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Adding fuel to the fire

The government takes an unpopular decision and faces the heat



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KUNDA DIXIT

Give credit where it's due: the Deuba administration has shown considerable courage in taking a potentially-suicidal political decision. Knowing fully well that there would be all hell to pay on the streets, it went ahead to announce hefty fuel price increases because it simply couldn't delay the decision any longer. The price rises announced on Tuesday were necessary to stave off Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) from bankruptcy, ensure future fuel supplies, harmonise prices with India to stop smuggling, and reduce the kerosene-diesel differential to curb adulteration. True, it did it only when refineries threatened to cut supplies, banks refused to lend, and there are murky questions about complicity of politicians and the NOC in allowing dealers

to hoard fuel in the past week. But, says Bhusan Tuladhar of Clean Energy Nepal: "Finally we have a government that has the guts to raise petroleum prices, this was long overdue and it deserves public support." The government was aware that this was going to be a hugely unpopular move, and was prepared for flak from the four-party agitation who latched on the knee-jerk populism of the fuel agitation to its anti-'regression' street protests. Indeed, the demonstrations have been nationwide with party-affiliated student unions, transporters and trade unions joining in. What the government didn't expect was the UML feigning ignorance to point fingers at their own comrade minister in the governing coalition. This has backfired badly against the UML because in the public's eye it exposed the party's confusion

about whether it is in the government or the opposition. The NOC is running losses of Rs 300 million a month and is over Rs 5 billion in debt. It also needed to bring fuel prices at par with India to stop smuggling across the open border. The price gap has now been reduced, making smuggling less lucrative. It's not just the government that is arguing that the fuel price hike will not hurt the poor. "The majority of really poor people in Nepal do not benefit from low petroleum prices," explains Tuladhar, "only nine percent of the energy consumed in Nepal is from petroleum products, 77 percent is from firewood and biomass." What will perhaps hurt the rural poor is the inflation that the fuel price hikes will trigger. The government says it has ensured a safety net by providing a transportation subsidy so that there will be no

surcharge on kerosene supplied to 22 remote districts. And it is now going to allow the NOC board to review international crude costs every two months and set domestic prices as a step to keep politics out of petroleum. Environmentalists also favour higher petroleum prices that reflect the true cost to the biosphere of burning fossil fuels. The economy will then be forced to turn to renewable energy like hydropower of which Nepal has in abundance. This switch will lessen Nepal's crippling and growing dependence on imported fossil fuels, they add. ●

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Ishwar Pokhrel

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Old is gold

The great thing about getting older is that the rest of the world thinks you are also wiser, although you know it for a fact that this isn't necessarily so. There are lots of advantages to being youth-challenged in Nepal these days and one of them is the admiration and respect that society has traditionally reserved for old timers like us.

That is why we can get away with a lot more than we used to when we were young students vandalising public property. Like when you get to be a certain age (and, no, I won't tell you exactly what age that might be) you can order people around to do the vandalising on your behalf for old time's sake.

Some of you who are getting older as rapidly as me will realise that as one gets on in years, hair starts sprouting from one's ear lobes. This is perfectly normal. It is when it stops growing that you should

UNDER MY HAT Kunda Dixit



start getting worried. In fact, when you approach the autumn of your life, you want to have as much body hair as you can lay your hands on, especially in the slightly more unconventional parts of your anatomy. Adding extra fleece to the skin is Mother Nature's way of keeping our cockles warm and toasty throughout the long winters. My nostril hairs have now grown so long that I have to tell my barber: "Not too much off the nose cone today, Rajaram."

The other habit that starts to creep in as one gets long in the tooth (where does this expression come from, since my experience is that we start losing even the tusks we have?) is that one starts reading all the spam that comes into one's hotmail account. And we find ourselves lingering longer over items in the inbox that offer free trials of hair-loss remedies, botox treatment and a certain blue pill that guarantees to increase the size of your endowment overnight.

As they say, the child is the father of the man. Age allows one to become an adolescent pyromaniac again. So when Girija Prasad Koirala orders his friends to stop burning tyres on the streets they take his instructions seriously and instead set cars on fire. With age comes wisdom, political acumen and astuteness, which is why Girijababu can get away with proving to us once more that he is a complete and utter arsonist. In future, the army should train its bomb dogs not to lift their hind legs while sniffing out choppers carrying octogenarians.

Senior citizens are allowed by law to be less fussy about carrying out bodily functions in public. In fact, doctors tell them not to lock their bathroom door in case, god forbid, they do something stupid like fall asleep on the commode.

Unfortunately, this increases the chance of some disgustingly young teenage member of the extended clan barging in while you are attending to an emergency situation trying to untie the injar of your suruwal before nature beats you to it.

But the beauty of it is that something which would have made you die of embarrassment in the old days doesn't upset you at all when you cross 50. This applies equally to letting out a high-decibel burp in polite company or engaging in some hit-and-run passing of the trade winds when no one is looking.

One is only as old as one feels and my feeling is that none of us are getting any younger. Like me, there comes a time in everyone's life when it is advisable to switch from injar to elastic in your suruwal. ●



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We need a unifier

Tej Prasad Sitaula in *Desantar*, 9 January

देशान्तर साप्ताहिक

For the last 240 years, the Shah dynasty has directly or indirectly ruled Nepal. In between, the Ranas ruled for 104 years with an iron fist. Over the past 12 years, the country has suffered from malgovernance of political parties. For the last two years, it has been under direct rule of the king. We speak with pride about how we never became foreign slaves. Ironically, we are slaves in our own country. Prithvi Narayan Shah believed in fostering national integrity. None of his successors displayed the same sense of responsibility and dedication to the nation. No ruler was capable of keeping it united. Consequently, Nepal was defeated in the Nepal-British War (1814-16) and we lost much of our territory. In the eyes of the British, the war ended with the recruitment of Gurkhas into their armed forces, thus undermining our Nepali identity. It was only after the 1950 revolution that Nepalis were truly free again.

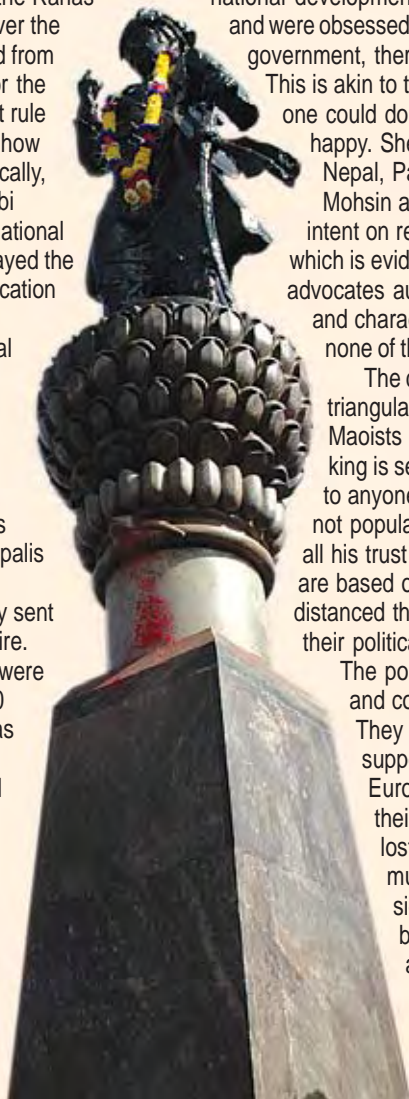
The Ranas were anglophiles. They sent Nepali boys to die for the British Empire. Nepalis became known as people who were ready to die for foreigners. During 100 years of their autocratic rule, the Ranas pocketed the taxes that poor Nepalis paid. They stashed the money abroad and plundered the treasury to build palaces.

It took two brave patriots like BP Koirala and Ganeshman Singh to usher in democracy. Unlike today's leaders they shared a vision for the country and worked together. Foreseeing trouble, the two leaders warned that fighting for democracy

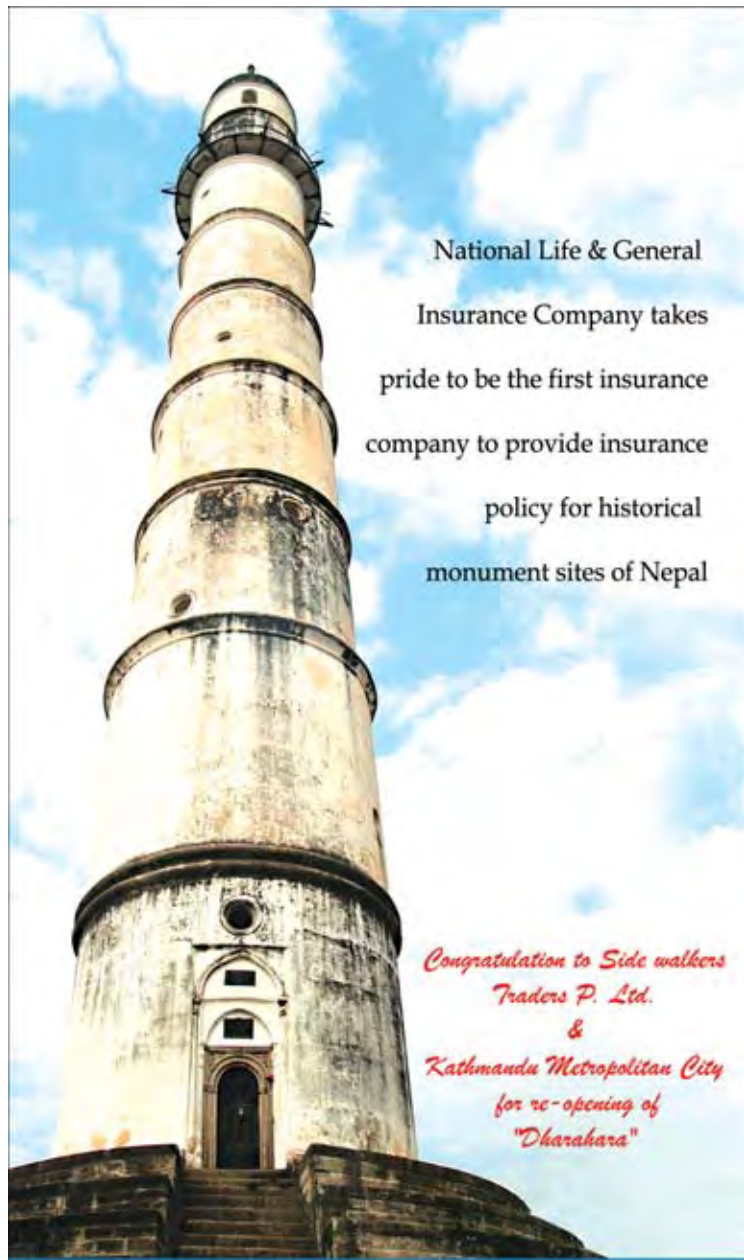
was the easy part. One false step could jeopardise hard-won freedom. But the leaders after them were selfish, with vested interests and no focus on national development. They looted the country and were obsessed with power. Once in the government, there is no question of quitting. This is akin to the Panchayat regime when one could do anything if he made the king happy. Sher Bahadur Deuba, Madhab Nepal, Pasupati Shamsheer, Mohammad Mohsin and Sachit Shamsheer seem intent on restoring the Panchayat system, which is evident in the way Mohsin advocates authoritarian rule. Good quality and character are virtues of a leader that none of them possess.

The country is witnessing a triangular battle between the king, the Maoists and the political parties. The king is self-centred and will neither bow to anyone nor talk to any party. He is not popular among the public and puts all his trust in the army. Maoist activities are based on violence and they have distanced themselves from the people and their political purpose remains unclear.

The political parties lack harmony and cooperation within themselves. They are gradually losing popular support. India, the US, UK and Europe are making it worse with their supply of arms. They have lost hope for the restoration of multiparty democracy. All these signs show that the country will be pushed towards authoritarianism. Nepal desperately needs someone who can unite constitutional powers.



KIRAN PANDAY



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Running on empty

The government gets its oil price rise but will it now tackle the oil mafia?



KIRAN PANDAY

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

When Sher Bahadur Deuba's government decided to bell the cat and announce the hefty hikes in fuel prices this week, he expected criticism from his nemesis, Girija Prasad Koirala.

But what his UML coalition partners did not expect was the outrage from their own party. Industry, Commerce and Supplies Minister Ishwar Pokhrel was hounded by party cadre and reportedly even threatened to resign if other members of the government didn't share the blame.

This was the third rise in fuel prices in seven months and may finally ensure that the Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) will not go bankrupt. "The new

prices finally reflect the cost price but it still doesn't ensure a profit margin," says the Planning Commission's Shankar Sharma, coordinator of the price recommendation committee.

The main reason for the crisis are volatile international fuel prices. For instance, even after the government increased prices last August when NOC was still incurring a monthly loss of Rs 580 million, losses rose even higher to Rs 700 million in November. A month later, the losses came down to Rs 480 million. This week's price hike will allow NOC to go back to the banks and borrow for next month's imports. Says Sharma, "Now the commercial banks will resume lending to NOC because it is bankable again."

The NOC had borrowed Rs 2

billion from Rastriya Banijya Bank and Standard Chartered Bank last August to tide over the deficit. But since then, it had been having a tough time getting other banks to lend it money to pay Indian Oil which supplies refined petroleum products.

Pokhrel blames political meddling in the NOC by previous governments for its woes and claims to have corrected the irregularities by allowing the board to fix prices based on international fluctuations. (See interview, below)

It remains to be seen whether the board will really be allowed to be autonomous. There are plenty of examples of the politicisation of other supposedly independent boards.

But Sharma says the board is serious about revising prices on a bimonthly basis based on international and Indian prices.

"We are looking forward to a decrease of prices in the Indian market because of the downslide in the prices in the international market," says Sharma, adding that if that happens domestic prices will also be revised downwards.

Besides smuggling across the border into India, there is also the question of cleaning up NOC with its sleazy management and corruption that leads to rampant adulteration. For example, retailers say the corporation

doesn't send out tankers before noon so they can claim compensation for evaporation loss. "That is how they pocket the difference," says Krishna Man Shrestha, chairman of the Association of Retail Sellers of Kerosene.

Then there is rampant unauthorised sales of subsidised kerosene to industries and business houses that are required to use furnace oil by the law. "The corporation has been selling kerosene in bulk to industries that are supposed to use furnace oil, we have records to prove it," said Bijay Man Singh, chairman of Nepal Kerosene Dealers Association. ●

Hoarding around

The government got its price rise but this doesn't mean it has a clean chit on the supply front. It needs to address the corruption that drives adulteration of diesel and petrol with subsidised kerosene.

Until the rise in the prices of petroleum products was announced on 10 January, the Nepal Oil Corporation was supplying not even 10 tankers of kerosene a day in Kathmandu. The people were queuing up all day. Where did all that kerosene go? It was being legally hoarded by dealers who would start selling for higher prices the day it was announced.

Ironically, the government has allowed private dealers to hoard. The NOC Act allows private dealers to maintain their stock without being subject to inspection during price changes. This is a license to stockpile fuel in anticipation of price rises so dealers can make a packet. Ministry officials said the government could do nothing against hoarders because of the agreement. "When we tried to raid some dealers last week, they showed us the agreement," he says.

Minister of Commerce, Industry and Supply Ishwar Pokhrel admitted there was such a provision and he came to know about it only on Wednesday. "I have just come to know about it and we will do something to change that," he said.

Krishna Man Shrestha, chairman of the Association of Retailers who sell kerosene at a subsidised price says the NOC seven sends out information on impending price hikes so dealers can hoard.

This time, too, consumer rights activists believe NOC and the dealers were in cahoots to share the profits from hoarding. "The networking of the oil mafia is an open secret," says Prem Lal Maharjan, general secretary of Consumers' Forum.

But former Commerce, Industry and Supply Minister Mahesh Lal Pradhan passed justified the rules saying dealers need to keep stocks of fuel because the government doesn't pay compensation when prices go down.

"Protestors don't have the right information"



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Minister of Commerce, Industry and Supplies Ishwar Pokhrel is from the UML but his own party has singled him out for attack because of the fuel price hike this week. In an interview with the *Nepali Times* on Wednesday, Pokhrel admits he was a scapegoat. He also makes the surprising admission that the government has allowed fuel stations to hoard petro-products and that there are many unchecked anomalies within the Nepal Oil Corporation.

Your own party the UML seems to have disowned you for your decision to raise prices. Is this double track strategy deliberate?

I have no idea.

Your party's general secretary, Madhab Kumar Nepal, has gone on record to say he was not informed about the price rise and that the party opposes your move.

A committee formed by the cabinet submitted its recommendations on pricing policy to the government on 11 December. The committee's coordinator NPC vice chairman Shankar Sharma and member secretary Upendra Koirala had informed all the top leaders of the coalition partners on the price increase issue at the prime minister's residence on 10 December. In a democracy, everyone has the right to express their feelings. One must look at the opposition in a positive light as an expression against past aberrations about fuel price fixing. The protestors may have become angry because they do not have the right information.

Some say the government and the fuel dealers are in cahoots.

There is no such deal. The scarcity was due to the result of the obstructed supply in the market because of highway blockades. The Nepal Oil Corporation itself may have also bought less oil earlier but I don't have a clear idea about it.

The NOC act itself prohibits inspection of stocks of petroleum products when prices are about to be raised?

I came to know about the provision in the act only today (Wednesday). Indeed, there was such an understanding two years ago that allowed private dealers to keep their stock without monitoring. They were allowed that facility because they agreed to benefit and accept losses according to price fluctuations. That understanding may need to be reviewed.

How did the government which acted so promptly to raise prices dragged its feet on an understanding that allowed the dealers to profit from hoarding fuel?

I agree that this issue is dubious and needs to be addressed. There are many such anomalies in the NOC with a history that goes back 34 years. I am sure many other irregularities will come to light in the future.

The government is not taking action against industries that are using subsidised kerosene instead of furnace oil. Isn't such leakage at the cost of ordinary Nepalis for whom the kerosene is actually meant?

Such irregularities in the transaction of petroleum products are quite rampant. We will review them all.

Nepal used to buy crude oil and allow it to be refined in India for us. But we are now buying refined products from them at retail prices. Doesn't this make the cost of imported fuel doubly expensive for us?

It is true we used to buy crude but we did that only once. We need to get an entire tanker and our demand doesn't make that feasible. That is why the previous management decided to go for refined products. But you're right, even this issue needs to be reviewed.

So till then the prices will keep going up?

We should not be talking only about price hikes. What we should be talking about is price adjustment with international rates.

Do you have a plan to save the NOC from bankruptcy?

The NOC is autonomous only in theory. Actually, it has always acted as an arm of the government. Now it should be allowed to make pricing and policy independently in the real sense.

Defend for themselves



Casualties of conflict

- Tope Bahadur Shrestha was taken away by Maoists in Dudhraksha VDC near Butwal and killed in July 2002. His wife, Kopila (right), was pregnant then. Today their child is three years old. Kopila dreads the day when he will ask: "Where is Daddy?" Kopila has mourned for three years but now she is worried about her son: feeding, educating and raising him. No one has come to help and there has been no government assistance.
- Dharmagat Basyal is also from Dudhraksh. In May his 21-year-old son was taken away by Maoists and beaten to death. "It seems like yesterday, I am more dead than alive myself," says Dharmagat hoarsely. No one ever came to ask what happened to his son and he doesn't understand the senselessness of it all.
- Parsuram Adhikari (right) from Ramapur still can't understand what reason the Maoists had for killing his 16-year-old son, Hari. Villagers have murmured that it was probably because he was a 'spy', but no one wants to help him.
- Talsa Pandey, 65, had two sons, now both are gone. Last year, soldiers killed her elder son in Parroha. The younger one, 21-year-old Yubaraj, was taken away last year and hasn't been heard from since. The mother's grief has been compounded because her sons are now classified as 'terrorists'.



Ram Krishna Bhandari in Butwal

justice system a virtual jury to talk about abuse

provisions are the main reasons for violence against women and need to be annulled," Indira Phunyal, coordinator of Alliance Against Trafficking in Women and Children in Nepal told us. Women victims of abuse agreed to speak out in the Women's Court because they were frustrated with the way

things were going in the real court system. "In most cases, the courts were of no help and the women wanted an alternative justice system," Phunyal added. Like in a real court, the Women's Court also had a jury and in its summation it stated: "The cases presented show a clear case to question our legal

system and serious revisions from the gender perspective." The organisers said that even where the laws were correct, legal loopholes allowed perpetrators of violence to get away.

The jury even went into the nitty-gritties like the fines that perpetrators of violence are required to pay. At present, the compensation paid by traffickers or abusers goes to the state coffers, but the jury ruled such punitive damages should henceforth go to the victim.

Even though this was a virtual court and the jury's rulings are not legally binding, Phunyal maintains that the court set a social and political precedence.

Ironically, the court saw almost no participation from the government even though they had been invited. "This just proves the lack of seriousness on the part of the government on women's issues," said activist Meena Poudel.

This is the second time a Women's Court has been organised in Nepal in the past 10 years and Poudel says it proved there has been no letup in the prevalence of abuse. ●



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OIL AND POLITICS DON'T MIX

Politicians are known for populist grandstanding, that is what they are made for. So it's not surprising the UML comrades want to have it both ways: Supplies Minister Ishwar Pokhrel hikes petro prices with a fishy one-week delay and his party's student wing is out on the streets vandalising public property in protest. Even by the reckless standards of Nepali politics, the UML's two-faced opportunism is stunning. Then Pokhrel makes the shocking admission to us (p 8) that dealers are allowed to hoard.

All this doesn't make the fuel price hike less inevitable. The 30 percent increase in global oil prices in the past year has put Nepal Oil Corporation Rs 5.12 billion in the red. The corporation's losses are threatening to bankrupt the state as well.

The basic rule of business is you can't sell a product for less than what you bought it for unless you are: a) stupid, b) a welfare state or c) Nepal Oil Corporation. To be able to afford subsidies, a government needs to be honest, efficient and have a revenue source. Our government is none of the three. So, NOC is putting up public property as collateral to borrow month-by-month from banks to pay Indian Oil for refined petroleum imports. But it can't pay anymore because its selling price is much lower than its buying price.

There is another reason for raising prices: smuggling of cheap subsidised fuel across the open border to India. This is a well-oiled business in which folks on both sides get a cut. Forty percent of the kerosene Nepal imports is either used to adulterate diesel or is smuggled into India. The Nepali state is subsidising Bihari consumers.

Things got so serious that on the eve of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's visit to New Delhi in September, Indian Oil announced it would slap excise duty on its exports to Nepal as a warning against smuggling.

This week's fuel price rise has narrowed the gap with India but there is still a NRs 1.64 per litre difference in kerosene, Rs 4.15 for diesel, nearly Rs 2 for petrol and a whopping Rs 5.49 for aviation turbine fuel. (It makes sense for an Indian Airlines Airbus to tank up in Kathmandu instead of Calcutta.)

Despite the price rise there is still a domestic differential of Rs 5 between kerosene and diesel and a big Rs 26 with petrol. As long as this gap remains, we will keep getting adulterated fuel at the gas stations.

NOC must be completely overhauled into a clean energy company. Only then can it repay its debts, go into profit so the government can invest the surplus into renewable energy. Nepal's strategy must be to cut our crippling dependence on imported fossil fuels.

Till then, here's a wi-win idea: we waste 600 million units of hydropower worth Rs 1.5 billion every monsoon. Let's swap that for refined fuel from Barauni.

Let's stop playing politics with fuel and use pricing mechanisms to control adulteration and smuggling.



SUBHAS RAI

Not the people's war

Nepalis will not forsake democratic norms to compromise with the Maoists out of fear

The Maoists are neither benevolent enough to liberate the downtrodden, nor do they seem to want a truly democratic environment. The revolution is full of contradictions, and it is being undermined by their shortsightedness and lack of a sustainable long-term political agenda.

GUEST COLUMN
Sadip Bahadur Shah



Essentially, the Maoist ideal is a shortcut to power through violence against a democratic state. Their ultimate aim is to establish a totalitarian communist regime. Accommodation and compromise are not a part of the plan. Even if demands for major constitutional changes are met, the Maoists will continue to subvert the system to achieve their ultimate goal. Addressing the economic and political grievances of the people is therefore an absolute necessity, but not sufficient to defeat or resolve the insurgency.

The Maoists have built the ability to concentrate human and material resources tactically in support of operational goals through use of coercion. But the terror tactics have

created a backlash. The Maoists have realised the erosion of their popularity, they fear the emergence of splinter cells and their acts smack of desperation.

Let's not forget that the Maoists are waging a war to reverse the democratic process initiated 14 years ago. Democratic governments are vulnerable to this form of warfare. Infused with the ideology of individual and political liberty, the state may be unaware of the threat, reluctant to acknowledge it and restrained from adopting prompt and effective measures to counter it.

The decisive factor in any insurgency is the support of the people. The Royal Nepali Army firmly believes that resolving the Maoist problem through negotiations and socio-economic development rather than application of military force, is a more sensible way of resolving differences.

War usually means that other humane alternatives to resolve differences have failed. A war requires the mobilisation of a moral consensus to legitimise the use to military force. That consensus should be part of a national strategy in political and military terms, and if it fails, the war is lost.

It is clear that the government and the people must either give full support to the security forces, or find an alternative method to pressurise the insurgents to adopt a path of negotiations. Half-hearted support will only prolong the nation's agony.

The Royal Nepali Army and the Unified Command are improving coordination and are

performing more professionally. There may be incidents committed intentionally or otherwise that violate human rights, but such incidents are likely to occur in any insurgency.

Individuals commit the acts while the parent institution remains accountable and must investigate the violations and take due disciplinary action and disseminate that information to the public. At the same time, the media and human rights organisations must also pressure the Maoists to abide by the same principles lest they be accused of bias.

The primary questions now are: will the Nepali people forsake their democratic norms and values and compromise with the Maoists out of fear of violence? Would such compromise set precedence for violence as an agent of political change in future?

The Civil-Military National Campaign Plan (CMNCP) is the government's strategy to counter the insurgency and promote security and development nationwide with long-term peace under a multi-party democracy and constitutional monarchy. Should the government decide to hold elections, the security forces are capable of making them happen even if the Maoists decide to carry on with the insurgency.

Phasing the elections is a very critical criterion. Should the initial phases succeed, the confidence of the people, political parties and international donors will grow. There are pre-requisites: providing border surveillance by

LETTERS

J N DIXIT

A S Panneerselvan says in his obituary for JN Dixit ('A metaphor for the Indian state', #229) that the late Indian diplomat 'symbolised all that is good, bad, ugly and indifferent about India'. Perhaps he is right. But he is wrong when he alludes to the case of Bhutani refugees in Nepal. Dixit investigated, if not overtly assisted, Bhutan's absolute monarch to forcibly evict over 100,000 Nepali-speaking Bhutanis who are languishing in refugee camps for over a decade now. Afterward Dixit created hurdles so that these stateless people could not make a bid to return to their homeland. In other words, he effectively conspired to get these refugees 'assimilated into Nepali society'. Clearly, Panneerselvan is mistaking conspiracy for contribution.

Amrit Neupane, Jawalakhel

COMMERCIAL

Rajeeb L Satyal's Nepali Pan contribution ('Not non-profit', #229) was thought provoking. Indeed, the panacea for ever-

developing countries like ours is nothing but true commercialisation. The article reminded me of a recent dinner in which I was rubbing shoulders with prominent Nepalis. A doctor introduced himself with certain pride. An engineer was similarly proud to introduce himself. It was a business man's turn, and he slunk into the sofa and murmured something like "I do business." Such is the low self-esteem of our business community. In New Zealand a few years back the immigration officer at Auckland Airport asked a doctor ahead of me on the line what his purpose of visit was, and was not very happy to stamp entry permit on his passport. When my turn came, he asked the purpose of my visit. I said I was there to explore investment opportunities. The officer's face glowed and he promptly stamped the entry permit, adding with a smile "Welcome to New Zealand, sir!" Now, how many immigration officers at Kathmandu airport show this kind of gesture to potential foreign investors in Nepal?

Ananta Amatya, Dhobighat

KNOW THY ENEMY

I couldn't agree more with the thrust of your editorial ('A people's tsunami', #229) in which you ask the king, the Maoists and the political parties to recognise their enemies. It is the inability of all three to recognise their true adversaries that is at the heart of the problem. Even Mao Zedong realised this, and wrote in his little red book: 'Joining a revolution is not like going to a banquet...in a revolution you must know who is your friend and who is your enemy.'

Mrinal Kumar, email

PRINCELY

I am a regular reader of *Nepali Times* and once again would like to thank you for bringing concealed news items from the Nepali press to public notice like 'New year' from *Budhabar* weekly (From the Nepali Press, #229). I was taken aback reading the column even though the incident described seems to be a pretty common occurrence. I am a student of political science, and our last class before winter vacation was on 'justice'. There have been different definitions

given by thinkers, intellectuals, idealists, liberals though the ages. The ancient Greek had a satirical interpretation: 'Justice is the interest of the stronger.' This quite sums up the meaning of justice in modern Nepal. Where is the application of justice here? Are the rules and norms just applicable for the poor and weak classes of the society? Or is it that the prince's position makes all his actions virtuous? Anybody should understand that respect bought with money is not worth much.

Milan Gurung, email

MANMADE DISASTER

I fully agree with Kanak Mani Dixit's Southasia Beat column ('Other disasters', #228) in which he argues that manmade disasters are worse, and nature is actually kinder. The tsunami gives us the ideal opportunity to realise that natural disasters like the Gujarat earthquake and the tsunami would not kill so many people if we did not live in unsafe houses, along vulnerable coastlines and were more prepared for the aftermath. In



MADHUP SHARMA

neighbouring countries while Nepali forces systematically sanitise designated areas, augmentation of security manpower and air assets.

Should the government decide to declare a ceasefire, too, the Royal Nepali Army is fully trained to function accordingly due to its peacekeeping experience. The insurgency is stalemated, and it demands more seriousness from the Maoists for a credible ceasefire and a peaceful resolution. The current conflict must be seen as a part of the process of democratisation and the country's transformation into a liberal democracy. The nature of the policy determines the nature of war. Should the Maoists opt to continue imposing violence, it would be within the ambit of the government to escalate the application of force to bring them to the negotiating table. If absolute superiority is not possible, relative strength at a decisive moment with help from India to neutralise the allies of the opposing side would clinch the issue. ●

Excerpted from paper presented by Lt General (Retd) Sadip Bahadur Shah at a India-Nepal Track II conference in New Delhi last month.

Adding fuel to the fire

The cost of energy and the price of power

During a middle-class Nepali meal, a slice of lemon is first squeezed, dipped in dal, and then squeezed again. This process is repeated until the last drop of juice is squeezed out of the lemon. The UML has adopted this technique in ministries under its control to wring every benefit from them before being kicked out.

STATE OF THE STATE

CK Lal



The sugar-shortage during Dasain-Tihar, the Korean labour export fiasco, the mass transfers in ministry of health, and the tug-o-war over the Nepal Rastra Bank governor have all been coordinated from Balkhu to draw maximum advantage for UML cadre and coffers. Tuesday's hefty hike in fuel prices seems to have been designed to pre-empt the presentation of the half-yearly budget by ordinance,

and then offer sops later to derive political benefits.

The UML's high-wire walk of remaining in government while being critical of it has been an adroit balancing act. Alas, the gains may turn out to be illusory, if not harmful, in the long-term. By adding fuel to the fires of inflation, Minister of Commerce and Supplies Ishwar Pokhrel has started an inferno that comrade Bharat Mohan Adhikari in the finance ministry will not be able to control. It may turn out that the schemers in Balkhu have been too smart for their own good.

Obsessed with their own survival, comrades Adhikari and Pokharel have not seen the writing on the wall: despite a temporary spurt in revenue collection, the country's economy is in a tailspin. For the first time since the Indian economic blockade in the late-eighties,

Nepalis are losing hope of a revival. This has set off massive capital flight. Labour export has gone up, but the remittance flows are either stagnant or decreasing. This can mean only one thing: capital is leaving on the hundi channel.

The sagging national economy is even more visible in the preliminary data for the fiscal year's first quarter released by Nepal Rastra Bank. The state spend only Rs 825 million on development but regular expenditure during the same period crossed Rs 12 billion.

The agriculture sector is in triple jeopardy: the insurgency has hit harvests hard, the government has reduced investment and removed subsidies without offering any protection from cheap imports. Other than for subsistence, it makes no sense to farm in Nepal anymore.

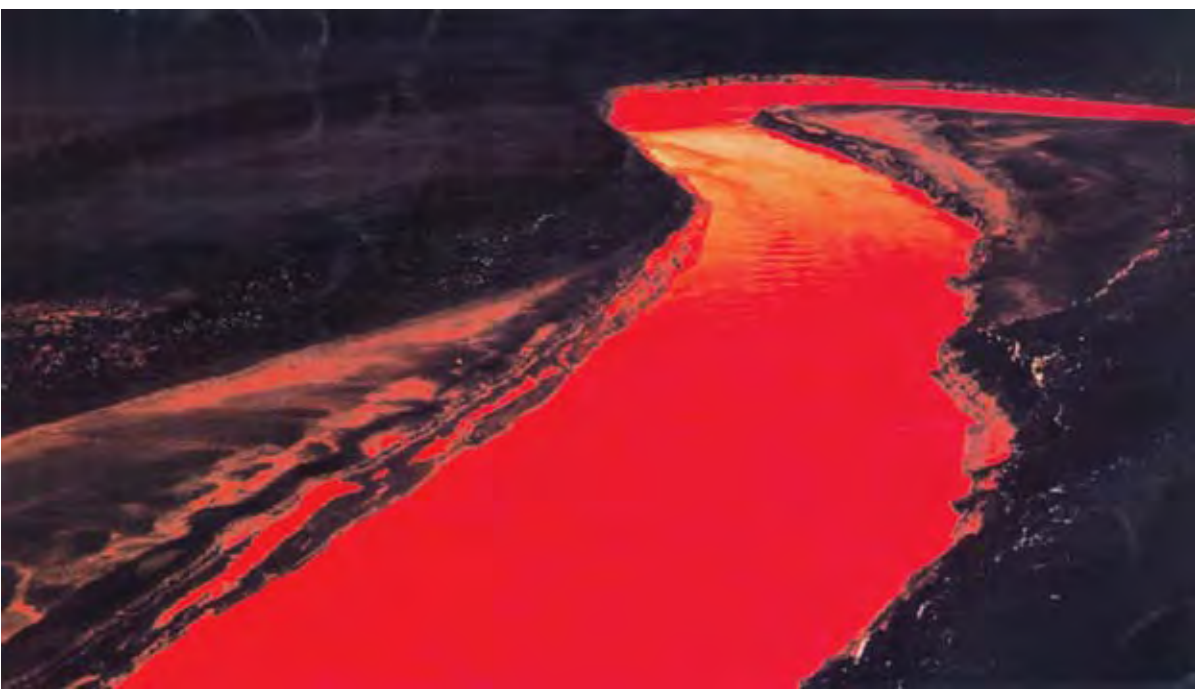
Tourism is limping along, but income is wilting. Visitors are now confined to the Lukla-Pokhara-Sauraha triangle, and even here frequent blockades and bandas have taken their toll. Undercutting is rife, and our tourist industry actually ends up subsidising the Nepal trip of most visitors. And the domestic airline industry is doing well for the wrong reason: road travel has become too hazardous.

Manufacturing isn't doing much better. Other than instant noodles, biscuits, cigarettes, and alcoholic beverages, most other industries are in trouble. The rebels have killed the goose that lays their golden eggs: businesses on which they

depend for extortion money have shut down because of the economic impact of their revolution. Infrastructure, which is the single largest employer in the organised sector, has already fallen prey to insecurity. The urban construction boom in Kathmandu Valley and a few safer towns in the tarai keep contractors partially occupied. But they are not big enough to sustain dozens of steel rolling mills and cement packaging factories.

The only sector doing well seems to be trading, which perhaps explains the rise in revenue collection from import duties. Intense competition between banks and low interest rates have been the engine of growth in trading, as people with secure income take on more debt to finance consumption. Car sales have gone up, and so has the market for consumer durables. But this segment is too small to make a dent in employment situation and consumption doesn't create a value-chain in Nepal because most of the items are imported.

If the present coalition is asked to leave after King Gyanendra's India visit next week, no tears will be shed. Nobody expected anything from premier Sher Bahadur Deuba anyway. But the Unified Marxists-Leninists squandered their political capital by wheeling-dealing just like the consummate capitalists in the reigning coalition. Its alternative vision of the economy has been the biggest casualty of the UML's association with Deuba opportunism. ●



addition, we have to take into account what we have done and are doing in the name of 'development'.

Natural disasters are devastating but we need to remind ourselves that we live at nature's mercy and should learn to respect her generosity in providing every kind of support that living creatures need. Neglecting this fact, human beings think themselves very powerful and try to fight nature and compete with it. Governments haven't learnt their lessons and design grand projects like India's river-linking project, construction of huge dams displacing tens of thousands in the name of infrastructure. We chop down trees and make our children grow up in concrete jungles. Maybe nature is just reminding us to be prepared for future manmade disasters and telling us to restore our harmony with the eco-system.

Bhawana Upadhyay, Anand, Gujarat

MANJUSHREE THAPA

Though her analysis on gay rights may have some merit ('Reverse

lens', #226), Manjushree Thapa needs to re-educate herself on the 'born dalit' issue. Being a column writer and supposedly an intellectual, she does not seem to get out of man-made caste systems. It should be clear to her mind that women are not man-made since they have same physical characteristics while the dalit system is the cruelty of Hinduism. If Manjushree is an intellectual, she needs greater understanding and confidence to analyse the inhuman discrimination inherent in our society.

Bhesh Bhandari, Australia

● As a person who has read Govinda Bartaman's *Sohra Sanjharu*, and treasure the experience of reading it, I was shocked by Manjushree Thapa's review of the book ('62 cups of tea', #224). 'Shocking' is the word Thapa uses when referring to the fact that Bartaman chronicles in his book his drinking of 62 cups of tea. 'What is shocking,' Thapa writes, 'is not that he had so much tea or cigarettes but he wrote about it in such detail.' I would ask Thapa: Since when has it become a bad thing to describe

mundane aspects of life—or, the coexistence of the mundane and the dramatic in our lives—in a work of literature? Bartaman's book is not only about the 'broken lives' of the people in war-torn western Nepal, whose suffering he so poignantly conveys. It is also about the travel that he and his friends undertook. The book gives an exceptionally compelling account of what it's like these days to travel from Kathmandu to western Nepal in search of an understanding of the effects of the conflict, and of what goes through the mind of a sensitive writer during such travel. The travel, as Bartaman precisely describes, does not consist exclusively of dramatic encounters with the 'wounds of the war'. It is also characterised by daily routines, indefinite waits, and idle talk with fellow travelers and shopkeepers. Thapa seems to be completely untouched by the hidden humour and pathos, backed by sharp insights into the characteristics of our time contained in the lighter passages of the book. Instead, she simply dismisses them as being 'goofy'. For some reason, Thapa, a

novelist herself, wants to see Bartaman's work reduced to a straightforward reportage with a simple political message. This I find shocking. It just may be the case that Thapa, as a particular kind to contemporary writer, sees no value in the search for ontological truths through explorations of both lyrical and prosaic aspects of our experience. Perhaps Thapa also gets bored reading Flaubert or James Joyce. I suppose she, personally, has a right to feel that way. But I believe most ordinary readers like myself would enjoy Bartaman's work in its entirety, as a work of literature, and be deeply grateful to him for producing a compelling portrait of, and helping us try to recognise, the historical moment in which we live.

Tatsuro Fujikura, Lalitpur

DV VICTIMS

Although Kunda Dixit in *Under My Hat* pokes fun at the diversity visa rejects protesting in the streets of Kathmandu ('Demos we'd like to see in our cracy', #229) it is deadly serious issue. I can't understand why we are so desperate to come to America. Yes, we are facing serious

hardships because of the Maoist crisis, but why don't we think about the problems here in America: no sense of family, alienation, discrimination and many more. We only think about America's dollars, good life but tuun a blind eye to other problems. We will be lot happier if we try to solve the problems facing our country and stay in our country. Fleeing to America is not a solution.

Bhumika Ghimire, Florida, USA

HERO IN ISTANBUL

While walking the ancient waterfront of Istanbul on new years day, I spotted a familiar image. Was our beloved Herojig on vacation too, or is he an archetype? Maybe there's a little Herojig in all of us.

John Child, Kathmandu



JOHN CHILD

Nepalis go underground

PRANAV BUDATHOKI
in LONDON

From years of poverty in Butwal to a pitiable livelihood in East London. From a respected teaching job in Pulchok Engineering Campus to a tatty shelf-stacking job in Reading. From a threadbare existence in Nepal to England and beyond. Many Nepalis in the UK have done well for themselves as doctors, bankers and managers. But there is a whole population of forgotten Nepalis in Britain's migrant netherworld.

Bikram Ale came to England six years ago and has been working in a London hotel as a barman ever since. Badri Bastakoti got a Chevening Scholarship for postgraduate studies and is now working in a bakery shop in Reading City. A former assistant dean at Pulchok Engineering College now stacks grocery store shelves. These are some of the more decent jobs Nepali illegal migrant workers can get in Britain these days.

Students come to England, get enrolled in phoney colleges that sell documents and certificates and go to work full time. Hundreds of others clean hospital lavatories and the truly wretched ones who come in via the package

service of human traffickers and end up applying for asylum, disappear into the underground economy.

At any given time 600,000 illegal migrant workers are estimated to be working in the UK, most have fled desperate economic conditions back home, some have run away from political persecution. But it is getting harder and harder to tell the difference. Across Europe, the phenomenon has hardened attitudes towards foreign workers with headlines like 'Europe under Siege' in Britain's tabloids. Middle England is convinced asylum seekers and illegal workers are taking away their jobs and benefits.

For a country struggling to keep its young employed, and paying pensions for the growing ranks of the elderly, illegal labour is becoming a political hot potato. Cheap migrant workers play a vital part in the British economy, doing work locals wouldn't do and for much less. At 2.50 pounds an hour, the underground economy adds an estimated five percent to Britain's GDP, according to a BBC estimate. Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown even bases his growth forecasts on the current, unprecedented rates of migrant labour.

"The black economy involving illegal migrant



workers is no longer in the periphery, it is in the mainstream of our economy," says Harriet Sergeant of the Centre for Policy Studies. They number in the millions and fill the chronic shortage of manpower in the agricultural, manufacturing and catering sectors. The British state provides them with nothing, and they work for a pittance, often below the national average of 4.50 pounds per hour. They help keep the wages down, while paying VAT like

everyone else.

The migrant labour force has become the lifeblood of hotels and hospitals throughout Britain. In Peterborough, illegal farmhands working below minimum wage for Indian gangmasters dig for onions. Some 30 Chinese illegal workers smuggled into Britain by snakehead gangs from Fujian were caught in a tidal bore in Morecambe Bay while picking cockles last February, 20 drowned. The restaurant

business is swarming with illegal workers, most of them are South Asians and Chinese. There are some 8,000 plus Indian restaurants, half of them located in London. But crackdowns in the cities are pushing many illegal workers to rural areas.

As elsewhere, Nepalis flock to where there is already a concentration of fellow Nepalis, leading to a build-up of little Nepals up and down the country. They intermingle only with fellow Nepalis or other

The world moves on

Compassion slips away to be held in reserve for the next tragedy

GALLE, Sri Lanka — Enroute from the horror of it all, a pause to reflect on how quickly the world moves on. For a week or so after 26 December 2004, it seemed as if tsunamis and their devastation were all we knew. Vicariously, through television and tragically, through first hand experience, the world's people came to fear their planet and its wrath.

Drawn to disaster and needing to earn a living, I flew from the far side of the globe to join the gabble of

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



puzzled, shocked and horrified media voices. Safely ensconced in business class and nibbling on smoked salmon or some such luxury, I wondered if I was doing the right thing. If getting the information out about suffering and loss was useful or mere voyeurism.

But on the ground, no time for such thoughts. There was work to do. Huge amounts of it. The heroic efforts of humanitarians shone at first and the stunned government agencies eventually got their acts together. Communities that had lost almost everything nevertheless found reserves of strength.

In Galle, Sri Lanka, a jeweller whose entire stock had disappeared when the

waves crashed through his shop was feeding villagers who'd lost even more. His house was open to visiting doctors. Muslim mullahs, Buddhist monks and Christian nuns ran ecumenical relief centres, all were welcome. Villagers whose houses still stood helped devastated neighbours clear debris and bury the dead. An Israeli psychiatrist lead Sri Lankan students in trauma counselling camps, encouraging survivors to rebuild their networks of community, faith and commerce. Austrian soldiers ferried children to clinics, British sailors rebuilt fishing boats.

India's aid effort was more

indigenous but equally energetic. The middle classes from outside the affected areas were generous, sometimes overly so, but always willing to lend a hand or send whatever was needed. Schools skipped spending money on new uniforms or excursions to send rupees to the Indian Red Cross. A few politicians, not many but a few, gave up a day's salary, as did India's president. All in a good cause, a great cause, an irresistible cause.

But now, nearly three weeks on, we're getting on with life, in the hardhit coastal areas and elsewhere. America is back to politics as usual. The Canadians are debating a stolen ice hockey jersey. The British prime minister and his

finance minister are feuding, as before. Germany is deep in angst about its waning economic miracle and the French are, well, doing whatever it is they do.

It's not that the forces of good within those countries aren't still helping tsunami survivors and beleaguered South Asian governments. They are. Debt relief has been promised and aid continues to flow. Never mind that neither promise has been lived up to in past humanitarian disasters. Let's hope the media holds good intentions to account this time.

But even in the affected countries, people are moving on. Schools are reopened, television chat shows are back to blathering about local celebrities and various daily ephemera is filling the public spaces of the nation.

Meanwhile, at the fringes of fading consciousness, a million or more devastated lives recede into the shadows. For once, tragedy united denizens of wealthy countries with the world's subsistence majority. Tourists and holiday makers perished and were blighted by the waves, just as the fisher folk were. It must be devastating for the bereaved and the traumatised to see compassion fade into context, then slip away to be held in reserve for the next tragedy.

But it's the only way we can cope. ●



in Britain

Divided and exploited, desperate Nepalis work illegally in Britain's migration netherworld

South Asians. The educated young work as waiters in Indian and Bangladeshi eateries. Those with poor English skills throng restaurant kitchens. And the rest (like newly married women who come to England as spouses of 'students') end up cleaning hospital facilities.

The Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading City alone employs over 100 Nepalis, mostly women, as cleaners. "The number could be anywhere up to 150 people. And that is just one little hospital in the south of England," says Krishna Dhakal, a registered 'full-time student' in a computer training institute who works 70 hours a week as a cleaner in the hospital.

Due to the lack of legal protection and official recognition, the newly arrived illegal Nepalis have no option but to seek integration into their own close-knit community. "The space to manoeuvre in British society is nonexistent when you are a Nepali, especially when you expect to start a new life in

England based on who you know rather than what you know", says Subindra Bogati, a documentary film maker and international relations scholar.

For a greenhorn like Krishna Dhakal, there is little else to do than follow 'what everyone does', register for a course in a shady college like University Tutorial College in Reading City that charges 500 pounds a year and sells enrolment papers, get the visa extended as a student and keep working in a hospital without going to college in the hope of striking it rich some day.

The idea of ethnic integration that Tony Blair's liberal left government tries so hard to apply couldn't be more remote in this underground migrant community. A Pakistani sticks with Pakistanis, a Bengali will not have anything to do with the rest, the Indians do not venture anywhere else other than their restaurants and their ramshackle houses. The Nepalis are busy eking out a living but still have time to backbite and categorise themselves just as they do back home even though they are all

in the same boat, being exploited by gangmasters.

Reading City's 500 plus Nepalis have set up two separate communities segregated along ethnic lines. As with other South Asians, ethnic division seems to become more pronounced when abroad. Bahuns, Chhetris and Newars celebrated Dasain with the Reading Nepali Society UK and the rest (mainly Rais and Gurungs) bond together in the Tamaudhi Reading Nepali Society.

Marko Bojcun, professor and expert in east-west migration patterns in Western Europe says, "When you don't know what your rights as a migrant worker are, you get tossed and kicked around, exploited and oppressed." Kamal Bastola, a Jhapa resident guts ducks for Peter Ricketts, an infamous gangmaster in Norfolk. He works 16 hour shifts, bent double. He paid Rs 600,000 to a human trafficker in Maharajganj to get smuggled into the UK via Saudi Arabia and Algeria. The final stretch was a horrendous ordeal in which he had to travel as a stowaway in a freight train



across France.

Immigrant hotspots like Reading and Norfolk are under constant surveillance by the Home Office. But with only 193 full-time immigration enforcement officers, the ministry is overstretched to crush the network of traffickers and illegal farmhand employers. The government is all too aware of the ground situation, but seems to be able to do little more than get the media to accompany them on occasional immigration raids.

Meanwhile in farms, factories, hotels and hospitals across Britain, South Asians refuse to talk to each other, let alone integrate into British society. Indians continue to dig dikes and work in hideous factories for less than 2.50 pounds an hour. Pakistanis are actively setting up corner shops and grocery stores in their own ghettos. Bengalis are busy importing brides. And Nepalis stick to their own divided ethnicities, while working at Indian restaurants. ●

International certification for forests

Nepal's community forests have been awarded an international certification for sustainable extraction of herbal and medicinal products.

The Rainforest Alliance is to award the first community based non-timber forest products certification in Asia to the Federation of Community Forestry Users of Nepal (FECOFUN) whose members supply herbal products to the international market.

The Forestry Stewardship Council certification will help stem the destruction of herbal products in the Himalaya and the exploitation of villagers who extract them. Eleven community forest user groups in Bajhang and Dolakha covering 10,500 hectares of community forests will get the certification.

Letter to Prachanda

Amnesty International (AI) has written an open letter to Prachanda sharply criticising his party's human rights violations, including the recent attack on civilians in Dailekh. In the letter to the Maoist supremo on 12 January, AI has asked the Maoists to investigate all cases of human rights abuse by its cadre. The London-based group has listed a series of killings, abductions and torture committed by the rebels. It also urged the Maoist leadership not to recruit and use children in conflict in any way.

Gurkha pay, pension revision

The Gurkha Army Ex-servicemen Organisation (GAESO) has said the British government's decision to review pay and pensions of recruits as a victory. British Defense Minister Geoff Hoon on Tuesday informed the British parliament that Gurkha pay, pension and other benefits of Nepali soldiers in the British Army were being reviewed.

After years of legal battles, GAESO believes the posture of the British government is an indication that the Gurkhas will now be treated at par with their British counterparts. The organisation said it was all set to go to a British court late last year when the British government asked it to wait.

Hits Day

Hits FM is holding its eighth Music Award 2061 at the BICC on Friday and the event will be televised live on Ntv from 4PM onwards. The number of categories have gone up to 19 and nominations are based on listeners' preferences and evaluated by an independent panel. The categories include: Best New Artist, Best Female Vocal Performance Pop, Best Male Vocal Performance Pop, Best Performance by Group or Duo with Vocal, Best Rock Composition, Best Pop composition, Best composition, Best Music Video, Best Vocal Collaboration, Best Female Vocal Performance, Best Male Vocal Performance, Best Song Originally Recorded for Motion Picture Soundtrack, Folk Record of the Year, Folk Album of the Year, Best Song in Foreign Language, Song of the Year, Album of the Year, Record of the Year and the Lifetime Achievement Award. Popular musicians such as 1974 AD have performed live at the Awards before. For this year's performances, see *Nepali Times* #229, the list is in no particular order.

बजारमा उपलब्ध छ ।



हिमाल

खबरपत्रिका



हिंसा टुङ्ग्याउने उपाय



ग्राहक सेवा: ०१-५५४३३३३

War victims left to

Families have not just to overcome the shock of bereavement, but also struggle against hunger

INDRA DHOJ KSHETRI in CHITWAN

Khem Bahadur Khatri was killed in a security force encounter on 31 July at Bairiya in Chitwan. Human rights organisations which investigated the case certified he was not a Maoist combatant, but more than six months later his family has received no compensation.

Khem Bahadur left behind nine dependents. On top of the shock of the losing their sole breadwinner, they have had to struggle to survive from one day to the next. Khem Bahadur's elderly parents, his two widows and five children have been surviving on nettle and cattle feed. Some days, even that is not there and the family goes to bed hungry.

Khem Bahadur married his second wife, Kopila, as is the custom in some of these remote villages in Chitwan, two months before he was killed. She gave birth to their son on 28 December, and looks frail and malnourished. "She should be eating food to restore her health but we don't have anything, just dhindo," says Kopila's mother-in-law.

Khem Bahadur's first wife, Krishnamati, had also given birth to a boy last month and she is worried about both Kopila's

and her own health. The family lives in Shaktikhor and don't even know how to go about it. Luckily, a charity is now helping them but the need is great and the help is not enough.

As the only man in the family, the responsibility now rests on Khem Bahadur's father, Gagan Bahadur Khatri. "I am old, at a time when others are supposed to take care of me, I have to handle five children 15 days old to nine years, two widows and my elderly wife, how can I do it?" Gagan Bahadur tells us, fighting back tears.

Gam Bahadur Moktan was killed in a security force action in May in Lothar in eastern Chitwan. He has also left behind his wife and four children aged four to 12. The family's ancestral farm only yields enough food to feed the family for three months in a year. Besides, there is no one now to plough the fields. Gam Bahadur's wife, Sita Maya, tried

to earn money carrying firewood and working as a porter to feed her children. "Sometimes, there is no work and we all go hungry," she says. Even though her husband was not a Maoist, she has not received compensation because the state regards him as a 'terrorist'.

No one offered sympathy until a charity working with war victims, JMC Nepal, came to help. For families of those killed like Khem Bahadur and Gagan Bahadur, the organisation has become a lifeline. The organisation is also helping send the orphaned children to school, but the immediate needs are those of food and survival. In Chitwan alone, there are so many families that need help that much more assistance is required. Every day that the conflict drags on the misery throughout the country is multiplied. ●

Khem Bahadur's children, mother and first wife, Krishnamati (right) and his second wife, Kopila with her 15-day-old son (overleaf).



Bull by the horns

A short manual on how to earn holy brownie points by rescuing Kathmandu's abandoned street cattle

For those of us living in the Kingdom, the sight of a wandering ox is no big deal, unless of course you have been stalled in traffic at Chabahil Chok for the past 15 minutes, waiting for the resident bull to finish his brunch.

In its female avatar, the holy animal is worshipped as the embodiment of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity. But sometimes when one sees a local shop owner dousing a cow with hot water, in order to rid himself of the chore of cleaning cowdung from the pavement, one wonders. The other day, when a local water truck slammed into a calf and sped off in the middle of the night, one wondered again about the

ANIMAL KINGDOM
Jiggy Gaton

spirituality of the driver. But such is the life of Kathmandu's street cattle.

Personally, I admire the practice of letting cows run free on the streets. Better off there than where I hail from, where cows are raised in tiny pens and turned into burgers behind closed doors. Still, there are accidents and abuse, even in the Kingdom of Nepal, and our cows need help. Despite strict punishment to drivers that collide with street fauna (and probably because of it) there are quite a few hit-and-run cases where urban livestock have to live with serious wounds. Many are left to rot on the side of the road. So for all of us, here is a short user's manual on how to save a cow:

1. If you see a cow in trouble, don't ignore the problem. It is not about to go away.
2. Enlist the help of others, as cows are generally heavy things and cannot be lifted into a rescue vehicle alone.
3. Secure adequate transportation. A Maruti taxi won't do as the cows won't fit in the back seat. A flatbed truck with folding sides works best. Offer the driver expenses as petrol is becoming harder and harder to find these days.
4. Using a blanket or other strong material as a makeshift gurney and gently roll the cow into it. Then, with six or more helpers, lift the cow into the vehicle using the blanket. Sometimes cows use their god-like prerogative to struggle or bellow but don't be dissuaded, as talking calmly to the cow in Nepali and being firm will do the trick. (However, do stay clear of flailing horns and hooves.)
5. Transport the injured or sick cow to the SPCAN Veterinary Hospital in Sifal. A veterinarian will be called and the cow will be cared for. Now you can relax, knowing you have done a deed that will have the gods eternally shining down their appreciation on your kind soul. So that's how it's done, not a big deal really. But for Lakshmi who got caught on the wrong end of a water tanker the other day, it was a life-saving event.

The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals-Nepal has opened a shelter in Sifal where sick and injured animals are cared for by your donations. 01-4467953

www.animalnepal.org
animalnepal@hotmail.com



An alternative

Fed up with the real courts, women appear before

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

If it hadn't been for the Maoist insurgency, the problem of violence against women in Nepal would have been a national issue.

But worried by the prevalence of abuse, activists and women's groups are trying to spread awareness even though it is overshadowed by the conflict. They are convinced that talking openly about abuse, as they did in a unique 'Women's Court' in Kathmandu recently, is the first step in empowering women and ensuring legal reform.

The 'court' sessions lasted three days at the Royal Nepal Academy with dozens of women narrating the pain and agony of violence they had to undergo at the hands of family members

and others. Their experience left the audience and jury stunned.

Most of the women were victims of trafficking, some had suffered domestic violence and a few had been physically tortured by soldiers or rebels in the conflict.

"My husband suspects I am having an affair at an age when I have grandchildren," related Alainchi Bika from Sindhupalchok. "He beats me up every day and wants me to leave him. Where do I go at this age?" Such marital abuse is not new in Nepal, what is new is that Bika stood in front of hundreds of people and publicly related her suffering.

A while later, Anandi Rai got up and narrated her suffering from the same stage, proving the point that not all abuse is physical. "It has been more than 10 years since I was rescued from a brothel in India but people still

treat me like an outcast," she said softly.

Astika Thapa from Nuwakot was not able to speak clearly when she stood on the stage. All she could say was, "I have been severely beaten on my head and I can't remember things," she said, flustered.

The Women's Court was organised by a consortium of women's groups working on reducing violence against women, who felt that most Nepali women are now willing to share their experiences as a means of unburdening themselves and also to build up solidarity. Aside from individual experience, the organisers concluded that the root causes of the violence are faulty laws.

"The Women's Court clearly showed that all discriminatory laws including constitutional

Variation orders

The Nepal Electricity Authority is sitting on a recommendation by a committee that probed the financial irregularity in the payments to the civil contractor of the Kali Gandaki A hydropower project. The committee submitted its report to the NEA management a few weeks ago, a source told us: "Management has not acted according to the report."

An NEA official said the report has been kept in deep freeze, but management could not be reached for comment. The authority paid \$50 million as cost overrun to Kali Gandaki's Italian civil contractor Impregilo SpA without getting clearance from the NEA board. Both the contractor and Kali Gandaki officials blamed geological and political complications for the over-runs.

The NEA initially estimated that the civil construction of the 144MW hydroelectric project would cost \$130 million but demanded an extra \$55 million as variation order. The authority and the Italian contractor are also wrangling over an earlier \$5 million payment. NEA officials say the Fidic contract it signed with the contractor requires it to pay whatever variation order the contractor claims. The NEA board launched an investigation but officials said the report of the probe committee is gathering dust at the NEA.

Standard meet



The 18th Annual General Meeting of Standard Chartered Bank Nepal Limited convened on 7 January at the BICC announcing good overall performance for the year ending 15 July 2004. The payment of 110 percent dividend to shareholders was approved and there have been significant changes in the share ownership and the board.

Destination Malaysia



Even though northwest peninsular Malaysia was affected by last month's Asian tsunami, things are getting back to normal according to Malaysian tourism authorities. All air, sea, rail and road gateways into Malaysia have begun functioning. The tsunami that hit Penang and Langkawi were secondary hits, unlike the waves that crashed on other shores. International hotels on the beaches of Penang and Langkawi have professional bodyguards and a baywatch system, which provided sufficient warning, resulting in low casualties.

NEW PRODUCTS



SAMSUNG SINGS ANEW: Samsung electronics through its distributor, Hansraj Hulaschand & Co, launched the latest DVD Audio Line up for 2005. These systems are in the micro and mini segments in various models. They have features such as DivX and Qmp compatibility. MAX DJ 750, MAX DJ 550, MAX DJ8, MM-DS80 are some of the models that cost within the range of Rs 19,000 to 33,500. All systems carry a one-year warranty and are available at all authorised Samsung outlets.



BIG LITTLE BROTHER: The new Hyundai Tucson is here after its European unveiling at the Geneva Motor Show and its international debut at the Detroit Auto Show. The Tucson features a spacious, well-configured interior with a folding front passenger seat and fold-flat rear seats. Two versions are available in Tucson namely GL and GLS. Both feature Hyundai's proven 2.0 litre CRDi 4-cylinder Diesel engine fitted with Continuously Variable Valve Timing (CVVT) matched to a five-speed manual transmission or available Shiftronic automatic transmission. Four-wheel-drive is available in both the versions. Now if only we could get the highways to open.

It's the economy, ulu

Let's keep politics out of it

We couldn't understand the economic problems of Nepal's far-flung areas so we politicised it. The result is a conflict that shows no sign of ceasing. We wanted to give the country's economy the

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed



best person to lead as chief of its central bank but the appointment is mired in politics.

We make political decisions while changing heads of state enterprises and let the

decisions. The current coalition government, like its predecessors, is the perfect example. You have one set of people in the party that will constantly and consistently talk about withdrawing from the government while the other set sits in to make hay while the sun shines.

Passing scathing remarks, they let their affiliated organisations rise in agitation while they pretend to be clean. Everyone in the coalition is out to make a quick buck as long as it lasts. And this is a great time to rake it in: no parliamentary accounts committee to

that create jobs and keep the consumer happy drives the economy. The IT and outsourcing boom in India has created a whole new class of people who are driving the new economy. The reason it is thriving is because politics is kept out of it.

In Nepal, the presence of multilateral and bilateral agencies along with numerous non-profit organisations have not served the purpose of delineation. Aid is about assisting the economy, not crippling it. The way it has politics at the user's end has complicated matters.



RAM HUMAGAIN

organisations bleed to death. We use every opportunity to hit back at political foes and educate students to vandalise and destroy property clearly knowing that oil or electricity prices are pure economics. Irrespective of any political force in power, they cannot stem price hikes. We, as businesses, lobby politically to make loan defaulting kosher. We have a management association headed by the prime minister's wife that has little to do with corporate management cadre.

Political parties need to fuel their own cash flows and there is nothing like leveraging economic policies and

scrutinise them, no public inquiry into expenditures, budgets are ordained by ordinances...it can't get any better than this. With the anti-graft body having figured out which side of their momos have the achar, political parties are rocking big time. And of course those not involved in all this are crying foul. They want their chance too. Set up an all-party government and this will not change.

The more delineated politics is from economics, the better are benefits to citizens. Enterprises should drive the economic and not political masters. Innovative businesses

Politicians use donor or not-for-profit money for their own gain rather than what it was meant for. Unaccounted money always leads to unaccountable applications.

Out political button-pushers must be alienated from economic institutions, be it the central bank or the oil corporation. Enterprises and entrepreneurs should be driving the economy at the village and transnational level. If Nepal is looking for a long-term solution to the conflict and not a short-term ceasefire, we need to understand where politics ends and economics begins. ●

Along with your status, skill and determination, please don't forget to bring sense of humor



Its golf alright, but the rules tie you up in knots. If you finish overplay, you'll definitely have to hit the bar and buy a drink. If you finish underpar you'll still have to hit the bar but the drink in on us. Each team will comprise of 4 players .

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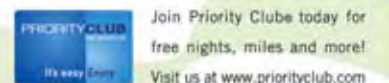
Date: 29 Jan, 2005 (Saturday)

Time: 10:30 am

Venue: Front lawn, Soaltee Crown Plaza.



THE PLACE TO MEET.



IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE KATHMANDU POST





ALL PICS: MIN BAJRACHARYA

Dining out in style

It's not just what you eat but where and who you eat it with

AARTI BASNYAT

It is said there are two kinds of people: those who live to eat and those who eat to live. In the first category are those for whom partaking of food is not just the physical act of chewing and swallowing but a ritual of companionship and camaraderie. So it is not just what you eat, but where and who you eat it with.

Ever since the hippie era, Kathmandu has evolved a cosmopolitan range of eateries. With boutique restaurants the Valley's cuisine is now entering a new era. As the world grows

smaller and horizons expand, Kathmanduites are exposed to various new genres of music, art and culture. With this expansion, their culinary tastes have also diversified. Nepalis are exploring beyond dal bhat and alu tama into salmon, pasta and steak.

It has become important for good food to be served in an ambience that gets the diners into the right mood. Boutique restaurants are not just about being expensive or exclusive but about maintaining the quality and dignity in food and

décor. The size of the restaurant is another factor: most occupy a cosy and homely space.

Price is not the issue here. Most managers of boutique restaurants in Kathmandu say their clients are looking for the ambience and company and are willing to pay more for the right mix. Kunal Lama of café Mitra says, "When people walk into my café they know they will be treated well and the décor itself tells them that it will be a little more expensive than regular restaurants. But

we guarantee satisfaction and a great experience overall."

The market has expanded to include restaurants that not only provide great service but also specialise in exclusive Italian, Malaysian, Chinese and even Nepali tastes.

Chandan Kayastha of La Dolce Vita says, "It's better to specialise in one thing and be very good at it than put everything from Mexican to Indian on the menu till it ends up being a hotchpotch." He maintains that it is possible to run a restaurant based on one

cuisine especially if the quality of food products is good.

In this exclusive arena of great food and good service, restaurant owners all over Kathmandu are learning the art of fine culinary tastes matched with an aesthetically appealing environment with which to please their clients. It is an upcoming business which will add sophistication to the tastes of the Nepali palate as well as provide cosmopolitan food for tourists should they want a taste of home. Or other people's homes. ●



La Dolce Vita

Probably the best ristorante Italiano in Thamel, it was established in 1986 by an Italian but is now run by the Roadhouse group and redecorated. Comprising of three floors with a restaurant, an espresso bar and a terrace, the food here is più romantico in una città romantica. The pasta is homemade or imported and the spices used are from Nepal. Though the cooks are Nepalis, they get on-the-job refresher courses regularly from Italian professionals. The prices are reasonable and worth it. Guests are mostly regulars who have grown used to the excellent service and delicious food. La Dolce Vita is featured in Lonely Planet and has a quick turnaround budget lunch involving a 10" pizza and Coke for only Rs 125.

Jalan Jalan

Jalan Jalan is the new Malaysian restaurant that recently opened next to Bluebird Department Store at Lajimpat. Catering to people who want exclusively Malaysian food, the proprietor, Shailesh Bhatta says, "There are many restaurants in Nepal but none that caters exclusively to Malaysian food." Those familiar with Malay cuisine will find all the familiar aroma and tastes of the peninsula, with a choice of degree of spiciness in the food from mild, middle to spicy. Bhatta's mother, Ganga, who worked as a chef in Malaysia for 12 years manages the kitchen. The prices are promotional and the restaurant hopes to attract middle class Nepalis. Real coconut and authentic spices especially flown in are used here.



The Chimney

The Chimney at Hotel Yak and Yeti was first conceived by the legendary Russian resident of Kathmandu, Boris Lissanovitch. In fact, even the name 'Yak & Yeti' was his invention and he started a bar by that name at what used to be the Royal Hotel in 1969. The original copper chimney from that bar was brought over to the new Yak & Yeti Hotel when it opened in the early 1980s and that is where the restaurant derives its name. The menu tries to keep the original Boris touch with his signature specialities including the borscht which hits the spot on cold winter nights. Boris was a famous ballet dancer, big game hunter, master chef entrepreneur and entertainer of royalty. Legend has it that mountaineers on their way back from expeditions even used the chimney as a climbing wall. The Chimney's warm fireplace and sumptuous food recreates a bygone era. Sorry, climbing the chimney is not allowed anymore.



Zen café

The Zen café is appropriately located next to the Buddha Art Gallery and used to be known as one of the more expensive eating places when established with a limited menu and specialised teas. Now the management has decided to revamp the place with a menu that is more extensive than expensive. Continental food with free Internet, the Zen promotes good food and art. Besides the Buddha Art Gallery, it hosts classical performances every Saturday from 5PM and plans to have Irish and other traditional bands performing soon. With a lounge environment and a big screen tv, seating is limited. Plans include addition of a cocktail bar. A delightful feature of the Zen café are free refills of tea or coffee. They are also open to the idea of catering for seminars or parties for which they open their terrace.

Krishnarpan

Krishnarpan Restaurant at Dwarika's has become a must-see for expats and tourists. Even locals who can eat dal bhat at home find its spread and service exquisite. The menu is fixed and has set new standards for dining in style. Once you make a reservation and it is preferred that you do, customers get personalised menus with their names on it. The menu is fixed and ranges from a six-course dinner to a whopping 22-course one depending on the client's appetite. The experience is thoroughly Newari and the restaurant's décor and floor seating reflect this. The menu is designed to include food items from all Nepali cultures, from Newari to Tibetan food. There is a special price for Nepalis at Rs 999 for the six-course meal.



Café Mitra

Established in September 2002, Café Mitra launched its bar lounge a year later. The café retains the integrity of the 75-year-old Newari building it occupies while creating a colourful retro ambience inside. Though many customers call the cuisine a 'fusion', Kunal Lama, the proprietor maintains that this is not so. Coming from an hotelier background, when he studied hotel management from Switzerland, it was only normal for Lama to open a restaurant after he returned to Kathmandu. Customers at Café Mitra are a pleasant mix of tourists, residential expats and Nepalis. Lama says that customers are usually friends and if they aren't, they become friends through repeated visits to the restaurant hence the name, Café Mitra. The menu here is limited but everything on it has been approved by the management and is changed according to the preference of the customers. Café Mitra insists on consistency and is proud of the fact that everything on the menu is always available.

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ECH/04D/DABURVATIKA/75/04

Baburam writes

Letter from Baburam Bhattarai in *Samaya*, 7 January

समय

In the short time that *Samaya* took to establish itself, one of its pieces, 'Gadari ko Lahar' (Trail of betrayal) caught my attention. I am not in a position to state how far the facts in the article are true or false. Since Lenin's time, communist parties have followed the tradition of forbidding comrades from making internal discussions public. Until the 10th Convention of Russian Communist Party in 1921 Lenin allowed party factions to disseminate information on their own. But after that the party only put out an agreed line. Under Stalin, a strong tradition developed in which no cadre was in a position to air party differences in public. That tradition has carried on to this day in communist parties.

As a party member, I am not in a position to express any opinion in public. But it gives every right and responsibility to defend in public false things written about me. The *Samaya* piece says: "Most senior (Maoist) activists who surrendered were those on Bhattarai's side." I don't think anyone who has known me closely during my 27 years of political life and 24 years in the Communist Party would characterise me as a leader of surrenderees. Noone except those who join a revolutionary movement out of rage or emotion ever quit. Those who deeply understand the meaning of revolution and translate those values into their purpose in life will ever be lured away. Such individuals will be communists all their lives. It makes no sense associating me with those who have quit the party. It has become a routine task for the royal army to assassinate my character. The royalists have been especially hard on me since my writeup about the palace massacre. I know the royalists were unable to digest my presence during the last peace talks. But what I don't understand is how eminent journalists are unable to report facts. I urge journalists not to deal such serious issues with frivolity but to employ their pens on the behalf of truth.



Yubaraj Ghimire in *Samaya*, 13 January

समय

In Baburam Bhattarai's letter, one can see original thinking on the differences between principle and practical matters, the existence of minority and defeated factions in the present conditions and the practice of Janabaad within the CPN Maoist. What is important is the fact that Prachanda, the party's chairman allowed the letter to be published. Bhattarai, right now is not a thinker, he has become Comrade Laldhoj because of his commitment to communist philosophy and tradition. That is why he is not a leader now but a follower. After his line was defeated or fell into the minority during the plenum four months ago, he gave himself up to the majority's decision—the campaign for military offensives and a strategic offensive. So what is Bhattarai's line and how is it different from Comrade Badal's line? Logically, Bhattarai would have been for ending the conflict through effective talks. If the Maoists' present majority line does not produce desired results by March, the party may go back to the minority line. But this presupposes that hardliners in the party leadership show the same patience and character that Bhattarai has since the plenum.

Talk, or else

Information Minister Mohammad Mohsin in *Bimarsha*, 7 January

तियारा

"The 13 January deadline for the Maoists to come for talks is not the government's ultimatum. It is the government's compulsion. The compulsion is based on the responsibility the government was given at its formation. When Sher Bahadur Deuba was appointed prime minister more than seven months ago, he was given the responsibility to form a government including all sides, maintain law and order and begin the election process of the House of Representatives by the end of this Nepali year. We still hope that the rebels will come for talks. That is why the government has been reiterating its appeal. The rebels have been creating obstacles by saying that they will hold talks only with the king. Under what provision of the constitution can the king hold talks with the rebels? The rebels have not yet made their strategy clear on why would they like to hold talks with the king directly. Surely, they would like to alleviate their stature by holding talks with the king. Otherwise, why should they balk at talks with the government? The king has declared that the present government does have executive powers. The government has not removed the terrorist tag and the red corner notice because the rebels have shown no sign of holding talks. As soon as they indicate that they are ready for talks, the government will remove the tags. As per the Maoists' demand for a constituent assembly, how can the government that was sworn in under the present constitution accept it? Accepting constituent assembly would mean trashing the present constitution. Can the government do that? But since the government has said it will discuss all the issues raised by the rebels, the issue of constituent assembly can also be discussed during peace talks."

Now, army blockade

Dristi, 11 January

दृष्टि

DANG—The Maoists and the security force are taking turns to disrupt life here. The security forces have blockaded the roads as a retaliatory strategy against the Maoists. The rebels barred buses from Salyan going to Rukum after many villagers used the route to escape forced recruitment by Maoists in road construction gangs. The Maoists desperately need the villagers to dig the Rolpa roads. The villagers are now forced to use only the Rukum-Rolpa route. Buses can travel only till Lanti Bajar of Salyan. To make the situation worse, the security forces have started blocking buses travelling to Salyan from Kapurkot. Most buses have stopped operating from Dang. "If the Maoists won't allow free movement of buses, we will do the same. If you can't travel all the way through Salyan, it's better to stop here," an army personnel explained to a bus driver. The people from Rukum and Salyan have been hit hardest by this edict. Essential supplies like rice grains, salt and others have not reached villages. It became much worse after the rebels removed markets near the villages of the two districts. The Maoists have announced that buses travelling from Dang to Shantinagar, Panchakule, Purandhara and Bagmare VDCs will be given permission only after they register with the people's government and pay taxes. On the other hand, the security forces have warned bus entrepreneurs that action will be taken against them if they pay taxes and register with the Maoists. "We are caught in the middle between these gun-toting armies?" say the people.

forests themselves after the security force vacated the area due to the Maoists. "Now that there is no program, the conservation done at the consumers' level will also be affected," says the chairman of the proposed buffer zone development council Santosh Shrestha.

Community forest users' groups, small scale loan and cooperatives institutions, and other local groups have all united to demand the reinstatement of the Participatory Conservation Program. They have urged Maoist rebels to commit that they will not harm officials. The local groups are also lobbying to get UNDP to resume the project.

Displaced children

Kantipur, 11 January

कान्तिपुर

DAILEKH—Children of displaced families have not only been denied education, they are forced to work for meagre salaries in order to survive. Six-year-old Lal Bahadur Nepali, who had been studying in class two in his village, now works in the district headquarters with his parents. He earns Rs 10 per day. According to available data, about 150 children under-14 work at the district headquarters. They are employed to carry bricks and heavy loads. Children under 10 years earn Rs 10 and those 10-14 years earn up to Rs 15. The DDC has employed refugee families to build the play ground of the Narayan Campus. "We have no choice but to make our children help us carry heavy loads," says Amarika Ramjalimagar of Naumule.

The fall of Dailekh

Rajdhani, 11 January

राजधानी

Many villagers who launched the movement against Maoists are now fleeing their villages fearing a counterattack by the rebels. Most have sought refuge at the district headquarters. The rebels have been abducting and brutally beating villagers who rebelled against them, not sparing even those who took part in the peaceful anti-Maoist campaign. "They could kill us any time," says a traumatised villager from Pusakot, now a refugee in the town. Last week, more than 35 villagers from Pusakot abandoned their homes. The Maoists have threatened to start a 'cleanup campaign' to punish those who joined the women's movement against the rebels. The Maoists call the resistance 'royalists' and say they will be chased out. After the security base camp was established in Dullu, frightened villagers have left homes and taken refuge in the Dullu Bajar. The number of displaced families has reached 125 in Naumule. There is a severe food shortage.

Buffer zone

Rajdhani, 9 January

राजधानी

Villagers in and around the Parsa Wildlife Reserve have demanded the resumption of the UNDP-supported Participatory Conservation Program. The program was run in the buffer zone of the wildlife reserve until Maoist rebels ambushed a vehicle carrying conservation staff in the reserve last month. Because of the human and property loss, UNDP withdrew from the 10-year-old program. The program was suspended as was Rs 1.3 million, the last installment for the Nepali year. The suspension of the program has left about 550 consumer groups without staff. Under the program, Rs 7.8 million has been collected as deposit from consumer groups. More than 13,000 families have been associated with the program that has already invested Rs 10 million in the area. Encouraged by the success of the program, members of the consumer groups used to conserve the



MASSACRE
Torch: Price hike


हिमाल *हिमाल* Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabarparika*, 12-26 January

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

This petrol price hike was meant for increase of royal palace expenditure.

Nepali Congress leader Krishna Sitaula in *Rajdhani*, 12 January

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Rajkarnicar / VH-05

Disaster aids unity

The tsunami united Sri Lanka like nothing else



MARWAAN MACAN-MARKAR in COLOMBO

These are surreal times for Sri Lanka's political leaders. Never before have they been sought after, sympathised with and offered promises of assistance from an impressive list of international figures as has happened since the tsunamis ravaged the nation's coast.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, World Bank President James Wolfensohn and US Secretary of State Colin Powell were among the latest in this procession of largely first-time visitors that has wound their way through sections of the destroyed coast. The list of concerned world leaders is expected to lengthen as the country comes to grips with a tragedy that has left over 30,000 dead, nearly 12,000 of which were children and over one million displaced.

By the weekend, the Sri Lankan government estimated that the damage caused by the 26 December disaster was over \$ 1.3 billion. Devastation includes miles of flattened homes, schools and commercial buildings, long stretches of road ripped apart and the twisted railway tracks along the country's southern coast. Yet this surreal moment in Sri Lanka, the country worst affected after Indonesia, has given rise to a question aimed at the political leadership: will it give life to a more accommodating and conciliatory vision to rebuild the country or revert to views that divide a deeply fractious land?

Hints of such a shift gained ground during the first week after the disaster with archrivals reaching out at times from across the many political divisions in this country of 19 million people. Most notable was the common ground reached by sections of the government and members of the separatist Tamil Tiger rebels to help the tsunami victims in the heavily battered eastern regions.

At the same time, the government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga appeared willing to work with the country's opposition United National Party, a move that was applauded by the local press and commentators on television. However, the little hope Kumaratunga triggered that her administration will pursue a policy of accommodation has begun to flounder in the wake of moves that betray a clear political bias rather than the more urgently needed humanitarian one.

Colombo demonstrated this when it prevented UN chief Annan from visiting areas in northern Sri Lanka held by the Tigers that had been as badly devastated as the rest of the country. This move helped buttress the argument made by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that the government is denying tsunami victims in the north an equal share of the aid.

In another realm, the country's political leaders are under scrutiny over the way it manages aid and assists the victims. The focus is on how civil society groups and other NGOs get the people in the devastated regions to play pivotal roles in rebuilding.

"A top-down approach will not work. The politicians have to let the people participate in the process of rebuilding," says Aritha Wikramanayake, a lawyer and founder of the Sri Lanka branch of Transparency International, the global anti-corruption watchdog. "Organisations working at the grassroots will have to be brought into the process," he adds. "We will have to watch those trying to make political gains from relief."

While Colombo has still to embrace such a people-centred approach, the prospect of ignoring it and returning to the old top-down system is being challenged since the tsunami. Spearheading such efforts is a broad spectrum of people drafting plans to build shattered communities at a speed the government can't match.

The Sri Lankan government still has to answer questions these initiatives prompt: Will it, in a show of endorsing the politics of accommodation, back such an abundance of goodwill in rebuilding the country? Or is this—a shift by Colombo to place humanitarian and development needs over narrow political gain—too much to expect? ● IPS



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नेपाल अधिराज्यको संविधान २०४७ ले प्रत्येक नेपाली नागरिकको आधारभूत मानव अधिकार सुरक्षित गरी स्वतन्त्रता र समानताको आधारमा नेपाली जनताका बीच भ्रातृत्व र एकता कायम गर्ने कुरामा जोड दिएको छ। जुनसुकै विचारधाराका भए पनि नेपाली सबै एक हौं भन्ने भावनाले राष्ट्र निर्माणको काममा अग्रसर हुन सके मात्र यस देशको विकास तीव्र गतिमा हुन सक्ने हुँदा विचार फरक भएका विषयहरूमा आपसी समझदारी र सहयोगको भावना लिएर छलफल गरी निष्कर्षमा पुग्नु र संपूर्ण नेपालीलाई भ्रातृत्वको दृष्टिले हेर्नु प्रत्येक नेपालीको कर्तव्य हो।

श्री ५ को सरकार
सूचना तथा संचार मंत्रालय
सूचना विभाग

The path to sustained peace

When the millennium opened, world leaders pledged to seek peace, the end of poverty and a cleaner environment. Since then the world has seen countless acts of violence, terrorism, famine and environmental degradation. We can change direction.

COMMENT

Jeffrey D Sachs



Knowledge, scientific advance, travel and global communications give us many opportunities to find solutions for the world's major problems. When a new disease called SARS hit China last year, the World Health Organisation coordinated the actions of dozens of governments and the crisis was quickly brought under control, at least for now.

When Bill Gates donated \$ one billion to bring vaccines to poor children, he made it possible to protect tens of millions of young people from preventable diseases. When an agricultural research unit called the World Agroforestry Centre discovered that a certain tree could help African farmers grow more food, they introduced a new and valuable approach towards overcoming Africa's chronic food crisis.

Unfortunately, such examples of international cooperation are as rare as they are impressive. With our knowledge of science and technology, the horrendous living conditions of the world's

poorest people could be dramatically improved. Millions of people could be spared from malaria, HIV/AIDS, hunger, and life in slums. The problem is not that we lack good solutions. The problem is that we fail to cooperate globally to put those solutions into practice.

United Nations' Secretary General Kofi Annan honoured me by making me his Special Adviser on the Millennium Development Goals and asking me to lead a group of scholars and development experts in identifying practical steps to reach the goals by the target date in 2015. This effort, known as the UN Millennium Project, will issue its report to Secretary General Annan on 17 January 2005. Our study, *Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals*, will be available for free around the world at www.unmillenniumproject.org.

What we learned is easily summarised. For every major problem—hunger, illiteracy, malnutrition, malaria, AIDS, drought, and so forth—there are practical solutions that are proven and affordable. These investments, in turn, would strengthen the private sector and economic growth. Yet they require global partnership between the rich and poor countries of the world. Most importantly, the world's richest countries need to do much more to help the poorest countries make use of modern science and technology to

solve these great problems.

The US, for example, currently spends around \$450 billion each year on its military but less than \$15 billion to help the world's poorest countries fight disease, educate their children and protect the environment. This is a mistake because military approaches alone cannot make America safe. Only shared prosperity can truly make the planet secure. The US should be investing much more in peaceful economic development.

Germany, Japan and several other rich countries are also doing much less than they should—and much less than they promised. In 2002, all donor countries committed to "make concrete efforts" to reach 0.7 percent of national income in development aid to poor countries. Germany, Japan and the US, among others, remain far below this commitment.

The year 2005 will offer many opportunities for citizens around the world to insist that their leaders keep their millennium promises. After our report is issued in January, Secretary General Kofi Annan will issue a report to the world in the spring, identifying the practical steps that should be taken this year. Around the same time, an important commission on Africa will issue a report to the United Kingdom's Prime Minister Tony Blair. Then in July, the UK will host the annual G-8 Summit of rich countries.

Blair has promised that he will make the fight against

How to make the world a better place



poverty and long-term climate change the two priorities of the Summit. In September, the world's leaders will reconvene at the UN to decide on their actions during the coming decade.

The rich and powerful nations often declare their leadership in the world. The US claims that it helps the world fight poverty but instead spends its money on weapons. Germany and Japan say they each want a permanent seat on the UN Security Council but neither has yet followed through on its own pledges to help the world's poorest people. The world's poorest countries will ask themselves why they should vote for Germany and Japan to have permanent seats on the

Security Council if they can't keep their promises.

Nothing would be wiser for the world's affluent countries than to fulfil their pledges to the world's poor, hungry and disease-ridden peoples. Therein lies the path to sustained peace. 2005 is the year when words can become a reality and that the world can begin to fulfil its hopes for our new millennium. Let us make our leaders aware that we aspire to shared peace and prosperity. Let us pledge that the rich and powerful should take real actions to help the poor, the weak and the suffering. ● (Project Syndicate)

Jeffrey D Sachs is Professor of Economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

Porous Societies, Sealed Frontiers

What would Lalon Fakir have said?

It takes just a couple of hours on winding road starting from Jhapa to arrive at the Bangladesh border post of Changrabandha, traversing India's Chicken Neck. The ecology remains the same but the human landscape is unrecognisable from just half a century ago.

This tropical expanse of Himalayan piedmont and Teesta floodplain looks identical across the three frontiers: the

SOUTHASIA BEAT

Kanak Mani Dixit



Kamala-Balan basin in Nepal to the

Mechi river at the India-Nepal border, and the Teesta and Mahananda which flow into Bangladesh's Rajshahi Division past Siliguri. The banana and bamboo groves, the villages on plinths above the flood line, the drongos and kingfishers on the roadside wires, the whiff of drying hemp. All this could be in any country. The disused meter gauge from the British era still snakes across the India-Bangla frontier at three points.

Several seemingly contradictory forces have transformed the demographic makeup here: open migration, forced migration and prevented migration due to closure of frontiers.

In southeast Nepal, the roadside cemeteries are primarily of the Tibeto-Burman Kirant hill migrants, with many of the graves ornately designed replicas of mountain dwellings. More than 120,000 Nepali-speaking Lhotshampa refugees are

huddled here in refugee camps. It has been 12 years since they were ousted from their native Bhutan, and regional geopolitics blocks their return.

The syncretistic mix of cultures in Nepal's Jhapa is nowhere in evidence 40 km away as the crow flies in Bangladesh. The cemeteries here are all Muslim: many of the Hindus have left since Partition. Only the placenames remind of the once-upon-a-time demography: Rangpur, a dynamic marketplace before the borders were drawn in 1947 is now a backwater.

The most striking difference is the visibility of women on the roads of Jhapa and their absence in Rangpur. In Nepal, women will ride bicycles, even 'man' petrol pumps. Closer to the towns, they also wear trousers and t-shirts. The population density is remarkable along the Bangladesh highways, but there are no women about.

The Chicken's Neck is a babel of languages, with Bangla in command but the locals also speaking Nepali, Hindi and Santhali. In Bangladesh, it all dissolves into Bangla. The Nepali which has spread out into a good part of the Indian plains does not penetrate into Bangladesh.

In his book *A Princely Imposter* (Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2002), historian Partha Chatterjee describes a time when 'India' was one. A zamindar from Bhawal outside Dhaka goes on holiday to Darjeeling using the meter gauge line up to Siliguri. He dies in the hill station, and the rest of the story investigates the claims of an itinerant fakir that he is the actual prince. The story

crisscrosses from Darjeeling to Dhaka to Calcutta, a triangle that has collapsed in the last half century, and which in the best of worlds would be revived.

The Nepal-India border is open, a kind of frontier that does most justice to the shared history of all Southasia. The Bangladesh-India frontier has been closed since the rise of East Pakistan, but remained porous. Today, it is in the process of being sealed. India's fence-building to keep out Bangladeshi migrants has reached Changrabandha. To the south stretches an impregnable line of barbed wire, steel pillars, concrete and a service road.

This is one alternative for a Southasian future: weak governments dependent on vote bank politics will take the course of least resistance. But building a fence will only make societies more rigid in their own identities and certitudes. One wonders whether sharply defined frontiers will ever work in Southasia. Instead, is there a lesson to be taken from the open Nepal-India frontier just a few miles away?

What would Lalon Shah Fakir, the great Bangla mystic and Baul minstrel who died in Khustia in 1890, have said of barbed wire fences? The translation is by Brother James (*Songs of Lalon*, University Press Limited, Dhaka, 1987):

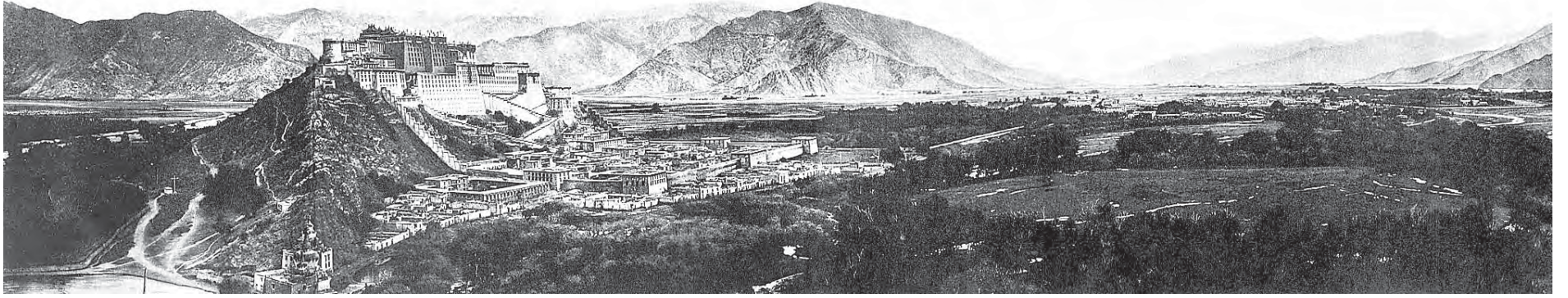
You came into this world with certain expectations; not an iota of all these hopes has been fulfilled. Deeply engrossed in bad companions and bad amusements, you made a mess of your life.



The drongos look the same all over.

Putting Phempo on the map

A delightful re-discovery of the Kadampa school of Buddhism



This beautifully produced landscape format book, released by the up-and-coming Vajra Publications, is an important contribution to our understanding of the Kadampa school of Buddhism. The two authors, an academic and an architect, take obvious delight in

BOOK
Mark Turin



the topic and transmit this

infectious pleasure through the book.

Ulrike and Hans-Ulrich Roesler modestly refer to their *Kadampa Sites of Phempo* as a 'booklet' and a 'survey', but in truth their contribution is much greater. In the summers of 2000 and 2002, they travelled to Phempo, 30 km north of



Lhasa, in search of early monasteries. Not only did they find many monasteries and document them but the authors were surprised to learn that in other modern guidebooks, 'information about their present condition is scarce'. Their book, dedicated to the 'people of Phempo, past and present', is an attempt to put Phempo on the map.

The Kadampa school has played a central role in the history of Buddhism, as well as its spread through Tibet. This tradition, later absorbed by the Gelukpa school, was based on the teachings of the Indian master Atisha, whose disciple was thought to be the founder of Kadampa practice in the early 11th century. The monastic foundations laid by the Kadampas certainly helped strengthen Buddhist learning in Central Tibet, and Kadampa teaching focussed on practice rather than on philosophy and scholarship. According to the Roeslers, Kadampa masters stressed 'a solid, step by step Buddhist practice, ideally by leading a secluded life concentrated on learning' (p 7).

On their tour, the authors were intrigued to learn that all of the centres of Kadampa learning, except for the monastery at Phuchung, are to this day inhabited by monks or nuns who focus on their spiritual practice. The architectural sketches and photos presented in this book illustrate that by the 11th and 12th centuries, the Phempo

region was home to a great number of monasteries with a thriving and vibrant religious culture.

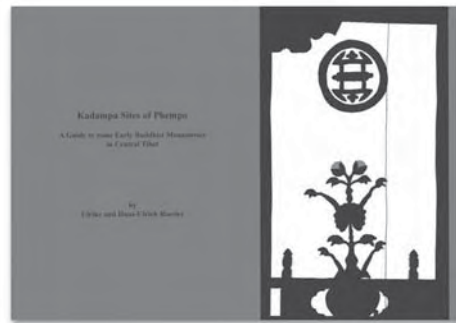
After an informative introduction, the main text of the book describes in brief a series of religious sites. Concise written overviews of monasteries alternate with colour plates (some of the reproductions are a little over-saturated), giving a sense of the history as well as the present condition of the site. The appendices to the survey deserve special mention. The catalogue, or register, of Shara Gompa is presented in full, including a photo of the Tibetan text, its transliteration and translation. The final appendix, with which the book concludes, is comprised of well-drawn architectural plans of Nesur monastery based on measurements taken in 2002.

I have only two quibbles with this otherwise delightful book, one practical and the other commercial. For those readers not schooled in written Tibetan,

like myself, it would have been interesting to have the meanings of the place names and monasteries spelt out clearly in the glossary at the end of the book. My other question relates to marketing: it never becomes apparent who the intended audience is. Not detailed enough to satisfy scholars and a little unwieldy for casual tourists eager to minimise the load of their backpacks. I fear that the charming *Kadampa Sites of Phempo* may fall in between categories and have a restricted readership.

The joy in its creation is perhaps enough for the authors, however, who write: 'the extremely interesting and most pleasant experience of visiting these places instilled the desire in us to record in this booklet what we witnessed' (Preface). ●

Mark Turin is a linguistic anthropologist and Director of the Digital Himalaya Project <http://www.digitalhimalaya.com/>



Kadampa Sites of Phempo: A Guide to Some Early Buddhist Monasteries in Central Tibet
by Ulrike and Hans-Ulrich Roesler
Vajra Publications, Kathmandu 2004
87 pages
ISBN 99933-695-3-5
Rs 1,400

हाम्रो मुस्कान
नेपाली उद्योगको योगदान

उद्योग धन्दा सबल हुनुले रोजगारीको सुनिश्चितता मात्र होइन अन्य विषयमा पनि सकारात्मक असर पार्दछ। उद्योग धन्दाको समुचित संचालन हुँदा हाम्रो बुबाको रोजगारी पनि सुनिश्चित हुने भएकोले हाम्रो अध्ययन कार्य समेत सुचारु हुन्छ र देशको आर्थिक क्रियाकलापमा सहभागी हुने अवसर कायमै रहन्छ। अर्थात् सम्पन्नता निर्माण हुन्छ एक वैभवशाली, समृद्धशाली एवम् गौरवशाली नेपालको।

दिगो शान्ति, सबल उद्योग, समृद्ध देश

Positive putting

Putting is a mind game

You think you can do it. You know what to do. You know how to do it. Yet so often you just cannot accomplish what should be routine and simple.

In the Kailash Tea Open earlier this month, I had more birdies and eagles than I have ever had before in a tournament. The sum total was a remarkable 26 birdies and two eagles in the four days we played. This is quite an achievement even at the top of the golfing curve, if I may say so myself. Without making lots of putts I could never have achieved this.

In a recent column I complained about my putting during the Surya Masters in early December. I took that as a challenge to improve and worked diligently for the past month. The results are quite apparent.

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



During last week's event I was able to make quite a number of putts from inside 15 feet, something I was unable to do

under pressure these past months. Yes, I still did have occasional three putts on a few greens, but overall, I was way above my usual average.

So what sparked off this sudden improvement?

After the Surya Nepal Masters, one of the first things I did was analyse and understand where I had gone wrong. This is a common practice all pros use to improve their game. I went through all my statistics of putting (I usually record my putting stats after each full round I play).

I realised I was very uncomfortable putting from inside six feet, and this is where I was vulnerable. The result of this was that I was not giving myself a chance on sinking longer putts, as I would concentrate on just putting it close.



By being scared of leaving myself 4-6 footers. I was mentally just playing for two putts from outside 10 feet without giving the ball a chance to go into the hole. In other words, I was literally choking on these longer putts.

In putting, you need to have the right basics, and also the right attitude on the greens in order to drop putts. More than anything it is all about having the confidence and the willpower to sink it. Right before making the putting stroke a lot of unwanted nervousness creeps into the mind. The result? A hesitant stroke and a miss.

I am not discarding the need of choosing the right line, the right pace and knowledge of the contours and slopes on the green. All these are equally important. However in professional golf it is more the 'mind' anything else.

Now, let me explain the details of the little success I have achieved in improving my putting. I practiced a lot of putts from six feet and tried to be more positive. This helped me considerably as I gained confidence to stroke the longer ones without fear. Honestly, I haven't tried to change any of the mechanics. I just tried to be more positive, and with repeated practice, this habit was ingrained. The result was a better stroke on the ball.

Be more positive while you practice your putts or when you are playing the course. Undoubtedly, you will see encouraging results. Use this knowledge to your advantage in the run up to the New Years Cup 2005 being held at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort on 22 January. Be a winner and you'll soon be taking a golfing holiday for two to Malaysia!

Catch highlights of the Surya Nepal Masters being shown on Ten Sports on Friday, 14 January at 1:45pm and on Saturday at 6:45pm.

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Golf Director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu
prodeepak@hotmail.com



Zen and the art of mountain biking

Kathmandu is the perfect place to take up off-road biking as a hobby

ANOOP PANDEY

Nepal is the ideal terrain for mountain biking: it has mountains and narrow dirt trails that are euphemistically called 'roads'.

When it started out in the US west coast as 'off-road biking' in the 1970s, mountain bikers probably didn't realise they were inventing a sport fit for Nepali conditions. No wonder off-trail biking has taken off here in a big way attracting enthusiasts and professionals from around the world. Mountain biking along trekking trails across the Annapurnas and pedalling to Everest Base Camp are catching on as our own version of extreme biking.

With shops selling bikes and accessories from internationally renowned bike manufacturers such as *Gary Fisher*, *Trek*, *Giant* and *Specialized*, Kathmandu actually has some of the best gear in the world. But they can cost up to \$2,000. The trick is not to go for an expensive one right away, start off with models in the Rs 20,000 range and if you find yourself really enjoying the great outdoors, you can always buy a better one.

The beauty about Kathmandu is that there is a wide selection of mountain bikes at the famous bicycle row along Jamal or at Dawn Till Dusk, situated at the Kathmandu Guest House parking lot in Thamel.

Now that you have a bike, what you need is to latch on to a group to ride with, preferably one which has some experience. Travel light: the lighter you ride the more energy you have for riding. The hills



surrounding Kathmandu Valley are some of the most ideal mountain biking terrain in the world. No wonder, the Himalayan Mountain Bike Races are held here every autumn.

Hatiban is probably the best place to start riding. Get off the Ring Road at Balkhu, travel past Chobhar along the asphalt for 15 km towards Pharping. These are not off-road conditions but the uphill stretches test your endurance and stamina. Once you get to the base of Hatiban, take a breather. Have a cup of tea, get a glucose fix at the local shop under the pipal tree, acquaint yourself with the shop and its owner.

Take lots of water: this is your survival trick. A litre of water for each hour of continuous riding is recommended. The steep switchbacks up to Hatiban ridge is only three km but it is real technical riding and will take up to half-an-hour to get to the top.

Once at the top you can make the choice of continuing up for a while, resting or riding back down to take a half minute's rest and pedalling all the way back up again. This is called training

in intervals, a period of high intensity 20 minute riding followed by a 30 second respite. This will help in longer more serious rides like the day trip up the endless 10 km incline to Nagarkot. If you're lucky you'll be rewarded with a spectacular view. After Nagarkot you're probably fit to try riding off-road on grassy, sandy and rocky terrain. A perfect ride would be to the temple of Bisanku Narayan and further on to Kot Danda and then on to more difficult sections of Lakhuri Bhanjyang via Sisneri along the Valley's southeastern rim. Once you have amassed experience it is time to go further afield and ride up Sarangkot in Pokhara where the view is even better and the terrain even more challenging.

By now you must know how to deal with basic breakdowns: punctures, wheel tuning, brake adjusting and so on. Once you've started to ride, keep going. With experience you'll find yourself enjoying the exertion and the rush of happy hormones that it unleashes. ●

NEPAL PASHMINA INDUSTRY

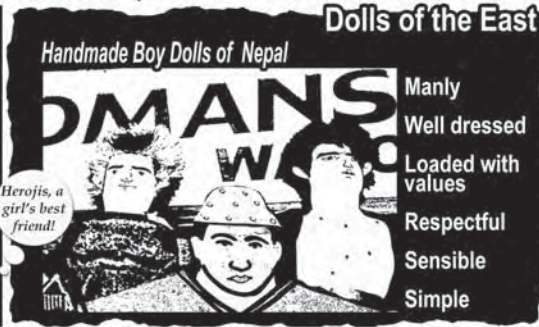


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"Lata ko desh ma gaando tanderi." (In a land of fools, even a man with a bad goatee can be a hero.)



KE GARNE? WHATEVER.
But be a Heroji-ette - and Coddle ur Boy
"Your legs and breast bristle with shaggy hair but your mind, Pannicus, shows no signs of manliness."
-- Marcus Aurelius, Roman Emperor (161 - 180 AD)
Next change:
Herojig goes to Mexico and it feels just like Nepal.

HeroJig's Adventures can also be seen at www.extreme-nepal.com

#35♂2061 by jigme gaton - read. love. write.

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Maghay Sankranti** 14 January, marking the first day of the month of Magh.
- ❖ **Samyak Festival** at Swayambhu on 15 January.
- ❖ **Amateur Nature and Wildlife Photography Exhibition** at Nepal Tourism Board. Until 18 January. 5524202, 5549803
- ❖ **Ajanta: The Unseen Jewel** First major photo exhibition of Ajanta paintings photographed by Benoy K Behl at Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal. Until 19 January. 4413174
- ❖ **Zen Paintings** by Kang Chan-Mo at the Buddha Gallery, Thamel. Until 26 January.
- ❖ **Collective Reverberation** Paintings by Manish Lal Shrestha at Gallery Nine, Lajimpat. Until 26 January. 4428694
- ❖ **Lha Phewa Kumbha Mela** at Jomsom, till 29 January. 4360388, 5528549
- ❖ **Life through the Lens** Photographs by Kishor Kayastha at Indigo Gallery, till 31 January. 4413580, indigo@wlink.com.np



EVENTS

- ❖ **Sanibaar Mela** Every Saturday at the Dharara Bakery Café, 12AM-5PM.
- ❖ **3rd Annual Wave Web Winner 2004** Website designing contest. Entry deadline 15 February. www.wavemag.com.np.
- ❖ **The God Dance of Kathmandu Valley** Tuesdays at Hotel Vajra. 4271545

MUSIC

- ❖ **Unplugged Eve** Full Circle at Moksh on 14 January, 6.30 PM. Tickets Rs 200. 5528703
- ❖ **Motown Nite** with Soul-T on 14 January at New Orleans Café, Thamel, 7PM-10PM. Tickets Rs 100. 4700736
- ❖ **Shukrabar** at Patan Museum on 21 January, 6PM. Tickets Rs 350.
- ❖ **Classical vocals and instrumental music**, 7PM onwards, every Friday at Hotel Vajra. 4271545
- ❖ **All that jazz** with Abhaya & The Steam Injuns at Fusion-The bar, Dwarika's every Friday, 7PM. Rs 675 per person, includes BBQ dinner. 4479488
- ❖ **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

- ❖ **Italian Food Festival** at Hotel Yak & Yeti. Until 22 January. 4240520
- ❖ **Grand Dosa Festival** at Hyatt Regency, 6.30PM onwards. 4491234
- ❖ **Seasons Special Luncheon** at the Shambala Garden Café, Rs 450 per person including a bottle of soft drink or mineral water. 4412999
- ❖ **New delicacies** Introducing pastas and snacks at Roadhouse Café, Jawalakhel. 5521755
- ❖ **La Soon** Restaurant and Vinotheque, 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

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Jungle Base Camp Lodge** in Bardia, special package and prices. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- ❖ **Shivapuri Heights Cottage** Birdwatching and tranquil atmosphere at the edge of Shivapuri National Park. steve@escape2nepal.com
- ❖ **Dream Holiday** Package tour to Malaysia. Marco Polo Travels and Qatar Airways, 2012345, malaaysiaholidays_marco@polo.com.np
- ❖ **Getaway package** Night's stay at Godavari Village Resort, includes dinner and breakfast. 5560675
- ❖ **AAA Organic Farm and Guesthouse** Rs 950 with three meals. 6631734
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** Escape the Kathmandu chill. 4361600
- ❖ **Temple Tiger** One night package \$250. 4263480
- ❖ **Machan Wildlife Jungle Resort** special packages available. 4225001
- ❖ **Weekend Special** at Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha. 4375280
- ❖ **Jomsom Mountain Resort** Two nights-three days at Rs 5,999 for Nepalis, \$199 for expats including airfare and food. 4496110, salesjom@mail.com.np

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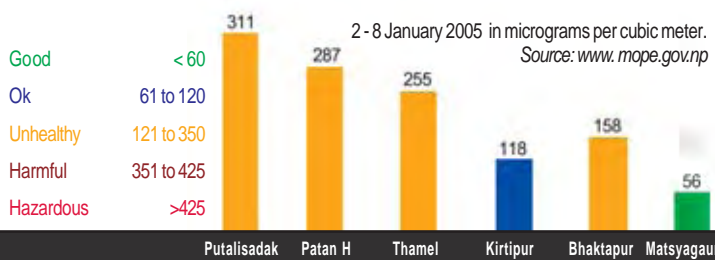


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NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



It hasn't rained in Nepal's midhills now for more than a month, although there has been snow on the Tibetan rimlands. This situation is expected to persist, although we are pinning our hopes on a westerly front currently over Pakistan that will bring overcast skies into the weekend. Fingers crossed there will be some moisture there. Temperature will remain just above freezing. This satellite picture taken on Thursday afternoon shows the westerly front. We have also seen the reemergence of the Indo-Gangetic fog stretching from Bangladesh to Uttaranchal in India while Nepal's tarai has been spared its worst effects. Valley residents may expect cooler nights and cloudy afternoons this weekend.

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KIRAN PANDAY

LOTS OF FLAG WAVING: Rally to mark the 283rd birthday of King Prithbi Narayan Shah and National Unity Day on Tuesday at his statue outside Singha Darbar.



INDRA DHOJ KSHETRI

TUSKER RALLY: Elephants bearing portraits of royalty to mark National Unity Day in Narayangad on Tuesday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

EFFIGY BURNING: Students of Ratna Rajya Campus on Exhibition Road set fire to an effigy of Supplies Minister, Ishwar Pokhrel on Tuesday soon after the announcement of the fuel price hike.



RAM HUMAGAIN/NEPALNEWS.COM

REMEMBERING ROBIN: The memorial service at a monastery in Kapan on Monday to remember Robin Needham of CARE Nepal, who was washed away by waves in Phuket on 26 December. His wife, Lucy, offers flowers.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

MAMMA MIA: Italian chef, Vito Froio, at the Yak & Yeti's Italian Food Festival dishes it out to lean and hungry guests on Monday. The festival is on till 22 January.

Bandipur sisters

Evangelina and Miriam, (pictured below), are two of the most famous and respected foreigners in Bandipur. For the locals of this scenic hilltop town, the two are not just Japanese Catholic nuns but fellow Bandipureys.

Situated halfway between Pokhara and Kathmandu, education is a serious issue for this town. Twenty years ago it supported the setting up of the Japanese Notre Dame School. When the Maoists closed it down

with other missionary schools in Gorkha and Tansen four years ago, more than 600 students had to leave for boarding schools in Pokhara and Kathmandu.

"The people were heartbroken and we were sorry to go," recalls Evangelina who is affiliated with Japan's School Sisters of Notre Dame that runs schools across the developing world. Both Miriam and Evangelina left for Japan expecting never to return but when word came in 2003 that the school could reopen, the sisters rushed back.

It was like starting all over again, new students and teachers had to be found. But progress was quick and soon Notre Dame will be a high school. Miriam and

Evangelina say they hope they won't have to leave again and the situation in Nepal will get better. But recently the school received another threat from the rebels to close down. This time, parents have taken matters into their own hands and are determined to keep the school open. Says Miriam, "The Maoists should know we are here only to give good education to the children especially those who can't afford good schools."

Naresh Newar



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