

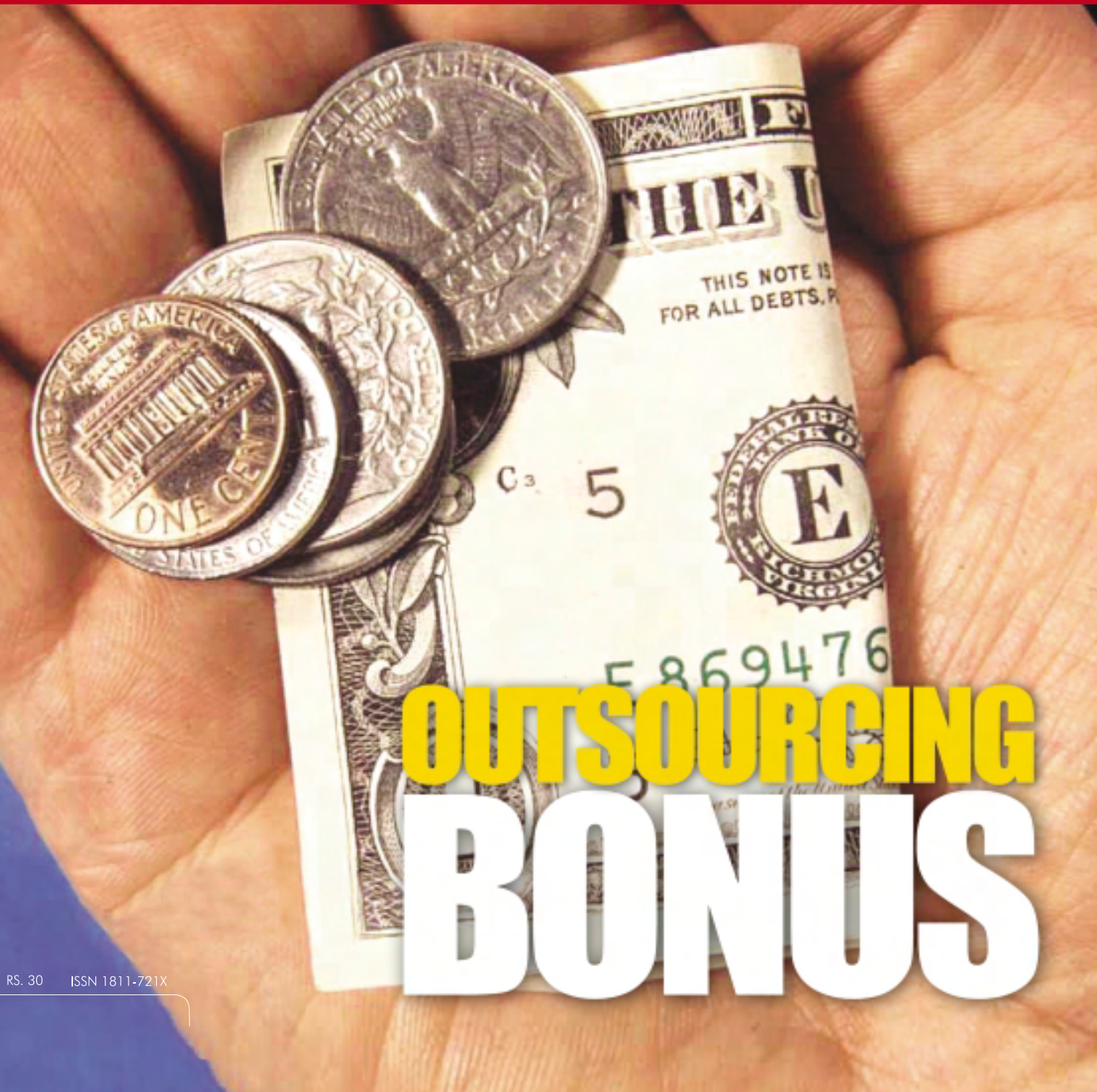
DISAPPEARANCES | RADIO GAGA | COUNTDOWN TO COLOMBO

DECEMBER 19, 2004 VOL. I, NO. 35 पौष ४, २०६१ बर्ष १, अंक ३५

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ServingMinds

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From tent houses to top hotels, business is booming

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Letters



“ Social exclusion is a simplistic mantra used to explain an extremely complex insurgency ”

MAHADEV THAPA

Conflict diagnosis

I READ WITH KEEN INTEREST Bipul Narayan’s column that questioned the conventional theory that Nepal’s conflict has its roots in social inclusion (“Conflict Diagnosis,” Opinion, Dec. 12). He offers Paul Collier’s empirical study of conflict in 27 countries, between 1965 and 1999, to establish that civil conflicts thrive on opportunities to build their movements and not necessarily on social exclusion. The opportunities include access to finance (as scope for extortion), to natural resources and to donations from the diaspora as well as opportunities offered by geography and poverty. While I do not believe the Nepali diaspora has contributed much to the Maoists, the rebels have benefited enormously from extortion at all levels inside Nepal. And they have relied on sheer violence toward that end. People are less likely to take chances when they see their neighbors hacked to death for refusing to “cooperate” with the Maoists. Our talking heads

should at least try to read Collier and see if there can be some parallels for Nepal in his work. I have always believed that social exclusion is a simplistic and donor-driven mantra used over and over again to explain an extremely complex insurgency that is becoming even more so.

MAHADEV THAPA
VIA EMAIL

Deuba in denial

MINENDRA RIJAL, LIKE HIS MENTOR Deuba, chooses to forget that the government has outlived its utility (“Endgame,” Cover Story, Interview, Dec. 12). The Deuba government has steadily lost its early goodwill, and it’s primarily because it could never make the Nepali people believe that the prime minister was in control. With all his tall claims of being a democratic leader, Deuba now seems to worry solely about his survival. He has failed to articulate why the people should



view him as an elected prime minister. He is a royal nominee and behaves like one. Like Deuba, Rijal fails to pronounce the inevitable: The buck stops at Narayanhiti. Since the King dismissed an elected government and sat on top of the dissolution of Parliament and local bodies, the onus now lies on him to get the country back on track. The charade of frequent government changes needs to stop. These governments just aren't capable of telling the Maoists and the people that they hold the reins. So why even pretend you are in charge?

PRAYASH SHARMA
VIA EMAIL

Jomsom Journal

KUNAL LAMA'S "JOMSOM JOURNALS: Part I" was a sight for sore eyes (No Laughing Matter, Dec. 12). Reading from the dust bowl of Kathmandu, the article transported me to that land of pleasures, the scenic landscape of Mustang. Then in the middle of the flight I encounter some turbulence. The columnist goes off on a tangent and begins talking about horse-riding being erotic and orgasmic to women. Kunal, you already write very well, why try too hard? Discretion is the better part of valor.

SUSHMA SHRESTHA
NEWROAD

Harping the obvious

JOGENDRA GHIMIRE'S COLUMN on the judiciary last week didn't really tell much but the obvious: That it is in urgent need of reforms ("Wakeup Call," Legal Eye, Dec. 12). The article is laden with heavy doses of NGO-ese, the consultancy language that makes up the bulk of the paperwork that floats around the NGO-world. Here are my own questions to the judiciary. Why did it take so long for Baliram Kumar to resign? Shouldn't the Robinson saga make all the judges hang their heads in shame? The Legal Eye can surely do better than just dish out un-clever apologies.

PNEUPANE
VIA EMAIL

Cover mismatch

I have been impressed by your recent covers. However, I have an issue with the last one (Dec. 12). While the white

candle on the dark background looked attractive, I couldn't quite figure out how the message "Endgame" fitted with the dark shadows trying to snuff out the burning candle?

RAMAN GURUNG
TIKHEDEWAL
LALITPUR

Porn business

YOUR DEC. 5 COVER STORY ("Porn Business") looked like a cheap attempt to sell "sex." The article left me with more questions than answers. Here are some disturbing ones. Why do an increasing number of young people now have easy access to pornographic material? Who are we to blame—the parents or the police? How does porn impact the young minds? How does the society handle the explosion of erotica in the public space and its impact on impressionable minds? Every single day, I shudder at the thought of our young girls and boys viewing "Baywatch" as their ultimate fantasy.

SUBASH KOIRALA
VIA EMAIL

No idiot this

MY ATTENTION WAS DRAWN TO an article "Reborn Yogis" (Lifestyle, Nov. 28). I have no issue with Yashas Vaidya's claim that TV has made yoga popular in our lives. But I am not sure whether I particularly like the way he mildly ridicules the people who seemed to have learned the art from TV. Come to think of it, with all the bashing it receives from us everyday, the TV has been our great teacher. I saw war live on TV, I saw how the British bury their royalty (when Diana died), I now know the force of hurricanes, and I see George W. Bush so often on my TV that he now seems to me like someone next door. Not to talk about the average TV viewing youngster's phenomenal understanding of the lives of people around the world. Well, many of us may say that we hate the idiot box for its homogenizing effects on us, but think of the cultural understanding it fuels.

NEILA SUNDAS
VIA EMAIL

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Tel: 2111102, 4229825, 4261831, 4263098

EDITOR: Akhilesh Upadhyay
editorial@nation.com.np
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR: Suman Pradhan
COPY EDITOR: John Child
SENIOR STAFF WRITERS: Sushma Joshi, Satish Jung Shahi,
Tiku Gauchan
STAFF WRITER: John Narayan Parajuli
PHOTOJOURNALISTS: Sagar Shrestha, Das Bahadur Maharjan
DESIGNER: Raj Shrestha
EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS: Indra Adhikari, Yashas Vaidya

AD & CIRCULATION DIRECTOR: Krishna Shrestha
ASST. MARKETING MANAGER: Rameshwar Ghimire
MARKETING EXECUTIVES: Rena Hughes Sharma, Bijendra Pradhan
ad@nation.com.np
SUBSCRIPTION OFFICER: Akshaya Shrestha
subscription@nation.com.np
ASST. SUBSCRIPTION OFFICER: Jeshna Karmacharya
DISTRIBUTION: Angras Manandhar
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E-mail: editorial@nation.com.np
Fax: 4216281

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Tripureshor, Kathmandu, Nepal.

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A vacation with Nation Weekly

1. Pabitra Bhandari receives the best agent award from Krishna Shrestha, Advertisement and Circulation Director of Mirror Media Pvt. Ltd.
- 2, 3, and 6: Sujan Joshi, Utsav Amatya and Dil Krishna Shahi respectively won mountain flights
4. A few of the 100 subscription agents with Editor.
5. Madhu Thapa won two-way tickets for a couple for a 'Trip to Malaysia.'
7. Anup Tamang, Campaign advisor of Mirror Media hands over certificates to all subscription agents.





ODD COUPLE: House pets, a dog and a monkey, from neighboring shops show playful intimacy at Tinkune.

nation weekly/Sagar Shrestha



HIV and Us

Much like the Maoists who are only too happy to exploit the differences among the constitutional forces, HIV too is happy to exploit our cultural attitudes

BY SUMAN PRADHAN

For much of the past week, all eyes were trained on the Raj Parishad. The controversial "political" meeting held by the King's own men and women hogged the media headlines and aroused ferocious passions. All that is well and fine, because what the Raj Parishad does and recommends to the King will probably have far-reaching consequences for this battered nation.

But I wish as much news column space and activism were devoted to another malady in Nepali society, a malady that is silently eating away at our national fabric. HIV/AIDS, the disease that has ravaged the world, is now ravaging Nepal.

Last December, I was at another AIDS Awareness Day. The international agencies charged with fighting the deadly virus came up with a new, though un-startling, report: The virus is infecting more vulnerable women than men. The tragedy is most of these women are being infected unknowingly by husbands who frequent prostitutes and, one might add, indulge in unprotected sex.

We don't have to scour the world for examples. We have it right here. The western district of Achham is in the grip of the HIV epidemic. It's not only that 70 percent of its population, mostly males, migrate to India for economic reasons and the conflict. But also because many of these males, away from home for long periods, indulge in promiscuity. The Nepali Times recently reported that many of these labourers return home only after falling sick with the disease and end up infecting their wives. Those poor women, who are culturally un-empowered to defend themselves against their husbands, end up dying an agonising death.

Just imagine, for a second, what sort of a life is this? For no fault of one's own, you get infected and have to spend the rest of your days lying to your neighbours while you await death.

This, my friend, is Nepal's biggest tragedy. It's a bigger tragedy than the Maoist conflict. The conflict may have killed 11,000 people and rendered thousands more homeless, but this silent HIV epidemic is going to kill many times more within the next decade. The sad fact is that of the estimated 70,000 people infected in Nepal today, most, if not all, will die an agonising, dehumanising and undignified death.

And most of them will be women, like those poor wives from Achham.

We can wash our hands of Achham and say, OK, Achham is a poor district with hardly any literacy. The men are not aware enough to protect themselves from the virus. But look at other districts, even the most developed and educated ones like Kathmandu. You will find many similar stories like Achham. I personally know a few people who have died of AIDS in recent years, but not before passing on the virus to their unsuspecting wives and unborn children. Why must women suffer for the faults of their husbands?

The answer probably lies in our society, in our cultural beliefs and practices. Ours is a society that culturally glorifies women. We worship female symbols of power (Kali, Durga, Laxmi, etc.) and never fail to mention Sita's virtues against the malicious onslaught of Ravana. And yet, we fail to treat women as equals in our every-day lives. The court and legislative battles over the past few years—when there was still a

Parliament—speak of this dual characteristic of our society.

Much like the Maoists who are only too happy to exploit the differences among the constitutional forces, HIV too is happy to exploit our cultural attitudes. It is this hypocrisy that is tearing our nation apart. We see it in our everyday lives, not just in terms of HIV/AIDS. We all proclaim to work for the common good, but we hardly fail to dip our fingers in the cookie jar the moment the opportunity arises. It's not for nothing that many of our politicians and bureaucrats have been hauled to the CIAA. Ditto for the Maoist comrades, many of whom are alleged to be profiting from the "people's war." Members of the Raj Parishad too last week proclaimed to worry about the nation, but it is hard to dispel the notion that all they were really concerned about is to once again become the nation's powerbrokers.

They say ignorance is what fuels HIV/AIDS in Nepal. Yes, and hypocrisy too. **N**



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'Thinker'
by Auguste Rodin



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F I N E C A R P E T S & D E C O R A T I V E A R T S





MAOIST HAVOC: Aftermath of the explosion at Agricultural Inputs Company in Kuleshwore in the early hours of Thursday, Dec. 9.

Royalist meet

CPN-UML ministers boycotted the meeting of the Raj Parishad in Kathmandu. Sitting ministers, as ex-officio members, are members of the Raj Parishad. Student organizations affiliated with the four agitating parties, as well as the ANNISU, the student wing of the UML, took to the streets to protest against the convention. Deputy Prime Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari earlier had requested Prime Minister Deuba to call off the convention saying it was unconstitutional. Meanwhile, Kesharjung Rayamajhi, a staunch royalist and former chairman of the Raj Parishad standing committee, called upon the King to be actively involved in the country's politics. The King should rule the country through an advisory council, he said.

Robinson saga

The second judge behind the controversial case of Gordon William Robinson, Justice Baliram Kumar, resigned. Another judge implicated in the same case, Krishna Kumar Verma, had resigned earlier in August. The two have been under public scrutiny ever since they acquitted the British drug peddler, Robinson—who was caught trying to smuggle heroin into Nepal—

even after a Special Court sentence of a 17-year jail term and a Rs. 1 million fine. Since, the Supreme Court has reversed the verdict.

Child abuse

Sexual abuse of children is on the rise. Security personnel, transportation workers, even teachers and monks are involved in child abuse, a report by Child Workers in Nepal, known commonly as the CWIN. Fifty-two such cases have been reported through the CWIN help-line since 2003. Twenty were reported in 2001. Most of the abused children are between six and 16 years of age. The report also blamed the police of indifference about such abuses.

Indian forces

India has deployed security forces along its border with eastern Nepal to stop the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal from returning to their homeland, reported Nepal Samacharpatra. The West Bengal government has instructed the district administration of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri to stop the refugees from crossing over.

Let free

Jana Morcha Nepal released three of the six Maoists it had captured from Baglung. The party had held the Maoists, including a

judge of the “people’s court,” captive; the judge has not been released yet. Jana Morcha, who were formerly associated with the rebels, launched anti-Maoist campaigns across the country following a brutal Maoist attack on its party members, including the wife of party Vice President Pari Thapa.

Riot reports

The commission formed to look into the riots of Sept. 1 following the killing of 12 Nepalis in Iraq submitted its report to Prime Minister Deuba. The commission estimated the loss due to the mayhem and destruction that day to be around Rs. 1 billion. The head of the commission, former Justice Top Bahadur Singh, asked the government to compensate the victims. The committee was formed in Sept. 6 and was asked to present a report within three months.

AIDS hotline

Youth Power Nepal, an NGO, with the help of ActionAid International Nepal, started the first free hotline telephone service on AIDS. The service will also give free counseling on other areas like sexually transmitted diseases, reproductive health, suicide prevention and drug

abuse. The line will be open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Optical fibers

Nepal Telecom is starting an optical fiber project along the Arniko highway. The fibers will be laid down along the 114-km stretch from Kathmandu to Tatopani at the Tibet border, with a grant of Rs. 260 million from the Chinese government. The project will provide an alternative to the current satellite communication system. Kathmandu will be connected to Hong Kong, an important worldwide communication portal, speeding up global telecommunications.

Royalty reduction

Government has reduced royalties for Cho Oyu for the next five years. The reduction came into effect this month. The royalty has been brought down from \$10,000 to \$500 for a seven-member team. The Ministry for Tourism and Civil Aviation said that the reduction has been made to attract tourists who have been climbing from the Tibetan side in the last few years. The golden jubilee of the first ascent of the peak was celebrated recently. The peak is 8,201 meters high.

Oil crunch

Kathmandu Valley and other urban centers faced an acute shortage of petroleum after the employees of the Nepal Oil Corporation called a strike. They were demanding an increase in the price of the petroleum products. The company has been incurring perennial losses of Rs. 580 million a month. Long queues were seen at the oil-depots in Kathmandu, while most petrol pumps remained closed. The oil corporation has been selling its products at a price lower than the purchasing price, hence the losses. The government meanwhile is considering the privatization of the NOC, Rajdhani reported.





Endangered heritage

The Department of Archeology, along with UNESCO, has started a 10-year working plan to safeguard the World Heritage Sites of Nepal. All seven such World Heritage Sites in the Valley were declared threatened by UNESCO. The U.N. body also warned that all the sites could be stripped of their status if proper measures were not put in place by the government to protect the threatened areas. The durbar squares of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur; Chagu Narayan; Pashupatinath; Swayambhunath; and Bouddhanath were put on the UNESCO's "endangered" list last year.

New passports

Nepalis passports now will be machine-readable. The replacements will supposedly be harder to manipulate than existing ones. The switch is being made, as many countries across Europe and United States will soon grant visas only to the machine-readable passport holders. All existing passports will be replaced. The instillation and management of the new system will cost the government over Rs. 1 billion. During initial phases, the passports will be distributed only from Kathmandu. Later, a separate passport distribution unit will be present in each development region.

Blockade off

After an 18-day blockade by the Maoists, the Kohalpur-

Bhurigaun segment of the Mahendra Highway reopened on Tuesday, Dec. 7. The rebels reopened the highway on the behest of human rights activists and journalists. A Maoist leader, Ramesh Koirala, said the blockade signaled the beginning of political retaliations against the government for its military operations in the West.

Still optimistic

Ninety percent of Nepalis in a survey by AC Neilson/ ORGMARG—leaders in market research, information and analysis—believe that the conflict will end soon. The poll covered around 3,200 respondents from 60 districts, who believe unanimously that there was no military solution to the current crisis. Ninety-six percent of the respondents believed that the government should hold peace talks with the Maoists, while 85 percent held the political parties responsible for the crisis.

EU team

A four-member European Union delegation is slated to arrive in Kathmandu on Dec. 13 to push for talks between the government and the Maoists. This is the first such EU delegation being sent to Nepal. The European team, headed by Robert Milders, director of Asia in the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, will meet Prime Minister Deuba, various Cabinet ministers, as well as the representatives of the civil society. While here, they will also moni-

tor the situation of the conflict on the ground.

Hotel pullout

Taj Hotels, the famous Indian hotel-chain, called it quits in its only Nepali venture. It withdrew from Nepal's first five-star hotel, Hotel De l'Annapurna. The Taj Group holds a third of the assets of the hotel. The rest is owned by Nepali shareholders. The deteriorating security situation in Kathmandu was cited as the reason for the withdrawal. Nepali operators will now take over administrative duties, which had been looked after by representatives of the Taj for the last 15 years.

Royal visit

The royal couple is scheduled to visit India from Dec. 23 to Jan. 2. The official visit comes at the invitation of the Indian President APJ Abdul Kalam. This will be the King's third India visit in the last three years.

Plea for release

Paris-based Reporters Without Frontiers has urged the government to track down Raj Kumar Budhathoki, a reporter of Sanjeevani weekly. The reporter was abducted along with his father and three friends on Nov.

30 from his home in Banepa. The organization quoted the journalist's neighbors as saying that the car that took away Budathoki belonged to security agents. Reporters Without Borders has also called upon the Maoists to release three other journalists in their custody.

Passing away

Niranjan Govinda Vaidya, one of the four founding members of the Communist Party of Nepal, died on Friday, Dec. 11. Vaidya, 82, was suffering from blood cancer. He had founded the communist party along with Pushpa Lal Shrestha, Narayan Bilash Joshi and Nara Bahadur Karmacharya on Apr. 22, 1949.

Water treaty

India agreed to provide water to Nepal for irrigation according to a bilateral pact in 1959. After years of wrangling, India has finally decided to provide water from Gandak dam to Nepal to irrigate 10,000 hectares of land. A Nepal-India Koshi-Gandak Joint Committee meeting in Patna finally decided to implement the agreement. The pact had been long behind schedule. A sub-committee has been set up to work out the technicalities.



Honored

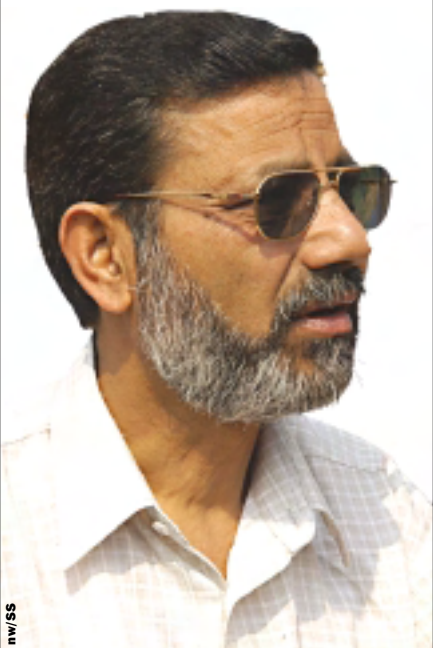
An international organization working for peace has honored Bhutanese human rights activist Tek Nath Rijal as an "Ambassador for Peace."

Rijal, who heads the Human Rights Council of Bhutan, has also been invited by the Inter-religious and International Federation for World Peace to participate in a Washington D.C. conference on "Leadership and Good Governance" from Dec. 11 to 14. An awards ceremony will precede the conference. "There will be around 3,000 people [there]," says Rijal, "and this will be an opportunity to discuss the Bhutanese refugee problem in the international arena."

Rijal was detained in Bhutan several times after campaigning against practices adopted by the Bhutanese government during the 1988 census. In 1993, he was sentenced to life imprisonment for "treason," but was set free in 1999 due to mounting international pressure.

He went on an indefinite hunger strike in February this year, asking Bhutan to resettle the refugees languishing in U.N. camps in eastern Nepal. He ended his fast when Nepal assured him of its support to end the refugee impasse. The government agreed to support the ongoing verification of the refugees and their repatriation under the aegis of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and the Human Rights Council of Bhutan.

In 1998, Rijal received the Prakash Kaphley International Award for his efforts to bolster the democratic movement in Bhutan.



rw/ss

UTILITY PAYMENT

Suvidha Sewa has launched a new service for payments of utility bills. Suvidha Sewa provides the service in association with the Standard Chartered Bank. Standard Chartered credit card holders will now be able to pay their utility bills—for telephones, cell phones, electricity and water—easily in Suvidha Sewa outlets, mainly department stores and retail shops at present. The payment will be made through the customer's credit card account and original receipts of payment will be deposited at the outlet. Twenty-five outlets in the Valley will currently provide the service. There will be a one-time membership fee of Rs. 100 for all services while the monthly service charge will be Rs. 25 per service. Suvidha hopes to win customers over with the security of its transactions and its timeliness.



GURKHA BANK

The Gurkha Development Bank, promoted by British Gurkhas, began operations from early this month. The bank aims to invest in the sectors that have not been explored yet. Also, the bank will focus its activities in the areas of agriculture, industry, trade and services. The bank is the newest development bank and the 26th investment bank in the country. With an authorized capital of Rs. 640 million and a paid up capital of Rs. 320 million, the Gurkha Development Bank will distribute 51 percent shares to individual promoters, whereas 19

per -



cent will be separated for institutional promoters and the remaining will be allocated as ordinary shares to the public. Besides all these, the bank also expects to promote schemes such as project financing, working capital loans, home loans, vehicle loans and education loans.

CHINESE MARKET

Nepal participated in the China International Travel Mart at the International Expo Centre in Shanghai. The travel expo had more than 2,900 exhibitors from 64 countries. The Nepal Tourism Board and the RNAC arranged for Nepal's participation this year. Three private participants—Asian Trekking, Saathi Nepal Travels & Tours and South Asian Holidays—took part in the event. The tourism board reported that more than 4,000 people visited the Nepal stall.

NEW YAMAHA

Fazer, Yamaha's new bike, has hit the market. Morang Auto Works, the authorized distributor of Yamaha motorcycles, introduced the new bike. The bike is available in two models, with disc brakes and self-start or without. It is powered by the already-tested YBX engine, which has been used for both the Yamaha YBX and the Enticer models. An air-cooled, 4-stroke, 2-valve engine improves the bike's pickup and performance. The twin headlights and the diamond-shaped frame give the Fazer both poise and style. Other features of the bike include the Yamaha Throttle Position Sensor, a patent technology of Yamaha, and a BS carburetor designed to meet the new Euro-2 emission stan-

dards for 2005. The Fazer has a fuel capacity of 13 liters, with a reserve of 1.2 liters. A large capacity stylish muffler, a new design taillight and integrated meter panels also add to its sporty look. The introductory price for the Fazer is Rs. 113,900 for the disk brake and self-start version and Rs. 105,900 for the one without these features.

PASHUPATI PAINTS

Pashupati Paints has brought out a new machine—the “Color Bazaar,” which will allow customers to get the color of their choice instantly. The machine will aid people to customize their own colors from an array of 10,000 different colors. The machine has a built-in fully computerized fluid management technology.



NUMBERS STILL DOWN

The decline in the number of visitors coming in by air continued in November. The figure dropped by 17 percent as compared to numbers from the same month last year. Tourist arrivals from India as well as other third world countries declined in November; the total number of tourist arrivals by air was 24,095. The tourism industry had seen a growth of around 50 percent in the number of tourists from the non-Indian market until September. There has been a softening in the declining rate of Indian visitors, though, which the NTB attributes to promotional offers launched by the Royal Nepal Airlines and Nepal Tourism Board in India. The figures for the arrivals by air for November are as follows:

- India: down 17% to 5,127
- United States: down 15% to 1,445
- United Kingdom: down 18% to 2,305
- Germany: down 5% to 1,471
- France: down 4% to 1,695
- Japan: down 37% to 1,883

BOK DIVIDEND

The Bank of Kathmandu will reward shareholders with dividends from its profits in the fiscal year 2003-2004. The bonus amounts to 20 percent of the profits. Ten percent of the dividends will be distributed in cash while the rest will be retained as capital funds.

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WEEKLY

THE MIRROR MEDIA PVT. LTD.



ALL THE KING'S MEN

A meeting called at the pleasure of His Majesty displeases many

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

PROBABLY THE LAST TIME THAT the Raj Parishad—the King's privy council—hogged the headlines was in June 2001, when it convened to choose the successor to late King Birendra. Until then not many knew what the body's functions were or why it had been formed. The most obvious duty of the chairman of the council's standing committee was to act as the chief guest at social functions.

But last week Raj Parishad was in the spotlight again, amidst sharp comments, especially from opposition political parties. It held a full-scale meeting in the capital. The gathering's top agenda item, the parties fear, is to ask the King to play a more "active" role to resolve the present political impasse. That would be turning the clock back to the Panchayat, a bloody blow to the achievements of the 1990 Jana Andolan, which brought the banned political parties to the political mainstream and made the people sovereign.

The parties are smarting unnecessarily, say the royalists. Similar meetings have already been held in all other regions—starting with Biratnagar in the East, Nepalgunj in the Midwest, Dhangadi in the Farwest, and Pokhara in the West. "The Raj Parishad is doing exactly what the Constitution allows it to do," former Army chief and Raj Parishad member Sachit Shumshere Rana told the media after King Gyanendra inaugurated the conference at the Birendra International Convention Centre on Dec. 9. "We can even prove our move in the court should there be the need."

It is not surprising that the parties and their affiliates have resorted to street protests once again. They believe

strongly that the Raj Parishad is only paving the way for an activist Palace to take a front seat politically, especially while Parliament is dissolved. Analysts say that

the Palace is looking to expand its support base for such a role and also hoping to weaken public support for the opposition parties.

"The Raj Parishad came into being because of King Birendra's urging, though it has the same functions as the National Assembly," says Narhari



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Acharya, a senior NC central committee member. The key function of the Raj Parishad is, according to the Constitution, “to submit recommendations on matters referred to it by His Majesty” and to announce the succession after the death, incapacity or abdication of the King. The parties believe none of those things has triggered the current meeting.

“The intention of the Raj Parishad does not look so clean,” says Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of the CPN-UML, whose ministers chose not to attend the gathering despite being ex-officio members. Its ministers and senior leaders have declared the meeting “unconstitutional.” Their

The Constitution provisions for the Raj Parishad

Raj Parishad members

- Members of the royal family or any other persons designated by the King
- Ex-officio members: the prime minister, the chief justice, the speaker of the Pratinidhi Sabha, the chairman of the Rastriya Sabha, the chairman of the Raj Parishad Standing Committee, the deputy prime minister, ministers, the main opposition party leader in the Parliament, the field marshal, the bada gurujiyu, the commander-in-chief, the mukhya chahebjyu, the chief commis-

- sioner of the CIAA, the auditor general, the chairman of the Public Service Commission, the chief election commissioner, the attorney general, the mukhya chautariya, the secretary of the King, the chief secretary and the inspector general of Police

The Raj Parishad Standing Committee

- A maximum of 15 Raj Parishad members, including a chairman
- Ex-officio members: the prime minister, the chief justice, the speaker of the

- Pratinidhi Sabha, the chairman of the Rastriya Sabha, the bada gurujiyu and the commander-in-chief

Conditions to call for a meeting of the Raj Parishad

- On the demise of the King or if the King proclaims his abdication
- If at least one-fourth of the total Raj Parishad members sign a requisition declaring that that King is unable, by reason of mental or physical infirmity, to perform his functions
- At the command of the King

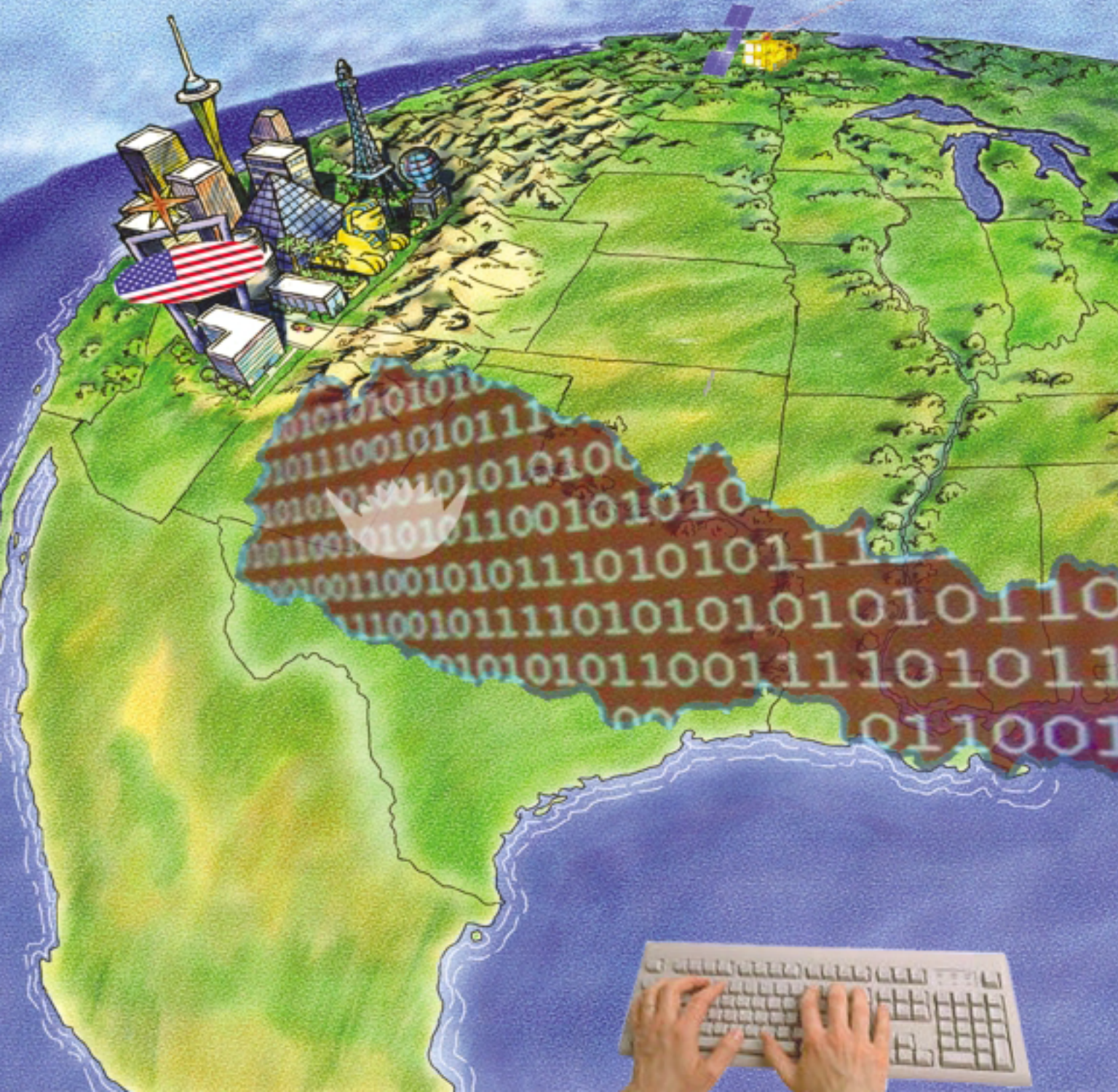


protests were joined by almost all major parties, including the student wing of Prime Minister Deuba’s own party, the NC-D.

In fact, the five-party protests before Prime Minister Deuba’s reappointment in June called for the dissolution of the Raj Parishad. The protesting parties are now saying that the council’s activism and convention are dangerous, coming at the heels of the Palace confidante and Information Minister Mohsin’s recent warnings about the impending specter of an authoritarian government. Former chairman of the Raj Parishad standing committee, Keshar Jung Rayamajhi, has repeatedly suggested that the King form an advisory council, since the parties, he says, are incapable of resolving the present crisis.

The keynote speech of the current chairman, Parshunarayan Chaudhary, also made the parties nervous: He declared the monarchy to be the “major” trump card to bring all forces together in the current crisis. It is unlikely that the parties protesting in the streets will agree to that. As Chaudhary was speaking inside the BICC, a senior Army officer was leading a charge at student protestors inside the Tri Chandra College and Armed Police SSP Madhav Thapa was requesting: “Jaar Saab, please move out. Just try to understand.” **N**

OUTSOURCING BONUS



'Outsourcing is Growing'

Though there is no Wipro, Infosys or Satyam in Nepal yet, Nepali technocrats dream of building their own world-class enterprises some day. Nation Weekly spoke with CAN President **Biplav Man Singh**.

What are the prospects of outsourced jobs in Nepal?

The potential is immense. We have adequate manpower. Currently our IT colleges produce more than 4,500 IT graduates each year. We have a cheap labor market. That's what companies in the west look for. Nepal could be an alternative outsourcing destination.

In what areas can Nepali companies do better?

We haven't explored the niche markets. Every country looks for a niche. For instance, Holland [the Netherlands] is focusing on designing circuits. But there is no such thing in Nepal. Everyone seems to be doing everything. We have advantages in IT-enabled services.

How big is the volume of the outsourcing business in Nepal?

We don't have authentic data, but our guesstimate puts it somewhere between \$5 million and \$6 million annually, and it's growing.

Is it likely that Nepal could emerge as an alternative outsourcing destination to India, if things go right?

Cheap labor is the driving force behind outsourcing. Apart from that, English literacy also plays an important role. Countries with high English literacy rates like India and the Philippines

have until now been major outsourcing destinations, but the labor cost [there] is getting higher. Companies will go to any length to find cheap labor. The question is whether you want to hire a clerk or an accountant in the United States for \$7,000 or in India for IRS. 7,000 or in Nepal for Rs. 7,000. The answer would obviously be Nepal. But how far and how quickly can we tap the potential... That's the biggest question.

Most of Nepal's business in outsourcing comes through India, doesn't it?

Nepali companies do get business directly. But a new trend is emerging in recent days. It's called neighbor outsourcing. India in 2003 exported \$2 billion worth of outsourced services. If we can piggyback [and take] 10 percent of the Indian share, it would be huge.

Do we have adequate laws?

The government made an IT law in 2000, and it's revising [the law] again. The bill is before the Cabinet. Many countries in the world are yet to have any IT laws. So we have a comparative advantage.

But IT entrepreneurs say the law is just on paper, that there is no implementation.

We can't just keep on blaming the government. The government can only act as a facilitator; the private sector has to take the lead role. The pri-



vate sector does business, not the government.

What challenges do Nepali companies face to tap the potential?

The journey to turn the potential into reality is a long one. We have young IT grads with immense creativity; we need companies and firms to manage and promote their creativity. What's happening in Nepal is that a few grads get together and start a company with a little capital that they raise from their families. The result is that they cannot start a big business or really go far. There are neither funds nor venture capital available in Nepal, unlike many other countries. Even the banks have remained tight-fisted when it comes to providing soft loans to IT businesses. Instead of providing loans on the basis of the collateral, the banks must provide project-based loans.

There is also a need for the government to act as an incubator. Our 4,500 IT grads can open 400 IT companies. If only 40 of them perform well, the benefits will be huge. Nepali grads have performed well in this sector. With proper promotion, they can excel. **N**

vices in the years to come. Nepal's advantage, they say, is in both cost and quality. The 12-hour time difference between Nepal and the United States also helps: Nepali university students can work the night shift, especially in call centers, and still attend classes during the day.

"I went to college during the day while I worked at night," says former call center employee Mokshada Thapa. "Trying to sell products to Americans while sitting here in Nepal was a learning experience. Mostly it was fun, but it was also annoying to hear rude remarks from would-be clients." Night



jobs at call centers are not the only option.

Work done during a day shift here can be delivered to clients in America, first thing in the morning as they arrive at their offices. Nepali companies are already providing many outsourced jobs: medical transcription; back-office operations; revenue accounting; insurance claim processing; web and digital content development; mapping and digitization; and data entry, processing and conversion.

Most Nepali outsourcing companies work for U.S. companies for good rea-

son. A report from U.S. consultancy Forrester Research projects that 3.3 million jobs will be outsourced through 2015, more than 200,000 each year. Most of these jobs, the report says, will be low-paid (by U.S. standards) call center positions. Nepali companies would get a huge boost if they could snag just a fraction of these 200,000 jobs.

Thanks to the Internet and ever-cheaper telecommunications bandwidth, outsourcing of IT-enabled services has become not only possible but also inevitable. Companies in the west send many of their low-paying and

thankless jobs offshore to countries like Nepal and create a win-win situation. Nepali companies are increasingly preparing to take advantage of the opportunity.

At the huge TechxNY technology tradeshow—formerly known as PCExpo—at the Jacob Javits Convention Center in New York last year, Nepali outsourcing company Data Resources was pitching potential clients about opportunities in Nepal. Data Resources' Managing Director Bhavana Rana was at the expo to convince clients that the Maoist problem won't affect work



outsourced here. Her company is expanding its outsourcing operations and is seeking clients like hospitals, legal firms, insurance companies and airline frequent flier programs. "We're here looking for long-term business. That's what I learned in this country, and that's what I want to do," Rana said at the time.

The profits from outsourcing that India has garnered in recent years have spurred economic growth. Prospects for Nepal could be very good as well, say industry leaders. Nepal is emerging as an alternative for global companies looking for even cheaper options. Nepal's strength lies in its comparatively higher rate of English literacy as compared to other Asian countries with cheap labor. Nepal also has a pool of IT graduates growing by more than 4,500 each year. The exact figure of those working in outsourced jobs is uncertain, say CAN officials, but it is certainly in thousands. There are many new, startup companies that are trying to tap outsourcing's potential.



"We have all the elements to do well in outsourcing," says Allen Tuladhar, the CEO of Unlimited Software Network, which has been in the business for 14 years. "But the bulk of the outsourced work is not yet coming in." Tuladhar's company has been contracted by Microsoft to localize MS Windows and MS Office into Nepali. The work on Windows has already been completed. He says this is one of the biggest contracts any Nepali company has ever received for software development. Unlimited is also one of the biggest Nepali exporters of software to America, and the company has an office in Los Angeles. "My bread and butter comes solely through this business," says Tuladhar.

Despite the huge potential, industry officials point out many drawbacks. Most outsourcing jobs are labor-intensive, and the price tag for 10+2 graduates is often very high, says an entrepreneur. Qualified workers who can be productive immediately in outsourced jobs like medical transcription and call centers are almost non-existent. And there is the huge problem of funding outsourced projects that often require considerable capital investment. "There are neither funds nor venture capital available in Nepal, unlike many other countries," says CAN's Singh. "Even the banks have remained tight-fisted when it comes to providing soft loans to IT businesses." Other entrepreneurs complain about sluggishness in the implemen-

Call Centers: Large companies use call centers for telemarketing and customer service. Call center clerks respond to customer questions by providing information about products and prices. There are two types of call centers: inbound and outbound. Inbound centers only respond to queries, while the outbound centers make calls and market products.

Medical Transcription: Medical advice by doctors recorded on Dictaphones is transcribed and sent back to them electronically. Medical transcription companies in Kathmandu alone employ more than 500 people.

Back-Office Operations: Raw data and paper documents are sent out for data entry, conversion and processing. Organizations like banks and airlines outsource their data processing operations to cut costs and to focus on core operations.

tation of an otherwise excellent national IT policy.

"Nepal's IT policy is excellent from an outsider's perspective," says Unlimited's Tuladhar. "But has it been implemented? It's a big joke." Despite the problems, Nepalis are enthusiastic about outsourcing. Some Americans and Europeans, though, are bitter about the jobs lost to outsourcing. But experts say that their anger is, for the most part, unjustified.

The fact is that countries outsourcing jobs aren't losing. It's a win-win situation for both sides, writes Daniel T. Griswold, associate director at the Cato Institute, a prominent American think-tank. The institute's Center for Trade Policy Studies in Washington says that outsourcing is stimulating the American economy by enhancing companies' ability to focus on core operations. That, in turn, results in increased productivity. For every dollar Americans send abroad in IT-related outsourcing, they get three dollars in "insourcing," according to Griswold.

Changing market dynamics and the revolution in information technology have triggered an outward flow of a slew of jobs from the developed world. Every country in the developing world is vying for a part of that business. "Theoretically," says Unlimited's Tuladhar, "the prospects for Nepal are high." So are hopes. ■

INFOTECH: Fresh grads from places like Apex College (above) find ready employment in the IT industry



INVOLUNTARY DISAPPEARANCES

A U.N. team is in town amid reports of an alarming number of disappearances. Rights activists hope the visit will force the government to come clean.

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

NEPAL'S ESCALATING internal conflict has earned the country many worldwide top-tens, including that for most disappearances—cases where people are deprived of their liberty unlawfully and are without access to the justice system.

The National Human Rights Commission says it has documented 1,430 cases of disappearances, both by the se-

curity forces and the Maoists. Other rights organizations say that, on average, one person disappears each day, mostly into state custody: The actual number could be many times higher. Many families don't report disappearances for fear of being targeted again.

The disturbing pattern of disappearances has been on the radar screens of the U.N. High Commission for Human Rights and other non-governmental organizations for quite some time. Members of the U.N. Human Rights

Working Group are in Kathmandu to gather firsthand information on the alarming human rights situation after local human rights activists asked them to intervene. Although the group can't impose legal sanctions, the fact that it is here to assess the situation, say rights activists, will put pressure on the government and security forces to discharge their obligations under international conventions.

On the last International Day of the Disappeared in August, the working

CONCERNED: Human rights activists and intellectuals discuss worsening human rights situation



group made direct reference to Nepal's growing numbers of disappearances. "The working group expresses particular concern over reports received from reputable non-governmental organizations on the situation in countries such as Nepal, Colombia and the Russian Federation," a statement said. "While in 2003 the working group transmitted 18 cases of alleged enforced or involuntary disappearances to the government of Nepal, in the first half of 2004 this number had risen to 130."

The group set up by the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in 1980 has taken up 50,000 cases of alleged disappearances with over 70 governments. It was established to assist the relatives of those who have disappeared in ascertaining their fate and their whereabouts and to act as a channel for communication between the families and governments concerned. The U.N. group notes that involuntary disappearances infringe upon an entire range of human rights embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in other major international human rights instruments.



It describes enforced disappearance as a serious crime with severe consequences for victims, for the relatives and friends of the victim, and also for entire societies and for the credibility of states. The alarm bells on Nepal's rights records now seem to be ringing continuously.

In October, the Asian Human Rights Commission, a Hong Kong-based rights group, called for urgent action to stop massive cases of disappearances. It said that hundreds of people, including children, have disappeared in Nepal, that authorities have taken no action to stop the situation and that the perpetrators have absolute impunity. More innocent lives will be lost and the country could record one of the worst cases of disappearances in the entire human history if nothing is done to arrest the problem.

Rights organizations, both national and international, say the rule of law has collapsed and that Nepal has failed to discharge its obligations to its citizens in accordance with the international conventions. The scale of disappearances is shocking.

"This is a dangerous trend," says Shiva Hari Dahal, president of Peace Campaign Nepal and a member of the Civilian Probe Committee on Disappearances. Rights activists say that supporters of the victims' families have also been threatened. The government has revealed the whereabouts of only 30 of some 800 people allegedly detained by the security forces.

The Army, however, claims there are no more than 50 individuals under detention. "The Army is committed to human rights," says the RNA spokesman, Brigadier General Deepak Gurung. "We are investigating cases of human rights violations and extra-judicial killings and compensating those affected." The Army in its recent press briefing said it has freed more than 1,000 private individuals after interrogation.

It also claimed that it has punished 105 security personnel accused of human rights violations. But it denies having the alleged detainees in its custody. Human rights groups fear that many of them may have been killed.

Amnesty International's recent report says that it has, to date, documented a total of 622 cases of disappearances by the state. Rights activists have been demanding that the government make public the

whereabouts of all illegal detainees. Following a hunger strike by relatives of some of those who had gone missing in the third week of June, the Home Ministry formed a five-member probe committee under Joint Secretary Narayan Gopal Malekhu to investigate the cases. After three months of investigations, the committee came up with 30 names. Rights organizations lament the increasing tendency in the government to stone-wall the allegations. They say the government probe is inadequate and incomplete. "Without an independent probe commission investigating the cases of disappearances," says Hiranya Lal Shrestha, a member of Civilian Probe Committee on Disappearances, "it is highly unlikely that any government committee will provide factual statistics on disappearances."

The committee has documented 1,705 cases in total—1,193 by the state, 449 by the Maoists and 63 by unidentified groups. Among the reported cases, Kathmandu, shockingly, has the highest cases of disappearances, more than one individual per day.

"It doesn't appear that the government is serious about improving the human rights situation," says another member of the committee, Padma Ratna Tuladhar. Local human rights activists are increasingly asking the international community to pressure the government.

With the arrival of members of the U.N. working group, the rights groups hope the government will be forced to act more responsibly. Recently the New York-based Human Rights Watch sent a fact-finding team to Nepal and lobbied the U.S. Congress to pressure Nepal to do something about the poor rights situation.

The U.S. Congress has now tied human rights strings to its military aid to the Army, and for the first time in two years, the Army's chief met officials from the National Human Rights Commission. He had repeatedly declined to do so prior to the Human Rights Watch visit. "This visit will also have an impact on the government's modus operandi," says Dahal. That should also apply to the Maoists, who seemed to have upped the ante since the Dashain ceasefire came to an end. **N**

RADIO GAGA

There are now 14 FM radio stations operating in the Valley. Countrywide 56 stations have been awarded licenses, and more than 40 are already in operation. Having a wide range of such media is good, what's not clear is if they are all sustainable.

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

GET INTO ANY TAXI IN THE capital city, and it's almost certain that the radio will be blaring loud music or a live talk show. Ask the taxi driver which station he is tuned into: He'll probably say, "I don't know, just some FM station."

The launch of Nepal FM 91.8 MHz on Dec. 3 by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba brought the number of FM radio stations operating in the Valley to 14. Two more are coming soon. Bhaktapur FM 105 MHz is currently undergoing test transmission and Media Current 100.8 MHz has already obtained its license. It's becoming hard to keep track of all the station names.

"The radio has become a good time pass," says taxi driver Harisharan Khadgi, as he drives his white Maruti 800 past Ratna Park, maneuvering slowly through the heavy traffic so common now on Kathmandu streets. "There is always another station to listen to when you get bored of one." Khadgi likes to listen to the latest Hindi "disco" music and news updates as he drives. Ask him about the day's headlines and he'll quote them exactly.

"FM radio is changing the patterns of people's lives and has become an integral part of the society," says Bharat Dutta Koirala, a Magsaysay award winner and a founder of Radio Sagarmatha, established in 1997. "Both the Maoists and the security forces are tuning into FM stations and no FM station has come under Maoist attack so far." Even the Maoists have been running their own

FM station clandestinely since the last two years in Maoist hotbeds.

"In some places such as Solukhumbu, porters have specially-made dokos to carry their FM sets, as [the radio] has been so popular," adds Koirala, who is also the president of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters. FM stations are in operation in Bajhang, Gorkha, Jumla, Dang, Surkhet, Palpa and Rupandehi.

FM radio stations are setting trends in news, entertainment and music. One of the most popular types of shows are call-in programs, where the audience share their views with the program host. "The production of call-in shows is cheap," says Ghama Raj Luitel of Radio



MEDIA SPATE: FM stations in Kathmandu are increasing—Kantipur FM (left), Metro FM, and Radio Sagarmatha (right)





Sagarmatha, “and they empower young people to express themselves.” He is also the general secretary of the Upatyaka FM Prasarak Manch, a forum of broadcasters within the Valley. Luitel points out that there are some complaints about FM stations—that the news they broadcast is misleading and that they are debasing the language with a confusing mix of English, Hindi and Nepali. And most FM stations now mushrooming in Kathmandu, says Sanjeev Adhikari of Radio Sagarmatha, have targeted the youth at the expense of other audiences.

“Many aim only to please their advertisers in the name of programming [because] they think only of making a profit,” says Adhikari, adding that the FM stations now should identify their niche audience and focus on improving their strengths. “But the market is just too small, and rumors are that a lot of the stations are running huge financial losses. The government’s liberal policies will run the existing stations to bankruptcy rather than help them flourish.”

Another controversial issue, both Luitel and Adhikari say, is that the government has allowed a single commercial FM station to operate in many parts of the country. Image FM 97.9 MHz in Kathmandu has transmission stations in Bhedetar in the East and Pokhara in the West. Kantipur FM 96.1 MHz broadcasts from Kathmandu and also has a 10,000-watt transmission facility in Bhedetar.

“[Allowing] that destroys the whole concept of local FM content. How can

a football match in Jumla get priority if the station from Kathmandu is broadcasting news of a match in Dhulikhel?” asks Adhikari. “Additionally, it minimizes the opportunities for community stations in the rural areas to be more competitive.”

According to the National Broadcasting Act, a 500-watt FM station, community or commercial, has to pay an annual licensing fee of Rs. 250,000, and the fee increases by 10 percent each year. Those, like most community stations, with 100-watt capacity have to pay up Rs. 50,000.

According to Koirala, who was the coordinator of a committee established by the government two years ago to suggest ways to manage the media, a proposal to waive licensing fees and taxes for community radio stations was raised, but, like most government plans, it has remained only on paper. The community stations are usually managed by the public with resources through local VDCs and their objective is not necessarily to make profits. The same committee headed by Koirala had suggested that the government “do as they like” with other profit-oriented commercial stations.

But the government neglect is not discouraging people like Koirala. “We need to make this [Nepal] a radio country,” he says. “With the low literacy rate and television just too expensive for remote areas of Nepal, radio is very suitable. That is just where most of the development money is flowing presently.” **N**



All photos: MW/SS



THE FATE OF QU

In two weeks, all quota restrictions on textile and clothing exports to the United States and the European Union will come to an end. For a Nepal in the midst of a war, the easiest route is to plead and lobby for tariff-free treatment.

BY SWARNIM WAGLÉ

IN LITTLE OVER TWO WEEKS, ON Dec. 31, 2004, the world will mark a quiet revolution. That day, the WTO Agreement of Textiles and Clothing (ATC) will terminate, ending all quota restrictions on textile and clothing exports of WTO members to the major markets of the world, especially the United States and the European Union.

This is significant because for the past 40 years, trade in textiles and clothing, now a \$350 billion global industry, has been governed by a series of protective regimes, most recently the Multi-fiber Arrangement (MFA). While the purpose of the MFA was to restrain trade, it ended up being useful to the least developed countries (LDCs) of Asia like Nepal, Laos, Cambodia and Bangladesh, by provoking a shift of investment from countries where quotas were exhausted. The Nepali apparel industry, for example, grew as a direct result of quota restraints placed on India. During its peak in the early 90s, it employed over 100,000 people; despite the gradual decline since, garments, which brought in \$162 million in 2003, is still our largest export category.

The quotas that sheltered production in countries like ours will vanish after two weeks. Come Jan. 1, 2005, and beyond, how will this momentous change in trade rules impact the various regions of Asia? The gamut of assertions and speculations on post-ATC outcomes is very wide, depending on the person asked, method used and data analyzed. According to one synthesis of research coordinated by Accountability, London, nobody knows the magnitude of the following: i) the scale of job losses in the least developed countries, ii) degree to which proximity to markets will shape trade flows,

iii) importance of domestic textile base and supply chain, iv) prospects of an unrestrained China in claiming other country's export markets, v) uncertainty about buyer behavior, vi) role of free trade agreements, and viii) intensity of domestic public policy response required, etc.

Despite an unpredictably complex web of factors, a general expectation is that, following the removal of quotas there would be an increase in exports of textiles and clothing from Asian countries (led by China and India). Overall, there would be two likely groups of gainers: The first includes countries that are competitive by virtue of scale, cost, and capacities that are vertically integrated with the rest of the production chain, including ability to offer services supplementary to mere production. The second consists of countries that are moderately competitive in comparison, but are beneficiaries of tariff preferences, niche expertise and shorter distance to major markets.

Nepal does not belong to the first group. But it could belong to the second, if it enjoyed secure and meaningful preferential access to major markets, or be known for production of distinctive niche products, such as Sri Lanka, that has in recent years been producing world-class bras. Victoria's Secret, one of the top-end producers of women's lingerie, sourced over \$350 million of exports from the conflict-ridden island in 2003. For a Nepal in the midst of a war, the easiest route is to plead and lobby for tariff-free treatment of clothing exports in the major markets. Right now, the LDCs do enjoy duty-free access to the EU, under what is called the Everything-But-Arms Initiative, but this

concession comes with relatively tight "rules-of-origin" requirements, which the LDCs find difficult to comply with in full. Even Bangladesh, the more able within the poorest nations club only had 57 percent of its clothing items qualify for preferential treatment for having met such rules of origin in 2002. While these rules are needed to ensure that the benefits of preferential access are not shared with third countries, they need to be made much simpler if the poorest countries are to benefit. Canada has shown the way recently through its Market Access Initiative for LDCs, in which apparel exports qualify for duty-free treatment with as little as 25 percent value-added in an LDC of origin. This has led to some of them performing instantly well. Comparing the year-on-year import figures from January-September 2003 and 2004, Bangladesh's export of items such as knitted, crocheted, and woven clothing grew by 52 percent to Canadian \$339.5 million, Cambodia's grew by 69 percent to Can\$105.6 million, and Lao PDR's by 40 percent to Can\$6.5 million. Even Nepal saw its exports to Canada grow by 127 percent to Can\$7.3 million during this period.

Lobby US Congress

In the world's most significant market, the United States, however, Asian LDCs do not enjoy any preferential treatment, unlike their counterparts from Sub-Saharan Africa, who have been benefiting from elements of the African Growth and Opportunity Act. This means that LDCs like Nepal are doubly hit. On the one



OTA BABIES

hand, they cannot match the economies of scale and vertical integration of the textile and clothing sectors in large neighbors like India, China and Pakistan, and, on the other, they do not enjoy the tariff preferences enjoyed by their smaller peers in Sub-Saharan Africa. Any non-reciprocal preferences offered by the United States to the exports of clothing from Asian LDCs like Nepal could thus be of great help—in fact, a dollar of trade tax waived on our apparel exports would be worth much more than a dollar given to fund anti-Mao bullets. But in the immediate future, whether such a concession can be secured would depend on the initiative of individual members of Congress. Senator Dianne Feinstein of California had initiated such a bill for Nepal in 2003, but it was later withdrawn. Following the U.S. elections of November 2004, there now are fresh attempts to introduce the Least Developed Economies Economic Development Act (LDEED) in the 109th Congress. Cambodia has been hiring expensive lobbyists in Washington to push through such an act. If we are too poor to cost-share, why don't we pay them with smiles and politely piggyback?

Although some job losses have been reported, Bangladesh's exports are keeping steady so far. In Cambodia, too, the major apparel importers went on record in an important World Bank survey recently that, in appreciation of the country's relatively decent working conditions, they intend to increase or maintain their share of sourcing from that country, one that is still recovering from history's most disastrous flirtation with violent Maoism under Saloth Sar (nom de guerre: Pol Pot). Nepal and the Lao People's Republic aside, the other poorer quota babies appear to be slightly better prepared to face the storm next year. One reason for

some optimism is that companies wouldn't want to rush to China immediately, the largest projected gainer from quota elimination, because exports from China will continue to face restraints in the major markets at least until Dec. 31, 2008, as per its Protocol of WTO accession. Another reason is that stung by outbreaks like SARS in East Asia, and the terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001, that severely disrupted trade flows, buyers seem keen on maintaining a steady supply chain by diversifying their portfolio of production sites in several important countries, not just one or two. While eventually, the bulk of the clothing trade will be dominated by large producers, there still will be countries that could remain attractive to importers of clothing niches. The question for us is, can we do what it'd take to belong to this secure club of "China and the Few"?

Nepal is on Fire

Like all charity, wish-lists should also begin at home. Can we overhaul our trade facilitation systems to reduce time and cost of doing business through

faster customs clearance; reduction of opportunities for rent seeking; rationalization of fees, taxes, and inspections? Can we create in-country resources on knowledge about markets for enhanced ability to lean-retail and develop quick fashion response? Can we introduce effective systems of credit support clothing enterprises at reasonable interest rates? Can we ensure that input costs on power, transport and key raw materials are competitively priced? Can we invest enough on our infrastructure? Can we enhance our labor productivity in the shortest term? Can Nepal engineer policy reforms that will facilitate the institution of these generic measures? The answer is no, not in the next two weeks, months or even years. If your house is on fire one afternoon, you wouldn't worry about having missed your morning walk that day.

Even damning editorials in the foreign press, such as the one that appeared in last week's issue of *The Economist*, call for greater international attention to a "failing" Nepal. If I stitched clothes sitting in Purano Baneshwore for teenagers in Helsinki, what would that mean? For a start, it'd mean implementation of long-standing international commitments that pledge duty-free entry, with easier rules of origin for products from LDCs in all major markets. Without some form of tariff-edge embodied in our clothing exports, it'd be impossible to out-

sell comparable competition from our more efficient neighbors. If that kind of international solidarity is not forthcoming immediately, our garments industry will have to brace for a guaranteed, graduated collapse. At those eventual moments of reckoning, I'd want to drop my sewing needles and ask: Should I be sad at having to mourn a slow death, or shall I instead rejoice the fact that I lived as long as I did when I was not supposed to, and I did so only because, for 40 years, the world was less noble and its rich boys more greedy. **N**

(Views expressed are personal; for details on trade policies affecting the global apparel industry, please write to the columnist at kautilya100@yahoo.com)



Beastly Instincts

Every five years, tens of thousands of animals are sacrificed at Gadhi Mai. It is a cruelty without parallel.

BY JAGDISH ARYA

Every five years, thousands of animals are sacrificed to appease the Goddess Gadhi Mai, the site of the single worst carnage in the country. This year the fateful date is Dec. 18.

What leads to the massacre is a very murky turn of events. The goddess gives the indication of her hunger for blood when a lamp ignites on its own at an anointed site at Gadhi Mai in Kalaiya. The whole thing takes place outside the public view, under a piece of cloth. Once the priests show that the lamp is lit, it is deemed as an indication from the goddess that she is demanding sacrifices or that she has signaled that the sacrifices can begin. A series of rituals takes place, ultimately leading to the bloodbath in which hundreds of thousands of animals are hacked to death.

The first ritual is the worshipping of weapons, which are later used to sacrifice the animals. Then the priests chant different hymns to appease the goddess. Once the pre-sacrificial rituals end, the animals are brought in for the kill. The sacrifice starts with the offering of five different creatures—the Pancha Bali. This includes: pigs, buffalos, goats, roosters and rats. The first on the list is the goat, followed by thousands of pigeons. Then come the pigs. This goes on until a rat is brought to complete the Pancha Bali. Remarkably, the pig's blood is not sprinkled on Goddess's idol as the animal is considered unholy.

CLIMAX

As the ritual of the sacrifice of five groups of animals approaches its end, more than 600 people carrying naked swords and axes wrapped in red clothes descend from all sides. They frantically rush towards the fenced field where thousands of buffaloes are kept. Many of them wear red headbands, indicating they are licensed killers.

This fair is infamous for the sheer number of deaths and the cruelty on display—all in the name of appeasing Goddess Gadhi Mai. The fair reaches its climax on the day of the mass animal sacrifice.

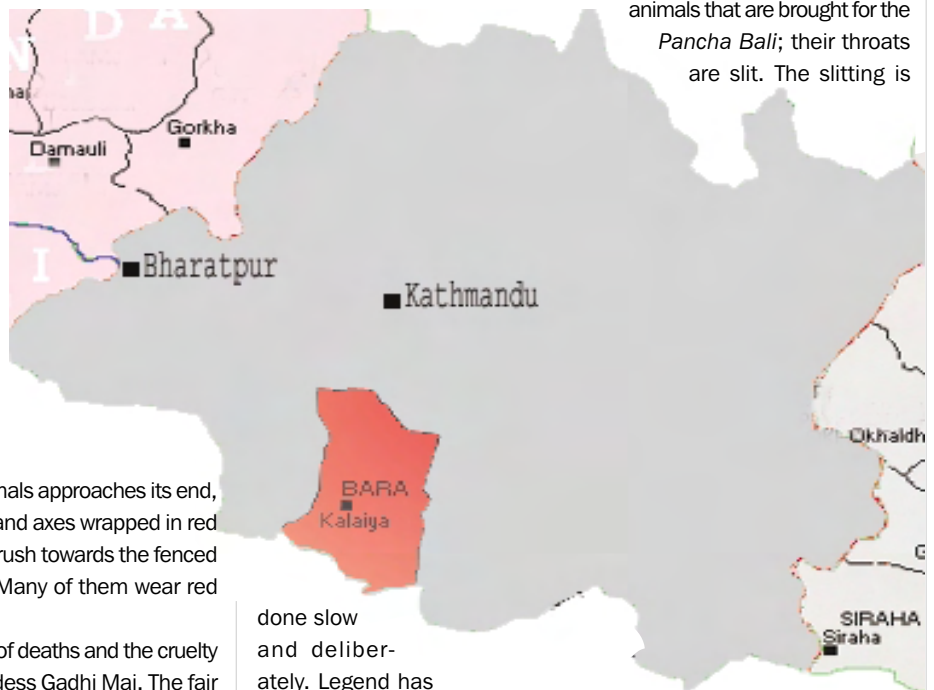
The last Gadhi Mai Mela in 1999 saw 18,000 buffaloes sacrificed. Interestingly, the Gadhi Mai Mela Committee keeps the record of buffaloes that are brought for sacrifice because the devotees pay to get their animals beheaded. This year, the committee expects this number to cross the 25,000-mark. It, however, does not keep records of other animals or birds because of the overwhelming numbers. They include goats, chickens, ducks and pigeons, besides buffaloes.

To facilitate these killings a sacrifice zone with a three-km radius around the Gadhi Mai Temple has been set up. After entering the sacrificial zone one can chop off the animal anywhere one pleases.

This, however, doesn't apply to buffaloes. They are kept separate in a very large, fenced field and they have to be registered and paid for before the kill. No one is allowed to take away the heads of their animal; that portion of the kill is meant for Gadhi Mai. Obviously, all creatures, small and big, which are brought for sacrifice, go through pain and suffering but buffaloes suffer the most. The killers can't chop off the buffaloes' heads because of their size. So, to make their task easier, the hackers first cut the buffaloes' hind legs after which the animal falls on the ground. They then start hacking on the neck until the buffalo's head is separated from its body. It takes 20 to 25 attempts in case of big buffaloes.

The bloodletting that takes place turns the entire area into a marshy land of blood; the chopped animal heads littered everywhere present a repulsive sight. The most appalling treatment is meted out on the

animals that are brought for the Pancha Bali; their throats are slit. The slitting is



done slow and deliberately. Legend has it that longer the duration, the happier the goddess. That's not all. Three to four days after the sacrifice, people start fleeing the mela venue as it starts emitting a nauseating smell. All kinds of traffic avoid the fare. But it's the people living in adjoining localities who suffer most. Many fall sick. It takes up to two weeks for the smell to go away.

Clearly, the scale of the killings at Gadhi Mai is increasing. Who is going to stand by these mute animals and speak for those who cannot speak for themselves? **N**

(Arya is an environmentalist campaigning against cruelty against animals)



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Musings on the National Museum

BY VENEETA SINGHA

The locale is quiet—trees and bushes and a paved path. On three sides are the galleries and the museum. There is a fountain pool in the middle but no water. The buildings are intricate and unique but in dire need of a fresh coat of paint. Sparse shrubbery calls out for succor and water. Swayambunath looks down from afar.

There are a few visitors but there ought to be more, many more. The iron gate is half closed—it should be open and welcoming. A stray dog walks by and the stone lions look tired.

The entrance to the museum is ornate but dilapidated. The museum is housed in a neo-classical style building reminiscent of the Rana palaces. You look around and wonder—the pages of history are earmarked but woefully in need of light, color and vigor.

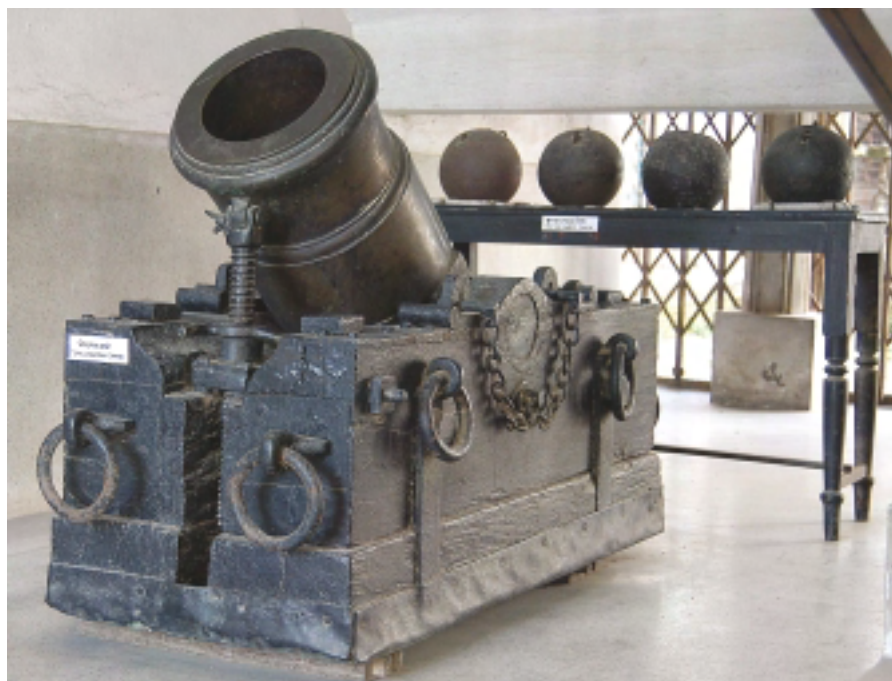
Nepal is one of the few countries that has seven World Heritage sites within a radius of 20 kilometers yet the National Museum with its plethora of art and sculpture and historical artifacts looks worn down. It was established in 1928 as an arsenal museum. Originally called the “Chhauni Shilkhana”—the storehouse of arms and ammunitions—it was

opened to the public in 1938 and then was named the Rastriya Sangrahalaya by King Mahendra in 1967.

The main museum is a treasure trove with a natural museum, a weapons gallery, and postal and numismatic galleries. Ancient ceramics from Israel (circa 800 B.C.), prehistoric Paleolithic and Neolithic tools and even a photograph of the political map of Nepal before the Treaty of Sugauli—there is much to be

admired and much to be preserved. On display in the weapons gallery are the automatic electric machine gun designed by Nepali scientist Gehendra Shumshere, the Sword of Napoleon III presented to Jung Bahadur Rana during his tour to Europe and the Indian Sepoy Medal presented to Colonel Rayamajhi.

The second building known as the Juddha Jatiya Kalashala was built by the Rana Prime Minister Juddha Shumshere and its main entrance is a copy of the Torana Stupa from the first





The Buddhist Art Gallery is a tribute to Buddhist art and is divided into three sections—the Southwest Tarai, the Kathmandu Valley and the High Himalayan Range. It was established with a Cultural Grant Program in 1995 and grant assistance from Japan. The gallery hosts rare Buddhist art, painted red ware and grey ware potteries, silver punch marked coins, caskets among others. Wooden Buddhist sculptures—Basundharas, Chakrashambaras, Dipankaras, Lokeshwaras—sit under warm lights. The Mandala Gallery introduces 108 Bodhisatvas along with other minor gods arranged in accordance with tantric Buddhist scriptures. This gallery is well designed and thoughtfully presented.

One is astounded by the artifacts but the condition of the museum is saddening. It lacks the ambience, the atmosphere, the color and the life that most museums gift to the visitor. History is preserved but in a meager way. Our forebears must surely be saddened that a way of life, a culture, a gift is now lying in a cupboard without the life that has gone into it. **N**

century B.C. The different sections of the museum present stone, wood, bronze and terracotta art as well as paintings and lamps. The oldest piece in the stone section is the sculpture of Jaya Varma from the Christian era. In the bronze section, we are presented with a solid statue of Vishnu that dates back to

the 10th century. We now come to the wood section—crafts which have made Nepali architecture famous the world over. There is a veritable abundance of woodcraft amongst which is a wooden tympanum of Mahishasur Mardini (circa 18th century). Next come the paintings—yet another feast of art.



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Hope for Nepali Fiction

In the next decade or two, the best writing in Nepali fiction will be in English

BY AJIT BARAL

In a two-part essay published in the *New Yorker* in 1997, Salman Rushdie made a rather interesting claim: That the best of Indian fiction was written in English. He made a similar statement in his book on Indian writings. Unsurprisingly, the two statements unleashed a volley of protests from the vernacular writers. Later Rushdie admitted that he had read little Hindi literature and whatever little he had read was marred by poor translation. Essentially, he admitted that it was a case of misjudgment.

Notwithstanding the Rushdie retraction, here's a statement, Rushdie-style: The best of Nepali fiction in a decade or two to come will be written in English.



PROMISING FUTURE: Manjushree Thapa and Samrat Upadhyay have made their mark in English fiction writing



This I say with all the awareness that fiction in Nepali has over a hundred years of history while Nepali fiction in English began just recently. Here are the reasons behind the claim.

The more developed a language is, the more developed will its literature be. But the Nepali language isn't as developed as other languages like English and French. It started to systematically grow after the publication of "Turner's Dictionary," exactly 130 years ago. But the Nepali language is yet to develop "more or less fully" as is evident from the fact that it doesn't have a standardized grammar or consistent usage and

spelling. The written Nepali language often turns stiff. That the *sampadak mandal* of "Nepali Brihat Sapdakosh" writes its *sampadakiya* couched in flowery sentences indicates how indifferent we are to one of the basics of good writing—that language should be simple.

The complete lack of editing practice doesn't equip Nepali writers to write well-crafted fiction. No publishing house has an in-house editor. Ask them why they don't have an editor and they will come up with a routine answer: "We make a profit of just Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 20,000 rupees from a publication. We won't get anything if the amount goes towards paying an editor."

Try explaining to them that an editor can improve the language and the content of the book, and thereby help

the sales, and they will turn their heads away in mock disbelief. Surprisingly, even organizations like the Royal Nepal Academy don't have the practice of editing publications. Every academy publication has an editor or two, but they seem to be by and large honorary. The content is poorly edited.

There is also a lot of self-publishing going on. In fact it doesn't cost much to publish a book; a modest one can be published for Rs. 30,000, or even less if, for example, one is willing to compromise on the quality of layout and printing paper. Since one can publish just about any-

thing, one doesn't feel the necessity to write well.

As long as more books are self-published, rather than the product of professional publishing, it will be difficult to expect well-crafted writing. Honest and critical reviews would deter writers from publishing whatever gushes through their minds in a burst of inspiration. Sadly, we don't have a tradition of honest and critical reviews.

In short, the situation in Nepal isn't conducive for producing excellent Nepali fiction. That, however, doesn't mean that Nepali writers haven't produced quality fiction. Writers like Dhurba Chandra Gautam have been consistently producing excellent fiction. But they are few and far between.

The future of Nepali English fiction, however, looks bright. The reach of English is spreading, and more and more Nepalis are starting to develop sound proficiency in the global language. Each year around 4,000 students leave for the United States for higher studies. Some of them are even joining creative writing courses and getting trained in the craft of writing. Those who have a penchant for writing but are not fortunate enough to take a creative writing course have been consulting loads of books on the art of writing and editing. Those writing in Nepal don't have the luxury. Sure, they can consult English books, but their lack of proficiency doesn't help their cause.

Moreover, there are certain rules in English that don't apply to Nepali writing. For example, one of the cardinal rules of English writing is, to quote William Safire's "Rule for Writers": "Passive Voice should never be used." Some of the passive voice constructions in Nepali are delectable and read well.

This is the reason why we are getting to read a lot of fiction by Nepalis in English these days. Most of it is posted by young writers, particularly on the Internet. With time they will mature as writers and some of them will make it big, thanks to the agents and editors who will help them find good publishers and improve the quality of their writings. No wonder that novelist Manjushree Thapa says she expects exciting times for Nepali fiction in English in a decade or two. **N**

Love in the Time of War

Violence is always pointless

BY BISWAS BARAL

They are just a bunch of novice scouts in their 20s, who believe their only job is to safeguard their country against the invading German army. They are the stars of "The Star," a Second World War Russian epic, recently screened at the Russian Cultural Center to commemorate the 60th anniversary of "the victory of the allied forces over the Fascists."

The setting of the movie is the Russian-Polish border at the height of the war in 1944. A group of young Soviet



scouts—code-named "The Star" for the operation—are sent across the border to monitor enemy activities and radio back to the Russian bases. Two such groups already having failed during previous attempts, there seems little hope for the new scouts.

A love story is also enmeshed with the ghoulish realities of the war. The vague relationship between Travkin, the scout-commander, and Katya, a female radio operator, is often hard to grasp for modern viewers. But the film's main focus is on how a handful of amateur scouts manage to accomplish their mission against all odds. They succeed through sheer determination and grit; but, in the process, they pay the ultimate price with their lives. In the mold of the typical Hollywood war classics, the movie salutes heroism, self-sacrifice and renunciation in the battlefield.

This 93-minute Russian thriller—with English subtitles—managed to hold the

rapt attention of the audience. There were episodes of spontaneous applause following heart-touching episodes, interspersed with less frequent light moments when the viewers cooled off. The bravado of an Asian-Russian, much alike a khukuri-wielding Gurkha soldier—maybe, the gallery hoped, one of those 200,000 Nepalis who participated in the Second World War—provided some hilarious moments in an otherwise somber film.

"The Star" in many ways is a poignant portrayal of the events of war—of lives torn apart, of villages razed to dust, of indiscriminate killings. The scene where Katya tries to radio Travkin, even when he is believed to have died at the warfront, epitomizes her unswerving devotion for the desolate hero. Katya's broadcasting the radio signals from The Earth, the codeword for the Russian base, keeping her hopes of making contact with The Star alive, certainly bears metaphorical connotations. Katya has met Travkin only a couple of times but is shown desperately lovelorn when he is dispatched to the border. The love story is underdeveloped, sometimes even threatening to wreck the true essence of the film.

The movie at times verges on the melodramatic but, overall, it is a won-

derfully cinematographed and directed war saga. Among its other weak points is the unnecessary German narration, which permeates the movie once a while, hindering the normal flow of the story.

"The Star," with its running time of 93 minutes, is short yet entertaining. It doesn't get unnecessarily caught in trying to show the horrors of war, a subject many war movies are perpetually preoccupied with. And yet, while this movie is able to present a brilliant depiction of the downsides of wars, heroism in the battlefields is its central theme.

The film is based on a famous 1947 story, "Zvezda" or "The Star," by Emmanuil G Kazakavich, a renowned Russian short story writer. The book captures the author's experiences in the Russian army. Kazakavich shows the realities of war rather than flaunt the Red Army's superiority, as



many of his contemporary Russian scholars and filmmakers did, in writing about the role of the Russian troops in the Second World War.

"The Star" shows that heroism transcends geographical boundaries. There are heroes everywhere: in Russia, the United States, in Communist China, in Nepal; even the Nazi Germany had many who chose to stand up to despots. But, ironically, those brave men pay the biggest price while on their way to achieving immortality.

"It [the film festival] is a commemoration of the then Soviet people and Soviet armies who boldly fought against fascism," says Sergey F. Kiselev, the director of the Russian Cultural Center in Kathmandu. The message the festival strives to give: That violence causes only suffering; that aggressors are doomed in any war; and that international consensus is the only way to resolve interstate disputes. **N**

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Jomsom Journals: Part 2

Wee-hours trips to the loo are a wee bit cold at 3,800 meters

BY KUNAL LAMA

I'm not terribly religious nor was I on a pilgrimage, but I had to walk up to the white-walled compound from where the temple and the gompas gaze serenely down. A sacred site for both Hindus and Buddhists, Muktinath is mentioned as *Shaligrama* in the Mahabharata because of its ammonite fossils known as *shaligram* and said to represent deities, especially those associated with Vishnu. I was pleasantly surprised to see a Buddhist nun open the doors to the shrine that housed three idols, all of them looking more like the representations of Buddha in monasteries than Hindu gods in temples. Hinduism and Buddhism are indeed two faces of the same coin, but General Simha should have chosen the aftermath of a less politically-loaded occasion than the recent Second World Buddhist Summit in Lumbini to voice his unsettling opinion, seeing that he is the chairman of the World Hindu Federation.

Muktinath, at 3,800 meters, was cold; the trips to the nearby toilet in the middle of the night weren't at all amusing. However I lazily dreamt of Dzong, the seldom-visited ancient capital of this region across the river

village. It was poignant to observe this caste separation, even by the pure waters of the Panga Khola.

After a night in Jomsom, full of tourists unable to fly to Pokhara unless they paid \$200 for a chopper ride, I took the trail to Marpha and Tukuche, avoiding the tractor track that runs all the way to Kalopani. Marpha was a picturesque revelation. Tucked into the folds of the mountains, safe from the scathing winds sweeping up the Thak Khola, it prides itself as the "Delightful Apple Capital of Nepal." Though I was sick of apples by now, Marpha was, nevertheless, delightful. Full of curving, cleanly swept, flagstoned lanes and two-story houses constructed of roughly dressed stones, it could be the perfect setting for the next Harry Potter sequel, should they decide to borrow the magic of Marpha. Bhakti Hirachan, charmingly chaperoning me about the town, proudly told me how the lanes were widened by covering up the free-flowing sewage system. He wryly added that alcohol-soaked locals now did not have to fear falling into it. I was also taken to Tashi Lhakhang Gumpa, host to the Mani Rimdu festival every Laxmi Puja. The present, third *avatar* (reincarnate) Lama was away in Denver, married to an American, teaching Buddhism at a university. The revealing, savvy, globe-grasping guise of Buddhism never fails to bemuse me.

Leaving Marpha, I made a quick side trip to Chhairi, the site of a decaying gumpa set in a pretty pine grove with a brook bending through the trees. Conservation efforts are afoot. Then it was a steady trudge to Tukuche into a biting wind on a seemingly endless, dusty road marked by a string of lofty electrical poles. It felt quite eerie to be the only two souls in the middle of nowhere. The Niligiris still watched over us, and the landscape now began to sprout pine trees. When we finally reached

Tukuche, I was deeply disappointed. Once the most important Thakali village, houses—decorated with carved windows and doorways reminiscent of the Newari architecture of the Kathmandu Valley—on the riverside were rapidly falling apart, heavily padlocked as if to stop them from disintegrating completely. The only saving grace of Tukuche was the discovery of High Plains Inn that proudly and defiantly advertised a Dutch bakery. A cozy hostelry run by Purna, a local Thakali lady, married to Patrick, a Dutchman, the rooms were quirkily arranged in tight corners, on different levels. This was the only hotel I stayed in where even the faucets were fastidiously gleaming with polished chrome. I woke up at six a.m. to the salivating smells of pastries and bread baking away and the astonishing aroma of freshly brewed Douwe Egberts coffee! **N**



from Muktinath. Dominated by the ruins of a crumbling fort, Dzong exists in its own empty, esoteric, exotic world with only an *upa swastha chowki* (sub-regional health post) to show its links to the government of Nepal. The next morning, we did what I call the "Lupra Loop": Instead of descending to Jomsom the same way, via Jharkot and Kagbeni, Kamal Pun—my faithful guide/porter—and I took a left turn up into the hills, then dropped down steeply to the river to reach Lupra. The walk in the hills was pure joy. I threw away my hat to have an unbrimmed view of the panoramic scenery and to develop a high Himalayan tan, photo ageing be damned! Lupra was a fascinating Bon-po village, the only one in the heavily Nyingma-pa dominated region. Traditionally consisting of 13 households, each with their own household lama, the number has now grown to 16, including a Biswakarma family at the far upper edge of the

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The Washington Post calls Jenkins "who brings music from around the world into the classroom"

Resham Phiriri and the Music Man

A music legend in America brings back fond memories of tunes from Nepal

BY KARUNA CHETTRI IN MARYLAND

As I lead my group of four- and five-year-old students into the library of Robert Goddard Middle School in Maryland, I freeze in mid-step hearing the unexpected: the cassette player is belting out "Resham phi-ri-ri"

in its unadulterated, original folk version. The moment, albeit brief, is as irrational and surreal as a dream—for displayed on a long table in front of me is an assortment of Nepali musical instruments: *maddals*, *kartals*, flutes, *manjiras*, gongs, cymbals, *damarus*, *matyangras* and bells. A musical feast for a deprived Nepali like myself.

Little did I know that when I requested Bill Jenkins to give an interactive musical workshop on Asian musical instruments, I would be regaled by songs from my own childhood and my students experience a sensorial journey into a world of Nepali music. I had only the talented

musician, collector and teacher, Bill, to thank for such a rare experience.

For Bill, teaching music is a passion that evolved over time from early 1950s. He had a hobby of collecting such things as stamps, baseball cards, rocks; but the interest in music was sparked when young Bill was given a set of bongo drums. Thus started what was a lifelong interest in international music and musical traditions, and international travel. By the time he was in high school, Bill had gained much knowledge of Indian music that was further strengthened by a degree in Asian studies. What had initially started as a personal interest eventually expanded into a career in music when Bill was asked by a local library to consider doing a children's program. It was a success. His rapport with the children and his ability to impart the basic knowledge of beat, rhythm and harmony regardless of the children's age or the type and origin of the instrument, gained him instant popularity with the local schools as well as the famous Smithsonian Museum.

He was also profiled in the venerable *The Washington Post* as "Bill Jenkins [the one] who brings music from around the world into the classroom."

"The way people organize sound into groups of numbers, especially into increments of four, can be frequently observed in traditional music," observes Jenkins in the *Post*. "It's natural. Every time, we walk we are keeping a beat and we've heard the sound of a heartbeat since before we were born, and so everybody has musical ability in varying degrees." It must be just this faith that allows him to reach out to every child participating in his workshop.

Children are fascinated by his collection of non-western musical instruments made from, seedpods, coconut shells, gourds, bits of wood, skin, animal bones, tortoise shells, goat toes. Music from such instruments has stronger rhythms and simpler melodies that they learn with ease. The synchronized beat of drums, bells, maracas, shakers and scrapers—unleash the joys of creativity which allow the children to express their energies while positively altering their moods. A natural high, I, myself have observed and experienced for the last three years, each

time I have participated in Bill's "World of Music."

Bill's ability to re-create various environments and habitats through music is exceptional. This year, I watched him bring to life the rainforest of South America with the help of a bunch of seed-noisemakers, which my students shook with great enthusiasm and vigor while he blew on different kinds of carved wood whistles that mimicked the calls



and warbles of the Amazon rainforest birds. I stood mesmerized, transported to a world beyond my imagination; a world of sounds and harmony in nature; the imagery and sensorial experiences, all too powerful to resist.

In March 2002, Bill traveled to Nepal to help the Smithsonian Museum collect musical instruments for its children's program. The hands-on program based in Washington D.C., named "Imagin Asia," incorporated exploration of the Himalayan regions while displaying art and artifacts from around Nepal, Tibet and India. The musical instruments were an important component that provided the authentic, cultural experience of a Himalayan culture steeped in folk music. Bill organized the six-week long workshop for children with Bhim Dahal, a Nepali drummer and dancer.

During his visit to Nepal, he stayed in Patan and frequented many instrument factories from where he bought 10 *madals*, three flutes and many *kartals* to name a few, for his private collection which boasts of 200 instruments representing the major musical traditions from all the continents. His collection is probably the largest of its kind outside of a museum in the Washington D.C., Maryland and Virginia area. He also recorded *bhajans* and *sutra*-chanting by monks from Boudha. When asked to name a Nepali instrument he found exceptionally unique, Jenkins responded that although most of the instruments were beautiful in their structure and craftsmanship, he found the Nepali bells resonate with a rare purity and clarity of sound. Jenkins attributes it to the skillful mix of seven metals inherent in the bells and the singing bowls.

"Watch me clap. Move only one hand, flexing at the wrist, while holding the other hand still," Bill instructs my class as he prepares the students to clap to the beat of "Resham phi-ri-ri." After a few minutes of clapping and singing to the catchy folk song, he hands out the *damarus*, the *kartals* and the finger cymbals. On cue, the children play their instruments in almost perfect harmony. As the pulsating music approaches a definite crescendo, Bill motions for the group to slow down while he switches to the haunting *bhajan* of "Raghupati raghawa raja ram..." The mood of my young students mellows at which point Jenkins strikes on a number of various sized temple bells. The pure tones and varying pitches ring unceremoniously stringing each person with a haunting strand before fading into a harmonious memory. The mood created is serene and the space, sacred. As I closed my eyes to press back the tears, I experience Devghat in Maryland. **N**

(Chettri is a early childhood educator who has been teaching at Robert Goddard Montessori in Maryland for the last five years)



CITY ThisWeek

EVENTS



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ART EXHIBITIONS



the Park Gallery, Pulchowk. Till Dec. 16. For information: 4419053.

Zodiac Blast

Haami presents a night of pure dance music with DJ Ashish and DJ Raju. Highlights include free palm reading, door prizes and free drink. Price: Rs. 400. On Dec. 18. Time: 8:30 p.m. onwards at the Rox, Hyatt Regency. Proceeds to be used for various social activities. For information: infohaami@yahoo.com

Cine Club

Movie: Highlander(1986). Director:Russell Mullery . Starring: Christophe Lambert. At the Alliance Francaise, Tripureshwore.

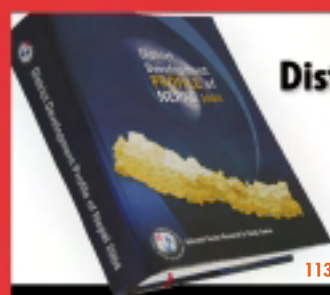
Date: Dec. 19. Time: 2 p.m. For information: 4241163.

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ONGOING

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Catering to the CROWD

From tent houses to top hotels, business is booming

BY DHRITI BHATTA

It's 12:45 p.m. Indreni Food Land in Naya Baneshwore is quiet except for a group of three youngsters enjoying cheese pizza in the wide indoor hall. There aren't too many customers around but the place still looks busy. The waiters are running up and down the two-story restaurant, also a party venue, with a sense of purpose. So what's going on?

Chef Kumar Giri and a dozen other kitchen staff are working in the huge kitchen full of oversized *dekhis* and *tapkes*, filled to the rim with uncooked cauliflower, marinated tomatoes and other uncooked vegetables. In one corner a strong hand cuts up pieces of chicken and in another the staff chops ginger and onions. "We're getting ready for the party tonight," says Giri, wearing his tall white hat and supervising the work in the kitchen. "There's a wedding party at 4 p.m."

It's finally Mangsir. After a five-month hiatus, the wedding season is here again. Beautifully decorated houses decked with party lights illuminate the dark winter nights, and handsomely

dressed men and women with gifts converge for parties. Then they savor the lip-smacking catered buffet in the corner of the tent.

Wedding parties are a big business today. The guest lists are long—from 100 to 1,000, a party of that size requires a lot of coordination. Obviously there's lots of the pressure on the hosts. And one important part of the job is arranging food: Hence hiring caterers for wedding parties has become common.

The catering business has come a long way. A decade ago there were about 20 catering businesses in the Kathmandu Valley. The number now has shot up to more than 150. The number could be higher since many of them never register. "About 25 percent of the companies are operating illegally," says Govinda Bahadur Chaulagain, who has been running New Annapurna Catering in Naya Baneshwore for the last four years.

Many of the illegal outfits are avoiding taxes. Ujjwal Krishna Shrestha, who has been in the business for more than 10 years and owns A-Z Catering in Prayag Pokhari and the Party Palace in



All photos: mw/SS

Lagankhel explains why: "Registering with the tax office means exposing yourself to hundreds of unanticipated problems."

With so many caterers, the competition is fierce. Customers look for a bargain—a Rs. 50 per person discount saves a lot when the guest list runs to hundreds. But Sambhu Shrestha, proprietor of Indreni, suggests caution. "Quality, after all, is the essence of catering," he explains. "Only then does the issue of price come in. Once the customer values your quality, it's very easy to get more business, and that's how the business cycle become complete." The prices range from Rs. 150 to Rs. 350 per head and are fixed according to the menu. Non-vegetarian menus have high demand. But, in the last three to four years, the number of vegetarian parties has also shot up.

While the number of parties has gone up, caterers say they are making less profit than they were seven or eight years ago. Big catering companies like A-Z



Catering, Indreni and Kismis Catering who used to have a whopping profit margin of 50 percent have had their profits slashed to less than 25 percent. And small outfits like New Annapurna Catering say they are struggling to stay in business.

Big or small, caterers have swamped every kind of party, even private receptions. "It's no longer just weddings," says Manish Nyachhyon, owner of Kismis Catering Service. "We are asked to cater on such occasions as bratabandas, paasnis, birthdays, seminars and even during mourning." Weddings still make up the bulk of the business, but the other events are important because they keep the business afloat during the lean non-wedding months. Without them, caterers would be employed only between April to July and in the winter months.

Ask the caterers what they fear most? "Bandas, traffic jams and fuel shortages are the three biggest hindrances," says Nyachhyon. Many of the caterers are compelled to cancel their bookings due



to these. Electricity and water are also major problems. "But we are so used to them that they no longer seem as a problem," says Nyachhyon with a grin.

Meanwhile, Kumar Giri of Indreni and his group of nine men are finally at the end of their hectic day. It's 11 p.m. and they've worked incessantly through-

out the day to please the 130 guests. "It's such a relief now. I can go back to my room and lay back and relax," says Giri. But work needs to start early tomorrow morning. There's a wedding party for 400 people. Work never stops for the caterers these wedding days. And, they aren't complaining. **N**



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Colombo Countdown

The Sports Council took everybody by surprise last month when it revealed training plans for next year's South Asian Games. Now the onus lies on it to put the plans to practice.

BY SUDESH SHRESTHA

In an interview with the state-owned Nepal Television last month, member secretary of the National Sports Council, Kishor Bahadur Singh, revealed plans for a long-term training session for athletes. The session was supposed to be a lead-up to the 10th South Asian Games scheduled for August 2005 in Sri Lanka.

The decision was an unprecedented one. Never before had the council been so proactive as far as training for the regional games goes. Was the council trying to equal the 1999 feat when Nepal won a record 31 golds to finish second behind India in the medal standings? It's been all downhill since: In the last edition of the games held in Islamabad, Nepal bagged only seven golds.

"General training is already on for a few sports," says Dhan Bahadur Basnet, director at the council's training division. "The sport-specific training will start only in January." It's also encouraging to see the authorities trying to assemble a good contingent for the regional games.

But as during most lead-ups to international events, this one too is fraught with difficulties. And there is no dearth of advice. Those familiar with the working of the council believe it could start with identifying the areas of weakness before building on the strengths. And there are plenty of such areas.

Deepak Bista, a taekwondo gold medalist in Islamabad, hits out at the council's all-too-erratic administration. "The council's programs are always in a state of flux and that discourages athletes who want to get into some kind of groove," he says, recalling a bitter inci-

dent recently, which resulted in him along with Nayana Shakya, a swimmer, being denied coaching licenses. Others say a good deal has to be done before the training actually begins.

Then there's concern that the sports establishment is banking too heavily on a handful of top athletes for too long, overlooking its long-term responsibility to raise new talent.

It may be a bit unfair to compare our preparations with Australia's, but here's a little peek at their program. The Australian Olympic Committee last month announced a package of 17.8 million Australian dollars (\$13.7 million) to help top



athletes like swimmers Ian Thorpe and Grant Hackett. The preparation for the 2008 Olympics has started down under.

Another 8.2 million Australian dollars will be spent on international competition in the lead-up to Beijing; 4.6 million on medalists and their coaches and 5 million to develop young athletes.

All this suggests that Australia's unprecedented success at the Athens Olympics was not an accident. It stood fourth in the medal standings in August, finishing behind the United States, China and Russia. It won 49 medals, including 17 golds. Australia is aiming for a top-five finish in Beijing.

Sport officials themselves concede there is a lot to learn from successful sports administrations abroad: While budget crunch is a perennial Third World problem, good management and foresight can help offset at least some of that disadvantage. The officials admit that it was "a big mistake" on their part not to scout young talent.

"We're now considering long-term planning with an emphasis on grooming the base-level talent, rather than placing importance on short-term gains through a quick training regimen," he explains.

The council is planning a two-pronged strategy: Maintain competitive interest among the athletes while expanding a base that will ensure a larger pool of talent in all sports disciplines that have a wide following in the country.

But budgetary concerns inevitably pop up. To run a nationwide sports program with an annual budget of Rs. 120 million is a daunting task. One estimate suggests the preparation for the upcoming Colombo Games alone would cost over Rs. 30 million. The discipline-specific training will jack up the cost to Rs. 70 million.

With the insurgency eating up much of the country's resources, chances are remote that the sports sector, which is considered a "luxury" by some planners, will get a cash infusion from the government any time soon.

Despite the apprehension, Basnet appears optimistic, like most other officials when they talk to the press. He insists that medals alone will not be the yardstick of our success. "The emphasis should be on the quality of performance and how athletes perform under stress," he says. He explains that efforts are on to rope in the private sector for sponsorships in order to gradually avoid dependence on the government.

The sooner that happens the better. At least, then the athletes will get some time to get into their groove during the Colombo countdown. **N**



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TRUE CLASSICIST

Call him a classicist who cares little about commercial pressures. Singer, composer and lyricist **AAVAAS**, who studied under the legendary Ambar Gurung for more than 10 years, is admittedly an old-school musician. But it took him quite a while to come out with an album on his own. His first solo album, "Palaal Palaal," was released early this month. It was recorded live in a small studio with 20 musicians over six days. Each of the 10 songs was recorded time and over until everybody thought he got it right.



Help is on the way

You don't get AIDS through hugging. Many of us talk the talk but few of us actually decide to walk the walk. **ASHA RAZAK** has been actively involved as an AIDS volunteer with Nepal Plus. In fact, she is the only non-HIV member with the organization run by AIDS patients. Her responsibilities: To raise awareness about AIDS by involving media groups. On Nov. 26, Razak was at Pashupati lighting 100,000 lamps together with Nepal Plus members and the students of the St. Xavier's College in memory of all those who have died of AIDS. "Youngsters are the most vulnerable to HIV," says Razak. "It's high time we started sex education and teaching about drug abuse in schools"

Brazilian Director

Brazilian theater director Juliane Boal, famous for his "Theater of the Oppressed," a drama form where audiences actively participate, landed in Kathmandu last month. Visiting Nepal at the invitation of Aarohan theater group, which had adapted Boal's theater form and staged it as *Kachahari*, Boal gave a four-day training on the subject. "Although we'd been practicing this theater form for the last three years," says Sunil Pokhrel, a founder and active member of Aarohan, "its true roots and its adaptations came out vividly only after this training."



Photo: Courtesy of Kantipur





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A GREAT NEWSPAPER

The Mountain Biker



nm/ss

Seven years ago, **Suresh Kumar Dulal**, now 23, came to Kathmandu from Lamjung as a student, struggling to make ends meet. After a few years in the rafting and hotel business, Dulal found himself a unique profession—that of a cycling guide. Cycling, since then, has helped him scale new heights. He is now Nepal’s champion biker who has won all the major competitions since 2000 and has represented Nepal in Germany, Austria, Italy, Japan and New Zealand in international races. But he has set his sights even

higher. An executive member of the Nepal Cycling Club, which promotes mountain biking, Dulal now wants to train in England to prepare for the 2005 South Asian Games, the first time mountain biking will be included in the regional games. His next shot: the 2008 Olympics. Satish Jung Shahi talked to Dulal about biking, its infrastructures and his Olympic plans.

What is the biking scene here like?

As good as in Switzerland or Germany. We are gifted with the rough terrain that is apt for biking. In recent years, the number of Nepalis participating in various competitions has increased. One such event, the Kathmandu Mountain Biking Competition, was held last month. A few are even taking up biking as a career.

And you are one of them...

My specialization is cross-country mountain biking. Luckily for me, the South Asian Games has decided to include mountain biking in its next edition. Our biggest competitor there will be Sri Lanka. I hope I can win a medal for Nepal. Later, in 2008, I want to represent Nepal in the Olympic Games. Tesco, a supermarket, and Trek Cycles has agreed to sponsor me; and the British Cycling Federation in North Hampton has agreed to provide me training. That is, if I get a visa and I am able to go there.

Don't we have training facilities here?

Not at all. The government allots around Rs. 30 million every year for sports but not a penny of that amount is spent on mountain biking. There is so much potential if biking could be promoted as a form of adventure tourism. A few regular competitions every year would be of great help. That would bring international bikers to Nepal and provide better competition for us. I am also very happy that the media has started promoting mountain biking as an adventure sport.

In recent years, the number of Nepalis participating in various competitions has increased. A few are even taking up biking as a career.

Isn't mountain biking an expensive sport?

Yes, it is. A minor spare part of an original mountain bike costs a minimum of \$20 to \$30. The bicycle I ride costs around Rs. 160,000. But I am happy that I am biking for a living. So far, I am absolutely loving this career. I've traveled to Bhutan, Mongolia, China, Sikkim,

Darjeeling and Thailand on my assignments as a cycling guide. That is how I earn my bread and butter.

What are your daily training sessions like?

I get up at around 5:30 a.m. and head either to Nagarkot, Phulchoki, Kakani, Lakhure Bhanjyang or Jamachou on my bicycle. I can reach Nagarkot in an hour and 10 minutes. But I have to come back to my office at Himalayan Mountain Bike Tours and Expeditions to do my nine to five duty. In the evening, I attend an hour of fitness training. Only cycling up and down the slopes is not going to be enough, I also require serious fitness training.

Your club organized a clean-up campaign at Pancha Kumari Temple in Sinamangal last Saturday, Dec. 11. What was the idea?

People believe cyclists do nothing but wear short, tight half pants and helmets and ride around in their cycles. We wanted to prove them wrong; as well as promote cycling by increasing our interactions with locals—raising awareness about a healthy and clean environment through cycling. We noticed a huge pile of garbage near the Pancha Kumari Temple in Kalimatidole along our popular cycling route behind the airport. We wanted to do something about it. Plus, we thought we could promote cycling as a pollution-free sport and a cheap form of transport. **N**



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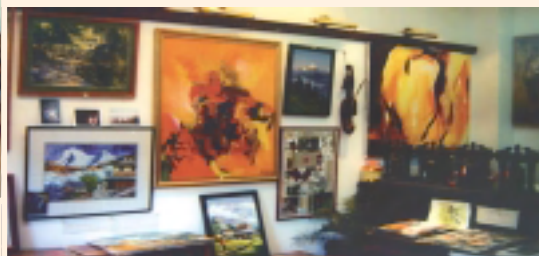
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Rigor of Writing

Hamilton's understanding and curiosity of the people and cultures make him one of the first proto-anthropologists to enter the country and take stock—literally—of Nepal

An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal and of the Territories Annexed to this Dominion by the House of Gorkha

By Francis Buchanan Hamilton

Printed in 1819

Reprinted in 1986 by Asian Educational Services (New Delhi)

PAGES: 316

Price: Rs. 952

(Available at Saraswati Book House and other bookstores in Kathmandu)

BY SUSHMA JOSHI

There is a reason why the English ruled over an empire where the sun never set. The English colonists knew the value of knowledge. Take “An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal, and of the Territories Annexed to this Dominion by the House of Gorkha,” written by Francis Buchanan Hamilton and published in 1819. Written by a man who spent only 14 months in Kathmandu, between 1802 and 1803, and two more years on the frontier, it is an extensive documentation of everything from the genealogies of the *rajās* of small principalities of Nepal to listings of natural resources, from the minutest details

of how metal was subdivided between different parties to the exact decimal point of grain measurements. Classifications of medicinal herbs, trees, animals, birds and ethnic groups are mixed in with a quite remarkable understanding of government and the justice system. The author, without doubt, was one of the most highly educated men brought up in the liberal tradition of the European Enlightenment. His understanding and curiosity of the people and cultures make him one of the first proto-anthropologists to enter the country and take stock—literally—of Nepal.

The book has a heavy filter of scientific detachment and rationality without the later Darwinian undertones (Darwin would only be born six years later, in 1809). The mandatory burst of Eurocentric racism, where he talks about the deceitful and treacherous nature of the mountain Hindus, occupies only a couple of paragraphs. The word “barbarian” pops up a couple of times, but in ways in which a contemporary person might find more laughable than offensive, for example “a vigorous barbarian.” Nineteenth century ideas that people

were formed by their geographical locations—he calls the plains people “melancholy” and “choleric” and the mountain people are considered “phlegmatic” and “sanguine”—do appear, but only cursorily. Thankfully, there is no mention of cranium sizes or intelligence, a later racist discourse that would only pop up after Darwin and Mendel. The rest of the book gives a great deal of methodical and respectful attention to each of his informants, from highly educated Brahmans to a slave.

Hamilton obsessively deconstructs Kirkpatrick’s “Nepaul.” Kirkpatrick, his predecessor, seemed to have done sloppy research even with extensive British East India Company support, and Hamilton goes to great lengths to point this out and to disprove Kirkpatrick’s claims. His tone is tart during these moments, the well-deserved sarcasm of the emerging researcher with new findings. Colonel Kirkpatrick complained about the lack of kitchen vegetables, saying that there were only cabbages and peas. “Meaning, I presume, European,” adds Hamilton, pointing to his own understanding that just because a European did not eat coriander, eggplants or okra they couldn’t just be dismissed as non-vegetables. Some of the earliest critiques of Eurocentrism came out of Europe itself, and Hamilton was definitely a vigorous critic of the limited understanding of his own countrymen.

Besides a few hilarious tonal mistakes—he heard “Bhatgang” for Bhadgaon, “Sristha” for Shrestha, and “ashruffy” for *asharfi* (gold coin), Hamilton is mostly accurate about the names, dates and places he mentions. He is methodical enough, unlike Kirkpatrick, to realize that “Nuggerkoties” were less an ethnic group than the people of a particular locality.

Hamilton, however sympathetic to the locals, was still an employee of the East India Company, and his inventory of resources doesn’t let us forget the

What makes Hamilton’s account particularly relevant for the is his careful accounting of cultures and gender roles of

Hamilton portrays Prithvi Narayan Shah, who resisted the British as an unsympathetic and cruel character



purpose of his Nepal visit. Everything is carefully and extensively documented with an eye for future exploitation. Prithvi Narayan Shah, who resisted the British, shows up as an unsympathetic and cruel character, and his enemies are treated cordially by the British, revealing a small bit of their “divide and conquer” methods. The minerals and herbs would never make it down to India. What would come to be the British’s greatest gold mine, the Gurkhas, makes brief ap-

pearances in a small paragraph about a *raja* who keeps a Kiranti army armed with poisoned arrows.

What makes Hamilton’s account particularly relevant for the contemporary reader is his careful accounting of cultures and gender roles of different groups. For those who have a fondness for making grand claims about Brahminization and Sanskritization without the attendant footnotes, this book provides documented ammunition. Extensive notes about widow burning, marriage choices for women in different communities, all the way down to the fines for adultery (2 rupees

and 10/16 paisa) make this a goldmine for researchers and activists working in gender rights and women’s history.

Also relevant are the careful accounts of extrajudicial killings between warring parties, torture that sounds startlingly similar to what is still practiced in Nepal, and concepts of honor that might give our activists working in peace-building a clearer understanding and historical framework on the messy human rights situation in Nepal.

Hamilton pays detailed attention to the governing structure of the country, extensively documenting land rights given to courtiers and to various office-holders. He writes, of the government: “At other times, again, on business of the utmost emergency, a kind of assembly of notables is held, in which men who have neither office, nor any considerable influence in the government, are allowed to speak very freely, which seems to be done merely to allow the discontents of the nation to evaporate, as there is not a vestige of liberty in the country, nor does the court seem ever to be controlled by the opinions advanced in these assemblies.” We can all be glad that our country has come such a long way from the 1800s in terms of government.

Were Hamilton still alive, his meticulous attention to cartography and to the lengths and durations of destinations would probably lead him to be recruited as a consultant by our contemporary warring parties. If the Army or the Maoists had paid as much attention to geography, this war would probably be over by now.

But even the British were not omniscient, and, as later documented, neither were they omnipotent. Hamilton, talking about the “swelling in the throat” of Nepalis, theorizes that this must be due to drinking water that came from mountains covered with perpetual snow. The discovery of iodine was still eight years away. In 1811 Bernard Courtois (1777-1838) would discover iodine while trying to help Napoleon make gunpowder. But until then, even Hamilton, that thorough, careful frontier-anthropologist, would remain in the dark about what caused goiters. ■

contemporary reader
of different groups



Business Unusual

The Raj Parishad has come up with the obvious: It believes that the King's role in Nepali politics is central, and that if Nepal is to tide through its deep-seated problems, the monarchy has to get back to its activist ways. Unsurprisingly, the King's privy council blames the political parties for all the ills currently plaguing the country. The Royal Nepal Army is seen as the ultimate savior. Sacchit Shumshere Rana, member of the Parishad and former chief of the RNA asserts, "Everything except the Army has collapsed due to the all-pervasive corruption." The Maoists, he believes, are nothing but the result of this dangerous decadence. At the conclusion of its controversial meet last week, the Parishad unapologetically declared, "His Majesty's patronage and guidance will provide answers to all the problems."

The Raj Parishad prescription is provocative, divisive and out of sync with public opinion. We have little doubt that the majority of Nepalis still want the King to remain firmly within the confines of a constitutional monarchy and want the political parties to regain the driver's seat in national politics. While the Nepali people still have huge issues with individual politicians, this should not be mistaken for a blank check for the Palace or the Army to intervene politically. If anything, the people are as fed up with the Palace as they are with the parties—the two don't see eye to eye on anything. The net result is a feeling among the public that neither is able to pull the country back from the abyss. The fact that the constitutional forces have especially drifted apart after Oct. 4, 2002 is telling. The drift continues, three appointed governments later.

Indeed, the Palace often gives the impression that it listens more to a narrow group of Kathmandu elites, who seem to cringe at the very mention of political parties and politicians—most of whom also have huge constituencies outside the Valley. We are staring at a class divide of monumental proportions.

So who is benefiting from all this confusion? The Maoists, of course. They are happy to see the parties and the Palace run

each other down while they get to enjoy the occasional moral high ground. Prime Minister Deuba is deeply frustrated that the Maoists won't come to talks. This despite successes in lobbying both New Delhi and Washington to get additional weaponry (with promises for still more) and explicit support of the government's anti-Maoist campaign.

The Maoists, however, seem to be in no mood for talks. This points to two possibilities: Either that they have decided to fight to the finish, or, even more alarming, that Nepal's conflict has reached a point of no return. What was once described as a low-intensity internal conflict has transformed into a full-blown civil war, where, to borrow Michael Ignatieff's phrase, warriors have lost their honor. The National Human Rights Commission has documented 1,430 disappearances to date, which puts Nepal in the dubious company of such war-torn countries as Colombia.

It is time for the international community to step in, and not just with polite fact-finding missions. The venerable Economist, in its Dec. 4 editorial, warns of the power vacuum that may tempt Nepal's nervous neighbors to rush in. If India does that and China decides not to sit idle, the result would be disastrous. In its current state, Nepal is a serious security problem not just for Nepalis but the whole region, something New Delhi has already found out the hard way.

Which is why we call on the international community to take action now. There should be an immediate international conference on Nepal under U.N. aegis. The Economist politely describes Nepal as a failing state. We say this: Venture outside the Valley, and witness a failed state. Meanwhile, inside Kathmandu, the parties and the Palace continue to duel and its residents nonchalantly watch news of more deaths, destruction and dead-end politics.

Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor



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