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XMAS in chitwan

p12-13

Times nepalnews.com
 Weekly Internet Poll # 164

Q. What should the king do to end the crisis?

Restore parliament	23%
Talk to Maoists directly	47%
Rule directly	21%
Hold elections	9%

Total votes: 1,018
 Weekly Internet Poll # 165. To vote go to: www.nepalimes.com

Q. Should landmines be banned in Nepal?



Villagers this week cross a mud and boulder obstruction booby-trapped with bombs on the Gyang Khola Bridge along the East-West Highway.

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Blocked artery

For a month now, western Nepal remains cut off by landmined highways

RAMESWOR BOHARA
 in BARDIYA

It has been nearly three weeks: nothing moves west of Nepalganj. By blocking the main East-West Highway west of Kohalpur with barricades and bombs, the Maoists have brought western Nepal to a standstill.

Hundreds of thousands of people have been affected. Many people are crossing into India to travel to other parts of Nepal like they used to do 15 years ago. Nepal is a war zone.

There are three army bases, one Armed Police Force camp and a Unified Command base on the 60 km stretch between Kohalpur to Chisapani in Bardiya, yet the security forces have not ventured out to clear the road. On the same day that the army claimed a huge success in nearby Pandaun, soldiers at a base here were not

moving a few km down to open up the highway that had been blocked for two weeks.

Major Yagya Bahadur Rajaure explained why: "It's a trap, they block the road and ambush forces that go to clear it. We can't go there, the local people must clear the road themselves." Between 16-23 November, 13 soldiers and police mobilised to clear blocked highways in Banke and Bardiya were killed by landmines and in ambushes. Desperate bus passengers risked their lives clearing a landmined stretch of highway near the Babai Bridge last week. Angered, Maoists opened fire on the packed bus, wounding three passengers.

At Pushpanagar a 14-year-old school boy tells us how the obstructions are made. "Last night 12 of them came on bicycles and forced us to stack the boulders, pack it with mud

and plant the bombs inside," he said, warning us not to go near it. It took the villagers, including school children, all night to pile the mud on the road to make a 1 m high barrier.

Schools haven't properly opened since Tihar and parents keep children at home afraid they may pick up a bomb or step on one along the roadside. Twelve-year-old Sudip Poudel wonders what is happening, "We never hurt anyone, why are we being punished?"

Elsewhere, the Maoists have booby-trapped culverts and bridges with landmines. Sacks containing explosives are strewn along the highway with wires running along the road's edge. There are dozens of similar obstructions on the highway between Kohalpur and Chisapani and even other

feeder roads have been blocked. Bus companies in Nepalganj are on the verge of bankruptcy, losing Rs 1 million a day. "At this rate we'll become beggars and the banks will take the buses back," says Binod Shahi of a bus syndicate.

Some of the mined portions of highway are right in front of people's homes. "Our houses and fields are covered with bombs, where will we live?" asks an elderly farmer in Deudhakala. On one bridge at Gyang Khola, locals took the risk of clearing a narrow section of a booby-trapped barrier. While we watched, villagers stepped gingerly across only a few metres from wired bombs.

Human rights activist Bhola Mahat points out the irony: "This is a violation of the rules of war, why are the Maoists punishing the people to take revenge on the army?" ●

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LINE/2004



KUMAR SHRESTHA/NEPALNEWS.COM

KING AND PRIME MINISTER: Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba welcomes King Gyanendra and Queen Komal with *khada* in Lumbini on Wednesday morning as the royal couple arrived by helicopter from Kathmandu.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

WELCOME BACK: Royal Nepali Army brass welcome home Chief of Army Staff Pyar Jung Thapa after his three-day trip to India on Tuesday evening.



KIRAN PANDAY

MOONLIT: The Tuladhar community celebrates Halimali Bwayagu marking the first full moon after Dasain on 26 November at Annapurna temple, Ason.



CHARLES HAVILAND

ON HIGH ALERT: Unified Command patrol guards the Humla District Hospital during a health camp organised by the Nepal Trust last week.



KIRAN PANDAY

FOLK BEAT: French ambassador Michel Jolivet releasing 'Folk Roots', a music album by Kutumba and East meets West Music Box at Aksheshwor Mahabihar in Patan on 27 November.

Hi, I'm Junghey

Namaste. I am what they call the Greater One Horned Asian Rhinoceros but people here in Kasara call me Junghey. If you are visiting the Royal Chitwan National Park, you'll see me mingling with the locals in the villages around the park headquarters or just hanging around the Gharial Breeding Centre.

Us One Horned Asians were nearly wiped out many years ago by guys in pith helmets who found great pleasure in shooting us while perched safe on top of elephants. If they had the guts to face us on the ground, my ancestors would have given them some real sport. Although Chitwan has been protected for 40 years now, it's still difficult for us here. When humans

want more land they take it away from us. And there are those who hunt us for our horns claiming it makes them virile. Dimwits.

Surviving is not easy because competition is tough. There are too many of us here and too little territory despite dozens of our cousins being translocated to Bardiya over the past decade. That is why sometimes we go out to the villager's fields and make a little snack of their crops. I guess it's our way of giving it back.

I was found by a ranger wandering around the jungle after I was wounded in a scrap with a larger male rhino over a girlfriend. This long gash right here on my side was where he gored me.

Luckily I have thick skin and survived. Yes, that is how love triangles are with us too. They've kept me here ever since and I am what they call 'tame', but I would really like to go back into the wild side. We rhinos are not very welcome among locals here as you can see from the cuts on my back, in the jungle we would wallow in mud pools that would disinfect them. The rangers put ointment on them, but they don't heal as well.

If only humans could learn to live with nature in harmony, we would all be much happier. Anyway, if you come to Chitwan, drop by and say hello to me. Go to the warden's office in Kasara and ask for Junghey. They'll know where to find me. ●

(Alok Tumbahangphey)



ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

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

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

After attending World AIDS Day 2004 at the National Stadium, our Herojig discovers new uses for The Condom...

New Uses for The Condom:

- *Lubricant can be used as aftershave.
- *The ring of the condom makes a good hair band.
- *In a pinch, use as a tourniquet for rickshaw wounds.

KE GARNE? WHATEVER.
But be a Heroji - Practice Safe Sex - regularly.

"An intellectual is a person who has discovered something more interesting than sex."
~ Aldous Huxley, English Novelist (1894-1963)

Next change: Herojig attends a Nepali RAVE but forgets to bring earplugs and a sleeping bag....

#47 X 2061 by jiggy gaton - read. love. write.

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Photography workshop** by street children on 2 December followed by an exhibition, 10AM-12PM at NEFEJ, Thapathali. 9851074587
- ❖ **Children United Against HIV-AIDS** Art by Kathmandu Valley School students on 3 December, 5.30 PM onwards at Moksh, Pulchok. 5528703
- ❖ **A Touch of Purity** Paintings by Erina Tamrakar at Gallery Nine, Lajimpat. Until 3 December 4428694
- ❖ **Nepal Kaleidoscope Photo Competition** at Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal, 3-5 December. 4780394
- ❖ **Life through the Lens** Photographs by Kishor Kayastha at Indigo Gallery. Until 15 January. 4413580, indigo@wlink.com.np
- ❖ **Near Wild Heaven, Voice from the Mountain** Photos by Yuko Akiba at Park Gallery, Pulchok. Until 5 December. 5522307
- ❖ **Chinese Handicraft Exhibition** at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. 5-12 December. 4247834
- ❖ **Spirit of Emotions** Abstract paintings by Ramesh Khanal, 6-16 December. 4419353
- ❖ **Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival** at the Russian Culture Centre, Kamal Pokhari from 9-12 December. 5542544
- ❖ **Poster exhibition** of Japanese Graphic Art at Japanese Embassy Hall, Panipokhari. 9.30 AM-4.30 PM. Until 10 December.

EVENTS

- ❖ **Christmas Spree** at Cross Kitchen, Lajimpat on 4 December, 10AM-10PM. 98510-83806
- ❖ **Reception to honour Fr Donnelly** on being decorated with the Suprabal Gorkha Dakshin Bahu, 5PM on 4 December at GAA Hall. Contributions Rs 300. 4414785
- ❖ **Third Career Carnival** at St Xavier's College, Maitighar on 4 December at Watrin Hall.
- ❖ **The Great Dictator** A film by Charles Chaplin at 5PM on 5 December at The Film Club, Baggikhana, Patan Dhoka. Tickets Rs 50, 5542544
- ❖ **Why is this happening to me** A weekend course on discovering Buddhism by Ven Namgyel at HBMC, Thamel. 4414843
- ❖ **Summit Christmas Market** on 10 December, 3PM-9PM at Summit Hotel, Kupondole.
- ❖ **Surya Nepal Masters** Top notch golfing action at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort, 9-12 December. 4451212
- ❖ **WCN Amateur Nature and Wildlife Photography Competition** for amateur. Deadline 15 December. 5524202, www.wcn.org.np

MUSIC

- ❖ **Jazz at Boudha** with the McTwisters at Rox, Hyatt Regency on 5 December, 7PM onwards. Proceeds will be donated to Bhaktapur Cancer Hospital. Entrance Rs 600, 5527803
- ❖ **Winter concert** by Kathmandu Chorale on 11 December, 3.30 PM-6PM at the British School Hall, Jhamsikhel. Free entrance
- ❖ **Jatra** Saturday nights with Looza, 6.30 PM onwards. 4256622
- ❖ **Jukebox experience** with Pooja Gurung and The Cloud Walkers every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at Rox Bar. 4491234
- ❖ **Happening live jazz in town** at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lajimpat. Every Wednesday and Saturday, 7.45 PM onwards.
- ❖ **Abhaya and the Steam Injuns** Every Tuesday live at Moksh, Pulchok, 6.30 PM-7.30 PM.

FOOD

- ❖ **The Spirit of Christmas** Christmas Goodies at Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Tickling Tastebuds** barbeque every Friday at The Shambala Garden Café, Shangri-la Hotel, 7PM onwards. 4412999
- ❖ **La Soon** Restaurant and Vinotheque, next to the Egyptian Embassy, Pulchok for spacious indoor and outdoor seating. 5537166
- ❖ **Sizzling Weekend Treat** with live music, dance, barbeque and karaoke at Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Dwarika's Thali** Lunch at the Heritage courtyard. 4479488

GETAWAYS

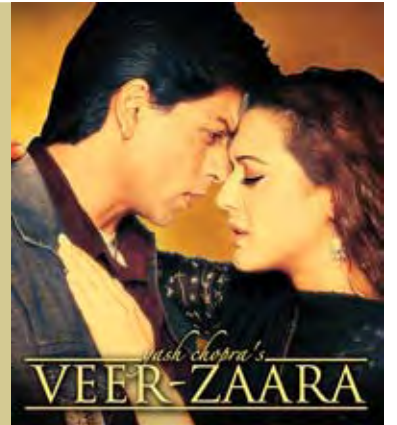
- ❖ **Dream Holiday** package tour to Malaysia for Christmas and New Year. Marco Polo Travels and Qatar Airways. 2012345, malaysia_holidays_marco@polo.com.np
- ❖ **Getaway package** night's stay at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Shivapuri** Tranquil village, superb views and birdwatching. Shivapuri Heights Cottage. Steve@escape2nepal.com
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** Pure relaxation. 4361500
- ❖ **Christmas by the jungle** at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia. Special package and prices. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com

Veer-Zaara portrays the trauma of partition. In true Yashraj tradition, it is an emotional love story. Saamiya Siddiqui (Rani Mukherji) is a Pakistani lawyer who helps two lovers. Veer aka Veer Pratap Singh (Shahrukh Khan) is from India and Zaara aka Zaara Hayaat Khan (Preity Zinta) is from Pakistan. This film shows how love conquers all and goes beyond boundaries drawn by men. It also reflects the new Indian sentiment towards Pakistan.

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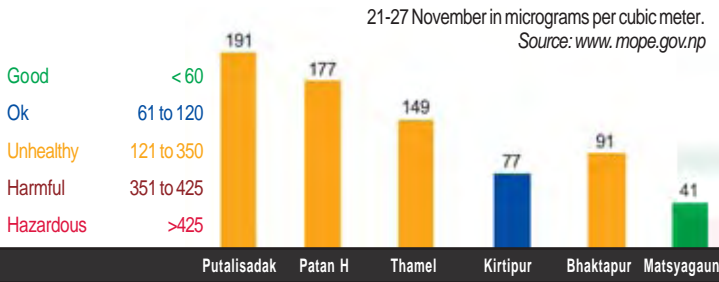
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There is good news and bad news in the air. The good news is that there was a drop in Kathmandu's air pollution level last week. The average PM10 (harmful particles that are small enough to enter the human body) concentration in the Valley was down by 27 percent. The bad news is that the PM 10 level in urban Kathmandu is still much higher than national standards of 120 micrograms per cubic meter.



NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



This satellite picture taken on Thursday afternoon shows the arrival of a new westerly front over the western half of Nepal. It is brining in cold and dry Siberian winds which has brightened the days and thinned the morning mists in the Valley and tarai. The result will be sunny and breezy afternoons with a steep drop in minimum temperatures. The westerlies may bring light rain and snow over the western hills over the weekend with wispy fast-moving cirrus over the rest of the country.

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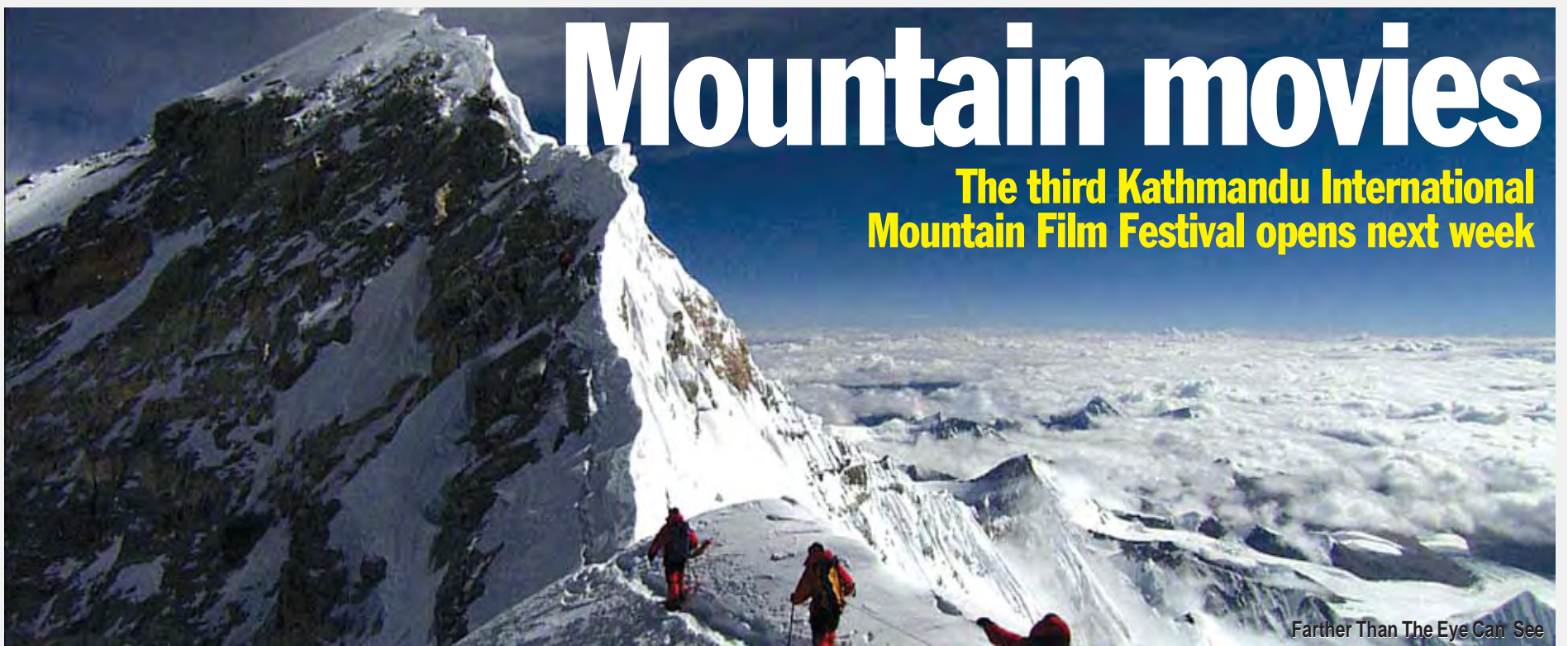
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Mountain movies

The third Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival opens next week



Farther Than The Eye Can See

HALL A

9 DECEMBER, THURSDAY

The Forbidden Team (54') 2.45 PM

Denmark, 2003, Rasmus Dinesen/Arnold Kroegaard
A team finally gets to play football.

Sabuk Uprising, April in 1980-Dust Buries Sabuk (83')

3.55 PM
South Korea, 2003, Lee Mi-Young
On 21 April 1980 in a remote coal mining town called Sabuk in southeast Korea, miners revolted against wretched working conditions and armed themselves with scythes and clubs, looted weapons and explosives. They occupied Sabuk for three days. But behind what became known as the Sabuk incident were massive arrests and torture. These stories have remained untold for 20 years.

Starkiss-Circus Girls in India (77') 5.35 PM

Netherlands, 2002, Chris Relleke/Jascha De Wilde
Nepali girls in India's oldest circus.

10 DECEMBER, FRIDAY

The Secret of the Sherpa (90') 10AM

Austria, 2001/2002, Gertrude Reinisch
Sherpa life below Chomolungma.

Pororoca-Surfing the Amazon (26') 11.45 AM

Germany, 2003, Bill Heath
Riding the ultimate wave (nothing to do with mountains!).

EXPERIMENTAL SHORTS

Rocks (8' 5")

Germany, 2001, Chris Stenner/Heidi Wittlinger/Arvid Uibel
Charming cartoon where the rocks speak.

Nuts & Bolts (6')

Germany, 2003, Andreas Krein
A man, a frog and a construction site.

Mouse (7' 5")

Germany, 2001, Wojtek Wawarczyk
Bigger is not better.

Peace into Pieces (4' 47")

Nepal, 2004, Raghurwar Nepal
Shattered hopes, experimental.

Schools in the Crossfire (52') 2.30 PM

Nepal, 2004, Dhurba Basnet
Education and the Nepali conflict.

Six Stories (43') 3.45 PM

Nepal, 2004, Mohan Mainali
Women caught in the crosshairs.

Travellers & Magicians (108') 4.45 PM

Bhutan, 2003, Khyentse Norbu
Tale of a monk and modernity

11 DECEMBER, SATURDAY

Farther Than The Eye Can See (72') 9.30 AM

USA, 2003, Michael Brown
The film is an intimate look inside one of the most successful Mt Everest expeditions ever. The film captures the emotion, humour and drama of blind climber Erik Weihenmayer's historic ascent as well as four other remarkable 'firsts' on Mt Everest. By rallying behind Weihenmayer, 19 of the 21 team members stood on the top, with the oldest climber to ever reach the summit along with his son, an American first.

The Return of the Mummies (41') 11AM

Philippines, 2004, Abner P Mercado
Filipino mummies go home.

Electricity for the Sherpas in Modern

Times at Mount Everest (30') 12PM
Germany, 2004, Bettina Ehrhardt
The Khumbu Bijuli Company brings light.

Know Your Himal Quiz 12.30 PM

Quizmaster - Kunda Dixit
Editor, *Nepali Times*

On the Road with the Red God: Machhindranath

(50') 2PM
Nepal, 2004, Kesang Tseten

The film captures the gritty reality of the spectacular 12-year chariot festival of the deity Rato Machhindranath, celebrated in 2003. More than a thousand years old, this is one of the largest, most significant and longest surviving festivals of the indigenous Newar community of the Kathmandu valley, and one of the most elaborate chariot festivals in the world today.

Into the Thunder Dragon (47') 3.15 PM

Canada, 2002, Sean White
Unicycling about Druk Yul.

Some Roots Grow Upwards-The Theatre of Ratan Thiyam

(51' 30") 4.20 PM
India, 2002, Kavita Joshi/ Malati Rao
The guru and the troupe in Manipur.

Nima Temba Sherpa (52') 5.35 PM

Netherlands, 2003, Margriet Jansen
Mr Sherpa speaks.

12 DECEMBER, SUNDAY

Home (68') 10AM

China, 2002, Wang Yan/ Zhou Xiaolin
The Yao minority are being relocated.

Destination Mahabhir (41') 11.25 AM

Nepal, 2004, Mejan Pun/Dab Bahadur Garbuja
These honey hunters are Pun Magars.

Never Ending Thermal (47') 12.20 PM

Canada, 2003/2004, Sean White
Venezuelans celebrate the paragliding lifestyle.

Story of our climb (38') 2PM

Nepal, 2003, Dinesh Deokota
Nepali amateurs attempt a virgin peak.

Natural Heights (23')

UK, 2003, Helen Atkinson
Meditations on modern free climbing.

Mountain Beauties (60') 3.30 PM

Lecture and slide presentation on our Floral Heritage by
Dr Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha

Daughters of Everest (56') 4.45 pm

Nepal/USA, 2004, Sapana Sakya/Ramyata Limbu
The first Sherpa women's expedition on Everest.

HALL B

9 DECEMBER, THURSDAY

Marriage (80') 3PM

China, 1999, Bibo Liang
In the village in the Qinling mountains, marriage is still carried out in a very traditional manner, following the 'six procedures'. Two couples go through the marriage process from the first proposal to the actual wedding over a period of nearly a year. The matchmaker also stands out as an indispensable character throughout the nuptial process.

Tripping Towards Lhasa (27') 4.35 PM

USA, 2002, Leo Artalejo
A visual, meditative tale of a road trip.

The Gallotti Turns 50 (33')

Brazil, 2004, Priscila Botto/ Paulo de Barros
Around and about a Brazilian peak.

10 DECEMBER, FRIDAY

Meltdown (50') 10AM

UK, 2004, Richard Heap
The Khumbu's receding glaciers.

Shepherds Journey into the Third Millennium (124') 11AM

Switzerland, 2002, Erich Langjahr
One of the oldest cultural forms of human existence is that of the shepherd. In a time of upheaval and changes in values between tradition and future, the film, based on the transfer of herds between seasons, deals with the fundamental issues of human beings and their existence. The shepherds in the film do not come from an agricultural background, but have chosen this way of life out of a need for freedom to do something meaningful.

The Idu of Dibang (42') 2PM

India, 2002, Pramod/Neelima Mathur
A study of the Idu of Arunachal.

Random Voices from Kashmir (12')

India, 2003, Dr Parvez Imam
Kashmiri voices on the long conflict.

Eiger North Face - In the Footsteps of its First Climbers

(52') 3.15 PM
Switzerland, 2002, Frank Senn/Thomas Ulrich
Retracing climbing history on the Eiger.

Thoughts in the Wind (19') 4.20 PM

Italy, 2003, Ermanno Salvatera
Another meditation on mountaineering.

Alps: Coastal Peaks and Valleys (29')

Italy, 2004, Folco Quilici
Rocks of the Mediterranean. Glorious music.

Hummingbirds, Jewels of the Andes (50') 5.25 pm

Germany 2003, Heinz Von Matthey
Pleasing vignette on South America's tiniest bird.

11 DECEMBER, SATURDAY

The Adventure Is Not Yet Over (39') 10AM

UK, 2004, Richard Else
Bonington reflects on a life of climbing.

Base Matterhorn (22')

Austria/Switzerland, 2003, Mario Kreuzer
Leaping off the Matterhorn. Have parachute.

Condors and Bulls brought on Stage (41') 11.15 AM

Switzerland, 2001/2002, Andre Affentranger
The real and unreal behind a documentary.

Shepherd Women of Shambala (9')

USA, 2001, Joy Tessman
Pakistan's Ismaili women welcome an outsider.

Shared Flight (50') 12.15 PM

Poland, 2003, Miroslaw Dembinski
Paraplegic paraglider surmounts the odds.

The Conquest of K2 (49') 2PM

Italy, 2004, Alessandro Varchetta
The historic conquest of K2.

Makalu, That Old Dream (55') 3.10 PM

Spain, 2003, Sebastian Alvaro
Tragedy of a Spanish team on Makalu.

Mount Poi-The Big Thing (26' 27") 4.20 PM

Germany, 2003/2004, Jochen Schmolli
Climbers mix with Kenyan locals.

Alps: The Giants of the Val Diaosta (29')

Italy, 2004, Folco Quilici
Good views on rocks, people and ice.

12 DECEMBER, SUNDAY

Pizzet: Maybe The Last Year (52') 10AM

Switzerland, 2004, Ivo Zen
Chronicle of a mountain farmhouse.

Thumbnail (58') 11.05 AM

Spain, 2004, Jesus Bosque
Two women and a peak.

Wildness (56') 12.15 PM

Australia, 2003, Scott Millwood
Photographic quest to save Tasmania.

Adventure High (89') 2PM

Estonia, 2004, Liivo Niglas
Five young men bicycle from Mongolia to Nepal through the Tibetan plateau. Their one aim is to find out if there is a place for adventure in their responsible grown-up lives when they have family responsibilities.

www.himalassociation.org
Tickets (Rs 30 per screening) are available from 6 December at Saraswati Book Centre, Harihar Bhaban, 5521599
Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 4245570
Suwal Music and Video, Lajimpat, 4421522
Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka, 5543017
Thamel Book Shop, opp Sanchaya Kosh Building, 4419849
Vajra Book Shop, Jyatha, 4220562
and at the venue.



Schools in the Crossfire



Makalu, That Old Dream



Six Stories



Home



Adventure High



Daughters of Everest

“It’s WTO vs WHO”

Indian companies pull out anti-AIDS drugs



RANJIT DEVRAJ in NEW DELHI

As India moves to meet a new year's day deadline to comply with the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) regime of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) the cheap, generic anti-AIDS drugs that this country is famed for could be a thing of the past.

Last month, the Hyderabad-based pharmaceutical Hetero Drugs Limited voluntarily withdrew all six generic antiretroviral (ARV) drugs from WHO's list of approved drugs following concerns about their laboratory tests. ARVs are substances used to kill or inhibit the multiplication of retroviruses such as HIV.

It was the 3rd time since June that an Indian company has removed anti-AIDS drugs following WHO inspections which claimed that bioequivalence tests (meant to show the drugs have the same effect as the original patented brands) were faulty. This has deeply upset those involved in fighting the global HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Earlier this month Indian pharmaceutical giant Ranbaxy pulled its AIDS drugs off the WHO's list after the global body claimed there were discrepancies in the equivalency tests. It followed the removal by India's Cipla of two HIV/AIDS drugs in June for similar problems.

Cipla is the Indian company credited with introducing the 'dollar-a-day' treatment that dramatically transformed drug access for HIV-infected people around the world. Ranbaxy and Cipla were able to prove to WHO, before the voluntary pull-off, that their ARVs met the global body's bioequivalence standards — though not before their world business had taken a knock that benefited the manufacturers of costlier patented drugs.

That initially led to charges from activists that the world health body was acting at the behest of western pharmaceutical giants. Things have now become even more complicated: why did the two Indian pharmaceutical companies pull their ARVs from the market if they had insisted all along that their drugs met WHO pre-qualification standards?

“We are concerned over the withdrawals. Earlier it was WHO which dropped the drugs. This time the companies are doing it on their own. We may ask the Drugs Controller of India (DCGI) to look into the issue,” a senior health official said.

WHO's pre-qualification list was created to guide procurement by aid agencies and donors interested in

fighting the global HIV/AIDS epidemic and includes more than 60 ARVs made by both patented and generic drug manufacturers.

Drug policy expert Mira Shiva says the actual culprit in Hetero, Ranbaxy and Cipla pulling out the drugs was actually the WTO and not WHO. She says Indian pharmaceutical companies that specialise in cheap generic drugs could face legal action initiated by the WTO if they continued to manufacture and sell them after 1 January, 2005.

TRIPS has been identified as one of the worst international trade regimes and resistance to it in developing countries has come from farmers, public interest and human rights groups.

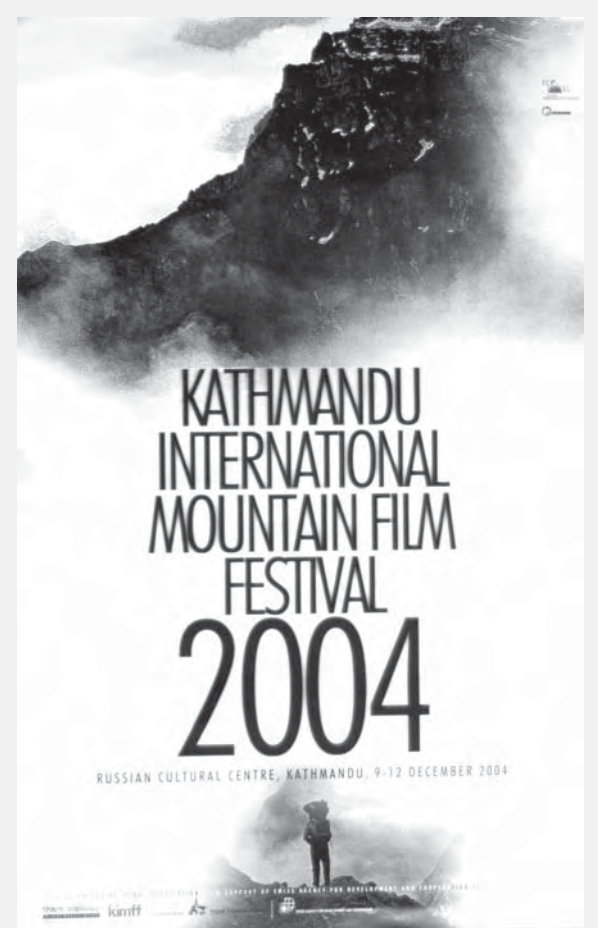
TRIPS agreement, introduced in the late 1990s, defines how products can be protected from piracy. A major criticism has been that in its current form, intellectual property rights regimes such as TRIPS serve to stifle competition.

“Excessively high levels of intellectual property protection required by TRIPS have shifted the balance away from public interest, towards monopolistic privileges of IPR holders,” says Martin Khor of the Malaysia-based Third World Network. “This undermines sustainable development objectives, including eradicating poverty, meeting public health needs, conserving biodiversity, protecting the environment and the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights.”

India's pharmaceutical business has followed the fiercely nationalistic India Patents Act of 1970 that fostered the phenomenal growth of the industry that came to be hailed by the United Nations Council for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) as a model for developing countries.

According to a World Bank study in the mid-1990s prices for four typical drugs were 10 times more expensive in Pakistan, 17 times more expensive in Britain and 37 times more expensive in the United States than in India.

Poornima Mane of UNAIDS says patients should continue using Ranbaxy and CIPLA drugs that are available in the market. “We want to clarify this so that patients do not panic. The voluntary withdrawals do not mean the drugs are not good,” she says, warning that disuse of the drug would develop resistance. India has 5.1 million people afflicted with HIV and the number for Asia is said to be 8.2 million. ● (IPS)



The third edition of the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival this year is scheduled for 9-12 December, coinciding with the International Mountain Day on 11 December. Screened back-to-back at the Russian Cultural Centre, it will bring together 49 of the best international mountain films produced over the last three years.

The main aim of the festival is to entertain, inform and educate viewers about life and times in the mountain regions from the Andes to the Tatra, to the Himalaya. The range of presentations from 21 countries include adventure cinema, experimental shorts, light-hearted commentary and feature films. KIMFF 2004 will open with the premiere of *On the Road with the Red God: Machhindranath* by filmmaker Kesang Tseten.



Eiger North Face



Sabuk Uprising



The conquest of K2

This year, KIMFF has several satellite activities lined up: 10 December—Half-day workshop on Learn to Shoot like a Pro

11 December—Photo exhibition on Alps-Himalaya, On-the-spot painting contest for children, a 'Know Your Himal' quiz.

12 December—Slide presentation/lecture on Nepal's biodiversity by Dr Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha

Films will be screened from 9.30 AM to 6.30 PM at the Russian Cultural Centre, Kamalpokhari. All films are in English or subtitled.

Win-win situation

With a few more tournaments, our golfers could be hitting a win

I grew up playing this game at the Royal Nepal Golf Club. In those days, golf was about trying to win club level tournaments. The biggest accomplishment was to win the Club Championship, the most prestigious event of all, played off scratch (no handicap) in a matchplay format (one on one).

Back then it was rare for any golfer in Nepal to travel abroad to participate in international tournaments. Things changed however in 1993 after Surya's international tournaments began in Kathmandu.

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



After this event, Nepal's golf outlook changed dramatically for everyone involved with the sport, from professionals to general golfers, right up to those

developing golfing facilities.

Before 1993 there were just two professional golfers in Nepal, Ghanashyam Thapa and Rithe Sapkota. Today, there are just over 20. The number of golfers has multiplied five-fold and together with them, the golfing facilities. After that watershed year, many Nepali golfers also began playing in international tournaments.

Surya Nepal has certainly helped improve the standards of golf in Nepal. We don't have many professional tournaments and every pro golfer here and even general golfers, spend the entire year in anticipation. Some wait to participate, some just want to witness it.



Even with such interest and enthusiasm, we have yet to see a Nepali winning. In my opinion, the lack of tournaments for professionals is the main reason for our golfers not being able to come out on top. Pro golfers in Nepal have very few opportunities to compete, hardly five tournaments in a year. This is just not enough for a person to viably consider making golf their profession. Compare this to the Indian professionals who have almost 30 major events a year.

The result is that the Indian standard of golf has grown tremendously and their players have been performing better every year. As expected, the Indian pros dominate the Surya Nepal Masters. The closest a Nepali came to winning was back in 1996 at the Royal Nepal Golf Club when Deepak Thapa Magar finished second. In other years, Ramesh Nagarkoti and myself have both reached the fourth position.

To try and raise the Nepali professional from the position of the underdog into a frame of mind ready to succeed, the Nepal Professional Golfers Association together with Gokarna Forest Golf Resort, have organised a preparatory tournament. The Gokarna Nepal PGA Classic started on 30 November till 3 December. A number of golf lovers individually contributed to the prize money and the winner is expected to take home Rs 25,000.

We are hoping the tournament this week will boost local players, help fine tune their game and give them that sharper edge to succeed. We may just be fortunate this year and see a local professional winning Nepal's top golfing event. ●

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Golf Director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu.
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Life in free fall



Nepal's adventure tourism has another adventure: jump off a bridge and swing

MIN BAJRACHARYA

AARTI BASNYAT
at the LAST RESORT

The terms of reference given to us were: jump off a bridge 160m above the Bhote Kosi with a cord tied to you and swing like a yoyo.

Oh yes, the cord is able to sustain 4.3 tons and it is all safer than the bus ride to from Kathmandu to the Last Resort. (That's not saying much, given the number of road accidents on Nepal's highways these days.) Still, all the pep talk did not prepare us for the sheer fear of jumping into the void to swing like Tarzan (or Jane) on a vine.

Waiting out our turn, we watched how the others did it. They walked the plank to the edge and jumped into the canyon below and swung back-and-forth on the bungee cord. After lunch, we were asked to sign a form stating we were fully

responsible for our actions. It felt like we were signing a death wish but we signed anyway. Like sacrificial goats we were weighed, our weights written on the back of our hands and then we were led down to the bridge where the never-ending wait began.

Unlike the bungee cord, the rope for the swing bungee is not attached underneath the bridge but on to a steel cable approximately 140m downstream. So, unlike a standard jump you don't just go down vertically but also swing horizontally over the river. Fear crept in, every cell in my being rebelled against the idea of stepping off into nothingness.

The queue for jumping was not according to weight, as we had initially thought. Some had just lost their nerves, so I pushed to the front while I had some of my carefully built-up courage



left. The weather was wet and cold, it was difficult to figure out whether I was shivering from the cold or from fear. Walking the plank, my survival instincts kicked in though there was no turning back now.


The world was a blur, my mind was blank as I plummeted 110 metres in five seconds to within nine metres of the boulder-strewn rapids. Why resort to meditation when you can jump off a bridge? Then the cord caught and the swing began, the adrenaline rush and euphoria that follows is hard to describe. Swing bungee maybe scarier than bungee but the swing factor adds more fun and pizzazz to the experience.

Travelling at 160 kmph, the thrill is prolonged. The swing adds a feeling of flight, rather than just a fall. They say once you have done it you are addicted to the adrenaline rush and you gain more confidence. After all, if you've jumped off a bridge 160m above a raging river and survived...you can do anything.

Swing bungee is \$80 for tourists and Rs 3,000 for Nepalis. Extra swings cost \$25. For a fee of \$15 and Rs 700 for Nepalis you can go and watch. The Last Resort is located on the Kathmandu-Lhasa highway 100 km from Kathmandu. ●

Contact : The Last Resort
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SURYA NEPAL

GOLF

Bhote Kosi

Kantipur, 29 November

कान्तिपुर

The Bhote Kosi Power Company has put forward a new proposal to seek a 'mutually acceptable' way out of its Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA). Bhote Kosi has been embroiled in a controversy for building a power plant that had more capacity than was allowed in its agreement. NEA has refused to pay for the extra power, while the Texas-based Panda Energy which is the joint venture partner has put pressure on the government to amend the license agreement. The joint venture company got an agreement to generate 36 megawatt but put up turbines generating 45 megawatt. Dipak Gyawali, former hydropower minister, had set up an investigation committee under the Power Development Department which had confirmed that the company's turbines were indeed of 45 megawatt capacity. Ever since, Bhote Kosi has been desperate to amend the license agreement. A member of the department says Bhote Kosi is actually generating power illegally at the moment. The government had tried to push a new agreement in exchange for an additional Rs 9 million annually but it was stopped after it became clear that the NEA would be the loser. The disagreement between Bhote Kosi and NEA is over payment for 1.7 million units of electricity over the past three years which would cost \$3.5 million. Bhote Kosi's latest proposal would require NEA to pay this final amount and not be required to pay for the extra power in future. In addition, Bhote Kosi has also proposed to take out a clause pegging unit cost increases of six percent annually on the American dollar.

Comrade Umesh

Nepal Samacharpatra, 26 November

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

Netra Regmi alias Comrade Umesh who took part in attacks in Bhojpur, Dhankuta, Terathum and Taplejung says he still has not understood 'Prachandapath'. "They tried to teach us but I couldn't understand what it was," he says. "The philosophical understanding within the party has become weak. If this grows among gun-toting party workers, arms management will be difficult to deal with." Comrade Umesh was the Maoist district secretary for Sankhuwasabha. Seven months ago, after he was wounded in an attack, doctors told him that his left hand might be paralysed. He admitted himself to a hospital and did not return to the party. He has not surrendered to the state either. Now, he wants to work as an independent leftist. During the Panchayat era, he was a student at the Nepal Law

Campus. Later, he worked as a teacher in Sankhuwasabha and joined the UML. He became member of the District Development Committee but when the party broke up, he contacted the Maoists and began helping their committees in Sankhuwasabha and the eastern hill areas. "The democratic parties were corrupt but then the Maoists began to use arms. I did not want to work on the military front and opted to work with the administrative part, whenever questions arose, I had to answer. When attacks that were not in accordance with the party principles were carried out, I went to the people and asked for forgiveness." He has regrets. "I still want to die for my country but not that way. The mind must always be stronger than the gun." If he is guaranteed security, he says he will come out in the open. "I want to see the day when parties begin acting for the good of the common people, and letting them decide."

Reinstating issues

Sushil Koirala in Deshantar, 28 November

देशान्तर समाचारिक

There is a conspiracy against democracy. All alternative state powers after October Fourth have proved to be anti-democratic. King Mahendra introduced the advisory council system. That was his political game. We see a similar scene now and that is what Girija Prasad Koirala has been warning time and again. Everything is aimed at taking away the gains of the 1990 People's Movement and the constitution. There have been some interesting developments in the political spectrum. The king held a lengthy meeting with Surya Bahadur Thapa after which Thapa declared the establishment of a new party. Royalists have been floating authoritarian ideas, bringing up certain issues. All this indicates that the king is up to something. And our party president believes the king is setting up an advisory council.

The king's intentions are quite clear: he wants direct rule. As lip service, he says he will bring together all political forces and move ahead with democratic norms but in reality he has dismantled 1990 one by one: democratic institutions like multiparty parliamentary system, human rights, rule of law and people's power. We still believe that the reinstatement of the parliament will bring democracy back on track. It will solve the current political and constitutional deadlock and help chart out a peaceful solution. But certain quarters with vested interests deliberately ignore these arguments. These were the same people who once argued

that the house could not be reinstated before its lifetime of five years was over. And now the same people say that the House should have been reinstated before the five-year timeframe and that it is too late now. Our constitution did not envisage a situation in which the country lived without parliament for more than six years. It has been two and half years since we had a parliament.

A petition has been filed at the Supreme Court seeking its revision of the decision to approve the dissolution of the House of Representatives. There is an emerging consensus that the house should be reinstated. Democratic forces and intellectuals are for it. So the quarters supporting regression are now putting forward the idea of elections. They are trying to fool the people and its timing is aimed at pre-empting the decision of the Supreme Court. Once the dates for elections are finalised, the apex court will have difficulty giving its decision.

Closing in

Rukum people's government chief Sharun Banthamagar in Machhapuchhre, 25 November

माछापुकुछ्रे

After the completion of the fourth convention of the people's united committee, we implemented the decisions made at the meeting. That includes taking approved decisions to the grassroots levels. What you call abduction of the people, we call voluntarism. We have been gathering people and training them. We completed the eight-kilowatt micro-hydropower plant in Simli which was possible only because of the voluntary labour provided by the local people. We spent Rs 500,000 in the scheme, built two roads in Chaurjahari and four ponds in Garamala. More than 150 latrines have been established in different locations. In the near future, we will produce five kilowatt electricity in Chhipkhola. There have been significant developments in agriculture also. In Chhipkhola, there is a vegetable farm where we train farmers. They are also trained to make 500 shawls. We plan to popularise the concept of cooperatives because we know they could help raise living standards. Right now, we have 11 cooperatives: four are related to medicine, two to livestock and the rest are hotels. In Rukumkot, the army destroyed a hotel cooperative building.

We wish to make schools peaceful areas but the security force trouble students and teachers who support us morally. They arrest them and they are 'disappeared'. As a result, we arrest teachers and students who spy against us too. When we began the people's war, our aim was to strengthen base areas. Now that we have achieved our goal, we are preparing to declare some VDCs base areas. We have shut down

regions where security forces move frequently. Such places will be allowed to reopen if security forces remain confined to their camps.

Maoist Makalu

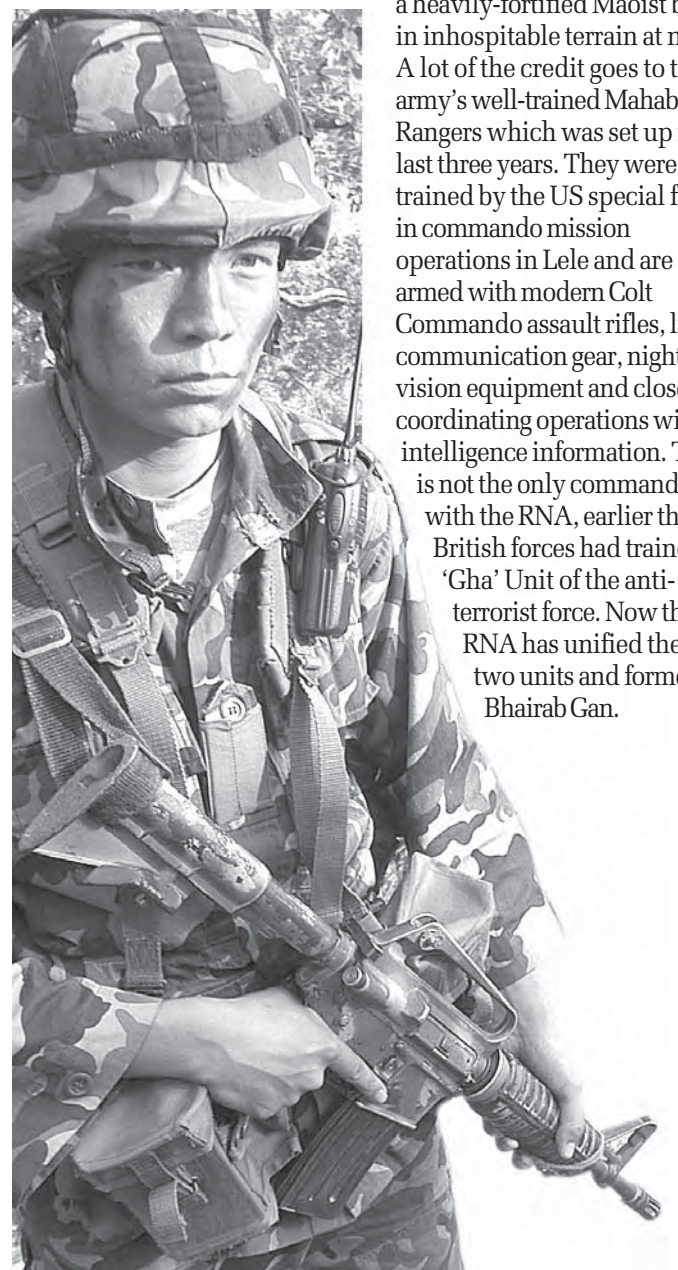
Samaya, 25 November issue

समय

TASHIGAUN—Thanks to the Maoist conflict, the people of this village below Makalu who had been eking out a living on tourism are back to their poverty-ridden ways. Tourists have fled from the area and with them, the dreams of the locals. Nar Bahadur Gurung, former deputy chairman of Makalu VDC used to make Rs 3,000 working as a porter from Tashigaun to Makalu Base Camp. The people of the region made around Rs 20,000 each season, enough to run their household for the rest of the year. "Now, we don't have much choice, we head down the valley for work," says Gurung. The local income resource ran dry after the Maoists destroyed the central office of the Makalu Barun National Park. There is no market even for vegetables and dairy products after the park officials abandoned the area.

Another VDC member, Pema Sherpa, used to run a lodge here since 1988. He made Rs 20,000 per month until tourists stopped coming altogether in 2000. In the heydays of trekking, Sherpa used to charter helicopters to bring supplies from Hile to his lodge. Gone are those days. "There may be one tourist a week, and even they complain about the money they have to pay the Maoists along the way and stay in tents," he says. There used to be up to 50 lodges here in the 1990s, most of them are shut down.

The lack of tourists has its



MIN BAJRACHARYA

positive side: food is now affordable. "A chicken used to cost Rs 700 and honey Rs 60. It had become difficult for us teachers to survive because the villagers would not sell us food," recalls teacher Mohan Niraula in Seduwa. But with the tourists gone, the foodstuff is cheaper. "We can afford to live here again," says Niraula. Then things got worse as the Maoist activities intensified and the teachers had to survive on whatever food their students gave them.

Tourists stopped coming to Makalu, the fifth highest peak in the world, when Maoists began collecting taxes and treating them badly. Some tourists came up to Seduwa and returned after being unable to meet the Maoist demand of Rs 5,000 per tourist. Harka Gurung, a member of the Maoists in Sankhuwasabha hands his receipt book that shows the group used to collect up to Rs 60,000 a day from tourism. "Tourists who pay who can go to base camp, those who can't pay go back," he says. He admits roughing up a Czech tourist who he says tried to "bully" him, and adds that American tourists are not allowed in this area.

Rangers in action

Himal Khabarpatrika, 1-15 December

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

The battle for Pandaun on 20 November coincided with the third anniversary of the Ghorahi attack after which the Royal Nepali Army entered the fray against the Maoists. It was also the army's most successful offensive so far. Pandaun was the supply centre for the Maoists' entire mid-western region and the soldiers attacked a heavily-fortified Maoist base in inhospitable terrain at night. A lot of the credit goes to the army's well-trained Mahabir Rangers which was set up in the last three years. They were trained by the US special forces in commando mission operations in Lele and are armed with modern Colt Commando assault rifles, light communication gear, night-vision equipment and closely coordinating operations with intelligence information. This is not the only commando unit with the RNA, earlier the British forces had trained the 'Gha' Unit of the anti-terrorist force. Now the RNA has unified these two units and formed the Bhairab Gan.

Strategic question mark



Five thousand women gathered in Dullu to protest Maoist atrocities, but what are the chances it will spread?



security forces. Fearing that the resistance would spread, the Maoists attacked Naumule and Salleri on 16 November and shot dead 61-year-old ex-serviceman Balbir Gurung, his eight-year-old grandson Ashok Gurung and farmer Durga Bahadur Khadka. There are now 2,000 refugees from Salleri and Naumule living in schools in Dullu and they haven't gone back even though the security forces have taken over their village. Ashok's mother, Aitram Gurung left her son's body on his bed at home and says she is too terrorised to go back. The Rs 30 million that Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba announced as relief to the refugees is not going to go far, even if it is distributed to the genuinely needy.

Even though the Dailekh uprising was spontaneous and unprecedented, it is not going to be easy for the government to take advantage of it. Government presence is nil in many parts of the country and it first needs to show that it is a viable alternative that reflects and acts on the citizen's concerns. Given the disarray and disunity of the political parties, it is unlikely that Dailekh's brave resistance can be replicated nationwide. ●

Kishore Nepal in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 1-15 December

हिमाल

NAUMULE, Dailekh—For the Maoists, Dailekh's Kalika Forest is a strategic corridor joining their training grounds from Achham, Bajura, Kalikot to the north and Jajarkot, Rukum and Rolpa to the east. Naumule is the only place where Maoist violence and killings have been so prevalent in Dailekh. Naumule is a critical buffer zone between the district headquarters and Kalika, which is why they concentrated their actions ever since destroying the police post here in 2001. Even till a year ago, the Maoists were solely in control of Naumule. Now, because of their own excesses, the rebel presence here grew steadily weaker and they undermined themselves. They banned religious activities, didn't allow the local people to worship in temples, play traditional music during festivals or allow children to go to school. Dailekh has some of the most-revered Hindu shrines in the region

including temples where natural gas seeping out of the earth have created eternal flames that have been worshipped for centuries. If only there were better roads, these shrines would be popular pilgrimage destinations. Most of the priests who attended these temples have been chased away and recently Maoists cut off the legs of the 72-year-old priest Bhagwan Nath Yogi. The people of Dailekh had accepted these atrocities because they feared retribution from the rebels. But the Maoists began putting too much pressure on the local people and the last straw was the requirement that every household provide one person as a 'whole timer' to the rebel force.

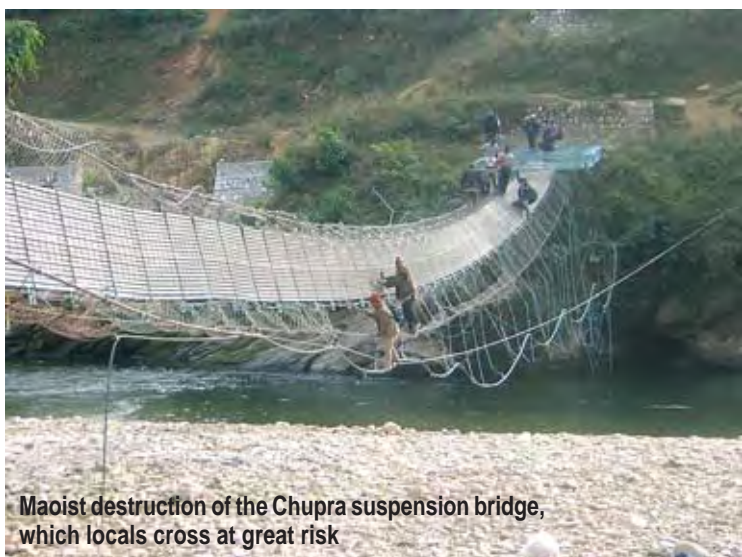
It culminated on 24 November when the women of Dailekh spontaneously came together to protest. There were around 5,000 people shouting anti-Maoist and pro-peace slogans. Social worker Krishna Shahi (pictured here on magazine cover) who rallied the women of the 13 surrounding

VDCs emerged as the informal coordinator of the protests. "We have set an example for the people of Dailekh and for the rest of Nepal, let's hope all the victims of Maoism hear our call," Shahi says. Other women warned political parties from trying to take credit for the protests, saying the demonstrations were non-partisan and an eruption of anger and desperation.

After the protests, the army has decided to move a base to guard Dullu against Maoist revenge attacks. The security forces also want to capitalise on

these spontaneous protests by the people. During the Dullu demonstrations, 27 Maoists surrendered to the security forces and 73 others have given up with documents, small arms as well as the money they had extorted from the local people. Taking its cue from Dullu, the resistance spread to Naumule and Salleri. The people here were angry at the Maoists for their campaign to 'join the movement, leave the village or live with broken limbs'. Since October, locals have been taking Maoist recruiters, tying them up and handing them over to the

PICS: RAVI TULADHAR



Maoist destruction of the Chupra suspension bridge, which locals cross at great risk



UML Minister at podium: If there are not talks, there will be polls.
Madhab Nepal: You better believe this party is in government.
Audience: Ha! Ha! Ha!

समय Samaya, 2 December

QUOTES OF THE WEEK



"We have begun a campaign to get the party out of the government, just wait for few days,"

- UML spokesman Pradeep Nepal in *Kantipur*, 28 November



Iraq's silent dead

America has lost its margin between insurgents and civilians

power – and this estimate did not even count the excess deaths in Falluja, which were deemed too dangerous to include.

The study noted that the majority of deaths resulted from violence and that a high proportion of the violent deaths were due to US aerial bombing. Epidemiologists acknowledged the uncertainties within these estimates but presented enough data to warrant an urgent follow-up investigation and reconsideration by the Bush administration and the US military of aerial bombing of Iraq's urban areas.

America's public reaction has been as remarkable, for the reaction has been no reaction. The vaunted *New York Times* ran a single story of 770 words on page eight of the paper on 29 October. The *Times* reporter apparently did not interview a single Bush administrative or US military official. No follow-up stories or editorials appeared, and no *New York Times* reporters assessed the story. Coverage in other US papers was similarly frivolous. The *Washington Post* on 29 October carried a single 758-word story on page 16.

Recent reporting on the bombing of Falluja has also been an exercise in self-denial. The *New York Times* on 6 November wrote 'warplanes pounded rebel positions' in Falluja, without noting that 'rebel positions' are actually in civilian neighbourhoods. Another *New York Times* story on 12 November, citing 'military officials', dutifully reported that

'Since the assault began on Monday, about 600 rebels have been killed along with 18 American and five Iraqi soldiers'. The issue of civilian deaths was not even raised.

Violence is only one reason for the increase in civilian deaths in Iraq. Children in urban war zones die in vast numbers from diarrhoea, respiratory infections and other causes owing to unsafe drinking water, lack of refrigerated food and acute shortages of blood and basic medicines at clinics and hospitals (that is, if civilians even dare to leave their houses for medical care). Yet the Red Crescent and other relief agencies have been unable to relieve Falluja's civilian population.

On 14 November, the front page of *The New York Times* led with the following description: 'Army tanks and fighting vehicles blasted their way into the last main rebel stronghold in Falluja at sundown on Saturday after American warplanes and artillery prepared the way with a savage barrage on the district. Earlier in the afternoon, 10 separate plumes of smoke rose from southern Falluja as it etched against the desert sky and probably exclaimed catastrophe for the insurgents.'

There is, once again, virtually no mention of the catastrophe for civilians etched against that desert sky. There is a hint, though, in a brief mention in the middle of the story of a father looking over his wounded sons in a hospital

and declaring, "Now Americans are shooting randomly at anything that moves."

A few days later, a US television film crew was in a bombed-out mosque with US troops. While the cameras were rolling, a US marine turned to an unarmed and wounded Iraqi lying on the ground and murdered the man with gunshots to the head. (Reportedly, there were a few other such cases of outright murder.) But the American media more or less brushed aside this shocking incident, too. The *Wall Street Journal* actually wrote an editorial on 18 November that criticised the critics, noting as usual that whatever the US does, its enemies in Iraq do worse, as if this excuses American abuses.

It does not. The US is killing massive numbers of Iraqi civilians, embittering the population and the Islamic world, laying the ground for escalating violence and death. No number of slaughtered Iraqis will bring peace. The American fantasy of a final battle in Falluja or elsewhere, or the capture of some terrorist mastermind perpetuates a cycle of bloodletting that puts the world in peril. Worse still, America's public opinion, media, and election results have left the world's most powerful military without practical restraint. ●

(Project Syndicate)

Jeffrey D Sachs is Professor of Economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

Evidence that America's war in Iraq has killed tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians is mounting. Yet this carnage is systematically ignored in the United States where the media

American behaviour and self-perceptions reveal the ease with which a civilised country can engage in large-scale killing of civilians without public discussion. In late October, the British medical journal *Lancet* published a study of civilian deaths in Iraq since the US-led invasion began. The sample survey documented an extra 100,000 Iraqi civilian deaths compared to the death rate in the preceding year, when Saddam Hussain was still in

COMMENT
Jeffrey D Sachs



and government portray a war in which there are no civilian deaths because there are no Iraqi civilians, only insurgents.

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Our pilots are being pirated

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

Royal Nepal Airlines Nepali pilots are regarded as some of the best in the world with thousands of flying hours in some of the world's most difficult terrain. For a long time, a sense of pride about flying the national flag kept them here. But increasingly fed up with poor working conditions, lack of growth prospects and attracted by salaries sometimes fifty times higher than what they earn here, there is an exodus of Royal Nepal Airlines pilots.

"Nepali pilots have very good job prospects because foreign airlines recognise and value their experience," says Captain Vijay Lama who has just upgraded from Twin Otters to 757s. "The only way the airline can keep its pilots is to make it financially rewarding for them to stay."

This is a huge loss for the airline which has invested a lot of money in training the pilots. There used to be 130 pilots flying for Royal Nepal Airlines in its heydays in the 1990s when the airline had four jets, two Avros, two Pilatus Porters and nine Twin Otters. Today, there are fewer than 60 pilots flying two 757s and four Twin Otters. Some two dozen pilots who retired have not been replaced and others have left to join foreign carriers.

Airlines sources say the first phase of the exodus was 10 years ago when domestic private carriers lured away



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Nepali pilots are being lured away in increasing numbers by better paying foreign airlines

Royal Nepal Airlines pilots with higher salaries. As private airlines expanded and added modern equipment, pilots of the state-owned carrier found it better to switch jobs than keep flying ageing Twin Otters.

Only after Capt P J Shah left Royal Nepal Airlines to join Emirates in 1988 and Capt A Z Sherpa who switched to Cathay Pacific did more pilots fly away to foreign airlines. The biggest recruiter of Nepali pilots in recent months has been Phuket Air, a private Thai operator that is beginning thrice-weekly Bangkok-Kathmandu-Dubai flights from January. Phuket has the same model Boeing 757 200s that Nepali pilots have been flying for the past 15 years.

The first to go earlier this year were recently-retired Royal Nepal pilots, Capt RK Lama and BM Amatya. According to International Civil Aviation Organisation rules, they can fly for another two years. Then Capt GP Rijal and Capt KR Manandhar also left to fly for Phuket. Royal Nepal sources told us more pilots have shown interest and may leave soon.

"This is an incalculable loss for Royal Nepal Airlines and a big gain for a foreign airline," says an airline source citing the cost of regular simulator training over the years keeping the pilots licenses valid. The average salary of a Royal Nepal Airlines 757 captain with 15,000 hours is Rs 18,000 a month with

allowances for flying time and layovers. Phuket is said to be offering a minimum of Rs 2,88,000 per month plus perks.

Qatar and Gulf Air also interviewed a few Royal Nepal pilots, but although a 757 rating allows pilots to fly 767s that Gulf operates, there are problems with equipment compatibility. Former Royal Nepal Airlines pilots who were flying for now-defunct private domestic operators like Necon have also left, with two now flying for India's Deccan Air which operates ATR-72s.

Paradoxically, the shortage of pilots among Nepal's rapidly growing domestic airline fleet is being filled by Indian pilots and Cosmic Air's new Fokker 100s

are being flown by European instructor pilots who are training Nepali crew. "The traffic is not all one-way," says one domestic airline operator, "there are many Indians flying for Nepali airlines, especially those that operate Dornier 228s."

Royal Nepal's shrinking fleets and irregular service also means the remaining pilots get barely enough hours in the air to keep their licenses valid. "There is just no career growth within Royal Nepal Airlines, staff morale is low, you see corruption every day, it is disgusting," admits a pilot who says after flying Twin Otters for many years out of a sense of duty, he is thinking of leaving.

But by far the biggest reason for going abroad is poor pay. "It's the money factor," says Capt Shuva Shrestha. "What we get paid in a month what foreign pilots earn for flying for an hour." Considering the terrain they fly in, Nepali pilots are rated the best and qualified enough to operate in any part of the world and there are carriers willing to pay good money for them.

Not everyone is sad to see the pilots go. "We must be happy for them, they will have exposure to state-of-the-art equipment, they will earn more, and have better job satisfaction. What's wrong with that?" asks Royal Nepal's chief pilot, Capt VK Shrestha, who retired recently. "When pilots find better opportunities they will leave because at the end of the day it's all about flying higher." ●

Royal Nepal Airlines captains are bailing out



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Captain Kul Bahadur Limbu has been flying for Royal Nepal Airlines for the last 25 years. He also heads the National Airlines Pilots Association. Now a senior captain flying Boeing 757s, he explains why many of his colleagues are bailing out.

Why this out migration of pilots?

It is a serious problem. Since the open sky policy 10 years ago, 42 pilots have left Royal Nepal Airlines. The main reasons are salaries and perks which are way below market rates even within Nepal. There is only one way to correct hits: pay pilots more. If management can't raise their salaries, it should up their allowances. Or else this airline that runs on tax-payer's money may one day have planes and route rights but no pilots.

Which sector is most affected by the exodus?

Domestic has been hit harder and there is actually a shortage of pilots. The remaining pilots are flying up to 100 hours a month, which is the upper limit. How long can they go on like that?

Where are the pilots going?

Actually, I don't see many of them going to other countries. Yes, some have gone to Thailand and elsewhere but as the domestic airlines grow there are lots of well-paying opportunities right at home. Until recently, private Nepali airlines were only flying turboprops, now Cosmic is flying Fokker 100s. I hear other airlines are also upgrading to jets. But more important than equipment is that they are paid almost as much as foreign airlines.

How has Royal Nepal Airlines management responded to the departure of its pilots?

They have been quite indifferent. The standard reaction is: people come and go. That attitude has backfired. Management is unable to fill the vacancies. And airline pilots need to be skilled, well-trained with regular simulator tests. More importantly, after 9/11, getting pilot training in

the US and in Europe has become more difficult. Even senior pilots like us have to obtain security, justice and defense clearances. That is why private airlines are poaching from Royal Nepal.

Who is to blame?

Our politicians were never serious, they interfered with the operations and ruined it. Opening our sky does not mean you sell off the national interest. We should have never given away our fifth-freedom rights at the cost of the national flag carrier. Even Japan doesn't allow Royal Nepal Airlines to pick up passengers between Osaka and Shanghai, yet our politicians have given away our rights from Kathmandu to onward destinations to foreign airlines. What did the country achieve doing that? We didn't get more tourists, we just hurt our own national airlines.

Is this a conspiracy to ground the airline?

I wouldn't be surprised if the aviation mafia is working on a plan to kill off Royal Nepal Airlines. We believe that the country needs to have a strong national flag carrier if it wants to strengthen its hold on tourism. Yesterday our forests and rivers were sold off, today they are selling off our air traffic rights.

But the airline is a victim of politics.

In democracy, it is natural to have a difference of opinion. But when it comes to the interest of the national flag carrier, there is no alternative but to unite. We need to learn from our past mistakes. Perhaps we did not have any vision in the past. But now we need to listen to others even if that means the opposition. We need to take progressive steps and change antiquated bylaws.

ABHA ELI PHOBOO

On the southern fringes of Patan, Khumaltar is growing into an institutional area and the latest to strike roots here is the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). At a time when some international organisations are relocating from Nepal, ICIMOD plans to move into bigger and better premises.

This Sunday, King Gyanendra will inaugurate the impressive new ICIMOD secretariat built on a 1.5 hectare plot worth Rs 1 million gifted by the host government. "These are trying times in Nepal," says J Gabriel Campbell, director general of the institution who speaks fluent Hindi, Urdu and Nepali. "But it gives all the more reason to work with Nepali institutions and people. As an old friend of Nepal, we hope to keep being a good friend."

ICIMOD set up shop in Kathmandu on 5 December 1983 to spread awareness in mountain development, propel advocacy and influence government policies in the region. Coinciding with its 21st anniversary, a symposium on 'Securing Sustainable Livelihoods in the Hindu-Kush Himalaya: Directions for Future Research, Development and Cooperation' will be held to take stock of past programs and plan

new ones.

China and India, the two big ICIMOD members put up \$100,000 for the building whose architectural plan was judged first in a design contest two years ago. Last minute touches are still being given as serpentine cables disappear under floor panels. Tom Crees, the architect, takes us on a tour of the place still under construction, painting a picture of what the end result will look like.

Elegant furniture from China will furnish the reception, he says waving at the empty spaces adding, "A Chinese painting and special carpet will make it look authentic". In the conference room, a stage has been set. "That is where the king will sit," he points out. The wall hangings have a distinct Indian flavour. "This is India's contribution. There will be a plaque stating it," says Milan Raj Tuladhar, chief administrator.

The sign at the main gate says ICIMOD in the eight different languages of ICIMOD's member countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Bangladesh and Bhutan have helped set up pavilions behind the main building, built in the traditional styles of their countries by their own craftsmen.

"As an architect, one of the innovations were the pavilions," says Crees, admitting it was a challenge for his team: "The design had to embody the spirit of the eight regions in the Hindu-Kush Himalayan range but it had to have modern standards and efficiency". To allow it to blend in with Kathmandu Valley, the building exudes a native Nepali look but inside it reflects the diversity of the region that ICIMOD encompasses. The interiors are bright and airy, giving the effect of transparency, spaciousness, efficiency, a sense of community and cooperation.

The regional character of the building's architecture and the elegant country pavilions in the courtyard provide working space for meetings and brainstorming

Building

sessions. Even the cafeteria has been designed to encourage group work with more than four chairs at each table.

"Interconnectedness will encourage us to translate the integration in ICIMOD's name into joint thinking and action," says Campbell. "The fact that we will no longer have to use operating expenses to pay rent or loan repayment within four or five years will decrease our overhead and increase our program investments." Ofcourse, there is the advantage of having ICIMOD's

demonstration site in Godavari closer.

A tower is being set-up at the back of the premises where equipment to study the phenomenon of the 'South Asian brown cloud' is being set up. A laser beam that can shoot upto 60 km vertically is being installed that can measure the growing regional pollution threat, explains Bidhya Pradhan, environment officer. "It's the first of its kind in Nepal. We will be able to make an impact on environmental policies here and in the Himalayan regions." ●

Gone surfing

While ICIMOD cements its presence in Nepal, a UN regional office has decided the security situation in Kathmandu is too hot to handle and is leaving for, guess where, Sri Lanka.

The head office of the South Asia Sub-regional Resource Facility (SURF), which provides UNDP country offices support to design projects, is relocating to Colombo in January. Security has been cited as the main reason for the decision. This is has surprised many, not the least some expat UN staffers who told us: "It's like jumping from the frying pan into the fire."

In the past, truck bombs in Colombo have

demolished the entire business district and an airport attack in 2001 destroyed almost the entire Sri Lankan Airlines fleet. Although things have been quiet in Sri Lanka since the ceasefire three years ago, the Tamil Tigers recently threatened to restart the war after deadlocked negotiations.

The SURF decision was reportedly made after bandas in September and recent Maoist threats, including a hoax bomb in the basement garage of the building in which SURF is housed. The UN's security concerns have grown after its office in Baghdad was blown up killing 15 staff. "Kathmandu has been rated a more risky place than Colombo," one SURF staffer told us. "When we asked if Sri Lanka was safer, they said the conflict there was relegated only to the Jaffna peninsula." He also said SURF was finding it difficult to find applicants for new positions because they didn't want to relocate to Kathmandu.

Summitting under a shamiana

KANAK DIXIT
in LUMBINI

The Second World Buddhist Summit, held by the Mayadebi temple and nativity site, which was inaugurated by King Gyanendra on Wednesday resembled one of the royal public receptions we have seen in the past year.

The common folk were herded into cattle pens facing the harsh midday sun while the diplomats, high lamas and dignitaries were on the dais in the shade. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's faux pas when he misread his speech and welcomed 'His Majesty King Birendra' to the conference was symptomatic of the rest of this confused and ill-conceived gathering.

It was a Rs 5 million plus state-sponsored show organised by institutions and individuals who are far from Buddhist spiritualism, either by birth or by inclination, seeking to take political mileage of this place at this time.

Kathmandu's politicians have long hijacked Lumbini for state purpose, having among other things promoted a blatant but as-yet unsuccessful touristic agenda. They have instigated

sectarian competition in the monastic zone within the Lumbini Garden, where money and marble are given preference over ascetic concerns. Religion, variously defined, has largely hijacked what was meant to be a spiritual haven for the world's seekers.

Part of the chaos at the conference seemed to emanate from a tussle between the Lumbini Development Trust and the government effort headed by Minister for Culture and Tourism Deep Kumar Upadhaya, who hails from next door Kapilbastu. While Upadhaya was making frantic calls to local boarding houses seeking rooms for guests, bureaucrats just stood around. The minister was micro-managing to such an extent he was heard suggesting to staff that makeshift loos were best supplied with toilet paper.

The conference venue was in the shape of a massive wedding shamiana with side panels made up of incongruous kitsch images showing trains, lakes and paddleboats. Never had the Mayadebi Temple area been trampled by military boots or witnessed automatic weaponry in such numbers. The sound of army helicopters reverberated throughout the conference

One reason Nepal was saved from total embarrassment was that there was so little international participation at the world Buddhist summit

period.

One reason that the nation was saved from total embarrassment was that there was so little international participation in this 'summit', and the ambassadors present were hopefully habituated to the way things are done here. Otherwise, what would the world have thought of the absolute sidelining of the local communities which surround the Lumbini Garden, making up some of the poorest people in the country, a majority of them Muslim? Or that there was nary a mention during the summit of Tenzing Gyatso, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, regarded in his non-political avatar as a repository of the faith by a significant portion of the world's Buddhists? Or that political henchmen and student activists linked to various ministers were allowed to stomp all over the conference and push their weight around?

Amidst the confusion, however, it was possible to locate some points of departure worth nurturing. The

conference's thoughtful slogan was 'Unity in Diversity' and this was in ample evidence in terms of Nepali participation. Gathered in this tarai venue in Rupandehi were representatives of Nepal's hill and mountain peoples, from the Managba to the Sherpa, Loba, Tamu, Thakali, Magar, Kirats, and the Newars of Kathmandu Valley as a sizeable not-to-be-missed contingent.

The substantive agenda of the conference was rescued on behalf of the beleaguered organisers by the two Shakya gentlemen presenting theme papers. Heritage activist Karna Shakya made the case that Buddhism was the only world faith based on history, which was reason enough to respect the legacy and archaeology of Lumbini. He decried the conversion of Lumbini into 'a playground of intellectuals', a place where 'iconoclastic concessionaries' were allotted real estate amidst the sublime landscape. There was a hegemonistic rat race in

progress, he said and Lumbini should be saved from the all-too-apparent dangers of ethnocentricism and religious parochialism. Shakya added that the Lumbini region could never develop into a space for spiritual renewal if local communities were neglected. "Only with their participation is the future of Lumbini assured," he concluded.

Bhikkhu Sugandha (Anil Shakya), scholar of anthropology and presently a senior monk in Thailand with proximity to King Bhumibol, started his talk by asking whether peace was even possible in a war zone. Repeating a saying of Shakyamuni, that "one should not kill or cause to kill", he asked rhetorically what each of the players in Nepal today—the monarchy, the Maoist rebels and the politicians—was willing to give up in the name of peace.

"You cannot stop the war with more war and war and war," said the Bhikkhu, "power will never gain us peace, only sacrifice can." Speaking up



"Mt Everest is not melting"

We asked the people of Khumbu what they think about the campaign by green groups to put Chomolungma on the UNESCO danger list so countries cut carbon emissions

NARESH NEWAR in NAMCHE

Despite the worldwide hoo-hah about the world heritage site around Chomolungma being put on the UNESCO endangered list because of global warming, most people here say it is all hype.

International environmental activists campaigning against climate change have used its effect on Chomolungma and the Himalaya to draw attention to act on the Kyoto Treaty ahead of a big international conference in Argentina next week.

But here in the capital of Sherpaland, few have heard of it and when told refuse to believe that the world's highest mountain is in any danger. "Why is it that we, who live here, are always the last people to hear about anything like this?" asks Sonam G Sherpa, chairman of Namche Buffer Zone Users' Committee that oversees the environment outside the Everest National Park. Elsewhere in Namche, the politicians, hotel owners, students and even conservationists we talked to, laughed out loud when we told them of the worldwide campaign.

"I find it quite amusing to hear that Chomolungma is endangered," says Mingma Sherpa who runs the Chukum Restaurant here.

The green group, Friends of the Earth and mountaineers last week launched a worldwide campaign to lobby for emission controls saying Mt Everest and the Himalaya are

melting. They petitioned UNESCO in Paris to place Everest National Park as well as reefs in Belize and glaciers Peru on the World Heritage Danger List due to global warming. Inclusion in UNESCO's endangered list would commit the world body to take corrective measures like pressing countries around the world to cut carbon emissions.

"The World Heritage Committee must urgently investigate these sites and ensure that everything necessary is done to maintain their world heritage status, to keep people safe and to pass them on intact to future generations," said Peter Roderick of Climate Justice, a London-based green group. British mountaineer Chris Bonnington, who climbed Chomolungma and Annapurna in the 1980s agrees: "Both the beauty of this magnificent area and the livelihoods of its inhabitants are threatened by global warming."

But here in Khumbu, the Sherpas are wondering why no one ever asked them for their opinion. "Everything is decided in Kathmandu, we are the ones who are affected by climate change most. Why don't they come here and raise the issue," says Sonam Sherpa.

He says the people here have noticed the effects of climate change in a single generation: receding glaciers, glacial lakes swelling with snow melt. Dozens of people here

have lost their lives in the past 15 years due to avalanches and glacial outburst floods.

Big glacial lake outbursts in 1975 and 1982 destroyed land, livestock, bridges and a hydroelectric plant when two glacial lakes burst. Despite this, people here think green groups are exaggerating the dangers for their own publicity and worry about what it will do to Khumbu's tourism, which has just started picking up again. "It sounds alarmist and it is nothing new, why bring it up now?" asks Tsering Sherpa, a Namche teacher.

Even trekkers here find the news of Everest being in danger a bit odd. "Yes, I heard about it but we have to be careful such news doesn't create panic and give the impression that the mountains have melted away," says British hiker Simon Baker on his way down from Kala Patthar.

Scottish conservationist Helen Cawley who has been based in Khumbu for the last 15 years admits the news may be a bit sensational but will serve to focus global attention for industrialised nations to work seriously in reducing global warming. "If it makes powerful governments in the west take action, then it is all right," she says. "But I'd rephrase it to say the people are more in danger than Everest." ●



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Indifferent to differences

The myth of Nepal's ethnic, linguistic and religious tolerance

RATIFY KYOTO

Many things that urgently need to be done in this country are being sidelined because of the conflict and its attendant crises. In fact, the insurgency is often offered as an excuse. "How can you talk of health, education, vaccination or the environment when we have other more urgent priorities," is the usual refrain. In fact, providing these services should be an essential part of the government's efforts towards resolving the conflict, not killing more people.

To be sure, patching up the differences between the parties and the palace and restarting the peace process should be a priority. But let's not forget essential decisions that must be taken within the country and outside. One issue that needs the urgent attention of the prime minister as soon as he returns from Lumbini is Nepal's ratification of the Kyoto Protocol which is so plainly in our own short and long-term interests.

There is a misconception that climate change will submerge island and delta nations and we'll all be high and dry. Actually, the most visible signs of global warming are not along the Ganga-Brahmaputra delta or in the Maldives but all along the Himalaya. The snows are melting, glaciers are receding and glacial lakes are threatening to burst their banks. Even if global average temperatures increase by half the projected scenario, sometime in the middle of this century our Himalayan water towers will have started melting.

You don't expect politicians to have time horizons to worry about what will happen in 2055. The American administration is certainly not worried and our politicians are wont to argue that if the Americans aren't budging why should we bother? Besides, it looks like the planet's surface will continue to warm well into the 2100s even if the emission cuts under Kyoto are implemented.

But the reason Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba should move urgently this week to get Kyoto ratified (by ordinance because there is no parliament) is because we stand to lose millions of dollars under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) trading the carbon we have not emitted because of Nepal's success in promoting renewable energy.

In the next 20 years, Nepal could be rewarded for not pumping 50 million tons of carbon into the atmosphere and collect up to \$200 million just from its biogas program alone. Additionally, as fossil fuels get scarce and more expensive our own hydropower will be a much more competitive export.

After Russia's ratification last month, Kyoto now addresses more than 61.6 percent of global carbon emissions and will go ahead (Australia and the United States, the two non-ratified make up the rest.) Whether or not Nepal ratifies is certainly not an issue for Kyoto. But it is an issue for us. Since we do everything at the last moment anyway, it's not too late for Deuba to move fast to get Nepal's ratification in time for the Conference of Parties (COP-10) in Buenos Aires next week.

Even if we don't do it for the planet, let's at least do it for ourselves.

STOP PRESS: Good news: the cabinet on Monday approved ratification. Not so good news:



We Nepalis pride ourselves in being a tolerant society and never tire of repeating the mantra that our diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious groups have always coexisted in peaceful harmony in this beautiful land.

NEPALI PAN
Rajendra Pradhan



King Gyanendra himself proclaimed after 1 September that we have a history and culture of tolerance. Indeed, compared to the ethnic separatist violence in India, Sri Lanka and even once-peaceful Thailand, the relative absence of such violence in Nepal does

seem to prove our own rhetoric.

Nevertheless, we have to ask ourselves whether we are really as tolerant a society as we make ourselves out to be. Many of us like to believe that the Black Wednesday attacks against Nepali Muslims and their mosques, houses and shops were not an example of communal or religious violence but that it was a one-off event.

Muslims have lived in Kathmandu for centuries in harmony with fellow Nepalis. We take pride in the fact that Hindus and Buddhists worship the same gods and participate in the same festivals and we boast that people of various ethnic groups claim to be Hindus and speak Nepali.

But have we ever listened to their voices of dissent? Is our tolerance based on acceptance and celebration of differences and on equality, or on a hierarchical ranking of differences or even on indifference? Do we accept cultural diversity as equals or do the dominant groups accept and tolerate other groups so long as they remain in their

place and do not claim equality?

From the perspective of the non-dominant groups, they seem to be tolerated as long as they do not assert their religious and cultural rights. It is the dominated groups that have to show tolerance to the religions and cultures of the dominating, they have to tolerate the situation of inequality.

This is not unique to Nepal. Many countries which claim to be exemplars of pluralism and tolerance are in fact tolerant of people from different cultures and religions only so long as they remain at the margins and do not assert themselves. So long as they remain apart and do not demand to interact with the dominant group as equals, they are tolerated.

Holland is a country famous for its tolerance. Whatever may be the official state policy and the relations between the white Dutch and westerners of different beliefs and ideologies—black Surinamese, Indonesians, and other Asians and Africans have always felt discriminated against. (See 'Holland after van



LETTERS

LESSONS NOT LEARN'T

Your excellent coverage of Nepal's power sector 10 years after the inevitable collapse of the badly planned Arun III ('Ten years after abandoning Arun III', #223) should take the debate to new levels of enlightenment. Unfortunately the comments by former and present vice chairmen of the National Planning Commission do not leave much room for hope: our senior economic planners still refuse to learn the right lessons. It is amazing that Dr Ram Sharan Mahat should say \$400 million in committed grants and loans had to be written off. The truth is that ADB and Japan used their money committed to Arun III in Kali Gandaki and the smaller bilaterals spent their grants in constructing new transmission lines for Nepal. It is only the World Bank that has shown singular incompetence in utilising its portion of the committed aid to get a Power Development Fund off the ground in all these 10 years. Dr Shankar Sharma couches his

comment with an "if" ("if the rate of return calculations made sense"). That is like saying "we can all eat a big omelette if elephants laid eggs".

Shiva Bisangkhe, Lalitpur

RING ROAD

Thank you for the revealing piece by Padma Sunder Joshi on the absurdity of having an Outer Ring Road for Kathmandu Valley ('Road to nowhere', #223). Aside from the argument against concentrating all development in Kathmandu Valley as you also say in your editorial in the same issue ('Round and round in circles') there are other practical

reasons why the Outer Ring Road is a very bad idea. Joshi's article is the first time the Nepali media has asked the right questions about this project. As he says, the Outer Ring Road will only increase urban sprawl. It will only be welcomed by the people whose land is going to have a higher property value. What are much more necessary for the moment are:

- Access to all VDCs in the valley which will help the market centres and concentrate urban growth along corridors
- Inner Ring Road as proposed by JICA which will relieve congestion in the city core



MIN BAJRACHARYA

- Widening of the Arniko Highway to prepare for the eastern Sindhuli access to the tarai from the Valley.

Name withheld, email

FUNGIFICATION

In your last editorial ('The world is watching us', #222) you say: 'They want to revisit the commitments made at the Nepal Development Forum to see if resources aren't being fungified'. Now, what kind of a verb is 'fungify'? Is this derived from 'fungibility'? If so, that seems to take fungibility of English words a bit too far. Or rather is it a microbiology term derived from 'fungi' (as in Italian), meaning to turn something into fungus? Turning public resources into something mouldy has certain vividness to it. I certainly hope the editors are not going 'fungified' in the head!

Ben Ohara, Kathmandu

- In your editorial 'The world is watching' (#222). I appreciate your courage for bringing up the crux of what I think is the ultimate challenge in Nepal...this I-can-do-nothing attitude, that whatever happens is written. If I get killed by a bus while

crossing the street, it was suppose to be. So what do the Nepali people do about this? As you say, they having an incredible tolerance for abuse, and if they ignore it it will go away. Of course, it only gets worse. No surprise that Nepal has one of the worst motor vehicle accident rates of any country in Asia? And Kathmandu has the highest rate of lung cancer of any city in the world. It doesn't have to be that way, it is not fated. In the same issue Daniel Lak says ('Paying the price') it's high time the Nepali people were asked what they want. If I was made prime minister, I would ask all foreign donors to leave within six months and tell the Nepali people: 'From now on we're going to make it on our own or we're not going to make it at all.' Where are the leaders of Nepal? Where is a Nepali Vaclav Havel?

FA Hutchison, Kathmandu

LAK

Daniel Lak tells us that the 'America's Christian fundamentalist right' are the equivalent of 'the Islamist movement up to and perhaps just shy of al Qaeda'. It is

Gogh', #223)

Cultural diversity is acceptable but only for the ethnic chic of food, music, clothes, jewellery and household decorations. To be really accepted, the minorities have to assimilate into Dutch culture, which they can never fully do. And when they assert their differences, their own cultures, as the Muslims have been doing recently, it is billed as a 'clash of civilisations'. But it is only through such clashes that the minorities can ever hope to have their cultures accepted and recognised as equal to the dominant cultures.

To be a truly tolerant society, we should first accept that we may not be as tolerant as we would like to believe. Our tolerance may be based on the dominance of a religion, culture or locality, that our tolerance would be put to test when other ethnic, religious and regional groups begin to assert themselves.

Denying our own ghettos and accepting social apartheid will not help us build a more tolerant society. Unfortunately, it is only through struggle – and, sometimes, even violence – that we learn to accept, value and really tolerate differences. ●

Like in most of the developing world, polls in Nepal are barely free and seldom fair even under the best of circumstances. Instances of outright intimidation of voters, as in the Indian state of Bihar for example, may be rare here. But that is because inducement makes coercion unnecessary.

STATE OF THE STATE CK Lal



The government machinery can often influence the outcome of an election to its advantage without having to steal it outright.

Having been a prominent beneficiary of managed elections in the past, premier Sher Bahadur Deuba knows the advantage of conducting parliamentary elections with a cooperative administration and supportive army running the show.

Premier Deuba's cabinet colleagues in his breakaway faction of the Nepali Congress

Fig-leaf elections

Insisting on polls at any cost may cost us democracy and stability

realise that the political ground under their feet isn't very firm. Ministers Bimalendra Nidhi and Prakash Man Singh lost past elections despite having illustrious daddies. Their eagerness for polls at any cost is understandable.

Political opportunism is the hallmark of the ex-Panchas in the RPP and the Badri Mandal faction of Sadhbhabana. Never a believer in free and fair polls, former Panchas like Minister Balam Gharti Magar know that they are better off in a stage-managed election. Even better if such polls can be held under their own stewardship. Unencumbered by ideology, they will sail with the wind and sing praises of authoritarianism if need be.

In post-1990 politics, the UML has perfected the art of saying something in public and then doing the exact opposite. Its 'critical support' for the constitution ended up undermining it. Had Madhab Nepal seen in 2002 that Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba was jumping off a cliff by dissolving parliament, he wouldn't be in the predicament

he is in today. But having a reputation for political hypocrisy has its own advantages.

UML ministers sit pretty, endorsing the cabinet decision to issue poll threats and then issuing press statements that polls are impossible without peace. It's a clever game of heads you lose and tails we win. Sometimes being too clever by half has its own hazards. Aware of risks, prominent ministers of UML are busy securing their own future.

As expected, the Maoists have rejected elections outright. A government that can't keep national highways open, whose security forces are barely able to protect their own barracks, and which has neither the will nor the capacity to initiate peace talks with insurgents can't be expected to hold elections except as an excuse to prolong its life or to legitimise hybrid authoritarianism.

A regime that engineered the dissolution of parliament and let the term of elected local councils lapse can't be expected to form them again without having its own interests

and dominance fully secured. It seems the only stakeholders serious about forthcoming polls are Nepal's donors. They want the legitimacy so badly that they are ready to accept any polls as long as they are held. The argument is that if Sri Lanka, Kashmir and Afghanistan can hold elections why can't Sindhupalchok, Kabhre or Argakhanchi?

For a vast section of Nepalis, their representatives are still the last resort to get anything done by Kathmandu back home in the districts. Elected representatives may not be able to do anything to help constituents, but even giving a patient hearing is often therapeutic.

Insisting on an election at all cost may cost not just democracy, but the very stability of the state itself. The priority should be peace-building but the parties in power seem to have lost the will to pursue it in right earnest. That can mean only one thing: they have become irrelevant and can be shown the door without any adverse fallout. ●



these 'fundos', as Lak loves to call them, who have apparently put Mr Bush back in power. How did they do that? Are we to picture Bible-toting teenagers with explosives strapped around their waist crashing into ballot stations? Or perhaps flak-jacketed housewives from Alabama, armed to the teeth, storming the Capitol? Lak is at pains to emphasise that the 'hard, churchgoing, literal Bible believers in America' are not as numerous as they seem. What we really should be scared of, he tells us, is an assertive China. 'Deep corruption. Huge population. Environmental degradation.' Lak isn't nearly as scared as he should be. Sixty million of those awful people are, wait for it, Bible believing Christians. Ahh, more fundos! So much for the advance of 'Enlightenment' (sic) thinking.

Mark Pickett, Pulchok

his western background gave him some perspective but now that he is in Florida, he seems less concerned about what is happening in an obscure Asian country he once reported from. Now that the Internet is widely available in Nepal, the rantings of western columnists can be read from any roadside cyber cafe, and cable TV has given Nepalis all the CNN, BBC and Fox that they could want, why do we need a foreign journalist giving us foreign news stories from 8,000 miles away? I suggest reducing the frequency of his occasionally quite insightful column and replacing him with a regular local who is more familiar with the nuts and bolts of Nepali life and politics. This arrangement might benefit everyone, perhaps even Lak himself.

Manish Gyawali, email

CORRECTIONS

In the interview with Bikash Pandey ("After Arun there was a paradigm shift", #223) the road to Num was to take 40 months to build and not 14 months as inadvertently stated.

I recognise Daniel Lak's strengths as a reporter but I don't understand why he is still given a slot on the editorial section of the *Nepali Times*. He had interesting things to say while he was still in Nepal and

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A war on two fronts

The people of Nepal's most AIDS-stricken district struggle with an insurgency and an epidemic

● A middle-age woman in Bayalpata lies in bed covered with a blanket, shivering. Her husband returned from India two years ago and died. She too fell ill and was diagnosed HIV-positive, she didn't try to hide her infection and was ostracised. While she still could she tried to spread awareness among other women in her village about AIDS but now she is too weak.

● The 29-year-old man had returned from India four years ago. He had been ill and the villagers all thought he had tuberculosis. Last month, he died of AIDS. "We hadn't told anyone he had AIDS because it would have been difficult to live here," admits his brother.

● In Muli, two young men who had recently returned from India fell sick. They were being treated in the district hospital but were not responding to the antibiotics. The doctors finally got a blood test done and found they were both HIV-positive. Both are now dead.



RAMESHWOR BOHARA

RAMESHWOR BOHARA
in ACHHAM

Mid-western Nepal's Achham district has traditionally been an area of heavy out-migration of seasonal workers to India. Even during peace, up to 40 percent of Achham's population would

be in India at any given time.

Today, with the insurgency, the district administration estimates that 60 percent of Achham's population is away. The result is starkly visible: there are few able-bodied men left in Achham's 75 VDCs.

Most of the men have traditionally gone to Mumbai to

work as chowkidars, and stay away for three to four years before returning. In Mumbai, many visit brothels to spend time with young women from Nepal for comfort and sex. There are an estimated 100,000 Nepali women sex workers in Mumbai alone and many are HIV-positive.

One returnee told us that Nepali men get discounts for sex, and some even have 'season tickets' and keep their favourite girls and young women on a monthly retainer. When they fall sick and can't work, the men come home and infect their wives. The assistant health worker at Achham's district

Gundruk diplomacy

It's in our interest to keep Big Brothers happy

MIAMI—In the political salons of my homeland's capital city, there are sundry noses out of joint. They yaw left mainly but some pitch right, or go both ways according to the vicissitudes of the times. What matters is that they're angling out of true and for an explanation, blame George W Bush.

But wait, dear reader, this is not yet another anti-American rant. I write this week about how important America is, even to those who pretend to disdain the place.

You see, this past week, Mr Bush visited my native land. He flew up for talks and dinner and flew

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



out to the eastern side of the country to thank people there for being so friendly to stranded American airline passengers in the wake of 9/11.

For Canada, this was high drama. Newspapers dissected every nuance of the visit and then some. They probed the words that were spoken in public, in all a few hundred. They pondered whether two old friends like Canada and the US could ever patch up their Iraq-strained relationship. Some even printed the menu for the state dinner on their front pages. Beef was served, Canadian beef, now banned in the USA because of fears over the mad cow disease. Food as non-too-subtle

diplomacy.

And those dozens of Ottawa noses out of joint? The self-important of the capital who didn't receive an invitation to the big feed with Mr Bush at the high table. There were only 700 place settings and like any other political hot spot, Ottawa has thousands of big egos who just know they have something important to tell the President.

Outside the banquet hall and meeting rooms was self-importance of another kind. All week long, protesters shouted anti-war slogans and baited the police. Some protesters even lit up huge marijuana cigarettes and smoked them in public in hopes that the CEO of America Inc. would sense their wrath over his country's objections to soft drug decriminalisation in Canada. Or maybe they just wanted to get high.

The point is not in what Canadians thought about was going on. The point is that Washington simply could not care less about a visit that Canada put at the centre of its agenda. American newspapers devoted hardly an inch of column space to the trip, save for words

spoken by Mr Bush about Iraq and domestic issues. American issues. In the US, no one even noticed that their president had popped across.

And that's probably how it should be. Canada and the United States share the world's largest trading relationship, the longest un-militarised border on the planet and a host of other commonalities

that go beyond the squabbles over Iraq or beef or anything else for that matter.

The US considers Canada family and although Canadians don't like Mr Bush very much or his wars, they're fond of their American, er, call them cousins. That's why Canadian diplomacy is hugely focussed on Washington, on managing a massively complex but abiding relationship that blows hot, warm and occasionally chilly. But never, ever hostile. Even when Ottawa refuses to send troops to help the US invade Iraq. Even when it serves the Commander in Chief beef that's banned at home.

Now there's a lesson here for Nepal, for New Zealand, for Mongolia, for Belgium, for Uruguay, for, I dare say, Ukraine, for any other lightly populated or small country that has a huge neighbour. However much they annoy you, however much they seem unable to get it right sometimes, however much they ignore you or don't take you seriously, get along with them. Keep them largely happy and put some effort into the relationship.

Start getting the dal-bhat ready for Manmohan Singh, some gundruk and lapsi, alu tareko fried in banaspati ghiu. And aila to wash it all down. ●





Mangalsen (left) has been hit by the twin threats of AIDS and war. Jiraj Shakya (above) a doctor at the Bheri Zonal Hospital in Nepalganj.

hospital in Mangalsen, Jhapat Rawal, says HIV entered Achham through workers returning from India. "Most of those infected have recently returned from India or have come in contact with them," he says. But anti-AIDS activists here say blaming those returning from India for the epidemic may have been true in the past but now the virus is spreading rapidly within Achham and Nepal.

The conflict in Nepal's midwest has escalated outmigration from Achham and surrounding districts, thereby increasing the danger of infection. Officials at the District Health Office in Mangalsen admit that there is no way of telling how bad the situation is because they can't go to the villages to conduct surveys. "The situation must have grown worse but we just don't know how much" says Khadga Bista of the district AIDS coordination committee. A recent survey carried out by two non-governmental groups in 12 VDCs showed that there had been 128 deaths due to AIDS so far with 85 new infections and 250 AIDS orphans. "We went house to house, asking how they died, how many children they had and who else was sick, but we don't know what the situation is like in the rest of the 75 districts," says Yogendra Oli of Gangotri Gramin Bikas Manch.

According to the last census, Achham's population was 231,000, but nearly half of them could be working in India or have become internally displaced by now. If Gangotri's survey is extrapolated to all the districts, some 1,500 people may have already died of AIDS here. There is no estimate about HIV

infections. Their situation could be serious because the public health system in the mid-west has collapsed because of the conflict. Once infected, HIV patients have no access to health care.

The German aid group, GTZ recently gave 100 HIV detection kits to the hospital in Mangalsen but it is clear the AIDS clinic will soon run out of kits. In one week this April, of the 10 persons tested, five turned out to be HIV-positive, and two have since died. All five had returned from India. Jhapat Rawal recalls: "We first treated them thinking it was TB, but they didn't get better so we tested them."

As it is, Achham already had one of the lowest nutrition levels and alarming anemia especially among young girls and women. The social standing of women in Achham society is poor and food intake has dropped because of conflict-related disruptions. All this adds up to a lowering of resistance so that after women are infected, death comes quickly. Even those with opportunistic tuberculosis or other infections don't get medicines because health posts have closed down and medicines are not sent out to the villages for fear it will get into Maoist hands.

Jiraj Shakya is a doctor at the Bheri Zonal Hospital in Nepalganj, he says the AIDS crisis in mid-western Nepal is reaching serious proportions because the virus keeps coming into the country through workers returning from India and warns that the response so far has been inadequate. "We must tackle the problem at its root, through local awareness and by targeting returnees. It is already getting too late," Shakya says. ●

Helping people like us

Ex-addicts at a rehab centre in Pokhara address Nepal's growing drug problem



MIN BAJRACHARYA

VINCENT ANDROSIGLIO

Suraj stuck a needle in his arm almost everyday for seven years. He is a 'brown sugar' heroine addict and an alcoholic. Only after numerous attempts at recovery and staying a year at a rehab in Pokhara did his life move out of hell to founding a drug rehab himself with other ex-addicts.

This is a story of hope and courage—the very thing Nepali people need to hear today. After being drug free for a year-and-a-half, the parents of two drug addicts approached Suraj to help their sons. The sons had already been to drug rehabs several times, with no success. They absolutely refused to return. The parents were at their wits end.

Suraj was asked to help. He responded without a moment's hesitation. He stayed with the sons in the parent's house, day and night, taking them through the terrifying experience of withdrawing from a drug. Suraj had been a volunteer counsellor in rehab, so he knew the ropes. He gave them the proper medications to ease the process but he couldn't do it alone. He asked a friend, Dinesh, also a recovering addict, to help. Both, hardly sleeping, supported each other.

But the parents couldn't bear it. The screaming, the fighting, the physical restraining of their sons when they wanted to run away was overwhelming. So, the parents rented two rooms in a hotel and the treatment proceeded. Addicts going through withdrawal can't stand to be in their own body. They want only one thing: drugs. And they will do anything to get them. It was their own past experience that gave Suraj and Dinesh the understanding and compassion to take these sons through this ordeal. Fifteen days of this seems like an eternity. But they stayed steady, trying to catch a few hours of sleep while the other stood watch.

The two sons got through it but detoxing alone isn't enough. Recovery from drug addiction is a lifetime process requiring a change in values, attitudes and lifestyle. The sons were introduced to NA and AA (narcotics and alcoholics anonymous). There, addicts attend group meetings openly

admitting that they have a problem, sharing their fears and attempts to return to drugs. Within the fellowship of these supportive meetings the main treatment takes place.

Other parents started sending their sons. Again, they responded but two rooms with no furniture was impossible to work in. So they moved to another hotel with four rooms.

This has been going on for four months now. Several more ex-addicts volunteered so that the others could spend time with their families and get some rest. They get no salary, no donations, no help from the government. The families give a small fee, if they can, to cover the rent, food and medicines.

The ex-addicts are inspired as well as an inspiration to others. They are truly alive, they have learnt that we are here to help each other. They have learnt the lesson that an addict can't control a drug with will power. The acid test of an alcoholic for instance is that they can't have 'just one drink'. They often finish the bottle.

When a recovering addict feels the urge to use drugs again because of loneliness, boredom or fights with family or friends, he now picks up the phone to call a fellow addict or goes to a NA meeting. An addict needs to abstain from drugs completely and share their urge to go back. We can't do it alone, we need each other. Ironically, many young addicts return to drugs because their parents give them the money.

Now, these four rooms at lakeside in Pokhara has a name: The Gateway Drug Rehab. It is government registered and a licensed psychotherapist counsels addicts. They are in the process of requesting affiliation with the Manipal Teaching Hospital, which will oversee medical complications. ●

Vincent Androsiglio is a former monk and Professor of Psychiatry. He runs worldwide email therapy practice while overseeing the Gateway Drug Rehab in Pokhara.

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Why Nepal needs Kyoto

There is a reward at the end of the rainbow

The impact of global warming is becoming increasingly evident in the world's fragile polar regions and our own Himalaya. High mountain communities in Nepal have noted that glaciers are retreating at unprecedented rates. The planet's extremities are the canary in the coal mine — alerting the rest of the world to the extent of the changes that are coming.

Russia's ratification of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) last month made it the 129th country to join the Kyoto Protocol. The treaty will now come into force on 16 February, 2005, seven years after it was first proposed in the Japanese city whose name it carries.

The Kyoto treaty has been called the biggest step forward in international environmental politics and laws that the world has ever seen. Global climate change is an environmental challenge like no other and threatens to disrupt the very basis on which life on earth is sustained, the climate. By 2100, average world temperatures could go up by 5.8°C. Besides the increase in frequency of extreme weather events and expected rise of sea level up to a metre, forestry, biodiversity, agriculture, rainfall and human health and wellbeing will all be strongly affected.

Now that Kyoto is going to be a reality, what are the implications for Nepal? First, Nepal has yet to ratify Kyoto. It hasn't done so in the past because of a mix of indecisiveness and more recently, lack of parliamentary mandate. However, it is urgent that Nepal ratify before the upcoming Conference of Parties (COP-10) in Buenos Aires on 6-17 December.

Nepal has strong reasons to support the Kyoto Protocol. It is the first international agreement that sets binding targets on developed countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but none on developing countries like Nepal. When Kyoto comes into force it means an effective carbon tax will be placed on fuel use, penalising and making more expensive those fuels with high greenhouse gas emissions. This surcharge will benefit Nepal as it will make our own energy sources more competitive.

Fossil fuels are under-priced today because their users do not have to pay the cost of the environmental damage they create. Nepal had good reasons to be the first country in South Asia to ratify Kyoto. Instead, together with Pakistan, we will be the last. Maldives and Bangladesh, with the most to lose from predicted sea level rise, were the first to ratify followed by India, Sri Lanka and Bhutan.

Ratification of Kyoto will qualify Nepal to participate in the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), one of the Kyoto provisions to allow complying developed countries flexibility in meeting their emission obligations. These countries can meet a portion of their obligations by purchasing carbon credits from countries like Nepal that reduce emissions over the business-as-usual baseline. Nepal has a large potential to develop CDM projects, any sector where use of unsustainable firewood or fossil fuels can be replaced with clean energy will qualify.

The most advanced of Nepal's CDM projects is the Nepal Biogas Support Program, which has already received a Letter of Intent from the Community Development Carbon Fund (CDCF) of the World Bank's Carbon Finance unit for the purchase of 1 million tons of carbon dioxide for around \$4.5 million. Trading Nepal's saved carbon is pending ratification of the Kyoto Protocol by Nepal.

It is estimated that the household biogas sector alone can generate up to \$200 million in the next 20 years. Other areas with potential are transportation, industry and the domestic sector where competitively priced electricity can replace diesel, kerosene, furnace oil, and LPG. There are likely to be opportunities for CDM projects in forestry and agriculture as well. Nepal's ability to access other funds specifically targeted at countries most vulnerable to climate change impact will also be greatly enhanced with the ratification of Kyoto.

The most obvious and visible impact of climate change in the Himalaya is the accelerated melting of glaciers, increasing the size of glacial lakes and the danger of devastating outburst floods (GLOFs). Less understood is the impact of climate change on the country's monsoon rains where change could drastically affect agriculture.

Ratification of Kyoto by Nepal will not make any difference to the Protocol itself as the required 55 countries have already ratified. However, ratification by Nepal in time for the upcoming COP-10 in Argentina will register Nepal's commitment at this historic moment to accept the challenge posed by climate change and to take immediate steps to address it. At home, ratification will provide momentum to CDM project developers and will open up the way for support to institutions which must prepare for a warmer planet. ●

Bikash Pandey is an energy specialist and Nepal representative of Winrock International.

Better late than never

Cabinet approves Kyoto ratification in the nick of time

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

For successive governments in Kathmandu, nothing could be more of an eye-glazer than the Kyoto Protocol to cut greenhouse gas emissions. They never understood it and if they did, they didn't think it was a priority.

Until last week. Suddenly with the big climate change Conference of Parties (COP-10) in Buenos Aires on 6-17 December looming, Environment Minister Bachaspati Debkota began the complicated task of convincing the cabinet why it was important. It wasn't easy, but he was finally able to make Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba understand the benefits to Nepal.

"We convinced the cabinet it was a win-win situation and the ratification process was approved," Debkota says. Now that the cabinet has decided to go for it, the legal wheels have started rolling to get the royal ordinance that is needed in the absence of parliament. But there are still potential pitfalls. The government is in a bind since it needs to keep renewing the WTO ordinance and there is nothing in it about Kyoto. The options now are to wait till

March for the WTO ordinance to be renewed again or ask the king to do us all a favour by recalling the WTO ordinance and sticking in the bit on Kyoto. This would be necessary to get Kyoto ratified by the Buenos Aires meeting next week, but the government will have to make the embarrassing admission that it goofed up.

Once Nepal ratifies the protocol, it will not only join most countries in the world that want to cut greenhouse gas emissions but also reap rewards for the country's successes in renewable energy.



Under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, countries can sell the carbon they don't burn through renewable energy and conserving forestry to polluting rich countries which need to meet their Kyoto quotas for cutting carbon dioxide emissions.

Now that the ratification process is moving, and provided there are no major hitches, Nepal can collect the \$4.5 million for the carbon it has not emitted by promoting biogas. Nepal signed a letter of intent with the World Bank last July for the deal. The World Bank's Prototype Carbon Fund set up a Community Development Carbon Fund, which aims to help grassroots development schemes that offset carbon emissions.

Nepal's biogas program is regarded internationally as a model for successful use of alternative energy for the rural Third World. Each of Nepal's 125,000 functioning digesters prevents five tons of carbon dioxide from being pumped into

the atmosphere every year even though some methane does leak out. Nepal has now overtaken China and India in the number of biogas plants per capita. This 'saved' gas is what rich countries are buying to reach their own emission quotas. The \$4.5 million will be ploughed back into clean energy that will make Nepal eligible to trade even more carbon.

Now that ratification is on the cards, Nepal can sell more of the carbon it saves through other renewables such as hydropower and solar energy use. Several Dutch banks are said to be interested. Under the CDM, many banks broker deals in the international market between buyers and sellers. That way the countries selling saved carbon may end up getting less money than the market value.

Those countries that have not ratified the Kyoto protocol need to rely on such middlemen. "Once Nepal ratifies the protocol, it can negotiate with ultimate buyers and get the real market value," says senior accountant Ratna Sansar Shrestha who is involved in CDM deals.

Environment Ministry Under Secretary Purushottam Kunwar says Nepal will now be heard when it talks about damage to the Himalayan environment from climate change at the Buenos Aires meeting. "Now that we are in Kyoto we will be in a better position to push the issues," he says. "It also makes sense for Nepal to join Kyoto before it comes into force on 16 February 2005."

After ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, Nepal will be entitled to all such benefits without having to cut its per capita carbon emission which are still below quota limits. Even China and India don't have to reduce their current emission levels, but Kyoto requires industrialised countries to cut their greenhouse gas emissions by 5.2 percent of the 1990 baseline by 2012. ●



By ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, Nepal will be reimbursed by rich countries for not pumping carbon dioxide into the atmosphere through hydropower project like Jhimruk (top) and individual biogas plants in Nepali homes.

anew

As it inaugurates a new secretariat in Kathmandu this week, ICIMOD renews its commitment to Nepal and the Himalayan region



The imposing facade of the new ICIMOD headquarters in Khumaltar (above) with its architect, Tom Crees (far right). Director general J Gabriel Campbell at his old office this week (right).

ALL PICS: MIN BAJRACHARYA

in Lumbini



KUMAR SHRESTHA/NEPALNEWS.COM

against violence that was overtaking the country, the Bhikkhu said that the role of religious organisations was not merely to act in piety, but to actively condemn violence.

Despite the dust and confusion, the tacky conference venue and the travails of room and board, in the end it was the

placid ambience of the Lumbini Garden that cast a spell over most of the participants. But one thing was clear: no government should go about organising peace summits when it is in the middle of a bloody war to which it is party. It just does not carry conviction. ●



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Nepal says no

The government has balked at pressure from some donors to divide Bhutani refugees for assimilation in Nepal and immigration to Europe and the United States. Foreign Ministry officials said Bhutani refugees should be repatriated home and any other plan would be unacceptable. "The donors are pushing re-registration and want to help some of the refugees resettle in their countries, but we think that would only divide the refugees and hamper repatriation," a senior official told us. Re-registration is a euphemism to allow donors to select refugees that fit into their immigration parameters. Some donors have argued that since not all 100,000 plus refugees can return to Bhutan, resettlement in third countries and 'internal integration' in Nepal may have to be considered. Bhutani leaders in exile are also against the idea, saying it will drive a wedge among the refugees and hinder repatriation. "Only a select few will go to places like Europe and America, and Bhutan will take back a bare minimum," said Bhutani Human Rights leader Tek Nath Rijal.

Cosmic travel

The first private Nepali carrier to fly the Kathmandu-Delhi route began its flights on 1 December. Cosmic Air's Fokker 100, which has transformed domestic air travel, started bi-weekly flights to Dhaka last month. Now, the 105-seater has introduced double daily flights to Delhi with a convenient 8.40 AM departure from Kathmandu. By next week, passengers in a hurry can finish their business in Delhi and take Cosmic night flight back to Kathmandu. On Wednesday, Cosmic took delivery of its second Fokker 100 with which it intends to expand its international connections to Bangalore, Bangkok and Bombay. On the domestic sector, jet flights are now available to Biratnagar, Bhairawa, Nepalganj and Pokhara will soon be added.

Everest profits

Based on the first three months ending Aswin 2061 unaudited accounts, Everest Bank Ltd (EBL) has declared that their operating profit has shown an increase by 47 percent over last year reaching a figure of Rs 106.38 million for the first three months of this fiscal year. EBL has added one more branch at Birganj Dry Port and an extension counter at customs point in Birganj raising the number of its branches to 15.

NEW PRODUCTS

TWO YEARS OF FEDEX: Everest De Cargo, licensee of FedEx Express, the world's largest express transportation company held a customer event on 20 November to celebrate its second anniversary. Shipments from Nepal can be delivered within two to four working days to United States, Europe and other destinations.

NIC CASH CARD: Nepal Industrial and Commercial Bank (NIC Bank) has introduced NIC Cash Card. Based on the Smart Choice Technology (SCT), this new service can be used by customers with any type of account at NIC Bank. The NIC debit card allows holder to draw money from 26 ATMs in Kathmandu besides NIC Bank.

NCC TOO: Nepal Credit and Commerce Bank (NCC) has introduced NCC Debit card under Smart Choice Technology. This service is available to all account holders of NCC. A card holder can withdraw upto Rs 25,000 in one day, and the bank will issue these cards free of cost for NCC Savings Plus account holders.

Naming and shaming

Defaulters are defaulters and should be called defaulters

In Nepal, we've always refrained from calling a spade a spade. It's a small place and we are afraid of stepping on powerful toes. That is why the reluctance of politicians, bureaucracy and, yes even the media, to call businessmen who

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed



have run away without paying bank loans what they are: defaulters.

Stealing is a sin. And yet, there is this self-righteous debate about whether it is criminal on the part of the regulator to find a mechanism to list the people who do not pay loans in time and publish them in the public domain. Why is it wrong for banks to keep track of people and businesses that are not paying loans? It is because of society's squeamishness that crooks in our midst hold their heads high. The only way is to name them and shame them.

In polite company, banks still don't call them write-offs, they are called 'non-performing assets' and they even have an acronym for it: NPA. It is estimated that out of every Rs 100 the banking community lent, Rs 30 never comes back because powerful businessmen wield powerful political muscle to not pay back. That is bad news for the economy. With multilateral agencies breathing down their necks, banks and regulators have now decided enough is enough.

If a borrower does not pay regularly, or defaults, they will be blacklisted. Embassies in Kathmandu will not give blacklisted guys visas.

The reason things got so bad here is because we tolerated political patronage for so long. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba was expressing his desperation when he lost his cool and blamed businessmen at the FNCCI gathering last week.

A trade-dominated economy like ours always looks for arbitrage, be it increasing the spread by not paying taxes, paying less taxes or by not paying bank dues. Business always thinks that the government should bail them out. In this way, even though their businesses go bankrupt the businessmen themselves emerged fatter at the end of the day. Defaulters are not ashamed, and even take up public positions and seats at public functions with pride. Banks are equally to blame, especially the erstwhile government-managed banks, which had become 'loan doling' machines that ensured their own executives got a slice of the pie.

The post-Enron world of international banking has become more careful. The new Basel agreement that has come into force requires banks to be more watchful in lending to corporate houses and regulating the enterprise as well as their loans. Surely, with Nepal's omnipresent enthusiasm of signing international



agreements, we will make the provisions apply here too.

It is important for Nepal to embark upon credit rating or enterprises and ensure that deserving businesses do not lose out at the cost of habitual defaulters. It is also equally important that while businesses are being regulated, financial institutions should be regulated too. Should business people be allowed to own banks? Should a single business house own a plethora of financial institutions? How do we regulate the non-banking finance sector such as finance companies and the ever-mushrooming co-operative finance organisations? How do we make the central bank an institution that prefers to bite than bark at donor-funded workshops?

Prime Minister Deuba was justified in lashing out, but it would be a good idea to demonstrate delivery by starting from his own extended family. ●



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It's a jungle out there

Chitwan is going wild in anticipation of new year tourists



NANDA RANA

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY in CHITWAN

Planning to get away this Christmas and New Years? Tired of over-touristified beaches and gawdy wats? A 20-minute plane ride away from Kathmandu is the Royal Chitwan National Park (RCNP) Nepal's wildest and most-famous nature reserve.

And the beauty of it is that you don't have to rough it: Chitwan has some of the best safari resorts in the world. And they are going for a song. A Chitwan vacation deep inside the primordial jungles of the Chure Hills is a vacation of a lifetime: a place you can see and feel nature as it was originally created.

This is not just about

getting a glimpse of the elusive Royal Nepali Tiger, it is about getting away from the chaos and disorder of the outside world. Here, the only sounds are of the cicadas, the mysterious rustle in the undergrowth, a heart-quickenning shriek from across the river and a deep rumble in the jungle.

A few days of being pampered by the resort staff, taking long jungle walks with expert guides, canoe trips and elephant-back jungle rides and you feel your batteries are fully recharged. Chitwan this time of year is also a bird-watcher's paradise. The Siberian hibernators are already here

flapping about along with the ox-bows of the Rapti River, honking proudly or nesting in gaggles by the reeds.

The Royal Chitwan National Park used to be a hunting reserve for Nepal's royals. They nearly hunted the tiger to extinction, luckily it was declared a reserve in the nick of time and the tigers are now back to full strength as is the Greater Asiatic One-horned Rhinoceros (hereafter referred to simply as the 'rhino').

This 932 sq km of land is situated in the Bhriti Madhesh between the Mahabharat and Chure ranges and besides the celebrity mammals it has rich

wetlands teeming with birdlife (over 450 species), crocodiles, the fish-eating gharials and the endangered fresh-water dolphins. It is Nepal's first national park and was enlisted by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 1984 paying homage to its unique ecosystem.

Stay at any of the resorts and you can either just laze around or take part in back-to-back nature trips. "Our programs are designed according to each guest's requirements, so they get the most out of their time spent here," says Olivia Taylor, guest relations officer at Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge.

If you insist on catching up with your inner soul, a few minutes of jungle serenity is enough. As the sun goes down on the marshes, the denizens of the jungle come out for supper. But remember you need more than luck to see the elusive tiger. Anna Caplyton has been working at the Temple Tiger for more than two months now and she has yet to see the cat. "Plenty of footprints, loads of deer, rhinos, wild boars and the rest, but no tiger" says Clayton, who hasn't given up.

The thing to remember in Chitwan is that you're not the only one watching. There are bound to be cat eyes fixed on you from the undergrowth. ●



ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY



Machan Wildlife Jungle Resort

Located 2.5 km inside the RCNP 40 km from the Bharatpur airport, this is one of Nepal's premier jungle lodges offering elephant and jeep safaris, jungle walks, slide shows as well as the local Tharu dance. It's run by efficient and friendly staff that make you feel at home and the chef doles out great desserts. There is a swimming pool if you want to take a dip and the elephant stable has eight-month-old Sani, whose mother is a domesticated elephant, while her father is a bull from the wild. That explains her temperament but she's cute.

One night US\$110
Two nights US\$ 220
(National Park fees and tax excluded)
4225001,4245402,4245529



Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge

Nepal's oldest and probably the most famous jungle resort, Tiger Tops is an experience in itself. About two hours from Bharatpur and an elephant ride from Megghauli, it is an eco-friendly place using solar energy for electricity and heating, serving fresh organic farm products and also providing education for villagers. Trained and experienced naturalists tell you what to look for. Wild boars, elephants, even rhinos sniff around at the edge of the lodge. Mangalay, a three-year-old rhino has taken refuge in the lodge ever since it lost its mother in a flood two years ago.

Two-night package: \$250
(National Park fees and tax excluded)
4361500



Temple Tiger

Approximately two hours from Bharatpur airport, Temple Tiger has one of the best views of the park from the lodge itself and is located about 4 km inside the park right in the middle of a dense sal forest. Deep inside the forest, the jungle walks offer a good chance to see tigers and an abundance of birds all pointed out by experienced guides.

One night package \$250
(National Park fees and tax excluded)
4263480,4244651,4221637



Tharu Safari Lodge

Owned and run by the Tiger Mountain group and situated outside the park, the lodge is inspired by the indigenous Tharu people who lived in the plains long before malaria was fully eradicated from the region. The longhouses are constructed in the traditional Tharu style. In addition to the usual activities, it has its own stable of horses and ponies as well as a swimming pool and a lawn tennis court. A school run jointly by the resort and Swiss Airlines is nearby.

US\$ 200 per night
(National Park fees and tax excluded)
4361500

Machan Paradise View

A half-hour drive from Bharatpur airport and located just outside the RCNP periphery near the village of Jagatpur along the banks of the Rapti, it is perfect for those wanting to spend quiet hours watching ducks and rhinos along the Rapti bank.

One night US\$ 80
(National Park fees and tax excluded) 4225001,4245402,4245529



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एकदमै Close



Voodoo economics

Politicians use the economic spell to gain support

Americans have once again finished a presidential campaign season in which the quality of the debate over economic policy was abysmal. On the Republican side, hacks, spin masters and many who ought to have known better suddenly developed an extraordinary appreciation for

next several decades. Democrats pretended that the tax cuts had already harmed the economy when they ought to know the greatest damage is yet to come.

The Republicans magnified their economic quackery by frantically trying to minimise public perceptions of the long-run fiscal problems of America's social-insurance system, largely to deflect attention from the fact that Bush threw away the budget surpluses President Clinton had bequeathed him – and with them what may have been the country's last best chance to

But there is one glimmer of hope. The past two generations have witnessed the rise of independent central banks whose monetary policy, largely insulated from partisan politics, aims for maximum possible employment and purchasing power consistent with price stability.

It may well be time for another technocratic push: a Fiscal Stabilisation Board that would take its place beside the Federal Reserve Board.

Just as the Federal Reserve exists to ensure that monetary policy is

fix things in this regard short of some form of disaster. These same Republicans argued for government spending restraint while blocking the institutional changes to Congressional procedures needed to make spending restraint possible. All this economic legerdemain was magnified by the media.

At this point, I as a pundit am supposed to come up with my magic scheme for fixing things. I don't have one.

not inconsistent with price stability, the Fiscal Stabilisation Board would guarantee that spending authority remains in line with the legislated level of taxes.

Let the debate begin. ●
(Project Syndicate)

J Bradford DeLong is Professor of Economics at the University of California at Berkeley and was Assistant US Treasury Secretary during the Clinton Presidency.

STARS & STRIPES

J Bradford DeLong



something called the 'CPS Household Survey of Employment' as a supposed guide to month-to-month changes in the labour market. The CPS survey was never designed to do this but it offered the most favourable gloss on the Bush administration's dreadful record on employment.

On the Democratic side, the same sorts of hacks and PR men focussed like a laser beam on the bad employment news of the George W Bush years, ignoring the good news about output and productivity. And again, Republicans responded tentatively by focusing on the unemployment rate rather than on the job numbers – as if it were a good thing that the lousy labour market since 2001 has artificially depressed the number of unemployed people.

Republicans glibly touted the Bush tax cuts – the equivalent of which his father, President George H W Bush, two decades ago called "voodoo economics" – as the acme of economic wisdom. They paid no heed to the large drag that Bush's unbalancing of America's public finances would impose on the US economy over the

Women hit back

NEW DELHI — What should be the penalty for rape? Opinions in India vary from hanging to life imprisonment to castration. But the women of Nagpur have devised a different method to mete out justice. Fed up with delays in the judicial process, police inaction and fear of being victimised again by alleged rapists who procure easy bail from court, they have decided to take the law into their own hands. Last month women from the slums of Nagpur attacked alleged rapists whom they say were walking free often with the connivance of the authorities. A mob dominated by 50 women, led by a rape victim, burned down the houses of the three alleged rapists who had reportedly attacked residents with impunity for months. The accused were lucky to get away alive.

The razing of the alleged rapists' homes followed a series of high-profile cases that began in August, when Akku Yadav, a gang leader who faced 24 criminal charges, including murder, was stabbed and stoned to death in a court by a mob led by women. According to them, he had raped young girls and pregnant women and sent his henchmen to extort money. Despite repeated arrests, Yadav walked out of jail each time and continued to terrorise the neighbourhood. Local people feared he would be released on bail again. The police detained five women after the attack but released them after more than 400 women occupied the courtroom.

In another case in Nagpur in October, two men accused of extortion and sex abuse were killed after demanding that a local woman hand over cash. When she refused they tried to strip her. Both were killed by a group of women armed with sticks and stones.

The incidents in Nagpur have led to a public debate on vigilantism and the state of India's justice system. Failure of the judiciary and police inaction is the two main reasons for the people's justice at Nagpur. Many women's rights advocates, including Poornima Advani, head of the national commission for women, have come out in defence of Nagpur's women.

Bush bags Doublespeak Award

President George W Bush, for the second year in a row, and his administration have been given the honour of receiving the 2004 Doublespeak Award from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Committee on Public Doublespeak. The award is an ironic 'tribute' to American public figures who have perpetuated language that is grossly deceptive, evasive, euphemistic, confusing or self-contradictory. The award was announced at NCTE's Annual Convention in Indianapolis last week.

According to the selection committee President Bush has set a high standard for his team by the inspired invention of the phrase "weapons of mass destruction-related program activities" to describe what has yet to be seen. Further he has made clear the principle of democratic discussion: "As you know, these are open forums, you're able to come and listen to what I have to say." Bush also won for his creative use of language in public statements regarding the reasons why the United States needed to pursue war against Iraq – for unsubstantiated statements, for the lack of evidentiary support, and for the purported manipulation of intelligence data. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's description of the widespread torture at Abu Ghraib as "the excesses of human nature that humanity suffers" was brilliantly mind-befuddling. The Secretary is well served by a Pentagon that erased terms like the Vietnam era 'body bag' which became 'human remains pouches' during the Gulf War and is now known as 'transfer tubes' the transfer of which are to be kept from media sight. The Justice Department also deserves mention for its ingenious contributions to the cause of helping us not confront the shame of our government fostering torture.

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62 cups of tea and tales of war

Govinda Bartaman's book depicts Nepal as a country of broken lives, the people behind the daily body counts

Govinda Bartaman is the quintessential Kathmandu leftist: versed in all cryptic aspects of Nepali politics, passionate about its obscurantist splits, given to vague ego tussels with fellow leftists, typically a moody poet

BOOK
Manjushree Thapa



and a down-to-earth journalist. He is a child of the country's elite caste structure with none of the privileges of being one. Except for the gift of language. This he has put towards a travel memoir, *Sohra Sanjharu* (or Sixteen Evenings), about his journeys to Liwang, Nepalganj, Dhangadi and Baglung during the 2002 ceasefire.

Bartaman's Liwang is chockablock with shifty now-you-see-them-now-you-don't guerrillas, harrowed government officials, keen reporters and human rights workers, and chipper DFID consultants assessing the conflict's impact.

It is a surreal town. The District LDO, has been transferred 26 times over the course of his career, has in his tenure in Rolpa District taken on various guises — including of a

Hindu ascetic — to avoid being recognised by the Maoists. More than 300 young men from the outlying villages have left in order to avoid being recruited by the guerrillas. People say that 15 women in one village have been raped by state security forces. Eighty-odd families from all over the district live as refugees in, the district centre. Among them is a man reprimanded by the Maoists for having two wives. He went on to bring home five more wives. The ceasefire has brought some relief. Locals now laugh, bleakly, about past days with 3PM curfews. But they remain worried that peace might end. The burned-out ruins of the roads department and the agriculture and post offices dot the landscape. A former rations supplier for the army, meanwhile, lives in a house decked with marble.

Sohra Sanjharu is not the most artful travelogue. At times it reads like an unedited diary. 'I had gone to do the short one, but I ended up doing the long one,' he says at one point, of a toilet break that the reader might have been spared the details of. Shockingly, he chronicles his drinking of 62 cups of tea and smoking of just as many cigarettes. (What is shocking is

not that he had so much tea or cigarettes but that he wrote about it in such detail). Each chapter chronicles a day, and ends with a 10PM bedtime. And every now and then there are goofy asides, such as his attempt to learn English, or passionate discussions on Stevie Wonder.

Still, this book is a must-read. Bartaman embodies Nepal's democratic left. His reservations about state atrocities is obvious but his horror at what the undemocratic left, the Maoists, have wrought is equally palpable. For those who dismiss all leftists as Maoist sympathisers (a widely-held view among the Kathmandu bourgeoisie) the political nuances in this book are enlightening.

And it contains many very poignant tales of war. An encounter with the niece of the Maoist-affiliated journalist Krishna Sen is one such story. Sen's own family no longer lives in his family house just outside Liwang. His 16 year-old niece Bandana heads the household now after her father (Sen's brother) died and her mother eloped, abandoning her with her 13 and 12 year-old sisters. They get by on their family lands with

the help of neighbours. Most of the exchange with her is ordinary enough, but in the end, she asks, "They say that Uncle's been killed, is that true?" Unable to tell the girl that Sen was, infamously, killed in police custody, a companion of Bartaman's tells her that the case is still being investigated.

As Bartaman moves from Liwang to its outlying villages, and then onto Nepalganj, Dhangadi, and back to Baglung, he meets war victims one after another. An 18-year-old Tharu woman talks openly in front of her mother-in-law about being raped by policemen as other policemen kill her husband. A man talks of how he was moved 17 times while imprisoned by the Maoists. Another woman in Baglung tells of how after her husband was disappeared by the security forces, her neighbours have been pressing her to consider him dead and to wear the widow's whites. Another woman, whose husband has also been disappeared by the security forces tries to console her mother-in-law saying: "At least you have other sons. You still have the

word 'son'. I don't have a husband. I don't have the word 'husband' anymore. My son doesn't have the word 'father'. So don't be sad."

Chronicling these tales, Bartaman depicts today's Nepal as a country of broken lives. Readers inured to the daily body counts in the news can finally see in this book the people behind the statistics. And they can see, in the words of one victim, all that is lost when politics ends and only guns remain. ●



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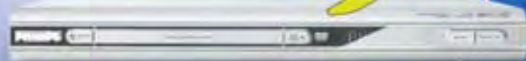
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Survive another breeding season

As you young fellows of reproductive age who have had the pleasure of tying the nuptial knots of holy matrimony this week may have noticed, marriage is not just a popular card game in Nepal.

The institution of marriage is a binding contract between a man and his in laws under which in exchange for the Cosmic Yinyang motorcycle the groom will provide all possible assistance to bring forth new human beings into the planet and live happily ever after until they are reincarnated, at which point he will have to do everything all over again.

No need to worry, though. Those of you addicted to card games will soon realise that you are in familiar territory because marriage is also a

UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit

gamble. For instance, you could discover on your wedding night that the person you have chosen to be your lawfully wedded husband because he is the son of a mover

and shaker is as hairy as a yak and snores like one. You win some and lose some.

But marriage is a compromise and as generations of married couples before us have discovered, the perfect antidote to a snoring spouse is to learn to snore yourself so you can drown out the all-night nasal saxophone on the next pillow and turn a solo concert into a duet.

As someone who has been married for donkey's years since the early Malla period, I have some unsolicited advice to all you newly-weds out there about the birds and the bees and what they do in private. May I?

- The most important part of a wedding is the marriage party which takes place simultaneously with approximately 15,000 other parties all over town, including the four-party anti-regression torch procession at Bag Bajar. And every one of these jantis has a Sgt Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band playing the latest Bollywood hit. This is the acid test: if you survive the band you will survive anything.

- The wedding night. This is the second most important part of a marriage and the time when couples weigh their pros and cons and decide that, despite the armpit aroma, on the whole cohabitation is a good thing.

- In a marriage one engages in the most intimate acts known to man: holding hands while watching the sun set, sharing Q-tips and listening to each other's stomachs growl.

- For conjugal bliss, a marriage must be filled with love and passion, and one of the most romantic activity you can engage in is the mutual pleasure of squeezing each other's zits.

- Because it's like having a room-mate for life, a marriage is about compromise. Even after 20 years of marriage, for instance, it drives a wife nuts when her husband insists on taking a leak without lifting the seat in an upright position. So, as a compromise, she replaces the loo with a squatting toilet. And this drives the husband nuts.

- Matrimonial harmony comes from strengthening the bonds of marriage by the husband and wife curling up and talking late into the night about the day's happenings. Since men and women are from different planets, sometimes it may seem like the conversation is one-sided as exemplified by this transcript of a clandestinely-recorded dialogue in our household:

Wife: Look, my aim is to keep this place clean, your aim would help. How many times have I told you to lift the bloody seat, I'm warning you I'm going to get a squatter. And can't you screw back the top to the tube after you brush your teeth, you haven't learnt to do a simple thing like that in 25 years, you dork. Are you listening to me or are you completely deaf?

Husband: Unnh?

Wife: I knew it, you aren't listening at all are you? So I can tell you anything I want: no more bed tea, you hear? If you want tea you make it yourself and pour it down your snout. And from tomorrow you wash your Y-fronts yourself, and your filthy socks. Oh, by the way, someone called.

Husband: Whoa, what? Who, when? Did he leave a number? Why didn't you tell me before?

See what I mean? After 25 years in a blissful marriage one learns to filter out all extraneous noise. Great thing, marriage, wouldn't be able to do without it.

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