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# Highway hell

**SETTING FIRE TO ANYTHING THAT MOVES: One of the 18 trucks bound for Kathmandu that was set on fire near Hetauda on Wednesday morning.**



PRATAP BISTA

## King's visit off

King Gyanendra's visit to India has been "rescheduled" because of the death of former Indian prime minister PV Narasimha Rao on Thursday.

Rao was the architect of India's economic reforms and was prime minister 1991-96 after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. He had been admitted to hospital after a heart attack two weeks ago and news of his death came at 2:30 pm just ahead of the scheduled departure time for the royal visit. King Gyanendra's visit had been getting muted coverage in the Indian press and his interview in *The Times of India* last week was relegated to the entertainment section. Indian officialdom has leaked New Delhi's message to the king would be that he mustn't be tempted to go it alone. They have also hinted that the army should be more aggressive in going after the Maoists, and even give up UN peacekeeping to do so.

## TANKA KHANAL on the EAST-WEST HIGHWAY

On the eve of King Gyanendra's visit to India, the Maoists launched a campaign to cripple the country by blocking off all main highways in Central Nepal with booby-trapped barricades.

For Kathmandu Valley, this is effectively another blockade since all four highways linking the capital to the rest of the country have been blocked for two days now. Shops are hoarding vegetables and food, and queues have formed at petrol stations.

Early Wednesday morning, 18 lorries on the East-West Highway were burnt to cinders by the Maoists for defying their blockade. The army has been hard-pressed to clear the barriers and carried out heli-patrols along the main highways on Thursday.

A day after six policemen were killed in the first ever attack on a post inside Kathmandu Valley, the chief of the Maoist eastern command, Comrade Badal, said on Sunday, it marked the beginning of the rebel's 'strategic offensive' phase.

On a trip this week from Pokhara to Biratnagar, we saw thousands of passengers forced to spend cold nights huddled inside

buses, many had run out of money to pay for food. There are bombs hidden inside trees and boulders piled on the highways and are too risky to remove.


"Driving was already risky because of accidents and robberies, but the landmines have made it even riskier," says Dhiraj Rai, a bus driver. The Maoists are replicating tactics they used in western Nepal last month by blocking highways and ambushing the army as it tried to clear them. Seven soldiers were killed in an ambush on the Jiri Highway on Saturday.

All over eastern Nepal, along the East-West and Mechi highways, tree trunks and boulders have blocked roads. The barricades are festooned with Maoist banners and from the nearby forest the Maoists warn bus passenger through loudspeakers not to remove the trees. "Don't move them, we won't be responsible if you are killed," they say.

Major Kosh Raj Ghimire from the Ilam barrack says it is difficult to clear the barricades because of the bombs and the danger of Maoist ambushes. "There are so many of these obstructions, it takes time," he told worried bus passengers on their way to Mirik on Wednesday. ●

**Times** nepalnews.com  
Weekly Internet Poll # 167

**Q. Should the UML stay in government?**



Total votes: 650

Weekly Internet Poll # 168. To vote go to: [www.nepaltimes.com](http://www.nepaltimes.com)

**Q. Do you believe King Gyanendra's India visit will help resolve the Maoist insurgency?**

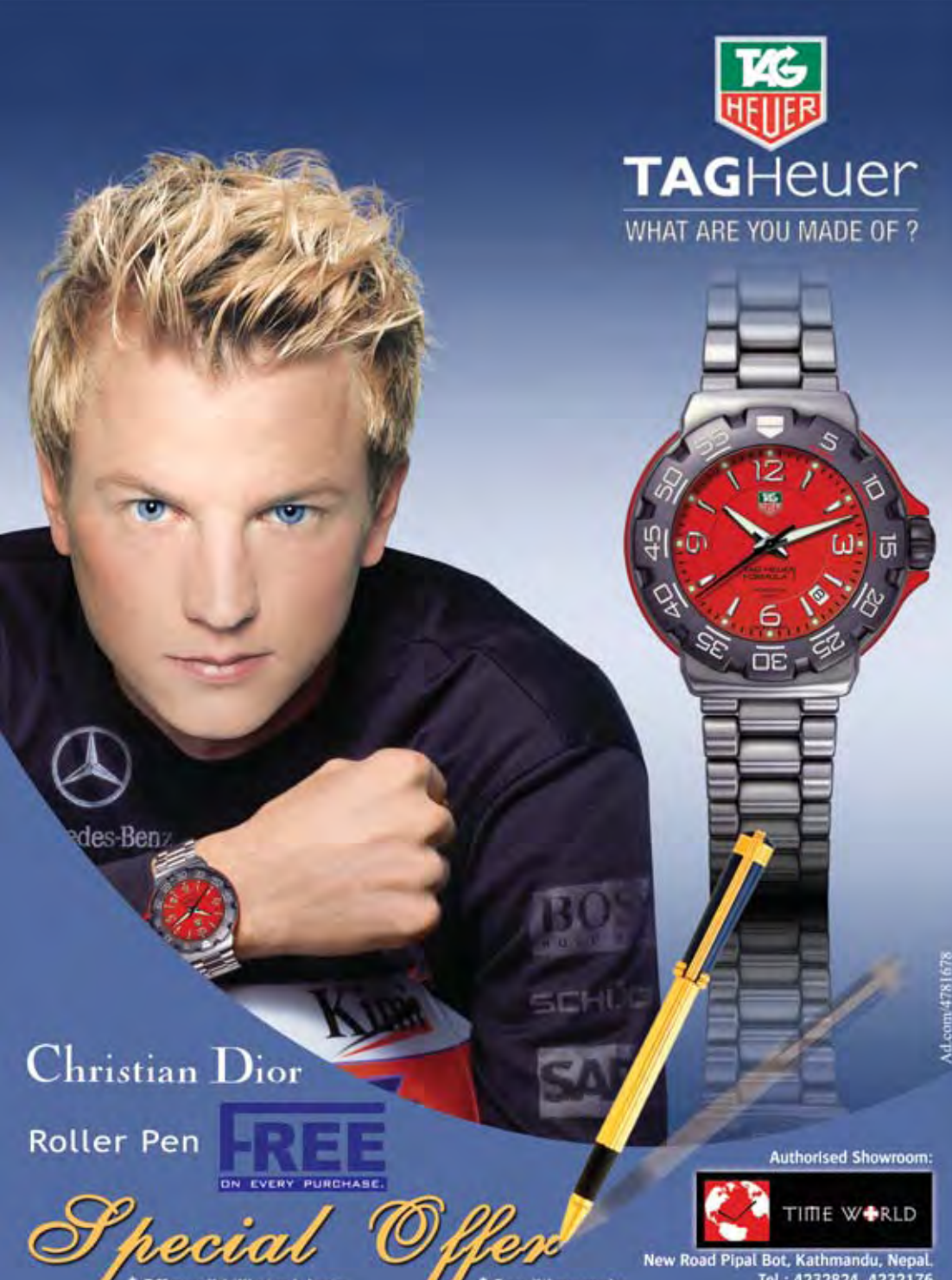
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"Lata ko desh ma gaando tanderi." (In a land of fools, even a woman with un-fair & not-so-lovely skin can be a heroni - as translated by UNACO, the United Nation's Assn. of Cartoonists)

All the Adventures can be seen at [www.extreme-nepal.com](http://www.extreme-nepal.com)

Strip #50 2061 by jigme gaton - read. love. write.

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Life through the Lens** Photographs by Kishor Kayastha at Indigo Gallery. Till 15 January. 4413580, [indigo@wlink.com.np](mailto:indigo@wlink.com.np)
- ❖ **Impression of Nepal** A photo exhibition by Victor Klenov from 25-28 December, 11AM at the Shambala Garden in Hotel Shangri-la.
- ❖ **Mass Timings** at the Assumption Church, 24 December 5.30 PM carol singing followed by Holy Mass, 25 December 9AM Christmas Day mass in Nepali and 4PM in English and Christmas Mass at Hotel Annapurna at 8AM in English

EVENTS

- ❖ **Pablo Neruda** poetry reading in Spanish, English and Nepali, also the screening of *Il Postino* at the film club Baggi Khana 4PM Sunday, 26 December
- ❖ **Christmas Eve Carol Service** by the International Church on 24 December at 6.30 PM and Christmas Day Service on 25 December at 9.30 AM, British School, Jhamsikhel. 5525176
- ❖ **3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Wave Web Winner 2004** Website designing contest. Entry deadline 15 January. [www.wavemag.com.np](http://www.wavemag.com.np).
- ❖ **Citizen's Call For Peace** at Ratnapark in Kathmandu on 27 December at 10.30 AM. Come express solidarity towards the peace movement.
- ❖ **Haute Couture** celebrate New years with a fashion theme this year at the Yak and Yeti for more information and tickets contact 4248999
- ❖ **The Chimney** Exclusive dining with soft music and a seven course meal at the Yak and Yeti includes entrance to Sinners in Heaven. 6PM to 10PM Rs 3,999/person and Rs 5,999/couple. 4248999
- ❖ **Sinners in Heaven** Yak and Yeti hosts their annual New Year's Party from 8PM to 2AM for all the party animals. Rs 1,599 includes food and unlimited imported spirits. 4248999
- ❖ **New Year's Eve at Dwarika's** Performances by 'Abhaya' and the 'Steam Injuns.' Rs 3500/couples and Rs 2000/person including dinner and drinks. 4479488

MUSIC

- ❖ **Swinging this Christmas with the Mc. Twisters and the Divazzzzz!!!** D.J session with J.J. and friends on 24 December 7PM onwards at Moksh restaurant and bar, Tickets Rs 300, 5528703
- ❖ **Christmas Jam** with 'Benaam', 25 December 8PM at Himalatte Spaghetteria and Café, Thamel. [www.himalatte.com](http://www.himalatte.com), 4256738

FOOD

- ❖ **Christmas at K-too's** Christmas with Turkey and chocolate almond tarts at the Kilroys restaurant till 3 Jan, Thamel 4700043
- ❖ **Café Mitra and Lounge Bar** presents a special a la carte Festive Season Menu from 24 December till 31 December. 4259015
- ❖ **Christmas Eve at Dwarika's** BBQ, traditional Christmas desserts and welcome drink for Rs 1,000 on 24 December. 4479488
- ❖ **Special Christmas Dinner** at Hotel Summit, 6.30 PM onwards on 24 and 25 December.
- ❖ **Christmas Dinner and Lunch** on the 24 and 25 December respectively at the Yak and Yeti. Rs 1175/person. 4248999
- ❖ **Christmas at Kilroy's** Smoked salmon, turkey and plum pudding till 3 January. 4250440, 4250441
- ❖ **Bethlehem** Christmas Eve dinner with live music at Hotel Shangri-la, 7PM onwards. Rs 1200 per person Lajimpat. 4412999
- ❖ **Super Star** Christmas Day lunch with live music at the Shambala Gardens. 12PM onwards, Rs 720 per person at Hotel Shangri-la, Lajimpat, 4412999
- ❖ **The Spirit of Christmas** Sumptuous Christmas goodies at Hyatt Regency. 4491234



GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Christmas and New Year's Eve at Dwarika's** with breakfast and dinner at the venue of your choice. \$49 per person on twin-sharing and \$75 for single. 20 December to 5 January. 4479488
- ❖ **Merry Christmas Package** One night, two days with welcome drink, breakfast and dinner. Single room Rs 4,000 and double room Rs 5,100 at Le Meridien. 4445550
- ❖ **Dream Holiday** package tour to Malaysia for Christmas and New Year. Marco Polo Travels and Qatar Airways, 2012345, [malaysiaholidays\\_marco@polo.com.np](mailto:malaysiaholidays_marco@polo.com.np)
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Lodge** Attractive Christmas and New Year offers for expats only. 4361500
- ❖ **Christmas by the jungle** at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia. Special package and prices. [junglebasecamp@yahoo.com](mailto:junglebasecamp@yahoo.com)
- ❖ **Club Himalaya** invites you to celebrate the sunrise of 2005 rather than the sunset of 2004 at their windy hills on 1Jan 2005, Nagarkot,

JAI NEPAL CINEMA

Set in modern day India, *Swades* is a film that tackles the issues of development at the grass-roots level. It is to this India, which is colourful, heterogeneous and complex, that Mohan Bhargava (Shah Rukh Khan), a bright young scientist working as a project manager in NASA, returns to on a quest to find his childhood nanny. The film uses the contrast between the highly developed world of NASA and this world back home in India, which is at the crossroads of development. Mohan's simple quest becomes the journey that each one of us goes through in search of that metaphysical and elusive place called 'home'.



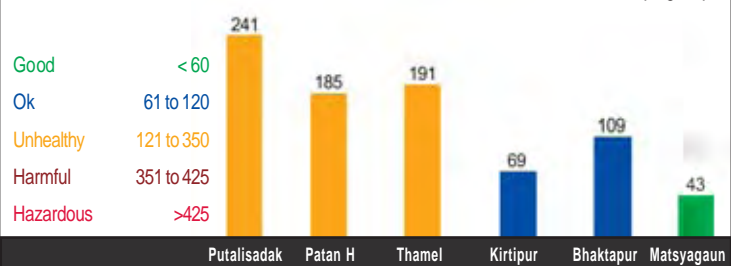
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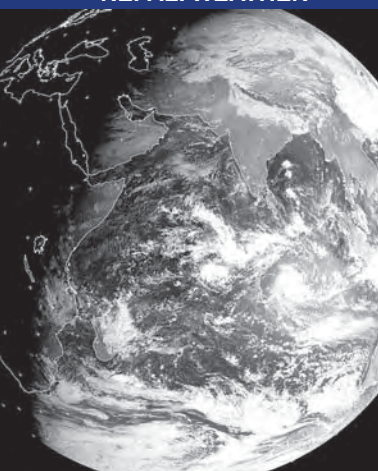
KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

The good news is that the concentration of particles below 10 microns in Kathmandu's air is not getting worse. The bad news is that it is already very bad. In fact, PM10 concentrations in Kathmandu's streets were still in the 'harmful' range. But the two-day bandh did leave a positive impact. The worst areas are still Putali Sadak, Thamel and Patan Hospital.

12-18 December in micrograms per cubic meter. Source: [www.mope.gov.np](http://www.mope.gov.np)



NEPALI WEATHER



by MAUSAM BEED

We are switching satellites this week so we can see the fog over the Indo-Gangetic plains more clearly. This picture taken on Thursday morning shows the fog stretching from Assam to Pakistan and lapping at the slopes of the Chure hills in Nepal. The wide westerly front over Afghanistan that was heading our way has been pushed off northwards by the jet stream. The fog is also present in Kathmandu Valley and along the river basins, but unlike the tarai the sun burns it off by mid-morning. Expect a further drop in minimum temperatures and warm afternoons for the Valley.

KATHMANDU VALLEY





# Jesus Christ, the revolutionary

The single most important fact about the birth of Jesus, as recounted in the Gospels, is one that receives almost no emphasis in the American festival of Christmas. The child who was born in Bethlehem represented a drastic political challenge to the imperial power of Rome.

**STAR AND STRIPES**  
James Carroll



The nativity story is told to make the point that Rome is the enemy of God and in Jesus, Rome's day is over. The Gospel of Matthew builds its nativity narrative around Herod's determination to kill the baby, whom he recognises as a threat to his own political sway. The Romans were an occupation force in Palestine and Herod was their puppet-king. To the people of Israel, the Roman occupation which preceded the birth of Jesus by at least 50 years, was a defilement, and Jewish resistance was steady. (The historian Josephus says that after an uprising in Jerusalem around the time of the birth of Jesus, the Romans crucified 2,000 Jewish rebels.)

Herod was right to feel insecure on his throne. In order to preempt any challenges from the rumored newborn 'king of the Jews', Herod murdered 'all the male children who were two years old or younger'. Joseph, warned in a dream, slipped out of Herod's reach with Mary and Jesus. Thus, right from his birth, the child was marked as a political fugitive.

The Gospel of Luke puts an

even more political cast on the story. The narrative begins with the decree of Caesar Augustus calling for a world census—a creation of tax rolls that will tighten the empire's grip on its subjects. It was Caesar Augustus who turned the Roman republic into a dictatorship, a power-grab he reinforced by proclaiming himself divine.

His census decree is what requires the journey of Joseph and the pregnant Mary to Bethlehem, but it also defines the context of their child's nativity as one of political resistance. When the angel announces to shepherds that a 'saviour has been born', as scholars like Richard Horsley point out, those hearing the story would immediately understand that the blasphemous claim by Caesar Augustus to be the "saviour of the world" was being repudiated.

When Jesus was murdered by Rome as a political criminal—crucifixion was the way such rebels were executed—the story's beginning was fulfilled in its end. But for contingent historical reasons (the savage Roman war against the Jews in the late first century, the gradual domination of the Jesus movement by Gentiles, the conversion of Constantine in the early fourth century) the Christian memory deemphasised the anti-Roman character of the Jesus story. Eventually, Roman imperialism would be sanctified by the church, with Jews replacing Romans as the main antagonists of Jesus, as if he were not Jewish himself. (Thus, Herod is remembered more for being part-Jewish than for being

## The politics of this year's Christmas story



a Roman puppet.)

In modern times, religion and politics began to be understood as occupying separate spheres, and the nativity story became spiritualised and sentimentalised, losing its political edge altogether. 'Peace' replaced 'resistance' as the main motif. The baby Jesus was universalised, removed from his decidedly Jewish context and the narrative's explicit critiques of imperial dominance and of wealth were blunted.

This is how it came to be that Christmas in America has turned the nativity of Jesus on its head. No surprise there, for if the story were told today with

Roman imperialism at its centre, questions might arise about America's new self-understanding as an imperial power. A story of Jesus born into a land oppressed by a hated military occupation might prompt an examination of the American occupation of Iraq. The story of Jesus come decidedly to the poor might cast a pall over the festival of consumption. A story of the Jewishness of Jesus might undercut the Christian theology of replacement.

Today the Roman empire is recalled mainly as a force for good—those roads, language, laws, civic magnificence and 'order'

everywhere. The United States of America also understands itself as acting in the world with good intentions, aiming at order. A 'new world order' of George W. Bush. That we have this in common with Rome is caught by the Latin motto that appears just below the engraved pyramid on each American dollar bill, 'Novus Ordo Seclorum'. But, as Iraq reminds us, such 'order' comes at a cost, far more than a dollar. The price is always paid in blood and suffering by unseen 'nobodies' at the bottom of the imperial pyramid. It is their story, for once, that is being told this week. ●

(James Carroll is a columnist for the *Boston Globe*)

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## Bluebird

Starting off as one of the first supermarket chains in 1985, Bluebird set the trend for many others to follow. The competition has proved beneficial and as a result, prices have gone down. A full-fledged departmental store offering a variety of popular food products, local and imported, it also has an audio-video section offering appliances and has recently introduced branded items, sticking to the big brands like Nike, Reebok, Adidas, etc. "We do not sell many Chinese items as we would rather stick to investing in better quality," says Binod Tuladhar. Giving customers a treat to look forward to, Bluebird is giving every shopper who makes a purchase of up to Rs 15,000 a free one night stay (valid for couples) at the Bluebird Hotel in Pokhara.



## Gemini

Gemini was established in 1991 and they started out as the biggest grocery store in Kathmandu now they have expanded into two departmental stores with one in Boudha and the other in Jawalakhel. Gemini was the first store to introduce computer billing and barcode scanners in Nepal, according to Jagdish Maskey. "Earlier people liked to go to shops and give the shopkeepers their lists. Now they prefer variety and choosing their own products; this is probably why the retail boom is happening," Maskey says.



Though facing some problems due to the traffic situation in Boudha, Maskey maintains that Gemini is booming. "Even with only 20 percent of business capacity we aren't doing badly," he adds.

## Saleways

'We will make the difference' is the motto of the new Saleways departmental store which is opening soon in Jawalakhel. Saleways plans to become the Walmart of Nepal and it seems to already be on its way with two stores already open in Pokhara and doing booming business. Saleways plans to expand to Kathmandu and beyond. Says Sudhir Pradhanang, "Organised retail is at a very nascent stage in Nepal right now, the potential is huge and we plan to cash in on it." Sushil Pradhanang, Sudhir's brother, adds "We are different and are planning to provide superior customer service with memberships and paying them back according to their expenses through various free packages and plans".



## Metro Mall

Metro Mall is now two years old, as possibly the first 24-hour department store not just in Nepal but the region. Located inside the Soaltee Complex, security was not a problem and the store catered to the all-night crowd at casinos and was a shopping paradise

for the jet-lagged and nightbirds. Though it has a reputation for being more expensive, proprietor Bijen Jhochan insists his products are actually up to seven percent cheaper.

"In Nepal, if there's a road, there's a shop," explains Jhonche stressing the extent of the 'shutter culture' of the mom-and-pop shops. The market is completely laissez faire and the government doesn't have restrictions on the number of shops on a street. "Every shop owner should be made to pay a minimum sum of revenue to the government every month," he says, "That way you encourage both quality and healthy competition."

## Namaste

Namaste was one of the first supermarkets in Patan when it opened 12 years ago, now it is one of many. When Jeevan Shakya first opened his store, people used to think that supermarkets were only for the rich. "We have changed that attitude, and now people are becoming more aware of the fact that all sorts of products from all price ranges are available with us," he says. Namaste did so well that it has expanded and moved to the former Hotel Narayani in Pulchok. (Its former premises in Jawalakhel have been taken over by Saleways). Shakya would like to keep his store open till midnight, but cites present security concerns.



Namaste also plans to have a wine and cookie tasting with caroling for Christmas Eve. Shakya says "This is the first time that we are organising such an event within a supermarket"




## Dexo

Dexo has seen quite an expansion since 1986, when it specialised only in woollen garments. Now, it has music consumer items and a supermarket offering all grocery items. Located in Thamel, Dexo is always busy with late-night shoppers



and the most popular spot being the liquor section which draws a lot of wine-lovers. Piracy has hurt the selling of original soundtracks and albums on cds and audiocassettes, but Dexo's emphasis on quality has gotten loyal customers.

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KATHMANDU

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## CLASS STRUGGLE

Going on nine years, this conflict is degenerating into a competition between the two warring sides to be nastier than the other in tormenting non-combatants. This year they beat their own national record on disappearances, extra-judicial killings and torture. They now seem hell bent on breaking world records.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the blatant use of children in Nepal's armed conflict. The party that has been most insistent on calling for United Nations mediation is the one that is recruiting children directly from their classrooms, forcing them to join militia training, closing schools down with threats, and menacing teachers. As a result, the country's education system is now in shambles, the remarkable progress made in the past decade in raising the country's literacy rate is seriously jeopardised.

Even in conflicts more vicious than ours, we have seen an unspoken agreement between belligerents not to target children and schools. But in Nepal there has been a cynical and deliberate attempt to wreck the school system. Day care centres are bombed, children are used as cannon fodder and education turned into a theatre of war.

As we have seen in Africa, conflicts reach a virulent, irreparable phase when children are taught to kill. As our report from Rolpa in this issue (p 4-5) makes it clear: parts of Nepal are now in this phase. Forcing children into war is the worst form of exploitation. The Geneva Conventions and the Convention on the Rights of the Child make the recruitment of anyone under 15 a war crime. The Option Protocol, to which Nepal is a signatory, has raised that age threshold to 18.

The Maoists may say they are not the government, but non-state parties are also bound by the conventions and the leaders of armed groups can be brought to justice and tried for war crimes in future. The Maoist's disingenuous argument that they don't force the children to join them, "they come voluntarily" is unacceptable. The Conventions prohibit recruitment: whether it is forced or voluntary.

If the warring sides in this conflict can't stop this senseless bloodletting, the least they can do is fight by the rules. The use of children in war, their removal from classrooms to work as porters, sentries, spies, cooks or fighters is not allowed. Turning schools into barracks, as state security is doing in some places, is wrong.

Luckily, children are much more resilient than we adults think. With an ultimate homecoming to a peaceful Nepal, they can grow again. But what kind of Nepal are we leaving behind for them?



MOHAN MAINALI

## LETTERS

### TERROR

Daniel Lak's treatise on terrorism was interesting 'One era's terrorist', #225). He is quite right that those who are called terrorists today do become friends of different countries or different parties and leaders sometime later. But it can also work the other way around. Bin Laden was friend of US leaders when he was fighting against the Soviet Union, but at the end of Cold War they suddenly turned him into a terrorist.

Western leaders are quite good at this sort of thing. However, as far as Nepalis are concerned, the Maoists deserve to be called terrorists because they have terrorised the general public in a way that has never been seen in Nepal's history. Even if one hastens to use the terrorist tag, they should at least be called 'murderers' and should never be forgiven for their gruesome killing tactics. Instead of implicitly giving positive signals to murderers. Mr Lak, you should live in places like Dailekh to understand what they have done to poverty-stricken people. It may be just semantics for you because you are in a privileged position far away, but many Nepalis like me have to bear the burnt of their atrocities.

**B Raj Giri, email**

- It is easy for Daniel Lak to split hairs from his liberal high horse about the politically-correct

definition of terrorism. Journalists like him have always bent over backwards to justify terrorists, and this is the latest example. What does he call the injuring of 37 people at the Sanchaya Kosh building in a Maoist bomb last month? What is the drilling of Pari Thapa's wife's legs? What of the killing of teachers like Mukti Nath Adhikari in Lamjung ('Teachers at the frontlines', #225). The Maoists have terrorised Nepalis to force them to obey their diktat. They terrorise them to hand over their children and money. Their methods are as brutal as the Khmer Rouge. Wake up, Mr Lak.

**J R Pandey, email**

- Hats off to Krishna Shah for her courage and selflessness ('Enough is enough', #226). Your interview with the heroine of Dailekh shows that there are still Nepalis who are willing to risk their lives to defy the Maoists. Shame on the motorists of Kathmandu for not standing up to a Maoist banda and enjoying two days holiday. Shame on the political parties who cower in the capital and bring out masal julus against the king. Shame on government officials who don't dare go to the countryside without an army of security. Krishna Shah and the women of Dailekh have shown us all that they don't need guns, they have lots of guts.

**Jayant Jha, New Delhi**



Krishna Shah

### CHUGHTAI

Sangeeta Thapa's piece in your art section 'Chughtai's Nepali connection', #226) was an interesting read and made me interested in the painter and I even researched him on the net.

But I wonder why she repeatedly called Chandra Shamsher 'Maharaja'? That didn't sit well by me. Is this an attempt by a Rana family to put their stamp in Nepali history?

**Suvash Thapa, Kathmandu**

### GAYS

In your latest issue, #227, you have given us an entire page 8 on gay rights by Manjushree Thapa ('Reverse lens') and Ulhas Rana ('Happy to be gay'). Was it really worth the whole page? As long as people do what they have to do behind closed doors with the bolt locked, who is really bothered? Is it their moral right and nobody is trying to infringe on their privacy. But, are the majority of the Nepali society willing to accept them and give them a pat on the back? Nepal's gay community is at least ten years ahead of its time, if not more. In short, we understand your problems and our sympathies are with you, but the reality is that you are a minority and considered by the majority of our society to be abnormal. Yes, in due course of time you will be accepted by one and all.

**Dr Amrit KC, Bishalnagar**

- Thanks to Manjushree Thapa and Ulhas Rana for their bold and forthright articles on sexual freedom in Nepal. We can pride ourselves on having one of the least taboo-ridden societies in South Asia, but there are still holier-than-thou

homophobes among government, the legal community and the police. Next month's ruling by the Supreme Court will show whether we will go back to the dark ages or not. Let's hope not.

**G Upreti, email**

### GREAT PAPER

I am not a very regular reader but I think this is the best paper that comes out of Nepal by a long shot. I do not read the vernaculars but your translation of the Nepali press makes up for it and most of your paper is great with such good writers like CK Lal, Majushree Thapa and my favourite, Kunda Dixit.

**S Thapa, email**

- I was intrigued to read in Kunda Dixit's Under My Hat ('Before we go, the main points once again', #226) that International Corruption Day was observed in Kathmandu with 'special talk programs, rallies, tyre-burning, street riots and arson'. Good to see that Nepal is catching up with America on this front. Go for it, Nepalis! Maybe one day George Bush will become your president.

**J Swan, email**

- Stop, Kunda Dixit. I have nearly choked twice on my breakfast in the past two weeks reading your paper backwards. You are becoming a health hazard.

**Gwen Sharpe, email**



# Embrace Nepal's diversity

Let's replace exclusionary Nepalpan with an inclusive Nepaliyata of religious, linguistic and cultural plurality

In the space of a month, King Gyanendra has inaugurated the Second World Buddhist Summit in Lumbini, participated in the re-enactment of the marriage of Ram and Sita in Janakapur and performed a puja at the Gadimai temple in Bara, the biggest animal-sacrifice ritual in the world.

**STATE OF THE STATE**  
CK Lal



In all three sites, India's Sangh Paribar has a political agenda to pursue. By accepting the significance of Lumbini, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) wants to prove that it is opposed to 'foreign' religions like Christianity and Islam, but is tolerant of 'Indian' faiths like Jainism, Sikhism and Buddhism.

The purpose of Bibaha Panchami festivities in Janakapur last week was to create a Hindu solidarity for politicians to face the electoral challenge across the border in Bihar where a general election is due soon. The BJP is also flexing its muscles for the UP by-elections. The Sangh Paribar hopes to cash its Nepali connections for better electoral prospects in our neighbouring states.

It's unlikely that the palace bureaucrats don't understand the political significance of the presence of Sangh Paribar fire-breathers like Ashok Singhal and Vinay Katiyar in Janakapur. King Gyanendra's association with them, albeit indirect, is sure to have sent the wrong signals to Congress I-led ruling coalition in New Delhi smack before his ten-day visit to India that begins on Thursday. Mulayam Singh Yadav in Lucknow and Rabri Debi in Patna, whom King Gyanendra is

also scheduled to meet, will not be amused.

The VHP-affiliated Vishwa Hindu Mahasangh bestowed upon the king the title of 'World Hindu Emperor' and together with the RSS and BJP are collectively referred to in India as the Sangh Paribar, which is opposed to secular politics and wants to establish a fundamentalist polity in the world's largest democracy. The palace bureaucracy has to be careful about hob-nobbing with this lot, and understand its implications for Nepal's own multi-religious and multi-ethnic status.

Over-doing the monarchy's Hindu antecedents is already rattling Nepalis who do not believe in the superiority of one religion over another. Relying on religion for political legitimacy is extremely risky business.

A king who sees himself as an

icon of culture, rather than just the ruler of territory, was seen in France in 1830. Louis-Philippe, son of Philippe d'Egalité who supported the revolution of 1789, took the Bourbon throne. But instead of assuming the traditional title of 'King of France', he chose to describe himself as the 'King of the French'. This chauvinistic patriotism later led to two great wars in Europe.

Jang Bahadur Kunwar saw this at work when he became the first oriental potentate to visit Europe in 1850. The ideas he took home lay dormant in his dynasty's century-long rule only to emerge later when symbols of a new Nepali nationalism were forged.

The coterie of émigré Nepalis who descended into Kathmandu after the Shah Restoration of 1950 impressed upon then Crown Prince

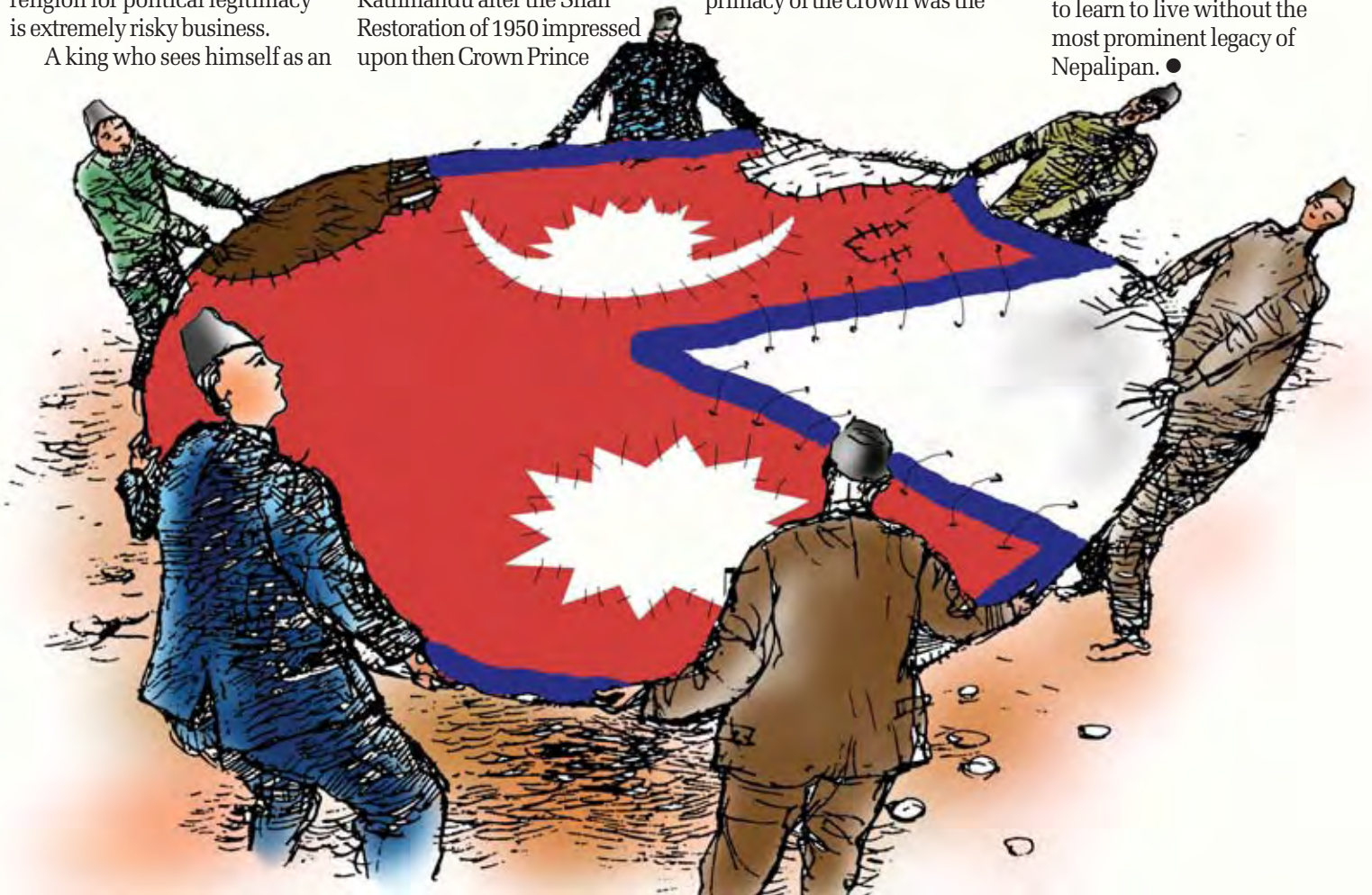
Mahendra that the King of Nepal deserved to be the king of Nepalis everywhere. The notion of *Nepaliya* national identity and *Nepaliyata* was very soon replaced with the idea of Nepali nationalism built around the ethnicity of *Nepalipan*.

Nepalipan was a de-territorialised identity: anyone who swore by the crown, wore *daura-suruwal-topi* (or *sari*), spoke Nepali, and professed Hinduism remained a Nepali irrespective of citizenship. Nepal was the fatherland of everyone true to Nepalipan. Compared to the adherents of prescribed Nepalipan, people living inside Nepal for generations were deemed to be lesser Nepalis if they happened to believe, dress, speak, or worship differently. Since the primacy of the crown was the

fundamental principal of Panchayat patriotism built around Nepalipan, everyone struggling for the restoration of democracy was also hounded by the establishment as an 'anti-national'.

The biggest failure of the post-1990 order has been its inability to replace exclusionary Nepalipan with an inclusive Nepaliyata of religious, linguistic, and cultural plurality. However, after October Fourth, the royal predilection for a monolithic Hindu orthodoxy has re-asserted itself.

The French don't have a king anymore, but a monarch continues to reign over the United Kingdom. If the illusion of cultural emperors isn't discarded, Nepaliyata will have to learn to live without the most prominent legacy of Nepalipan. ●



**X-MAS AND NEW YEAR AT THE YAK & YETI**

**The Chimney**

**Christmas Eve Dinner at Chimney:**  
Experience the joy and magic of Christmas as we bring to you a special Christmas Eve dinner at the Chimney with an exclusive 5 course menu prepared just for the occasion.

Date: 24th Dec 2004  
Time: 6:00 p.m onwards  
Rates: Rs. 2499/- nett (Five course menu with a glass of mulled wine.)  
Privilege Card holders pay only: Rs. 2275/- nett

**Ho! Ho! Ho!**  
**The Joy Of Christmas is at Yak & Yeti.**  
Yak & Yeti invites you to the Sunrise Cafe where our chefs promise to out do their expertise with plump roast turkey, plum pudding and all of Christmas traditional fares.

24th Dec 2004 Time: 6:30 p.m onwards (Christmas Eve Dinner)  
25th Dec 2004 Time: 12 noon onwards (Christmas Day Lunch)

Rates: Rs. 1175/- nett (Includes Buffet with a glass of mulled wine.)  
Privilege card holders pay only: Rs. 1000/- nett

**SAN MIGUEL HAUTE COUTURE**

Welcome to a fashion feast this New Year's Eve. Models sashay between the tables displaying designer brands as you feast on a royal buffet; down to the elite photographer's corner where you are invited to be picture perfect. A dream of beauty, desirability and exclusiveness; only at the Yak & Yeti.

Date: 31st Dec 2004  
Time: 8:00 p.m onwards  
Rates: Rs. 1,699/- (Until 25th Dec)  
Rs. 1,899/- (26th Dec - 29th Dec)  
Rs. 1,999/- (30th Dec - 31st Dec)  
Inclusive of two bottle of beer, buffet dinner and fashion show.  
Supplementary charge Rs. 500/- (Entry to Sinners in Heaven)

**The Chimney**

*Far from the Madding Crowd*

Pamper yourself with a seven course candle lit dinner with classical guitarist Kishor Gurung sets the mood for you and your loved one for the evening.

Date: 31st Dec 2004  
Time: 6:00 p.m - 10:00 p.m  
Rates: Rs. 3,999/- (Single) (Includes 7- Course dinner with a glass of sparkling wine.)  
Rs. 5,999/- (Couple) (Includes 7- Course dinner with two glasses of sparkling wine.)  
Includes complimentary entrance to Sinners in Heaven

**closeup**  
**SINNERS IN HEAVEN**

Your last chance to sin. This year at least.

Let DJ Neil from Bangalore take you down the path of evil.  
31st Dec 04, 8 pm onwards at Yak & Yeti

Ticket: 1500/- per person (Inclusive of dinner and unlimited drinks)

For more information contact Guest Relations at 4248999 Extn. 2865



Year Zero is already here  
for Rolpa's child militia

# Giving children a



JB PUN MAGAR  
in ROLPA

There were seven of them on the trail to Thawang, boys and girls carrying heavy home-made shoulder bags.

The biggest was barely four feet tall, must have been 14. He was carrying a Chinese radio with the antenna pulled out. There was a comb in his shirt pocket and his hair was slickly groomed. In a voice of authority, he asked: "Who are you?"

We said we were journalists on our way to Thawang. "Do you have a pass?" We replied that the head of the people's government in Mijhing had told us to get a pass further on. "Ok," he replied.

He was Comrade Sahas, the leader of the group of Maoist child militia. One of the girls, Comrade Bhabana who looked 13, asked: "How are things over there, are there any enemies about?" They were on sentry duty, checking the papers of everyone who came up the valley or working as messengers and porters.

Once they found out we were harmless, the children opened up. Sahas said he was studying in Grade Five and has been taking part in Maoist abhiyans since 2000. Bhabana was in Grade Three when the Maoists said if she didn't join the militia her parents would have to join the People's Army. They said they would take her for a month but Bhabana hasn't been home for a year now. "They had said I'd only have to cook but I am carrying grenades and guns," she says.

## LORD OF THE FLIES

(Above) With a .303 slung over his shoulder, Comrade Waibhaba leads a group of Maoists in Rolpa. He claims to be 15 but his friends say he is younger.

(Below, left) Kami Pun and Ramtel Gharti were recruited from their school and managed to escape from the Maoists on their second try.

(Below, right) On sentry duty on the road to Thawang, we ran across this bunch: Comrade Sahas (second from left), Comrade Akrosh (in red shirt) and Comrade Bhabana (extreme right).

PICS: JB PUN MAGAR



## The curse of geography

### Let's stop using it as an excuse for underdevelopment

The 'Resource Curse' is a glib bit of developmental theory that says any poor country that possesses great natural wealth is less likely to become prosperous than a place without petroleum, minerals or timber. It's an easy thought.

Look at Angola, Nigeria or Venezuela. Oil hasn't helped them become stable, equitable democracies. Arguably, in the

HERE AND THERE  
Daniel Lak



wrecked a country where peaceable elections were once a hallmark.

On the flip side, Singapore. A country with nothing, a city state in a swamp plagued by ethnic riots and overshadowed by two huge neighbours with the same communal problems. A recipe for disaster you might say. But Singapore's lack of resources has made it turn to its people for wealth production, and they've responded gloriously.

The swampy island at the tip of the Malay peninsula is now one of the

world's richest countries. India too fits into this mould in an odd way. Put simply, India has little left in the ground or above it that anyone else covets. There are minerals and oil and timber but not nearly enough to go around, to have much impact on development. Agriculture remains the country's mainstay but manufacturing and creative industry are catching up. In other words, Indian brain power is becoming its natural resource.

So whither Nepal within the paradigm of the 'Resource Curse'? Well, the kingdom appears to be well placed. It doesn't have many resources. Hydroelectricity doesn't really count because it is so costly to extract, so labour intensive and rather controversial. And the age of viewing hydro-potential as bags of money just waiting to be opened is long past.

It's generally agreed that leaving forests standing and managing them for community benefit is better than lumbering. There are few mines and oil

exploration remains a distant dream. In short, there's no gold in the hills that we know of. And for that, we should be pleased. Because it's not resources themselves that curse a developing country.

It's the penchant of greedy local elites to steal everything that isn't nailed down, then to come back for the nails. And boy does Nepal have that elite problem in spades. The top people here—not all of them but many, and going right to the very top—have plundered and stole and pillaged and—yes—raped as much as ever they could. In earlier days, they did take timber. But mostly they stole the labour of the people, and managed Nepal's geography to their advantage.

Being landlocked means that those who control and manage access to outside markets and ideas own immense power. That's what the elite did here for centuries. Why else would Jung Bahadur Rana and the British collaborate in keeping this kingdom sealed off from the

world while so many others in the region were wide open? It's because access became a resource, a natural resource. And a curse.

These days aid and development types play that role. Using as local contacts members of that old elite, they control access to Nepal and they do it with a similar if unintentional rapaciousness to the old feudals. India may be the land that locks this country, but it can be managed more easily than the plethora of multinational agencies that preside of Nepal's decline.

In short, if Nepal is ever to change, it needs to be far more open to the wider world than it ever was. It needs to build bridges and forge relationships through diplomacy, diasporas, trade and culture. These must be based on equality, not aid partnerships that owe more to feudalism than anything else.

A good start would be to stop using the curse of geography as an excuse for underdevelopment. ●



# fighting chance

## Doublespeak

On 19 September, Maoist leader Prachanda issued a statement in which he said his party hadn't abducted innocent civilians and this was against party principles. That same day the Barachhetra Secondary School in Rolpa's Badachaur was deserted (see pic).

None of the 300 students came to class because the head of the local people's government, Comrade Agni, had ordered that all children from Grade Five and above would have to join a "special people's militia training". The parents refused to send their children to school.

But the children were not safe even in their homes. The next morning, the Maoists went house-to-house and picked 12 students from Grades 8-10 and took them away. The only ones who evaded the forced recruitment were children whose parents had sent them away at night.

Despite Prachanda's pronouncements that forced recruitment was against his party's principles, a meeting of

the Maoist student wing in Thawang last December had decided to go ahead with a campaign under the slogan: 'One School, One Strong Militia'. A few months later, a Maoist student leader vowed at a public meeting in Banke to meet the target of putting together a 50,000-strong army by giving school children guerrilla warfare training.

What we see today across Rolpa is this policy being implemented. The result is that villages and schools are emptying.



The work is hard, sometimes there is all-night sentry duty. Sahas' duty is to make sure they obey his orders because he gets his orders from "higher up". He behaves like a class bully. The children are surprisingly open about their hardships and from the tone of their voices and body language it is clear they are not here out of their own free will.

Along the trail in Rolpa, we meet many child militia who are Maoists because they had no choice. None of them look happy, they haven't seen their parents for a year or more and are homesick. Most say they'd rather go back to school. One 14-year-old told us quite openly, and oblivious of Maoist reprisal: "I'll wait another month or so, then I'll run away."

Desertions are common, and attrition in battle has decimated Maoist ranks in the heartland of Nepal's revolution. Maoist leaders Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai have repeatedly issued statements saying their forces adhere to the Geneva Conventions and will not recruit child soldiers. But here in Rolpa, it is clear that child soldiers have become the focus of the Maoist movement. Local commanders deny they are forcing the children to join them, arguing that the children want to become whole-timers and come willingly. "They join us in the abhayan and they are interested in joining the people's army," says Maoist Area Eight member, Bibek Bista.

The Maoist strategy seems to be that early brainwashing will create future guerrillas: after all, within four years many of them will be adults. But judging from the morale of many of the children we encountered in Rolpa, most would quit if given the chance. Local Maoist

commander of Powang, Prem Bahadur Chhetri, admits desertions are becoming a problem. "Poor kids, they can't cope and they run away," he says.

Ten-year-old Ramtel Gharti and his friend, 12-year-old Kami Pun were forced to join the militia two months ago. They gave the guerrillas the slip and fled along jungle paths by night, but were caught by another sentry in Kasala. As punishment, they were forced to carry loads of shoes and uniforms, but managed to escape again. A dozen children had been forced to become whole-timers in Gumchal, all of them deserted and fled all the way to India.

Hom Bahadur Pun is a Grade 10 student who has just returned from a Maoist abhayan. He says his group was trained to drill, use guns and lay booby-trap bombs. "When the comrades say they are taking the children to give them

peoples' education, actually they are given military training," says ex-Maoist, Mahesh Buda.

Some of the more motivated children end up participating in battles and in executions. In April, a 12-year-old student dressed in his own school uniform shot a head police officer on duty in the Rolpa headquarter of Libang. He had a light machine gun in his school bag. "We chased him, but he melted into a crowd of school children so we couldn't shoot," recalls Rolpa's police sub-inspector, Gyan Bikram Shah.

Across Rolpa's schools there are contradictory slogans on the walls: 'It's a crime to be illiterate, let's enroll all children above five' and 'Let's take up arms to ensure a people's education'. The Maoists say they are preparing their own people's curriculum which includes military studies, Marxism and Leninism, economics, culture and even something called 'socialist aesthetics'.

In Badachaur, Tilak Gharti and Hom Bahadur Pun had been getting threats that they must join the militia, so one day they packed a set of clothes, got Rs 500 from their parents and ran away. They reached Butwal, and like thousands of children from western Nepal, have by now crossed the border to India. "They used to come with their guns to the classrooms everyday and say you have to join us, so we ran away," Tilak told us in Butwal, adding that 10 of his classmates have been forced to join the Maoists.

Teachers in Rolpa's schools are powerless to stop recruitment and in fact have to join their students in many of the military training camps. Saligram Subedi is a teacher at Mijhing's Suryodaya School and has been forced to participate in Maoist abhayan. Subedi says: "Their argument is that this is war, and everyone including teachers and students have to help." ●



## "Many like us died in Beni"

LIBANG—In June, a raggedly-dressed emaciated young boy appeared in the Rolpa headquarter. He looked tired, hungry and was crying.

Rolpals who had fled Thawang and had been living as refugees in Libang could barely recognise 14-year-old Bhagyaman Roka who they remembered from their village as a healthy young lad. Two years ago, Bhagyaman, studying in Grade Six, was taken away with seven fellow-students from Jelbang School. They accused the students of stealing, stripped and beat them for three days. "I fainted many times, then they made us cook for the guerrillas in Thawang," Bhagyaman (left) recalls.

Later, the boys had to drill and were taught how to use guns and throw grenades. Together with many other school children, they were used as porters to transport rice, ammunition and grenades in the attack on Beni in February. "There were bombs exploding everywhere that night," Bhagyaman remembers, "there were flashes of

## No stitch in time

Garment industrialists will not toast cheers 2005 as a happy new year. Reason: from 1 January 2005, Nepal's garment quota for export of ready-made garments to countries like the US will be scrapped because of the WTO. That will mean almost all the remaining 30 garment industries in the country will have to close shop. The death of the annual Rs 6 billion industry will also mean a big loss for the national coffers that had been getting 35 percent of its earnings from garment exports.

There was sufficient warning. The industry and the overnment have both known this was coming. "That is the reason we had been alerting the government to do something since years ago," says Kiran Sakha, President of Garment Association of Nepal (GAN). "But unfortunately, nothing was done and here we are helpless when our industry is dying."

The end of the quota system means the Nepali garment industry has almost lost its lifeline because it cannot compete with giant regional exporters like India and China on pricing. Situated far from the sea as it is, Nepali garments already have a hefty transportation markup. That was the reason GAN had suggested that the government rush to build a dry port near the border and an Export Processing Zone (EPZ).

With the financial assistance from the World Bank, the government did build a dry port near Birganj but there is no sign of an EPZ. "Without an EPZ we don't have the infrastructure to build capacity as an exporter in the quota free era," says Sakha.

Garment industrialists had also pressured the government to request the US government to provide duty free access to Nepali garments in the American market. But the bill for such a provision has been gathering dust because lobbyists of an American company (Panda Energy) wants a dispute, over the Bhote Koshi hydropower project it has invested in, to be resolved first.

GAN executive members said Republican senators close to Panda Energy are blocking the bill and holding the Nepali garment industry hostage. More than 90 percent of Nepal's ready-made garment production is exported to the US market earning \$100 million this year. Although this is down from \$140 million in 2001 it is a big source of employment and cash for the beleaguered government. Since 2001, 70 percent of the 125 garment factories have closed down.

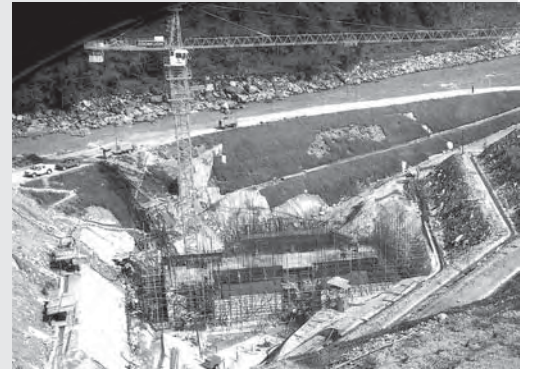
## Middle Marsyangdi suspended

Construction work on the Middle Marsyangdi, one of the biggest current projects in the country, has been suspended indefinitely due to Maoist threats. The German-funded 70 megawatt project in Lamjung had ground to a halt since 6 November when Maoist rebels bombed a vehicle. The civil contractor, DDC-JV stopped work just like it had several times previously.

The Rs 14 billion project is owned by NEA which has now decided to suspend the work abiding by the project consultant, Fischer's, recommendation. "The contract agreement requires

us to do what the consultant says," said the head of the Middle Marsyangdi project, Shashi Bahadur Shrestha. NEA officials said they have taken the idea of the project suspension positively because otherwise they would have to pay a hefty penalty of Rs 2.5 million every day to the civil contractor. But now that the project has been officially suspended, the NEA will not have to pay that amount.

The run-of-the-river project, which was designed to meet Nepal's power needs by 2005 is already delayed by two years. Now that the project has been suspended for an indefinite period, there is a danger of power cuts as well as the cost of restarting the project at a future date.



light in the mountains, bullets whizzing everywhere."

Ras Bahadur, Bhagyaman's friend from Grade Seven, was also in Beni. He recalls: "We cowered in a ditch, my friend Shere was hit and died right in front of us. There was blood gushing out of his stomach, one of the *dai's* came and took him away in a *kokra*, some of the younger boys were crying."

The Maoists used the children as porters, and during the battle massed them at the opposite end of the town as a decoy to fool the soldiers guarding the base to expend their ammunition. "Many like us died," says Ras Bahadur matter-of-factly. Those who survived had to carry heavy loads of looted guns and ammunition, he recalls and the army was shooting at them from helicopters as they retreated from Beni.

A few months later, Bhagyaman and Ras Bahadur decided to desert the Maoists and in June, finally made their getaway to Libang.



# Willing to go after defaulters

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

It's getting ugly as the battle between Nepal Bank and its powerful defaulters enters a new phase

Nepal Bank Limited has tried just about everything to recover bad loans: it took the defaulters to court and even tried naming and shaming them.

That didn't work, and now its aggressive expat manager has written to foreign embassies in Kathmandu not to grant visas to defaulters and is asking the government to impound their passports.

The bank even wants Nepal Rastra Bank and the Ministry of Finance to request the royal palace not to invite the defaulters to official functions. Already, there has been an agreement among Nepal's donors to avoid social contacts with willful defaulters.

Nepal Bank's high-profile defaulters are crying foul, calling the moves unconstitutional and are preparing to fight back. The row has split the business community and put the embassies in a fix.

At the heart of the storm is Nepal Bank's CEO, J Craig McAllister, whose letter to the ministry reads: "There is no single action that would be more effective in demonstrating support to the banking system and the efforts to chronically overdue loans from willful defaulters than action by the palace."

The fight has gotten personal and degenerated into name-calling between McAllister and Nepal's Bank's biggest defaulter, Piyush Bahadur Amatya of Pokhara's Fulbari Resort, who owes the bank Rs 2.18 billion. The other 36 defaulters in Nepal Bank's list owe the bank Rs10 million or more.

An irate Amatya told us in an interview: "The foreigners are trampling on the law of the land." (see interview, below)

Defaulters say their businesses have suffered because of the country's conflict and argue that there are legal ways to address the problem. "Nepal Bank should have adopted procedural methods instead of blacklisting businessmen and recommending such harsh measures," says Chandi Raj Dhakal of FNCCI.

Other defaulters who declined to be named had a procedural problem with the request to embassies to stop visas. "The bank should have asked the Nepal Rastra Bank to request the foreign embassies not to grant us the visa," said one defaulter. Some lawyers also have problems with the visa-ban. "This move has no legal standing," former attorney general, Sushil Pant told us. "Legally, the bank can't send a letter like this, nor can foreign embassies entertain them."

Nepal Bank officials say they made the request to stop visas only after exhausting all other means. "We sent them request letters, notices and asked them to sit for negotiations repeatedly," says Ajay Nepal, Nepal Bank's public relations officer. "They just ignored it, that is why we have been forced to adopt these tough measures." Nepal Bank officials believe they are running out of time because they have only seven months before the renewed contracts of the expat management ends. "If we wait for the Rastra Bank and the ministries, nothing is going to happen," said one banker.

Defaulters, like Amatya blame the World Bank for backing Nepal Bank to arm-twist the defaulters. Indeed, the World Bank is behind the financial sector reform program which aims to bolster the banking industry by, among other things, addressing the

problem of non-performing assets of public-sector banks like Nepal Bank Limited and Rastriya Banijya Bank. In his interview with us, Amatya didn't hide his contempt for the World Bank, and even accused it of corruption.

World Bank's country director Ken Ohashi expressed surprise over Amatya's comments. "If there is any evidence of corruption, we would be happy if he came forward with it," he told us. Ohashi argued that the financial sector reform was the government's plan and that it was the government's decision to introduce the foreign management.

"There are competent Nepali bankers for such reforms also," he said. "But since they have social and family relations with the business community and political leaders, it would have been difficult for them to deal with the situation."

But even with the foreign management team, Nepal Bank has only recovered Rs 5 billion of its Rs 20.74 billion in bad loans in the past two years. "We could have done much better if only we had support from the judiciary and administration," says a senior bank official. "There has been no hearing on cases we have filed against defaulters."

Indeed, government officials and even businessmen say prominent defaulters are so powerful that they have succeeded in knotting the recovery process in legal tangles. The stay orders that the courts have issued at the petition of the defaulters have prolonged the process.

Bank officials say they have been forced to take strict action because the CIAA was also dragging its feet. "Had the CIAA taken action against one official, who had lent the money violating the banking norms, it would have sent the right message at the right time," said one official.

At the CIAA, commissioner Basu Deb Lamichhane told us his office had interrogated more than a dozen ex-officials and board members of Nepal Bank. "It is true that it took some time, but we were just trying to do a thorough job," Lamichhane told

us. The CIAA did find there was hanky panky and collusion between the defaulters and bank officials.

The business community is divided over the pressure being put on defaulters. Most are against Nepal Bank's moves to stop visas, saying it is high-handed. Others support it. "It is the public's money, it is their savings that will go down the drain," says industrialist Rajendra Khetan. He says defaulters include some "big boys" who are leaning on the chambers of commerce to save their skins.

"The business community is 40,000 strong and it is certainly not going to defend the 200 or so defaulters," Khetan told us. Other businessmen say the defaulters' argument that they are hurt by the conflict doesn't hold water because others are exposed to the same conditions and have managed to pay their loans.

The Public Accounts Committee of the dissolved parliament had in 2000 raised the issue of willful defaulters at a time when the blacklist had only 20 names. But since the investigation did not go anywhere, the list has now more than ten times that number. ●



JCraig McAllister,  
The CEO of Nepal Bank

MIN BAJRACHARYA

## "Why only pick on me?"

**Nepali Times: What do you say about Nepal Bank Limited's recent move to request foreign missions not to grant visas to loan defaulters?**

**Piyush Bahadur Amatya:** It's an unconstitutional move. This shows how foreigners are trampling on the law of the land. In other words, they don't give a damn about our rules and regulations. If it were not so, they would have never dared to ask the royal palace not to invite them.

**But defaulters like you have ruined the bank. What else could it have done?**

This move is a part of corruption. International agencies like the World Bank are funding such moves. It's a well-organised corruption of the World Bank to get our economy in its clutch. But today everyone knows that wherever the World Bank enters, there is corruption.

**This is getting vicious. Do you have something personal against the expat consultants managing Nepal Bank?**

No, it's not personal. It is the outcome of immoral people who have ganged up against us.

**So, tell us, are you going to back the money you borrowed?**

What can I do when the situation is out of my control? When there is war going on, or if there is an earthquake, I can do nothing. Such circumstances can arise anywhere in the world.

Nobody is talking about how bad it is for business. Even the World Bank, that claims to be running the country, is ignoring the impact of the crisis on the business.

**Some say despite your troubles, you are still living lavishly. Buying new cars and building houses.**

Who do you think is spending on new houses and cars? It is the banks which have been lending in non-productive areas like housing and vehicle loans. They have stopped spending in industries that generate employment and benefit the economy.

**Does that mean you will never repay the loan?**

I have always said that I will repay the loan. But why did they cancel the 12 year rescheduling that the bank had earlier granted to me? Other hotels got the extra time to repay the loans. Soaltee got 17 years to repay its loan. Yak & Yeti got eight years and now Hyatt has 20 years. So, why pick only on me?

**What is your next move?**

I have challenged the bank's moves against me in the court. I have filed many cases including defamation. I have been remaining quiet because my cases are still in the court. But, now this is not just against me. The whole business community has been offended. We are going for class litigation now. For that purpose, a cell has been formed at the FNCCI.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

**In the list of Nepal Bank Limited's defaulters, Piyush Bahadur Amatya tops the list. He owes the bank Rs 2.18 billion. The bank's management had recently requested Kathmandu based foreign missions not to grant Amatya and other defaulters visas. In an interview with Nepali Times, an angry Amatya reacts to the bank's move.**



### Architect honoured

Nepali architect Sarosh Pradhan has won the young Architect's Award 2004 from Nepal in an annual Focus Countries Architect of the Year Award for South Asian architects given by JK Cement Ltd in India. Pradhan had been nominated by the Society of Nepalese Architects (SONA) for the construction of the prize-winning design and construction of the voluntary group, Tewa in Dhapakhel. The Award includes a citation, trophy and Rs 40,000 cash. Three Years ago Tom Crees won the award for the Riverside

The Springs Resort and the Commendation Award went to Dipak Man Sherchan and Rosha Marahatta respectively. This year's recipient from India of the Chairman's Award for Outstanding Contribution to Architecture went to J M Benjamin from New Delhi. Past winners include big names like Charles Correa, B V Doshi and Hafeez Contractor. The Award Presentation function is planned to be held in Bangalore in February 2005 and is promoted by J K Cement Ltd.

### Dabur's new brand



Dabur has unveiled a new brand identity through a new logo and positioning statement 'Celebrate Life!' that it says reflects the

company's vision and mission. The restructuring of the company's brand identity has given birth to a portfolio of five powerful brands: Dabur - the healthcare brand; Vatika - the herbal beauty brand; Anmol - the value for money brand; Real - the fruit beverages brand and Hajmola - the tasty digestives brand.

# Misrule of law

## The government arbitrarily destroys firms it has problems with

If you are Raghu Pant, the Minister of Labour and Transport, what would you do to ultimately save face? You would put on a Minister-knows-best cap to cancel the registration of a private sector firm.

**STRICTLY BUSINESS**  
Ashutosh Tiwari



In doing so, you would

make that firm's investors' money worthless, throw its employees out on the streets, damage its relations with suppliers and clients and show all others who is boss.

But winning the battle would also mean losing the war, which, as a Marxist, Raghuji would know. Through his action, his silent signal would be that the government of Nepal could arbitrarily destroy private firms that it has problems with, even if that firm's in a cut-throat competitive market. Instead of sorting out these problems by fighting its case to the finish in a court of law to establish impersonal precedents to deal with similar cases in future, the government could interpret the law itself, decide what's legal and illegal as though it were a court and then take actions in the name of some vague public good.

For somebody who once ran his own paper, Pant should have known better. Only 15 years ago, owners of fledgling private sector media houses in Nepal lived in constant fear of having registrations cancelled by the Panchayat

government with the flimsiest of excuses. That fear so paralysed the publishers' business plans that they were finally able to band together to get rid of it by getting a clause of their own in the 1990 constitution that says under no circumstances can the government cancel the registration of any media house.

And no matter how Nepal continues to rank in various indices of global press freedom, that clause continues to assure all non-profit and for-profit media houses that whatever problems they may have with the government, cancellation of registrations through diktat by the Ministry of Information is never going to be one of the outcomes. It is rather odd that while the private sector media is thus shielded from government arbitrariness that threatens their existence, private sector firms—who too are in the same business of using private money as investment, providing employment, supplying goods and services to those who pay for them, paying taxes and keeping the economy going—continue to have no choice but to ultimately kneel down even

before a short-term Minister lest he, in a fit of righteous anger, made them legally non-existent.

To be sure, few would mistake Lumbini Overseas, the firm whose registration Pant cancelled, as a model corporate citizen. The allegations against it are damning: it extorted lakhs of money from job applicants, it sent more than 1,500 undocumented workers to South Korea and it evaded taxes. Although these malpractices may also exist among 400-plus 'manpower' firms, the fact is that

Pant's ministry hasn't proven any of those allegations against Lumbini in a court of law, much less shown what 'special circumstances' (as stated in Section 21 of Foreign Employment Act of 1988) warranted the cancellation of its registration. This provides a window for Lumbini and other business bodies to mount a legal challenge against Pant's action, if they still have energy left to do so.

But for Pant, a larger question remains: If the ends justified the means, as in this case, then, how different really is his action from that of the Maoists or the Panchayatis who too think that arbitrarily trampling upon the rights of those who they do not like is justified in the name of righting perceived wrongs? ●



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# A Buddhist path to peace

## A Nepali monk in Thailand speaks of lessons from there in resolving the insurgency

BHIKKHU SUGANDHA

I left Nepal to study Buddhism in Thailand as a 15-year-old novice monk in 1975. At that time Thailand was at a similar state of development as present-day Nepal. South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia had fallen to the communists within a few days of each other. The 'Domino Theory' predicted that Thailand would be next. I was residing at a royal monastery under the patronage of the present Supreme Patriarch of Thailand. He was quite influential and The King and Queen, many top Thai generals and senior members of the national government would visit him for advice and inspiration. I had become fluent in Thai and so gained an insider's understanding of the seriousness of the situation. The military and the government were not as concerned with the communists in neighbouring countries as they were with the communists and sympathisers within Thailand.

Many brilliant Thai university students had fled to the jungles in northeastern Thailand to support a domestic Thai Maoist guerrilla force. Their weaponry was supplied from outside as was their training. But the villages in the 'pink' parts of the northeast gladly supplied food and other requirements to the rebels. They were an ominous threat precisely because they had local support.

They declared many parts of Thailand 'red' where it would be very dangerous for civil servants or governmental staff to go. The Thai military often engaged the militants in bloody firefights. I often followed my teacher to the red zone trying to help villagers who were secretly sympathetic to the communists. We were threatened and on one occasion, a bomb was detonated on the route where my teacher passed after visiting a monastery.

My senior colleague, a British Buddhist monk, Ajarn Brahm, who was in Thailand during 1970s has written in his book, *Opening the Door of Your Heart and other Buddhist Tales of Happiness*, how the Thai government addressed the Maoist problem. Brahm says the Thai military and government took a three-pronged strategy:

**1 Restraint:** The military did not attack the communist bases, though every soldier knew where they were.

**2 Forgiveness:** Throughout this dangerous period, there was an unconditional amnesty in place.

**3 Solving the root problem:** New roads being built and old roads being paved in the region. The King of Thailand personally supervised and paid for the construction of many hundreds

of small reservoirs with connected irrigation schemes, allowing the poor farmers of the northeast to grow a second crop of rice each year. Electricity reached the remotest of hamlets and with it came a school and a clinic.

A Thai government soldier on patrol in the jungle told me once: "We don't need to shoot the communists. They are fellow Thais. When I meet them coming down from the mountains or going to the village for supplies and we all

important positions in the Thai civil service. Why waste the resource of such courageous and committed young men?"

There is a lesson for Nepal in all this. Following the Buddha's teachings, the path to resolving the present conflict lies in addressing the following six points:

**1 The economy.** Poverty is a root cause of violence and the Buddha himself pointed out: "If a ruler allows poverty to develop, it will lead to social strife, so it is his responsibility to avoid this by looking after the poor."

**2 Negotiations.** The Buddhist way of solving conflict by peaceful means is carried in the Buddha's own life when he gave practical lessons in tolerance.

**3 Nonviolence.** The Buddha always instructs his followers to be true pacifists by telling them: "Conquer anger with love, conquer evil with good, conquer greed by giving, and conquer lies with the truth."

**4 Patience.** The Buddha instructs his followers to advance themselves by practicing loving kindness, compassion, appreciative gladness and equanimity.

**5 Forbearance and forgiveness.** The Buddha says: "The words of a fool are best stopped by responding to his anger and verbal onslaught by oneself remaining calm, not by harsh measurers. This will not lead to one's opponent thinking he can take advantage of one's 'weakness', forbearance is a sign of real strength, unlike the deceptive 'strength' of a fool."

**6 Tolerance and amity.** The Buddha teaches his followers to have religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence with followers of other religions.

If the leaders of the government or Maoists practice these values sincerely, it would guarantee peace in Nepal. The ruler's actions are of far-reaching consequence since they affect his own kingship as well as the fortune, fate and destiny of his subjects who are almost entirely dependent upon him. By his exemplary action the king, the leader, influences, for good or bad, for weal or woe, the material as well as the spiritual condition of those who live under his rule, and he thus influences and determines their happiness or misery. Perhaps the ancient wisdom of the Buddha who was nurtured on Nepali soil can solve the current problems. ●

Phra Sugandha (Anil Sakya) is a Nepali monk who is assistant secretary to the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand, His Holiness Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara. This article is excerpted from a theme paper he presented at the World Buddhist Summit in Lumbini recently.



KUMAR SHRESHTHA/NEPALNEWS.COM

## Well done, Nepal

### A Sri Lankan diplomat was impressed with the Second World Buddhist Summit held in Lumbini last month

The Second World Buddhist Summit proved to be one of the most representative Buddhist Conferences that I have attended anywhere: Buddhists, friends of Buddhism, admirers of the Buddha and his serene teachings and a cross-section of peace-loving people of all faiths.

The participation of the Nepali national leadership led by the king (*seen above paying his respects at the Maya Debi shrine*), prime minister, ministers, senior officials and spiritual leaders expressed by their very presence the importance attached to this event and the objectives. I have not witnessed such a strong and sustained presence of the national leadership even in countries with predominantly Buddhist populations.

The Summit aptly began with a detailed presentation on the contribution which the teachings of the Buddha, the venerated son of Nepal, have made to world peace, culture and civilization. Delegates were deeply concerned that Lumbini, as the holiest site of Buddhist pilgrimage, had to be better developed and the goals set out by U Thant had to be achieved expeditiously.

My first visit to Lumbini via Nowgarh railhead in India was in 1956 riding a seatless, rickety truck, hired at an exorbitant price. My family of seven took hours to reach Lumbini through a harsh treeless terrain. The road was a dusty, sandy, gravel track. At Lumbini itself there was only the Ashokan Pillar with the famous inscription and the Maya Debi Temple in a dilapidated condition. As far as our eyes could see there were only two trees: the Bodhi tree and the tree by the Maya Debi Temple.

In 1969, when I was in Kathmandu on UNESCO business, officials made a valiant effort to get me to Lumbini. Rains had cut off every access to Lumbini. The next year, when I did get there on a jeep from Kushinagar, Lumbini was still deserted but for two monks.

The Lumbini today is a tribute to the persevering dedication of the government of Nepal. Every single tree which makes Lumbini such a pleasant environment was planted and watered by hand. That alone is an achievement. The master plan is an idealistic grand conception, we need it to direct us to greater action. It has saved the site of Lumbini and preserved the surrounding area in a higher state of ecological balance but it is not set in stone.

Kwaak Young Hoon, on a mission funded by UNDP, has envisioned the evolution (rather than the creation) of the World Peace City of Lumbini, the Biswashantinagar. The adoption of this vision by the Summit and its endorsement by the national leadership of Nepal marks another step in the progress of Lumbini. Such a centre of spiritual, cultural and educational significance, radiating to the world, the wisdom of the Buddha, needs to be very carefully planned with the participation of a wide circle of national and international stakeholders.

The most pleasing decision of the Summit, heartily endorsed by the national leadership, was to develop the entire region with a special emphasis on Kapilabastu, Devadaha and Ramgram. A comprehensive Buddhist Circuit, connected with the Buddha's life, will invite pilgrims and other visitors to spend more time in the area and help raise living standards of the local people.

There are other ideas: getting local people to craft miniature replicas of the Maya Debi panel and Buddha statues with clay from Lumbini itself as a sacred souvenir that pilgrims can take away. This idea of hotel entrepreneur, Ambica Shrestha, has a lot of merit.

The other immediate measure is to change the entrance and exit to enable pilgrims and visitors to pass through the area between the two existing monasteries and the canal where local traders could sell flowers and incense as well as religious souvenirs. It is now a bazaar which the majority of visitors miss when they follow the official entrance and exit. ●

Ananda W P Guruge used to be Sri Lanka's ambassador to the United States and UNESCO and is Dean of Academic Affairs at University of the West in the US



Bhikku Sugandha

know who they are, I just show them my new wristwatch, or let them listen to a Thai song on my new radio then they give up being a communist."

Thai Communists began their insurgency because they were so angry with their government that they were ready to give up their young lives. But restraint on the part of the government helped to prevent their anger from becoming worse. Forgiveness, through an amnesty, gave them a safe and honourable way out. Solving the problem, through development, made the poor villagers prosperous. The villagers saw no need to support the communists anymore: they were content with the government they already had. And the communists themselves began to doubt what they were doing, living in such hardship in the mountain jungles.

By the early 1980s, there were hardly any insurgents left, so the communist leaders also gave themselves up. They were not punished but offered





Devotees arranging Christmas decorations at Assumption Church in Dhobighat this week (left) and a Nepali Mary in a sari and pashmina.

PICS: KIRAN PANDAY

# A season to be jolly

**NARESH NEWAR**

From the remote corners of Banke, Kailali, Dhangadi to the streets of Thamel, Nepali Christians are busy preparing to celebrate Christmas, their Dasain. Some Hindus and Buddhists as well will join in festivities on the big day.

Christmas is done in Nepali style. In the nativity scene, Baby Jesus is dressed up in a bhoto inside a doko, the Three Magis are decked up in daura suruwal. During the weekend prayer sessions, everyone takes off their shoes, squats on the floor and prays in Nepali. Even "praise the Messiah" is recited as "jai mahasi".

The New Testament was first translated into Nepali in 1821 by William Carey and is now being translated further into 12 indigenous languages. "Nothing is foreign about Christianity anymore," says church-goer Sujata Rai from Jawalakhel, "We are all one big family of Christians."

Christians have earned a positive reputation for involvement in social, health

and education sectors, reaching out to the backward, poverty stricken and illiterate Nepalis in remote areas.

Among the best-known are the Jesuits who were one of the first to arrive after 1951 and they established themselves in the country by starting the boarding school, St Xaviers in Jawalakhel and Godavari. They were followed by the United Mission to Nepal (UMN), a collaborative body of several global missionaries. It made its own mark by establishing some of the best public and community hospitals, launching literacy programs, agriculture development activities and so on. It also became one of the first international NGOs to pioneer development work in Nepal. Today, it is the second-largest employer in Nepal after the government with the largest number of expatriate and Nepali staff working in UMN's projects around the country.

Other Christian charities like Caritas, International Fellowship (INF) and Nepal Leprosy Trust (NLT) have also been doing exemplary work in health and education—

especially to reach marginalised communities who fall between the cracks. NLT is the only organisation that operates the leprosy services centre in southeast Nepal, that has the highest prevalence of leprosy. Over 20 percent of hospitals and clinics in Nepal are run by Christian charities.

The numbers of Christians in the country is growing. With less than 30 Christians in late 1950s, the number of believers increased to 200,000 in 1990 and now is estimated at one million, making up nearly four percent of the population and one of the fastest growing in the world. There are churches now in almost all the 75 districts of Nepal.

Among Christians, the Catholics have been working towards Nepalising Christianity. "Our religious differences do not affect our culture," explains Binod Gurung, president of Nepali Catholic Samaj. "We were brought up as Nepalis and have a close affinity with Hindu and Buddhist friends and we often celebrate each other's festivals." ●

## Christianity in Nepal

The Christian missionaries came to Nepal over the Himalaya from Tibet more than 250 years ago. They were Tyrolean Capuchin monks and wrote in their chronicles how Kathmandu Valley was the dirtiest place they had every visited.

They called on the Malla kings of the Valley and presented the King of Patan with a telescope. For decades after that as the Gorkha conquest began, Nepal was closed to outsiders especially beef-eating Europeans.

But by the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, more missionaries came in from British India and their first group of local converts were from the Newar community. However, Christianity did not spread much after King Prithbi Narayan Shah came to power who saw the religion as a threat to national security and suspected Christians of being British spies. European missionaries and newly-converted Newar Christians were asked to leave the country. King Prithbi Narayan also strictly banned the conversion of Hindus into Christianity.

There is still a lingering distrust of Christians as proselytisers among Kathmandu's officialdom. Even after Nepal opened its doors to the outside world in 1950 and Christian missionaries poured in they were under strict surveillance which still did not allow conversion. The law carried a sentence of three years for the preacher, one year for the convert and six months for the baptiser. Many were persecuted during the 1980s.

During the Panchayat regime, a large number of Christians were persecuted and 300 pastors were jailed for proselytising. Many were subject to police brutality and there are records of at least one missionary having been killed. Church-goers had to keep their religious identity a secret and missionaries were effectively underground.

After the People's Movement of 1990, the new constitution granted religious freedom. When the Nepali Congress (NC) came to power it instituted democratic reforms, including freedom to practice any religion. The government introduced a law that allowed freedom of religious practice. Today, voluntary conversion from one religion to another is legal. Only forced conversion is considered illegal. With more tolerant laws and policies in place, Nepali Christians today feel very much at home. "Nepalis are a tolerant community and we no longer have any fears unlike during the Panchayat days," says Silas Bogati, parish priest from Assumption Church.

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# Little Nepal flourishes in

Nepalis in the Special Autonomous Region are going places

**DAMBAR K SHRESTHA**  
in HONG KONG

There used to be a time when this was still a British colony when the only Nepalis here were British Gurkhas, their families and the occasional Manang trader.

But after the law that allowed anyone born in Hong Kong before 1983 eligible for permanent residence, many children of Gurkhas have decided to live here. As conditions in Nepal deteriorate, more and more Nepalis have decided to stay on, and the number has now exceeded 50,000.

Vibrant, laissez faire Hong Kong has made many Nepalis prosperous. From newly-arrived pavement trinket sellers to established millionaire real estate developers, the Nepalis of Hong Kong now have a strong presence. There are Nepali FM stations Nepali newspapers and magazines, Nepali is taught in 16 government schools and there are six special Nepali schools. Nepalis have stood for local elections and Chinese candidates print fliers in Nepali to woo voters.

"Nepalis here are now treated like Hong Kong citizens, and we have also shown that we are a hard-working and law-

abiding lot," says Ganesh Ijam of the umbrella organisation of Nepali associations here, the Hong Kong Nepali Federation.

Among the Nepalis who have done very well for themselves is ex-British Gurkha Tej Bahadur Rai who is into construction and runs a company providing security services. He is also the chairman of the Hong Kong Nepali Chamber of Commerce and has invested in a hydroelectric project back home in Nepal.

Prakash Pun is also ex-Gurkha and has a similar portfolio of companies in construction and security services. Between them, Rai and Pun employ a thousand or so people, are involved in building some of Hong Kong's landmark high rises and have annual turnovers of hundreds of millions of dollars. Dipak Khadka and his brother run Pacific Crown Engineering and employ 350 Filipino, Chinese and Australian staff.

Many of these entrepreneurs started from scratch in Hong Kong, and still have a soft spot for Nepalis giving them preference in jobs if they are qualified. Y B Rai came to Hong Kong 10 years ago and worked in a Chinese restaurant. Today Rai owns six franchises for Uncle Russ Coffee in prime



**Kishan Rai, the editor and publisher of the Nepali-language weekly, Everest**



**Prakash Pun owns the Gorkha Construction Limited**

locations in Hong Kong's business district. "It was just hard work, pure and simple," Rai tells us when asked the secret of his success.

Harimaya Gurung runs the well-known Nachghar Restaurant in the Jordan neighbourhood, which brings in Nepali singers and dancers for performances. Mohan Limbu and his friends studied information technology and run the successful HSM Computer Institute. Rajendra Shrestha runs a string of



**Tanka Sambahamph and Pashan Tamu have launched a website about Nepalis in Hong Kong, www.hknepal.com**



**Tej Bahadur Rai, CEO of the Sunkoshi Construction Company**



**Ram Li Rai, a Nepali businessman who owns a store in Yun Long**



**Nima Gurung does brisk business on the footpaths of Kowloon**

## Seeking asylum

There have been several waves of Nepali migration to Hong Kong. Not all have been legitimate. But the latest is the trend for Nepalis seeking political asylum in Hong Kong claiming that they are being persecuted back home.

The Hong Kong authorities do not recognise the Nepalis as refugees, but they can apply to the UNHCR office here which, if approved, allows them to stay while their papers are being processed. If they are deemed not to be refugees, Hong Kong police deports them.

In the past, year there has been a steady rise of Nepalis claiming refugee status and the number is now estimated to be more than 600. Most are Nepalis

who have paid middlemen up to Rs 550,000 for jobs in Korea or Japan but are dumped here without money, tickets or passports.

The cheated Nepalis name a certain Sarita Gurung of Hattigauda in Kathmandu as being involved in the racket. Says Sukra Raj Gurung of Lamjung, "We gave her Rs 300,000, now it's gone and we have no way of going back. So we are applying at UNHCR for refugee status." In the application, most claim they fled their villages in Nepal because of Maoist extortion or threats.

A group of illegal Nepalis in Hong Kong live in a tiny room and do odd jobs in Nepali restaurants as cooks and guards. They have to be vigilant about police raids at their workplaces. One Nepali working

illegally in a restaurant in Yunlong admits he is not a refugee, "I just want to regularise my stay here, and claiming to be a Maoist victim seems to be the easiest way of doing it."

But there are some genuine Maoist victims among the illegal Nepalis here, like Raju Shrestha of Thankot. He had two houses and some property but says he left it all because the Maoists accused him of being a spy and feared for his life. "If I was sure I wouldn't be killed if I went back home, I'd go back tomorrow," Raju says.

The UNHCR office here says it can't reveal the numbers who have applied for asylum in Hong Kong. But nearly all the applicants have reportedly cited fear of Maoists, and none have said they were forced to flee because of state security. The



**Sukra Raj and Biraj Gurung who were abandoned by a Nepali labour recruiter in Hong Kong. Both have applied for refugee status**

Royal Nepali consul general in Hong Kong, Hemlal Bhatara, says he has no official information about asylum seekers. "We know of people who have been abandoned by labour middlemen, but no one has notified us about those seeking

refugee status," he adds.

Says Ganesh Ijam of the Hong Kong Nepali Federation, "We know this is emerging as a big problem, the only way to stop it is to crack down on unscrupulous middlemen who abandon their clients here." ●



# Hong Kong



A Nepali school in Hong Kong teaches Nepali and even has non-Nepali students, like Filipina, Michelle (second from left).



There are more than 50,000 Nepalis in Hong Kong, out of a total population of 7.5 million.

ALL PICS: DAMBAR K SHRESTHA



Raju Shrestha from Thankot works illegally in Hong Kong while his application for asylum is being processed by the UNHCR

businesses and his wife Daya Magar owns a beauty parlour. Kishan Rai, who brings out the *Everest Weekly*, says: "The paper is for the Nepalis in Hong Kong to read about what is happening in Nepal and also to strive for unity among Nepalis here."

There are other newspapers: *Sunrise* weekly, *Nepal Post* monthly, and *Namaste HK*.

Hello Annapurna and Asia Telecom provide radio feeds from FM stations in Nepal which can be accessed through internet and telephone. Tanka Sambahamphe and Pashan Tamu have started [www.hknepal.com](http://www.hknepal.com) a portal providing all necessary contacts and information about Hong Kong Nepalis. ●



Self-made restaurateur, Y B Rai, runs a string of six franchises in Hong Kong for an American coffee shop chain.

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Dikta Lama, co-owner of United Brands displaying her wares



ALL PICS: KIRAN PANDAY

AARTI BASNYAT and SHREYA MUKHERJEE

The shopping and retail boom in the capital is hard to miss, even without the holiday season.

Department stores and malls offering high-quality consumer products have managed to rope in quite a few locals. This means they are less dependent on Indian shoppers and tourists as they used to be.

All in all, the Kathmandu consumer has become more quality-conscious and have gotten used to the convenience of shopping under one roof. And the supermarket chains and malls are responding to this booming demand.

The latest to hit the markets are branded products. Labels, specialising in international brands has opened up sister outlets like Pepe on New road and Adidas on Durbar Marg. By bringing in their own imports from Europe and India, stocking trips to wholesale markets in Bangkok and Singapore have gone down. Most trade in cheaper clothing and knock-off designer goods has been replaced by the Tibet trade. Bluebird and Namaste, for instance, now have exclusive sections for branded goods owned by Labels.

"Businesses in Nepal have lacked creativity and originality," says Bijen Jhunchhe, owner of Metro Mall, Soaltee Mode. Shop owners are now spending a lot more money on improving the ambience of their stores and providing customers with a hassle-free, convenient shopping experience.

"Nepalis are becoming very brand conscious and prefer buying quality products," says Dikila Lama, co-owner of United Brands, specialising in mountaineering gear and casual wear. United Brands gives shoppers the choice of buying top-notch, authentic brands like Jansport, Low Alpine, Eagle Creek, Ground, etc. "It is necessary for the locals to be exposed to original, genuine products," says Lama. Opened only two months ago in Thamel, the store has found upscale customers not only in tourists but in the local crowd as well.

The market in Nepal is reaching a stage where it could possibly become a free port like Dubai and Singapore. If more store-owners invest in creating a shopper-friendly atmosphere and selling genuine products, the tourism industry should be welcoming this advancement with open arms.

As Kathmandu shoppers become more sophisticated, supermarkets have had to find innovative means of attracting customers. All in all, a good thing for the consumers as not only will they have a one stop shopping experience but also quality products at quality prices.

# Shopping in paradise

**A consumer boom has gripped Kathmandu as shoppers discover affordable and convenient malls**

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## Dot com shopping

For all those who want to be able to shop in their pyjamas with a hot mug of coffee, there is always shopping on the net. Muncha.com began as a shopping website in May 2002, currently selling about 7000 products including various electronic and home appliances and food products. Muncha House also offers money transfer services from the US to Nepal and a photo web site that converts digital images of products into a printable format which is attached to every delivery. Initially targeting people outside Nepal, it has recently taken into account locals as well.

"We have made the web site more user-friendly for the locals," says Amrit Tuladhar, founder of Muncha.com. The food and rations section is a recent addition to the web site, where rice, dal and common spices are sold at standard market rates. Muncha also provides free delivery for members and is one of many other online shopping experiences that are emerging for the net savvy Nepali who is too busy to go to the store.



# 2004's little-known winners

No one knows why but in today's world many find football the only area of identity in which they recognise themselves and in which they really believe



KIRAN PANDAY

**EDUARDO GALEANO**  
in MONTEVIDEO

In football, rarities occur. In a world organised around the daily confirmation of the power of the powerful, nothing is rarer than the coronation of the humiliated and the humiliation of the crowned. But in football, at times, this rarest of events does happen.

Indeed, in 2004 a Palestinian team was the champion of Israel for the first time in history and for the first time in history a Chechen team was champion of Russia. In the Olympics, the football team of Iraq, convulsed in war, won game after game and made it to

the semi-finals, in a series of surprises, against every prediction and all evidence and was the crowd's favourite.



The Arab team Bnei Sakhnin and the Chechen team Terek Grozny, blazing champions of Israel and Russia, have certain things in common with the Iraqi team.

They are all teams that in some way represent people who don't have the right to be what they want to be, that suffer the damnation of living in submission to a foreign flag, stripped of their sovereignty, bombed, humiliated and pushed to desperation.

And as if this were not enough, all three are modest teams, poor, nearly or completely

unknown and without any famous players. They are errant teams, playing in foreign lands and before empty stands. The village of Sakhnin, in Galilee, never had anything like a stadium, though the Israeli government promised one a number of times. Terek played in the Grozny stadium, which has been closed since Chechen independence fighters planted a bomb beneath the seat of the country's Russian-picked president. And in Iraq, there are only battle fields, no football fields are left. The occupation troops, which at this point have already forgotten the pretext for their criminal invasion, have converted sports areas into cemeteries or hospitals.

Where the Baghdad stadium once stood, now there is a military base holding American tanks. The Iraqi team trained in fields where flocks of sheep grazed.



A powerful symbol, a great mystery; no one knows why (though theories abound) but in today's world many people find football the only area of identity in which they recognise themselves and in which they really believe. Whatever the reasons may be, collective dignity has a lot to do with the passage of a ball flying through the air.

I do not mean only the communion the fan experiences with his team each Sunday from the stands of the stadium, but also, above all, the game played in the paddocks, in the little fields, on the beaches, the few public spaces still not devoured

by urbanisation run amok. Enrique Pichon-Riviere, an Argentine psychiatrist and passionate student of human pain, can confirm the efficiency of football as a therapy for the illnesses born of scorn and loneliness. This sport is a shared endeavour, played in teams; it contains an energy that can greatly help the scorned to love themselves and save them from the solitude which they feel condemns them to being perpetually incommunicado.

In this regard, the experience of Australia and New Zealand is very revealing. There, the native languages do not have a word for suicide for the simple reason that suicide did not exist in aboriginal life. A few centuries of racism, marginalisation, the violent eruption of consumer society and its implacable values have succeeded in making the rate of suicide among aboriginal youth the highest in the world.

Given this terrifying panorama, with such deep roots, and such broken ones, no magic potion can act as a cure. But the testimony of those admirable people working against death does concur on one fact. The results of this therapy are quite surprising: it seems capable of reviving lost feelings of fraternity and belonging. Sports, especially football, is one of the few places that can provide shelter to those who have no place in the world, and it contributes significantly to re-establishing bonds of solidarity broken by the culture of alienation/

separation that is dominant in today's Australia, New Zealand and the rest of the world.



It is not a chemical miracle. Enthusiasm and delight are the drugs for this cure. The 11 players of each team are many more than 11. In each player, a whole crowd plays. These are rituals of affirmation of the humiliated, both men and women, boys and girls.

Little by little, women's football has been carving a larger space for itself in the sports media, where for the most part men cover men and don't know what to make of this invasion of women and girls.

On a professional level, the development of women's football today has found a certain resonance. But there is no echo, or only enemy echoes, from the game that is played for the pure pleasure of playing.

In Nigeria, the women's team is a national treasure and source of intense pride. It is ranked among the top in the world. But in the Muslim north of the country, men are against it because the sport draws maidens into depravity. In the end they accept it, though, because football is a sin that can bring them fame and save their families from poverty.

In Zanzibar and Sudan, the brothers of these female players, guardians of the family honour, administer beatings to punish this mania of their sisters who think they are men enough to dribble a ball and commit the sacrilege of revealing their bodies. Football, a game for men, denies women fields to play and practice. The men refuse to play against the women. Out of respect for religion, they say. Maybe so. Or maybe when they play, they lose.



Across the ocean, in Bolivia, there is no problem. Women play soccer in the towns of the high plains without taking off their numerous skirts. They wear over them their coloured jerseys and are still able to make goals. Every game is a party. Football is a free space open to these women, prolific in children, overwhelmed by slaving in the fields and mills and subjected to frequent beatings by their drunk husbands. They play barefoot. The winning team is given a sheep. So is the losing team. These silent women laugh and laugh more throughout the game and continue laughing uncontrollably throughout the banquet. They celebrate together, the winners and losers. No man would dare set foot inside. ● (IPS)

Eduardo Galeano, Uruguayan writer and novelist, is the author of *The Open Veins of Latin America* and *Memories of Fire*.





# From bahadur to chef

Nepalis have found a niche running India's Chinese restaurants

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY in PUNE



One of the Chinese dhabas in Pune run by Nepalis. Suraj Sonar who runs two Chinese eateries

If Tanka Tiwari had a choice, he'd still be in his village in Bajhang walking from home to school every day. But the streetwise 12-year-old is working hard to support himself and his family.

Like tens of thousands who have fled the conflict back home, Tanka works as a waiter in a dingy kitchen in this western Indian city that dishes out suspicious Chinese food. He works 12 hours a day, but is not complaining. Back home, he may have been killed by the security forces for being a suspected Maoist or forcibly recruited by the rebels.

Had he been an Indian citizen, child rights activists may have rescued him from his miserable working conditions, but he is just another Nepali migrant worker and he's lucky. Things could have been much worse for Tanka.

Food and lodging are taken care of and Tanka saves most of the IRs 1,500 he earns every month. His uncle comes every once in a while from Mumbai to collect his wages from the employer. It's better that way. If he was allowed to keep the money, he may have frittered it away.

His savings will help pay

family loans and expenses. He has become a respected earning member of his family. For now, his most difficult task is to keep his emotions at check. It doesn't matter that he couldn't go home this Dasain, "I will go next Dasain... maybe," he says, eyes misty with memories of happier days.

Hem Bahadur Pun had a stark choice. He was in eighth grade in Rolpa when the Maoists came to recruit. They abducted the entire class and forced them to attend political indoctrination. Afraid Hem Bahadur might be forced to join the 'People's Army', his father sent him to try to join the Indian Army. Hem Bahadur wasn't selected and he didn't want to suffer the indignity of returning to Nepal empty-handed. So he joined other Nepalis as a cook's helper at a roadside Chinese food stall here. Luckily for Hem Bahadur, his employer is a Nepali and an educated one, Suraj Sonar.

Sonar is an Indian-born Nepali whose father served in the Indian army. Suraj saw opportunity in India and decided to stay, though he visits his retired father in Nepal every now and then. Suraj has two food stalls in



Pune and employs eight Nepalis. Each stall makes a minimum of IRs 2,000 every evening. Even though he graduated from Pune University, Suraj doesn't mind starting small. "I'm earning here and its honest earning. I don't have to worry about security," he says.

There are countless Hem Bahadurs and Tankas in Pune and the numbers are increasing. "There are around 5,000 here from Pokhara alone," says Dilip Pandey from Palpa, who worked his way up from dishwasher to now own two food stalls that employ 12 fellow Nepalis. Dilip's family has joined him and his sons go to English schools here and speak Marathi. ●



## Long and straight

What I did to get back on line

The last couple of weeks we concentrated on the biggest golf event in Nepal. Now we get back to some tips and rules of the game.

During this year's Surya Nepal Masters, I felt I was hitting my driver better than ever before. I was averaging 295 yard drives with almost 85 percent of fairway hits. That is quite something for any player and an even more remarkable achievement for me. I have always hit the ball long but have been quite wild. Well, the sudden change was an adjustment I made recently, and I will share how with you.

In recent months while I have been working hard to straighten out my drives, these are a few things I consciously worked on.

**TEE BREAK**  
Deepak Acharya



**Making an effort to keep the spine at the same angle until impact.** This promotes a lot of balance in the swing and avoids those big slices and hooks.

**Ensuring shoulders and hips are fully turned.** I concentrate on this when taking my club back. This is what brings the big muscles into play.

**Using the bigger muscles.** On the downswing, I worked on ensuring I cleared my left shoulder and on turning my hips. This helped avoid unnecessary hand action and instead allowed the bigger muscles to power the ball through.

This distance and accuracy has proven very useful for me and a lot of people who've played with me recently are quite amazed with my length and accuracy.

See if these tips apply to your swing and can help you improve and enjoy the game more. Don't hesitate to discuss and practice these with your professional golf instructor as well.

### Another decision on the rules of golf:

There are many occasions during a round of golf where you end up in interesting situations that leave you puzzled as to how to proceed. Here is one example.

Two balls end up close to each other in a bunker. A's ball is just an inch away from B's ball but A's is further away from the hole. What is the proper procedure according to the rules of golf?

In this situation B, who is nearer to the hole should mark his ball and lift it, and should be aware that he may not clean his ball. Since both balls were so close, A, while playing the shot can alter the lie where B will replace the ball. If the lie is altered, B, in equity, is allowed to have the lie given to him before A's shot, and should recreate the original lie as near as possible and place the ball under rule 20 - 3b (iii).

This rule sounds quite complex, and most golfers are surprised that B was allowed to touch the sand prior to making the shot.

Next time you are faced with this situation during a competitive four ball match, be confident that you can apply this ruling. This and all other rulings are available under 'Playing the Game', followed by the 'Rules' link at [www.usga.org](http://www.usga.org)

Do have a browse through when you have some free time.

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Golf Director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu. [prodeepak@hotmail.com](mailto:prodeepak@hotmail.com)



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# 'Comrade

Maoist ideologue from Baburam Bhattarai writing under his alias in *Janadharana*, 16 December

जानदरुण

## On peace talks

Our party has never been against a progressive political outlet and the peaceful solution of the ongoing civil war. But, there is no meaning and relevance of the proposal of talks by the Deuba-UML government that is just a rubberstamp of the royal army. Extending detention of people from 90 days to one year through the Terrorist and Destruction (Control and Punishment) Ordinance, the increase in the expenditure of the royal palace and the army are proof about where the real authority and the intention of the government is. Even the common people have understood this fact. That was the reason our party's recently held central committee meetings decided to sit for talks only if the people's sovereignty is guaranteed and if there is reliable international mediation.



has had a central state power. So, under no circumstance will there be any agreement on the continuity of the monarchy and the mercenary royal army. If someone tries to make any compromises, he/she will be trashed in the history books by the Nepali people. That is why our proposal to hold talks with the king in an open manner and with the help of international mediation must be understood as our efforts to bring the monarchy out from behind the curtain. If anyone thinks

## Talks with king

Our party cannot even imagine relinquishing such a historic, revolutionary and sacrificial movement to those who have been against the country and the people. This is the first movement of its type in more than 200 years of history ever since Nepal

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Rocks: Defiance

नेपाल *Nepal*, 26 December

**QUOTES OF THE WEEK**



It is important for the king to have public backing whenever he visits a foreign country. If the parliament had been restored, the Royal visit would have been more honourable and made more of an impact.

Girija P Koirala in *Kantipur*, December 22



# Laldhoj' and Prachanda

otherwise, it would be a fallacy.

## On party's goals

Like we said last year, our party's ultimate goal is a people's republic. Its basic interrelated concept is to transform it into a capitalistic people's system, which is above the present parliamentary system and constitution and below the people's system and the constitution we aspire for. The final goal is a people's republic and a people's elected constituent assembly is the means to achieve it. For this minimum and immediate program, we can join hands with parliamentary democratic parties and move ahead. Toward that end, political parties need to be serious. We also appeal the general people and civil society to exert pressure in this regard.

## Prachandapath

Our party's central committee meeting last year had brought forth the proposal 'Development of people's republic in the 21<sup>st</sup> century'. The proposal is about a people's republic, a new party, army and regime which is of long term importance. The essence of that proposal is formation of a party, army and a regime of the proletariat. After that, the ongoing war will stop, but the revolution will move on into new phases until we attain communism

where there is no state and class. This concept comprises such crucial points that were discussed even at the times of Marx and Lenin. Today, all true revolutionaries, including those with RIM, must analyse the concept seriously and come to a conclusion. That is the reason why the RIM-affiliated revolutionary communist party in the United States of America and others have launched public discussions on the concept of the people's republic and their authority. Our party has also begun intensive discussions on preambles of Marxism, Leninism, Maoism and Prachandapath to enrich and develop the science of the international proletarian revolution. For that, our party has stressed the protection, use and development of the proletarian revolution science's three organs - philosophy, political economics and scientific socialism. In short the development and prosperity of 'Malema' (Marxism, Leninism and Maoism) and Prachandapath is possible only if the lapses and drawbacks during the people's republic of Comrade Stalin are corrected. Standing on the central committee's proposal of the development of people's republic in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we need to develop the concept of Malemaism and Prachandapath. Or else, both of these concepts will become extinct.

## "The king can't remain behind the curtain"

Maoist chief Prachanda in *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 20 December

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

Excerpts from interview:

"We have never said we will hold talks with the king only. What we meant was that it only makes sense to talk to the one who is in control of the army and the old regime. But one must remember that we have been holding direct and indirect talks with the major political parties, civil society and intellectual society also.

The king will either have to give up his control over the old regime and the army or we won't allow him to remain behind the curtain from where he has been pushing the country and the people to destruction.

In the absence of a reliable and acceptable-to-all mediation and an agreement on democratic system, we see no point sitting for talks with any one's representative. There is also no use of talks with the feudal government that is there to increase the budget of the royal palace and to bring black law for the royal army.

Both the king and Deuba of the old regime do not have people's base. As for us, our foundation on the people's level has been proved by the success of the people's war in the last nine years. The people's governments in all the rural areas of the country also prove our base.

That our demand for international mediation will

result in foreign interference is a fallacious argument of the brokers of imperialists and expansionists. Without dealing with the present state of the civil war, the government's talks for elections is a part of the conspiracy to invite genocide. Since elections in status quo would be a part of the regression, we will destroy that conspiracy.

There have been arguments that the elections could pave way for an elected government with whom we could hold talks. But the first round of peace talks was held with an elected government of Sher Bahadur Deuba. Yet, the result only exposed that he had neither the capacity nor the authority. As long as the royal army remains loyal to the palace, elections and democracy in Nepal will only be showpieces.

Our demands for a round table conference among all political forces and civil society, the formation of an interim government through the meeting and the election for constituent assembly still remain. By the time elections for the constituent assembly are held, the arms of both the sides have to be stopped. After the elections and, in line with the results, the army and arms of both the sides will have to be managed. We can discuss this in detail.

We are confident that the result of the elections of the constituent assembly will be in favour of the republican system.



But we are committed to accept any result of such elections.

Our movement is nationwide today. In the rapid spread of such a revolutionary movement, it is natural that mistakes may have been committed in some places. The incidents in Dailekh are due to a combination of conspiracy by the old regime and the royal army and weaknesses of our own local cadre. But this does mean we have lost the people's sympathy. We have been trying to correct our mistakes and win their hearts and minds."

## Internal affair

*Drishti*, 21 December

दृष्टि

There is no doubt that the police were themselves involved in the Nabil Bank robbery where the pistol used by the robber belonged to a policeman. Although the police helped to recover the bank's Rs 6 million, they have not yet furnished any further details about the incident. Even till now, the police have not been able to find those involved in the loot: proof that the police department is failing in its duty. In the last four months, there were 81 robberies where more than Rs 100 million worth of cash and items were stolen. So far the police have been able to nab only seven robbers and there are indications the police were involved. On 11 October, policemen Balbahadur Pun, Amar Buda and Gyan Bahadur BK, all of whom were based at the police headquarters looted a grocery store at Sitapaila. The police took legal action only against Pun. His accomplices are walking scot free. Just a week after the Sitapaila robbery, another policeman, Sudarsan Prasai, posted at the National Investigation Department was involved in looting a house in Balaju. Even the security force personnel have been associated with robberies in the city. On 17 October, some of those who robbed about Rs 45,000 from a house in Budhanilkantha were dressed in army uniform. If this dangerous trend

continues, the scale of lawlessness will become uncontrollable.

## Maoist plans

*Drishti*, 21 December

दृष्टि

Intelligence services claimed that they have come across the activities and plans of Maoist rebels in Kathmandu. After receiving such information, the police headquarters have already alerted different units under it. According to a fax letter (symbol number 573) sent to police stations by the headquarters, there are around 300 Maoist guerillas working in Kathmandu Valley. They have been divided into several groups. Each has around a dozen guerillas and they are given the responsibility of covering 25 areas in the Valley.

The same letter has the information that the rebels have plans to attack one Pawan Aggrawal of Satya Sai Kendra because he handed over two Maoist rebels to the army. It also talks about the rebel's black list that includes the name of the former president of the Raj Sabha standing committee Keshar Jang Raymajhi because he had recently voiced the need for the active rule of the king. Another letter from police headquarters (number 3991) has it that the Maoists are planning for a big centralised attack. For that purpose, the letter says, the rebels have been transporting rations from the tarai to the hills. Special commands and routes have also been fixed for the work.

In the letter it is also mentioned that the rebel had planned to create obstructions in the East-West highway and attack the security forces who come to remove them and capture their weapons. The letter talks about the Maoist plan to destroy industries and factories that have Indian and American investment.

## Bus terror

*Samaya*, 24 December

समय

For the last two years since the Royal Nepal Army was mobilised along the highway for security checks, bus travelers have been going through their worst experiences. The night bus travel to Kakribitta, which is a 12 hour journey, now takes about 24 hours. Traveling from any other city to Kathmandu is a nightmare. Tight security checks on each bus have proven to be a never-ending harassment. The heavy traffic jam along the Mahendra and Prithibi highway lasts for hours. It gets much worse at Nagdhunga while entering Kathmandu. Even the ambulances carrying patients are stuck in road jams. The army was first stationed on the main highways after the state of emergency was imposed two years back. Since then, the army has been adding check points one after another and it's the ordinary civilians who have to pay the price for national security. The bus to Kakribitta has to pass through at least 20 security check points. Buses from Mahendranagar to Chitwan have to stop at

19 places. For passengers, the security checks have been the ultimate harassment, they are enraged but don't dare complain. The check points haven't improved security, in fact it is spreading anger against the security forces. "What have they really achieved until now? Have they found anything they are looking for?" asks one irate passenger who had to get out of the bus at every check point. Even on a short journey from Narayanghat to Kathmandu, buses have to stop in at least four places. The worst is for the buses going west from Jhapa. Passengers have to walk for about half an hour in Pathalैया, where the army believes the Maoists smuggle arms from India.

The security checks have adversely affected transporters who have seen a sharp decline in passengers, especially on night buses. In normal times two years ago, over 400 buses packed with passengers used to ply on the highways out of Kathmandu every night. Now more than half of those buses travel only in the mornings and afternoons and they are half-empty. Most buses worry about reaching the destination before curfew time. Many buses that start in the evening from Kathmandu have to halt near the forest areas while travelling to Chitwan and Hetauda where they fall prey to dacoits.

The army's spokesman Deepak Gurung says: "The security force has to do its job. We have to make the passengers walk during the checks as we can't recognise Maoists from their faces."



## Daughters in law

NEW DELHI—India, where extreme patriarchal attitudes prevail, is about to make a giant step towards gender equality by introducing a bill that will give women an equal share in family property. To be introduced in the ongoing winter session of parliament, the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Bill 2004, will remove discriminatory provisions in an existing law enacted in 1956 that ensured that only males inherited ancestral property.

"Studies clearly show that when women have access to resources it improves their power to make decisions," said Saroj Pachauri, South and South-East Asia director of the international non-governmental organisation, The Population Council. Commenting on the bill, Pachauri said that some of the worst manifestations of gender discrimination in India such as female foeticide and dowry, particularly in northern India, can be traced to biased inheritance laws, which adds to the vulnerability of women. (IPS)

## Invisible expatriates

SINGAPORE—Everyday in this tiny island republic of four million people, thousands of well-educated and highly qualified Asian expatriates quietly go about their work, often mistaken as locals. The number of Asian professionals working here, the bulk of them Indians and Chinese, has increased tremendously in recent years. Yet the public image of the expatriate here is largely that of a Caucasian on a well-paid



job package that includes free housing, car, domestic help and schooling for the children.

In a country whose citizens are about 70 percent ethnic Chinese, 12 percent Malay and seven percent Indian, thus making a rich Asian ethnic mix, it is often difficult to distinguish the Asian expatriate from the locals. For Ravi, a Indian

business analyst, this local tag gives more breathing space and helps a person feel more at home. But Filipino engineer Raoul is not happy about being asked often, because of his Filipino accent, "Are you not local?"

The typical expatriate in Singapore is no longer from Western countries but from Asia. Arun Mahizhnan, deputy director of the Institute of Policy Studies, says: "The image of the expat has definitely changed, colour is no longer white, because of the resulting influx of Indian (South Asian), Chinese and other Asian professionals." (IPS)



# Study abroad

The US lead in attracting the world's best students is eroding

SAM DILLON in NEW YORK

American universities, which for half a century have attracted the world's best and brightest students with little effort, are suddenly facing intense competition as higher education undergoes rapid globalization.

The European Union, moving methodically to compete with American universities, is streamlining the continent's higher education system and offering American-style degree programs taught in English. Britain, Australia and New Zealand are aggressively recruiting foreign students, as are Asian centers like Taiwan and Hong Kong. China has declared that transforming 100 universities into world-class research institutions is a national priority and is persuading top Chinese scholars to return home from American universities.

"What we're starting to see in terms of international students now having options outside the US for high-quality education is just the tip of the iceberg," said David G Payne, an executive director of the Educational Testing Service, which administers several tests taken by foreign students to gain admission to American universities. "Other countries are just starting to expand their capacity for offering graduate education."

In the future, foreign students will have far greater opportunities." Foreign students contribute \$13 billion to the American economy annually. But this year brought clear signs that the United States' overwhelming dominance of international higher education may be ending. In July, Payne briefed the National Academy of Sciences on a sharp plunge in the number of students from India and China who had taken the most recent administration of the Graduate Record Exam, a requirement for applying to most graduate schools. It had dropped

by half.

Foreign applications to American graduate schools declined 28 percent this year. Actual foreign graduate student enrollments dropped six percent. Enrollments of all foreign students, in undergraduate, graduate and postdoctoral programs, fell for the first time in three decades in an annual census released this fall. Meanwhile, university enrollments have been surging in England, Germany and other countries.

Some of the American decline, experts agree, is due to post-9/11 delays in processing student visas, which have discouraged thousands of students, not only from the Middle East but also from dozens of other nations. American educators and even some foreign ones say the visa difficulties are helping foreign schools increase their share of the market.

"International education is big business for all of the Anglophone countries, and the US traditionally has dominated the market without having to try very hard," said Tim O'Brien, international development director at Nottingham Trent University in England.

"International students say it's not worth queuing up for two days outside the US consulate in whatever country they are in to get a visa when they can go to the UK so much more easily."

American educators have been concerned since the fall of 2002, when large numbers of foreign students experienced delays in visa processing. But few noticed the rapid emergence of higher education as a global industry until quite recently. "Many U.S. campuses have not yet geared up for the competition," said Peggy Blumenthal, a vice president at the Institute for International Education.

During 2002, the most recent year for which comparable figures are available, some

586,000 foreign students were enrolled in United States universities, compared with about 270,000 in Britain, the world's second-largest higher education destination, and 227,000 in Germany, the third-largest. Foreign enrollments increased by 15 percent that year in Britain, and by 10 percent in Germany.

The countries exporting the most students were China, South Korea and India but the annual global migration to overseas universities involves two million students from many countries travelling in many directions. That number is exploding—by some estimates it will quadruple by 2025—as economic growth produces millions of new middle-class students across Asia.

Traditionally most countries, including the United States, had tried to attract foreign students as a way of disseminating their nation's core values. But three other strategies emerged in the 1990's, countries with aging populations like Canada and Germany, pursuing a 'skilled migration' approach, have sought to recruit talented students in strategic disciplines and to encourage them to settle after graduation. Germany subsidises foreign students so generously that their education is free.

Australia and New Zealand, pursuing a 'revenue generating' approach, treat higher education as an industry, charging foreign students full tuition. They compete effectively in the world market because they offer quality education and the costs of attaining some degrees in those countries are lower than in the United States. Emerging countries like India, China and Singapore, pursuing a 'capacity building' approach, view study abroad by thousands of their nation's students as a way of training future professors and researchers for their own university systems. ● (NYT)



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# 2004, the year

All of a sudden, Japan, China, Korea and Thailand have stolen Hollywood's thunder



CHINESE BOMBSHELL: Zhang Ziyi

This year, a Chinese film *Hero*, topped the US box office charts for the first time, despite already being available on DVD. A lush kung fu film in the manner of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, it was directed by former cinematographer Zhang Yimou.

## REVIEW Mark Cousins

*Screen International* called it 'one of the most eagerly awaited films in Asian film history'. It also went to number one in France and cut a swathe through the box office in many Asian countries. This is unheard of, yet Zhang's follow-up, the even more beautiful *House of Flying Daggers*, looks set to follow *Hero's* extraordinary breakthrough. Shot partly in the rust-red forests of Ukraine, it has already broken box office records in China itself.

Something remarkable is happening in Asian cinema, and Hollywood has cottoned on. 'Check out the latest US movie production slate and it is hard to escape the conclusion that Hollywood is turning Japanese,' commented the *Guardian* in July. 'And Korean. With a dash of Thai and Hong Kong thrown in'. No fewer than seven new versions of box office hits from Asia are preparing to go before western cameras. Tom Cruise is developing a remake of the Hong Kong/Thai horror picture, *The Eye*. Martin Scorsese is in pre-production with a new version of *Infernal Affairs*, the Hong Kong *Policier*. A Japanese thriller, *Dark Water* is being reworked for Jennifer Connelly. British director Gurinder Chadha is remaking the Korean feminist crime comedy *My Wife is a Gangster*.

This is not the first time that Hollywood's imitation of Asian cinema has seemed like flattery. *Star Wars* borrowed from

Kurosawa. The *Matrix* films used Hong Kong fight techniques. But western film industries have never banked on the east to this degree before. Virtually every Hollywood studio has optioned an Asian project.

*Dark Water*, *The Eye* and *The Ring* films unnerved Hollywood because they beat it at its own game. They found new, subtle and inventive ways of doing what producers in southern California have spent a century perfecting: jangling the audiences nervous systems. All of a sudden, Japan and Korea have stolen its thunder. Directors from these countries are using the power of suggestion and turning the screw of tension to scare audiences profoundly. They build up tension more slowly, hint at unseen horrors and use sound more evocatively.

Asian cinema, however, doesn't merit our attention merely because it has captured Hollywood's. Despite the brouhaha caused by Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* in Cannes this year, the lasting impression of the festival was the overwhelming beauty of a quartet of films from China, Japan, Hong Kong and Thailand. I have been going to Cannes for well over a decade but have never seen audiences applaud the visual magnificence of an individual scene as they did with *House of Flying Daggers*.

Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Nobody Knows* was one of the greatest works of observation that cinema has produced. And although I had to stand throughout Wong Kar Wai's two-hour *2046*, the world it created was so ravishing I didn't even shift on my feet. Finally, Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Tropical Malady* delivered one of the festival's greatest coups. While Hollywood can easily ransack Asian horror cinema to renew its own techniques, it is unlikely ever to match the beauty of these four.

In movies from Beijing to Hong Kong, actresses like Zhang Ziyi and actors like Tony Leung Chiu-wai fill the screen with heart-skipping beauty and charm. In May at the Cannes film festival, audiences swooned for Wong Kar-wai's romantic drama *2046* and Zhang Yimou's latest swordsman epic, *House of Flying Daggers*.

Although they could not be more different in story, sensibility and visual pleasures, what the films share in addition to Zhang Ziyi is an extraordinary glamour born from the tension between release and repression.

In the major cinemas of mainland China, Hong Kong and, to an extent, Taiwan glamour is serious business. Much as it was in old Hollywood, glamour in contemporary Chinese film is a device and a

disguise but it is also a luminous end in itself.

By the time Marilyn Monroe laid down her peroxide head for good in 1962, glamour was a goner. With sex banished from the screen, it was left to these photographers to manufacture desire, to turn mortals into deities. There are images of Zhang Ziyi in *Flying Daggers* that make her look like an MGM pinup.

If she were still on watch, Madame Mao would have had a fit and then probably had someone executed. Film production in China was put on hold for several years during the Cultural Revolution and the Beijing Film Academy ceased normal operations. Two years after the arrest of the Gang of Four in 1976, the academy began accepting undergraduates again. Among the students in that first class were Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige (*Farewell My Concubine*) and

Kaige's childhood friend, Tian Zhuangzhuang (*The Blue Kite*).

Among the first films made by this group, known as the Fifth Generation because it was the academy's fifth graduating class, were social issue stories set in the countryside where all three filmmakers were sent as teenagers during the Cultural Revolution. Following the Tiananmen Square demonstrations and facing tough restrictions at home, the filmmakers ventured into more commercial terrain with stories that could travel around the world.

Since he began directing, much of the appeal of Zhang Yimou's films has rested in their bold visuals and his equally bold women. Zhang helped return sex or at least its suggestion, to mainland cinema and greatly aided by his long-time star and lover, Gong Li, a

## China's sexual

Madame Mao would have had a fit and probably had someone executed

burgeoning glamour.

Just as Zhang and Gong were becoming the toast of international film festivals, Wong Kar-wai began putting his glamorous stamp on Hong Kong cinema. In films like *Days of Being Wild* and *Fallen Angels*, the characters are at once glamorous and isolated, trapped in their gleaming casings like flies in amber. Maggie Cheung and Tony Leung circle each other with adulterous longing in Wong's 2000 romance, *In the Mood for Love*.

Wong's influence has reached

around the world, inspiring imitators from Sofia Coppola to Lou Ye, the Shanghai-born director of the visually lush *Suzhou River* and *Purple Butterfly*. Though glamour is a construction for these filmmakers, it is also sincere. There is nothing ironic about the downcast eyes and yearning mouths they immortalise. The slow sexing-up of mainland cinema in the past decade and a half has occurred during what headline writers are fond of calling China's sexual revolution. ●



# of the Asian film

How is it that, despite the occasional blink of recognition, the west has remained so blind to Asian cinema for so long? There has always been a sense in which America and Europe owned film. They invented it at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and so heady were the first decades of cinema that America and Europe can be forgiven for assuming that they were the only game in town.

It comes as no surprise, for example, that Zhang Yimou's *House of Flying Daggers* is so beautiful. His *Raise the Red Lantern* was visually striking and he started as a cinematographer on the breakthrough work of modern Chinese cinema, *Fellow Earth*. *House of Flying Daggers*, however, maybe one of the most photographically distinguished films ever made. In it, the actress Zhang Ziyi, who starred in *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, plays Mei, a blind dancer in the year 859, who is sympathetic to a revolutionary group threatening the Tang dynasty.

An early sequence takes place in a large pavilion decorated entirely by peonies. A local captain suspects that Mei is a subversive and sets her a test. In the pavilion, he surrounds her with 100 vertically mounted drums. She stands in the middle, dressed in a coat of gold silk, embroidered with turquoise chrysanthemums. Presented with dishes of dry beans, the captain flicks one at a drum. The camera follows it though space. As it strikes the taut surface, Mei spins and flicks the enormously long sleeve of her coat in the direction of the sound. It travels as the bean did and strikes the drum in a rococo flourish. Then the captain flicks another bean, and Mei spins and flicks again. Then another. Then a small handful which scatter around the circle of drums. Mei responds to the percussive effect, her sleeves darting and soaring, her face still serene and

expressionless, at the centre of the vortex. The bean shots are computer-generated, the most satisfying use of CGI yet. The combination of such cinematic modernity with martial arts splendour and centrally Zhang's enigmatic performance, makes this scene, at once, a classic.

Hong Kong director Wong Kar Wai's *2046* goes even further. It, too, is a widescreen film of seductively shallow-focus, surface patterning and feminine beauty. Zhang Ziyi stars again, this time joined by two other great Chinese actresses, Gong Li and Maggie Cheung. Like Wong's previous film, *In the Mood for Love*, it is an evocative exercise in atmosphere and music, set in Hong Kong in the 1960s.

At first glance, the Japanese director Kore-Eda's new turn, *Nobody Knows*, is different from the aesthetic worlds of Zhang and Wong. Set in present-day Japan, it tells the story of a neglectful mother who rents an apartment with one of her children and who, when she moves in, opens her suitcases to reveal two more. The former documentary director is equally interested in stillness, in shallow focus and in production design.

Thai director Apichatpong Weerasethakul's film *Tropical Malady* is more enigmatic. In its first half a soldier befriends a young peasant man who lives in the country. They drift around, sit talking, grow fond of each other. In one scene the soldier puts his head in his friend's lap, in another the soldier licks his hand. As their growing eroticism looks as if it might become explicit, the peasant walks into the jungle. Then the screen goes black: no sound, no picture, as if the film has broken. Then a second film begins. The actors are the same but their situation is more fable-like. *Tropical Malady* is likely to be seen as one of the most experimental films of its time, but what is again striking is its

gentleness and stillness.

Though made in very different countries, the films of Weerasethakul, Zhang, Wong and Kore-eda share certain ideas about art. Just as the work of Ozu can be fully understood only by balancing its psychological aspects with more abstract Buddhist questions of space and stillness, so the influence of Buddhism can be seen in these new films.

Despite the range of western cinema today, most of it assumes that movies are narrative chains of cause and effect, that their characters have fears and desires and that we follow the film by understanding these fears and desires. The new films of Zhang and the others make similar assumptions but are less driven by them and balance questions of self-hood with Zen ideas about negation and equilibrium. This makes their beauty hard to replicate in the west.

But Buddhism is not the whole picture. Unlike Maoism, which pictured a clear moral opposition between the good workers and bad bosses, and unlike Confucian philosophy in which masculinity is noble and femininity is not, Taoism is less clear-cut. Morally it sees good within bad and vice versa. The



feminine is a virtue in the same way emptiness may be for artists.

Every one of the great Asian films in the pipeline evinces Taoist ideas of sex and space. In none of them is gender polarised. In all of them, space is crucial. And the influence is acknowledged. Zhang, for example, has talked about the way Chinese painting has affected his work. His shots are often very wide. Space and landscape weigh as heavily within the frame as the human elements. Art historians have long discussed the Taoist component of such paintings.

As the art form most swayed

by money and market, cinema would appear to be too busy to bother with questions of philosophy. Other Asian nations are proving that this is not the case. In Venice in 1951 and Cannes in 2004, the audiences left cinemas with heads full of dazzling images. But the greatness of *Rashomon*, *Ugetsu*, *2046* or *House of Flying Daggers* is, in the end, not to do with imagery at all. Yes, they are pictorially distinctive, but it is their different sense of what a person is, and what space and action are. ●

(Mark Cousins is the author of *The Story of Film*)

## revolution



Chinese glamour queens are replacing Hollywood stars in cosmetics ads.





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MIN BAJRACHARYA

**RUNNING OUT OF GAS:** Cars line up outside a petrol pump on Thursday as the Maoist blockades of major highways around the Valley created fuel and food shortages.



RAJESH GURUNG

**NO ENTRY:** Maoists block the Prithibi Highway (Dhading) using booby-trapped trees and propaganda banners on Tuesday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

**ICONS:** Nima Rumba and Nalina Chitrakar perform at the Yak and Yeti after being chosen as the Icons of 2004 on Saturday.



KIRAN PANDAY

**IT'S A SECRET:** Bhaskar Rajkarnicar and Finance Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari at the 10<sup>th</sup> annual general meeting of the Advertising Association of Nepal (AAN) at the Radisson on Sunday during which a new logo and awards were announced.



KIRAN PANDAY

**DIPLOMA HOLDERS:** Samasthi Nepal gave away plaques and pashminas to people who excelled in the tourism sector at the Reporter's Club on Friday.

# The exorcist

**H**ari Lal Giri began conversing with spirits at the age of eight. By the time he was 16, he was a professional shaman driving the devil out of those possessed in the village of Katunje in Okhaldhunga.

Exorcism is not as easy as it seems, says Hari Lal. It needs learning and patience and a lot of energy leaping around to the beat of the dhyangro. "You can't just go and call on some deuta to help you because it is actually the debis who are more powerful. The most powerful is Kali," he says. Many villagers still trust the jhankri more than a doctor. A jhankri also needs to know about medicinal herbs because a lot of villagers come with simple ailments like stomach aches.

Hari Lal learnt to deal with the spirits by making them listen to him. "Most spirits are of children or people who've died young," he says. "Spirits do exist. They are like shadows with no concrete form. They come only if invited." Hari Lal gave up being a shaman 10 years ago and became a security guard. He converted to Christianity and still believes in spirits:



the Holy Spirit. But a night security guard's salary is not enough, so he paints furniture by day to make extra money.

Even in Kathmandu, people used to come from far and wide to seek his services. "The work just got too hard, the spirits sap your energy, they don't let you sleep," he says. "If they come to talk to you, you can't ignore them as they become angry."

For a while, the spirits wouldn't let him alone although he wasn't a jhankri anymore. "They'd hit me and drag me across the floor, they stopped bothering me when they found out I wouldn't relent," he adds. These days, Hari Lal likes the solitude of his night work so he can contemplate on life and the mundane matters of daily survival. ●

(Abha Eli Phoboo)

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# Back to the future

As we get ready to celebrate new year 2025, it is also a time for us as a nation to take stock of how far we have advanced since the early part of this century when we were lost in the political wilderness of the Old Regime.

In hindsight, it seems ridiculous, almost comic, how we blundered around aimlessly burning tyres in the streets in those naïve days of the new millennium. But today, as we get ready to usher in 2025 and celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Regression and 40 Years of the Great People's War we pay tribute to the political myopia and official narrow-mindedness that has made Nepal what it is today.

**UNDER MY HAT**  
Kunda Dixit



Sometimes it feels like we are caught in a timewarp as we remember how in 2005 we willingly and whole-heartedly agreed to sacrifice our individual

freedoms that we had misused for so long in return for the peace and silence that we have today under the Dear Helmsman. The last 20 years have shown that however low a country sinks, however chaotic its past, as the Carpenters said, tomorrow will always be brighter than today and yesterday all our troubles seemed so far away. Or was it the Beatles?

Anyway, to mark the anniversary, we reprint with permission a selection of news items from the front page of the 1 January, 2025 edition of *The Still Rising Nepal* daily:

## Far-Out Ring Road To Be Built

The government is leaving no stone turning over to start construction of the Far-Out Ring Road under grant assistance from the government of the Faroe Islands.

Officials at the Department of Potholes said the Far-Out Ring Road was not a luxury but a necessity because the Outer Ring Road completed in 2007 had now become too congested. The new ring road will connect the satellite housing colonies that have come up on the summits of the mountains peaks on the valley rim, including Phulchoki, Shivapuri, Nagarjun and Chandragiri.

Said the official, "It is going to be a highway in the true sense of the term and a marvel of civil engineering."

## Helmsman Felicitates Kim Jong II

On the occasion of the National Day of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Helmsman has sent a message of felicitation to Dear Old Leader, Kim Jong II. In the message, the Helmsman has extended warm wishes for the personal happiness and continued prosperity of the people of the Democratic People's Republic of North Korea. He further stated that Nepal and North Korea had a lot in common these days, and hoped that the bonds of amity and cooperation between the two great nations would be further strengthened in the years to come as they embarked on joint nuclear weapons tests while battling imperialism and hunger.

## Girija To Stand Again

The Nepali Congress Central Committee meeting today decided unanimously to allow 102-year-old Girija Prasad Koirala to stand for Party President for the Tenth Term.

"He is going to stand but in consideration of his advanced years, we are going to allow him to sit," said his cousin, Sushil Koirala, 99. He added that Mr Koirala had convinced them that the NC would splinter again for the 14<sup>th</sup> time in as many years if he didn't once more take up leadership of the party that is synonymous with democracy. He added: "Considering the regression has lasted 25 years, we must carry on burning effigies in Ratna Park. If we don't who will?"



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