

Beetlemania

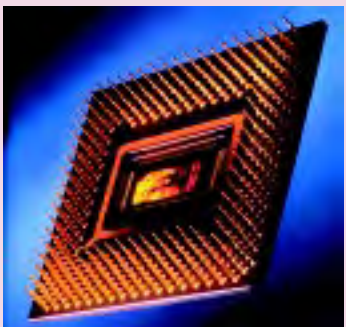


10-11

Kathmandu's Mating Season Under My Hat 20

EXCLUSIVE

Just do IT



Nepal finally has an Information Technology (IT) strategy. "We've missed the industrial revolution and the green revolution, but we don't want to miss this one," said Surendra Chaudhary, our S&T minister who is a self-confessed fan of India's cybercrat, Chandrababu Naidu. Chaudhary reckons Nepal can earn Rs10 billion from exporting IT products in five years. Nepal wants to model itself after Naidu's Andhra Pradesh, but the private sector says the government has got one thing wrong: Indian industry gets duty-free hardware and software imports. In Nepal, we still tax the knowledge economy. Equipment coming into the proposed IT Park in Banepa will have a one-percent duty for five years. There have been no major investors in Nepal since 1997, and from the look of it, the new policy is not going to change that. Here's a tip for an amendment: allow duty-free hardware and software imports and provide incentives to this dollar-earning industry.

Paramilitary

Dunai is history. Then came the Maoist strike at Kalikot. The Army was partially deployed in 16 districts, but the palace and the cabinet are playing ping-pong with the proposed ordinance on an Armed Security Force. This week the government finally got its way on one point: the paramilitary will not be governed by the National Security Council.

Next week in Nepali Times

MILLENNIUM GETAWAYS

SHRIBHAKTA KHANAL

There may be a row brewing between India and Nepal over bilateral trade, but in the vast underground Indo-Nepal ganja business things couldn't be smoother. In this narcotic free market, the prices are fixed in advance, officials are properly greased, and the only laws that apply here are the laws of supply and demand.

Intrepid Indian traders have begun to venture deep into Nepal's midhills supplying marijuana seeds on credit, providing technical know-how, and even agricultural extension to subsistence farmers to set up plantations. They come back at harvest time to pay for the ganja crop and take it away in trucks, ox-carts or porter back. Our investigation shows that Nepal is growing 3 million kg of ganja (dried marijuana plants) and charas (concentrated resin) every year with a street value of Rs 6 billion for "export" to India every year. But don't look for this data in any official bilateral trade figures because the entire industry is illegal. The cultivation and trade is going on with the full knowledge (and usually the connivance) of local government, police, and even Maoist cadre who provide protection to villagers against official harassment.

Just 20 km south of Kathmandu Valley in the neglected and roadless regions of Makwanpur District, Tanang and Chepang villagers who never grew enough food to feed their families are turning over their terraces to ganja. Even in the dry season, the well-maintained farms are lush with mature marijuana plants ready for harvest. Watchtowers provide a lookout against police patrols that sometimes carry out half-hearted raids to destroy crops. Villagers told us police only destroy the crops of those who haven't paid them off, usually the really poor peasants. But they aren't complaining, since the plants are ready to pluck anyway. As one farmer told us with a rueful smile: "The police do our work for us by cutting the ripe plants."

Another farmer is a Nepali Congress worker who grows ganja. He told us the police raids don't really affect him much: "The raids you read about in Kathmandu papers are all fake. And when there is a ganja haul, you can be sure they are smugglers who didn't pay off the right people." One police source told us traders taking ganja to India pay police posts a fixed rate of Rs 200 per sack, and there is no bargaining. A posse of 65 policemen went on a showcase ganja raid last month, but it was clear much of this was being done as a public relations exercise. Some villagers begged the police to spare them because they had nothing to eat, and it was obvious the policemen were just doing it for the

GANJA NATION

cameras. Lalit Bahadur Praja was having a chat with the cops who came to his homestead. He told them: "Look, I don't have food, I survive on roots. I cannot afford rice. Even God protects the poor." The policemen spared his crop.

For subsistence farmers in Makwanpur, Bara, Parsa and Dhading, the marijuana trade is a godsend. They buy marijuana seeds from Indian suppliers at Rs 1000 per kg on credit, the Indians tell them how to nurture the plant, about weeding, irrigation and harvesting techniques. The older farmers don't need to be taught—they used to grow marijuana before the Nepal government was persuaded to ban marijuana in 1973 under pressure from the US government after US aid to Nepal was doubled to compensate for the loss of revenue.

The peasants plant the seeds and can grow up to 10 kg of ganja in one *katta* (0.3 hectares) of land. In the more suitable climate and moist sandy soils of Makwanpur and Dhading, one *katta* can yield as much as 20 kg. When the Indian trader returns, he subtracts the advance he gave for the seeds and pays Rs 3000 per kg of ganja in the lean season. But the same crop sold to a Nepali middleman will not get the farmer more than Rs 1000 during harvesting. "If you can sell directly to the Indians you earn more," one farmer told us. "But I sell my crop to the village headman so I get less." Another farmer, Bhulmaya Praja, says middlemen often cheat her. "They give us only 200 or 300 rupees for a 10 kg sack," she says. Farmers in Parsa get better prices: being so close to the border they are in direct touch with buyers and boast they can make as much as Rs 2000 (Rs 3,200) for a kg of ganja.



CHANDRA KISHORE JHA

Dirt poor Nepali villagers have a new cash-crop: they are growing marijuana in illicit plantations that produce Rs 6 billion worth ganja annually for the Indian market.

After walking five hours from Manahari, 30 km east of Hetauda, you are in the heart of Makwanpur's ganja country. At Kalikatar you can already see the green marijuana plantations on terraces across the river on the other side of the valley. Growing ganja here is as good as legal. There is no sign of any police presence since remote posts have all been closed

for fear of Maoist attacks. The villagers are wary of strangers: anyone who doesn't look visibly Indian, Chepang or Tanang is regarded with suspicion. We pretended we were freelance marijuana traders, but no one believed us.

In every Village Development Committee we visited there are ripening terraces of ganja, vigilantly guarded by villagers who know what it is worth. The links with Indian buyers goes back to the 1980s, and the villagers found it much more lucrative to sell this new cash crop than to scour the surrounding forests for Himalayan herbs to sell in India. From the terraces carved out of the steep flanks of the Manaharat hills right down to the inner tarai villages adjoining the East-West Highway, ganja plots are everywhere. In adjoining Parsa District, nearly all the village development committees have sizable marijuana plantations.

⇒ Going to pot p6



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FOR YOUR HEALTH WE CARE

NEPALI Times

NEPAL'S TOP NEWS PAPER

EXTRAORDINARY NEPALIS

In media schools, they teach you that news is whatever is out of the ordinary. This is the woman-bites-bitch rule of journalism. When positive becomes commonplace, it is negative that makes the news. Thousands of buses travel safely to their destinations every day. That does not make news. It is the bus that falls into the Trisuli that is reported.

Having said that, buses are now falling so frequently into the Trisuli that it takes a threshold fatality of at least three passengers before it is even reported by the national news agency. Usually, it needs at least ten dead to be broadcast on Radio Nepal (unless some bigwig is on board), and 15 to make it to the evening television news. Like a tree that topples in the middle of a forest, unless there is someone there to witness the event, it hasn't happened.

It is the same with the Maoist body count. When a schoolteacher is hacked to death in Gorkha, or a VDC chairman is shot in Baglung while jogging, it is for the inside pages. A day after we wrote an editorial on this subject earlier this month, eleven policemen were killed in Kalikot. It was a blip in the media radar screens, and faded away within a day. The surnames of those killed in Kalikot showed they represented castes and communities from Dhankuta to Dadeldhura—sons of poor Nepali families who joined the police because they needed jobs. Only one newspaper knelt to interview the widow of the constable from Dang, and chronicled the tragedy for a far-away family of one life lost.

The other thing about news is the pace with which it happens. Sudden events are news, tragedies that unfold slowly are not news. Thousands of babies drying up and dying of diarrhoeal dehydration do not make it to the news. To take notice, media demands that they die suddenly and spectacularly. So, the fact that more Nepali mothers die at childbirth than anywhere else in the world is not really newsworthy for us.

It is a big dilemma for the Nepali media to cover corruption. When corruption becomes widespread, and even accepted, it is not news anymore. In fact, coverage of corruption is so rare that when it does happen the average reader's reaction is that the story is motivated and media itself is corrupt. The nasty *Conde Naste Traveller* has now pronounce Nepal "one of the most corrupt countries on earth" Where do you even begin to cover graft when everything is so graft-ridden? How do you prioritise theft: by magnitude of the money involved, by the misery it generates, by the sheer injustice, or a blatant disregard of the common good? Which is the bigger evil: a petrol pump owner who openly admits mixing cheaper kerosene in diesel, an international civil servant who takes kickbacks on maternity hospitals, a ministry which makes \$150 for every hour that a leased jet is in the air?

All right, if evil is so rife this is what we will do: we will cover the out-of-ordinary. We will profile honest bureaucrats, the immigration officer who refuses to be on the take, the MP who walks to the House, the policewoman who will insist that you pass your driving test, VDC chairmen who work tirelessly to ensure the well-being of their constituents. These Nepalis are news because they are extraordinary.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT

We have heard of hotel workers going on strike, but only in Nepal will you see hotel owners throwing guests out into the streets as we saw on Monday. This must belong somewhere in Ripley's Believe It Or Not. So we are now back to square one. If all it took was the prime minister's



"assurance" to persuade hotel owners to open up for business why didn't the prime minister give them that assurance at the beginning of November? If all it took was a meeting with the deputy prime minister to tell the party-controlled unions to get back to work why didn't he do that earlier? Instead, we had this tripartite charade of hotelwallahs, unions and the government playing hide-and-seek. For what? To bring us back to where we started. Nothing has been resolved: the same cliffhanger situation is slated for a repeat end-January.

There we have it: hotels may be open for business but there are no guests because everyone has gone somewhere else. Tour operators in Japan and Europe are not going to be in a hurry to send guests our way. The Christmas and New Years booking looks bleak. Meanwhile, the country's economy is suffering losses of up to Rs 265 million a week. Way to go, everyone!

Nepali Times is published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd
Sanchaya Kosh Bldg, Block A-4th Floor, Pulchowk, Lalitpur
Mailing address: GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal
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Printed at Jagadamba Press (01) 521393



STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



Engineer of human souls

There is loneliness all around, but no solitude.

BANGALORE - Silicon Valley is a silly name for this city located on the Deccan Plateau at an altitude of 3,000 feet. Even Indians have forgotten that Bangalore was once called the Garden City, and one is reminded of Kathmandu's lost charms as you go around this city recalling that it really used to be a cool and green garden. All that is history now.

Today there are silicon boys around who earn obscene salaries as Bill Gate's cyber coolies, but for everyone else in India and beyond Bangalore is better known as the gateway to Sai Baba. A holyman (or, as the Indian media likes to label them, a "god-man") who considers himself an incarnation of a Sufi saint from Maharashtra, this Sai Baba is 75 years young, has an afro hairdo and commands a following of millions all over the world many of whom make a pilgrimage to his ashram at Whitefields, about 25 km outside Bangalore.

Sai Baba is of course suddenly in the news after a rather negative expose of his sexual escapades in a British paper, picked up in a cover story earlier this month by the mass circulation *India Today*. There is obviously more to the cult of Sai Baba than sacred ash materialising out of thin air and actually falling off his photographic portraits and images. The Sai Baba phenomenon, like the Falung Gong or Christian evangelical sects in North America, is all about keeping the faith in the times of deep disillusionment: the realisation that consumerism, materialism, and the pursuit of wealth does not always bring happiness. Religion may be the opium of the masses, but it addresses the emptiness inside.

Back in 1973, Whitefield was a sleepy suburb of a backwater town called Bangalore. Sai Baba was not a rage then as he is now, and you could quite easily get close to him. Today, the inner sanctum is surrounded by a huge wall where devotees gather and sing *bhajans* in praise of the Baba. Brindavanam, as the place is now called, is a buzz with activity. Sai Baba himself sits majestically on a high-backed, throne-like gilded chair placed on an elevated platform. Faithfuls squat in rows, gazing wide-

eyed at the Baba's face as if in a trance. The atmosphere is magical during morning and evening *bhajans*. That over, you can buy yourself a cup of coffee or Pepsi from the Ashram shop and walk around observing subcontinentals, orientals, Anglo-Saxons and even Africans mingling in the vast lawns—a rainbow coalition of devotees.

I was there on Friday, and among the devotees was a sizeable group from Nepal including Swami Anand Arun, the Oshoite who runs South Asia's most popular meditation destination at Nagarjun in Kathmandu Valley. The Baba has quite a following in Nepal, even among the high and mighty. (Finance and Defence Minister Mahesh Acharya and Rasthra Bank governor Dipendra Purush Drakal are devout Sai Baba followers.) There are Sai Baba temples sprouting in several Kathmandu neighbourhoods. And instead of increasing flights to Bangkok, Royal Nepal Airlines in October started a new link to Bangalore: it seems pilgrim traffic is more lucrative than casino traffic.

Outside Brindavanam are trinket-shops festooned with portraits of Sai Baba invariably with a aura, halo or rays of light emanating from behind his head. The posters sell for many times more than the cost of a comparable one of Mahuri Dixit. There is no doubt who is god around here. And like in all holy places in the subcontinent, honesty and fair play has not trickled down to the level of the auto-rickshaw drivers who behave like vultures. My driver was comparatively honest and offered to throw in a tour of the Technological Park of Silicon Plateau for free if I chartered his vehicle. There are a few pragmatic fellows in Holy Land.

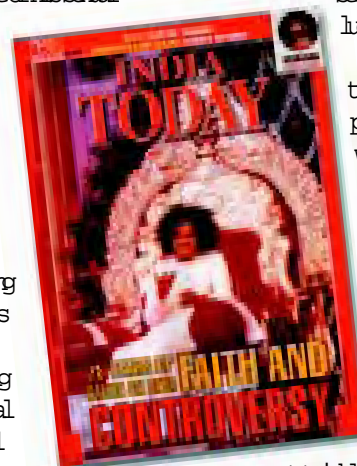
You do not have to be a devotee of Sai Baba to see that he does perform a function in globalised free market world that has lost a sense of direction, is suffering ecological meltdown and where spiritual solace is hard to come by. For the same reason that the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* have become popular TV serials, a procession of god-men command large followings. Irony, isn't it, that television serials that have the highest ratings

tap into this spiritual longing, and the channels rake in billions through commercials. Nothing like peddling the opium of the masses to a mass wealth.

So, the new rich build their villas with driveways supported by Corinthian columns and with lavish lavatories. The puja room is an afterthought. And as you get on in life, and your heart gives its first hiccup, you come to a realisation that someday soon you have to leave it all and continue on your journey to eternity. An irony of our times that even in the most crowded of our cities, the only place that you can have completely to yourself is inside a toilet. There is so much loneliness all around, but no solitude. And as we ruminate there we realise how quickly we rot, how transitory it all is.

Traditional family structures are crumbling. In our nuclear subcontinent, extended clans are being replaced by nuclear families. Bangalore has the dubious distinction of having a Non-resident Indians' Parents Association (NRIPA). Can you get any more lonely than that? If you don't have a straw to hang on to you can easily go mad. But don't panic, help is at hand. There is always a magician-turned-cult guru who will market salvation. Sai Baba at least runs schools and hospitals from his earnings, and does not ask you to burn schools as they do in United States or poison subways as they do in Japan.

Devotees at Brindavanam have middle-class frustration writ large over their faces. There may be some who have no one else to turn to. There may be others who suffer terminal ailments. Here they have found what many of us have lost—innocence. Even in these hard and cynical times, it is a moving experience to see people can find faith. Walking around, I soon felt like an intruder in this assemblage of faithful. Was I the only one who didn't come here looking for a spiritual placebo? In the auto-rickshaw, putting my back to the cyberdhabas of Bangalore I couldn't help thinking about what would happen when the Osho departs. Despite his enigmatic epitaph: "Never born, never dead" perhaps the Sai Baba cult will also fade, just as you don't see Rajneesh lockets in Kathmandu these days. But you can be sure there will be another engineer of human souls to take his place. ♦



Nepal meltdown



Nepal is not a substantial contributor to climate change and may not suffer its worst immediate impact, but it could be seriously affected by melting glaciers like Tsho Rolpa (above).

Mark Twain supposedly made the famous remark that everyone talks about the weather but nobody does anything about it. Some 20,000 participants gathered 13-24 November in the Dutch capital The Hague to understand how the human species may, inadvertently, be causing global climate change and how we might come to grips with its consequences. This Sixth Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP-6) concluded unsuccessfully, with the Americans and the Europeans unable to agree on a plan of action to cut emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs) that are largely blamed for global warming. The "G77 and China", as the countries of the South are collectively known, had very little say.

The global community reached a historic agreement on a Protocol for reducing atmospheric GHGs in December 1997 at Kyoto, Japan. The Kyoto Protocol contains emission reduction targets for each industrialised country to meet and a timetable for doing so. As a group, the industrialised "Annex I" countries, have agreed to reduce emissions by a total of 5.2 percent below 1990 levels within the first commitment period of 2008-12. Non-Annex I countries do not have binding obligations at present.

COP-6 was meant to resolve how much flexibility Annex I countries would be allowed in meeting their individual Kyoto targets without directly reducing their emissions, including setting rules on crediting countries for removing carbon from the atmosphere through planting trees (sinks). Other goals of the Conference were to agree on how to monitor countries' compliance with their commitments and to set up accounting methods for national emissions and emissions reductions. Agreement was also expected on the creation of an Adaptation Fund as well as capacity building and transfer of technology to help vulnerable developing countries cope with the adverse impacts of

climate change. An agreement at The Hague would have gone a long way to readying the Kyoto Protocol for ratification by both Annex I and non-Annex I countries. At the end it was the flexibility that turned out to be the most contentious.

The Kyoto Protocol includes three "Kyoto Mechanisms" designed to allow Annex I countries considerable flexibility to supplement domestic actions to fulfil their reduction commitments:

Emissions Trading, that allows a country to trade reductions made beyond its commitment; **Joint Implementation**, where investors in one Annex I country can get credit for emissions reduced by a clean energy project in another; and, the **Clean Development Mechanism (CDM)** allowing for joint implementation of projects in non-Annex I developing countries. CDM projects have the additional requirement of also meeting sustainable development needs of the host country.

Going into COP-6, the United States favoured complete flexibility in the extent to which sinks and the Kyoto Mechanisms could be used to meet committed reduction targets in the interests of pursuing least-cost compliance options. The members of the European Union and many environmental groups, however, wanted strict limits on the use of sinks and Mechanisms so that countries would be forced to take substantial domestic action to reduce emissions. The main argument was that greater flexibility would allow for large loopholes and result in postponement of crucial investments needed to make renewable energy systems competitive with fossil fuels—the only realistic way global emissions can contract to 50 percent of current levels by the end of the century. The negotiations fell apart because the Americans and the Europeans were not able to sufficiently narrow the differences in their positions.

Even though Nepal is not a substantial contributor to climate

change and may not suffer its worst immediate impacts, it is still very important for us to fully engage with the issues for a number of reasons. Every impact makes the already difficult task of sustainable development that much harder.

Agricultural productivity and forests are expected to decline in tropical and sub-tropical regions throughout the world as a result of global warming due to varying precipitation, pest outbreaks, and exacerbation of El Niño effects. This will negatively affect farmers both in the tarai and the middle hills of Nepal. Vector-borne infectious diseases, like malaria and encephalitis, will likely become widespread and move north into the population centres of the middle hills. Accelerated melting of glaciers will result in increased frequency of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs), washing away roads, bridges, hydropower plants, and farms and settlements along glacier-fed rivers. Intense rainfall events are expected to be more frequent, increasing flood damage. While the expected 15-95 cm sea level rise by the end of the century will not directly affect Nepal, the pressures put on our neighbours will also result in stress on our borders.

Bangladesh is expected to lose as much as 17 percent of its land to inundation by 2100 if it cannot build dikes—this translates to a loss of as much as half of its rice-growing areas.

Nepal needs to substantially increase its capability to adapt to the effects of climate change. We need to be able to forecast the weather, including El Niño effects, and inform our farmers better, manage floods more effectively, install systems to provide early warning of GLOFs, and strengthen public health.

Nepal can also attract investment into clean energy projects in the transportation, industrial, and domestic sectors by making use of the Clean Development Mechanisms. The country is naturally suited to use its own renewable sources like hydropower and solar energy to meet its energy needs in place of fossil fuels, like coal and petroleum that need to be imported and which cause serious local air pollution. However, even with the high petrol prices today, it is still cheaper to drive cars and trucks than to run electric vehicles, trolley buses, ropeways, and electric trains powered by hydropower. It is

cheaper to cook with kerosene and LPG than with electricity. By giving credit for the saved carbon to the investor, who can then use it towards meeting his country's Kyoto targets, the CDM encourages Annex I investment in Nepali projects that use clean energy even if they may be more capital expensive.

Developing countries, as a whole, were largely sidelined at COP-6. They remain concerned, however, that the richer countries have not left them sufficient 'environmental space' for their own future economic growth. Since it is expected that developing country emissions could surpass that of Annex I countries in as little as 10 years, it is clear that there will very soon have to be negotiations to reduce emissions beyond the first commitment period that will also include all countries. One suggestion, initially made by environmentalists from India 10 years ago, gained a lot of currency at COP-6 (not in the official plenary sessions but in the well-attended side events)—that future negotiations be based on the premise that every human should have equal entitlement to

the environment. Countries would then be able to trade the portion of their entitlements that they did not use. The Kyoto negotiations in contrast started with countries' 1990 levels of emissions and negotiated reductions using that as a baseline.

It has recently been reported that the Americans and Europeans have worked to resolve their differences since The Hague and that an agreement might be hammered out before Christmas. If this happens, the Kyoto Protocol may indeed move fairly quickly towards ratification. Nepal needs to build up its ability to manage the impacts of climate change by participating in technology transfer and accessing the Adaptation Fund. It also needs to attract investments into clean energy and infrastructure projects under the CDM. In the interests of global equity, Nepal should support per capita entitlements as the basis for negotiating emission reductions in future commitment periods. ♦

Bikash Pandey is an energy expert and director at Winrock-REPSO Nepal.

LETTERS

OIL AND CORRUPTION

Much as I would like to, it is becoming more and more difficult to find something to feel good about Nepal. Reading your page one piece "Nepal oil corruption" (#19) was for me the final straw. Something as open and direct as adulteration cannot be stopped even when the culprits are mixing kerosene with petrol in broad daylight. And boasting about it! It points to failure of governance and a failure of civil society. When a middle class becomes so apathetic that it cannot be outraged by something as glaring as this it has a sinister implication—it means democracy is not working as a check and

balance. You in the media may highlight these issues, but what use is it if the institutions that are supposed to act on it (the legislature, judiciary, consumer groups and government) don't care?

Sam Shrestha
via Internet

Why are our party leaders such a bunch of jokers? Madhav Nepal with his supporters protested in front of Singha Durbar (#12) but instead of protesting about the hike in petrol prices they should first think about the real problems our country is going through like unemployment, education,

corruption and Maoists who are causing chaos in the villages.

Max Mali
Pune

Thank you for your front page on petroleum adulteration (#19). Through your paper I, as a Nepali consumer, want to tell this to the government, I don't care about rising prices. In fact, double the price of fuel—but make sure we get what we pay for. And I have another message for the opposition: stop shouting about fuel price hike, do something about adulteration and the corruption that feeds it.

J Alders
Pokhara



Paul Pena

HERE AND THERE

Daniel Lak: you'll have to start practicing throatsinging in my garden. Having seen Genghis Blues, I too couldn't tell if it was a tale of, as you say,

"immense human dignity" or one told by "New Orientalists". (Here and There, #20) White boys in Mongolia: I was wary from the start. My Orientalist radar did beep several times during the film, but I was so won over by Paul Pena that I eventually threw away that radar. Pena never arms himself against his unfamiliar milieu; he opens his heart to viewers, exposing his inmost joys and anguishes, and offering us the gift of his humanity. That the rest of us might remain equally open when we travel...or even when we see travel documentaries.

Manjushree Thapa
Kathmandu

VOLUNTEERS

I couldn't help but notice that your #20 was a particularly stunning issue. I thought that the feature on page 6 "Goodwill ambassadors" was especially well researched, and written with just the right sense of empathy, analysis and appreciation.

Simon Forrester
Officer, UNV Programme

CORRECTION

The credit for the two pictures illustrating the story "One step forward, two steps back" (page 4, #19) should have gone to Nick Dawson instead of what inadvertently appeared. — Ed.

Nepal's ISP e-economics

BINOD BHATTARAI

It's been ten years since the World Wide Web hit the world. And in this short time, Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in Nepal have demonstrated how competition can benefit customers. Computing power has increased thousand-fold, the price of connectivity has come down and there are more services to choose from.

But the industry could also be stagnating—thanks to high telephone costs, courtesy the Nepal Telecommunications Corporation (NIC).

Five years ago an average minute of Internet connectivity cost Rs 12. Today, it's just about Rs 1. Some service providers even go below the rupee barrier, especially start-ups trying to get a foothold in the booming market. Nepal is said to have 20,000 email/Internet account holders, which in real terms works out to about 100,000 users. The market is said to be growing by about 30 percent each year, but at existing telephone tariffs and in light of the fierce competition, it may not be long before many of the smaller companies begin to fold up.

"The cost of a phone call is the biggest roadblock obstructing the growth of Internet users," says Rajesh Lal Shrestha, Managing Director of Infocom, one of a new



MIN. BAKSHARVA

After five years of exponential growth, Nepal's Internet market is stifled by the high local phone tariffs.

about 10 paisa per connection or less."

Life for ISPs may soon get harder. Nepal Telecommunications Corporation (NIC), our monopoly telephone network owner, is considering a hike in local phone tariffs. The NIC says use of its international services is down, and the proposed hike will help bolster diminishing revenues. It blames

manager of NIC.

The NIC used to thrive on unusually high international tariffs which accounted for almost 55-60 percent of its revenue. This, it says, was used to subsidise local telephone rates. "Revenue data over the last year shows that we're losing more money than we'd anticipated. We could be in trouble if we cannot raise local tariffs," Shrestha added.

ISPs find this hard to swallow—public perception is that the NIC makes a killing on local and international calls. There's been a sharp increase in local calls as more people have gone online. ISPs argue that the NIC would benefit if it made telephony cheaper, not more expensive. They even have a proposal which they say could result in a win-win situation for all parties. We're proposing a revenue sharing mechanism between NIC and the ISPs, or a reduction

in the cost for those using phones for data communication," says Sanjib Rajbhandari of Mercantile Communications. "The competition in the market would force ISPs to transfer the reduced costs to customers, and everyone would benefit."

Generally, ISP economics is straightforward. The more people online, the more the benefits to be derived from the emerging knowledge economy. There's even a law, attributed to Robert Metcalfe, a pioneer of computer networking. "Metcalfe's Law" says that the value of a network grows in line with the square of the number of users. The truth could be somewhere in between, but the NIC doesn't seem too inclined to discuss it.

There are 15 ISPs in Nepal, and most have bitter stories to tell about working with the NIC. Until this May, when the Nepal

Should we struggle to prop up an inefficient government monopoly whose real costs are unknown? Or should we prepare ourselves to become cost-effective netizens by formulating the right policies early in the game?

Telecommunications Authority began licensing V-SAT users, ISPs relied on the NIC for their communications needs. This included everything from getting telephone connections to relying on NIC's network to get through to servers upstream in the web, Singapore, India or the US. That is no longer the case, even though NIC's connectivity has improved and is certainly cheaper than what ISPs pay V-SAT service providers. V-SAT stands for Very Small Aperture Terminal, and it's a cost effective satellite solution for users seeking an independent communications network connecting a large number of geographically dispersed sites. "We're paying more for total reliability," says an ISP source. "NIC rates are cheaper, but there are too many unseen costs." In plain English, the "unseen costs" are bribes and favours ISPs have to offer to get even routine official tasks done. Many ISPs have begun using radio modems for even local connections to bypass the NIC, especially for corporate clients.

Customer service and industry relations are the weakest links in the NIC's Internet backbone. The NIC's poor service record is old hat—about 40 percent of all complaints take more than 24 hours to fix. Unreliability on this scale is unacceptable in an industry rife with competition and growing exponentially. "You cannot blame us for trying to provide reliable services," says another ISP source. "We rely on speed and accuracy. If

I get a faulty connection on a Friday evening, at NIC's space it will be repaired next week."

When it began Internet services, the NIC tried wholesaling connectivity, spending six months trying to convince service providers to purchase its connections for resale to retail buyers. None of the ISPs—who had already been burnt doing business with the corporation—were interested. Eventually, the NIC decided to move into end-user sales, which its officials bragged would "teach ISPs a lesson". Its only aim was to enter the market cheaply and fast. It didn't take into account that it would have to provide installation and follow-up services. It offered the cheapest connections, and this forced prices down. But customers soon found out that cheap also meant erratic and unreliable service and maintenance. This is why the service provider with the lowest rates has just 2,000 email and Internet subscribers. We called the NIC asking how we could get an internet connection. "Come to Bulchowk and fill out a form. Then go to Jawalakhel to get your account." We then asked if the corporation would help us with installation and provide training on how to use the service. The person at the other end sounded irritated by this unreasonable demand. He said: "We'll give you a catalogue and you can do everything yourself."

With this kind of service, even the 2,000 subscribers the NIC has seems too many. But this total itself

"The cost of a phone call is the biggest roadblock obstructing the growth of Internet users," says Rajesh Lal Shrestha, Managing Director of Infocom.

generation of ISPs. "At today's market growth rate and telephone charges, about half of the ISPs we have may shut down in about a year. You cannot stay in business long with earnings that average

international calls through the Internet for some of that revenue loss. "Only pricing to reflect the costs of providing the service can keep us afloat over the long run," says Rajubhar Lal Shrestha, general

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



Talk to my lawyer

Lawyers dominate democratic governments—the political equivalent of letting the fox baby-sit the chickens.

The debacle that followed the American election is being blamed on the most despised class of non-criminal human beings on the planet—the lawyers. In the most litigious society on earth, the United States, legal eagles soar high, and now they've hijacked the democratic process. That's probably one of the least of their sins in the overall scheme of things.

Yes, lawyers are essential if there is to be law, the presumption of innocence and protection of fundamental rights. Courtroom drama is an honoured genre in film and pulp fiction, and I confess to being rather fond of the novels of one John Grisham, a lawyer by profession. Check out the films "Twelve Angry Men" with Henry Fonda, and "Inherit the Wind" featuring Spencer Tracy as the great Clarence Darrow—as close to a lawyer-hero as America has ever had. Those stirring movies show the legal process at its theoretical best, with reason and good will triumphant after a tussle of immense intellectual proportions. But these days, an American television channel is as likely to show you commercials featuring "personal injury specialists" who will sue anyone and charge their client nothing in hopes of a massive jury settlement. Slipped and fallen on your neighbour's walk? No problem, just hire Sue, Grabbit and Run, and settle out of court for a couple of million. Never mind that you were drunk when you fell, or running to make a late appointment, or ignored the signs warning you to be careful. It's Not Your Fault!

Lawyers dominate democratic governments in many developed countries—the political equivalent of letting the fox baby-sit the chickens. People who make money from manipulating the rules are



making the rules. Hello! Anyone home? The outgoing president of the United States is a lawyer, a law professor actually. He met his wife, also an advocate, in law school. I take some heart from the fact that neither

of the two gentlemen who've asked the courts to appoint them as President Clinton's successor has worked in a law office. But ask them how many lawyers they have hired in their lives, and they won't be able to tell you. They have long since lost count. The problem, of course, is that the modern task of the lawyer involves constant reinterpretation of the intentions of people long dead, or out of the political loop. That's a license to bend rules, and to create new ones where the existing structure doesn't serve the clients' purpose. If the law were simple and straightforward, if courts dispensed true justice, if all people and organisations acted with good will and if truth were ever-present, then who would need lawyers? They exist because we are so gravely imperfect.

There are many lawyers who do good. One of the best is Asma Jehangir, a lawyer from Pakistan, who has done more to enforce the badly tattered standards of decency and human rights in that country than any politician, general or businessperson. In fact, it's clear that lawyers in countries like Pakistan, Nepal and India are crucial because they do the opposite of many of their counterparts in developed lands. They uphold the spirit and letter of the law by highlighting misuse of legal process by elites. Long live Asma Jehangir and her ilk.

Shakespeare's famous line from Henry VI "the first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers" was actually spoken by an anarchist plotting revolution, so it's clear the bard was actually praising the legal profession in a roundabout way. Most likely, judging from many other jibes at lawyers in his plays, Shakespeare saw them—wisely—as the necessary evil that they most assuredly are. ♦



MIN BAIRACHARYA

may be misleading. No one will say how many of those accounts are free—either service connections or like those made available to MPs earlier this year. The NIC's cheap unlimited internet connectivity does benefit people who need no help figuring out the difference between an IP address and an ISP or setting up and using a connection. But there aren't too many such users.

"We should be working to create a situation where NIC's returns would grow with the growth of our businesses," says Shyam Agarwal, Managing Director, WorldLink Communications P. Ltd. "It is scary to have such a large

Clockwise from left: Worldlink's V-SAT antenna in Jawalakhel, Sanjib Rajchandari of Mercantile Communications in his server room on Durbar Marg, Shyam Agarwal of Worldlink Communications, and the computer room of Infocom at Hatisar.

applications for fixed line connections. "Even today we have not been able to get all the high speed digital lines we would like to have and here you have NIC retailing Internet connections rather than helping us meet the need," an ISP source said.

NIC's revenue per line, including international calls, is



MIN BAIRACHARYA



MIN BAIRACHARYA

increased use of telephones is due more to the addition of new lines and other services that rely on telephony such as pagers, mobile phones and, yes, the Internet. It also says that the Rs 0.40 we pay per local call per minute is among the lowest in the world. Further, it blames ISPs for the reduction of its revenues from international calls, especially after the advent of Internet phones or the Voice Over Internet Packets (VOIP) services. There is some truth in NIC's grouse, but why should people pay its absurdly high monopoly tariffs when a phone call is just the Internet away. Privately many NIC top brass admit they themselves use Dial Pad to make personal phone calls abroad.

Providing Internet connectivity isn't all that profitable. One reason ISPs are in the business is to try and build large networks by popularising the Internet. When that happens, they'll be better positioned to add other services and charge for content. Both number of accounts and usage need to be diversified for them to make real money. And then, with size of networks providing economies of scale, ISPs could think about providing free connectivity.

The NIC is also headed for change. The plan is to break the huge corporation down into separate companies providing different services to level the playing field for private companies that are

being allowed to undertake telecom services. That will not only change the monopoly profits it has been thriving upon but also force it to do cost/profit centre accounting to reflect its real costs minus the corruption that takes place all the way up to the ministry. Its revenue structure—55-60 percent from international communications, 14-16 percent from domestic trunk calls and 16-18 percent from local calls—is also bound to change.

All this is reason enough to discuss the ISP proposal, especially because we're already talking about e-commerce and the need to base our growth on the knowledge economy. Internet access sale is not the NIC's main line of business, so it is unlikely that it would concentrate on propagating connectivity as much as private ISPs would. That is the reality that faces the government's recent pronouncement that we should work towards drawing benefits from the knowledge economy. Should we struggle to prop up an inefficient government monopoly whose real costs are unknown? Or should we prepare ourselves to become cost-effective netizens by formulating the right policies early in the game? It is telling enough that most ISPs will not go on record saying most of this. They say it's because the NIC has enough muscle to create problems for troublemakers and loud mouths. ♦

Five-star fracas

Just to recap:

- Two hotel unions decided to go on indefinite strike from 11 December demanding a 10 percent service charge on top of their salaries.
- Hotel owners said no way, and threatened a lockout.
- The government belatedly intervened and on the eve of the strike convinced the unions to agree to a two-month moratorium.
- Sulking hotel owners said we've lost business anyway so we will remain closed, and started evicting guests from their own hotels.
- Prime minister met

hotel owners and coaxed them to reopen, which they did.

A rift between tourism entrepreneurs prompted owners to reluctantly lift the lockout "in the interest of the economy". But travel trade sources tell us much of the damage has already been done.

Many Christmas and Millenium bookings have been cancelled, airlines have curtailed flights and hotels are nearly empty. "The situation is murky," said one hotel owner. "Since there is no business for the next few months it would have been better to remain closed and force the issue once and for all." Some HAN members are angry that after all this heartbreak, the issue has not been resolved, only postponed. In two months, the tourism industry will have to go through the whole bitter experience again. A high-level government mediation panel is looking into the union demand for service charge and is supposed to come up with a recommendation in two months.



Guests leaving hotel in Kathmandu on Monday during the 24-hour lockout.

MIN BAIRACHARYA

No school

With the government unable to provide security to schools that wanted to defy a 8-14 December closure called by a pro-Maoist student union, most schools all over Nepal (even international schools in Kathmandu) remained closed this week. Talks between the student union, parent reps, school teachers and the government failed to find a way out. Not surprising given the nature of the 15 demands put forward by the students' group which included return of Nepali territory occupied by "foreign powers", free secondary education, nationalisation of private schools, banning the national anthem and the teaching of Sanskrit.



MIN BAIRACHARYA

The Private and Boarding School Organisation, Nepal (PABSON) says it's had enough. It will not abide by future threats to close schools. It is seeking support of all parents, teachers, students and school authorities to ensure education is not disrupted. It has also called upon national and international human rights agencies to monitor such threats. Among the Maoist demand is nationalisation of private schools, which presently accounts for the education of about 1.5 million students and employment for over 75,000 teachers and administrative staff.

"We're thinking about special rates for data communications, but it's only a proposal," says Raghubar Lal Shrestha, general manager of the NTC.

player in the market, especially one that has total control of the telephone network." The NIC, which sells everything from international telephony to Internet connectivity, also has the space to cross-subsidise different services and distort the market. "People are scared to put in too much money to upgrade their businesses, thinking that NIC is in a position to make connectivity free," says Agarwal. On average it costs Rs 5 million to set up an ISP making use of the NIC's phone network. Those willing to set up their own V-SAT gateways would need another Rs 2.5 million for the license and Rs 4 million for the system. But the relatively low start-up cost (minus the gateway) is misleading: the investment increases fast because companies must make frequent technological upgrades and pay for replacements due to high depreciation rates in the business.

ISPs say the NIC should focus on more important things. It has a backlog of over 260,000

triple as much as it was two years ago—up from about Rs 750 per line to about Rs 2,000 in Kathmandu, where telephone density is highest. ISPs say it is the services they provide that have helped increase the revenue and they want NIC to share that with them, as is being done in many countries. Alternatively, the NIC should be thinking about lowering dial-up rates, they add. NIC's numbers show that local calls have increased revenue by as much as Rs 60 million in the last year, but it is unwilling to accept that the increase is a result of the growth brought about by ISPs. The NIC doesn't have the technology to monitor usage and there's no way for them to realistically confirm or deny the suggestion. "We're thinking about special rates for data communications, but it's only a proposal," says the NIC's Shrestha. Nothing is said about revenue-sharing.

The NIC believes that the

js tyres



Going to pot

⇒ from p 1



ALL PHOTOS: CHANDRA KISHORE JHA

Woran farmer weeps after police destroy her family's ganja plantation in Patrapuri in Bara district last week.

At Hetauda we looked into the regional police office. The resident chief denied there was any marijuana growing in Makwanpur. But junior constables said ganja was so widespread that there was no way they could destroy the crops with their present manpower. At the Manahari police post, Surya Prasad Upadhyaya told us: "We have information that Indian buyers provide armed protection to people transporting marijuana to the border." A local Nepali Congress leader agreed. Indian criminals protect farmers who cannot protect their own crops from police raids, he said. We asked the Chief District Officer of Parsa, Dolakh Bahadur Gurung, if all we had been told was true. He hedged the question: "We don't have a budget to destroy ganja. I have no information of Indians coming here and doing marijuana cultivation."

Local politicians will tell you privately that everyone gets a cut from this well-greased trade, and that is why it runs so smoothly. All local organs of political parties get something out of the ganja economy. Some like the UML sometimes take action—the party expelled a local cadre Triloki Chaudhary because of his involvement in the business. But other locally elected officials have actually got together to protect marijuana farmers. VDC chairman Buddhi Bahadur Lama of Patrapuri in Bara District and



Nepal's open border through which the ganja enters India.

another member of the Nepali Congress party have formed a "Ganja Protection Committee" to hold talks with the administration to leave ganja farmers alone.

When a reporter comes snooping around, there is a ping-pong of blame: the police say ganja growers have political protection, and politicians say the police and the district administration are colluding with Indian ganja interests. The truth is probably that they are all up to their necks in it. And why not? Some have convinced themselves that the trade is good for the country, it brings income to poor peasants who have no other income, and it spreads the wealth around.

Also, political parties have to look the other way—such is the power of the "ganja vote". Their constituents depend so heavily on the crop and its trade that any politician seen to be destroying this livelihood will not last long. In Makwanpur's Sarikhet village local farmers have begun to raise Rs 500 per kattha to pay off the district administration to leave them alone. The locals will tell you in hushed tones the rates of all the ganja barons in Manahari and Hetauda. Even some pragmatic national-level politicians know which side to be on: they say use of marijuana should be banned, but not its cultivation because the people depend on it. And so, it seems, do politicians. In Parsa, Indians not only provide seeds but they lease land from farmer/politicians paying Rs 2000 per kattha and they grow the ganja themselves. Many local politicians own the land, and benefit from the lease. Deep in the jungles of the *char kose jhari* are marijuana plantations that can only be seen from the air, but the locals will tell you about them.

But just how much marijuana cultivation benefits villagers is an open question. Here in the dusty trails of Makwanpur district, it is difficult to see any visible sign of improved living standards after ten years of harvests. The ganja mafia has of course made money, and the middlemen and officials along the way have been paid off. But for people like Thulinaya Tarang of Kol village, it is still a hard-to-mouth existence. "I have a loan of Rs 20,000 to repay. Other crops I grow don't produce enough to feed the family, let alone pay back the loan." Ganja may not have improved the lives of farmers like Thulinaya Tarang, the middlemen may be exploiting her, but it is clear that without this cash crop their lives would be even more difficult.

A young man in Kol is also rather desperate: "I want a job, and to get a job I need to pay a bribe. How can I make enough money to bribe unless my family grows ganja? If you water vegetables, you have a meal, if you water ganja plants, you can grow money." The cash has also given the farmers of Makwanpur a new status among the moneylenders and shopkeepers in the bazaar. Once they see the cash, they will let them buy on credit.

In the tarai people plant marijuana in about five katthas and grow a row of maize or sugarcane along the side to conceal it from law enforcers. In the Parsa villages adjoining the Indian border where it is difficult for the outsiders to visit, the crop is grown openly. "Indian presence is here from the very beginning," a schoolteacher and former ganja grower from Nijgadh told us. The Indians also provide crop specialists as "consultants" who can guarantee a 100 percent yield from the seedlings for a price 10 percent of the harvest. These "mistris" as they are known, also help to press the ganja into 5 kg bricks and the charas into pellets for easy transportation. ♦



Villagers mill around after police destroy their marijuana plantation in Makwanpur.

Maoists and marijuana in Makwanpur

Replace cocaine with cannabis, Colombia with Nepal and you have it: leftist guerrillas involved in protecting an illegal narcotic crop. Since the farmers growing ganja are mostly poor peasants, local Maoist cells in Makwanpur have got a cause they can fight for. And both have a common enemy: the police patrols who regularly raid ganja plantations. Two months ago Maoists attacked the Makwanpur police post to warn them not to harass ganja farmers in northern Makwanpur. The Assistant Sub-Inspector of Kalikatar police post told us it would be impossible for him to send patrols anymore to the ganja region for fear of Maoist ambushes. The police have even withdrawn from posts in Dandakharka and Kandarang because of Maoist activity, according to Makwanpur's Superintendent of Police Narendra Khaling. Local residents spread scare stories to police patrols, telling them Maoists have booby-trapped the trail. The Maoists are not actually growing marijuana themselves, but they have told farmers not to pay off police since they will provide them protection.

BARBS

by BARBARA ADAMS

'All the king's horses and all the king's men'

Every time talks with the Maoists seem to be getting somewhere, a monkey wrench flies in from nowhere and destroys all trust.

The common wisdom in Kathmandu is that there will be no dialogue with the Maoists. And there will be no attention paid to what the government keeps calling "the Maoist problem," until after the Congress Party *tanasha* in Pokhara in January. I don't think it would be considered "too political" to reiterate that the Nepali people crave peace and security, and that the longer the country and the people have neither, the harder it will be to reinstall both. Positions will harden further, more people will either be displaced from their homes, jobs and schools, or join the Maoists, and the chaos and corruption in the capital will be even less controllable than at present.

If we wait much longer to talk, compromise, and give the people the kind of government they long for, it may be too late. We could get to that point immortalised in nursery rhyme where "all the king's horses and all the king's men,

couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again". In the aftermath of the failed fiasco of the tête-à-tête between the deputy prime minister and the Maoist's Kathmandu chief in November, and the closing down of schools, rumours are ruminating again. One is that the status quo classes are selling off property and investing in gold. And are our police getting a "strike force" trained by some foreign "special forces" unit? Internationalising this insurgency may have some dangerous ramifications for Nepal.

One area in which there should be no qualms about internationalising the issue would be in finding reputable international institutions specialising in conflict resolution. Because the situation is getting so serious and the present government seems to be focussing more on factional quarrels in the run-up to

Pokhara, this may actually be one way out. Provided both sides are serious about talks, these negotiations could be held in a far-away neutral venue such as Geneva with capable and experienced negotiators.

It might actually be useful for both parties to confront their disagreements from a comfortable distance, and far away from media glare and domestic posturing. Physical and mental detachment and a neutral venue could cool passions and hardline positions on both sides, and create a better atmosphere for compromise. The cost would be negligible compared to the money looted by Maoists from provincial banks, and by defaulting businessmen from the big banks in Kathmandu.

A neutral observer and mediator, whether counselling

parties in a failing marriage or parties to a deadly conflict, can be quite desirable. But a pre-requisite is serious commitment to finding a negotiated solution on both sides. You can't go into this in a half-hearted way, as a strategy to buy time, or to follow a two-track, carrot-and-stick approach. Up until now, every time we thought the talks might be getting somewhere, a monkey wrench flies in from nowhere and destroys all trust. There are professionals specialising in negotiating ceasefires and compromise solutions to insurgencies. Why don't we make use of them?

If that sounds far-fetched, another place to start would be to look at a negotiator from the Army to talk on behalf of the government and the people. The Maoists have hinted in the past that they would not



be averse to talking with the army. After all, the Maoists consider themselves at war, so negotiating with representatives of the military apparatus would make sense to them.

Since the Congress Party is so fragmented that it seems unable to agree on anything, one can only, very tentatively, put one's last extant hope in the good patriotic sense of the group of ten parties of the moderate left. If they could only

put aside their political differences, and temporarily unite to work for the good of this rapidly deteriorating country, they might actually have a good chance to succeed. Were they to unite to make peace with the Maoists, and agree on changing the Constitution, they could prove a real and positive force. How about it comrades? How about cobbling together a United Front for peace? ♦

Voices with vision

The Bhutanese refugee children's photography project

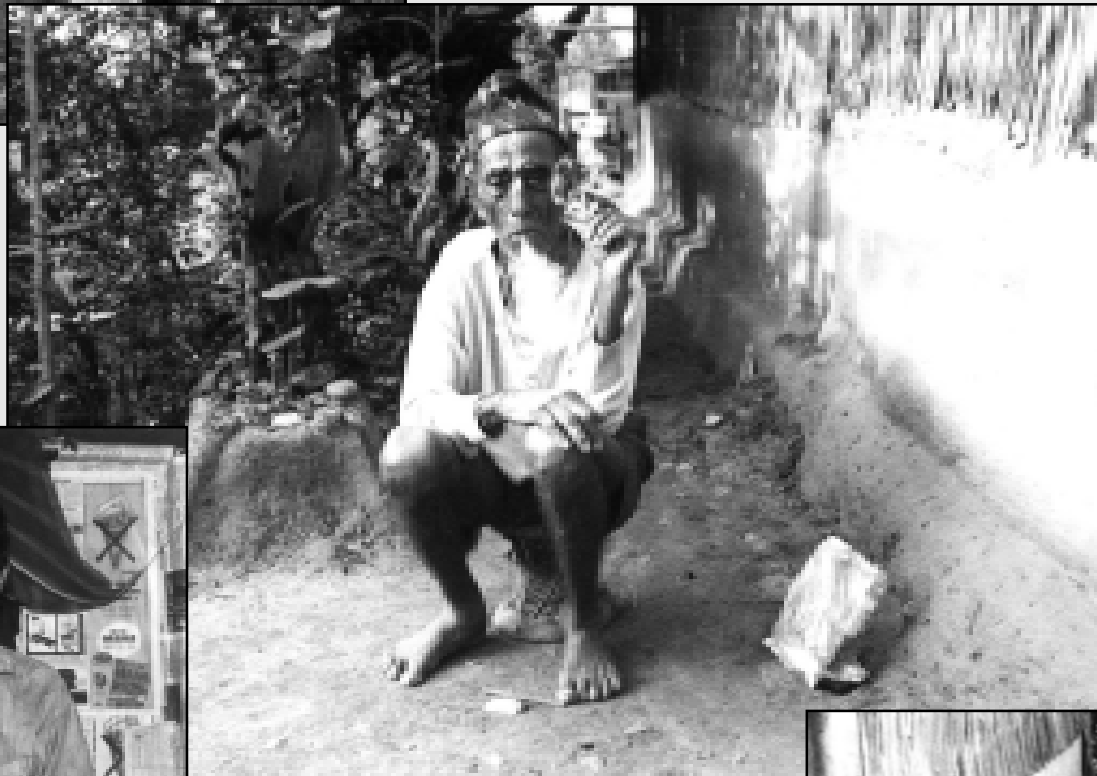


The Rose Class

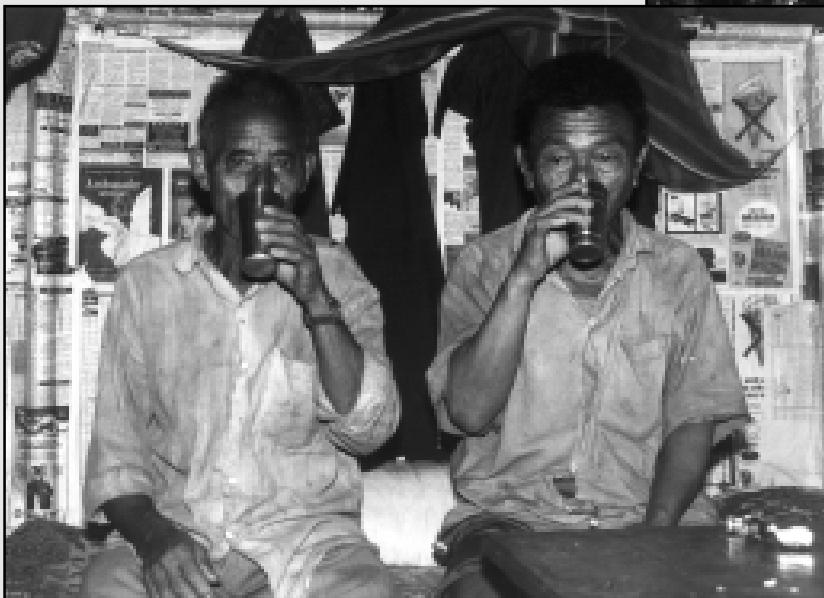
The Rose Class was a participatory photography project that ran during the summer of 1998 in Beldangi II Extension camp, which houses 10,000 Bhutanese refugees. The project worked with 13 Bhutanese refugee students, aged between 15 and 17, teaching them photography and providing them with a medium through which to document and write about their lives. The group called themselves the Rose Class because the beautiful rose was their favourite flower.

During the project, through photographs, writing and painting the group recorded day to day life in the camp and their hopes, fears and frustrations. The Rose Class became a platform from which the students could tell outsiders their stories and their dream that they might one day be able to return to Bhutan. The Rose Class put together an exhibition of their work in the refugee camp and this was followed by a collaborative exhibition with Street Vision in London. The students of the Rose Class have spent nearly half of their lives living in the camps. The Rose Class was organised by Photo Voice, a London-based group dedicated to raising awareness and providing means of creative empowerment to displaced persons around the world.

Through study every individual can be led onto a brighter path. It is consolation to the old, ornament to the rich and wealth to the poor. Being refugees we do not have anything to do and we do not have property, only our education is with us.
Picture by Bishnu Maya Rai
Caption by Aite Maya Rai



The refugee children photographed, wrote and painted, recording their hopes, fears and frustrations.



Because we do not have much work to do we joke with each other to pass time. Our huts in camp are so close that we often meet with our friends. Whenever there is a group of people they will talk about Bhutan.

Picture by Mon Maya Thapa

This is a 97-year-old man who lives in the camp. He thinks life is like smoke that a puff of wind can disperse. He is a pessimist. He says in Bhutan he was very rich and that he came to Nepal with only the clothes that he was wearing. Now he is poor: his clothes, plates and pots are from UNHCR. He complains that he will die without seeing his country again. We tell him that is not the way to think, that our problems will soon be solved.

Picture by Yethi Raj Siwakoti



If real tears are an indisputable sign of grief, then glass tears could possibly be the mark of insincerity. From looking at our faces you see no tears but our internal hearts are crying.

Picture by Bishnu Maya Rai
Caption by Yethi Raj Siwakoti



Though these little children live in small huts they are happy with their lives. They have no concept of Bhutan. Small children born in the camp do not know anything because we are not able to show and teach them practical things. If we ask them, "Where do we get milk from," they will say we get milk from a bicycle.

Picture by Yethi Raj Siwakoti
Caption by Aite Maya Rai



His name is Hari Krishna Rai. He is about 42 years old. It is one year since he became blind. It started with a headache and in a few months he was blind. He took many medicines provided by SCF, but his health did not improve. We are often ill because we have no fresh fruit and vegetables to eat. Hari Krishna Rai is blind, but he talks like a healthy person. He spends his life in sorrow because he cannot see the things that are happening in our society and the world. He says that if we go on sitting in this refugee camp, the coming generation will be blind because our rations do not give us any vitamins to keep us healthy.

Picture by Aite Maya Rai



Picture by Bishnu Maya Rai

BIZ NEWS

Way out

Japanese consulting firm Nippon Koei has nearly finalised a study on an alternative road leading out of Kathmandu Valley which would avoid the Thankot bottleneck and cut commuting time by half.

The proposed road will link Sitapaila in the Valley with Dharke in Dhading district, avoiding the Naubise-Thankot stretch, one of Nepal's busiest roadways. The Naubise-Thankot road was upgraded three years ago to support 3,000 vehicles daily, but over 2,800 cars, buses and trucks already use it every day, and the number is growing by 7.5 percent each year.

Another study by the Department of Roads says that the annual average daily traffic at Thankot and Kalanki points was as high as 5,990 and 14,300 vehicles per day. The 25.4 km link from Sitpaila will take 34 months to complete, cost Rs 4 billion to build and another Rs 654 million to compensate landowners along the alignment.

Duty drawback

The government's inability to make duty drawback payments on time has frustrated exporters, mainly three major Indian joint ventures: Nepal Lever, Dabur Nepal and Colgate-Palmolive, the largest sellers of Nepal-made goods in India. Nepal Lever alone has Rs 163 million blocked in the form of duty drawback, about 14 percent of its total exports, the company says. The money payable to the three companies is over Rs 400 million.

The Department of Industries and the Ministry of Finance arrange the payments. Lever officials say that of the claims submitted so far, only Rs 17 million has been settled. Some of the claims date back to 1997-98. The government introduced the new duty drawback system to remedy a situation where exporters could import goods after paying 50 percent customs duty and claim refunds after exporting finished goods.



Hukam certified

The International Organisation for Standardization has awarded Hukam Pharmaceuticals Private Limited (PHPL) ISO9002 certification, the first for a pharmaceutical company in Nepal. The certification means Hukam's products are of international standards, and paves the way for the company to aim at international sales. ISO is a federation of bodies that sets production standards in 130 countries.

Sick mill

Lack of working capital and raw material forced closure of the Hetauda Textile Industry last week. The mill, with an annual capacity of 11 million metres of textiles, had been operating only for a few hours each day since early November until raw materials finally ran out last week. This is not the first time the factory has stopped weaving, and every time the operations halted, the government has restarted the looms by injecting more money. This has cost the government over Rs 85 million till date. Factory sources say they need Rs 130 million to get working, after paying overdue salaries and making provident fund deposits.

Orthodox tea

Ilam Tea Producers Pvt Ltd (ITPPL) has begun marketing high quality orthodox tea in 150 and 200gram sachets aimed at promoting the brand in international markets. At present, Nepali orthodox tea finds its way to Germany and Japan.

Nepal produces some of the world's best orthodox leaf in the eastern hills and many farmers sell the leaf to processors in India's Darjeeling district. Growers say Ilam produces better quality leaf because the plants are younger, though climatic conditions are similar across the border. Nepal now annually produces 700,000 thousand kg of orthodox tea and 7 million kg of CTC tea, the most widely available form in the market. The government also has ambitious plans to bring 30,000 hectares of land under tea cultivation in the next few years.

ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

Historical blunderers



We have never learnt to deal with our problems.

As the hotel strike drama unfolded, one thing was very clear—we Nepalis do not require a foreign hand to make matters worse in our country.

Historically, when we look at the progress made, we have been rather efficient at self-destruction. The Malla kings left us with empty coffers, and the Rana regime followed it up by building palatial neo-classical structures during a crippling famine. Thirty years of one-party democracy ensured the creation of an economic class at the cost of a backwardness. We've never needed the services of a Genghis Khan or a colonial superpower to cause economic imbalance, we have done it well ourselves. What else could explain the mess in the tourism industry in the past month? We obviously love to remain a \$200 per capita country ranked first or second from the bottom, and we have politicians who believe this is the future.

The effects of the past week on tourism in Nepal will be felt in the long run. Other Asian destinations competing with Nepal today, like Vietnam and Laos, could not cash in on tourism due to perceived problems of security and uncertainty. Now they've overcome these problems and are marketing their countries well, while Nepal is saddled with such disruption that tourists will

think twice before visiting. The impact on Western tourists forced to change plans or Indian tourist here on honeymoon is the same. Why should they come to Nepal again?

The government's lackadaisical attitude and indecisiveness kept the problem simmering until the damage was done. The Prime Minister gave verbal assurances to the business community that he'd look into the matter, but everyone knows what that means. The trade sector cannot see how this problem won't recur after two months. On the other hand the government has asked labour unions to defer the strike by two months. The government cannot keep both commitments and only time will reveal all the complications.

After the restoration of democracy, the labour force and the media are two sections of society that have grown. The empowerment of labour through legislation and active international intervention has given this country a lop-sided socialistic model.

Though the transformation from government owned enterprise to private enterprises has taken place, the labour model remains the same. A powerful pro-labour media has backed this. Politicians have also recognised the labour class as a powerful

vote bank and like to keep them happy. The business segment making the most money doesn't have to deal with unions, as their businesses are trade-oriented. This has left a handful of entrepreneurs to bear the brunt of labour unions' tactics. Hotels, being an industry and not a trading enterprise, have been affected most. They have bowed to pressure from unions and conceded a lot in the past decade without being able to push issues linked to productivity and efficiency.

The past week should be a billion-dollar lesson for the country. The issue is not the service charge. It is the state of the nation. It is a state of anarchy where anyone, anytime, can undo what others have built over years. Politicians here exist for their own petty agendas, not for the country or enterprise. There would be no labour without enterprise. The government should know how to regulate enterprises but not hinder them. Yes, enterprises too should act well in time to understand a problem rather than wait till the end. But no one listens in this country. ♦

Readers can post their views and discuss issues at artabeeed@yahoo.com

Grindlays Gazette

INTEREST RATE UPDATE

NEPALI RUPEE	CURRENT%	PREVIOUS%
Call Money Avg.	5.25	5.50
70 Days t/bill	4.86	-
91 Days t/bill	5.26	5.29
364 Days t/bill	5.73	6.18
Repo. rate	5.76	5.79

Average rate of 91 days and 364 days T/Bill dipped lower on aggressive bidding by some of the commercial banks. The average rate of 91 days T. Bill is expected to remain under pressure in the coming weeks unless the liquid banks park their surplus liquidity in the secondary market. Expected range for next week 4.20 to 4.30 %.

FOREIGN CURRENCY : Interest rates

	USD	EUR	GBP	JPY	CHF
LENDING	9.50	6.50	6.00	1.50	5.13
LIBOR (1M)	6.71	4.96	5.99	0.82	3.44

BANK RATES (DEPO/LENDING)

	Mkt Hi/Lo	Mkt Avg
S/A NPR	6.0/3.5	5.23
F/D 1 YR	7.5/6.0	6.73
OVERDRAFT	15.5/12.5	13.54
TERM LOAN	14.5/13.0	13.37
IMPORT LN	13.0/10.5	11.52
EXPORT LN	13.0/10.0	10.63
MISC LOAN	17.5/13.5	15.03

CURRENCY UPDATE

AG/USD	CURRENT *	WK/AGO	%CHG
OIL(Barrel)	28.44	32.29	- 11.92
GOLD(Ounce)	272.50	269.80	+ 1.00
GOLD (NPR *)	7200	7110	+ 1.27
EUR	0.8832	0.8763	+ 0.79
GBP	1.4443	1.4383	+ 1.37
JPY	110.79	110.96	- 0.15
HF	1.7077	1.7277	- 1.16
AUD	0.5438	0.5386	+ 0.97
INR	46.75	46.83	- 0.17

*Currency bid prices at 12.30 p.m. on 11/12 - Source Reuters

Oil : Strong selling pressure in the wake of expectations of Iraq resuming its oil exports in the next few days sent crude oil prices sliding down last week. Suspension of Iraq's exports has already cut oil flow by some 25 million barrels, as Iraq exports about 2.3 million barrels per day, a fifth of world oil trade.

Currencies : The U.S dollar has been under pressure against the Euro and other European currencies over the past two weeks amid mounting evidence of a slowdown of the U.S economy. The dollar was locked in tight range against the Yen with the market on tenterhooks as it awaited a U.S Supreme Court ruling to decide who would be the next president.

INDIAN RUPEE OUTLOOK : The Indian rupee firmed slightly as sentiments were buoyed by a drop in global crude oil prices and a surge in foreign exchange reserves to a new high. Reserves rose by \$4.28 billion over the past month, driven by inflows from State Banks. Data on Saturday showed foreign exchange reserves up by \$730 million to a record high of \$39.021 billion in the week ending December 1.

INTERNATIONAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES FOR NEPALI TIMES

	6 months	1 year
SAARC countries	US\$25	US\$48
Other countries	US\$40	US\$75

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In US\$	Dal-Lentil 1 kg	Bhat-Rice 1 kg	Petrol 1 Litre	Diesel 1 Litre	Kerosene 1 Litre	Electricity 1 Unit	\$ Rate
Bangladesh	0.74	0.37	0.40	0.22	0.37	0.04	53.75
Bhutan	0.68	0.36	0.58	0.36	0.21	0.02	46.75
India	0.64	0.36	0.57	0.28	0.13	0.05	46.76
Maldives	0.25	0.28	0.40	0.30	0.42	0.21	11.82
Pakistan	0.41	0.43	0.52	0.22	0.12	0.03	57.91
Sri Lanka	0.73	0.36	0.61	0.23	0.19	0.03	82.42
Nepal	0.65	0.38	0.63	0.36	0.30	0.09	74.30

All prices are in US dollars, collected from informal sources, and are only indicative.

ZeabRose

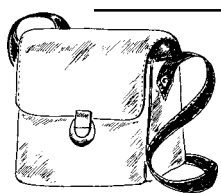
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ALL PHOTOS MIN BAJRACHARYA



Forbidden fruit

Kathmandu has a new, irresistible aroma. The smell of Mustang apples.

SALIL SUBEDI

You don't need to go to Jomsom anymore, or rely on the generosity of travelling friends to savour Mustang's juicy golden and red apples. *Mustang syau* (Mustang apples), dried apples, apple jam and brandy are now in Kathmandu and Pokhara.

Kashmiri, Chinese and Simla apples are cheaper, but *Mustang syau* are the Alfonso of apples. Connoisseurs say the appeal of the apple lies in its superb flavour, enhanced by the aromatic presence of high Himalayan water. "The Junla *syau* is as tasty but the appearance of *Mustang syau* surpasses all others. They are number one in South Asia," says pomologist Gopal Prasad Shrestha, who trains apple farmers

and conducts research at the Agriculture Ministry's Directorate of Fruit Development.

The apples are brought in by Pokhara Fruits Centre (PFC) in collaboration with Hinali Agro Centre (HAC). Three varieties of Mustang apples are available in Kathmandu and Pokhara, priced according to flavour and aroma. There's Royal Delicious (Rs 70/kg), Golden Delicious (Rs 70/kg) and Red Delicious (Rs 60/kg). Dried Mustang apples are popular among the elderly for "tinepas".

The apples are cheap in Mustang at Rs 28/kg. But in Kathmandu's supermarkets you could pay up to Rs 120 for a kilogram of the heavenly fruit. "Some supermarkets have complained about our low prices. But we don't need such a big margin. It is

unethical," says Anar Baniya, proprietor of PFC. Rhetoric aside, it is a strategic move on the part of PFC and HAC to keep their prices low this year and encourage more people to buy. It's a new market, and they're looking to cement their first-mover advantage before more people get into the act. Large-scale domestic apple trading began last year when PFC took 50 tons of Junla apples to Kathmandu and Pokhara. Only 30 tons were sold, the rest rotted. "But we saw demand for good apples, and looked for alternatives," says Baniya.

This year they decided on *Mustang syau*, and are now competing for the retail market with supermarkets. The fruit at the stores looks glossier and is supposed to be of the highest grade. No one says how the fruit is graded or what this indicates,

but wholesalers like PFC claim there's no difference in taste. The supermarkets have their own suppliers in Mustang, supposedly funded by Japanese businesses exploring the possibility of an international market.

The capital's apple-lovers aren't complaining about these shenanigans, though. Since the season started in October, 15 tons of Mustang apples have been consumed here. Outlets at the Kalimati Fruits and Vegetable Development Board Market and at Kuleshwor Wholesale Fruit Market say that they sell 60 crates—1200 kg—of Mustang's pride a day. All manner of people buy *Mustang syau*, from middle class families to the largest hotels in the Valley. Hotels buy over 70 kg of apples daily from wholesale outlets. A vendor says: "First-time retail buyers purchase around 3 kg. When they come next, it's up to 7 kg." The season ends in mid-December, but the fruit is available longer. Mustang is a rain shadow region, so the apples aren't exposed to high levels of humidity. The resulting compactness makes them easy to transport and they keep longer than

most other locally available apples.

"Our target was sales of 100 tons this year," Baniya says. But that looks impossible. Snow has already stopped apple-picking in Mustang. "With better transportation facilities in peak season, the apples would've arrived in Kathmandu easily," says Ram KC, proprietor of Hinali Agro Centre.

How do the apples get to the valley from Mustang? At Jomsom they board a flight down to Pokhara. A chartered helicopter costs US\$ 2,200 per hour, so if the helicopter is filled to maximum capacity—4 metric tons—transport costs for this phase average out to Rs 38/kg.

Transportation on mules to Pokhara costs under Rs 10/kg, but almost 60 percent of each load is damaged, and it takes too long anyway. In Pokhara the fruit is loaded on to trucks and sent to Kathmandu overnight at Rs 2 per kg with a maximum load of eight metric tons per truck. If all goes smoothly, the apples reach Kathmandu five days after they've been picked. This is expensive, but it works better than the Junla apples entrepreneurs tried to bring to the Valley last year. Regular chartered helicopters are available from Jomsom, while air transport from Junla is problematic.

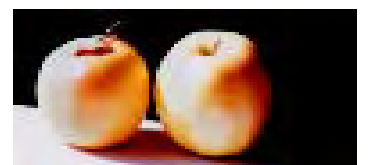
Apple farming was commercialised in Mustang and Dolpo by Pasang Khampache Sherpa and Buddhi Patra Sherchan in the early 70s. Pasang Sherpa headed Marpha's Horticulture Research Station, a state-run organisation, when he saw the potential of growing apples commercially. The sticking point for people who wanted to bring Mustang apples to the Valley was high transport costs. Now there might be a way around that. Last year's experiment didn't work out, but this year



Mustang syau hit the market in Kathmandu in mid-October to tap into Tihar spending. At the Kirtipur Horticulture Centre's apple exhibition then a whopping four metric tons were bought. (Exhibitions like these are trade shows and attract farmers, distributors, and scientists.) The government, sensing a good thing, announced annual subsidies of Rs 9,00,000 to help cover the packaging, transportation and storage costs of any business that brought apples from Mustang to Kathmandu. For this year, the subsidies have come too late and remain on paper except for the Rs 2,00,000 packaging subsidy. The Ministry of Agriculture offered a test flight this year, but it was at the end of the season and few logistical issues could be worked out to ensure the system works next year.

The other factor contributing to risk and high prices in the undertaking is lack of appropriate storage space. The 35-odd apple storehouses in villages like Marpha, Tukuche, Kowang, Kunjo and Lete in Mustang help stock some of the annual yield of three thousand metric tons of apples in barrels, but more space is needed that provides optimal conditions for apple storage. Fresh or properly stored fruit is more profitable than the brandy, cider and jam that farmers' co-operatives in the region are forced to turn much of their produce into. If the subsidies work out, wholesale prices of Mustang apples in Kathmandu could drop as low as Rs 45/kg. The Agro Enterprise Centre, an agricultural wing of the Rehabilitation of Nepali Chambers of Commerce and Industry, believe there's something good here. They provide farmers technical training, help market their products, and lobby on their behalf. "There is immense export potential for cash crops like the Mustang apple. But there has to be proper infrastructure—storehouses, better transport and international grading standards," says Vijay Shrestha, programme manager of the Centre.

Last year Chinese and Kashmiri apples ruled. Next year it might be the pricier, but rather more delicious *Mustang syau*. The impact of a sharp rise in demand for domestic and possibly international markets is anyone's guess. For now, the prospect of biting into a large, red, crisp, fragrant, sinfully delicious Mustang apple is fomenting seditious tendencies. ♦



Golden Delicious, Rs 70 per kilo

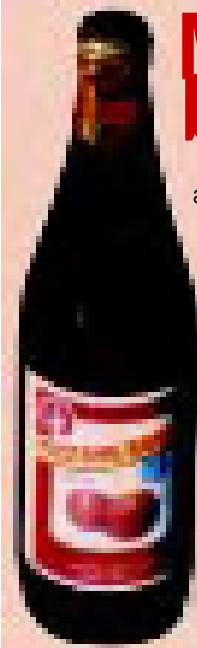


Royal Delicious, Rs 70 per kilo



Red Delicious, Rs 70 per kilo

Marpha brandy



Mustang's apple brandy may not be as famous as its Normandy counterpart, Calvados—nothing is ever as famous as its French version—but it is a fine drink, and deserves to be enjoyed even off the trekking trails.

Although the 162 acres of orchards in Mustang are very productive, apples never go to waste here. They are either dried into *sukuti*, or turned into jam, jelly, cider and brandy. Especially brandy.

The village of Marpha in Mustang is almost synonymous with apple brandy among tourists doing the Annapurna circuit and Nepali wine connoisseurs. The first brandy factory was set up here in the mid-80s to see what else could be done with the large apple and apricot yield. Currently, there are five distilleries in Mustang—the Marpha distillery at the Horticulture Centre Mustang, Muktinath Distillery, Tukuche Distillery, Nilgiri Distillery and Himsikhar

Distillery—which produce the 25 proof apple and apricot brandy.

When you drink Mustang apple brandy, you're not only treating yourself to a truly fine drink, you're also opening a bottle that has advocates of energy-efficient recycling nodding enthusiastically. Instead of using new bottles, distilleries seal their brandy in the beer bottles you see piled up like installation art outside Lakeside restaurants in Pokhara. The *khali sisi*—empty bottle—collectors, mostly from the Terai, buy bottles from the restaurants and bars at three rupees each. They sell them to larger consolidators for a profit of around two rupees a bottle. The bottles, now worth five rupees, are cursorily washed and sent up by mule or air to Marpha, Tukuche and Jomsom.

All the distilleries have cleaning facilities where the bottles are treated scientifically and readied to receive the nectar of the Himalayas. Apple or apricot brandy in, metal cap crimped on, label attached, and the bottles are good to go. In Mustang, good apple brandy costs Rs 125 for 750 ml, apricot brandy around Rs 70. In Kathmandu, the wholesale price for a beer bottle of apple brandy is Rs 170. Retail price varies on where you buy, but can go as high as Rs 350 in some supermarkets. Hole-in-the-wall wholesalers, supermarkets, orchards, back-alleys: where you buy the stuff is your call. Just make sure you have yourself a moment or two of solitary communion with the divine drink.

nepal dist



Suddenly there were Bugs everywhere.

BEETLEMANIA

A NEPALI TIMES CAREEN

Suddenly, there were bugs everywhere on the Aniko Highway. A large new four-wheel drive was overtaken by a wildly careening powder-blue 1964 Beetle. Minutes later, a yellow 1974 Bug zoomed by the 4WD as haughtily as it is possible for a car that belongs, rightfully, in a Noddy illustration. The occupants of the big car looked on in surprise as the rear-propelled bugs disappeared in a cloud of yellow dust.

Thirty-one of Kathmandu's lovingly maintained Beetles, the oldest 37 years, and the youngest 25, drove in procession from the Yak and Yeti hotel to the Himalayan Shangri-la Resort in Dhulikhel last Saturday to raise money for the Ganesh Foundation that supports corrective surgery for Nepalis with cleft lips. Supporting a good cause was incentive enough, certainly, but there was an equal measure of the fanatical clan pride of Bug owners in evidence. The cult of the Beetle remains a mystery to the uninitiated, but the love of Beetle owners towards their Bugs is almost filial. It is also cross-generational, and there were many enthusiastic participants at the rally who were surely born after production of the Bug had ceased. A typical conversation between two complete strangers

at the parking lot of the Yak and Yeti ran something like this:

"Which one is yours?"

"The blue 1974 over there."

"Ah, nice one. Is it a boy or girl?"

"It's a boy, his name is Harvey."

Sharad and Bernice are in Nepal to get married. Sharad is serving in the British army's Gurkha regiment, and both share a passion for Beetles. They showed up Saturday morning—the day after their wedding—in a 1967 Beetle festooned with balloons, a Nepali flag and a discreet but legible Just Married sign. Said Bernice: "Sharad had talked so much about his beloved Beetle in England. And when we read in *Nepali Times* there was to be a rally the day after our wedding—also my father's birthday—we thought it would be a really nice celebration." They didn't just participate, the newlyweds also found the time to get together a basket of paper products (including a 2001 Beetle Calendar) to sell to participants to raise more money for the Ganesh Foundation. They had such faith in their Bug that they were confident they'd make it to Dhulikhel even though the car lies unused when Sharad is away, but they took along an old trusted mechanic just in case.

Every car made it, though,

The Great Himalayan Volkswagen Beetle Rally last weekend raised enough money for 60 hare and cleft lip operations for Nepalis.



and personal mechanics, the tow-truck driven by two bankers, Richard Vokes of the Asian Development Bank and Jeffrey Cox of Grindlays in their "Vokes Wagon", and the first-aid vehicle piloted by *Chaneli* director Ravi Baral, all had a lazy morning. But things did get a little rough on the road. The Volksy bright blue-and-white paint job on a certain bug was seductive enough to make more than a few drivers give chase. The oldest car in the rally, Sanjhu Rana's 1962 Beetle with sliding roof, dressed in mature maroon, navy and black, took on the challenge only to have a little trouble with its hydraulics system. But the old Bug reached Dhulikhel all right, and despite the sizzle it sputtered on arrival, was fit for its age.

A 1964 Beetle that was brought into Nepal by King Mahendra for his personal use also participated in the rally, although it had changed hands many times and looked its age. Satindra Siddhi Bajracharya clocked the fastest time to Dhulikhel in his aquamarine blue bug with a sporty white stripe running down the middle. Satindra maintains his car with spare parts bought from Bangkok and locally. "I go to Chitwan and Lumbini all the time, and I overtake all the new model cars without problems. The road handling and power of this vehicle are unsurpassed," he says proudly. Another Beetle fan is Ujjwal Satyal, a teacher at the Tourism Training Centre, who has a hard time giving old Beetles a new lease on life. "I used to buy Beetles for Rs 6,000, renovate them and sell them for Rs

25,000 till 1987," says Satyal.

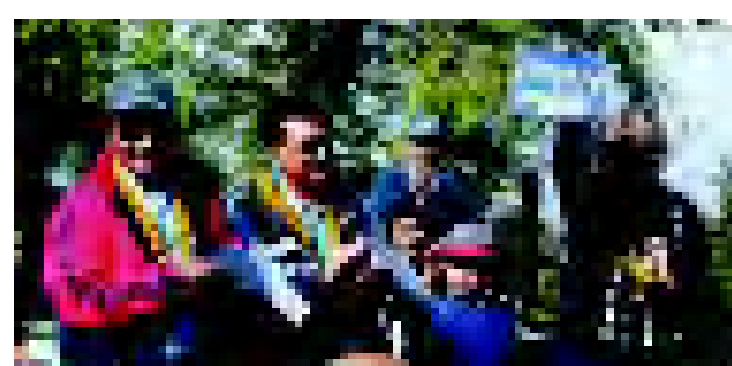
The Beetle rally was organised by Susan Fowlds who came to Nepal in 1996. She soon met Dr Narayan Thapa, former director of Kanti Children's Hospital and a paediatric surgeon. Susan had a white Volkswagen Beetle, and found that Dr Thapa owned a black one. They realised their shared passion for this strange-looking car could lead to interesting things. They decided to gather Kathmandu's Beetle-owners together for a rally. But, they needed a cause for what would certainly be a fund-raiser, to draw on the inexhaustible goodwill of the clan when given a chance to show off their cars. Dr Thapa used to do about 120 cleft-lip operations a year at minimal cost. So they decided to dedicate the rally to raise money for Nepalis who can't raise the Rs 6,000 it costs for an operation. Says Susan: "Dr Thapa was my inspiration, and together we made this rally happen. It is a rally with a purpose." There are an estimated 40,000 Nepalis with cleft lip and palate. The real reason it is more visible in Nepal compared to other countries—there are even 60 year-olds with the condition—is not that there is a higher incidence here, but simply that many families are too poor to afford corrective surgery.

The city's Beetlemaniacs acquitted themselves well. Once they got to Dhulikhel, unrolled their lips—after all, they were with The Family now—and got the dust of the Aniko Highway out of their hair, they rolled up their sleeves to begin another sort of game. There was Bug memorabilia to be bid for,

after all: T-shirts proclaiming participation in the Great Himalayan Beetle Cleft Lip Rally, stickers from a Bug-parts shop all the way in Calgary, Canada, and best of all, a shining red and black model Bug, complete with opening doors, a retractable sunroof and functional steering wheel. Many people supported the rally one way

or another, and Susan Fowlds is very pleased with the results: "We raised enough money for one operation a week for more than a year," says the New Zealander. The Ganesh Foundation is so named because many boys born with cleft-lips in Nepal are called Ganesh. Which was the name of many of the boy-Beetles at the rally. ♦

Clockwise from top left: Beetles line up before the rally at the Yak & Yeti Hotel, the oldest entry (#18) 1962 convertible, #16 a yellow 1974 model zooms past Bhaktapur, a straggler 1974 model #16 crosses the finishing line at Dhulikhel, and the fastest driver, Satindra Bajracharya receives his T-shirt prize from Susan Fowlds.



This woman from Chitwan recovers from corrective surgery for a cleft lip. When the bandage came off, her child didn't recognise her. There are over 40,000 Nepalis with cleft lip or palate. They're very visible here because many don't have Rs 6000, the minimum fee for corrective surgery. Dr Narayan Thapa performs three to five operations a week, and the Ganesh Foundation is now raising money so operation costs can be covered for more people.

Volks populi

In 1924, Adolf Hitler was in prison for an unsuccessful putsch on the Federal German capital. Having time on his hands, the future Führer devised an ingenious plan to solve Germany's unemployment problem. The government would build special roads—autobahns—for motor vehicles. It would also mass-produce a car that the man on the street could afford. These were the humble beginnings of the People's Car, the Volkswagen.

Nearly a decade later, in

Porsche back in 1931. The body styling itself dates back to 1931, to a car called the Wanderer which never reached production. However, Beetle-friends who insist on the car's superiority, design-wise, at least, to every other passenger vehicle in history, will be pleased to learn that the only prototype built was used by Ferdinand Porsche for his personal transport. Hitler had his own reasons for approving the Bug's design. He is supposed to

have briefed Porsche, "It should look like a Beetle, you have to look to nature to find out what streamlining is"

These were variously suited to off-road use, carrying three men, ammunition and a machine gun, travelling in water.)

After the war, KdF Stadt was renamed Wolfsburg by the Allies, and the family of KdF cars, Volkswagen, and the factory came under the jurisdiction of the British Military Police. In the summer of 1945, after British motor manufacturers had gracefully and foolishly, as it turned out, declined the offer to produce and market the Beetle, production of the Kubelwagen restarted with spares that were lying around the factory. The factory was sold to a man called Heinz Nordhoff in 1947. The new management decided to keep the Bug's unique design, by now code-named Type 1, and less than five years after the war, the factory was producing close to 20,000 cars annually. By 1949, in fact, there was even an export model.

By 1955, Bug production had reached a million. Various changes were made to the Beetle over the years, and the car was steadily growing in popularity. Most of the changes were to do with increasing engine size and exterior specifications. The Beetle reached its highest ever production in 1969 (almost

1.1 million bugs). In 1970, VW tried to improve on a good thing and produced a markedly different Beetle which tried to overcome criticism of the car's small under-bonnet capacity. The most visible changes were a slightly curved windscreen and a more bulbous bonnet. Production fell every year after this, although by 1973 the Beetle was officially the most popular car ever in the world, with over 16 million having been produced. The final model of the Beetle as we know it (more later on what purists call the travesty that is the New Beetle) was launched in 1973. The creature had slid into ugliness, some insisted, with its very curved windscreen, shorter bonnet, plastic-padded dashboard and wider rear wings that framed the new football-like rear lights.

Whether it was the new, unimproved design, or a sadly changing world with no place for a comic-book car, in 1974, VW announced massive losses, the first ever in the history of the company. The upshot: the Beetle would have to die. German

"It should look like a Beetle, you have to look to nature to find out what streamlining is." – Adolf Hitler

production of the car stopped in 1980. However, VW factories in places as far afield as Brazil continued to produce the car into the mid-1980s. In its heyday, the Beetle had been produced in South Africa, Nigeria, Malaysia, Philippines, and Singapore. Today, 52 years after it started production, Mexico still makes the Beetle the old-fashioned way. Despite its waning popularity, the

hippie Bug was still endearing enough to star in those silly Disney movies, playing Herbie.

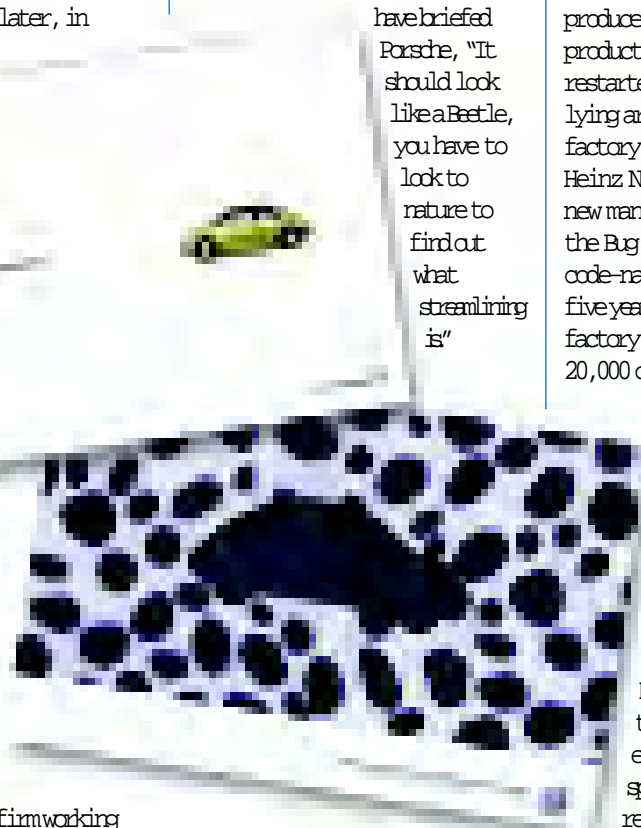
As for the so-called New Beetle, its similarity to the old Bug is only skin deep. It is a thoroughly modern, rather soulless car. If you want a front wheel drive, water-cooled engine,

twin air-bags, power steering, front suspension, large wheels, automatic transmission, side-impact door beams, front and rear crumple zones, air-con, and a compound crank rear axle, whatever that is, go drive a Golf. Like we said, the similarity between the ageing Bugs and the pretender is skin deep. Of course, it is a rather nice skin, but even so—they just don't make 'em like they used to. ♦

February 1933, the Nazis swept to power and at the first cabinet meeting Hitler laid out his cunning plan. Work on the autobahns began in September, and a Stuttgart design firm working with Daimler-Benz, headed by one Ferdinand Porsche, was commissioned to design the people's car within ten months. However, it wasn't until 1938 that the design for the Volkswagen was finalised.

Hitler specified certain criteria the car must meet: it must have a top speed of 62 mph and achieve 42 miles per gallon; it must have an air-cooled engine and be able to transport two adults and three children. And most importantly, it should market at no more than £86. It was for reasons of economy that Ferdinand Porsche decided on a rear-engine car, the car was then known as the Type 60. He experimented with various engine designs: flat four, vertical four cylinder, two cylinder, but none of them proved adequate. In 1935 a new Austrian engineer at the firm came up with a design for a flat four engine in two days. Accountants and other stodgy, careful people checked it out and it proved to be the most financially viable option. The same engine design has driven the Volkswagen Beetle for the last 60 years.

Ferdinand Porsche had been working on other cars for various manufacturers before the Volkswagen and he incorporated some older designs within this new project. The backbone chassis and the idea of independent front and rear suspension came from one car, and the torsion bar front suspension had been patented by



The prototype "people's car"



The business end of a 1964 model Beetle

Dancing titles

GREG HOWSON IN TOKYO

It is a busy arcade in downtown Tokyo, but rather than the crackle of virtual gunfire, this one is alive with the sound of music. Two gyrating teenagers steps swiftly around a dancepad, matching their feet to onscreen commands, while nearby a middle-aged couple rhythmically shake maracas in time to the electronic *samba*.

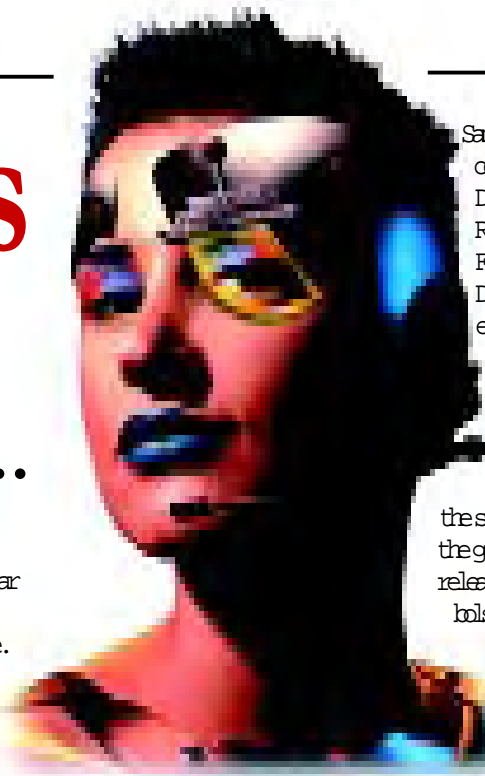
Welcome to the world of music videogames, which like Karaoke, are set to become the next big Japanese export. Known as *Bemani* in their native country, the games all work in a similar way: as a song starts, the player must match moving arrows with those at the top of the screen. Depending on the title this could involve strumming a guitar, playing a

There is now an exciting and viable alternative to video games: computer karaoke!

keyboard or physically stepping on a specific part of a dancepad.

Billy Britt, product assistant of Konami, the official manufacturer, says: "These games are phenomenally popular in Japan and have sold about three million units altogether." And Britt feels it's more than just a trivial pastime: "These games are popular because they take their fun seriously. Over there, they practise at home, then they go and show off in the arcades. There are huge tournaments where competitors dance in front of packed auditoriums."

Konami introduced the first machines into UK arcades in 1998 but the games are now coming to a far more culturally significant space (at least in the UK anyhow)—the home. The PlayStation and Dreamcast are the main emissaries, with each console sporting a varied musical catalogue. But, while the last 18 months has seen the beginnings of an invasion, with games like *Parappa the Rappa*, *Bust-a-Groove* and the recent *Space Channel 5*, these games have all been controlled by the standard joystick.



Samba de Amigo where the player controls a pair of maracas to the Dreamcast before shaking away to Ricky Martin and the rest. Finally, Konami is releasing *Dancing Stage*, which is best experienced using its 1 metre squared dancepad. So, rather than passing yourself in public, you can learn your steps in private.

Another significant factor in the success of music games has been the genre's wider appeal. The UK release of *Dancing Stage* has been bolstered by the inclusion of western-friendly tracks by pop group *Byzone* and *Gloria Gaynor*, which Britt sees as important. "We're hoping that *Dancing Stage* will have a universal appeal as it's certainly a far cry from your traditional shot 'em up or a racing game," she says.

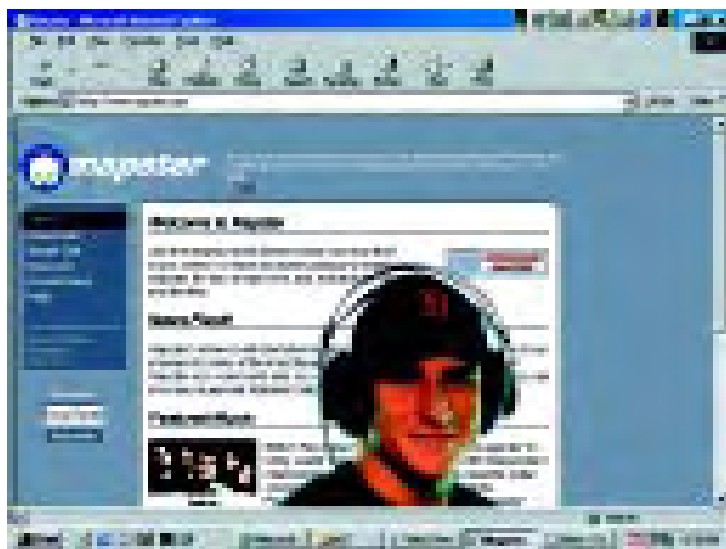
The game even includes a calorie counter, making it possibly the first to ever help you get fit.

While seasoned *Quake* fanatics will drool on their pizza, it's likely that women, whom the mass-market needs if these videogames are ever to become truly mainstream, will be keen.

However, there are problems for companies wishing to import this Japanese musical phenomenon into the UK. A combination of cultural differences and peripheral expense has made it hard for the genre to gain more than a niche foothold. While an average PlayStation game costs £30 (\$42.90) in the UK, a musical controller can double the cost, making it less attractive than, say, the latest football game.

Still, Britt is confident that there is a market in this country. "We have great expectations for *Dancing Stage*. It has wide appeal, the tracks are well known and popular. We're hoping it will appeal to peoples' sense of fun and humour, as well as their competitive streak." ♦ (The Guardian)

The ultimate music portal?



The Bertelsmann takeover of Napster may end the days of free downloads.

MARTIN HALUSA IN NEW YORK

First, there was good news for friends of contemporary music: Napster and its champion, Shawn Fanning (19), have been saved. No judge would dare to close down the music website after the surprise deal which it has just secured with Bertelsmann. And as far as the software goes—the fastest-travelling computer programme of all time—no judge would now even consider banning it.

Napster almost became the digital revolution's first martyr, a kind of Robin Hood who stole from the rich

and gave people the means to party. Instead, this teenager and his cohorts are cult figures.

David and Goliath, however, have finally decided to make up. Instead of music systems around the globe falling silent, wofers and tweeters everywhere are hard at it pumping out some serious sounds.

Now, for the bad news. The days of the free download may well be numbered. The talk is of a monthly fee of around five dollars. A pittance? Possibly. A pity? Definitely. The agreement reached with the

Bertelsmann Music Group (BMG) will turn up the pressure on the other four of the big five music concerns—Sony, EMI, Warner Music and Universal—to finally make peace with the new technologies. The cooperation between Napster and BMG is by no means exclusive—the party has begun, and everyone is invited. One piece of advice: get there early because Napster's 38 million registered users are already inside and partying hard. And what's more, the idea of having to pay a little at the door is not going to put them off coming back for more.

The future of the rock, rap, rhythm and roots business lies on the Internet. Ten years ago, the world of music revolved around good old vinyl and there was not a cloud in the sky. Now it looks as if the CDs risk suffering the same fate over the next few years. Large music shops in downtown shopping malls could soon become a thing of the past, as customers choose instead to order the music they want as a small bundle of data over the Internet. It saves time and money, quality is ensured and all thanks to the MP3 digital standard and the German laboratories which came up with it in the first place.

Music historians will look back at Napster in a hundred years and mutter the word pioneer. They will talk about a period of two years when music was available to anyone and everyone for free on the Internet. They

will rave about the piracy and secretly yearn for a return to the anarchy which permitted any song anyone could imagine (and put a name to) to be spun from one hard disk to the next—without a single cent, penny or pfering changing hands. However, they will no doubt feel obliged to mention one or two of the catches involved—there is no such thing as a free lunch; never has been, never will be. The whole venture was not without its drawbacks.

For one thing, as far as a large number of US record companies and an even larger number of musicians were concerned, the whole deal was illegal. It represented a hideous breach of copyright, an attack upon the

intellectual property of the artist. It just became time for this obscure little engine which existed somewhere out there in cyberspace to be given the legal seal of approval.

Both the recording industry and Napster stand to profit from this kind of cooperation. Shawn Fanning and Co. would then wave goodbye to the last whiff of illegality clinging to them and stride confidently into a future where the company can live on-risk capital flows like wine, everyone can make money and the whole thing ends up as a success on the stock market. This could be the start of something seriously big—the ultimate music portal. And the recording industry would have found a way, finally, of closing the book on the chaos of uncontrolled musical piracy.

The deal with BMG gives the Germans an option for an equity stake in Napster. In return, the Internet company not only gets a much-needed infusion of cash but also a free ride out of the court room, soon.

A whole host of further deals between traditional companies and websites could now open up with those offering free services, such as *Gutella*, *FreeNet* and *iMesh*, following in Napster's footsteps. This would move the battle from the field of music to the silver screen and the world of literature.

Critics say that industry in the three-dimensional world has already lost the battle against the web pirates. The deal between BMG and Napster has more than symbolic significance: it may have stopped the largest loophole in web history. ♦ (qza)

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INTERVIEW

'A serious anti-colonial revolt'

In your writings and lectures on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, you constantly refer to the centrality of 1948. Why?

I don't think you can understand what's happening today and the situation of the Palestinians unless you understand what happened in 1948. A society made up principally of Arabs in Palestine was uprooted and destroyed. Two-thirds of the Arab population of 870,000 was driven out by design. The Zionist archives are quite clear about this, and several Israeli historians have written about it. Of course the Arabs have said it all along. By the end of the conflict in 1948, Palestinians were a minority in their own country. Two-thirds of them had become refugees and the rest became subjects of Israeli military occupation in 1967, when the West Bank and Gaza, along with East Jerusalem, were occupied. So the festering wound of 1948 has remained.

Talk about the framework of the public discourse. Start with "the peace process."

The peace process began in 1993, with a secretive agreement between the PLO and the Israeli government that was to give the Palestinians and the Palestine Liberation Organisation under Yasir Arafat some territory and authority in the West Bank and Gaza. However, given the tremendous disparity in power between the Israelis and the Palestinians, in effect the peace process has simply been a repackaging of Israeli occupation. Israel still controls 60 percent of the West Bank and 40 percent of Gaza... a military occupation that is the second longest in the twentieth and twenty-first century, the longest being the Japanese occupation of Korea from 1910 to 1945.

"Defence."

Of course, the Israeli army is called the Israeli Defence Forces. The media has, very misleadingly, presented it as if they are defending Israel from Palestinians, who are basically throwing stones. This has an almost Orwellian quality to it. The Palestinians have no arms to speak of except for some small arms among the police. It's been a population of stone-throwing youths against Israeli missiles, helicopter gunships, tanks and rockets. So to use the word "defence" here is a grotesque misnomer. The Palestinians are resisting military occupation and the Israelis are prolonging the occupation, and making, as all colonial troops have done, whether in Algeria, Vietnam or India, the civilian population pay the price of resistance.

The Economist observed that "the new Palestinian intifada is rapidly assuming the form of a serious anti-colonial revolt." This might be the first use of that term.

This is certainly that. The occupation of the West Bank and Gaza with settlers and settlements and roads and the constant expropriation of Palestinian lands, the redesigning of the geography of the West Bank to permit its greater control, have followed the line of all classical colonialism to make sure that an oppressed and subordinate people are captive in their subordination for the profit and in some cases the leisure of the occupiers. So what has happened in the recent past has been an attempt to overthrow this.

Noam Chomsky, Alexander Cockburn, Robert Fisk and other critics of Israeli settlement policy have used the term "Bantustan" in describing it.

There's a kind of repeatable quality to this. It comes from the history of nineteenth-century colonialism. The French did this in Algeria. They would find areas where docile natives could be put in their villages with native chiefs. In West Africa the British did it under what was called "indirect rule". In South Africa, the idea was to put the blacks on reservations or homelands where they could have some of the attributes of sovereignty but none of the real ones. They couldn't control the land and water, and whites controlled entrances and exits. This is exactly the pattern here. These little

"Arafat could have the impression, or give himself the impression, that he's the leader, but in fact the colonial occupier pulls the strings behind the scenes," says the writer Edward Said in this interview.



Palestinian protestor, injured in a previous demonstration, hurls a slingshot at Israeli troops in the Gaza strip last week.

Palestinian areas, which are small and divided, are centres of Palestinian population, but they are the equivalent of homelands where somebody like Arafat could have the impression, or give himself the impression, that he's the leader, but in fact the colonial occupier pulls the strings behind the scenes.

The visit by Ariel Sharon to Harem El-Sharif, the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa mosque is cited as the match that ignited the new intifada. What does Sharon represent to Palestinians? What does it say about Barak in allowing Sharon to make the visit?

Sharon, in Israeli popular mythology, is something of a hero. His exploits began in the fifties. Thereafter he went from one exploit of this sort to another. He's basically a bully who specialises in the oppression of civilians and enemies who are far less well equipped than he is. So by any standards at all Ariel Sharon is a war criminal. He has said the solution of Palestine is what he calls the Jordanian option, to turn Jordan, which is a sovereign country, into a Palestinian state. His appearance at the Al-Aqsa mosque, with a thousand policemen supplied to him by Barak, was a provocation. It's quite clear that Barak was behind, or at least approved of the move. I don't know if it was meant to be a provocation to bring forth the horrors that ensued. I don't think his limited brains could foresee this. But I think it was a way of asserting Israeli sovereignty on a sacred Muslim site. It was designed not so much to be provocative as to be offensive, to show that an Israeli military figure who has a long history of brutality and war crimes can appear in one of the holiest places of Islam with impunity. That was the Jew, representative of the Jewish state, trampling all over Muslim places and the Muslim religion and in effect saying, We are the military occupier, we can do with you what we wish. And yet none of this was ever reflected in the media. They kept talking about it as a provocation.

The catechism recited by the likes of Elie Wiesel is pretty much like this: Camp David collapsed because of Arafat's intransigence and his failure to seize a unique opportunity.

It's simply factually untrue. Before he went, Barak made it absolutely clear that he had no intention of returning to the 1967 borders. Second, he made it absolutely clear that there would be no return of refugees. Third, he made it absolutely clear that there would be no return of Jerusalem to Palestinian sovereignty at all. Fourth, he made it also absolutely clear that he had no intention of uprooting any of the settlements. These are the positions on which his whole subsequent negotiation was based. It didn't depart from them. It simply consolidated them. He didn't concede anything. He simply said, We will allow you a form of sovereignty in the holy places. We will keep the Christian and Armenian sections. You can have a little bit of sovereignty over some of the Muslim holy places, but the real substantive sovereignty over East Jerusalem will remain in Israeli hands. That was supposed to be a "forward-looking" position. So far from it being an opportunity for Arafat to take advantage of Israeli generosity, it was an opportunity for Arafat effectively to commit suicide and to give Israel the last prize, which was everything they wanted in addition to what Arafat had already conceded, which was 78 percent of what they had in 1948.

Another theme echoed by the pundits is the image of Palestinians as losers. Barak in his Knesset speech revived the Abba Eban comment that the Palestinians never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity.

The basis of their politics is that the only argument the Arabs understand is violence. The occupation is a form of violence, against which throwing of rocks and the occasional terrorist outrage, horrible though they maybe, is nothing in comparison to the collective punishment of three million people which has been going on for the last thirty-three years. Israel was the only country in the world where torture was permitted. Twenty percent of the population of the Israeli citizens of Israel, who happen not to be Jews, Palestinians, are treated essentially as blacks were in South Africa. They are denied rights, not allowed to own, rent or buy land. Their lands are regularly confiscated. Twenty percent of the population gets one percent of the budget. This is a policy of violence and discrimination of the most appalling kind.

In light of the 2000 intifada, what does that mean for your proposal of a couple of years ago for a binational state where Palestinians and Israelis would live in one country?

I think now the preminent thing is the end of military occupation. Palestinians and Israelis are so integrated; the territory is so small that you can't have a situation in which one population has imposed itself militarily upon another. I'm very much against evictions and driving people off. I do think, however, that the settlements have to be dismantled and the populations have to face each other as not only neighbours but in fact in coexistence, in a basically homogenous state which we call historical Palestine, whether you call it Israel or a Palestinian state. The economies and the histories are so intertwined that I still think that in the end a binational state is the only long-term solution. I suppose in the interim, as a kind of transition, one would have to have two states in which one is free of military occupation and then is able out of that freedom to pursue policies that integrate it not just with Israel but with Jordan, Lebanon, the other small countries that make up this very densely populated and highly integrated part of the world. The point is that partition, separation, has not worked. ♦

(Interviewed by David Barsamian in New York on 9 Nov 2000. Printed with permission from Alternative Radio, Boulder.)

The alternative Nobel



Birsal Lenke

STOCKHOLM - Indonesian labour lawyer and human rights activist Mmir is among four recipients of the 2000 Right Livelihood Awards, also referred to as the Alternative Nobel Prize, presented at a ceremony in the



Mmir

Swedish parliament last week. Mmir has been one of the most devoted fighters for civilian control of the powerful Indonesian army.

As founder of the human rights organisation Kontra, the Indonesian

lawyer has worked to encourage respect for due process of law and promote reconciliation. He is a member of the Commission to Investigate Human Rights Violations in Timor and of the drafting committee for a law on human rights courts. Kontra, which stands for Commission for Disappearance and Victims of Violence, focuses on fighting political and military violence, supporting victims of violence and promoting reconciliation and peace.

The Award was founded in 1980 to "honour and support those offering practical and exemplary answers to the most urgent challenges facing us today". Founder-chairman of the award, Jakob von Uexküll, said at the ceremony: "During the decades of

authoritarian rule, we were told by Sharto's Western friends that different rules, rights and values applied in Indonesia. Add to this the rise of fundamentalism, the search for scapegoats, the unwillingness of the military to step back and accept the primacy of democracy and you have an idea of the challenges facing Mmir." Uexküll is a Swedish-German philatelic expert, who sold his valuable postage stamps to provide the original endowment for the awards. He had felt that Nobel Prizes tended to ignore much work and knowledge vital for the survival of humankind.

Besides Mmir, this year's awards were given to activists from Ethiopia, Turkey and the United States. Ethiopian scientist Te wolde Berhan

Gebr Egiakher was awarded for "for his exemplary work in representing the Like-Minded Group of developing countries at the Biosafety negotiations in Cartagena and Montreal, and achieving an outcome that safeguards bio-diversity and the traditional rights of farmers and communities to their genetic resources".

Turkish environmentalist Birsal Lenke was recognised "for her long-standing struggle to protect her country from the devastation of cyanide-based gold mining and her key role in the international campaign to ban this disastrous technology". The US plant geneticist Wes Jackson was honoured "for his single-minded commitment over

more than two decades to developing an agriculture based on perennial crops that is both highly productive and truly ecologically sustainable". Together the award winners receive about \$200,000.

An international jury that includes Jakob von Uexküll, founder-chairman of the Award, chooses the awardees. Those honoured in the last two decades include Norway's Jham Galtung, known as the founder-father of research, and Vandana Shiva of India, for placing women and ecology at the heart of modern development discourse.

In 1994, Ken Saro-Wiwa, founder of the MOSOP (Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People) in Ogoniland, Nigeria, was decorated for exemplary courage in striving non-violently for the rights of the Ogoni people. In 1998, the award went to the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) for its campaign for the right of mothers to breastfeed their babies. ♦ (IBS)

To dump or not to dump

The controversy over Chinese goods raises questions about India's commitment to trade liberalisation.

DK JOSHI IN NEW DELHI

Thirty-eight years after Chinese troops crossed their common Himalayan border endangering India's security, Beijing poses another threat to its Asian neighbour. But today's foot soldiers are China's manufacturers and their weapons, cheap consumer goods.

Indian trade bodies are protesting that China is dumping its low-cost and high-quality consumer goods, destroying the country's industrial base. With small-scale industries like hosiery and batteries already shut down, Indian business is demanding the government adopt anti-dumping measures against goods that sell at 60 to 70 percent the price of locally manufactured products.

The Directorate-General of Anti-Dumping and Allied Duties has initiated investigations on imports of dry batteries, shoes and toys from China. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee recently told the government-organised Council on Trade and Industry, which includes businessmen, that anti-dumping measures would be strengthened in coming months. "We have taken some steps. These include a wide range of measures such as ensuring transparency in invoice value, tariff measures, adherence to standards and specifications, and institution of

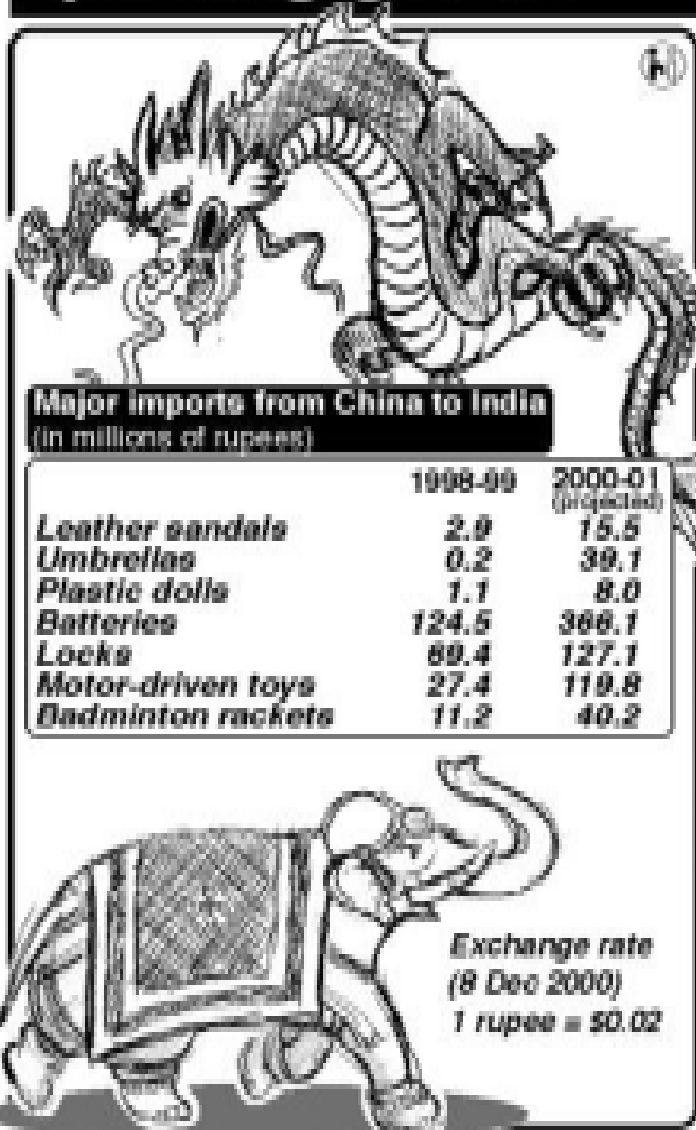
anti-dumping action," he said.

China's ambassador to India, Zhan Gang, dismisses dumping charges as "completely groundless", adding that imports of Chinese goods account for only 2.4 per cent of India's total imports. India's exports to China grew much faster (60 percent) than China's exports to India (32 percent) in the first nine months of 2000.

A World Trade Organization (WTO) spokesman said member-countries can rightfully "take use of WTO regulations to protect local industries". A member-country must prove that imports cost well below the normal selling price of the product in the home market, and that local industries producing similar goods are threatened. India joined the WTO in 1995, but China isn't yet a member. A 60-member WTO working group is still preparing for Beijing's entry, calling for firmer assurances from China on commitments it has made.

Although countries can take action against dumping, Vajpayee told Indian industry to adapt to face competition, as an over-protective approach would foster inefficiency and stagnation. "The dismantling of Qualitative Restrictions (QRs) forms part of the international management, which we have accepted and are

India and China: sparring giants



obliged to honour," he said. India is party to the General Agreement on Tariff and Trade (GATT), predecessor to the WTO. Under

this agreement, imports can be controlled only through tariffs or customs duties, not through QRs or non-tariff barriers. There are

exceptions to this rule, such as balance of payments (BoP) difficulties.

India's BoP situation was quite unstable until 1993. In 1995, some WTO members disputed India's justification for imposing non-tariff barriers for balance of payments reasons. India began phasing them out, deciding to remove all by 1 April 2001. Commerce ministry spokesperson Shipra Biswas says the WTO provides ways to meet with "abnormal situations causing domestic concerns." The Agreement on Safeguards permits restrictions on imports for a temporary period by either increasing tariffs or imposing non-tariff barriers.

Safeguard action can only be taken after an official investigation. According to Qar Abdullah, junior minister for commerce, an investigation has been launched under WTO norms. The government has adopted a four-pronged strategy—hiked import duty on edible oil, launched an anti-dumping investigation into select imports from China, announced standards for imported goods, and made licensing compulsory for all imports. But Amit Mitra, secretary-general of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), says the controversy isn't about regular Chinese imports, but about "massive smuggling, rampant under-invoicing of official imports".

All this has Indian politicians getting hot under the collar. Madan Lal Khurana, ruling Bharatiya Janata Party MP and anti-dumping campaigner, fumes:

"Even if one agrees that Indian industry must become competitive, it would be ruined thanks to China's limitless capacity for undercutting." Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha says: "It is not the multinationals but the Chinese goods that are bothering us." And commerce minister Murali Manan assured Indian industrialists: "I will not sit on the ash hill of the domestic industry wearing the crown of globalisation."

Nevertheless, consumers welcome Chinese imports. *The Economic Times* pleaded: "The state should always support our consuming interest—it is through trade that this region will become safe." Ambassador Zhan said, "Boycotting Chinese goods will prove detrimental to both sides. There is great potential for Indo-Chinese bilateral trade and it won't be long before we join the WTO."

Populist rhetoric aside, New Delhi is handling the situation cautiously, and with good reason. India-China relations are improving and the two countries are on the verge of striking an agreement on a part of their mutual border after decades of dispute. For the first time, they have exchanged maps on the 545-km Line of Actual Control in the so-called Middle Sector between the two countries. Equally importantly, protectionism runs contrary to India's commitment to second-generation economic reforms. New Delhi has assured Beijing that its measures are only temporary. ♦ (Gemini)

Cat catastrophe

In Indonesia, tiger poaching is treated the same way as stealing a chicken.



RICHEL DURSIN IN JAKARTA

Rising demand for the body parts and skins of Sumatran tigers is threatening to drive the endangered species to extinction. There used to be thousands of tigers in the jungles of Sumatra, but due to widespread poaching only about 400 Sumatran tigers are left in national parks and 100 outside protected areas such as logging concessions. Every year some 36 Sumatran tigers are illegally removed from the wild, but the actual number may be much higher.

"It is difficult to stop because the poachers are clever and have strong networks," says Saredi, head of the sub-directorate of wildlife trade and traffic control of the Ministry of Forestry. The trade in Sumatran tigers—known in West Sumatran mythology as kind-hearted beasts—is flourishing partly due to the economic crisis in Indonesia.

WF Indonesia says body parts

of the Sumatran tigers which live mainly in five reserves on Sumatra island are illegally exported to Hong Kong, Korea, Japan and Taiwan with countries like Singapore as the transit point. The three main exporting cities for Sumatran tiger parts are Jakarta, Pekanbaru, and Medan. More than 200 kg of tiger bones was exported to South Korea alone in 1993. The forestry ministry says that more than 15 tigers were killed.

The Indonesian government, together with conservation groups such as the Minnesota Zoo Foundation, has set up anti-poaching units in national parks like Way Kambas, Bukit Barisan Selatan, and Kerinci Seblat in South Sumatra, northeast of the capital Jakarta. Still, the patrol units do not often arrest tiger poachers for fear of retaliation. "What the patrol units do is drive the poachers out of the forests, but not arrest them. It is hard to get evidence," explains Nazir Roed, deputy director of species conservation, WWF Indonesia. The anti-poaching units, consisting of three forestry police officers and one villager, are tasked to arrest tiger poachers and remove snares, and to record the habitat and population of one of the world's most endangered animals.

The decline of the Sumatran tiger population is also due to the damage

to its habitat, fragmented by human settlement, expansion of resource extraction activities, and poor laws. The skill of tiger poachers also aids the illegal trade—some tiger poachers are taxidermists who provide 'quality' skins for sale.

Indonesia's conservation laws set maximum punishment for offenders of five years' imprisonment and a fine of 200 million rupiah (\$25,500). However, many prosecutors and judges are unfamiliar with conservation laws. "What is applied in Indonesia are common criminal laws. That's why tiger slaughter is treated the same way as stealing a chicken," Roed says. Once, a tiger poacher was arrested in Way Kambas National Park in Lampung, South Sumatra but sentenced to only six months in jail. "If only the law was being enforced, it is a good deterrent to poachers," Saredi says.

Sumatran tigers are classified under Appendix I of the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species, which means they are "very endangered" and should not be traded. But, Sugeng Hariady, head of the West Sumatra wildlife preservation office, says, "Poachers can sell just about every single piece of the tiger's anatomy. Practically all parts of the tigers, including the skeleton, are traditionally believed to have medical benefits."

Much of the kill is destined for the Chinese medicine market. Additionally, tiger parts like claws and bones are utilised as ornaments or in shawans' amulets, and the tiger's penis is considered an aphrodisiac. In Indonesia, some homes have whole tigers mounted as decorations or kept as pets. Tiger parts and skins are sold openly in malls and airports.

Sumatra's damaged environment provides ample proof that tigers and other animals are under threat. "The rapidly diminishing population of the Sumatran tigers is indicated by the increasing number of pigs and wild boars in West Sumatra, which are often a nuisance to farmers," Hariady says. Indonesia's total forested area has fallen to 58.5 million hectares from 64 million hectares over the last six years due to illegal logging and conversion of forests to palm oil plantations.

In Sumatra itself, lowland forests have been shrinking. At least 25 percent of the Mount Laseur National Park in northern Sumatra has been damaged by rampant deforestation. Says Roed, "Now with poaching decimating their population and extensive logging destroying their habitat, it is feared that the Sumatran tigers will suffer the same fate as the Balinese and Javan tigers, both long declared extinct." ♦ (IPS)

The great betrayal

ISLAMABAD - Nawaz Sharif's exile to Saudi Arabia last weekend discredited Pakistan's military-led government in the public eye, but its rulers see it as a way to secure power. Reports said that under the agreement Sharif would no longer serve time but would stay away from politics for 21 years.

Officials deny any underhand deal. An official spokesman said Sharif was pardoned on purely humanitarian grounds. Sharif, 51, had been complaining of heart problems and is expected to report to hospital after arriving in Jeddah. "The government only turned imprisonment of the Sharifs into exile, while the rest of the punishments would stay," the spokesman added. Officials say that Sharif would forfeit some PRs 500 million (\$8.8 million) in property.

The acceptance of mercy appeals is unprecedented in Pakistan. In 1979, ousted PM Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was hanged by Gen Zia ul Haq's military regime after similar appeals were rejected. Former Chief Justice of Pakistan Sajjad Ali Shah opined that Pakistan's president cannot pardon Sharif without the consent of the court. The situation has only encouraged erstwhile discredited politicians to demand "the early restoration of democracy". Last week, the parties of former prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Sharif—the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Muslim League (ML)—joined hands with 10 others to form the Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD). A PPP spokesman said: "It is clear that accountability has little to do with corruption, and everything has to do with achieving political ends by fair means or foul for a certain political agenda." ML workers, who stood by the Sharif family through the ordeal, are at a loss on what they see as betrayal by Sharif.

Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz and United Arab Emirates (UAE) President Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan reportedly orchestrated Sharif's release. Bill Clinton too is said to have influenced the deal, by expressing sympathy for Sharif during his visit to Pakistan.

However the exile may be seen outside, at home it is "the great betrayal". *The News* said Sharif was the prototype politician engineered by the previous generation of military rulers and one whom a big chunk of population took for real. "His departure from the scene would have been considered a welcome end to a failed experiment in political engineering," it added. ♦ (IPS)

SAVING FAITH

by DESMOND DOIG

Was there a yeti in the Royal Zoo?

In a corner of Bhaktapur's Durbar Square, standing prominently below the old palace, is a small shikara type temple to Bhagwati, significant because it boasts some amazing sculpture. Images of the goddess are particularly fine, but eclipsed by a double row of stone statues that flank the temple stairway.

At the base are two strong men, perhaps watchmen or royal guards. They restrain savage mastiffs with heavy chains, and in their free hand clutch what have been described variously to me as children or criminals. I favour children because the nude figures clutch what look like balls or fruit in their hands. On the other hand, the firmness with which they are held suggests evil deeds of some sort, their small size perhaps reflecting the old artistic device of making lesser characters smaller than important ones. Whatever, the dress of the larger figures is extraordinary. To me they look like Venetian Dogs, but obviously they wear the costume of the court. Very grand headdresses wound around with figured turbans and secured with jewelled clasps. Carefully pleated robes, handsome belts in which are tucked daggers, Tibetan type boots and a wealth of jewellery around their necks and cascading from their ears.

I asked passers-by as I sketched if they knew who these figures represented and the answers were fascinating. Wrestlers. Policemen. Royal ayahs. Gods. Zoo keepers. Executioners. Noblemen. The child was being punished, dragged for a walk, going to be killed, fed to the dog. Since the child, or criminal, wears a sort of coronet on its head, guessing becomes difficult.

Above the men are two horses, richly caparisoned, hurg with bells, bejewelled, and even their hooves appear to be carved, perhaps painted with bold designs. These surely were royal mounts, or more important, mounts fit for the gods.



The ascending humans, beasts and divinities are each ten times stronger than the other so that the accumulative strength protecting the temple image is enormous.

They look spirited without a trace of devilment.

With the two one-horned rhino above the horses, we are into conjecture again. Were these primordial beasts brought from the tarai in the heavy chains they wear to fight before the king, or were

they exhibits in his zoo? That they wear rich saddle cloths seems to suggest that they may have been tame and used especially for processions. The anonymous sculptor, however, has captured a fierceness in their eyes that together with their heavy chains makes me believe they belonged either to a royal menagerie or were watched in duels, distinguished by the colours they wore.

Sitting above the rhino are the most intriguing of all the sculptures. Undoubtedly they portray wild-men, jungle-men, ape-men, or could they possibly be yetis? They have human faces with beards, manes and mustaches. But their ears are pointed, like animals, their bodies are as much animal as they are muscular human. The way in which they crouch rather than sit points to the wild. And they wear head chairs of captivity. Is it possible that a Malla king had ape-men in his zoo, or had the sculptor either himself seen or heard the tales of wild men of the snows?

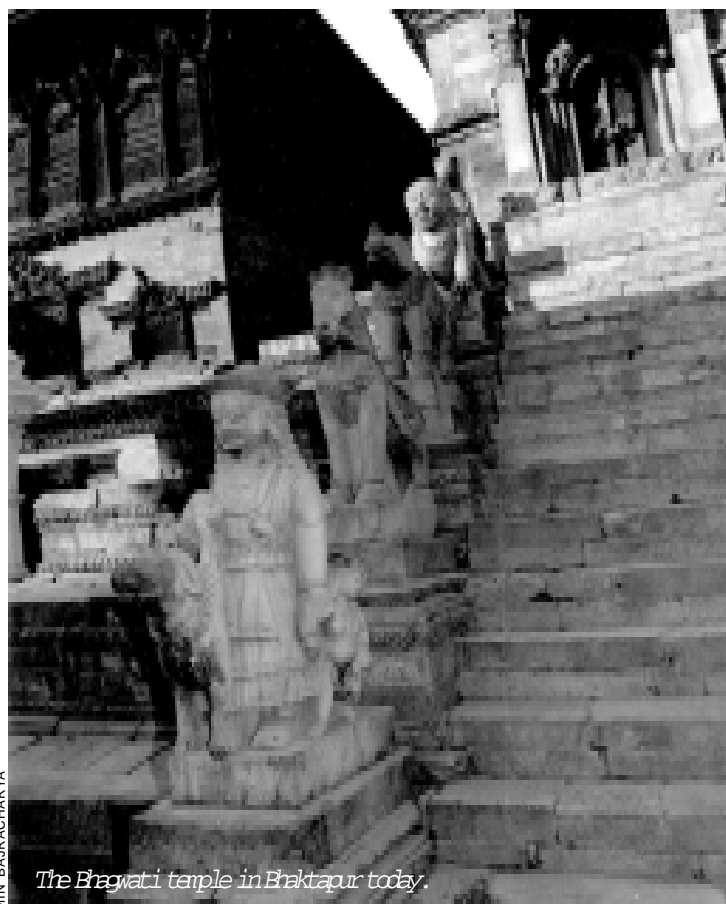
Lastly are a pair of carrels, the only two stone sculpted carrels in the Kathmandu valley. In fact, it is only in Bhaktapur, carved into an ornate wooden window and here on the steps of

the Bhagwati temple, that carrels have inspired sculptors and carvers. Could it be they echo the carrel caravans that crossed the high Gobi desert on their way to Tibet and Nepal? Or do they recall the carrels of the Rajputana desert that the early Rajput immigrants remembered?

I have been unable to discover the purpose of these delightful sculptures other than that they protect the deity in the temple. Many of the great temples of Bhaktapur have their entrances guarded by legendary wrestlers of superhuman strength. One memorable example has the ascending humans, beasts and divinities each ten times stronger than the other so that the accumulative strength protecting the temple image is enormous.

This Durga temple was raised in the seventeenth century, in all probability by the master builder of Bhaktapur, King Bhupatindra Malla. His love of the beautiful and bizarre may well make him responsible for this temple and its unique sculpture. If only he had kept a diary. I'd love to know about that ape-man. That yeti. ♦

(Excerpted with permission from *In the Kingdom of the Gods*, HarperCollins, 1999)



The Bhagwati temple in Bhaktapur today.

MIN BAURACHARYA

BOOK REVIEW

by WENDY KING

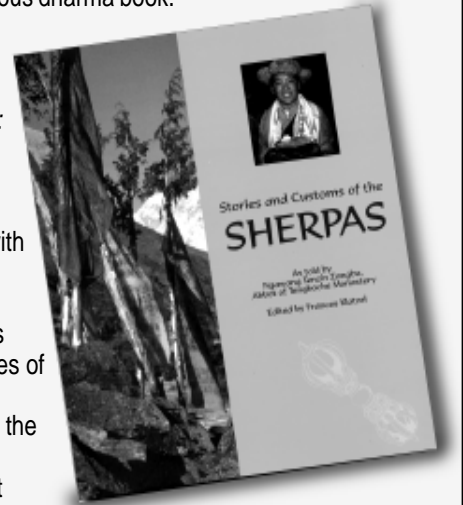
Tales from Tengboche

Treat yourself to a fireside chat with the Abbot of the Tengboche Gompa.

much has been written and said about the Sherpas of Khumbu. There has been every kind of work—academic, touristy guidebook, oversized coffee table glossy and the ubiquitous dharma book.

There's a different flavour though, to *Fireside Chat with Tengboche Rinpoche: Stories and Customs of the Sherpas*.

It does have this fireside appeal to it, with its orange cover. You almost feel the Tengboche Rinpoche's presence, telling stories of Sherpas, Mt Everest, Sherpa Buddhism and the famous Tengboche monastery, as you sat around and sipped tea.



The Abbot of the Tengboche Monastery explains that he "wanted to make a book about the Sherpa's heritage" for visitors coming to Khumbu to see Chomolongma. But also for Sherpas themselves, since their way of life is changing so rapidly. And it effectively tells stories in true oral tradition.

Ngawang Tenzin Zangbu, the Abbot of Tengboche Monastery, has met trekkers and climbers in Khumbu for decades, and anticipates their questions. In this book, he shares his special perspective on the stories, the myths and lives of Sherpas. He illuminates the Sherpa world and their origins: the 'people from the east'. He tells the story of Guru Rinpoche, the founder of Tibetan Buddhism, and how he founded the Khumbu Valley and established it as a spiritual sanctuary. The Rinpoche then delves into Sherpa religion, explaining, "The purpose of religion is to perfect our minds... Our own minds cause happiness and unhappiness." His pithy explanation of Buddhism provides a basic foundation for newcomers and renewed inspiration to followers.

He follows the annual cycle of prayers for the crops, the animals, a new house, marriage, living and dying. The ceremonies are primarily religious, but the celebrations, like all good celebrations, also unite the community and strengthen bonds within and between villages. The Rinpoche tells the story of Lama Sangwa Dorje of Pangboche village who started the Dumje festival to celebrate the anniversary of Guru Rinpoche's birth. It now also commemorates Lama Sangwa Dorje's enlightenment. Eight families take their turn each year to sponsor the Dumje, feeding the entire village. The Rinpoche explains: "Dumje-type prayers are done in Tibet, but the feeding is only done in Khumbu, where it is possible because the communities here are small."

Focusing on everyday life, Rinpoche portrays Sherpa occupations, food, architecture, dress and jewellery. In describing monk's clothing, he explains the importance of religious objects like prayer flags and holds that these "help create harmony between our actions, body and mind".

After setting the scene in Khumbu and the local culture, Rinpoche talks about the Tengboche Monastery "which has been the heart of Sherpa culture since 1916". It was partially rebuilt after the 1934 earthquake, and then totally rebuilt after a fire in 1991. In the reconstruction, the Rinpoche established a school in the monastery for higher Buddhist education to maintain Sherpa culture in this changing world. The book culminates with a description of the annual Mani Rimdu festival with its colourful masked dances celebrating Phakpa Chenrizig, the god of compassion.

Jim Fisher, an anthropologist who did his field work on Sherpas in the 1960's, returned again in the 70's and 80's to look at the impact of decades of tourism. Fisher found that the respect and admiration the tourists bestow upon Sherpas—for their culture, their prowess as climbers, and simply as personable individuals—has actually reinforced and strengthened Sherpa traditions and culture.

This book was first published in 1985 through the Sherpa Cultural Centre project. This updated fourth edition is a product of the long friendship and collaboration between the Tengboche Rinpoche and Frances Klatzel, the editor. It is a short, informative, and personal book, creatively illustrated on every page with a fine collection of over 60 black and white photos (including some 1950's photos from Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf's collection) and a dozen sketches. Though there is a general map of Nepal, I wish the book included a local map of the Khumbu area, highlighting places mentioned in the text.

Stories and Customs of the Sherpas is a privileged insight into the Tengboche Rinpoche's perspective on Sherpa heritage. Treat yourself and your friends to a fireside chat with the Abbot of Tengboche Gompa.

Fireside Chat with Tengboche Rinpoche: Stories and Customs of the Sherpas; as told by Ngawang Tenzin Zangbu, Abbot of Tengboche Monastery
 Edited by Frances Klatzel, Mera Publications 2000

Uncaring government

Saptahik Bimarsa, 8 December

Most of the ministers are not carrying out their duties in the manner that is expected of them. The highly objectionable and irresponsible behaviour of some is raising questions about the entire government performance. Ministers are making no effort to tackle the grave issues we are facing and one can only guess as to what problems these issues will lead to in future. No one has been able to gauge correctly the magnitude of problems that the nation is likely to face in the future, but one thing is for sure—the situation is slowly turning catastrophic.

Everyone thinks a disaster is unlikely, but now one of the main pillars of our economy, the tourism sector, is being completely shut down. The government has made no effort to solve the crisis. The government was informed both verbally and through a written notice that hotel employees were to go on strike from 26 November and that hotel owners were going to pull down their shutters. The tourism minister was not prepared to listen and try to foresee where the problem could lead. Since he had to contest an election in his village, he asked the law ministry to handle the situation and left the capital. The problem just got worse. The employees wanted the government to take a decision, but that did not happen. The situation has now taken such a turn that employers are prepared to keep the shutters down rather than pay the 10 percent service charge demanded by unions, and employees are not prepared to work unless they get the 10 percent service charge.



Abandoned Kathmandu hotel reception.

This has led employers to notify their international agents and clients that they may not be able to provide services for some time in the near future. Hotel owners even informed clients who were using their services that from 11 December there may be disruptions in facilities and services being provided. If no agreement is reached, all hotels are going to be shut for an unlimited period.

In this very week, teachers working in 18 remote districts have stopped work. They are agitating because allowances for working in remote places have been slashed. The government has not taken any steps to resolve the issue. The agitation started by temporarily TU teachers is also on. The government is undecided on this front too. The health sector too has been in turmoil for the past 10 days. People working in X-ray units, clinical labs and other basic but important departments are agitating because the allowances they were being provided have been reduced. The concerned ministry remains silent over the issue. Earlier teachers in government schools went on strike for five days. No decision has been taken concerning their demands. The teachers state that their agitation will enter phase two now.

The price of kerosene was reduced by Rs 4, but this was done only after the opposition threatened to shut down the whole country for two days. It seems that only the mention of shutting down the country activates the concerned ministry and then it tries to resolve the crisis, never realising how that could lead people to lose confidence in the government.

In the last few days, it seems that the PM himself has been unable to control his cabinet members. Ministers have realised that it makes no difference whether they carry out their duties or not. Eight months ago, when this government was formed, the cabinet passed a decision stating that a monthly press conference would be held by each ministry to evaluate progress and make public what work had been done. Only the Local Development Ministry held a press conference after the decision was taken, but only once. Other ministries have not even bothered to do the same. Ministers remain silent even when publicly questioned and criticised by junior officials in their organisations. A recent example of this was when the chief secretary stopped a minister from carrying out any discussion in the cabinet about a secretary of his ministry.

It is also said that none of the ministers have been able to control their respective ministries and agencies. Ministers have publicly accused some chairmen of public corporations of taking wrong decisions or not acting in the best interest of the people. But they have not been able to take action against the concerned chairmen. Some chairmen are rumoured to have taken decisions that have caused high financial losses, but all the ministers have done is to set up investigation commissions, received the recommendations of the commissions and then let the issue pass. No one has been able to comprehend why the PM and his cabinet have become so inefficient.

'Maoists don't want dialogue'

Prakash Weekly, 8 December



Excerpts of an Interview with R.K. Mainali, Politburo Member, CPN (ML)

Q Is the left parties' agitation leaderless?

A To be frank, there is no leader that can understand the desire of the people to be able to carry the left movement forward, someone who can bring all the communists together. Today's movement cannot be carried forward with a mode of operation that dates back to the 1960s.

Q That's how the Maoists are functioning, isn't it?

A There has been some change in the thinking of the Maoists in these four years. In spite of difficulties being created by their violent means, some change has taken place in the past few days. They have started talking about competition. They still kill people who do not agree with their politics, but have also realised that is wrong. They say different things about starting a dialogue, but have realised that a dialogue could be held with the King even while they remain underground. For a political party to realise and accept that a dialogue with anyone is for the benefit of the party and people is an achievement in itself.

Q The dialogue between the Maoists and the government is in limbo. What effect will this have on the country?

A Both the government and the Maoists are dishonest. They have made dialogue a medium for politicking. Various factions in the Congress are opposing each other and have made the issue of dialogue a means of carrying further their own political agendas. The UML leaders have been stating that they can be mediators, but the truth is that no political party can be a medium for such a dialogue. If the Maoists are honest, then they should work through a human rights activist. The Maoists do not want a solution through dialogue, because if you hold a dialogue then you must reach a conclusion and also lay down arms. The Maoists are not prepared to give up their weapons. On the other hand the Congress wants to finish off the Maoists through dialogue.

Q You have raised the issue about the need for direct elections of the PM.

A Our general secretary raised the issue. Actually this will prove detrimental for the country. If direct elections are held for a PM, it is bound to create problems—influencing 11.5 million people is not a small issue. If during elections to parliament, foreign forces are active. Think about how active they will be when direct elections are held to elect a PM.

'PAC can summon the PM'

Lokpatra Weekly, 8 December

Excerpts of an interview with Subash Newari, Chairman, Public Accounts Committee (PAC)

Q Do you feel that PAC directives are not being followed?

A Till now the results were good, but in the Lucha Air case we feel that

our directives have not been carried out.

Q Does it mean that you can disregard PAC directives?

A When parliament is not in session then PAC itself becomes a miniature parliament. Therefore there is no question of not following its directives. A decision made by it is similar to a decision made by parliament. By not heeding the directives, the government is not following the directives of parliament.

Q What can PAC now do on the Lucha Air issue?

A We are slowly reacting to what has taken place. The PAC has listened to the minister's statement on the issue. He said that disregard of PAC's directive was unintentional.

Q Are you satisfied with the response?

A The PAC is meeting again. We will discuss his response. As far as I am concerned, he could not give us a satisfactory answer. We asked him only one question, 'can parliament's directives be disobeyed under any



circumstances?' He did not reply.

Q What about summoning the PM for questioning?

A The PAC is going to discuss this. If the PAC is not satisfied with the minister's answer, then we might go ahead. By ahead, we mean that the council of ministers and the PM can be called in for questioning. The PAC can call him. Right now I cannot say whether this is going to happen or not.

Q Can parliament function properly if its directives are disobeyed?

A Our constitution places responsibility on the council of ministers and the head of this council who is an elected representative. Therefore parliamentarians are compelled to follow the decisions and function responsibly. A parliament cannot function without this practice. Therefore we are arguing that disregarding our directive on Lucha Air has become a question of concern to parliament. This must stop otherwise parliament will not be able to function properly.

'Maoists threat to monarchy'

Lok Dristi National Weekly, 9 December

Excerpts from an interview with Subil Koirala, General Secretary, Nepali Congress

Q Does the PM's candidacy for party president mean the defeat of the second generation?

A In politics there is nothing about generations. Reaching middle age, having grey hair or beard is no qualification for becoming a leader. Therefore there is no first or second generation, we are all the present generation. On the other hand, just announcing the candidacy of one person does not mean the other has been defeated. Koirala (PM) has an opportunity to win, Deuba also has the chance to do so. The so-called second generation should be able to prove themselves in the forthcoming party election.

Q What is the basis for Koirala to be elected again?

A In South Asia, there are only two people alive who have fought for over

50 years for democracy—one is (Krishna Prasad) Bhattarai and the other is (Girija Prasad) Koirala. Bhattarai has stated that he will not contest. Therefore there is only one person who has the political courage to tackle problems, has a clean image, is wanted by the party workers and has political stature, and that is Koirala.

Q How do you assess the candidacy of Deuba?

A To vie for leadership through bargaining and not by contesting is a joke. He was president of the Nepal Student Union for eight years and during that time he went abroad many a time. Now he claims to have a formula for correcting everything in this country and stands in the name of the youth. This is not going to benefit him.

Q There are also talks that a no-confidence motion against Koirala is coming?

A It is a rumour. There is no truth in it. I cannot imagine any friends moving a no-confidence motion during these tough times. A no-confidence motion is not in the interests of the party, country, democracy and people. It will add to problems. Such an action will make the Congress weak and will destroy democracy.

Q Will the Congress break up?

A The Congress will not break up—it did not break up yesterday nor will it break up today or tomorrow. In spite of all the rumours it will in fact unite and move ahead. It is a specialty of the Congress, unity in diversity and togetherness amidst diversity.

Q Has the government failed to resolve the Maoist problem?

A The government has not been unsuccessful. It has kept the doors open for negotiations. The government is using all means available to resolve the problem.



Q Is the monarchy safe when the Maoists seem to be growing more powerful?

A If this problem continues then a civil war will break out. It will destroy the monarchy. The monarchy is not safe with Maoists around. If the nation does not survive, monarchy will not survive and the people too will not survive.

Phone fees double?

Desharner Saptahik, 10 December

After the increase in the prices of electricity, diesel and kerosene, it now seems that telephone charges are going to be raised. It is said that decrease in the revenue from international calls is forcing an increase in charges for local calls. This will benefit a very small number of people and hurt the majority.

According to the general manager of NIC the increase is not slated for now but sometime in the future. He said that the ministry is studying the proposal and it is not yet clear if the government will approve the hike. A decision will be made in a month.

Last year the corporation gave the government its proposal for raising charges. It presented four alternatives. The government and parliament at that time did not want to further burden the people as it had just increased the electricity tariffs and prices of petroleum products and did not have the courage to raise telecom rates.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"At any point of time our party may take to armed revolution depending on the situation and circumstances in the country."

General Secretary Bantey Gutam in his inaugural address to the First National Convention of his Communist Party of Nepal-Marxist-Leninist—in Ghatibidhi, Saptahik, 9 December.



Hey, principal, don't worry, we have ensured full security, you can open your school.

—Spacetire, 10 December

Who is the best?

French midfielder Zinedine Zidane as expected won FIFA's world player of the year award in Rome this week but his coronation was overshadowed by the continuing spat between Pele and Diego Maradona over which of the two most deserved to be crowned player of the century.

Zidane took the prestige award for the second time in three years in the poll of 150 national coaches from across the globe. The 28-year-old Juventus midfielder won 370 votes, ahead of Real Madrid's Luis Figo—the world's costliest player at 37 million pounds—who polled 327. Third was Brazilian ace Rivaldo, last year's winner, who took 263 votes.

Zidane is world player of the year. Maradona and Pele both think they were the best ever.

Manchester United's David Beckham was the top British player in sixth place despite Franz Beckenbauer's recent assessment that he was the best on the planet. Beckham gained four first-place votes, one of them significantly from Dutch coach, Louis van Gaal. Only two other British and Irish players featured in the list—Roy Keane and Andy Cole—who only managed to collect one third-placed vote each.

Zidane, who won the prize on the back of his European Championship

displays rather than on this season's European stage where he has been sent off twice while playing for Juventus, said he still had at least two years left at the peak of his career. But the World Cup and European Championship-winning star said they would not be spent in the Premiership where so many of his compatriots play.

"The English league is excellent with many high-quality players but it is not one of my priorities," he said. "I have a contract with Juventus until

2005 and I still think my two best years are ahead of me. If there is one thing I miss, it is a Champions League trophy. I have been on the losing side twice."

Zidane's success could not disguise the fact that most of the attention focussed on Maradona and Pele who arrived at the glitzy gala at a Rome television studio within seconds of each other and were mobbed by cameramen. Earlier, Maradona had answered a personal plea from FIFA president Sepp Blatter by flying into Rome with his entire family to receive one of the two 'player of the century' accolades. Maradona and Pele have been at loggerheads ever since becoming entangled in a war of words over which of the two was more deserving to win the award.

When it became clear that the owner of the "Hand of God" had surprisingly picked up the original internet poll open to the general public, FIFA fearfully introduced a separate "football family vote" conducted by its own officials and was won by a landslide by Pele with his rival back in third place. As an attempt at diplomacy, it bordered on the pathetic.

Just before entering the invitation-only ceremony, Pele could not disguise his feelings for the controversial Argentinian, who was dressed to the hilt for the occasion including silver earrings in both ears. "It's true we are not good friends," said Pele. "He was a good player when he was at Napoli and I have great respect for him. But if he thinks he was a better player than me, that's his problem." ♦ (stb)



"My two best years are ahead of me."

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

Central Agency for Technical Cooperation
Rural Development Programme



The objective of the Rural Development Programme (RDP), implemented by CATEC and supported by the Central Agency for Technical Cooperation (CAT), is to enable the rural population to improve their socio-economic situation. RDP's main areas of activity are the promotion of self-help groups, rural transport infrastructure development, strengthening MCOs and local government bodies as well as extension and employment promotion.

RDP invites qualified professionals to apply for the following posts:

I. Coordinator Technical Division

Minimum qualifications and experience:

- Graduated in public affairs, Economics, extension, agricultural extension, planning, sociology, education, RDP studies
- Quality knowledge of computer software for word processing and calculation
- Knowledge of management reporting system, financial systems, databases
- Good knowledge of Nepali language

Minimum professional requirements:

- 5 years of experience in rural extension, agricultural extension, extension, planning, sociology, education, RDP studies
- Experience in technical management extension, agricultural extension, extension, planning, sociology, education, RDP studies
- Good knowledge of word processing software for word processing and calculation
- Good command of oral and written English, knowledge of German will be an added advantage

II. Coordinator Operational Division

Minimum qualifications and experience:

- Graduated in the field of technical extension, agricultural extension, extension, planning, sociology, education, RDP studies
- Development and implementation of monitoring system and a monitoring system for extension activities
- Quality knowledge of rural extension, agricultural extension, extension, planning, sociology, education, RDP studies
- Good knowledge of Nepali language

Minimum professional requirements:

- 5 years of experience in rural extension, agricultural extension, extension, planning, sociology, education, RDP studies
- Experience in technical management and monitoring system, financial systems, databases
- Good knowledge of word processing software for word processing and calculation
- Good command of oral and written English, knowledge of German will be an added advantage

3. Senior Professional for Training, Institutional Development and Social Mobilization

Minimum qualifications and experience:

- Degree of B.A. or B.S. in Agricultural Extension or Social
- Professional training in
- Promotion of saving societies
- Knowledge of the requirements of the field of extension, agricultural extension, extension, planning, sociology, education, RDP studies
- Quality knowledge of rural extension, agricultural extension, extension, planning, sociology, education, RDP studies
- Good command of oral and written English, knowledge of German will be an added advantage

Minimum professional requirements:

- 5 years of experience in
- Good command of oral and written English, knowledge of German will be an added advantage
- Experience in technical management and monitoring system, financial systems, databases
- Good knowledge of word processing software for word processing and calculation
- Good command of oral and written English, knowledge of German will be an added advantage

4. Senior Professional for Economic Promotion and Natural Resource Management

Minimum qualifications and experience:

- Graduate degree in Economics, Extension, Agricultural Extension, extension, planning, sociology, education, RDP studies
- Quality knowledge of rural extension, agricultural extension, extension, planning, sociology, education, RDP studies
- Good command of oral and written English, knowledge of German will be an added advantage

Minimum professional requirements:

- 5 years of experience in Economics, Extension, Agricultural Extension, extension, planning, sociology, education, RDP studies
- Good command of oral and written English, knowledge of German will be an added advantage

5. Professional for Economic Promotion and Natural Resource Management

Duty station: RDP District Office Lamjung

Minimum qualifications and experience:

- Graduate degree in Economics, Extension, Agricultural Extension, extension, planning, sociology, education, RDP studies
- Quality knowledge of rural extension, agricultural extension, extension, planning, sociology, education, RDP studies
- Good command of oral and written English, knowledge of German will be an added advantage

Minimum professional requirements:

- 5 years of experience in Economics, Extension, Agricultural Extension, extension, planning, sociology, education, RDP studies
- Good command of oral and written English, knowledge of German will be an added advantage

6. Procurement Officer

Minimum qualifications and experience:

- Graduate degree in Economics, Extension, Agricultural Extension, extension, planning, sociology, education, RDP studies
- Quality knowledge of rural extension, agricultural extension, extension, planning, sociology, education, RDP studies
- Good command of oral and written English, knowledge of German will be an added advantage

Minimum professional requirements:

- 5 years of experience in Economics, Extension, Agricultural Extension, extension, planning, sociology, education, RDP studies
- Good command of oral and written English, knowledge of German will be an added advantage

7. Information Technology Specialist

Minimum qualifications and experience:

- Graduate degree in Information Technology, Extension, Agricultural Extension, extension, planning, sociology, education, RDP studies
- Quality knowledge of rural extension, agricultural extension, extension, planning, sociology, education, RDP studies
- Good command of oral and written English, knowledge of German will be an added advantage

Minimum professional requirements:

- 5 years of experience in Information Technology, Extension, Agricultural Extension, extension, planning, sociology, education, RDP studies
- Good command of oral and written English, knowledge of German will be an added advantage

Minimum qualification for positions listed above: Graduate level education in relevant discipline from a recognized university in Nepal or abroad.

Where are the vacancies?

These are complete applications (including passport size photograph) to:

CATEC, P.O. Box 107, Kathmandu
(contact telephone: 01-4253101/102/103)

Closing date: 21 December 2000. Only short-listed candidates will be contacted. Nepali is the official language.

ABOUT TOWN

ART EXHIBITION

❖ **Spiritual Expression.** Solo exhibition by Indian artist Mona Ghosh, works varying from mixed media to oil and acrylic. NAFA Hall, Naxal. Closing 15 December, Friday. 411821.



❖ **Watercolour Exhibition.** An exhibition of watercolours by artist Raju Chitrakar reflecting cultural and social aspects of Nepal. Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal. Closing 17 December. 10.30 am-5.30 pm.

❖ **A diary of portraits (1975-99).** A series of studies in mixed media of the colourful people of Kathmandu by Carolyn Boch, long term resident of Nepal and art teacher at the Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre. The New Restaurant, Summit Hotel, Kuponole. Opening 3 pm, Friday 15 December.

❖ **Reflections of Nature.** Exhibition of paintings by German artist Dagmar Mathes depicting impressions gathered during her six-year stay in Nepal, mostly from treks to Dolpo, Mustang, Manang, Solu Khumbu, Nubri and Tsum. The artist uses watercolours, acrylics and pigments from turmeric, saffron, cinnamon and nutmeg in paintings and collages made on Nepali handmade paper. Closing 17 December. 9 am-5 pm. GTZ, Neer Bhawan, Sanepa. 470584

FAIRS

❖ **The Summit Hotel Xmas Night Market.** A grand Christmas Night Market. More than 25 stalls will display an array of Nepali products, gifts and much more. Friday 15 December, 4 pm-8 pm, Summit Hotel Garden. Entry Free.

❖ **St. Xavier's School Annual Mela.** Annual funfair with lots of game stalls, the city's popular food joints, as well as some business stalls. Raffle ticket holders need not pay the Rs 25 entry fee. 16 December, 11 am-5 pm, St Xavier's School, Jawalakhel.

PHOTOGRAPHY

❖ **Revolutions:** Rhythms of Humla. Exhibition by Prasant Shrestha, upcoming Nepali photographer, and Kimberly McClinch, American photographer and anthropology student. Closing 18 December, Monday. 11 am-5 pm. 220735, Nepal Art Council Gallery.

❖ **Angkor:** Black and white photography exhibition by Jaro Poncar of Prague. The focus of the exhibition is the Hindu/Buddhist temple complex Angkor, regarded as one of the architectural wonders of the world. Indigo Gallery, Naxal. 20 December through 20 Jan 2001. 8 am-6 pm.



MUSIC

❖ **Jazz Sessions.** Live jazz at The Jazz Bar, Hotel Shangrila. A unique jazz bar where Michael Feinstein played Gershwin & Porter. Featuring this month a host of jazz bands including Elaine McInnes & Chris Masand with the Jazz Commission, the Swingtones, the Latin Lovers and others playing Cole Porter, Gershwin, Brubeck and Coltrane. Enjoy drinks from a bottomless cellar, gourmet food, coffee, cognac and cigars and hear... interpret Ella, Sarah, and Louis. 412999.

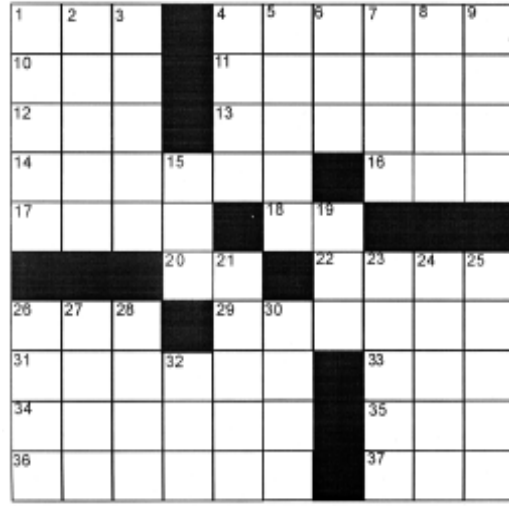
❖ **Maha Yantra Live:** Hotel Yak & Yeti presents a classical music concert by the acoustic trio, Maha Yantra. Get ready for a trip from East to West on the vibes of bamboo basuri, tabla and guitar. 7 pm, Saturday 16 December, Durbar Hall, Rs 500.

MARTIN CHAUTARI

Status of the Women's Right Bill and other legal challenges for women's rights. Sapana Pradhan Malla and Gopal Siwakoti Chintan will lead the discussion. Participation open to all. 19 December. Unless otherwise noted, presentations are in Nepali. Write or call for directions: chautari@mos.com.np/246065

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com

QUICKWORD 11



Across

1. Suppliant holding (3)
4. Spirited places (6)
10. Pigeon, or spoonbill (3)
11. Attack the ant (6)
12. *Sajha* cart (3)
13. Anterior perhaps (6)
14. Base solution (6)
16. Flashy diode (3)
17. Poultry preoccupation (4)
18. Message the other as well (2)
20. Time for the personnel (2)
22. Look out in Norway (4)
26. Tap the school body (3)
29. Fledgling raptor (6)
31. Deep blue cruisers (6)
33. Foal breakfast (3)
34. Inaccurate swinger (6)
35. Singapore from here (3)
36. Uncompromising breastbone (6)
37. Not him certainly (3)

Down

1. Plotter clique (5)
2. Flap in screamer's throat (5)
3. Troublesome fly (5)
4. Drag the seizure (4)
5. Meat jelly (5)
6. American paper boats (3)
7. Tension chewy (4)
8. Lunar pull (4)
9. Toboggan (4)
15. Remains of the grey (3)
19. Gearwheel canine (3)
21. False start (5)
23. Splash the drunk (5)
24. Grant for a while (5)
25. Freshwater mammal (5)
26. Positive advantage (4)
27. Trace or a hint (4)
28. Before the poker game (4)
30. Dropped out of south-east trade group (4)
32. Stray, it's human (3)

Terms and conditions

- 1 The contest is open to everyone, except employees of Himalmedia Pvt Ltd and Infocom Pvt Ltd.
- 2 In case of more than one correct entry, the winner will be decided by lucky draw.
- 3 Entries have to reach Himalmedia, by 5 pm, Tuesday.
- 4 The winner will be announced in the coming issue.
- 5 The prize has to be collected from Himalmedia within a week of the announcement. Please come with an ID.

QUICKWORD ANSWER 10



Out of 5 correct entries the lucky winner is **Sulochan Acharya**

WIN A 100 HOUR INFOCOM MILLENNIUM CD WORTH RS 3600/-

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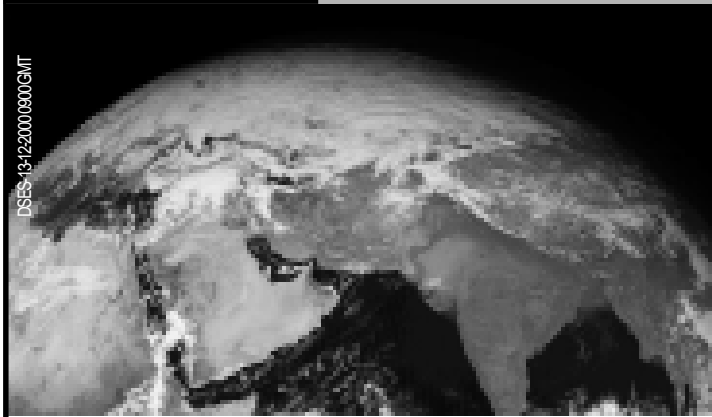
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To send in your entries, please fill in the details below and fax to 977-1-521013, or email to crossword@himalmedia.com. Entries can be dropped off at Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur.

Name.....
Ph.....email.....

NEPALI WEATHER



Moisture from the west has finally started filtering across to us here in the Central Himalaya, but not in sufficient quantities to lead to any major cloud buildup. Look for some cloud cover and thick fog in Kathmandu and other midhill valleys. The southwesterly jet stream is now active. The system still does not possess sufficient water vapour for any substantial rain or snow, although a drizzle or flurries in the high mountains is a possibility. A high-pressure system prevailing over the Gangetic plain is preventing the westerly front from further advancing into Nepal. All this resulted in a drop of daytime temperature but no change in night temperature. The very low temperatures in December are due to heat loss on clear nights, this may change in the coming week with sporadic cloud cover.

KATHMANDU

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
19-04	18-03	19-02	19-03	20-02

Corrupted oil in Nepal

The Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies has named a three-member team to probe adulteration of petroleum products. The team is headed by a joint secretary of the ministry and has chiefs of the commerce department and the Department of Standards as members. The ministry says the probe was formed to address "recent public outcry" over adulteration and to present the facts to the public. Recent issues of *Himal Khabarpatrika* and *Nepali Times* (#19) published investigative reports on widespread and open adulteration of petrol and diesel and the involvement of Nepal Oil Corporation officials in the racket. The Ministry's probe team does not include anyone from NOC.

Chhinalata passes away

Noted lyricist and promoter of Nepali literature Ramola Devi Shah 'Chhinalata', 77, passed away on 4 December. Chhinalata was married to the late Prince Basundhara Shah, King Mahendra's youngest brother. A self-taught writer, she established the *Chhinalata Puraskar Guthi* literary trust in 1983, which honours personalities involved in the field of Nepali music. Her four books are noted for their lucid expression.



A whole nation's future is dimmed when schools are forced to close.

Let not the flame die.



Private and Boarding School Organisation Nepal (PABSON)





After taking 2.5 million steps across the Nepal Himalaya, Japanese photographer Tadao Nomura has published a book to show that every mountain has a distinctive personality.

BINOD BHATTARAI

Tadao Nomura's 11th trip to Nepal this month was for what he called an "easy trek." Instead of lugging 20 kg of photographic equipment to take pictures of Nepali mountains in different moods, this time he was guiding his son and a group of photographers to revisit some of the best spots from his earlier expeditions during which he traversed Nepal from east to west.

With the help of a device strapped to his legs, he even counted the number of steps he took over two years: 2.5 million. Other statistics: Nomura took 3,000 pictures, walked for 150 days on four separate expeditions, and he traversed ten high Himalayan passes above 5,500 m like Tashi Labtsa, Thorung La, Tilman Col. Between 1997-99, Nomura made his way from Kangchenzonga to Dhaulagiri the hard way: up and down valleys and passes along the main spine of the Nepal Himalaya.

Nomura chose 95 of the thousands of pictures and packed them into a beautiful glossy 85-page book, the title of which translates as *Pilgrimage in the Himalaya*. The mountains here are at their photogenic best: eight-thousanders like Cho-Oyu, Mt Everest, Kangchenzonga, Dhaulagiri, Lhotse, Makalu in various moods ranging from the ferocious reds of sunsets to the pale grey of sunrise. Then there are unconventional shots of Gang Chhenpo, Kangtega and Machha-pudhare. Nomura's

affection for mountains and his meticulous attention to photographic detail have produced a book (unfortunately only in Japanese for the moment, although there are plans for a translation) that gives information on equipment, exposure, lens used, speed and film for every photograph printed in the book.

When Nomura was not lugging his cameras up the mountains before dawn or at midnight (to capture an intriguing long-exposure shot of North Star above Ganggauri), he was shooting life in the villages and homes. Dawa Wangchu Sherpa of Karali Trekking, his guide on the trip says: "He was tireless, he walked all day, and stopped when he came across a good spot." Asked to name his best photograph, Nomura chooses the portrait of Maraslu on the cover (top, left). "I like mountains best in the light of the morning," he told us through an interpreter. In fact Nomura seems to have a fascination for the interplay of delicate light on mountains. Most of the pictures are in the pinks and pastels of sunrise or sunset with the natural filters of the atmosphere giving the pictures their distinctive hues.

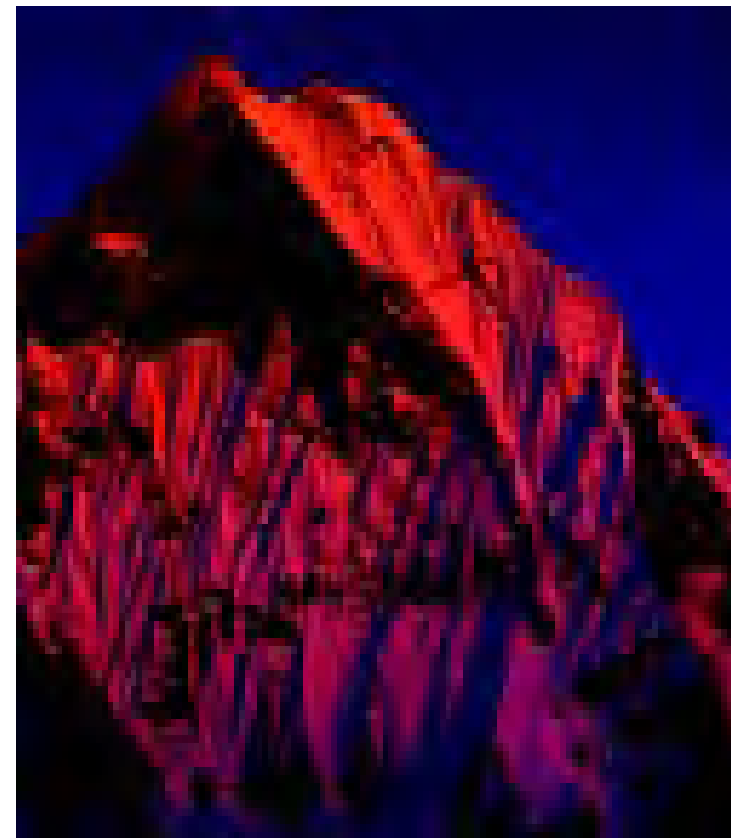
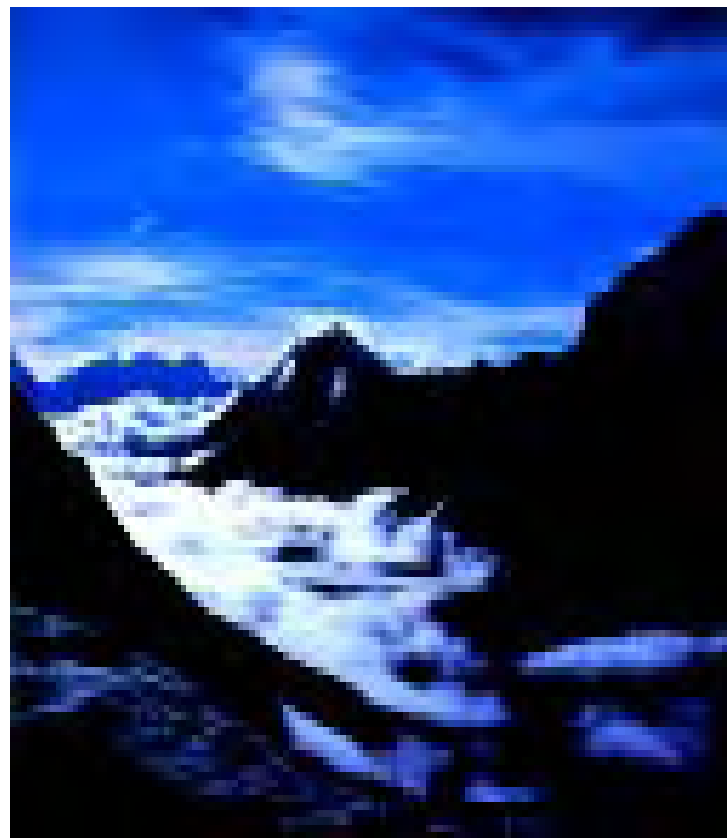
"I like the mountains, especially Mt Everest in the morning red because during those times they look really holy." He prefers still photography because that is about being there to capture the pictures at the right moment. "The moment for hitting the shutter is very important," he says. "Sometimes you may stay at a spot forever but never get the right picture." Nomura has a lot of patience: he has sometimes waited two days for the right moment, the right light

and the right weather to capture a frame. He would have lingered even longer, but as he puts it: "On a trek in the mountains of Nepal you cannot wait more, there are other schedules to be met."

Mountains have fascinated Nomura since he was a school boy in Nagoya, and even before he started shooting professionally for television at the Tokai Broadcasting Company. Nomura uses three cameras including Horseran 6x9, Fuji 6x5, and Mamiya 6x7. Nomura is worried about the greenhouse effect and its impact on mountains. Nepal will feel the after-effects of pollution caused mainly by industrialized countries, he says. Nomura practices what he preaches: during his treks in Nepal he has walked even where there have been roads, as between Jiri and Kathmandu or between Trisuli and Gorkha. *Pilgrimage in the Himalaya* has a print run of 2,000 copies and is priced at \$25. ♦



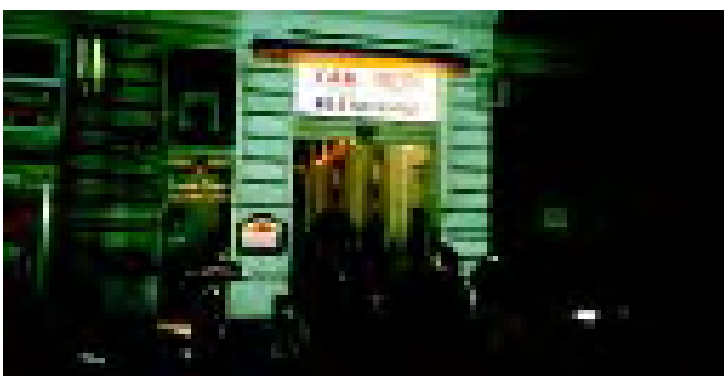
Photo genius in a photogenic land



HAPPENINGS



VICTORY SMILES: Gyandaya School pose after coming first in the Women's Open Basketball Championship organised by the NBA on 9 December.



YAK AND YETI IN VIENNA: A new Nepali restaurant was inaugurated earlier this month in Vienna called (what else?) Yak and Yeti. Go there for fire mums.



FREE FLIGHT: Bombardier Aerospace of Canada showed off its super-quiet commuter turboprop, the Dash 8 Q-300 with a demonstration flight on 6 December.

sharp



Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

no sooner had Kathmandu's dogs wrapped up their bi-annual mating season (which this year was accompanied by an unprecedented orgy of street violence) than it was the turn of humans to launch their own mass weddings.

It must say that the dogs put on quite a show, and the whole exercise had the atmosphere of a street carnival. At the Patan Durbar Square, tourists paid Rs 250 each for the privilege of watching interesting intercourses at intersections. The Great Himalayan Mating Season is emerging as a major tourist attraction, and the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), which is always in hot pursuit of bright ideas, is said to be working on a brochure entitled "Carnivorous Carnivals of Nepal" to distribute at the International Travel Bourse in Berlin next year. The booklet will contain detailed information on the best time to see dogs going all the way, the best places to watch from, and information for photography buffs including most suitable film, shutter speeds, and aperture. It will point out hotels located at strategic vantage points from the comfort of which you can watch the drama unfold in the street below—there is a premium rate for a room at the Hotel de la Patan du Pagoda Pvt Ltd from where the forthcoming four-part special on National Geographic Channel called "How Dogs Do It in Kathmandu" was shot.

As you know, dog mating almost always begins on a full-moon night with a yowling contest at three in the morning. All this howling may seem pretty pointless to us humans, but it serves as an important audition for choosy female dogs so they can start working on a shortlist of prospective mates. The tenor and timbre of the yowl, as National Geographic tells us, is an indication of strength genes. Well, I don't have to go into the graphic details of what happens next since I have it on good authority that there are

underage readers peering over your shoulders even as we speak. But the end result of all this fooling around is that two months later there are millions of genetically modified puppies all over our landlocked Himalayan kingdom.

Canine street fornication may all be very good for our country's budding sex tourism industry, but what is it doing to the morals of our children? As responsible parents, we have a right to be concerned that in the peak season we cannot drive 100 metres without seeing dogs engaged in various stages of congress. Recent conversation inside car:

Little Phanindra in the back seat: "Dad, why are those dogs stuck?"

You: "What? Where? Oh...um...ahem...maybe they ate too much garbage."

LP: "But why would eating garbage make them stuck?"

You: "Oh, I don't know, maybe someone threw away a perfectly good tube of superglue."

LP: "I don't think so. I think they are copulating, I think it is the physical union of male and female genitalia in the act of procreation."

I don't know what filth they teach kids in school these days, but it was not like that in my time. Be that as it may, it is time to turn our attention to human antics.

There is a national census coming up next year, and it is the duty of all Nepalis to do their bit to make this country great, following our Founding Father's instructions to "go forth and multiply". That is why the Royal Astrologer Mangal Raj Joshi has

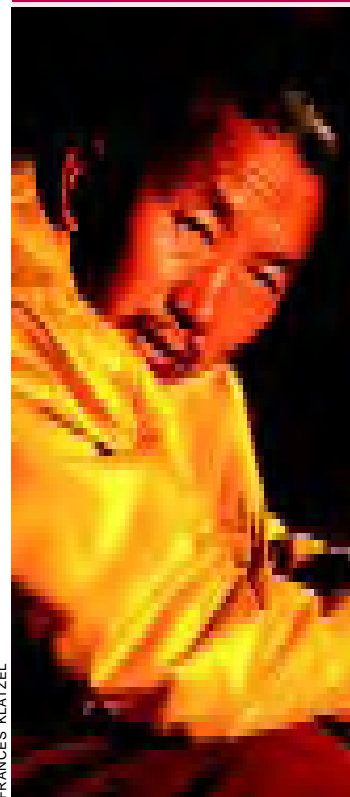
determined that December and January are the months that humans should also get on with the job of, um, procreating.

Since men are from Mars and women are from Venus, Mr Mangal (who, as his name suggests, hails from Mars) has calculated that the heavenly bodies are in right alignment with the Space Station Mir so it is quite safe to tie the nuptial knot. Just don't forget to block all traffic with your marriage processions, and make total darknesses of yourselves. ♦



Mating Season

NEPALI SOCIETY



The Venerable Ngawang Tenzing Zangpo Rinpoche, abbot of Tengboche Monastery in Khumbu, is still in Kathmandu after his participation in WWF's "Sacred Gifts for a Living Planet" programme last month. In a sunny room in his small dera in Boudha, the Nepali Rinpoche sits contemplative, meditating, listening to the news on the radio and telling fellow lamas what needs to be done to bring peace in the world.

The Rinpoche was recognised as Tulku or a reincarnate of the late Lama Gulu, the founder of the TengbocheM monastery, by Ngawang Tenzin Norbu a high lama in Rongbuk. He was then sent off to Tibet for many years

The Tengboche Rinpoche

of study and he came back in 1956 to be the abbot, or Rinpoche, of the Monastery.

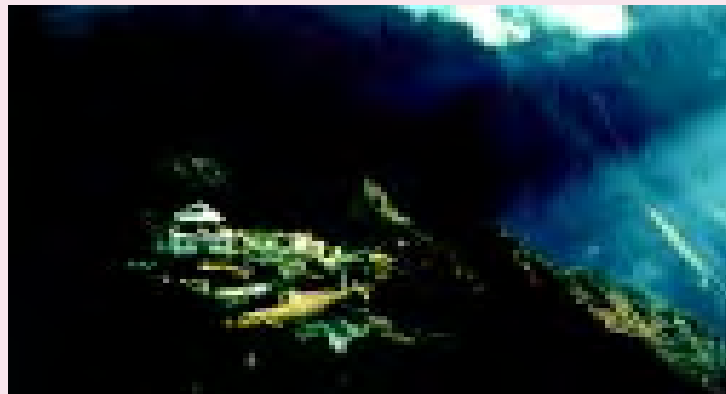
What's remarkable about the monk is his broad vision. From the needs of the 50 lamas at his Gumpa, to the state of nature, the village, the nation and the whole planet, the Rinpoche believes in "doing things right and not only talk". And his efforts have borne fruit. The preservation of forests in the Tengboche area is a growing success. "There's still a lot to be done. We're asking for government forests to be handed to us so the Monastery can take care of them," he says. "The park people are planting trees. That's okay. But they only plant in areas that are visible to passers-by. More than good work, sometimes I feel it's a hoax. There's no planting deep in the forest or along the riverbanks," says the Venerable. "This year we have decided to plant new saplings at our own cost in barren areas."

The Rinpoche strongly believes in community-based action. "If there are basic facilities in the villages—electricity, water supply, school and roads—people will definitely come back and look for new ways to develop their villages." He is

saddened by the way Kathmanduites are dealing with their environment, culture and religion. "They are throwing stones on their own head. Look at all the pollution and waste. In Kathmandu I found people listening to radio a lot. I also do. But how can you be informed about developments and crises in the world listening to only songs?"

The world could do with improvements, but Rinpoche has time for jokes. "I don't know English. That's my biggest advantage. If I did, I'd be busy explaining about the Monastery to visitors," laughs the 66 year-old monk. But he welcomes visitors to his Monastery.

The Rinpoche is proud of the work of the Tengboche Sacred Land Eco Centre. "We are not lamas to sit indoors and chant and talk only about philosophy. We are aware of the changes in the world," he says. In his speech at the WWF event he said: "In my Monastery, we have been making a great effort to promote conservation, reduce pollution and waste, and raise awareness of the relationship between spirituality and nature." ♦



fragrance from darjeeling

back to school forbidden fruit

eating out/hang out hot spots

kripa - hope for the hopeless

pushkar's journey skin deep

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WAVE IN DECEMBER

MAYOS