

BIZ NEWS Spending rules

The government has announced new expenditure regulations to lighten spending on projects. Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat says this is to eliminate one of the 'loopholes' in development administration...

Nepal Lever profits down

Nepal Lever, a subsidiary of Hindustan Lever, has reported a roughly 50 percent drop in net profits for the fiscal year that ended mid-July 2001. Profits fell from about Rs 120.5 million in July 2000 to Rs 68 million in 2001.

Mind our business

- The Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) invited Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba over to tell him how bad things were for business. Deuba said he was willing to help and that he'd amend labour laws...

Sanitary ware

India's Hindware has begun marketing its bathroom fittings and tiles in Nepal. The products are to be retailed through eight outlets in Kathmandu Valley, and gradually more all over Nepal.

ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

Silly season

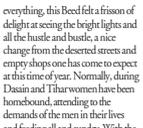
This Tihar, think about doing business the next festive season.

Nepal undeniably needs a good kick in the pants to spur economic growth. And obviously taking a month off is the way to do it. Dasain and Tihar are wonderful festivals, a time to reaffirm one's commitment to family, society and so forth through the copious swilling of liquor, eating of goat and gongaling of savings.

But, the Beed, ever the clear-eyed killjoy also sees it as a month during which productivity is at a disgraceful low, and many offices take on the appearance of ghost-towns. It is autumn, and most of the population, sensing the end of the warm season, unthinkingly makes merry and, like the grasshopper, regrets it through the winter.

This year, while the government imposes operating out of tax havens in India Chowk and its by-lanes may argue that there has been a viable recession, retailers nevertheless did frenzied business during the festival. A good reason is always a good reason to a good Dasain, and agricultural productivity has been on the up this year.

The dim, but noticeable, rays of hope emanated by the peace between the government and the Maoists have also fuelled some optimism in villages. Cries like 'Pokhan and Dhan, which have historically been happy to buy, buy, buy, your brick Dasain business will be the making of it. But, I have an idea, you too well, and retailers, hostels and restaurants there say



they don't remember a festival time in recent years when there have been such few tourists.

This, the Beed was thinking, is actually the best time to assess the state of the economy, based on the money that changes hands. Gambling is as much part of our national psyche as are drinking and the darsa-sarwal, and since the festival legitimises betting and night, we see the stakes pretty high and a mind-boggling amount of cash is exchanged. It is always rude to ask people the source of their income, and never more so than during Tihar, nevertheless, there ought to be something that can be done when in one night businesses bet amounts that yearly they have earned over three offices, and government employees play more than their life-time savings.

One may be conscious of the bacchanalian lunacy that descends on the Nepal nation in the festive season, but that does not blind one to some other interesting sociological changes in the making. For instance, it was quite surprising to see on the streets during Dasain, despite

Readers can post their views at arthabeed@yahoo.com.

From below sea level to the highest mountain

Nepal and the Netherlands are an unlikely, but curiously compatible couple.



MARK TURIN IN AMSTERDAM, a side of being two small constitutional monarchies that sit alphabetically next to each other at United Nations conferences, the Netherlands and Nepal appear to have little else in common.

The Netherlands is a post-industrial country with wide-ranging infrastructure, virtually no remaining unannihilated nature and startlingly high income tax. Nepal, for its part, is essentially non-industrial, with little infrastructure to speak of, nor enforced taxes for that matter, but abundant in natural beauty. There is also the most apparent and amusing contrast—in the Netherlands the highest point is a few hundred feet above sea level, which in Nepal would be swiftly dismissed as a dip.

But tourism is one concern both countries share. Nepal wants tourists and the Dutch are tourists. Whichever country in the world you care to visit, you are bound to find a Dutchie. Most are just travelling, but others settle down and turn to good old-fashioned Calvinist Dutch entrepreneurship.

From beaches in Thailand to outposts in Alaska, there are Netherlands running bars, restaurants and businesses. Nepal is no exception; the cosy oasis called the Summit Hotel was established by their own countrymen and specifically caters to their cultural and dietary needs.

In 1998, the number of Dutch nationals visiting Nepal saw a sharp increase. According to figures from the Consulate of the Kingdom of Nepal in Amsterdam, the total number of tourist visas issued were 6,649 in 1997, 10,860 in 1998 and



Cas F de Stoppelaar helped bring Transavia to Nepal.

220-seater aircraft a week to Kathmandu for 35 weeks of the year, transporting up to 15,400 people to Nepal and back. The psychological importance of being able to fly directly from one's own country and, moreover, with a trusted home airline cannot be underestimated. By filling this niche in the market, the Transavia service to Kathmandu has quite literally placed Nepal on the map of possibility for a class of older, wealthier, non-backpacking Dutch tourists who might previously have gone to Bali for a beach holiday.

And it's not just the Dutch. The number of Belgian tourists coming to Nepal has jumped 15 percent this year compared to last year—the only nationality to register an increase. Present Transavia flies two

Advertisement for SIMS SERVICE featuring a mobile phone and text: 'We have all our customers a very happy New Year and announce that... 33% DISCOUNT'.

Do you agree with the Maoists demand for a new constitution?

No, I don't agree. First of all who are the Maoists to demand? No government in the world can succumb to terrorist threats. Second, they are not the people's representatives, they point guns at innocent people to agree with their rhetoric.

ministers rather than loyal policemen. There is no point making other laws, because laws are written to be broken.

Dambar Khanal, Delhi

Government shouldn't panic. We need to think critically, and make the right decision that does not put the country in danger. A few years ago, the Maoists were nobody, now they want to take over the country and change the constitution. This is not far from other citizens who want democracy.

Nanda Limbu

Even though a new constitution is not required, the present one needs to be amended to suit the modern era. The state should be secular. The power of the prime minister should be clearly defined, whether in mobilising the army or declaring a mid-term poll. The judiciary should be made accountable to the people, the palace must be made more transparent.

Rajesh Bhat

Yes, the demand is quite right from the people's perspective. The present constitution is not less democratic than any constitution of the world, but it is only mimicry, not reality. Did the framers of the constitution get a mandate from the people?

Prakash

There is nothing wrong with the current constitution, only with the people implementing it. Nepal needs a group of honest people to be elected who will run the country in its best interest, not their own. The political powers and the powers-to-be should remember that they are elected by the people to serve the interest of the people. If instead of worrying about who sits in which chair and holds what powerful position, they worry about the needs of the people, a lot of the troubles that we all slowly disappear, including the trouble caused by the criminals masquerading as Maoists. It seems to be the nature of all those who acquire positions of power in Nepal to become corrupt. A new constitution will not solve the problem, what is needed is to change the way people think.

Dev Basu

Yes, Nepal needs radical change, fresh blood, something new. If the current politicians run the country, we are going to be poorer.

DDP

In my opinion this is not the time to change the constitution. There is no better ruling system than this. But it has not been handled properly by those elected by the people. If I were a Maoist, I would get rid of corrupt

D Koirala, Biratnagar

towards improving the quality of life of all citizens. Without a democratic political framework in place, the alternative is the danger of totalitarianism, authoritarianism, anarchy, civil war, and fragmentation of the sovereign Nepal as we know and love it today.

Padam Sharma, Minnesota

It will be real stupidity to change the constitution. But, we can certainly do some changes that are promptly needed, such as in the case of royal powers and so on. It is better for Maoist to quit their crazy demands.

DD

I think so. Given our political situation maybe we need Mao.

DD

Progress means going forward, not backward. This constitution is not doing anything for the people. After 12 years it hasn't brought change, if Nepal is to go into the 21st century, we need total change, become a republic and have a presidential system.

DD

Try to understand what most Nepalis want. The constitution needs a shot in the arm, and it isn't wise to ask the king of a tiny country to step down when there are over three dozen ethnic groups who hate each other's guts.

DD

I do not understand why on earth Maoist leaders are demanding a new constitution or a constitutional assembly. To formulate a constitutional assembly, first of all there have to be elected representatives from every constituency and then the representatives will construct a new constitution. This is a very long and complex procedure and an extravagant economic burden for a country like ours.

J Bruno

Every decade, the Nepali people should be given an opportunity to decide on the status of the royal institution through a referendum. A two-thirds majority of parliament should vote on question on the referendum. A king in command of the Royal Nepal Army would preclude the prime minister and his entourage from being authoritarian.

DD

With amendments to the current constitution, the multiparty political system can be improved to create an environment where leaders can rise with experience from village level public office to that of prime minister. Eventually, the system will produce principled visionary leaders who command the respect and support of the populace in leading Nepal.

Babul Pakhrin

Atma Shrestha