

MISSING KASHMIRIS | HACKING FOR DUMMIES | SILENT CHRISTMAS

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WEEKLY

WAR ECONOMY

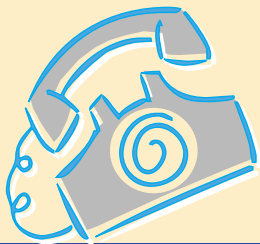
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closeup

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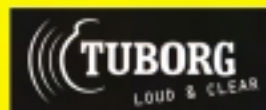
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Letters



“How unseemly of Baral to concede the literary high ground to the English language”

P.CHETRI

Baral does it again

HOW UNSEEMLY (AND COMICAL) of Ajit Baral to play the prophet of defeatism and concede the literary high ground to the English language (“Hope for Nepali Fiction,” Dec. 19)! To avoid another Rushdiesque misjudgment, until the Nepali-English literary scene produces more than two writers, and the many books in Nepali and other vernacular languages are translated



competently—in other words, once sufficient data is collected and analyzed—it seems reasonable to hold judgment and practice a little humility.

P.CHETRI
VIA EMAIL

BARAL DOES IT AGAIN! I HAVE read more than one article by Baral in your magazine where he makes outlandish claims but fails to pull off his thesis. He seems to have been hopelessly enamored by two young Nepalis who write in English, Samrat Upadhyay and Manjushree Thapa. Both Upadhyay and Thapa are at best only beginning to make their mark in the literary world, though one of Upadhyay’s works, “Arresting God in Kathmandu,” I should admit, has received some literary acclaim. In the lack of a well-argued thesis, Baral’s assertion—that the best writing from Nepalis

will come in the form of English fiction in the next 20 years—sounds more like banter from a starry-eyed subcontinental youngster who thinks everything English is superior.

BIPLAV PRADHAN
KATHMANDU

The universal language

A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND words and photography is one language everybody understands (“The Man and his Magic,” by Veneeta Singha). I had an opportunity to communicate not only with Kishor Kayastha but also with his portraits on Dec. 11 during his photo exhibition at the Indigo Gallery. Just as he says, “Camera is brush and light is canvas.” His photos are a piece of fine art. His pictures are truly inspirational. What’s even more noteworthy is that he is trying to sell Nepal abroad, capturing our culture, traditions, religions and people in his portraits. As a student of photography myself, Kayastha’s approach to photography and imaginative works have revealed to me my potential as a Nepali. Let me single out “Monsoon Composition” for special praise. His pictures made me realize that we have an enormously rich heritage to tap!

ASHISH DONGOL
VIA EMAIL

Nepal in doldrums

CALL ME PESSIMISTIC, BUT I REALLY don’t see what can be done about the state of the country (“Business Unusual,” Last Page, Dec. 19). Even if the “international community” were to suddenly take an interest, what would that accomplish in the long run? Nepal can only be helped by the outside world in two ways—militarily or financially. Given the Army’s conduct in

recent years, one can safely assume that any proposal to increase its power would be wrong. And given that the greenbacks will likely make it to offshore accounts not long after they arrive, accepting monetary aid seems equally shortsighted. If the international community wants to help, it needs to show a good deal of patience. Nepal is non-functional now in almost every way. The Maoist-Army violence, the sheer lethargy of the political class, and a bureaucracy that has almost given up are only some of the country's problems. The only hope comes from a sign that were things to get better, a healthy entrepreneurial climate could develop in the country. But, given that many in the country have been brainwashed into thinking that anything to do with making money is by nature evil, that could be a lot to hope for as well.

NAME WITHHELD
VIA EMAIL

Sakya likes novelty

I FOUND THE REVIEW OF KARNA Sakya's new book "Soch" inspiring ("Eternal Optimist," by Biswas Baral, Dec. 12). I consider Sakya an entrepreneur par excellence who has combined his love for nature and zeal for conservation with business acumen to get brilliant results. But more than anything, I find Sakya's never-say-die attitude so very refreshing. This puts him right ahead of the crowd. Most Nepali businessmen will be happy following the "tricks of the trade" handed down by their forefathers and whining about the lack of "government support." Not Sakya. He is always looking to do something new and noble. Where there's a will, there's way.

NARESH SHARMA
VIA EMAIL

Bhutanese hope

THANK YOU FOR FEATURING the Bhutanese democratic leader Teknath Rizal in your Milestone (Dec. 19). The Bhutanese human rights movement and our desire for dignified repatriation will hopefully draw the attention of the international community. For now, Rizal stands tall as our only hope.

RAMAN SUBBA
DAMAK

All the King's men

I AGREE WITH SATISH JUNG SHAHI that the Raj Parishad meet early this

month was nothing but an exercise in muscle flexing by the royalists ("All the King's Men," Dec. 19). You should now go a step further to document the progressive decline in democratic values in recent years. History will hold Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's governments (both the current one and the one before this) accountable for making too many compromises and the Maoists for pushing the country to brinkmanship.

KAPIL SARKOTA
VIA EMAIL

On the mark

KUDOS TO SWARNIM WAGLE FOR his comprehensive analysis of how Nepal's garment industry came into being and what we should do now that the export quotas are being phased out ("The Fate of Quota Babies," Writing on the Wall, Dec. 19). After nine years of senseless violence, the country's economy is in deep waters. Once-robust industries have closed down due to continued extortion, unending labor unrest and lack of markets (because the goods can't move from once place to another). If the garment industry falls, it will be the final nail in the proverbial coffin. The rich countries must stand up to their longstanding international commitments to provide duty-free entry to the products of least developed countries in all major markets. More than the guns to fight the Maoists, the United States, for one, should provide Nepal with opportunities that will help us keep our house in order.

PRABIN SILWAL
KATHMANDU

THE ANSWER IS VERY SIMPLE. Nepal must lobby the U.S. Congress and plead for the tariff-free entry of its apparel. Or else our major export industry will be gobbled up by giant producers in such countries as India and China. It's time for Nepal's allies to stand up for a friend in need.

SUDHIR PATHAK
VIA EMAIL

NOTE

The author of "Beastly Instincts" is Jagdish Aarohi, not Jagdish Arya (Guest Column, Dec. 19).

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Tel: 2111102, 4229825, 4261831, 4263098

EDITOR: Akhilesh Upadhyay
editorial@nation.com.np

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR: Suman Pradhan

COPY EDITOR: John Child

SENIOR STAFF WRITERS: Sushma Joshi, Satish Jung Shahi,
Tiku Gauchan

STAFF WRITER: John Narayan Parajuli

PHOTOJOURNALISTS: Sagar Shrestha, Das Bahadur Maharjan

DESIGNER: Raj Shrestha

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS: Indra Adhikari, Yashas Vaidya

AD & CIRCULATION DIRECTOR: Krishna Shrestha

ASST. MARKETING MANAGER: Rameshwar Ghimire

MARKETING EXECUTIVE: Bijendra Pradhan

ad@nation.com.np

SUBSCRIPTION OFFICER: Akshaya Shrestha

subscription@nation.com.np

ASST. SUBSCRIPTION OFFICER: Jeshna Karmacharya

DISTRIBUTION: Angiras Manandhar

MARKETING CONSULTANT: Kreepa Shrestha

CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Nripendra Karmacharya

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By the age of nine, Kisbor Kayastha was already lugging around a camera and shooting pictures wherever he went. At fifteen, he was possessed by a fiery passion for photography. Since then, he has dedicated his life to art photography.

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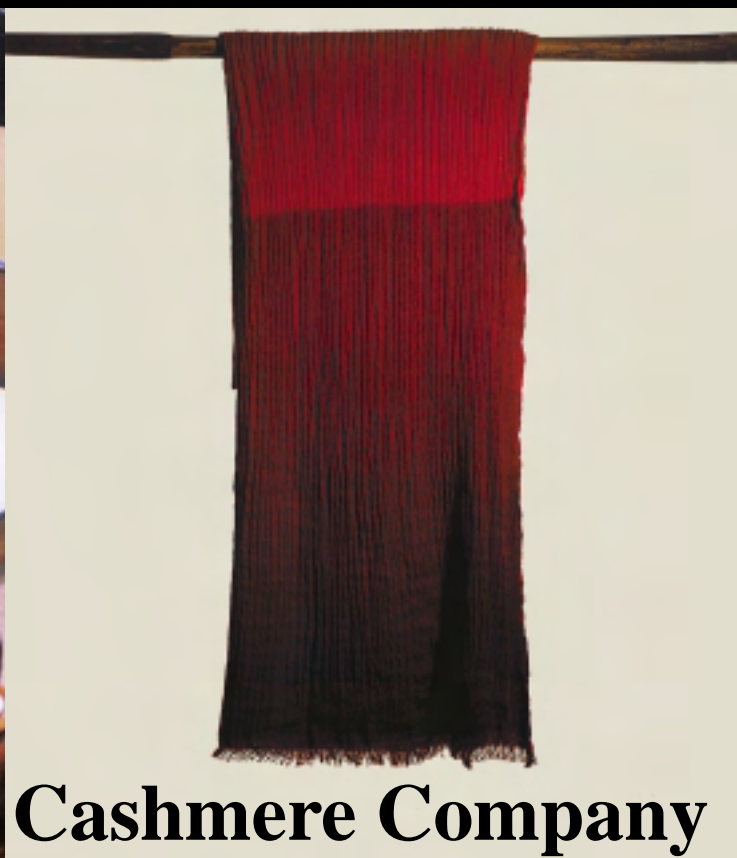
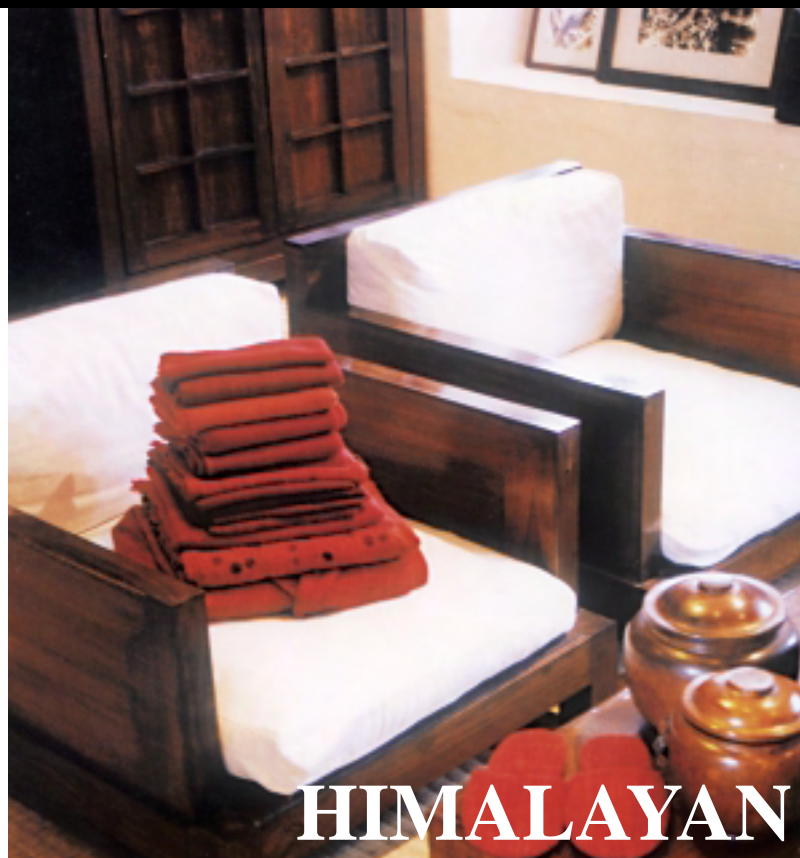
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Unfinished Business

The resignation of Supreme Court Justice Baliram Kumar brings to an end an ugly saga. But shouldn't the judiciary go a step further to restore its sanctity by setting a healthy precedent?

BY JOGENDRA GHIMIRE

The resignation by Supreme Court Justice Baliram Kumar this month seems to have put to rest a controversy that started with the apex court's decision early this year to release the notorious drug peddler Gordon William Robinson. Robinson had been found guilty by the Special Court of trying to smuggle over two kilograms of brown sugar through Nepal. He was arrested red-handed at the Tribhuvan International Airport. Baliram Kumar of course was part of the two-member bench; the other member, Krishna Kumar Verma, the senior among the two judges resigned five months ago. The Verma-Kumar decision has since been reversed by a larger bench of the Supreme Court. Their findings, and the reasoning used by them to arrive at a judgment favorable to Robinson is, therefore, not good law for any future criminal prosecution.

The outcome of the eight-month-long controversy, and two judicial resignations, still leaves a couple of questions unanswered. One, should a judge, or for that matter any public official, accused of corruption be allowed to take an honorable retirement with all the post-retirement benefits? Two, in case of Supreme Court judges and other constitutional functionaries who can only be removed through parliamentary impeachment, isn't there anything more than relieving them of their positions that can be done to punish them for their wrongdoings?

The first question can be answered in the negative, but it comes with a caveat. It is only in an ideal world with a functioning parliament that such honorable retirements cannot be allowed; the Parliament can impeach Supreme Court judges. However, proponents of the idea that Verma and Kumar should not have been allowed to take honorable retirements tend to forget that we don't live in an ideal world. Since we don't have a parliament, disciplining the offenders through impeachment becomes a non-issue. Hypothetically, the Parliament could have started impeachment proceedings against the judges. But until the Parliament came into being, their fate would have remained undecided.

By convincing both Verma and Kumar to resign, the Judicial Council has achieved a fair amount of success in ridding the judiciary of some rotten elements while also restoring some public confidence in the institution. Surely, the best option would have been this: That the

two offenders were forced to face impeachment proceedings and dismissed through impeachment.

That leads us to the next question about the extent of immunity that judges or other constitutional functionaries, removable only through impeachment, enjoy from criminal prosecution for the abuse of authority during their terms in office.

A popular belief among the commentators seems to be that the offenders can be relieved from their position only through impeachment. And in cases where the Pratinidhi Sabha is not in existence, force them to quit quietly—as it eventually happened in the case of Verma and Kumar. One avenue that remains to be explored is the possibility of prosecution of individuals after they have resigned or have been relieved of their positions. The objective of the constitutional protection accorded to the judges of the Supreme Court and a number of other constitutional functionaries is to ensure independence while discharging their duties. They do not enjoy this privilege to shield themselves from possible criminal prosecution.

There is, therefore, no bar against the initiation of criminal investigation against the duo and against charging them for corruption and abuse of authority. The constitution talks about the Parliament only when it comes to removal of judges from their office. It does not say that the only sanction against corrupt judges is their removal from office. For anything other than removal from office, including investigation for corruption charges, the constitution provides adequate opening.

To demonstrate how ludicrous the argument—that judges can only be removed but not prosecuted—is, one only needs to consider a hypothesis. What if a judge murders somebody in his chambers or what if a judge commits rape?

It is difficult to argue that in those extreme cases all that can be done against the judge in question is to remove him from office and let him live the life of a free man. In case of a rape or murder, the answer is that the person should be criminally prosecuted. What is there to suggest that in case of a corrupt judge the principal of prosecution does not hold?

Of course, Baliram's resignation comes as a huge relief. But the resignation should not be an end in itself. The judiciary will have to do quite a bit to restore its image that was defaced by the Robinson saga. Toward that end, the resignations of Messrs. Verma and Kumar can be considered a good beginning. **N**



LET FREE: Drug peddler Robinson

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





HOAX: Helpless patients and nurses wait anxiously outside the Kathmandu Medical College in Sinamangal following a bomb scare

Kathmandu budget

Kathmandu Metropolitan City unveiled a budget of Rs.1.5 billion for the fiscal year 2004-05. Development expenditures account for 61.95 percent, administrative expenses for 22.31 percent and social costs for 15.74 percent of the budget. The budget has nearly doubled from the last fiscal year. It includes the cost of a poverty alleviation fund from this year, which looks after the welfare of the poor, women and children. The city also plans to launch programs to deliver basic health services to poor families in the metropolis.

SAARC patients

In the SAARC region, more than 40 percent of the outpatients attending hospitals suffer from respiratory diseases. The region also accounts for more than 27 percent of the global tuberculosis burden, said Dr. Krishna Kant Jha, director of the SAARC TB center in Thimi. The center is organizing a regional conference on TB, HIV/AIDS and respiratory diseases from Dec. 14 to Dec. 20.

Helping women

The Asian Development Bank has approved a \$10 million loan for a project aimed at uplifting women in rural areas. The fund will be spent on economic, legal, social and institutional reforms. The project is scheduled for completion in 2009. The project

will cover 15 districts in the Midwest, the Farwest and the central region.

Beaten to death

Residents of Suryapur village in Nawalparasi beat five Maoists to death on Wednesday, Dec. 15, including a Maoist section commander. The scuffle started when the Maoists tried to abduct a village denizen. The Dec. 15 incident came as a reaction to growing Maoist atrocities, the villagers claimed. Separately, another Maoist section commander, Ramesh Choudhary, was beaten to death in Paklihawa of the same district. There have also been uprisings against the Maoists in Dailekh and Baglung in recent weeks.

Missing persons

The probe committee led by Narayan Gopal Malekhu, joint secretary at the Home Ministry, made public the whereabouts of 116 persons believed to be under government detention. Of the 116, the report said, 14 were released after interrogation, 17 were freed after completing jail terms, 33 remain in detention and 45 have been kept at an investigation center at Sundarijal. The committee in its earlier three reports had disclosed the whereabouts of 204 persons. The report came a day after the relatives of the disappeared persons urged the U.N. Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Dis-

appearances to help trace those missing.

Border security

Indian authorities have ordered their security personnel to seek permission from Nepali authorities before entering Nepal. Himanshu Kumar, the director general of Sashastra Sima Bal gave the order early this month. Earlier, Indian security personnel were reported to have entered Nepal with weapons and beaten villagers. This is the first time Indian authorities have made it mandatory for their security personnel to seek Nepal's permission before entering Nepal.

Bank loot

Just hours after a robbery at the Kantipath branch of the NABIL bank, police recovered the loot. Nearly Rs.6 million was recovered from an apartment at Hattigaonda, which was rented by the brother of the suspected culprit, Niranjana Khanal. He reportedly used a Chinese pistol stolen from a relative, also a police officer. The suspect remains at large.

Lumbini shutdown

Labor and Transport Management Ministry terminated the registration of the Lumbini

Overseas, an employment agency, as directed by the Commission for Investigation of the Abuse of Authority. The watchdog agency asked the government to take immediate action against Lumbini for breaching labor laws while sending 1,727 Nepali workers to South Korea.

Defaulters on blacklist

Nepal Bank Limited has asked diplomatic missions to deny travel visas to loan defaulters. The bank has requested Nepal Rastra Bank to convene a meeting inviting representatives of all embassies and consulates to discuss the option of barring those on the blacklist from traveling abroad. Donors have continually been urging the government to take action against the defaulters. The combined non-performing assets of the Nepal Bank and Rastriya Banijya Bank stand at around Rs.20 billion.

NC home

Nepali Congress finally has its own building at Sanepa, Lalitpur. NC President Girija Prasad Koirala inaugurated the new building, BP Bhavan. Still under construction, the building will have 33 rooms including two conference halls and a library when completed. The construction started nine years ago.



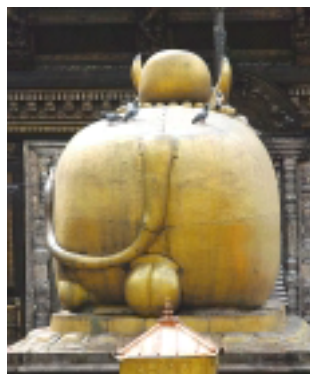
King's India visit

King Gyanendra is visiting India for the third time in as many years amid speculations in the media about the motives behind his visit. The royal itinerary, which starts on Dec. 23, was announced immediately following the conclusion of the Raj Parishad meeting. The royalist meet had urged the King to actively participate in Nepali politics. Analysts here are closely following the meet as the conflict takes a downward spiral. In the last one month alone, more than 200 people succumbed to the conflict.

nw/s

Pashupati income

The temple of Pashupatinath generated less than Rs.200,000 in income last year, according to priests there. That despite the four million devotees from Nepal and In-



dia who visit the temple every year. The actual income of the temple is said to amount to millions of rupees annually. Four Bhattas, including the chief Bhatta from India, and 108 Bhandaris from Nepal reside over the management and day-to-day activities of the temple. The Pashupati Area Development Trust officials said they did not know the actual amount collected at the temple.

Nepali envoy

King Gyanendra has appointed Madan Kumar Bhattarai, the ambassador to Germany, as the ambassador to Republic of Poland and Hungary. Bhattarai served in the Foreign Ministry before he was appointed as the envoy to Germany in April this year.

Ring road

Ministry of Physical Planning and Works has started the planning process for the outer ring road, the second such road to circle the Valley. The road is being constructed with Chinese assistance. The initial planning will be finalized before a Chinese team

arrives in Kathmandu in February. The team will assess the possibility of the road construction. Nepal and China agreed upon the alternative ring road during the Crown Prince Paras's China visit in August earlier this year.

More skirmishes

Twenty-one security personnel, including 18 Army men and two members of the Armed Police Force, were killed in a clash with the Maoists in Arghakhachi, said the Army. It also claimed to have inflicted heavy casualties on the Maoist side in the encounter. Clashes began when the Maoists attacked a patrol team of the security forces at Siptara village.

Bhutanese issue

Human Rights Watch, The Lutheran World Federation and Habitat International Coalition urged donors to re-consider their support programs with Bhutan if it fails to resolve the Bhutanese refugee issue. These international agencies seek the active role of the U.S. government in the refugee repatriation process. Meanwhile, Bhutanese Foreign Minister Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk, in a recent address to the National Assembly, dismissed the legitimacy of the categorization and repatriation process.

Perks for Bhattarai

Former Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai will now get perks at par with sitting ministers. An "ashram" is also to be built for him. It will later be converted into a trust in Bhattarai's name. Bhattarai will get a private health assistant, and the government will finance all his medical expenses.

Economic stagnation

Nepal's economic growth will stand at 3.7% in this financial year, which ends on Jul.15, 2005, said the Asian Development Bank. The figure remains essentially unchanged from the previous year. Continuing internal strife in the country is the reason for the lackluster performance, the report said. The average growth was over five percent before conflict began in 1996.

AAAN reshuffle

The Advertising Agencies Association of Nepal will now include in its working committee representatives from those professional and business houses involved in advertising. Before this, only advertising agencies were represented on the committee. The association's name will be changed and its charter amended for this purpose in its upcoming general assembly on Sunday, Dec. 19. This decision is being taken citing the changing role of

advertisements, the association said.

Give us more

The 17,000-strong Armed Police Force has asked the government for 3,500 more personnel, Nepal Samacharpatra reported. The proposal on behalf of the para-military unit was submitted to the Cabinet by Home Minister Purna Bahadur Khadka. This request follows the Army's recent proposal for 17,000 more personnel.

Maoist arrest

Security forces arrested Ganesh Regmi, a prominent figure in the ANTUF-R, the Maoist trade wing, on Monday, Dec. 13. Regmi, who was arrested in Kathmandu, had played a major role in the shutdown of over a dozen industries in the country in September earlier in the year. The Maoists have appealed to the media and human rights watchdogs to help safeguard his life.



STILL WAITING: Mahendra Police (in blue) beat Three Star, 3-2, on Saturday, Dec. 18 to lift the Himalayan Bank Cup and shattered Three Star's dreams of winning a national-level knockout tournament for the first time

Indo-Pak Engagement

In the first meeting of its kind to be held in Nepal, leaders from India- and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir met in Kathmandu. The four-day meeting, which started on Dec. 11, was an initiative to bring together political leaders, intellectuals and former officials of the two countries to discuss the Kashmir issue in a neutral venue.

The Track-II Kashmir talks were organized by Rome-based Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, the co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1995. The Pugwash Conferences were founded with the desire to see all nuclear arms destroyed and to find solutions to international disputes through means other than war. In its citation, the Nobel Committee said that the award was given to Pugwash "to encourage world leaders to intensify their efforts to rid the world of nuclear weapons."

Pugwash aims at bringing about a consensus between New Delhi and Islamabad, over the contentious issue of Kashmir. Toward that end, the organization is encouraging people-to-people contact. Among the Indians attending the meeting were Hurriyat leaders Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, Abdul Ghani Butt, Shabir Shah and Sajad Lone, and also Bhim Singh of the Panthers Party. Among the Pakistani delegates were Sultan Mahmood Chaudhary, former prime minister of Pakistan-administered Kashmir; the area's former Chief Justice Abdul Majid Malik; and former army general Talat Masood. The low-profile meeting, held behind closed doors, took place at the Hyatt Regency.

Professor Paolo Cotta-Ramusino of Italy, the Pugwash secretary general, said that a report with the suggestions of the Kashmir representatives would be submitted to Indian, Pakistani and Kashmiri officials. A statement, released at the end of the talks, suggested that confidence-building measures be taken to end violence, to improve economic and social institutions and to enforce the rule of law in Kashmir.



SHIKHAR LIGHTS

Surya Nepal has introduced the new Shikhar Lights, a milder version of its Shikhar Filter Kings. Shikhar Lights will be available in packs of 20 and will be priced at Rs.29.80 per pack. The new cigarette will come in red and white packaging with the Shikhar crest. The product has been released only in the Valley but will soon be available across the country.



ELECTRICAL PRODUCTS

Bajaj Electricals, in collaboration with Golchha organization, will commence sale of irons, water heaters, toasters, room heaters and gas stoves in the market. Bajaj Electricals is a part of the Bajaj Group and offers a wide range of products such as lamps, tube-lights, luminaries, household appliances, fans and turnkey engineering services. The company is introducing their top of the line, award-winning products in the markets here.



SURYA NEPAL GOLF

Surya Nepal and the Nepal Tourism Board organized the Surya Nepal Masters 2004 golf tournament from Dec. 9 to Dec. 12, along with the Standard Chartered Bank, the Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Air Sahara and McDowell's Signature Whisky. The tournament is the biggest international golf tournament in Nepal with a prize purse of Rs.1.6 million. The main aim of the tourney was to attract potential tourists from across South Asia, particularly India. Nepal Tourism Board, which was the event partner, wants to develop Nepal as a golf-tourism center.

PETITION IN US

Nepal has petitioned the U.S. government to allow free entry for Nepali pashmina and hand-made carpets into the United States under its

General System of Preferences scheme, government officials reported. Under the scheme, the U.S. government adopts liberal market policies towards some 5,000 products from least developed countries. Other Nepali products seeking such status in the United States are natural honey and handicraft products.

LG PC

Mahesh Overseas Enterprises will now offer the LG brand of personal computers for sale. The new PCs have been brought in the market to tap the market for branded computers. The company said that LG computers have been fitted with tested quality components and are therefore free from defects. All the computers come with a one-year warranty and service facilities, and are available in different configurations and casings.

EMPLOYMENT DIRECTORY

Vision Nepal Publication has released the fourth edition of "Overseas Employment Information," in coordination with Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies (NAFEA). The directory is meant for those seeking jobs abroad. The directory has been published on the occasion of the 13th anniversary of the NAFEA and contains information on recruiting agencies, insurance companies, training institutes and travel agencies. Also incorporated in the book are articles on the opportunities and the challenges of foreign employment.

LML BEAMER

Beamer, LML's new bike, has hit the market. The Beamer comes with a 150cc, 13.9 bhp engine and is aimed at consumers looking for a powerful bike. The new model will



be available in four colors. The bike's Italian design, with its rectangular steel frame, adds to its visual appeal as well as its stability and handling. The new model is priced at Rs.131,900 and has a two-year or a 30,000-km warranty. There is an additional electronic-parts-warranty for five years or an equivalent of 50,000 kilometers.



2 P M
noodles has introduced its "scratch and match offer." In the new

offer, consumers will be able to win cash prizes up to Rs.999,999. Every 2PM packet will contain a scratch coupon that will reveal six numbers on scratching. Prizes will be awarded on the basis of the number combinations on the coupon, with the combination of six nines receiving the maximum cash prize of Rs.999,999.

REVIVA WATER FILTERS

Apex commercials, the sole distributors of Euroguard, have brought out Reviva, a water purification system with reverse osmosis system. The filter processes water by a five-stage purification mechanism. Reviva is said to be microbiologically potable and has a capacity of eight liters. It can also reduce the hardness of the water.

ABILITIES PRODUCTS

Abilities India is exporting new pistons and rings for two-wheelers in Nepal. Pistons and rings for



all models of Indian bikes will be made available. Fifty percent of the company's exports are to Latin America. The company produces 70,000 sets per month.

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WEEKLY

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SAD VIGIL: (from left) Gulam Mohammad's wife, daughter, mother and son

MISSING FROM

As Kashmiris discussed peace in Kathmandu last week, the fate of Kashmiris missing in Nepal remained unknown. Young children of one of them wondered if their father would ever return home.

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

AS REPRESENTATIVES FROM both India and Pakistan sat down last week at the posh Hyatt Regency Hotel to discuss peace in embattled Kashmir, 28-year-old Wasir Ahmad Sofi waited in his handicraft shop. Around him lay colorful pashmina shawls, and the air was full of the smell of incense as he watched "Musafir," a Hindi film, on his small TV. The Track-II conference here had brought hope for some, but Sofi's shop outside the Hotel Yak and Yeti Plaza in Durbar Marg was

empty. And so was his heart. "Tourism is down," he said. "And we've suffered continuously in the last four years."

Sofi's family members took turns at the Hyatt Regency during all three days of the Track-II conference, talking with the delegates and lobbying officials. Their goal: Learn the whereabouts of Sofi's uncle, Gulam Mohammad Sofi, 48. Gulam Mohammad has been missing since the day of Gai Jatra in August 2000. The Sofis say that officers from the National Investigation Department took him into custody while he was attending a party at his friend's house

in Bhaktapur. Even young Sofi was taken at gunpoint from another pashmina shop, Hyatt Handicrafts in Jamal, which was run by his brother, Ishfaq Ahmad Sofi. But he was released 10 days later.

At least a dozen other Kashmiris in Nepal were arrested about the same time, all on suspicion of having links with terrorists. The whereabouts of four of them remain unknown; one of them is Gulam Mohammad.

"He was too old to be a terrorist and had been to Kashmir only three times in his lifetime, all on business trips," says

Sofi. He believes the Nepal Police handed the Kashmiris to India without proper investigation. "He had been living in Nepal for the last three decades," he says. "He had chosen to do business [in Nepal] to escape the violence back home in Kashmir."

Sofi then talks of his family's fruitless search for his missing uncle. "We have tried looking for him everywhere, in Nepal and India," says Sofi. "We have been threatened constantly to keep shut. But we aren't giving up."

The family of Gulam Mohammad has met top police officers, government ministers here, and in India, including in Kashmir. The best they have received is kind words; often the response has been harsh.

"We are all Indian citizens. How can they do this to their own citizens, just because of their wrong policies that view anyone from Kashmir as a terrorist?" asks Sofi, angry about the ordeals he and his



NO MESSAGE: Wasir, Gulam Mohammad's nephew, hasn't heard from his missing uncle for the last four years

16, 2000, the same day his uncle was arrested. They put him in a closed van and took him to his showroom near the Yak and Yeti Hotel to look for his uncle. When the police couldn't find Gulam Mohammad there, Sofi was blindfolded and taken to Bhaktapur. He was held to-

any place the family suspect Gulam was being held. "How can we find that?" says Sofi. "It is the duty of the police to find him." The family has also turned to human rights groups and international agencies for help. Amnesty International registered their case and included it in their annual report the year their uncle went missing.

When Nation Weekly met Sofi at his showroom on Tuesday, Dec. 14, he asked us if we knew how to lodge a report of his uncle's disappearance with the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. News reports have said that the U.N. group is investigating disappearances due to the Maoist conflict.

"This is our only hope. Please help us," says Ishfaq Ahmad, Sofi's elder brother, who also showed us family pictures of Gulam Mohammad. "My uncle wasn't a terrorist. He would get scared if anyone even spoke in loud voice. For us, he was more like a friend with whom we shared cigarettes and talked of our girlfriends. It is sad that he was targeted for no reason at all. Please help us find him."

In the family picture, Gulam Mohammad stands with his wife Rosy and their two children. Those were happier times: Four years later the children, now 9 and 11 years old, wonder if their father will ever come home. **N**

KATHMANDU

family have undergone since his uncle's disappearance. "Everybody is harassing us just because we are desperate Kashmiris far away from our homeland, which is wracked by violence."

There are 1,000-1,500 Kashmiris currently settled in Kathmandu, according to estimates by local traders.

During one visit to New Delhi in search of the missing uncle, the Sofis met another Kashmiri, Ansar Bhatt, in the Tihar Jail. Bhatt told them the Nepal Police had arrested him in Kathmandu and handed him over to New Delhi. When asked about his whereabouts, Indian Embassy officials in Kathmandu say they are not sure about the Sofis' claims and need sometime to establish its veracity.

According to Sofi, two Nepal Police officers took him into custody on Aug.

gether with his uncle, and the uncle's friend and his wife, whose party Gulam Mohammad had been attending. "My uncle was asking me: 'What wrong have I done to court this arrest?'" says Sofi. "I told him they had picked me up for no reason and asked him instead what wrong he had done." That same night the four were brought to the police station in Anamnagar. Sofi was released after spending 10 days in custody. His uncle's friend and his wife were released from the Jansewa Police Post in New Road the same day they were arrested.

That was the last anyone has seen of Gulam Mohammad, who was taken to an undisclosed location that same day, according to the Sofis.

The Sofis have filed a case at the Supreme Court and have gotten assurances that they would get a court ruling to raid



WAR ECONO



ARMY

Skyrocketing defense spending is arming the security forces but disarming the country's crucial development programs. It may even cripple the whole economy.

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

Early this month the Royal Nepal Army asked for an additional budget allocation to recruit and train 17,000 more personnel in addition to the current 80,000-plus. The RNA reportedly wants to have close to 200,000 soldiers to combat the insurgency: Army officials won't disclose their exact target, but they indicate the figure is between 100,000 and 200,000. Can a cash-strapped economy really sustain that? Well, the Army seems intent on its goal.

Many say Nepal's rapidly growing defense expenditure is unavoidable. With the worsening security situation, the government has no choice but to arm the security forces to battle the insur-

gency. But, in turn, the development budget has declined dramatically. In the absence of peace the defense budget will continue to expand. How much can the country afford?

"There is no room for further increases in defense spending," says Yubaraj Khatiwada, member of the National Planning Commission. Other officials say that any further increase in the defense budget will put an intolerable strain on the development budget, which has been shrinking since the beginning of the insurgency in 1996. The gulf between regular expenditure, which includes the security budget, and the development expenditure has nearly doubled in the last eight years.

Defense expenditure has reached 4.5 percent of the Gross Domestic Product, up from 0.8 percent before 1996. Sri Lanka, meanwhile, spends about six per-

cent of its GDP on defense. Nepal's GDP is estimated to be around \$38.29 billion, nearly Rs. 2.7 trillion; the country now spends more than 23 percent of its budget on defense. The percentage may be even higher, as military hardware like helicopters, guns and other weaponry are periodically purchased through extra-budgetary allocations. Government officials say they desperately want to limit further defense spending, but they also concede that they may have to yield to the demands of the security forces if the situation deteriorates further.

In this year's budget, Finance Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari made a symbolic reduction in the defense budget to Rs.8 billion, down from last year's Rs.8.38 billion. The actual spending last

GROWING: Early this year women too were added to the Army's fighting force



year exceeded Rs.15 billion; this year's figure is likely to be even higher.

"This year the government has tried to limit the defense budget," says the planning commission's Khatiwada. "It would be a positive step if the government succeeds in its efforts." Despite plans and hopes, security spending in wartime is dictated by events. The longer the conflict drags on, the higher the expense.

The Army needs more money to expand its presence throughout the country and to recruit more personnel. At present security forces are deployed at 900 different locations. Army officials say they want to deploy troops to an additional 92 outposts and that they need more soldiers to do that. Observers question whether an additional 92 bases will make an impact, when there are more than 4,000 VDCs, many with no government presence at all. The Army is already stretched too thin to contain the insurgency. Most of the 18 brigades—11 infantry and seven specialist—are engaged in protecting the cities and district headquarters. Far too few of them, critics maintain, are tasked with combating the rebels directly or with mounting counter-insurgency or intelligence-gathering operations.

When hundreds of Maoists recently attacked an Army contingent in Krishnabhir, Dhadhing, the allegation was that the Army didn't respond on time. Army officers say that they had information about the Maoist movements but that due to unfavorable weather they couldn't send reinforcements by helicopter. But

according to other Army officers, there were troops nearby and fully aware of the incident: They couldn't respond because they weren't deployed for search and destroy operations. "They were there to hold the fort," says one officer.

The Army has its own list of grievances, including resentment over what they see as government insensitivity to their requirements. "We don't have enough resources," says Army spokesman Brigadier General Deepak Gurung. "We have been asking for more budget." He cites budgetary allocations for last year and this year: The Army had asked for Rs.14 billion last year, while the government actually gave them Rs.8 billion. This year the Army had demanded Rs.16 billion, and the allocation is same as last year. "The government has entrusted us with the task of providing security, but the huge irony is that we have been asked to fight with the least possible resources," says an Army officer, referring to the budgeted amounts. "We don't have enough helicopter gunships, weaponry and surveillance equipment. We have been forced to charter private choppers at times for operations and for supplying rations to our outposts," he adds.

The government, on other hand, has its own difficulties. Officials insist that they want to equip the Army and security forces with all the resources possible, but that there is a limit on defense spending. The economy, they say, cannot afford to give the security forces a blank check. It is unclear where the line will be drawn. No government official will provide a high-end limit to defense

spending. "We can't compromise on security," says the planning commission's Khatiwada. In almost the same breath he says that further increases are not possible. The vacillation on the subject is partly political, but it is also pragmatic: In extreme cases the government does seem prepared to provide further allocations to the Army even if that means cutting the development budget yet again. Security comes first; without peace, development efforts can't succeed, says Khatiwada.

The Ministry of Finance and the Army are at loggerheads over extra-budgetary allocations. Ministry officials haven't given their nod to the Army's demand for funds for the additional 17,000 personnel. "We simply don't have that kind of money," says an official. But the Army insists that it needs the extra troops to fight the insurgency. It costs on average about Rs.300,000 to recruit and train each soldier in the first year and about Rs.100,000 per soldier per year afterwards. The RNA is understood to have asked the Ministry of Finance for Rs.6.78 billion for the expansion. Army officials also hold a grudge against Fi-



LOCKED N' LOADED: The Army wants more, the government is reluctant



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nance Ministry officials for what they call “unprofessional attitudes.” An Army officer says, “We sent them our figures for new recruitment, which are secret, but they keep on leaking them to the press.”

Observers say that it is natural for a country deeply embroiled in an internal conflict to escalate its defense spending. Sri Lanka increased its security expenses almost 15-fold in the past two decades. But Nepal’s dependence on donors for most of its budgetary requirements puts it in a difficult position.

Donors have already raised eyebrows at the fattening defense purse and the consequent reductions in development spending. Major donors have conveyed private warnings to the government, and some have spoken out publicly. The government is obliged to listen. More than 60 percent of the development budget is donor-funded; that comes to about 30 percent of the total budget. There is acceptance among donors of the fact that

without security development will be difficult. Even so, much of the funding comes with strings attached, and officials at the Finance Ministry are finding it hard to perform the necessary balancing act. Donors are likely to further pressure the government to limit the defense spending following the recent publication of a grim report on human development.

The Nepal Human Development Report 2004, the third in a series prepared by the UNDP, describes the present pace of progress as painstakingly slow and calls

for “dramatic shifts in current policies and resource allocations.” The recommendation comes at a time when regular expenditure is eating away at the development budget and threatens to consume it completely, if the present rate of growth in military expenses continues. The document, described by the authors as a “diagnostic report,” states that conventional anti-poverty approaches have failed and that enormous disparity still persists. A huge gap between the state’s obligations and what it has delivered creates tension and conflict, the report notes. It calls on the government to invest in the people, who are the real wealth of the nation. A nine-point reform agenda emphasizes a rights-based approach to deal with a series of social and economic woes.

The overall message of the report is that the government must immediately address the social and economic underpinnings of the conflict. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, who launched

Donors have raised eyebrows at the fattening defense purse

the report, refused to accept the report’s grim assessment at face value. “Contrary to the media-driven rhetoric, progress has been made in certain sectors like healthcare and education,” he said.

Government officials insist that they realize the gravity of the problem. “Our social fabric has been torn apart by the conflict,” says Chief Secretary Bimal Prasad Koirala. The state’s inadequate and sometimes-brutal responses at the start of the insurgency are also blame.

Some of the government’s and the security forces’ ac-

tions seem to have hardened the insurgents' resolve to fight to the last. Indiscriminate actions by the police at the beginning of the insurgency are also blamed for exacerbating the conflict. Operation Romeo (1997-1998) and Operation Kilo Sierra (1998-99) both cost the state forces the hearts and minds of villagers: The Maoists cleverly exploited the situation to sustain their movement. Cuts in development spending caused by the huge increase in defense spending may have the same effect. The process is likely to continue as the insurgency spreads.

The intensifying insurgency calls for strong and effective action by the security apparatus. If the government expects the security forces to do that, Army officers

win situation. The economy is already reeling from the nine-year-long insurgency.

"This is a reactive process," says retired Major Karna Bahadur Thapa, a military analyst. "Political offensives instead of military offensives should have been intensified." Analysts say that numerical strength and military hardware won't help much. "I don't believe in



to agree on anything has weighed against an effective political offensive to persuade the Maoists to come to the table. In the absence of a political consensus, the state is left with only the military option. That, in turn, drives the soaring defense budget. Analysts are worried about the long-term impact of military spending, but they also add that the government is left with no option. "We are worried by the growing expenses in defense," says the planning commission's Khatiwada. "But we can't compromise on security." Unless there is a tangible peace overture, the country cannot escape the vicious cycle and the economy could become a casualty.

Swelling military spending is already robbing development projects of funds. The defense expenditure is necessary to arm the security apparatus to fight the insurgency. At the same time, development spending is the only way to address the core social and political underpinnings of the conflict. But security is intricately also linked for effective implementation of development projects. It presents the government with a dilemma: Which should come first?

That's the wrong question. Security obviously comes first. But the only sustainable course requires gearing up development efforts simultaneously with improvements in security and coupling both with concrete steps towards peace. Investing in military hardware may serve as a temporary deterrent, but the long-term solution has to come through political, social and economic initiatives.

The number of Army personnel has almost doubled in the last eight years, and the military's budget has grown by more than four times. The pace of military buildup has been alarming for a small economy like Nepal, even as the economy continues to expand with less vigor.

"It is a matter of grave concern," says Sriram Raj Pande, assistant resident representative of the UNDP and the lead author of the Nepal Human Development Report 2004. "But there has to be peace to have development." Even government officials appreciate that focusing only on a military solution is unsustainable. Eventually the soaring security expenses will put the whole economy in jeopardy. ■



say, it is obliged provide all the necessary resources. "The Army is often criticized by the media and civil society for not venturing out of the district headquarters," says the Army spokesman Gurung. "But no one cares to know whether we have adequate strength." He says that the Army needs more troops to do the job the state and the people expect them to do.

Government officials counter that they haven't compromised on security needs and don't intend to. The government, in fact, has allocated funding above planned levels. Actual spending this year is likely to exceed Rs.16 billion, twice the budgeted amount. Soaring defense spending may help the Army to fight the insurgency, but it is unlikely to be a win-

“This is a reactive process”

figures,” says Thapa. “Look at Sri Lanka: Even after increasing its defense spending by more than 15 times, the real situation on the ground hasn't changed much.” Analysts say security has two aspects, tangible and intangible. A military mind always looks at tangible things like barracks, bullets and battalions. But intangible aspects—instilling trust and building confidence—are at least as important. “In the short run, tangible aspects may serve as a deterrent,” says Thapa, “but they won't help much in the long run.” Without a negotiated settlement, the conflict will continue. It's a lose-lose situation.

The absence of Parliament is also playing a role to extend the conflict, and the inability of the mainstream parties



PENCHANT FOR ARTS

The female to male ratio in private colleges' humanities departments is 3:1. What attracts so many women to the arts?

BY BISWAS BARAL

AS THE BELL ANNOUNCES the end of the last class at 2:30 p.m., streams of students trundle down the narrow lane beside St. Xavier's

Campus in Thapathali. A conspicuous feature stands out in the seemingly homogeneous crowd: Women outnumber men.

The Bachelors' of Arts in Social Work at the college has a total of 81 female and 26 male students. A floor above, the Intermediate of Science classes have 527 men and 191 women. This is the trend in private colleges in Kathmandu: more females in humanities and more males in science and management. Champion College in Kupondole has 24 women and nine men in its Bachelors' of Arts

third year, and Sagarmatha Multiple College in Dillibazaar has 26 females and 10 males in the same batch.

Why such a discrepancy in the sex ratio, and why are so many more women than men doing humanities?

Shristee Lamichhane, a chatty and ebullient third-year student at Xavier's, thinks the reason probably lies in women's temperament. The liberal arts, she explains, are in tune with women's liking for ideas rather than skills, while men, still seen as the bread-winners in a patriarchal society, go for more techni-



OUTNUMBERED: There are more women than men in the humanities department in Campion College

cal fields of studies. She believes that women relate more readily to the abstractions of the humanities than to the quantitative nature of science and technical fields.

The head of the department of humanities at St. Xavier's, Joyson Jose, says that liberal arts subjects—as social work, which he teaches—traditionally have higher female enrollment worldwide. He says the phenomenon has a lot to do with the caring and appreciative nature of women. The expected role of women in our society also eventually contributes to what they study, he adds.

According to Jose, the women taking up liberal arts often have a strong family backing for their studies. But many women get married before they complete their education, he says. Women

have to be better prepared for many harsh challenges ahead in our male-dominated society.

Evidence supports both Jose and Lamichhane's claims that men are more inclined towards the technical fields. In Kantipur City College, for example, which is by and large a technical institution, the number of men in the third year of Bachelors' in Computer Application is 34, compared to 16 women. Similarly, in the third year of Bachelors' in Information Technology and the Bachelors' in Engineering, there are just five and six women respectively—comprising a quarter of the students in each class.

Men dominate in government colleges too. A few kilometers down the road in the shabby rooms of Tri Chandra College, the second year English class has 18 students, with only four women; 80 males and 30 females study in the sociology class.

Another stark difference between the women at St. Xavier's and those at Tri Chandra is their average age: The students at Xavier's are much younger.

Among the few women in the English class at Tri Chandra College was an enthusiastic woman who appeared to be in her late 20s. Unlike most women at Xavier's, who come from

well-off families, she has a relatively humble background. She recommenced her studies after a hiatus of five years, she says, as she was getting bored of an idle lifestyle.

"I can't go to the private colleges because students there are far too young," she says, when asked the reason for attending the government institution. "I would feel totally out of place. Besides, the government colleges are cheap, and I can attend the classes at my liking. So for my age-group, who also have to deal with many household chores, we feel more comfortable here."

Unlike the lady in Tri Chandra though, most young women in private colleges come from elite families. Some of them feel more secure in private settings, say the women. Others want to stay clear of the politics in public colleges, and most of them believe that humanities provide the learning curve that other technical subjects do not offer.

As for Lamichhane, she believes studying humanities will stand her in a good stead for a career in international relations, her favorite subject, "by giving me a better understanding of the realities of life, something that technical education would not." And also, she adds, no dreaded mathematics in humanities. **N**

MAGIC CARPET RIDE

Nepali carpet industrialists are hoping for a revival of the once lucrative European market. But they face many challenges.

BY INDRA ADHIKARI

Early this month, a team of European carpet importers visited Nepal to assess the possibility of expanding the market for Nepali carpets there. The visit brought hope to Nepali carpet entrepreneurs who are hoping for a revival of the European market that saw a decline in the mid-90s.

The problem then was quality and cost. The import of low quality wool, increase in the number of factories with booming demand in Europe and America in the early 90s and lack of adequate skilled manpower for these mushrooming industries were some of the drawbacks that led to the fall of the quality of Nepali carpets. "Carpet producers here lack the expertise to produce carpets exactly according to the demand in Europe," says Ramesh Dhungana of Creative Export Nepal. One of the major reasons is that the expanding Indian car-

pet industry has attracted a lot of skilled Nepali workers, especially to Bhadohi in Bihar.

After the decline of the European market, Nepali carpets received a good response from American buyers, but the U.S. market ultimately failed to live up to its potential. In recent years, exports to that market have seen a rapid decline. Exports to the United States decreased to less than 15 percent of the total carpet exports this year, down from 20 percent in 2000. Carpets worth more than \$1.2 million were exported to the United States in 2000. Rising sales of cheap and colorful Indian and Chinese carpets crowded Nepali carpets out of the American market. Indian carpets tagged as "Indo-Nepal" are the major cause of the decline of the market for Nepali carpets in America and Europe, say exporters.

Exports to Germany, still the largest importer of the Nepali carpets, have also been similarly affected. They decreased

by eight percent from last year to less than \$4 million. In the fiscal year of 1992-1993, Germany imported Nepali carpets worth \$8 million. However, there is a visible rise in the export of Nepali carpets to European countries such as Italy and Turkey. Exports to these countries increased by 751 percent and 141 percent in comparison to last year's figures. "This is why we have again targeted the European market instead of the United States where demands have been decreasing," says Kapil Bazgai of J.K. Woolens. The European market for Nepali carpet seems to be seeing a revival. Industrialists hope for another boom.

But on the other side of the Atlantic, the problems continue. The American market has been seeing a downturn for a number of years. To compound the problem, the duty-free entrance into U.S. markets given to Nepali carpets will end this month. This will further decrease exports to the United States un-





less such legislation is revised, says industrialist Gopal Krishna Joshi. One alternative for the industry is to revive the European market, he stresses. The recent visit of the European importers hopefully is a positive sign.

Nepali carpet producers looking for a revival of their fortunes in Europe will have to meet the demands of the market there. European tastes have shifted away from traditional and colorful carpets to plain or monochrome ones. That presents a challenge to the Nepali carpet industry. Most of the demands are for specific colors and patterns, says an officer with Dhondhup Khangsar, a carpet exporter. Demands made last year were mostly for plain, single-colored patterns as opposed to bright and complex patterns with traditional symbols. The problem, however, with such carpets is that they cost more.

There are more reasons why Nepali carpets are expensive. Lanka Man Roka, second vice president of the Central

Carpet Industries Association, quotes this reason given by European retailers: Nepali carpets first go to wholesalers who then sell them to the retailers who in turn sell the carpet to the buyers. Thus they end up being more expensive than Chinese and Indian ones that go directly to the retailers.

Other factors too add to the cost of Nepali carpets making them more expensive in comparison to those from China and India. The carpet industry has to use wool specified by the government. The wool has to be between four and six inches in length, containing 16 percent moisture and have y/z color value—a measurement of the wool's yellowness—showing the high quality of the wool. The price of wool of this quality has also increased. For instance the price of wool imported from New Zealand went to Rs.250 per kilogram up from Rs.160 five years ago. To add to that, Nepali carpet producers use natural vegetable and in-

set dyes that are more expensive than the Swiss and synthetic dyes used by most Chinese and Indian producers.

Not only are they expensive, Nepali carpets have failed to capitalize on international fairs as well, which are essential for the promotion of exports. There has not been any campaign in Europe; there was one in the United States. Industrialists blame the government for not showing any interest in promoting Nepali carpets. They say that if there were some promotion, the European market would once again retain its profitability.

The Nepali carpet industrialists are hoping for a revival of the once lucrative European market. They optimistically predict growth levels at par with the highs of the 1990s over the next few years. For those predictions to come true, they, however, will have to reach out to retailers in Europe, something they have never done before. **N**



THE LIMITS OF LANG

Predictions that the best Nepali writing in the future will be in English are naive. A foreign language, however global, is not a neutral system of symbols that can be easily used to depict Nepali realities.

BY ADITYA ADHIKARI

LANGUAGE IS NOT ALGEBRA, not a for-mal system of symbols, which, once mastered, can be applied to the solution of any number of problems. The English language is not a neutrally available code that can readily be applied to illustrate Nepali realities. Language itself changes the character of those using it. An English-language Nepali writer's education largely consists of the scores of volumes in English he has read, and he has imbibed not only the stylistic devices, but also the ways of looking at the world from these books. The change in character is even more pronounced among writers educated in the west, these days chiefly in America. These writers will have absorbed the predominant values of the institutions of learning there, values that are usually referred to these days as "liberal"—beliefs in liberal democracy, justice and equality, in the importance of giving a voice to the traditionally voiceless.

These values, of course, have their merits. But problems arise when Nepalis return to Nepal or decide to set their eyes on and write about Nepali realities. These writers, belonging almost exclusively to the so-called "middle-class" of Kathmandu, which is in reality the privileged class, very quickly realize that there is a disconnect between their mind and heart, between what their education has given them and their background. They find that they know very little about life outside the Valley, and that the values they have learned stand in opposition to the values held by their

parents and the society they find themselves amongst. They find themselves in the strange situation of being intellectually liberal but instinctually conservative.

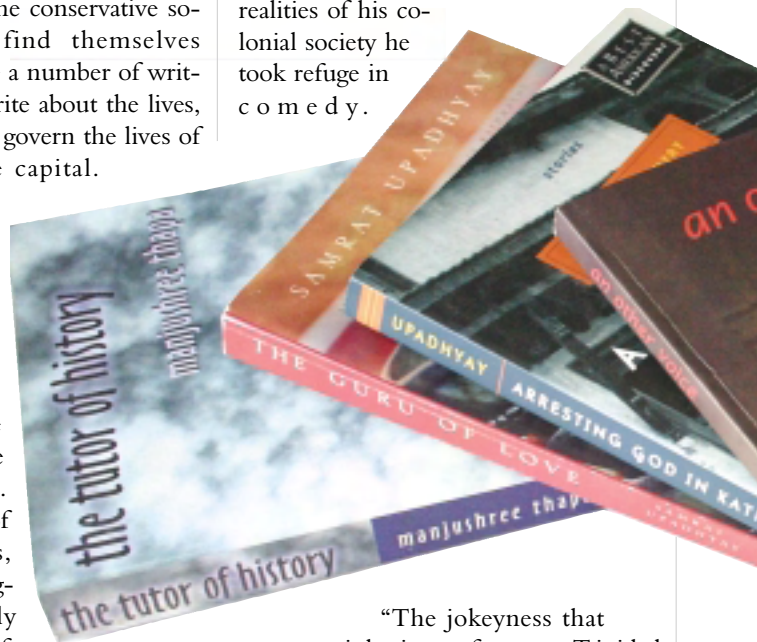
It is evident in the works of almost all American-educated Nepali writers that this is a problem they have faced, that they are very aware of, and which they wish to overcome. There is a genuine desire to understand the people of the mountains and hills of Nepal, to write with compassion about less privileged people. And this can be done only by breaking out of the conservative social milieu they find themselves amongst. So we have a number of writers who decide to write about the lives, rituals and rules that govern the lives of those far from the capital.

Though this desire is admirable, these writers are unable to escape themselves, they are constantly conscious of their own tremendous distance from the people they have taken as their subjects. Often descriptions of life in the villages, lives dominated by agriculture, are highly romanticized. Too often writers are unable to go beyond cloying sentimentality.

It almost seems as though these writers are ashamed of their own backgrounds. As though in writing about their less privileged fellow-countrymen—who of course do not speak English—they feel the constant need to apologize for their own privilege. The sense of guilt they feel clouds their judgment, makes them unable to face the real problems of a society they feel responsible towards. And it is immensely difficult to go beyond the stereotyped clichés of the peasant's life.

Then the opposite situation can occur: Of a person whose education has so changed his character that he feels alienated and estranged from his native cul-

ture. Though there haven't been examples of such writers in Nepal yet, there will surely be in the near future. There can be resentment towards, contempt for, one's own society and people. And because it is impossible to escape one's origins, this can lead to feelings of insecurity and rage. In writing, this can be expressed outright, but the insecurity will most often probably be camouflaged in comedy or irreverence: This is seen in V.S. Naipaul's first three books; where unable to face the realities of his colonial society he took refuge in comedy.



"The jokeyness that was my inheritance from my Trinidad background," he later wrote about his early writings, "however good, however illuminating, was also a way of making peace with a hard world; was on the other side of hysteria... Unwilled, this anxiety or hysteria, the deeper root of comedy had become my subject."

Among a whole host of other difficulties that English-language writers face today, here are a few others. Among those who live in the west there is the psychological problem of the immigrant, who is often unable to understand the changes in their native country after they have left it. Their vision of their native land remains the world of their childhood and youth, and this perspective is not easily overcome. This can be seen in Samrat Upadhyay's "Guru of Love," where the

LANGUAGE

Royal massacre and the Maoist movement receive a most perfunctory treatment in the epilogue, quite detached from, and without relevance to, the rest of the novel. A similar problem faces those who, wishing to play it safe, decide to focus on the narrow “middle-class” world they come from. However, beautifully they may express themselves and describe their society, the problem of a limited relevance remains.

There is then the problem of translating emotions expressible only in Nepali into English. Especially when translating direct conversation, the words used often fall

flat on the page, or seem unnaturally contrived. At its worst, translation creates a distortion of Nepali reality, as it is lived and breathed in the Nepali language.

Nevertheless, these difficulties are not impossible to overcome, and in any case will not stop writers from choosing English as their mode for expression. The English language is immensely attractive to writers today. It is a source of more power than is available through writing in Nepali, and there is the pos-

sibility of reaching a wider audience. But when one decides to write in English, emulating models from the literary traditions of the west, the work is no longer part of the Nepali literary tradition. Instead it occupies an uncomfortable position in between cultures: This work is dependent on the west, but does not completely belong to it. It is also easy to repeat forms that have been long established in western traditions without the addition of any innovation. To create meager replicas of what has already been done: This is hardly the wish of any writer; but it takes writers of uncommon vision to create something startlingly new and powerfully relevant.

As for the obvious problem of who the audience is going to be: Writers are usually uncomfortably aware that those they are writing for are often not who they are writing about. The talented Pankaj Mishra—belonging to the Indian-English school of writing, which, contrary to public perception, still hasn’t become self-confidently mature—states that he writes for people who have read the same books as he has: Chekhov, Flaubert and Turgenyev. It does not take a genius to recognize the inadequacy of this position. Mishra’s answer is a defensive reaction against a question that causes him discomfort.

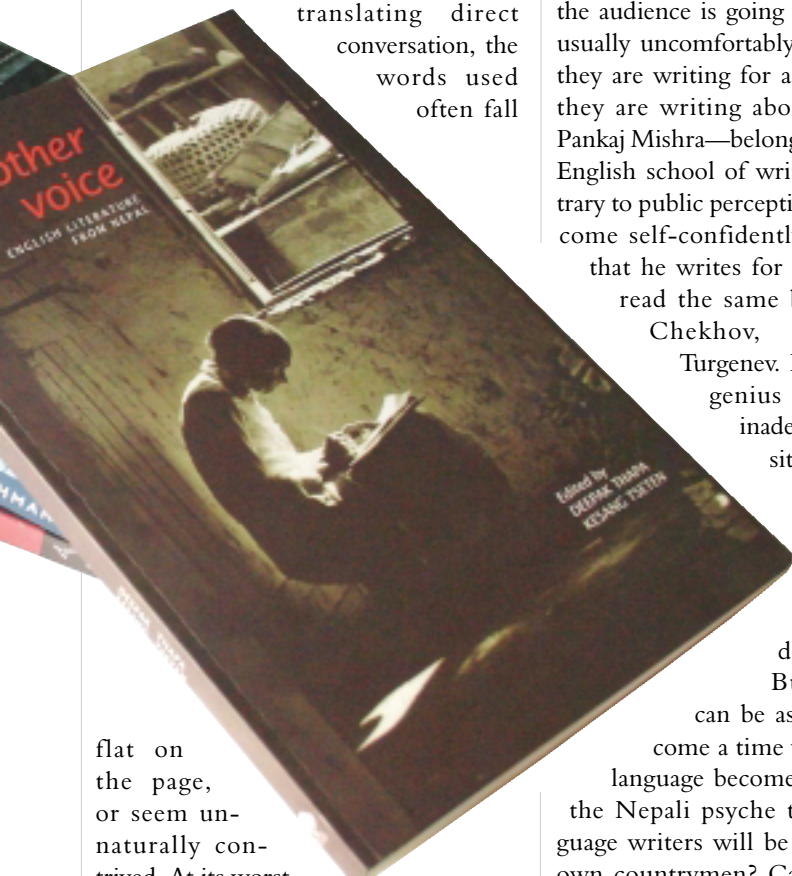
But the question can be asked: Won’t there come a time when the English language becomes so ingrained in the Nepali psyche that English-language writers will be writing for their own countrymen? Can it be expected that the English language will gradually grow on Nepali soil, eventually becoming a language which we live and breathe? After all, we have adopted so many western manners and customs over the years. But this road too seems to be fraught with difficulties.

A delightful illustration of an early attempt by the Nepali court to adopt European manners is given in Lawrence Oliphant’s 1852 account of his travels to

Kathmandu. As the guest of Jung Bahadur, Oliphant witnessed a parade of the army. Initially impressed by the display of firearms, Oliphant was then confronted by a strange sight: “Suddenly the music changed; the bandsmen struck up a lively polka, and a number of little boys, in a sort of a pen-wiper costume, clasping one another like civilized ladies and gentlemen, began to caper about, after which they went through various antics that surpassed even the wildest notions of our highly civilized community... and the whole thing was so eminently ridiculous and looked upon very like a farce.”

Seventy-six years later, another English writer on Nepal, Perceval Landon, very sympathetic to Nepalis, chastised Oliphant for lacking any understanding of the “Asiatic character.” “What Oliphant wholly failed to understand was that a process of a much slower order, that of assimilating the organization, drills, manufactures, mechanical development, and, above all, the higher standards of justice and humanity which prevailed in Europe, was even then taking root in this strange soil.”

Another 76 years have passed since Landon wrote those words, and the process of assimilation is still incomplete. What is assimilated becomes distorted when received by the Nepali psyche; for a people’s character is not a blank slate, onto which anything can be inscribed. A people have their own mind, with its beliefs and limits, and absorbs what it is able to understand. And often when it identifies something it admires and attempts to emulate it, the results are so far from the original that it cannot but inspire ridicule in the mind of someone like Oldfield. Though by now we are far from “clasping one another and capering about” there are numerous other examples that can be given as cases of imperfect assimilation. Though space does not permit further enumerations of such examples, it is clear that the adoption of the English language is not a straightforward process that develops as more and more people learn English, but rather one that meanders along various paths, encountering difficulties, some of which are almost impossible to resolve. **N**



CHRISTMAS WITHOUT CAROLS

Christmas is still a quiet affair for Nepal's growing population of Christians

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

It's already Dec. 20, but there is still no sign of Christmas in Kathmandu, except for the commercial promotions at big department stores and five-

star hotels. No Christmas trees, no lights, no carols and no Santa Claus bearing gifts. Carols, both religious hymns and secular songs of the season, are the essence of Christmas; they lift the spirits. Groups of Christmas carolers go from house to house to rejoice and proclaim the birth of Jesus. Christmas without carols is like a Tihar without *deusi bhailo*. Since the im-

position of the emergency in November 2001, caroling has virtually come to a stop. Many Christians lament that Christmas has become invisible, all the more so without carols.

"Walking through the streets of the Kathmandu you can't tell whether Christmas is here or not," says Isaac Sharma, who has seen Christmas celebrations during his stay in Nagaland, India, with its vast majority of Protestant Christians. "Many of my friends keep asking when Christmas will come. It's on the 25th of course, but it's a lot longer than that." It's more than



just a day of celebration, he says: In many parts of the world Christmas begins in late November and lasts until New Year's Day.

"I have barely dusted down my house," says Rebecca Shrestha, a resident of Kusunti. "It's on 25th, I still have some time." Church leaders say that Christmas is a quiet and closed-door celebration in Nepal. Among the Christian community, the celebrations are confined to a day or perhaps two, despite the growing population of Christians. According to figures provided by the Nepal Churches Fellowship, the umbrella organization of Nepali Christian churches, there are more than 500,000 Christians in Nepal. That's about two percent of the population, much higher than the figure reported by the Census Bureau.

Although Christmas is a relatively quiet affair in Nepal, it is the biggest

event for the Christian community here. Churches have already begun preparations to celebrate the holiday. Church choir groups can be seen rehearsing hymns and skits for the 25th. At the Aereopagus Congregation in Thapathali, Sylvania, the leader of the youth fellowship, encourages youths to exchange gifts with one another. "It's important that we learn to share our love and joy with each other in order to multiply the happiness," he says. The choir group and the youth fellowship help retain the spirit of Christmas.

For the younger generation another big part of the Christmas spirit is shopping for new clothes, but for older people the spiritual underpinnings and the chance to renew one's faith are most important. "Christmas to me is a time to be new again and to be filled with peace and joy," says Ramon Karthak, who is going to Darjeeling this Christmas to celebrate with his extended family there. Because of their travel plans, the Karthaks haven't done much at their home in Bhaisehatti. For families like the Karthaks and others, Christmas is much different—almost invisible compared to celebrations in India or elsewhere. But a recent Christmas concert might have helped to kindle the festive spirit.

On Dec. 11 the Kathmandu Chorale gave a spectacular rendition of Christmas music and reminded everyone that singing is central to the Christmas celebrations. "It felt like home," says Stephen, a Norwegian. "What better to remind us of Christmas than these hymns?" The

Kathmandu Chorale is made up of people of different nationalities and professional backgrounds; it has been giving regular Christmas concerts since 1980. This year's concert was held in the auditorium of the British School in Patan and attracted more than 500 people for two shows.

The chorale's performance left everyone delighted. "Last year the chorale sung Nepali hymns as well," says Kathy Freeman, assistant conductor of the concert. But not this year.

"The music was moving," says Rajendra Khanal, a non-Christian. "This is the first time I have heard Christmas hymns. I'm eager to hear them again." Many Nepali Christians who were there were overwhelmed and seemed carried away by the music.

Birendra Shrestha of Patan Museum Café recalled his days as a student choir member in a Christian school in India. The audience at the shows included the UNDP Nepal chief, Matthew Kahane, and Mike Gill of the Fulbright Commission. "Good to know Nation Weekly is covering this," Kahane said.

The concert began with the "Hallelujah Chorus" and ended with the evergreen "Joy to the World." In between there were hymns in Italian, French and Hebrew, as well as English. Despite limited publicity, more than 500 people, mostly expatriates, turned up for the event.

More quiet Christmas events will take place over the weekend in churches and homes across the country, but news about them is unlikely to reach the public. As in recent years, Christmas will come and go quietly. Nepalis will continue to wonder, like Isaac Sharma's friends: When is Christmas? **N**



GOODIES: Christmas is also a time to do good business



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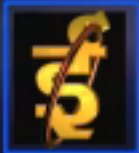
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B Rai

Telling Tales

The four-day Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival showcased a wide range of movies. The ones that received the most acclaim from the audiences focused not on mountains but on people.

BY YASHAS VAIDYA

In 2003 Kesang Tseten was assigned by Helvetas Nepal to make a film about the Rato Machhendranath. That year, like every 12th year, the *rath*, the chariot of the god Rato Machhendranath, was pulled from Bungamati to Patan and back. That year the chariot also had to be built from scratch, like every 12th year, from the smallest of parts. In the months following the construction, Tseten follows the chariot's arduous and often precarious journey through the flood-washed roads and rough trails of Bungamati and the narrow, congested urban streets of Patan. He filmed the festival in its gritty reality: the frenzy, the excitement and the chaos as the unwieldy 65-foot-tall four-wheeled chariot seems literally ready to come apart at times.

Nearly 20 months later, after months of painstaking editing of the 110 hours

of footage, Tseten's film "On the Road with the Red God: Machhendranath" is finally ready. It premiered two weeks ago at the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival, known also as the KIMFF, at the Russian Cultural Centre. It was the inaugural film at the biennial film festival that took place from Dec. 9 to Dec. 12.

At the opening of the film on the first day of the festival, eminent historian Satya Mohan Joshi talked at length about the Rato Machhendranath as a living testimony to and an intangible part of Nepali culture. In the movie that followed, filmmaker Tseten focused more on the real upholders of tradition and culture, the people. The people who built the chariot, performed the necessary rituals, pulled the chariot, and did whatever was necessary for the success of the chariot's journey are at the center of the movie. Tseten's film shows how this festival, which is believed to be more

than a thousand years old, depends on the oft-chaotic cooperation between many people for its success. For the filmmaker, that is the essence of the festival—the human conflict, emotions like greed and resentment, and even feelings of rebellion and dissent.

Human-interest in the storylines was a recurring theme at the mountain film festival, including in the story of Nima Temba Sherpa. It tells the tale of the unsung heroes of the mountains, the Sherpas. The film titled "Nima Temba Sherpa," by Dutch filmmaker Margriet Jansen, is about Nima, who has led many expeditions to the top of the highest Himalayan summits. But it's not often that he and his fellow Sherpas get the limelight that they deserve. Viewers seemed to be moved by his tale: It received the Audience Award, based on ratings by the viewing audiences.

Another moving movie, "The Forbidden Team," is about Tibetans in India who form a football team and decide to play an "international" against Greenland—a match that is supported by neither China nor FIFA. The Greenland team, an autonomous territory of Denmark, has something else in common with the Tibetans: They want to play ball too. The movie documents the Tibetan team's struggles to make it to Copenhagen to play the match. The story is compelling: The audience at the Russian Cultural Centre cheered on the



Tibetan team and went wild when they scored a goal. The film by Danish filmmakers Rasmus Dinesen and Arnold Kroeigaard is visually appealing and good sports as well as good theater: The football looks as good as any match on ESPN.

It isn't only the slick production and editing that attracted people to this year's offerings at the festival. Narayan Wagle, editor of Kantipur, is one of the many well-known figures who prowled the halls of the Russian Cultural Centre during the screenings. He has been following Kathmandu film festivals since the first significant festival held by Himal Association, the 1994 Film Himalaya. For Wagle, the documentaries are also a form of journalism in that, like reporting, they have stories to tell. The way a story is told and innovation in the storytelling gives Wagle inspiration. On the subject of mountain films he says, "Mountains may be easy to photograph, but it's really hard to find a story in them." The story, for most filmmakers, is the people.

Good storytelling is what also drew Ayushma Regmi, recently out of high school. She's been a regular since the last mountain film festival in 2002. She volunteered to help out at Film South Asia, Himal's other film festival, in 2003 and at this festival as well. So what brings her back? "The Nepali films shown at the festival leave me stunned every

time," she says. "You don't get to see great Nepali films elsewhere."

The Nepali films screened at the festival weren't run-of-the-mill productions. Nepali filmmakers are making more documentaries and feature films that forgo the conventions of the Bollywood-imitating Nepali film industry, like "Numafung" by Navin Subba and recently "Karma" by Tsering Rhitar. The number of Nepali films entered for selection at the festival went up this year and seven were ultimately chosen, including one experimental short, out of a total of 49 films on show. The last festival included only four films by Nepalis out of a total of 53.

Out of the seven Nepali directors at the KIMFF, two—Tseten and Mohan Mainali—had movies featured in the last festival as well. Tseten's documentary "We Homes Chaps" was on show in 2002, as was Mainali's "Jogimaraka Jyundaharu," "The Living of Jogimara"—about 17 construction workers from

Jogimara, killed by the security forces and labeled as terrorists. That film aired to critical acclaim but also generated some controversy: The government made its displeasure known by asking the organizers to can the movie. This year Mainali's "Six 'Stories'" premiered at the festival. It confronts another burning issue, the plight of families caught in the crossfire between the state and the Maoist rebels.

Besides the seven by Nepali directors, there were two more films about Nepal. The focus on movies from and about Nepal paid off: Large crowds came to watch these movies, which generally played to full houses.

Kesang Tseten's movie on the red god was especially well received. The theme of chaos and conflict struck a chord with people who are living in the midst of conflict. The festival of the Rato Machhendranath receives royal patronage, as its success has supposedly much to do with the fate of the country. Royal misfortunes are linked to accidents involving the chariot: The film cites the death of King Mahendra after two accidents in the 1970s and later the royal massacre in 2001 after the chariot "nearly toppled over in a severe way" in 2000. Earlier this year, in the shorter version of the festival, the chariot toppled again at Sundhara. With the country plunging into a downward spiral of violence in what seems a never-ending conflict, many must have asked themselves: Are the gods really against us? Or are base emotions, like those that threaten to plunge the red god's festival into chaos and undermine its success—greed, jealousy and opportunism—leading the country and the people to their doom? **N**



FALLEN: Rato Machhendranath at Sundhara early this year



Dead Willing!

Chettri, our regular contributor, survived a car crash on Dec. 12. She writes about her near death experience

BY KARUNA CHETTRI

I died this morning. I had been warned by the astrologer during my visit to Kathmandu this summer. “Two things,” he had said, “Don’t drive if you don’t have to. If you must, drive slowly... you have one more shani ko dasha, (an ill omen which supposedly has been haunting me for the last seven years). It involves a vehicle.” I promised I would be careful.

On my return to Maryland, I thought about writing a will. The holidays have accelerated the number of vehicular accidents in my area. Last Sunday, I was stuck on a three-lane route for two hours while the roads were blocked by police, ambulances and two Medivac helicopters. I had watched the helicopters land and take off. Alcohol was involved and two people had died that afternoon. Senseless deaths! Such tragedy.

A week later, same road, same day, Sunday—this morning at 8:10 a.m., I kissed my little girl goodbye on my way to my Sunday Yoga class.

Route 29 is a long stretch of a three-lane road which few drivers resist speeding on. From afar, I saw the traffic lights turn yellow. Mindfully I slowed down... 55... 50... 40... 35... miles per hour. Just then, I saw the Ford Explorer on my left veer sharply right into my lane attempting a last desperate effort at crossing over my lane to an exit road it had missed. I always knew and now am convinced that teenagers should not be allowed to drive—ok, maybe a bicycle. How about a swap with voting rights: Teenagers should vote but not drive. Less at stake there!

I slammed my brakes and closed my eyes bracing myself for the impact. “Smash!” My small car was lifted off the road. It flipped over cart-wheeling three times until it stopped in its final resting place with wheels spinning in the air. The air bags mushroomed out like nuclear explosions. I coughed and whispered, “Oh powers of the universe protect me!”

As I careened into mid air, something smashed into my face. I put both hands on my face... I could not feel it! My eyes opened in terror, and in slow motion, I watched the windshield and side windows shatter into smithereens.

The spray of glass instantly reminded me of the ocean spray of Bali. Horrifying and yet fascinating! Suspended in time and hanging upside down by the seatbelt, my mind raced. Can the speed of thought be measured, I wondered. I touched my face again and I knew for certain that either I was dead or paralyzed. Strange, my mind was so alert and yet so impotent. My time was warped, and space was encapsulated between death, life and numbness. My thoughts sprinted into autopilot: In my teenage years, I recall my dad warning me, “it’s not so easy to die. You can be maimed or worse, paralyzed!” What if I were paralyzed—who would take care of my girl? No job, no paychecks. Who would take care of me, a mere vegetable—an extra alert mind has no value in a dead body? Fight or flight impulse... or was it simply fright. I don’t know. Just a series of incessant reasons! Thoughts! Logic! And a spit of enlighten-

ment: There was meaning to death after all! No senseless deaths in car crashes. All those who had died in crashes had a reason to let go... like a sick fetus, unwilling to hang on to life—knowing, just knowing that living would hurt him and others even more. There is reason in death yet! Given the choice, I WAS gladly dead! Just one thing: Let there be someone with the power to explain to my girl, “Mama is better dead! Let her go... Don’t cry, she is ok... She is happier dead than paralyzed!” And the Will, dam the Will! Why didn’t I write it? For that brief moment, I willed my dead self back into yesterday... when I was fully alive and functioning to write the piece of paper that would determine my child’s future and shape her destiny in the event of my demise. Alas! Here I was a corpse, numb and suspended in midair. I pulled my hand away from my numb face... no blood, not one drop. Amazing how prettily my silver nail polish gleams on my lifeless nails. Surely, surrealism has no place in death! Waiting... waiting... waiting for eternity for someone to release



me and ship my ashes to my final resting place in my mother’s home in Kathmandu. Death is peaceful in its final moments. Strange!

I heard the ambulance, police, cars, and people yelling. “Close off the roads! The doors are jammed... pull her out through the window! Who was the first witness to the accident?” “Ma’am, ma’am, are you ok?” “Don’t move her! Bring the stretcher... Ma’am, do you have any relatives, parents, sisters, brothers... we can contact... No? No one?”

“I have a little girl... Now, she has nobody and I haven’t written a Will!” I whispered. The last thing I heard as they raced me toward the ambulance was, “it’s ok honey, you won’t need a will for now, you’ll live to write one tomorrow!” **N**

(The accident took place on Sunday, Dec. 12, at the intersection of Route 29 and Cherryhill Road, Silver Spring, in Maryland)



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Goodbye from Mustang

BY KUNAL LAMA

Glistening haughtily, the magnificent Dhaulagiri icefall signaled that we were approaching Khobang, the next significant village after Tukucho. Khobang merges seamlessly with Larjung and is, indeed, significant. Every 12 years, Thakalis from all over the world congregate here to renew family ties and celebrate their culture. The next gathering is to take place from Jan. 12 to Jan. 28, 2005. I wish them all luck and fun, but I would urge them to tidy up Khobang, as it is dark, dingy and dirty.

Larjung ends at the river. As I crossed the dry riverbed, I suddenly spied a straggly shrub laden with small, yellow berries. Seabuckthorn! Since the start of my trek, I had been drinking seabuckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*) juice, super rich in vitamins A, C and E, flavanoids and other bioactive compounds. It has a tart but complex flavor; higher up, the color is more peach than yellow. It is especially yummy drunk warm, while sitting by a fire in the evenings. On the far side of the river the vegetation changed dramatically to that of the low-lying hills: lush trees and thick undergrowth. By the time we got to Kokhethanti, the forest air



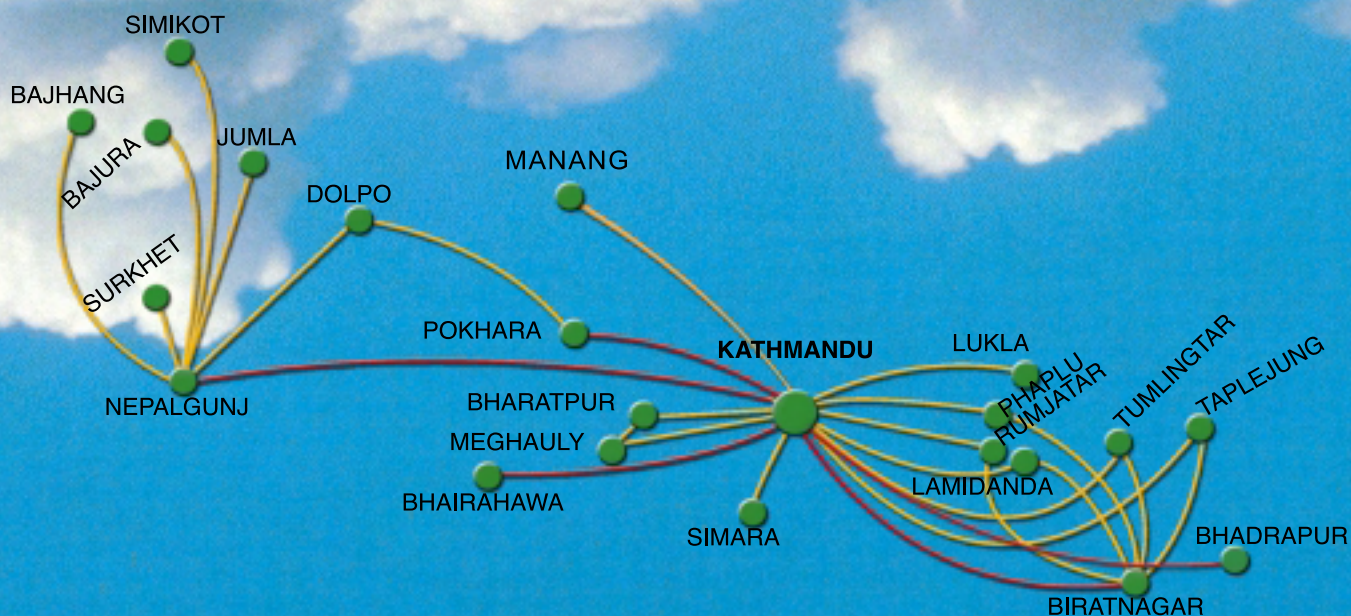
was heavy with pine fragrance. My destination was Ghasa, the last outpost of the Thakalis. I stopped at Kalopani for lunch. On the menu, I saw yak steak offered at 450 rupees! I steered clear of it and, instead, settled for a delicious Nepali thali, while studying the nearby school that was in full session, out in the open. Groups of students distractedly listened to their teachers droning on about Nepali literature and such, blades of grass sticking out of their mouths. The education was definitely being given but one wonders: Was it being received?

After a police check at the end of Kalopani, called Lete now (another example of seamless merging), it was a precarious drop to a powdery path across the face of a large landslide. I was in a forested land, with the river raging to the left. There were yellow, blue and pink flowers blooming everywhere. I heard birds twittering; butterflies fluttered here and there. It was all very pleasant and pretty, but I missed the stark, treeless landscape of Kagbeni, Jharkot and Muktinath. That was new, dramatic and different; this was familiar ground: seen that, done that and humdrum. Anyway, Ghasa turned out to be a small village with houses resembling—and in the same state as—those of Tukucho. After a night's stay in the

third-floor bedroom of the rickety National Guest House, Kamal and I hit the road. Just before we crossed an enormous suspension bridge 30 minutes below Ghasa, there was another security check at an army post. The officer in charge was a smiling Gurung. He clearly rued his posting and hungrily shared with me his dream of building a house in one of the three plots of land he owns in Kathmandu. This was an important checkpoint. I had heard stories of people and porters being turned back from here to Beni if they lacked IDs or a plausible excuse to be traveling in these parts. In fact, in Ghasa there was an unofficial curfew after 8 p.m. Encounters with security personnel always shake me up a bit, so I was happy to get away and get on with my trek, admiring the premature pink blossoms of *painyu* (Himalayan cherry) along the way. The expected orange groves, in full fruit, also began to appear. An hour-and-a-half later, a sign at the tiny village of Pairo Thaplo wished us, "Have a nice journey and Goodbye from Mustang." It also reminded us that we were traversing through the Kali Gandaki valley, said to be the deepest in the world. I saw an old man being carried up in a cutout *doko* in the traditional way of the hills. I thought of taking his photograph but felt I was intruding upon his privacy, seeing that he looked ill and sad, almost angry, at having to suffer the indignity of being carried on the same trail he must have walked on unaided so many times over the years. We stopped briefly at Rupse Chhahara, a beautiful waterfall, and then walked through Dana, Suke Bagar and Guithe before reaching Tatopani.

Ever since we left Ghasa in the morning, it had been spotting with rain intermittently. I was glad it was doing so because it made for a cool walk, though we were mostly going downhill. We met a few tourists struggling up. Minutes after we checked into the Dhaulagiri Lodge in Tatopani, the skies truly opened up, and it poured for the next few hours. There was no electricity. So, after a quick lunch, I did the only thing I could do in Tatopani: head to the fabled hot springs down by the river. **N**

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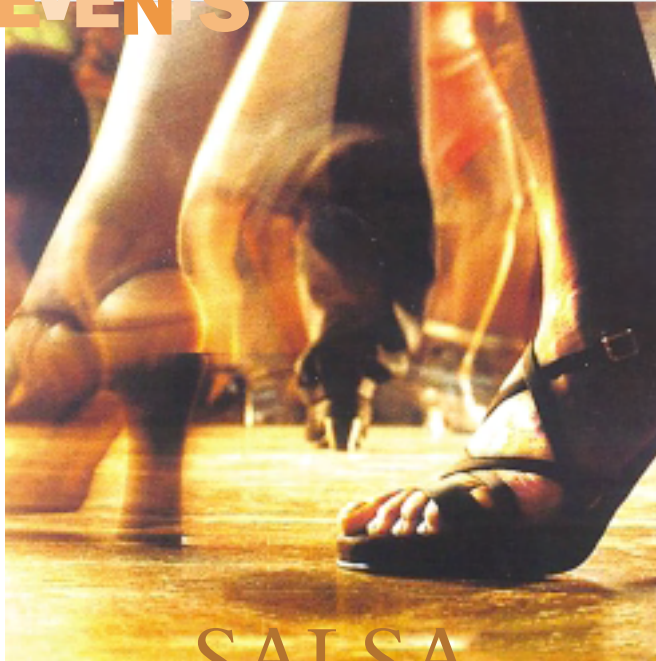
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EVENTS



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Emerging Voices

ART EXHIBITIONS

Three young artists, Sushma Shakya, Rukmani Maskey and Dal Bahadur Rai exhibit a total of 48 prints in a group exhibition at the Siddhartha Art Gallery. These three aspiring artists are students of the famous printmaking husband-wife duo of Uma Shankar Shah and Seema Sharma. These young printmakers have immersed themselves in learning the technicalities of time bite, gum bite, wood block and sugar-lifting to understand the crux of this modern graphic artwork. Among the artists, Dal



Bahadur Rai has depicted the natural heritage of Nepal. Rukmani Maskey's work is influenced by religion and culture, and Sushma Shakya surprises the viewers with elements of mystery in pictures that might seem conventional at first glance.

Christmas BBQ at Dwarika's

Enjoy the Christmas Eve with loved ones at Dwarika's. Start the evening with a warm glass of *gluhwein* before the bonfire.



Relax and enjoy a wide range of barbeque items with traditional Christmas fare. That's not all. Before the end of the evening, Santa will bring something special for those who've been really good this year. Date: Dec. 24. Time: 7 p.m. onwards.

Price: Rs.1,000 includes a welcome drink and Christmas barbeque dinner. A 50% discount for children under 10 years.

Cine Club

Movie: Leviatha (1989). Director: Georges Pan Cosmatos. Starring: Daniel Stern. At the Alliance Francaise, Tripureshwore. Date: Dec. 12. Time: 2 p.m. For information: 424-1163.

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shopping, theme parks, fusion cuisine and much more. For information: 201-2345.

Bethlehem and Superstar

Christmas Eve dinner and lunch with live music at the Shambala Garden, Shangri-la Hotel. For information: 441-2999.

Baker's Basket

The mastery of Chef Ayub Salim is on display this festive season at Hotel Yak and Yeti. Luscious plum cakes, nutty Yule logs, fruit mince



tarts, Christmas short cakes and rum soaked puddings await. The Baker's Basket will also feature white, light, grainy and rustic breads and baguettes; a delectable range of sweet pastries including house cakes, scrolls and scones; and a warming selection of pies, quiches and savory pastries. Date: Dec. 7-Dec. 28. Time: 12-10 p.m.

ONGOING

The Spirit Of Christmas

Sensational and sumptuous Christmas goodies are laid out at the Hyatt Regency to celebrate the



spirit of Christmas. For information: 449-1234.

Nepali Platter

At the Radisson Hotel every Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Come and enjoy this special moment in the festive season. The scheme applies to Royal Stag, Ultimate Gin and Ruslan Vodka. Time: 6-8 p.m. For information: 441-1818.

Jukebox Experience

The jukebox experience with Pooja Gurung and The Cloud Walkers every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at the Rox Bar. For information: 449-1234.

Seasons Specials

Exotic Thai, sizzling tandoori, traditional Nepali and Italian cuisine, daily for lunch at the Shambala Garden Café, Shangri-la Hotel. Date: Dec. 1 onwards. Price: Rs.450 per person, includes a bottle of mineral water or a soft drink.

Shahanshah Winter Splash

Want to sweat in the winter? Go and experience Shahahshah's indoor heated pool and relax in the steam and sauna. At Rs.350. Exclusive ladies' day on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Time: 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Tickling Taste buds

Barbeque every Friday Evening. At The Shambala Garden Café, Shangri-la Hotel. Time: 7 p.m.

onwards. For information: 441-2999.

Cadenza Live

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Presenting "Abhaya and the Steam Injuns" and the best of

jazz in Nepal at the Fusion Bar, Dwarika's Hotel, 7 p.m. onwards,

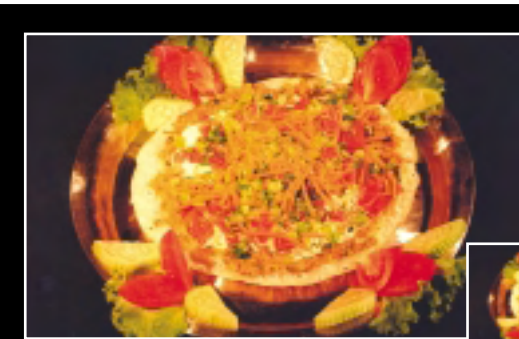
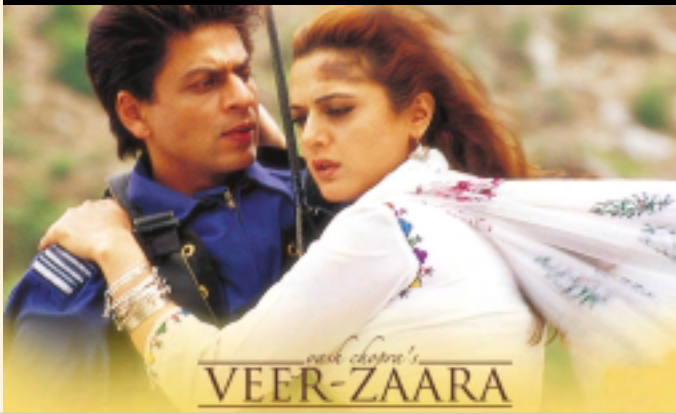


every Friday. Entry fee: Rs.555, including BBQ dinner, and a can of beer/soft drinks. For information: 447-9488.

Fusion Night

The Rox Bar welcomes everyone to be a part of the Fusion Night. The rhythmic and harmonic beats of eastern and western instruments—a treat for the senses. Enjoy the sarangi played by Bharat Nepali with a well-blended mix of western tunes played by The Cloud Walkers. Every Wednesday. Time: 6 p.m. onwards. For information: 449-1234.

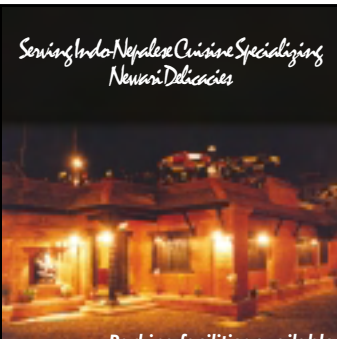
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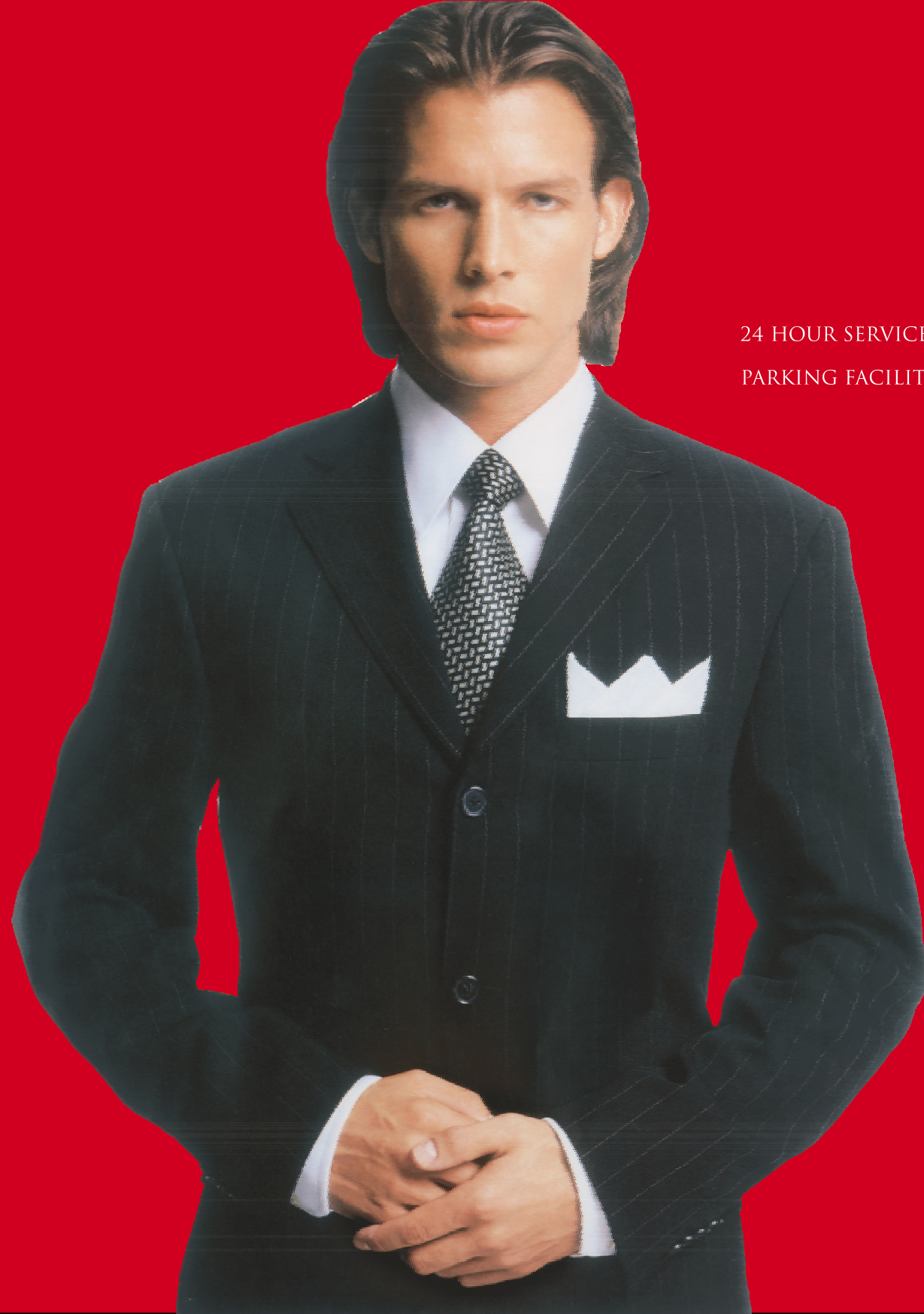
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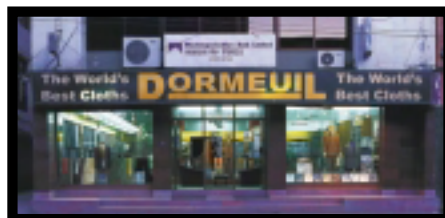
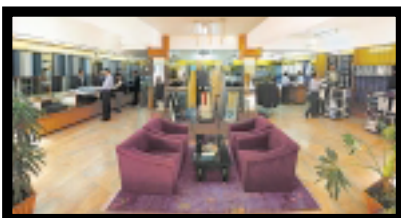
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HACKING WOES

Though still not a common topic for discussion, computer hacking is a serious problem

BY KUMUD NEPAL

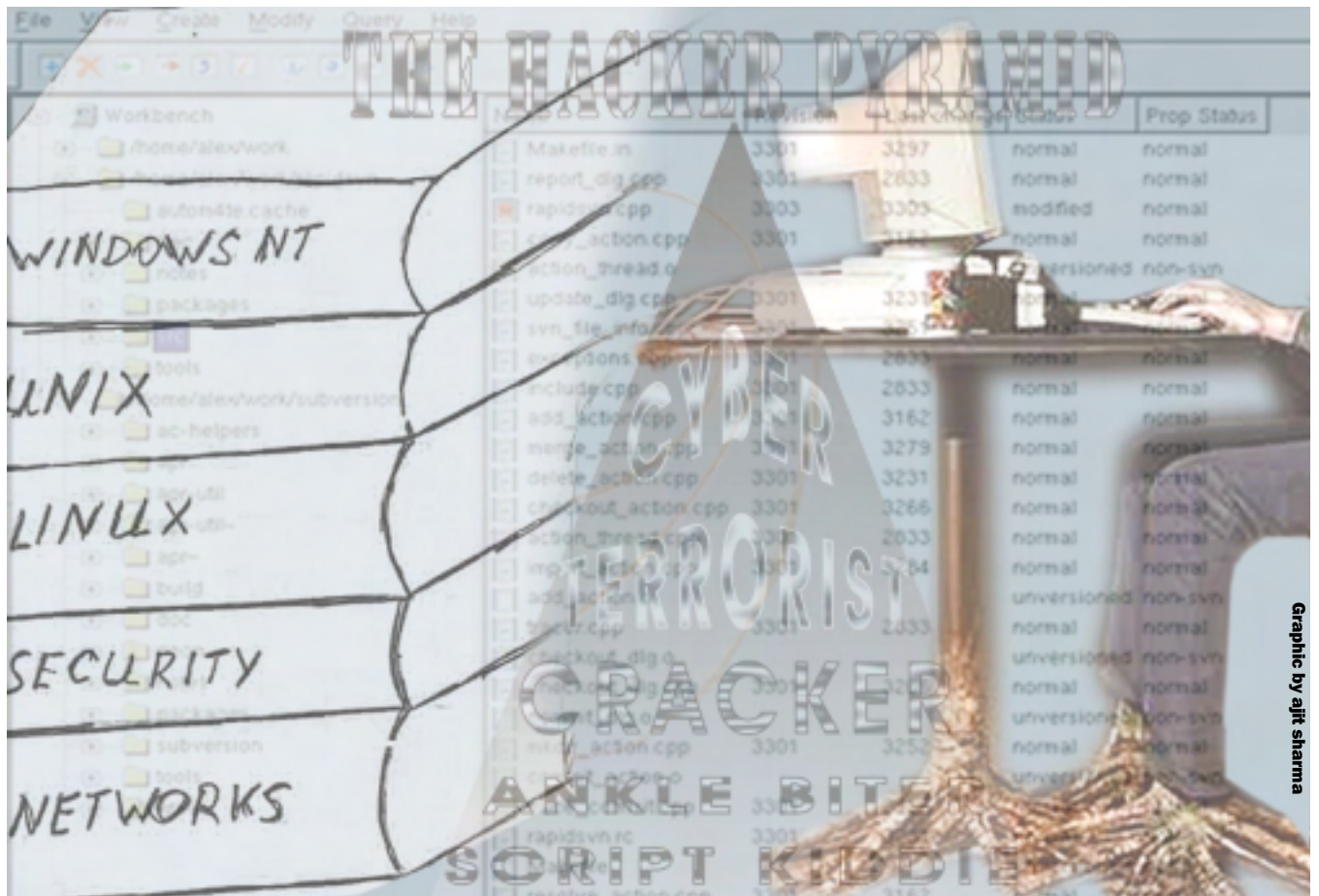
Shaswat Sapkota's computer mouse seemed to take on a life of its own. As the 19-year-old from Rato Bangala School was happily chatting with his friend Sanjeev Pant, he noticed something bizarre. New folders were popping open and files were getting renamed. The 900-word essay that was part of his application to a U.S. college got dumped into the Recycle Bin. What was going on? The computer seemed possessed.

In a sense it was: Sapkota was being hacked. His friend Sanjeev had sent him a Trojan horse, a computer virus, which had infected his computer. "I was shocked when I found out that with a Trojan horse, one can easily access someone else's computer and that only a few details could invite the intrusion," says a bemused Shaswat. "Thank goodness, it was just a friendly prank."

The Trojan horse attack is a simple form of hacking, which is becoming increasingly common all over the world. With a few clicks on the mouse, you can

access anyone's network if you know the IP address, which is assigned by the network provider each time you log on to the Internet. Because hacking takes no great expertise, anyone can do it: There are high chances of causing serious damage to unsuspecting computer users. Strangely, few Nepalis, even those who are avid web surfers, seem to worry much about the risk involved. Computer security is still not a common topic for discussion. But the questions of security, privacy and above all, personal and professional ethics are serious.

It's not common knowledge, but hackers attacked the Nepal Public Commission and Nepal Telecom websites in 2001. Many of us were first introduced to the alien world of hackers in the same year, when the Nepal Police website, nepalpolice.gov.np, showed a string of comic pictures, ridiculing the very security system the police were enthusiastically promoting. Sarose Joshi, a hacker from Sinamangal was responsible; he was eventually tracked down. He got off with a relatively light penalty, 18 days of imprisonment. In the absence of a law to address what was then the



Graphic by ajit sharma

first hacking offense, the government had no choice but to release him on bail.

The subject of hacking became hot again last year. A group of students who were looking to track down their school and college buddies through schoolmates.com.np were redirected to ysgnet.com, which turned out to be a

hackers' forum. "It was my first nasty experience on the web, and it made me realize how vulnerable we are," says Manogya Bhattarai, who usually logs on to the site to meet his old friends from GEMS school.

Hackers offer their own spin to the story. While those who are hacked, typi-

cally Internet service providers and web site hosts, accuse the hackers of damaging their systems for cheap publicity, the hackers say that they are just pointing out the vulnerabilities of the web hosts and helping improve the sites. They claim that their motivation is never to cause harm.

'Crackers Are Nasty, Hackers Aren't'

Sarose Joshi, 25, is probably the first official hacker in Nepal. When he started a project called "Trap the Cat" in 2001, his motive was to hack into websites and find out their vulnerabilities. He broke into almost 120 websites before the police arrested him. There was no cyber law then, and he had to be released after a few days. He has since found a new profession for himself—that of a computer security consultant with ZeroOne consultancy. He talked to Nation Weekly about hacking and his new vocation.

How do you define hacking?

Hacking is an innovative act that allows people to tweak and flirt with the unknown aspects of the computer system or network. People generally confuse it with cracking, which refers to breaking into a system with spiteful intent. Crackers are nasty; hackers aren't, and I surely wasn't a cracker. Crackers generally make attacks for money, and they generally rely on pornography and dangerous virus attacks for extortion.

You said you were a hacker.

How did you get into all this?

My career began after I started working with network applications like Linux/GNU that can be modeled your own way. This gave me some idea as to how a network runs. The open source software allowed me to learn many technical aspects related to security. I am still contributing to free software patches voluntarily. I spend most of my time reading and auditing the inside details of critical software re-

sources; that often helps me to discover security breaches.

Why were you apprehended?

What do you have to say about it?

I was apprehended for breaking into computer sites under my project "Trap the Cat" in 2001. We didn't have a cyber law then, and they held me for only about two weeks. I think I was a bit too unprofessional then. I should have approached the matter more professionally like I am doing now as a computer security consultant.

How did ZeroOne Security come into being?

When I thought of approaching security issues more professionally, I gave up hacking, which, I must ad-

mit, I did for some publicity, and started a career as a security consultant.

What does ZeroOne Security mostly do? Are people and offices helping?

ZeroOne security has a bunch of qualified engineers and a software development laboratory where we work to find out security vulnerabilities of many sites of public institutions and corporate houses. We train people how to avoid hacking and teach them measures to avoid common security problems. People are slowly but rightly becoming aware about computer security and are coming to us. We have good contacts with business houses that are running e-commerce and e-marketing facilities. Even the ISPs and CAN are cooperating.

How big a problem is hacking in Nepal?

Hacking cannot be segregated from computer usage. There are people who are always looking to break into the system for some reason or the other, and this cannot be avoided. Especially with the growing use of Internet, young people are getting into it more easily. There are free hacking tips and tutorials easily accessible to people. Also new technologies like wireless Internet and optical fiber browsing bring up new, serious security issues.

What is your objective now?

My primary objective is to develop a safe and sound computer system and network infrastructure in Nepal, and my company is working to accomplish this dream. **N**





OPTIMISTIC: WorldLink believes hacking isn't an ominous problem yet

Whatever the motivation and whoever the culprit, web surfers are the losers. Anyone who has been hacked will always be haunted by the thought that their network, private or public, can be tinkered with. Business houses are bewildered and government officials confused. They have the uneasy feeling that someone is snooping around.

"We do not want to be scapegoats in this tussle between the hackers and the ISPs [Internet Service Providers]," says Purna Dhungel, who relies heavily on Internet ads to publicize his sport shoes business. Bigyapan.com.np, a free site for ads, was defaced last year. "We want a secure and sound service, and we are not interested in what either side has to say." He fears that he may lose a substantial number of customers if the problems continue.

Corporate houses voice similar concerns. On condition of anonymity, a New Road-based business house told Nation Weekly that it had received threats of extortion from hackers.

"The problem of hacking was getting out of hand in Nepal," says Prajjwol Devkota, a systems administrator at WorldLink, a leading ISP. "But after the imposition of the cyber law, the problem is at least manageable. Now we have few problems of cross-site scripting.

Nothing serious, really." Cross-site scripting is a form of hacking that redirects the users to another web address. That was exactly what had happened with schoolmates.com.np and bigyapan.com.np last year.

"We had no bad intentions," explain the two teenagers responsible, who are known in the hacking circles as d00m and t3a. "We could have easily ruined both sites, but we were concerned for the users. We simply wanted to make WorldLink aware that all was not well with them," says d00m. "The sites it was hosting had lots of loopholes."

WorldLink's Devkota, however, asserts that the problem has nothing to do with their server but is linked with Internet Explorer. WorldLink, he says, runs regular security checks through its database to weed out possible vulnerabilities and also updates its clients by email about possible security risks.

Though no official figures on the number and types of hacked websites are available, there are some estimates. Deepak Rauniyar, information security chief at the Computer Association of Nepal, says the figure is fewer than 100. Hacker t3a believes that the number is a few hundred; the most commonly hacked sites are those of the government, he says. While hacking

so far has generally been confined to defacing websites, newer technologies pose a bigger danger. Broadband wireless service and optical fiber Internet connections that are coming onto the market have their own security glitches as well.

"Yes, it is true that people can scan for free access points and channels and can browse the Internet with their mobile phones and laptops anywhere," says Devkota from WorldLink. The company combats this by registering customers' mac addresses, unique identification numbers for each network card, to prevent hackers from easily cracking into the system.

Increased hacking woes caused the government to impose a cyber law in September this year. The Electronic and Digital Transaction Act penalizes hackers with up to three years of imprisonment and up to Rs.200,000 in fines. The computer association's Deepak Rauniyar feels that although the penalty is more than the damage most hackers do, it has brought hacking under some control. Also, computer security firms like ZeroOne consultancy have started operations. The association too is active: "We are acting as a common platform for hackers and the victims to come to a settlement," says Rauniyar, putting a positive spin on the budding problem. ■

Fixing Football

After years of innovations and hard work, crowds are getting bigger. But allegations of match fixing could undo ANFA's recent success.

BY SUDESH SHRESTHA

The All Nepal Football Association's recent marketing strategy has resulted in relative success. Not only did it manage to convince the old sponsors to stay put but also succeeded in roping in a handful of new ones. And the list of tournaments in the association's annual calendar only seems to grow.

Running them is a far more difficult task, though. Tournaments with big prize money urge the clubs to be at their best so that more crowds come in. But quality depends on a host of factors and doesn't always come through urging.

Indeed this year's Martyrs' Memorial National League, featuring the country's 12 'A' division sides attracted bigger crowds compared to previous years. But the clubs gave the impression that the prize money wasn't good enough. Rs.500,000 went to the winner—the highest prize money ever on offer in football in the country—and Rs.300,000, Rs.200,000 and Rs.100,000 for those finishing second through fourth.

But the league, in the end, turned out to be a lot more intriguing and hardly for the quality of football on display. The season that had kicked off with great fanfare ended with deep suspicions of match fixing.

Spectators, who closely followed the league, just wouldn't believe the outcome of a couple of matches, especially the one between Friends' Club and the eventual champion Three Star Club. Friends' Club went down 7-2 despite taking an early lead. The result did not mean much to Friends' Club as it was already out of contention for the third place. But it proved decisive for Three Star, which finished on top of the league table. Later, it only needed a draw against its

nearest rival Mahendra Police Club in the crunch match. Three Star indeed played a 1-1 draw to take the league title.

"I've watched sides staging a comeback on numerous occasions," says a sports official, insisting anonymity. "But the final score [7-2 in favor of Three Star] was simply too good to be true." The issue quickly fizzled out,

however. There was no official complaint.

Public memory is often selective, choosing only to retain the odd high moments. But it is certain that most of those who watched the Three Star-Friends' Club encounter will find it hard to swallow the 7-2 come-from-behind victory. Is rigging then on the rise and if it is, could it not deal a deadly blow to the football revival in the country? ANFA, more than anyone, should be worried.

In Khukuri Cup held early last year, the crowd was surprised: The Three Star and the Rani Pokhari Corner Team played an uncharacteristically fair game that threatened to put referees out of business.

Both the teams had drawn their matches against Dharan FC, a qualifier

DIFFERENT BALLGAME: Increasing sponsorship augurs success but match-fixing allegations may ruin the spirit of the game



nw/ss

from the East, and they needed a 3-3 score-line to qualify for the quarterfinals. Try explaining to those who watched that match, which unsurprisingly finished on a perfect 3-3 score-line, and they will tell you with absolute certainty that the game was fixed.

An investigation was opened into claims of match fixing after Dharan lodged an official complaint with ANFA, which later announced that the match was played in “competitive spirit.” Is ANFA serious?

Former FIFA referee Shree Ram Ranjitkar, who has officiated countless matches over the years, concedes it is difficult to establish a match-fixing charge. But, he says, there have been occasions when matches were thrown away, apparently traded for some favors.

Incidents of fixing match scores are not new. In league competitions, while disparity between bigger and smaller clubs often makes the guessing game simpler, bigger clubs are quick to fix matches when they face the threat of relegation.

Ranjitkar suggests that ANFA should intervene before the phenomenon takes a heavy toll. It could terminally cripple football as a spectator sport. “As the number of richer tournaments will increase, we can’t rule out the possibility of players and teams resorting to unfair practices,” he cautions. ANFA, after all, has done a lot to revive football in the country in recent years and it doesn’t want to shoot itself in the foot.

ANFA spokesman Lalit Krishna Shrestha dismisses all allegations of match fixing. This, he attributes, to the Nepali mentality that “leads people to

wonder each time they see an unexpected result.”

“ANFA has been very watchful,” claims Shrestha. ANFA plans a double-leg league starting next season under the home-and-away format “with tougher measures to stifle any illegal activities.” Tournament programs, he insists, are devised in such a way that there is no room for match fixing.

But ANFA’s ways have kept the fans guessing. In 1999, an unruly player was handed a three-month suspension but he did not have to serve the suspension as there was no football being played during that period.

Failure on the part of ANFA to mete out appropriate punishment to wrongdoers on time will only invite more trouble. ANFA needs no reminding how difficult it is to get a sponsor when there is no crowd watching the game. **N**





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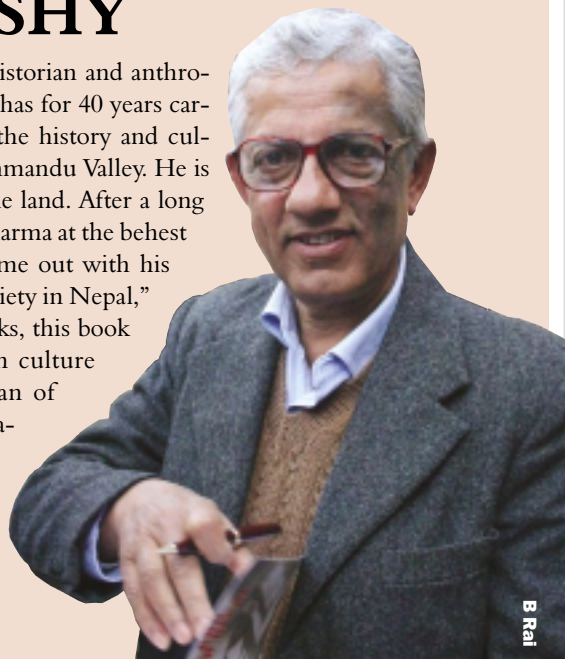
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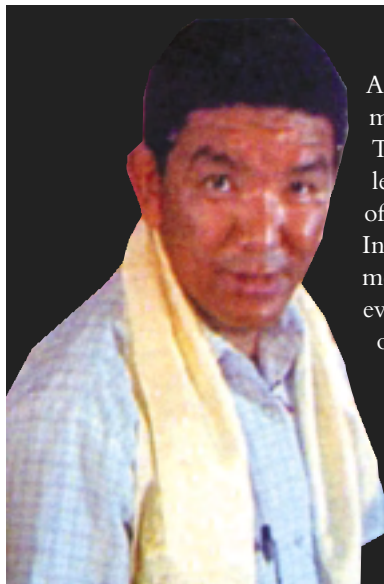
PRAYAG RAJ SHARMA, a historian and anthropologist, knows his subject. He has for 40 years carried out firsthand research on the history and culture of the Farwest and the Kathmandu Valley. He is also well versed in the law of the land. After a long gap of more than seven years, Sharma at the behest of some of his close friends came out with his fourth book, "The State and Society in Nepal," last week. Unlike his other works, this book is a collection of 18 articles on culture and history written over a span of three decades. But Sharma, by nature, doesn't court attention. He was concerned to see his image on the cover of the book. "I am happy to live an ordinary life," says Sharma. "I don't yearn to be a public figure."



B Rai

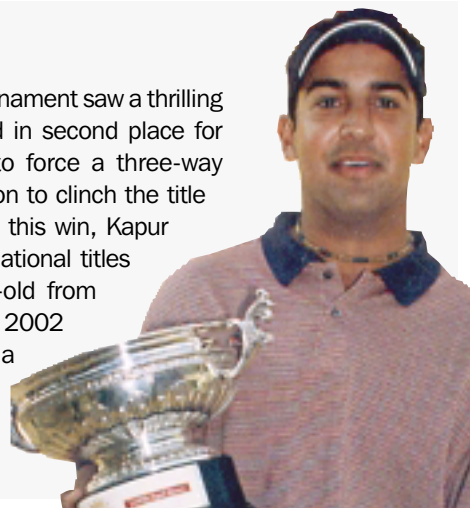
In the Limelight

A few weeks ago he was just another Sherpa headman, a *sardar*, of numerous mountain expeditions. Today **NIMA TEMBA SHERPA** is a minor celebrity. A native of Rolwaling, he won the hearts of hundreds at the recently concluded Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival. A documentary made on his life and struggles as a Sherpa, ever since he accompanied climbers from the age of 12, received the Audience Award. Directed by Margriet Jansen, a Dutch filmmaker, the documentary focuses on the importance of Sherpas to any successful expedition. "We climb mountains not just because we want to," says Sherpa in the movie. "For most of the Sherpas like me who aren't educated, it only is a means of earning money."



Fitting Finale

The Surya Nepal Masters 2004 golf tournament saw a thrilling finale on Dec. 12. After trailing behind in second place for three days, **SHIV KAPUR** was able to force a three-way playoff on the final day. He then went on to clinch the title and the top prize of Rs.259,200. With this win, Kapur adds to the several national and international titles already under his belt. The 22-years-old from Delhi won the Asian Championship in 2002 as an amateur and also the All-India Amateur Classic last year. The Surya Masters Cup will surely make a fitting addition to Kapur's impressive trophy cabinet.



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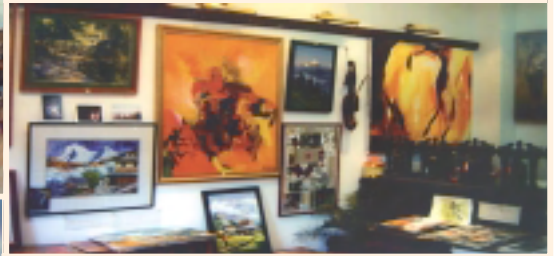
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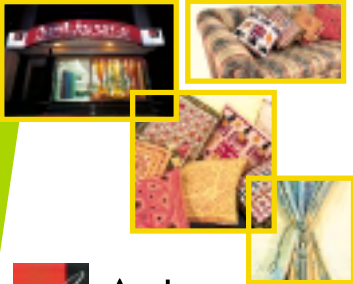


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Sherpa Myth



nm/ss

Fupu Tenjing Sherpa finds the stereotyping of Sherpas as mountain climbers disturbing. As the managing director of the Nepalese Fashion Home, he aims to change that by providing young Sherpas opportunities to hone and display their talent. He has

gained some experience at providing platforms for young talent by organizing the Kid Queen contests that ran through Pokhara, Dharan, Narayangard and Kathmandu last year. Presently, Sherpa, a professional fashion designer, is busy preparing for the Miss Teen Sherpa-2004, slated for Dec. 30. The contest, held in coordination with the Nepal Sherpa Association, brings together 23 Sherpa girls for a rather noble cause: Raising funds to sponsor poor Sherpa children. Dhriti Bhatta talked to Sherpa about the value of such competitions and opposition to such fanfare.

How is Miss Teen Sherpa going to be different from the slew of beauty and talent competitions around?

Our area of concentration is distinct. We focus on the youngsters, we prepare them with more caution. The 25-30 day grooming sessions include lectures by professionals from different fields like history, social studies, etc. The questions for the competitions are sent in by the schools whose children participate in the program, so that the judges don't end up asking vague irrelevant questions. And finally we guarantee a refund of the entry fee if the parents decide that their children haven't benefited from our grooming. We want to make sure the experience has been worthwhile.

How did this concept come about?

Sherpas have always been stereotyped as mountain climbers. The idea behind organizing the competition is to change this conventional thinking. We [the Nepalese Fashion Home] realized that except for the climbing fraternity, Sherpas are little known elsewhere. This holds especially true for the way the media looks at our community. I even observed some of the major beauty

pageants like Miss Nepal and found that there were very few Sherpa contestants. So we thought of holding a competition for Sherpas alone.

Who are the participants?

They are Sherpa girls between the ages 13 and 17 from Kathmandu. Although we wanted to have participants from outside the Valley, it wasn't possible with the resources at hand. We hope that from the next year on, with help from various Sherpa associations outside Kathmandu, Miss Teen Sherpa will have young Sherpas from around Nepal.

We prefer to groom children because they have so much enthusiasm and ability to grasp what you teach

Your organization seems to have concentrated on the younger age group...

Today, our country is in dire need of people who have the confidence to face crowds. But, it's obviously not easy. Especially when you are never taught how to do it. Also, as you get older, you lose the ability to learn. We prefer to groom children because they have so much enthusiasm and ability to grasp what you teach.

You have already organized four competitions in a single year, inside and outside the Valley, with the budget constraints you talk about. Why the focus on quantity?

Kathmandu alone doesn't represent the whole of Nepal. The talent present outside the Valley needs a platform as well. Organizing more than one competition in a year is obviously hectic. Holding such competitions in smaller cities is not too profitable either, given the difficulty of finding sponsors. But someone has to step in, right?

With so many beauty pageants going on, don't you think such events are losing their value and popular appeal?

A decade ago, the only beauty pageant was the Miss Nepal contest. Several other competitions have definitely come up. But I don't think there has been a compromise in quality. The grooming instructors, for example, are getting better. A single competition can't provide a platform for all the young talent around. The more the better, I say. That is, so long as you maintain the quality.

What about the corresponding increase in the number and the intensity of protests against beauty pageants? Why the vulgar fanfare when the nation is burning, some say?

I think it's just a fad. When one such protest happens, it is followed by several others. I find this hard to understand. If people can support the massive technological changes, why can't they tolerate the social ones? These competitions are a means of making the country's young ready and confident. Do not forget, protests by their very nature also attract publicity and a lot of organizations don't mind getting it whichever way they can. Many of them are motivated primarily to make their presence felt, and the pageants provide them a pretty handy forum with all the attendant media glare. **N**

Human Frailties

Deep irony is palpable in most of the 35 poems in Khem Aryal's "Kathmandu Saga and Other Poems." Aryal touches upon many topics, from unrequited love to the festering insurgency in this anthology.

"The Wonder-man" highlights the downsides of vainglorious thinking. Each human being thinks he is a wonder-man; but, at the end of the day, all of us are on the same plane, each living with his weaknesses that he desperately tries to hide. "Kathmandu Saga" talks about the mysterious aura that Kathmandu has about it—a city full of rabble-rousers and imposters who claim to serve the interests of the general people.

In "A Fool in Love," the protagonist laments the moment he first fell in love, while "Love Deferred" moans the betrayal of the beloved. Undertones of the Maoist rebellion can be felt in "Nonsense Citizen-speak" and "The Son who Had Left the City."

Throughout the book, Aryal talks about inherent human frailties like self-

ishness, vanity, rebelliousness, hypocrisy, distrust and lack of spirituality. Discordant themes like love and betrayal, the divine and the material are often the central elements. Death is another topic touched upon with delicacy.

All in all, "Kathmandu Saga and Other Poems" is an eclectic collection, highlighting human weaknesses and celebrating humanity at the same time. In "Sitting at the Golden Mile," for example, the author feels a bond of kinship with his Japanese friend only because the "same" sun sets both in Japan and Nepal.

The book is worth a read for its witty unraveling of the deepest ironies prevalent in the society today and for its colloquial appeal. **N**

Kathmandu Saga and Other Poems

by Khem Aryal
Society of Nepali Writers in English
(2004)

PRICE: Rs.100

PAGES: 61



Last Laugh, Not Quite

Humour and the Last Laugh

by K. C. Bhatt
PRICE: Rs. 300
PAGES: 177

"Humour and The Last Laugh" by K.C. Bhatt is an assortment of short newspapers articles in the form of a thin book, funny at times, totally incongruous at others. This breed of books, to paraphrase Francis Bacon, is only to be tasted—nothing there to chew and digest.

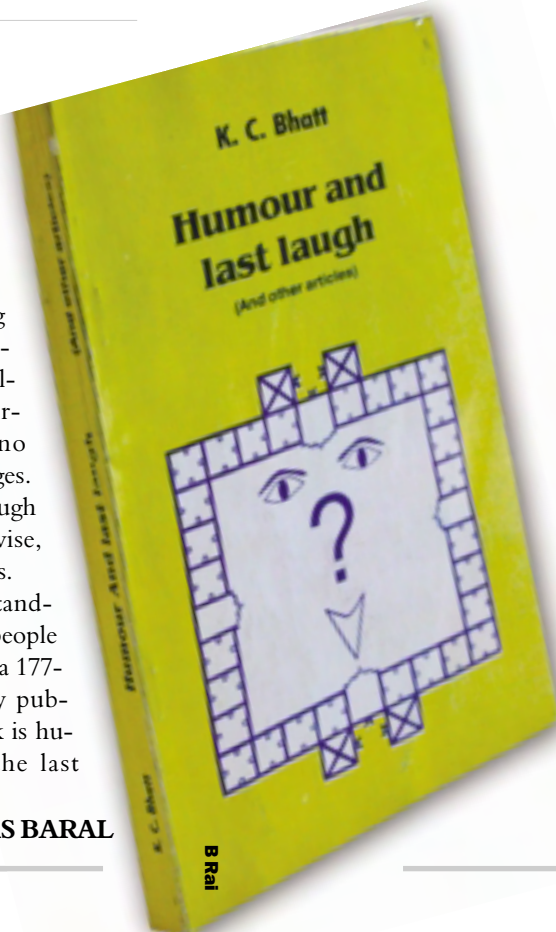
Some articles are funny; a few, the lesser said the better. Chapters like "On Migrating Idols," "Civil Behavior and Hypocrisy," "Happiness and the Broiler Chicken," "A Religious Test of Sort," and a few others, are noteworthy for their whimsies. But some pieces like "Face Value and Facial Hairs" and "On Recycling," abstruse and clumsy. The author,

it seems, lost for words, pens whatever floods his mind.

The book is a good time pass, if not an enlightening read. For those scared by voluminous tomes, this anthology may just serve the purpose. The articles are no longer than two to three pages. And you are guaranteed a laugh or two, ironical or otherwise, browsing over the chapters.

Poor editing notwithstanding, it's hard to persuade people to do away with Rs.300 for a 177-page edition of previously published articles. Bhatt's book is humorous, but not quite the last laugh. **N**

REVIEWED BY: BISWAS BARAL





High Stakes

King Gyanendra leaves next week for an 11-day India visit, his third in as many years. Never before has any visit by Nepal's head of the state or government to a foreign country fueled so much alarm and speculation. What is the King up to? The Palace has remained largely silent further compounding the sense of unease. It has also made a clean departure from one very important post-1990 convention: Neither the Foreign Ministry nor the Prime Minister's Office knows much about the specifics of the New Delhi visit. Very few outside the immediate Palace circle seem to have been consulted during the lead-up to the visit, which also takes the royal couple to all four Indian states that share borders with Nepal—Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Bihar and West Bengal.

Open or opaque, the visit loses none of its significance for Nepal and India, which has made no attempt during the last one year to hide its nervousness over the conflict's evident spillovers across the porous border. Every single analyst, and thinking Nepali, now holds that no study on our conflict will be complete without bringing into the picture the New Delhi-Palace dynamic. No wonder discussions on the state of Nepal and the possibility of a ceasefire invariably end with two unanswered questions: Is the Palace really serious about its public pledge to remain within the confines of a constitutional monarchy? And where does the Palace feature in New Delhi's scheme of things? These two questions also go to the heart of the conflict as the Maoists ratchet up their demand for a constituent assembly and as the rebels' military offensive shifts into high gear.

Indeed, how far will New Delhi allow the King to go—as much in his dealings with the political parties as with the Maoists? And equally important, will New Delhi allow third-party mediation or facilitation in the conflict? That New Delhi will give a firm no to international mediation is almost certain but it seems to be far less sure about the role it sees for political parties. There is a general feeling that Washington and New Delhi do not try hard enough to understand the nuances of national politics in their overriding concern to tame the Maoists.

We would like to urge caution. There is little doubt that our allies are deeply concerned about the fast deteriorating security situation in Nepal and that the Maoists are fast expanding cross-border links with fellow communists in Bihar, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. Still, New Delhi must persuade the Palace that it's not in either India's interest or Nepal's to go for a purely military solution. That would be catastrophic. A seasoned analyst who has extensively documented more than two dozen conflicts across the world gives Nepal's conflict a "3 danger point"—"10 danger point" being the worst; that of Darfur in Sudan. But, he ominously warns, there are signs that the "danger point" could quickly go up between now and April, the supposed election deadline, depending on a number of variables. We urge both Washington and New Delhi to engage the Maoists through backdoor contacts, even while keeping up pressure on the rebels through the wider international community.

Toward that end, the visiting EU Troika early this month made a notable pronouncement. It said there was no alternative to a government with a broad-based democratic mandate and urged democratic and constitutional forces (meaning the King and the parties) to rally behind the incumbent government and present a united front. Largely seen as a more moderate voice than New Delhi and Washington, the EU also told the Maoists in no uncertain terms to respond positively—without preconditions—to the government's invitation for dialogue. And that failure to do so will serve as evidence that the CPN-Maoist has no real intention of pursuing political objectives through legitimate political means.

Pursuing political objectives through political means should be the key to any settlement. On the eve of this crucial visit, we urge both New Delhi and the Palace to keep this in mind. The Maoists should never be made to feel that the door to negotiations has been shut in their face.

Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor



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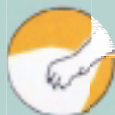
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