

# HIMAL

HIMALAYAN MAGAZINE



## The New Lhasa

Kailash Trashed • Dirty Kathmandu



*The Abode of Gods, King of  
Mountains, Himalaya  
You bound the oceans from  
east to west  
A northern yardstick  
To measure the Earth  
— Kalidasa (Kumara Sambhava)*

Editor Kanak Mani Dixit  
Associate Editor Manisha Aryal  
Photography Bikas Rauniar  
Manager Kiran Shrestha  
Administration Balaram Sharma  
Mamata Manandhar

#### Subscription Rates

Only Bank-drafts acceptable for subscription orders made to *Himal* in Nepal. Do **NOT** send cash in mail.

Individual	1 year	2 yrs
Nepal	NRs 220	400
India	IRs 140	260
Bhutan	Nu 175	330
Other S. Asian Countries	US\$ 12	20
North America	US\$ 22.50	40
Germany	DM 50	90
United Kingdom & Ireland	£ 20	35
Netherlands	Dfl 45	80
Elsewhere	US\$ 25	45

Institutional	1 year	2 yrs
Nepal	NRs 600	1100
India	IRs 260	500
Bhutan	Nu 330	640
Other S. Asian Countries	US\$ 25	45
North America	US\$ 35	60
Germany	DM 70	120
United Kingdom & Ireland	£ 30	50
Netherlands	Dfl 100	180
Elsewhere	US\$ 45	80

#### Send subscriptions & related correspondence to:

**South Asia:** P.O. Box 42, Lalitpur, Nepal  
(tel 977 1 523845, fax 977 1 521013), or  
Central News Agency, 23/90 Connaught  
Circus, New Delhi 110001

**Japan:** Akio Horiuchi,  
P.O. Box 9, Kiyose, Tokyo, 204 Japan.

**Australia:** Indra Ban, 12 Norfolk St.,  
Paddington 2021, Sydney, Australia.

**North America:** Barbara Bella & Associates,  
500 Sansome Street, Suite 101, PO Box 470758  
San Francisco, CA 94147

**United Kingdom & Ireland:** Joti Giri (Ref: H),  
221 Ashly Gardens, Emery Hill Street, London SW1 1PA

**The Netherlands:** C. F. de Stoppelaar,  
Foundation Himalaya, Keizersgracht 463,  
1017 DK Amsterdam

**Switzerland:** Helene Zingg, Tannerweg 18,  
CH-3073, Guemligen, Switzerland

**Europe:** Durga Press (Himal), Luitpoldstr. 20,  
D-82211, Herrsching, Germany

*Himal*©1995 is published every two months by  
Himal Association, PO Box 42, Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur, Nepal  
Tel: 977 1 523845, Fax: 521013, email: himal@mosnepal.ernet.in  
Library of Congress Card, Catalogue Number 88 912882  
ISSN 1012 9804

Printing: Jagadamba Offset Pvt. Ltd. Tel: 521393.



## Modernise, Or Else! Building the New Lhasa

by John Grey

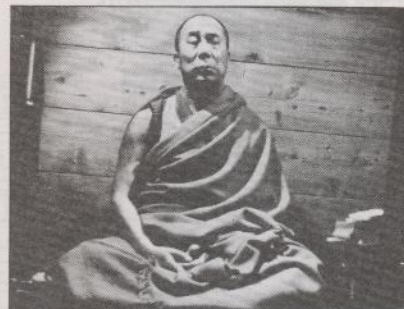
The modernisation  
offensive in Tibet  
today has largely  
bypassed the  
Tibetans themselves.

Cover picture by *Kevin Bubriski*  
shows a Lhasa child with a mock  
Chinese military headgear.

## 20 An Elegant Return

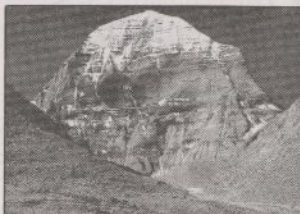
by Roger L. Plunk

The Dalai Lama's  
presence in Lhasa would  
help the Tibetan people  
face their day to day  
problems with confidence  
and resolve.



## 23 Kang Rimpoche Trashed and Commercialised

by John V. Bellezza



Asia's holiest place is turning  
into a dirty Disneyland.

## 29 Kathmandu, Mailo Kathmandu

A Photo Essay

## 41 Citizenship Made Simple

*Katha*

by Prem Krishna Gongaju

## Departments

- 3 Briefs
  - Balti Cuisine, Kinnauri Fashion
  - Biofencing Elephants
  - Climbing Unopened Peaks
  - Tourism, Bali Style
  - Placename: Kanchenjunga
  - Notes from the Karakoram
- 26 Voices
- 33 Review
- 35 1994 Himal Index
- 36 Himalaya Mediafile
- 39 Know Your Himal
- 44 Opinion
- 47 Abstracts
- 49 Mail
  - No Sops for Uttarakhand
  - Intellectual Challenge
  - Gurkha Sorrow
- 52 Abominably Yours

#### Newsstand Rates

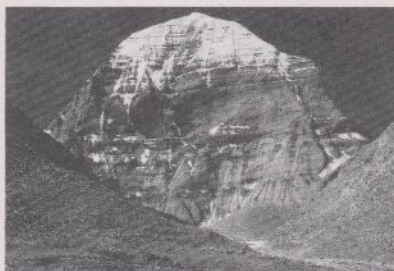
NRs 40 IRs 25 Nu 30 DM 9 £ 4 US\$ 5  
United States \$ 4.75 Canada \$ 5.75



# Kang Rimpoche Trashed and Commercialised

*The holiest spot in Asia used to be the unfrequented destination of hardy pilgrims. It is fast becoming a dirty Disneyland.*

by John V. Bellezza



**"S**ell Kailash!" This is the battle cry of the Luyu Chu, Tibet's government-owned and controlled tourism organisation. The Luyu Chu has issued a directive to Tibet Kailash Travel, its branch agency in Ngari Prefecture, ordering it to bring in more tourists to Mount Kailash. The target set for 1995 is 1500 overseas tourists, a 50 percent increase over 1994. The quotas set by the Luyu Chu are mandatory, yet the burden of meeting them falls on the branch department.

Tibet Kailash Travel has had to scramble to fulfil its mission. It has endeavoured to establish better contacts in Nepal. During the last year, its sales representatives met repeatedly with Nepal's Minister of Tourism and various tour operators. A concerted effort is being made to market Kailash as a overseas tourist destination.

It all began in 1984, when a handful of hardy Western travelers made it to the holy mountain. In 1985, a Japanese expedition and a

smattering of foreign individual tourists had the privilege. In 1986, the first tour groups began arriving at Kailash. Approximately 100 people of non-Himalayan countries came that year. The number of tourists visiting has increased steadily since.

By 1989, 300-400 travellers from non-Himalayan countries were visiting a year, and 1000 made the journey in the 1994 season. If the Chinese have their way, 2000 such tourists will be tramping around Asia's holiest place by 1997.

The majority of tourists arrive in organised tour groups, each member paying on an average US\$ 150 a day. Income from Kailash tourism therefore represents a substantial source of revenue for the government.

## The Southern Yatri

The situation for Indian tourists and pilgrims is quite different from that of overseas tourists. Indians were first permitted to travel to Kailash by the Chinese government in 1981. From 1981-1992, the number of Indians allowed to visit was doubled to 400 as per a renewed bilateral agreement between India and China. In 1995, 1000 yatris will be permitted to travel to the sacred mountain.

In 1986, it cost an Indian IRs 11,000 to make the journey from Dharchula in Kumaon to Kailash and back. In 1992, the cost was up to IRs

25,000. Next year, it is expected that the cost of the pilgrimage will rise to IRs 40,000 with much of the increase due to fees levied by the Chinese.

From 1981 through 1994, Indians could only enter Tibet from the Lipu Lekh pass in Kumaon. This year, three new routes—Niti La in Garhwal, Shipki La in Himachal Pradesh, and the Demchok border point in Ladakh—are slated to open. Of these, the Demchok border is the most promising as it is the only one with a motorable road link. Using this route, an Indian could reach Kailash from Delhi in three days. The only obstacle to developing this route, which follows the Indus River, is that the Indo-Tibetan frontier was mined during the period of bad relations between China and India. The land mines will have to be cleared in order to make Demchok a viable pilgrim route to Kailash.

Nepalis have had the easiest time making it to Kailash. They are allowed to make their own travel arrangements, which for the poor means walking or travelling in the back of trucks. It is rumoured that even Nepalis will have to form expensive tour groups, but there is no evidence of this as yet. In 1994, the Simikot-to-Khojurnath transborder route from Nepal was opened to foreign tourists. This route to Kailash could become popular with those on



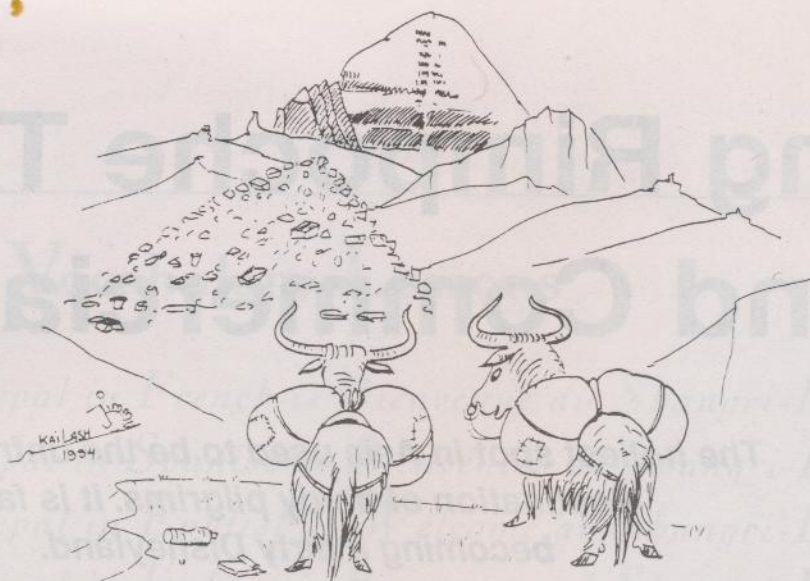
lavish budgets. A helicopter service has been opened from Nepalganj to Simikot, the headquarters of Humla District. Helicopter operators are lobbying the Nepal government to permit flights right up to the frontier, a move that is being resisted by the Central District Officer (CDO) at Simikot, who wants to protect portering and other service jobs for Humla's population. It is unclear which side will win, but what is clear is that Kailash is becoming more and more accessible.

### Five-Star Pilgrimage

The Chinese Government's grandiose plans to transform erstwhile inaccessible Kailash into a popular tourist resort area include the construction of a five-star hotel and restaurant at Darchen, at the foot of the holy mountain. There will be two airports, one at Burang and the other at Ali, the prefectural capital. There is talk of improving the three link roads to Kailash, which are presently in a terrible condition.

These ambitious projects remain on the drawing board as there is no commitment on the part of the Chinese government to free up funds to realise them. The objective evidently is to maximise profits without making significant investment. Infrastructure at Kailash remains quite primitive. In 1989, a 14-room lodge was built to handle tour groups, and work will begin next year on a better appointed ten-room facility. Most tourists, however, will continue to camp.

Vendors have lost no time capitalising on increased traffic to the region. In 1985, there were no vendors; now there are as many as 40 operating out of tents. These itinerant hawkers sell sundry foods and household items. The trend unquestionably is for more and more vendors to set up shop. In 1989, the Peoples Liberation Army set up a restaurant to cater to tourists. Also in 1989, to better monitor and control the growing tourist and commercial traffic, a permanent police checkpost was set up in Darchen. Since that time, it has been increasingly difficult for low budget tourists and



pilgrims to visit because these kinds of visitors are officially discouraged.

With increased commerce, environmental problems have burgeoned. Darchen (4800 m), the staging point for visits to Kailash, has an inherently fragile ecology. Just a little more than a decade ago, the only rubbish around was the organic castaways of Tibetans. Since that time, garbage has been accumulating at an alarming rate. The Darchen Chu, a sacred stream representing the central channel or *nadi* of Kailash, is now choked with plastic, glass, metal and other trash.

The refuse around Kailash is not only an eyesore, some of it is also hazardous. One comes across hundreds of discarded batteries containing heavy metals, and there is significant pollution of petroleum products from vehicles. Toilet paper is strewn around the Kailash circuit, an aesthetic distraction and irritant to the local people. There are no cleanup or waste management plans in place, consequently the problem worsens year by year. With maximisation of profits the priority, environmental protection has fallen by the wayside.

### Kang Rimpoche

To the native Drokpa, Kailash or Kang Rimpoche is the crown of the world and in it the oceans have their source. Kailash is the fount of all life, they believe, feeding the continents with both precious water and pure consciousness. The Tibetans maintain that to pollute the water at its source

poses a grave danger to the entire world. For this reason, they are unhappy with tourists who leave their refuse behind.

It is true that, contrary to their own beliefs, the Tibetan people tend to be just as sloppy as tourists and travellers. Nevertheless, the Western tourists are the champions when it comes to the volume of waste generated. The holy mountain is becoming a garbage dump.

Unfortunately, some tourists have squandered their welcome in other ways as well. The open sexuality that Westerners are prone to demonstrate shocks the sensibility of the natives. The worst was when back in 1992 a group of Americans tried to make a pornographic film at Kailash. They were prevented from completing the filming, but not without a fight.

Visitors demonstrably lack even basic respect for the sanctity of Kailash. For instance, there is the obnoxious tendency to point the barrel of one's camera at people and holy spots as if it were an assault weapon. A proper cultural orientation should be part of the tour agenda, but neither the government nor tour operators seem concerned. Kailash is sold and marketed, but the local people are being estranged.

### Dealing with Scum

Sadly, even darker depths of depravity have been reached, in conjunction with tourism. The last ten years has seen a rash of robberies in the Kailash region, some of it with Western



complicity, which has impoverished local monasteries. Nepali and Tibetan criminal rings have stolen priceless statues from the gombas, sometimes at the behest of Western criminals posing as tourists.

Recently, some notorious European art thieves visited Kailash in the guise of tourists. Wherever they go in Tibet, the priceless heritage of the country disappears. In 1993, five bronzes were stolen from the Zuthulphuk Gomba on the Kailash *parikrama*. The thieves were apprehended along with photographs taken by the Westerner who commissioned the theft.

Nothing has so damaged relations between the natives and tourists as the robbing of the monasteries. As a result, Gomba caretakers are now hesitant to open chapels to visitors and an air of suspicion and mistrust exists where earlier there was a warm and easygoing relationship. Major thefts

in the last few years include Chako Gomba (18 statues in 1992), Tashigang (three large Lokeshwaras in 1989), and Yiri Gomba (15 bronzes in 1991). In 1990, a gang of robbers relieved pilgrims of their money and jewellery in the middle of the night. Kailash has attracted scum along with bonafide visitors and pilgrims.

The goodwill, the coming together of people at Kailash in peace and mutual respect, is disintegrating. Cynicism is surfacing with the increased exploitation. While some might accept this as a normal part of change and modernisation, it is that much more tragic when it happens at the location considered the most sacrosanct on the planet. What are the long-term impacts of mental and physical forms of pollution at Kailash?

With money as the prime motivating force that spurs tourism, there is little regard for cultural or ecological values. Kailash becomes another commodity to be marketed

and exploited, diminishing its religious aura. Visitors could be educated so that they develop a healthy attitude and awareness, but where will the resources for this come from?

The native people and the true pilgrims suffer the most from the commercialisation of Kailash. They have little choice but to watch the debasement of their holiest sites. Dissent is not encouraged by the Chinese. The native people are the losers in every way, for they do not even benefit significantly from the money generated by their holy mountain. How far will this onslaught on Kailash go? How long will the visions and needs of the Drokpa and pilgrims be drowned out by the mushrooming commercial interests? For now, at least, the most strident voice that drowns out all others is "Sell Mt. Kailash!"

Δ

J. Bellezza ('Jungli John') is a traveller of the Western Himalaya and Tibet.

<b>Tableware</b>	<b>Knitwear</b>
<b>Floormats</b>	<b>X'mas items</b>
<b>Bedcovers</b>	<b>Clay</b>
<b>Cushion Covers</b>	<b>Copperware</b>
<b>Pillows</b>	<b>Paper Crafts</b>
<b>Kitchen textiles</b>	<b>Wooden items</b>
<b>Cloth by the meter</b>	<b>Basketry</b>
<b>Clothing</b>	<b>Leather items</b>
<b>Bags</b>	<b>Sarees</b>
<b>Toys</b>	<b>Felt items</b>

A fine range of

Nepali  
100%  
Handicrafts



Made by low-income women

Retailers :

**Dhukuti**

Kupondole, Kathmandu  
Ph : 523147

Exporters :

**Nepali Craft Trading (P) Ltd.**

G.P.O Box 3701, Kathmandu, Nepal  
Ph : 270721, 272676 fax : 521880

Manufacturers :

**Association for Craft Producers**

G.P.O Box 3701, Kathmandu, Nepal  
Ph : 270721, 272676 fax : 521880

