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#228

31 December 2004 - 6 January 2005

24 pages

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MADHUP SHARMA

2005

On wings and a prayer

As 2004 drew to a close, Nepalis fed up with the conflict launched spontaneous peace rallies across the country. In Kathmandu more than 50,000 people took part in a mammoth peace rally on Monday to put pressure on the Maoists and the government to find a negotiated settlement. An army helicopter (above) escorting King Gyanendra to the Gadimai Mela in Bara takes off with hundreds of doves on 18 December.

Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 168

Q. Do you think 2005 will be better, worse, or the same as 2004 for Nepal?

Better	33%
Worse	47%
The same	18%
Don't know	2%

Total votes: 600

Weekly Internet Poll # 169. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Do blockades hurt or benefit the Maoist cause?

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It's a multi-party night

The town is throwing lots of parties to celebrate the end of a lousy year

AARTI BASNYAT

With the influx of Mtv culture, celebrating the Gregorian new year has become another excuse to party. Though some old timers still shrug it off as 'foreign culture', the trend is catching on with many Nepalis making plans to ring in 2005.

The year 2004 was filled with contradictions and unresolved issues. The Maoist conflict remains unresolved, people are still killing and being killed, education has taken a backseat to political aspirations and nature herself has rebelled. There have also been many positive changes with people growing liberal and working towards uplifting Nepali art, culture and music. They have refused to be harassed and are standing up for their rights, becoming more aware of environmental issues while others are being raised or put to rest. All in all, it's been a year most people wouldn't mind saying goodbye to.

But where will you be this new year's eve? Hotels, resorts and nightclubs around the country are offering special deals, packages and new year parties. Each is trying to outdo the other in an attempt to draw the masses to 'special and exclusive' celebrations.

Partynepal.com, Nepal's one and only party portal, as they call themselves, are going all out for the Big Day. Last year it only covered events, this year it plans to make up for the lapse. Known to be pioneers of the multi-party system in Nepal, Partynepal.com has come up with yet another innovative and first of its kind event with the Surya Rhythm Nights—Freedom Zone. It plans to hold it at three different venues: Himalayan Java Coffee House, J-bar and Dechenling Garden restaurant,



all in Thamel. The parties begin with a pre-party at Dechenling and moves on to the other venues. The Rs 1,600 cover charge is valid for all the venues and include dinner, snacks and two welcome drinks.

Hotel Yak & Yeti is also having three events simultaneously. 'Haute Couture' is aimed at the fashion savvy with a fashion show during dinner. The other events include dinner for an exclusive clientele with a seven-course meal at The Chimney and the regular 'Sinners in Heaven' party. Each event is being marketed separately and their tickets vary according to its packaging.

Hotel Soaltee Crowne Plaza is organising two separate parties, the first to be hosted in its banquet hall with dancing, an international dance troupe and sparkling wine. The second is in the Garden Terrace with Nepali bands like Axix, Astha and Anil Singh performing live. Both events have door prizes for holidays to international

destinations. At Soaltee, if you don't have people to take care of your children, bring them along. A special children's party with babysitters is also being organised, so parents can be assured that the little darlings are in good hands while they wear cone hats and toot the tubes in the next room.

For the late nightlife or early risers, Club Himalaya invites you to view the first sunrise of 2005 from Nagarkot with tea and cookies at a minimal fee of Rs 50. It also has a dinner package with a dance party but if you are planning to book a room for the night, think twice because the resort is booked to its maximum capacity.

There will be a hundred places to choose from and to make it simpler here is a list with time, place, event and cover charge. Each event caters to a different crowd and you can choose your party according to your mood. So take out those dancing shoes, iron your best garb and get set to paint the town red. ●

Party Nepal and Surya Light Rhythm Night—Freedom zone:

Dechenling Garden Restaurant will open 8PM onwards with a live band called Rasa. Dinner, snacks and drinks will be served as a warm up to the main party. It will move to J-bar, which will be transformed into an electronic room with strictly electronic music played by DJ Rav4. Then the party will move into the inside section of the Himalayan Java, which will be made into an exclusive nightclub with special decoration, superb lighting and a powerful sound system. There will be commercial, R&B, Hip Hop and remixes being played by DJ SickFreak. Then there is the Chill out Lounge, terrace where people can relax or take a break from dancing. Rs 1,600 per person with dinner, snacks and two welcome drinks. Contact www.partynepal.com/info@partynepal.com, 4422089 and 9851068871

The Yak and Yeti Hotel

Haute Couture—a party for the fashion savvy with a fashion theme and models sashaying between the tables displaying the latest trends. Rs 1,999 with buffet dinner and two bottles of beer, 8PM onwards.

The Chimney—an exclusive party for an exclusive clientele with a seven-course meal and soft music for those who want a quiet New Year's celebration. Rs 3,999 per person and Rs 5,999 per couple, includes entrance to Sinners in Heaven. 6PM to 10PM.

Sinners in Heaven—The annual New Year's party at the Yak and Yeti. A dance party that will leave you wanting more. Rs 1,600 including unlimited food and drinks, 8PM to 2AM. Contact 4248999

Soaltee Hotel

Banquet Hall—an international dance troupe, live bands, a DJ and dance floor. Not to mention the bottle of sparkling wine and free flow of Carlsberg with dinner. Add door prizes to international destinations and you have a great party. Rs 4,000 per person, 8PM onwards.

Garden Terrace—Astha, Axix and Anil Singh performing live, a DJ with a free flow of alcohol with dinner and door prizes. Rs 2,000 per person, 8PM onwards. Contact 4273999

Radisson Hotel

Waterfall Garden—this year the party is called Phantom of the opera with DJ Rupesh to keep you on the dance floor with dinner and unlimited drinks. Rs 1,250 per person.

The Splash Bar—they are offering a BBQ dinner with drinks and music. Rs 1,000 per person. 8PM onwards. Contact 4411818

The Hyatt

The Café—special New Year's Eve dinner with sparking wine or an exotic cocktail.

Regency Ballroom—will have a wide genre of music by their very own DJ Raju.

The Rox—an exclusive New Year's Eve party with international DJ Charmaine from the USA and DJ Jimmy Tangree the only Indian DJ to have performed with Paul Oakenfield. Rs 999 with unlimited drinks. Contact 4491234

The Le Meridien

The Club House—all you can eat BBQ with the theme of 'Rumble in the Jungle' in a relaxing setting with door prizes. 7.30 PM onwards, Rs 1,000 per person. Contact 4445550, 985108657

Road House Café—Pre-party dinner and complimentary drinks with no cover charge. Contact 4260187, 5521755

La'Soon—a special Raclette night with other specialities and dancing with DJ Sony to welcome the new year. 7PM onwards. Contact 5537166

The Red Onion Bar—live music with the Prism band and unlimited drinks, dinner and snacks. Rs 1,499. Contact 4416071

1905 Kantipath—the Just Divine Nights are back and here to celebrate new year's. 9PM onwards, Rs 500 per person. Also at 1905 is the Jazz dinner with the McTwisters, 6PM onwards for Rs 1,200 per person.

Godavari Resorts—a package deal with a gala dinner, a special New Year's breakfast and a night's stay with the live band Mind Turn. Rs 5,500 per couple. Contact 5560675

Club Himalaya—a dinner package with dance party and welcome drinks included at one of the most scenic points near Kathmandu. Rs 1,000 per person and Rs 1,800 per couple. Also an invitation to view the first sunrise of 2005 with a minimum entrance of Rs 50 with tea and cookies. Contact 6680080

Flora Hill Nagarkot—maximum freedom, minimum governance at Nagarkot with neurotic New Year 2005. 5PM onwards, Rs 300 per person with either transport or a bottle of beer.



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Former comrades

Samay, 31 December

समय

Until six months ago, Comrade Ajay was a loyal Maoist militant. But he renounced the party when he discovered that his comrades were involved in corruption, irregularities and caste politics. Ajay, alias Shambu Prasad Yadab, joined the armed Madhesi Tigers as one of its most active members. A new Maoist battalion was brought in from Sindhuli to hunt down Ajay and his group.

Today, Ajay is helping Rautahat villagers fight back against the Maoists and rebel activity there has decreased. Many of the Maoists who once fearlessly tread Dudhihawa, north of Rautahat, are now rarely seen. "We fear Ajay more than the army or the police. He knows us too well," says a member of the Maoist district committee. Even non-militant Maoists carry 3.5mm pistols and two grenades.

The Maoists are more vulnerable now that Ajay and the Royal Nepali Army are working together. Ajay has been feeding security forces with information on the rebel leaders. He helped them locate Tharuwan Liberation Front's president Suresh Chaudhary. Former rebels, UML and Nepali Congress workers, displaced villagers and the security forces have been lending him support.

Sixty displaced rich and powerful Yadab leaders have been his main supporters from their shelters at the district headquarters. Some rebels, still within the party, support Ajay's campaign. They believe he was right to raise concern over the issue of corruption and ethnic politics among the Maoists. Ajay himself was not a model citizen before he joined the rebels. He was a notorious robber and now the Maoists regret having recruited him. They admit to having enlisted many robbers and using them to carry out killings. After these infamous citizens surrendered to the state, the police pumped them for information.

One security officer claims that the state has offered Rs 50,000 to all rebels leaving the party besides the six leaders. "Opportunists have quit," says military commissar Rupesh adding that the rebels in the tarai aren't as loyal as those from the hilly region. The Maoists have begun a 'clean out' campaign to eliminate disloyal members. Three weeks ago, they killed Rajinan Sahani, a criminal who had joined the party and then quit. Two former militants Niras Yadab and Aabed Miya were accused of working against Maoist principles and killed.

Security lapse

Nepal, 2 January

नेपाल

At Sankhu, the police were busy watching a football game on Ntv when they heard

gunfire and ran outside to see what was happening. A large group of Maoists were storming the station. Police inspector Indra Badur Lama came face-to-face with one militant. He tried to take his gun out but was felled by another Maoist. After seeing him die, the rest of the police staff surrendered and those who tried to flee were attacked. Five were killed and 11 injured. The rebels ran over the police post in just 10 minutes and seized 15 .303 rifles, three Mausers, eight shotguns, 36 hand grenades, a communication set, mobile phone, two tear gas guns and 2,400 bullets. The attack was well planned.

Locals had seen two young men on a motorcycle scouting the area. The police did not bother to check them although they were seen to be moving in and out of the place several times. Just an hour before the attack, three to four young men had come asking for work at a construction site. They pretended to move bricks. At 4.45 PM when the attack began, the men pretending to be construction workers took out weapons from their jackets and started firing at the police post. More Maoists moved in from the bus station shouting at local residents to pull down their shutters. Many police personnel were seen fleeing. Those who tried to shoot back were attacked. They also heard the rebel commander shouting orders not to shoot at fleeing police and at the public. Some of the attackers were women.

More than 65 militants were involved in the attack led by Commander 'Sabin' from Rolpa and Commissar 'Dinesh' from Sindhupalchok. Only 25 of them were actually involved in storming the police station, the rest were guarding the four main entry points to Sankhu. After their successful attack, one group left through the jungle near Bajrajogini Temple and the other headed towards the south of Changu Narayan. The remaining sped off towards Kathmandu on their motorcycles through Dachi. The rebels used a bus loaded with people who were returning from a picnic. Although Inspector

Lama had radioed for help before being killed, help came only after 90 minutes. For half an hour after the attack, the rebels were seen wandering leisurely in Sankhu Bajar. It was 7PM when an army helicopter finally came from the nearby airport. There are several army posts in the vicinity, including Nagarkot. The question is: why didn't any of them come help the beleaguered police? This indicates a lack of coordination between the security bodies. Intelligence inside the capital is also ineffective. The Maoists have been quite successful in their psywar strategy. All it took were some fake socket bombs to spook the police. Before the attack, the Maoists spread the false rumour that they had planted a bomb at a bridge near Khulaltar and the police were busy looking for it. In the end the blame must go to the Sankhu police for not being better prepared. Since it was Saturday, most of the policemen were in a holiday mood, neglecting their duty. Several police personnel were loitering in the market, playing carrom and watching television. Not one rebel was hurt during the attack.

Tuition classes

Rajdhani, 26 December

राजधानी

According to local Maoist leaders, they will start free tuition centres for students appearing in SLC exams from the remote villages of Karnali zone. They stated that the idea was to help poor students who would otherwise have to travel to other districts for SLC preparation. At the rebels' initiative, all five districts in Karnali will have at least two tuition centres. "We will accept voluntary fees from students belonging to well-off families but the centres will offer free classes for the poor," said Nirak Bahadur Rana, chief of the Odanku village people's government. "Competent teachers of Karnali will be given the responsibility of giving these tuition classes." The shortage of competent teachers has resulted in students failing the SLC exams despite spending more than Rs 1 million being spent on tuition annually. An average of 1,500 students travel from Karnali to Surkhet for SLC tuition classes every year. Students taking tuitions in the Karnali rebel-run centres have to bring their own ration food.



NARENDRA SHRESTHA

Indian expansionists

Baburam Bhattarai in *Janadharana*, reproduced by *Nispakshya*, 21 December

Our recent activities, military and otherwise, confirm that we have successfully entered the first phase of the strategic offensive. The attacks in Kailali and Banke in the west, Dhading in the central region and Dhanusha in the east have shaken the old regime. Our operations in areas near Kathmandu show that the future is in our favour. Our party did not begin the offensive against Indian expansionism all of a sudden. Right from the general convention 13 years ago as the United People's Front, we have raised the issue of the Indian expansionist interference and high-handedness in Nepal. We have stressed on liberation from such a situation but during a revolution, we do not attack our enemies simultaneously, we go about it strategically.

Till date, our enemy has been the monarchical military fascists and it is against them that we have focused our movement. This fascist system has existed because it is backed by foreign powers. When we centralise our attack against the monarchy, we need to ready ourselves to resist the expansionist and imperialist forces behind it. We have a policy of national resistance against possible foreign interference. This does not mean we are straying from taking aim at the monarchy. Our party is principle-based and responsible. Our position against India was not impulsive, it was a strategic decision. Even when India did not arrest and extradite our party members, we were against an unequal treaty like that of 1950.

We believe that unequal relations with India have existed since the signing of the Sugauli Treaty during the colonial era. Unless it is corrected, Nepal will never be self-reliant. Our position is based on historical facts, political and economic realities. To interpret this as a reaction to our comrades' arrests by the Indian authority would be naive. As far as our attitude towards India is concerned, we will be more sensitive and responsible when we have state power. We will end the historical semi-colonial relations through diplomacy and peaceful means to establish new relations based on equality and Panchasheel. If this does not seem possible, we will draw alternatives on the basis of the international law and values of an independent sovereign country. We will not accept the anti-national means that rulers after the Sugauli treaty adopted.

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Founded in 1948, IUCN-The World Conservation Union brings together states, government agencies and a diverse range of non-governmental organisations in a unique world partnership: some 1063 members in all, spread across 147 countries. IUCN Nepal works from the national to local levels to support collaborative approaches to ecosystem management and sustainable livelihoods.

IUCN's country office in Nepal seeks to recruit dynamic, self-motivated professionals for the 2 national positions of:

SENIOR PROGRAMME OFFICER, ECOSYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

The incumbent will be responsible for providing technical support to IUCN's ongoing national and local initiatives related to ecosystem management and sustainable livelihoods, lead and /or support the development of new initiatives, and will work to ensure lessons learned are fed back into the programme development and implementation process. She/he will work in close collaboration with other team members within IUCN Nepal and may be required to supervise some staff and consultants.

The successful candidate will possess a Master's Degree relevant to ecosystems and sustainable livelihoods, at least 6 years of relevant work experience including at least 3 years of direct field implementation experience in community based natural resource management with emphasis on sustainable livelihoods and equity issues; excellent interpersonal capacity and team working skills; fluency in English and Nepali; and competency with computer applications.

SENIOR PROGRAMME OFFICER, EQUITY AND GOVERNANCE

The incumbent will be responsible to develop, implement and monitor programmes in the areas of equity, social inclusion and local governance related to natural resource management. She/he will strengthen integration of and learning from these issues in IUCN's existing programmes and projects, as well as in broader natural resource management in Nepal. She/he is expected to build the capacity of national and field staff in equity and governance issues and contribute to new programme development.

The successful candidate will possess a Master's Degree, have at least 6 years of relevant work experience in understanding and addressing issues of social equity and inclusion and in promoting governance in Nepal. She/he will also have excellent interpersonal capacity and ability to work in a multidisciplinary and multicultural team; willingness to travel and work in the field; fluency in English and Nepali; and competency with computer applications.

IUCN is an equal opportunity employer; qualified women and members of ethnic minorities or disadvantaged groups are encouraged to apply. Only short listed candidates will be notified. Interested candidates should send their CV, names of two referees and a cover letter clearly stating the position they are applying for and explaining their interest in the position by 18 January 2005 to: The Human Resources Officer, IUCN Nepal Country Office, P.O. Box 3923, Kathmandu, Nepal. Email: hr@iucn.org.np. Terms of Reference for the position are available at the Country Office reception desk or on <http://www.iucnnepal.org>



Indo-Pak uphill stretch

NEW DELHI—A year after India and Pakistan launched their first serious attempt at bilateral dialogue, the prospect of success looks tantalisingly close and yet it is a steep uphill on the last stretch. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf will have to struggle to overcome long-standing obstacles. Unlike past talks, bilateral discussions this time around have been more structured, systematic and better prepared. Public opinion in both countries overwhelmingly favours reconciliation. The two leaders have also got to know each other well. And the Pakistani establishment has shed much of its initial prejudice against Manmohan Singh.

Yet, going by the multiple rounds of talks held at various levels so far, the going will not be easy. All that India and Pakistan have managed to achieve over the past year is to restore communication links, including air, bus and train services ruptured after a December 2001 attack on the Indian parliament. Although they agreed in June to reopen their consulates in Karachi and Mumbai, little progress has been made. There is stagnation over trade and economic cooperation, in particular proposed energy links through an overland gas pipeline from Iran to India via Pakistan. Easier visas and greater freedom to travel are the only areas where there has been mutual cooperation. But these are reversible. On the two thorny issues, Kashmir and nuclear weapons, there has been no forward movement even though the two sides have agreed to discuss Kashmir for the first time ever. (IPS)

Malaysians wait for Anwar

PENANG—The euphoria that greeted Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's stunning electoral victory in March is waning as Malaysians turn their eyes to another star: former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim.

Before the polls, Abdullah stole the thunder by launching an anti-corruption drive. But a growing number of

Malaysians feel the new administration has faltered in its war on graft and not making the Anti-Corruption Agency a fully independent body answerable to parliament. To be sure, Abdullah's position is secure, at least for now. On 2 September Malaysia's highest court quashed a sodomy conviction against Anwar and freed him from almost six years in jail. Later, however, it denied a request to re-hear his appeal against his final charge of corruption.

As a convicted felon, Anwar is barred by election laws from contesting or holding political office for five years from date of release or until 2008 but he can still participate in party politics as an adviser. Not everyone is jumping in line behind Anwar, though. He does not have the automatic, undivided loyalty of civil society and 'reformasi' activists, people are waiting to see how he plays his cards. In the meantime, challenges are emerging on the economic front despite some strong growth figures. Price hikes, in recent months, have fuelled a sense of unease while a few firms have started shedding workers. (IPS)



Region d'etre

The year that was and the year that will be

India looks east

BEIJING—Just as China has been seeking to limit India by cultivating its immediate neighbours like Pakistan and Burma, India is now reaching out to countries like Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia that have borders with China. The China-ASEAN two-way trade is now set to cross \$100 billion annually. India's trade with ASEAN is only \$12 billion and it wants to triple it by 2007. India came up with a lame explanation that it planned to concentrate on the poorer cousins of the ASEAN: Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Burma countries that were left out in the Beijing deal anyway. India is determined to catch up with China by leveraging its strengths in the private sector with the software and services industry.

The Indian show at Vientiane included the Indo-ASEAN car rally which traversed 7,000 km from Guwahati to Batam in Indonesia to prove the feasibility of an overland connection linking the two regions. India and China are both competing to woo Burma. India laid out the red carpet for Burma's Senior General Than Shwe in October, the first visit by a Burmese head of state to New Delhi in 25 years. There were deals signed to build hydroelectric projects and a security agreement to curb insurgency along Burma's border with India's turbulent northeast. But there was no mention of the incarcerated, pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi who went to school and college in Delhi and has many friends there. Burma returned the favour by increasing pressure on Naga insurgents.

There are signs that India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, a former World Bank economist, is taking the hint. His plans to develop Guwahati as an international commercial hub for India's 'Look East' policy is similar to what China has done for Kunming. (IPS)

The dragon awakens

BEIJING—Every ripple from this giant economy, which is driven by the fast-expanding needs of 1.3 billion consumers, can now be felt across the world. The country's frenetic construction is driving up world prices of nearly every commodity while large-scale foreign investment is powering a flood of exports bringing down global prices for manufactured goods.

China is the world's second largest buyer of US government debt as it recycles a \$124 billion trade surplus with the US. A series of recent multibillion-dollar acquisitions announced by Chinese companies around the world show that Beijing is aiming for even a bigger role on the global stage. China has long been the world's strongest magnet for foreign investment and is now sitting on a near \$540 billion pile of hard currency, which it seems anxious to spend as the dollar plunges.

Intended buy-offs are in industries that include car manufacturing, minerals, airlines, banks, consumer electronics, oil and telecommunications. Not all of them have taken off. Officially, China represents less than four percent of the world's economy but its spectacular rate of industrial production—which grew by 16.3 percent last year alone—is making its effects felt all over the world. Last year, China accounted for seven percent

of global oil consumption, 27 percent of steel, 31 percent of coal and 40 percent of cement.

The lifting of global restrictions on the textile trade from 1 January means China will be able to flood the world with even more low-cost clothing. The most populous country already accounts for 20 percent of the global textile trade but industry analysts are predicting that this is set to go up by another 50 percent by 2007. The damage of China's emergence as a textile giant could be particularly devastating for smaller developing countries such as Nepal with less diversified economies which can't compete with Chinese clothing produced by a workforce that cannot form independent unions and has one of the worst industrial accident rates in the world.

For the industrialised west, China has also become both a key engine of global trade and a major source of instability should, as doomsayers predict, its high-flying economy crash. European companies have doubled their sales to China during the last four years and the EU is set this year to become China's biggest trade partner. (IPS)

Hardline days in Burma

BANGKOK—The strong spirit of Burma's top dissident, Aung San Suu Kyi, will be put to the test in 2005 with grave concerns for her safety. The Burmese junta extended her house detention last month for another year. Suu Kyi's personal security members at her home in the capital, Rangoon, have been cut to six from 13 and visits from her doctor slashed from three a week to one, her National League for Democracy (NLD) said in a statement.

This is Suu Kyi's third period of house arrest since she took up the democracy struggle in 1988. Today the party is not even authorised to have a fax machine.

The prognosis for Burma in the coming new year is bleak according to ALTSEAN. By February 2004, an estimated 265 people had been arrested, disappeared, or killed. Among those arrested many were leaders of the NLD party. Hardline generals have said NLD headquarters will remain closed "until the present problem is solved". On 14 December, 13 more NLD officials were arrested in Bogalay, southwest of Rangoon. 2005 will be a year of uncertainty for Burma with the hardliners now in control of the country and the regime being insensitive to outside pressure. (IPS)



Cor blimey, gov'nor

Controversy swirls around reported donor preferences for the new governor at Nepal Rastra Bank

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

For the donor community which finances nearly three-quarters of the country's development, it is getting more and more difficult to get involved in policy decisions without being seen to be interfering. But when a nation's dependency on the outside becomes so acute, that is a thankless task.

No matter what donors do

they will be accused of interference, as the latest controversy over their supposedly overt pushing of a favourite candidate for the post of Rastra Bank governor proves.

For the World Bank which has been backing the financial sector reforms and is the lead agency in the Nepal Development Forum, who becomes the next governor of the central bank is a critical question.

The bank knows, as does just about everyone in Kathmandu, that the search for a new governor is always a highly-charged politicised affair.

Aftershocks from appointment four years ago of the incumbent governor, Tilak Rawal, reverberated for months. And like last time, there are accusations that donor agencies are trying to influence the appointment. And because candidates have their political patrons, rivals accuse each other of being unfairly backed by donors.

Until the final hour on Thursday when the cabinet was discussing recommended names for the new governor to succeed Tilak Rawal, fingers pointed at certain donors lobbying for their favourite candidate.

Donor agencies have denied any favouritism, insisting that while they follow the appointment keenly they don't want to be seen to have any say in it. But even some non-government officials have cried foul, accusing donors of "extra-terrestrial" interference. Economist Dilli Raj Khanal, adviser to the coalition partner



"We know that (Ohashi) has even been visiting (Bimal) Koirala's office for that purpose and then tried to cover his tracks."

Dilli Raj Khanal, UML



Outgoing governor of the Nepal Rastra Bank, Tilak Rawal.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

"At the end of the day, it is up to the authorities to take or leave our advice."

Ken Ohashi, World Bank



UML, says some donors are openly lobbying for a certain candidate. "They have even been visiting them in delegations," he told us.

Another economist, Bishwamber Pyakurel, says he had heard of this but it is nothing new. "We have known some donors who even recommended names for the position in public, as foreign assistance increases in the country so does the interference," Pyakurel says.

Donor officials told us they just want to make sure the right man gets the post because the Rastra Bank governor plays a key role in the financial sector reforms program. "We have not endorsed any candidate's name," says Sukhwinder Singh, director of International Monetary Fund (IMF) for Nepal. "But we believe that whoever becomes the governor should be able to accelerate the financial sector reforms program and command the respect of the financial and business community."

Who becomes the next governor also matters to the World Bank, IMF, the British aid group, DfID, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). They are all involved in the financial sector reforms that the central bank coordinates. Under this program, the World Bank has the financial sector restructuring project with four main components: voluntary retirement schemes, hiring of advisers, reengineering of Nepal Rastra Bank and management team support to Nepal Rastra Bank and Nepal Bank Limited.

The financial sector reforms program has the World Bank's \$75.5 million assistance. DfID is more involved in the administrative side of things, and ADB is involved in the rural financing.

Among donors, the World Bank has the leading role and at the centre of the governor appointment controversy is its

outspoken Nepal country director, Ken Ohashi. Critics have accused him of pushing the chief secretary Bimal Koirala as candidate. "We know that he has even been visiting Koirala's office for that purpose and then tried to cover his tracks," economist Khanal told us.

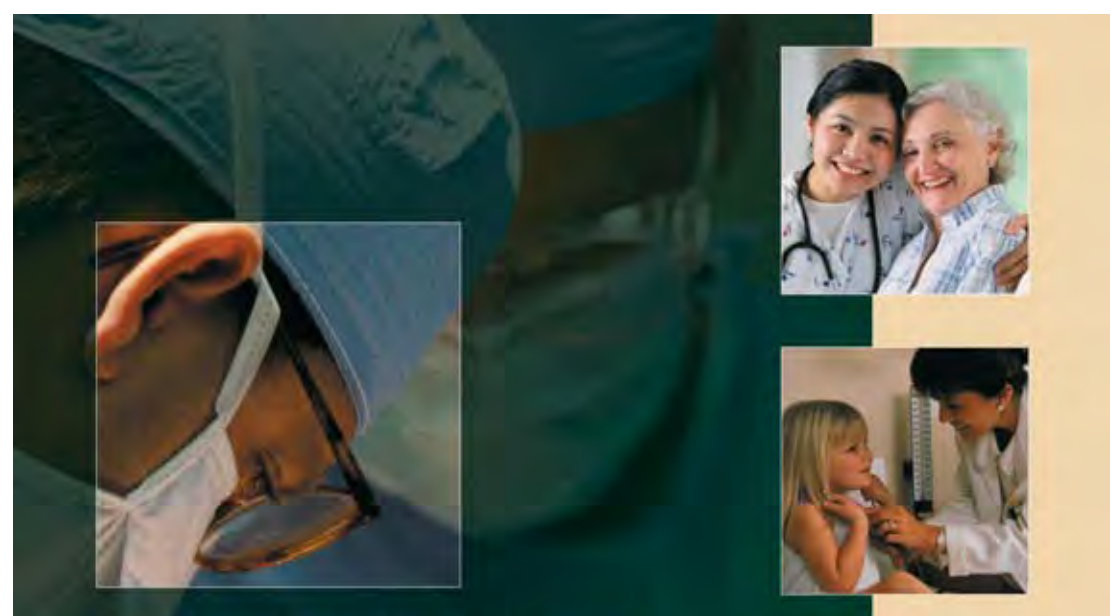
A source at the National Planning Commission confirmed Ohashi had met him after visiting Koirala. "He was trying to explain that he was not actually pushing for Koirala."

Ken Ohashi denies lobbying for any candidate, "The process of appointing the central bank governor is clearly laid down in the new Central Bank Act. It is designed to ensure the selection is not made on the basis of political pressure or for that matter donor preferences and we respect that."

Donors say the government sometimes dangles a few names to seek donor reaction, but doesn't ask for recommendations. "Government officials and policy makers ask us general questions regarding our view on the appointment," the IMF's Singh says. Ohashi shares his viewpoint. "We do provide advice when sought, we consider this very much a part of our development mandate in your country. At the end of the day, it is up to the authorities to take or leave our advice."

Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari says the government is following its procedures for the appointment. A three-member committee was formed through cabinet decision to recommend three candidates for the position. The rule allows the government to choose one of the three recommended names.

Adhikari denies that the government goes around asking donors for the green light. "We never ask them for suggestions," he told us. "We will make the appointment within the stipulated time ourselves." ●




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Atlas shrugs

Even in Nepal, despair and doom

Leap years are supposed to be inauspicious. And sure enough, 2004 lived up to its image with its parting kick: the killer tsunamis around the Indian Ocean.

Even for Nepal, it has been a year of despair and doom. At the end of the year, there doesn't

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



seem to be any light at the end of the dark tunnel of insurgency. Institutions crumbled so fast this year that many Nepalis have begun to believe the doomsday 'failed state' predictions of parachutists. The Maoist blockade devastated the working class and was an inconvenience to socialite socialists in Kathmandu as they hopped from one conflict resolution workshop to another.

For sometime to come, Kathmandu's middle class will find it hard to live with the sorrow and shame of 1 September 2004 when rampaging mobs took to the city streets and vandalised minority businesses, mosques and media houses with ruthless efficiency. The ignominy of the event was made worse by the nonchalance that the security forces showed towards the tragedy.

In almost every election, residents of Kathmandu Valley have overwhelmingly supported leftist candidates of which the UML has been the main beneficiary. They will repent their choice for years to come. Comrade Madhab Nepal disappointed the entire petty-bourgeoisie by abjectly surrendering this year to the regressive regime. The UML has further disgraced itself by deciding to stay in government despite the helplessness and humiliation of its nominees in the cabinet. Its own party cadres allege that UML ministers do little more than provide official consent to the palace's whims. In return, some of them have

reaped significant financial benefits at the expense of the party's reputation.

As is always the case, the proletariat has lost the most in this suicidal war being waged in their name under the Maoist banner. Nearly 11,000 people have been killed in nine years, most of them innocent civilians. Many more have been displaced and millions have been indirectly affected by the consequences of violent conflict. All hopes of rapprochement between the warring factions were dashed in 2004 as the government and the guerrillas intensified their atrocities making Nepal earn the dubious distinction of being one of the major human rights hot-spots in the world. Despite all the excesses, if the state hasn't failed so far, the insurgents and security forces can't be blamed for not trying hard enough to lead Nepali society towards disintegration.

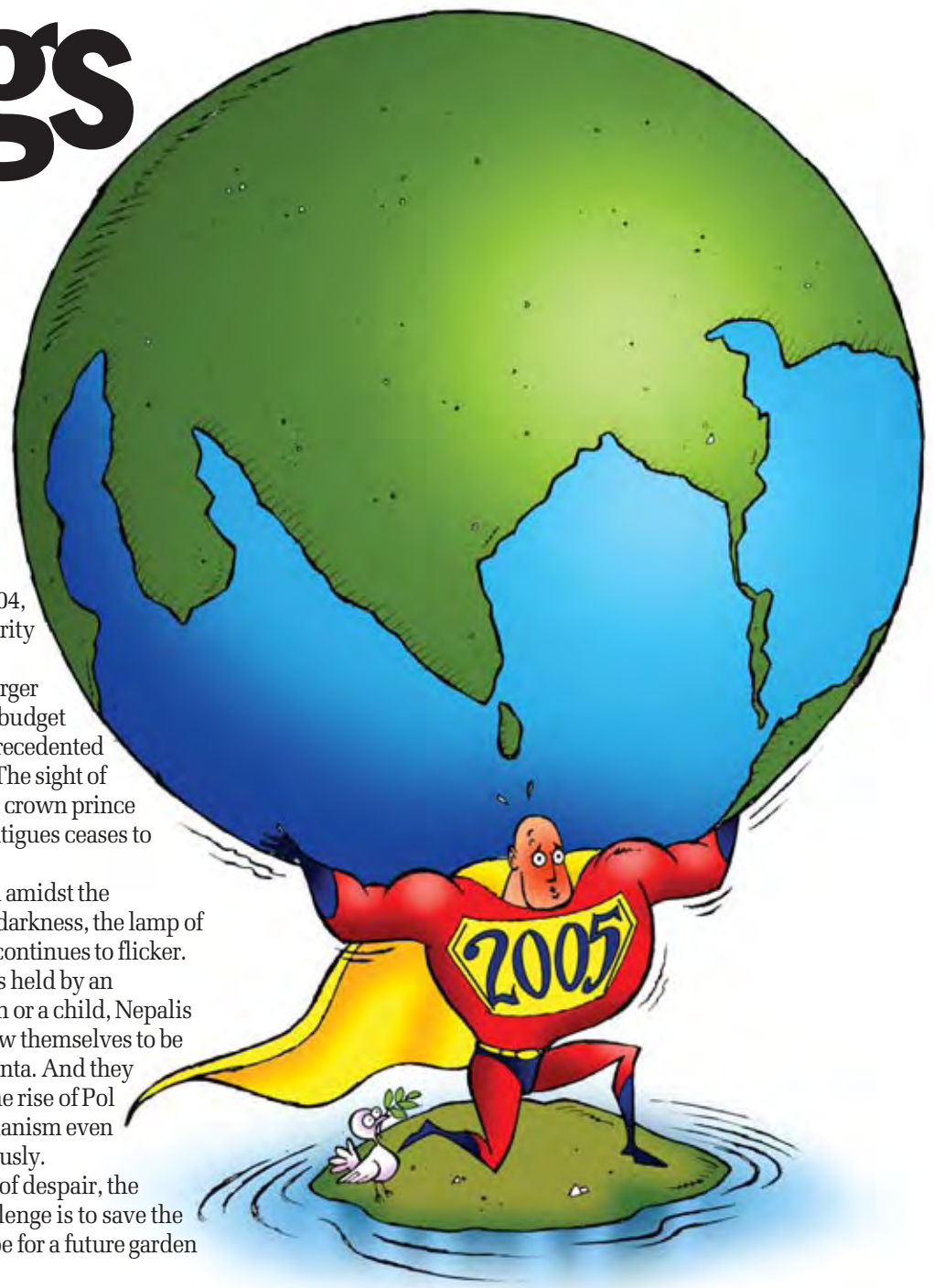
The international community may not have done anything directly to intensify the conflict, but it has certainly added fuel to the fire by supporting undemocratic governments after October Fourth. The European Union has been no less complicit than the Americans, British and Indian governments. A recent study by two Oxford University scholars show that a substantial chunk of development aid invariably leaks into military spending either directly or through fungibility of projects. The study has also established that despotic regimes spend substantially higher on defence than democratic ones even though such military build-up have almost no deterrent effect in internal conflicts. The international community is propping up the Royal Nepali Army with weapons and arms supplies even as the military aspires to wield more power over the state.

Militarisation of society

became even more visible in 2004, as state security gave itself a larger and larger share of the budget to fund unprecedented expansion. The sight of the king and crown prince in combat fatigues ceases to surprise.

But even amidst the enveloping darkness, the lamp of democracy continues to flicker. Whether it is held by an octogenarian or a child, Nepalis will not allow themselves to be ruled by a junta. And they will resist the rise of Pol Pot totalitarianism even more ferociously.

In times of despair, the biggest challenge is to save the seeds of hope for a future garden to grow. ●



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Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Chief Editor: Kunda Dixit
 Desk Editor: Abha Eli Phoboo, Aarti Basnyat
 Design: Kiran Maharjan, Web: Bhushan Shilpakar
 Advertising: Sunaina Shah, advertising@himalmedia.com
 Subscription: Anil Karki, subscription@himalmedia.com
 Sanchaya Kosh Building, Block A-4th Floor, Lalitpur
 GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal
 Tel: 01-5543333-6, Fax: 01-5521013
 Printed at Jagadamba Press, Hatiban: 01-5547018



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BEGONE, 2004

This has been a year none of us will be sad to see the sun setting on. In Nepal, the escalating violence left at least 2,500 dead in the past 365 days. One-fourth of those who have died in the past nine years of conflict were killed in 2004.

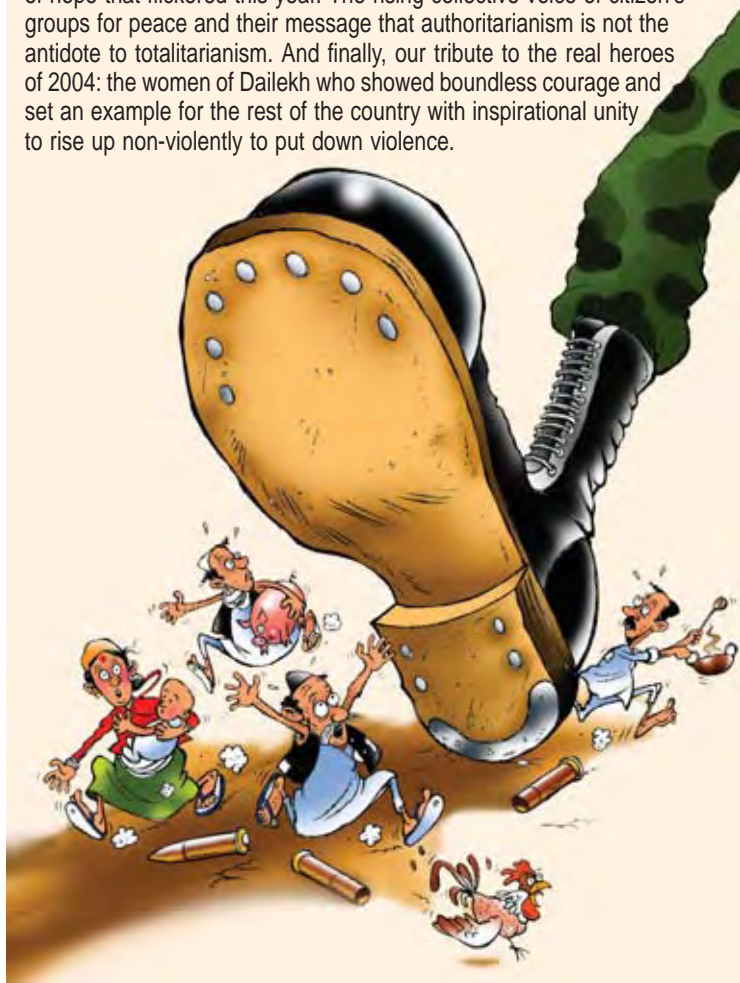
The fact that most of them were non-combatants means this has almost become a rule of engagement in the conduct of this war. It is hard to see what perverted revolutionary logic justifies the forced recruitment of children or blockades enforced by fear of death to strangle the very people one is supposed to liberate. And despite rhetoric about hearts and minds, we see state security falling into the classic trap of guerrilla war: pushing ordinary people into the Maoist fold with its impunity.

The year saw a hardening of positions on the part of all three protagonists in this country's conflict: an intransigent palace, intransigent parties on the streets and intransigent rebels. The rigidity has resulted in a double deadlock: a political standoff in Kathmandu and a military stalemate across the country. We are stuck in a quagmire and sinking fast. We are not just back to square one with Nepal's development and the economy—we have been pushed back decades.

September First illustrated the volatility of the situation, a hair-trigger polity in which there was no dearth of those fishing in murky waters. State security mysteriously stood by and watched the capital burn even though they had prior warning of the sectarian mayhem that was unleashed. The hired goons of one 'anti-regression' party went on a pre-meditated orgy of arson to capitalise on the chaos and the born-again obscurantists who arrived in their wake added fuel to the fires. How can we trust the leadership of this country to erstwhile members of parliament who demonstrated in 2004 that they have no qualms about stoking communal violence for political ends? Or those who wish to take the country back to political authoritarianism by provoking a stampede of religious orthodoxy?

A disastrous end to a disastrous year has been the apocalyptic devastation of the coastal regions of the Indian Ocean. Some near to us also perished, bringing home the truth that in this day and age no tragedy is local anymore.

If 2005 is to be any better than 2004, we must nurture the few signs of hope that flickered this year. The rising collective voice of citizen's groups for peace and their message that authoritarianism is not the antidote to totalitarianism. And finally, our tribute to the real heroes of 2004: the women of Dailekh who showed boundless courage and set an example for the rest of the country with inspirational unity to rise up non-violently to put down violence.



SUBHAS RAI

LETTERS

BORN GAY

No doubt the choice of having sex with the same sex should be given legal status as Manjushree Thapa argues ('Reverse lens', #226). Even more importantly, homosexuals should not be labelled as anti-social elements and thus be treated as inferior and depraved. They are, by no means, an object of mockery. They have all the rights to enjoy their preferences and live a life of utter respect. No one has the right to deprive others of their rights. I always feel pity for the naivety of those who think that homosexuality is against the law of nature and is the degradation of

human dignity. I completely agree with Manjushree but at the same time, am shocked to find that she demands the legality of homosexuality merely because some people are born gay or lesbian. She stresses that since some are born gay or lesbian why should they not be allowed to live their own modes of life respectfully. It is true but by saying this she also upholds the supremacy and arrogance of heterosexuals which is the only deterrent of giving homosexuals the same status. What if a heterosexual opts to be homosexual? Why should only inborn characteristics be counted

and not preferences and choices?

The concern of being natural does not impress me. I am disappointed to read that Thapa believes that a person is born as dalit or janjati. A woman is born as a woman. Similarly, some can be born differently-abled. But no one is born with names such as dalit or janjati or bahun or chhetri or whatever else it may be. I wonder when the modern Nepali intellectual will dare challenge this sort of unreasonable and regressive division in our society. The existing falsified norms should be challenged now.

Anubhav Ajeet, Sanepa

CHILD SOLDIERS

Thanks to JB Pun Magar for his chilling expose on the situation of children in armed conflict in Nepal ('Giving children a fighting chance', #227) and your editorial ('Class struggle'). This investigative report makes it painfully clear that whatever the Maoists may say about children joining them voluntarily, recruitment of children and targeting the education system is an integral part of their revolutionary strategy. No one will deny that Nepal's education system, like society itself, is skewed in favour of the historically privileged groups. And this crisis needs to be addressed in order to find a long-

term solution to inequity. The school system needs to at least distribute opportunities more fairly through access to education. This is not happening, and this is the frustration that the Maoists are cashing on. Even so, it is no excuse to destroy the only chance Nepali children have to live a normal childhood to learn and grow up in an environment without coercion, threats, intimidation and violence. Having now spent some years away from Nepal, your coverage of children caught in the crossfire is an indication of just how bad things have got in the land that we love.

Joyce Schiller, Geneva

Doctors without

SHREYA MUKHERJEE
in NAMCHE

The towering peaks of the Khumbu formed an inspiring backdrop to an international conference on Tibetan medicine here recently in which traditional healers from across the Himalayan region participated.

Amchis, as the healers are known, had journeyed here from Ladakh, Mustang and Dolpo with one common concern: how to protect their unique medical heritage and the rare high-altitude herbs on which their profession depends.

The Everest Conference of Amchis was held in Namche earlier this month by Nepal's Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, Royal Sagarmatha National Park, Tengboche Monastery and the World Wildlife Fund for Nature Nepal. The national park spread out below the world's highest mountain was chosen for its conservation success story, and to attach a higher profile to the world of the Amchis.

The Himalayan arc is 3,500 km long, stretching from Afghanistan to Burma and nurtures an incredible biodiversity. This variety is also evident in an estimated 10,000 species of medicinal and aromatic plants found here, many of these rare and found nowhere else in the world. These precious plants are regarded as holy in remote regions of the Tibetan plateau and along the high rimlands in neighbouring countries.



NARESH NEWAR

Through millennia, the inhabitants of the Himalayas discovered the medicinal value of these plants and passed the knowledge from one generation of Amchis to the next, right down to the present day.

Like the herbs, the Amchi tradition of 'sowa rigpa' has also become endangered. But a renewed worldwide interest in traditional medicine spurred by the realisation of the limitations of western medicine has breathed new life into the world of the Amchi. For centuries, these plants were only picked by the gentle, knowing hands of Amchis,

medical professionals trained in traditional and spiritual healing.

The potent qualities of high-altitude medicinal and aromatic plants have since then been scientifically recognised. This has turned the plants into cash crops, often picked and collected in an unsustainable manner. "Very often, only the tip of the plant may be needed but the plant is still yanked out by its root," says Helen Cawley, project co-coordinator of Sacred Land Healing Centre, a small local initiative set up to help conserve the medical tradition and plant resources of the



Amchi apprentice Pema Lama from Dolpa (left) and the Rinpoche of Tengboche monastery tends to the medicinal plants in his garden.

Chomolungma region.

As demand for Tibetan remedies increases, the plants are under pressure. As long as the demand was local, regeneration compensated for harvesting. Species that are facing new threats include those that have proved popular in modern pharmaceutical compounds, Ayurvedic cosmetics and fashionable 'natural' products in the Indian market. More than 100 tons of herbs are transported from lofty Himalayan valleys in Nepal to the Indian border every year. Suppliers can even afford to charter cargo planes to take the plants down because of the prices they fetch.

High altitude plants grow slowly but have more potent medicinal qualities. Plants growing up to and beyond 5,000m are in huge demand and as a result, the rate of extraction is slowly exceeding that of re-growth. They are also susceptible to climatic changes and overgrazing.

Some of the more popular

medicinal plants include jatamasi, known by its Latin name, *Nardostachys grandiflora* and kutki, *Picrorhiza kurroa* which are traded in huge amounts between the Tibetan plateau and the lower valleys on the Nepal side from where they find their way to the international market.

High demands on the herbs resulted in prices going up, and Amchis can't afford to buy them anymore. Having provided free medical services to patients in their communities for many generations, the traditional healers now are forced to respond to the laws of supply and demand. "Keeping my patients healthy is what keeps me alive," says Rinpoche Tsewang Dorje Tulku of the Dolpa district.

The Namche conference succeeded in bringing about keen discussions on regional variations in medical plants, how they are best utilised, whether or not they are

First to come, first to go

Darwinism is at work in the absolute anarchy of Kathmandu's traffic

Kathmandu's chaotic traffic is growing worse by the day and we have our own explanations: exponential growth in the number of vehicles, limited road space, violation of traffic rules, frequent demos and lack of rapid mass transportation.

However, even if all these problems are addressed, traffic would sooner or later become as chaotic as it is now.

GUEST COLUMN
Rajendra Pradhan



Better roads, mass transit and

enforcement of traffic rules will not solve the problem. We need a better sociological and anthropological understanding of Nepal's urban culture and how this impacts the traffic.

What are the attitudes of drivers and pedestrians concerning both public property in general and public spaces. Is there a meaning attached to driving a vehicle and does it vary according to the type of vehicle? What do official traffic laws and the people's own rules tell us about the Nepali urban social structure?

How do we share space and time on

our roads? One way is to treat them as common property to be shared equitably according to some prevalent 'rules' such as first-to-come-first-to-go and pedestrians, especially the four-legged ones, have priority over vehicles. But more commonly, they are treated as what property theorists call an 'open access property regime' in which everyone tries to maximise their interest, trying to get

ahead of others, even if everyone else suffers. Every other road-user is a potential rival. This mad, frantic rush to get ahead reveals the individualistic and self-centred nature of the urban Nepali.

Road users have their own hierarchy. The drivers of mammoth SUVs claim superior status. Might is right of way. The swift, swerving motorcyclists are the guerrillas who thumb their noses at the

Big Boys in this post-colonial and post-modern age of deconstruction of tradition and status. Blue plated vehicles often get priority because the donors they belong to probably constructed the roads in the first place and demand respect and don't like to be deconstructed.

Pedestrians question and envy the status and rights of vehicles but it doesn't count when they decide to obstruct traffic. They don't have the right to the roads because, as one taxi-driver explained to me, pedestrians do not pay taxes to use the roads. They should walk only on the sidewalks, even if most of Kathmandu does not have them.

When tradition, hierarchy, post-modern individualism, primal antagonism and survival instincts are so entrenched, chaos is to be expected. Readers may argue that enacting better laws and strictly enforcing them will solve these problems. But as legal anthropologists argue, state laws have to compete with rules people make based on various principles or norms. ●



MIN BAJRACHARYA

herbs

Himalayan medicinal plants are endangered and so are the healers who know how to use them



endangered and how the process of their extraction could be made sustainable. However, one question remained unanswered: gaining political recognition and support.

"The Amchi tradition is not yet recognised by the Nepali government even though the training and traditional practice is well-established," says Cawley. One reason could be sheer ignorance on the government's part, she says, "It's not that they are directly denying the Amchis anything. They just do not know enough

about them. It is time they did."

The prospect of losing species of medicinal plants forever is devastating for the Amchis and locals whose lives revolve around their constant availability. Even where modern health care has reached in the Himalayan region, traditional Tibetan medicine is the fall-back option for many. It would be a shame to see plants going into anti-wrinkle creams in the cities instead of saving lives in the remote regions of the Himalaya. ●

Saving sacred plants

When Helen Cawley, started the Sacred Land Initiatives ten years ago, she knew it was only the beginning. Together with her husband, Michael Schmitz (see pic, right), she moved to the Khumbu and little by little the impact of their work on environment and heritage conservation is becoming apparent in the region.

"I didn't come seeking a spiritual path. I just happened to meet some extraordinary meditation teachers that introduced me to a whole new dimension," recalls the 41-year-old Scot, looking very content with the turn her life took at that point. She met her husband-to-be at Boudha, accompanying him when he was asked to head the project to help Tengboche Monastery manage its tourism sustainably to benefit the monks, people and trekkers.

Cawley says she is simply helping implement the Tengboche Rinpoche's ideas, as it is under his direction that the monastery has not only been restored after a devastating fire 25 years ago, but also expanded and improved. Much of the help has come from individuals and organisations like the Himalayan Trust founded by Sir Edmund Hillary.

The Rinpoche of Tengboche has always been involved in conservation (see interview with the abbot, #217) and has been worried that the Himalayan medical tradition and the medical plants on which it relies are being lost. He encouraged Helen and Michael to establish medical gardens in the Khumbu region and invited a traditional doctor, Amchi Sherab Barma to work at their clinic in Namche.

Amchi Sherab has made traditional treatments available again and offers free care to those who can't afford it. Together with Tengboche Rinpoche, Sonam Gyalsten of the Royal Sagarmatha National Park buffer zone project and local Sherpas, the couple established Sacred Land Initiatives for the production and marketing of tea and incense to support the clinic



and gardens.

"Our biggest problem is registering the clinic as an Amchi Institution as it is not yet recognised by the government," says Helen. "If we were to register it as an ayurvedic centre, there would be no problem." Helen has reason to believe in Tibetan medicine after the tiny black pills given to her by an Amchi cured a painful abscess on her tooth in a day, a miraculous substitute for an extraction.

"I've gone back to him twice already," she adds smilingly, hoping these selfless practitioners will receive the acknowledgement they deserve.

Michael and Helen, with the help of WWF Nepal, are working on an exhibition in April 2005 at the Sacred Land Healing Centre in Namche. It will include information on conservation issues, photos of medicinal plants and striking images in 16th century thangka depicting medicinal treatments and plants used by Amchis.

If the centre has come so far just on the commitment and passion of a few people, imagine how much more successful it would be in reviving the endangered knowledge system of traditional Himalayan medicine if it received official recognition and political backing.

कायाकैरन	बिहान ६:०० बजे
नेपाल खबर	बिहान ९:०० बजे
	दिउँसो १२:०० बजे
	दिउँसो ३:०० बजे
	साँझ ६:०० बजे
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Home thoughts from abroad

Some disappearances can be easily explained

I am one of those growing number of ageing Nepalis that have lived abroad for a long time. All of my information on Nepal is from the Internet, local cocktail parties, and episodic visits to Kathmandu where I end up in Thamel at Kilroy's most of the time. In other words, I am an ignoramus about Nepal and perhaps other things as well.

But despite all this, I am told I still rank a couple of intellectual notches above the politicians, monarchy and the Maoists combined. So I don't feel so bad now. I might even start calling myself an intellectual.

After going through readers' comments on my last piece ('Unilateral fatalism', #226) I have new respect for *Nepali Times* columnists like Lak and Lal. How do these guys do it week after week? And the abuse you

NEPALI PAN
Pravin Rana



get. Mostly, I received unprintable responses like: 'Hey Pravin, give it up. Haven't you feudalistic, reactionary, harem-keeping Ranas already messed

up Nepal enough? Here you are, you &#!***, showing zero respect for people that churn out heavy-hitting articles week-in and week-out and they look a lot better than you. Stick to your regular job you &#!***.' And that was just my wife.

So the UN disappearance team was in town, I see. What qualifications are necessary for that job: psychic abilities coupled with an affinity for mind-boggling bureaucracy and doublespeak? As they compile their report, I hope they take into account that some disappearances are an everyday aspect of Nepali culture and do not necessarily involve security forces or the Maoists.

For example, one of my uncles (like most Nepalis, I have about 40) disappeared when I was five only to turn up 10 years later with two Bengali girls in tow. Turns out he'd been carousing in Calcutta the whole time squiring beautiful Bengali girls. I asked him how I could disappear. Then there's my aunt (among another 40)...oh well, you get the idea.

One of the UN team's findings was that in some cases security forces didn't keep a list of the prisoners in detention. Well, that one's kind of hard to explain away in a press conference. Since Donald Rumsfeld may be out of a job soon, they might consider hiring him as spokesperson. He knows how to drive reporters and about half the world crazy. "Well, you have *known* lists and *unknown* lists and at any given time during the process you might even have *unknown unknown* lists. But you have to go with the list you have. Unless of course, you don't have one. Next question please."

The only people that do not need a list are those that were part of the UN Oil-For-Food (Note: replace food with luxury goods, weapons and ostentatious palaces) Program. This I know because I regularly read the UN Charters and I bet Kofi Annan wishes he could make his son disappear right about now.

Reminder to self to add to my shopping list when I next visit Nepal: multi-function shoelaces (also known as a low-tech Maoist substitute for cyanide capsules) of the type used by the Maoist's Chief Extortionist, sorry, coordinator for Kathmandu Valley, to commit suicide while in detention.

Ok but let's be fair, we have to hand it to our security forces for fighting a thankless war while dealing with relentless pressure from just about everyone: human rights groups (about 100 of them); people that use the word 'regression' ad nauseum; Manjushree "why can't we ALL be leftists" Thapa; Girija "I really, really hate that guy Deuba" Koirala; Krishna "Babe-magnet" Bhattarai; a certain Canadian columnist who shall go unnamed...

So go ahead, you try to fight an insurgency while these guys have you in their collective crosshairs. It's enough to make you want to go to Iraq.



KIRAN PANDAY

More children are orphaned by AIDS in Nepal than by the conflict

Left alone

NARESH NEWAR



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Jittery in Jiri

"What tragedy I have to see in my old age."

BIBI FUNYAL in JIRI

The sound of guns and bombs are never far away in rural Nepal these days. And so it is here, in the scenic Dolakha town of Jiri.

This is where the road from Lamosangu ends and the start of the trek to Lukla began in the old days. There are still some intrepid trekkers looking for adventure who walk this way, but for the most part the night-stops along the trail are ghost towns.

Despite the brilliant sunshine, it is a freezing winter morning here at nearly 2,000m above sea level. Thousands of people from in and around Jiri have gathered at the Jiri Higher Secondary School. Most are

alumni of the school and the student body is also present to celebrate the 38th anniversary of the school and an alumni reunion.

Sukbeer Biswokarma's eyes are moist with emotion. He is a labourer from a simple Dalit family and can't contain himself after receiving a Letter of Appreciation from Ambika Prasad Regmi, Dolakha's DEO. "It is my happiness overflowing," he says, "these are tears of joy."

Biswokarma and his friends have been respected for their dedication in finishing work on the school library in time despite all hardships. Krishna Jirel is a close friend of Biswokarma and says this is the first time "simple people" like

him have been honoured and their work recognised. It was a very small gesture by the school that made an immeasurable impact on Sukbeer and Krishna.

Principal Tek Bahadur Jirel felicitates Gertrude Liebrich, a volunteer from Basel for her contribution to the school. Jirel reminds those gathered that Jiri has strong links to Switzerland ever since the Swiss built this highway 25 years ago. In fact, Switzerland seems to have done more for Jiri than Kathmandu ever did.

A helicopter passes overhead and all eyes look up at the sky. It is flying high and headed east towards Lukla. There is a collective sigh of relief. For the past few days

Ranjana KC looks blankly at the floor, more in fear than remorse. Three years ago she lost her parents in Achham, first her father and then mother. She was only six when her uncle and aunt made her a servant in her own house. The villagers taunted her with "AIDS girl" or "She also has HIV" even though she was not infected with the virus.

Like so many other Achhamis, her father had been a migrant labourer in Mumbai who returned home ill. Everyone knew the cause of his death. Today, nine-year-old Ranjana, brought to Kathmandu by social workers, is living with strangers in a shelter in Lalitpur. Afraid of the stigma that pursued her in her village, she hasn't revealed her true identity or real place of birth to anyone in her school, fearing she will be kicked out and lose her friends. "It's very difficult without my parents," she tells us.

Ranjana is just one among tens of thousands of Nepali children orphaned after their parents died of HIV/AIDS. There are no accurate figures on the number of AIDS orphans. The only data available is a 2001 UNICEF survey which showed that about 13,000 children under 14 years were orphaned. About 56,000 Nepalis were estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS, and 13,000 of them are women between 15-49 years. By 2004, UNAIDS estimated that about 60,000 people were infected and in the absence of effective care and treatment, about 10,000 to 15,000 are expected to die every year.

Since 1988, the HIV/AIDS movement in Nepal has focused mainly on the prevention and awareness about the disease. Yet, the disease is turning from a concentrated to a generalised epidemic and spreading out of

control.

Little attention has been given to care and support, rehabilitation and anti-retroviral treatment. Children orphaned by AIDS are left to fend for themselves, stigmatised and victimised by ignorant family members or the community. The orphans don't even appear in the agenda of many donor agencies and NGOs: the reason why there is not even one survey on the extent of the problem and condition of the children.

"The issue of orphans should not be isolated from HIV/AIDS campaigns and policies. Their numbers are growing, and all the donors talk about are what they call large impact programs like prevention and awareness," explains Bishwo Khadka of Maiti Nepal, one of the few NGOs that takes care of AIDS orphans. "Their number is growing and the kind of support we give is just a drop in the ocean."

Among international NGOs, Save the Children (Norway) has started an orphan care and support with community-based programs for orphans who are provided with free schooling, books and clothes with the help of the local community and the District Education office. "Children who lost their parents to AIDS become traumatised at many levels," says Kalu Singh Karki of SCF (Norway). The organisation works through volunteers to reduce stigma against people living with HIV/AIDS and mobilises communities to support orphans. There are about 221 orphans in 12 VDCs in Achham.

But this is just one of those few examples where the local government administration and community make the effort to help such children. "Unless there is a national level policy and advocacy on this issue,

such support will only be temporary," says Karki.

Close relatives often claim the parental property of orphaned children and force them to rear animals, till the farms and perform household chores. Teachers often ask such children to leave school in fear that they might infect other children. Karki adds that sometimes things become worse for the children when they are brought to Kathmandu for rehabilitation.

"Even in Kathmandu, when you tell the truth about the child expecting sympathy, they are not accepted," says Hem Thapa from House of Rest, a centre for women and children. "We were forced to hire a teacher and educate the children in our centre instead."

UNICEF's State of Children 2005 estimates that there are about 1 million orphans under 17 in Nepal, who have lost their parents mainly due to poor health conditions, accidents and various other causes. The number of children who have lost one or both parents has grown since the conflict began nine years ago. There are no figures but activists maintain that more children have been orphaned by HIV than by the conflict. It is also rare for both parents to have died in the conflict, whereas it is much more common for both the father and mother to die of AIDS.

"Our responsibility does not finish with just talking about combating the disease. We need to seriously think about the future and situation of children orphaned due to AIDS as it gets worse, especially in the remote areas," says Tarak Dhital of the group Child Workers in Nepal. On a global scale, there is an estimated 15 million children under 18 who have lost their mother or both parents to HIV/AIDS. ●



Ostracised

Babita BK knows she will be thrown out from school if the teachers find out that her father died of AIDS. Since his death last year, the entire community in Saigaun VDC of Banke began harassing 13-year-old Babita and her family. Even close relatives disowned them. Babita and her 15-year-old brother are unable to continue schooling because their mother cannot afford to pay the fees. "We lost all our savings on the treatment for my husband. I had to take loans to buy medicines," says Babita's mother. "I don't know how long we will survive, we can't even afford to buy food any more."

In Banke district, there are many children like Babita who have lost one or both parents to AIDS. The local community regards people infected with HIV as criminals whose children have to suffer after their parents die. They receive no support from the government and must depend on charity groups for food and shelter. "No one has shown any interest in helping the orphans," says AIDS specialist G Raj Sakya from Nepal HIV/AIDS Research Centre, which has established a rehabilitation shelter for orphans here. About 20 children are receiving support for their education, food and clothing with plans to house 50 more orphans. Rameswor Bohara in Nepalganj

Life or death

Time is running out for people living with HIV and AIDS but Nepali activists say donors have not shown much interest in starting care and support programs that could prolong their lives.

The only hope is the \$11 million granted to Nepal by the Global Fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. Sources say the first instalment of \$4 million has arrived and is stuck in UN bureaucracy. "I am dying and too tired to knock on donor doors," says activist Rajib Kafle.

The Global Fund agreed to release funds to Nepal on condition that an independent institution manages it and not the government. (See: 'Aiding AIDS', #214). The UN system was selected as the contracting agency months ago but agreement papers between the UN and the government is said to be waiting at the Ministry of Health. "The file is not moving because the government has not been able to reach a decision at the cabinet," an activist told us.

Sources say that the UN is reluctant about acting as the authoritative body to manage the funds and distribute it among Nepali activist groups. Nepal receives one of the largest funds for HIV/AIDS in Asia but they say the biggest chunk is controlled by donor agencies and channelled to partner INGOs and NGOs. Some donors are said to be willing to increase the aid substantially as long as the government is not involved in disbursement.

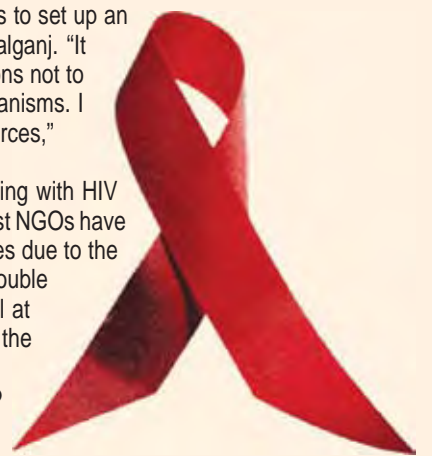
Meanwhile, the country and people with AIDS are losing time. The \$4.6 million has to be used within the first two years of the grant period, failing which the rest of the \$11 million will be cancelled.

The main concern is not who controls the funds as long as care and support systems are put in place. "The government is actually doing a better job, it has already upscaled the ARV (anti-retroviral) treatment program with its own resources," says Kafle.

Despite objections and lack of support for the government, National Centre for HIV/AIDS and STD Control (NCASC) began ARV therapy for 25 patients. By December, it increased the treatment to 75 patients. The centre also plans to set up an ARV treatment facility in Nepalganj. "It would be better for organisations not to go after regular funding mechanisms. I would rely more on local resources," adds Kafle.

The situation of people living with HIV and AIDS is getting worse. Most NGOs have withdrawn from outlying villages due to the conflict. "The conflict has a double impact," explains Bina Pokhrel at Save the Children UK, "While the rate of infection is growing, response has decreased." ●

Naresh Newar



the surrounding hills have reverberated with the sound of gunfire and explosions. Some who have come to the school from Chuchure, Lapchan and Banchara in the adjacent district of Ramechhap speak of a bloody battle that lasted all day. The army said many dozens of Maoists were killed, but they're not boasting about it. Even the army doesn't want to be seen as

a butcher of fellow Nepalis.

Sixty-two-year-old Aaite Tamang and his granddaughter Malati, nine, are from Banchara and have just arrived in Jiri to flee the fighting. "What a tragedy I have to see in my old age," says Aaite. Last year, a platoon of Maoists entered his cattle-shed, took away his bull and slaughtered it. Last week, his pregnant water buffalo was

grazing in the forest when it was killed in strafing by an army helicopter.

Aaite wants to take Malati far away from the sound of gunfire and is headed for Kathmandu. He goes to the bus park to buy tickets for Kathmandu for tomorrow. The ticket seller tells him: "Nakabandi chha, bus chhaina."

Not if, but when

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

We can't prevent a Sumatra-type earthquake, but we can be prepared for it

The fact that the 9.0 Richter Sumatra earthquake on the morning of 26 December was felt 4,000 km away in Nepal was an indication of just how powerful it was.

Like the devastating tidal waves it set off in the Indian Ocean, Nepalis living along the banks of the Kulekhani Reservoir and Mai Pokhari in eastern Nepal noticed unusual waves on Sunday morning. But the real aftershock in Nepal came with the realisation that the epicentre could easily have been in the Himalaya and if that was the case, how ill-prepared we are to cope with a disaster of such magnitude. The Sumatra earthquake occurred under the ocean at the tri-junction of the Australian, Eurasian and Indian Plates. We are located at the other end of this tectonic suture in the Himalaya.

The Indian Ocean disaster happened almost exactly 70 years after the last big earthquake to hit Kathmandu, an 8.0 Richter temblor that killed 17,000 people in Kathmandu Valley and other parts of Nepal on 15 January 1934.

Fault lines along the Himalayas snap every 75 years or so on average to release the tectonic energy building up along the Eurasian and Indian plates. This means that the next big one could happen, literally, any day now. But even more worrisome for seismologists is the fact that a whole section of the western Himalaya from Pokhara in Nepal to Dehradun in India has a 'seismic gap' where tectonic energy has been building up because there hasn't been a major earthquake there for over 200 years. A 9.0 magnitude earthquake in western Nepal could devastate north India and Kathmandu Valley.

In this week's Indian Ocean disaster, relatively few people died from the earthquake itself—many times more died in the tidal waves that it triggered. Similarly, a major earthquake west of Pokhara could set off glacial lake outbursts all along the Himalayas sending down walls of water, boulders and mud along Nepal's snowfed rivers.

"It is not a question of whether it will happen, it is when," warns Amod M Dixit of the National Society for



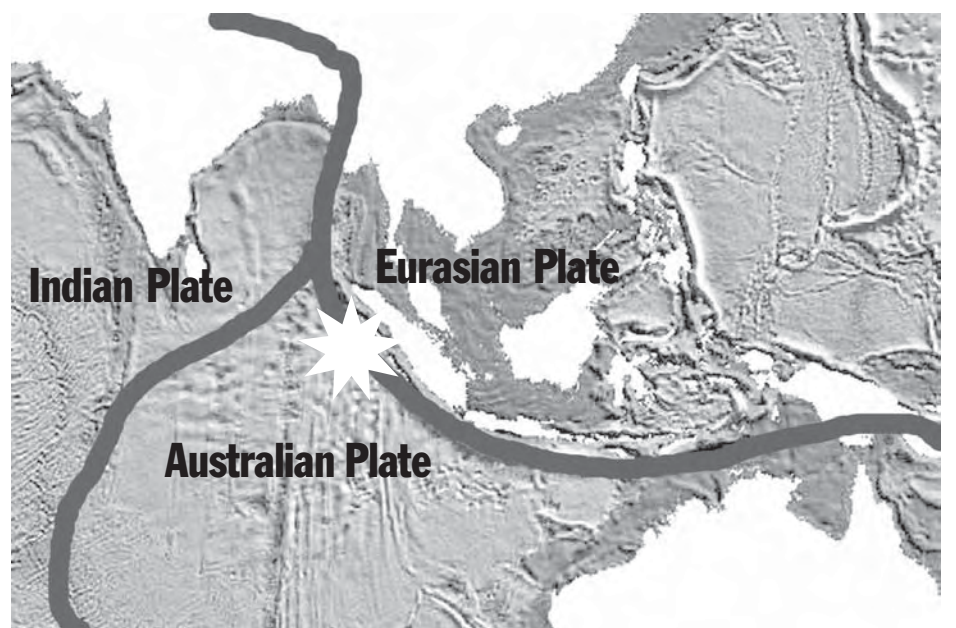
1934: Patan Darbar Square after the quake on 15 January 1934 (left) what was left of Ghanthaghar (above) and a broken Dharara. Maps below show the tri-junction of tectonic plates where the earthquake occurred and the 'seismic gap' in western Nepal.

Earthquake Technology, which is working with the government to build a national earthquake-preparedness plan as well as promote quake-resistant housing. "We have to get used to thinking the unthinkable and planning for it."

While forecasting an earthquake is imprecise and nothing can stop geological upheavals, experts are concerned by the lack of disaster preparedness here. Given rampant urban growth and flimsy housing in Kathmandu, Pokhara and other towns, the next big one will kill at least 100,000 people in the Valley alone.

Out of the 21 cities around the world that lie in seismic zones, Kathmandu is considered at the highest risk of death, destruction, and unpreparedness.

"A massive awareness program is needed as our goal is to turn Nepal into a totally earthquake safe community by 2020," says Ramesh Guragain, a structural engineer. Indeed, a partnership between Nepali quake safety groups, the government and international organisations has resulted in a higher level of awareness about the dangers, now all that needs to be



done is implement the plans.

Disaster preparedness specialists say it is better to worry now and be prepared, than to wait for the quake to strike and then panic. "We need to spread the message across the country starting right now," says Ramesh Aryal, chief of the Earthquake Division at the Department of Mines and Geology. "This is where the government should also work actively to try to form disaster committees in every ward." ●



Worst case scenario

If Kathmandu is hit by a 9.0 Richter earthquake:

- Between 100,000 to 200,000 will be killed in the Valley and its outskirts mainly because of unsafe construction practices
- More than half the bridges along the highways will be destroyed and damage to the runway will make it impossible to bring in relief
- The hospitals that remain standing will be overwhelmed
- Electricity will be out, overhead transformers at roadsides will fall off the poles because they are neither bolted nor strapped
- Electric sparks and bursting gas cylinders could set off huge fires that could spread across the city if it is a breezy winter afternoon
- Land lines and mobiles will stop working because of damage to base stations
- Drinking water supply, such as it is, will stop completely
- Since there is no government disaster preparedness plan people and communities will be left to fend for themselves
- After the initial rescue, disposing of rotting bodies and preventing the spread of disease will be a major challenge

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15 February 2005



Nepal will miss Robin



CARE Nepal country director, Robin Needham, 52, was among those killed by the tsunami in Phuket, the organisation announced on Thursday. Needham (*pic, above*) who took up his post in Nepal six years ago was known to be committed to Nepal's development, especially about the welfare of Nepali children. As chairman of the Association of INGOs working in Nepal, Needham was deeply concerned about the conflict and the effect it was having on

ordinary Nepalis. In Nepal, CARE is involved in community forestry, primary health, family planning and HIV/AIDS awareness, education and safe drinking water.

Needham had worked with CARE for 24 years and served with the charity in Somalia, Kenya, Bangladesh and Ethiopia. An avid diver, he was in Phuket's Golden Buddha beach with his wife and children for Christmas break. The rest of the Needham family survived and

have been rescued.

The body of Krishna Adhikari from Kathmandu was rescued in Khao Lak and has been cremated, while a survivor, Rupesh Gurung is undergoing treatment at a local hospital. Him Prakash Pokhrel who worked in a hotel near Phuket is still missing, as are five other Nepalis. "My brother still has not been found and another Nepali who worked in the same hotel is also missing," Pokhrel's brother, journalist Peshal Pokhrel, said in Kathmandu. ●



Other disasters

Manmade disasters are worse, nature is actually kinder

It is a civilisational event when tragedy strikes on such a massive scale as it did this week. A time to tarry and consider the origins and frailty of all life. There are those who succumb, and a larger majority that is saved. When the giant tsunamis radiated out from the sea floor early on Sunday morning, parts of the Malay Peninsula not shielded by the northern tip of Sumatra suffered terrible fate.

But nature's real wrath was reserved for Southasia's poor ocean-front dwellers as the wall of water charged across the Indian Ocean to

engulf the eastern coast of Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu. The tens of thousands who died were fisherfolk, as the ocean that provided their livelihood

SOUTHASIA BEAT
Kanak Mani Dixit



became their doom. Tourists and urban dwellers on morning walks were not spared either.

If you were not protected by distance or by an intervening landmass, there was little to be done. The angle of India's east coast from Kanyakumari to West Bengal was pre-designed to take the brunt of the tidal waves travelling west and northwest. The Arabian Sea was protected by the subcontinental mass.

Southasia is no stranger to disasters both natural and manmade. More and more people are vulnerable because more of them live along dangerous coastlines or river banks. More die here for any event than elsewhere. Droughts are a scourge even when granaries are full. Floods bring routine catastrophe to the Ganga-Brahmaputra delta, particularly if the two great rivers peak simultaneously half way through the monsoon season.

Cyclones hit the east coast of India with regularity and thousands die every time they tear at Orissa or Andhra. After past disasters, Bangladesh has now developed an efficient cyclone early warning system that saves lives. A tsunami-warning system could have saved lives across Asia last Sunday. Bangladesh proves it can work.

When the sea decides to rise up in a tsumani, a coastline which has functioned with clockwork and controlled predictability for centuries suddenly goes beserk. There is no fighting the wall of water that shreds the shoreline and grabs at living things.

When it comes to disasters that come up from the deep, one can only pick up the pieces and care for survivors. What Southasians have to worry about and can do something about are the manmade disasters we create. Even amidst this tragedy we must remember that the miseries created by man are worse. Nature, actually, is kinder.

Global warming created by emissions of the affluent is now almost certainly scientifically proven and receding Himalayan glaciers are a reality. Maldives, as we were tragically reminded this week, is most prone to rising sea levels. With global warming, the ocean will invade the Bangla delta, uprooting tens of millions. Where will they go?

Modern governments are prone to think up grandiose projects. There are the technocrats and politicians amongst us who have not learned from river diversions that led to the drying up of the Aral Sea, the biggest ecological disaster of our time. And yet, India's 'visionary' politicians and technocrats push a River Linking Project.

The 'Asian brown cloud' hovers over our hemisphere, a product of industrialisation that prevents the sun from warming the land. The Indus and Ganga plains are suffering increased winter fog that stretches from Ultan to Guwahati. Embankments, canals, irrigation and waterlogging seem to be the culprits. Elsewhere, we are depleting ground water, polluting rivers, spreading pesticide and taking water off rivers so people downstream are left in despair.

Traumatized as we are by nature's wrath this week, we need to try to comprehend the immensity of the devastation that humans unleash. Since we cannot teach nature to behave, it is best to see how humans should. In manmade disasters, the drama is missing, the disaster creeps in and the devastation is many times worse. ●

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Economic blockage

The Maoists may have lifted their blockade of highways leading to Kathmandu but the week-long stoppage caused losses of Rs 20 billion in business and some Rs 140 million in loss of revenue to the state.

According to FNCCI, retailers cumulatively lost an estimated Rs 2 billion every day in business. The revenue loss to the state was to the tune of Rs 20 million a day. "The losses we have calculated do not include the loss of salaries and labour of individuals," says FNCCI vice president, Chandi Raj Dhakal. "If we calculate their wages and productivity, the loss would be much higher."

The loss from one week of closed highways is estimated at Rs 20 billion or more if the closure of factories and the fall in transactions nationwide are included. "Till Wednesday, we were using stock raw material for production but now we have none. Our machines have come to a halt," said Dhakal.

With the factories shut, industrialists had even considered temporarily laying off workers. "Or else the workers will have the choice of remaining on the job on a no-work-no-pay basis," Dhakal said. The losses of the industries do not include farmers who have invested in cash crops and dairies. Millions of rupees worth of vegetable, fruit and milk have been thrown away in Sindhupalchok, Dolakha, Dhading, Chitwan and other tarai districts.

Flying royal

The Bhutani airline, Druk Air, has responded to the fare war on the New Delhi sector by introducing a special promotional fare for passengers from Kathmandu-Delhi and back. The offer is available for Rs 4,500 for one-way and Rs 9,000 for two-way. A 25 percent discount is available for children under the age of 12.

At the AGM

Laxmi Bank Ltd recently concluded its 4th Annual General Meeting and elected two directors representing public shareholders and appointed a representative of Citizen Investment Trust as a board director. The bank now has four points of representation: Birganj, Pokhara, Banepa and Kathmandu and plans to open another branch in Biratnagar.

Boroplus cycling

Emami has launched its latest advertising campaign featuring Amitabh Bachchan for Boroplus, one of its power brands. It has also introduced Boroplus Light Cream and Lotion. A three-day Boroplus Bicycle Rally was organised to promote cycling and raise environmental awareness.

NEW PRODUCTS

SING GIN DUET: McDowell Nepal Ltd has introduced a new gin, Blue Riband Duet, following the success of Blue Riband Gin. The new Duet is a pre-mixed gin, containing gin and lime priced at Rs 415 for 750 ml.

XDA MODELS: Ocean Computer is introducing a new range of handheld devices—the XDA II, XDA IIs and the XDA II mini. The XDA II is a PDA with a GPRS mobile. Functions include a camera, MMS, Bluetooth capability, PDF viewer, Internet access and projection support.

What's in store?

If you think 2005 will be any better, think again

We began 2004 with a government that had stopped functioning, an economy that had started crumbling and a population that was in deep depression. There was an omnipresent desire for peace.

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed



A year later, nothing has improved. Economic growth and the revenue indicators are stagnant. So, in a sense, the good news is that things haven't grown much worse than they were in January 2004.

We have a new government that has nothing new to offer, we have two armies eyeball-to-eyeball who seem perfectly happy with the status quo as the business of war seems to be more lucrative than the business of peace. The political parties, of course have lost more than they had at the beginning of 2004.

In 2005, remittances from the increasing numbers of the overseas Nepali labour force will continue to lubricate the \$6 billion economy. Donors will continue to pour in more money as funding a conflict-ridden country is both fashionable and moral. We will surely see a slew of more conflict management workshops and junkets to former conflict zones for our activists and experts. The business community will wake up to the WTO, too late as usual. They will try to find novel methods of protectionism while still getting away from not paying taxes or loans.

If the ready made garment industry is the trailer of the

movie screening next year, other exporters better watch out. No one knows what is in store in a world where trade regimes have become more liberal. The government will have to enact more ordinances even if it is to bring domestic legislation in line with global rules.

The service sector better be prepared for foreign competition. Watch out: consultancies and travel agencies. State-owned enterprises will keep haemorrhaging the government. There will be no capital injection, better management or privatisation. The way successive governments handled

because, surprise surprise, the private sector is as incompetent as the government.

Trading will continue to prosper as more retail shops open up in our booming shutternomics. With more bandas and blockades there will be ever more opportunities for hoarding and more profits. And our own media will ensure that the rumour mills are churning so that no one even has to call a banda anymore, just the rumour of one will be enough.

Donors will push banks towards the financial sector reform and lean on them to



Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) to bring it to the brink of bankruptcy proves the noble intent of the people in power.

By the end of 2005, NOC will stand for No Oil Corporation. The Nepal Electricity Authority will continue to run up huge losses as it ponders new ways not be chased out of the Upper Karnali or how to manage contractor compensation payouts. Private telecom operators will still be struggling to get a dial tone

draw daggers at wilful defaulters. Perhaps this will be the only sector that will end in a different note than in 2004.

The Beed will of course continue to write in this space every fortnight through 2005. Hardcore fans can read it in hardcopy, follow it on the *Nepali Times* website (www.nepalitimes.com) or on yours truly's very own www.arthabeed.com. Comments and reax welcome.

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It's all in the mind

Stressed by daily news of violence, Nepalis are taking to yoga in a big way

SHREYA MUKHERJEE

Yoga has always been a popular form of exercise for those wanting to stay in shape but its ability to calm the mind and filter thought processes is what beats a workout at the gym any day.

Endless bandas, staunch smell of burnt rubber after riots, road blockades when least expected and bumper-to-bumper traffic jams are all in a day's work in Kathmandu. So the denizens of the capital don't just need to limber up their limbs but also relieve stress.

"Yoga teaches you to be masters of the mind so it doesn't master you," says Sangeetha Raghavan, a scholar of yogic studies and spiritual philosophy. "It lets your conscious state, the most

superior, escape all involvement with your material surroundings."

Life goes on but the imperceptible anxiety caused by the sight of guns, security checks and traffic, all add up. Cumulatively, it can affect a person's physical health, unless you decide to do something about it and take up yoga. It works. After all, in the last decade, hundreds have turned to yoga as a way of strengthening their inner selves, cleansing their conscious state of all worries and giving thoughts a healthier direction.

The principles of yoga are deep-rooted. Based on scriptures of Hindu philosophy, they remain exactly the same thousands of years later. Krishna

says: "The mind is restless and hard to control. But it can be trained by constant practice (abhyasa) and by freedom from desire (vairagya)." This dialogue between Arjun and Krishna in the battlefield of Kurukshetra is remarkably relevant in exploring why yoga has become the most popular forms of mental therapy, especially in countries caught in political crises.

"I treat many young patients nowadays and most require a combination of breathing exercises and meditation to relieve stress," says Laxmikanth Pandey of the Yoga and Nature Cure Research Centre in Lajimpat. Contrary to the idea of modernising yoga to make it fashionable, this age-old form of relaxing and controlling the human mind and body has come to its own in Kathmandu. For a vigorous calorie-killing workout, most fitness freaks would prefer two hours of pumping weights but many are now trooping to yoga centres that are mushrooming in every gali in town.

"Just like running a marathon causes exhaustion, a strained thought process can cause mental fatigue. The only way to relax is to reach a level of concentration that allows your inner self to transcend reality and set your mind free," says Satyam Singh, a part-time yoga instructor offering classes in the basement of his home in

New Baneswor. Other yoga centres in the area, including the Satyananda Yoga Centre, the Divine Yoga Institute and the Royal College of Lifestyle Medicine and Hospital, are all doing brisk business.

Some take yoga classes and meditate in their own bedrooms by switching on the tv and flipping to the Astha Channel. "It has become very popular in Kathmandu," says Rita Thapa, who used to work for the World Health Organisation. "I met a friend who is usually depressed but seemed very happy for a change and the first reason I thought of was he'd been watching a lot of Astha."

Some of the 80 overseas Indians trapped in the World Trade Centre as it was engulfed in overpowering heat on 11 September 2001 turned to yoga as their last resort. So there must be something to the philosophy that binds yoga: 'there is no power greater than that of the mind'.

Yoga has even tamed the hearts of hundreds of prisoners in Kathmandu. Inspired by the miracles Kiran Bedi spun after teaching meditation techniques and breathing exercises to some of India's most hardcore criminals in New Delhi's Tihar Jail, Acharya Shree Dhruv began the

same in Nepal in 1997 to cleanse their minds and souls.

"I teach them how to reach a state of self-satisfaction through various meditative exercises



KIRAN PANDAY



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Another high-wire act

Rescuing minors from Indian circuses is fraught with danger, even in Nepal

CHANDRA KISHOR
in BARA

Six months after the dramatic rescue of Nepali girls from an Indian circus in Lucknow, more minors have been rescued from another Indian circus—this time in Nepal.

However, activists who took part in the rescue last week in Bara discovered to their dismay that it is as difficult to free the girls in their own home country as it is in India. In Lucknow, in June, the activists managed to rescue a dozen girls used as sex slaves by the circus owner who threatened to kill the rescuers. ('Take us home', #202)

The Nepal Child Welfare Society, which took part in the Lucknow rescue, came to know that the Calcutta based Western Circus had minor Nepali girls working for it. They decided to carry out the rescue while the circus was at the five-year Gadimai Festival in Bara last week thinking it would be easier if the circus was in Nepal. Little did they know that the circus owners had powerful protectors here, too.

On 26 December, Khetraj Mainali of the society made his move on the circus with the help of local police, women volunteers and human rights activists and rescued a dozen young girls. But after that things did not go exactly as planned.

Some of the girls were too frightened. They refused to reveal their identities to the rescuers since the circus owner and his henchmen were



WHAT A CIRCUS: Rescued girls confronting the Indian circus owner Akbar Hussain in Bara last week.

CHANDRA KISHOR

standing around. Mona Lamichhane and Renu Bharati of the Rural Development Centre persuaded the girls that they were being taken back home to their families and didn't have to work for the circus anymore.

After almost four hours, 15 girls agreed to go with the rescue party to Kalaiya. They were given shelter at Debaki Lama Dharmashala but were forced to return to the circus at around 5.30 PM when goons allegedly hired by the circus employer, Akbar Hussain, threatened to break into the shelter.

The rescue plan was botched from the start. Information about the raid had leaked out and the

circus managed to hide around 18 other girls. The District Police Office in Bara and human rights activists were threatened and persuaded to back out.

"But we refused to be intimidated," says Mainali who recalls that a large group of student union leaders and hoodlums on the payroll of the circus owner threatened to shoot them. "The circus must have paid them a lot of money to come after us," says Debendra Giri, president of the Rural Development Centre.

After the activists defied the strongmen and went ahead with the rescue, the circus management spread rumours that the rescuers were animal

rights activists trying to stop the mass sacrifices at the mela. This rattled even the CDO, Madhab Prasad Regmi, who started having second thoughts about supporting the rescue.

In the end, the team decided to allow the girls to decide for themselves whether or not they wanted to be rescued. "We were owed a lot of money by the circus, so we decided to go back," Rita Biswakarma, one of the girls told us. She and two other teenage girls decided to go back.

Others were minors and slowly opened up to the rescuers, complaining of exploitation, being overworked and underpaid, and having to

wait many years before being allowed to visit their families in Nepal.

The Indian circus owner, Akbar Hussain, had his own tale of woe. He claimed to have a five-year agreement with the parents at the end of which he had to return the girls to their parents. But one of the parents, Gobinda Karki Chettri, complained that the circus hired goons to chase him away every time he approached them for his daughter's salary.

Ten of the girls are now under protection of the Nepal Child Welfare Organisation in Hetauda where they will be rehabilitated and returned to their families. ●

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SHYAM BHATTA/SAMAY

Why the Maoists won't talk

Punya Gautam 'Biswas' in *Himal Khabarpatrika* 16-30 December

हिमाल

"In principle, we aren't against talks," Maoist leader Prachanda said as far back as 1997. Since then, the Maoists have sat down to talk three times and yet they are refusing to negotiate with the Deuba coalition. Why? Why are they refusing to consider the 13 January ultimatum?

The Maoists earlier used ceasefires as golden opportunities for launching campaigns to expand their military by at least two or three battalions and spread political presence in the countryside. If they accepted the present government's olive branch, they could have another opportunity to bolster their strength. Yet they have ignored the peace overtures. They have said this is because the Deuba government is a "servant" of the king and they will negotiate only with the "master". Yet, the Chand and Thapa governments that preceded Deuba were also royal nominated under Article 127 and yet the Maoists had no qualms about negotiating with them.

The real reason for not negotiating with the Deuba government is because the UML is part of the coalition. The Maoists believe that a country can have only one Communist Party: theirs. According to the Maoist viewpoint, the UML is a reformist and reactionary party and they are unwilling to accept them as communists, let alone talk with them. For its part, even though the UML regards the Maoists as extremist and anarchic it says it is willing to negotiate with them.

The Maoists believe that you need a diamond to cut diamond and the UML is just being used as an imperialist pawn against them. And vice-versa, the UML regards the Maoists as a nail in its heart. Especially since the Maoists are busy demolishing the UML's party network across Nepal and replacing it with their own. Ex-UML cadre from the districts have risen up the Maoist ranks to become senior leaders.

The UML needs peace talks for legitimacy and the Maoists are not about to do them the favour. That is why there won't be talks as long as the UML is in government. There could be other reasons why the Maoists don't want to talk: the desire of international comrades in RIM that the Nepali Maoists keep fighting, the fear articulated by Deb Gurung recently that if they do sit for talks this time India and the Americans are going to get the Royal Nepali Army to round up senior rebel leaders. (Hence the insistence on UN mediation.) And the last reason: for lack of progress in talks could be that the hardliners are calling the shots and that Baburam Bhattarai and even Prachanda may have been sidelined.

Without the prospect of peace, this government will have to go. Then it will just be the king versus the Maoists which is probably the kind of polarisation the Maoists have wanted all along. They also realise that unless they deliver a few more major military blows against the government forces, it will not agree to the constituent assembly. On the other hand, the government thinks that the only way it can bring the rebels to the table is by giving them a bloody nose.

By insisting on talking to the king through international mediation, the Maoists are just trying to raise their international legitimacy and equate themselves in strength with the army and monarchy. They don't really want to talk. And there are even fewer indications that they want to join the political mainstream.

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कान्तिपुर Kantipur, 26 December

QUOTES OF THE WEEK



We will agree for talks immediately if the old regime agrees on international mediation.

Krishna Bahadur Mahara, Maoist spokesman in *Janadharana*, 30 December

A road to the future

KISHORE THAPA

There has been a lot of media coverage on the proposed Outer Ring Road in Kathmandu Valley, including this paper ('Road to nowhere', #223). Real estate speculators seem most excited and land prices in the Valley have soared ever since an MoU was signed in July during Crown Prince Paras' visit to Beijing.

Studies have shown that the Valley's population will grow from its present 1.6 million to 2.5 million by 2020, although this figure may have to be revised upwards due to internal displacement by the insurgency. Although 300,000 people can be accommodated by densification in the core urban areas within the existing Ring Road, some farmland has to be encroached upon to settle an additional 600,000 people.

Although media often portrays Kathmandu as a 'crowded' city, its density of 100 people per hectare is worryingly low. The optimum density of a medium-size city like Kathmandu should be at least double that. Low density means a city tends to spread uncontrollably outwards before the city core is properly developed. Streamlining urban management would discourage haphazard growth of radial roads which would be environmentally destructive and enhance the vitality of the Kathmandu Valley: its heritage, scenic location, salubrious climate and tourist attractions.

The government has endorsed a Long Term Development Plan after hearings

The Outer Ring Road can be a sustainable and visionary plan for the future development of Kathmandu Valley



MIN BAJRACHARYA

involving politicians, planners, business and professional organisations which will develop the Valley as a National Capital Region based on self-governance by local authorities under an apex body called the Kathmandu Valley Urban Development Council. A draft bill has been prepared to provide legal backing to the Council which will be made up of the chiefs of local authorities and representatives of line ministries.

The Plan has proposed that green and built-up areas be maintained at a 60:40 ratio by the densification of existing municipal areas, planned urban expansion beyond the municipal boundary and development of traditional compact settlements like Khokana, Bungmati, Lubhu, Sankhu, Bode and Tokha. It envisages the delineation of a rural-urban boundary and conservation of rivers and watershed areas.

Many ask: is an Outer Ring Road a priority? Improvement of existing city streets, 14 radial roads and the completion of the Inner Ring Road including the Bishnumati, Bagmati and Dhobikhola corridors are more urgent because they would reduce traffic congestion in Kathmandu and Lalitpur.

True, and these activities should also be implemented. But there is a rationale for the Outer Ring Road which has more to do with integrating infrastructure development than just building a road. The Melamchi water supply project will bring snowmelt to Sundarijal through a 27 km tunnel which needs to be distributed to different areas of the Valley. It would be cheaper to construct a road and lay pipes along its alignment. The road will also help in the construction of the large reservoirs to be built in eight locations of the Valley.

High voltage transmission lines can also follow the road, as can other utilities like telephone and telecommunication. The Outer Ring Road could also serve as a bypass highway for Greater Kathmandu once the Bardibas-Banepa highway is completed. The Outer Ring Road would also help in delineating the rural-urban boundary as envisaged by the Long Term Plan and open up new areas for planned development.

The Department of Roads has done a feasibility study of the alignment of the Outer Ring Road, taking into account topography, geology, ecology, heritage sites, urban planning and future infrastructure such as Melamchi and electric transmission lines.

Since the resources are very limited, rational judgment should override populist decisions. If the proposed alignment does not incorporate future infrastructure and utilities, it will be very costly. Utmost care shall be taken to conserve fertile agricultural land and environmentally sensitive areas.

Politics will inevitably become a factor and there is already a move to expand the alignment so it will go through the ecologically sensitive foothills which are the Valley's watershed. We should be very clear: the Outer Ring Road is for planned urban expansion of the city rather than rural development. The settlements in the foothills will benefit from improvements in the existing radial roads rather than the Outer Ring Road.

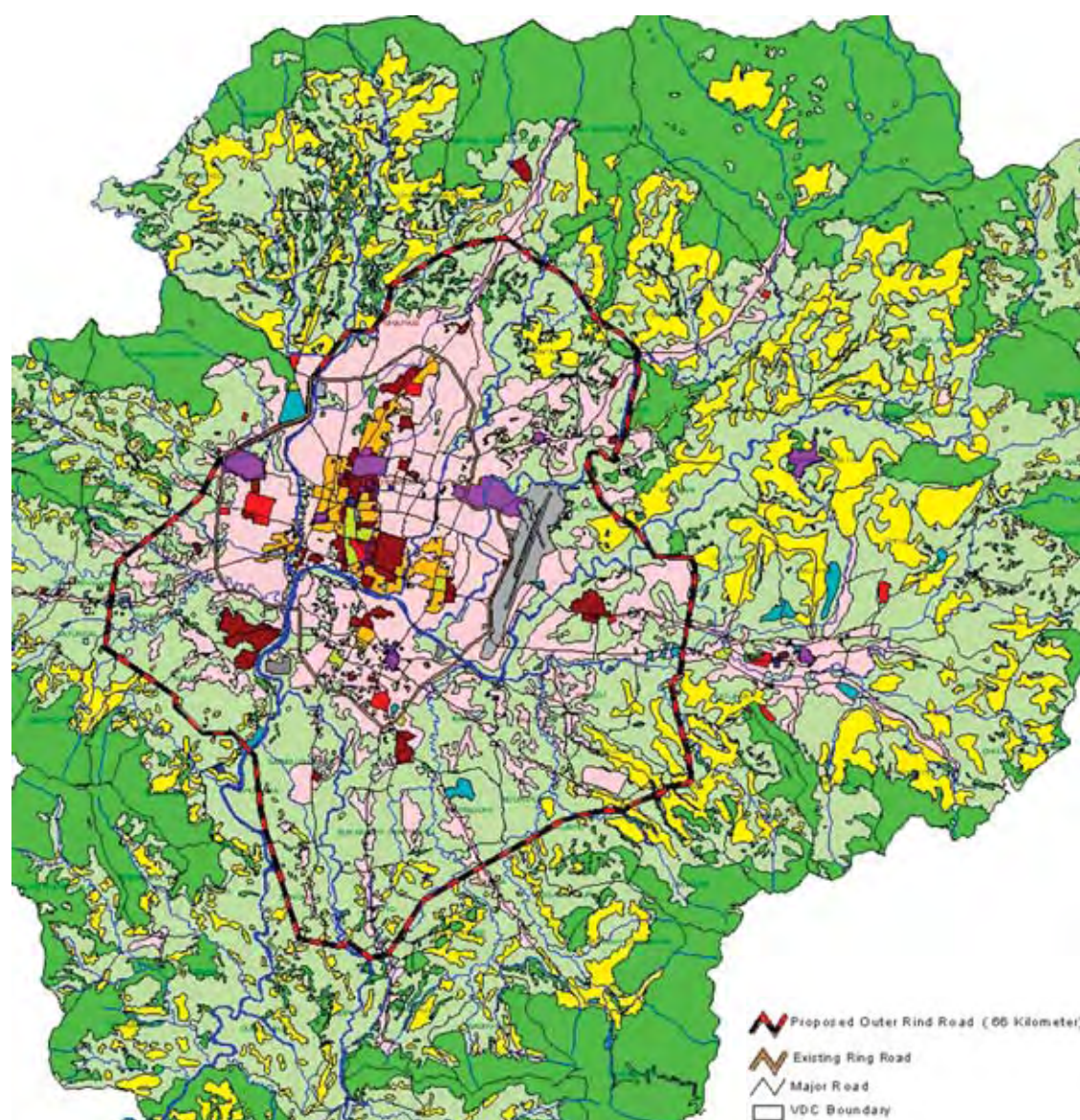
The Outer Ring Road should not just be a road. If it is conceptualised as an

infrastructure development project, it will guide the planned urban development of Kathmandu Valley and benefit the present and future generation. The DoR alignment is a road 66 km long, 50m wide for a six-lane highway with a bicycle track and sidewalk. Sufficient landscaping will be done to maintain greenery within the right of way. There will be 22 bridges with a 120 m span across the Bagmati at Chobar.

Chinese assistance will be available for road construction with the government responsible for the estimated Rs 3 billion land acquisition. But if the concept of 'land pooling' is used, this cost could come down considerably. Landowners will be compensated for land lost by the value-added to existing property by the road. Land pooling will also facilitate infrastructure development of 250m on either side of the road. Buildings falling on the right of the way of the road will be compensated according to the current market rate. Special resettlement policies will be formulated to address the issue of socially disadvantaged people affected by the project. Land pooling is not a new concept and despite being time-consuming, has worked well wherever it was implemented in the Valley.

National-level politics may dominate the discourse in Kathmandu, but its 12 MPs have always been elected on the basis of their influence in the city's outskirts. As long as we keep politics out of it and alignment and other decisions are taken rationally, there is no reason why the Outer Ring Road can't be a political visionary, socially and environmentally sustainable and technically sound project for the future development of Kathmandu Valley. ●

Kishore Thapa is the Director of Outer Ring Road Land Development Project.



Greener than we thought

Despite rapid urbanisation and population growth, the Valley is still predominantly green and rural. A 2001 study showed that 32 percent of the Valley is covered with forest, 40 percent is farmland, 17 percent is rural settlement and 11 percent is built-up municipal areas. Since the existing planning doesn't recognise the Kathmandu Valley as a single ecological entity, it is virtually impossible to enforce development tools that address conflicting urban and rural issues.

Kathmandu Valley is divided into five municipalities and 95 VDCs but it is a single natural region and its 1.6 million inhabitants share the same watershed, drainage channels, forest, soil and water.

2004 highlights

Portugal hosts Euro

Euro 2004, the second biggest football championship in the world, was hosted by Portugal. This provided Portugal with their much needed chance to step out of Spain's shadow and strengthen their position as a tourist destination. Portugal shone in their role as the host country and progressed on to the finals where they were beaten by Greece.

Athens Olympics

The Olympics returned to Athens this year, in between drug scandals and controversies. USA managed to come away again with the most number of medals. Hosts Greece had a tough time quelling the drug scandals and deaths of their star athletes. Few world records were broken at this year's Olympics as drug testing was intensified and many were barred from competing.

Cycling for non-violence

Eleven members of the Sri Lankan Global Peace Secretariat cycled across South Asia, including all the SAARC countries on their tour to promote non-violence throughout the region. Though on a tight budget of Rs 1,000 a day for the whole team, they managed to spread the word on peace and harmony.

Running with Rajendra

Rajendra Bhandari, after breaking his own national record at the Athens Olympics, went on to win a gold in the 5,000m race at the Asian All-star Athletics Championship in Malaysia. It was the first time that Nepal won a gold at the Asian level athletic event in which more than seven Asia-Pacific countries participated.

Sangina's Olympics

Sangina Baidya became the first South Asian woman to qualify

for taekwondo in this year's Olympics. Even though she lost out 4-0 to Hsin Chen Shih of Chinese Taipei, she went to Athens amid wild support from Nepal. Baidya, who won the gold in the SAF games in Islamabad against India, lost out in the prelims of the Women's Under 45kg.

Golfing glory for India

Surya Nepal Masters concluded on 14 December with Shiv Kapur from India walking away with the trophy at the Gokarna Golf Resort. Nepal's annual international golf tournament brought out many golfers but Kapur sank a 35-foot birdie putt to pull off the victory.

Indo-Pak showdown

In a deciding match, India beat Pakistan on 24 March for a victory in the series of fierce one-day matches. The first series that was played in Pakistan brought mutual goodwill between the two nations. Pakistan played their role as hosts marvellously and took their defeat like true sportsmen even from the hands of their archrivals, India. The series was seen as a new start of friendly relationships between India and Pakistan.



Swinging it in '05

A beginner's guide to getting started with golf

If your New Year's resolution is to learn a new sport, golf is just about as good as it gets. It is relaxing, focused and challenging. And it's not just for retired international civil servants, ex-generals and ambassadors either. More and more young people have been bitten by the golf bug. Many think that it is an elitist game and therefore steer clear of the greens believing it will cost a lot. Not so.

TEE BREAK Deepak Acharya



Over the two decades I've been golfing, I've noticed that most golfers begin showing an interest through friends or relatives who golf. Rarely will you

meet someone who began on their own initiative. This could be attributed to the lack of awareness about what the game is really about and also, how to get started. Where are the clubs and facilities?

Golf, like any other sport, can be fun. Anybody, old or young can enjoy golfing. Though it is not as fast-paced and sudden like some sports, it still requires a degree of fitness to play the game socially. You have to walk fairly briskly for over eight km every four-hour round you play and doing this regularly definitely makes you fitter.

Though golf is still not available throughout Nepal, we do have nine facilities in four cities: four in Kathmandu, three in Pokhara, and one each in Dharan and Nawalparasi. Golf can be learnt in all these places. The two driving ranges (one in Pokhara and the other in Kathmandu) are built to help those already playing to improve, and encourage newcomers to start the game. The golf courses all have their own driving or practice facilities with dedicated golf professionals teaching the game.

To learn golf quickly and properly, one needs to take professional coaching. If not, progress is slow and bad habits develop, which can later be very difficult to correct. Additionally, the game has comprehensive rules and etiquette which you are expected to know and follow. The basics of these are taught during golf lessons.

All you really need to start playing golf are a pair of sports shoes, comfortable clothes and if your hands are a little soft from inactivity, you may require a golf glove that can be bought at the golf practice facilities. Next is a quick phone call to one of the golf instructors at a golfing facility. Make an appointment for your first one-hour lesson, and show up on time. That's it!

Usually included in the cost of the lesson, which will be around the Rs 500 range, the instructor will provide the golf clubs and practice balls. You may be surprised at how 'not easy' and how tired you are after just an hour of practice of this so-called 'old man's game'.

No more reasons for procrastinating. Get out into the bright sunshine, clean air and take up a sport that brings you in touch with nature and yourself. 2005 might just be your golfing year! ●

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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Emerging Voices** Prints by three young artists at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. Until 3 January. 4218048
- ❖ **Life through the Lens** Photographs by Kishor Kayastha at Indigo Gallery, till 15 January. 4413580, indigo@wlink.com.np

EVENTS

- ❖ **Freedom Zone** New year's eve with Partynepal.com, 31 December at Himalayan Java, J-Bar and Dechenling. 8PM onwards, Rs 1,600 per person including dinner, snacks and welcome drinks. www.partynepal.com, 9851068871
- ❖ **Rumble in the jungle** on New Year's Eve at Le Meridien Gokarna Forest Golf Resort and Spa for Rs 1,000, 7PM onwards. 4445550
- ❖ **New Year's Eve Celebrations** at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4491234
- ❖ **Haute Couture, The Chimney and Sinners in Heaven** Celebrate New Year's at Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **New Year's Eve at Dwarika's** with Abhaya and the Steam Injuns. Rs 3,500 per couple, Rs 2,000 per person. 4479488
- ❖ **Movie screening** of Caravan and Dosro Rastriya Dohori Katha Pratiyogita at Hotel Radisson on 2 January. Tickets for Rs 200, Rs 300 available at Suwal and Photo Concern. A fundraiser for Kanti Children's Hospital.
- ❖ **Winter Day Camp** for school students of grades 5-9 from 8-13 January. Last date for registration is 3 January. 5553870, 5550452, 5524188
- ❖ **3rd Annual Wave Web Winner 2004** Website designing contest. Entry deadline 15 February. www.wavemag.com.np
- ❖ **The God Dance of Kathmandu Valley** Every Tuesday at Hotel Vajra. 4271545

MUSIC

- ❖ **Classical vocals and instrumental music**, 7PM onwards, every Friday at Hotel Vajra. 4271545
- ❖ **Jatra** Saturday nights with Looza, 6.30 PM onwards. 4256622
- ❖ **Jukebox experience** with Pooja Gurung and The Cloud Walkers every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at Rox Bar. 4491234
- ❖ **Happening live jazz in town** at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lajimpat. Every Wednesday and Saturday, 7.45 PM onwards.

FOOD

- ❖ **Jazz Dinner with McTwisters** for Rs 1,200 at 1905 Kantipath, 6PM-8PM.
- ❖ **Café Mitra and Lounge Bar** presents a special a la carte Festive Season Menu till 31 December. 4259015
- ❖ **New delicacies** Introducing pastas and snacks at Roadhouse Café, Jawalakhel. 5521755
- ❖ **New year's at La Soon** Restaurant and Vinothèque, next to the Egyptian Embassy, Pulchok. 5537166
- ❖ **Sizzling Weekend Treat** with live music, dance, barbeque and karaoke at Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Genuine Thai** cuisine at Royal Lotus, Bakhundole. 5521231
- ❖ **Delicious barbecue dinner** Fridays at Summit Hotel. 5521810
- ❖ **Farm House Café** Unlimited nature with delicious meals at Park Village Hotel. 4375280
- ❖ **Café Bahal** Newari and continental cuisine under the giant Cinnamon tree at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4700632
- ❖ **Barbecue-Ban Bhoj** at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Vegetarian Creations** at Stupa View Restaurant. 4480262
- ❖ **Splash Spring BBQ** Wednesday and Friday evenings, 6PM onwards. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu.
- ❖ **Executive Lunch** at Toran Restaurant, Dwarika's. 4479488
- ❖ **The Beer Garden** at Vaijayantha, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Dwarika's Thali** Lunch at the Heritage courtyard. 4479488
- ❖ **The Tharu Kitchen** at Jungle Base Camp. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Dream Holiday** Package tour to Malaysia for Christmas and New Year. Marco Polo Travels and Qatar Airways, 2012345, malaiaholidays_marco@polo.com.np
- ❖ **Getaway package** Night's stay at Godavari Village Resort, includes dinner and breakfast. 5560675
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- ❖ **New Year by the jungle** Special package and prices at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- ❖ **Temple Tiger** One night package \$250. 4263480
- ❖ **Machan Wildlife Jungle Resort** Special packages available. 4225001
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- ❖ **Club Himalaya** invites you to celebrate the sunrise of 2005 at their windy hills of Nagarkot on 1 January.

JAI NEPAL CINEMA

For young Nikhil, Samarpur was everything he could ask for and at school he had football, the game he loved. When his beloved Neha becomes ambitious and takes off from Samarpur to pursue her dreams, Nikhil can't help following her to Mumbai. But fate has something else in store for him—an unrelenting Neha, a perky workmate Sara and an irksome yet petite neighbour, Shagun. His romantic roof caves in burying him in a rubble of hilarious situations. Who then amongst Neha, Sara and Shagun is finally destined for Nikhil? Dil Maange More is Anand Mahadevan's second film, starring Shahid Kapoor, Ayesh Takia, Tulip Joshi and Soha Ali Khan.

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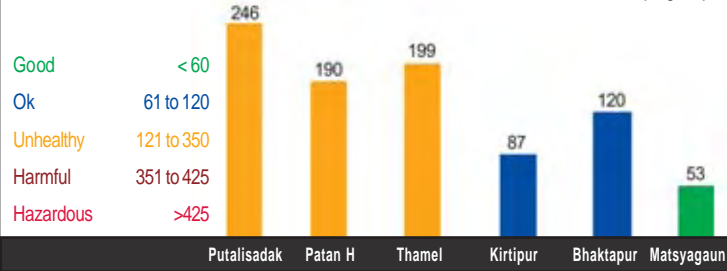


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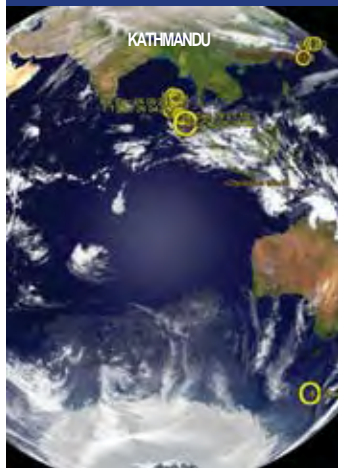
With temperatures in Kathmandu dipping down to its lowest in the past decade, the air pollution level went up. Even with two days of Nepal bandas, last week's average PM10 (particle matter less than 10 microns) concentration in Kathmandu was up by more than 11 percent compared to the previous week. In residential areas such as Thamel, the PM10 was almost two times higher than national standards.

19 - 25 December in micrograms per cubic meter.
Source: www.mope.gov.np



NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



The mercury is crashing to record lows this week, going down to minus one on Monday morning, making it the coldest day in Kathmandu in 12 years. The northwesterly breeze is bringing some of the Siberian blasts on the Tibetan Plateau over to our side bringing down temperatures by three degrees below average for this time of year across Nepal. This satellite picture taken on Thursday morning indicates a wide westerly front over western Nepal. (The yellow circles represent earthquakes.) The ensuing cloud cover over the weekend will bring some drizzles and flurries at higher altitudes, bring down maximum temperatures while halting the slide in the minimum.

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RAM HUMAGAIN/NEPALNEWS.COM

REMEMBERING A CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCH: People paying respects to late King Birendra at his statue in Jawalakhel on his 60th birth anniversary on Monday.



KIRAN PANDAY

NO ENTRY: More than 300 organisations took part in a massive peace rally at Ratna Park on Monday morning.

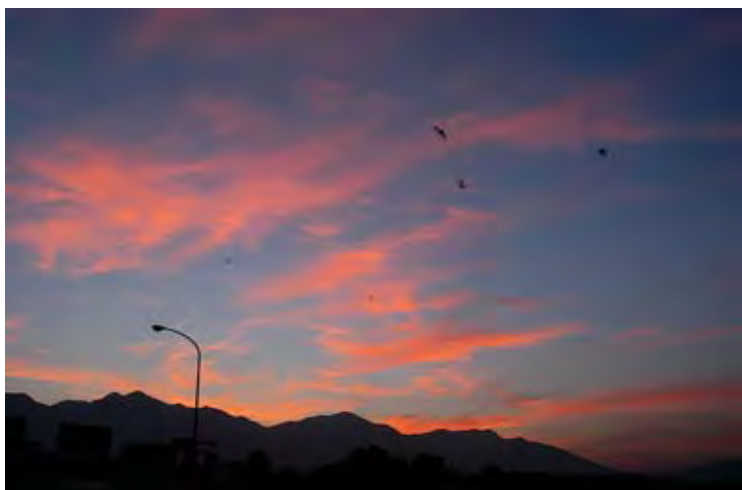


RAM HUMAGAIN/NEPALNEWS.COM

PEACE AT LHOSAR: The Gurung community in Kathmandu celebrated their new year on Thursday with the theme peace.



PHOTO OP: Japanese ambassador, Tsutomu Hiraoka after inaugurating a photo exhibition on Nepal-Japan relations by the Rotary Club of Patan on 25 December.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

LAST SUNSET: One of the last fiery sunsets of 2004 as seen from Kathmandu Valley on Wednesday.

Esha's inspiration



Esha Manandhar, 18, is one of the promising young Nepali singers. Her scintillating performance at the Wave Music Utsab catapulted her to fame among Kathmandu's music aficionados. Before that, she had just learned to strum and hum during her SLC break and performed at school functions and at the Alliance Française.

Esha's real foray into music came after she began singing for Hits FM and was noticed. She wrote to the station about her passion and asked if she could sing for them, they got in touch with her and soon she was singing for the Hits show,

Mega Tops. Since then she has performed at various events such as Wave events, Moksh Bar and Himalatte Café.

Esha began professional voice training at the age of 10 when during her winter holidays, her mother, tired of seeing her at home doing nothing, sent her to an aunt's to learn Indian classical vocals. Esha has been singing and singing ever since.

The daughter of a journalist, Esha is torn between her desire to be a writer and a singer. Until she decides, she is doing both: writing music as a composer and lyricist. She has six original English songs that are slightly autobiographical and she hopes to put in an album soon.

"They are mostly about teenage angst, love and life," she says, quickly adding, "I think it is time I moved beyond that because all my songs are starting to sound the same." Esha's songs are surprisingly mature and sound somewhere between Alanis Morissette and Sheryl Crow.

Were they her inspiration? "I was the one inspiring me," she replies, but laughingly admits that Morissette is one of her favourite singers. She wants to continue with classical vocals training because it helps her with her compositions. ●

Aarti Basnyat

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PRISMA 04

New year revolutions

There are the chronic pessimists among us who look forward to the new year, see the glass as half-empty and complain about it. Then there are compulsive optimists like me who go over to the bar and get myself a refill.

UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit



Given the way things are going in this country and in our immediate vicinity, I have made a new year resolution to get myself a life membership of the Nepal Bar Association Pvt Ltd and that is probably where you'll find me during the course of the year nursing a

large Famous Grouch on rocks. Which should be a fairly easy resolution to fulfill, considering that one of my 40-point resolution last year (stop making an ass of myself every week) never made it to the implementation phase.

Like it or not, the new year is upon us and, like it or not, tradition demands that we all come up with new year resolutions which is a non-binding Memorandum of Understanding one signs with oneself to make every effort to be a much nicer person in the forthcoming fiscal year. Having already made my resolution, I have been going around asking what other people's resolutions are. Here is a representative sample (for security reasons, some names have been changed to protect the

identities of resolution-holders):

Haku, the sleepy household Lab: "Being a son of a bitch, I guess I'll strive to be an even greater son of a bitch in the new year. Now, if you'll excuse me, can I go back to sleep?"

Neighbourhood petrol station wallah: "It's been a good year for us, with blockades, the kerosene price differential and artificial shortages. I'm sure that in 2005 things will get better before they get worse."

Middle Marsyangdi Contractor: "We are looking forward to doing even less work in the new year than we did in 2004."

Defaulters Anonymous: "So the #\$\$%&*** want to stop us from attending royal palace parties. Big deal. In 2005, I think I'll buy myself a Mazda 6 and invest in another apartment complex in Gurgaon."

Comrade Awesome: "In 2005, our brave and courageous fighters will set fire to more milk trucks and Maruti taxis, stop all ambulances and school buses and ruin vegetable farmers by preventing them from taking their produce to market. Onward with the great proletarian liberation, long live the strategic counter-retaliation offensive tunnel campaign against running dog imperialists and their blood-thirsty hegemonistic expansionist reactionary fascist mongrels."

Comrade UML General Secretary: "This government is hopeless and inept, it is a royal puppet, the minister has completely bungled the Korean labour issue, the country is a bloody mess, the ministers are in cahoots with the sugar barons. In 2005, we will support this government to the hilt."

The Kanchi Shankaracharya: "In the new year I'll seek political asylum in Nepal."



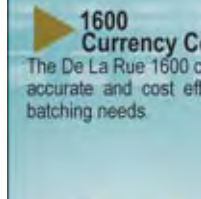
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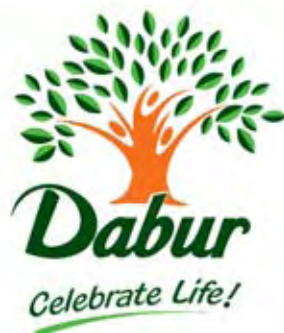
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