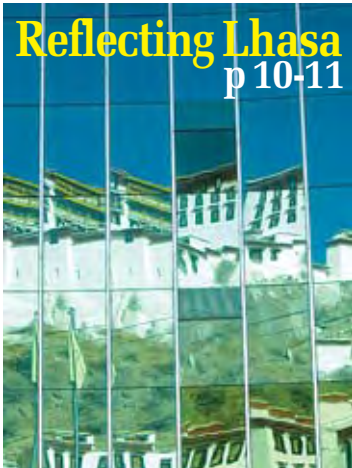


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Reflecting Lhasa p 10-11

# On a knife-edge

This narrow ridge is the only part of Kalikot that is in government hands



KUNDA DIXIT

Times nepalnews.com Weekly Internet Poll # 159

Q. Should the king talk directly to the Maoists?

Yes 71.2%  
No 27.5%  
Don't know 1.3%

Total votes: 1,016

Weekly Internet Poll # 160. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Which US presidential candidate would be better for the world?

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**KUNDA DIXIT** in MANMA

This may be Nepal in a microcosm: a knife-edge ridge not more than five metres across in places, a cluster of houses, a barrack, a CDO office, police station and helipad.

The district headquarter of Kalikot is a gunboat floating in a Maoist sea. Food, fuel, gin are all supplied by air. The only reason the Maoists haven't attacked is because Manma is protected by topography and landmines. The rebels may not even need to capture the town: government control goes barely beyond 20 metres below the crest of the ridge. The Maoists hold sway over all the 30 VDCs in this rugged and roadless district in western Nepal.

Manma's population has swelled because of the influx of

refugees, families of those killed or threatened by the Maoists. It is now a fortress prison, villagers can't come in and townspeople don't go out. Living in this bubble are elected VDC chairmen, ex-MPs, local representatives of the parties, civil servants, all surviving on rice flown in from Surkhet.

Since 2002, the people's representatives have been in limbo, this means no accountability in public spending. "We saw the Panchayat, we saw multi-party democracy, but never have we seen corruption as bad as this," says Tula Raj Bista of the UML. Bista has kept careful record of the Rs 500,000 that Kathmandu doles out to each VDC. No one from Manma can go to the villages, so the bureaucrats and officials have pocketed the Rs

1.5 million meant for 30 VDCs this year by faking suspension bridges, apple orchards and roads. "On paper, they showed 100 percent targets met and collected the money, not even zero percent of the work has been done," Bista adds angrily.

Manma never had a road, the Karnali Highway is being blasted out of solid rock, and even if the Maoists allow construction it is still three years away. The district has no airfield, work on the runway at Kotbada has stopped because the 300-strong army platoon there couldn't convince the contractor it was safe.

Phones have been out since the army cut 100 lines and the Maoists blasted the tower. The CDO censors all news going out. The district hospital doesn't have a doctor, no medicines are going to village

health posts. The only relief agency, WorldVision, has been hounded out by the administration, the WFP/GTZ food for work program has been suspended after the Maoists demanded a cut. Most teachers have abandoned their schools, there has been no postal service since 1999. None of the VDCs are functioning and nominated members don't dare go to their villages. No one sees the possibility of meaningful elections being held here.

Tek Bahadur Shahi is from the prime minister's NC-D party, but has lost all hope: "We live like prisoners here, Kalikot is going back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century."

**Editorial p2**  
**Bushwhacking**

See also p6-7



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# More FAQs

There are many things about our ancient culture and tradition that our founding forefathers bequeathed to the current generation, and being an obedient and disciplined race, we never bothered to question them. Until today.

The modern generation has a healthy scepticism of anything that harks back to pre-October Fourth and demands an explanation as to why we are mandatorily required by law to puff into our fingers if we inadvertently touch our Adam's Apple. And once we tell them that it is an effective antidote to goitre, the modern generation is perfectly satisfied with that explanation and promptly starts blowing on its fingers and thus passes on this important preventive remedy to the next generation of post-modern Nepali youth.

## UNDER MY HAT Kunda Dixit



Similarly, there are many other aspects of everyday life in Kathmandu that flummox even longtime residents, but they have been afraid to demand an explanation because of the newly-

promulgated Totally Arbitrary Detention Ordinance (TADO). Luckily, there is now a safe way to get answers to the questions vexing us, without fear of being locked up for a year without trial. Just ask me. That's right, simply send me an email with your frequently asked questions and I'll try my utmost to promptly delete it with all the spam.

And here is the moment you have all been waiting for, as we bring you this week's answers to your FAQs:

**Q: What, or who, is a *feu de joie* and how does one pronounce the darn thing?**

**A:** *Feu de joie* is a very spicy appetiser made up of fried goat's guts pickled in red hot chillies that is named after the simultaneous firing of hundreds of muskets every Dasain at Tundikhel to scare off our enemies because that's what it sounds like when aforementioned innards are being extirpated the day after. Government Health Warning: After partaking of a *feu de joie*, always keep a fire extinguisher on standby and notify the bomb squad. To pronounce: say *foie de gras* and *joie de vivre* over and over, faster and faster twice a day after meals.

**Q: Why is Darbar Marg the only street in the kingdom with fluorescent road dividers?**

**A:** So you can see the centreline at night, stupid.

**Q: Is there any significance to the presence of a snow leopard pelt and a stuffed tiger standing on its hind legs in the room where new cabinets are sworn in?**

**A:** The leopard is a subtle environmental message to new inductees that His Majesty's Government is serious about not letting fur creep back into fashion. The tiger is a reminder to the new prime minister that he, too, may one day be turned into a trophy.

**Q: How come Kathmandu has two-day weekends and the rest of the country has only Saturday off?**

**A:** To show the rest of the country who's boss. Next question.

**Q: Why are tourists allowed to bring only two perambulators into the kingdom?**

**A:** In case you didn't know: this is a country at war. All imports have to be vetted for possible military applications, especially if (like us) our armed forces intelligence can't figure out what on earth perambulators are. But they do sound like wheeled all-terrain vehicles, and we don't want them to fall into the wrong hands do we?

**Q: Is there any reason why you shouldn't be put under preventive custody under TADO for not blowing into your fingers after touching your Adam's Apple?**

**A:** None whatsoever.



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KIRAN PANDAY

**SLOW NEWS DAY:** Journalists surround Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and UML's Madhab Nepal to grill them on the possibility of an extension of the Dasain truce.



RAM HUMAGAIN/NEPALNEWS.COM

**BEING DIPLOMATIC:** Madhab Kumar Nepal explains the finer points of the situation to diplomats from Britain, Bangladesh, China and Russia at the UML Dasain tea party on Monday.



KUMAR SHRESTHA/NEPALNEWS.COM

**FOUR WHEEL DRIVE:** The damaged section of the Mugling-Narayan highway artery is still being repaired and trucks are allowed to pass one way.



KIRAN PANDAY

**NEPAL KO CHHORA:** Tyrolean climber, Reinhold Messner, with his wife at the civic reception for mountaineers to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first climb of Cho Oyu on Sunday.



KIRAN PANDAY

**REFLECTED GLORY:** Sneha Rana puts pre-Dasain finishing touches on a client at her newly-opened make-up studio in Sanepa.



**A**bout a year ago, three companies decided to merge and work towards promoting a single passion, Nepali classical music. They were East Meets West, Streamline Inc and Little Media and they were brought together by the realisation that the Nepali youth was getting influenced by western music. That is how 'Shukrabar' was born.

Once a month on a Friday, the Nepali public would be introduced to a relaxing evening out listening to Nepali classical music. The evenings became a hit and there has been no looking back. Well known bands such as Sitapati, Sur Sudha and Alankar have all performed at Shukrabar, but non-

# Band Friday

commercial artistes and musicians from all over the country are also being encouraged. Even a Japanese band 'Nookiki' has performed in a 'Shukrabar' event.

But there are still lots of other Nepali bands who have not yet performed, and that includes the up and coming band Kutumba, inspite of being vitally involved with 'Shukrabar'.

This month's 'Shukrabar' has once again come up with a special

treat at the Patan Museum called 'Bliss and Serenity' with Navraj Gurung on the tabla, Sujay Shrestha on the acoustic guitar and Sanjay Bhakta Shrestha on the ishraj. Three guest artistes are also performing with Samsung Nepali on the sarangi, Raman Maharjan on the flute and Raju Maharjan on the percussion. Tickets available at the venue. ●

(Aarti Basnyat)

Contact: Mangal K Maharjan 4256411  
www.shukrabar.com.np

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Herojig takes a wrong turn on trek and winds up in Lakeside.

HeroJig's Adventures can also be seen at [www.extreme-nepal.com](http://www.extreme-nepal.com)

#42 © 2001 by jigme gaton - read. love. write.

**ABOUT TOWN**

**FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS**

- ❖ **The Faces of Time and Colours of Sensibility** Paintings by Durga Baral at the Siddhartha Art Gallery. Until 31 October.
- ❖ **Works Influenced by Tibet** Paintings by Tashi Tenzxy Raptan Tsang at Gallery Moksh, Jhamshikhel. Until 5 November.

**EVENTS**

- ❖ **World Peace Through Spiritualism** A talk program by Ravi Shankar on 31 October at 2PM, Hotel Radisson, Lazimpat. 5526222, 2030229
- ❖ **Hasya Bahar** A program featuring comic poets from India and Nepal at Royal Nepal Academy, 5PM on 1 November.
- ❖ **Soaltee Crowne Plaza Super Sixes 2004** at Tribhuban University grounds from 29 October to 1 November. 4273999, [www.ournepal.com](http://www.ournepal.com)
- ❖ **Citizen Berlusconi** a film on how the media mogul Italian prime minister got to power and is staying there, 5PM at The Film Club, Baggikhana, Patan Dhoka on 31 October. 5542544
- ❖ **WCN Amateur Nature and Wildlife Photography Competition** for amateur photographers. Deadline 30 November. 5524202, [www.wcn.org.np](http://www.wcn.org.np)
- ❖ **Bluebird Festive Blast** Shopping specials for Tihar at both Tripureswor and Lazimpat outlets.

**MUSIC**

- ❖ **Heart Sutra on Shukrabar** a musical evening, 5.30PM onwards at Patan Museum Courtyard on 29 October. Entrance Rs 350
- ❖ **Women in Concert Part II** in support of the Circus Children Project, 7PM onwards on 31 October at Dechenling Garden. 4412158, 4416387. Entrance Rs 750, includes dinner.
- ❖ **Ramailo Saanjh** with Ishwor Gurung and the Himalayan Feeling at Dwarika's Hotel, 7PM to 10PM on 3 November. Entrance Rs 1200, includes snacks and dinner. 4479488
- ❖ **Tata Young Live** at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu on 5 November, 7.30PM onwards. Entrance Rs 2,500. 4720382, 2081040
- ❖ **Fusion Night** at the Rox Bar. Every Wednesday from 6PM onwards. 4491234
- ❖ **Deo** at Not Just The Jazz Bar Fridays at Hotel Shangri-la, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Jatra Friday Nites** Live music by The Strings. 4256622
- ❖ **Live music** at Moksh. Full Circle on Fridays. 7PM onwards, free entry.

**FOOD**

- ❖ **Charcoalz** a barbecue of western, Indian and Mongolian delights at Hotel Yak & Yeti, 6PM to 10PM. Till 30 November.
- ❖ **The Sizzling Stone Age Experience** at Rox Restaurant, Hyatt from 6PM onwards. Till 31 October. 4491234
- ❖ **Oktober Festival** at Dwarika's Hotel on 29 October. Includes live music by Abhaya and the Steam Injuns, 7PM onwards. 4479488
- ❖ **La Soon** Restaurant and Vinotheque, moved in the lane next to the Egyptian Embassy, Pulchowk for spacious indoor and outdoor seating. 5537166
- ❖ **Genuine Thai** cuisine at Royal Lotus, Bakhundole. 5521231
- ❖ **Delicious barbecue dinner** Fridays at Summit Hotel. 5521810
- ❖ **Friday Nights** at Subterranea Club Kilroy. 4412821
- ❖ **Farm House Café** Unlimited nature with delicious meals at Park Village Hotel. 4375280
- ❖ **Café Bahal** Newari and continental cuisine under the giant Cinnamon tree at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4700632
- ❖ **Vegetarian Creations** at Stupa View Restaurant. 4480262
- ❖ **Splash Spring BBQ** Wednesday and Friday evenings, 6PM onwards. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu.
- ❖ **Executive Lunch** at Toran Restaurant, Dwarika's. 4479488
- ❖ **The Beer Garden** at Vajriyanta, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Dwarika's Thali** Lunch at the Heritage courtyard. 4479488
- ❖ **The Tharu Kitchen** at Jungle Base Camp. [Junglebasecamp@yahoo.com](mailto:Junglebasecamp@yahoo.com)



**GETAWAYS**

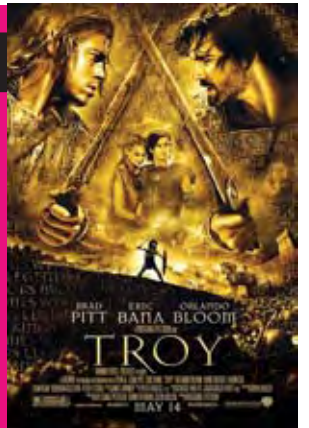
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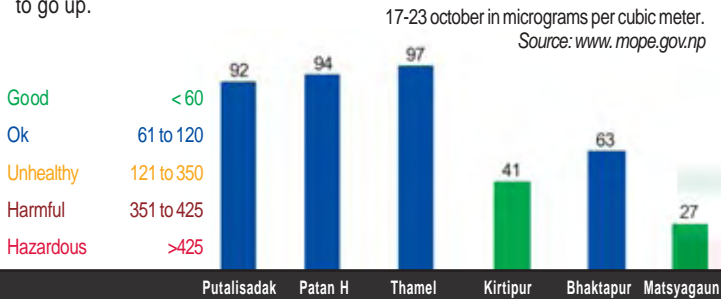
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**KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY**

With the festival season, and the drop in traffic the pollution levels in Kathmandu took a break, as indicated by this graph. Even in heavy traffic areas such as Putali Sadak and Bhaktapur, concentrations of PM10 particles were relatively okay. In residential areas such as Thamel, though, the level had increased in comparison to the weeks before. Too many people driving there? But with winter setting in and inversion already visible, the concentration of soot and dust is sure to go up.



**NEPALI WEATHER**

by MAUSAM BEED



Despite the end of the monsoon, the northwesterly jet is infusing the Himalayan region with moisture which has increased cloud cover, brought drizzles in the hills and the first snows down to 4,000 m in the mountain valleys. The northwesterlies combined with overcast afternoons have brought down the maximum temperature and this trend will continue over the weekend. The minimum temperature will now go into the single digits, bringing ground fog which will be burned off by mid-morning. Conclusion: valley residents expect further drop in mercury, misty morning, and partly cloudy afternoons with chances of brief showers.

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# A thoroughly modern Becky Sharp

In *Vanity Fair*, Mira Nair wants her audience to smell the shit

*Vanity Fair* being shot in the Edwardian English town of Bath, and Mira Nair (below, right).



DANIEL B HABER in NEW YORK

The opening scenes of the latest screen adaptation of Thackeray's early 19<sup>th</sup> century novel *Vanity Fair* take place in the teeming streets of London (actually shot in Bath), and the camera jostles with squealing pigs and other Dickensian denizens of the gutter. The mise-en-scene calls to mind Oscar Wilde's epigram that 'we are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking up at the stars'—which is what its heroine Becky Sharp does.

Although on the surface one might be tempted to compare Mira Nair's opulently costumed but modestly-budgeted (\$23 million) *Vanity Fair* to the more manicured Merchant-Ivory Productions period pieces which also have an Indian connection, but the gutsy director of *Salaam Bombay*, *Monsoon Wedding* and *Kama Sutra* says: "Pardon my French, but I wanted the audience to wake up and smell the shit!"

Just before flying back to Nepal, we caught the movie at a charity screening

sponsored by the Indo-American Council for the Arts to benefit the Salaam Baalak Trust (SBT) which rehabilitates millions of street children in India. It was established in 1988 after the international success of *Salaam Bombay*. With each success Mira says she holds charity screenings and donates proceeds to SBT. *Salaam Bombay's* urchin hero Shafiq, for instance, is now settled and driving a taxi in Bangalore.

Nair, like her screen heroine Becky Sharp, is a self-propelled woman. Since her student days, Nair told us, she was attracted to *Vanity Fair* which Thackeray called "a novel without a hero"—instead of a male hero there is a heroine. The protagonist, Becky Sharp, is a young orphan girl born of an impecunious artist and French chorus girl who becomes a governess and works her way up to the highest echelons of Regency society—even dancing before the Regent and literally rubbing elbows with royalty.

Becky is played by American actress Reese Witherspoon. As Nair sees it, Witherspoon's portrayal of Becky's

meteoric rise is very American.

Although English readers of Thackeray's day would have liked to have seen the brash Becky Sharp get her comeuppance, Nair would have none of it and made Becky more sympathetic and more contemporary: "Today, Becky would be championed for crossing classes."

Commenting on her admiration of Becky Sharp, whom one of the characters derides as not simply a social climber, but "a mountaineer", the director defends Becky as a modern day feminist who bucked the system. "I saw Becky as a kind of early feminist—wanting more. [Masculine] attributes like ambition or desire were perceived as wicked then, now they're not. Becky is a survivor. She didn't like the cards that society dealt her. So she created her own deck, and created it at a time when a woman was supposed to sit still in a drawing room and hope a guy was going to come and propose."

That Nair's *Vanity Fair* resonates with contemporary audiences should not be surprising. The changelessness of basic

human nature in the face of change explains the continued vitality of *Vanity Fair*, and in spite of its costumes—which are fashionably stunning in the movie—it still seems as fresh as ever.

Thackeray was born in Calcutta, and concludes his novel asking the ultimate yogic questions as Mira Nair interpolates them: "Which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has our desire? Or, having it, is satisfied?" Nair ends her movie on an upbeat note in India, which the novel only alludes to and where her screen anti-hero Becky ends up, married to a merchant of the East India company and it almost looks like a grand Bollywood ending. Drawing on her Indian heritage, Nair brings out the underlying Indian colonial element of the novel.

Wonder if the premier screening of *Vanity Fair* in Kathmandu could also be turned into a charity event to raise money for Nepal's own abandoned children like Indo-American Council for the Arts did in New York last month to benefit the Salaam Baalak Trust? ●

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# No China policy

## Unlike previous US elections, this campaign has seen a surprising lack of China-bashing

With China's rapid growth increasingly affecting a wide range of issues worldwide, it has become expedient for US presidential candidates to blame China for some of America's domestic problems. But in this year's US



CHINA SHOP  
Fan Gang

presidential election campaign, China bashing has been virtually non-existent. There are good reasons for this welcome change.

Recent US elections rarely spared China, which found itself a frequent target of populist demagoguery. Its exchange-rate regime, which pegs the renminbi to the US dollar, was blamed for the mounting US trade deficit. Never mind that America's bilateral trade deficit with China, even including

US market for imported clothing.



Hong Kong, accounts for less than one-fifth of the total US deficit: growing imports from China and more direct investment by US companies supposedly fuelled US unemployment.

Similarly, the unfinished

reforms in China's banking sector and state-owned enterprises have been used as evidence of state subsidies for dumping activities. Although the majority of China's exports now come from private companies that receive virtually

no loans from state banks, American candidates in previous elections routinely sought to curry favour with working class voters by vowing to protect US jobs against China's supposedly unfair business practices. The job issue

could be exploited further by citing poor working conditions, low wages, child labour, and other problems commonly found in developing countries.

Attacking a communist country has always seemed to offer American politicians a convenient way to appeal to the average voter. After all, most US voters can be trusted not to learn how other countries, let alone countries in east Asia, really work. But this time, George W Bush and John Kerry both know that it would be unwise to bash China too hard. American companies and the entire US economy have a huge stake in China now, so neither candidate has an interest in rocking the boat.

A candidate may promise more anti-dumping actions against Chinese goods, vow to press harder on China to change its exchange rate regime, or sharpen criticism of China's weak enforcement of intellectual property rights, but over-protectionism may make a candidate look irresponsible in 2004.

Indeed, protectionism can do nothing to reduce America's trade deficit and stanch domestic unemployment. No matter how much politicians blame others, growing US imports mean greater reliance on international markets, and some China factor in America's investment portfolio is needed to compete against European and Japanese firms.

China's geopolitical importance to the US has grown immensely since 9/11. At least for now, engaging China in the global fight against terrorism is in America's interest. China does have some common interests in fighting Islamic extremist terrorism, and it did not try to block America's path to the Iraqi war in the UN Security Council.

Of course, America still wants to contain China and prevent it from becoming a major regional and world power. But that remains a long-term strategic goal, not the stuff of presidential campaigns, especially when China seems too weak to pose any immediate threat to the US on any front in the foreseeable future.

China has never been a positive factor in American politics; so, from its perspective, the less it is mentioned in this US election season, the better.

The relative silence about China in the US these days may be merely due dominance of the Iraq War in the news. Yet it may also indicate that America's political elite are in the process of facing up to new realities and adjusting their view of China accordingly. ●

(Project Syndicate)

Fan Gang is Professor of Economics at Beijing University and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and Director of the National Economic Research Institute, China Reform Foundation.

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theoretical argument. Practically, elections are impossible for now because neither the Maoists nor the parties have agreed to it. The royal move of 4 October 2002 continues to be controversial. That is why the only meeting point of all the forces in the country is the reconstruction of the state. It is toward this end that all quarters must work together.

**Running for life**

*Nepal Samacharpatra, 27 October*

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

DAILEKH- Dasain gave many people in the district a chance to escape the Maoists. A large number of villagers fled their homes during the ceasefire called by both the rebels and the government. The Maoists had announced that every villager would have to join their war full-time and remain underground. Fearing forced recruitment many villagers fled to India. They managed to sneak through the Maoist checkpoints claiming to visit district headquarters. Thousands of youth, elderly citizens and children fled from the remote villages.

A large number of villagers who were unable to pay for bus fares are refugees in the district headquarters begging human rights activists and journalists for food and shelter. The villagers said that the Maoists were creating pressure with extortion, threats and abductions. "The government has to start the peace process quickly. If not, then it has to protect and support displaced families," said a villager who had to abandon his house and land to escape the rebels. Many of the displaced families came together from Naumule village. They are now planning to form an anti-Maoist group in the hopes of returning to

their village and getting rid of the rebels.

"We can do this if the government gives us full support," said displaced teacher, Gegan Shahi from Naumule. The Maoists seized all his property, locked his house and threatened to execute his family. Many other villagers are also destitute. "This is the time when we harvest crops and store food for winter," said a worried villager who had to leave behind his standing crops. "I have no hope from this government. I think I will die working here," says 85-year old Hari Kala Shahi, who is forced to grind stones with her weak old hands to make a living.

**Cease ceasefire**

*Annapurna Post, 28 October*

अन्नपूर्ण पोस्ट

PALPA — A few days before *tika*, during the Dasain truce, two innocent civilians were executed by the Armed Police Force (APF). Tulsi Gaha and Narbahadur Rana were shooting pheasants at Ruchang jungle without realising that a APF patrol was passing. Gaha and Rana were arrested and dragged to Nabaratnapur. Villagers were accused of supporting the Maoists and forced to stay indoors. After a while, they heard gunshots. "Even in their last breath, they tried to convince the soldiers that they were not Maoists," recalls a tearful Um Bahadur Rana. As the villagers came out of their houses, they were beaten up. "The APF accused us of sheltering the Maoists," Durga Thapa said. The villagers were made to gather near the school and dig a grave into which the bodies were dumped. Despite statements from witnesses, the district authorities have not acknowledged the incident.

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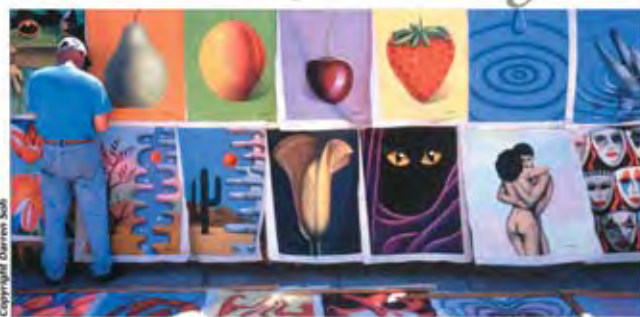
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# Our cult of violence

The victory of good over evil must be enacted in the triumph of peace over violence

There was a time when brutal violence was something that happened elsewhere. Indeed, Nepalis took pride their country in being known as peaceful and non-violent. But after 10,000 deaths in less than a decade, many more missing and

**GUEST COLUMN**  
**Rajendra Pradhan**



brutalised, creeping religious and ethnic violence, we have to question whether we were ever as non-violent and peaceful as commonly represented.

Is it that our culture of peace has always co-existed with a culture of violence? Doesn't the viciousness of everyday life and the symbolic brutal violence of religious myths and rituals feed into the magma of cruelty hidden in the bowels of our culture, waiting to erupt? And have we begun to localise the global culture of violence?

Many Nepalis experience structural violence in their everyday lives. Women, ethnic groups and Dalits suffer social

exclusion, discrimination and oppression, and are often physically and verbally abused. The desperate struggle for existence and dignity by the poor is surely one of the most pervasive forms of structural social violence. It is a part of our history, social structure and culture, and until recently were not seriously questioned but considered a normal part of our tradition or culture. Even now, we do not aim to eliminate or reduce structural violence, but rather escape from it, be part of the oppressors instead of the victims. Perhaps physical violence always lurks in the wings of history to either suppress resistance against structural violence or overthrow it.

Physical violence is an important part of the religious discourse, practice and imagination of many Nepalis. Take Dasain, which at one level is a harvest festival, when we visit relatives to receive blessings from seniors and feast. At another level, it reinforces and legitimises the authority of the king, the power holders and senior family members. Yet at another level, the carnage of animal sacrifices, the open flouting of naked khukuris associated with Dasain glorify bloodshed.

According to one *katha*, evil forces, represented by various *danabs* and *asuras*, threaten the cosmos and gods who are unable to defeat them. The gods combine to create a feminine force, Shakti, to destroy the evil forces. The goddess can destroy evil only

when she herself takes on an even more fierce form and ultimately is able to slay the demon Mahisasura who has taken the form of a buffalo. The goddess sometimes appears no different from the evil she fights. In sacrificing animals during Dasain, Hindus are both slaying evil as well as propitiating the fierce goddess, whose thirst for blood has to be quenched.

If the gory slaying of animals is one of the central elements of Dasain, then surely violence is one of the central motifs of Nepali Hinduism. Perhaps this ritualistic violence has been secularised such that people considered evil (class enemies, enemies of the state or whoever) are to be slaughtered. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the two forces when both claim to be fighting evil.

Physical violence is a normal daily occurrence around the world brought to us by a voyeuristic media: bombings, burnings, beheadings, not only of soldiers, insurgents, freedom fighters and rebels but also unarmed civilians.

This combination of structural social violence, secularisation of religious violence, and localisation of the global culture of violence through media has fostered a 'new' culture of physical violence in Nepal that threatens to engulf us. We can only overcome it by reinvigorating a culture of peace, tolerance and coexistence. ●

## BUSHWHACKING

America leaves such a large global footprint that we have always suggested, a bit apocryphally, that non-Americans should be allowed to vote in US elections.

After all, less than half the eligible voters even bother to cast their ballots in US federal elections every four years. If Americans don't care who governs them, then why not give the vote to the rest of us who do? US foreign, economic, trade and environmental policy affects the whole world, and yet we don't have a say in who the next occupant of the White House will be. Not fair.

From America's unilateral global war on terror to global warming, we all end up paying for its greed, thirst, self-indulgence and supremacy. Why is it that powers, whether global or regional, are so ham-handed? There is a serious lack of subtlety, a chronic reliance on arm-twisting, to get things done. Bullying is counter-productive, even to ultimately get your own way. Yet they never learn from mistakes and bamboozle their way with petty-minded insensitivity, alienating even friends.

Ever since George W Bush won unconvincingly in 2000 and became president, distaste for America around the world has grown by leaps and bounds. After 9/11 when the world said "We are all Americans", instead of being smart about it Bush's neocon advisers rushed headlong into war. First they needlessly bombed Afghanistan into smithereens, then they lied about Saddam's WMDs and links to al Qaeda to invade Iraq in an ill-concealed plan to distribute war booties to cronies and secure oil supplies.

We in Nepal have always felt insulated from the rest of the world. But in a globalised economy, who rules in Washington has a direct impact on our tourism, on how fast our glaciers melt, whether our garments get tariff-free entry into markets, and it becomes a matter of life or death for our citizens when they are slaughtered in Iraq to punish America.

Bush has been a disastrous president for the US and to the rest of the world. A

recent GlobeScan and University of Maryland poll in 35 countries showed that if the rest of the world could vote, Kerry would win 46 percent to Bush's 20 percent.

Given the alternative, on November Second our vote also goes to Kerry.



# The sword above our heads

TADO may be part of Deuba's preparation for elections

Dasain has come and gone, the lilting strings of the *Malshri Raga* evoking the impermanence of this family festival. For a brief week, the temporary, informal ceasefire allowed us all to pretend that harmony had returned to the land.

It was a public relations plus point for the Maoists to announce on the eve of

unilaterally halting offensive action. It forced the government to reciprocate, which it did with extreme reluctance. Now, even this uneasy truce is over and nobody knows what lies in store.

If the Terrorism and Disruptive Activities (Control and Punishment) Ordinance promulgated last week is any indication, we are headed for a long winter of discontent as the security agencies seem determined to force all political opposition into submission.

Ever since TADO was passed by the parliament, it has been shrouded in a thick cloud of controversy. Human Rights

activists objected to the provision under which security officials can put anybody in preventive detention for up to 90 days. After the dissolution of the parliament in early 2002, successive governments have been re-promulgating the act as ordinances with all provisions intact.

And the security forces have been using its preventive detention powers with full impunity. In fact, suspects freed on judicial order have immediately been re-arrested sometimes right from the court premises.

With the recent amendment in the act through an ordinance, the period of power to arrest and detain a suspect has been increased to one year. To detain any suspect for an initial six months, the designated officer doesn't even need a second opinion, he can arrest anybody on his own discretion. To extend the period of detention by another six months, he doesn't need permission of a court of law, just the concurrence of the Home Ministry.

We understand the 'Unified Command' had wanted premier Surya Bahadur Thapa to recommend this

amendment to the king for promulgation, but Thapa resisted long enough to be ousted. His successor, Sher Bahadur Deuba, has proved to be much more pliant: the amendment has been made through an executive decision without even the pretence of a public debate. As is his wont, Deuba seems to have signed on the dotted line without thinking of the implications.

If the experience of the past two-and-a-half years are anything to go by, TADO will have very little impact on the insurgency. Nearly everywhere outside Kathmandu Valley, the local administration is confined to the district headquarters and elsewhere the Maoist writ runs large. So who is this draconian ordinance aimed at? Inevitably it will be local political party activists who are keeping the facade of multi-party politics alive in the district headquarters, urban centres and Kathmandu Valley. Their fate will be in the hands of the Chief District Officer.

The amendment and re-promulgation of this ordinance have been done on

recommendation of the council of ministers, but its UML members seem to have failed to realise the potential of misuse against their own cadre in the countryside. When (it is no longer a question of 'if') the UML is evicted from Singha Darbar and forced to hit the streets again, its leaders will rue the day they signed what is in effect warrants for their own arrests.

Amidst all this, the agenda for peace has been pushed further into the background. Deuba now wants an election instead, the one he had announced he was going to hold in November 2002. Terrorising the opposition with TADO may be one of the necessary preparations for the kind of election his sponsors have in mind.

Apart from the security forces, the Maoists will be the biggest beneficiaries of this toughened TADO. It gives them fresh ammunition against the legitimacy of a government of royal nominees and insist on negotiations directly with the king. A stronger Maoist fold only means one thing: the prospects of peace will remain as doubtful as ever. ●

**STATE OF THE STATE**  
**CK Lal**



Dasain that they were



LETTERS

YES AND NO

The fact that the number of people who say they will vote for the Maoists if they disarm has dropped from 20.9 percent in the 2003 nationwide poll to 14.9 percent in the Kathmandu Valley poll could be due to two reasons: this was a poll in the capital where people are generally less supportive of the Maoists and also because of the violence against ordinary people that the Maoists have engaged in the past two years. But a non-violent Maoist entity still seems to have more support than any of the erstwhile parliamentary parties, which should be a sobering thought to our overground political leaders and perhaps a timely reminder to the underground ones that they should join the mainstream before their support falls any further.

Gyan Subba, email

Your Kathmandu Valley public opinion poll, if it was really meant to reflect the views of the nation, is ridiculous. Though I hail from Kathmandu, I hardly think its population is representative of the ethnic and ideological mix of rest of the nation. We may have migrants from all parts of the nation, but it is not proportionate to the nationwide sizes of various groups. You should also give more details of the methodology used for public opinion polls. Considering that a majority of the population has no means of modern communication and that even the best surveys in the West suffer from such difficulties, I doubt that your survey results are accurate. I suspect that you just want to further yellow journalism and tout your own doomsday analysis of the nation with such surveys.

K Shrestha, email

I analysed the results of the Himalmedia Public Opinion Poll in great detail, and found the comparison to your previous nationwide polls revealing. Indeed, Kathmanduites are more conservative than the rest of the country. However, given that nearly half your respondents were recent migrants one could safely assume that the results are an accurate depiction of the national mood. If so, there are a lot of lessons here for the political parties and the Maoists. In his roundup of the poll results ('Yes and no', #218) Kunda Dixit says 'the people blame the king and the Maoists for the mess'. I don't see that reflected anywhere in the results printed in *Nepali Times*. Granted, the people don't seem to approve of the king's sacking of the prime minister two years ago (50.66 percent), but 49 percent think he is actually in charge, and an overwhelming 45 percent think he should talk directly with the Maoists to resolve the crisis. That does not mean they blame him for the mess. King Gyanendra is in a dilemma because he is damned if he does and damned if he doesn't. If he tries to steer the countries back on course, as most of his subjects seem to want, the political parties will all cry foul and call it 'regression'. So what is he supposed to do?

Name withheld, email

INSURGENCY

David Brooks comment 'Elections at the time of insurgency' (#218) must have helped create a supportive environment for the government that has decided to go to polls in case the Maoists do not respond to its invitation for meaningful dialogue. As Brooks argues, the situation in Nepal is similar to that in El Salvador 20 years ago and I think that elections can be held in Nepal as well. But, it is always better for the government to consult and seek support from the political parties lying outside the spectrum of the current four party pro-government alliance. The elected government will have a constitutional base, right and power to deal with the Maoists and yield the result that its predecessors couldn't. I don't think anyone can question its legitimacy in case free and fair elections are held. The recent elections in Afghanistan must have also produced proof to leaders, civil society and general public in Nepal that polls can be conducted in spite of threats to disturb the polling process. And it is the only way out of the current impasse as it answers the doubts of agitating parties and rebels that have questioned the government's legitimacy.

Bikendra Shamsheer Thapa, email

VEGETARIANS UNITE

Three cheers to Jemina Sherpa's 'Conversations piece' (Nepali Pan, #218) for coming out with a wonderfully entertaining article on vegetarianism. I'm sure being a Sherpa, it hasn't been easier for Jemina to be a vegetarian. She seems to have gone through exactly my experience with giving up meat. Having been a vegetarian for five years now, I don't care to remember why I became one, and am thoroughly fed-up with constant pestering questions. What I can confidently say is that I'm in much better shape than I was before and I'm enjoying my food much more. We should all get together and open a Nepal Vegetarian Society to look after the interest of us vegetarians and promote the rights of the minority.

Shalav S Rana, email

DOODAH

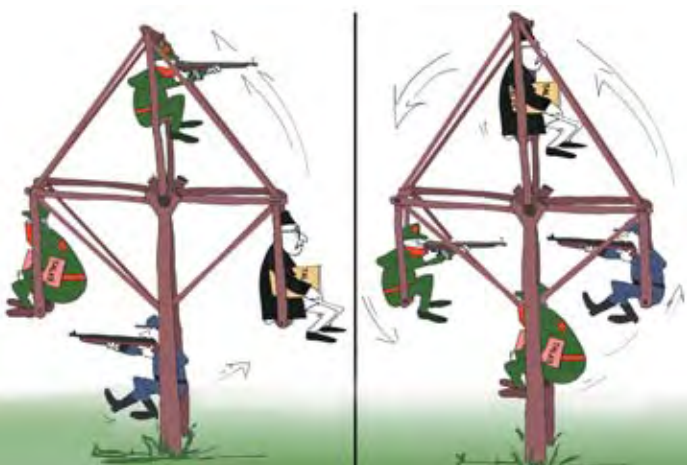
I have tried to order 16 crates of the Palmrazorphone Superturbo LX-cum-Selforganiser (Under My Hat, #218) via Google and Amazon, but have been unable to find it listed for sale. Can I order directly from Kunda Dixit? Having heard of this doodah, I simply do not know how I, or my wife, can live happily without it.

Jon Swan, email

CORRECTIONS

Due to a graphic design error in the Himalmedia Opinion Poll chart for the question 'If the Maoists gave up arms and elections were held, who would you vote for?' the bar for the answer No one/won't vote for 2004 was inadvertently dropped. It was 15 percent.

The page 2 cartoon 'Another Dasain comes around' was by Rajesh KC.



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NAVIN SINGH KHADKA  
in JANAKPUR

The houses of the Shah and Thakur families in Janakpur face each other across the street. But they are not just neighbours, the youngest sons of both families were among the 12 Nepali workers killed in Iraq on 31 August.

Nearly two months later, the country is preoccupied with its own conflict. The September First riots are just a memory, and the media has moved on to other stories. But for the families, shock of their losses are still raw.

Some family members are in denial. Bodhan Shah was among those killed, but his sister still doesn't believe he is dead. "They never showed the faces of those killed, perhaps they just wanted to warn off foreigners they shouldn't come to Iraq and showed the bodies of other people," she reasons.

Other family members have accepted the deaths, but are now hoping the bodies can somehow be found and brought home for last rites. Both families have received the Rs 1 million compensation the government, but they want the finality of funerals to provide closure.

"We think if the government has the will it can certainly bring back the bodies," Shah's youngest sister says, tears rolling down her cheeks.

Across the dusty street, Manoj Thakur's parents accept their son's death. "What has been done can't be undone," says Manoj's mother, Sumitra Devi Thakur, as she breaks down looking at the photograph of her youngest son. She and her husband, Ram, both agree their

# Dying for a better life

Nearly two months after the murder of 12 Nepalis in Iraq, Janakpur families who lost their sons are still in shock



Ram Thakur and his wife Sumitra Devi with a picture of their son, Manoj who was among 12 Nepalis killed in Iraq. BBC ONLINE

son needn't have gone to Iraq. "He wanted to earn a higher salary and just wouldn't listen to us," says Ram Thakur, "he wanted to strike it rich."

Both Bodhan and Manoj believed they would make a fortune in Iraq after they met the local agents of Moonlight Consultants, the manpower company in Kathmandu that had sent nine out of the 12 Nepalis to the Gulf. Both the young men in the early 20s were promised \$700 each to work in a US army base in Iraq. The equivalent of Rs 50,000 a month was just too tempting for the two jobless youths.

But after landing in Jordan,

they found out their salaries would be only about \$150. "After that, Bodhan began to call us saying he wanted to return but his employer had taken away his passport," Bodhan's brother Satyanarayan told us last week. "We told him to do his best to come back, and then we didn't hear from him again."

In Thakur's case, his family members suggested he work for at least a year even if the salary was not what was promised. "But, we never knew the risks involved," his father said. Both the Shah and Thakur families had borrowed a lot of money to afford the recruitment agents' fees to send their sons to Iraq.

They needed the income to pay back the loans. Bodhan's family mortgaged a portion of the family property to get Rs 250,000 to pay the middleman. Manoj's father paid the fee thinking that with his youngest son's earnings he would soon be able to pay off the debts and the loan he had taken from a finance company to build his house.

After the news of the murders in Iraq was flashed on television, Bodhan's family caught the local agent and held him for more than a week. When the agent promised to pay back Rs 150,000, they let him go. "But he has disappeared and the government has not been able to catch any of the crooks," says Satyanarayan Shah.

In Kathmandu, all that the Labour Ministry has done is cancel the registration of Moonlight Consultant. Not a single person from the recruitment agency has been arrested while the 12 Nepalis had repeatedly said in videos broadcast before the killings that Moonlight's Pralhad Giri was the person who duped them. Giri is also at large.

K B Rana, one of the directors of Moonlight, maintains his company had

sent the nine Nepalis to Jordan and not Iraq. "After reaching Jordan, they were offered better salaries to work in the US camps in Iraq and they went there on their own," he told us.

However, the testimonies of the Thakur and Shah families in Janakpur prove that the men, their families and the manpower middlemen all knew they were going to Iraq and Jordan was only a stopover.

A study by the Nepal Overseas Employment Agents' Association has shown that more than 20,000 Nepalis are already in Iraq. Some of them returned home after the Nepalis were killed. In a letter sent to his brother in Kathmandu, Surdarshan KC of Lalitpur said he was safe enough in an US army camp because there are helicopter escorts everytime he drives a tanker truck twice a week. A dozen other Nepalis who reached Iraq with KC returned to Nepal because of the risk of kidnapping.

Despite all this, there was pre-Dasain rush here at the Dhanusha District Administration Office. The young men lining up were desperate for jobs abroad. One told us: "We will go anywhere but Iraq." ●

## November Second

All that's left now is the result

Never mind the months of bluster and rhetoric, the charges, allegations and anger. Forget the media hype, the debates, the advertising and the surging tide of money that propelled this election campaign in the United States.

All that's left now is the result, and nobody here, repeat nobody, knows what that will be. Poll after poll point to a dead heat, a horse race so close that a

HERE AND THERE  
Daniel Lak



digital camera might have to

be used to declare a winner. Or a court decision.

Were this a novel, it would be a page turner and of course, readers would be awaiting the sting in the tail, the surprise ending. Well, I've got a funny feeling that there won't be any surprises before election day. Short of the sort of thing Tom Clancy might write about, there are only four possible results, each candidate winning by either a small or large margin. It's almost expected that there'll be challenges, and bitter acrimony long after the winner and loser have been declared. Half the country won't believe the result, but they'll get on with life regardless.

So why all the fuss? Why is the United States election this year the biggest media event the world has even, bigger even than the World cup of Soccer and the Millennium events of 1999-2000?

In three words, George W Bush. This is a man who didn't even win the 2000

election by any fair standard, who was installed as president by a politically biased Supreme Court that stopped the counting of ballots in Florida and let a disputed result stand. In the past four years, he has started two wars and thumbed his nose at international convention and opinion any number of times. America, loved widely under Bill Clinton, is now loathed more than at anytime in recent history.

And don't forget too, Mr Bush stands where he does today, with a very real prospect of winning a second term in office, because of Osama Bin Laden.

The horrific bloodletting and terror of 11 September, 2001 brought to an end

months of political drift in Washington. On 10 September, George W Bush was one of America's least popular presidents. From the next day onward, he became a leader. His detractors would argue he did so by default, that a wrong and terrified people reached out to an office, not the man who held it. Others would say that Bush's undeniable moral certainty, his unwavering belief in his own gut instincts, these qualified him to be America's war president.

What of his opponent? Who in the international community can claim honestly to have even heard of John Kerry before this long election campaign? He labored for 19 years in the Senate with a

number of accomplishments to his credit, none—it's fair to say—that we were aware of before his presidential candidacy. He's made it very clear that he was something of a war hero. He has twice married rich women, and has raised impressive children. But still, what he has done to qualify him to be America's leader, to be the world's leader in troubled times?

So far, he has won some presidential debates and been rather convincing in his criticisms of Bush's policies in Iraq. In all things, he promises much and, like any politician, keeps details to a minimum. Asked what the main difference is between he and his opponent, he replies, in effect, "I am more competent, just ask my friends".

In 2004, with HIV/AIDS, global warming, terrorism, economic inequity, injustice on a grand scale and countless other problems begging to be addressed by a thoughtful, clear-thinking American president, these are the choices.

Two privileged white men who've never really had to earn a pay cheque to feed their families. Two members of the cult of power in Washington DC. Two people promising much of the same that has emanated from their country for 20 years now, with the differences only in nuance and presentation.

Yes, it matters which one of them wins, but I'm not convinced that the world will be a better place, whatever the result. ●





RAVI TULADHAR

## Pushed back decades

**KISHORE NEPAL** in BAJHANG

**B**ajhang's philosopher king, Jaya Prithvi Bahadur Singh, left a legacy of humanism and education that was way ahead of its time.

The district's capital, Chainpur, became one of the centres of learning in this otherwise illiterate region of remote western Nepal. Narendra Bahadur Rawal is the headmaster of the Satyabadi High School that Jaya Prithvi Bahadur set up 80 years ago.

But Rawal now lives in Chainpur and hasn't been back for three years after Maoists

bombed the school when he refused to close it down. "There is no one to take care of it and the quality of education is falling," says Rawal.

In terms of education, health and infrastructure, far-western Nepal has been pushed back decades. Even the modest achievements after 1990 have, by now, been all but obliterated.

Walking towards Chainpur past the ruggedly beautiful mountains and the dazzling presence of Saipal Himal on the northern horizon, we are jerked back to present-day reality. Three Maoists, one of

them wielding a revolver and the other scanning the mountains with a binocular stop us. The young comrade, Raktim, is furious because a local journalist filed a report saying he had been killed in an encounter.

"Journalists are being used by the reactionary old regime to spread slander. They are spies," he said angrily. Across western Nepal, journalists are often regarded as suspects, which reflects a growing insecurity and intolerance.

Bajhang has an airport, but it has no schedules. The Maoists take pot shots from across the Seti River at occasional helicopters that bring in foodgrain. The choppers are out of range, but they shoot anyway to scare the passengers and show their presence. The airport tower is still in ruins after attacks last year, telecommunication is out and the government offices are still gutted.

The army has shifted its base to Hemantabada because it is more secure and has intensified patrols. It killed four Maoists in Tamoil and Bhande village recently and the rebels retaliated with a blockade of Chainpur since September. This has created serious shortages of food and medicine essentials in the run-up to Dasain. Malumela, a wholesale market and the only supply point for the district, is closed and the Maoists guard all entry points.

Bed Prakash Joshi used to be a Nepali Congress member but gave up all political work in order to survive. He was paying his Maoist taxes regularly and trying to keep a low profile. Last month, the Maoists dragged him from his home at night and killed him near a school. They ordered that his body not be removed and forbade his family from performing last rites.

Most other kangris have fled to Dhangadi, Nepalganj or to India and the rebels have confiscated the property of those who have left. Forty-two of the 57 VDCs in Bajhang are not in control of the government. Dil Bahadur Singh, former vice chairperson of Bajhang DDC told us "We don't know what is happening in the other VDCs, no one can go there. Most schools have become Maoist training centres."

The UML has not been spared. Its network has been smashed and no party activist dares go back to the village after the rebels killed UML worker Man Bahadur Dhama last year. Since the UML joined the government, locals say it has become more dangerous for the party in the district.

Krishna Bohora of Surama is now a refugee in Chainpur. He doesn't know why he was singled out. "I am neither an active political worker nor a feudal landlord. I just inherited a little property from my ancestors. They looted everything, took away even the rags," he says.

The Maoists have been on a bridge-destroying spree, cutting off road links and making it difficult for the army. They destroyed a 36-year-old British-built bridge linking Darchula and Bajhang and also tried to blow up the only suspension bridge over Babli River near Chainpur.

Asked what Bajhang's main problem has been, Dil Bahadur Singh says without hesitation: "Transportation." But this roadless district has been pushed further back because of the destruction of existing bridges and the Maoists' prevention of the completion of the highway linking Chainpur to Darchula. Singh adds "Forget about roads, for now our only desire is peace." ●

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## Collateral

It used to take two days for fast walkers to travel from Kalikot and Jumla. Today, no one can go anywhere without a 'visa' from the Maoists, not even from one village to another. The Maoists are so paranoid about infiltration by army spies, that it makes this tiny slip of paper difficult to obtain. The *sifaris* is valid only for travel to designated areas and is timebound. In addition, the applicant has to agree to take responsibility for any security force operation in his village while he is away. So, no one goes anywhere anymore, no one wants to take that risk.

Rabindra Sajuwal is the only government employee still left at a health post in the village of Ramnakot. His 18-year-old wife, Harisobha, had a complicated pregnancy. Rabindra pleaded with the Maoists to be allowed to take his wife to Nepalganj for a caesarian, but permission was refused. Harisobha and her baby died two weeks ago.

The security forces and the district administration have stopped supply of all medical supplies to health posts in the district for fear that it will get into the hands of the Maoists. Even before the war, Kalikot's infant mortality and maternal mortality rates were nearly double the national average. Epidemics of gastro-enteritis, influenza and measles used to be commo. Today, even if there is an outbreak no one can bring the news to Manma. Mothers and children die silently in their homes.

## Gone forever

The main trail to Jumla is overgrown with vegetation. There are no herds of sheep and mountain goats that used to come down from Humla at festival time. The mule trains that used to go down to Dailekh to transport sugar, salt and grain have all but stopped. There have been no weddings for more than a year. Thousands of villagers used to come home for holidays from India this time of year, but on a whole week of travel there was just one group of four returning from Lucknow. "The Indians accused us of being Maoists and wouldn't pay us," said one youth, "we decided to come back, we'd rather stay in Nepal now." There is a Maoist ban on going to work in India, but many young men take treacherous jungle roads at night, risking wild animals, Maoist sentries and army patrols to get to the border.

Most tea shops and lodges along the trail are locked up or are in ruins. Man Bahadur Bista owns a small lodge by the thundering rapids of the Tila, a day's walk from Manma. He used to make a profit of Rs 2,000 a day from travellers halting for the night, now he makes nothing. Says Man Bahadur, "Those days are gone. Gone forever."



Man Bahadur Bista (right) has a bright smile as he poses with his family even though his tea shop has no business.

## Anti-spectacles

It is Ghatasthapana and all villagers in Pili have been forced to attend a day-long Maoist program. Many farmers are not happy because it is harvest time, but there are repercussions if they don't go. From 10 in the morning, they have been sitting in the dirt listening to speeches. Comrade Mukti was delivering a fierce tirade against "royal mongrels in Kathmandu" when a 12-year-old 'Whole Time' comrade ran up to the stage to tell him some journalists had arrived.

The reporters were garlanded, welcomed amidst boy scout style clapping, and then publicly rebuked. "We have to be vigilant about government CIDs coming here disguised as human rights workers and journalists, the people will deal strictly with such infiltrators," Mukti thundered. An hour more of this, after darkness had fallen, the meeting was declared closed with slogans against "the killer king backed by American imperialists and Indian expansionists".

Later, in the relative privacy of a teashop, Comrade Mukti played good cop, bad cop. "It is in our character to welcome you with garlands, you are free to observe and write," he said, adding, "but if you distort the truth, we will bash your teeth in. Remember Dekendra." And in a threat that had chilling overtones of the Khmer Rouge, he went on: "You think you can just walk into the village with your pen and spiral notebooks, wearing spectacles? The people have their own way of dealing with people in spectacles."

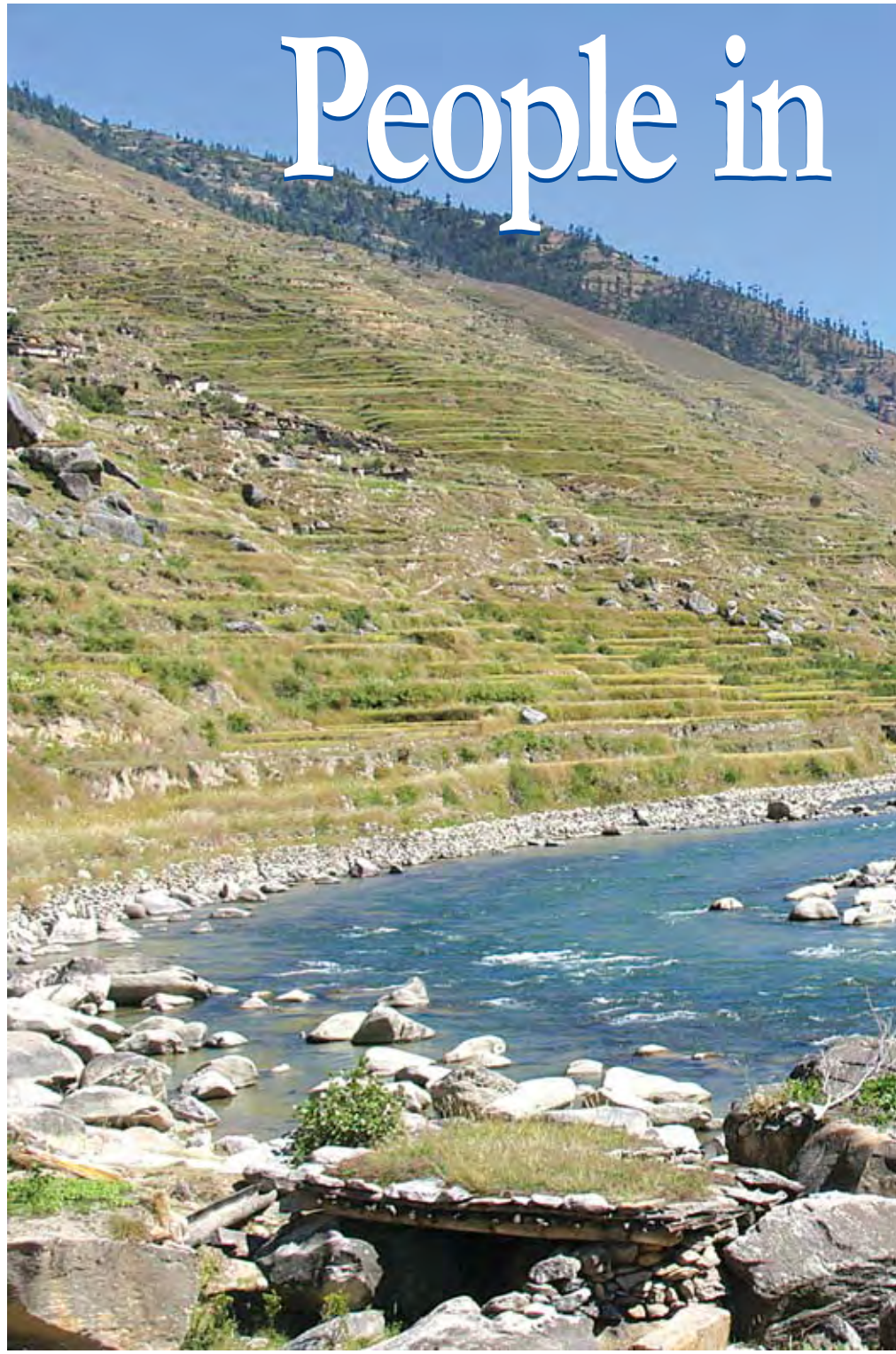


Comrade Mukti wears glasses himself, but doesn't like other people who wear them.

## Going underground

Jubari Lal Bhattarai used to run a small medicine shop in Jumla. Four years ago, fellow-villagers convinced him to move back to Kudari where there was no health post. "I came back, thinking idealistically that my people needed me," Jubari Lal recalls. He got trained as an assistant health worker, and ran a well-stocked drug store. Farmers from the surrounding mountains came down for treatment, and Jubari Lal subsidised the cost of their treatment with money from patients who could afford to pay.

After the Maoist attack on Jumla in October 2002, an army patrol in hot pursuit came through Kudari. Jubari Lal was suspected of treating wounded rebels, and his house and medicine shop blown up. The soldiers then threw his 10-year-old son, Rabindra, over the wall where he landed on a pile of broken bottles and cut his face. The wound infected and turned malignant, two years later the boy is still in hospital in the city where doctors are trying to save him. Six months ago, with his bank account frozen by the government and increasingly desperate, Jubari decided to go underground



# People in



Jubari Lal Bhattarai, with his youngest son, outside the ruins of his home and drug store that the army bombed two years ago.

and took on the name, Comrade Bipin.

Now, as the head of the 'village people's government' of Kudari, Jubari Lal has devoted himself once more to his people's welfare. "We have to strive towards self-sufficiency, this place has enough farms and orchards," he tells us, "with our cooperatives we can feed ourselves, there is no need to go to India. Let's shed our sweat and blood in our own country, why be enslaved by someone else?"

## No religion too

The roof has collapsed in a derelict wayside temple near Nangmo. A sign on the door says circumambulating the idol is banned, anyone wishing to worship should contact the concerned authorities, all coins should be thrown in from the window. Women are not allowed to wear jewelry anymore because they are "symbols of slavery". Most traditional melas and jatras have not been held for years.

"We will celebrate Dasain only after we are victorious," says Makar Bahadur Shahi, a comrade in Jubitha. "We want to stop all the rituals, superstition and exploitation in the name of religion." The Maoists say they haven't stopped families getting together at Dasain, but because of the restrictions on movement there isn't anyone visiting relatives for the festivals.

Mani Prasad Neupane in Lamra has a marigold garland above his door, and says it is to remember all the young family members who are away in India and haven't been home for four years. No one dares come home because the Maoists have demanded one person from every household. Four months ago, an army patrol killed four suspected

# the Red Zone



ALL PICS: KUNDA DIXIT



From Manma, Dirgha Raj Shahi points to his home in Sipakhana across the Karnali River. He hasn't been back in three years since he escaped from Maoist detention. Top: The main road from Kalikot to Jumla along the Tila used to be packed with travellers, this Dasain it was deserted.

Maoists on his doorstep. "The sons and daughters of the people end up dying," says Mani Prasad, his eyes welling up, "the generals and the big comrades are safe, it is the people who lay down their lives."

## Frontline teachers

At the frontline of this mindless war are the only government employees still left in the villages: assistant health workers and teachers. Without exception they have paid 5-10 percent of their monthly salary to the Maoists, and recently they had to hand over half their Dasain bonus. The Maoists don't trust them, saying they are "green snakes in the green grass", while the security forces think they are all Maoists. Unable to bear it any longer, all but the most committed teachers have fled, some have gone underground and joined the Maoists, for the rest it is a precarious balancing act.

Nabaraj Sharma Basanta was a teacher from Sipakhana and also worked as a journalist. He was abducted and killed by the Maoists two years ago. His colleague, Dirgha Raj Shahi was also detained but managed to escape, walking for four nights and nearly dying while crossing the Karnali. Today, Dirgha Raj is a refugee with hundreds of others in Kalikot. He hasn't been home and hasn't seen his family for three years, even though he can see his house from the district headquarters. "The Maoists have not spread because the people support them," explains Dirgha Raj, "the people are fed up, they will rise up against both the Maoists and the government if there is a credible third force."

## Dilip, the WT

Under a deep blue sky, on the fringe of a dense pine forest, the golden terraces are dazzling in the afternoon sun. The scent of ripening rice wafts up from the fields in Jubitha. In such an idyllic setting, it is easy to forget that there is a war going on here. Dilip Kumar Shahi is a sprightly eighth-grader from Jubitha who is now WT (acronym for locals who have joined the revolution 'whole time'). We ask him about his studies, and Dilip's answer is riddled with jargon he seems to have memorised: "We are replacing bourgeois education with a new *janabadi* curriculum, but it will take time. Many comrades are out fighting, we are in a militarised situation." Outside Jubitha, the painting brigade is returning after a day writing slogans all along the trails: 'Stop Arming the Murderous Royal American Army', 'Down with American Imperialists and Their Indian Dalals', 'Long Live Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and Prachanda Path', 'Long Live CCOMPOSA'. Paintbrushes in hand, they all give the fist salute as they pass. ● (Kunda Dixit)



The golden terraces of ripening rice and the scenic mountains in Jubitha make it difficult to believe there is a war going on here.

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NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

Fourteen years after living in refugee camps in Nepal, 100,000 Bhutanis may finally be nearing the end of their ordeal.

But it is not a solution many of them, nor the country that hosted them, may like. Under pressure from donors, Nepal is being asked to assimilate the main portion of the refugees while the international community selects some, only a tiny proportion is allowed to return to Bhutan.

Private interviews with Kathmandu-based diplomats and other officials provide strong

indication that the plan to relocate rather than repatriate the refugees is being discussed without the knowledge of the host country nor the refugees.

A slew of visits by senior donor officials, the latest by US Assistant Secretary of State Arthur Dewey last week, hint at a new initiative. Even though Dewey's trip to Jhapa was billed as a fact-finding mission, his terms of reference obtained by *Nepali Times* says he would be discussing with UNHCR officials in Kathmandu the re-registering of refugees.

The groundwork for the

# Anywhere but home

## Nepal and Bhutani refugees would be big losers if a new plan to solve the refugee crisis is implemented

preparation of new profiles of all refugee families has reportedly begun in the camps in Jhapa. Bhutani leaders in exile are worried that the donor community is working to select desirable refugee categories and divide them up into those to be 'locally integrated', resettled in third countries, and sent back to Bhutan.

The American Centre in Kathmandu said Dewey did discuss with UNHCR officials about registering the refugees with an aim to find out durable solution for all the refugees. UNHCR officials in Kathmandu were not available for immediate comment.

Bhutani human rights leader Teknath Rijal, who has just returned from a visit to Geneva to meet UN and EU officials, says

he has heard of the resettlement proposal, but rejected it outright. "The idea of resettling refugees elsewhere is not to our taste, we would like to go back to Bhutan because that is where we belong."

A Kathmandu-based diplomat confirmed that the proposal for resettlement and local integration were being discussed. He also confirmed that the re-registering and profiling exercise could be important to allow Western countries to select refugee categories they would like to take under their immigration quotas.

The idea of resettling refugees in Nepal and third countries is not new. In 2000, a senior official from the European Parliament had said

during a visit to Kathmandu that resettlement of refugees in Nepal and India was planned. "I think it will not be easy to integrate 100,000 refugees in Bhutan," Thomas Mann, then vice president of the SAARC Delegation of the European Parliament had said. "We have got to convince the Bhutani government saying that some of the refugees will stay here (in Nepal) and some in India."

Four years down the line it looks like the plan has been only slightly amended to include a provision for Europe and America to also take a proportion of the refugees. Bhutani officials find this even more objectionable, because secret selection criteria may create infighting among refugees and wipe out the repatriation option. "It will derail our chances of going back to our homeland," said refugee leader Rijal. "We'd rather ask the international community and also India to pressure Bhutan to sincerely repatriate the refugees."

Nepali officials don't like the idea of resettlement and local integration either, but aren't in a position to have much say. "We are not talking about any other options now nor are we interested in them," Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Prakash Sharan Mahat told us. "Refugees identified as Bhutanis must be repatriated."

After 10 years of deadlock in more than one dozen rounds of bilateral ministerial meetings, Bhutan and Nepal finally agreed to verify the refugees on the basis of the four categories they had agreed in 1993 when Sher Bahadur Deuba was home minister. Of the 12,000 refugees verified in Khudunabari in 2001, only 2.4 percent were found to be bona fide Bhutanis forcibly evicted by Thimphu. More than 70 percent were categorised as 'voluntary migrants'. It is clear that Deuba's agreement to the categorisation ten years ago was a blunder that has cost Nepal and the Bhutanis dearly.

Thimphu's pre-conditions for taking back even bonafide refugees have made them think twice about going back. The United Nation's charter allows refugees the right to return, but chances are that many refugees would refuse to go back. Hence the idea of resettlement in third countries and local integration in Nepal.

Nepal and most refugees would be clear losers if this plan is activated. "The main winner will be the Bhutani regime, because it will show that you can evict one-sixth of your population and still get away with it," says one refugee leader. "It will also be a precedent for other states with Nepali-speaking people in the region to throw them out." ●

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## NOM calling

Nokia, one of the world's leading mobile set manufacturer, has appointed Nepal Overseas Marketing (NOM) as its authorised dealer for Nepal. The company provides necessary as well as quality repair service for all its products. Corporate consumers can claim VAT (as it is refundable) and they will also get depreciation on their sets. The price of available Nokia mobile sets range from Rs 7,260 to 11,770.



## Battling for sixes

For the sixth consecutive year, Soaltee Crowne Plaza is organising the Soaltee Crowne Plaza Super Sixes 2004 from 29 October to 1 November at the Tribhuvan University grounds. The battle will see 16 different teams— Nabil Bank, Indian Embassy, British Gurkhas, Standard Chartered Bank, Kumari Bank, Himalayan Bank, ILFC, Everest Bank, Kantipur Publications, APCA Publications, Space Time, Surya Nepal, Bhote Koshi, Nepal Investment Bank, Nepal Merchant Bank and Soaltee Crowne Plaza.

## Banking ventures

Everest Bank Limited (EBL) celebrates 10 years of successful banking operations and plans to introduce a highly advanced system of credit appraisal. They plan to adopt the 'Credit Risk Rating Module' system with the help of its joint venture partner, Punjab National Bank. EBL also intends to strengthen the system of consortium lending so as to minimise risks attendant with multiple banking. The bank will also expand lending in general trading.

## Adding to the fleet



Druk Air, the national flag carrier of the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan has recently added Airbus 319 to its fleet. Manufactured by the Airbus company it has a capacity of 114 seats (20 business and 94 economy class). Another

Airbus 319 will arrive at Paro, Bhutan this December.

The aircraft Airbus 319 will land at the Tribhuvan International Airport, Kathmandu at 8:50 AM on 31 October as flight # KB400. Malla Treks Pvt Ltd is the general sales agent for Druk Air in Nepal.

# Road to hell

## Why does Nepal have the worst highway safety record in South Asia?

Between 11-26 October this year, 38 people died in various traffic-related accidents on our highways. Even as we go to press there have been two more fatal highway accidents. More than 265 people sustained injuries. When you collect these numbers tracking

**STRICTLY BUSINESS**  
Ashutosh Tiwari



15 day updates on *Nepalnews.com* and *Kantipuronline.com*, you can't help wondering why it is that the news about highway accidents seems to appear with a mind-numbing regularity, thereby making Nepal the country with the worst record on highway safety in all of South Asia.

Still, news about such high rates of accidents does sit oddly with the fact that long-distance transport companies, what with their politically connected all-Nepal federation and various zonal and regional divisions, have long been among the most organised and vocal private sector industries in Nepal. So strong is their network that they can call an all-Nepal *chakka-jam* and have the highways bereft of vehicles within hours. But, as in any industry made up of members who form a cushy cartel to look after their own interests, such a concentration of power inevitably goes side by side with a tendency to give a short shrift to customers' major concern: safety.

That neglect is allowed to fester into a dangerous habit in at least three different ways by the private sector news media and the government.

First, most news about highway accidents rarely mention names of bus and truck



KUMAR SHRESTHA

companies. (Strangely, the license plate of the stricken bus is always cited.) This omission ends up shielding companies from having to address a dented reputation.

Second, though passengers are, in some cases, insured against accidents it is never clear from the news reports whether they get their insurance money or not. Most likely, they don't. Still, the transport cartel sticks to increasing fares to pay for what one suspects to be non-existent travel insurance premiums, and that adds only to the burden of passengers.

Third, the government is lax when it comes to ensuring bus companies hire competent long-distance drivers who are trained on basic safety procedures. Driving licenses can easily be obtained by anyone willing to pay, and the highway police are known to look the other way on seeing speeding buses and trucks with passengers on the roof.

Conclusion: other than bad road conditions, one reason why highway accidents seem to take place is that the cost of surviving as a company in the long-distance transport

industry in Nepal is very low. Accidents do not harm a company's reputation. They also do not make the company start paying higher travel insurance premiums. And, as a card-carrying member of its politically connected federation, it can always count law enforcement officers as loyal friends. The result is that the transport companies face little incentive to reduce highway accidents, fatalities and injuries on their own. If anything, after accidents, they are likely to gain insurance money for themselves to repair old and buy new vehicles.

Those who are often left dead, injured and bereaved by accidents are usually poor and anonymous Nepalis with neither the voice nor the influence to seek justice. Here's hoping that when Urba Dutta Panta, state minister for Labour and Transport Management, forms 'a high level commission to investigate road accidents and recommend measures to contain them' by 8 November, he puts the difficulties of the victims squarely in the centre and those of the bus companies on the side. Anything less would only lead further down the road to hell. ●

# Cosmic takes off with first domestic jet flights



**Cosmic Air launched Nepal's first domestic flights with a jet aircraft this week offering direct flights to Bhairawa, Biratnagar and Nepalganj. Captain RP Pradhan (seen here alighting from a Fokker 100 after the inaugural flight to Biratnagar on Tuesday) told *Nepali Times* what made it feasible, and about Cosmic's future plans.**

**Why have you decided to take this jump when tourism is in a slump?**

The reduction in the number of tourists has been more than made up for by the growth in domestic traffic. Bus travel is getting unreliable and if passengers are given an affordable alternative, they will fly. We have launched flights to and from Biratnagar, Bhairawa and Nepalganj and will soon start Pokhara.

**Is it feasible to operate a jet aircraft on such short domestic routes?**

We chose the Fokker 100 for its relatively short take-off performance. It also consumes a lot less fuel per passenger mile than smaller turboprops. Jets are also more reliable than turboprops.

**How about India traffic?**

We have been studying the Nepal-India market for some time now. There is massive movement of people between the two countries, those who fly are just the tip of the iceberg. There is potential for growth because they will prefer comfortable air service at an affordable price. Once we begin our scheduled flights to New Delhi, people can get there in the morning and return in the evening flight. There is no point in just sitting here saying there are no tourists. The thing to do is to create the market.

**But it is a big risk.**

If government policy is consistent, there is proper regulation and no unfair competition then it is not risky. You have to believe in your market and go for it. But you are right, the airline business demands huge capital outlay, it needs meticulous planning.

**How about safety?**

Given the growth in domestic airline traffic, safety has actually improved. Jet aircrafts are far more reliable than turboprops and since the 100s fly higher, they are also less affected by weather conditions.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal has also become quite watchful when it comes to air safety, and we are waiting for upgrades in infrastructure and ground navids.

**When do you plan to launch regional operations?**

Within a couple of weeks, our second Fokker 100 will arrive and we will begin twice-daily flights to Delhi and Dhaka. At a later stage, we will also begin services to Bangkok, Bangalore, Paro, Colombo and Bombay.

**Under what arrangement did you acquire the Fokker 100 jet aircraft?**

We have brought it under dry lease arrangement, which means we will have to bear maintenance, operation and insurance costs. The aircraft was manufactured in Holland in the 1990s.



ALL PICS: SILVIA VERNETTO

# Tibetan reflections

Lhasa today is a worn Tibetan amulet inside a gaudy Chinese box

PICO IYER in LHASA

One's first response to Tibet today is likely to be shock, compounded by a piercing sadness if one remembers the way Lhasa's higgledy-piggledy jumble of two-story whitewashed houses (rainbow awnings fluttering from every one) looked only a few years ago.

The sign that greets you at Gongkar Airport announces PETRO CHINA and a nearby building proclaims THE LHASA AIRPORT OF CHINA (Beijing has never been slow to understand the power of visible symbols). As you complete the 90-minute drive into the Tibetan capital, you are greeted by a classic propaganda billboard of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and

Jiang Zemin beaming beside the Potala Palace. China Mobile banners flap from every lamppost.

Only a dozen years ago you could see the Potala from almost every point in Lhasa. Now it is hidden behind tall buildings and new developments. Yet the more time I spent in Tibet last summer and the more I walked around its markets, villages, and lapis-and-jade lakes, the less I noticed the signs of Chinese imperialism, and the more I felt I was meeting a Tibetan spirit that seems unquenchable. Tibet lives mostly in corners and shadows these days, under its breath and you have to seek it out. On the surface, Lhasa looks like an Eastern version of Las

Vegas: one long strip of ultramodern department stores and gaudy karaoke parlours plunked down incongruously in a desert. For the foreigner flying from Kathmandu past Mt Everest, drawn to the culture for its devotion and its otherworldliness, there are still traces, everywhere, of an older, changeless East.

I first came to Lhasa in 1985, only months after it had been opened to outsiders. I discovered a festival of hope and light.

Tibetans excited to encounter visitors for the first time and foreigners somewhat astonished to find themselves within a Forbidden Kingdom, that, in all its history until 1950, had seen fewer than 2,000 people from the West.

Photographs of the Dalai Lama filled the altars of the temples, shy monks came out from their prayer halls to toy with my camera and at night the few of us who'd made it into this city 3,300 m above sea level sat on our terraces and watched the Potala under a full moon. When I returned five years later, Tibet was pitch-black. Soldiers patrolled the rooftops of the low buildings around the Jokhang Temple, Tibet's holiest monument — demonstrations on behalf of Tibetan independence

had put them on alert—and tanks were never far away. Tibetans were even forbidden to visit the Potala and the handful of tourists allowed in were led through a largely bolted place where the power often failed.

Today Tibet is in some respects better off than it was then, although it looks less and less like itself. Tibetans fill the temples now, and the more entrepreneurial among them speak English and do good business. Tourists are generally horrified by the Italian ice-cream parlour and the signs for Giordano and Jeans West on every other plate glass window, but the Tibetans don't seem to object to them, or mind the better facilities and the cleaner streets they accompany.

(The little guesthouse where in 1985 I shared a single cold-water tap in a courtyard and a filthy hole in the ground with 30 or so others now offers Japanese food on its rooftop and The Doors' *Greatest Hits*.) The Dalai Lama himself has often said that discos around the Potala are "no problem" so long as something more important—his people's faith and livelihood—is respected.

Thus Tibet both alarms and uplifts at every turn, its kitschy, factitious new surfaces

undermined by a spirit that is committed, wary and fierce. Perhaps the saddest sight in Tibet today is the lines of monks, on shopping streets and in monasteries, sitting on the ground, rocking back and forth over their prayers and then extending their hands for alms. When I rested one sunny afternoon in a new Chinese amusement park across from the Potala, complete with swan boats and grinning tourists dressed up (for a moment) as Tibetan noblemen, two little girls of six or seven came up and ran their fingers across my face, cooing, "Give me money. Give me pen". In many of the most beautiful chapels in the temples you are asked to pay to use a camera, and in some the posted price for using a video camera is \$250.

And yet one way that Tibet has always challenged visitors is by refusing to present itself in black and white. Some of the friendliest shopkeepers and taxi drivers I met in Lhasa and Shigatse were, in fact, Chinese migrants from neighbouring Sichuan province, here for the jobs they cannot get at home. The Mainland tourists pouring off the Chengdu flight in zippy DISCOVER TIBET baseball caps, or sitting in the sunny courtyard





of the Yak Hotel reading old copies of *Lost Horizon* are, perhaps in some cases, the people who can do the most to help Tibet.

The Dalai Lama (unlike Nelson Mandela in apartheid South Africa, or Aung San Suu Kyi in oppressed Myanmar) has never asked foreigners to boycott Tibet, to turn one's back on the culture is in effect, to condemn it to a slow death under house arrest. Only visitors can convey to the world the needs and sufferings of the Tibetans.

What I found, then, as I drove across the spectacular 4,600 m passes that link Lhasa to Gyantse, as I visited temples whose 1,000 year old murals have been protected, or looked in on hangouts like the Boiling Point Internet Bar, was a place that can often make you weep but does not necessarily leave you disappointed. On the one hand, gaudy yellow and red banners in the streets of Lhasa announce, WELCOME TO PARTICIPATION IN TIBET HOLYLAND TOUR FESTIVAL and PARADISE OF ALL DREAM SEEKERS, as if to mock the sacred traditions that have been turned into a theme park. On the other, there are Tibetans all around whose magnetism and warmth are just as strong and touching as when I first visited 18 years ago. Likewise, the rail line linking Golmud and Lhasa, which Beijing is hoping to complete by 2007, seems certain to accelerate the Han settlement of Tibet and the \$3 billion being spent on the project is more than the local government has put toward health and education in 50 years.

Yet the Tibetan sense of self seems, if anything, to have intensified in response to the pressures brought to bear on it. The traditional marketplace around the Barkhor in Lhasa, for example, hustles with people selling false teeth and pieces of watermelon, and with friendly locals smiling even as soldiers goose-step behind them.

Tibet today is essentially two different countries living on top of, around, and even inside one another: a worn Tibetan amulet inside a gaudy Chinese box. Go to the Jokhang Temple in the afternoon and it's all about tourists in cowboy hats strolling around the rooftops and flashing their cameras. But go in the morning and you'll see nothing but a long line of pilgrims, some from the farthest

reaches of eastern Tibet, the whole dark place an enchantment of flickering candles and muttered chants and unceasing prostrations.

Similarly at the Potala, Tibetans make the pilgrims' ascent up the palace's front steps in the early afternoon, and go through its rooms in the proper ceremonial order. Tourists tend to visit in the morning, ascending the back side and coming down through its rooms in the opposite direction. Sometimes the two converge. In one dark chamber containing a throne that belonged to the sixth Dalai Lama and some priceless statues, I saw a lone monk chanting in the sunlight. A group of noisy tourists came into the room, joked around, threw some trash into a panda-shaped trash can, and then disappeared. The low, steady chant continued throughout.

I started going out in the early mornings, when figures were just outlines in the darkened alleyways and joined the first pilgrims on their ritual circumambulation of the Jokhang. No tourists were visible at that hour, just old women furiously spinning their prayer wheels as they walked, and occasional nomads shouting out their supplications. Girls diligently swept the area in front of their stalls, and here and there a monk on the ground murmured his *sutras*. High above, the Potala slowly came to light, while on either side of the Jokhang two furnaces, in which pilgrims pour gasoline and stoke juniper branches to release a scented mist, began to glow.

All that was visible of the low dark chamber immediately in front of the temple, slippery with melted butter, were lines of tiny flickering candles throwing light into the faces of those who tended them.

Around me were signs for the Lhasa Satellite Conference and even, next to one Tibetan-owned guesthouse, a gold plaque: EXEMPLARY SITE OF SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN TOURIST INDUSTRY.

To my left was a bolted door, above which was ominously written, JOKHANG SQUARE CONTROL OFFICE. Yet in front of me—and inside me now—were long lines of candles, flickering before the holiest site in Tibet, as it was once and as it is now. ●

Pico Iyer is the author of *Video Nights in Kathmandu* and wrote this piece for *Destination Asia*.



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# "We will liberate Kalapani"



RAMESWOR BOHARA

RAMESWOR BOHARA in SURKHET

At Babichaur near Surkhet recently, guerrillas of the Maoist 'People's Liberation Army' brought out their most prized weapons for a photo shoot: GPMGs, SLR and mortars.

Dressed in combat fatigues with ammo clip harnesses, they posed for photographs at a clearing, tightening their jaws and pretending to aim the weapons at the surrounding jungle. Watching his men from the sidelines was the rebel's central committee member and the Seti-Mahakali regional bureau in-charge, Lekh Raj Bhatta, or Comrade Rakesh. He explained that the entire Maoist western command was now preparing to "liberate Nepali territory from Indian occupation".

"We are now moving from a domestic class struggle to a national liberation war," Rakesh told us at his remote jungle hideout. "Our priority is to remove Indian troops from Kalapani, by force if necessary."

Indeed, across western Nepal there are freshly painted slogans on school buildings, walls and rocks denouncing the "occupation" of Nepali territory by India, which they call "the stooge of American imperialists".

Another central committee member and a western division commissar, Comrade Pratik, harangues visiting reporters with fiery rhetoric: "We shall use diplomatic and political pressure to get the Indians out of Kalapani, but if that doesn't work we will use military force."



It is hard to say whether all this tough talk is a pressure tactic to obtain the release of more than a dozen of their senior comrades arrested in India in the past year, or whether it is for real. But by turning attention towards an outside enemy, analysts say the Maoists may be trying to shore up waning domestic support for their movement.

The Maoist analysis seems to be that America is now bogged down in Iraq, and there is no immediate danger of US intervention in Nepal but Washington will use India as a proxy. Rebel leaders say that they are mobilising Indian Maoists and other allies in India to pressure New Delhi.

On the return journey, a Maoist on sentry duty bids goodbye to visiting journalists with characteristic bravado: "We are ready to fight against Indian expansionists, you must also help in this patriotic war."

## Private oil

Kantipur, 21 October

कान्तिपुर

The government is preparing to sell shares of the nearly-bankrupt Nepal Oil Corporation to the public. The move comes as a multi-pronged approach to rescue troubled public enterprises and to pave the way for private involvement in petroleum.

An ordinance has been drafted to involve the private sector in the buying, selling and distribution of petroleum products. Industry, Commerce and Supply Minister Ishwor Pokhrel says the ordinance will soon be made public. Once the ordinance goes into force, the government will start a competitive bidding process to allow the private sector to enter the market. The government is soon handing over the entire LPG business to the private sector. Private businesses are already involved in the distribution of gas. The new provision will allow private companies to import petroleum products as well. Under a new arrangement, the supply ministry has begun to stockpile petroleum products for 15 days.

## Clear objectives

Lok Raj Baral in

Kantipur, 27 October

कान्तिपुर

There is no strength in the argument that the country will witness far-reaching democratic reforms once the parliament is restored. To solve the present crisis, what we need is a peaceful movement which means that the political forces need to work together and make their objectives clear.

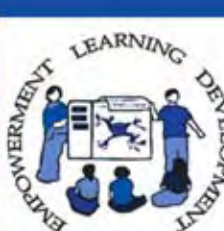
But the chances of such an alliance among political forces is growing slimmer by the day even though it is clear that such unity is a precursor to resolving the Maoist crisis. The role of working unity among political

parties becomes even more crucial when it concerns the insurgency because the king and the Maoists have divergent interests. The king wants to protect his traditional powers while the rebels are fighting to end it. The problem is to get the two to find a common agreement.

The political parties can work with the king only on the basis of people's power. As long as sovereignty is not restored to the people there is no possibility of forging a working relation with the king. As long as the monarchy believes that traditional rights are the basis of its power, democracy in Nepal will always remain ambiguous. Fifty years ago, King Tribhuban took over executive power citing what he claimed the rights of the monarch. Referring to the same rights, his son, King Mahendra prepared a constitution and held elections. One-and-a-half-year down the line, he used the same constitution as a stepping-stone to oust an elected government and to throttle the parliamentary system to death.

Without a logical end to this traditional power struggle between the king and parliamentary parties, the Maoist problem will not end. The vested interests of many quarters that are reaping benefits from the crisis will also prolong the insurgency. It is clear that the Maoist insurgency cannot be brought to an end militarily. It has been proven worldwide that insurgencies will only end through political means. The military can only be a force to exert pressure.

In Nepal's case the situation is more complicated. Besides the insurgency, no framework for democratic politics has been readied so far. Issues like the king's status, the state structure of the Maoists, and the meeting point between the rebels and parliamentary political parties are yet to be resolved. Of late, we have heard of yet another 'solution': elections. This is just a



## ELD News

### November 2004

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ELD will be fully busy with in-house assignments in Nepal and regional training in the Lao PDR throughout November. Workshops in Nepal will resume in December 2004 as follows:

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Forget about us. Look at those poor Nepalis, they are sacrificed all year around.

हिमाल *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 17 October-15 November

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**QUOTES OF THE WEEK**



"The army is not against peace talks. The army wants peace."  
Chief of Army Staff, General Pyar Jung Thapa in *Rajdhani*, 27 October

# Four more wars

## Let's not beat around the Bush anymore

Re-elected, the George W Bush doctrine of preemptive action—and the invasion of Iraq—will be endorsed, and the world will have to live with the consequences. By repudiating Bush's

policies at the polls, America will

have a chance to regain the respect and support of the world.

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, required a strong response. But they also led to suspension of the critical process so essential to a democracy—a full and fair discussion of the issues. Bush silenced criticism by calling it unpatriotic. For 18 months after 9/11, he managed to suppress all dissent. That is how he led America in the wrong direction.

In fact, Bush played right into the hands of Osama bin Laden. Afghanistan's invasion was justified: that was where bin Laden lived and al Qaeda had its training camps. Invading Iraq was not.

Immediately after 9/11, there was a spontaneous outpouring of sympathy for America worldwide. It has given way to widespread resentment. There are many more people willing to risk their lives to kill Americans than there were on 11 September.

Bush likes to insist that terrorists hate Americans for what they are—freedom loving people—not what they do. But war

and occupation create innocent victims. We count the body bags of American soldiers, over 1,000 in Iraq. The wider world also counts the Iraqis who get killed daily, perhaps 20 times more. Public opinion condemns America worldwide, and our troops in Iraq are paying the price.

Bush convinced people that he is good for American security by playing on the fears generated by the 9/11 attacks. At a time of peril, people rally around the flag, and Bush exploited this by fostering a sense of danger. His campaign assumes that people do not really care about the truth and will believe almost anything if it is repeated often enough. There must be something wrong with Americans if we fall for it.

For instance, some 40 percent of Americans still believe that Saddam Hussain was connected with 9/11, although the 9/11 Commission—set up by Bush and chaired by a Republican—definitively established that no such connection existed. I want to shout "Wake up America. Don't you realise we are being misled?"

The war in Iraq was misconceived from start to finish, if it has a finish. America went to war on false pretenses. Weapons of mass destruction could not be found, and the connection with al Qaeda could not be established. Saddam Hussain was a tyrant, and Iraqis, and the world, can rejoice in being rid of him. But America had an obligation to maintain



law and order. Instead, we stood idly by while Baghdad and other cities were ransacked.

The Bush administration's missteps are legion. First the Iraqi army was dissolved, then America tried to reconstitute it. First the US tried to eliminate the Baathists, then America turned to them for help. When the insurgency became intractable, America installed an Iraqi government. The man chosen to lead it was a protégé of the CIA with a reputation for being a strongman.

Much of the western part of the country has been ceded to insurgents, the prospect of holding free and fair elections in January is fast receding, as civil war looms.

Bush's war in Iraq has done untold damage to America, impairing its military power and undermining the morale of the armed forces. The war has

already cost \$200 billion and getting into Iraq was much easier than getting out will be. Bush has been taunting John Kerry to explain how he would do things differently. Kerry has responded that he would have done everything differently, and that he would be in a better position to extricate us. But it won't be easy for him, either, because America is already caught in a quagmire.

Top military and diplomatic experts desperately warned Bush not to invade Iraq. He ignored them. He suppressed the critical process, arguing that any criticism of the commander-in-chief puts US troops at risk. But this is Bush's war, and he ought to be held responsible for it. Americans should step back for a moment and ask: who got them into this mess? ● (Project Syndicate)

George Soros is President of Soros Fund Management and Chairman of the Open Society Foundation.

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# A game within a game

You can't be closer to the hole than inside it

**P**utting is a game within a game. It takes two shots to hit the ball 300 yards and then three putts for the remaining 30 feet!

Once on the putting green, the goal is to get that ball into the hole in two putts or less. Watching most amateurs, we see that it's usually that first putt that gets them into trouble. They leave the ball very short of the hole, or end up way off line.

All golfers have their own style and method of putting. As long as the ball finds the cup, there's no problem. The key is to be able to 'read the breaks', and develop feel and consistency. One of the great things about watching the better putters amongst professionals is how they judge distance and how they roll the ball just far enough to reach the hole. They have a genuine feel, that has been refined by years of practice.

## TEE BREAK

Deepak Acharya



Here's a golden rule for you to remember and practice: how far the ball will roll is controlled by the speed at which the putter is moving when it hits the ball, and

this must be determined by the length of your stroke.

When next on the practice putting green, try a number of putts from, first 10, then 20, and then 30 ft. See how much backswing and acceleration is needed for each distance. Then work between those lengths randomly. While varying the length of the putt, concentrate on the length of the stroke and on striking the ball out of the middle of the putter face.

You get only one chance on the golf course, so try to get it right the first time in practice also. Putting is more of feel than technique. The interesting part of this drill is to transform you from being "technique conscious" to "feel conscious."



'As the length of the putt increases, so must the length of the stroke. Always visualise the ball running two feet past the hole, and remember, as the ball dies it will take more brake.'

To have the confidence to stroke your long putts properly, you must not be scared of leaving yourself three to six footers coming back. A lack of confidence on long putts usually results in a tentative stroke, hoping to put the ball 'somewhere close' to the hole. More often than not, a three putt is the result.

You can't be closer to the hole than inside it though. Practice and improve the short putts and this will lead automatically to a confident stroke on longer putts. The result? You will start sinking a lot more longer putts.

I'll save the breaking putts over side hill lies for another time. For now, get onto the practice green and get your game back on par. ●

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Golf Director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu. [prodeepak@hotmail.com](mailto:prodeepak@hotmail.com)

# Nepal's champ

Pashupati Paneru adds another feather in his shuttle

SURESH RAJ NEUPANE

**P**ashupati Paneru took up badminton when he was 12 in his far-western hometown of Dhangadi. Encouraged by his cousins and neighbours, he was able to win the first-ever Dhangadi Badminton Championship, and that gave him all the encouragement he needed.

After he took a two-month formal training at the local hall, Pashupati was mentored by a friend from school, Dipendra Shrestha, who saw great potential in him. Pashupati went on to become junior badminton champion twice within the next four years and he took part in his first international match in 1999 at the Asian Junior Championships in Malaysia where he amazed everyone (including himself) by defeating a world-renowned player from Hong Kong.

Since then, Pashupati has participated in many international tournaments such as the Thomas Cup (2000) and the Asian Championships (2002) and has been able to use his international experience to bring home the team event cup in the ninth South Asian Federation games last year in Pakistan.

Pashupati has never looked back since his brother persuaded him to enter that badminton hall in Dhangadi 10 years ago. Today, he receives intensive training from Dipendra Shrestha, who has stayed with his protégé and become his coach. Shrestha has always believed in Pashupati's

livelihood by becoming professional athletes, but Pashupati wants to give it a shot since he is already earning up to Rs 200,000 a year from his championships. He believes good players can earn a living and be respected for their talent and he sees private sponsorship as the way forward.

Badminton is popular in Nepal because it is cheap and easy to set up and doesn't need much space. In the past few years, the number of badminton tournaments in Nepal have risen, encouraging players and raising the standard of the game. Pashupati feels that with international coaches and training, Nepali players can be as good as the best in the world. "Lack of facilities is the reason for Nepal's poor performance at international games, we have to play on wooden floors here and at international tournaments we play on matted floors. That in itself creates a lot of disparity in our game," he says in between training sessions for the National Badminton Tournament in January.



KIRAN PANDAY

badminton skills, and says: "Pashupati has the ability to understand his opponents and then use his own strengths to defeat them. With training, he can be better than the best."

Few in Nepal can earn a

The Chinese Embassy donating a matted floor to the Tripureswor indoor stadium comes as good news. Now, all we need are badminton tournaments in different parts of the country to encourage talent and keep the game alive. ●

## Vejthani Hospital...

...the next best place after mother's womb!

It's only natural for mothers-to-be to seek the safest landing pad for the arrival of the new-born.

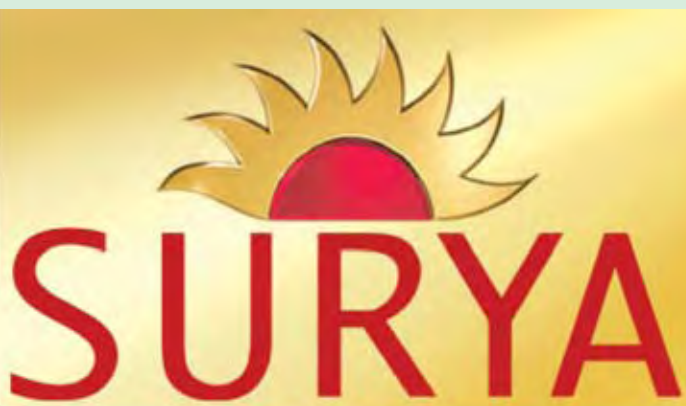
A team of internationally qualified and dedicated medical professionals from the Obstetrics & Gynecology Department and Neonatal Critical Care will ensure the most warm welcome for your new baby.

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STATUTORY DIRECTIVE : SMOKING IS INJURIOUS TO HEALTH