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MIN BAJRACHARYA

A dove of peace and the dogs of war loiter outside Singha Darbar on Thursday.

ADRIFT

KUNDA DIXIT

Now that the rains are over, the four parties protesting King Gyanendra's October Fourth are back on the streets.

Girija Prasad Koirala can't stand this government because it is lead by the man he blames for splitting his party. Also, Sher Bahadur Deuba was made prime minister by King Gyanendra invoking the 'regressive' Article 127, and Deuba's coalition includes the UML, which ditched him.

So, Koirala wants to use any pretext to bring Deuba down: accusations of selling out to India, the double-whammy oil price hikes, failure to curb the 1 September arson, even the airport incident when a soldier stopped him from driving to his plane.

But time is not on the rump four-party alliance's side, Dasain is

around the corner and the festive mood will set in by next week. Koirala knows his demand for the restoration of the house isn't grabbing people. Most still see the agitation as being motivated by power.

Koirala loyalist Narahari Acharya denies this, and says the NC wants the street agitation to push the government to begin peace moves. "We want to give the government no choice but to negotiate with the Maoists," he adds.

But the belief among partners that Koirala is offering himself as prime minister under Article 127 has frayed the opposition alliance. The other reason to resume the street agitation could be Koirala's need to flex muscles after his run-in with the CIAA and the Supreme Court over a probe on his alleged ill-gotten wealth.

Nepal's donors blame Koirala

of political opportunism at a time of national crisis, and hope that if power is handed to a second tier of leaders, a reunited NC could be a bulwark against the Maoists.

But rumours of a rift between Singha Darbar and Naryanhi over the India visit are rife, and some coalition ministers admit things are looking shaky ahead of King Gyanendra's own India visit before Dasain.

All this is a sideshow to the real issue of resolving the Maoist question. The political forces are all bent on depriving each other of the reward for restoring peace, and the military has leaned on peaceniks in the Deuba coalition to tone down talk of truce. The rebels have declared a two-day banda Monday and Tuesday prompting speculation they may be up to a dramatic offensive to force the government to talk. ●

(With reporting by Navin Singh Khadka)

Times nepalnews.com Weekly Internet Poll # 155

Q. How would you characterise Prime Minister Deuba's India visit?

Positive	33.6%
So-so	25.4%
Negative	37.0%
Don't know	3.0%

Total votes: 871

Weekly Internet Poll # 156. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Should the petroleum distribution and sales in Nepal be privatised?

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NOT THE PEOPLE'S WAR

A young Nepali boy came late for the candle-lighting ceremony at Maiti Ghar on the eve of the World Peace Day. The congregation was going home, but the boy lit his candle as we watched, held it in the cup of his hands for a long time and prayed. A violin mourned the passing of ten thousand Nepali souls since the start of the Maoist insurgency.

The country's overpowering yearning for peace was displayed in moving ceremonies this week: a large gathering against violence at Basantapur, the release of doves and balloons at Ratna Park and diyo lighting at Baudha.

These were spontaneous events by city citizens, a response to the violence that shrouds the whole country. They represented the moral rejection of violence and reasserted the belief that peace is second nature to human beings—that is why the words 'humane' and 'humanity' mean what they do. The spontaneity displayed by citizens' groups this week in Kathmandu and elsewhere were the result of the inability of the political parties as well as civil society organisations to fully represent them, their fears and hopes.

Nepalis are by nature disorganised. We tend to suffer in silence, waiting for a better day. At a time when representative politics has vanished from the land, we struggle to find a collective voice. And when civil society is itself programmed to only rise up with support from donors or on partisan issues, the people have nowhere to turn to.

Political parties that used to at least speak with one voice for the restoration of representative democracy are now divided. One major party is in government and the another at Ground Zero in Ratna Park. Neither seems to be doing much to fulfill the overwhelming national desire for peace and national progress. There were about 200 participants taking part in the dove releasing ceremony at Ratna Park on the World Peace Day on Tuesday, but there were thousands rallying nearby to demand an end to 'regression'.

When are our political parties going to unite against war? When will they stop using the conflict to undermine each other, and instead learn to respect the Nepali people's longing for an end to this senseless conflict?

As the monsoon gives way to Dasain, let us give the people back their voice.

Target: the army and India

The rebel strategy is to make the cost of not negotiating unbearable

One week before Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba travelled to New Delhi with the Maoist crisis at the top of his agenda, the rebels

GUEST COLUMN
Puskar Gautam



themselves launched a salvo against India. "Indian expansionists are the main obstacle to revolution," the rebels said in a statement.

Aside from stating in a joint

communiqué that the Maoist insurgency in Nepal was a 'common problem' but that there was no military solution to it, New Delhi seemed reluctant to stick its neck out any further. Still, Deuba came back with a new spring in his step and a commitment for new Indian military hardware. After eight years, Indian intelligence is finally admitting that Nepali Maoists are training in Jharkhand and elsewhere.

A year before they launched

their 'people's war' in February 1996, the Maoists had stepped up their anti-Indian rhetoric. While still aboveground, their leaders poured scorn at "Indian hegemony and expansionism" in public meetings in Kathmandu. After that, the Maoists reserved their strongest tirades for the Nepal Congress which was in power. And after the royal massacre and October Fourth, the targets of vitriol have been the monarchy and the king.

Now, it looks like they are back to attacking India politically, while fighting the Royal Nepali Army militarily. And for the first time in ten years, the rhetoric is again venomous. The Maoists may have concluded that if the Indians are tempted to intervene in Nepal, the threat to galvanise nationalistic forces against foreign invaders would be a useful deterrent.

After the arrests of their senior leaders in Siliguri and Patna, the Maoists have admitted that it is getting difficult for them to be based in India. The Maoists command has told its forces to be ready for a 'tunnel war' against India. A hyped fear of Indian intervention and preparations to build tunnels to hide in future air raids is a way for the Maoists to keep its guerrillas battle-ready.

It has been more than six months since their last major attack on Beni in February and the rebels need to strike another major blow soon. Their 'strategic offensive' phase may involve



LETTERS

PEACE CORPS

It is unfortunate that the US has suspended its Peace Corps program in Nepal (Peace Corps pull out, #214). Although the US ambassador has stated that this action would attract Washington DC's attention to help Nepal fight against the Maoist problem, it is likely that this may not be the case. The attack at the US centre and the suspension of the Peace Corps program leaves Nepal in a difficult position to use the American friendship in the Maoist problem. US businesses and individuals are scared of going to Nepal, and due to Nepal's political volatility, it is difficult for foreign nations like the US to extend a helping hand. Pouring foreign donations or weapons—as Nepal may expect—may not be the solution when the political leaders know very little about conflict management. This is a time for leaders, especially for King Gyanendra and Deuba, to show the true essence of leadership. If they fail, it is bitter but true that they too may be the roadblock to Nepal's healthy future.

Name withheld,
Flagstaff, Arizona, USA

• What kind of message does our pullout of the Peace Corps send to the Maoists? We have always told the Nepalis we want Nepal to stand

up to the Maoists. We gave them guns and training to fight the rebels. And when a small blast goes off in the American Centre, we pack up our bags and leave! American double standards around the world we have come to expect under the Bush administration. But to make the Peace Corps the pawn in our 'global war on terror' is repugnant. At a time when America needs to reinvent itself and promote institutions like the Peace Corps to regain our lost respect in the world, we close down the very thing that would have done that for us.

Ex-Peace Corps Volunteer, email

• When the 12 young Nepalis were needlessly killed in Iraq and the world press turned their backs almost as if it had not happened, I was struck that the Nepali Press did not ask: why did the US create the conditions in Iraq that lead to these horrible deaths? For years and years, young Nepalis have headed to the Middle East and other destinations in search of better lives. Money was earned, saved, sent home and when the workers returned to Nepal there was often money for a new home, a new wife, a new life.

It was not until the US invasion and occupation of Iraq, which UN Secretary General Kofi Annan described as "illegal", that conditions

existed in the Middle East where 12 Nepali workers would be killed for nothing! Without the conditions that are the result of the backwards Foreign Policy of the Bush Regime, I believe those young men would be alive today.

Now we read that the Peace Corps has been suspended and evacuated and that the US has promised \$1 million more for arms and war in Nepal. Would it not have been better to 'evacuate' US military advisers and their \$22 million of war materials, and leave the Peace Corps in place? Will Nepal, like Iraq, become another victim of US foreign policy, in the name of 'building democracy'? Do the Nepali people want Nepal to be the next Iraq?

Only when the king or his representatives and the politicians sit down at the table with the Maoists and tell the Bush administration to mind its own business and stay out of the internal affairs of Nepal will there be a chance for peace in Nepal. Maybe then, when the guns are gone, the Peace Corps can return...

D Michael Van De Veer Hawaii

• Indian investments have been bombed and destroyed, Indian schools have been set on fire and vandalised, the Maoists have been threatened to send 'human bombs' against Indian leaders if they help the Nepal government against the Maoists. Yet, the Indians are still

here. The American Centre is hit by a small blast, and the Americans pull out in droves. We don't really need much proof of who Nepal's real friends are.

J K Panday
Kathmandu

NO HAZARD

We wish to bring to your kind notice that there is considerable harassment caused to us in the matter of radiation hazard from base trans-receiver towers in the Boudha area. We suspect certain elements, including some foreigners who might not be interested in the telecom development of Nepal might be trying to generate media hype. Extensive as well as intensive research in the matter of radiation

hazards by many international bodies have clearly shown that there is no basis for presuming that base stations or wireless phones generate radiation that is harmful to human beings. A finding by the UN World Health Organisation (WHO), has concluded: 'because of low power emitted from wireless telecommunications base trans-receiver stations/towers, neither biological nor health effects are likely to occur to the public'. We would be happy to provide you and your readers further information.

S Kannan, United Telecom
Kathmandu

HOOGLIGANS

Navin Singh Khadka's recent article 'Six hours in hell' (#213) makes extremely critical but persuasive reading on what it means to be a Nepali in the midst of prevalent anarchy. No matter who was responsible for Black Wednesday, reading the article the second time around, brought me personal shame in being a Nepali. It appears no attempt was made to nip the problem on its awakening, difficult though that might have been for a faction ridden and demoralised government administration. In contrast, one must salute the magnanimity of King Gyanendra in receiving the various Nepali Masjid representatives at the palace and sharing his grave concern with them.



MANI LAMA

urban guerrilla attacks on symbols of the state in the capital itself.

Since such attacks will involve heavy casualties and attract international media attention, the Maoists had been hesitating. But the lack of expected international response to the blockade has probably assured the leadership that outside powers don't have the stomach to intervene.

Most residents obeyed last month's Maoist order to vacate Phidim in Illam. This could have been a rehearsal for a similar threat to vacate Kathmandu. All this comes at a time when the general citizen's faith in the security forces' ability to protect them is at an all time low after the unchecked arson and looting of 1 September, as well as the forced closures of industries and the Valley blockade. The Maoists will need a strong hand when they come to the negotiating table. They are keeping that option open.

Despite the lip service, the military and the Deuba government have no intention of talking to the rebels, so the Maoists strategy is to make the cost of not negotiating unbearable.

Isolated internationally, and increasingly isolated at home after their latest attacks on the Peoples' Front Nepal, the moment of truth has come for the Maoist movement. They are trying to give the impression of preparing for a massive last-ditch attack. Whether that is out of desperation or a genuine belief in military victory remains to be seen. ●

Adapted and translated from the Nepali original.

Praying for a saviour

The price of an unjust peace is usually very high

In the dictionary of diplomacy, smallness has nothing to do with the size, population, resources or even military might of a country. Any state that can't look after its vital interests (security, welfare and identity) is considered small. They depend upon regional or global hegemon

STATE OF THE STATE

CK Lal



to safeguard their existence.

Iraq is small despite its oil while Norway is big—a 'peace superpower'. Economic stagnation and democratic decay have reduced the stature of nuclear-power Pakistan, but Bangladesh has become bigger, despite endemic political instability and recurrent natural disasters because of a vibrant civil society and openness.

Maoist spokesman Krishna Bahadur Mahara says he is aware of the risk of international intervention in the internal affairs of Nepal, but do his warlords know how much they have endangered the very survival of the state?

Nine years of armed insurgency and its fallout has shrunk Nepal in the world. It is now a nation of conflict and a human rights hot spot. A country known for its UN peacekeepers now needs peacekeepers itself. Still, several hundred Nepali blue-helmets left for Haiti early this week.

Our diminishing size is reflected in the way the

international media treats us. From Bhutani refugees to democratic reversal, it couldn't be bothered. More recently, the world largely ignored the tragic fate of 12 Nepalis in Iraq, but played up the blockade and forced closure of a few businesses as signs of a failing state.

The state itself is desperately looking for a saviour from outside its borders. The United States seems willing to play the role of a guarantor to quarantine the Maoist contagion. Its instant offer of \$1 million in the wake of the blast at the American Centre on the eve of 9/11 wasn't a tip for the loyalty of the royal government: it was a diplomatic statement of intent to intervene in a more direct way.

In effect, the Americans were telling the Indians: if you do not want to handle the Nepali Maoists we will. South Block reacted with alacrity in denouncing Prachanda's minions as a 'common threat' for India and Nepal during Sher Bahadur Deuba's New Delhi visit. Early this week, Nepal figured in the talks between George Bush and Manmohan

Singh too.

Norway and Switzerland are willing to be facilitators for negotiations between the insurgents and the government, but not in a way that strengthens the status quo of the Royal Nepali Army's domination over the polity of the country. The UN Secretary General has been offering his 'good offices' to resolve the issue, but so far no one has taken it seriously. Publicly offered explanation is that inviting a third party in the internal conflict of Nepal may antagonise India, but the real reason is perhaps the fear that an UN-brokered peace may break the domination of the ruling elite.

By now, almost everyone has realised that Nepal can't handle the Maoists on its own anymore. The confusion is over the role that we are ready to give to an outsider. The rebels want the UN as guarantor to secure a position commensurate with their armed strength. The royal government is quite happy with the cash and weapons it has been receiving from the Americans, British, and

Indians to fight the insurgents. Mainstream parties fear being marginalised if the military and the militants strike a deal. Civil society swears by the UN, but other than a vague faith in the good intentions of Kul Chandra Gautam, Nepali intelligentsia doesn't know what exactly it wants from the it.

Only Narayanhiti Palace is completely free of all illusions. It knows it has to depend on the Indians now to protect the monarchy from all possible threats. Life certainly is a lot simpler when you know when, where and how to kowtow. This is a lesson that Girija Prasad Koirala never learnt, but Madhab Nepal rapidly grasped.

When King Gyanendra goes to New Delhi, expect him to lay the ground work for yet another Nepal-India treaty somewhat similar to the India-Sri Lanka Peace agreement signed between Premier Rajiv Gandhi and President JR Jaywardene in 1987. Some, it seems, want peace at any cost. The price of unjust peace, however, is usually very high and often turns out to be unsustainable. ●



KIRAN PANDAY

We hope that the national psyche is rekindled to self-righteous behaviour in future and we will be able to proudly stand up to our international image as peace-loving and secular thinking Nepalis, not romping street hooligans.

Surya B Prasai, email

NEVER TOO LATE

Thank you for your excellent editorial ('Never too late', #124), which is politically correct. As we go back to 1990 movement and think for a minute what went wrong and who made big mistakes by using the blood of hundreds of people in the streets, it was the leadership who surrendered for their own class interest and undermined the mandate given by the people. If the 1990 movement had been completed, we Nepalis would have gone far further in building the nation. I wish our leaders would read this editorial carefully and think about their role once again and let the new generation take a lead in the political process now, which, I'm sure, would help towards bringing a lasting solution by breaking the current vicious spiral. Our leaders also must understand that traditional ways of leading politics are not going to work now. They should encourage their young successors to become more dynamic, so that the new leaders are more accountable to the

people and sincere to the nation.

Meena Poudel, Newcastle, UK

TUJ

It seems that Bandana Rana ('Tij with Bandana', #214) has some personal prejudices against marriage and husbands. Every now and then, our festivals and culture are denigrated as feudal and primitive, our values are condemned as anachronistic, our heritage is ignored as worthless, our gods are insulted by our media. I request this attitude be corrected.

Vinay Kumar, Kathmandu

HEROJIG

Herojig is not one of my favourite cartoon characters, but the 'Cartoon Silence' (#213), mourning the death of the 12 Nepalis and 316 Russians, is appreciated.

S Pradhan, Kathmandu

CORRECTIONS

The byline box icon on Ashutosh Tiwari's 'Rising from the ashes' (p8, #214) was once again inadvertently dropped. It won't happen again.

The caption on the front page picture in our hardcopy edition identifying businessmen entering the Soaltee Crowne Plaza ('Open Sesame', #214) should have said 'right to left'.

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Ryder Cup update

Representing your nation and continent

The biggest and most prestigious event in golf today concluded last weekend. The Ryder Cup 2004 was the 35th tournament played between Europe and the USA since it started in 1927.

In the early days, the Ryder Cup was played between players of the American and British Professional Golf Associations, but the latter were always the underdogs. Thus in recent years the whole of Europe was

TEE BREAK Deepak Acharya



included in the "against USA" team to make the match more interesting. This is why you will find that players such as world's number 1 and 3, Vijay Singh (Fiji) and

Ernie Els (South Africa), cannot take part, although I'm sure both of them itch to participate.

Golf is usually known as an individual sport. However in this tournament you are not playing for yourself or the \$5 million purse. You are playing for a team. More than that, you are playing for your country or continent! The pressure of performing well is unbelievably high for Ryder Cup players.



Europe's Sergio Garcia blasts out of a bunker during his victory over Phil Mickelson of the USA.

I stayed awake, glued to my tv set till early in the morning for three consecutive days to witness the glorious event being held at Oakland Hills Country Club, Bloomfield Hills, in the US. Most avid golfers are aware of what the Ryder cup is all about, and many would have followed this year's event. For those of you new to golf, or who missed it, let me give you a brief rundown on its format and how it concluded this year.

Played over three days, the tournament has 28 matches all together, with one point awarded for each match (half a point each for a draw).

Teams are led by a non-playing captain with 12 players in each team. Ten of a team's players are chosen off the top of their respective PGA's order of merit, and two players are chosen by a captain's pick. On Day One, there are eight matches over 36 holes—four matches of four ball and four matches of foursomes. The same format continues on Day Two. On the final day, there are 12 single matches.

This year Hal Sutton captained for USA and Bernhard Langer led the European side. Players on the American side included Tiger Woods, left hander Phil Mickelson and consistent veteran Kenny Perry. The European side included young and dynamic Sergio Garcia, Padraig Harrington and veteran Colin Montgomerie.

On Day One, the battle was dominated by Europe—6½ to 1½. By the end of Day Two, the Americans had clawed back to 5 against Europe's 11. This left America in an impossible position, and on the final day Europe won the trophy with 18½ points to America's 9½.

In reality the standard of golf in the US is far better than in Europe. This is obvious if you consider the total prize money of the professional tours, where the US has 2½ times more than Europe.

Simply put, the Europeans were better team players. They were helping each other on the course to see the line of their putts and judging distances, whereas the Americans were playing more individual games. The US team received a lot of criticism in their local press for their lack of team spirit, which cost them the tournament.

Let's hope the US understands the need put team spirit before selfish individualism, and that the next Ryder Cup in 2006 ends up being a more exciting match. ●

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Golf Director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu. prodeepak@hotmail.com



STATUTORY DIRECTIVE : SMOKING IS INJURIOUS TO HEALTH

The missing link

Donald Trump and someone called Angie Everhart (who?) were co-presenters at the Ryder Cup opening ceremony last week

MARTIN KELLNER

It is only once every two years we become truly European, prepared to forgive our neighbours for trying to ban our cheese and onion crisps (allegedly), and saying our chocolate had to contain chocolate rather than vegetable fat, the remains of small rodents and all that other stuff we like, happy to overlook outrages like Europop, lederhosen and Maurice Chevalier. The most unreconstructed Eurosceptic, I suspect, will have been transfixed by our continent's Ryder Cup performance.

Which led me to thinking about what it means to be a European. I think the chief difference between us and the Americans is that, on seeing Donald Trump, we are more likely to look beyond the billions and focus on the hair. Trump was one of the star turns at the Ryder Cup opening ceremony, at which there were frequent references to the "worldwide audience of millions" but little allowance made for viewers born outside the United States.

Co-presenter with Trump, of whom we might at least have been expected to have heard,



although without any precise knowledge of how he became so rich and famous—was "model and actress" Angie Everhart. Who is she? Well, I can tell you, with all the authority of someone with a broadband connection, she has been in a number of films, none of which are in immediate danger of troubling the compilers of Sight and Sound's films of the decade list, and was once squired by Sylvester Stallone.

Angie and Don read alternate lines off a teleprompter. It was typically cornball stuff, with the Trumpster drawing comparisons between the worlds of golf and business: 'I'm a

competitive kinda guy," he declaimed.

Cheers and whoops greeted these platitudes, as they did Angie's opening: "Like many luminaries that will share the stage with us today, Donald and I love being part of this glorious event. Golf is in our heart."

With these words she adopted her most sincere look and placed her right hand across her small but perfectly formed chest.

None of this is to say that the Americans did not put on an impressive opening show, as you might expect from the nation that invented showbusiness. ●

(The Guardian)



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become clear that Chandeshwor Lama, a businessman from Boudha, received Robinson in Kathmandu with the help of the police. Robinson was accompanied by Lama's relatives to Kathmandu. Prior to this, Robinson headed to Dharan accompanied by Rajan Bohora. When questioned by the probe committee, Bohora quoted Robinson as saying: "You can't imagine how much money I have spent. I am going to be released tomorrow." Police had arrested Robinson from Bohora's house in Dharan but released him after Chandeshwor's man, Resham Lama, arrived. "Robinson is believed to have been taken to Kathmandu to settle a deal," said a member of the committee. The report says Chandeshwor Lama met Robinson as many as 25 times when he was in detention at Dilli Bajar. Lama was at the jail with his car when Robinson's acquittal was announced by the Supreme Court. Chandeshwor lives near chief justice Shrestha's Boudha residence. When Robinson appealed against the Special Court's verdict to slap him with a 17-year imprisonment, a single bench of Shrestha himself, who was acting chief justice, summoned the petitioner and the defendants to the court. Shrestha initiated the case in the absence of then-chief justice Kedar Nath Upadhyaya. (Nepalnews.com Translation Service)

corpus writ application, ordered the government to make the state of the missing people public within three days. The SC was informed that Balaram Rai, Rabin Rai, Tek Bahadur Rai, Rakesh Rai, Subas Rai, Bam Bahadur Rai, Durga Bahdur Rai, Prem Kumar Limbu, Om Prakash BC, Bal Ram KC, Khadka Bahadur Dharti, Teknath Sigdel and Guru Subedi had been detained in the last 15 days. The prime minister and the Council of Ministers, Defense Ministry, Home Ministry, Army Headquarters and Armed Police Headquarters have been asked four questions: were these people imprisoned or not, if they have been then for what reasons, under which law and their whereabouts. Earlier, laws, rules and a properly written habeas corpus writ were compulsory for issuing such orders. An official in the Writ Section of the SC said, "The fact that such writs need to be written within a certain format has been defied from Tuesday. It seems that any format would work from now on." Human rights lawyer, Bhimarjun Acharya, is happy about the precedence. "In sensitive cases like habeas corpus, such flexibility should have been adopted much earlier, but better late than never," he said. (Nepalnews.com Translation Service)

THIS OCTOBER

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 Paste Shortcut
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talking about your generation

Habeas corpus

Nepal Samacharpatra, 21 September

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

The Supreme Court has written a letter to the government and security agencies ordering them to make the whereabouts of people taken under custody by the government and the security forces public. This SC order is a milestone in Nepali history.

On the basis of information received, the joint bench of SC judges Min Bahadur Rayamajhi and Bal Ram KC on Tuesday ordered the security agencies and the Prime Minister's Office to disclose, within three days, the whereabouts of 14 persons who were said to have gone missing after they were arrested by security forces in the last 15 days.

This is the first time that orders were given to the government and security forces on the basis of a roughly written application letter.

Three weeks back, the Nepal Human Rights Commission filed a habeas corpus writ petition demanding to know the state and whereabouts of 433 missing people.

On the matter of the writ, the SC had issued a show cause notice to the government security authorities. Two days ago, the Nepal Human Rights Commission registered an application written on an unofficial paper at the SC, saying that the security agencies had arrested and disappeared 14 more persons in the last fortnight even after the show cause order was issued. The SC then had a hearing on Tuesday and on the basis of the habeas

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Namche looks forward

In the Everest region everyone is readying for the autumn trekking rush



NARESH NEWAR IN NAMCHE BAJAR

At the entrance to Namche Bajar, a group of armed soldiers relax, chat and greet this season's first batch of European tourists.

Nowhere else in Nepal do security forces seem so friendly and at peace, and for good reason. The Sherpas laugh when asked about the Maoist

militants. "It's too much hard work. They'd have to be expert climbers to cross the passes and come all the way down to Namche," says Mingma Sherpa, who runs a trekking inn at Phakding, a four-hour walk from Lukla airport. "Only Sherpas can do that. None of the Maoists are Sherpas," adds her husband.

BOTH PICS: KUNDA DIXIT

Changa Chait 2061, 1st Knock - Out Game

Saturday 9th Ashwin, 2061 (September 25, 2004)

1 Fewa Tours & Travels	VS	Specialized Tours & Travels
2 Seagull Travels & Tours	VS	Surya Travels & Tours
3 Yeti Travels	VS	Tour Nepal Travels
4 Shangri-La Hotel & Resort	VS	Marcopolo Travels
5 NIC Bank	VS	ACE Finance Company
6 Nepal Investment Bank	VS	Gorkha Brewery
7 The Boss- Speciality Media	VS	ECS Magazine
8 Mercantile Solution	VS	Infocom
9 AVCO	VS	Amatya Enterprises
10 Air Tech Industries	VS	Hilltake Electrical & Refrigeration

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 FOOD FESTIVAL ~ KITE STALLS ~ SPECIAL ATTRACTIONS & MUCH MORE

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Club Himalaya Changa Chait 2061

"Kite flying competition"

Meeting point.



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 (SEPTEMBER 25th, OCT 2nd, OCT 16th 2004)

TIME: 11:00AM-3:00PM
 VENUE: CLUB HIMALAYA, WINDY HILLS, NAGARKOT
 ENTRY FEE: RS 100/- WITH ONE WELCOME DRINK

Contact: 668-0080/83, 441-1436, 441-4432
 e-dress: clubhim@mos.com.np

Co-Sponsors:      

Event Managed By **CLUB HIMALAYA Nagarkot**

to lively autumn

MONSOON KHUMBU: A *mane* wall near Jorsale below Namche Bajar with moss growing on the 'Om mane padme hum' (*far left*) and the meadow at Tengboche is emerald green.

Mingma invested over Rs 800,000 to renovate her hotel during the last couple of months, and is confident that with tourist arrivals looking healthy, it will be worthwhile. "The investment will attract more tourists to my hotel. Besides, we never worry about tourists. This is Everest and everyone's full of hope," says Mingma.

Preparations for the tourist season are in full swing right up the trail from Lukla. Up to 15 flights from Kathmandu landed in Lukla's famous inclined runway during a break in the weather last week. Porters and yak trains can be seen carrying tons of supplies like kerosene, gas cylinders, mattresses, beverages, and chickens.

Many hotels are being renovated and redecorated to welcome even bigger crowds of Europeans expected next week. In Kathmandu, trekking agencies report only minimal cancellations, and those who had booked treks in other parts of Nepal have shifted to the Everest area.

Ang Tshering, a veteran expedition leader, says that this

will be the last week that Namche is quiet. "From next week, you have to be very lucky to even get a room for the night. The trail to Tengboche will be full of trekkers," says Ang Tshering, who was on his way to Lukla to fly out to Kathmandu to receive 100 Australian clients, when he talked to us in Monjo.

The lingering monsoon showers this year have made the trail wet. But up here, there are no leeches and the rain is confined to the night. The forest is luxuriant, birdlife abundant and the scenery through the breaks in the clouds, breathtaking. Throughout the monsoon, owners of the 37 or so lodges in Namche have been repairing and cleaning. There are enough hotel beds to accommodate 1,500 trekkers per night. Locals admit the rest of Nepal's loss has been Namche's gain, but they aren't happy about it. They know they prosper if Nepal as a whole prospers.

The only disruption here has been the Maoist blockade of the Jiri road and the harassment of porters on the trail from Jiri to Jumbesi. Nowadays, most supplies are flow in on cargo helicopters, which makes many food and consumer items expensive. Some porters do manage to make it through Jiri, but only at tremendous risk. This has given suppliers an opportunity to rip off customers,

who have no choice but to buy from them at any cost. Currently, a kg of buffalo meat costs Rs 400 at Namche's Saturday market.

"Tourism in the Everest region has hardly been affected. I haven't seen any change in the tourist turnover for the last 10 years," says Mingma Sherpa, owner of Chukung Resort. He has walked three days from Chukung to Namche with 80 American trekkers. Like most hoteliers in the Everest region, Mingma expects about 6,000 tourists this season, most of whom are expected to come starting next week. "It's better for Nepalis to book in advance as they will never get a room once the foreigners arrive. This road will be packed," says porter Dawa Sherpa, as he heaves his 60kg pack up the steep uphill to Namche.

Despite the curfew in Namche from 7PM onwards, the security forces are quite lenient and residents often walk around the market area until late at night. "Curfew in Namche sounds odd, we just ignore it," says Dipesh Chettri, a local trader.

A night patrol walks by at night sometimes, and they make casual inquiries and don't bother anyone. It seems everyone knows nothing should be done to spoil the chances of a trekking rebound this autumn. ●

Health post bombed, vaccine drive halted

A week after looting a medical caravan in Okhaldhunga bearing equipment and vaccines for the nationwide anti-measles drive, the Maoists have bombed a health post in Udaypur Gadi district which was inoculating children against the disease. Officials say the measles vaccines stored in the health post for delivery to various VDCs in the district were destroyed. The Maoists asked employees to evacuate the building, planted pressure cooker bombs at the Ilaka Health Post as well as a nearby police building and set them off, according to district health incharge, Dr Arun Kumar Das. The one-week vaccine drive in central and eastern Nepal was launched on 21 September and nearly five million children between 9 and 15 years of age will get measles injections and booster shots, as well as polio shots. The next two phases of the drive will be launched in the coming six months and some 9.5 million children will be inoculated. Each year measles afflicts 150,000 children in Nepal, and 5,000 of them die due to complications.

Air Sahara begins New Delhi flights



Air Sahara, one of India's leading private airlines, inaugurated its flight to Kathmandu on 16 September after its 737

landed during a heavy shower (*pictured*). The airline has chosen a special late-afternoon departure slot with flights leaving New Delhi at 1315 (Indian time), arriving in Kathmandu at 1455 (Nepali time) and turning around at 1600. Air Sahara is also including a special introductory fare for Indians and Nepalis, which will be valid till 30 September on Kathmandu-Delhi flights and until 15 October on the Delhi-Kathmandu flights.

Fashion week

Sunsilk, in association with Fashion Design Council of Nepal (FDCN) and IEC is organising Sunsilk Nepal Fashion Week. The event hopes to highlight and promote Nepali designers and their contribution to the world of fashion. Thirty fashion designers are participating in the event, which is scheduled for 24-30 September at the Hotel Yak and Yeti. There will be a fashion fair from 10AM to 5PM every day, followed by a fashion show from 6.30-8PM and then dinner and a party at Club Platinum.

Instant liquidity

The latest Everest Bank credit scheme, 'Loan against shares', allows customers to enjoy instant liquidity against shares approved by the bank. The scheme extends loans of up to Rs 5,000,000 for individuals and up to Rs 20,000,000 for firms, companies or business houses. The customer will enjoy the liquidity at a low interest rate without having to sell the shares.



MIAMI—The Americas were under siege this week, but not from terrorists, foreign armies or plagues. The most primal and irresistible forces of nature are outside the walls of the fortress, threatening to batter them down and wreak havoc within. Hurricane Ivan was the latest,

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



and he's laid waste to the lives of tens of thousands of people across the West Indies and the southern states.

Here in the United States, people had to cope with two earlier hurricanes, both given female names in the

alphabetical, alternating gender list that meteorologists put out every tropical storm season. I wrote about one of them, Hurricane Charley, some weeks ago (*Disaster in America, #210*). And I've just come back from feeling the effects of the second, Hurricane Frances. Ivan was far, far worse than either of those two. He's larger, more intense and completely unpredictable. Just ask the people of the Caribbean island of Grenada, the first place that Ivan struck. Screaming winds and deluges of rain left 50 or more dead, and wrecked more than half of the houses on the island. People knew it was coming, but they didn't expect to hit so

The Big One

From the scene of distant disaster, a plea to Nepal to get ready for the worst

hard, so directly.

A little later, an even stronger Hurricane Ivan (tropical storms pick up intensity over water and weaken over land) headed towards the more populous and poverty-stricken island of Jamaica. The nation prepared for the worst as best as people living in tin shacks and slums can. But at the last minute, Ivan veered and hit Jamaica with its fringes and not its full destructive power. It was devastating, but it could have been worse. Up here in Florida, for the third time in a little over a month, people were asked to leave their homes in threatened areas. They were given lots of notice, a week or more, because it takes time to come to grips with the prospect of absolute devastation. Memory of hurricanes Charley and Frances is still frighteningly fresh, so it didn't take much to persuade Floridians that they should be ready for the worst.

I wonder at times like this

about Nepal and its earthquake preparation strategy. I can hear people snorting into their tea all over the kingdom. Preparation? Strategy? Never mind that there's no culture of being ready for the worst by minimising the opportunity for damage or death. How can a country that sees itself as in near-terminal decline prepare for those mysterious and unpredictable forces of nature that observe no timetables, or pay no heed to logic?

Yet if Nepal doesn't take its earthquake scenarios seriously, it is well and truly doomed. I've often been struck, when I had the privilege of living among you, by the utter disregard at every level of society for the coming and certain calamity of the 'Big One'. Warning after warning that a major tremor is overdue, that the earth's plates beneath Kathmandu are hugely unstable, that no one is doing anything to get ready—all these pass without notice. This newspaper and others do their

best to point these things out, often by invoking memories of the disastrous quake of 1934 that killed 80,000 and informing us that the toll today of such an event would be millions.

Kathmandu Valley, home to 80 percent of the kingdom's economic activity, has but two road connections to the outside world, both through mountainsides that already tumble and block access in every passing shower. A single runway offers fixed wing aircraft the chance to take off or land. The recent riots show how close to the edge the populace is, how ill prepared the government and how evil forces of extreme right and left are ready to take advantage of any situation.

Yet again from a scene of distant disaster, I plead with Nepal to get ready for the worst. But I know deaf ears when I see them. And they exist at every level of society in the land I learned to love. Good luck to you all. ●

My second time

How I met the real Nepal on a return visit



PADAM GHALE

My first visit to Nepal was in mid-March. The only things I knew about Nepal at the time was that it was one of the poorest countries in the world, it had splendid mountains and that it was politically unstable. I stayed here for only four weeks, but it was difficult not to return.

In May I found myself back again at Tribhuban International Airport, and walked into town. This time I was determined not to live the artificial life of Kathmandu or the semi-artificial one of a trekker along an established route. I initiated my rite of passage into Nepalidom and got myself a guide, Rajendra Subedi to take me on a trip into Dhading.

Everyone had told me I was on a headon collision with the dreaded Maoists. My fears were realised in Satdobate. A lot of red flags prominently displayed this village's political preference. Two men, no older than 20, approached Rajendra and my apprehension grew as his face stiffened. All the boys wanted to discuss was politics. They grilled me on my views on US foreign policy, my country's stand, what I thought about Maoism and my take on democracy. Sitting there, in that tea shop with my guide as my translator, I was stuck by the irony of the situation as I recalled the numerous times during my trip that I had sat in similar tea shops hiding from the Maoists to sip a forbidden glass of beer.

All along the trails, the children come out to point, giggle and sometimes scream "Hello!" My respect for them increases as I watch them skipping past me in their slippers on the long road to school while me in my fancy hiking shoes, panting and sweating can barely keep up. Their schools are bare, few teachers and the homework can only be done in the dim light of lamps after work on the fields is over. Some small children work as porters carrying huge burdens to augment the family income. Still, they wake up every morning, don their blue uniforms and flock to school.

It is hard not to be captivated by the greenery, the landscape, the mystical air and the enormous natural space. But indoors, the space is claustrophobic and no one has any privacy. This has its own advantages: living together and sharing lives creates something beautiful in itself. These villages are real communities everyone tries to help everyone else. Everything is shared from food, the only tv and the responsibility to babysit children while parents work.

In the village, the lack of privacy affects women the most. They have to wake up at four in the morning to have a few moments to themselves, and they carry the burden of household chores, taking care of the children and joining the men to work the fields.

It has been said before, but foreigners don't realise it until they see it themselves: the immense pride the Nepalis have. Not only are they proud of their independence and of their country, but they display dignity and a sense of self-worth. All this despite all the hardships that have piled up because of the insurgency. The country may be on the brink of civil war, but I can see Nepalis will never give up their self-esteem. I feel ashamed to be so individualistic, and then look at my new-found friends who are so proud of who they are. This is something no one can take away from Nepal. ●

Marike Hippe works for the department of social welfare in Holland, but is currently enjoying a sabbatical in Nepal, volunteering for FOHRID and an orphanage. MRmountain1@hotmail.com

"This is Radio People's Republic."

The Maoists are taking their revolution to the airwaves with their own FM radio

RAMESWOR BOHARA in NEPALGANJ

An increasing number of antennas are popping up on rooftops all over midwestern Nepal. They aren't for tv, but radio aerials to help people in the western tarai catch the FM broadcasts of the Maoists' clandestine Radio Janabadi Ganatantra.

The broadcasts are feeble and not regular since the mobile transmitters are always on the move to avoid detection. But people listen anyway, more to find out the Maoist partyline than out of a desire to get information.

"We don't really believe what they say on the radio, it's mostly political slogans, but it is interesting to find out what they are saying and planning," says

one Gulariya resident, who did not want to be named. A year ago, the rebels launched the broadcasts without much fanfare. The Maoists are currently broadcasting on 100 mhz and say they have a transmitter mast with a capacity of up to 500 kilowatt. This would make the station as powerful as Radio Sagarmatha in Kathmandu. Locals need to hook their battery radio to an aerial to be able to catch the signal properly. The broadcasts began last year from the Maoist heartland of Thawang in Rolpa. The Bheri-Karnali Broadcasting Service followed, and now they have also begun the Seti-Mahakali Broadcasting Service.

A typical news broadcast this week went as follows: "Because of a courageous ambush laid by the brave people's liberation army, 22 Royal American Army

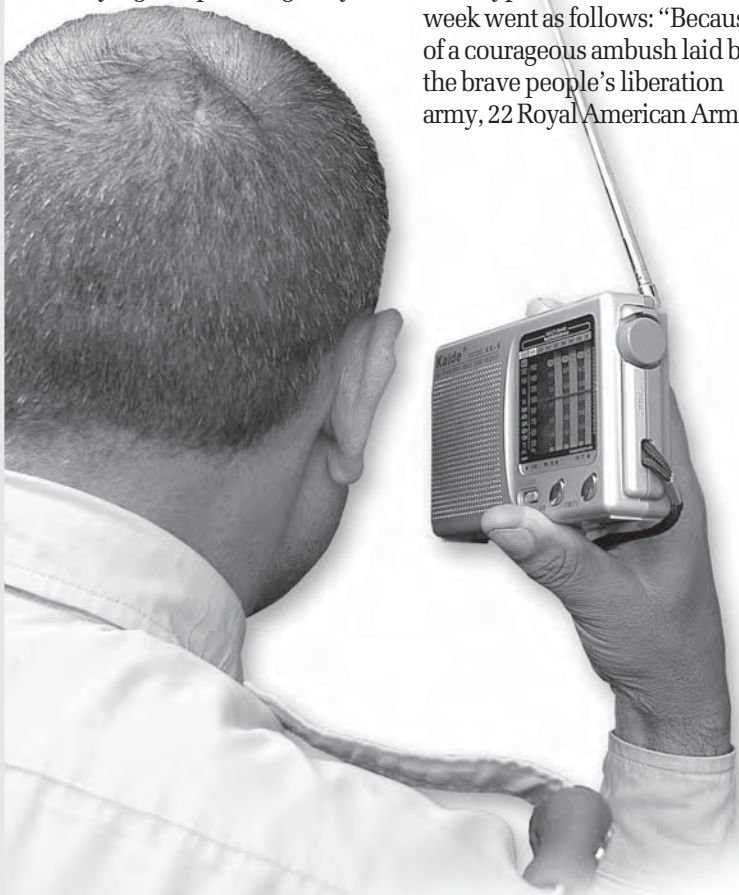
also a lot of abuse hurled at the "reactionary Indian government for supporting the fascist regime" in Kathmandu. For programs that are supposed to create awareness and win over public opinion, the language is crude and provocative, but it does seem to work in some places. One recent evening, the radio announcer repeated in a shrill voice: "We must uproot any state power responsible for discrimination." Some dalit listeners nodded their heads in agreement. Rebel leaders told us they have been trying to improve their radio presentation skills by being less propagandistic and more persuasive. "We have already begun giving journalism training to our correspondents and program producers," says Maoist Banke-Bardia in-charge, Anal.

The Bheri-Karnali service broadcasts three times a day on 100 mhz. From 6-7AM there are discussions, current affairs and liberation songs with a news bulletin at the end. The afternoon transmission airs 'people's songs' and a news bulletin. In the evening, transmission begins at approximately 6PM and usually goes on for three hours with the day's news in Nepali and local languages. Agriculture, health, education, communist philosophy and rousing liberation songs are also aired. The radio targets minorities and ethnic communities, and exhorts them to rise up against oppression.

A rebel journalist told us their studio equipment is still rudimentary, and none of the programs are aired live. The broadcasts are irregular, and sometimes the transmissions stop for weeks without explanation. The Maoists' regional communication in-charge, Biswajit, explains that this is because their transmitter has to be moved often to avoid detection. The stations have their own correspondents across the midwest. One of the senior Maoists looking after the broadcasts, Hari Das 'Prakhar', was killed in action three months ago, an event covered in detail by Radio Ganatantra.

Locals are not very surprised by the propaganda-laden style and language of the Maoists broadcast, and tell us it is not so different from what state-owned Radio Nepal broadcasts in its news about "so many terrorists killed and a large amount of explosives, detonators and documents captured". But the rebel radio is one notch ahead in the use of jargon and derogatory labels like "killer king" or "Royal American Army". Lately, there is

Ironically, the first people to notice the Maoist's Bheri-Karnali broadcasts were the security forces. Sentries guarding the television tower in Surkhet intercepted the signals but were not able to pinpoint the location of the transmitter accurately. The most dedicated listeners in fact seem to be the security forces, who say they tune in to find out what the enemy has to say. ●



MIN BAJRACHARYA

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Against the current

AARTI BASNYAT

It was in 1989 during the Indian blockade that people in Kathmandu started thinking seriously about alternatives to fossil fuels. Then the tankers started plying again and everyone forgot about it.

Now, as petrol prices are increased yet again, the government should be giving serious thought to giving incentives to electric vehicles. No such luck. The government fears loss of revenue from the tax on petrol and diesel cars and has dragged its feet on allowing five prototype vehicles that had

Five electric cars are rotting in Birganj customs because the government refuses to give non-fossil fuel cars a tax break

WAY TO GO: A fire-engine red Safa Tempo carries Danish Embassy staff to and from work every day in Kathmandu.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

already arrived in Birganj customs into the country.

But one organisation devoted to electric vehicles promotion hasn't given up. Founders of the Kathmandu Electric Vehicles Association (KEVA) say alternatives to fossil fuels makes both ecological sense and economic sense.

KEVA doesn't just talk, it was behind the introduction of Safa tempos in Kathmandu in 1993 with support from USAID and the Global Research Institute. That move did incalculable good to the lungs of Kathmandu residents by removing the polluting diesel tempos. There are now more than 600 Safa tempos in the Valley.

KEVA has now joined forces with Clean Energy Nepal (CEN) to lobby the government to introduce other electric vehicles like electric buses, trolley buses, electric trains and electric commercial cars. "Electric vehicles are the perfect solution to Kathmandu's growing pollution and fossil fuel problems," says Bibek Chapagain of KEVA.

As far as we can make out, the only disadvantage of current model electric vehicles is that they only run about 80km per charge, but in a city as small as Kathmandu that is more than adequate.

Says CEN's Bhusan Tuladhar: "These vehicles will only be charged at night, during off-peak electricity

consumption hours and at a time when excess energy is being wasted." This means that the public and environment would benefit and there would be optimum usage of electricity.

In a bid to promote these environment and user-friendly vehicles, the company Ecovisions imported five Indian-made Reva electric cars (*see box*) hoping to start off the trend of EVs as private vehicles. The project looked promising, but once the cars reached Birganj they were stopped and refused entry at 10 percent tax, which is what other electric vehicles were required to pay according to the budget on 17 March 2002.

The vehicles were not allowed to come into the country and were delayed until 18 July 2002, when the new budget came into play and the EVs were subject to 130 percent tax, with a 30 percent waiver due to their electric status. This would make the electric cars more expensive than petrol ones, and was therefore not feasible. As the debate raged uselessly, the the Reva cars have rusted in Birgunj and Ecovisions has folded.

Bibek Chapagain says, "The government support for electric vehicles has only been lip service." CEN's Bhusan Tuladhar agrees: "We realise that with the state the country is in, this may not be a priority, but we should see this as a way to make the country better." ●

All Reva-ed up

The days of the big Ambassador or even the dinky Maruti may be over, with the latest in Indian automobiles—the Reva. Sure, it looks a little bit like something Noddy or the Jetsons may drive, and its hard to believe that the two-door hatchback is really capable of seating a family of four, but beauty is superficial—and the motives behind this car are solid gold. The Reva is the first Indian non-pollution and noiseless car, completely electric and eco-friendly. Since the first prototypes in 1996, the Bangalore-based Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI) put it through extensive testing. The result is two models of a street-ready vehicle, which, on a single charge of 9 units, can run for 80km at up to 65km/hr. Charging 80 percent of the battery takes about 2.5 hours at any 15-ampere, 220 volt socket, and it is less than six hours for full charge. Without an engine, carburettor, radiator, exhaust or clutch, the Reva is easy to drive and low-maintenance and all for less than \$5,000. This month, 300 units were exported to Britain. In Nepal, the government has refused to cut the vehicle tax to make the ideal car for this country affordable.



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The Kali Gandaki tangle

NEA management, with official collusion, let \$30 million in guarantee money slip away



NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

Even before the shady transfer of cost overruns in the Kali Gandaki A hydropower project has been resolved, yet another scam has rocked the country's biggest power project.

The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) paid \$50 million in cost overruns to the project's Italian contractor, most of it without authorisation from the board. Now, it has been revealed that NEA's past management allowed the contractor's \$30 million guarantee money to slip away even though a court ruling in Paris a year ago awarded it to Nepal.

As a result, NEA doesn't have access to the performance bid (also known as 'retention money') amounting to \$30 million because the contractor has gone for arbitration in the International Chamber of Commerce in Paris. The Intasa Bank in Milan says it can't transfer the money to NEA's account because of the new legal tangle. The other bad news is that there is no counter bank guarantee

in Nepal—yet another flaw on the NEAs part—when it signed the deal with the contractor in the late 1990s. Had there been a counter bank guarantee, the recovery of the money would have been much easier.

"The previous management should have taken the money as soon as we had won the case," says Minister of State for Water Resources, Thakur Prasad Sharma. "Since they didn't do that, we are having a tough time getting the \$30 million back." NEA had sent two officials to Milan earlier this month but they came back empty-handed because the bank said the matter was in arbitration.

The legal proceedings will last another year-and-a-half and even at the end of it, there is no certainty NEA will get back the \$30 million. The arbitration is over another \$20 million the Italian contractor, Impregilo SpA, has claimed over and beyond the \$50 million in cost overruns that it has already been paid. NEA has been refusing the payment of the additional claim.

In this tangle, the question now is not

whether NEA will get the guarantee money back, but why it did not transfer the \$30 million to its account when it could have after the international court in Paris authorised it to do so. The decision came after Impregilo moved the court following NEA's bid to freeze the guarantee because the Italian contractor had not extended its term despite the authority's repeated requests. The extension of the guarantee money had become necessary because the two parties had not agreed on the variation costs of the project during the government of Lokendra Bahadur Chand last year. (See *Nepali Times* #155,166 and 174)

The court's decision in favour of NEA had come while when the Chand government was being replaced in early 2003. The successor government did not pursue the matter and insiders say the NEA management at that time was complicit in not making any moves to retrieve the money. Fingers are pointed at the then-Tourism Minister and NEA chairman Sravendra Nath Shukla, who

allegedly made no attempt to get the money back.

"He used to argue that the idea was to settle the variation dispute amicably," said one former board member. "But, many knew that this would be in the Impregilo's interest." Besides, the theory of amicable settlement simply does not apply here, because Impregilo had already walked away with \$50 million in variation costs. NEA insiders told us the additional \$20 million the Italians are claiming can't be justified, and reclaiming the \$30 million bank guarantee could have at least compensated for the earlier unauthorised payment.

Former Minister Shukla said the NEA did not collect the money because he wanted the dispute with Impregilo to be settled amicably. "If we had taken the money, we would have had to face the arbitration then. Our legal advisors suggested that we go for an amicable settlement." However, board members during his tenure remember suggesting to him that the money had to be collected at the earliest. "But he always discouraged the idea and now money has slipped out of our hands for good," said one official.

Impregilo's local agent Sanjeev Koirala says the money is safe in the Milan bank and that it has never said it would not pay NEA. "The bank has never said so and even if it had given the money in the past, the NEA would have an upper hand in the present arbitration," he told us.

But the Italian contractor has influenced the civil construction deal of the 144MW Kali Gandaki A project from the beginning. It won the contract by bidding the lowest, \$130 million, but used a clause in the contract for variation to claim and got the \$50 million in cost-overruns, most of it without the NEA board's approval. Our complicit officials seem to have as much a hand in this as the Italians.

When the scam became public knowledge, instead of taking action against the culprits, the former NEA board swept the matter under the carpet. Worse yet, it helped the foreign contractor keep its \$30 million guarantee money which rightfully belongs in the national coffers. ●

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The business of peace

Supply peace now, while demand is high

Though lots of Kathmanduites talk about the need for peace, the numbers don't add up when it comes demonstrating their support for the business of peace. However, on Monday evening

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed



at Maitighar and at Basantapur on Tuesday morning, the peaceniks took to the streets.

Last Saturday, the Beed watched groups of Peace Corps volunteers at Hotel Yak Yeti preparing to leave, still unsure of why they were being pulled out. The continuous flow of advisories have never helped the business of peace. Now diplomatic missions and other offices have to weigh the pros and cons of destroying an economy that affects many in order to save the jobs of a few.

On World Peace Day, the leaders were back to shouting slogans and snarling traffic. Whenever there is even a hint of peace, they all appear again to destroy that chance, proving they aren't serious about the business of peace.

Peace is an important issue for Nepal's neighbours too, since disruptions can easily spread to their own territories. A good example of this is how unrest in Indian towns and villages affected neighbouring regions of southern Bhutan as well. Although the Nepali delegation to India seemed satisfied that Deve Gowda hosted a dinner for the prime minister, India and Nepal need



MIN BAJRACHARYA

to do a lot more to ensure peace.

The donor community uses the phrase 'conflict resolution' to keep funding consultants, conferences, workshops and seminars, but there is no guarantee that this will lead to peace. The agenda may need to therefore change from conflict resolution to peace restoration. Of course, the less said of the government the better. It can't restore peace because, first and foremost, it has never shown any intention of doing so. The business of arms and war are vastly more tempting than the business of peace.

As always, it is sad to see that the business community remains largely indifferent. Here the Beed strongly endorses fellow columnist Ashutosh Tiwari's suggestion ('Rising from the ashes', #214) that a Business Initiative for Peace be created. Genuine businesses can only thrive and grow in the absence of conflict. There are businesses that thrive in chaos and strife, but the Beed hopes that that is not

what most Nepali businesses do, or wish to do.

We are in a do-or-die situation. Tourism has been hit hard, industries are suffering and the business of remittances through labour export has also been affected. The sense of insecurity is high and the options for resolution are low. In villages, where people are willing to walk four hours to a water sprout or two hours to a school, Nepalis are willing to bear any hardship for peace. Economics suggest that when the demand is at its peak, that is best time to ensure supply.

The crux of the issue is that the business of peace needs to be taken seriously. This business surely has the best short, medium and long term returns. This business benefits every Nepali as a stakeholder and provides every opportunity to return Nepal to what all would like it to be. That is why we have to applaud the initiative taken this week by informal citizens' groups to campaign for peace. ●

arthabeed@yahoo.com



"They don't even want to utter the name Iraq"

MIN BAJRACHARYA

Nirmal Gurung, President of the Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies, has been trying to get the industry back to normal after the devastating attacks on 300 member offices in Kathmandu on 1 September. Despite everything, he tells *Nepali Times* he is optimistic.

What actually happened to your own investigation on the 1 September vandalism?

We have done our investigation and we are submitting the report to the government's investigation committee. We are working very closely with the government in this regard. A copy of the report will also be given to the Department of Labour.

Is the issue of compensation also being sorted out?

Since the government has agreed to provide compensation of Rs 500,000 to the manpower agencies whose offices were destroyed and has assured it will cooperate in other ways, we have suspended the idea of setting up a pressure committee for now.

What "other cooperation"?

We have been assured that documents like passports that were destroyed during the vandalism will be reissued by the government.

How long before business gets back to normal?

It has already. Of course, there are challenges preventing smooth operation, but we have taken the challenge and have opened our shops again. A lot of documents have been destroyed, but we are trying. We have to. How can we just sit idle? The hopes of a lot of people waiting to work abroad are resting on us.

Are you getting workers willing to go abroad?

We are getting even more clients than in the past. More and more people are willing to go abroad to work. Most of them wish to go to the Gulf countries like Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Dubai. Significant numbers of workers are going to Malaysia as well.

What about Iraq?

People do not even want to utter the name of that country.

What kind of volume are we talking about now?

We can only give figures once we begin to run smoothly and accumulate data. Normally, around 200,000 Nepalis go out of the country to work every year and it will take time to reach that number again. The workers send home about Rs100 billion every year.

Was there an element of rivalry between various groups of manpower agencies that led to the vandalism on 1 September?

This is a conspiracy theory to divide manpower agents. We are all one and we have nothing against one another. The vandalism that took place on 1 September was the result of the anger due to the killings of the 12 Nepalis in Iraq. People simply could not control their anger and they went out to destroy things.

But the rivalry between the two sides is said to have existed for quite sometime now.

I am not aware of it. What I know is that manpower agents in Nepal have always been and still are united.

Any comment on the arrest of your vice president after he and other association members allegedly ransacked the Department of Labour last week?

The matter has been resolved and I do not want to comment on it. We have reached a compromise with the government agency and so we do not want to dig the dead issue up again.

Your executive members have had differences on this issue too.

The differences are due to the government's efforts to divide us.

You mean to say the officials at the Labour Ministry and Department are trying to divide you?

Yes. And by doing that, they reap benefits. That has been their way for quite some time now.

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MIN BAJRACHARYA

Divine childhood

How to reconcile a little girl's rights with the need to protect a national tradition

JENNY DUBIN



MIN BAJRACHARYA

These days, Nepalis need all the blessings they can get. Maoist rebels have been waging war against the monarchy for eight years, displacing hundreds of thousands of people. Amid so much political strife, traditions like the royal kumari provide comfort and continuity. But some Nepalis have begun questioning the tradition, arguing that this once-prestigious position is a violation of human rights.

A generation ago, hundreds of parents would offer their daughters for the royal kumari selection process, considering the post an honour. But in 2001, when royal caretakers went from house to house in Kathmandu looking for a prospective goddess, only five parents were willing to offer their daughters.

When the caretakers came to Preeti Shakya's door, her mother was ambivalent about letting the three-year-old be evaluated. "I didn't want to give her horoscope for consideration," says Reena Shakya, sitting in her living room today. "But how could I say no?"

Preeti's horoscope proved harmonious with the king's. The next step was to examine the girl for 'the 32 perfections', a divine tick list that seems more suited to a character in a Harry Potter novel than to real girl. The royal kumari must have 'a body shaped like a banyan tree, thighs like a deer's, cheeks like a lion's, a neck like a conch shell and a voice clear and soft as duck's'. The royal priest's wife confirmed that Preeti possessed these attributes and also had clear skin, black hair and eyes and a moist tongue.

The three-year-old was then taken to live with her new family at the kumari ghar. "You can imagine what a mother might feel," Reena laments. "My baby was going to be taken away from me for years. As soon as they took her, I knew she had already become a goddess."

For the past three years, Reena Shakya has seen Preeti only once a week, when she visits her at the ghar. "I go as an ordinary worshipper," Reena says. "I have to think of her as a goddess before I think of her as a daughter." Preeti's older sister, however, is allowed to play with

the pint-size deity on Saturdays. From her daughters' interactions, Reena has learned that Preeti is now a cheerful, active six-year-old who loves to play dress-up and eat ice cream—when she is not receiving devotees.

As the royal kumari, Preeti follows a strict routine. Early every morning, attendants dress her in a red and gold brocade gown, pull her hair into a ritual bun and paint a vermilion, black and gold all-seeing third eye on her forehead. At around 9AM, Preeti settles into her throne so priests can come and make offerings to appease the Taleju goddess. After that, Preeti spends several hours receiving and blessing a dozen or so devotees before beginning her daily studies. Then, finally, she is free to play. Even in her rare moments of childhood fun, Preeti is restricted. She can walk only on special cloths set down on the floor and she is forbidden to go out in the sunlight, except during a dozen public appearances a year.

Just before she hits puberty, Preeti will be thrust back into the real world. She will return to a family she barely knows and be expected to perform household chores, like any other adolescent girl. But unlike other Nepali teens, Preeti will have never walked down a city street, chosen her own outfit, or helped her mother cook a meal before.

This abrupt shift from goddess to mortal is rocky for both the girls and their families. "It was very hard. All I wanted to do was go back to the kumari house," says former kumari Rashmila Shakya, 23. The only visible remnant linking Rashmila to her days as a goddess, besides the photos of her that adorn her family's sitting room, is a bald spot on her head from having her hair pulled into a tight bun every day for nearly nine years. "It was home and family to me," Rashmila says. "I didn't know how to face my freedom. I had to struggle to get back into the educational system after I came home."

Rashmila, like all royal kumaris before her, received no education during her reign. She began second grade at age 12. After years of hard work playing

Top, left: The Kumari while bestowing blessings to King Gyanendra during last year's Indra Jatra.

Top, right: The Kumari chariot being dragged across Jaisi Debal on the first day of Indra Jatra.

Left: On the last day of Indra Jatra in 1994, previous Kumari Rashmila Shakya appears with a co-Kumari.

Right: Reena Shakya with her daughter, Preeti, when she was four, just after the announcement that she was the new Kumari in 2000.



DIPENDRA BAJRACHARYA



MIN BAURACHARYA

catch-up in school, she recently began studying for a bachelor's degree in information technology and she dreams of designing software. When she graduates, Rashmila will be the first former goddess with a college degree.

But despite her difficult adjustment, Rashmila has no regrets about her past. "It was an honour," she says. "Not everyone is chosen to be the kumari. It is something I am very proud of."

Rashmila's successor, Amita Shakya, did receive tutoring, thanks to her parents, who pushed for reform. Amita, now 14, agreed to be interviewed only with her parents present. She is slumped on a stool in the family's living room, dressed like an ordinary Nepali teenager in faded jeans and a pink T-shirt. She is silent as her father describes his struggle to secure a tutor for Amita during her reign as kumari. "I sent letters to the palace many times," he recalls. "But their attitude was, 'Your daughter is a goddess. Why does she need an education?'"

It wasn't until Mimita Shakya, Amita's mother, personally handed a letter to King Birendra at a kumari ceremony that changes were made. Five years after Amita had been appointed a royal kumari, the king arranged formal education for the child goddess.

Today, Preeti has a private tutor sent to her quarters each day. Although she is not allowed to attend classes and socialise with other children, she follows the government-prescribed 10-month curriculum for all Nepali schoolchildren.

In September 2002, MP Bidya Bhandari, took a public stand against the kumari tradition during a press conference. She urged that the tradition be abolished: "This is a violation not only of the rights of the child, but of women's and human rights," she said. "The girl is isolated from normal society and after a number of years, when she begins to bleed,

she is thrown out. It is not only traumatising, it is psychologically damaging for a child to be forced to shift between these two worlds."

Sapana Pradhan Malla, a lawyer and human-rights activist who founded the Forum for Women, Law and Development, agrees: "You are chosen when you are not able to decide what is good or bad for you. The child's interests are decided by parents who see this as a prestige issue, because the kumari is respected by the king."

It's no simple matter to abolish a tradition based on centuries of religious faith. "There are some things that are beyond normal human understanding," says Ramesh Prasad Pandey, a 72-year-old priest who has overseen the selection of three royal kumaris. "I could place a stone on the table, and if I see the sacred in it, then it becomes imbued with the sacred. But you could see it merely as a rock. It is the same principle with the kumari. It's a question of belief."

Sapana Pradhan Malla acknowledges that the kumari tradition is probably too much a part of Nepali culture to abolish. So instead, she proposes further reform. "The girl's rights should be protected," she says. "She should be given adequate opportunity for development and education, and she should get counseling before she gives up her position. It is the state's responsibility to protect her rights."

While the government does provide a modest lifelong pension of Rs 3,000 rupees a month for its former goddesses this is a pittance compared to the value of a lost childhood.

One day, Preeti Shakya will voice her own opinion. But for now, the goddess remains apart from mere mortals, until she begins to mature and suffers her inevitable fall from grace. ●

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The Indian Connection

Going international

Samay, 23 September

समय

After the central committee of the Communist Part of Nepal (Maoist) decided to prepare for 'tunnel war' with India, Maoist rebels have accelerated their anti-Indian campaign in mid-western hills. Local Maoist workers have said the new campaign is in response to the repeated arrests of Maoists in India and the Indian government's refusal to cooperate, adding that their party's view of India is beginning to resemble the way they view the United States.

The Maoists have plans to establish a new brigade to take action against India. They have begun recruiting new cadres for this, saying that the time has come to fight for the country and against India. Under the new campaign, the rebels have been recruiting one person from each family in the hilly villages of mid-western Nepal. One such village is Kalagaun in Salyan district, from which 120 people have been recruited and are being trained to use arms.

The training lasts for a minimum of one week and the trainees are between 15-50 years of age. According to Maoist trainer Khim Bahadur Rana, the new recruits are being indoctrinated against "expansionist India and imperialist America" and therefore actions should be initiated against both the powers. But the Maoists have not made it clear what this action consists of. All that the party workers know is that their party's central working committee had recently decided to mobilise the workers against India and the US. Even though lower-level party leaders are unsure about what the leadership actually wants them to do, they have made it mandatory for each family to be trained to fight against foreign invaders. Such training is taking place in what the rebels call their 'base areas'. They have claimed that those undergoing training joined the Maoist fold voluntarily, but most of the trainees have said that they were forced to undertake the training.



ROBIN SAYAMI

Indian nightmare

Nepal, 26 September

नेपाल

These days, Indian security officials become extra alert when they get to hear the term Compact Revolutionary Zone (CRZ). This, according to the Indian Home Ministry, is a plan by the Maoists of Nepal and India to spread their revolution from Nepal to Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Chhatisgad, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Udisa and Andhra Pradesh of India. According to the Indian Home Ministry's latest annual report, incidents related to Naxalites have increased by almost 14 percent. Last year there were around 550 such incidents in which 509 persons were killed. The attack on Chandra Babu Naidu last year showed that their activities had really intensified.

When the Nepali Maoists began operating nine years ago, the Indian People's War Group (PWG) and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) were their source of inspiration. Nine years down the line, their roles have been reversed. Today, the Nepali Maoists are much more battle-hardened and experienced than their Naxalite comrades in India. They are even a source of inspiration for the Indian revolutionaries. As a result, Nepali Maoists and the MCC have made several joint committees in the border areas between Nepal and India. In the meantime, the one-time sworn enemies PWG and the MCC have not only settled their differences, but are even planning a merger. The two Maoist groups have even coined a joint name for post-amalgamation—All-India Maoist Communist Centre. Interestingly, the Nepali Maoists are said to have played a pivotal role in this unification by facilitating the induction of a PWG unit into the MCC in Bihar. To deal with a now-hostile India, the Maoists have launched a campaign to unify separatist groups in India. There are around 50 such groups and most of them are active in sensitive bordering areas of Nepal, India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and China.

Delhi diversion

Former Foreign Minister Ram Sharan Mahat in *Deshnatar*, 19 September

देशनतर साप्ताहिक

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's Delhi visit was ill timed. The government revealed its weaknesses at a time when the law and order situation in Nepal was at its worst. The 1 September incident was still fresh in people's minds and the country was still in shock. The prime minister should have focused on these affairs. Instead, he chose to rush to New Delhi. The joint communiqué issued at the end of the visit also proves that the trip was unproductive. Whatever agreements were signed could have been done at the secretary or ambassador level. So why the rush to go to Delhi? The government knows that it faces the wrath of the people, who saw it remain a mute spectator as the capital burned on 1 September. The New Delhi visit was a ploy to divert the people's attention.

Immediately after the visit, Prime Minister Deuba said excitedly that the government would use force if the Maoists do not come forth for talks. He needs to explain what has given him the confidence to say this. Security is quite a sensitive issue, and if India has assured him something in this regard, then he owes the country an explanation. Unfortunately, there has been no document issued on any agreements or discussions. If this was a working visit and if discussions took place, they should have involved officials from the Home and Defence Ministries. The nation should have a record of the issues discussed. The prime minister was in New Delhi as a representative of Nepal, not as an individual. But there is no recording system in our Foreign Ministry.

When I was in the government, I never held any secret talks or made such visits. I always allowed officials to

accompany me. I always made sure that there were records of all the conversations between the two foreign ministers. Even when there were no officials, I made it a point to write down all the issues discussed and maintain records. Even when I had foreign visitors, I recorded all the talks. But the system I introduced has been discontinued.

School shootout

Rajdhani, 20 September

राजधानी

Despite their repeated commitments to the Geneva Convention, the Maoist rebels continue to misuse school premises as war zones. One of the latest examples was in a higher secondary school in Jajarkot district. Roughly a dozen rebels disguised as students entered the school on 19 September. When security personnel began frisking students at the entrance after receiving information that rebels had entered the school, two of the 12 began brandishing pistols as students ran for cover. The rebels then opened fire on the soldiers outside the school premises, and one soldier was injured during the shootout. After firing several times, the rebels fled from the back door of the school. "We could have retaliated and killed them," said a security official, "but we did not do so because we were concerned about the student's safety."

Peace committee

Rajdhani, 21 September

राजधानी

KATHMANDU—The government has made changes in the structure of the High-level Peace Committee (HPC) formed under the prime minister. The Council of Ministers has approved a proposal that allows the ruling parties to send a minister to advise. "To assist the committee, the Nepali Congress (Democratic), CPN-UML and Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP)

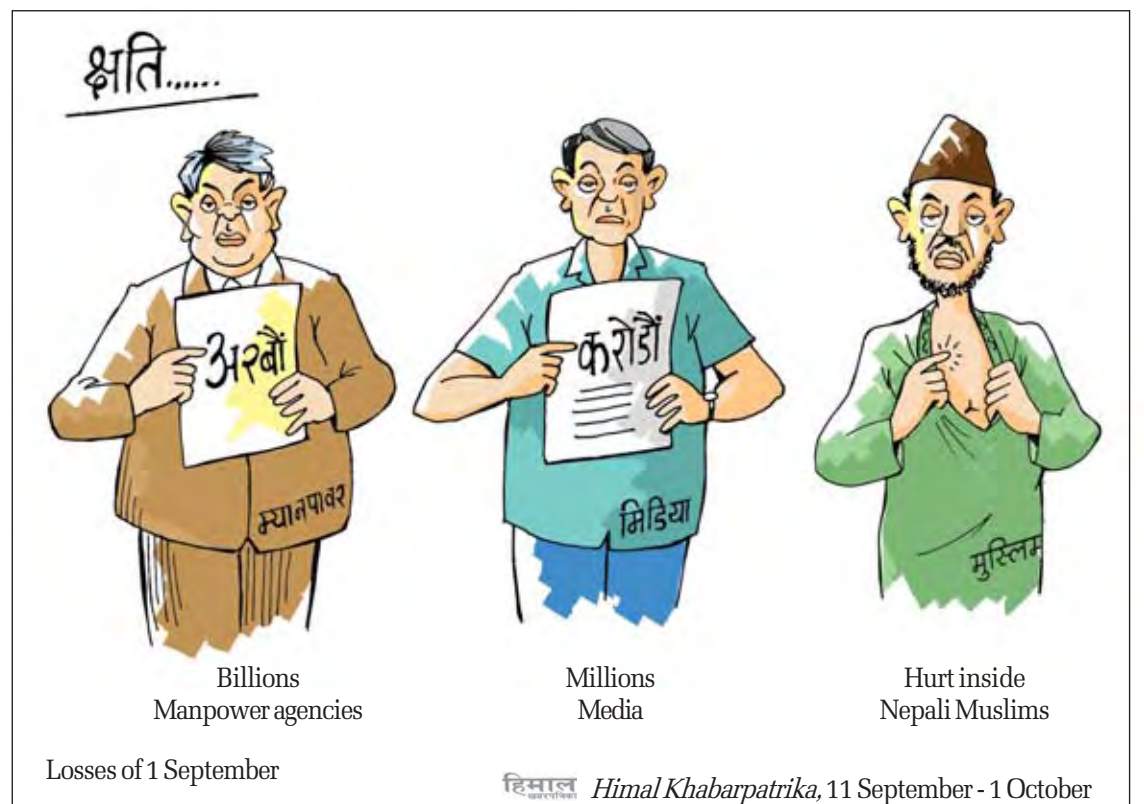
can each send one of their ministers," said a highly-placed government source. The source also said that another sub-committee is being formed which will work under the Democratic Coordination Committee, which includes Deuba, UML general secretary Madhab Kumar Nepal, RPP chairman Pashupati Shumsher Rana and Nepal Sadhbhavana Party chairman and Forest Minister, Badri Prasad Mandal. The sub-committee's job will be to settle minor issues so that the committee doesn't foment controversy. Apparently, the prime minister has asked the alliance leaders to send in names for the committee. Sources claim that NC(D)'s Minendra Rijal, UML's Bhim Rawal, RPP's Khemraj Pandit and Amrita Agrahari from NSP are set to be brought into the committee. (*Nepalnews.com Translation Service*)

Twisted justice

Kantipur, 20 September

कान्तिपुर

Gordon William Robinson, a notorious international drug-lord who was arrested with contraband drug in Kathmandu, was released from Dilli Bajar Jail on 23 April after the Supreme Court acquitted him. He was arrested in Dharan the next day. A few days later, the police handed him over to a businessman from Kathmandu. He then fled. The Judicial Investigation Committee, formed to investigate the controversial court verdict on the Robinson case, has held the court and the police responsible for the entire saga. The report of the three-member committee headed by Supreme Court justice Min Bahadur Rayamajhi which was submitted to chief justice Govind Bahadur Shrestha two months ago is yet to be made public. The committee was supposed to initiate action based on the committee's recommendation but has not done anything as yet. It has now



QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"To make the environment conducive for peace talks, the terrorist tag and the red corner notice on us must be withdrawn"

CPN (Maoist) spokesman Krishna Bahadur Mahara in *Kantipur*, 20 September



After assimilation

The ingredients of the melting pot are separating

of cultures.

Once upon a time, North America, notably the US, seemed to provide the answer. It was that of the “melting pot”: different peoples made their own contribution to American culture, but, above all, they made every effort to accept what they found and integrate. “No,” the Russian woman who came to the US in the early 20th century replied to the grandchild who asked whether her ancestors arrived on the Mayflower. “Our ship had a different name, but now we are all Americans.”

More recently, this has changed, giving rise to a process described by Arthur Schlesinger, the historian and former aide to John F Kennedy, in his book *The Disuniting of America*. No longer are all US citizens Americans. They have become hyphenated Americans: Italian-Americans, African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans and so on. The ingredients of the melting pot are separating.

Even in Israel, the last true

immigration country—at least for Jews—assimilation is no longer so easy. Recent newcomers from Russia have their own political party, and old Europeans have become a distinct minority. Israel and America continue to have mechanisms to integrate new migrants. Language is an important underlying factor, and in Israel, there is the army, while in America, the values embodied in the Constitution still represent a shared secular faith.

But these mechanisms are weakening everywhere and are virtually non-existent in European countries. Modern societies are characterised by acute problems of belonging. They don’t offer the implicit, unconscious ties of community that citizens felt in the past. As a result, people have begun to cling to more primordial group identities. They resist assimilation, fearing that it will rob them of their identity without offering a new one.

What then is the

alternative to assimilation? The “salad bowl” of so-called multiculturalism is no real alternative, because it does not provide the necessary glue that binds communities together. All the ingredients remain separate from the outset.

The only viable alternative for which there are examples is probably that of London or New York. The main characteristic of this alternative is the coexistence of a common public sphere shared by all and a considerable degree of cultural separation in the “private” sphere, notably in residential areas. The public space is multicultural in terms of people’s backgrounds, but is governed by agreed values, even a common language, whereas the people’s private lives are—to use an ugly word—ghettoised.

In theory, this is a distinctly second-best solution to the cultural consequences of migration. In practice, it is the best answer we have. But it cannot be had for nothing. Even the necessary minimum of a common language requires a deliberate effort, to say nothing of certain rules of behaviour.

Living in London, I marvel at the way in which we Londoners have come to terms with Indian family shops and West Indian-run public transport, while not asking many questions about whole districts that are Bangladeshi or Chinese. No one has yet found a name for this new version of the “separate but equal” doctrine that some of us fought so hard against in the 1960’s: separate private lives in a common public space that is equal for all.

This is clearly easier in London and New York than it is in smaller towns or cities where the world language of English is not spoken. Berlin’s Turkish community and the North African communities around Paris seem increasingly separate, with their own public sphere. Where this happens, an explosive condition can arise, a kind of separatism within, not by historically separate groups but by newcomers against natives.

If we are forced to abandon the hope of assimilation, our efforts should concentrate on creating a public space to which all contribute and that all enjoy. Ideally, this should be an expanding public space, for in the end, the element of unity in a modern society is the guarantee of its citizens’ liberty. ● (Project Syndicate/ Institute for Human Sciences)

Human migration is as old as history. Even migration to distant places and remote cultures is nothing new. In the nineteenth century, millions of Europeans sought liberty and prosperity in the

the Mediterranean are often not even sure whether they want to be in Italy, Germany or Britain. Even those who are certain, like North Africans in Spain and France, or Turks in Germany, had as their priority escaping the hopelessness of their home countries, not arriving at a particular destination. This modern form of migration raises massive problems for countries on the receiving end. In Europe, it is probably the most serious social issue today, because no one has a clear idea about how to manage the resulting clash

COMMENT
Ralf Dahrendorf



Americas, notably in the United States. What is new today is the scale of migration, often across huge cultural divides—and often without a definite aim.

The African boat people in

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Ralf Dahrendorf, author of numerous books and a former European Commissioner from Germany, is a member of the British House of Lords, a former Rector of the London School of Economics, and a former Warden of St Antony’s College, Oxford.

Putin's iron fist

Soviet-style strongarm tactics won't work as Russia fights terror

In response to the recent wave of terrorist attacks, Vladimir Putin has demanded that even more power be vested in him, but the problem in Russia is not a lack of central power, but of power exercised incompetently and without individual initiative.

The slaughter of hundreds of Russian

ANALYSIS
Alexander Golts



children in Beslan by

terrorists was final proof—if more was needed—the utter incompetence of Russia's military and security services. In Beslan, camouflaged men representing four ministries fussed uselessly, with no clear leader or goals, losing precious minutes while the violence erupted. Meanwhile, Nikolai Patrushev, the director of the Federal Security Service (FSB, the former KGB) and Rashid Murgaliev, the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), both sent to Beslan by President Vladimir Putin, were invisible as the tragedy unfolded.

So once again Russians must face how ineffective their military is. Indeed, none of Russia's power structures, including the military, the FSB and the MVD, are capable of performing effective anti-terrorist operations.

Most Russians reached this conclusion long before the Beslan attack. In 2002, after terrorists took 800 theatregoers hostage, Putin ordered that an anti-terrorist component be added to Russia's military strategic plan. Some military analysts saw this as the beginning, at long last, of serious reforms, as the army was capable only of executing military operations in Russia's traditional

way—using overwhelming force, as in WWII.

Russia's traditional army cannot fight terrorists effectively because it disdains the ability of soldiers to work in small groups and does not encourage individual initiative on the part of officers. All are simply expected to execute orders scrupulously.

But anti-terrorist operations require individual training and the ability to make split-second decisions in fluid situations. Incidentally, when one such anti-terrorist operation was suggested in

the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia, Putin decided against it, understanding that instead of eliminating terrorists it would likely turn into a full blown traditional war.

From the outset, the Defence Ministry was sceptical of Putin's order to include anti-terrorism on the military agenda. It suggested, instead, that the army should play a secondary role in anti-terrorist operations.

The Army's hostility to reform is deeply ingrained. Today, Russia's army has no professional institution for training non-commissioned officers. The Defence Ministry simply names sergeants from senior conscripts, which means that sergeants are not very different from their subordinates in either age or training.

The internal conditions of the "power" ministries—the FSB and the MVD, which bear the main responsibility for antiterrorist operations—are equally grim. Now the Kremlin wants to merge the FSB and MVD into one Ministry of State Security, thereby creating a single anti-terrorist centre. Putin has already decided to create an operational centre of 13 groups in the Northern Caucasus region to coordinate the actions of the Defence and Emergencies Ministries.

But there is little reason to believe that this proposed bureaucratic monster will provide better security. The only positive result that may emerge from such a structural change could be that the number of anti-terrorist formations will grow. Yet even that is uncertain: before Beslan, the response to terrorist attacks in Ingushetia and Chechnya consisted of efforts to form additional traditional military divisions.

It is now obvious that overwhelming numbers don't provide an advantage in fighting

terrorism, because it is the terrorists who have the initiative—they plan when and where to strike. Confronting them effectively will require root-and-branch change in order to inspire Russian security officials to take the initiative. For example, Russian security structures have no information about the underground work of the terrorist organisations, which are spread across the entire Russian Federation. There is no credible intelligence penetration of these organisations. This must change if Russia is to prevent future Beslans.

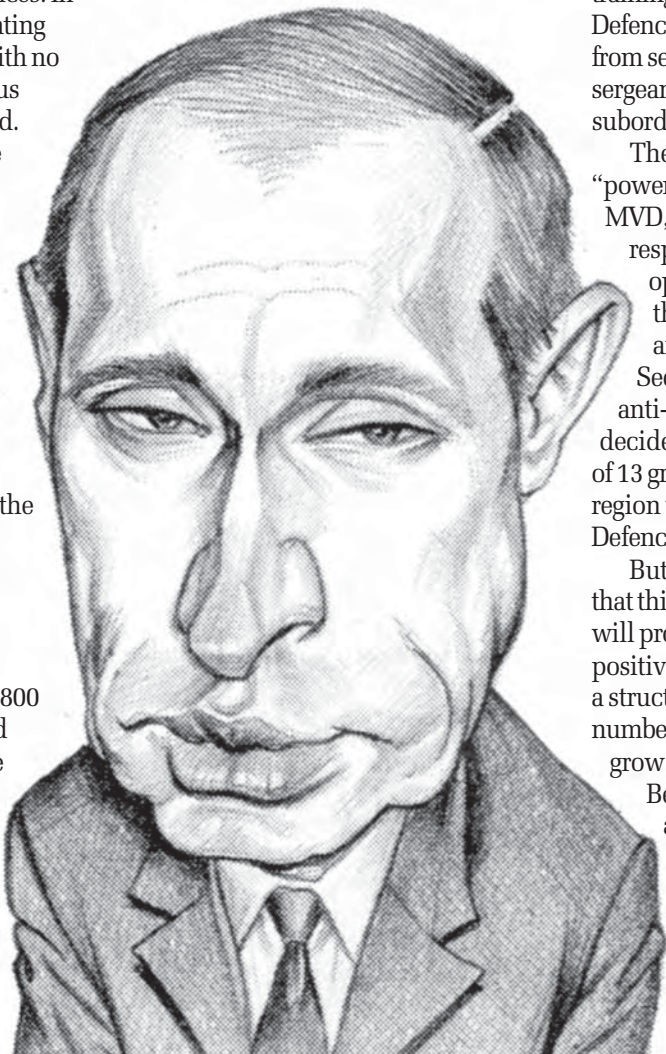
But fighting terrorists requires an entirely different kind of spying from "uncovering" traditional "spies," or neutralising unpopular oligarchs such as Mikhail Khodorkovsky. To meet today's threats, troops must be able to take individual responsibility and initiative, and react resourcefully at a moment's notice.

These qualities simply don't exist in Russia's Sovietised military organisations, with their rigid hierarchies and culture of blind conformity. The entire military philosophy in Russia must be changed. But neither Russia's president nor its power ministries seem ready for this.

Instead of confronting today's new and very real enemy, they would rather confront the old, traditional one—the West. After the Beslan tragedy, Putin offered an exotic explanation of terrorism: the terrorists, he claimed, are instruments in the hands of those who still fear Russia as a nuclear power.

This is nonsense on stilts, though it obviously sounds pleasing to generals in the power ministries, because the only war they know how to wage is with "world imperialism." They are useless at fighting today's new terrorist enemy. Without major reform of all security and military forces—reforms that provide incentives for individual officers to show initiative and take responsibility—Russia's war on terror will remain one-sided: the terrorists will be doing all the attacking. ● (Project Syndicate)

Alexander Golts is a Russian military analyst and deputy editor of *Ezhenedelny Zhurnal*.



Crispy, crunchy crickets

Critter cuisine is becoming highly fashionable in dot com land

JUSTIN HUNT in LONDON

While the idea of eating crispy crickets or lightly fried beetles probably fills most of us with absolute horror, insect eating is apparently becoming highly fashionable. Swarms of trendy new media types are reportedly logging on to wacky Thai food websites and ordering samples of freshly cooked insects to serve at their hip dinner parties.

Bizarre snacking apparently goes on at *Revolution* magazine, the glossy bible of the UK's new media industry. Where, rumour has it, journalists work with open tins of freshly cooked insects sitting on their desks. Not content with revolutionising the way we work, it now appears that the architects of the new economy want to try to revolutionise what we eat.

Christopher Edwards, an advertising executive at *Revolution*, would like to see insects re-appraised as food items. He argues that they are high in protein and low in fat. But until attitudes to food fundamentally change he believes there will only be a niche market for

edible bugs.

"I think the British are too squeamish," he explains. "It's just a case of educating people to try them. I scoffed a cricket. I saw this bug in my hand and thought 'Oh my God, I can't eat it!' It had all its legs and its antennae. They were all there. But I shoved it in and crunched it."

So how did it taste? "It was slightly crispy and soft on the inside. It was quite a bland taste," he says, adding that insect mini-buffets could go down well at parties. "I think you need to have dips with them,

probably some garlic."

To reassure highly sceptical consumers, the Thai food website (www.dcothai.com) explains that all its bugs are carefully sterilised, preserved and spiced before being packed. But the news of the campaign to market insect snacks to the UK has received a mixed response from leading Thai restaurant chefs.

While some of them privately admit that insects are actually quite tasty when cooked with pepper and a bit of seasoning, many believe that insect-eating will never become

socially acceptable in Britain. A cooked Thai bug is about as welcome to the British palate as a cooked French frog.

Vidhaya Intharayaem, manager and head chef of the Bangkok restaurant in South Kensington says: "When I was a boy I would eat crickets. It was quite a common thing. But if you asked me to eat a cricket now I wouldn't because I have been living in this country for too long."

Angela Nilsen, food editor of the BBC's *Good Food Magazine*, says she will not be recommending bug snacks to her readers just yet. "I can't see them becoming everyday fare in Britain where we are still fairly conservative in our tastes," she explains. "We used to eat this kind of food hundreds of years ago. But we've become a lot more choosy."

In the US there are several bug-eating societies that are campaigning on the net to try to make the eating of insects more socially acceptable. Once you have overcome your instinctive revulsion, insects are a pleasure to eat, they insist.

Some of the more popular websites among the bug-eating



fraternity, such as Eatbug (www.eatbug.com), carry favourite recipes which are designed to tempt the unconverted. There are even ones for chocolate-covered crickets (bake at 250 degrees, dip in melted chocolate and leave to dry until they are really crunchy). And mealworm chocolate chip cookies is another yummy treat. The mealworm is supposed to enrich the cookies with a sophisticated, lingering nutty flavour.

A spokeswoman for the UK's KP Snacks firm explains that for any new snack to be commercially successful you have to be able to eat it on the move and it must be light and tasty. So how does she rate the commercial chances of a crispy water beetle or a fried cricket on a stick?

"They would have to have a taste test first. I could not comment before then," she explains, trying to quickly swat away the questions. As in most things at the moment, it looks like the boundary-breaking dot.comers are still very much out on their own. While they swarm to the web to order insects, for most of us the idea remains repellent. ● (GNS)



Friendly fire

By forcing the World Bank to dump a dam in Qinghai, activists hurt poor farmers

SEBASTIAN MALLABY

There was nothing apparently controversial when, in April 1999, the World Bank concluded negotiations on a project in China's Qinghai province. China was the bank's star client at the time, having lifted around 200 million people out of poverty during the previous decade. The Qinghai project was designed to move 58,000 farmers from a hopelessly parched hillside to another part of the province irrigated by a small dam. Farmer's incomes would rise from around 20 cents a day to a level at which they could actually subsist.

Qinghai borders the Tibet Autonomous Region and one million of Qinghai's five million inhabitants are Tibetan, so Tibetan activists called for protests against the 'controversial' World Bank project that would 'dramatically affect the demography' of Qinghai by moving ethnic Chinese into a culturally Tibetan area. This was a strange claim. First, no Tibetans lived in the immediate settlement area: The nearest were 276 nomadic herders (the bank had counted them carefully) who wintered 37 miles south of the project.

But the Tibet Information Network was not deterred. 'Population transfer of Chinese into traditional Tibetan areas has become a major concern for Tibetans,' the group's newsletter said ominously.

Within a few weeks, the London activists had forged an international coalition. It drew from an anti-World Bank army of environmental groups opposed to dams, human rights groups opposed to relocation, other groups opposing cooperation with China. Campaigners deluged the bank with e-mails and faxes, anti-bank posters appeared around Washington and Tibet activists set up camp outside the bank's headquarters. A rap star from the Beastie Boys declared that the bank's loan would lead to the "destruction of the Tibetan peoples".

Despite the inaccuracy of this claim, the activists quickly won allies in Hollywood and the US Congress, most notably the actor Richard Gere, who had recently narrated a documentary film about Tibet, and Democratic Representative Nancy Pelosi of California. Sixty members of congress fired off a complaint to Wolfensohn, and Senator Jesse Helms leapt at the chance to condemn China and the World Bank in a single breath. When a World Bank delegation went to Capitol Hill to mollify the lawmakers, it was confronted with a map that did not even show Qinghai.

The entire province had been labelled Tibet, never mind that Tibetans accounted for only one in five people there.

The bank was totally encircled. It was simultaneously up against student protestors and the right wing of the Republican Party, and although the bank's assailants were flat wrong on the facts, nobody was willing to stick up for the institution.

In June 1999, the Clinton administration announced that it would vote against the Qinghai project when it came before the World Bank's board.

When the Qinghai battle came to a head, Wolfensohn did everything possible to defuse it. He went out of his way to hear the arguments of the NGOs, treating his own staff with much less deference. He summoned the project team to his office and demanded to know whose arse he should kick first.

After much raging and fuming, he hit upon a scheme that would meet the NGOs part way. The project would be referred to the bank's Inspection Panel, a tribunal staffed by eminent persons who investigate projects' compliance with the bank's environmental and social safeguards.

In a sane world, this strategy would have bought some peace with the activists. But the day after the bank decided to convene an Inspection Panel, a pair of students climbed up the face of the bank's headquarters and unfurled a banner proclaiming, 'World Bank Approves China's Genocide in Tibet'. Privately, other Tibet groups disapproved of these tactics—after all, there was no evidence of genocide—but they were unwilling to speak out publicly against their fellow activists.

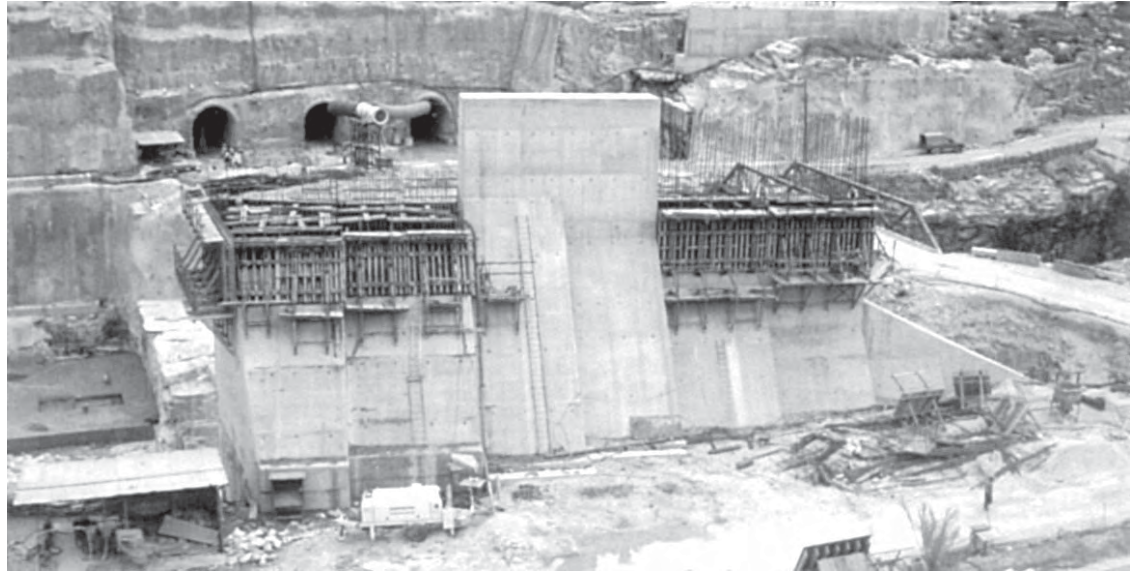
Meanwhile, members of congress continued to toe the NGO line. Republican Sens. Connie Mack of Florida and Benjamin Gilman of New York accused the bank of "cultural genocide". A House of Representatives subcommittee voted in 1999 to cut contributions to the bank's soft-loan window by \$220 million.

When the Inspection Panel inquiry got under way, it only succeeded in bringing the activist attack inside the World Bank's building. The head of the Inspection Panel, Canadian environmentalist Jim MacNeill, clearly favoured activists over bank staff.

The panel's final report, delivered in April 2000, was a 160-page indictment of the Qinghai Project based on procedural grounds rather than ground reality.

Not long after the World Bank pulled out of Qinghai, a delegation of Tibet activists went to visit Wolfensohn. They had heard that the Chinese government was pressing ahead with the resettlement project by itself. It later became apparent that China planned to ignore the bank's environmental conditions and move more people to the new area. They asked Wolfensohn what was going on. "How the fuck do I know what they're doing?" Wolfensohn shot back. "You just got us out of there!" ●

Adapted from Sebastian Mallaby's book, *The World's Banker: A Story of Failed States, Financial Crises and the Wealth and Poverty of Nations* (Penguin Press, 2004)



A dam good book

When the World Commission on Dams (WCD) released its report 'Dams and Development: A New Framework for Decision-making' in 2002, the polarised debate between supporters and opponents of large dams remained largely unresolved. Some countries rejected the report, others accepted it. Outside the formal halls of

REVIEW
Marcus Moench



government, NGO leaders and activists remained as bystanders and critics, their interests acknowledged in the WCD report but only on a practical level, lacking mechanisms to play new roles that could take the Commission's findings forward. Most groups, whether governmental or within the wider civil society, based their response to the WCD on generalities rather than a detailed analysis of the manner in which its findings or recommendations apply within their own country and context.

Nepal is an exception to the above global pattern. The *Constructive Dialogue on Dams and Development in Nepal* reports the outcome of a unique process involving NGOs, activists, the government and academics to respond to the commission's findings. The constructive dialogue represents, as far as I am aware, the first initiative in any region to systematically analyse how the commission's findings actually apply to the situation in any country. The carefully edited and well written summary produced by the *Constructive Dialogue* takes the

WCD report and identifies where the laws and processes in Nepal already conform to it and where issues remain to be addressed. The *Dialogue* also identifies key issues, such as those inherent in the definition of a 'high dam' or in notions of upper and lower riparian rights that simply don't apply or have little logic in the Nepali context.

Findings from the *Constructive Dialogue* provide essential guidance for any individual or organisation concerned with water resources development and the question of dams in Nepal. These findings make it possible to bridge the gap between proponents and opponents of dams—polarisation has largely given way to agreement on the importance of 'good' dams and the criteria necessary to ensure only 'good' dams are built.

More importantly, however, the *Constructive Dialogue* process suggests an approach many regions could use to respond thoughtfully following the report of the WCD or, for that manner, most other contentious, divisive issues. The WCD acknowledged that its report was 'not intended as a blueprint' but more as a 'starting point for discussions, debates'. No global approach to sensitive social or development issues can capture or respond effectively to the nuances inherent in local contexts. As a result, the outcomes from such processes tend to dissipate in a blur of dissent as regions respond to the inevitable mismatch between global perspectives and local realities. The baby tends to get thrown out with the bath.

The *Constructive Dialogue* has created a fundamentally

different outcome from the above norm. The dialogue conducted, in effect, a broad-based social audit to clarify points of conformity, key issues and points of disagreement between the WCD's global perspective and the realities of Nepal. Because the dialogue involved social auditors from many walks of life—the government, NGOs, academics and activists—it has successfully adapted the commission's findings to local realities. Such adaptive processes are essential in many fields in order to moderate the increasing disjuncture between globalisation processes and much more localised cultural, environmental, economic and social perspectives.

Overall, *Constructive Dialogue on Dams and Development in Nepal* is a good dam book reporting on a dam good process. ●

Marcus Moench is the director of the Institute for Social and Environmental Transition-International (ISET)



Constructive Dialogue on Dams and Development in Nepal
Eds: Ajaya Dixit, Pradeep Adhikari, Shiva Bisagnkhe
2004: Nepal Water Conservation Foundation & IUCN

BOOKWORM

Historical
Dictionary
of Nepal




Historical Dictionary of Nepal
Nanda R Shrestha and Keshav Bhattarai
Vision Books, 2004
Rs 1,200

The *Historical Dictionary of Nepal* offers a concise account of Nepal's history and political evolution, focusing on the period since the rise of Prithibi Narayan Shah in 1743, especially on the developments in the past 50 years. In an easy A-Z format, the dictionary spans Nepal's history, politics, economy, society, rich cultural and religious traditions, and the country's historical figures.

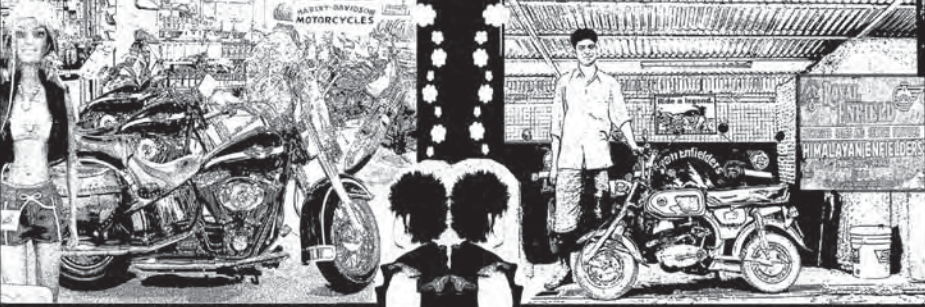
Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 4227711, mandala@ccsl.com.np

"Lata ko desh ma gaando tanderi." (In a land of fools, even a man with a bad goatee can be a hero.)



The Adventures of HEROJIG
HELLO. NAMASSTHAY!
by jiggy gaton
Wuz up?

Our Hero daydreams of shopping for a new motorbike but is awakened by the harse reality of Nepal... ke garne.



KE GARNE? WHATEVER.
But be a Heroji - Be Happy

"Contentment is natural wealth; luxury, artificial poverty."
-- Socrates
...an old Greek dude, 469-399 BC
Next change:

Herojig publishes research titled "The Effect of Explosions on Tourism"

HeroJig's Adventures can also be seen at www.extreme-nepal.com #37 ♡ 2061 by jiggy gaton - read. love. write.

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Images of the Terai** Paintings by SC Suman at Indigo Gallery, until 3 October, 8AM-6PM daily. 4413580, www.asianart.com/indigo
- ❖ **A Walk along Bagmati River** Paintings by Dagmar Mathes at Park Gallery, Lazimpat. 24 September-10 October. www.parkgallery.com.np
- ❖ **World Tourism Day** 25 September. Exhibition of new tourism products at the Tourist Service Centre, Bhrikuti Mandap, 9AM-5PM, 24-26 September
- ❖ **Images from the life of Mahatma** Photographs at the India Nepal Library, RNAC building. 2-4 October



EVENTS

- ❖ **Friday Forum** Talk on the Information Resource Centre and its activities, 3PM on 24 September at the American Centre
- ❖ **Rotary walkathon 2004** Starting 7AM from Kathmandu through Patan and Thimi to Bhaktapur and starting 7AM from Dhulikhel through Banepa to Bhaktapur. 25 September, to aid Bhaktapur Cancer Hospital.
- ❖ **Changa Chait 2061** Kite flying at Club Himalaya, Nagarkot. 25 September, 2 and 16 October. Rs 100. 4410432
- ❖ **La Leggenda del Pianista sull'Oceano** Film by Guiseppe Tornatore. 26 September, 5.30 PM at the Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikuti Mandap
- ❖ **Discovering Buddhism** Weekend courses at HBMC. 25-26 September and 2-3 October. 4414843
- ❖ **Movies** 2PM at the Alliance Francaise: Les diaboliques, 26 September
- ❖ **Pippin** the Stephen Schwartz musical at Lincoln School, 7PM on 28 September. Rs 150, reservations at 4270482
- ❖ **U2 Live in Concert** on the Big Screen. Tribute Night to U2 with Coldplay, Oasis and REM. Subterranea Club Kilroy. 30 September, 9PM. 4422999
- ❖ **Kick-off celebration** for adults at Lincoln School, Ravi Bhawan. 4.30-10.30 PM, 9 October. Rs 700, 4270482
- ❖ **Drin...king Utsav '04** Drinks of all types at the BICC, 15-19 October.

MUSIC

- ❖ **Abhaya and the Steam Injuns** Soul, Motown, blues and funk fundraiser for PAHAD. 6.30-9.30 PM at Moksh, Rs 300
- ❖ **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.

DRINKS

- ❖ **Reduced prices** on drinks for Dasain at Subterranea Club Kilroy. Sunday to Thursday, free entry before 11PM. 4422999
- ❖ **Just Devine Dashain!** After-office happy hour, 4-8PM, with free snacks and 20 percent off drinks. Also buy one JD Cocktail, get one free. All through October at 'Jack Lives Here', 1905 Kantipath. 4225272
- ❖ **Island Bar** with DJ Raju and The Cloud Walkers. The Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency. 4491234

FOOD

- ❖ **Fresh Catch** Seafood, Saturday and Sunday at The Café, Hyatt Regency.
- ❖ **Kebab Fiesta** Kebab platter at The Lounge, Hyatt Regency. Until 25 September, 12.30-3.30 PM and 6.30-8.30 PM.
- ❖ **Chillin & Grillin** at Fusion, Dwarikas. 24 September, Rs 699 including dinner and special cocktail. 4479488
- ❖ **1905 Bow-Thai Promotion** Burmese-Thai Cuisine from Burmese Guest Chef Roshan. Every day, 6PM, At 1905 Kantipath. 4225272
- ❖ **Genuine Thai** cuisine at Royal Lotus, Bakhundole. 5521231
- ❖ **Farm House Café** Nature with delicious meals at Park Village Hotel.
- ❖ **Vegetarian Creations** at Stupa View Restaurant. 4480262
- ❖ **Splash Spring BBQ** Wednesday and Friday evenings, 6PM onwards. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu.
- ❖ **Sunny Side Up Weekend BBQ** at Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu.

GETAWAYS

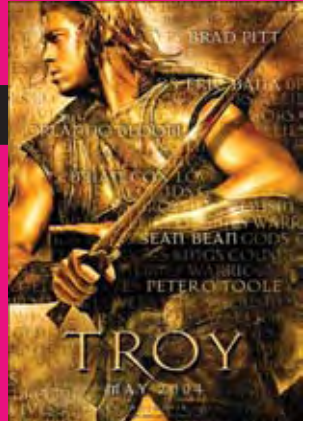
- ❖ **Dream Holiday** package tour to Malaysia during Dasain and Tihar. Marco Polo Travels and Qatar Airways, malaysiaholidays_marco@polo.com.np
- ❖ **Wet & Wild Summer Splash Swimming** package including a drink, weekends at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Getaway package** nights stay at Godavari Village Resort, includes dinner and breakfast. 5560675
- ❖ **Summer in Shivapuri** Tranquil village, superb views and birdwatching. Shivapuri Heights Cottage, Steve@escape2nepal.com
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** Pure relaxation and business as usual. 4361500
- ❖ **Golf** at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa. 4451212
- ❖ **Early Bird discounts** at Shangri-La Hotel & Resort. 4412999

When Paris, Prince of Troy (Orlando Bloom) steals Helen, the most beautiful woman in Greece, away from her husband Menelaus, king of Sparta, it sparks a bloody war that sets the two nations at war against each other. Menelaus' brother Agamemnon joins the fray, his army lead by Achillies (Brad Pitt), believed to be the greatest warrior alive. In a tale of love, bravery, greed and pride, thousands fall in pursuit of glory and a nation burns to the ground for love.

JAI NEPAL CINEMA

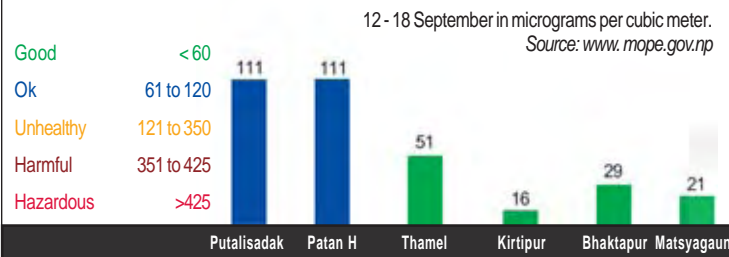
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Call 4442220 for show timings www.jainepal.com



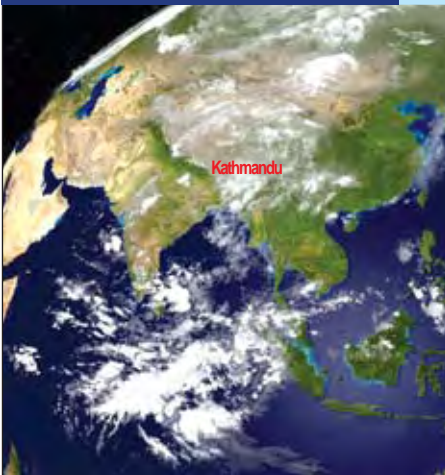
KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

After significant rises the week before, pollution levels around the Kathmandu Valley dropped again this week, bringing PM10 (particle matter less than 10 microns) concentrations to levels within the national standard of 120mg/m³. The PM10 levels around Patan Hospital dropped by 28 percent, and in Thamel pollution dropped by 32 percent.



NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



This monsoon shows signs of not wanting to leave us. The delayed arrival of the seasonal westerlies have allowed moisture from the Bay to keep massing up over the Himalayan foothills. The soil is already saturated, so these heavy bursts of rain can trigger landslides. This satellite picture taken on Thursday at noon shows cloud cover dissipating over western Nepal, but a monsoon pulse active over eastern Nepal. The monsoon usually recedes completely by September 22, but this year the rains will stick around for another week. The mercury will soon begin its degree-a-week drop.

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KIRAN PANDAY

THE LITTLE PRINCE: Naba Yubaraj Hridayendra and Princess Purnika are carried through Pashupati, following their mother, Princess Himani, and grandmother, Queen Komal, during the Tiji festival on Friday.



KIRAN PANDAY

AT BUDDHA'S FEET: Hundreds of people gathered for World Peace Day at Boudha on Tuesday to light butter lamps for peace.



ANUP PRAKASH

TEN THOUSAND STARS: A candlelit vigil was held at Maiti Ghar on Monday evening in memory of the Nepalis killed over the past eight years of conflict.



PURNIMA SHARMA

DEATH TALLY: On Tuesday, peace activists celebrating World Peace Day at Basantapur carry a banner with 10,000 tally marks, each representing a Nepali who has been killed in the past eight years of conflict.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

REGRESS OR PROGRESS: Girija Prasad Koirala addressing a rally of the four-party alliance at Ratna Park on Tuesday, calling for the restoration of parliament. The billboard in the background quotes late King Birendra: 'Let's unite and unleash the forces of development.'

Songs for Smarika

When Situ Kharel appears on stage in London's Ealing Town Hall on 11 October, she will be the first Nepali to hold a solo concert in Britain. Impressive as this is, when she sings the title track from her new album, *Paree*, the audience is more likely to be awed by her courage and character than just by the event itself. Situ sings about her 18-year-old daughter, Smarika, who suffers from a rare neurological disorder. With stirring vocals, Situ underscores a point that many ignore: disabled children need love and care, not just at home, but from everyone.

This is only the latest part of Situ's campaign to promote awareness and acceptance of handicapped children. Situ's father-in-law, famous lyricist Kiran Kharel, wrote the title track for her first album, also called *Smarika*, as a personal response to watching his beautiful granddaughter struggle to do things by herself. In a society where disabled children are still not brought out in public, the song has become something of an anthem for the Kharel family.

Situ is studying Indian classical music in London, and her time outside Nepal has taught her a lot about coping with disabled children. "I was inspired to do something for such children after seeing the differences in behaviour and attitude towards them in Nepal and Britain," Situ says. "They should not be confined inside the home. They

should be part of the society and they need more love and affection than normal children."

Music and singing has always been a part of Situ and Smarika's relationship, especially as music therapy is recommended for Rett's Syndrome, which Smarika suffers from. Says Situ, "Smarika inspired me to be an artist, and I thought, if I am to sing for her, why not sing for

the society as well?"

People have started calling radio and tv stations to say that they also have a child with a disability and that after listening to Situ's songs, they are more aware that these children need more love, care and respect. Situ is gratified with the response: "We have brought it out into the open now." ●
(Navin Singh Khadka)



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PRILEMA (001704)

Royal Uneconomic Class

The aviation sector worldwide is being swept by a tradition of low-cost, no frills airlines offering flights for as cheap as Siganpore-Bangkok for one dollar roundtrip. No catch, no fine print.

Thank heavens that in Nepal, despite deregulation, our domesticated airlines haven't stooped as low as that yet. Our airlines will never sacrifice the friendly and helpful in-flight service that they have come to be renowned for in our internal routes just to undercut rivals by slashing fares and getting into a suicidal price war. No sir, here we have opted to keep fares high and slash services instead.

It speaks volumes about our sense of commitment to comfortable and reliable air transportation, that Nepal's no-budget airlines would rather make passengers pay through their noses than provide them unnecessary luxuries while going from Point A to Point B.

When domestic flights first started in Nepal, they used to offer passengers actual meals. As time went on, they got rid of the samosas, the next to go were the chicken patties, then they took away the barf bags and finally they got rid of the co-pilots. But not to worry, Nepal is still the only country where ex-beauty queens fly planes and we don't have to pay anything extra for it. In any other part of the world they'd have a surcharge for that.

Nepal is also one of the few places in the world, besides Idi Amin's Uganda, where VIPs are allowed up to the plane in their SUVs if they can prove beyond reasonable doubt to the security personnel on duty that they have contributed in some measure to ruining the country. Next time, ex-prime ministers should take the ramp buses because some of them actually look more

airworthy than the aircraft they take you up to. For a time, airlines used to offer us the luxury of pre-flight cotton wool and candy ("Yes, sir, the cotton goes into your ear canal and the toffee goes into your alimentary canal, or is it the other way around?"). But as a cost-cutting drive and to avoid further confusion on the 12-minute Kathmandu-Simara shuttle these days they pass around chewing gum which you are supposed to stuff into your ears after chewing thus saving the airline industry lakhs of rupees a year.

With the recent hike in the price of av gas, domestic airlines have increased fares and stripped their planes of everything except the bare minimum required to defy gravity. All seats have been taken off on flights to and from Pokhara on Gundruk Class passengers have to strap hang, while in Royal Uneconomic Class at the front of the plane, premium passengers can sit cross-legged on straw mats on the floor of the cabin. In the interest of space, toilets have been done away with, but a hatch is available for in-flight emergencies. (Not to be used while flying over populated areas.) Due to popular demand in the runup to the holiday season on flights to remote area airstrips, goats will be allowed on board as carry-on baggage provided they do not exceed the dimensions of the overhead racks. If they do, the goats will have to ride on the roof cheek-to-jowl with standby passengers.

"Ladies and gentlemen, in a few moments we shall be touching down in Kathmandu. Please stand in an upright position and hang by the overhead straps for landing. May we remind you to please stow the gum you are chewing in your ear canals at this time. Thank you for choosing Fly-by-Night Airways." ●

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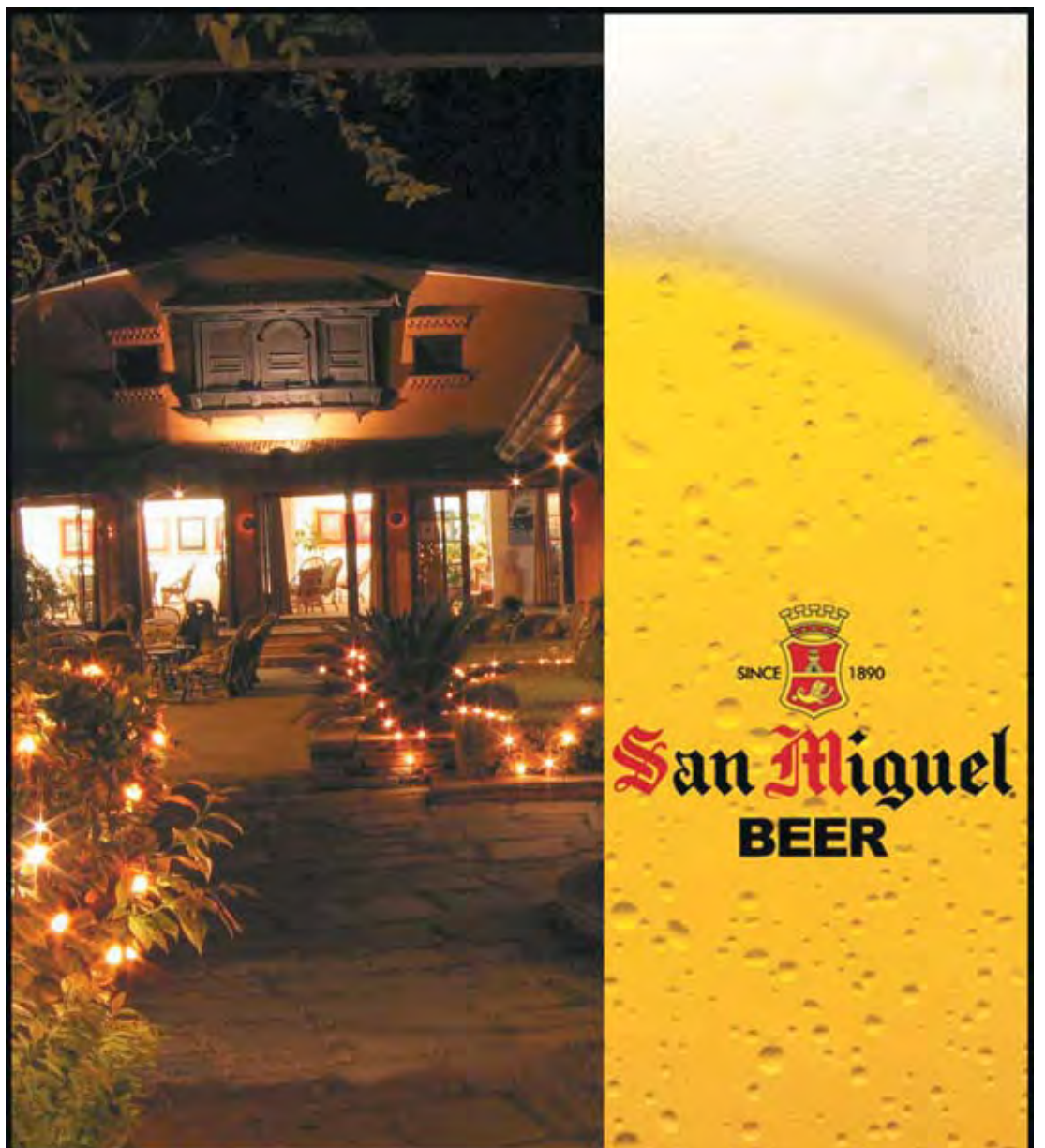
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