interesting—extending the language of media analysis into Nepali, etc.

I would like to request you to assign one of your reporters to do a critical piece on our work (vis-à-vis the media research landscape in Nepal and internationally). Our own analysis suggests that we are not only leading the scene in Nepal in terms of volume of production but we also have reasons to believe that we have contributed toward the creation of infrastructure for good media research and the creation of people who have the skills to uplift this discipline in Nepal. However I am not asking you to praise our work. I am asking you to do a critical inquiry about our record and point out to your readers if there are lessons to be learned about how research could be done in Nepal under conditions that everybody seems to find wanting, namely, supposed (a) shortage of people, (b) shortage of intellectual resources and (c) shortage of funding. I am sure your critical inquiry will also be an eye-opener for us regarding our weak points, both intellectually and in terms of institutional organization of research and will help us to upgrade our own work.

In addition, from August 2001 we have been holding a fortnightly media discussion series at Martin Chautari.... In total, we have already organized about 65 such discussions in the past three years. Your reporter might want to ask how this culture of discussion is related to good research.

I make this request because the level of understanding of issues related to social research (including on media) in Nepal exhibited by our *patrakars* leaves a lot to be desired. They seem to have only one thing in their minds – these guys [i.e. we social scientists] do research because they get lots of donor dollars and hence the contents are donor driven. The truth, I am afraid, is something else and remains hidden from the public because our journalists do not take the risk to ask tough questions about us, our work, our funding sources, our research methods, etc. Under your guidance... I am sure your reporter will do a good job of this analysis.”

Some days later, I got the following note from my editor friend: “Pratyoush, it’s a good idea, one that does warrant a critical look. That said, I really don’t have a reporter who could do a job of it. This because

of our staff crunch. But let’s discuss this further. My best shot would be outsourcing.”

In the ensuing months my friend has made no effort to “discuss this further.” That would not have been a source of worry if it were not the case that other editors who I had approached before him had told me much the same. For example, one editor, who never tires of extolling the virtues of social science research, told me more than two years ago that since his reporters were chasing many “other” important stories, he could not assign any to this subject then. It remains that way until now. My worry is also based on other experiences, including some with people who do talk radio.

One of the self-preservation myths that journalists in this country like to reproduce is that they are “watchdogs” of various interests on behalf of the Nepali people. Far from it, from case to case, the ability of Nepali journalists to interrogate people and institutions that make claims in the Nepali public sphere leaves a lot to be desired. Claims regarding a social science operation related to their trade (like the ones I make above) ought to be under their close scrutiny simply because if they cannot do even that, their claims to work on behalf of the Nepali people with



respect to other topics become suspect. Just to highlight one point, the process of quality monitoring in research and in fields like politics (which keeps most of Nepali journalists busy) is remarkably similar: how to attract good people to your field, how to train them, how to manage the operation financially, how to demonstrate your accountability, etc. Yet no Nepali journalist has asked us these questions and that is my source of worry.

One reader of this magazine asked some weeks ago: What are we doing to mentor a new generation of analysts and what is our gift to Nepali posterity? Before reiterating the “watchdog” claim, Nepali journalists ought to hold the mirror to themselves and try to answer these queries of an obviously intelligent reader. **N**

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# When The Going Gets Tough

...the tough get cooking


BY KUNAL LAMA

**T**he Durga Mata of all festivals, Dashain, has come and gone. In its wake it has left us poorer, with an almighty hangover and a huge backlog of work. We cannot really complain, however. It's *Dashain*, not just another midget, middling, meaningless festival. Like the saying, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going," we have to get going because times are tough. And nationwide celebrations are rare these days. When the opportunity comes once a year, with the force of "the greatest festival of the Nepali people" and the added punch of religion and perfect weather, what else is there to do but to surrender in the only way we know best: full-on and full out.

Well, I applied myself full-on in gathering non-celebrating, non-Nepali friends in my flat, after going full out for three days in the kitchen preparing some of my Mother's specialties. The hands down winner was the *bandeko-achar* (wild boar pickle) which combines the unique flavors of fenugreek, ginger, lime juice and green chilies with the meat. If you are lucky enough to have leftovers, then you can savor it for days afterwards as the pickle matures and becomes even tastier. Want the recipe? Here it is.

There's no point, really, in cooking just a kilo of wild boar meat, so, when you get the chance, get three. Make sure the meat is fresh and has the requisite layers of 1/8th skin, 3/8th fat and the rest meat. (If you think that is a lot of fat, get this: A guy suffering from obesity was advised by his doctor to omit fat from his diet. The patient plaintively inquired how he could tell that it was fat he was eating. The doctor answered brusquely, "If it tastes good, spit it out." Yep, no fat, no taste.) If you have the time, trouble yourself to freeze the meat for at least 48 hours as it helps to kill the nasty parasitic worm, *Trichinella spiralis*, which develops cysts in the flesh of the infected animals. If pork is inadequately cooked, the cysts remain viable and pass into humans, and may cause trichinosis, a serious illness. The freezing is a precautionary measure: this dish is cooked well and long. I digress. Back to the recipe. Cut the boar, or pork, meat into inch-wide pieces. You will also need a good tablespoon of fenugreek; 300 grams of fresh ginger, peeled, cut into inch-long slices and smashed to break up the fibers; 150 ml of fresh lime juice; 30 green chilies slit from the middle all the way to the tip and 150 ml of cooking oil. Heat a thick-bottomed pot; pour in the oil. When the oil begins to smoke, scatter in the fenugreek until it browns and turns fragrant. I now prefer to take the pot off the heat to allow the hot oil to cool down. (This prevents the oil from splattering and the meat from sticking to the sides of the hot pot when it is

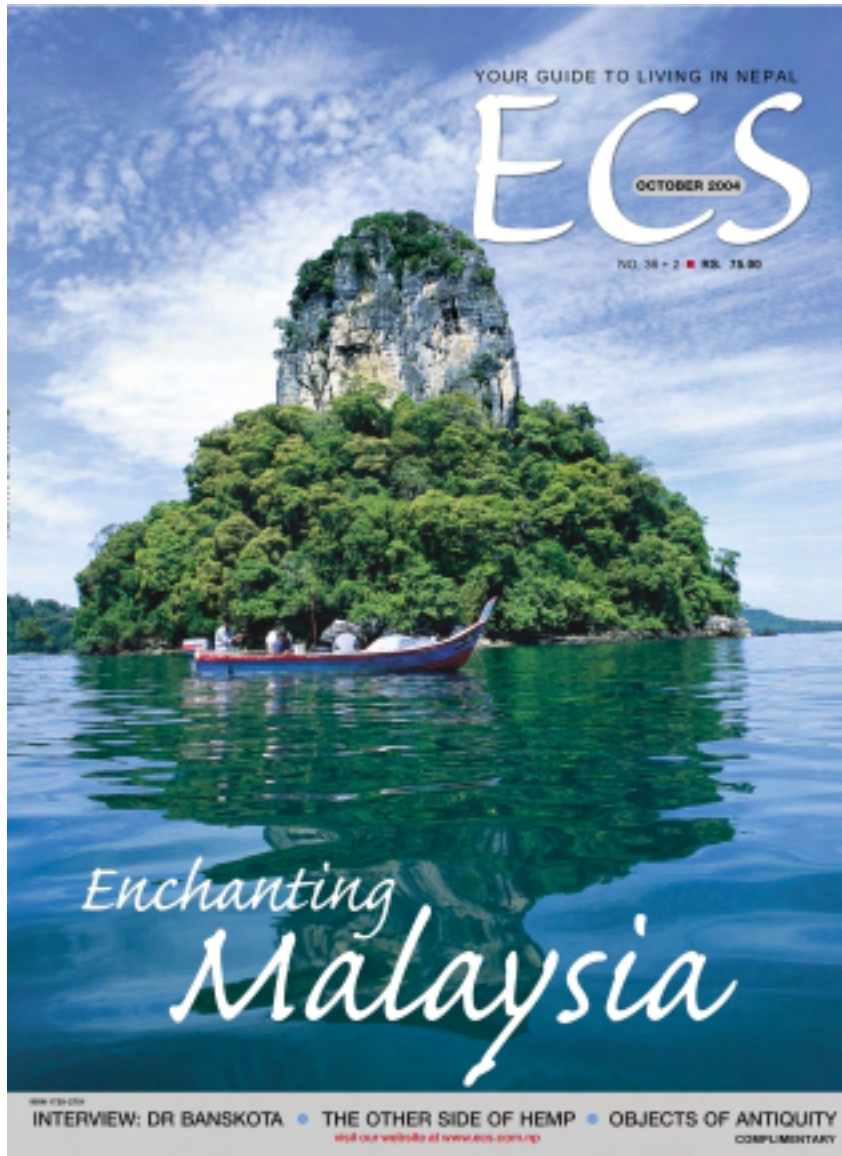
tossed in.) When the oil is cool enough, drop in the meat in batches, taking care to turn so that the oil coats all the pieces evenly. Put the pot back on medium heat. As the meat juices begin to ooze, turn the heat down to the minimum, cover the pot, and let the meat stew gently. When the juices have been reduced to half the volume, squeeze in the crushed ginger and throw in the fibrous ball. Now all you have to do, stirring occasionally, is let the meat and ginger juices reduce till the first hint of fat starts appearing. If the smell emanating activates your salivary glands, the meat is cooked, approximately three hours later. Take the pot off the cooker, throw in the green chilies, stir, cover the pot and let it cool. Once this is done, add the fresh lime juice and salt to taste. Stir. Serve, or keep it in the fridge. To serve later, adjust the lime juice and salt, and carefully warm over steam or microwave, but don't make it piping hot. Direct heating will cause the lime juice to go bitter. You can keep this dish for at least a week, or even longer. The fat and the lime juice act as perfect natural preservatives.

Ever since last Saturday, I have been drifting mindlessly, almost desperately, with the melancholic makings of a post-celebration depression. Not unlike a jolly, high-flying kite that has been cruelly cut loose in mid-air, flailing, nowhere near anything to get entangled with. Not even the thought of Tihar cheers me up. Too much fatty boar pickle perhaps? If anyone has a magic solution, a remedy, please, please dispatch it to me. Jumping from the terrace onto the nearest tree will not be a welcome suggestion. 





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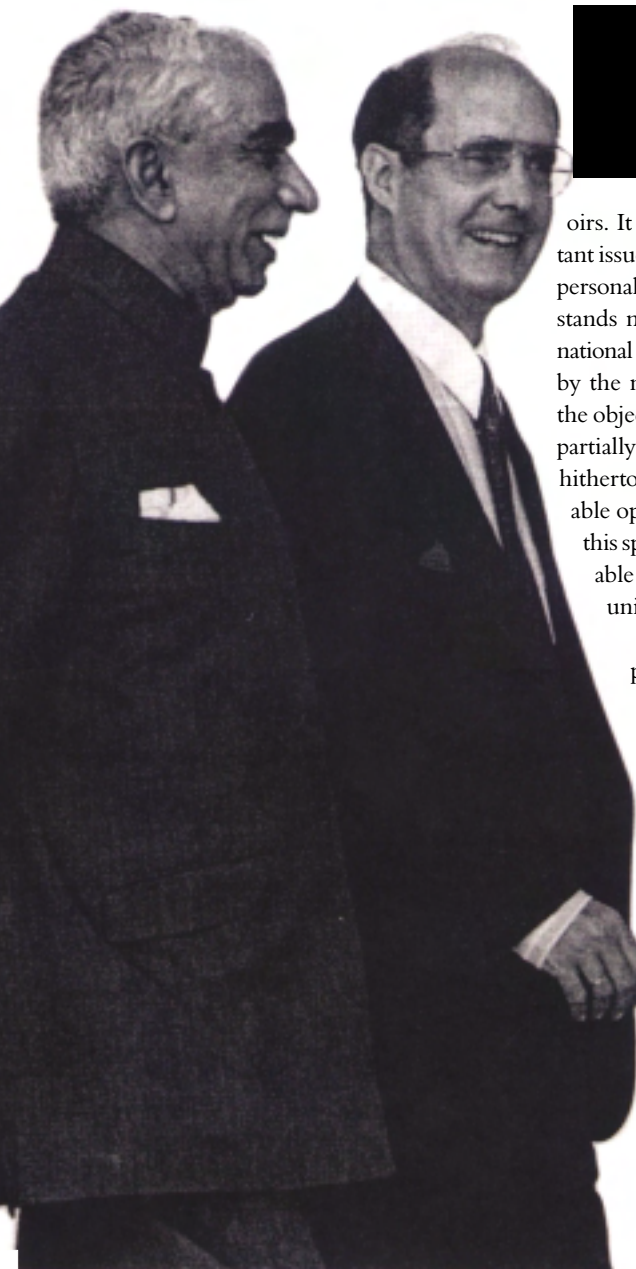
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# OF MEN AND

oires. It highlights a triage of quite important issues: How negotiations are affected by personal rapport, how principled yet flexible stands need not dilute the preservation of national interests purportedly being defended by the negotiators, and how even though the objectives of each of the parties are only partially met in the end, they could open up hitherto unseen, but fundamentally desirable opportunities on other fronts. It is in this spirit that Talbott calls his book a “parable about a benign version of the law of unintended consequences.”

These important dialogues that produced unintended consequences, of course, began after the Indian tests of nuclear devices in the Thar in May, 1998, and ended with the momentous visit of Bill Clinton to India two years later, opening a new chapter in Indo-U.S. relations. While the parallels with Nixon’s historic opening with China in the 70s are far-fetched, the American embrace of India this century has been hailed as a significant development in international relations—a long overdue, natural alliance between the two most important democracies in the world, one, the most prosperous and powerful, and the other, the most populous. Of course, added to one of the un-

intended consequences is the irony that the relationship that the Clinton Democrats forged with India is now being consolidated by the Republicans, with the Democratic presidential nominee, John Kerry, actually seen as a spoiler. Lalit Mansingh, India’s ambassador to the United States until early this year, did complain that the level of trust between the two countries that had been cultivated after 1998 was breached when Colin Powell announced Pakistan would be designated “major non-NATO Ally” of the United States without informing or taking the Indians into confidence. But Mansingh recently wrote in *The Hindustan Times* (October 10) that Bush comes across as friendlier than Kerry. Especially when judged by their respective parties’ foreign policy pri-

orities recently published in the respectable *Foreign Affairs*.

It is not my intention to turn this column into a book review, so I will refrain from commenting on the details, but there is a larger point one extracts from Talbott’s approach to documenting these important negotiations. Talbott is self-deprecating when he rightly says that his memoirs are an exception to Dean Acheson’s maxim that the author of a memorandum of conversations never comes out second best. He does. Deferential to Jaswant Singh, he approvingly quotes Raj Mohan of *The Hindu* describing the Rajput as one who rose to the challenges of foreign policy with “political aplomb and personal dignity,” then contrasting this assessment with his own dealings with the Pakistanis as spectacularly pathetic. Whether it’s the obdurate generals, who convey no illusions about who runs Pakistan, or the hapless civilian politicians like Nawaz Sharif, who find themselves rushing to Blair House in Washington, almost uninvited, to plead for sanity and grace, it tells us a lot, hints Talbott, about the differing “civilizational richness” of the two rivals.

## NO FAILURE OF CIA

The backdrop to these dialogues is of course the American pressure and Indian resistance to sign up to any nuclear non-proliferation pacts after 1998. The Americans failed to force India to sign on to any semblance of binding international treaties on nuclear non-proliferation, largely because the U.S. Senate itself voted against the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. America then lost all moral authority to pressure other countries to approve what it had rejected, and India went on to secure partial “certification of great-power status” that it craved by shaking the Thar, preparations for which were unnoticed by everyone except the local villagers, the Vajpayee-Kalam coterie and a Sikh newsletter in Canada. “It’s not a failure of the CIA. It’s a matter

## BY SWARNIM WAGLÉ

**STROBE TALBOTT**, BILL CLINTON’s deputy secretary of state for seven years, calls his “fourteen encounters at ten locations in seven countries on three continents” with the Indian statesman Jaswant Singh, the most intense and prolonged set of exchanges ever between American and Indian officials at a level higher than ambassadors.

Talbott’s “Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy and the Bomb” is an illuminating, highly readable account of diplomacy conducted at high places among the gentlest of gentlemen. But this book, that was very recently published by the Brookings Institution, of which Talbott is now president, is more than a set of affectionate mem-

What can Nepalis  
those conducted

# NEGOTIATIONS

of their intelligence being good, our deception being better,” gloated an Indian official afterwards.

Former staff of Time magazine, translator of two volumes of Khrushchev’s memoirs, and Bill Clinton’s room-mate at 46 Leckford Road, Oxford, Talbott puts his scholarly journalism on full display in these memoirs. Clinton says in his own autobiography “My Life” (p. 148) that after a tragic incident that injured Talbott’s eye in his youth, he “started seeing things that most of us miss.” But the way Talbott has put on record these dialogues says something important about the way the conduct of foreign policy is dependent on the personality of the other party, and how that personality is shaped by that party’s cultural and ideological baggage. India and the United States could continue with the dialogues in the manner they did because both are secure, proud, open democracies. America’s dealings with Pakistan were markedly different—more mercantilist and opportunistic in a strategic sense, tied by necessity and circumstance than any warm, natural bond.

Talbott’s point is: The benign superpower treats you the way you signal you want to be treated. And through 50 years of covert and dramatic negotiations with different brands of communists (the Soviets, Chinese and Vietnamese), the Americans have perfected negotiations into a fun-filled art-form. Ask Dr. Kissinger.

On the Indian nuclear tests itself, Henry Kissinger said: “If I were the president of the United States, I’d deplore it. If I were the prime minister of India, I’d do it.” Although Talbott, at Time magazine, covered many of Kissinger’s parleys and forays into unfriendly territory, it is Kissinger who we should turn to, to learn a trick or two on ways to deal with hostile negotiating partners. To the untrained diplomatic eye, whether it’s Vietnam’s Le Duc Tho (with whom Kissinger negotiated the Paris Agreement in 1973) or China’s Zhou EnLai (with

whom he negotiated the 1972 Shanghai Communiqué), or even his uneven rapport with the Soviets, it is difficult to appreciate the nuances of negotiations the author of these tactics has since revealed. Although they were all communist cousins (albeit bitter with one another), supposedly sharing a common outlook on how they foresaw the annihilation of their capitalist rivals, Kissinger spells out in his 912-page book, “Diplomacy,” the differing strategies of the Chinese Maoists and the Soviets. “The Soviet diplomats almost never discussed conceptual issues. Their tactic was to select a problem of immediate concern to Moscow and to batter away at its resolution with a dogged persistence designed to wear down their interlocutors rather than to persuade them. The insistence and the vehemence with which Soviet negotiators put forward the politburo consensus reflected the brutal discipline and internal strains of Soviet politics, and transformed high policy into an exhausting retail trade.”

## SECURE CHINESE

The Vietnamese approach, as conveyed by the suave Le Duc Tho, according to Kissinger, was about saying the unsayable with “impeccable politeness, frigid demeanor and moral superiority—and in a Marxist vocabulary impervious to interjections by the benighted imperialists.” The Vietnamese adopted a “glacial” strategy, Kissinger says, of conveying that “time was on their side, because they could exploit the other party’s divisions.” Le Duc Tho had only one objective: of “culminating his revolutionary career with victory.” America, as the superpower, had to have many, says Kissinger, offering another complicated facet of negotiations between uneven parties with multiple goals and differing legitimacies in international circles.

What about the real Maoists, the Chinese negotiators under Mao? “The Chinese represented a far more emotionally secure society than the Soviets. They were less interested in fine drafting points than in building confidence.” Supporting this statement Kissinger cites Mao telling Nixon about China not needing Taiwan for the time being, and that the issue can come after 100 years, thereby “asking for no reciprocity for the assurance America had been seeking for twenty years.”

## LESSON FOR NEPALIS

What can we Nepalis learn from these strands of historic dialogues and negotiations, those conducted among friends, and those with enemies? As the most popular word in Nepal today is “negotiations” what kind of

strategizing does the state need to do in anticipation of the Maoist compulsions, stonewalling, and chest-thumping? How do we analyze, or even rationalize their past behavior and tactics? They are Nepalis. But they are also

## Nepali Maoists are doctrinaire communists who resemble the nervous Soviets

doctrinaire communists, who in the succinct Kissinger typology actually resemble more the nervous Soviets than their more secure namesake of China. Or they may actually just be themselves. Whatever their motivations and the original force of their drive, there are negotiations conducted between different parties, in different eras, between people with grossly different personalities, aptitude and values, and we can learn a thing or two by studying them, at least the essence of core negotiating principles, if not the detail of contents, so as to appreciate the complexity of the eventual, conclusive negotiations between the Nepali state and the Nepali Maoists. How nice it would be if in the end, after all these lost years and futile bloodletting, we did actually secure a lasting settlement of the ongoing conflict, and that the brave Nepali interlocutors who issue that hope to us also end up writing affectionate memoirs about each other? **N**

*(Views expressed in this column are personal, and do not necessarily reflect those of institutions the writer is affiliated with.)*

learn from historic dialogues and negotiations, among friends, and those with enemies?

# CITY ThisWeek

## EVENTS



## Ramailo Saanjh

Dwarika's Hotel presents "Ramailo Saanjh," where Ishwor Gurung with his popular group "Himalayan Feelings" will be performing a musical fusion of traditional and modern Nepali melodies. Come and take pleasure in this enthralling event at the Dwarika's Heritage Courtyard, magnificently lit with *diyos* (oil lamps) and superbly set background with typical Nepali village themes displaying Nepali household items—*dhiki-jaanto* and potteries around the hut.

Enjoy varieties of Nepali "household" delicacies like *samaya bajee*, *celroti*, *bara*, *sekuwa*, *khasi ko kabab* and *haas ko masu* with an array of vegetables. Interesting mouthwatering dishes prepared at live cooking stations by our master chefs. A wide range of Nepali spicy pickles with sweet temptations including *julebi*, *panchamrit*, *juju dhau* and the renowned Dwarika's *pharsi ko halwa*. Date: November 3. Price: Rs. 1200 net per person, includes snacks & dinner with live music. 10% discount to Heritage Plus members. Time: 7- 10 p.m. For information: 4479488.

## Srijana Anniversary

## ART EXHIBITIONS

A four-day-long painting workshop was organized by Srijana College of Fine Arts to mark the 3rd anniversary of the college. Altogether 54 students of the college took part in the workshop and the outcome was 94 pieces of paintings executed in different themes, mediums and styles under the guidance of eminent and senior artists Batsa G. Vaidhya, K.K. Karmacharya, Shankar R.S. Suwal, Shyam Lal Shrestha, Sharada Man Shrestha, Uttam Kharel and Navindra Rajbhandari. The paintings created during the workshop are on display in Srijana Contemporary Art Gallery, Kamaladi. The exhibition will remain open till the Tihar festival. Time: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

## Dashain, Deepawali Bonanza

Celebrate the festive season at Radisson Hotel with 50% off on food and domestic liquors at the Fun Café. Date: October 15 to November 15. For information: 4411818.

International Food Festival 2004

The Himalayan Times presents International Food Festival 2004. Get food from around the globe. Culinary delights from 14 countries, more than 12 game stalls, magic shows and many more at the Hyatt Regency. Date: November 6. Time: 11a.m. to 5p.m. Tickets: Rs. 100 for adults and Rs. 50 for children under four.



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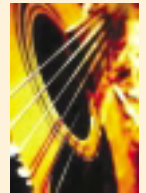
Indian, western and Mongolian barbecued delights to tempt your appetites. Time: 6-10 p.m. For information: 4248999.

**Rock@Belle Momo**

Enjoy combo meals at Belle Momo every Fridays 6:30 p.m. onwards as the rock 'n roll band Steel Wheels performs live. For information: 4230890.

**Fusion Night**

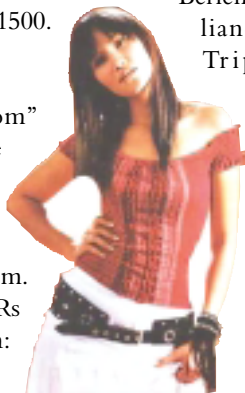
The Rox Bar welcomes everyone to be a part of the Fusion Night. The rhythmic and harmonic beats of the eastern and the western instruments will be a treat for your senses. Enjoy the sarangi played by Bharat Nepali with a well-blended mix of western tunes played by The Cloud Walkers. Every Wednesday. Time: 6 p.m. onwards. For information: 4491234.



p.m. , 5-6 p.m. , 6-7 p.m. and 7-8 p.m. Class fee: Rs. 1500.

**Jhoom to Dhoom**

Tata Young of "Dhoom" fame is performing live for the first time in Kathmandu at Hyatt Regency. Date: November 5. Time: 7:30 p.m. onwards. Ticket price: Rs 2,500. For information: 4720382, 2081040.



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Date: November 28. Time: 2 p.m. For information: 4241163.

**Photo Session**

Photo Concern announces its festival offer for everyone. Take along the Photo Concern Free Photo Shoot advertisement cutting available in the daily newspapers and get a free photo shoot during Dashain and Tihar. Valid up to November 30. For information: 4223275.

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# CHANGU CHARACTER

BY PRAGYAN SUBEDI

In the northeast periphery of Kathmandu Valley there is a village atop a hill. Walking along its single street—a narrow lane with old-style houses on both sides—it seems like any other village on Kathmandu's outskirts, neglected by the massive changes of urbanization that have so altered the center. The village is filled with dogs, chickens and ducks; the largely agricultural population still live in the houses of their ancestors. However the prominent presence of the Changunarayan temple, one of the most important sites for Vishnu worship in Kathmandu, gives the villagers a special pride in their locality.

It was this pride that caused Baishnav Raj Shrestha, whose ancestors have lived in the village for centuries, to partition off a large section of his 165-year-old house and assemble a collection of objects associated with the history of the village. That was five years ago. Now Shrestha spends his days guiding visitors through his Changu museum with the air of a man who has found his vocation.

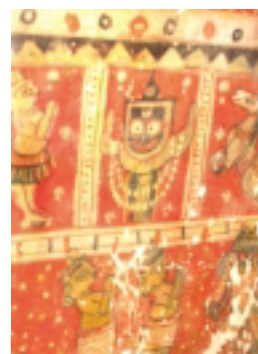
Shrestha can offer much information about each of the objects on display, but his historical sense is peculiar. There are many objects—swords, shields made of rhino skin and coins—that he claims are “thousands of years old.” When pushed to answer how many thousand years exactly, he gets philosophical: “A thousand years may seem like a long time to you and to me, but in history it is nothing. It is just like a month to us.” A peculiar answer for a man with such a passion for history, perhaps. But it is entirely in accordance with his conception of the past, a conception that has been passed down orally from generation to generation in his village. He refers to it as *jana-shruti*, the wisdom of the populace.

*Jana-shruti* is most prominent in the legend concerning the creation of the temple. Without the temple there wouldn't be much to be proud of, and so a major display in the museum is a series of framed paintings with captions that tell the story of the creation of Changunarayan. There was once a Brahmin named Sudarshan who had a cow. Everyday his assistant, his *gwala*, used to take the cow to graze, but the cow started going to a tree where a small boy would appear and drain her of milk. The Brahmin, furious to be deprived of his milk, chopped down the tree, but when he had done so, Vishnu emerged from the tree. The Brahmin cowered before the god, asked for clemency and was told to build a temple at the site where the tree was. An *akash-vandi*, a voice from the sky,

also revealed the mantra the Brahmin was to use in his everyday worship.

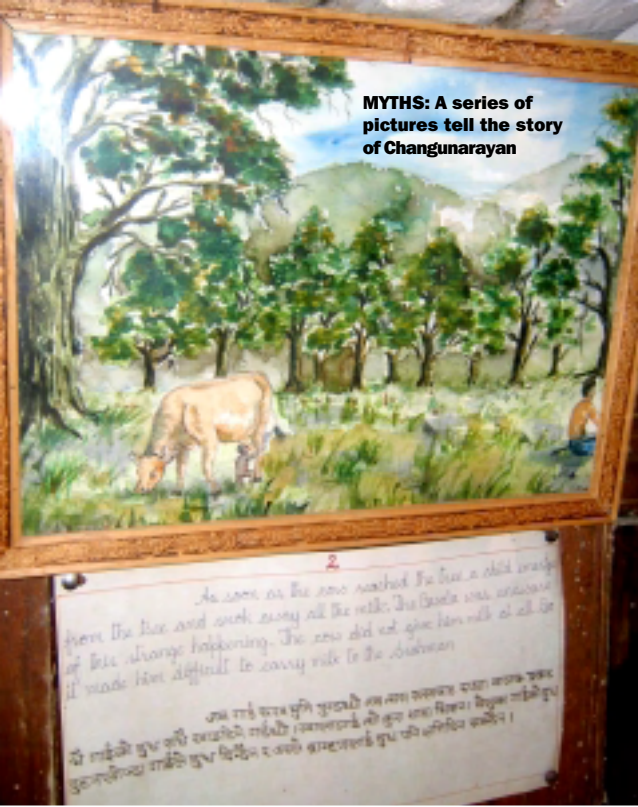
The story is not new. It is a version of an ancient Hindu myth that accounts for the beginnings of many holy places. But here, like other places in the subcontinent, it has been connected to the immediate soil, to the lives of the villagers, and in this way has gained strength. “From that day on, thousands and thousands of years ago,” Shrestha says, “the direct descendents of that Brahmin and that *gwala* have continued to worship Changu using the same mantra revealed to Sudarshan through the *akash-vandi*.” Does that mean that the Brahmin who worships at the temple now is the direct descendent of Sudarshan? Shrestha nods his head slowly and profoundly.

Other things on display include traditional Newari pots and pans, coins through the ages and tattered tantric manuscripts, all neatly labeled. But the most curious of objects are those connected to his conceptions of the supernatural. There is an



NEW-AGE AVATAAR: TV-headed Buddha depicts the technology age





that foreigners or Americans tell us. I think that we should believe more of the things that our ancestors tell us. That is *jana-shruti*. It is important that we believe *jana-shruti*.”

The skeptical visitor is chastened. When Shrestha moves on to the next object, a painting, which again is claimed to be thousands of years old, the visitor listens humbly. This time Shrestha has his own interpretation to add to the wisdom of his ancestors. A detail on the painting shows the 10 avatars of Vishnu. The first eight are identical. The ninth one shows a strange figure with a box like face. “We are living in the age of the avatar with the box-like face,” claims Shrestha. “He is Buddha. But look at how prophetic our ancestors were. They have given him a box-like face like a TV or a computer. They knew that in our age knowledge would be transmitted through these devices. Our age is the age of these inventions.”



egg-shaped rock-like object, with little tufts of hair on it. That, Shrestha claims, is *gaulochan*, a holy object that is referred to in myths. It is supposed to have emerged from a cow’s mouth and represents a blessing given to mortals by the cow, considered holy in Hinduism. Then there is a dry leaf with a curved line running over it that looks like a child’s scribble. That, according to Shrestha, is the writing of a crow. “You know how we refer to bad handwriting as crows-writing. Well, this is it. This is the writing of a crow,” he says.

A skeptical visitor asks for proof of his claims. Shrestha’s voice rises as though in anger at the presumption of this visitor; with frantic gesticulations he says, “We’ve all heard of *gaulochan* and of crow’s writing. This is it. This is what has been passed down from long ago by the lucky people who found these things.” Then as though catching himself, he softens: “All of us believe things

Shrestha has the desire to expand and improve his museum, but has been disheartened by lack of public support. He shows a folder that contains various letters and requests to get his museum recognized that he has sent to the Archeology Department in Kathmandu. So far there has been no response; no one from the department has even come to visit his museum.

In the meantime he waits for the occasional visitor and enthusiastically shows and interprets the relics of an earlier time. **N**

**PECULIAR:** Shrestha



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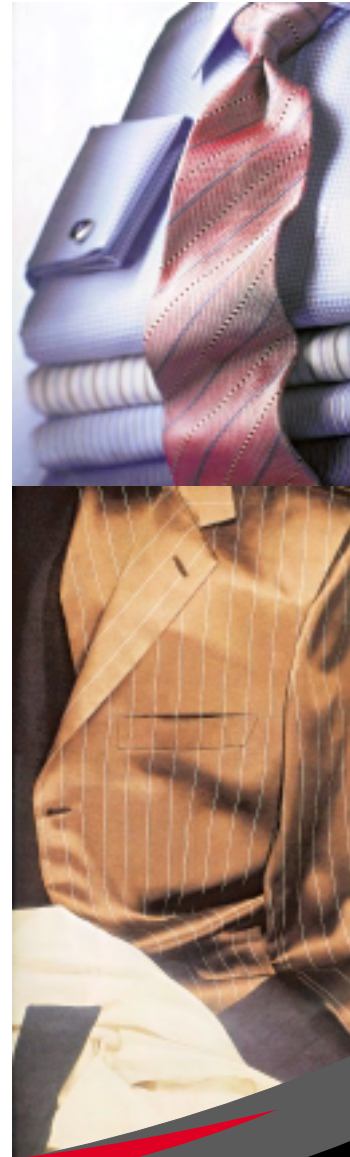


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## Snapshots

BY DHRITI BHATTA



## A Hat-Trick

It has been a good year for singer **YAM BARAL**. He has won three awards this year—the Gorkha Dakshin Bahu; the Critics Award for the song “Nepali Herai, Nepali Sochai,” which is aired before the NTV news; and finally the Narayangopal Yuwa Sangit Puraskar awarded to singers under 40. “2061 has been a great year for me,” says Baral. “My hard work has been recognized, and I’m thrilled to achieve what I once could only dream of.” What more for this talented singer after all these awards? More songs of course. Baral’s new album “Bhinnata” is all set to hit the market. Like the name—meaning difference—suggests, “my listeners can expect something new, fresh and different from this album.” Now it’s up to his listeners to decide if the new recording is worth a fourth prize.

## Crisp Commentary

With hundreds of spectators and dozens of kites in the sky, Changa Chait was an exciting, fun-filled and colorful event. But what added even more color and zing to the program was the commentary provided by **GINA GURUNG GHOTANE** and **PALLAVI DHAKAL**, better known as the “twisted sisters,” from their show of the same name at Image Metro FM 97.9. The duo provided the crowd with interesting information about kites and kite-flying traditions. “We prepared ourselves two to three days before the program,” Gina said, “because we wanted to entertain the crowd with a bit of information about kites.” But ask the ladies if they are interested in flying kites and the response is a flat no.



## MOUNTAIN MAN



**REINHOLD MESSNER** is one of the greatest mountaineers of our time. He is the first mountaineer to scale Everest without oxygen and also the first to climb all 14 eight-thousanders. Messner was in Kathmandu to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ascent of Cho Oyu. The city honored Messner and the only living member of the Austrian team that made the Cho Oyu ascent in 1954, Heuberge Helmut, at Hanuman Dhoka palace. Messner emphasized the need to protect and promote Nepal’s unique culture and heritage.

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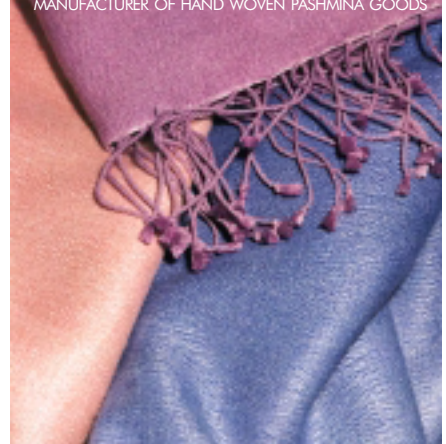
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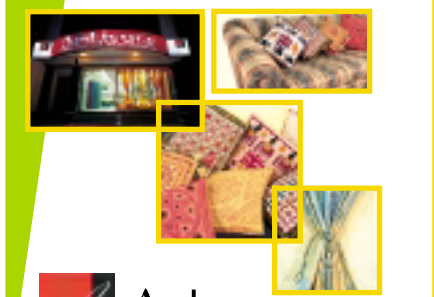


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# Ever Higher

**S**ince the first conquest of Everest by Tenzing Norgay and Sir Edmund Hillary in 1953, the Sherpas and the Himalaya have been almost synonymous. Indeed, the Sherpas are now an integral part of just about every high-altitude expedition. Little wonder many of them have established themselves as

renowned climbers. While others remain unsung heroes, who are responsible for many a climbing record, but little known outside the mountaineering circle. Early this year, two young Sherpas were in the news for a dispute the community members felt they could do without. Pemba Dorjee Sherpa and Lakpa Gelu Sherpa both laid claim to the record of the fastest ascent of Everest. The seven-member government team that was appointed to investigate the dispute included **Ang Karma Sherpa**, general secretary of the Nepal Mountaineering Federation and a mountaineer of modest reckoning himself. He spoke to John Narayan Parajuli about mountaineering, tourism and the Everest dispute.

**The dispute between two ace climbers, Lakpa and Pemba, has affected the Sherpa community, hasn't it?**

It's a replay of Lakpa's case in 2003. If any harm was done, it was done then. Disputes are not new to the climbing community. But what is unusual about this one is that it happened within the Sherpa community. It generated quite a lot of interest here and elsewhere, because people have high regard for the Sherpas. The probe confirmed Pemba's claim. Had this been reversed, it would have done great damage.

**Has this all got to do with pressure among young Sherpas to climb for fame?**

Climbing Everest has that appeal. You can be nobody today, and tomorrow you can rise to stardom. Climbing has offered that opportunity to Nepal. If you have the skill and the tenacity, why not?

**To change the topic a bit, there are concerns about excessive commercialization of Everest.**

The whole climbing community is concerned. There is no official body to regulate climbing. We must know how many people can be on the South Col on a given day. There has been huge traffic on Everest; Everest can't take it.

**You were the first Nepali to reach the summit of Everest from the Tibet side, in the summer of 1985. How did it feel?**

I felt it was quite an achievement. The Tibet side had just been opened for mountaineering, and few people had climbed Everest from the north face.

**Climbing is a risky business... what harm the insurgents can inflict is nothing compared to the dangers in the mountains**

**You have climbed in Nepal and overseas. How is the climbing experience different?**

Peaks are the same wherever you go. In the Himalaya, you have an emotional attachment. In Europe, climbing often becomes a technical affair, anything but climbing. There are smaller peaks [there], compared to our own Himalaya. But the essence of climbing is the same. When you are



**B Rai**

climbing, you are always with nature. There's always something new to learn; climbing is always rewarding and fascinating. It's like a new world opening up. Humans have always been curious about heights. Climbing appeases some of this human yearning. It is the same in Europe, and it is the same elsewhere.

**Besides being a tourism entrepreneur and mountaineer, you have also dabbled in journalism and you are a lawyer by training. A rather odd combination, many would say?**

In 1985, I happened to climb Everest with a Romanian team that consisted of teachers and professors. After the successful climb, they suggested I go to Romania to study journalism on a scholarship. I thought this was the thing to do, so I accepted their offer.

**How difficult is climbing?**

Not really as difficult as it looks. Nevertheless, mountains are not a comfortable place to be. You're short of breath; it's a hostile place. But then again, it is the spirit of climbing that keeps us [mountaineers] going. When you enjoy something, regardless of dangers, you go for it.

**The insurgency has affected tourism. What is the state of mountaineering?**

The insurgency has affected everything. But looking at the number of mountaineering teams, it looks like the insurgency hasn't hurt the sector. Climbing is a risky business; what harm the insurgents can inflict is nothing compared to the dangers in the mountains. **N**





B Rai  
7



8

nm/SS



B Rai  
6



B Rai

5

**1. & 7. FESTIVE MOOD:** Foreheads full of *tika*, the sign of Dashain  
**2. TIME FOR FAMILY:** Dashain, a time for one's own  
**3. QUEUING UP:** People waiting to get their cup of tea at the NC-D Dashain tea party  
**4. WINTER'S HERE:** The rainbow comes out in Pashupatinagar after slight rainfall indicating the start of winter season  
**5. ONE MAN'S MEAT...:** Animal sacrifice, a part of Dashain in Nepal  
**6. TAKE ME HOME:** People went home for Dashain by whatever means they could  
**8. LET THE MAN DRINK:** Under constant media scrutiny, Deuba at the UML Dashain tea party



1

B Rai



2

B Rai



B Rai

4



3

nm/SS



# Bush Bind

The United States saw the closest election in its presidential history four years ago. President George W. Bush, in fact, received fewer votes than his Democratic rival, Al Gore, but won a razor-thin majority in the Electoral College to take the presidency. In case you forgot, the 2000 election was actually decided by the Supreme Court, which ruled that the state of Florida had voted in favor of Bush. Humbled by the narrowest possible win, Bush, the conservative governor of the state of Texas and a newcomer to national and international politics, promised that he would rule America as a “compassionate conservative” and usher in a new era of bipartisan politics in Washington. His goal: Rally the nation and lessen the deep ideological divides.

Four years on, the divide between the president’s Republican Party and the Democratic Party has grown even deeper. The United States is more polarized than ever before; pollsters say this election is going to be another dead heat. Some are even saying, like 2000, it may again take a controversial court decision to determine the winner.

Bush has been a deeply divisive leader, the most radical American president in recent history. The Texan has been anything but a compassionate conservative in the eyes of half of his fellow Americans. We do not like to judge him on matters of domestic U.S. politics: That’s up to the American electorate to decide. But what troubles us is that in a world passing through extremely turbulent times, the leader of the world’s most powerful nation should make things more difficult by being stubborn, arrogant and condescending. It hurts us to watch helplessly as Bush and his cronies self-righteously dish out advice and threats to rest of the world.

We believe that under the Bush presidency America has lost a fair bit of its once-substantial moral edge and greatly diminished its standing in the world community. The groundswell of good-

will and sympathy that America gained from the entire world, including Nepal, in the wake of the September 11 attacks have been gradually squandered. When Colin Powell became the first U.S. secretary of state to visit Nepal in January 2002, he came here to solicit support for the global war against terror. Nepalis might then have guessed that the anti-terrorism campaign across the globe was to become the cornerstone of Bush’s foreign policy in the years ahead. Still, it would have been difficult to forecast that Washington would view Nepal’s own homegrown insurgency through the lens of the global war against terror.

It’s difficult to write an editorial two days before the election and make a judgment call; we are acutely aware that Election 2004 is a momentous event. It’s the first U.S. presidential election after 9/11, an event that changed American foreign policy dramatically under a gung-ho, go-it-alone president who seemed willing to discard core American values for quick gains. Under Bush, America has gone too far—blindly supporting a dictator in Pakistan, denying Afghan prisoners due process of law and failing to show any remorse over the mistreatment of prisoners in Iraq. The list of failures is long.

The conventional wisdom is that it makes no difference to Nepal whether it’s Bush or Kerry: America will continue to view our problems through the lens of the global war on terror, just as it does everywhere else. A recent article on Afghanistan in the “Foreign Affairs” journal warns that Washington’s single-minded focus on the fight against al-Qaeda and the Taliban remnants while neglecting broader security issues could backfire. Kerry, at least, may be willing to ask the world’s opinion instead of dictating it.

Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor



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